



تأكيد الهوية في الارض الجديدة قراءة ما بعد كولونيالية (ما بعد الاستعمار) في رواية " الارض المنخفضة " لـ

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الخلاصة

يُوظّف عدد من الباحثين في الدراسات الحديثة نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار بوصفها إطارًا نقديًا لقراءة الأعمال الأدبية التي تتناول قضايا ما بعد الاستعمار، والثقافة، والهجنة الثقافية، والهوية، والآخريّة. تُعدّ الكاتبة Jhumpa Lahiri (1967) من أبرز كتاب الأدب الحديث، حيث تعكس أعمالها هذه القضايا بوضوح، خاصة موضوعات ما بعد الاستعمار والثقافة والهجنة والهوية والاختلاف.

على الرغم من أن رواية *The Lowland* (2013) قد حظيت بعدة دراسات نقدية من زوايا مختلفة، إلا أنها لم تُدرس بشكل كافٍ من منظور ما بعد الاستعمار. لذلك يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل تمثيلات الهجنة الثقافية والثقافة في الرواية، مع طرح فكرة أن الحنين إلى الوطن والتكيف مع الواقع الجديد يمثلان جانبين متوازيين لا يمكن جميع الأفراد من تحقيق التوازن بينهما.

يعتمد البحث على الإطار النظري لما بعد الاستعمار عند كل من Homi K. Bhabha و Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak، مع التركيز على مفاهيم الثقافة، والهجنة، والهوية، والآخريّة. وتُظهر النتائج أن مفهومي العزلة والهجنة يُستخدمان لتحليل فقدان الهوية في المكان الجديد داخل الرواية، كما أن الانتقال بين الثقافات المختلفة يؤدي إلى زيادة الوعي بعمليات الثقافة لدى الشخصيات، حيث تتحول مفاهيم الثقافة والعزلة والهجنة إلى أدوات تحليلية لفهم التجربة الإنسانية في سياق الهجرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، هومي بابا، الاكتساب الثقافي (الثقافة)، (اختلاط الهويات)، الهوية، الاغتراب.

Confirming the Self on the New Land: A Postcolonial Reading of Jhumpa

Lahiri's *The Lowland*

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Abstract

Many scholars have recently used Postcolonialism as a lens to read literary works which represent Postcolonial, acculturation, hybridity, identity and otherness. Jhumpa Lahiri (1967) is a prominent modernist writer whose works depict postcolonial, acculturation, hybridity, identity and otherness. Even though Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013), has been recently analyzed from different perspectives, it has not been studied from a postcolonial lens. Therefore, this project aims to analyze the representation of both hybridity and acculturation in *The Lowland*. It argues that nostalgia and adaptation are parallel aspects that not all people are capable of achieving. The study deploys both Spivak and Bhabha's postcolonialism, focusing on concepts of "acculturation", "hybridity", "identity" and "otherness". The findings suggest that isolation and hybridity are adapted to investigate the



elements of identity loss on the new land in *The Lowland*; while there is a moveable shift between multi-areas the thing that leads to more recognition about acculturative aspects of the characters, acculturation, isolation and hybridity turn into objects to be used for research purposes.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Homi Bhabha, Acculturation, Hybridity, Identity and Otherness, Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Lowland*.

Chapter One

1.1. Background of the Study

Postcolonial theory has been developed as a theory concerned with the prospects of the peoples' lives through and after the colonial era in the east. However, the theory reflects the perspectives of many great thinkers like Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. Actually, the term "postcolonial" had its literary roots years before the publishing of Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* in 1994. Therefore, many earlier studies had been already published with the aim of discovering cultural differences from various lenses; but the fact is that none of these resulted in perfect version of the approach. However, Bhabha in his aforementioned book called upon a radical outline of the disciplinary boundaries, the thing which was considered by the time as the newly born of the postcolonial approach in its perfect hypotheses. In the same line, Bhabha's essay

"The Postcolonial and the Postmodern" deals with postcolonialism as a process that can be interpreted through considering the circumstances of cultures contemporarily by the means of a specific discourse to equip with the demands of modernity. Hence, Bhabha states:

"Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 247).

Therefore, Bhabha's definition shows the essence of the theory that stems from studying the interrelations through the control of the others with its varied prospects that peoples have undergone. Such postcolonial elements are what Jhumpa Lahiri has addressed in her *The Lowland*.

Jhumpa Lahiri (1967) is one of the prominent figures in the North American literature. Since she is the daughter of one of the Bengali immigrant families, she is always considered



as a hyphenated writer with multicultural dimensions in her writing. Moreover, her popularity has increased dramatically after winning the Pulitzer Prize for Interpreter of Maladies in 2000. As Lahiri is not an American citizen by birth, some of the topics that always permeate her writing are cultural encounter, isolation and even loss of identity. Consequently, she is usually dealt with by critics as a trustful representative of the diaspora, particularly South Asians. According to Jhumpa Lahiri, byname of Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri, (born July 11, 1967, London, England), English-born American novelist and short-story writer whose works illuminate the immigrant experience, in particular that of East Indians. Lahiri, who was born in London, did not spend her early childhood there. Her parents brought her to South Kingstown, Rhode Island where she spent the rest of her adolescence. Later, she travelled to Rhode Island to spend the rest of her adolescence. It happened in Barnard College that Lahiri graduated with Bachelor Degree of Arts of English. Ultimately, she gained her MA in Comparative Literature from Boston University. It was not enough for the ambitious writer; therefore, she continued her higher studies to gain her Ph. D in Renaissance Studies from the same university. Apparently, Lahiri has had massive admiration from so many critics who dealt with her writings including her masterpiece *The Lowland*.

Lahiri's *The Lowland* tells the story that depicts the lives of the two Indian brothers Udayan and Subhash. The two boys are on good relation with each other. The only distant occurrence is the time of their departure for college. Udayan, who has had radical thoughts, becomes a member of the Naxalite movement which is a splinter group to fight against the authorities for the sake of the poor and their rights. Contrary to Udayan, Subhash is not involved in any politics and he leaves for America to pursue a Ph.D. The two brothers keep on sending letters. Udayan tells Subhash about his marriage of Gauri. Subhash turns to feel as being beaten by that. It is in America that Subhash starts a relation with Holly who is a married lady. Their relationship lasts for only a short while. In this time of separation, Subhash receives a letter that through his parents tell him about his brother's death. Subhash goes back to India to attend the funeral of his brother. He sees how devastated his parents are after the unexpected death of Udayan. Moreover, he finds out that Gauri and his parents are not on good terms. Therefore, he persuades her to go to the U.S.A with him and she agrees. Gauri is now expecting a baby since she is pregnant. After a while, she gives birth to her baby, Bela. Subhash and Gauri are totally different. Gauri seems more interested in completing her studies of philosophy the thing that puts forth as her priority more than her little, Bela. At this point, Subhash's father passes away in grief. Then both Bela and him leave Gauri behind and leave for India. When the two are back in the U.S.A, they are shocked by the fact that Gauri has left for California which has the negative psychological impact on Bela. Bela goes on studying and she completes the college education to work on



farms. Eventually, Subhash informs Bela about the reality of her birth parents. After being frustrated in devastation for a period of time, Bela recovers and forgives them for their deeds and not caring for her. Later, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to her Meghna. Subhash who has changed by time gets married to Elise Silva. Gauri goes back to Calcutta trying to forget about the past. Then, she receives a letter from Bela, who declares both Meghna's and her will to see her again.

1.2. Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

The Lowland is Lahiri's masterpiece in which she represents a varied exposure of the postcolonial concepts through her characters who lead their complex lives in in-between acculturation. So far, many studies have examined the novel from various perspectives. For instance, Amany Abdullah AbdelAziz Eldiasty's "Diaspora and Cultural Hybridity: A Postcolonial Reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*" focuses on the vital domains of the struggle that immigrants encounter in the host community. The study argues that there are many difficulties that immigrants have to overcome while residing in the host community, particularly the living in in-between. Another study is "Breaking the Boundary: Reading Lahiri's *The Lowland* as a Neo-cosmopolitan Fiction" by Binod Paudyal. The study argues that living in the global world has its privileges in overcoming the diasporic aspects that immigrants feel. Contrary to that Silvia Lutzoni's "Jhumpa Lahiri and the Grammar of a Multi-Layered Identity" is a study that considers the lingual prospects that Lahiri enjoys as an outstanding writer. It argues that language itself is one of the elements that form identity on the modern world. Despite of the earlier studies that have dealt only with one perspective of the postcolonial elements, the present thesis seeks a holistic examining of the novel from sub varied perspectives drawing on the lenses of both postcolonial theorists; Spivak and Bhabha and offering the concepts of "otherness", "acculturation", "hybridity" and "identity". It argues that confirming the self in the host community is not an easy task that all people can achieve due to their acculturation and living in in-between.

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1.How is cultural hybridity represented in Lahiri's *The Lowland*?
- 2.How is social exclusion by the host community represented in Lahiri's *The Lowland*?
- 3.How are processes of identity reconstruction and resilience represented in Lahiri's *The Lowland*?

1.3. Review of the Literature



There have been many studies that have already examined Lahiri's *The Lowland* with its postcolonial prospects. For instance, Amany Abdullah AbdelAziz Eldiasty in her article "Diaspora and Cultural Hybridity: A Postcolonial Reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*" investigates the central domains of searching the identity that those immigrants who live in the American society, in particular the Indian origin individuals, lose. Furthermore, Eldiasty states "mitigating factor between the homeland and the host land" (Eldiasty, 2020, p. 19). Hence, she tries to find out about the aspects of cultural clash that results in psychological and physical suffering and leads to the process of adaptation for the sake of overcoming the crisis of one's living isolated on a new land or the so-called diaspora. Eldiasty puts forth Bhabha's notion of the "third place" or "in betweenness" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4) as the basis for tracing hybridity in the novel. Consequently, Eldiasty finds out that living on a new land is a matter of time since she sees that the second generation-resembled by Lahiri herself- is less anxious about the ancestors' homeland. Therefore, Lahiri is successful in overcoming acculturation.

Another study is "Breaking the Boundary: Reading Lahiri's *The Lowland* as a Neo-cosmopolitan Fiction" by Binod Paudyal in which he adopts a critical approach in reading Lahiri's *The Lowland* as a "neo-cosmopolitan fiction,". He sees in Lahiri's writing a kind of investigation within the global community which she follows to initiate a new analytical framework for South Asian diasporic elements in the transitional world of the modern age. He argues "Lahiri uses real historical anecdotes, incidents, political figures, as well as fictional characters, from different places around the world, all of which coalesce to create a transnational world in which South Asian subjects are active participants in global connections. The novel imagines a "global" history, ushering the local history into a global context" (Paudyal, 2020, p.17). Rather, the study tries to investigate the problem of identity for migrants in the United States relying on the interconnection of the modern world and the demands of different peoples to interact during the hasty era of globalization. Paudyal suggests "The novel's "narrative of connectivity" reflects the interconnectedness of a contemporary world characterized by exchanges of ideas, information, and sentiments made possible by global capitalism and technological advancements" (Paudyal, 2020, p. 19). Eventually, Paudyal concludes that "This new form of cosmopolitanism, as imagined by *The Lowland*, is what defines our citizenship today more than the nation-state or race" (Paudyal, 2020, p. 19).

A third study is Silvia Lutzoni's article, "Jhumpa Lahiri and the Grammar of a Multi-Layered Identity," which explores Lahiri's shift away from writing in English despite her position as a U.S.-based writer of Bengali descent. The study traces a complex identity journey that is closely connected to language and literary expression. Lutzoni argues that



Lahiri's use of English reflects a privileged position that contributed to her global recognition; however, her later choice to write in Italian represents a risk that may challenge or even diminish that privilege (Lutzoni, 2018). Moreover, Lutzoni suggests that language itself is one of the prospects of creating identities. Ultimately, she comes on the findings of that language is the mirror of the writer to reflect the self and to shape his/her existence in the place he lives in.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Postcolonialism is concerned with investigating the works that try to depict the themes of otherness, hegemony and conflicts that people have to witness at some points of their lives. Although Lahiri's *The Lowland* has been studied from different perspectives, it has not been analyzed from a postcolonial lens. This thesis enhances the literary studies about Lahiri's through exploring her depiction of postcolonial elements in *The Lowland*. Therefore, the main contribution of this study is offering a postcolonial reading of *The Lowland* focusing on the way Lahiri represents the multicultural dimensions of living in the host society. Another contribution of this thesis is highlighting the prospects of rejection that the host community. Eventually, the third contribution is finding out about the features of strength that Lahiri offers to overcome isolation and identity loss.

1.5. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

As for this thesis, I aim to deliver a study of the theme of self-confirmation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* with reference to postcolonial literature. Considering the theme of identity formation in a host community, this study draws on key postcolonial concepts that help explain cultural interaction, displacement, and negotiation of identity.

For the sake of this study which offers a Postcolonial reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*, I mainly draw on Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), with a focus on his ideas of hybridity and cultural interaction. These theoretical perspectives provide a framework for developing identity in multicultural settings. Bhabha argues that identity is not stable, it changes over time with different cultures.

From Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's point of view especially her work on marginalization and representation. Her theoretical framework explain how certain voices are marginalized or silenced within dominant social structures.

CHAPTER TWO: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction



In this chapter I intend to examine the perspectives of postcolonialism. First, it starts with offering the definition of the theory and a background of the early theorists who have participated in formulating postcolonial theory. Then, it delivers a general explanation of postcolonialism and the concepts that have been the basic pillars of the theory. Then I aim to give detailed explanation about the concepts developed by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak which I draw on to read the chosen novel for this study.

2.2. Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory studies how colonialism still affects societies today. It examines its impact on culture, politics, and how people understand themselves. It also explains how power shapes identities and the way some groups are seen as different or treated as the "Other" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak claims that marginalised subjects—especially women in postcolonial contexts—are rejected a voice within dominant discourses. In her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988). She focuses on the problem of representation as well as the manner in which power structures create and silence the subaltern.

According to Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* he argues that the "in-between" or liminal space—originating from colonial conflict—enables the negotiation of hybrid identities, creating new cultural meanings rather than simply mixing existing cultures. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38).

This study adopts postcolonial theory to consider how *The Lowland* represents migration, displacement, and identity negotiation among characters who exist between two cultures.

2.3. Homi Bhabha and Cultural Hybridity

Bhabha proposes in *The Location of Culture* (1994) that all cultural systems are constructed in a space that he calls the 'Third Space of enunciation' (Bhabha, 1994).

"It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory . . . may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity." (Bhabha, 1994)

These ideas are essential to understand the protagonists of *The Lowland* constantly negotiate between their Indian cultural background and their Western social surroundings, creating hybrid and developing identities.



2.4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Otherness

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is regarded as one of the establishers of the postcolonial theory due to her research on marginality, representation, and the subaltern. Spivak, in her famous article “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” (1988), explains that marginalized people are often not given the chance to represent themselves, and their voices are usually ignored or silenced by the dominant systems of power and communication.

Her concept of "otherness" highlights how some populations are treated as lower or “other” in colonial and postcolonial powers. Spivak's theories aid in the analysis of how migrant subjects are positioned within prevailing Western frameworks and how processes of inclusion and exclusion affect their identities in *The Lowland*.

This study analyzes Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* through key postcolonial concepts, specifically identity, hybridity, and in-betweenness.

Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who draw attention to the mutability and created aspect of identity under colonial and postcolonial contexts, are the sources of inspiration for these concepts. These ideas offer a framework for analyzing identity negotiation and cultural displacement in *The Lowland*.

CHAPTER THREE: Identity in The Lowland: A Postcolonial Reading of Hybridity and Subalternity

In *The Lowland*, identity is dynamic and constantly recreated based on individual experiences and historical circumstances rather than being fixed.

3.1. Identity in The Lowland

Identity is always evolving and being reinvented in postcolonial literature.

Homi K. Bhabha (1994) argues that identity is not fixed but formed in a “Third Space” of cultural interactions. Likewise, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) emphasizes that identity is also shaped by power structures that silence marginalized certain voices, particularly those of displaced or oppressed subjects.

“They no longer felt like the same people they had once been.” (Lahiri, 2013)

In *The Lowland*, Subhash and Gauri experience emotional and cultural changes that prevent them from maintaining a fixed sense of self. Their identities are reshaped by migration, loss, and personal choices.



3.2. Identity and Migration

Migration is very important in shaping identity in *The Lowland*, as the characters often find themselves living between two worlds: their home country and a new country. Sometimes they feel confused about who they are or where they belong. In postcolonial theory, this kind of experience often leads to identities that are mixed and not fully stable, because people are trying to balance between two different cultures .

Subhash's immigration to the US serves as an example of this situation in *The Lowland*:

“He lived as if he were suspended between two worlds, never fully belonging to either.” (Lahiri, 2013)

This clarifies how migration affects identity on a psychological and cultural level. Subhash feels in between since he is neither totally assimilated into American society nor deeply rooted in his Indian heritage. An unstable identity formed by displacement and adaptability is reflected in this stage.

Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity, which holds that migration creates a "Third Space" where identity is constantly altered, can also help explain this experience.

“ He felt his presence on earth being denied, even as he stood there. He was forbidden access; the past refused to admit him. It only reminded him that this arbitrary place, where he'd landed and made his life,”(Lahiri, 2013)

Subhash's situation of in-betweenness, where he feels disconnected from both his surroundings and his history , is reflected in this moment. According to Bhabha's theory, this condition can be seen as an reflection of hybridity, where identity develops within a "Third Space" created by emotional ambiguity and cultural exclusion.

3.3. Hybridity and the Third Space

Identity is created in a "Third Space" where various cultures interact and create hybrid forms of subjectivity, according to Homi K. Bhabha (1994). In this way, identity is no longer a stable essence but rather an ongoing process of interaction.

Subhash's experience of migration and cultural aleration in *The Lowland* reflects this idea:

“He felt as though he belonged to neither place completely.” (Lahiri, 2013)

Subhash does not fully belong to either America or India, which is reflected in his in-between position. As a result, his identity is hybrid, formed by two cultural systems rather



than distinct or fixed. He lives in a "Third Space" (Bhabha, 1994), where identity becomes malleable and established cultural boundaries are questioned.

3.4. Subalternity and Silence

According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), the world is represented from the dominant perspective of the first world and how it excludes the other or the subaltern and disenfranchised groups. She says that a clear and transparent language is needed to represent the subaltern or the oppressed people .

Gauri's persona in *The Lowland* exemplifies this notion of suppressed subjectivity:

“Back then she had only wanted to shut the door to it, to be apart from Subhash and Bela. She’d been incapable of cherishing what she’d had .” (Lahiri, 2013)

Gauri's emotional and social disengagement, as Lahiri portrays, may be seen as a kind of forced quiet rather than a free decision.

According to Spivak, Gauri is a subaltern subject whose voice is silenced by societal systems. Her silence reflects the restrictions on female independence and supports the notion that some identities are hidden by dominant discourse.

Conclusion

This study has examined Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* . The novel depicts how Postcolonial, acculturation, hybridity, identity and otherness can be seen in The different cultures. The study has deployed Postcolonialism lens to highlight the representation of the concepts of identity, hybridity, and otherness in the novel. These concepts have been examined deploying Homi Bhabha’s views about how the characters' feeling of cultural identification and belonging are affected by migration .The other theorist is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who has criticized for how the world is represented from the dominant perspective of the first world and how it excludes the other or the subaltern and the oppressed people, as she states that “the reasonable and rarefied definition of the word subaltern that interests me is: to be removed from all lines of social mobility” (Spivak, 475). All in all, this study has suggested three research questions to bridge the literary gap through reading the novel relying on the Postcolonialism lens.

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