

REWRITING PARADIGMS OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: THE NEW INDIAN IMMIGRANT IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S FICTION

Peonia Viana Guedes

Abstract

Social scientists have argued that identity is a socially constructed phenomenon, responsive to considerations of place, power, and circumstance. Bharati Mukherjee writes about what she calls the cultural hybridization of the new America and explores, in violent and often grotesque contexts, aspects of the collisions between the Indian and American cultures. Mukherjee sets her texts against a background of intertwined, transnational economic activities and mass uprootings in the Third World. In her fiction, Mukherjee presents a new view of postmodern, globalized America, in which the notion of the Indian immigrant as global cosmopolitan adds a transformative element to American multiculturalism.

Keywords: contemporary women fiction writers – social and cultural identity – hybridization of America

Resumo

Os cientistas sociais argumentam que a identidade é um fenômeno socialmente construído, ligado, portanto, a questões de lugar, poder e a incidentes circunstanciais. Bharati Mukherjee escreve sobre o que denomina a hibridização cultural da nova América e explora, em contextos violentos e muitas vezes grotescos, aspectos do conflito entre as culturas indiana e americana. Mukherjee

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situa seus textos tendo como pano de fundo as imbricações das economias transnacionais e o deslocamento de grandes contingentes humanos do Terceiro Mundo. Em sua ficção, Mukherjee apresenta uma nova visão da América pós-moderna e globalizada, na qual a idéia de um imigrante indiano como um ser cosmopolita acrescenta um elemento transformador ao multiculturalismo americano.

As Angelika Bammer claims, “The separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles or expatriates) or by the colonizing impositions of a foreign culture ... is one of the most formative experiences of our century” (Bammer, 1994: xi). The Indian-born writer Bharati Mukherjee proposes to examine in her fiction “the hybridization of the new American” (Byers-Pevitts 189) and how the “new” Indian immigrant has dealt with the inevitable social and cultural conflicts, how this has affected his or her identity as well as how this process has contributed to American multiculturalism.

Born in an upper-middle class family in Calcutta, India, in 1938, Bharati Mukherjee received an elite education, having attended a prestigious convent school run by Irish nuns in Calcutta and spending a couple of years in England and Switzerland after graduating from high school. Returning to India, Mukherjee attended the University of Calcutta and Baroda from which she received a master’s degree in English and Ancient Indian Culture. In 1961 she came to the United States to attend the Writer’s Workshop and receive the Ph.D from the University of Iowa. From 1966 to 1981, Mukherjee and her husband, the Canadian writer Clark Blaise, lived in Canada, whereupon they migrated to the United States. Mukherjee is the author of two volumes of short stories – *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) – and of six novels – *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1972), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Let It Be* (1997), and *Leave It to Me* (1998). Mukherjee is also co-author, with Clark Blaise, of two nonfiction books – *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1986) and *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* (1987) – as well as one of the editors of *Consuming Desires:*

Consumption, Culture, and the Pursuit of Happiness (1999). The recipient of Guggenheim, National Endowment for the Arts, and Woodrow Wilson Fellowships, Mukherjee has taught creative writing at Columbia and NYCU and is currently teaching at the University of California at Berkeley.

Differently from most of her fellow writers of Asian descent, Bharati Mukherjee is both an immigrant and a global cosmopolitan. She might be placed among a group of Third World writers who have emerged, globally, in reaction to the previous era of Third World nationalism, a group that includes V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Vargas Llosa, Isabel Allende, Garcia Márquez and many others. Critic Timothy Brennan calls our attention to the fact that these writers do not form a literary school, do not share a common style and, even politically, do not come close together. However, as Brennan points out: "... for all their differences, they seem to share a harsh questioning of radical decolonisation theory; a dismissive or parodic attitude towards the project of national culture; a manipulation of imperial imagery and local legend as a means of politicising current events; and a declaration of cultural hybridity – a hybridity claimed to offer certain advantages in negotiating the collisions of language, race and art in a world of disparate peoples comprising a single, if not exactly unified, world" (35).

Mukherjee is a writer who faces the issue of nostalgia for one's native country and culture in the transformed, globalized world squarely, exploring relentlessly the contradictions in her own native culture and presenting a dramatically revised vision of India, America, the world and the new immigrants. In her fiction, Mukherjee represents and writes about what she calls the hybridization of the new America. In examining this new identity, she says she wants to explore the consciousness of those who are not of one ethnic group or the other, "but who are many, many different ethnicities together, which is the real America" (198). In this pursuit, Mukherjee deconstructs cultural clichés, acknowledges the realities of the world's economic system, and sets her texts against a background of intertwined, transnational economic activities and mass uprootings in the Third World.

In Mukherjee's postmodern immigrant America, global and local enhance each other and prove increasingly interchangeable, each term revealing the other in its core, even as multiculturalism, not ethnic pluralism, becomes the staple of mainstream identity. Mukherjee's revelation of cultural heterogeneity as an American norm does not form the basis of a countercultural attack on a repressively centered cultural system. As she argues, by now cultural heterogeneity is the norm of an already-decentered system. An ethical project in Mukherjee's immigrant stories and novels is to make fully transparent the way an awakened, multicultural America can reflect a polycultural globe. In a recent interview Mukherjee claims: "I felt confident enough now to write about both sides: European or traditional Americans, as well as new-comers like me and the change the country is going through as a result of this new influx of non-traditional influence. So they become about America – *The Middleman, Jasmine* – rather than about new influence" (Byers-Pevitts 195).

Mukherjee's favorite fictional setting is New York, a syncretic and linguistic hodgepodge, a heterogeneously multicultural milieu, a thoroughly decentered system of circulating differences. Mukherjee's New York thus fits Frederic Jameson's description of postmodernity, in which "the advanced capitalist countries today are a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm" (Jameson 65). In such a city, unstable cultural heterogeneity and inventive syncretism are the deepest norms, not Anglocentrism or even ethnic politics. In the New York of Mukherjee's novels and stories, Anglos have become "others", and the society of new immigrants, of outsiders, becomes mainstream America.

"A Wife's Story" in the collection *The Middleman and Other Stories* shares many themes in common with Mukherjee's previous texts and captures, with irony and humour, the theme of geographical and temporal foreshortening. For the new immigrants in Mukherjee's fiction the adjustments which take place as a result of recent cultural and geographical displacements are accelerated, and mirror the cut-

and-mix culture of postmodernism. In an interview to *Bazaar*, Mukherjee claims that the phase of adjustments – assimilation, nostalgia, reassertion and reinvention – may now all occur within one generation as opposed to spanning several as it used to happen in the past (8). As Mukherjee says, “These new Americans are not willing to wait for one or two generations to establish themselves. They’re working for themselves and their children, of course, but they are not here to sacrifice themselves for the future’s sake” (“Immigrant” 28).

The tale of the wife in question, Panna Bhatt, cuts across borders, time and spaces, and fits this postmodern paradigm. Panna is an Indian woman who has left home and husband to acquire a Ph.D. in special education in New York. Panna is aware of the contrast her position makes – “multiple entry visa and a small scholarship for two years” (27) – in relation to her grandmother who was the illiterate daughter of a rich zamindar, and her mother who was beaten by her mother-in-law for registering for French lessons at the *Alliance Française*. Panna is also aware of the contradictions in her new privileged status and is continually put in positions which snag on these differences: “It’s the tyranny of the American dream that scares me. First, you don’t exist. Then you’re invisible. Then you’re funny. Then you’re disgusting” (24).

Hearing the racist jokes made on stage by actors playing real estate brokers in David Mamet’s *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Panna is faced again with the stereotypical view of Indians. As one of the actors complains: “So Patels are hard to sell real estate to. . . . They work hard, eat cheap, live ten to a room, stash their savings under futons in Queens...” (23). Panna feels the pull from both sides: “It’s not my fault. It’s the situation. Old colonies wear down, Patels – the new pioneers – have to be suspicious. Idi Amin’s lesson is permanent. AT&T wires now move good advice from continent to continent. Keep all assets liquid. Get into 7-11s, get out of condos and motels. I know how both sides feel, that’s the trouble. The Patels sniffing out scams, the sad salesmen on the stage: post-colonialism has made me their referee” (25-26). In one

breath, Panna's speech traverses national boundaries, continents, histories and technologies.

Returning home in a cab with her Hungarian friend, Imre, and listening to him talking away in Russian to the cab driver, Panna – “with memories of Indian destitutes mix with the hordes of New York street people”, she thinks – decides to challenge the current stereotypes: “I’ll write Mamet tonight. I feel strong, reckless. Maybe I’ll write Steven Spielberg too; tell him that Indians don’t eat monkey brains. We’ve made it. Patels must have made it. Mamet, Spielberg: they are not condescending to us. Maybe they’re a little bit afraid” (27-28).

It is in this multicultural New York that Panna's story unfolds with glimpses into her Indian past that includes riots, uprootings, arranged marriages, and a son's death. The Indian and American realities of Panna's life come together when her husband announces a short visit to New York and Panna is forced to revert, to a certain extent, to her old wife's role: “I change out of the cotton pants and shirt I’ve been wearing all day and put on a sari to meet my husband at JFK. I don’t forget the jewelry; the marriage necklace of *mangalsutra*, gold drop earrings, heavy gold bangles” (32). But the relationship between Panna and her husband has subtly changed: “I handle the money, buy the tickets. I don’t know if this makes me unhappy” (32). As Panna notices with surprise her husband has also changed: “. . . the man who has never entered the kitchen of our Ahmadabad house now comes toward me with a dish tub of steamy water to massage away the pavement heat” (34).

In the couple's excursions through New York, prejudice is a constant presence from all sides. In a tour-company counter, Panna is propositioned by a too friendly Lebanese tour guide: “Come on, doll, make my day! . . . I’m off after lunch”, he says to her (35). Her husband, who had noticed the exchange, counteracts: “I told you not to wear pants. He thinks you are Puerto Rican. He thinks he can treat you with disrespect” (35).

“A Wife's Story” ends with Panna's husband being called back to Ahmadabad because of labor riots: “Tomorrow morning he’ll call Air

India; tomorrow evening he'll be on his way back to Bombay. Tonight I should make up to him for my years away, the gutted trucks, the degree I'll never use in India. I want to pretend with him that nothing has changed", Panna thinks (41). The final paragraph of Mukherjee's story resumes the themes of dislocation, alienation and bodily fragmentation that characterize all the texts in *The Middleman and Other Stories*, and which mark the collection as an attempt to deal with the representation of the postcolonial and postmodern in the new immigrant reality. In an echo of the Lacanian metaphor, "A Wife's Story" ends with Panna's disembodiment in the bathroom mirror. Catching sight of an image of her body in that other space, Panna marvels at the body's beauty: "In the mirror that hangs on the bathroom door, I watch my naked body turn, the breasts, the thighs glow. The body's beauty amazes. I stand here shameless, in ways he has never seen me. I am free, afloat, watching somebody else" (41). The fragmented image in the mirror, so frequent in women's fiction, reminds us of Luce Irigaray's claim that aspects of women's bodies give women more self-identity than the static spectacle of themselves. In the mirror, Panna sees herself as a new, free and beautiful woman, a surprising image to herself, but one she had been building along the period she had been living by herself in New York.

In many contemporary postcolonial novels, hybridity and syncreticity are the source of literary, social and cultural redefinitions. According to several critics, "in writing out the condition of 'Otherness', postcolonial texts assert the complex of intersecting 'peripheries' as the actual substance of experience" (Ashcroft et al 78). As postcolonial critics argue, "marginality is the condition constructed by the posited relation to a privileged centre, an 'Othering' directed by the imperial authority" (Ashcroft et al 104). In Mukherjee's fiction hybridity and syncreticity are relentlessly explored, and her characters' lives represent continuously expanding horizons of marginal realities. Within these horizons there seems to be no fixed center but an interweaving, and perpetually intersecting, fabric of discourses of marginality, in

which the characters' gender, class, nationality and ethnicity play a major role. According to critic Sara Suleri, "the Indian subcontinent is not merely a geographic space upon which colonial rapacities have been acted, but is furthermore that imaginative construction through rapaciousness can worship its own misdeeds, thus making the subcontinent a tropological repository from which colonial and postcolonial imaginations have drawn – and continue to draw – their most basic figures for the anxiety of empire" (4-5). As Suleri points out, in most postcolonial texts this anxiety is identified "in a continually dislocated idiom of migrancy" (5), an argument Mukherjee's texts illustrate in many different ways.

As several critics claim, even the immigrants whose mastery of the colonizer's language is indisputably 'native' (in the sense of being possessed from birth), "begin to feel alienated within its practice once its vocabulary, categories, and codes are felt to be inadequate or inappropriate to describe the physical and geographical conditions, or the cultural practices they have developed in a new land" (Ashcroft et al 10). As these critics have claimed, the encounter between colonizer and colonized – between two different languages, cultures and subjectivities – has resulted in an inevitable linguistic and cultural 'contamination'. As Linda Hutcheon argues, the postcolonial project usually posits precisely the impossibility of an identity 'uncontaminated' by Eurocentric concepts and images. Nevertheless, as Hutcheon claims, the postcolonial writer has at his/her disposal various subversive and subverting strategies which can work from within the dominant culture, such as irony, allegory and self-reflexivity (135). In the last two decades, feminist and post-colonial critics have shown great interest in the issues resulting from the intersection of the patriarchal and imperialistic ideologies, which resulted in the 'two-fold colonization' of women. Ania Loomba and Benita Parry, for instance, have stressed the positive aspect of the concept of hybridity in the representation of the multiple and fluid character of cultural identities and subjectivities. These critics have shown that, even under the most

severe oppression, aspects of the colonized culture survive and become part of the new cultural formations which result from the clash between colonizer and colonized societies.

Critic D. E. S. Maxwell proposes a comparative model of postcolonial literatures based on the disjunction between place and language. According to Maxwell, there are two major groups of post-colonial societies which describe the experience of place in a language which is – to some extent – alien to that place. Maxwell identifies these two groups as settler colonies (like the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, for instance) and invaded colonies (like India, Kenya and Nigeria, for instance). According to Maxwell, wherever postcolonial critics originate, they share certain features which set their work apart from the indigenous literary tradition of England. Maxwell claims that in the first group – the settler colonies – the writer brings his/her own native language to an alien environment and uses it to express a fresh set of experiences. In the second group – the invaded colonies – brings an alien language, English, to his/her own social and cultural inheritance (82-83). Although a bit simplistic in its assumption that a language may be inherently inappropriate for use in another geographical place and cultural context, Maxwell's model is particularly interesting for the study of Mukherjee's fiction, one that often represents immigrants facing the challenge of dislocation and marginality. What is particularly interesting in many fictional works by Mukherjee is that these immigrants have to face the challenge presented by life in the United States, a former English colony, nowadays yet another imperial society.

Jasmine, the 1985-novel by Mukherjee, explores, in a radical and violent way, the danger – but also the potential – represented by displacements and uprooted identities. In the novel, the pivotal play of migrations, forced and voluntary, literal and figurative, found in the plural female subjectivity of the young protagonist/narrator – initially named Jyoti Vijn – represents the dislocation and progress within the tangled framework of the protagonist's/narrator's personal history, a

24-year history that moves with astonishing speed from the Punjabi village of Hasnapur to the urban centre of Jullundhur, to the Gulf Coast of Florida, to a Hindu ghetto in Queens, to upper-class Manhattan, to the farming landscapes of small-town Baden, in Iowa, and finally to California, in a certain way closing successfully Jyoti's journey from East to West. In the twilight, in-between spaces of waiting rooms in airports and railway stations, in trawlers and cheap hotels that carry and lodge illegal immigrants to the United States, the protagonist's/narrator's middle passage is constantly haunted by violence and sexual assault. Jyoti's spatial dislocations are also followed by constant changes of her name, usually through the agency of a husband/lover/employer. On the one hand, these constant changes of name imply the subversion of a fixed, uniform subject, and of a stable, well-rooted identity. On the other hand, however, the protagonist's/narrator's plurality of names helps to mask her ethnic difference and enables her to survive in a hostile, alien land and culture.

The action in *Jasmine* does not follow linear or chronological development, shifting constantly between past and present, between different places in India and in the United States. The protagonist/narrator is represented through fragments of her personal history, which only in the final scene coalesce to form a more embracing whole, one which leaves room for yet other developments, dislocations, subjectivities. As the novel opens, 7-year-old Jyoti is anxious to escape the confines of her Hindu cultural identity and the village's predetermined codes of femininity. She is also eager to escape a local astrologer's prediction that she will be a young widow and an exile. The fifth daughter of seven children, Jyoti is nearly strangled at birth by her mother, who wanted to save her from a life of poverty and indignity, "by the time my turn to marry came around, there would be no dowry money left to gift me the groom" (35). Good-looking and intelligent, Jyoti stands out among the young people in Hasnapur and charms the old English teacher, who lends her his own books. At this point in the narrative, Mukherjee positions her protagonist/narrator

very clearly in relation to important literary texts, products of a colonial past: "the British books were thick, with more long words per page. I remember *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre*, both of which I was forced to abandon because they were too difficult" (35). Signalling at the connection between these well-known narratives of personal development and the possible story of Jyoti's own development, Mukherjee suggests that the girl's abandonment of these two 19th-century novels opens the way for Jyoti's establishment of her own path towards development, away from the influence of colonial models, a modern *Bildungsroman* appropriate to represent a new reality. As Homi Bhabha claims, the presence in a colonial society of the English book, "is at once a moment of originality and authority, as well as a process of displacement that, paradoxically, makes the presence of the book wondrous to the extent to which it is repeated, translated, misread, displaced" (29). Jyoti's scholarly ambitions – to go on studying and become a doctor – confirm the girl's intention to write her own story according to different 'plot' lines, displacing the traditional colonial paradigm.

As a young woman, Jyoti marries, in a nonconventional way, Prakash Vih, a "modern man", who, in an attempt to make her "a new kind of city woman" (70), changes her name to Jasmine, and shares with her his dream of moving to America to continue his studies. The 15-year-old Jyoti abandons own her plans to become a doctor to live a love story in which her husband's expectations and plans for her shape her personality. In retrospect, she thinks: "*Pygmalion* wasn't a play I had seen or read then, but I realize now how much of Professor Higgins there was in my husband. He wanted to break down the Jyoti I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name: Jasmine. ... Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities" (70). Through the mediation of a former professor of his, now living in New York, Prakash is accepted by the Florida International Institute of Technology and the couple gets ready to leave India. However, before they can embark, the conflict between Sikhs

and Hindus reaches a terrible level of violence, and Prakash is killed in a terrorist bombing also intended to kill for her rejection of the traditional customs. The murderer is identified by Jasmine as Sukhwinder, a radical Sikh, former friend of Prakash and of Jasmine's brothers.

Jasmine, a 17 year-old widow, returns to Hasnapur to live with her mother in a nearly total ostracism, but soon rejects the idea of living this traditional role in the Hindu community and embarks with forged papers to America. Retrospectively she thinks, "Prakash had taken Jyoti and created Jasmine, and Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash. Vijn & Wife. A vision had formed" (89). Jasmine plans to get to Florida, to reach the university campus, and there burn Prakash clothes before committing the ritual *suttee*.

After a long journey that takes her across three continents in the company of unknown fellow travellers in massive migration – "whole peoples are on the move!" (91) –, Jasmine reaches the coast of Florida. Her brutal rape on arrival by Half-Face, an ugly trawley owner who transports illegal immigrants, moves her to avenge her powerlessness in rape by adopting the *persona* of the goddess Kali, murdering her attacker, burning her dead husband's clothes she had brought with her to America, committing a subverted and subversive *suttee* and beginning a new "journey, travelling light" (121) towards New York. On her way there, Jasmine is helped by a Quaker activist, Lilian Gordon, who teaches her how "talk and walk" American in order to avoid detention by the Immigration Service officials. To complete Jasmine's transformation, Lilian gives her the more Americanized name of Jazzy: "I checked myself in the mirror, shocked at the transformation. Jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords, and running shoes" (119). After intensive training in how to get through revolving doors, going up and down escalators, and cooking hamburgers and roasts, Jazzy is ready to move on to New York and face the Port Authority officials. As Lilian Gordon says: "If you walk and talk American, they will think you were born here. Most Americans can't imagine anything else" (120).

Getting safely to New York, Jazzy lives first with the Punjabi family of the former professor of Prakash's for five months. The ghetto-like atmosphere of Prof. Vadhera's family life in Flushing, Queens, – "Flushing was a neighborhood in Jullundhar. I was spiraling into depression behind the fortress of Punjabiness" (131) – causes Jazzy to look for a green card and a job. With the help of Lilian Gordon's daughter, Jazzy gets a job as an *au pair* girl, working for a young couple in Manhattan – Taylor Hayes, a university professor, and his wife Wylie, an editor – and taking care of their adopted girl, Duff. Completing her apprenticeship in being an American woman, Jazzy become Duff's 'day mummy' and, little by little, she begins to study and work at Columbia University as a Punjabi reader: "I became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College Dormitory. I lived with Taylor and Wylie Hayes for nearly two years. Duff was my child; Taylor and Wylie were my parents, my teachers, my family" (146). Receiving yet another name – "Taylor called me Jase" (156) – the protagonist/narrator wonders retrospectively at her new life and identity at the Hayes's as well as at her love for Taylor, unacknowledged by herself at the time: "Could I really have not guessed that I was head over heels in love with Taylor? I liked everything he said or did. I liked the name he gave me: Jase. Jase was a woman who bought herself spangled heels and silk chartreuse pants. ... Jasmine lived for the future, for Vijn & Wife. Jase went to the movies and lived for today. ... For every Jasmine the reliable caregiver, there is a Jase the prowling adventurer. I thrilled to the tug of opposing forces" (156-57). In her second year at the Hayes's, Jase is to learn another lesson, "In America nothing lasts" (160), when she learns that Wylie has fallen in love with another man and is about to leave Taylor and Duff. As the protagonist/narrator remembers her utter perplexedness at that moment – "I realized for the first time in at least a year that America had thrown me again. ... There was no word I could learn, no one I could consult, to understand what Wylie was saying or why she had done it. ... The Claremont codes still bewildered me " (161-62) –,

she realizes how foreign those American attitudes and codes were to her, who believed she had already mastered this new language and culture. Jase goes on living with Taylor and Duff, praying everything might work out all right. She slowly realizes Taylor is in love with her and that, this time, she is not going to be transformed once again: "Taylor didn't want to change me. He didn't want to scour and sanitize the foreignness. My being different from Wylie didn't scare him. I changed because I wanted to. ... I bloomed from a diffident alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase" (165). This happiness, which feels complete when Taylor asks her to marry him, is suddenly destroyed when Jase comes across Sukhwinder, the Sikh who had murdered Prakash, in Central Park. Her vulnerability as an illegal immigrant is brought again to the forefront when Taylor suggests she stays in New York and fight Sukhwinder: "Don't you see that's impossible? I'm illegal here, he knows that. I can't come out and challenge him. I'm very exposed ... " (168). Jase decides to leave New York right away in order not to put Taylor and Duff in any danger and, in the spur of the moment, decides to go to Iowa, where Duff had been born.

In the small rural town of Baden, Elsa County, Iowa, Jase starts working at the local bank and meets Bud Ripplemeyer, a wealthy banker, who falls in love with her, divorces his wife, Karin, and then promptly renames Jase: "Bud calls me Jane. Me Bud, you Jane. I didn't get it first. He kids. Calamity Jane. Jane as in Jane Russel, not as in Plain Jane" (22). Unable to understand all the cultural references, Jase/Jane wonders: "But Plain Jane is all I want to be. Plain Jane is a role, like any other. My genuine foreignness frightens him [Bud]. I don't hold that against him. It frightens me, too" (22). After rejecting Bud's initial offer of marriage, Jane finally agrees to live with him and they adopt a young Vietnamese boy, Du Thien. A few years later, Bud is shot by Harlan Kroener, a disgruntled farmer who fails to pay his debts to the bank, and becomes paraplegic. Jane, Bud and Du accommodate then to a life that is profoundly changed and unsatisfactory for all of them. Two years later Jane, with medical help, conceives a child by Bud but still refuses

to marry him. Already big with child, Jane receives a card from Taylor, in which he says he and Duff will come to Iowa to see her. Du decides to go to California in search of a sister, the only remaining member of his family. Jane wonders if things might have been different: "Had things worked out differently – no Harlan Kroener, no droughts – Du would have had the father of any boy's dream ... I would have had a husband, a place to call home. This, I realize, is not it" (199-200). It is Du's capacity to forge a hybrid identity, accepting both the American and Vietnamese heritages, that shows Jane the possibility of asserting her own hybrid cultural identity: "I am amazed, and a little proud that Du has made a life for himself among the Vietnamese in Baden and I hadn't had a clue. ... My transformation has been genetic; Du's was hyphenated. We were so full of wonder at how fast he became American, but he's a hybrid ..." (198). Jane decides to leave Bud when Taylor and Duff come looking for her, and Taylor proposes marriage and a move to California: "I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness. ... It isn't guilt I feel, it's relief. I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane" (214). As Taylor remarks: "We'll be an unorthodox family, Jase" (212). The American family that is reconstituted by Jyoti/Jasmine/Kali/Jazzy/Jase/Jane/Jase, her lover Taylor, the adopted Duff and Du, and Jasmine's unborn child consists of adopted sons and daughters and hybrid nationalities. It is in Mukherjee's own words: "a reimagination of a new kind of family for the new America" ("Where in America" 9).

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