RACIAL AND GENDERED IN/VISIBILITY: READING JHUMPA LAHIRI'S FICTION AS A RESPONSE TO THE OBJECTIFICATION OF THE DIASPORIC SUBJECT IN THE WEST

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by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IM Interpreter of Maladies

TN The Namesake

UE Unaccustomed Earth

TL The Lowland

KETERNAMPAKAN/TAKKETERNAMPAKAN RAS DAN GENDER: MEMBACA FIKSYEN JHUMPA LAHIRI SEBAGAI RESPONS TERHADAP OBJEKTIFIKASI SUBJEK DIASPORIK DI BARAT

ABSTRAK

Hasil karya fiksyen diaspora India oleh Jhumpa Lahiri telah sekian lama mengundang kritikan yang hebat lagi bersifat kontroversi. Terdapat kalangan para pengkritik yang memperakui kesahihan pengalaman diaspora yang digambarkan; pada masa yang sama, terdengar tuduhan bahawa hasil penulisan beliau hanya menggambarkan suatu pandangan terhad yang bertindak untuk menggalakkan, mengesahkan dan menyebarkan satu visi realiti tertentu secara terpilih. Justeru, kajian ini bertujuan untuk memastikan sama ada hasil fiksyen Lahiri berpaut kepada, atau menyimpang dari, hierarki kaum dan gender arus perdana semasa. Untuk memenuhi matlamat asas tersebut, kajian ini menawarkan satu model tafsiran baru yang bertindak memperlihatkan kesan-kesan politik, budaya dan afektif daripada tulisan diasporik Lahiri, dan penzahiran renungan kesasteraannya. Penggabungan antara dua teori yang seakan menampakkan pendapat berbeza terhadap teori renungan, iaitu psikoanalisis dan historisis, diutarakan untuk meneroka cara bagaimana hasil fiksyen Lahiri beroperasi sebagai suatu penelitian yang merekod serta beroperasi sebagai salah satu bahagian persekitaran sosial, seksual dan politik Amerika pasca-tahun 1960-an kerana zaman tersebut menyediakan konteks cerita serta merupakan zaman yang mana Lahiri menghasilkan penulisan fiksyen. Penelitian hasil penulisan Lahiri secara diakronik menampakkan seolah-olah hampir kesemua kisah yang diceritakan bertindak seperti suatu mekanisma penglihatan yang membentuk domain keterlihatan dan tak keterlihatan; iaitu menyorot dan mengkedepankan beberapa objek terpilih

yang tertentu sambil menyorok dan memendamkan objek lain. Aspek keterlainan, patologi dan mengerikan yang terhasil dalam watak wanita (pendatang) adalah akibat perlakuan mereka untuk merampas hak lalu bertindak sebagai penonton, yang mana fungsi tersebut secara konvensional dikhaskan sebagai hak mutlak watak maskulin (berkulit putih). Tumpuan khusus melalui analisis yang mengaplikasikan konsep panoptisisme juga berjaya menghuraikan fungsi fiksyen Lahiri yang seolah-olah bertindak sebagai alat mikro-kerajaan lalu menggalakkan perbuatan asimilasi ke dalam rubrik atau peraturan arus perdana serta menganjurkan agar seseorang individu tidak merumitkan keadaan melalui ketaksuban terhadap budaya lama dalam menyesuaikan diri dengan keadaan dunia baru. Kesimpulan kajian menunjukkan bahawa tulisan Lahiri jauh menyimpang daripada memihak kepada individualisme dalam penulisan fiksyen yang bersifat simpati dari segi perkauman dan gender. Malah, didapati bahawa hasil fiksyen Lahiri mengangkat martabat negara-bangsa dalam peranannya sebagai alat kawal selia transnasional demi memperjuangkan fahaman neo-liberalisme. Secara tuntas, model interpretasi baru yang diutarakan dalam tesis ini menawarkan satu teknik bacaan yang mendorong pembaca untuk memahami fungsi mikro pengaturan sosio-politik yang bertindak menghasilkan kesan diasporik dalam karya fiksyen Lahiri.

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ABSTRACT

The Indian diaspora writer Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction has been the subject of abundant yet controversial criticism. Whereas some acknowledge her truthful representations of diaspora experience, others have charged her with a limited vision that encourages, legitimizes and transmits only one favored reality. This research aims to investigate whether her fiction adheres to or deviates from prevailing racial and gendered hierarchies of the mainstream. To fulfill this underlying aim, the study offers a new interpretive model that seeks to evince the political, cultural and affective consequences of Lahiri's diasporic writings and their particular enunciations of the literary gaze. A rapprochement between the two seemingly divergent psychoanalytic and the historicist theories of the gaze is proposed to explore the ways her fiction operates as both a record of and a participant in the social, sexual and political milieu of the post-1960s America, a span of time her fiction is both produced and situated. A diachronic examination of Lahiri's oeuvre reveals that nearly all the narratives comprise an optical mechanism that shapes domains of visibility and invisibility, foregrounding and privileging some objects while bedimming and de-privileging others. The (immigrant) female character's otherness, monstrosity and pathology is in her imprudently taking the role of spectator, which is conventionally the privilege of the (white) masculine. The specific focus on the analytics of panopticism also unravels the way her fiction acts as a micro-governmental tool to promote the need to assimilate into the mainstream rubrics and not to complicate things through dogged persistence

on cultural ruptures between the old and the new world. It is concluded that far from writing in favor of individuality—i.e., racial and gender sympathy—Lahiri's fiction extols the nation-state in its role as the transnational regulatory apparatus of neoliberalism. The proposed new interpretive model thus offers the key to understanding the micro-functioning of a socio-political orchestration of (diasporic) affect in Lahiri's fictional representations.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

> At many times in my life, I wished I could be like any other American . . . [and] feel really a part of it, really woven into it.
>
> ~Jhumpa Lahiri, "Awards and Honors", 2015

> I always do good with writers and scientists. Those are my *crew.*
>
> ~Barack Obama, "Remarks", 2015

An unavoidable or imperative concept, without which the present study would not exist, is that of immigration, which is generally defined as a universal phenomenon "through which individuals become permanent residents or citizens of a new country" (Parry, n.d., para. 1). Many modern multicultural societies have developed from long and varied periods of immigration. One such modern state that is usually characterized by its wide variety of cultures and ethnicities and stands as "the signifier" of diasporic experience is the United States of America, "the space where creolisations and assimilations and syncretisms" are negotiated (Hall, 2007, p. 137). The country has hosted a large number of immigrants from different ethnicities around the world, in particular South Asian Indians, since the 1960s and '70s—a period of time that is marked with the end of colonization across Asia and Africa.

Emigration of Indians or people of South Asian origin to the United States started back in early nineteenth century until the 1924 Immigration Act prohibited entry to them, indicating a race- and class-based politics. The act stated that to the American government the immigrants' entry jeopardized "the good order of certain

localities within the territory thereof" (Okihiro, 2014, p. 4).[1] An important turning point, however, occurred during the 1960s, when the 1965 Immigration Act opened the floodgates for professional and skilled Indian immigrants and added to the multicultural nature of the States.

Even though the new act was primarily enacted to abolish the Orientalist Exclusion Act of early twentieth century, it coincided with the emergence of a yet extremer notion of the Oriental Other in the United States. Being brown turned into a racial formation and, in the tumult of the Cold War, was associated with the Communist threat. This type of racialization, nonetheless, was not new phenomenon; rather, "it was a recuperation of much older and different colonial legacies brought back to serve new purposes. The Oriental Other has been an aspect of Euro-American culture for over two hundred years" (Grewal, 2003, p. 546), and, in the US, the "Oriental" by the middle of the twentieth century referred to those who were not "white" (Okihiro, 2014, p. xi).

The correlation between South Asians and Communism led to the construction of new identities and new racial and gendered hierarchies. It authorized the hegemonic state power to devise and implement preventive disciplinary mechanisms to detect any forms of irregularity that potentially jeopardized security of the nation state.[2]

[1] The Immigrant Act of 1924, including the Oriental Exclusion Act, was basically enacted to preserve the ideal of U.S. homogeneity and was the natural extension of racialist and increasingly restrictive immigration policies established earlier in 1917 (known as the Asiatic Barred Zone Act). The restrictive policy, practiced due to "the uncertainty generated over national security during World War I," paved the way for the 1924 Act, which completely excluded immigrants from Asian lineage, in particular the South Asians. These people were categorized as aliens who by virtue of race (not being white) or nationality were ineligible for "Naturalization," or citizenship. For further elaboration on the provisions of the Act, refer to ("The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)").

[2] Diasporas are often considered threatening to state security because they inhabit a "transnational locality" (Reddy, 2013, p. 1). It means that despite their indigenization over time—i.e., creolization and hybridization—"they retain a transnational identity that is associated with a perceived homeland (real or imagined) especially during periods of national or international uncertainty" (p. 1).

People of particular bodies, identified with dangerous and violent tendencies, were incarcerated and criminalized. This included great "numbers of male migrants and immigrants from countries as diverse as Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Yemen and a number of other countries" (Grewal, 2003, p. 547). Though this type of Orientalism was primarily based on visible features—facial ones such as beards and dark eyes as well as clothing such as turbans—the disciplinary technologies were expanded to scrutinize even private behaviors which could be considered as socially abnormal. For instance, anything that could potentially destabilize the family unit, including the individuals' sexual inclinations, were closely monitored and regulated based upon socially prescribed normalities (Hurley, 1997, p. 52). The normative practices thus pervaded all of society through surveillance and led to the suppression of individuality. This regulating phenomenon was advocated by expressions of "cultural anxiety" in the guise of a paranoiac attempt to remove any potential danger to national security by simply regulating the Other's subjectivity, or state of being.

Such regulative disciplinary technologies of American nationalism, recuperated in the mid-twentieth century, were further reinforced in the US after the 9/11 events. The attacks provided ideal conditions for the growth of the anxiety inasmuch as race and gender became the regulative apparatuses of the powerful state more visibly than before. The Americans were presented with "an external threat emanating from people who espoused beliefs that were highly dissonant with American ideals" (Arnold, 2008, p. 162). The threat, which was analogous with the one the global Communism had posed to the American way of life in the second half of twentieth century, "fueled fear and paranoia about conspiracy in the nation's midst" (p. 162). In the process of identifying hidden enemies among "ordinary" Americans,

the public obsessively became suspicious of anybody who looked foreign. They "remained apprehensive, resigning themselves to a new era of color-coded terrorism alerts and increasingly pervasive security measures in everyday life" (p. 162). In effect, the post-9/11 rhetoric prepared the ground for further demonization[3] of racial and gendered minorities, subjecting them to forms of regulation and self-regulation by means of the "'law and order' apparatus of policing, surveillance, and incarceration of adults (mostly non-white) and children" (Grewal, 2003, p. 541).

Going back to the second half of the twentieth century, the 1970s also witnessed the emergence of an opposite social phenomenon called neoliberalism, whose prevailing rhetoric is that the US is individualistic and renounces any forms of oppression (Duggan, 2003; Ferguson & Hong, 2012; Koshy, 2013; McWhorter, 2013; Ong, 2006). In neoliberal rhetoric, individuals and groups have to "assume the risks and the costs of pursuing their goals … [and] suffer the consequences of their mistakes" (McWhorter, 2013, p. 62). Under the neoliberal governmentality, the subjects assume responsibility for their own security, well-being and quality of life, and thereby disengage the state "as free individuals to confront globalized insecurities" (Ong, 2006, p. 501). The dominating discourse of individualism thus exonerates the state from any kind of privileging or oppressing groups. In other words, the neoliberal state appears to be a less regulatory one that typically intervenes less in both the public and private lives of its citizens, and values instead "self-governing and self-enterprise" (Kimmel & Llewellyn, 2012, p. 1087). Ong associates the neoliberal

[3] The socio-political milieu of post 9/11 appeared to be a return to the demonological traditions lying at the core of American history. The history of demonology in American politics is identified with three major moments: racial, class and ethnic, and the Cold War. History begins for the Americans with "murder and enslavement .... [and] *violence against peoples of color*. ... A distinctive American political tradition, fearful of primitivism, *disorder*, and conspiracy, developed in response to peoples of color. That tradition draws its energy from *alien threats* to the American way of life, and sanctions violent and exclusionary responses to them" [italics my emphasis] (Rogin, 1984, p. 1).

discourse of America—with its focus on the self-governing of the citizens—with the construction of a "civic society," or the formulation of "national solidarity," and affirms that within this discourse, those citizens who fail to "measure up to the norms of self-governing are increasingly marginalized as deviant or subjects who threaten the security" of the state (2006, p. 502). At this point, the subjectivity of individuals ironically becomes a part of the apparatus of the hegemonic power, and hence the rise of neoliberalism is linked to the emergence of "a new political entity and object of love, a new article called minority culture" that provided the hegemon with "the building blocks for a new way to regulate" (Ferguson & Hong, 2012, p. 1058).

To this contrasting situation—of an orientalist and racist denial of individualism and of a neoliberal valorization of individualism—immigrants could respond in two ways. One was to protect themselves against racism by displaying a sign of allegiance to being American. In such cases, those who looked different "had to signal their allegiance ... by the same logic of visibility that marked them as racially un-American" which involved their demonstrable loyalty and national allegiance to "white, masculinity and heterosexual Americanness" (Grewal, 2003, pp. 548-50). The allegiance, however, did not necessarily mean that Indian immigrants were absolutely immobilized and were confined entirely to actions and behavior prescribed by the right-wing guardians of American nationhood.

The racialized subjects had another option: One that necessitated their recognition of the immobilizing political and socio-economic system operating against them and then their organizing themselves against that system. Migrants could thus choose to struggle against the orientalist paranoia by taking effective actions to rearrange social structures and practices and, consequently, alter their situation. Such

a movement, nevertheless, would involve a high risk of pain and loss. Whereas in compliance, which means docility and submission to the status quo, there is no need to pay heed to individuals—as they "acquiesce in being made invisible," in their "occupying no space" and in their own "erasure"—any forms of non-conformity, according to Hale (1996),

> exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry or *dangerous*. This means ... that we may be found "difficult" or *unpleasant to work with,* which is enough to cost one one's livelihood; at worst, being seen as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous … One can only choose to risk one's preferred form and rate of annihilation [italics my emphasis]. (p. 104)

Within such socio-politically discriminatory context, members of a diaspora are propelled to "advance legal and civic causes and to be active in human rights and social justice issues" (Cohen, 1995, p. 13). In recent years, intellectuals and activists from these populations have increasingly begun to stand against the discrimination imposed by the mainstream culture. With their growing connectivity to their homeland, the people of South Asian origin have attempted to reinvent and reassert their Indian identity by trying to translate and reformulate the cultural traditions within the diaspora and by giving voice to the subaltern experience. These people have developed a feeling of resistance to the status quo and against the "structured prejudices and discrimination" (Pande, 2012, p. 98) that they encounter on a day-to-day basis.

The post-1965 immigrants, as we have noted, brought highly educated professionals qualified in various fields of expertise such as science, technology and the social sciences. Many of these highly educated immigrants, not least the ethnic writers, were also looked upon as experts on or "informants" about Indian culture (Aubeeluck, 2006, p. 5). One of the most celebrated writers in the realm of South

Asian American literature in the past seventeen years is Jhumpa Lahiri (b. 1967), a young writer who has published mainly in the West and heralds “a new era” and “season of discovery” for Indian literature in English (Bhalla, 2008, p. 181). This thesis aims to examine Lahiri’s literary response to the racialization and gendering of a collective subject described as the Indian diaspora in the US in the post-1960s.

Nilanjana Sudheshna Lahiri, with the family nickname "Jhumpa,"[4] was born on July 11, 1967, in London, England, to a Bengali couple who had migrated to England from Calcutta, India. Like many of her fictional male characters, Lahiri's father was a university librarian who opted to relocate to the United States for work in 1970. As she was growing up in Rhode Island, her family frequently visited Calcutta to see their relatives. Her extensive travels in India allowed her experience the effects of colonialism there as well as the issues of the diaspora as it is out there after their emigration. In an interview with Vibhuti Patel in *Newsweek International*, Lahiri (1999, 9/19) professed to feel strong ties towards her parents' homeland as well as to the United States and England.[5] She declared that growing up with ties to all three countries created in her a sense of homelessness and an inability to feel accepted. She explained this as an inheritance of her parents' practice of retaining close ties with India (Editors, n.d.).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

To state the problem in the beginning and very briefly, Indian diasporic writers, who have persistently striven to provide a voice for the subaltern, have ironically been censured for their inaccurate representations of Indian culture and for their complicity

[4] Hereafter I will refer to her as either Jhumpa Lahiri or Lahiri.
[5] Due to Lahiri’s simultaneous attachment to the Subcontinent and the US, she is commonly labeled as a South Asian American writer.

in the dissemination of the pre-existing hierarchies of the dominant culture. Although these intellectuals are perceived as having enriched the lives of the Indian community in the United States by fighting against discrimination, they are looked upon as outsiders in India and by some Indians in America, being accused of writing from a remote, culturally compromised position in the West (Sanga, 2001, pp. 16-7). As a South Asian American writer of Indian diaspora, Jhumpa Lahiri has likewise been the subject of much debate and criticism concerning her diasporic writings and identity. Many critics have commended her for moving away "from previous generations' narratives of assimilation or representations of ghettoized ethnic existences" (Alfonso-Forero, 2011, p. 26). These critics argue that Lahiri's writing decentralizes and deconstructs prevailing stereotypes established by either the West or the Indians themselves and offers a balanced, universal representation of the Indian immigrant (Alfonso-Forero, 2011; Aubeeluck, 2006; Dhingra, 2012; Kumar, 2011; Shea, 2008). On the contrary, some scholars have criticized her works for not being postcolonial at all (Lynn, 2004; Mani, 2012; Srikanth, 2012). They assert that Lahiri's Indian characters are widely acceptable in America because of their exoticism. In like manner, critics like Rajan (2006), Bhalla (2008) and Shankar (2009) examine Lahiri's works in the light of Orientalizing discourses and postcolonial exoticism. They point to Lahiri's highly celebrated representations of Indian culture and argue that "cultural conditions in the United States (and other western countries) make it difficult or impossible for western reading audiences to embrace an Indian American writer's book only on its own terms" (Leyda, 2011, p. 67).

Within this context, in speaking of postcolonial America and the resistant attitude of immigrant women intellectuals, anticipated by anticapitalist transnational feminists like Mohanty (1984 & 2003), the following paragraphs can be followed to

elaborate on the problem of a perceived degree of compromise and complicity in the Indian diasporic writer and state the problem more specifically in the context of the subjects' own internalization of the existing hierarchies of power:

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* (2003) makes a frequently cited claim regarding the extent to which the United States can be considered a postcolonial society. They argue that the United States is postcolonial to the extent that its culture, specifically its literature, was the first independent national literature to emerge in response to a struggle for liberation from an imperial power. Since the 1965 immigration legislation, which enabled the States to experience mass immigration from non-European countries, the country has striven to define itself as the world's first independent, anti-colonial state (Singh & Schmidt, 2000, p. 5). However, taking advantage of the uneven distribution of wealth and power left behind after the departure of the British, the U.S. spread "the promise of democratic citizenship and belonging through consumer practices as well as disciplinary technologies," and in the process created diverse, transnational subjects (Grewal, 2005, p. 2). That the United States is able to become a neoliberal imperialist power and remain a hegemon precisely because of the colonialism that preceded it in countries such as India has been convincingly argued by scholars like Alfonso-Forero (2011), Gilroy (2005), Grewal (2003) and (2005), Sharpe (1995), Singh and Schmidt (2000) and Spivak (1999), among others.

Grewal, for instance, examines the recent racialization and gendering of a collective subject described as "Middle Eastern or Muslim" in the US. This new form of category became visible through the operations of disciplinary power and through the binary of freedom-incarceration, security-danger. Security and freedom can only

be achieved by the incarceration of "risk-producing" and dangerous bodies. In this regard, "race and gender become modes of knowledge that produce the figures of danger and risk through technologies of surveillance, visibility and, most importantly, self-regulation" (2003, p. 539). In effect, a new form of governmentality, or controlling individuals and groups, appeared under the name of "multiculturalism" that is both regulative and productive of American nationalism and transnationalism (p. 535). Grewal elaborates that:

> Multiculturalism has become one such technology in the US as a state project, produced through the census, laws, regulations of immigration and those 'protecting' minorities to create racialised and gendered subjects who see themselves as 'American' at some points and as different kinds of Americans at other times and places. (p. 538)

In any case, the gendered and racial minorities turn into a potential danger to both themselves and to the host country and thus "have to be subject to forms of regulation and self-regulation" (p. 539). In a similar way, Alfonso-Forero (2011) examines the manner in which mainstream American culture, in addition to certain nation-state policies, allows the U.S. to take on a colonizing role in relation to its immigrants. This form of internal colonization involves pressuring immigrants to become more "American," to speak English only and aspire to the type of economic success that can be difficult for first-generation immigrants to achieve in an increasingly corporate capitalist economy. In addition, immigrants from postcolonial nations often reproduce class and gender relations that emerged in their new *American* environment in response to colonial and postcolonial conditions in their countries of origin.

The possibility of America's shift from colony to hegemonic superpower has three significant ramifications. First, the reality of violence and oppression brought

about by such a change. Second, the construction of various dichotomies that come into play as foils for each other—e.g., civilized/savage, first-world/third-world, dominator/dominated, invader/conquered—with both cultures encroaching on each other's territory and the impossibility of denying each other's absence or presence. Third, attempts to efface the new colonized culture. When the first-world is set up in opposition to the third-world, logic dictates that the West is progressive, modern, enlightened, educated, innovative and civilized. This presumed superiority not only "reinforce[s] Western cultural imperialism" without questioning the assumed power dynamic between the first and third worlds, but also compels the liberal impulse of the West to assume the moral obligation to liberate the subjects from their "shared oppression" (Mohanty, 1984, pp. 337-52). The formation of such hierarchies and the migrants' subsequent revolt against them has informed almost all discussions on ethnic American identity, including postcolonial female immigrants in the States (Alfonso-Forero, 2011, p. 23).

While some critics confirm that it is the responsibility of the individuals within the group to decentralize the dominant power hierarchies in order to assert their individuality (Grewal, 2003; McWhorter, 2013), many blame the immigrant writers for their compliance with the mainstream and perpetuation of the established norms (Spivak, 1988 & 1999; Ganguly, 2001). Spivak, for example, calls Indian American writers "at best native informants for first world intellectuals interested in the voice of the Other" (1988, p. 284). She maintains this cynicism in her later works and asserts that the idea of the ethnics speaking for themselves is an "impossible perspective," or at the very least, a "somewhat dubious" one (1999, pp. 4-40), and concludes that "the hyphenated Americans [...] might rethink themselves as possible agents of exploitation, not its victims" (p. 357). As a Bengali Indian and ethnographer, Ganguly

addresses the problem by showing her skepticism over "the so-called accurate representations in postcolonial narratives" (2001, p. 37). Having delved into lives of South Asians living in New Jersey, she argues that immigrant "informants" tend to "(mis)remember the past in sublated terms" insofar as the information considered to be authoritative by them can be totally contradictory and debatable (p. 106). Such a misremembrance and misrepresentation, for Ganguly, leads to a cultural recolonization of the diasporic subjects as it works to valorize Americanization and American values.

With respect to Lahiri's diasporic writings, the growing concern over the possibility of the hyphenated subjects' working as agents of exploitation rather than being its victims is felt by the national award she received from the White House. While awarding her with America's 2014 National Medals of Arts and Humanities, the US President remarks that "writers and scientists" are sort of his "crew," and that Lahiri is appraised for her sharing "rare truths about the common experiences that we have as Americans" in much the same way as they do in the White House (Obama, 2015, para. 1). Many others have commended her for "precise, evocative and convincing" depictions of Indian immigrants (Kumar, 2011; Nagajothi, 2013) and for eschewing earlier forms of gender or racial politics (Marwah, 2013; Reddy, 2013; Zare, 2007). Such considerable recognition Lahiri has gained in the first-world for her "truthful representations" of diaspora experience and for her "enlarging the human story" (Obama, 2015, para. 4), however, incites suspicion over the credibility of her voice for the diaspora experience and leaves the question whether she belongs to those elite informants accused of disavowed participation in the production of favored knowledge for the hegemon unanswered. The conflicting attitudes towards Lahiri's stories demand a close reading of her texts with an appropriate analytical tool and

reading methodology that determines whether she is unwittingly perpetuating the pre-established power relations of the dominant culture or striving to decentralize and reformulate those relations. This dissertation will devise a model to examine the ways Indian subjects are objectified and the power relations are produced or re-produced in Lahiri's fiction.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

It is important to note that the overall aim of this study is to determine whether Jhumpa Lahiri's diasporic writings resist against or conform to the racial and gender hierarchies imposed by the mainstream. To achieve this focal aim, this thesis has two main objectives that entail a few other subsidiary aims. First and foremost, the main objective of this study is to introduce an interpretive model to enhance the understanding of Lahiri's engagement with the construction of human subjectivity. There are two assumptions behind this objective: One is that Lahiri's fiction can be studied from the framework of racialized technologies of the state when the theme of race is taken into account; and the other assumption is the emergence and convergence of race and gender as regulatory formations that appear in specific historical periods. The first objective will require an appreciation of the disciplinary technologies adopted by the mainstream and an analysis of the subjects' response—their internalization or opposition—to the prescribed racial and gender roles. The aim of this thesis is then to argue for the feasibility and practicality of this method with respect to the socio-political context of Lahiri's writings.

After the argument and the elaboration of the theoretical foundation of the thesis, an ocular-oriented reading of Lahiri's fiction will be presented in Chapters Four and Five. This will include the second objective of this study which is the provision

of a framework for a gaze-oriented reading of a text and the application of this framework to Lahiri's fiction. In order to scrutinize the stories, the following pivotal objectives are thus to be pursued:

1. Examine the concrete and palpable social and/or psychic phenomena that the disciplinary regime of the hegemonic culture considered as strange, alien and threatening to institute the propaganda of the *unfamiliar* Other's invisible menace to national security;
2. Situate Lahiri's fiction in its socio-politico-historical context and explore its disavowed participation in the production of favored knowledge for the first-world within the sexually and politically paranoid discourse of contemporary American culture;
3. Outline the established hierarchies of power in Lahiri's fiction by unpacking the way the visual and narrative architectonics of her fiction operate;
4. Explore the ways in which the woman's subjectivity is produced and regulated through her insertion into the optical system.

The tools to be used for analysis are to be introduced in the methodology section of this chapter.

1.4 Scope and Limitation

The present study is mainly concerned with racial and gendered formation of diasporic subjects within the mainstream American logic of visibility, viz white, masculine, heterosexuality. As it is engaged in analyzing the processes of in/visibility and the relations of visuality, theories of the gaze remain the most relevant and beneficial. My intention in this thesis, however, is to go beyond the exclusive focus on social and political formulations of the gaze in the process of objectification, and by employing

psychoanalytical concerns and examining the relationship between masculinity and the gaze, investigate Lahiri's literary response—her conformity or resistance—to the contemporary disciplinary strategies prevalent in American society. While I do not disagree with the particular interest in and movement towards exploring other theoretical possibilities for the notion of the gaze, I believe this specific approach—involving the interrelatedness and interdependence of the society and psyche—has in itself received little critical attention. Through a close reading of Lahiri's diasporic writings, this work investigates the plausibility of the approach. In addition, I make no claim or argument to refute either a political or psychoanalytical framework. I merely combine these approaches to discover how a diasporic woman writer's fascination with/entrapment in the dominant masculine gaze highlights the futility of her resistance to the prevailing hierarchies of power. My commitment to combine both of these approaches, the political and the psychoanalytic, will definitely take me beyond the limits of those disciplines and will contribute to the fledgling movement to view psychoanalysis as an ally of socio-political analytics (Hook, 2007, p. 274).

It should be noted that neither the author's psycho-/socio-biography nor discussions about the other, cultural diversity are the focus of this study. Clearly, an attempt on my part to include such perspectives in the present study would entail a project of enormously ambitious proportions, and is definitely not a task I shall be undertaking here. My approach to Lahiri's writings is to give them an attentive and meticulous reading to identify elements of either conformity or resistance to the hegemon—a reading that would necessarily entail positioning myself through the Westerner's gaze. Furthermore, my argument is not to judge whether her literary response, whatever it may be, is right or wrong; it is merely to investigate the extent to which Lahiri expresses resistance to the hegemon.

1.5 Significance of the Study and Review of Related Literature

Even though the construction of human subjectivity—in its both racial and gendered forms—is much discussed in postcolonial studies, and much useful foundation has been established for understanding hybridity, dislocation and the ways discourses of nationalism are produced to exploit diasporic subjects in preserving the existence of the nation-state, little attention has been paid to theorizing migrants' own complicity in disseminating the formulated networks of power. With respect to the South Asian diaspora intellectuals, little effort has been made to monitor the canonization of certain so-called informants and their participation in the perpetuation of favored ideologies. As one of the contemporary writers of Indian diasporic experience, Jhumpa Lahiri recommends herself to such a study for multiple reasons. First, it is her widespread popularity and meteoric success that position her among the canons in the hegemonic market. Second, there is the fact of her "location in a privileged western metropolis" and her having limited knowledge of India that appear to make her fiction indulge in stereotypes and clichéd details (Maswood, 2014, p. 100). Finally, there is her own confession in the epigraph to this chapter that yearns for assimilation into the mainstream. In direct opposition to parental expectation of remembering and respecting the traditional "home" (Indian) culture, Lahiri revealed to us that she had striven to fit herself into mainstream American culture.

Lahiri's fiction has ever since its emergence attained both critical and popular success. Her debut short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999),[6] won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000, the PEN/Hemingway Award and the New Yorker magazine's debut of the year. Her first novel, *The Namesake* (2003),[7]

[6] Hereafter referred to as *IM*.
[7] Hereafter referred to as *TN*.

was also impressively well-received and was adapted into a movie by Mira Nair in 2007. The novel was similarly a New York Times Notable Book and a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. It was chosen as one of the best books of the year by *USA Today* and *Entertainment Weekly*. In 2008, Lahiri published her second short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008),[8] which was debuted at number one on The New York Times bestseller list. It won her the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and the Vallombrosa-Gregor von Rezzori Prize and has ever since been published in 30 countries. Her second novel, *The Lowland* (2013)[9] only added to this already well-stocked trophy cabinet by succeeding to be a National Book Award Finalist and being shortlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize. Later in September 2015, just one day before the anniversary of the 9/11 events in the US, the book's acclaim crested with the 2014 America's National Medal of Arts and Humanities. Lahiri became the first Indian-origin author to be awarded the prestigious medal by the US President Barack Obama. Due to such considerable recognition, many scholars have labeled Lahiri a "celebrity author" (Dennihy, 2012) and "a literary treasure" (Guinn, 2000). Many have felt compelled to associate or compare her with canonical writers like Alice Munro, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ernest Hemingway, Anton Chekhov, William Wordsworth, William Trevor, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, Philip Roth, Gustave Flaubert, Gloria Anzaldúa, Adrienne Rich, Jane Austen, Nikolai Gogol, Raymond Carver, Maxine Hong Kingston, Bharati Mukherjee, and Chitra Divakaruni, among others (Freeman, 2008; Guinn, 2000; Kipen, 1999; Kohli, 1999; Postlethwaite, 2008; Sibree, 2008; Winder, 2013).

[8] Hereafter referred to as *UE*.
[9] Hereafter referred to as *TL*.

The oddity of awarding both the Pulitzer Prize in fiction and the National Medal of Arts to a London-born ethnic-Indian émigré singles out Lahiri's fiction from other diasporic writers as worthy of in-depth analysis. The Pulitzer, America's highest literary prize, "is supposed to be given for work preferably dealing with American life" (Rosett, 2000). Lahiri's fiction, however, explores life through a South Asian diasporic perspective, and some of her stories are not even set in the States. Lahiri's winning the award was implausible because "the fiction prize usually goes to a veteran novelist;" Lahiri should have been "an unlikely winner for three reasons: She [was] 32, a debut writer and an author of short stories" ("Little-known," 2000 Apr 11). In like manner, the medal gives annual recognition to individuals, institutions or groups whose work helps in deepening the Americans' understanding and appreciation of the humanities, broadening their "engagement with history and literature and helping preserve and expand Americans' access to cultural resources" ("President," 2015, para. 3). That the White House honored Lahiri for being their "crew" and for sharing original insights "about the common experiences" that Americans have (Obama, 2015, para. 4), casts serious doubts as to her reliability and her position as the native informant.

But Lahiri has garnered such colossal reputation only after an unending dispute among (normally Western and Eastern) critics and general public. When we turn to the existing criticism on Lahiri's oeuvre, we find the literature abundant and diverse. Her scholarly readers have attempted to take one element of her writings and extrapolate it towards total explanation. Particular topics appear often enough to provide a succession of leitmotifs: the individual/universal duality (Bess, 2004), mis--communication (Brians, 2003), ethics and aesthetics (Rajan, 2006), socio-stylistics (Karttunen, 2008), space (Caesar, 2005; H. Lahiri, 2008), gender (Alfonso-Forero,

2007; Mitra, 2006; and Zare, 2007), immigrant culture (Bhalla, 2008; Friedman, 2008), postcolonialism (Lewis, 2001; Tettenborn, 2002), foodways (Williams, 2007; Mannur, 2008), madwoman (Cussen, 2012 & 2014), adultery (Kuo, 2014), photography (Banerjee, 2010), melancholia (Munos, 2013) and generational breaks (Puttaiah, 2012), along with others. Only a few critics have developed grave misgivings about the overwhelming success and popularity of Lahiri's fiction in the United States and have felt compelled to examine her writings in the light of Orientalizing discourses and postcolonial exoticism (Rajan, 2006; Bhalla, 2008; Shankar, 2009). These researchers point to the highly celebrated representation of Lahiri within the mainstream culture to mainly argue that "cultural conditions in the United States (and other western countries) make it difficult or impossible for western reading audiences to embrace an Indian American writer's book only on its own terms" (Leyda, 2011, p. 67). In doing so, they have charged Lahiri with conforming to prescriptions of the capitalist market.

The existing abundant and diverse criticism of Lahiri's oeuvre thus includes topics ranging from postcolonial readings to innovative analyses of various metaphors like food and space. While all these standpoints are useful and valid, no specific study has been fully dedicated to a sustained examination of the ways hierarchies of power are (re)produced within Lahiri's narratives. This study is then a timely attempt to fill the discussed research gap by proposing a comprehensive reading method to explore the ways her characters are objectified and to identify the privileged hierarchies of power—the Indian diasporic or the Americanized identity.

1.6 Methodology

The primary sources in this research are the fictional oeuvre of Jhumpa Lahiri to date, including two short story collections *IM* and *UE* and two novels *TN* and *TL*. Secondary sources of the study include various books, articles, reviews and interviews on these literary works, more specifically on the notion of human subjugation, and on the proposed theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

In this thesis, the main method of reading can be categorized as historico-psychoanalytical. Numerous terms will be employed from both seemingly distinctive fields of historicism and psychoanalysis which are used commonly by scholars of both areas. The major concern of this analysis will be grounded in the construction of the immigrant subject in relation to concepts of race and gender. In Chapter Three of this dissertation, I will attempt to comment on the notion of objectification of the subject and demonstrate the methods of reading and their significance. The wide area in which the specific terms are discussed is the field of the gaze. The theory of the gaze is in itself quite vast and theoretically complex, and it is rapidly developing in different disciplines. Hence, appropriate versions of this theory are employed to examine the texts in relation to their contexts.

Therefore, it is quite rational to establish a safe ground to stand upon and employ merely those terminologies that would not represent a first time usage but formulate the foundations of the deployed theory. To achieve this goal, in this thesis I borrow the most common dichotomies of scopophilia/exhibitionism, activity/ passivity, subject/object, and masculine/feminine from psychoanalysis as well as Foucauldian notions of panopticism and internalization of the power networks to maximize the credibility of my research tools. The psychoanalytic dichotomies mostly

emanate from the Freudian postulations of the Id and Ego drives. A major problem with this rapprochement might be that the Freudian psychoanalysis is opposed by Foucault and his followers for being a "normalizing science" (Foucault, 2000; House, 2011; Whitebook, 1999).

In Chapter Three of the present thesis, I will explain the rationale of this apparent "return to Freud" as well as the points of commonality and divergence between historicism and psychoanalysis. By doing so, I will demonstrate how a mutually enriching relationship between the two modes of thinking over the human condition is feasible. In chapter three, I will also present a justification for selecting this particular rapprochement and Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction.

In Chapters Four and Five, the reading method will be put into practice and Lahiri's narratives will be analyzed. The above-mentioned dichotomies will be focused on individually and as a whole to find out the dominant hierarchies operating at the heart of the texts.

1.7 Definition of Some Key Terms

This section offers brief definitions of some of the key concepts utilized in the thesis. The list here places emphasis on definitions while more comprehensive explanations, including extensive details of how these concepts will be applied to Lahiri's works, are presented in chapter three of this study. However, since for understanding the construction of racial and feminine subjectivity, an interpretive model—i.e., a rapprochement of psychoanalysis and historicism—is required to formulate the backbone of my thesis, the terminology employed would naturally comprise of both fields. It is noteworthy that both domains are preoccupied with the widely influential, objectifying act of looking. However, regardless of their common interest in the gaze

as something imposed by one on the other, literary criticism generally treats these domains as distinct and separate. Even though in the present study I seek to explore the relationship between the psychic and social worlds, for the sake of convenience, the terminologies defined below conventionally focus on the gaze as a distinctively psychical and social phenomenon. Later in chapter three, I will connect these two seemingly distinct discourses to present the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study.

1.7.1 The Gaze

For the past few decades, "gaze theory" has made its way into literary and cultural studies, queer theory, postcolonial studies, Holocaust studies, black/whiteness studies, and critical race theory (Acton, 2004; Ball, 2003; Drummond, 2003; Eileraas, 2003; Russel, 1991). It is generally utilized as a theoretical framework to map out the formations of power working between two or more individuals, groups, or between an individual and a group. Researchers variously point to the following: "white" and "black" gazes, the "tourist" gaze, heterosexual and homosexual gazes, the "imperial" gaze, the "transatlantic" gaze, the "animal" gaze and the "meta-fictional" gaze, to name but only a few (Manlove, 2007, p. 84). The theory has a mixed pedigree and scholars have deep misgivings about its origin (Hawthorn, 2002; Newman, 2004). Hawthorn, for example, argues that theories of the gaze are not rooted in “a single place of origin or time of birth, [as] they build on and incorporate a number of traditional literary-critical concerns ... such as psychoanalysis, discourse studies, and film studies” (2006, p. 509).

Scholars generally distinguish between two dominant acts of looking, that of lust or scopophilia and that of surveillance. Whereas the former engages with matters of the individual psyche, the latter is involved with wider social relations and historical

forces. Scopophilic mechanisms entail "asymmetrical gender relations," while practices of surveillance enable individuals "to conceive of themselves as objects and the subject learns to regulate his or her behavior" (Newman, 2004, p. 10). Both fields are preoccupied more with "possession and power than in interaction, [and] both treat the person or persons surveyed as an object for use rather than as a human being to be respected" (Hawthorn, 2002, p. 123). Whereas the two fields of psychoanalysis and historicism have often seemed indifferent to each other, it is with the interdependence of society and psyche that I am concerned in the present study, because both kinds of gaze have in common a consciousness of being monitored.

1.7.1(a) Psychic Domain

1.7.1(a)(i) Scopophilia: Voyeurism/Exhibitionism

The term scopophilia literally means a love of watching; wherein both the observer and the observed, as suggested by the Freudian notion of "schaulust" or "pleasure in looking," gain perverse pleasure in seeing and being seen. In psychoanalytic parlance, scopophilia is traditionally isolated as an integral part of the instincts of sexuality and is associated with objectifying individuals and groups, "subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 8). Hence, two forms of this partial drive are differentiated as active voyeurism and passive exhibitionism (Freud, 1915).

Voyeurism refers to a practice in which the individual derives sexual gratification from observing others without being seen. A person who spies on others can also be considered as a voyeur. The objects of the voyeur appear in a way that the voyeur finds pleasurable. The key factor in voyeurism, however, is that the voyeur does not interact personally with the person being observed. This lack of personal interaction does not necessarily mean that the voyeur prefers not to be seen; rather, the traditional voyeur enjoys being seen as a seer. Furthermore, the voyeur is involved

in a kind of "theatricalization of the sexual relation by manipulation, submission, and humiliation of the object" (Hirt, 2005, p. 1843). Voyeurism turns the other into an image, an object of envy and covetousness and, in the process, appears to also bear witness to the visual focus of Western society.

Looking at an object for pleasure is one aspect of the process of looking. In order for a subject to look, an object must be seen, must capture the subject's attention and form the opposite pole of looking. In psychoanalysis, exhibitionism is one of the elements of instinctual life, making its appearance in conjunction with its opposite, namely pleasure in looking (Schilton, 2005, p. 535). As I use the term in this thesis, I concur with the proposition that exhibitionism is to be understood not as perversion "but as a normal part of human condition" and as the "passive manifestation of the visual field" (Newman, 2004, p. 2-6). In this regard, exhibitionism is inherent in all subjectivity: "I know that I am loved by the way I see myself being looked at by the other" (p. 2).

The privilege of being a voyeur is traditionally granted to the active male while exhibitionism is considered to be the inherent role of a passive female. In this relationship, the male gaze operates as a "means to present the female body as an object for the voyeuristic and sexist practice of the spectators" (Finzsch, 2008, p. 2). Such a definition of scopophilia, together with its two forms of voyeurism and exhibitionism are explicitly sexual. I will employ these concepts to examine the ways notion(s) of heterosexuality and/or homosexuality are reflected in Lahiri's fiction as disseminated by the mainstream.