
**Question of Identity: Mimicry and Decolonization in Jhumpa
Lahiri's Selected Short Stories**

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Abstract

Since Jhumpa Lahiri has been regarded as a second generation Indian immigrant living in the United States. This has made her fully aware of the cultural mixing between India and America. This paper focuses on the process of mimicry and decolonization of Indian immigrants who live in the United States. Lahiri's fiction *Interpreter of Maladies* reveals cultural identity, mimicry and decolonization that the immigrants experience while living in the target culture. This paper applies Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry and Frantz Fanon's concept of decolonization to explore three short stories in Lahiri's fiction *Interpreter of Maladies* namely; "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", "Mrs. Sen's" and "This Blessed House". The study concludes that some characters in these stories mimic the American culture as a result of their interaction with the Americans due to work or for being born and raised in America. Their imitation involves culture, tradition, language and religion. While, other characters decolonize and resist the American culture by rejecting everything related to this culture, in order to adhere to their original Indian identity and keep ties with their heritage.

Keywords: decolonization, *Interpreter of Maladies*, Jhumpa Lahiri, mimicry

1.1. Introduction

Postcolonial studies have gained the attention of many readers and scholars throughout the world. Postcolonial (literature) deals with the result of the colonization on colonized cultures and societies. It has been used by historians after the Second World War, at the late 1970s. The term postcolonial is used "to refer to cultural interaction within colonial societies in literary circles" (Ashcroft, et al, 1998:186). According to Innes, the term postcolonial with hyphen "refers specifically to the period after a country, state or people cease to be governed by colonial power into their own lands" (Innes, 2007:1). It was used to refer to the effects of colonialism from the beginning of the colonization. So, postcolonial studies are concerned with the interaction with the culture of the colonized power including its language and traditions.

The term Postcolonial has been described by Robert J. Young as a term that describes the historical condition change and culture formation which emerge in response to changing political circumstances in the colonized power. Postcolonial theory focuses on the economic material and culture situation which governed the global system in which postcolonial notion is required to use (Young, 2016:57). Postcolonial literature has been defined by Talib as “Literature written by colonized and formerly colonized people. This should include writings in various languages not only the language of the colonizer” (2002:13). This literature refers to the works produced by colonized people to eliminate the effects applied in the mid of 20th century, when many colonized people defend and fight to get their independence from the colonized power.

Edward Said is one of the cultural critics of postcolonial literature, he stated that colonialism is a result of imperialism. He used imperialism rather than colonialism in order to mean practice, the theory and the attitudes of domination. His book *Orientalism* is regarded as an influential work in postcolonial field. According to his analysis, the term orientalism connotes “the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth century and early twentieth century European colonialism” (Said, 2003:2). Said claimed that the relationship between "Occident" and "Orient" is a relationship of power and domination. He examines how European culture gained strength and identity by defining itself against the Orient.

European power dominates over many countries in Africa, Asia, and South America. This domination was constricted to social and cultural conditions as well as to political condition of colonized people. During the British domination on India, the native Indians were subjected to great intimidation especially on cultural and moral levels. So, the Indian writers appeared to unite the Indians and remove the colonial perspective from their nation. They choose English language to be the medium of their works. The literature they produced is known as “postcolonial–Indian English literature” (Abirami, 2018:167-168).

1.1.1 Indian Sub-continent and Colonization

Indian sub-continent was colonized by the British Empire for more than two hundred years. During this period, the Indians were subjected to degradation especially the cultural and moral lives of the natives. The British rule had great impacts on the economic and social life of Indians in general and the cultural side in particular. Because of the British colonization in India, the English language is used as a means of communication and has a great role in Indian societies. The British colonization in India changes the cultural values and beliefs of the native Indians. Colonizing powers considered the native as

savages and they started to civilize them. Indian sub-continent had been home to two major religions: Hinduism and Islam, but because of the British colonization, Christianity was considered as a major religion as well. The arrival of the British colonization led to the spread of Christianity in India and the British Empire started to criticize Hinduism in order to spread Christianity. So, the natives had no other choice and accepted the new way of life. They even changed their religion and were forced to learn the colonizer's language.

The British Empire was a global force, but its power had waned by the early twentieth century. India established its independence in 1947, after the resistance movement that was led by Gandhi, which succeeded in forcing the British forces to leave. Many Indian writers started to write in order to unite the Indians and remove the colonial perspective from their nation. Their works stand against the colonial perspective and encourage the natives to maintain their traditions. The postcolonial Indian-English authors like Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Arudhati Roy, and Jhumpa Lahiri composed their works with a view to voice the suffering of the under privileged in order to uplift them, thereby contributing to the growth of the nation, both culturally and socially.

1.1.2 Jhumpa Lahiri as a Postcolonial Writer

Jhumpa Lahiri, Indian-American writer, was born in 1967 in London, a novelist and short story writer. She was raised with her Bengali parents in New York, and she is a second generation Indian-American writer. Lahiri grows up in the United State and writes two novels, *The Namesake* (2003) and *The Low-land* (2013). Lahiri published two collections of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008). She has personally experienced what feels to be an Indian growing up in America. Amidst her confusion of not knowing which space she belongs to, Lahiri grew up in embracing her hyphenated identity, which is Indian-American:

My first book was published in 1999 and around then, on the cusp of a new century, the term "Indian-American" has become part of this country's vocabulary. I have heard it so often that these days, if asked about my background, I use the term myself, pleasantly surprised, that I don't have to explain further. (Lahiri, 2006)

In her collection *Interpreter of Maladies* she wants to tell her story as a child migrates from India to the United States, also she wants to describe the confusion that she faced because of living in two different cultures. In an interview with Isaac Chotiner (2008) in the Atlantic, she stated "It interest me to imagine character shifting from one situation and location to another, for whatever the circumstances may be, characters were all moving for more or less, the same reason

my parents came to the United States for opportunities or job” (N.p). Lahiri received many awards, one of them is the most prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. She tries to explain the dilemma that faced the Indian immigrants in the United States, based on her own perspective as a second generation Indian writer.

Jhumpa Lahiri, through her literary works, has gained a wide range of commentaries and critics’ attention. There are works on Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* which range from dissertation and articles in literary journals.

Prianka Sharma in her article “Bewildered Relations in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* (2012), focuses on the relationship between characters which are analyzed in each story. She also sheds light on isolation; the characters feel isolated as they search for a place:

They are defined by isolation of some form or other like husband is isolated from wives; immigrants isolated from their families and their homes; children are isolated from their parents, and people are isolated from the community in which they live. The lives in these stories end with a sense of loss. (2012:3)

She concludes that Lahiri not only focuses on the character who struggles in order to build a connection, but also focuses on loss of connection between people. The writer concludes that the main characters in these stories are not able to make their realities and this is not because they do not have the ability to do so, but they don’t know how to place themselves in their world.

Another article by Annisa Munaware entitled “ The Effects of Diaspora to the Second Generation Indian immigrants as reflected in Four selected short stories from Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* : Postcolonial Studies (2015). She declares that as the second generation of Indian diaspora, they have Indian identity, but they adapted their second culture (American culture). The writer concludes that the adaptation between two cultures makes the immigrants confused of their identity because of the mixing between two different cultures and they might lose their own identity, and this makes them suffer from a psychological conflict.

However, Baharch Bahmanpur in her article “Female subject and Negotiating Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*” (2010), focuses on the role of woman in the stories and discussed how the female is subjected and her identity crisis is portrayed in these stories. She shows the suffering, pressure and possible failure or success in the adaptation process of female characters in recreating their subjectivity. She explores how the female characters in each story deal with the new culture. She concludes that each individual in

these stories has his/ her own means of survival, one acculturated whereas the other escaped. So, the female subjects in Lahiri's oeuvre expose the unstable identities by various means and through their individual voice.

However, these studies are different from what this paper does, in the sense that this paper focuses on the process of mimicry and decolonization in Lahiri's selected short stories. This paper applies Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry and Frantz Fanon's concept of decolonization in Lahiri's short stories "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", "Mrs. Sen's" and "This Blessed House" which have been overlooked by previous research.

1.2. Mimicry and Decolonization

Mimicry is an important concept in postcolonial theory, because it describes the ambivalent relationship between colonizer powers and colonized. When the colonial discourse makes the colonized mimic the colonizer by imitating their culture and language, the result will be a blurred copy of the colonizer power. Mimicry therefore "locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behavior of the colonized" (Ashcroft, et al, 1998:139).

Mimicry is one of the critical terms in Homi Bhabha's criticism of postcolonial literature. In his use of this term, mimicry occurs when colonized people imitate the culture of the colonizer. Bhabha defines mimicry as "desire for reformed; recognizable other as a subject of a difference that's almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994:122). So, mimicry refers to the imitation of one species by another and a condition of doubleness that undermines the selves of the colonized and the colonizer. It is a result of interaction between two different cultures and identities. He argues that "Mimicry thus, the sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline which appropriates the other as it visualizes" (Bhabha, 1984:126). Bhabha's perspective of mimicry is a result of the interaction between two different identities. In fact, the term mimicry is a form of mockery, Bhabha's postcolonial theory is represented as a comic approach to the colonial discourse, because it mocks the continuing pretension of empire and colonialism:

It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they share is a discursive process by which excuses or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same but not quite), doesn't merely rapture the discourse, but becomes transformed into uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a partial presence. (Bhabha, 1994:123)

Bhabha stated in his book *The Location of Culture* that mimicry as a product of colonialism did not succeed in undermining nativism and it is a signifier of the productivity of colonial power and the reversal of the process of domination. He considers mimicry as a double vision in which disclosing the ambivalence of the colonial discourse and disrupt its power.

On the other hand, decolonization is “the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms” (Ashcroft, et al, 1998:63). It includes all the hidden aspects and the cultural forces that had kept up the colonized power and that remain even after achieving political independence. In various areas in the colonized world, the process of resistance was managed in terms or institutions appropriated from the colonizing culture itself. So, decolonization is “a complex and continuing process rather than something achieved automatically at the moment of independence” (Ashcroft: p.66).

Frantz Fanon remains a key thinker to decolonization and third world independence; he is a figure in the field of post colonialism. John McLeod stated that “Fanon’s works have been used as a means of conceptualizing the construction of identity under colonialism and a way of configuring the relationship between literary representation and the construction of consciousness during the struggle against colonialism” (McLeod, 2000:84). Fanon declares that the process of decolonization brings the future of capitalism radically into a question. Decolonization according to Fanon is “always violent phenomena” and it could be considered as a clash of two forces opposed to each other by their nature, which owe their originality to that kind of sub-stratification that resulted from and nourished by the colonial situation (Fanon, 1963:36). Fanon wants to focus on the idea that decolonization is a positively total change from the colonial situation that the colonized people lived before. Decolonization is not only the end of colonialism, but also the end of colonized men “decolonization is the veritable creation of new men” (Fanon: 34).

Fanon asserts that mass participation in violent decolonization lays the basis for true decolonization after independence. He also states that “decolonization is a quite simply the replacing of a certain species of men by another species of men” (p.33). He became a leading figure in Algerian struggle against the French colonial domination and did not regard the culture of the colonized in Africa as "African culture" whatsoever. Otherwise the culture of the colonized for him is a starkly colonial project bespeaking a colonial logic that from the stand point of the colonized masses cannot be redeemed except through the destruction of colonialism itself “The immobility to which the native is condemned can only be called in question if the native decided to put an end to the history of colonization, and to

bring into existence the history of nation - the history of decolonization” (Fanon, 1963:51).

Decolonization is not a reflection of the weakness, but it is a reflection of the strength of the decolonizing power. There are different aspects of decolonization. First, is the cultural decolonization, which is the project of preserving and valuing what has been lost from the colonized culture (because of the violence of colonization), and rejecting everything related to the colonial power. The other aspect is the political decolonization, which aims to wreak the havoc that colonialism wrought in the society. Rather, political decolonization is about understanding and undoing the damage that colonialism did to the colonized societies. Algeria for example, was colonized by France in the 19th century. Algerian people decolonized the French domination in order to get their independence. They resisted everything concerned with French colonization, as well as they used different means to show their resistance towards French colonization. Fanon declares in his book *A Dying Colonialism*, the Algerians attempts to decolonize the French domination “In Algeria, before 1945, the radio as a technical news instrument became widely distributed in the domination society. It then ... became both a means of resistance in the case of isolated Europeans and means of cultural pressure on the dominated society” (Fanon, 1959:72).

Thus, mimicry and decolonization are two major tools that normally accompany colonization. Countries, societies and cultures sometimes give up to the colonial powers discourse, as such they follow and accept their culture and assimilate in consequence when Bhabha considers mimicry. This process is normally done for various reasons. The colonized could be in need for this assimilation which develops them further. On other hand, Fanon discusses resistance or decolonization in which people, societies or culture normally reject everything related to the colonized power, such as language, traditions or culture in order to pressure their own identity or for other different reasons. These two concepts are to be applied to three selected short stories by Jhumpa Lahiri to evaluate the Indian society and how far they assimilate (mimic) or resist (decolonize) as the next pages will uncover.

2. Discussion: *Interpreter of Maladies*

Lahiri’s collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* focuses on the Bengali-Indian immigrants in the United States and their struggle to live in a foreign culture. This collection of short stories comprises nine short stories. This paper seeks to analyze three short stories “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, “Mrs. Sen” and “This Blessed House”, which are related to various aspects of Indians life in one way or another. These stories handle the first and the second

generation Indian immigrants who were torn between two cultures. The major characters of these stories are confused between their homeland culture (Indian culture) and the target culture (American culture). Some of them assimilated to the American culture while others show their resistance to the target culture. While reading these stories, the writer can indicate that there is a reference to the processes of mimicry and decolonization in this collection, therefore, this paper will apply Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry and Frantz Fanon's concept of decolonization in the analysis of these particular short stories.

2.1. Mimicry in Lahiri's Selected Short Stories

Mimicry can be traced in Lahiri's fiction *Interpreter of Maladies*. This section explores the process of mimicry in Lahiri's selected short stories *When Mrs. Pirzada came to dine*, *Mrs. Sen*, and *This Blessed House*, and how the characters mimic the adapted land culture as a result of their encountering between the colonized and colonizer cultures. Some characters of these stories are assimilated to the American culture for one reason or another. They indulge with the adapted land culture, traditions, language and lifestyle. Some individuals try to reinvent themselves through practicing social American norms such as the change of name in order to form a unique identity or to burn the past. In the process of mimicry, the origin culture didn't disappear easily, although the adapted culture will strongly influence it.

"When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" focuses on an Indian-American family lodging in a little town north of Boston, and Mr. Pirzada a man who visits them for dinner. Mr. Pirzada is Bengali, but different from other characters in the story (whose religion is Hindu), he is Muslim. He is also from East Pakistan whereas other characters are Indians. He is a university teacher in Dacca and gets a fellowship to study foliage of England. He is separated from his family, his wife and his seven daughters. Lilia, ten years old, is the narrator of the story, as a second generation who grows up in America; she spent her life in the United States and owns the powerful affinities with American culture and society. She did not have any information about her homeland's history and culture. She thinks that Mr. Pirzada is an Indian because she noticed that he speaks the same language of her parents and shares the same traditions. So, this story is about people from similar backgrounds coming together in a time of crisis. It is a story which involves tension and deeper meaning related to assimilation.

Lilia is perplexed at her own American identity and confused as to where she belongs. She is born in America and she is more American in her behaviors than Indian. Her mother claimed that her

daughter is separated from the hardships of their native land, and she is proud that her daughter is born and raised in America. She encourages her to hold American traditions instead of her homeland's traditions. She prefers to make Lilia know more about American history and culture: "Lilia has plenty to learn at school...we lives here now, she was born here" (Lahiri, 1999:26). Lilia's father wants her to learn about Indian history, but his wife told him "how can you possibly expect her to know about the Partition? Put these nuts away" (Lahiri: 27). This shows how Lilia's mother is adapted to the new culture and seems proud of their American identity. Lilia's mother is one of the characters who is assimilated to the host culture and starts to mimic the American's lifestyle. This goes along with Bhabha who contends that "Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" (Bhabha, 1984:126).

In October, there is an American festival, the Halloween. Lilia's mother celebrates with the neighbors and friends the Halloween day. Mr. Pirzada asks about the pumpkin on people's doorsteps, Lilia tells him that they celebrate the Halloween day. Mr. Pirzada joins them to carve a jack-O'-lantern out of a pumpkin bought by Lilia's mother:

Pumpkins," my mother replied. "Lilia, remind me to pick one up at the supermarket." "And the purpose? It indicates what?" "You make a jack-o'-lantern," I said, grinning ferociously. "Like this. To scare people away. (p.36)

This indicates that Lilia's family and their friend Mr. Pirzada, mimic an American traditions, they share with the Americans Halloween day. So, this is an evidence that they indulge with the target culture.

Lilia knows that Mr. Pirzada's family is not safe, because of the war there. So she gives into a secular type of prayer with the candy that Mr. Pirzada gives to her. She performs a ritual to keep Mr. Pirzada's family safe. She doesn't practice her parents' religion rituals, so she can read as a secular American. By doing so, Lilia eliminates her parents' religion and culture. She prefers to live her life as an American girl. Although Lilia's family is Hindu, but they celebrate charismas with their Christians friends "we went to Philadelphia to spend charismas with friends of my parents" (p.41). Christmas is a ritual related to Christianity, so this indicates that the assimilation of Lilia's family was not for traditions or language only, but also religion, they share a ritual that isn't related to their religion. This goes in accordance with Bhabha's allegation which says "Mimicry is a desire of reform; recognizable other as a subject of a difference that's almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994:122).

Whereas “Mrs. Sen’s” revolves around a Bengali-immigrant woman, Mrs. Sen the spouse of a mathematics scholar whose job has led them to unknown seaside town in New England. She did not opt to move to the United States and shows no interest in the place she finds herself in. The steps she takes towards adaptation are half-hearted, she tested assimilation but she does not totally assimilate to. She was a babysitter for a twelve- year old boy “Eliot”, to take care of him after the school days. Lahiri has created Mrs. Sen based on her own mother, in an interview with Vibbhuti Patel she claims that “Mrs. Sen is based on my mother who babysat at our home. I saw her one way, but imagined that an American child may see her different reaction with curiosity” (N.p).

Mrs. Sen has not assimilated to American culture, but she tried. The process of mimicry or assimilation was very difficult to her. Like many other Indian immigrants in the United States, Mrs. Sen longs for her homeland. She struggles to adapt to American culture, like driving a car which she hates “They proceeded directly to the car, and for twenty minutes Mrs. Sen practiced driving” (p.119). She cannot drive, so this prevents her from performing daily activities. Throughout the story, driving is an act connected with Americanness. She attempts to drive without her husband, but her attempt ends up with an accident. Lahiri highlights the fact that Mrs. Sen tries to assimilate herself into the host culture and lifestyle, but she failed. In contrast Mrs. Sen as a university professor has a sense of belonging to the new country, because he is contributing and interacting with the community, so he is vulnerable to assimilate to.

Likewise, “This Blessed House” cites an Indian-American couple, Sanjeev and Twinkle. They are newly married and they acclimatize to live in the house they purchased in Harford, which seems to be owned by Fervent Christians. The plot of this story follows the couples’ discovery of Christian paraphernalia, like a white porcelain effigy of Christ, 3D post of Frances and a plaster of Virgin Mary for the lawn. Twinkle admires these objects and wants to display them in her house, but her husband is uncomfortable with them and he reminds her about their religion. This argument reveals other problems in their relationship.

“This Blessed House” shows the adjustment of young Indian immigrants to a new culture and beliefs. Twinkle as a second generation immigrant is described as a modern woman who is more easily assimilated to the target culture and environment. Like Lilia in “When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine”, Twinkle is raised in America and she is more American in her ways. Her habit of smoking and drinking is an example of her imitation of the American culture. She is Hindu, but she admired the Christian statue that she found in her new house.

She likes the statue and wants to display it in mantle “She planted a kiss on top of Christ’s head, and then she placed the statue on top of the fireplace mantel, which needed, Sanjeev observed, to be dusted” (p.137). She regarded the Christian figures as a symbol of good luck, but her husband asked her to get rid of them, but she insisted to have them in her house and told him that may be these figures will be worth “But it could be worth something”. (p.136), also she added “the statue is part of our property” (p.147). Being Hindu but interested in Christian figures is part of imitation process towards American culture and values. She is well assimilated to American life style.

Twinkle portrays the stage of Americanization because she is easily assimilated to the second culture. She refuses to use her Indian name (Tanima) and asked her husband to call her Twinkle “Call me Twinkle” (p.15). She chooses to express her identity in an American name, at the same time she calls her husband (Sanj) instead of the Indian name Sanjeev. This is an evidence of Twinkle imitation of the American culture. The values of Christian cultures are deeply embedded in Twinkle’s mind due to their stark presence within the school system and life style. In the matter of food, Twinkle unlike her husband, refuses to cook Indian food “Indian food she complained, was a bother: she detested chopping garlic, and peeling ginger, and couldn’t operate a blender” (p. 144). The fact that Twinkle refuses to cook Indian meals and adorns her house with Christian figures is an act of the upmost disrespect to Hinduism, and shows that the couples have lost all connections with their heritage and will fully appropriate American values. Those Christian figures reflect the power of western domination. According to the roots of western culture, Christian brings its effort to dominate and enter the colonized. So, Twinkle totally mimics the culture, language, ideas and values of the colonized power.

2.2 Decolonization in Lahiri’s Selected Short Stories

Another theme in Lahiri’s fiction *Interpreter of Maladies* is decolonization. Lahiri’s characters show their resistance to American culture as a means of decolonization for the colonial power. The characters reject the colonial cultural traditions and everything related to the colonial power in order to maintain their own identity. Lahiri also sheds light on the alienation that the immigrants face in the host culture. Lahiri’s short stories *When Mr. Pirzada came to dine*, *Mrs. Sen and This Blessed House* show the life and struggle of exiled Indians who are torn between two cultures, Indian culture and American culture. They migrate to a new land and face various problems such as conflict between two cultures, sense of alienation, longing for their land and the challenge of cultural identity. They

maintain their culture and try to get a new life but carrying Indian identity.

Lahiri's characters of "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" remind us of Lahiri's experience as a second generation immigrant child who lives in the United States. She says in an interview "I feel that I have inherited a sense of that loss, because it was so palpable all the time I was growing up, the sense of what my parents sacrificed in moving to the United States" (N.p). As a second generation child, Lilia grew up in America. Her father was disappointed because his daughter didn't know anything about her origin's history, because she only taught American history at school. Her father questions an American school system in which an international history was not taught to the kids in America. He wants Lilia to know more about where she comes from. He was against his wife who wants her daughter to learn only American history. Lilia's father argues with his wife and he says "but what does she learn about the world? ... What is she learning?" (p. 27). He insists to make his daughter aware of Indian history and culture. His daughter is supposed to be Indian by her traditions, he is not pleased that his daughter didn't have any information about the world in general and India in particular. Lilia's father's disappointment with her lack of knowledge about Indian history instigates her to read about her parents' country, but her teacher prevents her from doing so.

Lilia's parents search for Indian surname in an attempts to find diner company, until they found a Pakistani man called Mr. Pirzada, speaks the same language and shares the same traditions as well as shares the same food:

It made no sense to me. Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea. (p.25)

Although they live in the United States, but they used to eat their homeland's food and keep their traditions and identity "from the kitchen my mother brought forth the succession of dishes; lentils with fried onions, green beans with coconut fish cooked with raisins in a yogurt sauce" (p. 30). This emphasizes the importance of Indian food for the immigrants and shows that food is very important for Indian culture. There is rice in every meal which represents Indian food. Food for Indians is part of their culture; it is a way to reunite every one and to have a convivial moment "In spite of it all, night after night, my parents and Mr. Pirzada enjoyed long, leisurely meals" (p.34).

They gathered every night and shared their national traditions. This is an act of their decolonization to the colonial culture and this goes with Fanon's allegation which says "During the period of decolonization, the native's reason is appealed to. He is offered definite values; he is told frequently that decolonization need not mean regression" (Fanon, 1963:43).

Mr. Pirzada used to have a pocket watch, it is eleven hours ahead of American time and it was set with the time of Dacca "He took out a plain silver watch without a band, which he kept in his breast pocket, held it briefly to one of his tufted ears, and would it with three swift flicks of his thumb and forefinger" (p. 30). This watch represents his connections with his homeland.

Similarly in "Mrs. Sen's" we notice the heroine's tenacity and desire to cook, eat and feed only Indian food could be considered one of the ways by which she shows resistance towards assimilation to American culture. She certainly was not going to give up her native root that would mean surrendering a very significant part of her identity. She uses a ritualized practice of cutting vegetables, cooking stews and hand selecting fish, to keep ties with her society. She lays out a newspaper opposite the television and sits comfortably with a steel blade, peeling, slicing and chopping an assortment of vegetables for nearly an hour every day. The procedure utilizes a cultural instrument that reflects a ritual of sorts in which neighborhood women celebrate an important event:

Whenever there is a wedding in the family... or a large celebration of any kind, my mother sends out word in the evening for all neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night. (p.115)

Mrs. Sen tries to make mini India in her house, she still wears the traditional Indian costume, the sari. When Eliot first meets her, she wears it "She wore a shimmering white sari patterned with orange paisleys, more suitable for an evening affair than that quite, faintly drizzling August afternoon" (p.112). Even when she is out of her apartment she wears sari in order to present her Indian identity. She kept her Indian traditions by taking off her shoes while in her home "Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Sen wore shoes; Eliot noticed several pairs lined on the shelves of a small bookcase by the front door, they wore flip-flops" (p.112). Mrs. Sen refuses the American lifestyle, she always tries to make mini India in her apartment by keeping her Indian traditions, shows her Indian identity and rejects everything related to American culture. She is totally resisting the target culture and values so this corresponds with Fanon's claiming which says "In

the period of decolonization, the colonized masses mock at these very values, insult them and vomit them up” (Fanon, 1963:43).

Mrs. Sen is not easily influenced by American society, so she managed to be the first generation who hold her custom, tradition and identity, living in the United States. She is described as one who tested assimilation but didn't assimilate. Her behavior and daily life continued to be strict with her cultural heritage; she feels sense of loss in her daily life. She cannot get fresh fish to which she is used to, and she comments about fish in America “testing nothing like the fish in India at least it was fresh” (p.123). She is connected to India “By then, Eliot understood that when Mrs. Sen said home, she means India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables” (p.116). The blade she uses to chop vegetables figures prominently in her distinction from American way of life “instead of knife, she uses a blade that curved like prow of a Viking ship, slicing to battle in distant seas” (p.114). While chopping, one day she tells Eliot about the blade place in Indian society “Where apparently, there was at least one in every house hold” (p.115). Moreover Mrs. Sen displays her culture through traditional cutting blade. Although she lives in the Unites states, but she keeps her Indian traditions in cutting vegetables. She applied scarlet powder on her forehead and she explains to Eliot the durability of Indian marriage through the symbolic gesture part of her hear “I must wear the powder everyday ... for the rest of the days that I am married” (p.117). She was not happy with her American life and she has little interaction with neighbors and people around her.

Sanjeev in “This Blessed House” is an immigrant who resists dissolving in the dominating culture of the host society by rejecting the religious beliefs that his wife found in their new house. He refuses to display them in his house and asks his wife to throw them all “throw it away” (p.136), because he is afraid that those figures might be reflected on their identity. He always refuses them and tries to be patient in order not to break his relationship with his wife “Get rid of that idiotic statue” (p.136), and reminds her “we are not Christians” (p.137). Sanjeev always reminds his wife about their religious background and the harm of collecting Christian objects, although his wife never listens to his advice. He considers all these objects repulsive and wants to throw them all, but he has to live with objects signifying an alien faith and culture right in the house for the sake of his wife and for the sake of survival in an alien land by appearing to accept its values but actually resisting them.

Unlike his wife, Sanjeev takes immense pleasure in eating Indian food after long hours of work “Avenue bridge to order Mughlai chicken with spinach from his favorite Indian restaurant on other side of the Charles, and return to his dorm to write out clean copies of his

problem sets” (p.138). Sanjeev being ,an immigrant, is deeply in touch with his roots and cultural traditions. He wants to save his original identity. He used to eat Indian food in his favorite restaurant, he is deeply connected with his origin. Sanjeev surprised at his wife’s insistence on keeping the Christian accessories make him think of their history and their heritage. He is more Indian in his habits, unlike his wife who is more American in her habits and manner.

Conclusion

Lahiri’s fiction is about Indian immigrants living in the United State and torn between their roots and the new world. The characters of these short stories are navigating between the Indian traditions that they have inherited and the traditions of the host world. Some characters in these particular short stories indulge with the American culture and mimic their lifestyle, almost forget their national traditions. One of the main reasons that leads the characters to assimilate to American culture is that they were born and grown up in America, like Lilia in “when Mr.Pirzada Came to Dine” and Twinkle in “This Blessed House”. Their adaptation to the American culture is due to the fact that they were not exposed directly to their origin culture. Jobs on other hand are another reason that motivates the characters to adapt to the second culture, like Mr. Sen, who is a Mathematics professor at the university. Whereas other characters like Mrs. Sen, totally refuses to assimilate to the American culture, she resists the foreign culture and everything relevant to the colonial culture. Other characters, although they assimilated in some cases, they show their resistance towards American culture in other cases, like Sanjeev in “This Blessed House”, and Lilia’s father in “When Mr.Pirzada Came to Dine”. All the characters who decolonize the American culture want to adhere to their original Indian identity.

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قضية الهوية: المحاكاة وانهاء الاستعمار في قصص مختارة لجومبا لاهيري

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المستخلص

تعد جومبا لاهيري مهاجرة هندية من الجيل الثاني تعيش في الولايات المتحدة ، جعلتها تدرك تمام الاختلاط الثقافي بين الهند وأمريكا. تركز هذه الورقة على عملية محاكاة وإنهاء استعمار المهاجرين الهنود الذين يعيشون في الولايات المتحدة. يكشف كتاب لاهيري "تأويل الأمراض" عن الهوية الثقافية والتقليد وإنهاء الاستعمار الذي يعاني منه المهاجرون أثناء العيش في الثقافة المستهدفة. تُطبّق هذه الورقة مفهوم هومي بابا للمحاكاة ومفهوم فرانيس فانون لإنهاء الاستعمار لاستكشاف ثلاث قصص قصيرة في كتاب لاهيري: "عندما جاء السيد بيرزادا لتناول العشاء" ، "السيدة سين" و "هذا البيت المبارك". وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن بعض الشخصيات في هذه القصص تحاكي الثقافة الأمريكية نتيجة تفاعلها مع الأمريكيين بسبب العمل أو لأنهم ولدوا ونشأوا في أمريكا. تقليدهم يشمل الثقافة والتقاليد واللغة والدين. بينما تقوم شخصيات أخرى بإنهاء الاستعمار ومقاومة الثقافة الأمريكية من خلال رفض كل ما يتعلق بهذه الثقافة ، من أجل التمسك بهويتهم الهندية الأصلية والحفاظ على العلاقات مع تراثهم.