

**PSYCHOANALYTICAL INTERPRETATION OF JHUMPALAHIRI'S *INTERPRETER OF MALADIES* AND BRIAN LEUNG'S *WORLD FAMOUS LOVE ACTS***

**BY**

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**MAY, 2015**

## DECLARATION PAGE

I declare that the work in this thesis entitled “**Psychoanalytical Interpretation of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* and Brian Leung’s *World Famous Love Acts***” has been performed by me in the Department of English and Literary Studies. The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. No part of this thesis was previously presented for another degree or diploma at this or any other institution.

BOLA-BORO, Aafa

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Signature

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Date

**CERTIFICATION PAGE**

This thesis entitled “PSYCHOANALYTIC INTERPRETATION OF JHUMPALAHIRI’S *SINTERPRETER OF MALADIES* AND BRIAN LEUNG’S *WORLD FAMOUS LOVE ACTS*” by Aafa BOLA-BORO meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Literature of the Ahmadu Bello University, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to all those who believe in me.

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## ABSTRACT

*This study is a psychoanalytical interpretation of Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies and Brian Leung's World Famous Love Acts. This is born out of the fact that previous studies have focused on the intricate relationship between dislocation in respect to spirituality and narration. In this regard, this study examines cultural and psychological dislocation in respect to the self and the other on the Asian Americans' existential experiences. This research's specific objectives are to demonstrate that the short story is a suitable literary discursive form for espousing Asian American experiences and that dislocation devolves into cultural disjunction and marital/familial degeneration. It also demonstrates that traumatic events bring to fore the despondency inherent in Asian American characters and that Horneyan Psychoanalytical criticism is an appropriate medium for the interpretation of characters' personality disorder. The study employs qualitative research technique and four stories are analysed from each collection in addition to the use of secondary sources. It also harnesses Horney's approach to psychoanalysis to investigate the various neurotic trends manifest in characters' coping strategy. The study's findings show that there is an affinity between unresolved conflicts, degenerating family relationships and unhealthy impulses. It also reveals that, dislocated Asian American characters mask their state to various degrees through neurotic trends. This work concludes by pointing out that the Asian Americans' cultural and psychological dislocation underscores their American experience.*

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background to the Study

With specific reference to the short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri and Brian Leung, this study is a psychoanalytical interpretation of the cultural and psychological dislocation of Asian Americans. Employing the methods of Horneyan psychoanalytic theory in the analysis of the selected short stories, this study explores the manner in which Asian American characters employ intra psychic and inter personal defence strategies to cope with their psychological difficulties. This concern is because Asian Americans form a significant component of the immigrant population of the United States of America and their attempt at integration is a significant dimension of their existence. It is in this regard that Lim and Ling (1992:3) argue that, "Asian American literature has burgeoned into a recognized body of texts that must be taken seriously as a rich contribution to the pluralistic culture of the contemporary United States". The idea expressed in the quotation embodies the view that since its inception at the end of the 1960s, Asian American literature makes up a substantial part of the ever-growing American literary canon.

In American literature in general, dislocation either cultural or psychological, is often discussed against the backdrop of slavery, racism, migration and integration in relation to such ethnic minority groups as African Americans, Hispanics, Latinos and Asian Americans. Some of these immigrants have saddled themselves with the responsibility of representing the reality and experiences of their respective groups thus writing within the tradition of ethnic literature in the United States of America. Rangno and Meyers (2010:58) posit that, "Ethnic literature refers to works by

minority writers, particularly those novels and short stories that deal specifically with the experience of being a minority in America". Hume (2002:10) also argues that the immigrant experience has been reflected in recent American immigrant fiction. She gives credence to this assertion when she states that, "Novels of the last thirty years have focused on the estranging aspects of immigration, on the slippage between America's promises – equality, justice, prosperity – and the actuality of encounters between newcomers and the culture they enter". The concern with the estranging aspect of immigration is not restricted to the novel genre alone but is also a major preoccupation of the immigrant short story.

An appraisal of American prose fiction shows some American short stories that discuss immigrant experiences and they include *Arranged Marriage* (1995) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, which chronicles the experiences of Indian Immigrants in the United States of America. Most of the stories in the collection depict the Indian migrants' socio-cultural experiences in America. Furthermore, Amy Tan's *Rules of the Game* discusses the experiences of immigrants. It depicts the conflicts that arise from choosing between the American culture and the Chinese culture. Filipino American writer Bienvenido Santos in his collection of short stories *Scent of Apples* (1979) also depicts the plight of immigrants in the story "Immigrant Blues". Jhumpa Lahiri's collection titled *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) examines the Indian Immigrant experiences in America and the difficulty encountered in the process of building a new life in a new environment.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Criticism of Asian American literature has developed into a thriving literary field of discourse and as such attracted critics who have discussed dislocation. Against this background, Russell (2007) discusses trauma induced dislocation and its effects on the

character's narration. Jung (2011) provides an interpretation on the effect of dislocation on the spirituality of dislocated Asian immigrant women. These studies are important; however, they have not examined the attendant implication of dislocation on the Asian American's relation to self and the other. This study fills this gap by discussing cultural dislocation as the root cause of cultural alienation and psychological trauma among Asian Americans and within the United States itself. It also considers conflict as a catalyst for the Asian American's psychological dislocation and distress. Consequently, this study is premised on the propositions that:

1. Living in American Diaspora and the attempt to negotiate between disparate cultures results in conflicts, fragmented identity and alienation.
2. Trauma and unresolved intra and inter-personal conflicts result in psychological dislocation.
3. Horneyan Psychoanalytic criticism is a significant platform for the discourse of dislocation because of its concern with the structure of personality and characters' internal and external struggles and strategies of defence.

### **1.3 Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to bring to the fore the peculiar cultural and psychological experiences of dislocated Asian American characters and how they are signified in the selected short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri and Brian Leung. Against the backdrop of the aforementioned, this study's specific objectives are therefore to demonstrate that:

1. The short story as a significant genre of prose fiction is a suitable literary discursive form for espousing Asian American experiences.
2. Dislocation devolves into cultural disjunction and marital/familial degeneration thus the need to properly apprehend its many guises.
3. Traumatic events bring to fore the despondency inherent in Asian American characters.
4. Horneyan Psychoanalytical criticism is an appropriate medium for the interpretation of characters' personality disorder.

#### 1.4 Justification

A brief review of the Asian American literary canon shows that a large corpus of critical works focus more on the subjects of identity/in-between-ness, belonging/assimilation, racial subordination and immigration. The importance of these studies cannot be over emphasised. However, discussing these subjects alone is constraining the canon. Therefore, it is imperative to add discussions to Asian American studies concerning dislocation and its importance in Asian American writing. It does this by making significant that the construct of cultural and psychological dislocation is an essential aspect of Asian American studies, because other issues that have received consistent attention in Asian American studies spring up from being culturally or psychologically dislocated. In this way, the study argues for an examination of dislocation because it is not only feasible but plays a prominent role in determining the behaviour of the Asian American's character. In this regard, this study highlights that being dislocated culturally or psychologically gives rise to several issues ranging from in-between-ness, family dynamics, breakdown in relationships, depression, self and non-self-destructive behaviour, and the frustration that ensues because of lack of fulfilment. Overall, the psychoanalytical interpretation of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Brian Leung's *World Famous Love Acts* contributes to existing studies on these texts. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, there has been no discussion on psychoanalytical interpretation with the subject being Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Brian Leung *World Famous Love Acts*.

## **1.5 Scope and Limitation**

This research limits its focus to two collections of short stories and they are JhumpaLahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Brian Leung's *World Famous Love Acts*. Out of the several short stories in these collections, this study is restricted to some selected short stories because they allow for an exploration of the subject matter of the study and also bear reflections of the same. Hence, this study limits its scope to some selected short stories namely: 'A Temporary Matter', 'Interpreter of Maladies', 'Sexy', and 'Mrs Sen's' from, JhumpaLahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* while 'Six Ways to Jump off a Bridge', 'White Hand', 'Who Knows Her Best', and 'Drawings by Andrew Warhol' from Brian Leung's *World Famous Love Acts*. These selected short stories supply substantial information about dislocation and its consequences on Asian American characters.

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

This is a qualitative research and it therefore espouses the use of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include some selected short stories from JhumpaLahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Brian Leung's *World Famous Love Acts*. The secondary sources include books, journals, articles and related internet materials. In addition, the critical analysis of the selected texts is based on Karen Horney's postulation of neurosis and how the various trends are employed as defence strategies. In addition, this research employs an inter-disciplinary approach. This is because the subject of

dislocation and its accompanying effects have been contested in a number of disciplines such as Sociology, Psychology and Cultural Studies.

## **1.7 Chapter Structure**

The study is divided into five chapters: Chapter One, which is the introduction, provides the general background to the study and include:statement of problem, the study's aim and objectives, the scope and limitation of the study, research methodology and definition of key terms. There is also a brief historical background of the migration of Asian Americans to the United States of America as well as an exploration of the development of the American short story. This overtly provides a foundation for a detailed study of Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Leung's *World Famous Love Acts*, and the authors' literary backgrounds. Chapter Two discusses Horneyan psychoanalytical criticism as the theoretical framework of the study and a review of related literature. Chapter Three, titled "Cultural Disjunction and Marital Degeneration in JhumpaLahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*," explores the Asian Americans' disconnectedness from the American and indigenous culture and degenerating family relationships. Chapter Four, titled "Family Estrangement and Destructive Impulses In Brian Leung's *World Famous Love Acts*," provides an analysis of destructive impulses employed by psychologically dislocated Asian American characters. It also explores estrangement within the family unit as an underlying factor for depression. Chapter Five, which is the final chapter, summarizes the study's main submissions.

## **1.8 Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of clarity, brief definitions are given on the key terms used in this study. They are migration, migrant and dislocation.

### **1.8.1 Migration**

Petersen (1968) cited in Orozco (2001:7211) defines migration as “More or less permanent movement of people across space”. According to ‘National Geographic Expedition’ (2005), migration is, “The movement of people from one place in the world to another. People can either choose to move of their own volition (“voluntary migration”) or be coerced into doing so (“involuntary migration”)”. In other words, migration is the process of social transition whereby an individual relocates from one environment to another with the aim of remaining there for an extended period. The individual involved in this process is referred to as “migrant”.

### **1.8.2 Migrant**

According to UNESCO, the term migrant can be understood as, “Any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties to this country”. The definition given by UNESCO, however fails to take into cognisance other generations of immigrants such as second and third-generation immigrants. These groups of people are perceived as belonging to a non-dominant cultural group in the society. The second generation comprises of people whose parents are immigrants while the third generation are those people whose grandparents are immigrants. It is imperative to note that the concept of dislocation is applicable to both first and second generation immigrants. For the first generation immigrants, the new culture becomes alien or hostile. The second and third generation migrants on the other hand enjoy an easier settlement. However, “Their sense of identity borne from living in a diaspora community is influenced by the past migrant history of their parents or

grandparents” (McLeod, 2000:207). Irrespective of not being first generation immigrant their sense of identity is problematic because there is a nexus between their identity and their history.

### **1.8.3 Dislocation**

In general, dislocation as used in this research is a perturbation of an individual’s psychological or cultural experience. Ishiyama (1995:262) defines cultural dislocation as a “Subjective experience of feeling displaced or not at home in a given sociocultural environment. Cross-cultural adjustment difficulties, which may be experienced both overtly and covertly, often culminate in a rather subjective experience of cultural dislocation”. Cultural dislocation, in most cases, results from migration because; the transition from the native land evokes cultural questions. Immigrants (first or second generation) who lack access to familiar cultural items and social networks are at great risk of alienation and acculturative stress. Bammer (1994) cited in Idrus (2011:3) regards cultural dislocation as, “The separation of people from their native culture, through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture”. Apart from being dislocated culturally, dislocation can also occur psychologically. Psychological dislocation can occur as the result of a process of separation from motherland. Akhtar in Stephen Gill’s *“Immigrant: A Study in Diasporic Consciousness”* hints at psychological dislocation in these words:

Diaspora therefore is an emotional and psychological state of (a) strutting between two geographical and cultural states (b) struggling between regression and progression, dislocation and then, relocation. This continuum of perpetual shift between two states of dislocation and relocation makes one interrogate the sustainability of an individual in such a situation.

In other words, the arduous exercise of moving from one location to another or the need to conform into another mainstream quite different from the familiar one the migrants are conversant with usually affects their psychology. Njogu(2013:3) opines that, “Psychological dislocation refers to those anxieties and mental upheavals occurring from physical dislocation”. This establishes the fecundity between migration and psychological dislocation. In addition, when an individual is confronted with a stressful life event that characterises his or her life with conflicts, he or she might suffer dislocation.

According to **The Free Dictionary.com** psychological dislocation is “A psychosocial transition whereby the individual’s identity and sense of self are disrupted, causing trauma but also forcing the individual to seek out a new identity in order to adapt to a new social context”. Furthermore, Gikunda and Chuka (2013:6) are of the opinion that, “Dislocation is not merely a physical removal from home. It involves conflict within an individual that somehow overwhelms them. It involves a search for identity, which, more often than not, overpowers and renders derelict”. In summation, dislocation can be physical, cultural or psychological. The next few pages give a brief overview about the history of migration in the United States of America.

## **1.9 Migration of Asians to the United States of America**

Immigrants migrate to the United States of America for diverse reasons. While some do so to pursue their dreams, others do so to avoid the unpleasant realities in their

native land. McLemore (1980:xiii) states that, “The United States alone has so many different racial and ethnic groups, each with a different history and different problems” In other words, immigrants in the United States of America have diverse reasons for residing in the United States. The aforementioned reasons for migrating fall under two basic factors the push motive and the pull motive. The “push” motive involves the demand to leave in a bid to survive while the “pull” factor is influenced by the attraction to a new way of life (Rack 1982). Whatever the case, the effect of migration does not only affect the host community but also the individual as well.

The United States is a country of immigrants from the early settlers to the present entrants. According to Loupe and Ojeda (2006:1), “America is a nation composed almost entirely of immigrants”. The early settlers who are referred to as Native Americans or Red Indians arrived the Americas in three waves (Vergan, 2012). Before the arrival of the Native Americans, humans did not habit North and South America. Clack(2005:6) posits that the land was a, “Moist and treeless tundra, it was covered with grasses and plant life, attracting the large animals that early humans hunted for their survival”. The beginning of the 1600s witnessed the beginning of a great rise of emigration from Europe to North America consisting of white Anglo-Saxon of protestant background. The Europeans had the prospect of living a better life in what they termed the New World or land of promise. Asokan (2005:7) states that, “The New World came into existence mainly in response to the individual’s aspiration to progress in an unrestricted atmosphere”. However, the Indians living in what is now United States of America had already carved out a culture and lifestyle for themselves. Therefore, they established a great resistance against the Europeans to avoid being subjugated. The defence resulted in genocide, dislocation, pacification and eventual subjugation of the indigenous people.

For some time, the population that settled in what is now known as United States of America was homogenous. However, in a bid to meet the demands of a fast developing nation, laws, which approved the importation and exploitation of minority/developing nations, were constituted. The massive influx of black slaves influenced the formation of the American society over time and the labour of these subjugated nations was used in developing the economy of the American nation. Apart from the slaves who were forcefully subjugated to servitude, all other immigrants came to America because of the promise of easy living – ‘The American Dream’.

The promise of opportunity and freedom continue to lure outlanders to the United States of America including the Indians and Chinese from the Asian Continent. People from this continent are referred to as Asian Americans. Lim and Ling (1992:4) define Asian Americans as people, “...whose countries of origin may be found within the geographical triangle formed by Japan, Indonesia, and Pakistan”. The Chinese were the first among the Asians to come in search of economic opportunities (Singh: 2006). About three thousand or more Chinese moved to the United States of America between 1849 and 1882 when the first exclusion act (the first law in US history to restrict immigration) was passed. The immigrants were young peasant men who worked in mines, construction firms, serving as domestic household workers in the houses of affluent whites, ran laundries and restaurants. Some of the immigrants returned to China after earning sufficient money to enable them become merchants and big scale farmers. However, some remained and lived in China towns (Lawrence *et al.*, 1952:121).

The year 1790 recorded the first Indian who visited Salem, Massachusetts. After this, quite a number of Indians migrated from Punjab to Canada and Northwest United States of America where they served as domestic servants, worked at lumberyards,

constructed railroads and worked in farms. Like their Chinese counterparts, they came to America with the prospect of saving enough money to send to their families back in India. For Indians residing in America, the activities of the Asiatic Exclusion League (A.E.L.) had serious consequences on them. Hence, they were not able to own lands or get hired. This hardship not only led to deplorable living condition but also influenced their option of living in slums. The Indians also had difficulty sponsoring their women into United States of America because of the Government's fear of them starting a family and establishing their roots. Since the activities of the A.E.L. restricted the flow of Indians into the States, the Indian population consisted mostly of students in the universities (Erhart, 2011).

The historical experiences of the Asian ethnic minority group in the United States make the group's experiences unique when compared to other ethnic minorities inhabiting the United States of America. A popular distinguishing factor between Asian Americans and other minority groups is the popular model minority myth. Yoo (2010) argues that, "There is a popular image of Asian American students as the 'model minority'". The stereotype suggests that Asian Americans are academically, economically, and socially successful than any other racial minority groups". This supposed 'success' of the Asian American is connected to core cultural Asian values of hard work. Unlike their African American or Native Indian counterparts who enjoy the centre of attraction because of their bitter experiences of slavery and extermination, the Asian Americans' problems do not receive wide recognition because of their supposed 'success'. Therefore, rather than positively affect the lives of the immigrants; this success model bears adverse consequences for the Asian American.

### **1.10 The Short Story**

The short story cannot be mentioned without referring to the transformation that occurred from the tale to what is known today as the short story. The tale before its evolution as short story is, as some critics have argued as old as man. This is because of man's natural desire to tell stories. This is because of man's desire to tell stories of war, mysteries and love. The tale is a reflection of a culture and its narrative framework. In some cases, tales are intra-cultural, because only people of a particular culture can understand them. In the process of recounting his experiences, the raconteur selects some details and omits others, describes key characters, emphasizes certain events and ignores the irrelevant ones. In plain terms, an editing process is involved in oral narratives. Literary Critics like Emenyonu (1990), Atkinson (1916) and Hunter (2007), have made formal distinctions between the short story and its harbinger (the tale). Emenyonu (1990:272) opines that the short story originated from "oral tradition and from human impulse to tell and hear stories". Atkinson (1916:ix) solidifies Emenyonu's claim and states that:

Mankind has always loved to tell stories and to listen to them. The most primitive and unlettered peoples and tribes have always shown and still show this universal characteristic. As far back as written records go we find stories; even before that time, they were handed down from remote generations by oral tradition.

This view gives credence to the transition of the short story from the oral form to the written text. In addition, Hunter (2007:1) states in *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* that,

The cave-dwelling storyteller... simply told, and if he was lucky and able enough to hold his hearers' attention, then they might not kill or eat him. It was incident and excitement, anticipation and suspense, and above all the provision of a satisfying ending that characterized the story as it was embedded in oral culture....

These are all pointers to the fact that the short story cannot be detached from the oral tradition as ideas, world view, experiences were handed down over from one

generation to the next by word of mouth. The short story as a conscious genre did not emerge until the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the forms that existed before it acted as precursors to the form. These precursors include parables from the Holy Bible, fable, jests, moralizing fairy tales, short myths, historical legends and middle length poems. As a distinctive sub-genre of the prose fiction and an enduring literary form, the short story defies a single definition. Baudin (1953) in the preface to his book *Contemporary Short Stories* posits that the short story is, “A work of fiction embodying a central motif, somewhere between a few hundred and ten- thousand words (too long for a suicide note and too short for a novel)”. This implies that the short story should be positioned between a few words and the length of the novel. Poe a major proponent of the short story posits in his review of Hawthorne’s *Twice Told Tales* (1842) that the short story provides the modern writer with several opportunities enabling him/her to use “A vast variety of modes or inflections of thoughts and expression” (Poe & Thompson 1984:573). Poe also wrote that:

We allude to the short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal. The ordinary novel is objectionable, from its length, for reasons already stated in substance. As it cannot be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from totality (Poe, 1974: 875).

Poe in the above quotation makes an argument for the length of the short story and posits that a typical short story should be read in a sitting. Henry James on the other hand opines in his notebook entry that the short story “...must be an idea – it can’t be a story in the vulgar sense of the word. It must be a picture; it must illustrate something”. This shows that the emphasis of the short story is to prove a point and that point or idea should exemplify something. Walter (1981:7) is also of the opinion that “The short story deals with a single incident; the fruit of a single moment of time; a single perception”. Fowler (1989:10) defines the short story as, “...probably the most ancient of all literary

terms: the terms cover everything from fable, folktale and fairy-story, to such sophisticated and highly developed structures as the German novella, via the stories of Decameron and Cervantes exemplary tales. May (1994) gives an encompassing definition of the short story and all it entails. He defines the short story as being "...identified with 'epiphanic' perceptions of reality, which focus on lyric evocation and revelatory moments rather than plot or linear narrative and development". These diverse definitions may not have any similitude in terms of word for word definition. However, they all seem to concur on the notion of the "idea as hero" and the technique of the short story that makes it a unique genre. Jhumpa Lahiri and Brian Leung's short stories deploy the techniques of a short story to present the 'idea' which itself is the 'crisis' of the story. Each of the stories is a symbolic representation of Asian American immigrants and their peculiarities.

Most critics like Litz (1975) in the preface to *Major American Short Stories* have argued that the short story is an American creation or what others call a 'national art form.' Litz states that, "The history of American short story is a faithful record of our literary history and cultural development". O'Connor (2004: 39) also argues that to the Americans the short story has become 'a national art form'. This is because the short story has held a prominent position in the nation's literary tradition and some of the nation's famous authors have produced a substantial number of short stories that are considered as masterpieces in contemporary American society. The rise of the short story form in America was largely influenced by commercial factors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They are: the changes in copyright laws – the copyright laws allowed publisher to pirate and print British works at a cheap rate, the exponential rate of improved technologies in the printing industry and the repeal of mid-Victorian free duties on paper. All these factors

coincided with the rapid growth of magazine publications, which became lucrative and accessible for middle class literates in industrializing nations of the West.

The magazines featured poems, literary criticism, essays and the likes. In a bid to fill up the pages of these publications, there were calls for the submission of short fiction. The magazine became popular because of the need to satisfy the appetite of the new reading public. Industrialization and crave for survival constrains the typical American. Hence, she or he has little or no time for leisure but devotes time to the reading of magazine. It is in this light that Poe opines in one of his letters, “I perceived that the whole energetic, busy spirit of the age tended wholly to the Magazine literature – to the curt, the terse, the well-timed, and the readily diffused, in preference to the old forms of the verbose, the ponderous and the inaccessible” (Poe cited in Scofield,2006:7).

The popularity of the magazine at that time, qualified it as an appropriate instrument for expressing the American literary culture quite different from that of Britain.It also created a reading public by featuring short stories, lyrics, essays and poetry. Thus, writers like Allan Poe saw the magazine as an avenue to create an independent American literary tradition devoid of external influences (Scofield 2006:5). The first literary text that can be credited as the precursor of the modern short story form is “The Two Drovers” by Walter Scott which was published in *Chronicles of the Canongate* in the year 1827 (Boyd, 2006). Boyd goes further to state that this story is an expedient landmark in the development of the short story form, “it is a convenient starting point, if only because the short story’s subsequent rapid development was international also not only inspiring George Eliot and Thomas Hardy at Home, but also Balzac in France, Pushkin and Turgenev in Russia and Fenimore Cooper and Hawthorne in America”.

Before the advent of the short story in America, several popular prose forms shared some elements obtainable in the short story. These prose forms include The Speech of Miss Polly Baker written by Ben Franklin, illustrative episodes in eighteenth century sermons, historical write-ups written during the early national period and the famous George Washington's story who admitted to chopping off his father's cherry tree by Parson Weem. Credence should be given to these prose forms because they contributed in no small measure to the emergence of the short story in America. However, they lack the basic features that characterize the short story, as it is known today in terms of setting, plot, characterization, development of theme and depth (Bendixen & Nagel, 2010). The publication of Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* gave the genre a new headway. Bendixen and Nagel (2010:4) assert that:

The short story as Irving shaped it in the installments of *The Sketch Book* was a work rich in description of scenery and locale, with memorable characters and vivid situations rendered through a highly polished style that shifted easily through a variety of moods but seemed especially successful in its mastery of a new kind of comedy. *The Sketch Book* also gave American culture its first literary best-seller, a critical and commercial success so great that the new democracy finally had an answer to those critics who had emphasized its paucity of cultural achievement.

Therefore, Washington Irving's two masterpieces: *Rip Van Winkle* and the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* marked the inauguration of the new literary form. This subsequent success encouraged other Americans to explore and experiment with the short story genre. Bendixen and Nagel (2010:8) posit that:

They grounded the short story more firmly in a clear commitment to narrative structure and plot, replacing Irving's genial rambling and lengthy descriptions with a firm sense of architectural form. Furthermore, they added a startling psychological depth to the development of character, employing a treatment of aberrational psychology in ways that transformed the Gothic mode into an enduring part of the American short story tradition.

The constant improvements and several novel ideas by subsequent writers after Irving, finally came to fruition by the beginning of the twentieth century. The genre became established as an important genre that is flexible and multidimensional, therefore paving way for several literary experiments by different writers including immigrant writers. In its modern literary sense, the 1820s and 1830s saw the birth of the short story in America (Bendixen and Nagel, 2010). Hawthorne and Poe surely improved on the precepts laid down by Irving and upgraded the genre to a proper work of art.

The arrival of several immigrants to the United States of America over the last several decades has not only enlarged and diversified the minority population but has transformed the American literary scene. Scofield (2006:8-9) is of the opinion that:

The short story is notable for the leading part it has played in the fictional treatment of Native American, African, Jewish, Hispanic, Asian and other ethnic groups within American society: disseminating ideas of cultural diversity and bringing these groups into various relations to each other and to the often challenged concept of a literary 'mainstream'.

The large number of writers from wide ranging backgrounds writing diverse stories from various points of view presents a country that is in perpetual transformation. In other words, it excogitates the nature of the American society and the need to amplify the voices of the various ethnic groups existing in the American society. Ling and Lim (1992:27) opine that, "For many ethnic writers, writing is frequently a writing of 'the story of my life' (or 'of my people's lives'), whether it takes the form of poetry, fiction, or autobiography". Through these literary publications, they put in words their historical, social, political and economic experiences. Hence, beyond entertaining their readers, ethnic minority American Short Story writers are saddled with the responsibility of

reminding their readers of the ferociousness meted out to ethnic minority groups in terms of slavery, segregation, poverty, hiring restrictions, unequal wage allocation, exclusion of Chinese and A.E.L. for Indians.

In adding their voices to the literary scene, some of these authors have adapted the 'national art form' as their medium of expression. The short story has played and is still playing a crucial role in defining and portraying the lives of Whites and non-White Americans. Scofield (2006:238) posits that, "The short story is perhaps the exemplary form for the perception of crisis, crux, turning point; and as such it has proved ideal for recording decisive moments, intimately private but often with broad social resonances, in the swift development of the psyche of post-independence America". For a populous nation like America with diverse ethnic minority groups, the versatility of the short story makes it a suitable genre for the representation of the experiences of minority groups.

Asians residing in the United States of America have also contributed extensively to the pluralistic nature of present day American literature. To support this claim is Heike (2003:6) who argues that, "Asian American literature constitutes a significant and growing aspect of U.S.-American". For a fast developing nation like America, the short story as a distinctive genre of prose fiction is regarded by most writers as a suitable medium for representing human experiences because of its flexibility and ability to change focus on a variety of topics, people and places. In other words, the short story captures basic details and experiences concisely. As the situation is with other minority groups, Asian American short stories began as a protest against marginalisation in all guises and cultural stereotypes. Sumana(2004:1) posits that, "The landscape of contemporary literature has been transformed by the rising tide of globalization; texts are

now crossing the borders of nations and cultures as newly emerging authors express myriad voices of those once considered the subaltern”. In other words, the progressive transformation of Asian American writings from protest literature to a record of their experiences has come to assume a weight of its own.

Because of its indispensable role in illuminating human experiences, contemporary American writers like Lahiri and Leung utilise the short story form in their representation of Asian Americans’ experiences. They capture their experiences by making concise statements in a limited space. They also present brief but pictorial glimpses of Asian Americans’ experiences capable of making indelible imprints on the reader without subjugating him/her to the strenuous method of the novel. This is achieved by focusing on the crisis of the story, which is the life changing experience of the characters. To give credence to the auspiciousness and importance of the short story, in depicting the experiences of dislocated Asian Americans, Scofield agrees with O’Connor’s opinion of the short story as a suitable medium for portraying the experiences of an alienated and troubled individual and the ethnic minority group. However, he argues that this definition is not sufficient and posits that, “...there is a sense in which the form does lend itself to the examination of scenes from the life of the common man or woman, episodes and crises which are typical of those of ordinary life but hardly demand the developed treatment of the novel” (Scofield, 2006:8). To the Asian American short story writer, the short story acts as a diary that records important events of the Asian American community. Thus, it serves as a historical reservoir from which other generations can draw reference. The short story has played an indispensable role in illuminating the American experience and that of minority groups by extension.

### **1.11 Background of Jhumpa Lahiri**

Jhumpa Lahiri was born as Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri in London in the year 1967 to Bengali parents. Her literary career started with the publication of a collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). This was followed by the publication of her novel *The Namesake* (2003) which brought her to lime light and has been adapted as a film. It is also a major national best seller and was named the New York magazine book of the year. Her latest collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* was published in 2008. Her recent book *Lowland* (2013) has also been on the spotlight (<http://www.biography.com/people/jhumpa-lahiri>). Irrespective of the obvious concern about the human condition of Indian migrants, her works still carry great significance because they make a statement on the general human condition. This is hinged on the fact that her subject matter of migration, emotional isolation, loneliness and a host of many other problems that her characters go through are common to humans. She has received some notable awards such as O. Henry Award for short stories, PEN Hemmingway Award for best fiction and Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Born in England to Indian immigrants, it can be said that Jhumpa Lahiri's background has a great influence on her writings. By way of example, her first collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* is a detailed account of the lives of Indians and Indian Americans who are caught in the web of in-between-ness of two cultures. In an interview with Farnsworth, she acknowledges that *Interpreter of Maladies* is a reflection of her own experiences as well as those of her parents and their Indian immigrant friends (Farnsworth, 2000).

### **1.12 Background of Brian Leung**

Brian Leung was born in San Diego to a white mother and a Chinese father. He started his literary journey in Los Angeles. Because of his dual heritage, his mother's family treated him as white while his father's family treated him as Chinese. He confirms

this in between-ness in an interview with Eric Forbes: "...certainly I have often reflected on my fortune, that as a male I carry my father's Chinese surname, and so a signal is sent to those who encounter this name which seems to contradict my white appearance". His popular collection of short stories earned him the remarkable Mary McCarthy Prize in short fiction and the Asian American Literary Award and was named Editor's Choice by Entertainment Weekly. His recent novel *Take Me Home* is also a WilliaAward winning novel (Forbes 2009).

To this end, Muller (1999) opines that the American dream is an ideal way of life immigrants reckon with. However, the promise of an easy living becomes an illusion because of the complexities associated with living in diaspora. The same is obtainable for the second-generation immigrants although they have a hybrid identity, their sense of identity and living in diaspora is not only influenced by their parents' migrant history but also their personal experiences. Therefore, the effects of dislocation are contributory factors to the issues that will be discussed in the following chapters. The short story has proved to be a significant art form via which these experiences can be reflected. Scofield(2006:238) is of the opinion that: "Across two centuries in America the short story has been like a torch whose stabs of light, brilliant, intermittent, startling, have illuminated the most crucial areas of American experience". The short story as a genre of prose fiction has played an indispensable role in illuminating the American experience of the minority groups.

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## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Psychoanalytical Theory**

Psychoanalytical theory was developed outside the realm of literature by Sigmund Freud an Austrian psychoanalyst who pioneered the techniques of psychoanalysis. The field became popular because of Freud's interest in providing an efficacious treatment for patients who had hysterical or neurotic symptoms. His motivation was fuelled when he realized that hysteria, phobia, depression and drug addictions are not caused by organic symptoms but by emotional disturbances that originate from the unconscious (Horney 1942:7). He opines that these disturbances could be cured by uncovering the unconscious factors that underlie them. One of the basic discoveries of psychoanalysis is the repressed unconscious, which is situated in the mind. Barricelli and Gibaldi (1982:207) assert that, "The mind is not a simple unity but a divided unity, and that motives and the meanings of actions are actively kept from consciousness in the interest of self-protection and self-delusion". Psychoanalysis has become a method of therapy for particular neurotic problems and has acquired a reputation of its own in terms of general character development. This is because people resort to analysis when life becomes unbearable or there are psychological factors that serve as an impediment to their progress and damage their relationship with others in the process (Horney, 1942:8).

Horney's *Self-Analysis* (1942:39) also attests to the fact that psychoanalysis, "...has not only a clinical value as a therapy for neuroses but also a human value in its potentialities for helping people toward their best possible further development". Psychoanalysis has since moved beyond the confines of medicine and has been employed in different fields such as Childcare, Education, Film Criticism, Cultural Studies, and Literary Criticism. The relevance of psychoanalysis in Literary Criticism is important as it helps in the interpretation of literary texts. Jill Barker as quoted in Wolfreys (2001:98) opines that:

Both literary criticism and psychoanalysis engage in the interpretation of texts. The former explicates or comments on texts which have been crafted and (usually) published. The latter uses artlessly spoken texts, which are treated by the analyst as a source of information about the unconscious mind of the speaker, and used therapeutically.

In other words, psychoanalysis is a viable instrument in the analysis of literary texts because of its ability to illuminate the activities of the authors or characters' "unconscious". Literary Criticism employs the use of psychoanalysis by using its method, concept and theory in the criticism of literary texts. This method of criticism is referred to as psychoanalytical literary criticism and has contributed immensely to the understanding of literature. This form of criticism, which developed since the early development of psychoanalysis, has now evolved into a rich heterogeneous tradition. This ensued because of Freud's shuttle between the scientist discourse and that of the artist, novelist and poet. It is to this effect that Freud wrote several essays on literature that he used to explore the psyche of characters and authors.

Psychoanalysis has become a broad umbrella for other forms of psychoanalytic criticism apart from Freud's. Psychoanalysis has evolved into different strands with each critic having their point of divergence from Freud's theory. A few examples are self-psychology, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Relational psychoanalysis, Interpersonal psychoanalysis, archetypal psychoanalysis, Horneyan psychoanalysis and a host of others. These various strands of psychoanalysis arose because of the experiences and research of other psychoanalysts and therapists which further deepened the insight into the field of psychoanalysis. However, it should be noted that Freud remains the most popularly known analyst when it comes to psychoanalysis. For the purpose of this study, Horney's psychoanalytical approach will be used as an insight into the analysis of the

selected short stories. Her contributions to psychoanalytic theory have made meaningful impact in shaping the ideas of this school of thought.

### **2.1.1 Background to Horneyan Approach**

Karen Horney (1885-1952) founded the American Institute for Psychoanalysis. The institute was saddled with the responsibility of advancing psychoanalysis due to the dissatisfaction with the orthodox approach to psychoanalysis. Before this development, she was among Freud's early students and a founding member of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. She broke away from Freud's school when she objected to his ideas about sexual conflict, neurosis being a libidinal conflict, the passivity in women and the synergy between castration and anxiety (what he called penis envy). She went ahead to foreground her own theory of female psychology that eventually disqualified her as a training analyst. These views on female psychology established her as the first great psychoanalytic feminist. She also established her theories on neurosis based on her experiences as a psychotherapist. Paris regards as one of the important psychoanalytical thinkers of the twentieth century (Paris, 2002).

Karen Horney's theory has not only proven to be of value in the field of medicine but also in other disciplines. Her approach has been employed in the field of Cultural Studies, Gender Studies and Literature. In literature, some critics employ Horney's approach in identifying adult defences and conflicts in literary characters. Bernard Paris a prominent Horneyan analyst in his book *Imagined Human Beings* (1997) opines that psychoanalysis is a viable tool for the analysis of literary characters that are drawn like real human beings. This approach helps in analysing characters with the information supplied by the literature. This is also validated by Wellek and Warren (1942:102) and they opine that, "Literature 'imitates' ...and 'life' is, in large measure, a social reality,

even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary imitation”. Thus, Horney’s approach is a viable approach for the analysis of literary characters because of its ability to shed more light on the characters.

One resemblance that Horney’s theory shares with Freudian psychoanalytic theory is the concept of the unconscious. They are both of the opinion that the unconscious is characterised by hidden conflicts. The conflicts can be categorised into two stages namely mild and malignant. The former occurs when the unconscious elements are in moderate conflict with each other. This results in mild forgetfulness, slight instability in self-esteem and periodic moodiness. The latter on the other hand occurs when a person is compelled internally to behave indiscriminately and obsessively, in psychological pain, and a host of other traits. These traits result in the loss of meaning in the relationship with others, activities, things and even self. The conflict that occurs in the human mind is what is termed as neurosis. She also concurs with Freud as regards psychological problems originating in early childhood. However, unlike Freud, she does not believe that the adult simply repeats earlier. She feels Freud spends excessive amount of time on childhood experiences. According to Paris (1997:9), “The character structure of the adult has its origins in early childhood, but it is also the product of a complicated evolutionary history, and it can be understood in terms of the present constellation of defences”. This is opposed to Freud’s view that nothing novel happens in the life of an individual after the age of five. She opines that the development of the individual continues beyond that age and his or her later actions develop from the preceding ones.

Therefore, it is crucial to see what the immediate past and the process of growing up is causing in a person’s present life. In other words, a character is analysed based on

the present structure of the psyche as opposed to the analysis done in reference to the infantile origins (Paris, 1999:4). Solomon shares similar opinion with Paris “She saw the value of concentrating on the present behaviour in the context of character trends” (Solomon, 2006:4). In other words, she acknowledges the importance of childhood experiences however she does not attempt to explain adult behaviour in terms of infantile experiences, which according to her might not be objectively recollected. The fact that most of her analysis centre on existing conflicts and minimal attention on childhood experiences makes it useful in the assessment of literary characters. Bernard Paris goes further to say that, “Horney's structural approach is highly suitable for the analysis of literary characters, since we are often supplied with ample information about their existing defences, however sketchy their childhoods. Because it describes the kinds of phenomena that are actually portrayed, it permits us to stick to the text” (Paris, N.A.). Among her several studies, this study employs her postulation of neurosis in the analysis of the characters in the selected short stories.

### **2.1.2 Neurosis**

Horney in the *Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (1937:28-29) defines neurosis as “A psychic disturbance brought by fears and defences against these fears, and by attempts to find compromise solutions for conflicting tendencies”. This describes a person saddled with the difficulty of handling some psycho-social stressors which eventually results into internal psychological conflicts (intra- personal conflicts). Furthermore, Horney (1950:368) defines neurosis as “A disturbance in one’s relation to self and to others”. In other words, neurosis is an offshoot of ‘basic anxiety’ in intra and interpersonal relationships. This is exemplified in the way people cope and exercise control over inter and intra personal issues that are part of their daily occurrences. Horney from experience

discovered ten natural and inherent needs in all humans. Horney's view is that these needs are important elements human beings employ in every day survival. This explains why normal people experience all the needs but satisfy one need at a time before moving to others. She opines that human beings employ it to minimise feeling of anxiety and in relating with other people. These needs include the need for a partner, the need for approval, the need for power, the need to exploit others, the need for prestige, the need for personal admiration, the need for personal achievement, the need for self-sufficiency/independence, the need for perfection, and the need to restrict one's life to narrow borders. As simple and general as these needs are the magnification or over usage of one or more of these needs makes an individual a neurotic. While the well-adjusted person wields one need at a time depending on prevailing external and internal factors, the neurotic person holds unto one need even when it is not fulfilled. He invests his/her energy into it and disregards other needs.

Horney (1942:54-59) explains the over magnification of these needs. The neurotic need for affection/approval entails the indiscriminate need to please others and be liked by them. Neurotics with the need for a partner derive satisfaction in handing over their lives to a partner who can solve their problems. The neurotic need to restrict one's life to narrow boarders is to be complacent and undemanding. The neurotic need for power is associated with contempt for the weak and the desperate need for power. However, the neurotic has a fear of being used, hence s/he assumes that other people are there to be used and proceeds to manipulate them. The neurotic with the need for social recognition or prestige is a person who is extremely concerned with appearances and popularity. The fear of not being important is associated with the neurotic who employs the need for personal admiration. To avoid this, they consistently assert their importance and desperately remind everyone of how indispensable they are. The neurotic with the need

for self-sufficiency or independence is satisfied with being independent. Finally, the neurotic need for perfection entails the fear of being flawed or making a mistake. In other words, it is an obsession to be perfect.

The ten needs can be divided into three broad categories namely dependent/moving toward, domineering/moving against and detached/moving away from people. Dependent/moving towards includes the need for approval and the need for a partner. While domineering/moving against includes the need for power, need to exploit others, prestige, personal admiration and the need for personal achievement. Finally, the detached category/moving away involves the need for self-sufficiency/independence, the need for perfection, and the need to restrict one's life to narrow borders. Neurotics that magnify the moving toward people strategy are amenable people who protect themselves against feelings of helplessness by bonding with other people. The neurotic who moves against people are aggressive and anti-social people who defend themselves against sensed hostility of others by exploiting others. Finally, the group that moves away from people are detached people who protect themselves against feelings of isolation by appearing supercilious and reserved. These exhibited needs are also referred to as defences. According to the American Journal of Psychoanalysis (2001), "...she believed a deep inner conflict emerges in the individual leading to the need for elaborating layers of rigidified protective defences". In plain terms the personality conflict experienced by the individual results in the development of protective shields that can also be called defences. This process is what she has termed as the neurotic process. In other words, the disruption in human relationships gives rise to basic anxiety, which eventually cumulates in the development of defence strategies.

### 2.1.3 The Basic Tenets of Karen Horney's Theory

Solomon (2006:13-15) in a critical exposition intricately identifies the principal elements of the Horneyan approach to psychoanalysis, which in summation encapsulate the following:

1. Conflict in Horney's opinion is either the juxtaposition between the idealised image and the real self, the destructive forces against the constructive forces or the real self-versus the pride system. The real self constitutes those things that are true about an individual while the ideal self are things aspired for. For the normal person, the real and the ideal self are two sides of a coin but for the neurotic, these sides are too far apart. The power tussle between the opposing sides results into inner conflict.
2. Secondly, the emphasis on the present in the process of therapy is infinitely effective than the focus on the past. Horney argues that the detailed recollection of the patient's childhood or early experiences does little or nothing in relieving his/her present conflicts. Horney (1945:218). In other words, less emphasis is placed on the patient's infant experiences and much focus is placed on what the patient is currently experiencing. Thus she focuses on inner conflicts and adult defences which provides enough information which the analyst or psychologist can work with. According to her, focusing on the present is more efficacious than focusing on the past.
3. Character disorder emanates from degeneration in interpersonal relationships.
4. Aggression and sexual morbidity are stimulated by frustration of basic needs for safety, security and love. She turns down Freud's proposition that instincts are biological hence, they cannot be altered. She summarises this in her book *New Way to Psychoanalysis*: "by regarding biological factors as the ultimate causamovens, one is bound to come to rock bottom in therapy because as Freud points out, one cannot change what is determined by biology" (Horney 1939: 71).
5. The constant desire to develop into a reasonable and better person. In other words, as long as an individual lives, s/he keeps evolving. This principle is born out of the positive disposition Horney exhibits towards the positive recovery of her patients. This goes further to validate the previous point.
6. The root cause of character disorder can be traced to basic anxiety. Anxiety is the dynamic centre of neurosis... Horney (1937:41). Furthermore, this approach is of the opinion that character disorder captures the patients' internal struggles with ambition,

hostilities, alienation, hopelessness, despair, fear, and estrangement. Furthermore, some specific cultural elements also contribute to character disorder.

#### 7. Poor self-esteem an aftermath of over or under valuation of self.

Following the aforementioned ideas as guidelines, the analysis of the characters in the selected short stories will rely mostly on Horney's recognition and classification of neurotic trends and how characters espouse them to cope with conflicts. This study uncovers the importance of Horneyan approach in the analysis of short stories. It argues that although the short story does not make much room for an extensive psychological character study, the Horneyan psychoanalytic theory is suitable for analysing the genre because it interprets human behaviour in terms of its function within the present psyche rather than in terms of puerile origins. Paris asserts that, "Horneyan approach does not force us to invent character's early history but permits us to utilize exactly the kind of information that literature supplies" (Paris, 1997:xi). Therefore, the use of concise phrases about the character conveys the needed information to the reader. It is relevant to this thesis because the short story achieves its brevity and unity by focusing on one isolated incident in the life of a character, or on one character's relationship with others. In other words, the short story as it is known is an art that 'runs to the end'; hence, the luxury for plot and character development is limited.

## **2.2 Literature Review**

This section of the study reviews germane critical literature on the concept of dislocation and Lahiri Jhumpa's *Interpreter of Maladies*. This review will exempt Brian

Leung's *World Famous Love Acts* because of limited critical literature. However, there are related critical materials that aid in understanding his short stories.

### **2.2.1 Dislocation**

Pradip(2000), in an article titled "Dislocated Subjects: The Story of Refugee Women", defines dislocation as a "Psycho-social transition whereby the individual's identity and sense of self is disrupted causing trauma but also forcing the individual to seek out a new identity in order to adapt to a new social context" (Pradip, 2000: 26). Pradip opines that societal transformation, war, coerced human displacement are some of the causes of dislocation. Amidst all these factors, Pradip's emphasis is the dislocation that occurs because of war or coercion and its impact on refugee women. The point of divergence between Pradip's article and this study is that the plight of the refugee is quite different from that of the migrant. The migrant in most cases as have been mentioned earlier leaves his home country on his own accord. The refugee on the other hand suffers profound consequences than his/her counterpart (the migrant). This study emphasizes the fact that the experiences of refugee women are unique from that of their male counterparts.

Employing the Canadian and Scottish history as case study, Alexander (2001) strongly opines that dislocation among the rich and poor ineluctably occurs because of free market. He goes further to enumerate some factors that lead to dislocation:

Dislocation can have diverse causes. It can arise from a natural disaster that destroys a person's home or from a debilitating accident that bars the person from full participation in society. It can be inflicted by violence, e.g., by driving masses of people from their territory, or by abusing an individual child who thereafter shrinks from all human contact. It can be inflicted without violence, e.g., as when a parent instils an unrealistic sense of superiority that makes a child insufferable to others. It can be voluntarily chosen, e.g., in the single-minded pursuit of wealth in a "gold rush," or in jumping at a "window of opportunity." Finally,

dislocation can be universal if a society systematically curtails psychosocial integration in all its members (Alexander, 2001: 4).

The factors enumerated in the quotation above are cited as causative factors for dislocated and dysfunctional people. In *The Roots of Addiction in Free Market Society* (2001), Alexander argues that, “Dislocation is an embodiment of various forms of disruption of everyday life” (2001: 10). Alexander also argues that dislocation is the prerequisite to addiction. According to him, an addiction becomes a replacement when a person finds it difficult to attain the ‘ideal’ life for which s/he hopes. Alexander (2001:1) defines addiction as:

Addiction in the modern world can be best understood as a compulsive lifestyle that people adopt as a desperate substitute when they are dislocated from the myriad intimate ties between people and groups—from the family to the spiritual community—that are essential for every person in every type of society.

Addictions are obsessions, which offer a temporary gratification to an unfulfilled life. In other words, they are ways through which dislocated people cope with psychological disorders. The habits inculcated as substitute lifestyles (addictions) go beyond drug use alone to social relationships that are not adequately stable, gambling, excessive craving for food, shopping, television, internet, video games etcetera. The pertinacity with which they cling to this alternate life style is what makes it an addiction. Furthermore, he infers this causes a poverty of spirit, which he terms as cultural dislocation.

Russell’s *Dislocated: Trauma and narrative distance in Korean American literature* (2007) analyses five Korean American works. They are: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*, Richard E. Kim’s *Lost Names: Scenes from a Boyhood*, Heinz InzuFenkl’s *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, Nora Okja Keller’s *Fox Girl* and Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life*. Using the Reader response theory as an analytical framework and

espousing some concepts from cultural trauma, Russell focuses on the literary aesthetics of Asian American texts by considering in detail the narrative features in the previously stated works. Russell opines that narratives from personal and cultural trauma are significantly affected by what he has termed as dislocated imagery and states that it disrupts the narrators story of the past hence the narrators need to erect varying degrees of narrative distance:

I do not wish to frame my discussions in normative terms, but rather examine narrative distance as it applies to the relative proximity between narrator and reader: near or far. I argue that more fractured, fragmented narrations...grant the reader a closeness to the story and a less obtuse vision of events, conversely, smoother, more congruent narratives keep readers distanced and uncertain (Russell, 2007: 14).

Thus in analysing the selected texts, Russell associates fragmentation and deliberate omissions to narrative familiarity. Therefore, the reader feels an intimacy with the narrator. Conversely, coherence in the narration signifies obscurity and withdrawal.

Chakrabarti and Dhar (2009) are of the opinion that, dislocation occurs in different forms and has evolved over the years to become a contemporary issue. However, they emphasise that people who become dislocated because of development-what they have termed 'development induced dislocation' have not received necessary attention. Chakrabarti and Dhar (2009:1) opine that, "Conflicts and wars among humans and also natural calamities have been the cause of dislocation since time immemorial. However, the advent of 'development connected dislocation' as a global phenomenon is relatively new, having gathered particular force since the advent of the industrial revolution". The development referred to in the above quotation could be in form of mining, setting up of dams, power and industrial enterprises. In their discourse of dislocation, they adopted the framework of economics of compensation from the field of economics arguing that dislocation may not necessarily be the dislodging of inhabitants

but also the interruption of the everyday lives of the inhabitants especially the establishment of enterprises, which might stand as a threat to their source of livelihood.

In an article featured in *International Migration and Diaspora Studies* vol. 18, Bhatt (2009) argues that the term dislocation goes along with relocation and Diaspora, “Diaspora is basically an experience of dislocation and re-location”. In other words, dislocation has to take place before relocation. The re-location or dislocation as the case may be is of significant import to the discourse of culture and cultural identity. This is an important facet in the life of the immigrant and has likewise gained popularity among Diaspora writers of literature. According to Dodiya (2006) as quoted in Bhatt (2009:46), cultural identity can be defined from two perspectives:

One is in terms of shared culture, a sort of collective.... the second one is what we really are, or rather - since history has intervened - what we have become ....Cultural identity in this sense is a matter of becoming as well as of being.It belongs to the future as much as to the past. Cultural identities...undergo constant transformation.

The implication of the dislocation/relocation includes loss of family ties, language, relationships among others. In this paper, Bhatt focuses on the conflict immigrants are faced with in a bid to acculturate into the American society using the LahiriJhumpa’s novel *The Namesake* as a backdrop.

Kelly in *Migration and Education in a Multicultural World: Culture Loss and Identity* opines that the issue of loss and identity, belonging, change, melancholy and disorientation are set up against the backdrop of heightened movement (migration), environmental degradation and uncurbed materialistic quest.Kelly admits the globalization of dislocation by asserting that the aforementioned issues are characteristics of contemporary times. These factors according to her are pivotal in the discourse of personal and cultural loss. However, her emphasis rests on the impact of dislocation on

rural life. Kelly attempts to synchronise these factors with education and like aforementioned scholars in this review, she enumerates the consequences of dislocation. Kelly (2009:104) opines that, “The resulting symptoms of this human distress of dislocation and habitat destruction—depression; alcohol and drug abuse; high rates of suicide, diabetes, and heart disease; and the breakdown of family and community culture—coupled with ecological distress... are embraced in [the] notion of solastalgia”.

Walsh (2010:5) further gives credence to Alexander (2001) assertion. He opines that, “...poverty and social exclusion constitute potent risk factors for the emergence and maintenance of serious drug problems and that culturally displaced groups, such as Irish Travellers, are particularly at risk of a high prevalence of Addictions”. Using the Irish travellers as a case study, he states that they are at a high risk of social problems. As a result of their trade being neglected, they become dislocated in their own society hence drug use becomes the ‘reasonable’ means of escape.

Similar to Russell’s studies is Jung’s. Jung’s *A Hermeneutic on Dislocation as Experience: Creating a Borderland, Constructing a Hybrid Identity*, focuses on the spirituality of Asian immigrant women using the Biblical account of the adulterous woman, Asian immigrant women’s stories in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee* and Andrew Xia Fufuda’s *Crossing* and stories of Korean Shamans. She examines all these factors from a post-colonial and feminist perspective. Jung argues that, “Dislocation provides numerous benefits but not without inflicting suffering on its subjects”. Just like other reviewed scholars in this study, Jung believes that dislocation is becoming a fast popular phenomenon. She also asserts that dislocation not only entails physical space but also has psychological/emotional implications, “Dislocation often implies a status of being on the edge or in liminal space, not only referring to being marginal at physical

territory but also at emotional and social territory” (Jung,2011:3). Her discourse of dislocation focuses on the results of migration and its effect on women in particular. The cost of dislocation according to her affects the immigrant’s spiritual life, “Because human beings are related to nature and to people in the place where they were rooted, the loss of a sense of place is deeply linked to crisis in one’s spiritual life” Jung (2011:2). Jung further argues for the positive impact of dislocation, which is obtainable when dislocated people create what she has called a borderland (space between cultures and their eventual marriage). The creation of the borderland enables the immigrants to construct a hybrid identity. This in her opinion is a positive edge for people in the borderland as they have the propensity to deal with cultural differences.

Johnson (2013) in her analysis of Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God's Wife* concedes with the fact that lack of achieving the ideal self, results in the person creating an alternative personality for him or herself through either enlightenment or re-creating themselves anew:

A full migrant suffers, traditionally, a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviour and code is very unlike and sometimes even offensive to, his own. And this is what makes migrants such important figures: because roots, language and social norms have been three of the most important parts of the definition of what it is to be a human being. The migrant, denied all three, is obliged to find new ways of describing himself, new ways of being human (Johnson, 2013: 3)

In her critique of Tan’s novel, she opines that cultural dislocation creates tension among the characters, as they constantly have to negate between the Chinese culture and the American culture. Negative outcomes of the separation from their motherland include feelings of despair, hopelessness, stress, anxiety, anguish and tension. They become vulnerable to the aforementioned factors especially when they do not have the personal or

social resources to master or feel part of their new society. Tan further opines that to preserve their indigenous culture the first generation immigrants reject some aspects of their host's culture dominant values and beliefs. Their challenges indirectly affect their family relationship and further degenerates to intra-personal conflicts. Although the studies of Pradip (2000), Alexander (2001), Russell's (2007), Chakrabarti and Dhar (2009), Bhatt (2009), Kelly (2009), Jung (2011), Johnson (2013) enumerate diverse causes of dislocation using different method of analysis. They all seem to agree on the fact that dislocation is global phenomenon and that dislocated individuals or characters engage in habits or erect some kind of barrier to make life bearable. However, little or no sufficient attention has been paid to the psychoanalytical interpretation of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Brian Leung's *World Famous Love Acts*.

### **2.2.2 *Interpreter of Maladies***

Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* has enjoyed an appreciable amount of literary appreciation from a number of Asian, Asian-American and American critics whose critical discourse has focused on diverse topics. Some of the issues discussed include unstable relationships, the collection as a short story cycle, identity formation/in-between-ness, symbolic representation of food and a host of other issues. For example, Bahmanpour (2010) gives a detailed exploration of the female character and the indispensable roles they play in these stories. This article brings to lime light three stories ('Mrs Sen's', 'The Treatment of Bibi Haldar' and 'This Blessed House') that have received less or no recognition at all. In the analysis of these stories, undivided attention is paid to the female characters. Bahmanpour further gives credence to the short stories and describes them as worthy of attention in these words:

This essay...focuses on those stories whose main plot more directly revolves around the construction of the female rather than the male identity; stories that deal with the suffering, pressure and possible failure or success in the adaptation-process of these female characters in (re-)constructing their subjectivity, (re-)asserting their agency or negotiating their identities through either silence, resistance, negotiation, acculturation or assimilation (Bahmanpour, 2010: 44).

In the exploration of female diasporic subjects, Bahmanpour sees the post-colonial theory as a suitable tool in the analysis of the short stories cited above because they are dedicated to the representation of the post-colonial situation of Indians and Indian Americans who are caught in the web of 'in-between-ness'. Therefore, the postcolonial framework is used to further buttress the transition of these female characters into the hybrid space.

Sharma (2012) in an article titled 'Bewildered Relations' in LahiriJhumpa's emphasizes the fact that the major crux of the collection is the "loss of connection between people". Sharma claims that *Interpreter of Maladies* extends beyond the confines of diasporic concerns and focuses majorly on dislocation, isolation, and lack of communication that characterize perplexed human relationships. Sharma (2012: 9 - 10) opines that, "This much heralded collection is largely celebrated, and correctly so not for its examination of diasporic anxieties but for its exploration of human relations where she successfully explores the communication barriers, incompatible distinctions, isolation and dislocation in relationships". From the above statement, it can be deduced that Sharma sees the aforementioned factors as reasons that impede growth in relationships. The tension that ensues in the lives of the characters occurs because of 'in-between-ness' (pushing and pulling between cultures). This in turn has adverse effects on their relationships and communication.

Furthermore, another review of Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* proposes that food is a reoccurring theme in the collection. Grag and KhushuLahiri (2012) argue that food is an integral aspect of the immigrants' identity. The grandeur that accompanies the preparation of Indian meals is not only an indication of nostalgia for 'home' but also a creation of an imaginary idea of their homeland. In other words, the daily ceremonial preparation and consumption of Indian meals is symbolic because they serve as a link between the opposing sides of past and present, home and abroad and the real versus the ideal. Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* has been credited by Grag and KhushuLahiri as a presentation of, "...diasporic subjects who reiterate their identity through the repetitive ritual of cooking and consuming Bengali food. Lahiri uses food as *mise en scène*, which enables her characters to merge seamlessly into the backdrop" (Grag and KhushuLahiri, 2012: 74). In other words, food is a present symbol in most of the stories. Apart from food acting as a symbol of identity, it is a code that is of significant import and gives additional information on the changing status of the immigrant in his/her new abode. The choice, preparation and consumption of these elaborate meals recorded in the short stories signify the success or failure rates of the interpersonal relationships between the characters. Since the short story is a concise form of writing, the use of food as a symbolic representation of identity, nostalgia and a signifier for successful or failed relationships make up for the lack of excess words.

Brada-Williams (2004) on the other hand sees Lahiri's collection as a short story cycle. As opposed to the popular definition that a collection that makes up the short story cycle is characterized by re-occurring characters or a single location hence integrating the different stories into a bigger picture. Brada Williams makes an argument for Lahiri's collection which is devoid of these characteristics yet in her own opinion qualifies to be rated as a short story cycle. Although each story has its own character and plot, they share

a tie that blends the several stories into a single entity. Brada-Williams (2004:453) opines that, “The popularity and critical success of Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* in both the United States and India could in part be due to the delicate balancing of representations she provides through the cycle as a whole”. Brada lists reoccurring themes, which qualify Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* as a short story cycle. She goes further to state that the connection between the short stories is influenced by the balancing of contrast.

In summary, the studies reviewed above have not attempted a psychoanalytical reading of the selected short stories of Lahiri and Brian. It is in the context of all these reviewed works that this thesis takes another strand of thought. It discusses cultural and psychological dislocation as portrayed in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* and Brian Leung’s *World Famous Love Acts* using the Horneyan psychoanalytic theory. In summary, this chapter has discussed Horneyan psychoanalytic theory and has attempted an authorial and topical review of related literature in order to argue for a novel perspective for the analysis of the selected short stories.

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### CHAPTER THREE:

**CULTURAL DISJUNCTION AND MARITAL DEGENERATION**  
**IN JHUMPALAHIRI'S *INTERPRETER OF MALADIES***

*Interpreter of Maladies* (also referred to as *IOM*) is a collection of nine short stories that chronicle the unique experiences of Indian Americans with its settings in America and India. The stories include 'A Temporary Matter', 'When Mr Pirzada Came to Dine', 'Interpreter of Maladies', 'A real Durwan', 'Sexy', 'Mrs Sen's', 'This Blessed House', 'The Treatment of Bibi Haldar' and 'The Third and Final Continent'. These stories are a representation of the troubled lives of Indian Americans who are in conflict with each other, their culture and their host culture. In other words, these short stories depict the complicated experiences of first and second generation Indian community. Dubey (2002:22) states this about Lahiri's collection of short stories, "...her stories record the experiences of both first and second generation Indian immigrants and majority of her characters, like her, have relatives in India but their home, in unambiguous terms, is northeastern(sic) United States". These conflicts illuminate the weaknesses of the characters and their attempt to prevail over them by deploying neurotic trends. The reoccurring themes in these stories centre on the nexus between the characters and their Indian heritage and the disconnected feelings in marriages that are plagued with unique maladies.

This chapter discusses disjunction of culture and disturbed marital and family relations as portrayed in Lahiri's 'Mrs Sen's', 'Interpreter of Maladies', 'A Temporary Matter' and 'Sexy'. Deploying the techniques of the short story, Lahiri craftily weaves this against the backdrop of being dislocated psychologically or from a cultural background. The succeeding paragraphs underline Lahiri's projection of cultural dislocation and the trauma that ensues because of the tussle between different cultures.

### **3.1 Cultural Disjunction and the Tussle between the Opposing Sides in Lahiri's 'Mrs Sen's' and 'Interpreter of Maladies'**

Lahiri's "Mrs Sen's" illustrates that Asian American characters experience stress and trauma when they migrate from a familiar cultural milieu to an unfamiliar one. Ishiyama (1995:263) defines cultural dislocation as, "...a subjective experience of feeling displaced or not at home in a given sociocultural environment". The trauma that ensues because of this form of dislocation devolves into psychologically associated problems such as depression, alienation, homesickness, anxiety, intra-personal conflicts based on cultural differences and feelings of helplessness. Xia (2009:98) posits that, "If depression, anxiety and feelings of helplessness accumulate, the degree and extent of psychological disorientation may be deeper and deeper so that people may have difficulties in paying attention to the learning of new cultures". In other words, cultural dislocation greatly affects the Asian Americans' ability to integrate psychologically and the zeal to participate in the activities of their host culture. This is elucidated through the protagonist in the short story 'Mrs Sen's'.

'Mrs Sen's' is recounted from the perspective of Eliot, an American boy and orbits around a middle-aged Indian woman who finds it difficult assimilating into the American society. Bahmanpour (2010:46) posits that, "A detailed study of her character proves her to be struggling in the process of adaptation to the new American cultural space". In 'Mrs Sen's', Lahiri projects that the inability to integrate into the host society's culture becomes a fertile breeding ground for psychological conflicts in the immigrants. This is because dislocation goes beyond the physical. Gagliano (2000:2) is of the opinion that the removal of an individual from a familiar environment to a new one causes trauma. She asserts that the journey goes beyond the physical, "...a spiritual journey equivalent to thousands of physical miles". There are instances of psychological conflicts arising from Mrs

Sen's cultural dislocation. This psychological conflict is classified by Horney as the tussle between the opposing sides. This implies that the pull between the Indian and American cultures creates tension in her life as she tries to navigate between her native Indian tradition and that of the new world. In other words, there is a tussle in her unconscious between the 'ideal' and the reality she encounters in America.

Lahiri realistically sets up contrasts (disjunction) between the Indian and the American culture. This is apparent through Mrs Sen's constant conscious and unconscious comparison between the American and Indian culture. For example when asked why she wears the vermilion, she replies, "I must wear the powder everyday...for the rest of the days that I am married. Like a wedding ring you mean? Exactly Eliot like the wedding ring. Only with no fear of losing it in the dishwasher" (*IOM* :117). She further gives credence as to why America does not and will never feel like home to her. She airs out her frustration to Eliot on one of their afternoons together:

Eliot, if I began to scream right now at the top of my lungs, would someone come?... Eliot shrugged maybe. At home that is all you have to do. Not everybody has a telephone. But just raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind and one whole neighbourhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangement" (*IOM*: 115).

Mrs Sen understands from Eliot's perspective that America presents another scenario as a scream from anybody amounts to public disturbance, "They might call you but they might complain that you were making too much noise" (*IOM*:117). She compares the position of the driver's sit while driving with Eliot one afternoon "In India, she said, the driver sat on the right side not the left" (*IOM*:120). She prides her culture over the American culture, which is a commendable thing. However, she fails to adopt some important strands of the American culture, that is acculturation, which is the "...acceptance and adaptation of basic elements of the local culture, its language and its

lifestyle” (Esman, 2009:103) makes it difficult for her to fit into the American mainstream; thereby making her stay a traumatic one.

Mrs Sen is a neurotic with the need for perfection. This explains why her inability to attain in America the ‘perfection’ obtainable in India, makes her detached and depressed in the America. Horney opines that, “*Perfectionism*, identifies himself with his standards. This type feels superior because of his high standards, moral and intellectual, and on this basis looks down on others. His arrogant contempt for others, though, is hidden from himself as well behind polished friendliness, because his very standards prohibit such ‘irregular’ feelings” (Horney, 1950:196). Abstinence from driving, cooking and being hospitable herald moments of severe depression for Mrs Sen, “In November came a series of days when Mrs Sen refused to practice driving. The blade never emerged from the cupboard, newspapers were not spread on the floor. She did not call the fish store, nor did she prepare chicken” (*IOM*:127). She only indulges in activities that link her to India like listening to the fare well tape by her family members, reading old letters from home and listening to Indian music.

‘Mrs Sen’s’ illustrates that the promise of an easy living in America becomes a mirage when the immigrants are faced with difficult situations. From the illustrations given above, it is obvious that Mrs Sen’s neurotic trend deters her from living the life of fun she and her relatives anticipated prior to her arrival in America. As a result, life in America becomes frustrating for her. In a feat of sadness and depression, she confides in Eliot, “Send pictures they write. Send pictures of your new life. What pictures can I send...They think I live the life of a queen...they think I press buttons and the house is clean...They think I live in a palace” (*IOM*:125). The reality before her nulls the expectation she had. Hitherto, she is psychologically disorientated after she has been

confronted with the deeper meanings and expectations that are not only alien but also difficult to identify with.

Mrs Sen's reluctance to drive is a symbolic representation of her inability to adapt into the American society. Her refusal to take caution and calculated risks results in her eventual disappointment in the American society, "No more, she said, her forehead resting against the top of the steering wheel. I hate it. I hate driving. I won't go on" (*IOM*: 131). Admitting this symbolises that she is helpless and finds it difficult to integrate into the American mainstream. She sees the American society as too big for her to live in and a fast moving train with everyone living their lives. The dilemma and harsh realities she encounters results in psychological conflict, which has serious consequences on her and her husband by extension. Mrs Sen's behaviour can be best described in the words of Johnson (2013:3), "A full migrant suffers, traditionally, a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviour and code is very unlike and sometimes even offensive to, his own". This implies that conforming to the host community's culture becomes unattainable for the Asian American who sees no resemblance between his/her native culture and the American culture.

From the analysis above, it can be deduced that immigrants like Mrs Sen are assailable to home sickness. The fact that Mrs Sen reminisces so much about India while in America reveals her level of unhappiness. This occurs as result of being plunged into a culture with which she is not familiar hence the continual longing for India. The extreme 'silence' in America makes her bored therefore she opens up to Eliot when she says, "It is impossible to fall asleep those nights listening to their chatter...here in this place where Mr Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence"

(*IOM:115*). Another vivid illustration shows her preference for Indian fish over the ones obtainable in America. It is for the previously mentioned reasons that Mrs Sen makes her home in America look Indian because that is the only way to feel at home:

Mismatched remnants of other carpets were positioned in front of sofas and chairs... while drum-shaped lampshades flanking the sofa were still wrapped in manufacturers plastics. The TV and the telephone were covered by pieces of yellow fabric with scalloped edges... Neither Mr and Mrs Sen wore shoes; Eliot noticed several pairs lined on the shelves of a small bookcase by the front door(*IOM:112*).

Also by dressing Indian and constantly making Indian meals, she psychologically believes that she is in India. These activities however only heighten her nostalgia for 'home'. Bahmanour (2010:46) posits that, "Mrs Sen's attachment is also simultaneously blocking the "acculturation" process". McDonald and Balgopal (1998:1) assert that, "Immigrants in the United States face numerous challenges as they struggle to assimilate into the American society while trying to retain their ethnic and cultural identity". In other terms, the conversion in terms of assimilation or acculturation as the case maybe becomes somewhat difficult for Mrs Sen because of her existing identity and memories. The idea of living in America, but falling back on the memories of India which she usually refers to as 'home', reveals the psychological tension that ensues in Mrs Sen's unconscious between the idea of 'home' and its culture in direct contrast to her new habitation. Eliot eventually gets to understand what home means for Mrs Sen, "By then Eliot understood that when Mrs Sen said home, she meant India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables" (*IOM:116*). Her constant reference to India as 'home' makes it impossible for her to see America as her new home no matter how hard she tries. The new reality leads to inner conflicts, emotional turmoil and homesickness and eventually climaxes in the reduction of her energy and motivation. This implies that for the immigrant, "Home is not merely the habitual abode; it is where one belongs to, that

which gives him cultural and spiritual identity. It is his native soil, his mother country, his security which becomes part of his self” (Diwekar: 2). The sharp contrast between Indian and American culture contributes to her inability to integrate into the new society. Due to this fact, there is the probability that Mrs Sen might have over romanticized and glorified India and its activities:

But if we do look back, we also must do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (Rushdie, 1991:10).

In other words, her memories of India may be inspired by distance and the nostalgia for home. Lahiri through the character of Mrs Sen depicts that relocating to America is a painful choice for some immigrants. Wickramagamage (1992:194) gives credence to this when he asserts that, “Most people envision relocation as a painful choice between assimilation (betrayal) and nativism (loyalty)”. Mrs Sen is obliged to live in America because of her husband but she strongly feels about not only leaving India but also her family. She is portrayed as someone who cherishes the importance of kinship and the implications of separating from them. In this light, she feels pity for Eliot who spends little time with his mother.

Primarily, the absence of her support network accelerates Mrs Sen’s intense grief and loneliness. The same situation applies to Ashima and Dimple; characters in Lahiri’s novel *Namesake* (2008) and Mukherjee’s *Wife* (1990) respectively. They not only miss their relatives in India but also have difficulty conforming to the new culture. The three heroines (Mrs Sen, Dimple and Ashima) experience, cultural and psychological dislocation in their effort to settle in the new land. In other words, they suffer from the cravings for India their native land. The acculturative stress results in severe trauma and

psychological problems. Acculturative stress becomes a little bearable for one of the major characters in *Namesake* Ashima because she has a social network of Bengali acquaintances in Boston with whom she relates. The story is however different for Dimple who shares the same predicament with Mrs Sen. Dimple is not also able to overcome the acculturative stress because of the lack of a social network. She aborts her baby and eventually murders her husband.

In 'Mrs Sen's', Lahiri brings to bare the importance of social network in terms of existing cultural groups and established networks in the form of friends, family and neighbours. The lack of a social network poses a serious challenge in general living, social-cultural and psychological adjustment for Mrs Sen. In the story, the only people she associates with are: Eliot's mother, her husband and Eliot. She is not recorded as having friends neither does she entertain any guest, as is the custom of Indians. Filtered through the perspective of Eliot, "It was never a special occasion, nor was she expecting company. It was merely dinner for herself and Mr Sen". It is obvious that the elaborate meals prepared daily are nothing special. Mrs Sen is out of place in the American society because she has been dislocated from a familiar culture to a very alien culture. The inability to blend into a new culture is aided by the attachment to her cultural roots. Her psychological disorientation influences her ability to solve problems and to make decisions. This decreases the motivation for adapting to the new conditions (Xia, 2009). Lahiri's collections depicts that not only does being uprooted from a familiar cultural environment cause trauma but that eventually, characters like Mrs Sen become alienated from their indigenous culture.

Lahiri's title story 'Interpreter of Maladies' also hints on the subject of being alienated from indigenous culture. This story suggests that over time, characters like Mrs

Senhaving been subjected to a rigorous and traumatic acculturation process become alienated from their home culture like Mr and Mrs Das. To begin with, alienation is a feeling of not belonging. This feeling can be political, psychological, physical, cultural, spiritual, economic or social. The alienation discussed in this study is the cultural sort. Cultural alienation therefore is the “The process of devaluation or abandonment of their native culture or their own cultural background” (Gianmaria *et al.*, 2009). Lahiri in this story illustrates that Immigrants become disconnected from their native culture (cultural loss) in a bid to integrate to a different environment/culture. In ‘Interpreter of Maladies’, the process of forging a new identity results in the alienation of Mr and Mrs Das’ native culture.

The title story ‘Interpreter of Maladies’ presents an American born Indian family on vacation in India. Because of their ‘hybrid identity’, Mr and Mrs Das exhibit the neurotic need for self-sufficiency and independence. Therefore, they exhibit a negative disposition towards their native culture and are estranged from the same. The cultural alienation of the Das family is made apparent through the eyes of Mr Kapasi the tour guide who wonders why a family that looked so Indian appear all dressed up in Western clothes, “The family looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did” (*IOM*:44). He deduced that their identity distinguishes them from other tourists he was accustomed to seeing. Furthermore, Mr and Mrs Das are not conversant with common traditional habits like ways of greeting. For instance, when Mr Kapasi greets them (Mr and Mrs Das), he expects them to respond using the same gesture, “...Mr Kapasi had pressed his palms together in greeting, but Mr Das squeezed hands like an American so that Mr Kapasi felt it in his elbow. Mrs Das for her part flexed one side of her mouth, smiling dutifully at Mr Kapasi without displaying any interest in him” (*IOM*:44). Having lost their grip on native

culture, they develop identities deployed to facilitate their adaptation in the American society. Mohanram(2000:4) encapsulates this in this quote:

We begin to construct our identity only when we perceive difference, or when we perceive our identity to have been eroded or eluded in some way. Pure or essential identity does not exist because we begin to construct identity only when the process of erosion has begun, when pure identity has already been adulterated in some way.

Mr and Mrs Das do not share any emotional affinity with India. They are not familiar with India than any other tourist thus; Mr Das relies on a tourist guidebook to tell him about his country and behaves the way European tourists do, “Hey do you mind stopping the car. I just want to get a shot of this guy...Mr Das took a picture of a barefoot man, his head wrapped in a dirty turban, seated on top of a cart of grain sacks pulled by a pair of bullocks. Both the man and the bullocks were emaciated” (*IOM:49*). This action implies that Mr Das is indifferent to the hardship and grim conditions faced by poor Indians as he simply treats them as one of the tourist attractions and takes the photo shot as a local souvenir to keep in his travel journal. In addition, Mrs Das show of indifference when flattered by one of the local men goes further to display how alienated they are from their cultural heritage:

Mr Kapasi heard one of the shirtless men singing a phrase from a popular Hindi love song as Mrs Das walked back to the car, but she did not appear to understand the words of the song, for she did not express irritation, or embarrassment, or react in any other way to the man’s declarations (*IOM: 46*).

Appearing aloof is an exponential factor in the existing cultural alienation and is ascribed to the failure of comprehending and associating with the mother tongue. The visit to the Sun Temple at Konarak means nothing more than a sightseeing adventure to the Das family. Having an Indian descent, the Das family visit to the temple should go beyond a sightseeing expedition as the temple embodies the historical and spiritual essence of Indians. “Mr Kapasi explained that the temple had been built between AD

1234 and 1255, with the efforts of twelve hundred artisans, by the great ruler of the Ganga dynasty, King Narasimhadeva the First, to commemorate his victory against the Muslim army” (*IOM:56*). The spiritual significance of the temple has not depreciated in spite of his constant visits on each tour. This is exemplified in his constant habit of admiring the bronze avatars of Suraya the son god: “Mr Kapasi walked ahead, to admire, as he always did, the three life-sized bronze avatars of Suraya the son god...” (*IOM:58*). Mrs Das on the other hand does not see the spiritual value of the statues and shows nonchalant attitude when the tour guide tries to educate her. It is in this light that Mr Kapasi concludes that, “He hoped that Mrs Das had understood Suraya’s beauty, his power...he would explain things to her, things about India...” (*IOM:59*). He arrives at this conclusion having come to the full realization of how ignorant Mrs Das is about her own cultural heritage.

### **3.2 Dysfunctional Family Relationships in Lahiri’s ‘Interpreter of Maladies’, ‘Sexy’, and ‘A Temporary Matter’**

Lahiri also explores family dynamics and portrays that distortions in human relationships play a significant role in breeding psychological problems for the Asian American. This is in lieu of Horney’s assertion that disturbances in human relationships not only lead to the development of neurotic trends but subsequent disturbances:

They provide a way out of the initial calamities, offering a promise that life can be coped with despite disturbed relationships to self and others. But also they produce a great variety of new disturbances: illusions about the world and about the self, vulnerabilities, inhibitions, conflicts. They are at the same time a solution of initial difficulties and a source of further ones (Horney 1942: 72).

Lahiri’s ‘Temporary Matter’, ‘Interpreter of Maladies’ and ‘Sexy’ depict that non-functional relationships in the family system create intra personal conflicts, which devolve into, inter personal conflicts or vis-à-vis. In order to cope, each of the characters in these short stories employ neurotic trends in their relationship with their family members.

These short stories present Asian American family units that are plagued with ‘initial calamities’ such as stillbirth, divorce or extramarital affairs. These circumstances inflict psychological instability in the individual and the family as a whole. These families can be categorised as psychologically disturbed families.

The degenerating marital relationship between Mr and Mrs Das in Lahiri’s title story ‘Interpreter of Maladies’ is symbolised by the insouciant attitude exhibited while they were on tour in India. Their tensed relationship is obvious to Mr Kapasi who marvels at their dysfunctional family, “They were all like siblings... Mr and Mrs Das behaved like an older brother and sister, and not parents. It seemed that they were in charge of the children only for the day. It was hard to believe that they were regularly responsible for anything other than themselves”. The nonchalant parental attitude exhibited from the beginning of the story by Mr and Mrs Das informs Mr Kapasi’s conclusion at the beginning of the story as they argue openly about whose turn it is to carry their youngest child (Tina) to the loo. Mrs Das fondly recounts the youthful exuberance and love she shared with her husband before the inception of their marriage, “We married when we were still in college... but then we couldn’t stand the thought of being separated, not for a day, not for a minute” (*IOM*: 63). The quotation shows that the emotional attachment Raj (Mr Das) and Mina (Mrs Das) shared before their marriage is an exact opposite of what is obtainable.

Mrs Das displays the neurotic need for self-sufficiency and independence. This defence mechanism is a response to her husband’s indifference towards her after their first child. This defence is evident in the hostile, anti-social, and independent behaviour exhibited throughout the trip. The emotional distance she builds between herself and her husband can be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to be free of her attention-seeking

venture. Horney (1942:59) associates with this neurotic trend, “The necessity never to need anybody, or to yield to any influence, or to be tied down to anything, any closeness involving the danger of enslavement; Distance and separateness the only source of security; Dread of needing others, of ties, of closeness, of love”. In response to her degenerating marital relationship, Mrs Das engages in extra marital affair with someone she finds more attractive than her spouse is (her husband’s friend) to assert herself. Her illicit affair is an offshoot of her marital troubles as every iota of commitment and fidelity reserved for her marriage vaporizes. Her act of not resisting advances made at her symbolises the loss of faith in her marriage as not even the cry of Ronny her son who “...cried to be freed from his play pen” (*IOM: 64*) deterred her from engaging in the act. Her neglect of Ronny becomes the foundation for the nonchalant attitude she exhibits towards her children and her husband. However, the profound guilt she suffers from the illicit affair has significant negative impact on her life and by extension those around her.

It is in the light of the above that she picks an impromptu interest in Mr Kapasi because his responsibility as a doctor’s interpreter (Interpreter of Maladies) qualifies him as a therapist worthy of procuring a remedy for her malady, “I told you because of your talents...Don’t you see? For eight years, I haven’t been able to express this to anybody, not to friends, certainly not to Raj. He doesn’t even suspect it. He thinks I’m still in love with him”(*IOM:65*).She recounts how the guilt has resulted in psychological problems and has given her pain, “I feel terrible looking at my children, and at Raj, always terrible. I have terrible urges, Mr Kapasi, to throw things away. One day I had the urge to throw everything I own out the window, the television, the children, everything. Don’t you think it’s unhealthy?”(*IOM:65*).Engaging in that extra marital affair is a way of detaching herself from her family and a medium of asserting her independence. However, her conversation with Mr Kapasi reveals that she is psychologically impaired. In other words,

Mrs Das does not get out of the affair without damaging her psychological state as she has battled with intense guilt, depression and enormous shame.

Mr Kapasi is not of help as Mrs Das has envisioned rather he helplessly states, “My job is to give tours Mrs Das” (*IOM:65*). The inability to proffer a solution irks Mrs Das as she convinces him to help her out of her predicament: “It means I’m tired of feeling so terrible all the time. Eight years, Mr Kapasi, I’ve lived in pain eight years. I was hoping you could help me feel better, say the right thing. Suggest some kind of remedy” (*IOM:65*). The image of Mrs Das as presented here contrasts the earlier image. Here she sounds helpless which is a direct opposite of the confident and assertive Mrs Das at the beginning of the story. These behavioural traits inform Mr Kapasi’s conclusion that Mrs Das is a frail woman drained of psychological and emotional energy. This explains why she acts aloof, shows no concern for her family and falls out of love with life. It is paramount to note that Mrs Das’ attempt at therapy yields no results. The deliberate omission of her lover’s name throughout her conversation is an attempt to disassociate herself from a past which she finds debilitating. Therefore, she consciously refers to him as ‘he’, ‘the friend’ or ‘Punjab friend’. A partial acknowledgement of her past implies that she is not only detached from her family members but also herself.

Like the previously analysed short stories, Lahiri brings to fore the importance of social network for the immigrants. Like Mrs Sen, Mrs Das detachment from her friends and family because of early marriage leads to not only physical isolation but also psychological isolation. “As a result of spending all her time in college with Raj...she did not make many close friends. There was no one to confide in about him at the end of a difficult day or to share a passing thought or worry. Her parents now lived on the other side of the world...” (*IOM:69*). Therefore, when she becomes overwhelmed with family

responsibilities and guilt, her family members could not provide succour. Also because of being overwhelmed and enmeshed in the American mentality of individualism, Mr and Mrs Das communal sense of living diminishes fast that “Rarely did they entertain”. In other words, the absence of the social support system intensifies her problem therefore; she suffers the consequences of her action alone without anyone to take into confidence. This isolation leads to a strain in her marital relationship with Raj. It is for this obvious reason of isolation that the personality and second occupation of Mr Kapasi as a doctor’s assistant interests Mrs Das and places him as a suitable candidate worthy of her secret.

Lahiri draws a parallel between the Das’ marital relationship and Mr Kapasi’s to show that irrespective of culture or continent, families are troubled by one malady or another. The marital contact between the Das family and Mr Kapasi makes him realise how deplorable his own marital relationship has become and just like he and his wife, he wonders if “Mr and Mrs Das were a bad match” (*IOM:53*). Immediately Mr Kapasi’s job as a Doctor’s interpreter receives commendation and is termed as romantic by Mrs Das, his perception about her changes. He subsequently begins to see her as possessing all the qualities missing in his wife and then becomes obsessively conscious of his appearance: “He began to check his reflection in the rear-view mirror as he drove...from time to time he glanced through the mirror at Mrs Das” (*IOM:53*). Mr Kapasi whom Mrs Das looks up to as an interpreter of malady, battles with his own malady of a dysfunctional family and secretly fantasies about having an affair with Mrs Das. Mr Kapasi is a neurotic with the need for affection and approval. He adopts the neurotic strategy of moving towards (compliance) Mrs Das and obsessively does everything to please Mrs Das and gain her attention. Mr Kapasi therefore translates a little moment of conversation, gestures and the use of the word ‘romantic’ to mean love.

Given the effects of extra marital affair on the psyche of the doer of the act and the family in “Interpreter of Maladies”, the story ‘Sexy’ is a detailed representation of the consequences of extra marital affair and parental separation on the psyche of the child. ‘Sexy’ revolves around Miranda an American girl in Boston who comes to understand the consequences of broken Indian marriages through her encounter with a seven year old Rohin. Lahiri establishes distinct parallels between Miranda’s relationship with Dev and the marriage of Rohin’s mother. Their marriage is an example of marriages that get broken as a result of illicit affair with white women. The result of these affairs is very devastating on wives and children as is exemplified through Rohin and his mother. The world of Laxmi’s cousin crumbles when her husband seeks a divorce after having a conversation that ‘changed’ his life with an English woman on his way to London.

The chancy life Miranda lives makes her an appropriate replica of what Laxmi her co-worker describes daily. Miranda’s unconscious expression of guilt is illustrated in her disposition and answers towards Laxmi incessant questions. However, being a neurotic with the need for a partner and affection, she lacks the self-will to pull out of the relationship. Miranda’s neurotic trend can also be referred to as dependent. Horney (1942:67) opines that dependent neurotics are, “...inhibited from making independent moves of his own...” Although she feels some guilt, her neurotic trend impairs her judgement and deters her from making rational choices. For instance, when Laxmi poses a direct question at her like, “If my husband so much as looked at another woman, I’d change the locks...she turned to Miranda wouldn’t you? She Miranda nodded” (*IOM*:92). Miranda’s inability to respond to Laxmi’s question symbolises her guilt of having an affair with a married Indian man. Miranda’s need for companionship cannot be overemphasised. However, she looks for love in an odd place. Her obsession for affection and partner makes her dependent on Dev to gain his approval. This is evident in her

extreme desire to please him, meet his expectations and be liked by him. Although she realises she does not gain from the relationship as much as Dev and that it would amount to nothing. She lacks the will power to pull out until seven year Rohin makes her see the futility, “Dev would open his eyes as if he’d been awake all along, smiling at her, full of a contentment she wished she felt herself”. Miranda’s attraction to Devan arrogant neurotic with the need to exploit others surfaces out of the desperation to hand over her life to another. Dev’s character is best described in the words of Horney (1942:66) as, “The person who must exploit others may take a certain liking to one who lends himself to exploitation...” This is exhibited in the way he enslaves Miranda by manipulating and preying on her weakness. As have been aforementioned earlier, her short interaction with Rohin changes her perception about her affair therefore, she concludes that, “it wasn’t fair to her, or to his wife, that they both deserved better, that there was no part dragging on” (*IOM*:110).

Lahiri explores the crucial effect of parental disagreement and separation on a child’s psychology and perspective of life. The title of the story is drawn from the response Miranda’s gown elicits from Rohin. Rohin’s definition of the word ‘sexy’ is very symbolic and depicts his impaired understanding of the same, “You are sexy he declared”. After much persuasion, he reluctantly tells Miranda his own definition of sexy, “it means loving someone you don’t know...that what my father did...he sat next to someone he didn’t know someone sexy, and now he loves her instead of my mother” (*IOM*:108). Miranda is aware of the situation in Rohin’s home however; listening to Rohin gives her another perspective entirely and eventually convicts her. The marital problems in Rohin’s home change his perception about love and the word ‘sexy’ most especially. This is the reason why Horney posits that an individual’s character is not

because of biological drives but a culmination of experiences that inform the individual's present psyche.

Due to basic insecurity, Rohin adopts what Horney refers to as the neurotic ambition for personal achievement. Through this trend, he succeeds in repressing his grief, anger and fear. Basic insecurity results in Rohin's constant need to achieve greater things. He achieves this by redirecting his energy towards memorizing the countries and capitals all over the world. This feat not only endears him to others but he also earns their admiration. Sensing his mother's unhappiness, Rohin becomes an unhappy child devoid of a happy childhood and a loving family. Rohin's system apart from getting acclimatised to wrong definition of words becomes conversant with abnormal things. This is exemplified when Miranda sobs harder and Rohin is not affected by the noise simply because he is accustomed to hearing his mother sob all the time, "Miranda cried harder, unable to stop. But Rohin still slept. She guessed that he was used to it now, to the sound of a woman crying" (*IOM*:109). Because of his parents' separation, he acts older than his age and listens to his mother's worries. However, in the period of his stay in Miranda's house, he exhibits signs of vulnerability, "...he clung to her, his legs wrapped firmly around her hips, his head resting against her chest" (*IOM*:106). Although still very young and intelligent, the marital problems of his parents rub on him and shape his opinion about life and humans in general.

'Sexy' explores the fact that there is a distinction between physical well-being and psychological well-being as these emotional problems might resurface later in life and damage his adult relationships. Although, Rohin looks and acts like every normal child; he is traumatized by the marital distress in his home and his mother's inability to pick back the pieces of her life after her husband's departure, "Parental conflict has repeatedly

been shown to influence the psychological wellbeing”(Falci,1997:17). As a child, he is indirectly drawn into his parents’ conflict that has placed him under emotional and psychological stress. Rohin unlike Bobby, Ronny and Tina in ‘Interpreter of Maladies’ is a spectator in the daily quarrels of his parents which eventually lead to their separation. In the case of Mr and Mrs Das, they do not have any plans of divorcing; theirs is a gap in family communication. Having considered the implications of extramarital affair and parental separation on Asian American families, it is pertinent to look at another factor that transforms healthy family relationship into tumultuous ones. The next paragraphs examine stillbirth and its aftermath on Asian American families.

In Lahiri’s ‘A Temporary Matter’, a possible marital destruction looms when Shoba suffers a miscarriage while her husband is attending a conference in Baltimore. The couple’s marriage undergoes hard times because Shoba cannot bring herself to face the reality of having a stillbirth. Her husband describes Shoba as, “The type to prepare for surprises good and bad” (*IOM*:6). However, she finds it difficult accepting the surprise which fate has thrown at her-losing her baby. Being a neurotic with the need for perfection, she is unable to overcome the fear of failing in her responsibility hence she unconsciously blames herself for the death of her baby. Lewis (1979:304) assertion explains Shoba’s action, “The bereaved mother may herself avoid contact with people because of unconscious feelings of shame and guilt. Her shame is associated with the sense of having failed as a woman”. This story reinforces the fact that irrespective of culture, the experience of stillbirth is a stressful life event.

Shoba’s inability to reproduce gives her the impression that there is a foreclosure to the achievement of one of society’s most celebrated milestones. This creates psychological problems especially on her part and an impending marital separation. She

(Shoba) who is never taken by surprise could not bring herself to admit that she has failed in her responsibility of bringing forth a child. Being a neurotic with the need for perfection, her happiness is truncated because she apportions the miscarriage as a failure on her part. Horney (1945:179) posits that "...mishaps of the sort that occur in everyday life assume undue proportion in his mind. Any minor failure may plunge him into depression because it proves his general unworthiness—even when it is due to factors beyond his control." The trauma of losing her child makes her reclusive into her shell hence she becomes a shadow of her old self. Shoba after the loss of her child begins to confine her life to narrow borders which of course is her own way of coping with her challenges. Her internal conflicts and disturbances culminate in the disruption of marital harmony, which subsequently ensued between her husband and herself. This traumatic experience, which strains the couple's marital relationship, leads to marital degeneration and an exchange of their normative roles. Because of Shoba's failure to reproduce, her interest for domestic duties progressively wanes as she becomes lousy about the upkeep of the house. Her tidy character gradually ebbs and gives rise to disorderliness, "She let the strap of her leather satchel, plump with files, slip from her shoulders and let it in the hallway as she walked into the kitchen" (*IOM*:1). She also loses track of how organised her home used to be, "Shukumar moved her satchel and her sneakers to the side of the fridge. She wasn't this way before. She used to put her coat on a hanger, her sneakers in the closet, and she paid bills as soon as they came". Horney opines that for the perfectionist, "...any misfortune befalling him—such as the loss of a child, an accident, the infidelity of his wife, the loss of a job—may bring this seemingly well-balanced person to the verge of collapse" (Horney, 1950:197). The untidy and nonchalant attitude is an unconscious reflection of her psychological instability.

Rather than been vulnerable to her husband, she channels her frustration towards her job as a proof-reader. Shukumar on the other hand channels his frustration towards household chores as that is the only thing that makes him 'productive'. Garg and Khushu(2012:76) opine that, "Cooking provides Shukumar the solace he needs, with the kitchen becoming a protective fold for him, and the domestic arena comforting him instead of constricting him". However, he neglects things that are more personal to him such as taking care of his body, confines himself to the four walls of his house and exhibits indolent attitude towards his dissertation. The neglect of minute details and reversal of roles by the couple depict how much change has taken place in their marital relationship since the stillbirth.

Lahiri establishes yet again the crucial role of social support system in 'A Temporary Matter'. It has been mentioned previously that stillbirth is a stressful life event thus the role of social network in helping the woman attain psychological wellbeing is very important. Danielle (2009:38) posits that, "...women's perception of social support from partners, family and friends following reproductive loss is related to emotional adaptation, such that bereaved women who feel supported are less distressed". Like Mrs Sen, Shoba reminisces about her childhood holidays and relatives in India with fondness. This implies that Shoba would have found the support she needs had she been in India because of the communal nature of the Indian society. However, under a foreign background, the marital union of Shukamar and Shoba slithers into an unhappy union due to the pressure of the stillbirth and the absence of social support system (friends and relatives) to talk them through their grief. They had stopped attending or organising parties, "One hundred and twenty people had crammed into the house-all the friends and the friends of friends they now systematically avoided" (IOM:9). The presence of Shoba's mother (the only family member who comes around to

help with some house chores immediately after the incidence) does nothing to alleviate her daughter's psychological well-being, "Since September their only guest had been Shoba's mother. She came from Arizona and stayed with them two months after Shoba returned from the hospital" (*IOM:9*). Throughout her stay, "She was polite to Shukumar without being friendly" (*IOM:9*). Lahiri presents Shoba's mother as a character who has imbibed the American individualistic culture as opposed to the communal nature of India.

The feeling of despair and hopelessness experienced by Lahiri's protagonists in 'A Temporary Matter' is encapsulated in the character traits they exhibit. Since Shoba does not create an enabling environment her husband makes frail attempts to reach out to her and only discusses mutually with her with the hope that they will pull through the predicament together. Shukumar's familiarity with the silence in his home seems to be a confirmation of his wife's guilt and shame. It is in this light therefore that Brada-Williams (2004) describes their grief as "Common yet isolated experience of grief for their lost child" (Brada-Williams, 2004: 457). Lack of support from her partner intensifies her grief and psychological dislocation. In adopting what Horney classifies as the moving away strategy, they dread seeing each other, establishing a conversation or eating meals together. She and her husband relate like strangers as they avoid eating or staying together. All Shukumar is left with are memories of what their marriage used to be, "He remembered their first meals there, when they were so thrilled to be married, to be living in the same house at last..." (*IOM:10*). The present state of their marriage falls short of the aforementioned marital experience:

For months now they'd served themselves from the stove, and he'd taken his plate into his study, letting the meal grow cold on his desk before shoving it into his mouth without pause, while Shoba took her plate to the living room and watched game shows, or proofread files with her arsenal of coloured pencils at hand (*IOM: 8*).

Keeping out of each other's way contributes in no small measure to their psychological state and their inability to discuss the unfortunate incidence as a family affects them. Matthews (1993:1) asserts, "Unbalanced families remain dysfunctional unless they recognize the source of disturbance and learn to deal with it". In the case of Shoba and Shukumar, they have substantial knowledge of the source of their disturbance but make no efforts to deal with it. Thus, rather than reaching out to his wife, he also adopts the neurotic need for self-sufficiency and independence (moving away strategy) and avoids her. Brada-Williams (2004:457) gives credence to this, "Taken together the sheer number of these small failures to provide care helps to define the depths of Shoba and Shukumar's common yet isolated experience of grief for their lost child as well as their waning care and love for each other". Shukumar's neurotic need is adopted as a conscious response to Shoba's neurotic need. His character can best be understood in Horney (1945:85) assertion that, "...the partner should be equally detached and so of his own accord respect the need for distance, or unless he is able and willing for other reasons to adopt himself to such needs". This establishes the fact that Shukumar adopts this neurotic need to grant his wife the needed space.

The temporary seizure of light, which indeed is the temporary matter the story refers to is not only remarkable but is the idea of this short story. Contrary to the envisaged outcome of their evenings together, the absence of light actually paves way for a reconnection between the couple. The confession game introduced by Shoba for subterranean reasons is of significant import to the story because it gives credence to the fact that she is actually trying to sever the ties, which connects her with her husband. Although she admits it is nobody's fault that she had a stillbirth, she finds it difficult to forgive herself for not being able to attain the ideal. Darkness in this story is very symbolic, as it becomes a neutral ground for the couple to share secrets freely without

fear. The restoration of lights marks the end of the revealing game and is also a significant part of the story. Although Shukumar feels shocked and relieved at the same time at Shoba's confession, his own confession/revelation proves to be more shocking and devastating for Shoba. The degenerating relationship diminishes the love between the couple and eventually climaxes in their possible separation. Shukumar's resolve to shield the truth about the baby's sex was informed by a bond they once shared: "he still loved her then" (*IOM:22*). However, his sudden resolve to blurt out the 'sacred' secret is borne out of a feeling of being cheated by Shoba who has secretly been devising a means of moving out of her matrimonial home. Shukumar's final revelation to Shoba is very shocking and proves too much for her to contain and for the first time husband and wife are vulnerable to each other as "They wept together for the things they now knew" (*IOM:22*). The story is open-ended, as it cannot be ascertained if the revelation will result into their separation. These tumultuous times faced by the couple cause them to search for their place in their relationship.

In summary, through the title story 'Interpreter of Maladies', Lahiri exemplifies the uniting theme that runs through the analysed short stories; which is the fact that all the characters have maladies that afflict them. *Interpreter of Maladies* presents Asian American characters who, having been psychologically dislocated, are in conflict with their host society and in the process encounter feelings of despair, failure and success in rare cases. For Mr and Mrs Das in 'Interpreter of Maladies', they are afflicted with malady of cultural and familial alienation and infidelity. Shoba and Shukumar in 'Temporary Matter' have a possible impending marital separation because of the loss of their baby while Mrs Sen is traumatised by the irreconcilable differences she perceives between the American and India culture. Finally, seven year Rohini is not only traumatised by his parents' separation but may have a wrong notion about love and the word 'sexy'

for life. *Interpreter of Maladies* presents characters that are in conflict with themselves and with each other (Intra and inter-personal conflicts).

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## CHAPTER FOUR:

### **FAMILY ESTRANGEMENT AND DESTRUCTIVE IMPULSES IN BRIAN LEUNG'S *WORLD FAMOUS LOVE ACTS***

*World Famous Love Acts* (also referred to as *WFLA*) is a collection of eleven short stories namely: 'Six Ways to Jump off a Bridge', 'Executing Dexter', 'Good Company', 'White Hand', 'Leases', 'Dog Sleep', 'Fire Walk: An Old Fashioned AIDS Story', 'Who Knows Her Best', 'Desdemona Ruins', 'Drawings by Andrew Warhol', and 'World Famous Love Acts'. Most of these stories have a common setting— Blue Falls in Washington. Out of the several stories mentioned above, this chapter focuses on 'Six Ways to Jump off a Bridge', 'White Hand', 'Who Knows Her Best' and 'Drawings by Andrew Warhol'. As typical of the short story genre, each short story centres on an action and revolves around one or two characters faced with an unusual difficulty. Deploying the crafty use of language, Leung offers an insight into the disintegrating lives of troubled and despaired Asian American characters. In few pages, Leung presents characters with varying degrees of hopelessness and the constant attempt to negotiate their unfavourable situation by employing destructive impulses.

#### **4.1 Depression and Destructive Impulses in Leung's 'Six Ways To Jump off A Bridge', 'A Drawing By Andrew Warhol'**

Leung vividly represents depression and destructive impulses (self-destructive impulses and non-self-destructive impulses) that afflict psychologically dislocated Asian American characters in 'Six Ways to Jump off a Bridge', and 'Drawings by Andrew Warhol'. The short stories analysed in this chapter show that there is a relationship between depression and self-destructive or non-self-destructive impulses. Lawrence University booklet on depression defines depression as:

When someone typically feels sadness that lasts longer than a few days or weeks. Depression has genetic components, and a predisposition toward depression can be passed from one generation to the next. It can also be triggered by stress or other life events or a combination of factors. However, depression is a treatable condition. Serious depression is a leading risk factor for suicide...

Chentsova-Dutton *et al.* (2013:1) posit that, "Depression and depression-like experiences disrupt lives worldwide, posing significant threats to people's productivity and well-being". In other words, it leaves long lasting psychological consequences on the individual. Depression in most cases results in suicide as is exemplified by characters in *World Famous Love Acts*. Orbach (2007:267-268) posits, "The most painful experience for a person in distress is the experience of disintegration. Thus suicide may be chosen as a last resort of maintaining self-cohesion when moments of high distress generate feelings of self-disintegration". Characters having suffered an unfortunate incident are confronted with the overwhelming responsibility of coping with an insuperable life. It is in lieu with this that Horney (1937:227) opines that, "The neurotic, whether or not he feels it consciously, is not only a very unhappy person indeed, but he does not see any chance of escaping his misery". Therefore, destructive impulses like depression, murder

and suicide become the viable route of escape. These impulses employed by the characters in 'Six Ways to Jump off a Bridge' and 'Drawings by Andrew Warhol' are the thoughts of wanting to hurt themselves or others.

Leung's 'Six Ways to Jump a Bridge', effectively conveys that unfavourable and traumatic life events lead to suicide. This is exemplified through Leung's characters that commit suicide as they have one or more upsetting events that triggered the decision to commit suicide. Inter and intra personal conflicts and the feeling of being 'messed up' make jumping off the bridge the only resort for the characters. Put differently, complex interactions of environmental, social, psychological and marital problems evoke feelings of worthlessness in the characters. The final working report of Royal College of Psychiatrists (2010: 6) further posits that:

Self-harm is behaviour, a manifestation of emotional distress. It is an indication that something is wrong rather than a primary disorder. For each person the contributing circumstances are individual. However, commonly they include difficult personal circumstances, past trauma (including abuse, neglect or loss), or social or economic deprivation together with some level of mental disorder. A person's self-harming behaviour may often be associated with the misuse of drugs or alcohol.

This assertion exemplifies the reasons why the characters commit suicide. For example, the jump for Rebecca Silvia commenced when she discovered she was three months pregnant, "She was just twenty-three, the same age as Susan. The jump first looked like an accident, but later her parents found a note...she looked relaxed because she was swinging her feet staring at the water. Suddenly, she leaned backward and was gone" (*WFLA*:12-13). Being a neurotic with the need for perfection, having a baby is a dent on her image. Horney (1950: 196) opines that for the perfectionist "What really matters is not those pretty little details but the flawless excellence of the whole conduct of life". The exaggerated feeling of guilt, self-blame and societal expectations lead her

into committing suicide. As the daughter of a Baptist minister, her attempt at complete infallibility is futile hence the need to put an end to the disgrace.

For Jason Glass, when he started using hard substance. Filtered from the perspective of Parker, Jason's suicide limns a character whose sensibilities have been distorted by drug use, "He saw someone pacing, not someone, actually, just a form moving back and forth. Finally, the figure stopped, and a voice cracked through the twilight air, the form bolting across the bridge. It was yelling I'm Superman as it push off the rail"(WFLA:3).For Ed Cane when his wife and children desert him and he loses his job:

Ed Cane had gone over something like this, Parker remembers. Got fired from his job as a welder at the Bonneville dam three weeks after his wife and kids moved away to Idaho. He just drove out to the bridge, weighed down his pink slip and divorce papers under a rock and jumped (WFLA:11).

All victims have a hopeless predicament or a reason as it were which has driven them to the point of psychological instability. Because their lives have fallen short of perfection suicide becomes the last resort, "It's just where they decide to stop being alone. That jump begins a long time before they make it out here" (WFLA:14). This implies that jumping off the bridge signifies the final phase of the suicide journey which started the "moment they decided to stop being alone".Filtered through the perspective of his protagonist Parker Cheung, Leung depicts that steps toward suicide begin when the individual no longer finds fulfilment in life "... all that pointing to the spot on the rail where they jumped. They got it all wrong because it happened well before that. When it comes to the final moment, it's already too late" (WFLA:17). This correlates with Horney's assertion that, "There are many ways in which we can kill something which is essential to our life; actual suicide is simply the most extreme and the final expression of

self-destructiveness” (Horney, 1950:148). In other words, suicide takes place psychologically way before the physical act. It also starts when the characters lose grip of the main reason for existence or when they feel an unforgivable mistake has been committed and feel there is nothing to live for. The sequel of this short story ‘Who knows her best’ gives credence to Parker’s assertion where Suzan appears as Zen with a life totally messed up and her eventual suicide as the consequences of her depression.

Presenting Parker Cheung’s unfulfilled dreams, Leung succeeds in asserting that most times first generation immigrants do not get their American dream realised. Therefore, just like Mrs Sen in *Interpreter of Maladies*, Parker Cheung concludes that the goals and aspirations he nursed prior to his arrival in the United States of America are quite different from his present ‘messy’ circumstances, “It’s not all how he imagined this stage of his life when he first came to the United States of America...” (WFLA:16). Helping paint the church every five/six years, contributing towards the construction of the bridge(which has become an instrument of death) and the elusive transformation of his native Chinese name to English (Pak to Parker); the wife’s preference of English name (Annie) over her native name-Ling are all attempts at assimilating into his new community.

Furthermore, ‘Six Ways to Jump a Bridge’ examines the devastating impact of suicide on the psychology of family and friends of victims. For instance, the Cheung’s settle down psychically in their new community, however they become psychologically dislocated and severely traumatised owing to the several suicidal jumps. Katie (Sheriff) admits that the family is the most traumatised of the inhabitants of Blue Falls, “In a way, Parker, I think you are worse than the rest of us. You have actually seen it happen” (WFLA:12). No member of Parker’s family commits suicide in this story. However, the

impingement of the suicide events on his family members range from depression, estrangement and eventual suicide as portrayed in the sequel story. The assertion of Michael and Rosen(2001: 9) supports the earlier claim that the upshot of suicide is not restricted to the victims alone but also to people around them:

...the effects of a suicide or suicide attempt do not end with one person's life. When someone attempts or completes a suicide, his or her death or near-death compounds the normal loss that loved ones feel when someone dies or becomes terminally ill. Suicidal behaviours involve guilt, shame, fear, and other mental stresses and can result in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among people who have suicidal feelings and those around them.

These traumatic events elicit feelings of guilt, alienation, fear and helplessness in Parker's family members. For example, Annie falls into depression because of the catastrophic consequences of the bridge. In addition, Susan retrogresses into depression after her boyfriend's death and is estranged from her father. Susan's depression is triggered by the event of losing a loved one hence the prolonged sadness, which she never recovers. Royal College of Psychiatrists (2010:36) gives credence to the fact that family and friends of suicide victims are assailable and co-partakers of psychological distress, "Carers and family members of people who self-harm are not themselves a minority group but their closeness to the person who self-harms clearly makes them vulnerable to psychological distress". Susan does not commit suicide in this story like other victims, however, she starts incubating thoughts of suicide from the moment of Jason Glass' suicide. Overwhelmed by the feeling of guilt she indirectly blames herself for being worthless in her relationship with Jason and her inability to convince him to stop taking hard substances. This is brought to bear when Annie tells her husband about the reason for their daughter's unending sadness, "She is his girlfriend. They fight over his drugs" (*WFLA*:7) Susan's action when her father speaks to her further affirms that she blames herself, "I just want you to know, there was nothing you could do...she began

crying louder...” (WFLA:4). Crying louder symbolises that her efforts in stopping Jason from substance abuse were not potent enough.

Like the stories in *Interpreter of Maladies*, Leung correspondingly brings to fore the import of the social support system in ‘Six Ways to Jump off a Bridge’. Mr Cheung’s failure to give necessary support to his daughter when she starts acting out of character makes him a key contributor to Susan’s depressing state. When depression sets in after the death of Jason Glass, he makes frail attempts to persuade her out of her new mood, “Once Parker heard her crying alone. He stopped and knocked on her door but she didn’t answer. I just want you to know he said...there was nothing you could do...she began crying louder and he put his hand on the doorknob but did not go in”(WFLA:4). This simply means that Parker just like the family members of the suicide victims plays a significant role in aiding his daughter’s depression.

Just as it becomes too late for the jumpers to seek help once, they make it to the bridge, so it becomes for Suzan and Parker. Parker fails to curtail Suzan’s slow but gradual long walk to depression and eventual suicide. For example, her decision to drop out of school is informed by the fact that over the years, all she has learnt is “how nothing lasts” and the feeling that the world is empty or meaningless. He becomes irked by the decision and opines that she has thrown a well-planned future away. “...hadn’t they later chosen a good career for Susan when she went away to study engineering? She’d even met a nice Chinese boy” (WFLA:8). Parker’s dilemma demonstrates that the choice of a ‘good’ career is of no significant advantage to Susan’s psychological well-being. This is because the lingering thought of Jason’s suicide affects the perception of her career and her outlook towards life in general. Being a neurotic with the need for independence and self-sufficiency, she has no expectations about life but rather sees its futility. In general,

all characters adopt what Horney has termed the moving away strategy. For instance, Parker's inability to reach out to his family and his failure to pay attention to minute details. His insensitivity about his daughter's emotional problems accelerates her work towards depression and her eventual estrangement from her family.

He displays nonchalance by assuming Suzan had gotten over Jason Glass suicide, "Susan had gotten over Jason, hadn't she?" It is only after several years that Parker realises he should have tried harder, "now he thinks he should have said more" (WFLA:7). The breakdown in familial communication culminates into intrapersonal conflicts and depression. Parker after analysing his family predicament realises that Susan just like other suicide victims has gotten to the level of the 'cliff' and can no longer be helped. From Parker's experience with Suzan, he discovers that the blame does not lie on the suicide victims alone but also their families who are not sensitive until the character develops self-hate and indulges in self-destructive habits, "All that ignored intuition, Parker thinks, those families of the people who jumped missed it completely..." (WFLA:17). Parker's conclusion shows that there could have been timely intervention to avert the various suicides if their families had paid more attention by giving them a good social support system, firm guidance with the victims' readiness to avail themselves to receive help. In his conversation with Katie, he resolves the puzzling thought besetting her mind "Maybe they just need a little hope, Parker. That is not it. Hope means you know you are missing something. It's more about understanding the lack of something than the possibility, he thinks" (WFLA:12). This statement correlates with Horney's assertion that the character must be responsible for maintaining a level of hope and a firm resolve to battle his/her depression.

In 'A drawing by Andrew Warhol', Leung considers depression and its consequences on other people who are referred to as victims. Horney posits that over time, inner needs eventually become externalised (Horney, 1950:291). In contrast to the characters analysed in 'Six Ways to Jump off a Bridge', the depressed character rather than self-harm or yield to his impulses to commit suicide redirect them on other people. 'A drawing by Andrew Warhol' is titled after a 20<sup>th</sup> century famous pop art icon and filmmaker who lived between August 6 1928 and February 22, 1987. He was famous for his soup cans drawings and his drawings in cookbooks. Leung weaves the plot of the story around Dave Jackson a supermarket manager who is lured into a road trip with a serial killer Gil. Having a coaxing and charming personality, he succeeds in manipulating Dave and gains his confidence. Fox (2001:105) gives credence to this assertion and states that, "Many of them (serial killer) are exceptionally skilful in their presentation of self, so much so that they are beyond suspicions and thus are difficult to apprehend" (Emphasis mine). He successfully masks his intentions to prey on unsuspecting Dave, "This is a man who carries books and buys macaroons for pigeons. I am not scared I say, and step out of the car" (WFLA:155). Because of his alternate personality, Dave playfully dismisses the assertion that he is a serial killer, "I am a serial killer. I smile and laugh...Are you going to beat me to death with your books? I ask" (WFLA:158).

Through Gil's character, Leung exemplifies that traumatic life experiences play a prominent role in shaping a character's personality and psychology. Gil's destructive personality is a culmination of the unhappy events in his life, personal motivations, fear and failures. For example, a factor that influences his personality is the loss of his wife, "I was married. She died, though. Rough stuff, brother" (WFLA:155). He also goes ahead to give Dave a brief over view of his life's experiences:

I have a degree in Library Science. Two years ago I was firing pottery in Blue Falls, Washington. A year ago I was working at Casino in Las Vegas. I had a wife at twenty six. She died. Nothing poetic. I came home from the library one night and she was lying on the floor of our kitchen. Aneurism.

The statement above, presents a man whose psychology has been dislocated by a failing and unstable life. The psychological effects of these unhappy events result in self-hate and impair his judgment. Horney (1950:293) sheds more light on the externalization of self-hate and states that, "...he tends to see others as contemptible and blameworthy. If anything goes wrong it is their fault. They should be perfect. They are not to be trusted. They should be changed and reformed. Since they are poor, erring mortals he must assume a godlike responsibility for them". This explains Gil's sudden need to put people out of their supposed 'misery' by murdering them.

Furthermore, the neurotic need for perfection defines Gil's character. The impulse to kill surfaces when he comprehends a representation of imperfection in others. In other words, in killing his victims, he sees himself as helping them and improving the world. Without emotions, he readily offers to be Dave's white Cadillac, "Do you want me to be your white Cadillac?" Gil in this instance is offering to be a machinery to his death. This further reiterates that he knows what he is doing and shows no sign of remorse or guilt for his actions rather he rationalises it. In Horney's terms, Gil exhibits the neurotic character trend of being aggressive, "The aggressive type justifies his sadism as being in the service of honesty, and with the belief that his victims deserve the treatment they receive" Solomon (2006:51). This implies that, he moves against people, which is the reason why he believes his victims deserve to die. While bored people in Gil's definition are neurotics like Dave who are complacent with their status.

Consequently, Gil's choice of Dave is deliberate. Dave is chosen because of the similar traits Gil possessed prior to the latter's transformation. He attests to this when he says, "I was normal. I was practically you. But that didn't get me far"(WFLA:155). Seeing the world as too big for him to live in, constrains him to be satisfied with the little allotment he occupies for fear of 'falling into the universe'. As a neurotic with the need to restrict his life to narrow borders, Dave's character trend is classified by Horney as the detached type. Paris (1997:28) opines that, "Detached people disdain the pursuit of worldly success and have a profound aversion to effort. They have a strong need for superiority and usually look on their fellows with condescension, but they realise their ambition in imagination rather than through actual accomplishments". An example of being allergic to change, is when he misses the opportunity of joining the LAPD in his prime and becomes stuck with the job of being a night manager. Inferiority complex sets in for the narrator, as he becomes nobody outside the supermarket

The major incident that takes place on transit to Gil's supposed place of work should be read symbolically. The serial killer becomes very compassionate towards a wounded dog and strives to rescue it from death. While Dave sees death as the easy way out for the dog. Hence, he silently wishes for the dog to be hit by another car so it can be put out of its misery, "It's going to die, I am sure...I know the dog is going to die...I am mad at the dog for not getting hit...I expect this or the motor home directly behind it to hit the dog." A deeper look at this thought reveals that Gil and Dave share the same desire of putting 'bored' or hurting people out of their misery, "Why did you kill those people? I say, Gil leans against the wall. They were bored. I have no reply. I am frightened that I understand Gil's logic, how merely existing counts for nothing" (WFLA:168). This similarity explains why he comprehends Gil's strange motive of killing twelve 'bored' people.

The narrator's life is ridden with complexities and questions before his encounter with Gil. However, his interaction with Gil bring these complexities to limelight and elicits honest answers to cogent issues. When asked if Kay (his fiancée) is the one for him, he simply replied, "we'll see" when asked in another instance why he is getting married to her he mutters that they have been together for five years. These answers imply that Dave's actions lack motive. He only indulges in them because that is what society expects of him even when it is to his detriment. This gives credence as to why Gil specifically chooses him for a life transforming experience. He says to Dave, "You should thank me this is the ride of your life" (WFLA:168). However, rather than make him the thirteenth victim, he gives Dave an opportunity to rewrite the story of his life, "You can change your circumstances Gil says you are worthless if you don't" (WFLA:169). Gil sums this up in his last words before he shoots himself when he terms people like Dave Andrews: "Andrews are geeks (people with unusual personality) therefore they draw stupid pictures in cookbooks. They work night shifts at grocery stores. They get married because they are next in line" (WFLA:169). In other words, there is nothing spectacular about them. Gil's promise to Dave of a life transforming experience is actually fulfilled. In this statement, he gives credence to the fact that letting Gil into his life "flipped everything all around" (WFLA:150). His encounter leads him into asking rhetorical questions about human existence.

#### **4.2 Family Estrangement and Destructive Impulses in Leung's 'Who Knows Her Best' and 'White Hand'**

Ogunbadejo (2014) defines family estrangement as, "The physical distancing and loss of affection between members often due to intense conflict or on-going disagreement. There is an incredible tension that is put on family relations when family

members hold grudges that they refuse to resolve”. Family estrangement is similar to Murray Bowen’s concept of emotional cut-off, which is defined as, “People managing their unresolved emotional issues with parents, siblings and other family members by reducing or totally cutting off emotional contact with them”. Rossi (2013:1) opines, “The emotional pain and grief is enormous. People mourn over severed family relationships much like they would losing a loved one through death”. These definitions illuminate the fact that estrangement is a tedious experience and has dire psychological implications. The protagonists in ‘Who Knows Her Best’ and ‘White Hand’ are recipients of family estrangement. They severely suffer depression, and in an extreme case suicide.

‘Who Knows Her Best’ is the sequel to ‘Six Ways to Jump off a Bridge’. Leung highlights in this story the implication of estrangement illustrated through the character of Zen. ‘Who Knows Her Best’ presents the aftermath of Susan’s life after her departure from Blue falls. In this story, Leung hints at the implication of depression and the psychological implication of the failure to live up to the ideal. Susan now turned Zen is presented as a woman who has fallen out of love with life just like Mrs Das in ‘Interpreter of Maladies’. Although she does not commit suicide in the first story, the walk to the bridge commences after the death of Jason Glass (her boyfriend). Eventually help comes for her in this story; however, it comes rather too late- way after she has made it to the ‘bridge’, “At her funeral, it was a contest to prove who knows her best...” (WFLA:123). Zen becomes estranged from her father for nine years and shows no enthusiasm about going home to see him. She does not dispute the fact that she has failed her father socially and most especially culturally.

The aftermath of Jason Glass’ suicide becomes a period of reassessment and reevaluation and she discovers that nothing in life lasts. First, she incubates thoughts of

dying and boldly admires successful people who died young, “He was lucky, Zen said, running her hand along the base...he died just as he got to be somebody. Perfect” (WFLA:108). For her, the perfect timing for death to occur is immediately someone becomes successful. In other words, there is no reason to hold onto success for a long time. Secondly, before she commits suicide, there is an abrupt improvement in Zen’s mood as she shows possibility of changing her life:

You could take some classes in interior design. It not too late. Yeah I could do that, she said....Maybe I’ll check it out on Monday...Movies don’t have to be your life. I mean, you could go back to school and maybe even call your dad. She half smiled as she stood up. I could (WFLA:121).

In this brief conversation, Zen shows signs of having made a decision to end her misery. The tone when confronted to change her lifestyle signifies she does not give much thought to changing, as she does not believe things will get better in future. Thirdly, in the cause of their last conversation together, she shows physical and emotional symptoms of weariness. In the narrator’s words, she is described as being, “...tired. Not just tired, but a kind of deflated tired” (WFLA:117). This explains why on this night, she goes from extreme high to extreme low in that there is no inclination to be bossy, dispute or overcome an argument with the narrator, “...she wasn’t being so combative” (WFLA:117). Susan here is portrayed as showing signs of helplessness and loneliness and readiness to talk. This signs however symbolizes her resolve to end her ‘messy’ life. For the first time she has a genuine chat with her driver by telling him about her life, growing up, forsaken goals and aspirations. She makes vague reference to her past back in Blue Falls; especially the experience she had with her father who she calls abusive names.

In addition to the persistent besetting depression Zen battles with, Leung also implies that the Asian American’s failure to realise the American dream of fame, success

and wealth has traumatizing consequences. In 'Who Knows Her Best', Zen's inability to attain her goal of being a designer propels her into the movie industry. However, her Asian nationality poses a challenge to getting decent roles in Holly Wood. It has been mentioned earlier that Zen is a neurotic with the need for self-sufficiency and independence. Those with this character trend usually do not have a craving for material things. However, Zen is an exception as she craves material things to cover up for her unfulfilled dreams. In lieu with this, Solomon modifies Horney's assertion that, "There are detached character disorders who very much strive for material success as a means of remaining strongly independent and detached from others" (Solomon, 2006:111). Therefore, the idea of having a driver, bodyguard and a make-up artist attached to her gives her feeling of a successful super star.

In other to live up to her new personality as a popular porn star and the illusion of success that she has created, she and her acquaintances stay under the influence of drugs. The narrator reports that, "...they accidentally get sober enough to almost understand that and they send someone out for more drugs before anything gets too real" (WFLA:116). Zen's use of hard substances is a deliberate attempt to sub-merge her feeling of helplessness and worthlessness. The use of hard drugs and alcohol provides a temporary confidence and an illusion that, she is living a fulfilled life however, they further submerge her into depression and hasten her chances of committing suicide. Like the first story, there are several indications to prove that she is contemplating suicide but the insensitivity of the people she is surrounded with makes it hard for them to notice her deteriorate psychological state. Zen's depression is influenced by her father's failure to empathize with her in the time of grief. Greenwald asserts that, "When important people fail to understand, recognise, acknowledge, appreciate or respond in a way that we hoped they would, that can be sufficient injury to produce depression". The psychological

trauma of Jason's Glass death and the withdrawal phase she experiences without the attention and understanding of her father compels her to carve out a niche for herself in Los Angeles. From her own predicament, Zen has acquired substantial experience in studying and understanding people.

Her neurotic trend endows her with the characteristic of a spectator with an excellent skill in human relations. She emphatically tells the narrator how inexperienced he is with people and subsequently warns him to take human relationships seriously. She realises from her own experience that people only claim kinship but are myopic in detecting and dealing with depression. Hence her advice to the narrator: "...if you want to know people, you can't work from the outside" (*WFLA*:110). The narrator just like Zen's father becomes partly responsible for her suicide. Zen is surrounded by people who claim a close kinship with her. Hence, they all have the same thing to say about her. This assertion is filtered through the perspective of Zen's driver: "...we are pretty tight...like sisters. Really I'm sure I said, but what I wanted to say was everyone said that about Zen. Even Larry said he knew Zen like she was his own daughter..." (*WFLA*:115). Surrounded by people who pretend to be intimate and carving a reputation for knowing her best death becomes the appropriate solution to end her misery.

Like Mr Cheung, the narrator assumes Zen is in good shape after he heard the shattering of the glass, "For a moment, I thought to go the door to see if she was okay. But it was just a vase and we ended on such a good moment, I thought" (*WFLA*:121). His timely intervention by going into Zen's room to check if she was hurt might have stopped her from committing suicide. This incidence readily brings to mind a similar occurrence in 'Six Ways to Jump off a Bridge', "She began crying louder and he put his hand on the doorknob but did not go in" (*WFLA*:4). The narrator eventually admits that he also has a

role to play in Susan suicide's when he mentions that, "She was in it neck deep and I didn't even recognise it". The narrator only realises how detached he was from Zen even though they developed closeness. The end of the plot reaffirms Zen's opinion that if you want to know people, you cannot work from the outside. In summation, none of the characters knows Zen best.

Leung highlights the issue of ethnic allegiance and familial estrangement in 'White Hand.' Narrated from the first person narrative point of view, Leung's 'White Hand' presents a young man who in spite of discouragement and rash reactions from his father strives to associate with the Chinese culture. As typical of the short story genre, 'White Hand' revolves around a single event that is the Ching Ming of the protagonist's grandfather. This event is very insightful into the intra-personal conflicts that take place in the protagonist and the one that ensue between the protagonist and his father, "Are you two going to argue all afternoon" (*WFLA*:58). Paula's interjection in the ensuing duel reveals the obnoxious tension between father and son.

Conflict in Horney's term is the juxtaposition between the idealized image and the ideal self. From the inception of the story, Leung creates a sharp contrast between the Chinese and the American culture as the year's Ching Ming (the day Chinese people honour their dead) coincides with the opening day of the baseball game, "This year's Ching Ming and the opening day of the basketball have fallen on the same date. Today, Chinese people honor their dead and Americans officially come out of hibernation" (*WFLA*:55). The memorial days and what they represent bring to light the obvious conflict between both cultures and what they stand for. Obvious tension is also exemplified in the relationship between father and son as they prepare for a traditional rite, "The air is filled with a moment of contradictions pulling my father and I in opposite directions"

(WFLA:55). The juxtaposition between Mr Zhong's expectations of an ideal son and whom he has grown to be results in their constant conflict. Solomon(2006:50) posits that these character trends are noticeable in neurotics who loathe what they are guilty of in others, "...to fulfil his idealized image's standards, the sadist relies on his partner to compensate for that failure by succeeding. If the partner does not attain the prerequisite success she deserves anger and vitriolic condemnation, the same feeling the sadist has toward himself". These conflicts occur because Mr Zhong hates to see the weakness he was once guilty of in his son thus the constant rivalry.

Mr Zhong's failure to live up to expectation culturally prompts him to rely on his son. Therefore, his son's inability to conform rapidly to the Chinese culture elicits outright condemnation and bitterness. Mr Zhong's air of superiority and all-knowing attitude towards his son is a defence strategy he adopts in order to cover up for his cultural lapses and weaknesses. Horney classifies this behavioural trend as the working against strategy and opines that people with this character trend are, "Openly arrogant, often rude and offensive although sometimes this is covered up by a thin veneer of civil politeness(Horney, 1950:199). His superiority is evident in the several conversations he had with his son, "I don't think you will understand today he says this is very Chinese". In addition, the scenario recounted by the protagonist during the grand opening of the Canton kitchen (Mr Zhong's Chinese restaurant) gives credence to the fact that he not only despises his son but also counts him unworthy to be Chinese. He outrightly alienates his son from participating in the family photograph, "People should think this is a Chinese restaurant. If you are in the picture, customers might think it's not run Chinese" (WFLA:61). He frequently berates his son to deter him from realising that he once had apathy and was estranged from his culture and everything that reminds him of China.

Being a character with self-effacing trends, Mr Zhong relates with people based on what he will gain from them. Horney is of the opinion that neurotics with the need to exploit others and get the better of them, “Use women for the satisfaction of his sexual needs with utter disregard for their feelings. With a seemingly ‘naive’ egocentricity, he will use people as a means to an end” (Horney, 1950:199). His relationship with the protagonist’s mother flourishes solely because she served as a distraction from China and everything about it, “He didn’t fall in love with me, he fell in love with not being in Hong Kong with his dad and a few million other people” (*WFLA*:59). His migration to America is a welcome idea to him as it availed him the opportunity to alienate himself from his family and culture. He eventually suffers the consequences of being dislocated from his homeland and culture.

Mr Zhong’s guilt from been culturally estranged incapacitates him from seeing his son’s attempt at being Chinese. In a deflated and depressed voice, the son asks, “Why don’t you give me some credit for trying, I say realizing the weakness of my words” (*WFLA*:66). Leung reveals Mr Zhong’s complete disappointment in his son, “My son plays Chinese, he continues. Today is Ching Ming, he thinks, so he will be Chinese. Look at him – at his confusion. His eyes have no single color; his hair is dark but swirls from his scalp. And where is my skin?” (*WFLA*:66). This irrational behaviour can only be understood in the light of his cultural dislocation and the fact that his son is a constant reminder of the enormous guilt he has to live with which is the result of his affair with a non-Chinese woman. Against this backdrop therefore, the son understands the underlying reason for his father’s action and the soothing relief it gives him to have relayed his emotional fears and burden to his son, “I feel as if he is unloading stones from an invisible sack slung over his shoulder” (*WFLA*:67). This statement depicts that Mr Zhong’s resentment toward himself and his son has severe psychological consequences.

However, relating the past, which Leung likens to stones, relieves him of his psychological distress.

Overall, *World Famous Love Acts* presents individuals who have suffered from one or more tragic events and are ridden with loneliness and depression. The failure to counter these traumatic experiences with positive ones like a conducive family environment and a supportive social network have long-term impact on the individuals. In other words, the gulf in communication and family relationships create an appropriate breeding ground for inter-personal and intra-personal conflict issues like depression, suicide and murder. For some of the characters suicide becomes the last resort to end the psychological pain. Another group represented by Gill objectifies other human beings by torturing and killing them.

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## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study examines the ways in which Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Brian Leung's *World Famous Love Acts* depict cultural and psychological dislocation and if so, the consequences on Asian American characters. The psychoanalytical literary theory, hinged on the parameters and postulations of Karen Horney's theory of neurosis, allowed for an extensive analysis of characters' personality hence advancing the knowledge on Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Brian Leung's *World Famous*

*Love Acts*. The qualitative research technique, which entails the use of primary and secondary sources, was of significant import to the study.

Although the brevity of the short story genre does not allow for an extensive character development this research has discovered that the combination of the short story genre and Horneyan psychoanalytic criticism offered an effective analysis of the selected short stories. This is possible because Horney's theory focuses on interpreting a character's personality based on present or existing defences. This research has also found that for Asian American characters to adapt into a novel psychological or cultural setting there is the need to carve a new identity that complements their new status. This new identity is in the form of exhibiting a neurotic trend, which could be dependent, domineering or detached. In addition, this research discovered that there is interplay between unresolved conflicts and the Asian Americans' psychological well-being, marital relationships and unhealthy impulses. In addition, this study has also found that the Lack of good social support network for psychologically or culturally dislocated characters hastens the 'walk' to depression, suicide, murder, degenerating family relationships and cultural disjunction.

The short stories of JhumpaLahiri and Brian Leung are eminently suitable for this research not only on the account of being located within the tradition of contemporary American writers but also because they present a comprehensive portrait of the Asian American experience by utilising the short story medium without subjugating their readers to the treatment of the novel form. To buttress the aforementioned, a study of 'A Temporary Matter', 'Interpreter of Maladies', 'Sexy', and 'Mrs Sen's' from JhumpaLahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and 'Six Ways to Jump off a Bridge', 'White Hand', 'Who Knows Her Best' and 'Drawings by Andrew Warhol' from Brian Leung's

*World Famous Love Acts* displayed the skill and strategy of the short story. The skilful use of language and symbols employed by both writers present their ideas in a pithy manner, which in many ways provides a graphic and in-depth exploration of the diverse cultural and psychological experiences of Asian Americans.

This study appraised Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, and proved that cultural dislocation deteriorates into cultural disjunction while psychological dislocation results into unhealthy family/ marital relationships. Exemplified in the analysed short stories, the study showed that psychological dislocation has tremendous consequences on the family unit. The marital relationship between Shoba and Shukumar degenerates because Shoba suffers intra-personal conflicts after the stillbirth. Mrs Das engages in extra marital affair due to degenerating marital relationship and still suffers the psychological consequences of her infidelity.

Degenerating family relationships have lasting psychological consequences on children. Rohin's psychology for instance is influenced by the deteriorating relationship between his parents. This affects his view of love and relationships in general because his idea of these words becomes impaired. Lahiri also acknowledges the psychological effects of migration on first generation immigrants who long for a lost 'home'. In the case of Mrs Sen the constant longing for India results into intra personal conflicts and cultural disjunction. Having gone through the pain of dislocation and assimilation, Lahiri points out through the title story 'Interpreter of Maladies' that the immigrants become alienated from their culture and feel out of place in their original home. This becomes the plight of Mrs Das and her family members. Being culturally dislocated creates in the characters the feeling that they do not belong either to their host or home culture.

The study also exemplified that Brian Leung's *World Famous Love Acts* presents estrangement and destructive impulses as the aftermath of cultural and psychological dislocation. To cope with their internal conflicts, characters in *World Famous Love Acts* indulge in destructive behaviours. The failure to get fulfilment from hard substances or risky behaviours instigates them to go for a lasting solution, which is suicide in most cases. Some of the characters rather than self-harm, seek gratification by inflicting pain on others. Characters like Gil engage in none-self destructive behaviour. He achieves this by becoming a serial killer. Apart from the intra personal conflicts that lead to self-destructive and none self-destructive behaviours, Leung also hints at the fact that cultural dislocation affects family relationships and alter the psychological and emotional growth of immigrants' children. This is applicable to Mr Zhong who has estranging relationship with his son. Overall, the exploration of the short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri and Brian Leung has added to previous studies on Asian American studies and have revealed that there is an interplay between the construct of cultural and psychological dislocation and other studies in this field. This emanates from the fact that the Asian American's inability to attain a balanced psychological and cultural state, interferes with their established human relationships and their belonging harmoniously in the larger society.

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