

Transcending Patriarchal and Cultural Borders in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*

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Abstract: *This paper offers a feminist reading of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1991). It aims at underlining the empowerment mechanisms of the protagonist at home and abroad as well as commenting on the different facets of subjugation that the protagonist triumphantly overcomes. Respectively, this paper traces the protagonist's racial and gendered performativity within the borders of India and America. It touches upon the different episodes in *Jasmine's* journey of becomingness. *Jasmine* metamorphoses from the Hasnapuri *Jyoti* to *Prakash's Jasmine* and from *Jase* to *Jane Ripplemeyer*. Through these incarnations, she refutes the inflexibility of identity. *Jasmine* is a story of rebirth, transformation, and reincarnation of the protagonist within the borders of America. *Jasmine's* Identity becomes a vehicle of subverting patriarchal and racial fixity discourses and a means of self-becomingness.*

Keywords: *Empowerment, identity, plurality, racial performativity, gender.*

Empowerment of the female subject is a common theme, especially in feminist studies. Empowerment is not something given, but rather something that is acquired and claimed. It is a process of becoming. Subsequently, this paper explores how Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is empowered through adopting a mestiza consciousness and a rhizomatic identity. *Jasmine* develops an identity that challenges rather than succumbs, that questions rather than obeys, that evolves rather than performs. Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is a rebel. She revolts against the fate that the astrologer, a voice of the patriarchal society, predicts for her by leaving her native land for the United States. *Jasmine* becomes the new woman who keeps "shuttl[ing] between identities" and different routes (Mukherjee, p. 77). *Jasmine's* identity is plural, subversive and rhizomatic. This plural identity becomes a vehicle of subverting patriarchal and racial fixity discourses and a means of self-becomingness.

This paper is based on some theories of empowerment and identity, drawing on theories of the mestiza and rhizomatic identity. In her *Borderland/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) theorizes the emergence of a new consciousness within the borderland: the mestiza consciousness. It is a consciousness that is inclusive rather than exclusive. The mestiza lives in a liminal space "cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems" (p, 78). The mestiza consciousness resists any categorization. She dissolves into all boundaries, categories, and ambiguities altogether. She mingles cultures into a beautiful mosaic picture. Anzaldúa beautifully writes: "As a mestiza, I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine . . . I am cultureless . . . I

challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs” (p. 80). The new mestiza is hybrid, plural, and borderless, yet she “is an act of kneading, of uniting, and joining” (p. 81). Though embracing a plural identity, the mestiza has a uniting power. She weaves cultures, spaces, and identities together.

Since a mestiza subject is rooted and re-rooted, her identity is rhizomatic. This is a term introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), who criticize the assumption of being rooted. Instead, they propose that the rhizome “can open up in all directions” (Deleuze, p. 15). The rhizomatic identity is about the multiplicity and interconnectedness of different cultures. Taking the term from Deleuze and Guattari, Edouard Glissant (1997) theorizes the rhizomatic in accordance to the question of identity. In his *Poetics of Relation*, he argues that the rhizomatic thinking is the “principle behind what [he] calls the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the other” (p. 11). Accordingly, the rhizomatic shapes the mestiza’s identity through building a network of relationships. Accordingly, Jasmine resists identity labels. She embraces an identity that builds networks, bridges differences, and crosses from and into distinct relations.

Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* is a story of exile and immigration and the becomingness of a female protagonist in a foreign land. Though the text clearly follows the uprooting and re-rooting of the female protagonist, it undeniably underlines issues of gender performativity and agency, as well. The story is told from the point of view of the twenty-four years old Jasmine who lives in Iowa who recollects distant events from her childhood in Hasnapur and reflects on present events. What is interesting to mention is that Jasmine’s journey has no end, even on the last pages; she is in a constant state of becoming. Jasmine is an Indian immigrant who undergoes a psychological transformation once she arrives in the United States. Paradoxically, exile to Jasmine is safety; through it, she breaks free from a conventional Indian society. Resisting any social categorization, Jasmine finds “compassionate ways to remake oneself” (p. 29). She makes of herself a “fighter and adapter” (p. 40). Though the text opens up with the astrologer’s prediction of Jasmine’s widowhood and exile, Jasmine has the power to re-make her own fate; she “re-position[s] the stars” as she makes her way through “greedy with wants and reckless from hope” (p. 240-41).

Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* is critically well celebrated. In “Social Critique in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*,” Arjun Dubey and Shradha Srivastava (2013) offer a feminist reading of the novel in regard to diaspora. The novel is interpreted as a purely feminist novel where the protagonist breaks the social taboos related to women and rebels against the patriarchal institutions. The article highlights the workings of gender in the novel. In a similar vein, Chuen-Shin Tai’s essay comes as an interconnected body of criticism to Dubey and Srivastava’s article. In her “Metamorphosing Jasmine: Identity Sorting in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*,” Tai (2016) examines how the different identities and naming that the protagonist claims allow her to relocate her self-value. She frames her article on Stuart Hall’s perspective on the fluidity of

identity. Tai asserts that the fluid identity serves as a positive vehicle for Jasmine to continually renew herself. The article mainly focuses on Jasmine's life in America and her identity transformation. Though both articles powerfully examine the issue of identity in the novel, this article comes as an addition to address theories of performativity of exile, the rhizomatic and mestiza identity that the protagonist embraces. My study is focalized around theories of mestiza, rhizomatic identity, and the performativity of exile.

The present analysis of Mukherjee's *Jasmine* draws on the subjugation of the female protagonist, Jasmine, and highlights the Indian conventionality. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir (1956) relates to the social injustices inflicted upon women and how these conventional codes shape women's subjectivities. De Beauvoir contends that a woman internalizes her own subjugation and entertains at her own victimhood. She also argues that in pleasing the patriarchy, a woman "opposes her cult of self; she wants to be seen, to be attractive" (p. 645). She falsely believes that she is fragile and needs validation, assistance, and protection. She "lets herself come to count on the protection, love, assistance, and supervision of others, she lets herself be fascinated with the hope of self-realization without *doing* [emphasis in original] anything" (p. 677). In an androcentric community, women are brainwashed to believe in their passivity. Correspondingly, De Beauvoir further argues that what normalizes the subordination of women is the image presented by the society. It makes the husband, and by far the male, "a demigod endowed with virile prestige and destined to replace her father: protector, provider, teacher, guide; the wife's existence is to unfold in his shadow" (p. 447). He is her mentor and guide. De Beauvoir affirms that in a conventional society, a woman "must renounce her claims as sovereign subject" and accept her domesticity (p. 643). As a matter of fact, a woman is always objectified and confined to her performativity of gender.

Accordingly, gender performativity is a term introduced by Judith Butler (1999) in her *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Like de Beauvoir, Butler believes that to become a woman is an act of performance of a femininity role. As such "gender is always a doing" (33). Quoting Nietzsche, Butler argues that "there is no 'being' behind the doing, affecting, becoming; 'doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything" (ibid). Indeed, in societies shaped by androcentric logic, being-ness is solely related to the "doing" of an assigned role. The latter is, therefore, performatively constructed. In such societies, women are set on the stage with a pre-written script ready for them to perform it. Ironically, to meet a social acceptance, women's subjectivity has been constructed within the contours and patterns of society. Accordingly, gender is constituted "through a *stylized repetition of acts*," (p. 179). It is through social repetitions and hailing that the subject is created and positioned.

Respectively, the novel masterfully captures the various facets of racial and gender performativity. Consequently, the analysis valorizes, on the one hand, the trappings of the Hindu social codes and marriage, and, on the other hand, it foregrounds the protagonist's experiences in exile as they entwine within racial and ethnic discourses. Mukherjee's text portrays a new kind

of performativity: the performativity of exile. The latter pushes its own kind of conformity on immigrants. Unescapably, it is necessary to highlight the subversiveness of such performativities. To meet such ends, the analysis traces the aspects of Jasmine's rhizomatic identity and the process of becoming a self through resisting exile and patriarchy. Jasmine shuttles between identities, names, and different locations. Her different incarnations define her spirit of subversiveness as the rhizomatic identity is subversive and nonconformist in nature. It "has the capacity to overturn the order of the world" (Glissant, p. 11-12). Jasmine's multiplicity of selves becomes a tool to subvert patriarchal and racial discourses of fixity as well as a means of self-becomingness.

Mukherjee mindfully reflects on the status of women in her motherland. She questions the conventionality and the trappings of the Indian society. Born in Hasnapur, a small village in India, Jasmine is subjected to the Hindu social codes. Since childhood, she feels jilted as being the seventh child and the fifth daughter of a poor conventional family. She confesses that "if [she] has been a boy, [her] birth in a bountiful year would have marked [her] as lucky, a child with a special destiny to fulfill. But daughters were cursed" (p. 39). In the village, they believe that "Gods with infinite memories visited girl children on women who needed to be punished for sins committed in other incarnations" (ibid). Expressly, if a couple gives birth to a baby-girl, the mother is blamed and accused of sinful life. As such, she is punished with the birth of a girl or more. With her giving birth to her fifth daughter, the villagers conceive that the past life of Jasmine's mother "must have been heavy with wrongs" (p. 39). The novel shows that men in India follow a patriarchal rule in marital accord. To them, marriage indicates "silence, order, authority. So was [woman]: submission, beauty, innocence" (p. 151).

Subsequently, the novel chews out the traditional Indian womanhood cult. The latter upholds femininity, wifehood, and motherhood. Such conventional societies design women who can be easily led. They adjust them to perform feminine roles of domesticity like "scouring brass pots with dishes . . . whomping cloths clean on stone slabs . . ." (p. 15). Interiorizing this womanhood cult, Indian women come up to believe that women are naturally "brought up to be *caring* and *have no minds of [their] own* [emphasis added]. [They] are like *cattle*; whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go" (p. 46). A woman cannot think for herself. Patriarchy spoon-feed women the righteousness of domesticity, servitude, and conformity. In taking in such beliefs, women become dehumanized, inferiorized, and animal-like. They lack critical thinking and thus, they are deprived of decision-making. Consequently, women interiorize these conventions and perform the gender roles designed for them. A woman is doubly victimized; by the patriarchal codes and also by herself. Accordingly, performativity becomes a liability that further burdens a woman and weighs her down.

Moreover, the Indian patriarchy champions the veracity of astrology practices. The latter is an Indian "model of reality which interprets the observed conditions of the cosmos at the time of an event in order to provide insight" (Fouw and Svoboda, 2003, p. xxii). Astrology is an

institutionalized practice that enforces women's subordination even more. In adopting such blind superstition, a woman's life will eventually be shaped around the astrologer's foretelling. She will be unconsciously confined to his future anticipation with no attempt to change the told fate. In the novel, when Jasmine is seven years old, the village's astrologer "cupped his ears – his satellite dish to the stars – and foretold [her] widowhood and exile" (p. 3). His prophecy indicates her future miserable life of widowhood and estrangement. The astrologer designs the life that Jasmine is doomed into living. Protesting against his statement, she feels astonished at the astrologer's reification of her. To him, she "was nothing [but] a speck in the solar system. Bad times were on their way. [She] was helpless, doomed" (p. 4). Moreover, the astrological practice is a sacred practice. It matches the-meant-to-be couples at an early age to avoid unprosperous marriages. Respectively, when arranging a wedding, it is expected from the parents and the couple to visit the astrologer to read the propitious time for the wedding to happen. Yet, Jasmine's marriage fails to meet these standards. Therefore, the villagers believe that the downfall of Jasmine's marriage is due to her aggravation of their traditions and social codes. Dida, her grandmother, accuses her of trashing the Indian customs. Dida argues that astrological practices are sacred maneuvers of God if trashed away, God's punishment will prevail. She accuses Jasmine of stepping on their social ethics.

Yet, Hindu conventionality is also voiced by Prakash, Jasmine's husband. In fact, Prakash plays a double role in the narrative and in Jasmine's becomingness. On the one hand, he represents another discourse of masculinity; on the other hand, he initiates Jasmine's liberation. For instance, Prakash changes his wife's name from Jyoti to Jasmine. Jyoti is no longer defined by her father's name. She becomes Jasmine Vihj, the creation of her husband. Prakash breaks the Hasnapur-Jyoti and "makes [her] a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave [her] a new name: Jasmine" (p. 77). Being a modern liberal man, he tries to change the village-Jyoti into a city-Jasmine. He, the voice of masculinity, remodels Jasmine's identity as a proof of his selfhood and modernity. Considering his wife as a garment, he "liked to show [her] off" as a city woman, a mark of his achievement (ibid). Furthermore, Prakash voices his masculinity through his discourse of possessiveness. He continuously calls her "my Jasmine" and his "little flower" (p. 77-83). Prakash keeps criticizing Jasmine's misbehavior, excusing her for being "small and sweet and heady" (p. 83). He presses on his masculine superiority through questioning Jasmine's straight thinking ability. Consequently, Jasmine comes to believe that there is "no winning [his] arguments. He'd read more than [she] had. He had statistics for everything. He'd done more thinking than [she] had; he was twenty four and [she] was fifteen, a village fifteen, ready to be led" (p. 78).

Prakash is also the initiator of Jasmine's liberation. He plays a crucial role in constructing and boosting Jasmine's agency. Prakash is a modern city man who tarnishes some Indian conventional traditions. He ratifies that there is "no room in modern India for Feudalism" (p. 76). Prakash partially succeeds in undoing some of the conventional roles. In his marriage, Prakash tries to make of himself and his wife equal partners. He asks Jasmine to address him by his name

contrary to Hindu wifhood doctrine. While Hasnapuri wives use only pronouns to call their husbands, Jasmine is fostered to be the new woman and the equal partner. Prakash solely believes that “Only in feudal societies is the woman still a vassal” (ibid). In such societies, “love was control. Respect was obedience” (p. 76). Love and marriage stress man’s control as he is the protector and the bread-winner. For the wife, this implies her dutiful respect to her husband. In this respect, Prakash refuses such institutionalized mechanism of patriarchy. For him, love is “letting go, independence, self-reliance” (ibid). He calls for a non-feudal system where husband and wife are equally independent. Prakash insistently encourages his wife, Jasmine, to throw away feudalism.

After her husband’s death in a Khlsa Lion’s attack, Jasmine courageously decides to travel with forged papers. Yet, she sadly returns to the Indian conventionality in America. After living with Lillian Gordon who strengthens her Indian spirit with the American way of life, Jasmine visits Prakash’s professor. She lives with the professor’s family, the Vadhera, for five months. Through this family, Jasmine is brought back to conventional Indianness. More explicitly, Flushing, a neighborhood in New York City, represents the patriarchal space that confines her. For Jasmine, Flushing is a “cocoon,” a wall, and a prison that shackles her into conformity. Like in Indian Hasnapur, the Vadhera family bows to conventionality and Indianness. They represent conformity and the “artificially maintained Indianness” within the borders of America (p. 145). The Vadhera considers Jasmine as a “widow who should show a proper modesty of appearance and attitude. If not, it appeared [she] was competing with Nirmala, [Professorji’s wife]” (ibid). Being a widow, Jasmine is expected to withdraw to the sidelines. Flushing frightens her as it unearths Indian life of submissiveness and the “fortress of Punjabiness” that she has been fleeing (p. 148). In Flushing, she feels “immured. An imaginary brick wall topped with barbed wire cut [her] off from the past and kept [her] from breaking into the future. [She] was a prisoner doing unreal time” (ibid). Within the borders of Flushing, Jasmine is forced to perform her gender role as a female and as a widow.

Choosing to run away from the Indian patriarchy, Jasmine is introduced to a new kind of performativity; the performativity of exile. Like gender, life in exile is also performative. It is a “doing” rather than a “being.” Exile inevitably forms and constructs the identity of immigrants. In her book *Racial Imperatives*, Nadine Ehlers (2012) focalizes how “race is performative” (p. 6). For her, the “specter of race is itself a disciplinary regime that generates, forms, and constructs the racial subject” (p. 18). The immigrant goes through a process of racialization that hails him/her into performing a particular role within the borders of exile. In other words, his/her self is only brought into being-ness through a racial discourse. Consequently, social assimilation is only possible when the immigrant succumbs to performing his racial role. Therefore, the identity of the immigrant is interpellated, “marked and formed by discursive practices” (Butler, 2014, p. 1). These practices are moderated through rigid regulations designed by the master. Consequently, racialized experiences of the immigrant become “a *practice* [emphasis in original]

that requires tenuous attentive labor in order to ‘survive’” (Elhers, p. 65). Briefly, the subject in exile is racially constructed.

Jasmine is called out the outlandish and the foreigner. She is pinned to perform the role of the exotic. When in New York, Taylor’s friends stand up to her and question if she is Iranian, Pakistani, Afghan, or Punjabi (p. 33). To them, a non-American is a foreigner whose identity is re-modeled on racial and even gendered basis. This interpellation is also performative and exploitative as it corners Jasmine into the category of the immigrant, the foreigner, and the other. Such racialization attempts to persuade Jasmine into a form of subjected being-ness. Yet, she seems to discard this performative discourse and never respond to their speculations. Furthermore, to Americans, Jasmine’s Indianness makes her exoticism surface. They expect her to know some exotic languages like Sanskrit, Arabic, Devanagari, and Guru-Mukhi script (ibid). This “alien knowledge” promotes her difference (ibid). Professors entertain at their classification and knowledge skills. She is also considered an Indian Princess rich with recipes brought all the way from India. People are even “getting used to [her] concoctions, even if they make a show of fanning their mouths. They get *disappointed if there’s not something Indian* [emphasis in original] on the table” (p. 9). Unconsciously, Jasmine seems to slightly perform the role of the Oriental that the Americans design for her. In addition, the racialization is even re-enforced by the traditional role structures. Being a woman, Jasmine is encouraged to perform a gendered role within the borders of America. Though no longer in Hasnapur, she is always reminded of her wifehood role and that “a good Hasnapur wife doesn’t eat just because she is hungry. Food is a way of granting or withholding love” (p. 216). Also, she is reminded that the Indian wife “never eat[s] before [her] husband[.]” (p. 213). Though she throws everything conventional and Indian-like, she still feels herself a “caregiver, recipe giver, preserver . . . all [she] wanted was to serve” (p. 215).

This racialization is also promoted through a mechanism of stereotyping. It is an apparatus that forces racial performativity. Such discourse emphasizes difference and otherness. It constructs the identity of the immigrant through the repetitiveness of clichés. Surveilled by such discourse, the immigrant forcibly succumbs to designed racial and gendered roles. In this same vein, Sander Gilman (2006) writes that because there is

no real line between self and the Other an imaginary line must be drawn; and so that the illusion of an absolute difference between self and Other is never troubled . . . This can be observed in the shifting relationship of antithetical stereotypes that parallel the existence of ‘bad’ and ‘good’ representations of self and Other. (p. 18)

Otherness and difference are culturally created to justify the process of racialization. Thereof, the social self of the immigrant is subordinate to the created image of him/her which is constructed by the hosting culture.

In the novel, the farmers in Baden articulate Jasmine's otherness. They confirm that Jasmine looks "a little *different* [emphasis in original], that [she is] a 'dark-haired girl' in a naturally blond country. [She has] a 'darkish complexion' (in India [she is] 'wheatish'), as though [she] might be Greek from one grandparent. [She is] from a generic place, 'over there'" (p. 33). Interpellated into the category of the Other, Jasmine is pushed to adopt a racial identity marked by her difference. Even her lover Bud views her as an "alien . . . darkness, mystery, [and] inscrutability" (p. 200). Here, 'difference' becomes necessary in the making of identity. Lillian Gordon emphasizes Americans' hostility toward the Other. She advises Jasmine to talk and walk like Americans to avoid hailing as the non-American Other.

Yet, Jasmine disrupts this kind of performativity by disrupting and shaking its fixity. Jasmine adopts a rhizomatic identity that calls for plurality, fluidity, and openness. In other words, her subjectivity becomes rhizomatically constructed. As discussed earlier, a rhizomatic identity advocates heterogeneity and multiplicity. Like Edouard Glissant, Stuart Hall argues that instead of "thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact . . . we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process" (p. 21). Identity is never finished, it is always fluid. It is evident in the text that Jasmine refuses the patriarchal fixity of identity. Jasmine's identity is always on the move. She never settles for one stable identity. Hall further affirms that identity is also "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (p. 23). It is about the roots and routes, which makes it a process that is always in a state of evolving, malleability and flux. Diaspora identities "are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (p. 31).

Seen from this perspective, Jasmine's identity undergoes constant transformations. It shifts from one self to another. She keeps remodeling her selfhood. As a matter of fact, Jasmine metamorphoses from the Hasnapuri Jyoti to Prakash's Jasmine. During this episode, she makes her first steps into self-definition. Moving to America, she transforms from Jasmine to Kali, a goddess of destruction. Then, meeting Lillian Gordon, Jasmine becomes Jazzy, an almost American individual. At a later stage in her odyssey to self-becomingness, she grows into Jase. Lastly, she is Jane Ripplemeyer living with Bud. Through these incarnations, she refutes the inflexibility of identity. Consequently, this part of the analysis deals with the different transformations of Jasmine and the process of her self-becomingness. Having discussed her first incarnation with Prakash, the following paragraphs explore the four other episodes of her transformation within the American frontier.

Jasmine's odyssey of becomingness is marked not only by the construction of new identities but also by the destruction of the old selves. She keeps producing and reproducing her identity. As she is determined to accomplish her husband's mission, she travels to America where she experiences a drastic transformation of herself. During her first day in America, she meets Half-Faced, the captain of the ship through which she and the other undocumented immigrants make their way into the country. Jasmine realizes that Half-Faced is "from an

underworld of evil” (p. 116). He disrespectfully abuses her taking advantage of her homelessness and her loneliness. Looking for shelter and security, Jasmine accompanies Half-Faced to a motel where he uncovers his dirty intentions and eventually rapes her. Unable to tolerate his deed, Jasmine decides to take revenge. Symbolically, she changes into a Kali, a Hindu goddess of destruction. She slashes her tongue into two and murders her violator. Jasmine’s act of violence is an act of self-empowerment and agency. She turns her anger into power. In an image similar to the Mythic Kali, Jasmine triumphantly wants Half-Faced to see her transformation to a goddess “with [her] mouth open pouring blood, [and her] red tongue out” (p. 118). She wants him to see her powerful transformation from the helpless village girl into the destructive goddess. Relatively, due to this experience, Jasmine discards committing sati. Metaphorically, she burns the suitcase of her husband and her clothes announcing the death of the old self and the rebirth of a new one.

Surviving this violent experience, Jasmine meets Lillian Gordon. The latter plays a significant role in Jasmine’s journey to self-assertion within the borders of America. She rehabilitates her to the American way of life. Mrs. Gordon is known for her sheltering undocumented immigrants; women who had lost their husbands and their children. She “saved [Jasmine’s] life, after others had tried to end it. She represented . . . the best in the American experience and the American character” (p. 137). Mrs. Gordon strengthens Jasmine’s will to survive. Going with the name of “Jazzy,” Jasmine steadily enters the realm of assimilation. Mrs. Gordon helps her undoing her otherness and her exoticism. Jasmine dresses up in American fashion which reinforces Jasmine’s self-confidence as it does not only hide her widowhood but her difference as well. She feels herself reborn again. This makes Mrs. Gordon a mediator who helps Jasmine by connecting her to the American community. In other words, Mrs. Gordon is “a facilitator who made possible the lives of absolute *ordinariness* that [Jasmine] ached for” (p. 33). Consequently, Gordon’s tutoring is important in the way it helps Jasmine’s shedding of her positionality as the “Other.” Jasmine’s transformation is speedy and fluid. When she checks herself in the mirror, she “chocke[s] at the transformation, Jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords and running shoes” (p. 133).

Having learned the American way of life, Jasmine’s identity is challenged. In Baden, Jasmine meets Bud Ripplemeyer, an American banker. He immediately falls in love with her. In this episode of her odyssey, her identity is once again tested through gendered discourse. Bud calls her “Jane . . . Calamity Jane. Jane as in a Jane Russel, not Jane as in Plain Jane. But Plain Jane is all I want to be. Plain Jane is a role, like any other” (p. 26). He wants to rename her Jane Ripplemeyer. By attaching her name to his, he wants her to be defined by him. As such, her selfhood becomes totally dependent on his. Bud’s renaming of Jasmine is different in the way he wants to re-shape her beingness and re-define her subjectivity. By bottling her up into a Ripplemeyer, she realizes that “Bud’s talking discipline, strength, patience, character” (p. 23). His discourse seems to be masculine. Feeling her rebellious and adventurous spirit, Bud wants to chain Jasmine down by proposing marriage. His proposal is of conformity. He wants to marry

her “to be able to say, Bud and *Jane Ripplemeyer* [emphasis in original]” (p. 7). By marrying him, Jasmine would be a property of his. Dragged into a life of passivity, she feels herself isolated in Baden. Her life with Bud suffocates her subjecthood construction. Consequently, Iowa symbolizes a deterioration of her becomingness journey. Fighting this “war between [her] fate and [her] will,” she decides to leave Bud and the life of passivity (p. 12). She flees a possible life of conformity and heads west with Taylor.

With the help of Kate, Gordon’s daughter, Jasmine begins a new episode of her self-becomingness with the Hayes family. Jasmine’s work for this family as a caregiver for their adopted daughter bestows her with a new perception of being. What is important at this stage is that her transformation comes from within. She transforms from Jazzy to Jase. The latter is a name given to her by Taylor, a name that she likes since Jase “was a woman who brought herself spangled heels” (p. 176). Jase is an independent woman in full hold of her subjecthood. Feeling comfort and contentment, Jasmine falls in love with Taylor smoothly and gradually. On a side-note, Jasmine’s initiation of love is seen just with Prakash and Taylor. She falls in love with Taylor because he brings out her self-value and accepts her for who she is. He has no will for changing her; rather he embraces her foreignness and differentness. Thereupon, Jasmine’s desire to change is internally triggered. She “changed because [she] wanted to” (p. 185).

Moreover, Taylor does not insult her intelligence. He stimulates her critical thinking by generating philosophical debates and involving her in his studies. In one incident, she tries to explain her belief of what she calls assignment logic of the universe. She spells out that “a whole life’s mission might be to move a flowerpot from one table to another” and maybe her “assignment was to bring [Taylor] enlightenment” (p. 59-60). Her views on existential matters are different from those of Taylor’s. To her, one should “treat every second of [his/her] existence as a possible assignment from God” (p. 61). Taylor believes that such world where “rearranging a particle of dust is as important as discovering relativity, that’s a formula for total anarchy. Total futility. Total fatalism” (ibid). Noteworthy to mention is that while living with Taylor and Wylie, Jasmine becomes financially independent; she is her own bread-winner. Her self-becomingness is crystallized within this episode where she voices her overpassing of foreignness and her rootedness within the American landscape. For her, America “maybe fluid and built on flimsy, invisible lines of weak gravity, but [she] was *a dense object*, [she] had *landed* and was *getting rooted* [emphasis added]” (p. 179). Her consciousness is borderless and boundaries-free.

Jasmine is the story of patriarchy, exile, and woman’s agency. It questions the blind maneuverings of patriarchal and racial performativities and the female’s shedding of these social masks. Jasmine succeeds in moving away from a codified life marked by gendered and racial difference. She negotiates and re-negotiates her identity within the borders of patriarchy and exile. Jasmine embraces a borderless rhizomatic consciousness. She is the new mestiza nurturing multiple selves. Consequently, the novel is about the plurality and multiplicity of the protagonist’s selfhood. She is in a constant reproduction and renewal of her “self.” With the

switching of names and identities, Jasmine crosses gender-based, racial, and cultural boundaries. Briefly, *Jasmine* is a story of rebirth, transformation, and reincarnation of the protagonist within the borders of America.

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