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Negating and Celebrating Roots: Negotiating Dialectical Ways of Identity Formation in Two Postcolonial *Bildungsroman* - Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to discuss the issue of writing *bildungsroman* in the Postcolonial context which essentially involves the issues of displacement, rootlessness, exile and the accompanying sense of identity-crises, trauma and alienation, while forming one's self in a changing environment. This paper discusses two texts in the context of writing *bildungsroman* in the Postcolonial scenario - one is Leslie Marmon Silko's Native American novel *Ceremony* (1977) and the other Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), an Indian diasporic novel - in order to explore two different modes of identity-crises and alienation and the discovery of ultimate escape route in two different Postcolonial contexts. This

paper aims to show that how negotiation of identity radically varies from one Postcolonial context to another and is always unstable, shifting and relational.

Keywords

Bildungsroman; Identity; Postcolonial; Rootless; Native American; Diasporic; Alienation.

The *Bildungsroman* as a genre is supremely anxious about the social, professional and romantic definition its protagonist seeks. Writing *bildungsroman* in the Postcolonial context, essentially involves the issues of displacement, rootlessness, exile and the accompanying sense of identity-crises, trauma and alienation, while forming one's self in a changing scenario. Subjects in this atmosphere bound to elude fixity and the phenomena of adoption, retains "universal" value as a means to adjust to or legitimize the transitional state of displacement. For my paper, I have chosen two texts - Leslie Marmon Silko's Native American novel *Ceremony* (1977) and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), an Indian diasporic novel - in order to explore two different modes of identity-crises and alienation and the discovery of ultimate escape route in two different Postcolonial contexts. My aim is to show that how negotiation of identity radically varies from one Postcolonial context to another and is always unstable, shifting and relational.

Let us begin our discussion with the Native American novel *Ceremony*. I want to begin by discussing how education, or *Bildung*, is a central theme and organizing principle in *Ceremony*. Indeed, education lies at the original heart of Tayo's trauma and provides the only means for his healing. Ronald Gronofsky pinpoints how the characters in trauma narratives move through stages of identity fragmentation, regression, and reunification (18). So it is with Tayo. Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* unfolds a young Native American's search for identity amidst fragmented shards of his own tribalism, a way of life

torn asunder by centuries of oppression. His story is written by a Laguna woman of mixed ancestry who does not speak the old language. Neither does her hero whose name is Tayo. Tayo is the representative of thousands of young Native American men, who have been used by the U.S. government in World War II, after which they were send back into the reservation only to lose their social importance as well as their own identity and thus these deracinated and occluded people engage themselves in self-destructive activities like drinking and fighting. Tayo is an embodiment of ethnic ambivalence; he is half-white, yet every step he takes in his tortuous journey is a step backwards his Native American heritage. Like N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and Welch's *Winter in the Blood,* Silko's novel presents us with the characteristic protagonist of the contemporary Native American man who begins the novel confused and disoriented and who ends it relatively unconfused after reorienting himself to important elements of his family, culture, and tribal identity.

Silko's novel, *Ceremony*, can be viewed as three simultaneous planes which interweave throughout. There is the human plane on which we see one man's despair and his regeneration; there is the socio/cultural plane on which we see the cultural conflicts caused by the partial acculturation of the Pueblo Indians; and there is the myth/ritual plane on which we see the traditional myths, values, and beliefs of the Laguna and their relationship to the contemporary Laguna Indian. The myth/ritual plane is the most crucial for understanding the whole novel, for among Indians the spiritual world is one with the secular world; disharmony on the spiritual plane causes disharmony in the whole world and vice versa. Thus, these three planes of the novel should not be separated, but must be seen together, as parts of a whole. The novel itself can and should be viewed as a part of the changing rituals in which the novelist has become the healer or *shaman* and the readers are the participants in the new ceremony.

The novel begins ceremonially with the Laguna myth of the creation. Among the Pueblos and the Navajos, as among many peoples, the creation myth recreates the power of the time of creation, and "the patient is projected out of profane time into the plenitude of primordial time"(Mircea 84). "It is through the actualization of the cosmic Creation, exemplary model of all life, that it is hoped to restore the physical health and spiritual integrity of the patient" (Mircea 82).

Ceremony begins with the image of "Thought - Woman, the Spider", whose web is a symbol of cultural weaving, a spinning out of thought, the story of origin:

> Thought-Woman the spider,
> named things and
> as she named them
> they appeared.
> She is sitting in her room
> thinking of a story now
> I'm telling you the story
> she is thinking. (*Ceremony* 1)

The protagonist of the story Tayo needs to reconstruct an origin that will accommodate his personal absences as well as a larger vacancy in his community. Tangled in the web of Western discourse, Tayo is unable to locate his origin. After the story of the Creation comes the ceremonial explanation of the connection between stories and ceremony. The stories are not just 'entertainment', they are the heritage of a people, they validate the traditions of the culture, they make the past come alive in the present, and they reassure that the past will continue into the future:

> You don't have anything
> If you don't have the stories
> Their evil is mighty

But it can't stand up to our stories
So they try to destroy the stories…
Because we would be defenseless then. (*Ceremony* 2)

Thus Silko attests that the novel itself is a ceremony, that the traditions are alive while growing and changing, and further, that the, ceremony is for healing:

The only cure
I know
is a good ceremony,
that's what she said. (*Ceremony* 3)

Since "she," Thinking Woman the Creator, said this, the story is validated as a cure by the highest deity. The poetic opening also becomes a "prayer," which concludes with "Sunrise" (*Ceremony* 4), a reference to traditional Pueblo sunrise prayers, but, of course, also symbolic of hope for the future. Gradually helped by the memory of his dead uncle Josiah's advices; by the *Shaman* old Betonie; old Ku'oosh, a wise Laguna medicine man; Robert, the kind uncle and stepfather and finally through the mysterious woman Ts'eh, Tayo comes to a greater understanding of the world and his own place within it.

From the earliest infancy, Tayo has learned to live by instinct and sensuous perception. His Laguna mother is driven from her tribe because Tayo is an illegitimate child, fathered by a Mexican. When at the age of four he is taken by his Auntie and uncle Josiah into their ranch-home, he learns the smells of animals and the sights and sounds of mountains, winds and rivers. It is the memory of his uncle Josiah, which helps him to recover war-trauma and to feel deep joy when he is alone in close companionship with nature: "…in the dream he smelled Josiah's smell - horses, wood-smoke, and sweat - the smell he had forgotten until the dream; and he was overcome with all the love there was" (*Ceremony* 117). Tayo has been shown by uncle Josiah that violence is senseless. Tayo disobeys his white teacher when he learnt from Josiah that one

shouldn't kill flies for it was a fly which went to Mother Earth to ask forgiveness for people. After he has undergone the healing ceremony, he is responsible to nature in its smallest manifestations - imitating the gentleness of the bees in pollinating flowers with a small feather or saving a tree from an early winter storm by carefully shaking the snow from its branches and Josiah advices him: "…there are some things worth more than money […] This is where we come from see. This sand, this stone, this, these trees, the vines, all the wild flowers. This earth keeps us going" (*Ceremony* 118). The land of Laguna is a teeming space of tangles, flows and webs and it becomes a character and almost a mindscape in *Ceremony*.

At the outset of the narrative, he has just returned to his reservation following six years of serving in the Second World War. He suffers from a "great swollen grief that expresses itself in mental and physical symptoms. Initially, he attributes his illness to malaria fever and battle fatigue and seeks medical counsel. However, the attention he receives at a Post Traumatic Stress treatment facility at a Los Angeles hospital only dismisses his illness as an inevitable war time consequence. When he hears this report by the hospital doctor, Tayo comes to sense that there is more at issue: "It's more than that. I can feel it. It's been going around for a long time. I don't know what it is, but I can feel it all around me" (*Ceremony* 53). It becomes clear that his trauma resides in a deeply entrenched Native American legacy of oppression and alienation from Native culture, mythology and history. The effects of oppression are symbolized in the drought that has been afflicting the Laguna region for six years. According to the holy men, the arrival of the white man disturbed the balance of the world, bringing "droughts and harder days to come" (*Ceremony* 186). Tayo cannot identify his illness because his community has been subject to a long and systematic erasure of Native traditions through school practices. Silko shows how Western practices of reason and sense making deprive Tayo of understanding his traumatic experiences at war and on the reservation: "He

examined the facts and logic again and again ... the facts made what he had seen as an impossibility. [...] He shivered because all the facts, all the reasons made no difference anymore" (*Ceremony* 8).

Rocky strives for mainstream success, diligently listening to his teachers' advice that "Nothing can stop you now except one thing: don't let the people at home hold you back" (*Ceremony* 51). To prove that he would not be retained, he enlists in the army, with Tayo joining him out of support. However, Rocky's tragic death in combat makes clear the limitations of the American dream. Tayo's survival consequently hinges upon an alternate *Bildung*, a learning oriented toward the recovery of the knowledge of his ancestors. For this he needs help, since forgetting had deeply imprinted itself upon him:

> Tayo felt the old nausea rising up in his stomach, along with a vague feeling that he knew something which he could not remember. . . . The feelings were twisted, tangled roots, and all the names for the source of this growth were buried under English words, out of reach. And there would be no peace and the people would have no rest until the entanglement had been unwound to the source. (*Ceremony* 117)

Old Grandma thus decisively announces: "That boy needs a medicine man" (*Ceremony* 33).

Three unorthodox teachers - two medicine men named Ku'uosh and Old Betonie and a spirit-mountain woman named Ts'eh arrive on the scene to help Tayo. Each, however, practices a different "remembrance/ pedagogy" (Simon et al. 2). Ku'oosh, Tayo's first instructor, preserves the old Laguna traditions: "He spoke softly ... as if nothing ... were his own but all had been said before and he was only there to repeat it" (*Ceremony* 34). Through Ku'uosh, Tayo learns the power of a single individual to destroy the whole. Yet, the witchery that has been unleashed by whites and natives alike - one exemplified by modern warfare and nuclear destruction - is beyond the theoretical scope and mimetic

methodology of Ku'uosh's educational framework. Ku'oosh thus refers Tayo to Old Betonie (and Betonie's young bear helper Shush). Tayo observes how this Native teacher "didn't talk the way Tayo expected a medicine man to talk. He didn't act like a medicine man at all" (*Ceremony* 118). Betonie insists that Native ceremonies must change if they are to defeat evil: "That's what the witchery is counting on: that we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and then their power will triumph and the people will be no more" (*Ceremony* 126). The lesson is clear. If Tayo is to cure the witchery, he must radically and creatively reconfigure his education to meet his contemporary needs. Michael Hobbs insightfully observes that Tayo must account for both ancestral and Western traditions by writing his own "internally persuasive discourse" (*Ceremony* 306). With this goal in mind, Betonie sends his student off on a journey north into the mountains to reclaim cattle that has been stolen from Tayo's family, predicting what is to come: "Remember these stars. . . . I've seen them and I've seen the spotted cattle; I've seen a mountain and I've seen a woman" (*Ceremony* 52).

Tayo is an ambivalent and passive learner, not particularly invested in his education, whether white or Native-influenced, and not attuned to his role in social change. On the one hand, he honours the traditional myths and tellings of the Laguna people:

> He had studied those [science] books, and he had no reasons to believe the stories anymore. . . . But old Grandma always used to say, 'Back in time immemorial... the animals could talk to human beings and many magical things still happened.' He never lost the feeling he had in his chest when she spoke those words... and he still felt it was true, despite all they had taught him in school. (*Ceremony* 94-95)

Yet, on the other hand, he is filled with doubt:

> All the rest - old Betonie and his stargazing, the woman in her storm-pattern blanket - all that was crazy, the kind of old-time superstition the teachers at Indian school used to warn him and Rocky about. . . . [W]hat good [can] Indian ceremonies ... do against the sickness which comes from their wars, their bombs, their lies. (*Ceremony* 194)

Tayo, therefore, must not only learn to negotiate two divergent discourses but also, and critically, learn how to learn and take responsibility for his education. It is a slow and painful process of unlearning and relearning, the effects of which, however, are deep and irrevocable.

The searching of the mountain lion is actually a temporary incarnation of Tayo's third teacher, the spirit-woman and muse Ts'eh. She provides him with the spiritual, psychic, emotional, and cognitive resources to complete the ceremony. Through her loving attention, he is able to come to see the pattern in the stars of which Old Betonie had spoken. Ts'eh confirms the value of remembrance, and reveals how it is embedded in a creative dynamic or life force: "[A]s long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of this story, we have together" (*Ceremony* 231). Yet, she also echoes Old Betonie's concern that the witchery will attempt to destroy Tayo. She predicts that those stopping him from completing his ceremony will be the white men who learn that he has taken repossession of his cattle, along with his war time drinking buddies who believe he has become crazy because he lives isolated in the mountains and who therefore want to return him to the hospital. Ts'eh exclaims:

> The end of the story. They want to change it. ... The violence of the struggle excites them, and the killing soothes them. They have their stories about us - Indian people who are only marking time and waiting for the end. And they would end this story right here,

> with you fighting to your death alone in these hills... because this is the only ending they understand. (*Ceremony* 231-32)

Ts'eh reveals that his veteran friends are too much the subjects of oppression ever to be able to release themselves from its destruction. Inadvertently, they consequently seek Tayo's demise. If this ending intended for him is successfully accomplished, Tayo's death will simply reinforce what has been thought all along. He will be written off as simply "another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran" (*Ceremony* 253).

In efforts to outrun this destiny, Tayo stumbles onto the uranium mine shaft of the Cebolleta Land Grant. It becomes the occasion for Tayo's awakening to the dynamic source of his trauma. In this moment, everything comes together. He recognizes that what he calls his "home" is also the place used to create the first atomic bomb (Trinity Site, White Sands, the Jemez Mountains, Los Alamos). He learns that the Japanese, Mexican, Laguna voices he had heard in a nightmare were a cry against nuclear devastation and "the fate the destroyers had planned for all of them, for all living things" (*Ceremony* 246). Tayo finally bears witness to the pattern:

> He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together - the old stories, the war stories, their stories - to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy: he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time. (*Ceremony* 246)

This insight empowers Tayo to compose the conclusion to his story and fight the witchery and, in the process, write a new way of being-in-the-world for himself and everyone. He watches as his friend tries to murder another friend and so bait Tayo out of hiding. Tayo stops himself from spontaneously seeking revenge. He counters his own instincts for violence by remembering all that he has learned, particularly Ts'eh's maternal-like reassurance that he and his

people "had always been loved" (*Ceremony* 255). Tayo's conclusion, then, encompasses a radical writing against the expected grain of a deep logic of violence. *Ceremony* concludes peacefully with Tayo returning home to his reservation, reunified with his past, and able to pass on his story and its affirmative message to his community. As the final verse maintains, the spell has been broken and the witchery "is dead for now" (*Ceremony* 261).

But unlike *Ceremony,* which is a movement towards lost values and one's own community and roots; Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) explores divergent conditions of cultural displacement through the variations of adoption that operate within the framework of the novel, which celebrates the freedom of dislocation. Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine,* about an immigrant woman might be read as an attempt to disrupt the notion of "colonized as a fixed reality" (Bhabha 76) through its challenge to static notions of Otherness. Jasmine is the story of a young village girl who is uprooted from her home in rural India, and finds herself, by some twist of fortune, on her way to Tampa, Florida. Jyoti, as she is called in her native village Hasnapur, will undergo various metamorphoses during her odyssey in America - from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jase to Jane, with each constructed identity conforming to its adoptive context: a family, community, or an individual.

In her article "Immigrant Writers: Give Us Your Maximalists" Mukherjee describes the maximalist characters having "shed past lives and languages, and have traveled half the world in every direction to come here and begin again... They've lived through centuries of history in a single lifetime - village-born, colonized, traditionally raised, and educated" (Mukherjee 2). Jasmine traces this journey of the maximalist immigrant's transformation. The epigraph to Jasmine, taken from James Gleick's *Chaos Theory*, serves as a statement for the maximalist perspective. It reads, "the new geometry mirrors a universe that is rough, not rounded, scabrous, not smooth, It is a geometry of the pitted, pocked, and broken up, the twisted, tangled, and intertwined" (*Jasmine* 1).

Jasmine's journey epitomizes the tangled geometry of a maximalist universe through a cultural version of what Gleick observes in physics. Her journey characterizes the melding of Indian and American cultures and how a more tangled view of cultural identity can positively transform those who come into contact with it. In this way, Jasmine's transformation provides a map for the "new" maximalist American. Mukherjee describes this novel as a fable of the new immigrant experience, highlighting the psychic violence and self-invention she describes as necessary for an immigrant to be successful in America.

Jyoti is given the more sophisticated and urbane name Jasmine by her ambitious husband Prakash. When she is suddenly widowed, she decides to undertake the journey to America that her husband had himself dreamed of. The spitting image of the stereotypically good Hindu wife, Jasmine decides that upon reaching the long awaited destination in Tampa, Florida, she will build a funeral pyre of her late husband's clothes under a tree, and commit *sati* in his memory by diving into the flames. She makes her way to the west as a stowaway on a boat. Upon her arrival in the U.S., and before the romanticized *sati* - vision can be performed, Jasmine is raped, murders her rapist, moves to New York, and obtains a "caregiver's position" with an academically inclined couple. For Taylor, the gentle, intellectual academic, Jasmine becomes Jase. Jasmine undergoes her next transformation to Jane when she reaches Iowa, moves in with a banker, adopts a Vietnamese son, gets pregnant and finally abandons the promise of domestic security to be carried off, by Taylor, to California. Faced with the choice between "old world dutifulness" and "the promise of America" the many times reborn Jane will go for the latter. America is no longer just the big nation far away, but has become, in its lesson of impermanence, the movement and rhythm of her pulse.

As the novel opens, we witness the young girl Jyoti (Jasmine's original name) frightened and angered by the fate of widowhood and exile foretold for her by the village astrologer, and her being subsequently struck on the head by

the old man as she vehemently denies the legitimacy of his vision. Later, it is her husband Prakash who encourages her first change in identity, her first "rebirth". A modern "city man," Prakash carries Jyoti away from her native village and coaxes her to discard many of her village traditions and her feudal assumptions about women, marriage, child- bearing, and caste. To establish her break from the past, he renames her Jasmine. As Jasmine ruminates, "Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities" (*Jasmine* 70). This early experience of remaking the self, sets the stage for several ensuing re-fashionings and emphasizes the structure of the novel as informed by the Hindu concept of *samsara*, the perpetual cycle of birth/life/death/rebirth- which Jasmine likens to riding along the spiraling grooves of a record album:

> What if the human soul is eternal . . . what if it is like a giant long-playing record with millions of tracks, each of them a complete circle with only one diamond-sharp microscopic link to the next life, and the next, ... ? I do believe that extraordinary events can jar the needle arm, jump tracks, rip across incarnations, and deposit a life into a groove that was not prepared to receive it. (*Jasmine* 113)

That "diamond-sharp microscopic link to the next life" comes when she embarks on a sojourn to the United States to honour the memory and wishes of Prakash, who has been killed by a bomb planted by the Khalsa Lions, a radical Sikh fundamentalist group. To fulfill her husband's wish- to emigrate together to the States- Jasmine obtains forged documents and begins a long, dangerous, clandestine journey to the U.S. During her travels, she discovers she is one among many:

> ... we are refugees and mercenaries and guest workers; you see us sleeping in airport lounges, you watch us unwrapping the last of our native foods, unrolling our prayer rugs, reading our holy books .... We are the outcasts and deportees, strange pilgrims visiting

> outlandish shrines, landing at the end of tarmacs, ferried in old army trucks... dressed in shreds of national costumes, out of season, the wilted plumage of international vagabondage. We ask only one thing: to be allowed to land; to pass through; to continue. (*Jasmine* 90-91)

Jasmine continues to push further into (what is for her) the frontier, having come ashore under cover of night on the Gulf coast of Florida. Before she can proceed toward Tampa, where she envisions herself building a pyre and burning Prakash's wedding suit (performing *suttee*), then dutifully throwing herself on top of it, she is taken to an abandoned hotel by Half- Face, the disfigured captain of the trawler that brought her ashore, and then raped her.

Jasmine's rape by the monster Half-Face, and her response - to murder him as he sleeps - poignantly reveal her need to constantly anew, to shift her borders and her identity at the very moment that they are in danger of crystallizing. In murdering Half-Face Jasmine consciously becomes the image or incarnation of Kali, goddess of destruction who is typically depicted as naked, black-skinned, wearing a garland of skulls, and holding a sword or dagger while her bright red, bloody tongue protrudes from her mouth. Becoming *Kali*, Jasmine stood "naked, . . with my mouth open, pouring blood, my red tongue out" (*Jasmine* 106), the very image of the goddess. As Jasmine realizes through this harrowing series of events, "I was walking death. Death incarnate" (*Jasmine* 106). Jasmine, as a "life force in some way" (Mukherjee in Connell 25), repeatedly effects creation or renewal through destruction, life through death-not only in her personal experience ("We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams") (Mukherjee 25), but also in the lives of those with whom she becomes involved.

Moving to New York and working as a "day mummy" for the professional couple Taylor and Wylie Hayes, becoming deeply attached to their adopted daughter Duff, Jasmine inadvertently breaks up the marriage, falling in love

with Taylor. Because a marriage is broken, new relationships develop. When Jasmine sees her husband's murderer in a New York park one day, she flees to Baden, Iowa, Duffs birthplace. Another broken relationship. After a short time in Iowa, Jasmine becomes involved with the small-town banker Bud Ripplemeyer - another broken marriage makes possible another new relationship. The perpetual cycle of destruction/creation continues throughout the novel: the characters and situations change, but consistent patterns of experience recur. This sense of repetition is made manifest in numerous parallels, in pervasive overlapping images.

Here again, she changes, exchanging Jase for Jane. Bud's renaming reveals her as an adoptable chameleon, but one that always contains the potential for that transformation into 'Jyoti' to 'Jane' is presented as a continuum in a warped space outside the systematic identities of citizenship or marital or maternal status: "I have had a husband for each of the woman I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane, Half - Face for *Kali*" (*Jasmine* 210). The point to note here is that she is actively changing her name, rather than passively accepting a name as she had with Prakash. But this new role requires a "regression, like going back to village life, a life of duty and devotion" (Interview with Connell 31). Here also, the unexpected alliance of white "father", Vietnamese "son" and Indian "wife" challenges the straight lines and smooth planes of history, Bud and those of his kind have so far been familiar with. It also places the essentialist notion of nationalist identity in jeopardy. Jasmine's objective is a transitional hybridized identity that is consistent with her conception of America.

Settling in Baden as the wife of Bud Ripplemeyer, the head of the local bank, would be the same as remaining in Hasnapur, since becoming Bud's wife would be merely another form of enforced identity. As Jane, she only feels affection for Bud. Crippled by a distraught farmer whom his bank has foreclosed on, Bud appeals to her feelings of responsibility to be a caregiver as

she had been in the Hayes family. To become Mrs. Jane Ripplemeyer, therefore, would require renouncing her desire to gain control of her body and destiny.

Jasmine has followed a steady westward movement over the course of the narrative, battling and surviving, enforcing Mukherjee's identification of the Asian immigrant as "new pioneer", marking her individual passage as representative (archetype, perhaps) of a generic image of American history. As Frederick Jackson Turner observed more than one hundred years ago in his landmark paper "The Significance of the Frontier in American History":

> American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth . . . this expansion westward with its new opportunities . . . furnish[es] the forces dominating American character. (Durham 10)

Jasmine embodies this national historical character as she walks away from Bud, urged on by Taylor ("America's a free country") (*Jasmine* 213), moving toward the frontier, toward new possibilities, further new identities: "Time will tell if I am a tornado, a rubble-maker, arising from nowhere and disappearing into a cloud. I am out the door . . . , greedy with wants and reckless from hope" (*Jasmine* 214).

In *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee mangers - in a tale filled with tough raw experience - a smooth sythesis of Hindu religious imagery and concepts and American frontier mythology, traditions that equally and together define Jasmine's personal experience and that serve to clarify through a hyphenated mythology the essence of the new immigrant's experience, the experience of being, as Jasmine calls it, "suspended between two worlds." (*Jasmine* 214)

In spite of their differences in negotiating identity, both Mukherjee and Silko suggest that displacement represents potential for being; in the words of the American poet Meredith Stricker, "The more a thing is torn / The more places it can connect" (Stricker 273 -273). The adoptive condition in these two *bildungsroman* emerged in this paper as a place to negotiate those less

determined and perhaps inconclusive identities, the Tayos and the Jasmines, the subjects expressive of the discontinuities as well as the possibilities of a shifting society.

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