

## **Cultural Translation, Hybrid Identity, and Third Space in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The phenomena of migration, displacement, and social integration have greatly impacted discourses on the interpretation of cultural translation, which is widely perceived as an ongoing reciprocal process of exchange, integration, and transformation. Drawing upon Homi K. Bhabha's theoretical notions, such as liminality, hybridity, and third space, the present study explores the poetics and politics of cultural translation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). More specifically, we examine the multiple ways in which the existing similarities and differences between dominant and marginal cultures influence diasporic individuals and communities and the various ways the migrants respond to their conflicting conditions in the diaspora. A close reading of the three stories of "Mrs. Sen's," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" and "The Third and Final Continent" reveals that while the liminal situation has the potential to become a site of conflicts in the lives of the migrant subjects, it germinates a condition of hybridity that embraces the diversity of cultures and their blurry borders with one another in the third space. This pattern is perfectly demonstrated through the three characters of Mrs. Sen, Lilia's mother, and Mala. Their heterogeneous experiences of integration underscore the idea that when two disparate cultural realities confront one another, the female characters welcome a new space where they succeed in negotiating and translating their cultures.

*Keywords:* Culture, diaspora, Homi Bhabha, identity, Jhumpa Lahiri

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The cultural turn in Translation Studies over the last decades of the twentieth century has not only problematized the literal translation of a text from one language

to another but also greatly impacted the field of literary studies (Baker & Saldanha, 2019). On the one hand, it has underlined the cultural significance in the translation of literary texts, presenting the process of translation as “a transaction not between two languages, or somewhat a mechanical sounding act of linguistic ‘substitution,’ but rather a more complex negotiation between two cultures” (Trivedi, 2007, p. 3). On the other hand, it has inspired literary scholars like Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Homi K. Bhabha to expand the idea by exploring the broader phenomena of cultural translation and transformation. Bhabha’s (1994, 1990) interpretations of cultural translation revolve around a heterogeneous discourse brought about by displacement or migration. He believes that cultural translation does not lend itself to the confines of a particular culture or a particularly radical definition. Rather, it “denies the essentialism of a prior given original or original culture” and, in so doing, emphasizes that “all forms of culture are continuously in the process of hybridity” in what he labels “the third space” (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). The translation is thus interpreted as an ongoing reciprocal process of exchange, integration, and transformation. For Bhabha, translation is a cultural and non-linear process of negotiation that occurs in what he calls a “third space,” that is, “a meeting place where conflicts are acted out and the margins of collaborations explored” (Wolf, 2008, p. 13). This transgressive space reinforces the idea of cultural relativism and problematizes

the traditional perception of culture and cultural identity as fixed and formulaic entities.

This article explores fictional stories on diasporic life and transnational experiences to study the various demonstrations of the concept of cultural translation as a process interlinked with displacement, migration, and transformation. The South Asian American writer Jhumpa Lahiri recommends herself for the study as she has been publicly and critically acknowledged as one of the foremost contemporary writers on experiences of migration, transculturation, and cross-cultural translation (Asl & Abdullah, 2017; Cardozo, 2012; Neutill, 2012). When facing the opportunities and challenges of international displacement, Lahiri’s fictional characters constantly translate the relationship between their national and diasporic cultures to create a meaningful space of their own and circumvent alienation, loneliness, and in-betweenness (Alvarez, 2021; Asl, 2018, 2022). In this article, we draw upon Bhabha’s theories to argue that Lahiri’s diasporic sensibility situates her in an in-between, liminal position that enables her to form a multi-faceted presentation of South Asian diasporic life. To pursue this argument, we focus on her Pulitzer-Prize-winning collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), to examine how interpretation, translation, and negotiation serve as remedies for maladies of diasporic subjects when facing the new culture of the host-land.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Jhumpa Lahiri as an Interpreter of Diasporic Experience**

Born in London and raised in Rhode Island, USA, by Bengali parents, Jhumpa Lahiri's literary writings revolve around the diasporic experiences of South Asian individuals and communities in the United States of America. Lahiri's fiction shows that migrants do not always easily assimilate into the dominant culture but are, at times, situated in a contentious cultural encounter (Apap, 2016; Asl et al., 2018; Dhingra & Cheung, 2012). Published in 1999, Lahiri's debut collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, marks the beginning of a new era in studying the South Asian diaspora and the complexities of cultural translation and interpretation. The work is created out of Lahiri's personal and diverse experiences of transnational mobility. Her identity and wealth equally inform it of knowledge and experience as a bicultural and bilingual person. In an interview, Lahiri emphasizes that her fictional works have served as the only place she manages to connect and make sense of national and diasporic cultural realities (Asl et al., 2016). Her life experiences involve a cultural ambiguity and complexity that seem to be quite overwhelming. She explains that numerous terms have been used to refer to this ambiguous in-between identity and the literature born out of it:

Both my book and myself were immediately and copiously categorized. Take, for instance, the

various ways I am described: as an American author, as an Indian-American author, as a British-born author, as an Anglo-Indian author, as an NRI (non-resident Indian) author, as an ABCD author (ABCD stands for American born confused "desi"—"desi" meaning Indian—and is an acronym coined by Indian nationals to describe culturally challenged second-generation Indians raised in the U.S.). According to Indian academics, I've written something known as "Diaspora fiction"; in the U.S., it's "immigrant fiction." (Lahiri, 2002, p. 113)

Having lived on the border of two cultures, Lahiri knows how to incorporate a traditional way of life with a modern one in a land that is not considered home. Numerous literary scholars praised her unique stance as a second-generation writer and her concise writing style (Chandorkar, 2017; Chatterjee, 2016; Lutzoni, 2017; Nair, 2015; Shankar, 2009). Koshy (2011), for example, believes that her stories "zoom in on small happenings and circumscribed settings, maintaining a spatial focus on the home and a formal and thematic focus on the slight, inconspicuous, and fleeting events and affects in daily life" (p. 597). Throughout the collection, Lahiri depicts different aspects of diasporic life and cross-cultural communication.

Over the past two decades, the poetics and politics of cultural translation in Lahiri's fiction have garnered global attention

(Diamond, 2021; Field, 2004; Lewis, 2001). In an interview, Lahiri acknowledges that nearly all of her “characters are translators, insofar as they must make sense of the foreign to survive” (Neutill, 2012, p. 119). While a few scholars have problematized the credibility of representation in her stories, casting doubt on the knowledge and intentions of the Western-based diasporic writer (Alfonso-Forero, 2011; Asl et al., 2020; Moynihan, 2012), many others have acclaimed Lahiri as a native informant (Bandyopadhyay, 2009; Brada-Williams, 2004; Caesar, 2005; Rastogi, 2015). Judith Caesar (2005), for example, argues that because Lahiri narrates the American world through the eyes of the other rather than through the familiar American eyes, her narration of diasporic spaces must be noted as the “subversions of old clichés” (p. 52). However, for the most part, the existing body of criticism on Lahiri’s creative writings mainly applauds her multi-dimensional portrayal of cultural differences and their positive impact on the lives of diasporic individuals and communities.

### **Theoretical Background**

The development of diasporic cultures as a result of transnational migrations has undermined essentialist ideologies by contesting the homogenizing perceptions of identity and culture as fixed and static entities (Anuar & Asl, 2022; Kuortti & Nyman, 2007; Pourgharib et al., 2022). In his seminal book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha argues for the productive nature of this cultural encounter,

asserting that the confrontation of the two cultures of the homeland and the host country entails the formation of a hybrid identity that constantly deconstructs and reconstructs itself. Hybridity, or the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone, is thus an empowering condition because it allows the diasporic subject to question, contest, and subvert the normalized boundaries. Hybrid identity is forged in what Bhabha calls the third space of enunciation or the liminal space between the dominant culture and the marginalized culture of the diasporic minority. He expounds on the interrelation of the two concepts of hybridity and liminality through the stairwell image. According to him,

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations 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. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4)

Hybridity thus takes place in “in-between” sites of diversity and opposition where the culture of the mainstream and

that of the periphery come together in a single place. The “in-between” territory is the interstitial “third space” that disrupts the established “policy of polarity,” or “Us” and “Them” divisions (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 36-39). In other words, the third space works as a catalyst that allows cultural differences to appear not as polarity or diversity but as hybridity (Singh et al., 1996). Hybridity occurs in the process of negotiation and translation, which produces a new identity different from either culture. The new form also indicates a hidden affinity between the dominant and the diasporic. Hence, hybridity uses alterity to disarm the prevailing culture and helps the minority with a chance to stand. What is involved in the construction of hybrid identity is an “estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness—that is the condition of extraterritorial and cross-cultural initiations” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 13).

According to Bhabha (1990), displaced individuals are agents of decolonization because they can push away the previously held fixed notions and stride beyond the segregating borders imposed by colonial and imperial ideologies. One of the major characteristics of their life is the everyday experience of otherness, which can be understood as one's separation from their culture and encounter with an unknown culture in relation to which they are viewed as different or peculiar. This experience refers to the “dual loyalty that migrants, immigrants, exiles, and refugees have to geography” of their connections to the space they presently dwell in and their

continuing entanglement with what they had “back home” (Agnew, 2005, p. 195). For Bhabha (1994), the diasporic space is highly conducive to forming counter-narratives. Elsewhere, he explains that “the boundary that secures the cohesive limits of the Western nation may imperceptibly turn into a contentious internal liminality providing a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 300). The third space provides the diasporic, the marginal, and the unvoiced with an alternative space to reform their identities to be heard. The liminal in the diasporic experience is thus the “in-between space” which “provide[s] the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate[s] new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (p. 2).

## **METHODOLOGY AND MATERIAL**

### **Research Objectives**

Drawing upon Homi K. Bhabha's theoretical notions, such as liminality, hybridity, and third space, the present study examines the poetics and politics of cultural translation as represented in literary writings of diasporic and transnational experiences. Specifically, the focus will be on the multiple ways in which the existing similarities and differences between dominant and marginal cultures influence diasporic individuals and communities, as well as on the various ways migrants respond to their conflicting conditions.

## Methods

The present study conducted a textual analysis of selected short stories. As a theoretical approach, the study engaged in Diasporic Studies, an offshoot of Cultural Studies. Homi K. Bhabha's critical and theoretical concepts are more specifically employed to analyze selected stories of diasporic and transnational experiences. In this relation, the notions of liminality, cultural difference/cultural diversity, hybridity, and third space were used as critical lenses to investigate the selected stories. Building on this theoretical framework, close reading is conducted to analyze selected short stories, pointed out below.

## Materials

Jhumpa Lahiri's Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), is the primary source of data collection and analysis in the present study. For the specific purposes of the study, three short stories: "Mrs. Sen's," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," and "The Third and Final Continent," were selected to be analyzed as they present the existing challenges and opportunities of living in a liminal situation. The collection was of paramount relevance to this study, as the stories depicted how the first- and second-generation diasporic characters from South Asia responded to cultural confrontations in their new home in the United States of America. Most characters portrayed in the collection, to borrow from Chambers (1993), "live at the intersections of histories and memories, experiencing

both their preliminary dispersal and their subsequent translation into new, more extensive arrangements along emerging routes" (p. 6).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Cultural Difference, Hybrid Identity, and Third Space in *Interpreter of Maladies*

"Mrs. Sen's" relates the story of a thirty-year-old Indian-Bengali housewife who moves from Calcutta to the United States as her husband is offered a position as a university professor in the States. As a subject of unwanted displacement, Mrs. Sen soon begins to experience a sense of loss and alienation in the host land. Bored in her new house in America, she decides to babysit an eleven-year-old American boy called Eliot. The notions of cultural difference, cross-cultural communication and translation, and individual transformation are presented through the interaction between the two characters and the comparisons Eliot makes between his mother and babysitter.

Throughout the story, the concept of home has a special meaning since it is strongly linked to Mrs. Sen's sense of identity, nationhood, and belonging. Mrs. Sen holds a fixed and radical perspective toward the concepts of home and gender. For this reason, she constantly tries to adhere to the traditions of her society and culture. Her reluctance to integrate into American culture is partly rooted in the established gender expectations and norms within the Indian culture, in which women are considered the guardians and symbols

of Indian tradition and spirituality (Anuar & Asl, 2021, 2022; Asl, 2022; Keikhosrokiani & Asl, 2022; Lamb, 2009). Identity, as Bhabha (1994) observes, "is never a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality" (p. 51). Nevertheless, Mrs. Sen has learned to totalize her whole identity with the ideal image of womanhood. Her desire to fulfill this role as a perfect Indian woman hides the trauma of being an outcast. Mrs. Sen's struggle to battle un-belongingness, alienation, and exile is in line with what Bhabha considers the distressing quality of living in in-between spaces. Through this cross of space and time, "complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" are produced where "a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond'" takes place (p. 2).

Bhabha believes that the state of liminality can be a point of destruction because the borders of identity are essentially blurred and ambiguous, and the diasporic self finds it difficult to cling to a meaningful center. Accordingly, Mrs. Sen fails to embrace the changing orders and insists on that "image of totality," falling into an in-betweenness. She dwells in the boundaries of the old and the new social forces and between the present reality and the past. Since she desires to reach that image of totality, she cannot transcend her sense of exile. Mrs. Sen feels the possibility of assimilation threatens her traditional cultural identity, so she ensures to openly state her cultural peculiarities by wearing "a

shimmering white sari pattered with orange paisleys" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 112). In contrast, Eliot's mother wears revealing clothes. The difference is so obvious that Eliot notices the ethnic and cultural disparities in many ways. To Eliot, Mrs. Sen retains a sort of femininity, a domestic quality that his mother seems to lack (Ruia, 2012). As Mrs. Sen strongly adheres to her cultural tradition, the eleven-year-old Eliot perceives her as a foreigner who is completely different from many people around him.

Bhabha (1990, 1994) distinguishes cultural diversity from cultural difference. The former refers to categorizing cultures, while the latter denotes the common ground among cultures. According to him, the ambivalent space helps to bring forth the similarities beneath the cultural difference and subvert the exoticism of cultural diversity. As he distinguishes between cultural difference and cultural diversity, the differences between Mrs. Sen and Eliot's mother initially seem to Eliot as comparative and categorized expressions of cultural diversity. However, he later discovers that all the disparities between his mother and Mrs. Sen stem from cultural differences. In other words, Eliot understands how stereotype works in Mrs. Sen and his mother's relationship. Since Eliot also knows their similarities, he ignores the existing fixity in their relations. He rejects the otherness that his mother sees in Mrs. Sen. Eliot's understanding goes beyond the appearances of cultural diversity, and he discovers a common sense of alienation, isolation, loneliness, miscommunication,

and misunderstanding in the people around him. In this manner, Lahiri deconstructs the stereotypical relation of her characters—Mrs. Sen with her surroundings in the host-land, whereas Eliot’s mother with a foreigner, Mrs. Sen—through a young boy who seems to be a more trustworthy narrator for the story. While cultural, racial, and gender stereotypes are fixed for the adults in the story, Eliot observes the existing non-stereotypical elements in human relationships. Through Eliot, the story reinforces the illusion of cultural difference and the reality of sameness.

In contrast to the leading female character of “Mrs. Sen’s” who fails to create a sense of home in the United States because of her disinterest in negotiating with the new world around her, the narrator’s mother in “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” is depicted as a hybrid woman who has managed to maintain the familial and friendship bond in a foreign soil. The story is about a Pakistani Bengali scholar named Mr. Pirzada who has left his family to continue his academic studies in America. While he is in the U.S., a historical partition war takes place in Pakistan, which leads to the formation of a new country called Bangladesh (Bhattacharya, 2022). Mr. Pirzada befriends an Indian family who invites him to their house every night to watch the Indian national news about the ongoing turmoil in his new place. The story is narrated through the eyes of Lilia, the ten-year-old daughter of the host family, who observes Mr. Pirzada’s difference from the American people. As the narrative ties,

the story of three countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh and America together, national borders and cultural diversity become salient elements throughout the story.

It is through their interaction with Mr. Pirzada that Lilia and her mother’s hybrid identity is portrayed and celebrated. Lahiri narrates the story through the language of Lilia to apply a new translation to the concept of border and reveal its arbitrariness, non-fixity, and fluidity. It is perfectly demonstrated when Lilia is perplexed by the Hindu-Muslim conflicts, explaining that the war

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. Nevertheless, my father insisted that I understand the difference, and he led me to a map of the world taped to the wall over his desk. (Lahiri, 1999, pp. 27-28)

In this excerpt, the father seeks to teach Lilia that national borders and cultural diversity exist in this world and that such boundaries and classifications are liable to change over time. He believes that if Lilia

learns the history and geography of only one nation, that knowledge will be a fixed and absolute understanding of that nation. However, if she becomes familiar with various historical and geographical events, she will know that the existing borderlines and segregations are all manufactured knowledge and arbitrary. However, while Lilia does not have enough knowledge of the world, its history and geography, she has the opportunity to learn from her parents' life that people can live together. At the same time, they are labeled as having different nationalities, races, gender, and culture. Therefore, as the second generation of Indian immigrants in America, Lilia is continuously involved in the process of translation in her coming to age story. Rastogi (2015) emphasizes that Lilia "likes learning about both Indian and American cultures and deems it a privilege in comparison to American youngsters who only know about their own culture" (p. 3). More than having this privilege over the American children (and also all those who are only confined to their native culture), Lilia states that according to her mother, Lilia "would never have to eat rationed food, or obey curfews, or watch riots from [her] rooftop, or hide neighbors in water tanks to prevent them from being shot" as her mother and father had (Lahiri, 1999, p. 29).

Lilia's mother has not lost her sense of belonging, and she is well aware of the importance of Indian cultural traditions, such as practices related to food and dinner parties. Nonetheless, she is also aware that limiting her life within the boundaries

of Indianness makes her a docile female subject who will feel isolated and forsaken eventually (Swarup & Devi, 2012). Indeed, the established paradigm(s) about women and domesticity are contested and disrupted through culinary acts. As Ranaweera (2022) argues, investing in the often devalued domestic chores with agency, subjectivity, and power presents female figures associated with domesticity as empowered individuals. Therefore, Lilia's mother welcomes cultural differences and creates a new space for herself and her family to benefit from new opportunities and possibilities. This hybrid lifestyle of Lilia's family and how it is open to cultural differences is eventually heeded and acknowledged by Mr. Pirzada.

"The Third and Final Continent" is the closing story of *Interpreter of Maladies*. It is, in fact, the only story of the collection that depicts mostly the optimistic dimension of migration and cross-cultural communication. The story's narrator is an unnamed Indian man who moves to London in 1964 from his native country to continue his studies at the London School of Economics. He has lived in an apartment with some other expatriate Bengalis in London for five years. Later, when he turns 36, the narrator leaves London to move, this time to Boston, since he finds a new job at Dewey Library at MIT. Soon, he gets married to an Indian girl from Calcutta, who moves to Boston to join him. While he is moving to the U.S., he makes himself familiar with the new country through a guidebook, which warns about the less friendly atmosphere of America in comparison to England and notes some of

America's historical achievements, such as the landing of two American astronauts on the moon for the first time.

The narrator stays at YMCA in Central Square for the first few weeks to save more money so that he can rent an apartment when his wife arrives. Later, he moves into an old house with a room for rent. The property owner is an old lady, Mrs. Croft, who gradually becomes interested in the narrator's company. The way the narrator hands in the rent instead of putting it on the piano surprises Mrs. Croft, who considers it a gentlemanly gesture and very kind of her tenant. Though they enjoy a nice relationship, he decides to move to a new bigger house before his wife's arrival. After several weeks, the narrator's wife arrives. He meets her at the airport and talks in his native language for the first time in America. His wife is called Mala, a 27-year-old-girl who knows almost all of the domestic practices that an ideal Indian wife should. Since they seem like strangers to each other during the first days of their acquaintance, the narrator asks her wife for a walk. However, he becomes regretful as he finds out that Mala wears her Indian dress. Incidentally, when they walk in the streets, the narrator realizes they are near Mrs. Croft's house. During their meeting with Mrs. Croft, a turning point takes place for the narrator. He feels uncomfortable and uneasy that Mrs. Croft finds him walking in the streets of Boston with his wife wearing a Sari. Mrs. Croft asks Mala to stand up so that she can scrutinize Mala from head to toe. Meanwhile, the narrator sympathizes with Mala in his heart, saying to himself that

“like me, Mala had traveled far from home, not knowing where she was going, or what she would find, for no reason other than to be my wife” (Lahiri, 1999, p. 213). To his surprise, Mrs. Croft responds positively to Mala; “She is a perfect lady!” (p. 213). The acceptance from the old, cynical American woman was a hopeful sign for the narrator. In response to this declaration, he says,

Now it was I who laughed. I did so quietly, and Mrs. Croft did not hear me. But Mala had heard, and, for the first time, we looked at each other and smiled. I like to think of that moment in Mrs. Croft's parlor as the moment when the distance between Mala and me began to lessen. Although we were not yet fully in love, I like to think of the months that followed as a honeymoon of sorts. Together we explored the city and met other Bengalis, some of whom are still friends today. (p. 214)

One month later, the narrator tells the reader, “Mrs. Croft's was the first death I mourned in America” (pp. 214-215).

The ‘Splendid’ moment of Mrs. Croft's acceptance and admiration of an Indian girl relates to Bhabha's notion of third space. In fact, while the narrator of the story is waiting for a ‘degrading’ remark from Mrs. Croft, he suddenly finds himself in a new splendid space somewhere beyond. With reference to Bhabha's ideas of negotiation, hybridity, and the dual nature of cultures, Hallward (2001) suggests that once binaries such as

"West-East" and "Us-Them" are shattered, cultures tend to clash and then combine. According to him, culture is not a source of natural conflict; rather, it is discriminatory practices that make conflict a product of differentiation. Cultures thus develop if they avoid bias and degradation. Likewise, Hoogvelt (1997) celebrates hybridity and takes it as a form of "superior cultural intelligence" (p. 158). This intelligence takes root in a land where two cultures gather to negotiate differences, a land which Bhabha digs to locate cultural interactions. In the story's concluding section, the reader learns that the narrator and his wife are still enjoying their life together in a country that was once foreign to them. In addition, they now have a son who studies at Harvard. Reviewing his life, the narrator concludes,

While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination. (Lahiri, 1999, p. 216)

"The Third and Final Continent" is the story of a diasporic subject who experiences

life on three continents of Asia, Europe, and America. He always translates these three different lifestyles and is continually involved in the process of hybridity. He does not simply transfer from one geographical place to another but carries those features he has learned from each culture he has experienced to have a better life in the new space. Gilroy likens cultural fusion to a "ship," which symbolizes the "trajectory between departure and destination" (Kraidy, 2006, p. 58). In other words, as the hybrid culture moves, it carries characteristics from both parties.

The young couple in "The Third and Final Continent" contrasts the experience of the protagonist of "Mrs. Sen's" at least in two aspects. Firstly, the story's narrator does not feel alienated and lost in the foreign country; secondly, Mala, who is homesick for her family, begins to negotiate with the new world she has landed in. In this sense, Mala is a restless and persistent cultural translator who attempts to contact her surroundings and communicate with the society that seems at the beginning strange and alien. In light of Bhabha's hybridity theory, the narrator and his wife in "The Third and Final Continent" appear to be a true example of hybrid diasporic subjects whose identity positions are constructed through an ongoing translation.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, we examined the poetics and politics of cross-cultural communication and translation among the South Asian diaspora as represented in Jhumpa Lahiri's short

story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. For this purpose, we used Homi K. Bhabha's theories of liminality, hybridity, and third space to study the impact of disparities between dominant and marginal cultures on diasporic characters everyday life experiences and identity constructs. We argued that the collection presents diasporic conditions not merely as a physical and geographical phenomenon but as a constant process of negotiating and translating cultures. Within this process, as our findings revealed, while some stories like "Mrs. Sen's" depict diasporic subjects' failure to assimilate into the mainstream, other stories like "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," and "The Third and Final Continent" narrate stories of successful migrants who accept the dynamic and challenging aspects of diasporic life. A close reading of the three stories suggests that individuals of different cultural backgrounds living in an in-between situation are always required to interpret their inner world and that of the outside. Otherwise, they are doomed to failure and a life of alienation and isolation. In line with Bhabha's theory of hybridity, the three stories underscore the idea that once two disparate neighboring entities confront one another, they should welcome a new space where they can learn to negotiate and translate their cultures. Here, translation is used to refer to a cultural phenomenon beyond its linguistic implication.

According to Bhabha, this cultural phenomenon refers to a constant negotiation between the diasporic and the mainstream culture to better understand each other,

differentiate, and find commonalities and similarities. Translation and negotiation are the underlying themes of the three stories. The selected narratives present hybridity as a requirement for diasporic life because cultural translation is a prerequisite for human relationships in different places, times, and conditions. The stories underline that the maladies of migrants need to be interpreted to be remedied and cured. It is perfectly demonstrated through the happy life of Mala in "The Third and Final Continent" and Lilia's mother in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" on American soil. The analysis of the three characters of Mrs. Sen, Lilia's mother, and Mala also suggests that while the liminal situation has the potential to become a site of conflicts in the lives of the migrant subjects, it germinates the notion of hybridity that embraces the diversity of cultures and their blurry borders with one another in the third space. In doing so, as we conclude, Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* depicts culture and identity as floating entities that are always in the process of change, growth, and evolution.

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