

Hybridity in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*

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ABSTRACT

*As immigrant fiction continues to emerge from the South Asian diaspora across the globe, theories of gender and identity that mostly treat such novels as bildungsromans are often used to bring to light the plight of literary characters caught between two different cultures. Similar is the case with Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*, which is often read through the lens of the identity crisis that is experienced by Feroza, the protagonist in the novel. Taking Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity as an analytical tool, however, this essay uses mimicry, ambivalence, and unhomeliness, concepts under hybridity, to facilitate the understanding of Feroza's experiences in *An American Brat*. Besides studying if the three selected elements of hybridity can be found in the protagonist, this work also investigates whether or not they are responsible for her decision to choose to stay either in Pakistan or in the United States at the end of the novel.*

Keywords: hybridity; mimicry; ambivalence; unhomeliness; An American Brat

INTRODUCTION

Much of the research surrounding Bapsi Sidhwa's work is based either on the 'trauma' caused by the Pakistan-India Partition and the long-lasting after-effects of it or the post-colonial feminism that her characters often embody. Some examples of this pattern are: *Gender, memory, trauma: women's novels on the Partition of India* by Kabir, *Border work, border trouble: Postcolonial feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India* by Hai, and *Telling tales: women and the trauma of Partition in Sidhwa's Cracking India* by Bahri.

Moreover, the novel is treated mostly as a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of formation or a coming-of-age story. Anupama Jain, for instance, in her study of *Hybrid Bildungs in South Asian Women's Writing*, discusses diasporic bildung and anonymous autonomy in *An American Brat*. She argues that the novel reveals how an immigrant woman in the U.S. continues to give shape to the iconography of the country even as she fashions herself. Shirin Zubair, on the other hand, in *Crossing Borders, Reinventing Identity (ies): Hybridity in Pakistani English Fiction*, takes theoretical insights from the works of Stuart Hall (1993), Bhabha (1994), Pennycook (2007) and others to problematise the complex notion of identity(ies) with regard to the construction of identity(ies) in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *An American Brat* (p.65).

This work, on the other hand, delves deeper into the concept of hybridity as theorised by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) to find out whether it actually exists in the form of mimicry, ambivalence, and unhomeliness in Feroza. Moreover, it also strives to investigate if (in case the three elements of hybridity do exist in Feroza's personality) these

hybrid elements compel Feroza to make the decision of deciding to stay in Pakistan or in America at the end of the novel.

The term ‘hybridity’ has had a long and evolving history. Today, however, it is used in the postcolonial theory to refer to a ‘Third Space’ (Bhabha 1994, p.53). In postcolonial theory, hybridity is one of the seminal concepts and is important as it redefines the concept of culture, which was before thought to be rigid and unchangeable. Although Western ideology may encourage otherwise, the differences in culture are not inflexible, rigid, or primeval. When systems of Eurocentric domination are questioned and redefined, cultural hybridity comes into action. Bhabha (1994) refers to hybridity as an “in-between” or “interstitial” space that gives birth to new signs of identity through a negotiation of differences (pp.1-2). Three important concepts that fall under the umbrella of hybridity are mimicry, ambivalence, and unhomeliness.

Mimicry is derived from the word ‘mimesis’, which is the Greek word for imitation. It was first used by Aristotle (384-322 BC) in the *Poetics*. In 1973, Jacques Lacan, a preeminent psychoanalyst, wrote the essay called *The Line and Light* (which is a part of his book *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*) in which he highlights the relationship between mimicry and camouflage. This essay greatly influenced Bhabha’s concept of mimicry. In defining colonial mimicry, Bhabha (1994) explains it as “the desire for a reformed, recognisable *Other*, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (p.122). He further states that mimicry is structured around an “ambivalence” of the colonial discourse. In other words, “mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 122). Here, Bhabha explores the counterstatement of the colonial discourse to bring to light the coloniser’s ambivalence regarding his attitude towards the colonised *Other*, or the attitude that the *Other* adopts with respect to the coloniser. As the lines of difference between the *Other* and the coloniser are blurred, the authority of the coloniser comes into question. Bhabha (1994) believes that this is a problem that is caused by mimicry, and through the “repetition of partial presence” (p.126) of the colonial subject, the colonial discourse is distorted.

Ambivalence has been in existence since man set foot on earth (Weisbrode 2012). From Adam and Eve to Hamlet, the abovementioned concept very well exists even in present day literary characters who are faced with a difficult situation that requires the making of a choice. In a chapter called *Signs taken for wonders: Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817*, Bhabha explains that culture consists of opposing dimensions and perceptions and that “the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (Bhabha 1994, p.153). In other words, the colonised *Other* comes to assimilate in himself aspects of his own cultural identity and that of the coloniser. It should be noted, however, that the relationship of both ambivalence and mimicry need not be in the form of coloniser and colonised, it can extend to that of an *Other* with the people of the area he/she is living in.

As Alghamdi (2011) says,

Of the multiple dilemmas that affect the postcolonial subject, the interaction between home and personality is one of the most pervasive and probably the most profound...Home has become a contested concept, no longer predictably applicable to a discreet geographic set of cultural practices, given the formation of the novel, hybrid and liminal positions. (pp.12-13)

The term unhomely has German roots, as it is derived from the German word ‘unheimlich.’ As we usually associate home with feelings of familiarity, unhomeliness denotes feelings of unfamiliarity and that which is not known (Freud 1919, p.220). The term was first used by

Sigmund Freud. It is from there that Bhabha derived his inspiration; unhomeliness became the main topic of his essay *Unhomely Lives: The Literature of Recognition in The Location of Culture* (1994). In a lecture called *The World and the Home*, given at Princeton University (and later published), Bhabha brings to light the fact that unhomeliness is commonly found in works of fiction:

In the House of Fiction [there is] the deep stirring of the “unhomely.” You must permit me this awkward word—the unhomely— because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place... In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (Bhabha 1992, p.141)

In his essay, however, Bhabha clarifies that the ‘unhomely’ is not a concept that is restricted to a condition that is either colonial or post-colonial. Rather, it has a “resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites/historical conditions and social contradictions” (Bhabha 1992, p.142). In the enlightening moment of unhomeliness, an individual/character realises (with a sense of shock) that a ‘home’ is not limited to the confinement of the four surrounding walls; it extends way beyond the physical or geographical boundaries into the world. As Bhabha writes beautifully in his book, unhomely subjects “inhabit the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality. And the inscription of this borderline existence ... bridg[es] the home and the world” (Bhabha 1994, p.19).

DISCUSSION

It goes without saying that the world in which we live today is as borderless as it has ever been. At a faster rate than ever before, people are immigrating to other countries, making possible a constant diffusion of language, race, and culture. In this scenario, it is but normal that writers choose to use literature as a tool to express and discuss the dilemma and plight of the people who are faced with making important decisions regarding their motherlands and their adopted lands. This can be seen in the works of Bapsi Sidhwa, who is a Parsee Pakistani author and has experienced migration to the United States. As is evidenced by her novel *An American Brat*, Bapsi is indeed one of those authors who have effectively used literature as a medium to address the problems faced by immigrants across the world.

An American Brat is a perfect example for the study of hybridity as it contains a protagonist that is caught between two different cultures and has to make crucial choices with regard to the way she would like to live her life. We will analyse each of the three elements of hybridity namely mimicry, ambivalence, and unhomeliness below to see whether they exist in Feroza and if they do, what impact they have on her final choice of residence in a country.

MIMICRY IN *AN AMERICAN BRAT*

Although *An American Brat* begins in Pakistan, a large part of it is set in the United States. When Feroza first arrives in the United States, she can be described as a typical Pakistani girl. The first person to introduce her to American culture is her uncle Manek. Studying at MIT, he is well-accustomed to life in the US and often gives Feroza useful, if sometimes on the verge of redundant, advice on how to behave and carry herself in America.

The first example of mimicry in Feroza supports Lacan's view. As Bhabha says "Lacan reminds us [that] mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically" (1994, p.128). For mimicry to be like camouflage, one does not have to completely forgo, but rather assimilate its features with those of the host environment. After being embarrassed by Manek a few times, Feroza starts to use a deodorant, as Manek taunts her by saying "You can't smell your own smell, stupid; people are going to start fainting any minute" and "That's the trouble with you *desis*. You don't even know what a deodorant is, and you want to make an atom bomb!" (p.74). He also teaches her to apologise when she interrupts. Moreover, he advises her to avoid eating *desi* style: "You've got to stop eating with your fingers...It makes them sick" (p.145). This is something that Feroza has to struggle with not doing but after being banned from eating with her fingers for the following three days, she finally learns to stop doing it.

Feroza is then introduced to and begins living with a real American: Jo. She is her roommate in the dormitory at the local junior college in Twin Falls and influences Feroza in all spheres of life. From working on her accent, her attitude, dressing sense, to even housekeeping skills, Jo has a major impact on Feroza's mannerisms. Jo 'cures' Feroza's way of saying "May I have this—may I have that?" (p.154) and replaces them with "Gimme a lemonade. Gimme a soda" (p.154). It is from Jo that Feroza picks up an American accent and way of speaking, and soon finds herself saying things like "Hey, you goin' to the laundry? Gitme a Coke!" (p.154). Feroza seems to become more and more "mottled" as Lacan says "[t]he effect of mimicry is camouflage...It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare" (qtd. in Bhabha 1994, p.121).

As is explained in this section, Feroza makes several changes to her personality in order to 'camouflage' herself into the American environment. An example of this is how Feroza starts flirting with boys. This is something that is, to a large extent, unheard of in Pakistan. Even when it happens, it is usually in the context of being a precursor to marriage. This is another attempt by Feroza of 'harmonizing with the background'. Sidhwa describes her state of mind in these situations as never having fully gotten over her feelings of guilt, "[e]very time she went out with Jo and flirted modestly with strange young men, her dusky face blooming and warm with wine, her eyes bright, she wondered what her family would have to say of her conduct if they knew" (p.163). Bhabha describes this aspect of mimicry as "the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" (1994, p.122). Feroza, who would cringe at the very thought of romancing a boy back in Pakistan, slowly allows herself to indulge in the pleasures of flirting, something that is only possible for her in the new environment of America.

When Feroza gets enrolled at the University of Denver and finds herself short of money, she starts to think of possible solutions to the problem:

Feroza considered waitressing, working in a bar, becoming a salesperson or selling tickets at an amusement park. These jobs were within her range—if she took the chances the other foreign students took—and was prepared to work for less than minimum wage. Feroza found the very concept of these jobs breathtaking, beyond the compass of the possible in Pakistan. (p.216)

It is evident from the above description that Feroza has acquired an American sensibility as she does not consider these jobs inappropriate as most Pakistanis would have.

Slowly, Feroza develops a desire to copy the style of her American friends' clothing. In the beginning of the novel, Feroza is described as "trott[ing] in her high heels, turquoise *shalwar-kamiz*" though the streets of New York (p.72). At that time, even the mere idea of sporting a pair of shorts is unthinkable to Feroza. However, after living in the States for some

time, the situation changes: “[a]fter a period of association with Gwen and Rhonda, Feroza finally mustered up the courage one sweltering noon to get into a spare pair of Rhonda’s shorts. Both her roommates applauded and assured her that she looked just great” (p. 225).

During a short visit to Pakistan, Feroza, who had previously been critical of America and its foreign policy while having intellectual conversations with some friends back in Denver, surprises herself by defending it in front of her relatives.

Which other country opened its arms to the destitute and discarded of the world the way America did? Of course it had its faults—terrifying shortcomings—but it had God’s blessings, too. (p. 239)

As is evident, Feroza seems to mimic an American patriot. It is as though she belongs to the US and not to Pakistan. When her mother tries to get Feroza to talk about the subject of marriage, Feroza proclaims that she has not completed her education yet and does not have a career. Zareen gets surprised and asks her about the need for a career, to which Feroza replies, “You’ve never worked, Mum. You don’t know how thrilling it is to earn your own money. And spend it” (p. 240). Zareen realises that “[t]he money Feroza earned and spent must give her a sense of control over her life, a sense of accomplishment Zareen had very little experience with.” She also realises that there is not much she can do to change her mind and agrees to let her complete her studies (p. 240). This reminds one of what Bhabha says in his book, “mimicry... visualizes power” (1994, p.122). The sense of control in Feroza’s life that Zareen refers to is actually the power that she has gained by virtue of her mimicry of the American people.

Feroza goes back to Denver and meets David Press, whose car she buys and in the process, loses her heart to him.

Feroza learned the rudimentary mechanism of her car, washed and polished it herself, and whizzed about Denver with one hand on the wheel and an elbow stuck out the window, surveying the world through her windshield with the air of a winged creature flying. (p.255)

Although she strikes a metaphor with a flying creature and herself here, in truth Feroza is only mimicking an American way of life: independent and ungoverned, where one may do as one pleases.

As she falls more and more in love with David, their relationship becomes physical. Unlike Feroza’s short fling with an Indian boy called Shashi during her early days at the University of Denver, with David Feroza is uninhibited.

Feroza was as “swept off her feet” as she could wish, as David wished her to be. And the instinct that had guarded her before, now let her go as David released her from the baffling sexual limbo in which Shashi’s cooler rhythm and the restraints of their common culture had set her adrift. (p. 256)

As Feroza’s relationship with David becomes more serious, they decide to marry each other. This news shocks Feroza’s whole family and her mother Zareen is sent to Denver to speak to Feroza and encourage her to change her mind. Feroza’s mimicry becomes very clear when in debating with her mother, Feroza takes the side of the Americans. When her mother asks her about David’s ancestry, she remarks:

“What do you mean, ‘antecedents’?”
“His ancestry, his *khandan*.”
“Oh, you mean his pedigree?”
“If that’s how you like to put it.”
“Don’t be absurd, Mum... If you go about talking of people’s pedigrees, the Americans will laugh at you.” (p. 277)

Here, Feroza mocks her mother in the same way as the Americans, according to her, would. As Bhabha says in *The Location of Culture*, “[m]imicry repeats rather than represents” (1994, p.125). Feroza’s repeats the behaviour of Americans rather than just representing them; even though she does not claim to be an American, she openly takes their side and behaves according to her perception of how they would in a situation. Moreover, with regard to religion, Feroza claims to her shocked mother that she and David have become Unitarians: “We’re having a civil marriage in any case; a judge will marry us... That way I can keep my religion, if it matters so much to you. Of course you know David and I are Unitarians.” Zareen says, “Unitarians!... You sound almost as if you’ve converted!” (p. 278).

Although towards the end of the novel Feroza decides that she will always be a Parsee and nothing can change that, the proclamation made by her in the above paragraph reveals the extent to which Feroza has transformed; even her beliefs not having been spared.

At one point in the novel, Zareen bitterly remarks, “I should have listened. I should never have let you go so far away. Look what it’s done to you—you’ve become an American brat!” (p. 279). Upon more deliberation, however, Zareen realises that “Feroza ha[s] changed. Not overtly, but inside” (p. 282). At one point even Zareen finds herself questioning the ban on interfaith marriages. So strong is her self-doubt that she “fe[els] herself suddenly aligned with the thinking of the liberals and reformists” (p. 288). Although she does return to her earlier ideas regarding Feroza’s marriage after a while, this is an interesting point, for even Zareen begins to mimic the open-mindedness of Americans after spending only a couple of weeks there.

Regardless of what happens in the aftermath of these events, be it facing the anger of her family members or her breakup with David, Feroza remains mimic, “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 1994, p. 122), in her actions and chooses to continue in that manner in the United States. As is evidenced by the above section, Feroza does embody mimicry to a great extent within herself. Its manifestation and the feelings it encourages inside her do go through several phases, however. First, when Feroza is compelled by her uncle Manek to change her ways as they are not appropriate in America, Feroza reacts rather defensively. However, Feroza soon starts to give in to her uncle’s demands and begins to learn bit by bit. To her, it seems like she is making progress. In other words, although things are new and different to her, they are not necessarily hostile. She makes herself believe that this change of place will be a fruitful one which will broaden her outlook. She soon finds herself spreading her wings.

However, there comes a point when she feels rather guilty for behaving as she does. She wonders what her family would have to say about her conduct. Nevertheless, this doubtfulness is short-lived as Feroza soon learns not to care so much about what others think. She lives life for what it is and believes that the independence that life in the United States has offered her would not have been possible at any cost back in Pakistan, where the primary concern of her family and relatives would be to marry her off to a ‘suitable’ man. Living in America is a fresh breath of air for Feroza. She learns how to eat and cook various meals and even refines her housekeeping skills. Her dressing sense undergoes a major transformation as well.

After a short visit to Pakistan, Feroza realises that she is on a completely different page from her relatives and friends there. Even her thinking has undergone a transformation and the issues that they busy themselves with do not have any value for her. Vice versa, Feroza’s family and relatives cannot empathise with her condition as they do not have any experience of living an independent life, free from relatives, in a foreign land thousands of kilometres away. Feroza feels relieved when she returns to America after the visit.

Throughout the novel, as evidenced by the previous section, mimicry manifests itself at countless occasions. This manifestation has one major effect on Feroza: she refuses to return to Pakistan and decides to live in the United States for the rest of her life.

In one of the final parts of the novel, Feroza contemplates the life she plans to live in America,

There would never be another David, but there would be other men, and who knew, perhaps someday she might like someone enough to marry him. It wouldn't matter if he was a Parsee or of another faith. She would be more sure of herself, and she wouldn't let anyone interfere... There would be no going back for her, but she could go back at will. The image of Father Fibs suddenly filled her mind's eye... Had she flown and fallen and strengthened the wings he had talked about?... If she flew and fell again, could she pick herself up again? Maybe one day she'd soar to that self-contained place from which there was no falling, if there was such a place. (p. 317)

As evidenced by the excerpt above, Feroza takes her failures in America as valuable experience and emerges as a braver, bolder, and more confident woman who is capable of making her own decisions and commitments. One day, she hopes to reach that “self-contained” place, which if exists, for Feroza, would no doubt be in America rather than in Pakistan (p. 317). As mentioned earlier in this study, Bhabha says that mimicry “‘appropriates’ the *Other* as it visualizes power” (1994, p. 122). Hence, Feroza plans to pursue her happiness in life through mimicry. Therefore, mimicry very much affects Feroza's final decision of deciding to remain in the United States.

AMBIVALENCE IN *AN AMERICAN BRAT*

In its most basic sense, ambivalence refers to the “[e]xistence of mutually conflicting feelings or attitudes” (Quayum and Talif 1997, p. 5). As Feroza starts to mingle with Americans, shades of ambivalence slowly become apparent in her character. While tasting the freedom that America has to offer, Feroza is often found questioning herself. When Feroza starts going out with Jo to parties and flirts with random guys, she first feels guilty and wonders what her family would think of her conduct were they to know about it (p. 163). However, “[a]t the same time, she felt she was being initiated into some esoteric rites that governed the astonishingly independent and unsupervised lives of young people in America” (p. 164). This ambivalence is referred to by Weisbrode (2012),

Of course we want these things. At the same time we do not, or some part of ourselves we call our conscience gives us second thoughts: which appear in the form of a contradiction: No, I don't really want or need that. So the most basic type of ambivalence originates with desire, namely in the contradiction between the heart and the head. (p. 5)

At another occasion, Sidhwa describes Feroza as thinking, “[t]he risqué nature of the pleasure the guilt afforded—the smoke-filled, twilight spaces inhabited by the boisterous, teasing, and amorously inclined young men—was well worth the gnawing battle with her conscience it also caused” (p. 164). So strong are Feroza's feelings of confusion that they are described as a battle. It is clear that she feels guilty and enlightened at the same time, at the border of which, as Weisbrode believes, lies ambivalence.

During one of the parties, late one evening, Feroza accidentally commits the ‘cardinal sin’ while being a little high. At a boy's insistence, she takes a puff from a cigarette. Parsees believe that fire is too pure to come into contact with one's unclean mouth, and smoking is thus a grave sin for which Feroza repents by performing a Parsee ritual and reciting some prayers (pp. 165-165). At a later stage in the novel, however, it is implied that Feroza is a casual smoker, as when her mother Zareen visits David and her, it is mentioned that “[n]either smoked before Zareen” (p. 288). In a bizarre way, what once mattered so greatly to

Feroza does not seem to bother her anymore. As Bhabha explains, ambivalence is the “slippage”, “excess”, and “difference” of mimicry (1994, p.122).

After some time when Manek decides to go to Lahore to find himself a suitable Parsee girl and get married, Feroza finds herself in a confusing state of mind. When news comes from her mother and grandmother regarding Manek’s wedding preparations, Sidhwa describes Feroza’s feelings as the following:

Feroza was torn by conflicting desires. She wished she had gone with Manek to Pakistan, and at the same time she knew she could not have borne to miss the escapades and adventures she was enjoying with Jo and her family and finding so incalculably enlightening. (p. 206)

Feroza’s boyfriend, David Press, decides to take her for a Sabbath meal with his parents one Saturday afternoon. They are a family of Jews, and during the meal, Feroza notices a striking similarity between their culture and her own: “[b]reaking bread, sharing salt—these concepts curled in her thoughts with comforting familiarity—they belonged also to the Parsee, Christian, and Muslim traditions in Pakistan” (p. 257).

Feroza’s choice of music is also a beautiful blend of East and West: “David was introducing Feroza to Western classical music... Otherwise she had listened to the cassettes she brought with her, the cassettes of Nayara Nur singing Faiz’s poems, of Tahira Saeed, Medhi Hassan, and Abida Parveen” (p. 257).

She is overcome by bouts of guilt at several occasions in the novel. In fact, it is in Feroza’s guilt where most of her ambivalence lies. On one occasion, after having spent a night with David in his room, Feroza creeps back to her room with her shoes in hand, “wonder[ing] if she was the same girl who had lived in Lahore and gone to the Convent of the Sacred Heart” (p. 264). She enjoys her newfound independence but is constantly haunted by guilt.

When Zareen learns about Feroza’s decision to marry David, she visits Denver on a mission to change her mind. Below is an example of what is exchanged between Feroza and Zareen during their many arguments:

“You’ll have to look at things in a different way... It’s a different culture.”
“And you’ll have to look at it our way. It’s not your culture! You can’t just toss your heritage away like that. It’s in your bones!” (p. 279)

Towards the end of the novel, Sidhwa voices out Feroza’s ambivalence out quite clearly: “[s]he would manage her life to suit her heart; after all, the pursuit of happiness was enshrined in the constitution of the country she had grown to love, despite her growing knowledge of its faults, she would pursue her happiness her way” (p. 314).

In many ways, Feroza’s mimicry leads to her feelings of ambivalence, which in turn causes unhomeliness, as is discussed in the following section. Feroza’s ambivalence is inextricably linked to her mimicry because it is only when she mimics Americans that she becomes confused about her identity and begins to wonder whether she should do things the American way or ‘her’ way, which happens to be Pakistani; vice versa, Feroza’s ambivalence also sometimes causes mimicry. Bhabha (1994) explains this by calling it a “discursive process [in which]...excess or slippage” (p.123) is produced by the ambivalence of mimicry.

Although it often leads to confusion and feelings of guilt, ambivalence does not necessarily have a negative influence on Feroza because she does not let the feeling of guilt prolong for too long. Through ambivalence, she learns to balance the conservative and liberal parts of her personality and learns a lot from this experience. In fact, it is this ambivalence through which she probes herself for answers about things she did not even think of questioning before. Feroza’s ambivalence makes her emerge as a stronger person. She

decides to pursue happiness in her own way and does not let herself get bogged down by the opinion of others. She has found a unique place for herself in the world and does not seem to care much if anyone else disagrees with her or thinks that she should do otherwise.

Interestingly, Feroza's ambivalence is also what leads to her feelings of unhomeliness as it is only through confusion and questioning that she comes to realise where her heart and home belongs, which happens to be America. As ambivalence guides Feroza through the process of self-realisation to the point where she can make major decisions of her life, such as whom to marry and where to live on her own, it could be argued as a major reason for Feroza's decision to choose to remain in the States and not return to her homeland.

UNHOMELINESS IN *AN AMERICAN BRAT*

Bhabha describes unhomeliness as “the estranging sense of relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place” (1992, p. 141). One of the first examples of unhomeliness in Feroza can be detected in the following scenario, which takes place when Feroza first starts to socialise with Americans.

Often, as she sat among them, Feroza thought she had taken a phenomenal leap in perceiving the world from a wider, bolder, and happier angle... As the pressure of constraints, so deeply embedded in her psyche, slightly loosened their grip under Jo's influence, Feroza felt she was growing...wings.... which, even at this incipient stage, would have been ruthlessly clipped in Pakistan. Feroza was curious to discover how they might grow, the shape and reach of their span. (p. 164)

This testifies the sense of independence, and the ‘pursuit of happiness’ (so famously referred to in the American Constitution) that Feroza begins to feel in the United States. Feroza feels a strange sense of being at home in the United States, “even if she knew it was an illusion.” (p. 159).

Unhomeliness is also noticed when Feroza, on her first day at the University of Denver, thinks to herself that “she was in the right place, that her life would develop in unexpected and substantial ways... Besides, after Twin Falls, Feroza found the sheer size and complexity of the University exhilarating” (p. 212). One seems to question, however, what exactly is the ‘right place’ for her? Because if her home is in Pakistan, then she should be expected to feel rather unhomely. However, in this situation it is seen that her right place seems to refer to the United States, and that if she were to go back to Pakistan, she would be feeling unhomely there, which is exactly what happens. After spending about three years in the States, Feroza decides to spend her summer in Lahore, where the following scene is described: “[a]fter the initial wave of euphoria, Feroza perceived that many things had changed. Time had wrought alterations she could not have foreseen—while her memory had preserved the people and places she knew, and their relationships with her, as if in an airtight jar” (p. 235).

Ironically, Feroza experiences unhomeliness both in the United States and in Pakistan. However, it is important to note that before her departure to the States, Feroza never feels unhomely in Pakistan. It is only during this short visit from the US to Pakistan that it manifests itself.

At one occasion during her visit, Feroza describes how some of her school friends had entered the Kinnaird and Lahore Colleges and how others had married and moved to their ancestral villages. In any case, she finds herself on a different page from her counterparts in Pakistan:

They talked about babies, husbands, and sisters-in-law and took her unawares by their gossip about people Feroza didn't know and their interest in issues she couldn't follow. Feroza felt she had grown in different ways. Her consciousness included many things they had not concept of and were not in the least bit interested in. (p. 238)

In other words, Feroza finds herself 'unhomely' in the very house she grew up in. She voices this concern more clearly in the following scene:

Feroza was disconcerted to discover that she was a misfit in a country in which she had once fitted so well. Although Zareen had not mentioned the slighting remarks... Feroza's subconscious had registered subtle changes in her mother's behaviour... [and] found her sense of dislocation deepen. (p. 239)

In other words, Feroza begins to feel out of place in her very own home in Pakistan. This situation is very similar to that of Isabel Archer's in *The Portrait of a Lady*, as described by Bhabha:

You have already heard the shrill alarm of the unhomely in that moment when Isabel Archer realizes that her world has been reduced to one high, mean window, as her house of fiction becomes 'the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation.' (Bhabha 1994, pp. 13-14)

Before leaving for Denver, Feroza "realise[s] with a sense of shock that she ha[s] outgrown her family's expectations of her" (p. 240).

A new chapter unfolds in Feroza's life when she meets and falls in love with an American boy called David Press. Feroza intends to buy his car and once the offer is secured, he takes her out for a drink. They chat shyly for a while, becoming more confident in each other's presence as time progresses.

She was amazed at how comfortable she felt with this incandescent being. His sentiments, his aspiration, were so like hers, and those of her family. And yet it was as if she had taken a leap across some cultural barrier and found herself on the other side of it to discover that everything was comfortingly the same, and yet the grass was greener. She never thought she could have felt this complete trust in a stranger to take her across the uncharted terrain of her emotions. (p. 251)

The 'unchartered terrain of her emotions' is Feroza's sense of unhomeliness. In this foreign land, her sense of home has undergone an evolution that extends beyond physical boundaries. Using Bhabha's words, Feroza experiences "extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (1994, p. 13).

There are not many traces of unhomeliness while Feroza's relationship continues smoothly with David. However, after their break up, she begins to question herself on where she would like to spend rest of her life and reaches some conclusions:

From her visit to Lahore, Feroza knew she had changed...Although the sense of dislocation, of not belonging, was more acute in America, she felt it would be more tolerable because it was shared by thousands of newcomers like herself. (p. 312)

Towards the end of her novel, she reflects on the life she has had so far and remembers Father Fibb's advice that she is like a young bird that will have to fly and fall, and fly and fall again till her wings become strong (p. 117). She thinks, "[m]aybe one day she'd soar to that self-contained place from which there was no falling, if there was such a place" (p. 317). As Feroza feels unhomely, she does not have a clear idea of her stable ground, and therefore wonders if such a place even exists. This does not, however, prevent her from loving America and choosing it over Pakistan to stay forever in. In one of the final parts of the novel, Feroza herself quite explicitly refers to the positive effects of unhomeliness:

There was also relief from observing the grinding poverty...injustices [and other] constraints [that would] crush her freedom, a freedom that had become central to her happiness. The abandon with which she could conduct her life without interference was possible only because of the distance from her family and the anonymity America provided. (p. 312)

Also, she mentions the following:

She was not alone in her desire for privacy and plenty. A sizable portion of the world was experiencing this phenomenon, on this scale at least, for the first time in human history, and the rest of the jam-packed and impoverished world—no matter how much they might moan about the loss of human contact, privacy, and the dwindling family—also hankered for it. (p. 313)

She goes on to claim that her options for education would also be limitless in America. She has developed a thirst for knowledge that can only be quenched by a country that is a haven for libraries and educational institutions (p. 313).

All these things and many more are possible for Feroza because of the unhomeliness that she feels in America. If she goes back to Pakistan, as she herself admits, many of the things that give her happiness and that she has become accustomed to would be robbed of her. Therefore, it would be right to say that although she experiences unhomeliness in both Pakistan and in America, the former is negative while the latter is positive. In other words, the unhomeliness that she feels in Pakistan makes her uncomfortable as she now cannot imagine living in a country that she once loved so dearly, while the unhomeliness that America makes her feel is what helps her in shedding the various restrictions imposed on her by her home country. This makes the study of unhomeliness in Feroza's character a subjective issue as it is debatable and depends on which angle it is analysed from. She does, however, decide to spend the rest of her life in the United States; a decision in which her sense of unhomeliness plays a crucial role. As Kani says about Feroza and Ayah (one of the main characters in Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India*) in the article *Migratory Experiences in Bapsi Sidhwa's Novels: An American Brat and Ice-Candy-man*, "[d]ue to the change of ghetto both Feroza and Ayah realise the value of their own self and are able to make their own decisions regarding their own life" (2013, p. 269). It is this change of ghetto that inspires unhomeliness in Feroza, which in turn empowers her and informs her decision to choose to stay in America for the rest of her life.

CONCLUSION

Employing a textual scrutiny of the novel *An American Brat* within the framework of Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, it is possible to conclude that Feroza is found to embody all the three selected elements of hybridity: mimicry, ambivalence, and unhomeliness. What is interesting to note, however, is that the manifestation (and hence, influence) of some is different in nature as compared to that of the others. Feroza, for instance, experiences mimicry and ambivalence only in the United States but she experiences unhomeliness both in Pakistan and in the United States. What is common, however, is that all the three characteristics of hybridity are found in Feroza and all three compel her to make her final decision. This serves to demonstrate that Feroza's hybridity plays an important role informing her decision of choosing America over Pakistan in terms of where she would like to spend the rest of her life.

Finally, this paper has been an attempt to demonstrate how literature is an authentic medium through which the downtrodden are given a voice. By finding out whether or not

hybridity affects the character's decision to choose to stay for good in a particular country, one can deduce what happens in real-life situations such as these.

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