

**Re-visiting “Adultery” in Diasporic Contexts:
The Bodies of Female Adulterers in Immigrant Narratives**

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Abstract

Adultery has been a controversial yet pervasive theme in literary representations from ancient mythologies around the world to the contemporary culture. This genre of texts associates women with limited notions of marriage, fidelity and even heterosexuality. Gradually the notions of adultery narratives, indicating transgression and subversion of social systems, transform themselves in a transnational era wherein immigrant narratives are produced. The female adulterers are complicated figures and even more complicated ones if they are situated in a diaspora context, interrogating not only the dominance of patriarchy but also the interpellation of the culture of belonging as well as nationalism. It may not be a coincidence that many immigrant women writers in their works associate the female protagonists' committing adultery with the notions of cultural displacement. In Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993), Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* (1997), Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1991), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2004), Gish Jen's *The Love Wife* (2004), and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), just to name a few, they all linked by the similarities in their inclusions of adulterous plots. Instead of idealizing or romanticizing adultery in the diasporic milieu, this paper intends to, in a broader cultural context, examine why and how immigrant female adulterers in immigrant narratives serve as the representatives of the further insights into the upheaval changes among identity disorientation and the entangled relationship between concepts of gender and patriarchal social organization, which are wrought by the transnational flow. Given a focus on South Asian immigrant narratives by women writers – *Manhattan Music*, *Brick Lane* and *The Namesake*, I will delve into the reason why and how these novels, in some way, represent adultery less as a moral transgression than as a means of psychological threshold or progression, investing both negative and positive influence to the reformation of diasporic identity. For female protagonists in these novels, adultery turns to be an imaginary space in which authors explore what happens when national and ethnic identity is destabilized, thereby shaking up notions of family relationships and facilitating an alternative mode of re-positioning self in diasporic context. Marked as dislocated and marginalized, the female immigrant adulterer's bodies become a site for all of those culture conflicts, senses of dispossession, and identity anxieties, revealing the notable lived body as a vital facet of the migratory experience.

Keywords:

adultery, immigrant narratives, identity-reformation, *Manhattan Music*, *Brick Lane*, *The Namesake*