Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

Kultura i Wartości
ISSN 2299-7806
Nr 36 (2023)

http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/kw.2023.36.141-157

Otherness and Identity in Daphne Palasi Andreades's *Brown Girls*

Magdalena Łapińska
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7686-3086

The article explores how Daphne Palasi Andreades presents the impact of assimilation and racial otherness on the immigrants' identity in her novel *Brown Girls*. First, the article explores theoretical approaches connected with immigration, with special attention paid to the processes of assimilation, acculturation, and collective identity. Subsequently, the analysis of the novel presents how the process of assimilation alters one's identity as well as disrupts interpersonal relationships. With the use of immigration and identity theory, the paper presents how individual identity clashes with collective identity and shows that an individual can become "the other" to those with whom they once formed a community. The article explores the fictionalized version of the immigrants' experiences, allowing for more in-depth analysis due to access to individuals' thoughts and emotions. The results of the analysis correspond with the findings of the presented theoretical approaches thus illustrating that fiction mirrors real life and allows non-specialists to understand complicated concepts connected with immigrants' identity through the act of reading fiction.

Keywords: identity, race, immigrants, racial minority, assimilation

The United States is a difficult country to define when it comes to identity, due to the multitude of ethnicities that create the nation. Debates on how to define citizenship continue to "reflect a continuing struggle with the exclusionary aspects

MAGDALENA ŁAPIŃSKA, PhD, University of Białystok, Faculty of Philology; address for correspondence: Faculty of Philology, Plac Niezależnego Zrzeszenia Studentów 1, PL 15–420 Białystok; e-mail: m.lapinska@uwb.edu.pl

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

of citizenship, particularly those based on gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, and religion."[1] When we consider citizenship as well as the identity of Americans, minorities play a significant role in both owing to past and present immigration processes. Because of immigration, which has been prominent throughout American history, contemporary American society is multicultural as well as multiracial. History is full of instances when strangers from foreign lands became American citizens while nevertheless continuing to be perceived as "the other."

Stephen Spencer explains how the concept of otherness should be understood. He postulates that "the other" is not a specific person or group of people but rather a metaphysical concept that "represents an area of consensus, a way of delineating self and the shared values of our culture or subculture. [...] The process of forging an identity at the individual as well as the group level is dependent on interaction with others."[2] As Spencer's observations specify, the concept of otherness is inextricably linked to concepts of identity. In her novel *Brown Girls* Daphne Palasi Andreades explores the notion of otherness in connection to immigrants in American society. This article focuses on the representation of problematic aspects linked to assimilation as well as identity formation in Andreades's novel. First, the article briefly explores theoretical approaches connected with immigration, with special attention paid to the processes of assimilation, acculturation, and collective identity. Subsequently, Andreades's novel, narrated in the choral "we" of the titular Brown Girls, is analyzed to illustrate the difficulty of daily life as a part of a racial or cultural minority.

One of the main concepts connected with immigration is assimilation. Assimilation can be conceptualized in various ways. For example, "[s]ociologically, it has been defined as a multidimensional process of boundary reduction and brokering, which blurs or dissolves an ethnic distinction and the social and cultural differences and identities associated with it."[3] On the other hand, "[i]deologically,

[1] Irene Bloemraad, Anna Korteweg, and Gökçe Yurdakul, "Citizenship and Immigration: Multiculturalism, Assimilation, and Challenges to the Nation-State," *Annual Review of Sociology* 34, no. 1 (August 1, 2008): 155, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134608

[2] Steve Spencer, *Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity and Representation*, Second edition (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 10–11.

[3] Rubén G. Rumbaut, "Assimilation of Immigrants," in: *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier, 2015): 81, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.31109-6

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

the term has been used in the past to justify selective state-imposed policies aimed at the eradication of minority cultures and the 'benevolent' conquest of other peoples."[4] There is a multitude of other perspectives from which one could consider the process of assimilation; however, let us focus on those aspects most pertinent to the American society portrayed in the analyzed novel.

Depending on when and where the term assimilation was applied it has been understood differently. After the First World War there was a period of time when "'Americanization' became synonymous with assimilation" in common usage that "reflected the dominant currents of thought of the times."[5] It was also after the First World War that the first classic definition of assimilation was formulated by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess. They defined assimilation as "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life."[6] Historically, in America "the apogee of the concept of assimilation [occurred] in the 1950s and early 1960s [...] [and reflected] the need generated by World War II for national unity, and the postwar tendency to see American history as a narrative of consensus rather than conflict."[7] Moreover, as Ruben G. Rumbaut observes, "the political and social upheavals of the 1960s [...] [shattered] the 'consensus school' and the rationale for studying assimilation, bringing back instead a focus on the ethnic group and ethnic resilience, and more inclusive conceptions of American society."[8] More than half a century later, the concept of assimilation has again transformed and "involves a series of interrelated but analytically distinct cultural (acculturation), structural (integration), and psychological (identification) dimensions."[9] The processes which the term assimilation encompasses are impacted by the society in which they occur.

---

[4] Ibidem.

[5] Ibidem, 82.

[6] Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 735, quoted in Ruben G. Rumbaut, "Assimilation and Its Discontents: Between Rhetoric and Reality," *The International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (1997): 943–944, https://doi.org/10.2307/2547419.

[7] Rumbaut, "Assimilation of Immigrants," 84.

[8] Ibidem.

[9] Ibidem.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

Thus, social acceptance or exclusion decide whether the assimilation succeeds or fails.[10] In the past, the process of assimilation was often thought to be necessary for upward mobility. Nowadays, however, numerous researchers "have noted that contemporary immigrants come from a much wider variety of socio-economic backgrounds than those in the previous wave, suggesting that different groups will start out on different 'rungs' of the American class system."[11] Because of that fact, providing a universal definition of assimilation may prove impossible. Moreover, the background of immigrants is not the only factor that impacts how their life in a new country will progress: the reaction of society they enter is also vital. "In varying contexts of reception, immigration is followed predictably not only by acculturative processes on the part of the immigrants, but also by varying degrees of acceptance, intolerance, or xenophobia about the alien newcomers on the part of the natives, which in turn shape the immigrants' own modes of adaptive response and sense of belonging"—thus impacting their individual and collective (racial or ethnic) identities.[12] Irene Bloemraad, Anna Korteweg, and Gökçe Yurdakul observed that there is an abundance of scientific literature in which scholars argue

> that immigrants' race and economic positions intersect to create three distinct incorporation pathways: traditional assimilation into the white middle class; selective integration when immigrants of color retain ethnic ties and culture to facilitate upward socio-economic mobility; or 'downward' assimilation into racialized urban minority with limited economic opportunities.[13]

If one considers the concept of identity in the context of assimilation or acculturation—which according to Rumbaut "comes closest to the common sense notion of 'melting,' involves complex processes of cultural diffusion and changes producing greater linguistic and cultural similarity between two or more

[10] Ibidem, 84–85.

[11] Yu Xie and Emily Greenman, "The Social Context of Assimilation: Testing Implications of Segmented Assimilation Theory," *Social Science Research* 40, no. 3 (5.2011): 966, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2011.01.004

[12] Rumbaut, "Assimilation of Immigrants," 81.

[13] Bloemraad, Korteweg, Yurdakul, "Citizenship and Immigration," 163.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

groups"[14]—it is collective identity not individual identity that is pertinent. According to Christoph Antweiler, "[c]ollective identity refers to perceived or experienced continuities in collectives."[15] Moreover, "[h]umans can only survive in collectives and the collective, due in part to the fact that the many are more powerful than the individual, thereby restricting the latter's autonomy."[16]

Collective identity is a broad term which encompasses different types of identity. "Social identity, group identity, cultural identity, and ethnic identity are often used as synonyms. At the same time, they also mean specific identity relations."[17] Antweiler explains that "[s]o-called group sociology deals with groups whose members often had a consciousness of togetherness and solidarity."[18] The individuals who belong to such groups are connected through collective identity which involves the treatment and experience of "[c]ertain activities, tasks, and responsibilities […] as group matters. The root of this is often a feeling of a common bond, which also explains the emotional solidarity against strangers and attackers."[19] Due to the often negative reception by the society entered into by the immigrants, the emotional bonds and thus the sense of the collective may be stronger. Among immigrants the common bond is often linked to one's ethnicity and to similar experiences, and among young immigrants or the children of immigrants can be forged while facing the same adversities during the process of growing up—the period of life when individual identity is strongly shaped. Those bonds developed and shaped in adolescence are a significant part of *Brown Girls*. Julie Seaman emphasizes that "identification with a social group tends to foster attitudes and behaviors consonant with the norms of the particular group."[20] This can support Andreades choosing to use the plural narrative voice as the protagonists become bonded to and identify with the same social group—immigrants living in Queens.

---

[14] Rumbaut, "Assimilation of Immigrants," 85.

[15] Christoph Antweiler, "Collective Identity," in: *The Bonn Handbook of Globality*, ed. Ludger Kühnhardt, Tilman Mayer, trans. Oliver Pye, vol. 1 (Springer, 2019), 354.

[16] Ibidem.

[17] Ibidem.

[18] Ibidem, 355.

[19] Ibidem.

[20] Julie Seaman, "Hate Speech and Identity Politics: A Situationalist Proposal," *Florida State University Law Review* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 121.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

Antweiler notes that "[t]he global turn has made multiple membership and multiple and flexible identity the norm. Individuals can belong to several indeed a multitude of collectives and can change their identity."[21] Thus, pluralistic societies have been impacted the most by the change in perception of citizenship and identity. "These multiple options for the individual create a new identity regime. This also leads to identity being permanently reflected, negotiated, and revised. This shows itself in the flexible and changing narrative of one's own biography and an evolving positioning of who one is, how one became to be oneself and what one will become."[22] Silvan S. Tomkins, an American psychologist who studied affects, reflected on this multitude of options concerning identity by stating that

> the increased preoccupation with identity problems arises in part from the multiplicity of kinds of achievement and the multiplicity of criteria which are a consequence of both the heterogeneity within a modern complex society and its rapid rate of change. The modern American is engaged in a quest for his identity because of an embarrassment of riches in his possible identities.[23]

This array of possibilities is not only linked to individual identity but also to collective identity. In the United States,

> [i]n contrast to all expectations, the main European immigrants did not just melt into an American unified mainstream culture. Instead, they celebrated their own culture, tradition, and ancestry and fought against cultural or racist discrimination [...]. This collective self-delineation often involved the conscious appropriation and reinterpretation of stigmatizing ascriptions ("nigger," "wog").[24]

However, with changing times and attitudes the immigrants' ways of integration were altered and the mentioned "self-delineation often became reduced to nurturing cultural traditions such as religious celebrations and traditional costumes ("symbolic ethnicity"). This can be observed with the third-generation im-

[21] Antweiler, "Collective Identity," 355.

[22] Ibidem, 356.

[23] Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2008), 503.

[24] Antweiler, "Collective Identity," 356.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

migrants—this kind of ethnicity does not hinder integration into general society."[25] Such integration, however, depending on its extent, can disturb the relations between individuals within the group, because as many individuals as there are in the groups will foster as many opinions as to how much integration is too much. Identity once defined is no longer fixed from the perspective of the individual or from that of those perceiving one from the outside. Nowadays, just like individuals, collectives are constantly redefining themselves. "Because of the number of options that can be negotiated, people have to do more 'identity work.' [...] [L]arge parts of an individual's identity depend on the articulated identity of the other individuals and on their recognition of one's own (articulated) identity."[26] Immigrants seem to be one of the groups in which individuals need to do even more identity work due to the often changing circumstances, whether they be geographical, political, or interpersonal.

At the very beginning of *Brown Girls* the reader is presented with the following situation: "In front yards, not to be confused with actual lawns, grandmothers string laundry lines, hang bedsheets, our brothers' shorts, and our sneakers scrubbed to look brand-new. *Take those down!* our mothers hiss. *This isn't back home.*"[27] Thus, the reader sees that the families of the protagonists are at different stages of acculturation because the grandmothers from the quote either do not know what is appropriate or plainly do not care, whereas the mothers' behavior points to their attempts to assimilate to the surrounding society. Rumbaut points out that "[i]n assimilation [...] the changes are more subtle and the process is typically unconscious, so that the person is incorporated into the common life of the group largely unaware of how it happened. Assimilation is thus very unlikely to occur among immigrants who arrive as adults."[28] Andreades's novel seems to illustrate that notion because, although we see that the adult members of the protagonists' families try to fit in, they do not fully comprehend some of the elements of life in the American society. This is also illustrated, for example, in the exploration of the process of applying to numerous educational institutions:

[25] Ibidem.

[26] Ibidem, 359.

[27] Daphne Palasi Andreades, *Brown Girls* (London: 4th Estate, 2022), 3.

[28] Rumbaut, "Assimilation of Immigrants": 82–83.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

> We do all this at the age of thirteen, already training ourselves in the competitive ways of the City That Never Sleeps. Our home. It is a process our parents, who weren't raised here, do not fully comprehend. But they let us go anyway. After all, the mantra *Education is the only way to succeed* is one our parents have carried from ancestral lands to this supposed Land of Opportunity. So, we board subways to unfamiliar neighborhoods. We go alone, but buoyed, full of excitement and possibility.[29]

The titular girls understand the process because they have been immersed in the American way of living. Their parents, despite not understanding the process itself, understand the importance of education but even this understanding is limited by the parents' immigration experience. They create restrictions as to what and where their daughters should study due to their perception of what will provide well-paid but inconspicuous jobs. The need to be "inconspicuous" is linked with the need to blend in with the rest of the society, and to not become a target of the various racial issues that continue to be ever-present in the United States (which is a fear illustrated in numerous scenes in the novel). This fear is not always passed down through generations as some girls disregard their parents' warnings and follow their own dreams; they have moved past ensuring that the basic human needs required for survival are met and yearn to be fulfilled emotionally and culturally.

The girls dream of success. Some choose to leave their communities, to study and live away from the family and the collective. This choice is met with a lack of understanding and even anger:

> *Isn't this neighborhood good*
> *enough for you, Michelle, Amalia, Sabina?*
> *What, you think you're better, Leah, Eun?*
> We squeeze our eyes tighter, pray for sleep to bury these voices. We fail.
> *Know-it-all. Arrogant.*
> *Don't expect a penny from me,*
> some of our mothers had said. In response to their words, we'd bitten our tongues, knowing it would be no use to take the bait. These arguments teach us that it is better to withdraw and keep our thoughts to ourselves. The hotheaded of us, however, shouted back, I DON'T WANT TO BE STUCK HERE FOREVER![30]

[29] Andreades, *Brown Girls*, 29.
[30] Ibidem, 32.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

The expressed anger may be the result of fear of "downward assimilation" indicated by Xi and Greenman when discussing the different trajectories of assimilation quoted above. The families' fears seem to deprive the girls of the choices their peers have. These restrictions have a negative emotional impact but, perhaps, the girls' desires are also shaped by the restrictions: often one yearns for what one cannot have. The reactions of the parents to the girls' defiance is severe and seems to have a haunting effect since the girls want to escape the voices through sleep. The fact that escape proves impossible may point to the fact that the girls either have been so deeply hurt by the words that the scars will not heal quickly and familial relationships will be altered, or that the voices they continue to hear are voices of reason which resonate with the girls at some subconscious level.

The emotional responses of the families that learn of the girls' plans as well as of the girls when they hear the painful accusations are also visible here:

> some family members and friends meet us with accusations of *What—you think you're better? See, she's too haughty to even look us in the eye!* they say, when we stare at the ground, shocked and hurt by their words. We have been admonished to *Study hard!* yet have also been told *Don't go far, stay close, stay near, aren't we good enough for you?* We long for more, but keep our dreams to ourselves.[31]

The hurtful words of the parents may express their fear of their daughters leaving and abandoning their links to their ethnicities, which are strongly linked with their collective in Queens. The words of others, like friends, may be prompted by jealousy either of the girls' achievements or even of their courage to attempt to separate themselves from the collective which has for so long provided them with safety and a feeling of belonging despite being perceived as "the other" in American society. The body language described also points to the experience of the affect of shame. When the girls look at the ground, their eyes are downcast and one could assume that their heads are also lowered, which according to Tomkins exhibits the affect of shame.[32] Whether the girls are ashamed of their actions or of the behavior of their loved ones (which Tomkins refers to as shared shame) is a matter of interpretation.

[31] Ibidem, 69–70.

[32] Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, 101.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

The abovementioned "otherness" is clearly visible, for example, in school where teachers cannot differentiate between the girls:

> OUR TEACHERS CALL ON NADIRA but stare at Anjali. [...] We stand when our names are called, and our teachers halt, confused. *Oh, I'm sorry, I—No, not you, I didn't mean you, I*—Across the classroom, we catch each other's gazes. Nadira is Pakistani and wears a headscarf [...] Anjali is Guyanese, and her braid looks like a thick rope that lays heavy against her back, curly baby hairs tamed by coconut oil. Michaela is Haitian and likes to mimic her parents' French accents on the school bus [...] Our teachers snap at Sophie to *STOP TALKING NOW,* but call her Mae's name. Sophie, who is Filipino, clamps a hand over her big-ass mouth, which is never closed [...] while Mae, who is Chinese and polite to teachers, at least to their faces, jolts from the bookshelf where she's stealthily shuffling novels from their alphabetical spots [...]. We laugh at our teachers, though our eyes tighten. Our classmates roar with glee at their errors and purposely call us the wrong names for the rest of the week, too.[33]

The scene illustrates that despite numerous qualities which make each of the girls unique and representing multiple ethnicities, the teacher is unable or unwilling to perceive the girls as individuals but rather sees them as part of a collective—all of them representatives of the same group: a racial minority. The girls as well as their classmates respond with what one can read as expressions of joy at the teacher's mistakes; however, the fact that the girls laugh through "tightened" eyes points to the notion that it is not a real expression of joy. Tomkins observes that people express both learned and unlearned smiles and neither needs to be connected with the experience of genuine joy.[34] Tomkins explored various types of smile but the following seem pertinent to the girls' reaction: "In the case of pain, fear and distress the smile of joy is a smile of relief. In the case of sudden anger reduction it is the smile of triumph."[35] One could assume that the girls' smile is that of triumph, as the rest of the class is on their side and the teacher is placed in a negative light. Nevertheless, the tightening around the eyes points to the remnants of negative emotions, perhaps anger or shame. The novel depicts numerous instances when the girls are singled out because of their race. Those situations

[33] Andreades, *Brown Girls*, 15–16.

[34] Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, 205.

[35] Ibidem, 204.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

range from acts of micro-aggression (e.g. when a husbands' boss mistakes them for a waitress) to outright accusations of theft based solely on the color of their skin. Despite the fact that white Americans repeatedly show the girls that they are not truly a part of "their America," the girls who choose to move away from the collective in Queens yearn for acceptance. One could assume that this need to be seen as worthy is connected with the need to fit in; it would definitively show them that they are Americans, acknowledging that the United States is their home, that they belong there.

Not all of the titular girls choose to move away from the collective or to separate themselves from their ethnicities—some choose to stay within their community. Each of the groups perceive the other as different, sometimes with hostility:

> But those of us who have stayed [...].We know that these girls don't give two shits about loyalty, wouldn't recognize it if it smacked them, dead on, in their smug, arrogant faces. We know these girls don't give a *damn* about anyone other than themselves or anything, anyone, outside their own stupid orbits [...]. They aren't fazed when we mention our worries at the sight of more make AMERICA GREAT AGAIN signs populating the streets where we grew up [...].They assume, when they visit, that nothing has changed, they wear their designer watches, sigh and check the time, they think we do not notice the pity in their eyes, reserved especially for us, when they return. We try hard not to slap their smiles, so fucking condescending. We must stifle our laughter when they talk—pretend—like they don't come from this neighborhood themselves. As if they were born somewhere else [...]. But that's the difference between them and us: We don't forget. We've never become strangers.[36]

The quote illustrates the attitude of the girls who have chosen to stay with the collective: they refer to their duties towards their elders, their concern about the changing neighbourhood which has for so long allowed their families to keep to the traditions brought from their motherlands. We can also see their anger aimed at those individuals who have chosen to separate themselves from the collective and not adhere to the values to which the group ascribes significance. A different scene shows that the girls who left are aware of the animosity, but they do not feel that they need to defend their own choices—and perceive the anger as jealousy. Perhaps it is jealousy to some extent, but the ones who have left do not

[36] Andreades, *Brown Girls*, 105–106.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

understand that that anger can have its source in the sense of duty to adhere to the elements of the collective identity that has helped to shape who they are and the need to maintain a community. The girls who once belonged to the same collective and shared common bonds have become strangers and are now perceived as "the other" by their former sisters.

In her novel, Andreades does not allow the girls who leave to completely separate themselves from their ethnic origins. The protagonists come to yearn to know their motherlands, to understand their legacies. "WE TAKE TWO WEEKS OFF, a month, three—we quit our jobs altogether. Something pulls us to places we've heard of all our lives, ones that have followed us like ghosts. Beckoned. This time, we do not resist."[37] This sudden need is surprising to their loved ones, as those girls have always emphasized their individuals stories and not the ones of the collective. Nevertheless, at some point the girls come to realize that the collective and the individual are intricately connected. The journeys to their motherlands present a clash between expectations and reality but also uncover a deeper potential issue: "We curse our families in the States for not warning us—though, perhaps they, too, had forgotten."[38] One could assume that since the girls frequently distance themselves from the collective they have never heard some of the stories told by their kin; thus, their expectations of their motherlands do not match the reality. The other possibility is that their parents have unconsciously assimilated to a degree where the thought of their children visiting their home countries has not even crossed their minds. Perceiving the United States as a place no-one would choose to leave, even temporarily, they neglected to tell their daughters the stories of their homelands.

The trips allow the girls to see themselves in a different light. In the past they desperately attempted to blend in:

> We rub a shimmery gold powder onto our cheekbones like they do in YouTube videos, TV commercials, magazines. [...] Never mind that our noses remain wide and flat, that the colors we dust onto our eyelids don't 'pop,' as promised; we do not realize they're shades meant for girls with fairer skin. Still, some of us are mesmerized with who we've become in mirrors. [...] In secret, hiding in bedrooms we've always shared, we unscrew bottles we've stolen from Rite Aid, CVS, Walgreens. We

[37] Ibidem, 121.

[38] Ibidem, 123.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

> just want to try. We just want to see. We begin to paint our faces lighter, lighter. Until we are the color of lilies. Or bones. There. Beautiful.[39]

The strategy of trying to pass as a member of the dominant racial group within American society has a long history. Racial "passing" among African Americans often allowed individuals to separate themselves from their racial group and live a less stigmatized life. It also led, however, to being rejected by one's original racial group and even to be the target of angry or violent outbursts linked to foregoing their adherence to the racial collective. Despite the fact that racial passing seems to be mostly about appearance and physical changes one can implement to blend in with prevailing racial phenotypes, Elaine K. Ginsberg emphasizes that passing is not about looks, it is "about identities: their creation or imposition, their adoption or rejection, their accompanying rewards or penalties. Passing is also about [...] specularity: the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen."[40] When the girls come back from their motherlands they come to disregard their differences in appearance in comparison to the mainstream American society: "We carry the tangible and intangible. Tangible: We arrive in New York with our skins burnished darker shades of brown. Intangible: the fact that we couldn't care less about our darker skin. After walking through streets filled with people who look like us, our time away has shifted something within—we are proud of our complexions."[41] They no longer seem to be concerned with the physical aspects of their racial or ethnic identities that might label them as "the other" in the American society. They are focused on the invisible elements that make them who they are. This may suggest the pull of the collective. When in their motherlands or as a part of the collective, they felt free and did not stand out because of how they look or who they are. The journeys forced them to think about their identities, to redefine themselves—a process common nowadays.

The girls who travelled to their motherlands had become assimilated; they wanted to be—and be perceived as—American, and not African-America or Asian-American. But their journeys taught them that they do not belong to only one collective identity: "The colonized, the colonizer. Where do we fall? Realize:

---

[39] Ibidem, 26–27.

[40] Elaine K. Ginsberg, "Introduction: The Politics of Passing," in: *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

[41] Andreades, *Brown Girls*, 136.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

Whether we like it or not, we lay claim to both."[42] The girls also reflect on all the labels they have been adorned with:

> Whatever existences we've lived in the eyes of the world, we re-examine the identities handed to us from even before our mothers pushed us from their wombs. Labels—male, female—we shed, in time.
> All of us, instead, learn to make our own worlds. We have come to comprehend that we inhabit many worlds at once.
> Yes, some of us learn to undo our shame, the ways we have been bred, trained.[43]

In the end the protagonists see that the fixed identities they have tried to mold themselves to fit are not truly fixed and are not just single identities. An individual can ascribe to multiple collective identities, none of which needs to ultimately define who one is as a person. The negative impact which has shaped one's identity can be alleviated and one can define oneself anew.

As the above analysis illustrates, an immigrant's identity is shaped and reshaped by a multitude of factors, ranging from social pressures to family restrictions. The feeling of being a "stranger in a strange land" may lessen with time, but as Andreades's novel shows, being treated as "the other" is connected not only with exclusion from or inclusion within the dominant society, but can also arise from attempting to assimilate at the cost of abandoning the ethnic or racial collective in which one was raised. Considering this fact, a question is raised: Is an individual always a stranger to someone else, and do they have to become "the other" or even an enemy to those they leave behind when they reshape their identity and their values change? Andreades's novel seems to answer in the affirmative, but it also provides hope that if one changes once again and yearns to explore the links to their heritage, there is the possibility of rejoining the abandoned collectives, although they can never be the same due to the passage of time.

[42] Ibidem, 133.
[43] Ibidem, 161.

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

Bibliography

Andreades, Daphne Palasi. *Brown Girls*. London: 4th Estate, 2022.

Antweiler, Christoph. "Collective Identity." In: *The Bonn Handbook of Globality*, edited by Ludger Kühnhardt and Tilman Mayer, translated by Oliver Pye, Vol. 1, 353–361. Springer Verlag, 2019.

Bloemraad, Irene, Anna Korteweg, and Gökçe Yurdakul. "Citizenship and Immigration: Multiculturalism, Assimilation, and Challenges to the Nation-State." *Annual Review of Sociology* 34, no. 1 (August 1, 2008): 153–79. https://doi.org/10.1146/anurev.soc.34.040507.134608

Ginsberg, Elaine K. "Introduction: The Politics of Passing." In: *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, edited by Elaine K. Ginsberg, 1–18. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

Park, Robert E., and Ernest W. Burgess. *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924.

Rumbaut, Ruben G. "Assimilation and Its Discontents: Between Rhetoric and Reality." *The International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (1997): 923–60. https://doi.org/10.2307/2547419

Rumbaut, Rubén G. "Assimilation of Immigrants." In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 81–87. Elsevier, 2015. https://doi/org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.31109-6

Seaman, Julie. "Hate Speech and Identity Politics: A Situationalist Proposal." *Florida State University Law Review* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 99–123.

Spencer, Steve. *Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity and Representation*. Second edition. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

Tomkins, Silvan S. *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition*. New York: Springer Publishing, 2008.

Xie, Yu, and Emily Greenman. "The Social Context of Assimilation: Testing Implications of Segmented Assimilation Theory." *Social Science Research* 40, no. 3 (May, 2011): 965–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2011.01.004

Streszczenie

Odmienność i tożsamość w powieści *Brown Girls* Daphne Palasi Andreades

W artykule zbadano, w jaki sposób Daphne Palasi Andreades przedstawia wpływ asymilacji i odmienności rasowej na tożsamość imigrantów w swojej powieści *Brown Girls*. W pierwszej części artykułu pokrótce omówiono teoretyczne podejścia związane z imigracją, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem procesów asymilacji, akulturacji i tożsamości zbiorowej. Następnie

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

analiza powieści przedstawia, w jaki sposób proces asymilacji zmienia tożsamość, a także zakłóca relacje międzyludzkie. Wykorzystując teorię imigracji i tożsamości, artykuł przedstawia, w jaki sposób tożsamość indywidualna zderza się z tożsamością zbiorową i pokazuje, że jednostka może stać się „innym" dla tych, którzy kiedyś dzielili kolektyw. Artykuł bada fikcyjną wersję doświadczeń imigrantów, co pozwala na bardziej dogłębną analizę ze względu na dostęp do myśli i emocji jednostek. Wyniki analizy korespondują z ustaleniami przedstawionych podejść teoretycznych, ilustrując w ten sposób, że fikcja odzwierciedla prawdziwe życie i pozwala niespecjalistom zrozumieć skomplikowane koncepcje związane z tożsamością imigrantów poprzez akt czytania fikcji.

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość, rasa, imigranci, mniejszość rasowa, asymilacja

Zusammenfassung

Andersartigkeit und Identität im Roman *Brown Girls* von Daphne Palasi Andreades

Im Artikel wird untersucht, wie Daphne Palasi Andreades in ihrem Roman *Brown Girls* die Auswirkungen von Assimilation und rassischer Andersartigkeit auf die Identität von Einwanderern darstellt. Im ersten Teil des Artikels wird kurz auf theoretische Ansätze über die Einwanderung eingegangen, wobei der Schwerpunkt auf den Prozessen der Assimilation, Akkulturation und kollektiven Identität liegt. Es folgt eine Analyse des Romans, die zeigt, wie der Prozess der Assimilation die Identität verändert und auch die zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen stört. Anhand der Einwanderungs- und Identitätstheorie zeigt der Artikel, wie die individuelle Identität mit der kollektiven Identität zusammenstößt, und demonstriert, dass der Einzelne für diejenigen, die einst das Kollektiv teilten, zum „Anderen" werden kann. Der Artikel befasst sich mit einer fiktionalisierten Version der Einwanderungserfahrung, die aufgrund des Zugangs zu den Gedanken und Gefühlen der Einzelnen eine tiefer gehende Analyse ermöglicht. Die Ergebnisse der Analyse des Romans stimmen mit den Erkenntnissen der vorgestellten theoretischen Ansätze überein und zeigen, dass die Fiktion das reale Leben widerspiegelt und es auch Nichtfachleuten ermöglicht, komplexe Konzepte der Identität von Einwanderern durch das Lesen von Fiktion zu verstehen.

Schlüsselwörter: Rasse, Einwanderer, Minderheit, Identität

Ins Deutsche übersetzt von Anna Pastuszka

Pobrane z czasopisma **http://kulturaiwartosci.journals.umcs.pl**
Data: 01/11/2026 09:16:37

Informacja o Autorce:

MAGDALENA ŁAPIŃSKA, dr, Uniwersytet w Białymstoku, Wydział Filologiczny; adres do korespondencji: Wydział Filologiczny Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Plac Niezależnego Zrzeszenia Studentów 1, 15–420 Białystok; e-mail: m.lapinska@uwb.edu.pl

