

Immigration: ‘A Lifelong Pregnancy’? An Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri’s Fiction

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In my thesis I investigate the fiction of Indian-American writer Jhumpa Lahiri, whose works can be labeled as postcolonial, Indian or Bengali diasporic, and South Asian American, all at the same time. While depicting specific ethnic experiences of educated, upper middle class Bengalis who have migrated to New England around the mid-1960s, Lahiri simultaneously addresses universal themes like marital harmony, loss of a loved one, or parenting. Thus, she opens up her literary creations to a wide audience and makes it clear that her intention is not to circumscribe her work to ‘pure’ ethnic communities, but on the contrary, to delve into the heterogeneity of migrants’ identities and look at the processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. A twice-displaced individual herself, Lahiri looks at the experience of migration from different angles and exposes its unevenness.

Using the concepts of cultural translation and cultural hybridization (Bhabha), subaltern status (Spivak), diasporic formation and diaspora space (Brah), cultural identity (Hall and Grossberg), transnationalism (Faist, Vertovec, Kennedy and Roudometof), and ‘third space’ (Bhabha and Soja), my project demonstrates how Lahiri uses physical space (houses, other buildings and city-spaces) in order to move from cultural translations, through cultural hybridity, to a third space of transnational encounters. I construct a three-stage model of migration which reflects the sequence of Lahiri’s fictional texts and I thereby demonstrate that intratextuality is a defining feature of her oeuvre.

There is a unitary development from her first work, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (a short-story collection published in 1999 and dealing predominantly with cultural translations), through her novel *The Namesake* (which appeared in 2003 and includes cultural translations, but also thoroughly examines cultural hybridity and transnationalism) to *Unaccustomed Earth* (her second volume of short stories, which was printed in 2008 and explores ‘third space’ and transnationalism). Her latest book, *The Lowland* (2013), picks up the red thread of transnationalism, and confirms the overall message that a transnational model of belonging is the most appropriate for contemporary migrants. The marked dialogic communication between her

four books along the space-time continuum, prompts me to view Jhumpa Lahiri's oeuvre in its own chronotope (Bakhtin).