

Diasporic Mediations in Eugenides' *Middlesex*

Abstract

The main objective of this research work is to explore the diasporic mediations in Jeffrey Eugenides's Middlesex. Due to some assimilated traits and some non-assimilated traits, the Greek-American face problem of ambivalent identity in the novel Middlesex. Eugenides employs the hermaphrodite protagonist and many Greek mythical allusions along with the vivid description of many assimilated and non-assimilated traits in different generations of the Greek-American immigrants to show the hybrid identity of Greek-American Immigrants. In this multigenerational novel, the Greek-American immigrants neither can completely assimilate in the American culture nor can completely follow the Greek culture, and they suffer from identity ambivalence. Thus, the Greek-American writer Jeffrey Eugenides exposes the identity ambivalence of the Greek-American diasporas in his novel Middlesex. The researcher analyzes that hybridity of identity by using the diaspora and ethnic identity theory of Homi K. Bhabha, R. Radhakrishnan, Salman Rushdie, Robert Young, William Safran, Stuart Hall and so on.

Keywords: Eugenides, hermaphrodite, diaspora, assimilation, ambivalence, hybridity, identity

This research work deals with the diasporic mediations of Greek-American diasporas in the novel *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides. Diasporas neither can identify themselves only with the Old World nor can identify themselves only with the New World rather they identify themselves with the both. Some of the traits of diasporas are assimilated but some are never assimilated. The Greek-American diasporas in Eugenides's novel *Middlesex* also suffer the ambivalent identity due to the same assimilated and non-assimilated traits. Eugenides shows the identity ambivalence by

employing the hermaphrodite protagonist along with other assimilated and non-assimilated characters in *Middlesex*. In the literary works related to the issue of immigrants, the question of identity, which lies between the representation of the self and the representation of the other, stages the problem of how people perceive themselves and how they are perceived by the others, especially by the host society. Furthermore, this ambivalence also questions the concurrence between collective identity and personal identity.

Identity of diasporas is always ambivalent as they neither identify themselves with the Old World nor with the New World. The Stephanides, the Greek immigrants to America also neither can identify themselves as Greeks nor can identify themselves as Americans rather they have shared identity or hyphenated ‘Greek-American’ identity. In such a way they live in the borderline of the “Greekness” and “Americanness”. The problem I want to attend in this research work is: How is Cal(lie)’s experience living within two genders similar to the immigrants’ experience living within two cultures? I mean how does the hermaphrodite protagonist metaphorically represent the identity ambivalence of diasporas in the novel *Middlesex*? Does an anxiety of identity make the immigrants like a hermaphrodite or middle-sex? How does the cultural assimilation and non-assimilation of the Greek-American immigrants create the hybrid identity in *Middlesex*? The researcher hypothesizes that the hybridity of identity is inevitable for the diasporas. As the immigrants neither can completely assimilate in the culture of the host country nor can fully follow native culture of their homelands, their identity becomes ambivalent like a hermaphrodite or middle-sex in nature. Such condition definitely creates the ambivalent nature of identity of the diasporas.

Jeffrey Eugenides is a Greek father and English mother born writer. He was

born in Detroit, Michigan, America. In terms of his writing career he has written *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), *Middlesex* (2002) and *The Marriage Plot* (2011) along with other many stories and articles. He won Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *Middlesex* in 2003. *Middlesex*, set in the twentieth century, is an experimental novel in terms of its narration. Its storyline is non-linear; sometimes goes in the past, sometimes at the present and sometimes in the future. Moreover, Eugenides uses both singular 'I' and 'we' first person narrative voice. The title of the novel '*Middlesex*' itself signifies its hybridity; the hermaphrodite protagonist and two side by side plots of Lefty and Desdemona, and the narrator himself really make the novel a hybrid in nature. The author himself is the Greek descendant born in America and his *Middlesex*'s narrator and protagonist Cal(lie) also has the same profile except Eugenides is not the hermaphrodite. Thus, it seems autobiographical in nature that is one of the characteristics of the diasporic literature.

Due to the adoption of both cultures, language, traditions and socio-economic life, the identity of the diasporas become ambivalent. Taking this point in case, the researcher explores the identity ambivalence of Eugenides's Greek-American diasporas in *Middlesex* in terms of their culture, religion, traditions, myths, language etc. The major arguments are analyzed by using the diaspora and ethnic identity theories of Homi K. Bhabha, R. Radhakrishnan, Robert Young, Stuart Hall, William Safran and Salman Rushdie.

In *Middlesex* the Greek immigrants strive to adjust in American culture as well as try to stick with Greek culture. This dual nature definitely leads their identity ambivalent. Like many other diasporic literature *Middlesex*, written by author of Greek descendant is also related to the issue of identity of the immigrants. Exploring the experience of rethinking of identity, Eugenides associates ethnicity and gender

within the narration. In many ways, the Greek-Americans seem to be caught between the identity dilemmas of Greekness versus Americanness. Especially, the protagonist, Cal(lie) seems to be caught in a series of identity dilemma, governed by binary dialectics: Greekness versus Americanness, boy versus girl, homosexual versus heterosexual and so on.

To refer to the protagonist and narrator of the novel *Middlesex*, I use feminine pronouns 'she' and 'her' as she is brought up and identified as a girl, 'Callie/Calliope', until her fourteen years age, and I use masculine pronouns 'he' and 'his' after he adopts male identity as 'Cal' after fourteen.

In his novel *Middlesex*, to show the diasporic mediations, Eugenides employs the hermaphrodite protagonist. The narrator and protagonist, Cal Stephanides, is the third-generation Greek-American hermaphrodite. He is in search of his identity due to his sexual difference. Because of a 5-alpha-reductase deficiency syndrome, Callie appears female at her birth and through her childhood, and she only experiences the masculinization at puberty. When she discovers her sexual hybridity, she flees in search of her personal identity. The sexual identity quest of Cal(lie) is metaphorically linked with the immigrants' experience for pursuit of identity. The Greek-American immigrants, the Stephanides in *Middlesex*, who have migrated from the Asia Minor to America in search of the happy and the secured life escaping the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922 are in problem of identity. Eugenides depicts that identity crisis through the hermaphrodite protagonist. Here, in her article "Remembering the Future: Ethnic Memory in Middlesex by Jeffrey Eugenides" Yulia Kozyrakis rightly remarks "The protagonist's dual nature aptly describes the conflicting situation or belonging to (in this case) two different cultures" (2). So, the hermaphrodite protagonist represents the dual nature of identity of the diasporas. Kozyrakis further opines that:

In *Middlesex*, embedding ethnic memory construction in both, the American and Greek tradition gives insight into the two different, but constantly interacting cultural paradigms as they influence the narrator's identity formation... In a unique way Eugenides succeeds in indirectly exploring the issue of racial identity through gender. If we pursue the earlier mentioned metaphor of Callie's hermaphroditism as pointing to her ethnic heritage then it seems to be no coincidence that the genetic defect of the Stephanides family skips the protagonist's father, but displays itself in Callie. As general pattern of assimilation shows, usually the second generation of immigrants succeeds to assimilate so perfectly into the American society that normally the third generation does not even speak the language of the immigrant's country of origin.(56)

By alluding Greek to myth of hermaphrodite, Eugenides has presented the hybridity of the Greek-American diaspora through his protagonist Cal(lie). A hermaphrodite is a person having both male and female reproductive organs and characteristics. Similarly, diaspora people have both cultural characteristics of their Old World and New World. Greek-American diasporas in *Middlesex*, especially, the Stephanides face the problem of their national and ethnic identity problem. They fall in-between condition in terms of their identity as they neither can fully assimilate in the American culture nor can fully follow Greek culture. In the opening of the novel Eugenides introduces the duality of his protagonist Cal, "I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974 (Eugenides 1). In a line ahead Cal is informed to be born with "5-alpha-reductase

deficiency syndrome” (1), due to his ancestors (grandparents and parents) incest marriage. She is identified and brought up as a girl until male traits of her body start emerging in puberty: muscular body and an emerging penis. It leads the protagonist to discover her/his identity. Callie flees and creates a new identity as a male Cal, who is now narrating the story for us as a forty-one year old man from the perspective of a present-day Berlin. Why Eugenides employs the hermaphrodite protagonist as the Greek-American descendant is to point out the double standard identity of the diaspora people. Jeffrey Eugenides, by employing the hermaphrodite protagonist Cal who has hybrid identity not only physically but also mentally as he says, “I’ve got a male brain. But I was raised as a girl” (10). Eugenides metaphorically writes about the hybridity of the identity of the Greek-American immigrants who are entangled between the Greekness versus Americanness, an indeterminate condition of their identity. In the article ““Theory Uncompromised by Practicality: Hybridity in Jeffrey Eugenides’ *Middlesex*” Debra Shostak argues that:

When Eugenides weaves his story of the hermaphrodite Cal(lie) into an account of Greek immigration and assimilation to mid-twentieth-century American culture, he implicitly overdetermines the metaphor of hybridity to refer at once to the body, to cultural identity, and to narrative structure. (384)

The biological hybridity of the protagonist Cal(lie) is implicitly connected with the diasporic identity hybridity. Being the descendant of the Greek-American immigrants the protagonist is hybrid not only in biology rather in his cultural identity too. He is entangled between not only the hybridity of maleness and femaleness but also between Greekness and Americanness too. It reminds the hybridity concept of Robert Young as he opines hybridity “was achieved at the price of the dislocation of

...people and cultures ...cultural interaction, language and sex, merge in their product which is characterized with the same term: hybridity” (4-5).

Diasporas accept and adopt some of the cultural traits of the host communities but cannot leave their own indigenous cultural traits of their homeland completely. They try to follow both cultural traits simultaneously. It means they blend the traits of both cultures in their activities. As the culture is the way of life, diasporas intentionally and unintentionally follow the both cultural traits and maintain hybrid cultural life. While maintaining the double standard identity, diasporas belong to neither homeland nor the host land. The Greek-Americans in *Middlesex* living in America go to the Greek Orthodox Church, female like Desdemona has limited gender role, conduct the rites like funeral and baptism according to the Greek culture. For instance Callie was “baptized into the Greek Orthodox faith” (137). Similarly, in the funeral of Jimmy Zizmo, “Flags were held over the coffin, the Greek flag on the one side and the American flag on the other” (73). On the other hand they like American looks, the Stephanides leave the “Greek town” in Detroit and settle in the “Middlesex Boulevard” street in Gross Point (158). Because of such activities Diaspora always find themselves caught between the neither end position in terms of their identity. In this condition the question of identity becomes very crucial for them. They suffer from the identity problem. They neither can forget their past means their origin culture nor can completely adopt the culture of the new land. Consequently they suffer the ambivalent nature of identity. They fall in-between situation to which Bhabha exemplifies with liminal space conception, as he argues:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designation of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white.

The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (4)

The assimilation for the immigrant becomes painful experience especially for the first generation. They face different kinds of problems in the initial stage of the assimilation. For Lefty and Desdemona, the first generation immigrants, assimilation becomes very painful. After reaching America, Lefty finds a job in Ford Motor Company and starts English language class in 'Ford English School Melting Pot' (58). Lefty "...accustomed to the multifarious conjugations of ancient Greek verbs, had found English, for all its coherence, a relatively simple tongue to master. Once he had swallowed a good portion of the English vocabulary, he began to taste the familiar ingredients, the Greek seasoning in the roots, prefixes and suffixes" (55). The English language instructor teaches the cultural norms and values along with the language to Lefty and other immigrants. Obediently the immigrant workers along with Lefty read, "Employs should use plenty of soap and water in the home. Nothing makes for right living so much as cleanliness. Do not spit on the floor of the home. The most advanced people are the cleanest" (54). Though it's painful, diaspora try their best to assimilate in the new cultural environment to realize their dream in the host land as R. Radhakrishnan examines, "The narrative of ethnicity in the United States might run like this. During the initial phase, immigrants suppress ethnicity in the name of pragmatism and opportunism. To be successful in the new world, they must actively assimilate and, therefore, hide their distinct ethnicity" (204-5).

As people leave their homeland in pursuit of happy and prosperous life,

keeping their identity and cultures aside until it is possible, they try their best for assimilation. To realize his American Dream, Lefty struggles very hard. He opens a restaurant “Zebra Room” that later on Milton, his son, takes over and runs very successfully. In his late life “Lefty’s English began to deteriorate. He makes spelling and grammatical mistakes he’d long mastered and soon he was writing broken English then no English” (164). On the other hand Desdemona suffers from “the homesickness that has no cure” (55). She is always in limited female role “stayed home and cooked. Without silkworm to tend or mulberry trees to pick, without neighbors to gossip with or goats to milk...filled her time with food” (54). It shows that the assimilation for the firsthand immigrants is very difficult. A painful process of assimilation and acculturation starts in the immigration inspection office at Ellis Island, where Desdemona, to her utter dismay, gets a proper makeover and a “denuded scalp,” void of heavy immigrant braids. “Amerikanidha” (45) is decidedly not what she wants to look like. Moreover, her anticipation of a prosperous silk farming business in the new country gives way to thorough frustration, as silkworm eggs are classified as parasites and cannot be imported. A transitional period between two different worlds and their values becomes easier to cope with due to the fact that Desdemona and Lefty settle in Detroit with their highly assimilated cousin and sponsor Sourmelina. The Stephanides’ grandparents are completely broke at their elderly age and move in with their son Milton’s family. Regarding the painful assimilation of immigrants R. Radhakrishnan’s note is, “Feeling deracinated in the diaspora can be painful, but the politics of origins cannot be the remedy.” (213). Therefore, it becomes clear that the assimilated and non- assimilated traits lead the identity of Greek-American diasporas is ambivalent in *Middlesex*.

In comparison to the first generation diasporas the successive generations

better assimilate in the New World. They start to be included in the mainstream of the host society. In Middlesex the second generation Milton and Tessie become more American than their parents. Tessie and Milton Stephanides enjoy the middle class status that their parents have achieved, and continue the upward mobility to the upper-middle class. This process is portrayed in the novel as the enforcing of the ownership of nation or neighborhood, no matter how symbolical, when Milton attempts to buy a house in an exclusive white neighborhood in Detroit. While describing this process in the novel, the author tackles the question whether the white middle class ethnic group, as well as the African American one, represents a desired form of normativity in America. We witness the formation of Tessie and Milton's identities in relation to the African American population. It is obvious that the social status of the white middle class ethnics is, to a certain degree, more favorable than the position of the African American ethnic group in the novel, as well as in reality.

One of the important aspects better assimilation of the diasporas is the successful economic life. The first generation children of the Greek-Americans immigrants are able to realize the American Dream. The narrator says, "In that optimistic, postwar America, which I caught the tail end of, everybody was the master of his own destiny, so it only followed that my father would try to be the master of his" (4). As he is American born and assimilated immigrant than his parents, Milton Stephanides, is an epitome of a self-made business oriented American man who achieves what his immigrant parents could not: the "American Dream" of freedom for all its immigrants. He obtains academic education, serves his country as a Navy officer, takes over his father's business and turns it into a fast-food empire, and moves his family from impoverished inner city Detroit to its segregated and affluent suburbs Gross Point. Milton's actions and mindset symbolize a complete break off from any

traditions and customs of the “Old World” that his parents represent, in order to achieve successful cultural assimilation. Milton denies his past, the origin, Greekness. Critic Debra Shostak rightly argues that in “*Middlesex* the identity that the first post-immigrant generation realizes is not a hybridized version of two influences. It is rather a completely new form based on the rejection of the past” (396). No matter, how much assimilated, even Milton and Tessie follow some of the Greek cultural values cultural. “Milton was too busy running the diner to notice. Tessie was too busy of taking care of Chapter Eleven to notice” (130). It shows that they are following the gender role as in Asia Minor. Male is outside the house but the female is limited inside the house. Furthermore, though Milton admits Callie in a private English school he encourages her to read Greek books. Thus, these assimilated and non-assimilated cultural traits make the second generations also hybrid in terms of their identity. So, it becomes clear that for the diasporas it is the necessary to form the identity in the borderline between the Old World and the New World. In regard to the formation of the new identity between the past and present, Bhabha notes that:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of the past and present. It creates the sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such act doesn’t merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic, precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as contingent ‘in-between’ space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The past present becomes part of necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (7)

It is not strange that the people where they born want to be obedient to their birthplace, whether it is the case of the native people or immigrants. For instance, unlike his mother Milton always “wanted to be an American and now he got to see

what his fellows Americans were like” (118). He attracted to Tessie because she “had so-called all American looks” (109). Here, Aristi Trendel rightly remarks, “...it is the concepts of public ethnicity and of rooted cosmopolitanism that support the construction of identity in *Middlesex*, and finally attempt to reconcile American values with native group’s values” (3). The successive generations of the immigrants do not experience the culture of the homeland directly like the first generation rather they mostly experience the culture of the host communities. This is the reason behind the differences between the firsthand immigrants and the successive generations towards the assimilation and identification. Despite the more assimilation of diasporas even the successive generations of diasporas also are always ‘Other’ or the ‘outsider’ in the eyes of the local people. They are discriminated. For instance, during the conversation with Miss Marsh, a realtor, when Milton introduce his ethnic name Marsh puzzles, “Stephanides. What kind of name is that?” Milton replies, “It’s Greek.” Then she says ahead, “Let’s see. Southern Mediterranean. One point...One point. Religion? Greek church... another point there” (156, 157). In those days, the real estate agents in Grosse Pointe evaluated prospective buyers by something called the Point System. That point system actually seems a system of discrimination. Milton becomes an outsider in the eyes of Miss Marsh.

We can see how the second generations oppose the view of the first generation regarding their cultural norms and values. In *Middlesex*, Milton does not agree with his mother Desdemona’s belief of guessing unborn Cal’s sex by dangling the spoon over the stomach of pregnant Tessie. Referring to Desdemona’s guess Cal narrates, “I was going to be a boy” (2). But Milton referring to the scientific conception system “...to have a baby, a couple should have sexual congress twenty four prior to ovulation” (3), says, “It’s science, Ma” (2). Moreover, Milton unlike Desdemona does

not believe in the baptism of Cal. It becomes more clear in the following lines:

Desdemona wasn't interested in my looks. She was concerned with the state of my soul. "The baby is two months old" she said to my father I March "Why you still no baptize her?" "I don't want her baptized," answered Milton. "It's a bunch of hocus-pocus." "Hokey pokey is it?" Desdemona now threatened him with an index finger.

"You think Holy tradition that the church keep for two thousand years is hokey pokey?" (136)

In this regard taking the view of Marcus Lee Hansen, Aristi Trendel points out that "Assimilation does seem a challenge to descent,...the transcendence of ethnicity through the proclivity of the second generation to deny its origins, dubbed as treason, is precisely a moral appraisal of such a challenge." Milton prefers the English language over Greek in everyday communication and only occasionally speaks Greek; he is neither interested in religion nor in corresponding customs and refuses almost all suggestions related to the church sermons as he is not interested in baptism. George Kourvetaris directs his conclusions more specifically towards progressive assimilation that Greek families experience in America. His opinion is that the children of immigrants identify themselves with both Greek Orthodox religion and American nationality. In *Middlesex*, Milton and Tessie to some extent identify with Greek Orthodox religion. Their sense of "Greekness" as measured by language, traditions, and Greek norms and values are replaced by "Americanness." For instance, Milton does not fulfill his promises to return to Smyrna and repair the Greek assumption Church. Moreover he does not give importance to be literate in Greek, and neither does Tessie. Despite his efforts and promises to Desdemona, Milton neither learns speaking nor writing in proper Greek. Most importantly to avoid the incorporation

with the Afro-American children Milton gets Callie enrolled in Baker & Inglis Private School and he says, “You see, Tessie? You understand why your dear old husband wanted to get the kids out of that school system? Because if I didn’t, that goddamn Roth would be busing them to school in downtown Nairobi, that’s why” (176). Though Milton does not speak Greek and believe in Orthodox religion, he highly values family ties and the ethnic community. He serves his parents and he works very hard being the breadwinner for his family. The second generation diasporas that born and educated in their immigrated land can assimilate better identify themselves with the New World than the firsthand immigrants. To this difference parameter of the assimilation R. Radhakrishnan notes that:

The tensions between the old and new homes create the problem of divided allegiances that the two generations experience differently. The very organicity of the family and the community, displaced by travel and relocation, must be renegotiated and redefined. The two generations have different starting points and different givens. This phenomenon of historical rupture within the "same" community demands careful and rigorous analysis. The older generation cannot afford to invoke India in an authoritarian mode to resolve problems in the diaspora, and the younger generation would be ill advised to indulge in a spree of forgetfulness about "where they have come from." It is vital that the two generations empathize and desire to understand and appreciate patterns of experience not their own.” (206)

One of the objectives of this research work is to point out how the diasporas construct their identity in different generations in the novel *Middlesex*. The third generations, the grand children of the immigrants in *Middlesex*, Cal and Chapter

Eleven are more assimilated Greek-American. They speak English but not Greek. The exceptions are just a few everyday words and phrases they are able to catch from their grandmother. This discontinuity of the language transmission is due to their parents who do not make any significant effort to speak the native tongue themselves, nor do they encourage their children to speak Greek rather Milton gets Callie admitted in Baker & Inglis Private School. Callie experiences many things for the first time at Baker & Inglis. She becomes aware of her ethnicity. In the school her teacher Mr. da Silva made her curious about her Greek ethnicity. He says, "Miss Stephanides...Since you are hail from Homer's own land, would you be so kind as to read aloud?"(194). Callie becomes aware of her Greekness. She also becomes conscious about her non-normative body, reaches puberty and has her first crush and sexual experience. She becomes conscious of her hybrid identity and her hybrid sexuality at the same time. Whether she learns to accept them both is not yet clear at this point of the narration. When Cal becomes aware of his ancestral roots that are different from mainstream America, and that he is a person of a dual physical nature, he starts to quest for his identity. But, his road to self discovery and self-invention is not an easy one, and it has both a physical and a psychological aspect: he journeys across America and to different countries, as well as to the past, in order to formulate his own version of "Greek-Americanisms" by incorporating the "otherness" of his ethnic ancestry into mainstream environment. Cal goes through enormous changes of his personality as well, in an attempt to accept his cultural and physical hybridity.

When she is fourteen years old, Callie falls in love with her female best friend, whom Callie refers to as the "Obscure Object". In separate encounters, Callie has her first sexual experiences with a woman, the Obscure Object, and with a man, the Obscure Object's brother. After Callie is injured by a tractor, a doctor discovers that

she is intersex. She is taken to a clinic in New York and undergoes a series of tests and examinations. After learning about the syndrome and facing the prospect of sex reassignment surgery, Callie runs away and assumes a male identity as Cal. He hitchhikes cross-country and reaches San Francisco, where he joins a burlesque show as Hermaphroditus. Cal is arrested by the police during a raid on his workplace. He is released into Chapter Eleven's custody and learns of their father's death. The siblings return to their family home on Middlesex. After reaching home he admits his father's funeral. In the funeral procession he does his duty of a male according to the Greek traditions:

On Middlesex, I remained in the front doorway. I took my duty seriously and didn't budge, despite the freezing wind. Milton, the child apostate, would have been confirmed in his skepticism, because his spirit never returned that day, trying to get past me. The mulberry tree had no leaves. The wind swept over the crusted snow into my Byzantine face, which was the face of my grandfather and of the American girl I had once been. I stood in the door for an hour, maybe two. I lost track after a while, happy to be home, weeping for my father, and thinking about what was next. (312)

The American born and educated hermaphrodite protagonist therefore, does his male duty in his father's funeral. Moreover he promises to repair the church in Bursa, their origin village in Asia Minor. When, Desdemona says, "In Bursa... Remember that church there? I want to go and fix it up some day...Milton is going to fix it. I keep telling him" (310). Cal promises "If he doesn't do it, I will" (310). Thus, why the protagonist who is hermaphrodite promises to repair the church that is one of the powerful heritages of cultural identity about in the concluding chapter of the novel is

that Eugenides metaphorically wants to address the ambivalent identity of the Greek-American diasporas in his novel *Middlesex*. Cal who sets out in search of his identity after his ambiguous physical condition is diagnosed, finally returns home and involves in the traditional ethnic system of funeral, it is quite metaphorical. Here, I agree with Sophie Coavoux as she in her article, "Greek Diaspora and Hybrid Identities: Transnational and Transgender Perspectives in Two novels: *Loaded*, by Christos Tsiolkas (Australia) and *Middlesex*, by Jeffrey Eugenides (USA)" explores that the identity of the Stephanides family is the representation of the Greco-American diaspora's ambivalent identity entangled between Greekness and Americanness. She examines that:

The identity quest of Cal/Callie is deeply linked with the immigrant experience of his family which is replayed in the narrative and it has to be said that the novel is also the saga of a three generations Greek family who construct/deconstruct their Americanness and their Greekness. The gender and ethnic identity quest of Cal/Callie is rooted in the larger perspective of the history of his family, and in the historical background of the US. In many ways, the story of the Stephanides is representative of that of Greek diaspora in the US. (451)

In this way the Greek-American immigrants are following the both Greek and American culture simultaneously that has made their identity hybrid. The protagonist is first Callie as a girl then Cal as a male, suffering from 5-alpha-reductase syndrome hermaphrodite. Therefore the ambivalent identity of the protagonist is metaphorical representation of the ambivalent identity of diaspora. Not only that now the protagonist, who is narrating the story lives in Berlin, once divided city with Julie Kikuchi, an Asian-American girl. Eugenides figuratively shows the divided and united

identity of the diaspora settling the hermaphrodite protagonist in Berlin.

Diasporas reinvent their identity in the course of assimilation. To adjust in the new cultural environment, they adopt the new cultural norms and values yet they cannot forget their root. In their trip to America Lefty and Desdemona reinvent their identity from brother and sister to husband and wife. Moreover, the protagonist reinvents the identity as 'Ca'l from 'Callie'. He says, "Like Tiresias, I was first one thing then the other" (1). These reinventions of the identity significantly allude to the Greek mythical reinventions of the identity, and reinvention of identity is quite necessary to the immigrants as they come in contact with the new cultural environment and cannot continue their cultural values as they are. Something they adopt from the new cultures and something they influence the original cultures of the destination. In such a way change in the identity is inevitable. R. Radhakrishnan's note to this change and reinvention of the identity is, "...when people move, identities, perspectives, and definitions change" (207). Diaspora who leaves their homeland, automatically their identity becomes hybrid. Radhakrishnan further point out that:

Identities, selves, traditions, and natures do change with travel (and there is nothing decadent or deplorable about mutability) and that we can achieve such changes in identity intentionally. In other words, we need to make substantive distinctions between "change as default or as the path of least resistance" and "change as conscious and directed self-fashioning." (210)

Eugenides uses many Greek mythical allusion in his novel *Middlesex*. For example the incest marriage between Lefty and Desdemona reminds us the Oedipal complex. The name of Milton and Tessie is also significant. First Milton was named

as “Miltiades after the great Athenian general” and Tessie was named as “Theodora, after the scandalous empress of Byzantium” (71). Moreover ‘Calliope Helen Stephanides’, the name of the protagonist has Greek mythical root. Callie takes part in the drama in her school like in *Antigone*, a Greek play. Similarly, instead of the term ‘intersex’, Eugenides prefers the term ‘hermaphrodite’ to refer to his protagonist that has Greek mythical root. The term has the root in Greek word ‘*hermaphroditos*’. Hermaphroditus was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite in Greek mythology. The nymph Salmicis fell in love with him and prayed to be united with him forever. They became joined as one body but kept characteristics of both sexes. Then it becomes clear that Eugenides wants to show the diasporic mediations of Greek-American diasporas through his American born hermaphrodite protagonist. In this regard Critic Aristi Trendel in his article “The Reinvention of Identity in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*” rightly examines that the hermaphrodite protagonist Cal(lio)pe is to show the unity in duality using the Greek myth of hermaphrodite. The intersex body of the protagonist does not only show the gender trouble but also figuratively represents the ambiguous identity of the Greco-American immigrants in America. She examines:

Greeks found a mythical way out of the contradictions and the ambiguities that characterize the fragmented human being in search of unity through hermaphrodites, the figure of an indivisible duality, quite appropriate to express the diverse reality of American unity...gender trouble in *Middlesex* could hardly veil the immigrant and ethnic experience in America that spans three generations of Greek family in twentieth century. (5)

The use of the Greek mythical allusions in the story of Greek-American immigrants shows Greekness versus Americanness in their identity. In another words Eugenides

uses those mythical allusions in *Middlesex* to show the hybrid identity of the Greek-American diasporas.

Despite their efforts of assimilation the majority locale always see immigrant's society as alien. They face many kinds of prejudices by the host societies even from the government authorities. For example two authorities from "Ford Sociological Department" inquire Lefty and Desdemona, "How often do you bathe, Mr. Stephanides?...How often do you brush your teeth?...What do you use?" they inspect the bedroom, the linens and the toilet seat and order "From now on, use this... It's a dentifrice. Here's a new tooth brush" (55-56). It's a humiliation and misbehavior of the host society to the diasporas. Diasporas basically from the eastern countries are considered to be uncivilized by the Americans. Though the "Greeks built the Parthenon and the Egyptians built the pyramids back when the Anglo-Saxons were still dressing in animal skins" (56), as Zizmo claims, in the eyes of the American authorities Greek immigrants are uncivilized. In this regard William Safran notes, "Members of diaspora communities are by turns mistreated by the host country as "strangers within the gates" or welcomed or exploited for the sake of the domestic and diplomatic interests of the host country" (92).

The question of identity is always a difficult one, especially for those who are culturally displaced, as immigrants are who grow up in two worlds simultaneously. Due to the displacement, Diasporas' quest for identity, a sense of inability to belong becomes all the more difficult and disappointing. The lost home and culture become tragic when they think of returning to their homeland. In *Middlesex* Desdemona suffer a lot from such loss of Old World. "She lived now amid memories and dream and in this state the old village story grew near again" (310). Assimilation in the alien culture is a quite difficult task for her. The truth was that in those days Desdemona was

struggling against assimilation pressure she couldn't resist. "Though she had lived in America as an external exile, a visitor for forty years, certain bits of her adopted country had been seeping under locked door of her disapproval" (138). Diasporas want to return their left homeland but conditions make them unable to return and their returning home turns out to be a romantic illusion. Diaspora people long for the world left behind from the alien land where they are living but cannot manage to belong to neither world. When they see some scene in a new place, they see some connection of that scene to their left world when they are longing for their left homeland. They find the connection to their New World as well as to their Old World. They have love for both of the nations and culture that and they are always in an indeterminate state to which to identify themselves with. So, diaspora people live a double standard life- the life in their lost homeland without succeeding to live physically and in their new land leaving the will in their lost homeland. In such a situation they strive to replicate their old home, without much success either as Rushdie experiences that:

It may be the writers in my position, exiles or immigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss urge to reclaim, to look back even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we look back we must also do so in the knowledge which gives rise to profound uncertainties that our physical alienation from...almost inevitably means that we will not capable of reclaiming precisely the things that was lost; that we will, in short create fictions, not actual cities, or village, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands." (10)

The identity position of diasporas is always in dual state. While striving to adopt in foreign land, they fall in the borderline condition. While settling down the process of blend in the new culture is always difficult. They try to find their new

selves without letting go off their “old selves”. Desdemona referring to Jimmy Zizmo asks, “He’s not Muslim, is he? Lina replies, “Not everybody from the Pontus converted...What do you think, a Greek takes a swim in the Black Sea and turns into a Muslim?” Desdemona again asks, “But does he have Turkish blood?...Is that why he’s so dark?” (49). Here the conversation between Sourmelina and Desdemona clarifies that hybridity is quite common everywhere that makes ones to live in the dual state. Due to the exchange of cultural norms and values, displacement and nowadays interracial marriage also responsible for the hybridity of the identity. America is the place of hybridity. Basically due to the immigrants from other countries to realize their American Dream, the country has become hybrid. It’s inevitable condition. The narrator narrates that:

You used to be able to tell a person’s nationality by the face. Immigration ended that. Next you discerned nationality via the footwear. Globalization ended that. Those Finnish seal puppies, those German flounders—you don’t see them much anymore. Only Nikes, on Basque, on Dutch, on Siberian feet. (22)

Because of the globalization and immigration the so-called pure cultural identity has ended. Language, religion, traditions and all cultural norms and values have become hybrid. Actually it has made everyone hybrid but the immigrants become more hybrid as they directly exchange their cultures with the host communities. Then their identity tends to be hybrid. To this fact Critic Robert young claims that:

... social theories did not just use notions of hybridity in a merely metaphorical way: as here, they were elaborated around the different effects of the conjunction of disparate bodies, derived from received knowledge about the literal issue of sexual interaction between the

races. In the different theoretical positions woven out of this intercourse, the races and their intermixture circulate around an ambivalent axis of desire and aversion: a structure of attraction, where people and cultures intermix and merge, transforming themselves as a result, and a structure of repulsion, where the different elements remain distinct and are set against each other dialogically. (18)

When people move from one place to another they come into contact with other. They exchange their ideas share their belief and ideologies. Reciprocally they influence to each other. In this course their culture and language don't remain pure. In such a condition when diaspora people quest for their identity they find themselves in the middle passage position. Hall argues, "In terms of popular cultural life, it is nowhere to be found in its pure, pristine state. It is always already fused, syncretised, with other cultural elements. It is always already creolized- not lost beyond the Middle Passage, but ever present from the harmonies" (233).

The novel *Middlesex* reflects this hybridity of the diasporas through its hermaphrodite protagonist, narrative structure, and the mythical allusions. Eugenides' intention to make his novel hybrid through such elements is to imply the diasporic ambivalence of the Greek-American diasporas. In an interview he clarifies that:

I no longer wanted to write merely a fictional autobiography of a hermaphrodite...that would trace the transmigration of the genetic mutation...it would encompass many things aside from this sexual metamorphosis. It concerns all kinds of transformations, national, racial, emotional, intellectual- you name it. (4)

Diaspora looks for their identity in connection with their left homeland. They claim that to be pure. They want to be back to that state again but on the other hand

they find their connection with the land where they are residing. At that moment they find themselves belong to either and neither, here and there, inside and outside together. They fall in- between of the both. That is the situation of hybridity like a hermaphrodite protagonist Cal(lie) in the novel *Middlesex*. In regard to the theme of Eugenides' novel *Middlesex*, Daniel Mendelsohn in his review entitled 'Mighty Hermaphrodite', published in *New York Review of Books* examines that:

A major problem with *Middlesex* is that there's nothing all that interesting or distinctive about either half of the main character: one is fairly Midwestern girl...the other an all-too typically sardonic post-everything American male. But like the other two parts of the novel they inhabit, neither seems to have much to do with the other; and it is of course the connection between them, the 'middle' to which Eugenides's title refers, that we want to know more about, because that's the part that's unusual and unknown to us.(68)

With the transformation and movement the identity of diaspora keeps on changing. Their identity is dynamic. The so-called original identity is not possible as they experience the adopted culture as well as their native culture simultaneously. When the people come in contact with the new cultures either intentionally or unintentionally the cultural exchange takes place. The exchange of culture leads to hybridity in identity. In this globalized world various means make the cultures hybrid. But, hybridity that takes due to migration of people is more obvious. With the movement of the people, reproduction of the identity essentially takes place. Moreover, for the diasporas it is inevitable. For this hybrid diasporic identity Hall's note is:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined not by essence or

purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through not despite, difference, by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (235)

Diaspora has been a popular issue in the transnational world of literature for innovative literary outputs in recent years. People who leave homeland and try to settle over the distant territories of the world for various reasons always find themselves in dual conditions in the process of settling down. The diaspora writers try to represent these feelings in diverse ways in diverse writings all over the world. Due to advancement of transportation and communication technologies, people are easily migrating to the different parts of the world basically to the western countries from their place of origin in search of better life. Diaspora people are deracinated population leaving their origin nation, cultural and ethnic community in a motherland. Diaspora studies presume the existence of displaced groups of people who retain a collective sense of identity. But in the host land they have to struggle hard to assimilate and adjust for the new cultural environment.

Middlesex is a family saga novel about three generations of the Greek immigrant family that roughly enacts the three-phase progressive assimilation that sociologist George A. Kourvetaris describes in such families: the first immigrant generation identifies with a Greek nationality; the second identifies with the Greek Orthodox religion and American nationality; and the third, most assimilated generation identifies with Greek-immigration status as a class (114). The twist in this novel appears in the form of the transgendered narrator, Cal, who was born female and reborn male.

Middlesex, of course, is also an ethnic novel, and we might even say that Cal's use of the term "hermaphrodite" is a simple result of his effort to be self-consciously Greek. Although Greek ethnicity within America has nearly become simply another form of whiteness, some Greeks in America continue to think of themselves as Greek, not American nor Greek-American. It seems that the Greeks have tended to be non-assimilative partly due to economic position and partly due to host country hostility. George A. Kourvetaris points out, "...most Greeks up until 1900 lived outside the boundaries of the Greek nation state" (185), so migrant Greeks historically maintained a Greek nationality while embedded in other nations. According to Kourvetaris, diaspora Greeks occupied a social category of "middleman minorities." There are two defining traits of this group: "its members are engaged in small commercial enterprises," and "middleman minorities have somewhat tense relations with the majority population" (179). Moreover, Kourvetaris notes that Smyrna, near the Asia Minor locale where Cal's grandparents Lefty and Desdemona emigrate from, served in particular as a center of Greek "middleman minority" commerce, especially in the wheat and silk trade (180).

The gender role in *Middlesex* seems male dominated. Though living in America, the women seem to be limited inside the house in Greek immigrants family. For instance, Zizmo institutes the conventional Greek gender roles into the house. "The house was sex-segregated like the houses in the patridha, the old country, men in the sala, women in the kitchen...Lefty and Desdemona, accustomed to living in their own house, were forced to adapt to their new landlord's ways" (55). Kourvetaris notes that the "ideal" male gender role in the Greek family is an autocratic dominant figure, "whose authority over the rest of the family members, particularly the wife, is absolute" (101). In practice, of course, role differentiation in the Greek family has

never been this simple. “In reality the father’s authority is contingent upon his ability to prove himself a good provider for his family, a compassionate husband, and an understanding father” (7). In the chapters that close Lefty and Desdemona’s portion of the novel, these traditional, ethnic gender roles recur to pre-figure the broad outcome of the novel as a whole. To prove himself a good provider, Lefty works “sixteen, sometimes eighteen, hours a day. He worked seven days a week. To support his family he had to be exiled from them” (77). But despite striving to the Greek paternal ideal, as the Great Depression mounts, Desdemona is forced to work, accepting a job as a silk worker for the Nation of Islam. Initially, despite Desdemona’s entry into the role of provider for the family, gender roles seem to consolidate along conventional lines. The Nation of Islam is highly gender segregated. In fact, Sister Wanda tells Desdemona “‘Islam’ means submission” (84), implying that such submission is the Nation of Islam’s ideal female role. This gender role shows their native culture in the land of their dream, New World. This is one of the unassimilated traits that are directly connected to their religion of the Old World. Such gender role is one of the traits that make the Greek-American ambivalent in terms of their cultural identity.

The title of the novel “*Middlesex*” itself is very significant to indicate the middleness of the identity. Moreover, in the chapter ‘Middlesex’ of the novel, Milton buys a house on “Middlesex Boulevard” and “the architecture of Middlesex was an attempt to rediscover pure origins” and “with the same concentration he practiced on the aorist tense of ancient Greek verbs...Lefty now cleaned the huge picture windows, the fogged glass of the greenhouse, the sliding doors that led to the courtyard and even the skylights” (158,160, 167). Through the setting and the structure of the house, Eugenides shows the middleness of the Greek-American immigrants. As the architecture of the house is the pursuit of the pure origin and Lefty in his old age

cleans it with great effort, it shows the pursuit of the pure identity origin by the immigrant. Diasporas want for their origin living in the foreign land but they never becomes successful as their identity always become hybrid due to the assimilation and non-assimilation.

To sum up I have examined the diasporic mediations in *Middlesex* in relation to the hermaphrodite protagonist, use of Greek mythical allusions, assimilated and non-assimilated traits as well the different degree of assimilation in different generations of Greek-American diasporas. In fact, the interaction of the cultures makes the identity of diasporas hybrid. Immigrants community cannot forget their past completely. Their left Old World haunts them in the present New World. Some of their origin traits are assimilated but some of them remain always unassimilated. No matter how much they are assimilated, in the eyes of the host community they are always outsider and even in the eyes of the community of their homeland, they are outsider as they adopt they foreign cultural traits. In such a way they belong to neither their Old World nor to their New World completely rather they are both halves. Their identity becomes ambivalent. Hence, the hybrid identity, created by Greekness versus Americanness of Greek-American diasporas, is metaphorically represented by the hermaphrodite protagonist in the novel *Middlesex*.

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