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Mixed Marriages are a Doomed Enterprise: A Taxonomical approach to Family Units in Jhumpa Lahiri's Short Fiction

—Blasina Cantizano Márquez and José R. Ibáñez Ibáñez

Jhumpa Lahiri has become in the last decade one of the most outstanding and evocative voices in the American literary panorama. Her debut collection of stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), achieved international recognition and made her recipient of a number of awards and honours, among which the prestigious 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Lahiri's following literary achievements include a novel, *The Namesake* (2003) –made into a popular film directed by Mira Nair– and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), second volume of stories which debuted at number one on the *New York Times Book Review* best-seller list and was recipient of the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. Despite this modest output, Lahiri's fiction has been much praised, giving rise to a growing interest in the academic world.

Lahiri has acknowledged in interviews that her fiction is largely based on her own memories, personal anecdotes and life experiences, in part due to her parents' observation of Indian traditions and persistence to raise their children as Indian. This mingling of two worlds pervades her writing which exhibits an anxiety of accommodating the two sides of her self[1]. In her short story collections and only published novel to date, Lahiri uses Indian and Bengali names and makes specific references to Indian customs and food, cooking utensils, dress and an extensive

imagery which connect her fiction to other Southeast Asian authors, such as Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra B. Divakaruni or Amit Chaudhuri. Despite this evidence, her writing may not be labelled as post-colonial literature, as Judith Caesar has rightly underscored, as most of her stories take place in the United States, not in India (Caesar 2003: 82).

Much of her short fiction deals with the lives and vicissitudes of Southeast Asian Indian (often Bengali) protagonists, trapped between two different worlds and two different ways of living. The characters, however, are not transplanted refugees: they are either Indo-Americans trying to adapt to a new country that provides opportunities, or else their Westernised children. Ties to the Asian sub-continent may be strong or weak, but they are always present.

Scholars have analysed Lahiri's short fiction – particularly her first volume of stories – focusing primarily on the racialised subjectivity as a result of Indian foodways (Williams 2007), ethical responsibility and memory (Rajan 2006), American inner spaces (Caesar 2005), cultural identity (Caesar 2003), immigration experience (Dubey, 2002) or considering *Interpreter of Maladies* as a short story cycle (Brada-Williams 2004). None the less, the importance of marriage in the Indian imaginary as a means of preserving both culture and customs seems to have been quite often overlooked. This work focuses on the role played by this institution in members of the first and second-generations of immigrants, whether these bonds are between Indian-born immigrants or Indian and Westerners. Considering this latter case, it is telling to realise that many of those arranged marriages in Lahiri's stories meander through harsh times only to survive with the passage of time thanks to the mutual affection displayed by both spouses. Other marriages are held to be mismatched unions and, as a result, end up in a divorce. None the less, it is particularly interesting how mixed marriages evolve from a defiance-of-paternal-authority stance into a return-to-tradition position once feelings and love fade away.

First-generation Marriages: Endurable Love after a Life Together

In her fiction, Lahiri portrays the traditional order of Indian marital culture in several stories dealing with either first-

generation immigrants in America or stories set in India. In male-oriented societies, as in Eastern tradition cultures, women are responsible for cooking and doing household duties. Childbirth is considered a period during which her personal freedom diminishes. Men are, according to such guidelines, responsible for working and providing their families with a monetary income.

In Lahiri's storytelling, as well as in the world she witnesses, there is a clear distinction between male and female worlds, private and public sphere, domestic and social life. Thus, "A Real Durwan" and "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar," two stories set in India, feature docile housewives presented as stereotyped characters whose only objectives in life are marriage and motherhood; in this latter story, the narrator recalls that Bibi's only dream for the future: "She wanted to be spoken for, protected, placed on her path in life. Like the rest of us, she wanted to serve suppers, and scold servants" (Lahiri 1999: 160). For such women, marriage becomes a necessity, the means to achieve respect, protection as well as the vehicle to fulfil a role in society. Families will do their best to find good and prosperous husbands to their daughters, as their happiness and welfare will depend on male counterpart's status and income. In "The Third and Final Continent" the anxiety of Mala's parents to provide her with a suitable match is self explanatory: "She was twenty-seven, an age when her parents had begun to fear that she would never marry, and so they were willing to ship her only child halfway across the world in order to save her from spinsterhood" (181).

The old tradition of marriages arranged between families also affects those first immigrants arriving in the Western world during the fifties or sixties, as many of them were either rapidly married before travelling to the United States, or committed to do so within the process of settlement in the new country. In her stories, Lahiri shows that men suffered from these imposed rules of marriage too, as they were obliged to find a wife and have children as a means to perpetuate castes and family ties. In that respect, the protagonist of "The Third and Final Continent" tells how this Eastern rule affects both the lives of young immigrants as well as his own existence: "Every now and then someone in the house moved out, to live with a woman whom his family back

in Calcutta had determined he was to wed. In 1969, when I was thirty-six years old, my own marriage was arranged" (174). He explains that his marriage was arranged by his relatives and how little it affected him, as he was immersed in a new job and living in America: "The marriage had been arranged by my older brother and his wife. I regarded the proposition with neither objection nor enthusiasm. It was a duty expected of me, as it was expected of every man" (181).

Those traditional marriages, though arranged and planned, usually disregarding the feelings of the spouses, develop into strong relationships and endurable love after a life together. The dutiful protagonist of "The Third and Final Continent" admits his indifference towards his wife at the beginning of their relationship, "I waited to get used to her, to her presence at my side, at my table and in my bed, but a week later we were still strangers" (192), just to foretell his mutual affection in the future: "As strange as it seemed, I knew in my heart that one day her death would affect me, and stranger still, that mine would affect her" (195). For present generations, these stories of exotic weddings in India and arranged marriages between perfect strangers display a romantic halo which modern love stories lack. In "Year's End," part of the trio stories of *Unaccustomed Earth*, young Kaushik reckons his parents' marriage as a romantic episode and later witnesses how they fell in love with each other after years together, probably forced by her mother's illness as well:

> My parents had had an arranged marriage, but there was a touch of romance about it, too, my father seeing my mother for the first time at a wedding and being so attracted that he had asked, the following week for her hand. They had always been affectionate with one another, but it wasn't until her illness that he seemed fully, recklessly, to fall in love with her, so that I was to witness to a courtship that ought to have faded before I was born. (Lahiri 2008: 255)

This first impression will be soon counteracted by a new opinion of arranged marriages, as his father remarries a young widow in India after his mother's death. The protagonist is ashamed and angry at his father's behaviour, and he fails to understand why

he marries this time and the reasons for forgetting his first wife so soon. The wedding and preliminary details are not so romantic as the first time, as this second marriage seems to be arranged for the convenience and benefit of the young woman and her two daughters: "He had known Chitra just a few weeks, had met her only twice before her marriage. It was a registry wedding followed by a small dinner at a hotel. 'The whole thing was arranged by relatives,' he explained, in a way that suggested that he was not to blame" (255).

A similar situation occurs in "Hell-Heaven," one of the stories of *Unaccustomed Earth* in which the marriage issue is best explored. Narrations such as "Mrs. Sen's," Lahiri focuses on the isolation faced by the narrator's mother, Aparna, an Indian-born woman married off to Shyamal Da, a workaholic Indian husband who disregards his wife's needs. Though the two of them were strangers to each other, Shyamal had accepted this traditional union in exchange of the possibility of his parents' approval to study abroad: His necessity of marriage arises as a way of reconciling private life with professional aspirations. Aparna, on the other hand, regards this union as an opportunity to leave behind the background and suffocating environment where she lives, an area in Calcutta she considers the wilderness. They both married in India before the couple moved to Berlin where Shyamal finished his training in microbiology prior to his acceptance of a position as a researcher at Mass General. Aparna's isolation and displacement become more evident when Pranab Chakraborty, a young Indian bachelor from Calcutta, arrives in Massachusetts to continue his studies. The attractive and charming personality of Pranab, hosted and fed at nights by the Das, contrasts with that of Shyamal Da:

> My father was thirty seven then, nine years older than my mother. Pranab Kaku was twenty-five. My father was a lover of silence and solitude. He had married my mother to placate his parents; they were willing to accept his desertion as long as he had a wife. He was wedded to his work, his research, and he existed in a shell that neither my mother nor I could penetrate. Conversation was a chore for him; it required an effort he preferred to expend at the lab. (65)

When this sense of isolation becomes more acute in Aparna, trapped in the suburbial life, her husband responds: "If you are so unhappy, go back to Calcutta" (76). Aparna, as many other female characters in Lahiri's stories, shows a strong attachment to her homeland, her roots and Eastern traditions thus proving that in terms of diaspora, emigration and displacement, male and female experiences are totally different. When it comes to leaving their original land in order to migrate to a new country, men tend to adjust to the circumstances and attempt to integrate themselves in Western cultures. They work, study and live as it is expected of them, as the masculine protagonists of "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," "Mrs. Sen's," "The Third and Final Continent" or "Hell-Heaven." Once they settle in America, once the process of adaptation is over, their wives are relocated with them in a different context making the sense of displacement stronger.

Second-generation Marriages: Abiding by Paternal Authority

Stories of Indian immigrants in the United States usually deal with highly qualified husbands attending American universities as opposed to wives deeply attached to Eastern traditions, devoting their time to household chores and child bearing. Those men adjusted themselves to the American way of life and their new jobs, grasping every chance to succeed in the land of opportunities. Their wives, on the other hand, got stuck between the Eastern tradition ruling their homes and the Western life from outside. Their physical appearance and behaviour make them look different and out of place: colourful saris and red dots on their foreheads account for their roots. The children of such couples are torn between two worlds as well: their birthplace and that of their parents. Though with Indian roots and family ties, these characters behave, talk and live as genuine Americans. In "Interpreter of Maladies" the description of the Das family, born and raised in the United States and travelling to the land of their ancestors, highlights this contrast in a single sentence: "The family looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did" (Lahiri 1999: 42-3).

Although the first immigrants in America sought to raise their children as Indian, obeying main Eastern rules, the second generation is born and raised in a Western country characterised

by an apparent freedom in terms of personal and marital relationships. It is noteworthy that most of them, though free to act, would choose someone from their same ethnic group to marry, probably as a guarantee of successful matrimony. In Lahiri's fiction, there is a tendency of young Eastern couples meeting for the first time due to their parents' right judgement and effort. Sometimes without realising it, Indo-Americans are lead not just to know each other, but to fall in love and marry afterwards. The situation is set for them, as recalled by Mina Das in *Interpreter of Maladies*: "Our parents were best friends who lived in the same town. My entire life I saw him every weekend, either at our house or theirs. We were sent upstairs to play together while our parents joked about our marriage" (63). A further example can be seen in "This Blessed House," where a young couple also meets after their parents' insistence: "They had met only two months before. Her parents, who lived in California, and his, who still lived in Calcutta, were old friends, and across continents they had arranged the occasion at which Twinkle and Sanjeev were introduced..." (142). This time the traditional wedding seemed to be quite hasty, although it is something their parents consider a necessity for both. The reasons for their hurry are explained as follows:

> She was twenty- seven and recently abandoned, he had gathered, by an American who had tried and failed to be an actor; Sanjeev was lonely, with an excessively generous income for a single man, and had never been in love. At the urging of their matchmakers, they married in India, amid hundreds of well-wishers whom he barely remembered from his childhood.... (143)

Back in America and after moving in into a new house, Sanjeev's comments and attitude suggest that his marriage will not endure, as their differences cannot be overcome. Twinkle is young, naïve and charming, qualities much esteemed in a docile wife in India, also admired by her husband's colleagues, but not so suitable for solitary Sanjeev. Moreover, her girlish behaviour, when decorating the house with Christian trinkets and welcoming visitors, are aspects Sanjeev dislikes and will not tolerate in his wife: "It made him feel stupid as if the world contained hidden

wonders he could not anticipate, or see. He looked at her face, which, it occurred to him, had not grown out of its girlhood" (142). To a certain extent, Twinkle's appreciation of Christian paraphernalia might be regarded as a lack of traditional cultural knowledge her husband is unwilling to take up.

In the three interconnected stories of *Unaccustomed Earth,* Hema displays a particular point of view of her own arranged marriage as the only means to achieve personal stability and a family of her own. In "Going Ashore," after years of an illicit relationship with a married man and unable to break up with him, she seeks a traditional husband with a similar upbringing as a remedy to her problems; hereafter, she decides to rely on her parents' will to find a suitable match for her:

> She refused to think of it as an arranged marriage, but knew in her heart that that was what it was. Though she'd met Navin before her parents, they had found him for her. They had asked Hema if he might phone her, and finally, after years of refusing similar requests, after years of believing that Julian would leave his wife, she'd agreed.
>
> (Lahiri 2008: 297)

Graduated from university and completely immersed into academic life in America, she is self-sufficient and independent but also a traditional woman who needs someone to share her life with and have children: "It was her inability, ultimately, to approach middle age without a husband, without children, with her parents living now on the other side of the world... it was her unwillingness to abide that life indefinitely that led her to Navin" (298). Moreover, her past relation with a married man contrasts her actual traditional behaviour as the chaste fiancée of an old-fashioned Bengali, whom she believes she would love some day:

> Before getting engaged they had spent just three weekends together, spaced out over as many months, Navin coming each time from Michigan to see Hema. They wandered chastely around Boston.... He admitted to her that he'd had lovers in the past, but he was old fashioned when it came to a future wife. And it touched her to be treated, at thirty-seven, like a teenaged girl. (296-7)

Once the relationship with Julian is abruptly finished by her engagement, Hema looks forward to Navin and her new life with him, but her emotional stability is suddenly altered as she happens to meet Kaushik in Rome before going to her wedding in India. They had met during childhood, had a lot in common and a strong physical attraction is set between them. She discovers the pleasures of love and sex once again, and that makes her prospective marriage unbearable: "...there was something dead about the marriage she was about to enter into. And though she knew it had every chance, over the years, of coming to life, on her way home, in the yellow light of evening, she was conscious only of its deadness" (301). After meeting Kaushik, her true character awakes just to realise the mistake she was about to make, something she would probably regret for the rest of her life. On her wedding day, Navin and their life together seem not only wrecking but also revolting: "At the end of that week, Navin arrived to marry me. I was repulsed by the sight of him, not because I had betrayed him but because he still breathed, because he was there for me and had countless more days to live" (332).

In this collection, Hema is depicted and observed in a crucial moment in her life, admitting hidden evidence and facing an unhappy life. As with many stories lead by female characters, who either go through personal crisis or face hidden evidence, "Going Ashore" is a moment of truth story, the concept explained by Mary Louise Pratt as follows: "Moment of truth stories focus on a single point of crisis in the life of a central character, a crisis which provokes some basic realisation that will change the character's life forever" (in May, 1994: 99). This successful literary device allows the writer to include references to past and future events. Pratt also states that "The moment of truth is an especially good fragment of a life to narrate because it projects itself by implication backward and forward across the whole life" (100-1), and that is precisely what Lahiri does when mingling the three final stories in *Unaccustomed Earth:* playing with the concept of time (past, present and future), and displaying the consequences, mistakes and delusions of certain decisions at a particular moment.

In "A Temporary Matter" and "Interpreter of Maladies," Lahiri reverses gender roles, especially those related to male and female experiences within marriages. In India, a strict set of rules dictates how husbands and wives act both publicly and privately, whereas in America, such guidelines are not as clear-cut but are subverted altogether. In her stories of Westernised Indians, her married characters often deal with confusions of marriage roles in relation to cooking, working outside the home and bearing children. The best example of Lahiri's role reversal is "A Temporary Matter" in which Shukumar is the stay-at-home student who does the cooking and cleaning whereas his wife, Shoba, has recently thrown herself into her work as an editor. After a miscarriage, they lead separate lives, avoid each other and suffer from a complete lack of communication. As the story develops, they get closer just to share the blame for the miscarriage and to talk openly about the dissolution of their marriage. He was conscious but did nothing, she is decided: "'I've looking for an apartment and I've found one'.... She needed time alone. She had money saved up for a security deposit" (21).

Although most of Lahiri's characters obey the tradition and follow the rules into monocultural marriages, there are some independent Americanised women who totally opposed to their parents' interference in their personal relationships. In "Nobody's Business," Sang, also her roommates, suffers from the insistence of Bengali men trying not only to meet her but also to marry her:

> Every so often a man called for Sang, wanting to marry her. Sang usually didn't know these men. Sometimes she had never even heard of them. But they'd heard that she was pretty and smart and thirty and Bengali and still single, and so there men, most of whom also happen to be Bengali, would procure her number from someone who knew someone who knew her parents, who, according to Sang, desperately wanted her to be married.
>
> (Lahiri 2008: 174)

Sang is always patient and respectful to them, always finding excuses to reject their proposals. She chooses an Egyptian man as

a partner, loves him and accepts his unusual character, just to discover he has been unfaithful with another woman.

Second-generation Marriages: Mixed Marriages, a Defiance of Paternal Authority

Several stories in Lahiri's fiction deal with relationships between Indian-American and Westerners. Lahiri dwells on the effects of mixed marriages in the lives of Indian-American as they bespeak the inability of spouses to accommodate two different ethnic and social background. Thus, "Hell-Heaven," the representation of a mixed relationship is explored through the comments of Aparna and her daugher and narrator, Usha. Aparna, married off to Shyamal Da, criticises Pranab Chakraborty for going out with Deborah, an American girl whose parents were professors at Boston College. Aparna's infatuation of Pranab evolve into a complexity of feelings in which adherence to tradition mingles with the fact of her having been scorned. For her that relationship is bound to founder as she believes that "in a few weeks, the fun will be over and she'll leave him" (68). None the less, once the relationship settles and wedding plans are made, she will stick to the idea that Deborah "will leave him" and that Pranab "is throwing his life away" (73).

In this Indo-American world, there is a set of unwritten rules to be respected and mixed marriages undermine its stability. In this sense, the foreign element is the one to be blamed as the only feasible explanation accounting for the community member's misbehaviour. This is what must be inferred from Aparna's words: "...and it was universally agreed that she [Deborah] had stripped Pranab Kaku not only of his origins but of his independence. She was the enemy, he was her prey, and their example was invoked as a warning, and as vindication, that mixed marriages were a doomed enterprise" (75). Alien (or non-Indian) spouses are often regarded as a threat to community tradition as Western values and beliefs brought by them may jeopardise the marital status.

An opposing view is held by Usha. Her acceptance of Deborah should be interpreted as the narrator's willingness to break away from the constraining influence of her Indian cultural background so as to seize the opportunity delivered by Deborah, an open window to the American way of life:

> I fell in love with Deborah the way young girls fall in love with women who are not their mothers. I loved her serene gray eyes, the ponchos and denim wrap skirts and sandals she wore, her straight hair that she let me manipulate into all sorts of silly styles. I longed for her casual appearance; my mother insisted whenever there was a gathering that I wear one of y ankle-length, faintly Victorian dresses, which she referred to as maxis, and have party hair which meant taking a strand from either side of my head and joining them with a barrette at the back. (69)

Usha's quest for identity and attempt to adapt to American culture is feared by her mother, who forbids her daughter to date American boy: "Don't think you'll get away with marrying an American, the way Pranab Kaku did" (75). However, Aparna's attitude towards her daughter leads up to her own reclusion and sense of displacement when Usha embraces Western values as a means of achieving her personal freedom. This is the first time the narrator becomes aware of her mother's profound loneliness: "I began to pity my mother; the older I got, the more I saw what a desolate life she led. She had never worked, and during the day she watched soap operas to pass the time. Her only job, every day, was to clean and cook for my father and me" (76).

Unable to overcome the distance that separates mother and daughter, Usha's coming to terms with her Indian background occurs at the end of the story. Twenty-three years later, Deborah and Pranab's divorce proved Aparna's words right. However, contrary to what she had foreseen, the marriage ended up when Pranab fell in love with a Bengali woman, questioning the idea that mixed marriages failed after the alien spouse abandoned the matrimony or committed adultery. In this case, Pranab was the primary cause of this wedding failure: "It was he who had strayed falling in love with a married Bengali woman, destroying two families in the process" (81).

On adultery and unfaithfulness is "Sexy," dealing with a Western young woman having a sexual affair with a married Bengali. Miranda is attracted to Dev's physical appearance, even to his moustache, and his gentlemanly manners. Both enjoy their first moments together, when his wife is in India: "At first Miranda and Dev spent every night together, almost. He explained that he couldn't spend the whole night at her place, because his wife called every day at six in the morning from India, where it was four in the afternoon" (88). At first she accepts the situation, but later on, when his wife returns, she becomes a simple sex object for him. Instead of romantic dinners, he visits on Sunday mornings just to have sex, always dressed in gym clothes as an excuse to leave home. Miranda finds Dev sexy and attractive, he represents the exoticism of the East, a distant land opposed to her dull daily life: "Now, when she and Dev made love, Miranda closed her eyes and saw deserts and elephants, and marble pavilions floating on lakes beneath a full moon" (96). This excerpt shows an idealised image of the Indian subcontinent and its people, the result of a blatant fetishisation of the East by Western cultures.

As Edward Said pointed out "Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, East, 'them')" (Said 1983: 43). In both collections of stories, Lahiri provides her fiction with rich descriptions and details of Indian life, cultural values and Eastern customs. While some domestic routines or rituals may be unfamiliar to Western readers, the style and themes of her writing are highly accessible and moving as they deal with general human conflicts (need of communication, isolation, identity, etc.).

Many cultures feel threatened by the temptations of American life and discourage their young people from marrying outsiders and that is precisely the case of Eastern immigrants living in the US for the last decades. They have been encouraging and supporting mono-ethnical marriages not only as a guarantee of a good match but also as a means to keep their tradition and roots in a Western context. Most of Lahiri's stories depict good Indian parents couching their children almost from the cradle to "stick to their kind," to find or let them find, suitable matches among their group. Stories of obedient Indo-Americans fulfilling their parent's wishes abound, their upbringing together with their respect to tradition lead them to marry someone they have previously met within the community and probably through their parents' efforts either in blind or arranged dates, such as the characters in "Interpreter of Maladies" and "This Blessed House." Both stories also prove that superficial similarities hardly

guarantee happiness, as real life is quite complicated; in the latter story, Sanjeev married a girlish wife just to avoid loneliness but mainly to follow his mother's pragmatic advice: "You have enough money in the bank to raise three families," his mother remind him when they spoke at the start of each month on the phone. "You need a wife to look after and love." Now he had one, a pretty one, from a suitably high caste, who would soon have a master's degree. What was there not to love?" (Lahiri 1999: 148).

Some other stories also show arranged marriages among members of the Eastern community, this time unforced by their parents but as a decision voluntarily taken by young people, disappointed by Western values. The American faith in personal freedom and independence, also the American dream which brought their parents from the other side of the world, did not seem to work out in terms of relationships. Marriage is a partnership, not a solitary endeavour, and the American emphasis on personal fulfilment can cause confusion in a lot of couples. Embedded in the American whirlwind of work and success, many Indo-Americans feel they have no time for themselves: they devote their whole time to study and work, while personal lives and relationships simply do not exist. At this point, they look back to their own upbringing to realise one basic fact: the traditional family unit provides not just companionship but also cooperation, compromise, respect and tolerance among its members. Those and other traditional Eastern values will make life worthy, as these are the days of permanent crisis in Western societies, not just in terms of economics but related to religion, coexistence and morals as well.

Disillusioned by the world around, many second-generation immigrants turn to old Eastern traditions and precepts to survive in a multicultural world and find personal happiness. The words of Hema in "Going Ashore" (*Unaccustomed Earth*) support this particular attitude to obsolete arranged marriages: "After years of uncertainty with Julian, Hema found this certainty, an attitude to love she had scorned in the past, liberating, with the power to seduce her just as Julian once had" (Lahiri 2008: 298).

In short, all marriages are mixed marriages, as not two people are the same, particularly a man and a woman; conventional

mixed marriages come in all forms: race, status, religion, even politics. This wide variety of matrimony and personal relationships enable Lahiri to reflect on the tensions, the strength and the inadequacies and aspirations of contemporary citizens of a multicultural world.

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1. With respect to her being a hyphenated American, Lahiri declared in March 2006: "While I am American by virtue of the fact that I was raised in this country, I am Indian thanks to the efforts of two individuals. I feel Indian not because of the time I've spent in India or because of my genetic composition but rather because of my parents' steadfast presence in my life" (Lahiri, 2006).

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3

The Dwindling Presence of Indian Culture and Values in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*

—Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz

> There are certain intensities to the experience of that first generation and their offspring that don't carry over. I'm aware of my parents' experience, how I grew up and now how my children are growing up. There is such a stark difference in those two generations.
>
> —Jhumpa Lahiri, "Interview with Bookforum"

> In her [Lahiri's] latest work, *Unaccustomed Earth*, a powerful collection of short stories, those [second-generation] children have left home and are starting families of their own, as they struggle both with tangled filial relationships and the demands of parenthood. The straddling of two cultures has been replaced by the straddling of two generations.
>
> —Lisa Fugard, "Book review: Divided We Love"

It is a well-documented fact among social scientists and migration studies scholars that second-generation immigrants develop a number of ties with the host society that make their experience of their identity utterly different from that of their parents' (Gordon 1964). Beginning with a more proficient use of the language, but covering almost all aspects of cultural, structural, and civic adaptation, these sons and daughters of migrants are seen to adopt many of the behavioural patterns, values and ideals of the mainstream group. It would be inaccurate and unfair, though, to affirm that all of them are equally intent on discarding