Hybridity as Agency for the Post-colonial Migrant: Gabrielle Watling Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine and Sara Suleri's Meatless Days

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Abstract
While there is clearly some measure of truth in Simon During's contention that theories of post-colonial hybridity are Western academic inventions which often serve to limit the celebration of indigenous cultures, the hybridity produced by Third World migration to the West nevertheless demands responses which can read and theorize the various negotiations between migrant and host. Whereas the 'first wave' of post-colonial migration led chiefly to Britain and to such bleak allegorical accounts of the barriers to communication between migrant and host in times of social, political and demographic change as Janet Frame's The Edge of the Alphabet (1962) and V.S. Naipaul's The Mimic Men (1967), subsequent narratives on the topic have been less pessimistic.
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While there is clearly some measure of truth in Simon During’s contention that theories of post-colonial hybridity are Western academic inventions which often serve to limit the celebration of indigenous cultures, the hybridity produced by Third World migration to the West nevertheless demands responses which can read and theorize the various negotiations between migrant and host. Whereas the ‘first wave’ of post-colonial migration led chiefly to Britain and to such bleak allegorical accounts of the barriers to communication between migrant and host in times of social, political and demographic change as Janet Frame’s *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962) and V.S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* (1967), subsequent narratives on the topic have been less pessimistic. Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* (1989) and Sara Suleri’s *Meatless Days* (1991) emerged after that first migratory phase, to tell of migration to the United States, and seem more readily able to concentrate on questions of individual subjectivity in a post-colonial context. Each text obviously owes something to its author’s experiences as a post-colonial migrant, and each has its own implicitly recommended strategies for how to go about occupying Western space, how to negotiate the cultural differences separating the self from the host nation. Thus they bear witness to a development in the conceptualization of the subjectivity of the post-colonial migrant, from anonymous ‘agent’ to autonomous, multicultural ‘citizen’, and, in their efforts to negotiate First World difference, they engage with the question of hybridity.

Even so, neither of these texts unequivocally endorses hybridity as a mode of agency for Third World peoples in the First World. Mukherjee, the less enthusiastic of the two, suggests that it produces partial (and therefore marginal) citizens, and recommends total commitment to the new host culture; Suleri is prepared to allow that it can be useful in the struggle to undo the knowledge/power nexus which produces social, cultural, sexual and gendered ‘others’ in both Third World and First Worlds, but her own eventual position, or positions, are much more
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pluralized and subtle than the single term ‘hybridity’ can cover. *Jasmine*, Mukherjee’s most noted work of fiction, condemns hybridity as ‘fence-sitting’ and endorses its heroine’s embrace of all things American; *Meatless Days* maintains that we all situated in a number of discourses, and that identity is ‘located precisely where you’re sitting’ (p.20), but Suleri acknowledges that to claim subjectivity is to exceed discourse. Whereas Jasmine makes every effort to erase her Indian identity and to close on the achievement of a new Western one (the realization of the dream of the hybrid subject), the narrator in *Meatless Days* eschews closure in favour of an intellectual and experiential inquisitiveness which accepts change and encourages boundary crossing at every juncture. For Suleri, hybridity is a state which, despite its permanence, is not definable. Thus her hybridity suggests a paradoxically permanent impermanence which allows the migrant to ‘walk with tact on other people’s land’ (p. 164). This paper argues for Suleri’s commitment to negotiation between cultures, as against Mukherjee’s commitment to cultural reinscription.

Relocation within a First World community substantially alters the post-colonial subject’s experience of cultural hybridity. By definition, the post-colonial migrant is a subject who interpellates and is interpellated by a broad range of discourses, not all of which co-exist unproblematically, but Western humanist expectations require that the subject consolidate his or her identity into the autonomous, unambiguous ‘I’ of the humanist tradition. Hybridity thus becomes shorthand for ‘assimilation’, a fixation of the self which requires that the migrant weed out the ambiguities born of her engagement with multiple discourses and recreate herself as ‘one of us’. To put that another way, the post-colonial migrant is expected to take on Western individuality and so become a ‘readable’ member of the First World community. Most migrants oscillate between their cultural base and the dominant First World culture, but Mukherjee’s Jasmine increasingly regards the movement back and forth between her Indian friends, family and culture and her adopted America as a sign of failure. Jasmine’s early efforts to negotiate America are typical of the difficulties faced by Third World migrants in the First World, but, in adopting American values on behalf of Third World migrants, Mukherjee’s work systematically overlooks the very forces which help to relegate the Asian migrant to second-class status. In short, Mukherjee’s Jasmine goes beyond the adaptation which would allow her to renegotiate America on her terms and becomes a Western humanist ‘I’, a self-asserting individual for whom the voluntary negotiation of multiple discourses is anathema.

A Punjabi village girl, Jasmine replays the American Dream. She arrives with nothing and is soon the victim of the corruption of decadent America, but her misadventure only inspires her to investigate the ‘Land of Opportunity’. Perhaps ironically, she is brought to America and inducted into its *laissez faire* opportunism through a signally Indian plot device, in that she has left her home country to come to the body of her
murdered husband, whose dream it had been to study at an American college, and there commit ritual suicide. But on the way, in Florida, the disfigured sea captain who smuggles her ashore brutally rapes her in a seedy motel. Jasmine manages to kill him, following which she ‘murders’ her Punjabi self, burning her widow’s robes and her husband’s suit in a dumpster outside the fatal motel. Having thus endured 24 hours in the U.S. of A., Jasmine walks on as a disciple of Kali: not a widow, not a victim, and, increasingly, not an Indian.

Mukherjee has called Jasmine ‘a very real feminist’ who leaves behind ‘a world of despair’, and has observed that the sort of ‘gumption’ and/or ‘hustlerism’ she learns to show in the States evokes the image which Americans traditionally have of themselves. Thus, Mukherjee suggests, Jasmine is less an Indian girl who makes it in America (as an Indian) than an Indian girl who becomes American. She does not make it despite her Indianess; within days of her arrival she trades that Indianess for American walk and talk. Despite the individualist implications of her ‘feminist hustlerism’, however, Jasmine in fact depends on several other people for survival and success. Her first American benefactor, Lillian Gordon, teaches her to ‘walk American’, an experiment which works too well, suggesting how eager the text is that Jasmine should become ‘more American than the Americans’:

Walk American, [Lillian] exhorted me, and showed me how. I worked hard on the walk and deportment. Within a week she said I’d lost my shy sidle. She said I walked like one of those Trinidad Indian girls, all thrust and cheekiness. She meant it as a compliment.

‘Tone it down girl!’ She clapped as I took a turn between the kitchen and bath. I checked myself in the mirror, shocked at the transformation. Jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords, and running shoes. I couldn’t tell if with the Hasnapuri sidle I’d also abandoned my Hasnapuri modesty. (pp. 132-3)

Although the text occasionally slows down enough for Jasmine to spread a little token Indianess amongst her benefactors, the smell of ‘cumin, coriander and turmeric’ (p. 215) does not linger long enough to make any impression. In fact, in the company of other Indians, Jasmine mainly feels vulnerable and humiliated. She is taken in by her husband’s Indian mentor, Professor Vadhera, but once inside his Queens apartment, which she describes as full of ‘artificially maintained Indianess’, she wants to ‘distance [her]self from everything Indian’ (p. 145). Mukherjee equates India with ‘the Old World’, ‘where your opportunities are closed by caste, gender, or family’, and sees America as a land without such barriers, a country where migrants can ‘make their futures in ways they could not have done in the Old World’. It is ‘more real … than India’.

But the America which Jasmine actually encounters has lost some of its legendary New World assertiveness. In Florida, New York, and Iowa she is obstructed by corruption, complacency and conservatism (but not by
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racism; this successfully interpellated neoAmerican competitor does not struggle against ‘Other’ Americans, but against other Americans). Sometimes she profits from American cynicism – it gets her into the country and procures for her a greencard without the requisite documentation; sometimes cheating the system works against her – an illegal immigrant, she has no legal recourse when she is raped, and the scam which got her into America also admits her husband’s murderer.

Having escaped Old World India, Jasmine takes on Old World America. Taking advantage of its corruption when she can, she sets about showing it the error of its ways. The conservative Old and the dynamic New American worlds come together in Iowa, where Jasmine flees when she learns that her husband’s killer has arrived in New York and has her in his sights. In Iowa she meets Bud, who in rapid succession becomes her boss, her lover and her de facto husband, and together they adopt a 14-year-old Vietnamese refugee called Du, another New American. Iowa, the heart of rural America, is in the grip of recession, and farmers who formerly epitomized America’s spirit of enterprise and hard work are having difficulty even holding onto their land. One such is Darrel, a man caught between the Old World and the New, the worlds respectively of Bud and Jasmine. As the text’s representative of the land-based American traditions and as Darrel’s bank manager, Bud tries to dissuade him from selling his farm to a golf course development on the grounds that to do so would betray his family’s past, their hard work and successes. But Jasmine approaches the situation differently:

I see [this] way of life coming to an end. Baseball loyalties, farming, small-town innocence. Most people in Elsa County care only about the Hawkeyes – football or basketball. In the brave new world of Elsa County, Karin Ripplemeyer runs a suicide hot line. Bud Ripplemeyer has adopted a Vietnamese and shacked up with a Punjabi girl. There’s a Vietnamese network. There are Hmong, with a church of their own, turning out quilts for Lutheran relief. (p. 229)

This New America is peopled by migrants like Du, a ‘new tycoon’ (p. 226). Darrel wants the kind of life he imaginees these New Americans lead, but he is eventually crushed by guilt for abandoning the Old. Jasmine, however, endorses the abandonment of the Old, and so Darrel’s suicide becomes little more than an object lesson in the dangers of trying to leap across ideological boundaries. Hybridity, in this scenario, is definitely not an empowering influence.

Carmen Wickramagamage regards Jasmine’s rites of passage as ‘a [release] from her confinement … [which leaves] her free to savour and experience the “fluidity of American character and the American landscape”’, and contends that she is motivated by the knowledge that ‘no human attachment to community, place, or culture is so final or sacred that it cannot be broken’. Certainly, Jasmine’s break with her culture is to
be seen to be complete. The story concludes with Jasmine deciding to leave Bud, the father of her unborn child, and to join Taylor, her New York employer and next lover, and his daughter, Duff, in California. This is the New American family:

I wait for Taylor's crooked-toothed grin, but his teeth don't look so crooked anymore. The smile says, *Why not?*
'We'll be an unorthodox family, Jase'...
'Don't pack,' he says. 'This is the age of plastic.' (p. 238)

Jasmine justifies her decision to leave Iowa and Bud by explaining that she 'is not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and [my] old-world dutifulness' (p. 240). Having chosen promise over duty, Jasmine is 'out the door ... scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and reckless from hope' (p. 241), and, she might add, off to the epicentre of the American dreamscape, California.

Jasmine occupies 'The American Dream' more successfully than most Americans because she has embraced the strategies they have neglected. As C.L. Chua observes, 'when Jasmine moves westward to a greater freedom and self-actualisation, she is merely acting in the time-honoured American tradition of lighting out for the territory ahead, a territory hallowed by Horace Greeley and Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.' And like a character out of Wild West folklore, this 'grabby and greedy' immigrant murders, hustles, cajoles, demands, uses and deserts her way to California. As Mukherjee comments:

I think that to some extent my characters, including Jasmine, are very often tough and they are survivors and they are hustlers, 'wheelers and dealers' ... and that's part of being a pioneer. I think a lot of people have forgotten that the first white settlers must have had to be tough in order to wrest the country from someone else, stake out the territory.9

Thus Mukherjee locates Jasmine within America's pioneer tradition, the myth of 'Yankee know-how'. But her description overlooks the fact that white America's success was achieved through the massacre and dispossession of America's native races, its own 'Indians'. Jasmine has become so equated with America as the land of 'opportunity' that she shares in the ethos not only of its 'pioneers', but also of the acts of violence on which the American dream was founded. Jasmine's staking out of her territory, then, goes beyond a mere migrant success story. It comes to share in the brutal colonial tradition of which she was once a victim. In the beginning Mukherjee's novel immerses its central character in the prejudices, exploitation and violence of migration – but it allows her to overcome these difficulties by internalizing the very tactics used against her.

As Anne Brewster has observed, Jasmine is positioned neither 'on the margin of contemporary American culture' nor in opposition to it; rather,
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'as an exemplar of a hegemonic nationalism', she 'represent[s] the voice of "the new America"'. Without contending for a moment that Third World migration necessarily demands that the migrant occupy a 'migrant state' on society's margins or in opposition to the 'mainstream', I agree with Brewster that Jasmine enunciates an American 'neo-nationalism'. The novel sees hybridity as a half-way state, and eschews it as such; for Mukherjee, to choose hybridity is to choose expatriatism over full citizenship, and so in Jasmine the hybrid, fluid self loses out to the autonomous self of 'citizenship' in a nation where 'opportunity' relies on an individual's ability to 'wrest the country from someone else, [and] stake out the territory'.

If Jasmine eagerly embraces the subject position of the autonomous and rapacious 'New American', Meatless Days, by contrast, both recognizes through the negotiation of various discourses – native, migratory, gendered and familial – that interpellation is for the migrant an ongoing process, and examines the value of occupying the fluid spaces hybridity can offer. The post-colonial woman's autobiography Suleri produces is a consciously fractured narrative which emphasizes the processive layering of self-construction over some notional consolidation of self. That said, it should be stressed that Suleri's text offers no simple endorsement of (something which is typically understood as) 'hybridity'. Instead, as Linda Warley observes, it works towards 'a contestatory, politically conscious subject position', and we find that, in practice, Suleri both articulates native agency, for example, as a juggler of discourses (Urdu poetry alongside Milton, Shakespeare and Kipling), and abdicates agency when events, such as the deaths of her mother and her sister or problems like her relationship with Tom, 'seem to evade explanation altogether, somehow exceeding whatever claims to knowledge and understanding the autobiographer might wish to make'. Meatless Days has an agenda, one which might even be described as an attempt positively to articulate 'hybridity'; but, as its structure and style indicate, 'hybridity' is not a position to be occupied or rejected wilfully by a migrant speaker.

Meatless Days takes the form of a collection of interwoven stories which are themselves fragmented. The stories, of family members and friends, are told not as unified, closed narratives but are stitched together as parts of an embroidery never to be completed. The stories intersect, engage with, and inform each other, with no one voice allowed to dominate the book's delicate balance, and, despite Suleri's device of naming chapters after individual people – 'Muskatori, My Friend', 'Goodbye to the Greatness of Tom', 'Papa and Pakistan', the eponymous characters do not dominate their chapters. 'Goodbye to the Greatness of Tom', for example, is less about Tom than it is about the idea of Pakistan becoming a political and social reality.

But neither is Suleri's project to assemble some (post-colonial) 'reality' from a group of personal anecdotes: conscious that her words may be
used to represent some sort of post-colonial 'truth', as in the past they have been, she remarks to her brother that she 'has lived many years as an otherness machine' (p. 105). Despite the similarities between the experiences of the Suleri family and Pakistan's own social and political development, Sangeeta Ray's observation is accurate: the text's 'anecdotal familial genealogy ... breaks down the master narratives of historical facticity by revealing its dependency on the fractured memories of its individual participants'. Frequently, the 'facticity' of history is challenged either by Suleri's own analysis or by the inability of human memory 'truthfully' to retain facts. For example, Suleri's grandmother Dadi, whose very spine has frozen into the shape of a question mark, can neither remember how many sisters she had nor which country her son has emigrated to, Switzerland or Swaziland; and Suleri's memory of witnessing her sister's childhood accident becomes blurred when Ifat herself retells the story many years later 'as if [Sara] had not been there' (p. 135). None of the participants 'owns' his or her story; every time a story is retold, events and their witnesses have to be viewed 'from, as it were, the opposite angle of the room' (p. 135). And, like history, language too is flexible. Suleri's mother tells her that she began very early to talk and become 'interested in sentences' (p. 155), but, as Sara points out, her interest in grammar, caused a single slippage in my nouns: I would call a marmalade a squirrel and I'd call a squirrel a marmalade. Today I can understand the impulse and would very much like to call sugar an opossum; an antelope, tea. To be engulfed by grammar after all is a tricky prospect, and a voice deserves to declare its own control in any way it can, asserting that in the end it is an inventive thing. (p. 155)

Meatless Days celebrates the speaking space it opens up. Its project is both political and personal: political in that it directs the reader towards a radically centred form of comprehension, and personal in that the speaker refuses to draw conclusions about their experiences on behalf of the subjects of its many anecdotes, insisting that what they 'know' is not knowable by anybody else. Thus Suleri's Welsh mother Mair, a major influence on her life, can frequently disappear from view when she 'retreat[s] ... away from us and into her own childhood, back to some Welsh moment that served to succour her when duty felt too great' (p. 161).

Deeply though she respects her family's and friends' private 'retreats', Suleri quite deliberately sets out to disrupt any inference of 'knowability' her anecdotes may threaten to convey. Pakistan's political and social development may be closely associated with the development of the Suleri family, but by the end of Meatless Days neither can with any certainty be 'known'. Suleris live all over the globe, and, despite their common Pakistani connection, they occupy many diverse social and national
discourses which will not be drawn into some closed explanation of their lives. And Pakistan similarly resists totalization: it will not serve as a metonym of the ‘Third World’, a term Suleri ironically employs throughout the text, as it is delivered to the reader in pieces which, like Dadi’s burned skin, cannot be made to congeal.

Moreover, although Pakistan acts as a geographical focus for Suleri’s stories, most of the apparently ‘Pakistani’ experiences can themselves be considered migrant ones. Not one of the central characters is ‘properly’ Pakistani: grandmother Dadi was born near Delhi and only moved to the Punjab after Partition (for all her devotion to Islam, Dadi ‘was not amongst those who, on the fourteenth of August, unfurled flags’ (p. 2) for the birth of the Islamic nation); father Pip was in London campaigning for the creation of Pakistan when the nation was constituted; older sister Ifat and younger brother Irfan were born in England, and, although Sara herself was born in Pakistan, her mother is Welsh. The family continue to divide their time between Pakistan and England and, with the exception of Pip, none of them really adopts either country as ‘home’ – or any of the many other countries their professions, marriages or travels take them to. Whether they are in Pakistan, Kuwait, England, or America, Suleris adapt, and locate ‘home’ in memories and anecdotes. Suleri’s point, I think, is that living in Pakistan is much the same as living in any other incomprehensible country. Pakistan, a nation which sprang fully-formed from the heads of expatriate Indian intellectuals in Britain, can be known no more than can Kuwait, the United States or Britain. And Pakistan’s occupants, like those of Kuwait, the United States or Britain, are hybridized in the very act of occupying their nationality. One can be – perhaps one is – hybridized wherever one is ‘sitting’.

The women in *Meatless Days* are metonyms of the diasporic experiences presented in the book. Suleri, her sisters, her friend Muskatori, and her mother, all confront life ‘elsewhere’, as wives, students and/or professionals. But as Ifat points out, women live in bodies – unlike men, who live in ‘homes’ (p. 143). ‘Home’ and ‘nation’ – masculinist concepts – imply ownership and patriarchal protection, fragile though the notion may be; the women’s lives have no such grounding. Mair’s experience becomes a dominant theme in Suleri’s treatment of migrant flexibility, crystallized perhaps in her refrain, ‘Child, I will not grip’ (p. 164). Renamed ‘Surraya Suleri’ when she married Sara’s father Zia, Mair ‘will not grip’ to her Welshness, but neither will she ‘grip’ to her applied Pakistani nationality. Instead,

[she] had to walk through her new context in the shape of memory erased ... She learned to live apart, then – apart from herself even – growing into that curiously powerful disinterest in owning, in belonging ... She let commitment and belonging become my father’s domain, learning instead the way of walking with tact on other people’s land. (p. 164)
Mair refuses to locate her consciousness in one place, and resists those taxonomies which work to regulate social position and behaviour, particularly women’s behaviour, in cultural systems. Her daughters remark that

Her logic was indeed a secret. ‘The only trouble with being female in Pakistan,’ Ifat complained ... ‘is that it allows for two possible modes of behaviour – either you can be sweet and simple, or you can be cold and proud.’ ‘No wonder they found Mamma difficult to decipher, then,’ I agreed, ‘whose coldness was so sweet ...’ ‘As tactful as ice in water,’ Ifat added passionately, ‘and as sweet!’ (p. 166)

Suleri observes that Mair is ‘a guest in her own name’ (p. 163). She refuses to follow either her husband into his obsession with Pakistani politics, or her children on their ‘Asiatic ... walk[s] throughout the world’ (pp. 160-1). As a Welshwoman in Pakistan, Mair opens a space for herself which allows for dialogue with her adopted country but at the same time reserves a corner for her Welsh memories. Suspended somewhere between Pakistan’s rules and Britain’s, Mair’s ‘intimacy with place and way grew habitual ... but [she] never changed her habit of seeming to announce, “It is good of you to let me live – in my own way – among you”’ (p. 165). Occasionally, as already noted, Mair retreats ‘to some Welsh moment’, but she spends most of her time moving ‘through Pakistan with a curious relaxation ... [becoming] to that community a creature of unique and unclassifiable discourse’ (pp. 165-6). Certainly she never disappears into that quasi-spiritual ineffability within which the West often contains the ‘East’. Her situation differs from, and in some ways inverts, her daughter’s, in that Mair is a white woman in a Third World country and Sara is a brown woman writing from the West’s most powerful nation – but her principal lesson to Sara, that one must ‘[walk] with tact on other people’s land’ (p. 164), presents both a possible strategy and an ethic for the migrant subject seeking agency in an other place.

As I hope this account has suggested, Sara’s own experiences as a migrant in the United States do not dominate Meatless Days. The book emphasizes the need for flexibility ‘wherever one is sitting’, and makes no special case for Sara’s American life. At the same time, as Linda Warley points out, ‘Meatless Days ... reminds us that a general theory can never be made to fit all peoples or all texts and, indeed, demonstrates what Trinh T. Minh-ha has noted ... categories always leak’. The book begins with a paradox that demonstrates just such a ‘leakage’, when Suleri says that ‘leaving Pakistan was, of course, tantamount to giving up the company of women’ (p. 1). But she immediately goes on to say that she could only reveal this to her American women friends. In Pakistan, she claims, ‘the concept of woman was not really part of an available vocabulary: we were too busy for that, just living, and conducting precise negotiations with what it meant to be a sister or a child or a wife or a
mother or a servant' (p. 1). But she also says that her friend Dale, an American woman who lives in Boston, ‘will one day write a book about the stern and secretive life of breast-feeding’ (p. 1). The concept of ‘woman’ may not yet be available in the Pakistani vocabulary – which perhaps explains her otherwise baffling claim that ‘there are no women in the third world’ (p. 20) – but women’s business, including breast-feeding, can be as ‘stern and secretive’ for Americans as it is for Pakistanis. Of course, the Pakistani sense of what a woman is and may do differs greatly from the American view – Suleri’s conversations with her circle of women in Pakistan differ greatly from her exchanges with Anita and Dale in the U.S. – but then Suleri’s concept of herself as woman changes too. Like Mair, Sara knows that her ‘ambidextrous eyes’ (p. 92) will allow her to enter both worlds – the strong, vibrant and fascinating domestic world of her Pakistani sisters and the world of serious public intellectual endeavour at Yale – without having either to mount a campaign to unify the two or to abandon one of them.

From her specific social and economic situation, Suleri points out that migrant experiences will always require negotiation between cultural paradigms. For her, migration is an elliptical and open-ended process which will not be reduced to a formula. Thus the view which emerges from Meatless Days refutes the eager adoption of American entrepreneurship and the rejection of all negotiation, that we found in Jasmine. Jasmine takes little more than a week to re-invent herself as American, but her unlikely trail leaves no gates open for anyone to follow her. Her only allegiance is to herself as a self-actualizing individual; she shows none to any community of immigrants. Suleri, by contrast, cannot conceive of life, either in Pakistan or in America, without a community. Having said that leaving Pakistan was tantamount to giving up the company of women, she devotes the bulk of her book to recording and commemorating the network of women she has built up throughout her life, regardless of where she might have been ‘sitting’ at the time. She recognizes that the particular circumstances of her own migration will not stand for all migrant experiences but also that, for all migrants, migration is an on-going process which demands that the migrant confronts both her association with and her disconnection from the several communities in which she lives.

Taken together, these books offer two clearly divergent potential responses to post-colonial migrant subjectivity. Does the post-colonial migrant take her home with her when she travels? Is she encouraged to share, and receive, cultural experiences when she arrives? Or is it best for the migrant to disavow cultural background and adopt the customs of the new country? It could be claimed that, in adopting the last of these positions, Bharati Mukherjee sketches a means whereby the post-colonial migrant might find a form of personal empowerment but, as she is more interested in borrowing the master’s tools than in dismantling the master’s
house, her book ultimately offers no feasible general strategy for post-colonial migrants in the First World. Perhaps the telling irony is that Jasmine goes to America intending to kill herself as a good Indian wife; and ultimately, in making herself entirely into a new American woman, that is what she does. Suleri, on the other hand, keeps alive her ties to 'home', which she suggests may remain a sustaining and strengthening notion – albeit mobile and indistinct – for post-colonial migrants. And while Suleri's particular flexibility perhaps reflects her position of social and professional privilege, her ability both to retain her heritage and adapt to a new culture has allowed her productively and creatively to link worlds without having to choose between them, without having to kill off a substantial part of who she is.

NOTES

2. Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
3. Sara Suleri, Meatless Days (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
8. Mukherjee, in Brewster, p. 54.
10. op. cit., p. 50.
13. ibid., p. 115.
15. Warley, p. 121.