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## **Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*: Becoming American, but "not yet"**

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[**Abstract:** Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* (1993) portrays the transformation that Feroza, a Parsee girl dispatched by her parents to the U.S., mainly to escape the Islamization in Zia-ul-Haq's Pakistan, undergoes in the new country. The essay argues that the novel, a coming-to-America and growing-up story, highlights the dilemma the ethnic/migrant subject faces in the U.S., subsisting under a perpetual tension between ethnic roots and communal affiliations while adapting to the mainstream notion of Americanness founded upon individualism and free choice. At this disjuncture of tension, a different sense of "imagined communities" is formed, one that is not necessarily homogenous or geographically bounded but rather diasporic and transnational, among a host of strangers.]

**T**he story of *An American Brat* revolves around the struggles of Feroza, who tries to become "American," struggling to be accepted as an "American" while unwilling to abandon her "ethnic loyalties." These desired terms of self-definition are contradistinctive to the spirit of Americanness founded on the rejection of group ties or ethnic identifications, a sentiment that valorizes individualism and personal freedom. The essay contends that Feroza's struggles create a new sense of national consciousness formed at the disjuncture between being ethnic and becoming American. This new consciousness makes new affiliations and belongings possible, reconfigures the meaning of "imagined communities" for the immigrant.

In the different notions of Americanness that circulated at the turn of the twentieth century, there were tensions between maintaining ethnic identifications and the creed of individualism and liberty, the main supports of American national consciousness; the old loyalties conflicted, too, with a third definition of America as a trans-nationality. James Bryce, in *The American Commonwealth* (1888), holds that “individualism, the love of enterprise, and the pride in personal freedom, have been deemed by Americans not only their choicest, but their peculiar and exclusive possessions” (419-20). Individualism and freedom constitute not only the defining traits of Americanism but also the core principles of national identification that unites Americans, in contrast to a unity based on shared ethnic/religious roots.<sup>1</sup> However, Randolph Bourne, in “Trans-national America” (1916), argues against narrowing the conception of Americanness to the Anglo-Saxon traditions. Bourne holds that “America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors” (121). The escalation of different waves of immigrants to the U.S. from the late nineteenth century heightened the feeling of urgency to find an ideal that could function as the ground for American national identification; individualism served that goal. It is only by adopting ideals of personal freedom that the immigrant is Americanized and will “possess *the national consciousness of an American*,” as Louis Brandeis maintains (640; emphasis added). It is to that end that Woodrow Wilson, in his speech to naturalized citizens underlined in 1915 that “[a] man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America *has not yet become an American*” (n.pag.; emphasis added). These contrary perceptions of Americanness imply that there are two kinds of consciousness and identifications that are set in contrast: one is national and inclusive, based on the ideal of individualism, which unites *all* Americans; and one is ethnic and exclusive, relying on group belonging, and hence is deemed not quite American. However, “ethnic” is not a self-identity; it is rather a political construction that has developed historically to grant, or conversely, deny specific ethnic groups their political rights based on the binary of white and not-white. The term “ethnic” has been often used to signify non-white individuals and to position ethnic identifications in opposition to national identifications. Feroza is sent by her parents in Pakistan to visit the U.S.; she wants to perceive herself as a Parsee and Pakistani as well as an American. According to Woodrow Wilson’s definition of the American national consciousness, Feroza has *not yet become American* because she is loath to let go of her ethnic/religious ties. However, Feroza does not find any contradiction between ideals of individualism

and personal freedom, on the one hand, and her desire to belong to her ethnic/religious groups, on the other.

The *not yet* may well be understood in light of Slavoj Žižek’s theory of “transubstantiation” in “Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism” (1997). According to him “transubstantiation” is a process by means of which the tension between an individual’s primary “particular ethnic identity” and his/her “universal identity as a member of a Nation-State is surpassed,” as soon as the individual recognizes “the substance of [his/her] being in a secondary community [Nation-State]” and cuts the links with his/her “primordial ‘organic’ community [family and local community]” (42; 41). Building on the tension that Žižek describes, one can argue that the *not yet* is a disrupted, incomplete process of shifting from the “particular ethnic identity” to the “universal identity as a member of a Nation-State.” *Not yet* American is also a cumulative identity that is formed by constantly deferring singular identifications; suspending both ethnic self-enclosures and essentialist national belongings. Such definition of the *not yet* echoes Homi Bhabha’s theory of the “third space” and of the liminal national subject within the context of cultural difference and national identities. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (2004), holds that the “third space,” “though unrepresentable in itself, ensures that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity” (55). Along these lines he elaborates that there is an ambivalence intrinsic to the formation of the national subject, sliding between the pedagogical perception of the nation (understanding the nation as homogenous and unified), and the performativity of national identifications (which unsettle monolithic perceptions of national belonging) (209-14). Liminal and cumulative, the *not yet* American subject’s affiliations and identifications are beyond geographic boundaries of nation-state, and are constructed and severed situationally. These contrary pulls create sites of ambivalence where Feroza’s struggles are enacted within, and outside, her.

Intertwined with the formation of affiliations and identifications beyond national boundaries is the flux of a developing sense of “imagined community” that is centered neither in the U.S. nor in Pakistan. In other words, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991) can be extended, in case of diasporic characters, to include “imagined (transnational) communities.”

Anderson holds that the formations of modern national communities (which he traces to the early nineteenth century) are “boundary-oriented and horizontal” (15). A truer account of America’s trans-nationality is offered by Bourne, who defines it as “a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and

colors" (120). Viewed in this light, the communities and comradeships imagined in *An American Brat* seem neither boundary-oriented nor necessarily horizontal; they are formed in both Pakistan and the U.S. The communities that are found in *An American Brat* are formed around religious, political, and/or state ideologies<sup>2</sup> (such as individualism, capitalism, in the U.S., and Islamization in Pakistan). The term "ideology" has, of course, to be understood in Raymond Williams's sense: as a set of ideas internalized by individuals. *An American Brat*, as is clarified in the following discussion, demonstrates how different ideologies create different senses of belonging and non-belonging.

Suffice it to note here that Imagined (transnational) communities are transnational in two senses: they are formed beyond the geographical boundaries of a single nation; and they are new formations, evoked by disruptive moments in which the individual's sense of national identification is problematized.

As mentioned earlier, *An American Brat* is a growing-up story of a Pakistani girl, Feroza. She is packed off to the U.S. by her parents after the Islamic regime takes over in Pakistan in 1978, imposing its rigid rules on all Pakistanis, especially on women, whether Muslim or not. Feroza is a Parsee who had to encounter the hardships of living under strict Islamic laws; in America, she encounters the difficulties of adjusting to a different culture. That is to say, *An American Brat* interweaves the growing-up plot with the coming-to-America narrative. Rosemary Marangoly George, in "But that Was in Another Country: Girlhood and the Contemporary 'Coming-to-America' Narrative" (1998), holds that the coming-of-age/going-to-America stories "partake of and propagate a developmental narrative in which Americanization and the very American ideal of individualization plays a vital part in shaping and establishing the full adult" (140). The developmental story in *An American Brat* differs from the generic coming-to-America story, though, because the female protagonist of this novel grows up in both the U.S. and Pakistan. Feroza's "liminality" between two cultural traditions shapes her relationship to the U.S. and to Pakistan. On the one hand, Feroza's parents emphasize a cultural difference between the U.S. and Pakistan. On the other hand, Feroza struggles with "domestic Americanization," which is "making *one* people [American] out of many" as Donald Pease holds in "C.L.R. James Moby-Dick and the Emergence of Transnational American Studies" (151; emphasis added). In other words, Feroza does not resolve the tension between her "particular ethnic identity" and her "universal identity as member of a Nation-State." In that sense, the national consciousness of the *not yet* American subject is a site of ambivalence, shaped by maneuvering,

challenging, and/or succumbing to the First World-Third World binary and “domestic Americanization.”

Feroza’s growing-up story is interwoven with her going-to-America story to portray the protagonist’s struggle with the Islamization of Pakistan and the opposite notions of choice and individualism in the U.S. Though published in 1993, *An American Brat* has not received wide scholarly attention, unlike *Cracking India*, published earlier, in 1991. Most reviews of *An American Brat* locate two major themes in Sidhwa’s novel: the adjustments made by the protagonist to fit herself in with a new culture, and the discovery of startling differences between the conservative East and the liberal West.<sup>3</sup> In most reviews, the novel is read as an assimilation narrative, for Feroza decides to stay on in the U.S., accepting the prospect of staying away from the rest of her family. Yet the novel is not merely an assimilation narrative; it rather reveals Feroza as possessed of a diasporic sense of imagined community, one that imposes on her dual moments of estrangement and assimilation in Pakistan as well as the U.S.

Feroza’s sense of imagined community is diasporic by virtue of her being born a Parsee<sup>4</sup>: members of her family are dispersed among Pakistan, India, and the U.S. Nilufer Bharucha explains, in “‘When Old Tracks are Lost’: Rohinton Mistry’s Fiction as Diasporic Discourse” (1995), that Parsees have formed three diasporas: first, the precolonial-India diaspora (when they fled Iran); second, by the division of India; and third, Western/First World diaspora—in Britain, Canada, USA, Australia, and New Zealand (57). One can therefore infer that Parsees, scattered as they are in various countries, belong to multiple communities concurrently within and outside the country where they reside, which in turn troubles monolithic identifications as either solely Parsee, Pakistani, or Indian. Sidhwa, herself born in Lahore before the partition, defines her identity ethnically, nationally, and regionally; or, as she refers to her identity, as a “3P identity”: “I am a Parsi first, then a Pakistani, specifically a Punjabi” (qtd. in Randhir Singh 6). Many critical interpretations of Sidhwa’s works—such as *Bapsi Sidhwa* (by Randhir Singh), *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa* (by Rajinder Dhawan and Novy Kapadia), and “Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*” (Ambreen Hai)—trace a direct correlation between the writer’s Parsee-Pakistan-Punjabi heritage and the storylines of her novels, which show not only in *An American Brat* but also in *Cracking India* (1991), *The Crow Eaters* (1982), and *The Pakistani Bride* (1983). According to these critical reviews, Sidhwa’s fiction familiarizes its readers with the history and culture of the Parsee diaspora in India, and in Pakistan as well as in the U.S. Although Parsees nationally belong to India and/or

Pakistan by virtue of citizenship, Hindu sentiments in India and Islamization in Pakistan have further minoritized Parsees in both countries. Feroza's dilemma of national identification in Pakistan occurs only after Pakistan becomes an Islamic State under General Zia-ul-Haq. The Islamization of Pakistan has driven Feroza's to feel that she does not fit in Pakistan unless she adapts to the new Islamic codes and, in Žižek's terms, has created tension between her primary "particular ethnic identity" and her "universal identity as a member of a Nation-State." For example, Feroza wants to adopt a strict Islamic dress code imposed by the Pakistani government, whereas Zareen, her mother, disapproves of orthodox Islamic traditions. In an argument with Feroza about how to dress, Zareen contends: "We're Parsee, everybody knows we dress differently" (10). This moment of contention between Feroza, who dislikes the traditional sleeveless blouse and sari, and her mother, who disapproves of the fundamentalist turn in Pakistan, problematizes their affiliations with an Islamic state in two ways. First, the Islamic code of dress in Pakistan means the Islamization—or in other words, a de-secularization—of the "public sphere," to borrow Jürgen Habermas's term.<sup>5</sup> Second, the imposition of fundamentalist traditions on the "public sphere" results in the exclusion of such religious minorities as Parsee, or secular Pakistanis. Zareen, in order to save Feroza from the "puritanical," "mullah-ish mentality" (13), decides to send her daughter to the U.S., which she regards a more secular place. Despite this binarism between the Islamic state of Pakistan and the secular liberal America, there exists an interlocking relation between the U.S. and Pakistan, specifically due to the circulation of capitalism and fundamentalism.

The political changes in Pakistan that brought Zia-Ul-Haq to power and led to the execution of the then Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (the more liberal political leader of Pakistan), were supported by and took place under the auspices of the United States.<sup>6</sup> In order to combat the spread of communism in the region, Pakistan was propped up as the third biggest country—after Israel and Egypt—to receive U.S. aid as well as a new market for the commodities from the U.S. The spread of commodities from the U.S. and pro-American Pakistani government were accompanied by the Islamization of Pakistan, thereby "turning religious identities into political ones," as Mahmood Mamdani outlines in *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (249). Politicizing Islam in Pakistan has led to minoritizing the Parsee community as well as jeopardizing secular persons who protested against the fundamentalist regime.

Feroza feels alienated when she is required to adapt to the altered conditions of existence in Pakistan, and then in the U.S. In Pakistan, Feroza feels a stranger, after the Islamization of Pakistan, because she

is Parsee, not a Muslim; and she feels a stranger in the U.S., because, as Manek, her uncle, says, she is “a Paki Third Worlder” (27). In the course of her journey from Pakistan to the U.S., Feroza encounters moments of estrangement in the U.S. because she is a foreigner, and within her Parsee community, because she marries a Jew, a non-Parsee. These moments of estrangement disrupt the assimilation story and complicate the formations of “imagined communities” to unfold instances of the *not-yet* American subject.

Upon her arrival at John F. Kennedy International Airport, Feroza is treated, as is customary, as a non-American citizen. As a non-citizen, Feroza feels isolated “in a strange country amidst strangers” (54). However, the collective feeling of anonymity among strangers offers Feroza a paradoxical sense of freedom. She feels free from the “gravitational pull” of “the thousand constraints that [had] governed her life” (52; 58). Feroza at this moment becomes both a stranger and a free individual.

Feroza’s intertwined feelings echo Georg Simmel’s correlation between freedom and being a stranger in his essay “The Stranger” (1950). For Simmel, the stranger is a figure emblematic of modernity in urban cities at the turn of the twentieth century. Feroza’s shopping expedition on Fifth Avenue resonates with the figure of the stranger in two senses: as a subject who is simultaneously attached to and distanced from the life in the metropolis; and as a subject whose relationships are based on sharing common—rather than specific—qualities with other strangers.

Feroza’s ride with Manek into Manhattan is, for her, like “climbing into a futuristic spaghetti of curving and incredibly suspended roads, mile upon looping mile of wide highway that weaved in and out of the sky at all angles . . . and sometimes they appeared to be aiming at the sky” (67). Feroza’s perspective is that of the newcomer, who is fascinated by the vast and entangled layout of New York City (a spaghetti of roads and highways). Her description of New York positions Feroza as an observer who is *not yet* part of what she describes. In Simmel’s words, Feroza “embodies that synthesis of nearness and distance which constitutes the formal position of the stranger” (404). This dual moment of proximity and distance is even clearer when Feroza feels shocked and bewildered by the filth and poverty of Eighth Avenue and Forty-Second Street, in comparison to the luxury and opulence she has seen in Fifth Avenue. It is “an alien filth” that unveils “the callous heart of the rich country” (81), a notion to which Feroza cannot relate. It is a moment of (un)imagining communities that disrupts her assimilation and triggers her feeling of vulnerability. Feroza’s vulnerability can be derived as a moment of fear caused by the exploitative face of capitalism. That is to say, behind the



enchancements of the U.S. (highways, skyscrapers, abundant food and merchandise, and efficient infrastructure) there is also a sense of confusion, disorientation, hollowness, and loss. Metaphorically, trapped in the stairways of the YMCA, Feroza feels that “America assume[s] a ruthless, hollow, cylindrical shape without beginning or end, without sunlight, an unfathomable concrete tube inhabited by her fear” (90). This perception of the U.S. echoes, but with a contrasting twist, Feroza’s earlier perception of New York as a *futuristic spaghetti* of roads and highways that aim at the sky. Besides, the metaphor of the locked exit door in the YMCA signifies Feroza’s “in-betweenness,” both in and out of this new world and the new terrains she treads. This moment of mixed feelings of fascination, confusion, and fear is also the moment of nostalgia for the lost network of family members and acquaintances left behind in Pakistan.

Feroza’s feeling of estrangement is not only within the U.S. but also within her Parsee community. Near the end of the novel, Feroza’s complex romantic relationship with David problematizes her belonging to the Parsee community, since a Parsee woman is excommunicated if she marries a non-Parsee. Although a Parsee man can marry outside his religion, for a Parsee woman, marrying a *non* is a dilemma. When Feroza’s parents receive the letter about her plans to marry David, a big family meeting is held in which stories are shared about Parsee women who were denied appropriate funerals and social status by the Parsee community for marrying outside their community. In her attempt to stop Feroza’s marriage to David, Zareen flies to Denver. Reiterating the rhetoric of individualism, Feroza ridicules her mother’s concern with heritage and pedigree. She says: “If you go about talking of people’s pedigree, the *Americans* will laugh at you” (277; emphasis added). It is not Feroza who abandons her religion and community but rather sexism that renders her a stranger to her community. Zareen starts questioning interfaith marriage in the Zoroastrian doctrine, only to conclude that the “mindless current of fundamentalism sweeping the world like a plague has spared no religion, not even their microscopic community of 120 thousand” (305-06). Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan and sexism in the Zoroastrian religious tradition complicate Feroza’s sense of national and religious belonging.

Feroza and David, although they surpass East-West boundaries in their relationship, are unable to overcome the traditional perception of roots and heritage as intrinsic to their personal sense of belonging. Consequently, what starts as an intriguing romantic interest between David and Feroza turns into an impossible relationship because of insurmountable cultural differences.

The theme of cultural differences, in fact, frames the whole novel. Manek, for example, describes Pakistanis as “Third World Pakis” with

a “snow-white Englishman gora complex” (26). Besides, in an argument between Feroza and her mother about Feroza’s relationship with David, Feroza asks her mother to think in new ways because “it’s a *different* culture,” but Zareen responds: “It’s *not your culture*” (279). Cultural differences in *An American Brat* can be interpreted through the lens of American capitalism that commodifies *difference per se*. “[C]apital has fallen in love with difference,” Jonathan Rutherford reminds us in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (11). The novel, in a sense, criticizes the capitalist’s ideology of multiculturalism. Žižek states, “The ideal form of ideology of this global capitalism is multiculturalism” (44). *An American Brat* depicts New York as an intertwined site of capitalism and multiculturalism. Feroza’s impression of New York is that of “a kaleidoscope of perceptions in which paintings, dinosaurs, American Indian artifacts, and Egyptian mummies mingled with hamburgers, pretzels, sapphire earrings, deodorants, and glamorous window displays” (76). Blurring the images of art and artifacts with food, clothing, and jewelry conjures up what Richard Sennett concludes in “The Public Realm” about diversity in New York and its planning. In New York, there is “linear, sequential display of difference”; as he elaborates, New York is a mix of difference and indifference, races “who live segregated lives close together, and of social classes, who mix but do not socialize” (269). Along the same lines, Peter McLaren in “White Terror and Oppositional Agency: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism” believes that despite claims of diversity, the ideology of multiculturalism either has its premises on assimilation or collapses into universalistic humanism that paradoxically re-enforces Anglo-American norms and essentializes differences (48-52). *An American Brat* seems not to break away from essentializing differences and valorizing the U.S. ideals of diversity.

Structurally, the novel is an amalgam of stories that revolve around *difference* situating Pakistan in contrast to the U.S. It opens with Pakistan as a starting point and ends with the U.S. as a final destination; thus, it resonates with a conventional coming-to-America/assimilation narrative. For example, the first chapter in *An American Brat* “dramatically cuts between origin (the country of childhood) and final destination [U.S.]” (George 144). This opening chapter encapsulates the dilemma of the Parsee diaspora as well as the crisis of rising Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan versus the more secular ideology of liberal America.

*An American Brat*, additionally, shares some aspects of popular fiction, specifically by mixing the romantic plot of Feroza and David. The latter follows a familiar narrative pattern of pop fiction: a simple plot in which the young woman from the less privileged lands of Pakistan comes to the U.S., meets her dream husband, and goes on to

defy her parents and the family traditions of marriage. Along these lines, Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance* (1984) holds that romances are all about a “man and woman meeting, the obstacles to their love, and their final happy ending” (199). In a similar sense, Walter Nash states, in *Language in Popular Fiction* (1990), that the romantic story “is nothing if not predictable” (4). The predictability of Feroza’s and David’s falling in love is precisely what renders *An American Brat* a popular romantic fiction. The coming-to-America narrative, thus, gets intertwined with the popular romance genre, re-asserting the ideology of individualism, especially for the female protagonist who challenges her community and its religious doctrines.

However, Feroza’s and David’s love story does not end in marriage and living happily ever after. Unlike the typical closures in romantic popular fiction, Feroza and David cannot override their respective cultural boundaries. That is to say, the unconventional closure disrupts both the assimilation narrative and the popular romance story; and, as a corollary, it allegorizes a disrupted process of “transubstantiation,” to recall Žižek: the shifting from the “particular ethnic identity” to the “universal identity as a member of a Nation-State.”

Moreover, the love story of Feroza and David reverses what Mica Nava calls “the Orientalist critical gaze” (25). Nava explains that the Orientalist gaze is a “panoptic controlling male gaze . . . in which the oriental woman is cast as [an] object of sexual desire” (26). Contrary to the Orientalist “panoptic” gaze, Feroza objectifies the white male body to her gaze. Feroza and David’s first meeting is described as follows:

At Feroza’s timid knock on the garage door, David Press *revealed himself, wearing only* his ragged shorts and a pair of square, metal-framed glasses. The longish gold-streaked hair that swept his forehead and framed his handsome face appeared, if anything, to enhance the wild effect of his *gleaming nudity*. (245; emphasis added)

In reading Sidhwa’s description, one cannot help noticing the slow rhythm of the account of David’s physique and its slow emergence—*revealing himself, longish gold-streaked hair, gleaming nudity*—as viewed from the garage door. This portrayal renders the *white* male’s body in exotic, nay, erotic terms. To extend the reversed metaphor, unlike the Orientalist’s portrayals of the exotic women from the East as languid, lewd, and/or oppressed, Feroza is described as “impassive, imperious” (247). Feroza’s haughty manner unsettles the East-West dichotomy that frames the whole novel.

Similarly, *An American Brat* subtly exoticizes the U.S. The “America-returned” Pakistanis perceive the U.S. as an “*exotic culture*” (171). This perception of the U.S. as an *exotic* place dismantles, what

Žižek infers to be its “privileged universal position,” granted by its ideology of multiculturalism (44). Multiculturalism sets the U.S. in the superior position that claims appreciation of *diversity*, yet is founded on a demarcation between the “ethnic” and the *American*. This re-configuration of the U.S. as an exotic culture can possibly re-nuance the definition of national consciousness in terms of diversity and multiple identifications, not in terms of assimilation and “domestic Americanization.” Whereas on the surface level of meaning *An American Brat* reads as an assimilation narrative, on another layer it disrupts this narrative. To recall Simmel, Feroza ultimately decides that she—like the stranger figure—finds comfort living in the U.S., away from family, because her feelings of dislocation, non-belonging, and anonymity are shared by many “newcomers” like herself (312). The last chapter of the novel sounds like Feroza’s and Manek’s testimony about living in the U.S. and its advantages, which focus on its opulence, material goods, freedom, and pervasive technology. The whole chapter echoes and sums up the earlier chapters in which Manek underlines the stark differences between the U.S. and Pakistan. In this chapter, it is Feroza reiterating the same notions, relieved that she is not in Pakistan, observing “grinding poverty and injustice” and the “disturbing Hodood Ordinances” (312). In this final chapter, Feroza refrains from arguing with Manek. On the other hand, Aban, Manek’s wife, also a *newcomer* to the U.S., plays the same role that Feroza did earlier in the novel. The implication is that characters in the novel follow the same linear journey: move to the U.S.; are challenged by the new life style; adapt to the new life in the U.S.; and, finally, are unable to give up living in the U.S. The linearity of this narrative does not break from traditional migrant narratives that propagate Americanization as the final destination.

Following Feroza’s journey to the U.S. is, as George points out in her review of the novel, “a journey into the English language and into the ‘ethnic’ narrative of successful progress” (136). Manek tells Feroza that she is lucky that her roommate—Jo—is a “real American” (148). Hence, Feroza works on *performing* “Americanness” by emulating Jo’s informal way of talking, calling names, and eating canned and frozen food. In a similar way, to sell Bibles to Christian families, Manek lies about his being a Christian. To make his sales talk appealing, Manek uses words and phrases that Christian families would positively respond to: “How is little Jim (or Bill or Barbara) doing?” “Have you started him on solids? . . . The Reverend told me Kevin is a mighty smart boy for his age” (202). The foregrounding of a singular accent into a new way of talking, and a dominant faith re-confirms the notion of a unified national community. Thus, “America” becomes “the imagined nation signified by . . . a monolingual tongue (English or,

rather, American English) and a determined assimilation of all differences into this national story" (George 136).

Feroza ultimately decides that she finds comfort living in the U.S., away from her family, because her feelings of dislocation, non-belonging, and anonymity, shared by many "newcomers" like herself (312), make her a part of the imagined community. That is to say, by the end of the novel, the community that Feroza finds herself identifying with is a community of *strangers*. In that sense, the imagined communities in *An American Brat* are neither "boundary oriented" nor necessarily "horizontal." The "imagined communities" in *An American Brat* are rather formed around a shared feeling of being "amidst strangers."

The ending of *An American Brat*, when Feroza accepts being a stranger in the U.S. because others are newcomers and strangers too, is paradoxical. On the one hand, this traditional closure offers the protagonist a place within the imagined community of the nation as Martin Japtok holds in another context (137).<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, within the course of the novel, by virtue of the fact that this is a two-world novel, this text unsettles the notions of a homogenous national consciousness and re-nuances the formations of the imagined communities to be *transnational* and among *strangers*. In other words, whereas structurally, especially in the dénouement, *An American Brat* partakes of a narrative of integration, the form of individualism that the novel depicts is contingent and situational, and its *national* consciousness is not pre-set. By the end of the novel, Feroza accepts being *both* American and Pakistani, without necessarily being torn by the tension between the *ethnic* and the *American*.

## Notes

1. Theodore Roosevelt held that ethnic loyalties, if they are necessary for some groups, should be only subordinate to the higher unity of the nation (qtd. in Yehoshua Arieli 187).

2. Tracing the genealogy of the term, Raymond Williams holds in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983) that "ideology" has been used to mean "the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interest, or more broadly, from a definite class or group" and is used paradoxically to mean false consciousness (because it serves the interests of a specific class or group) (155-56).

3. I am referring to reviews specifically by Robert Morace, Winifred Sihon, Adam Penenberg, Eliza Bent, and Adele King.

4. Roots of Parsees are in Persia, now known as Iran. The Arabs' invasion of Persia in the seventh century coerced Parsees to renounce the Zoroastrian faith and convert to Islam. They fled to the Indian subcontinent and congregated in Bombay, Lahore, Karachi; after the partition of the Indian

subcontinent in 1947, some stayed on in India, some in Pakistan, while some moved to Australia and to the West.

5. Jürgen Habermas's study, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), is a genealogy of the bourgeois public sphere, focusing on its social and economic bases. Habermas's accounts for the public sphere as a domain of “critical judgment” of state and government (24).

6. For this background information, I rely on *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* by Mahmood Mamdani (2004). During the Cold War years with Russia, the U.S. supported Muslim Afghan insurgents who were fighting the spread of communism in Afghanistan. After the victory of the Saur revolution 1978 that brought communist parties to power, the Afghan fighters fled to Pakistan and were trained by the CIA. This was also accompanied by a shift in the U.S. policies towards Pakistan. Despite Pakistan's violations of international humanitarian laws and the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the U.S. offered huge financial and military aid to Zia-Ul-Haq to host and support Islamist militants who joined the Afghan fighters from all over the world in their battle against communism.

7. I am borrowing from Japtok's study *Growing up Ethnic: Nationalism and the Bildungsroman in African American and Jewish American Fiction*.

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