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A Tornado Hitting the Homeland: Disturbing American Foundational Myths in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*

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Abstract: Historically, the United States has always been a country of immigration. Yet, in light of recent political events, a form of nativism and sedentarism is re-emerging that seeks to preserve what is generally perceived as essentially American: an ethnically white and male identity that has its origins in the foundational myths of the pastoral, the frontier, and the West. The American Midwest is where the allegedly “real” America lies: it is what Anthony D. Smith has termed an “ethnoscape”: a landscape imbued with historical and cultural meaning that has come to represent true “Americanness”. In her 1989 novel *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee uses the figure of Jasmine, an undocumented female immigrant from India, to disrupt this traditional trope of “the West” as the perceived location of American cultural identity. She liberates the land from its national, historical, and ethnic inscriptions by subverting the very foundational myths of the pastoral, the frontier, manifest destiny, virgin land, and the melting-pot, that are so crucial to the justification of this exclusive as well as exclusionary identity . . . This article analyzes the processes and mechanisms through which Mukherjee liberates the landscape: Firstly, she satirizes the ideal of the American pastoral and exposes the assumption of a stable, uniquely American landscape as purely imaginative. She then subverts the notion of the global city as the ideal location of immigrants, where “the other” can be safely contained outside the homeland and instead makes the Midwest ethnoscape the space where her protagonist uproots American national identity. Through her presence in the American heartland, Jasmine disturbs and challenges naturalized notions of America and constructs a new homeland that is open for all immigrants following her. Mukherjee thus shifts the perspective away from seeing the American homeland as a pre-existing place in need of defense, and proposes a fluid understanding of home that has acquired new relevance in light of recent political events.

Keywords: nation; migration; ethnoscape; cultural hybridity; pastoral; homeland

1. Introduction

From the beginning, a major argument in Donald Trump’s 2016 election campaign and a recurring theme in the first months of his presidency has been the immigration to the United States and how to keep unwanted people out of the country.¹ In the wake of increasing public and political concern about

¹ Among other things, President Trump has declared his plans to build a wall on the Mexican border, for example, signed an executive order temporarily suspending entry for citizens of seven Muslim countries, and attempted to terminate the so-called “Dreamer” program, which protects the children of undocumented immigrants born in the U.S. from deportation. In his presidential campaign announcement speech he has also referred to Mexican immigrants as criminals and rapists, and suggested they are involved in drug trafficking.

the effects of immigration on American culture, as well as political efforts to keep unwanted immigrants out of the country, many classic 20th century novels that appear to have long ago foreshadowed such events have come to enjoy a renewed interest.² Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (1989), however, is not as yet among the novels to have been thus rediscovered. This is surprising given the fact that the book deals with the very fears right-wing populists stir: Jasmine, an undocumented immigrant from India, disrupts rural America and turns the lives of its inhabitants upside down, while the American-born inhabitants of the American heartland struggle to deal with the changes globalization is enforcing on them. Jasmine, the undocumented immigrant, seems the very embodiment of populist fears, as she disturbs through her very presence the supposed stability of the American homeland. Yet, as so many reviewers and scholars have observed and justly criticized, the novel often unquestioningly celebrates the abstract ideal of "Americanness". This article acknowledges such criticism, but it also seeks to extend the perception of the novel's uncritical approval of American values by arguing that *Jasmine* challenges the exclusiveness of American identity through her very presence in landscapes that form the spatial basis of central American foundational myths. The author does not simply celebrate the narrow and exclusionary idea of the American home/land as male, ethnically white, and Protestant, but boils "Americanness" down to the values at its core that are precisely *not* exclusive. The heroine's presence disturbs and subverts naturalized notions of American national identity and homeland and opens it up to minority presences. Like a "tornado" (Mukherjee 1989, p. 215), *Jasmine* disrupts U.S. culture in the very physical location where the idea of the United States as a nation-state with a distinct national culture emerged: the American West. It is surprising, therefore, that so little attention has been paid until now to the relationship between the landscape of the American heartland and *Jasmine's* disruption as well as ultimate affirmation of "Americanness". This article seeks to close this gap and to reintroduce *Jasmine* into today's literary critical discussion, by providing a detailed analysis of how Mukherjee makes her migrant a disturbing figure to the American homeland, thereby reassessing the symbolic value of the American land so invested with history and national memory, and makes it available to everyone who embraces the values that constitute "Americanness".

When thinking of disturbed homelands, what might come to mind first is not so much the disturbance of American cultural identity, but of those of colonized peoples: As Macaulay's notorious Minute on Indian Education stated, colonialism produced an "in-between" class, native "in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay 2012, pp. 1640–42), which resulted in an estrangement of colonized peoples from their native culture. As a result, many colonial subjects came to occupy what Homi K. Bhabha has termed the "Third Space", a hybrid space where two different things collide and blend, creating the location of cultural identity (Bhabha 1994, p. 36). As Bhabha points out, "Third Space" is not limited to the (post-)colonial context. However, in an age when not only people but also knowledge travels with accelerating speed across the globe, there is no such thing as an original or pure culture (Bhabha 1994, p. 53). Yet despite cultural homogeneity being an illusion, immigrants will still often be confronted with a receiving culture that claims the land they seek access to as their rightful "home". The concept of "home" "can act as a valuable means of orientation by giving us a fixed, reliable sense of our place in the world. It is meant to tell us where we originated from and apparently where we legitimately belong. As an *idea* it stands for shelter, stability, security and comfort. To be 'at home' is to occupy a location where we are welcome, where we can be with people we may regard very much like ourselves, where we are not at sea but have found safe harbour" (McLeod 2010, p. 242). This "home" is the product of a narrative of one's history by means of language (McLeod 2010, p. 250), and often the nation, with its own narratives and myths of origin, can provide a fairly stable sense of home. For the United States, Heike Paul identifies the "core foundational myths upon which constructions of the American nation have been based" (Paul 2014, p. 11) as being

² Examples would include Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, George Orwell's *1984*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and more recent texts such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, among others (cf. Wheeler 2017).

often deeply entrenched in the American landscape. The idea of the pastoral, the West, or America as the Promised Land are just some of her examples.

However, such narratives are severely limited in terms of gender, religion, or ethnicity (Ashcroft et al. 2001, p. 155). Postcolonial theory reminds us that the nation itself is a construction, an “imagined community”, as Benedict Anderson phrased it (Anderson 2006). Its diverse origins are obscured by such narratives of origin, and “specific identifiers are employed to create exclusive and homogeneous conceptions of national traditions” (Ashcroft et al. 2001, p. 150). Myths of national origin can thus also be used “to control, suppress and discriminate against minority groups within many post-colonial states” (Bhabha 1990, p. 59). The national “we” depends on the construction of an “other” in opposition to which it can define itself, and consequently immigration always poses a threat to such narratives of unity and ethnic cohesion. On the one hand, then, “home” is always a problematic concept for the migrant as it emphasizes the differences between the sending culture and the one they seek access to. As McLeod puts it, “the migrant occupies a *displaced* position, dislocated from a past homeland that can only ever be imperfectly imagined but not fully grounded in their present location or residence. Migrants envision their existence in terms of fragments and fissures, full of gaps and breaches. The transformations wrought by the experience of migrancy make impossible the recovery of a plenitudinous sense of home” (McLeod 2010, p. 244). On the other hand, by virtue of its transcultural nature, the migrant figure carries exceptional potential to disturb naturalized, ethnic, and exclusive notions of home/land.

This article argues, then, that *Jasmine* shifts the perspective away from seeing home/land as a pre-existing place in need of defense, and instead illustrates how a seemingly threatening disturbance can open up new conceptualizations of home and homeland. After a brief introduction to the existing literature on *Jasmine* and the novel’s treatment of American foundational myths as well as nature, and the theory used to discuss these topics, the article first discusses the notions of “home” presented in the novel and the cultural and historical relevance the landscape of the Midwest carries as a symbolic American homeland. It then moves on to an analysis of the ways *Jasmine* disturbs the naturalized, essentialist, and limited notions of home evoked by the landscape, and constructs a new sense of home and homeland: Through its main character, the novel replaces the concept of a stable, unchanging landscape with one to be conquered with fluid processes of identification and belonging. On the one hand, Bharati Mukherjee uses the presence of a female immigrant figure in the American landscape to disturb narratives of origin and national identity: She subverts both the myth of the American pastoral and of the West on a metatextual level, exposing those spaces often used to narratively exclude immigrants from participation in the national community (such as the global city) in the process. On the other hand, on the narrative level, her heroine quite literally disturbs the lives of the people as well as the landscapes she encounters. Through her presence in iconic spaces, such as the Florida coast, New York City, and the Midwest, Jasmine challenges traditional ideals of stability, permanence, and belonging. She strips bare the land as the perceived location of cultural identity from its national, historical, and ethnic inscriptions and opens it up to minority presences. Through her disturbance of the American homeland, Jasmine metaphorically liberates the ideal of “Americanness” from its ethnic, religious, and gendered burden, forcing her readers to re-evaluate their ideas of a stable, permanent, and unchanging home and national identity—a task that seems overdue in the present age.

2. From India to Iowa: Home(land) and Land(scape)

Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, born Jyoti and then renamed by her first husband, is a Punjabi village girl filled with dreams of the freedoms America promises. Having experienced oppression, religious violence, and murder in India, she embarks on a long journey that eventually leaves her on the Florida coast, where she is first raped by the smuggler who brought her there and then kills him in an impersonation of Kali, the Hindu goddess of death, destruction, and renewal. Trying to make her way to New York, where she hopes to meet her late husband’s teacher, Jyoti, who has meanwhile adopted a new identity and goes by Jazzy, she quickly realizes that America is not at all what she

expected: instead of a pastoral landscape filled with white people, she finds swamps not so different from those of Punjab and barely sees white faces. When she finally arrives in New York City, a symbol of the ideal of the U.S. as an immigrant culture, she quickly realizes that, far from being integrated and assimilated into the melting-pot, in the supposedly global, multicultural city, immigrants live in segregated communities far away from everything Jasmine deems “American”. Drawn westward, albeit on a small scale, by her desire for freedom, she escapes the restrictions of the “ghetto” in Queens (Mukherjee 1989, p. 145) and moves in as an au pair with an American family on the Upper West Side, to whom she is Jase. Intrigued by consumerism and unlimited choice, Jase quickly falls in love with the father, Taylor, and his “American” life. When she accidentally runs into the man who killed her husband in India, the global city becomes a threatening place, though, and Jasmine escapes to the most symbolic of American landscapes: the Midwest. Most of her story is set there, and it is from there that she retrospectively narrates it. By then she is in a relationship with a much older banker-turned-farmer named Bud and pregnant with his child. Bud has divorced his first wife for her and is in a wheelchair, since he was shot by a farmer in financial difficulty whom he refused to lend money to. He has also once again renamed her: to him, she is Jane. Until she leaves him at the end of the novel to be with Taylor again and make a new life further west with him, Jane revisits her journey through the U.S. and the impact her presence has on the inhabitants of the American heartland.

Despite having been published more than thirty years ago now, *Jasmine* has continued to engage critics consistently throughout the past thirty years, which only highlights the enduring relevance of its themes. Ever since its publication, the novel has been the subject of a controversial debate as regards its representation of Americanness and immigrant identity formation. Early articles were especially concerned with immigrant subjectivity, national identity, Jasmine’s identity formation, and her “Americanness” (see, for example, Carter-Sanborn 1994; Dhaliwal 1994; Faymonville 1996; Koshy 1998), while with the turn of the millennium, critical attention was drawn more towards the post-ethnic and transnational aspects of the novel, addressing issues of globalization, hybridity, multiculturalism, and neoliberalism (see for example Alessandrini 2003; Grewal 2005; Hoppe 1999; Macpherson 2004; Nishimura 2010; Stoneham 2000; Warhol 2011). While some critics attuned themselves to the novel’s idealization of the American immigrant dream, celebrating Jasmine’s apparently successful integration in the American way of life (for ex. D’Souza 1994), and others criticized it for its apparent preference for assimilation over hyphenation and its endorsement of a total rejection of the sending culture, there was a general critical consensus regarding Jasmine’s assimilation of a decidedly “American” cultural identity. *Jasmine* allegedly places the West, as the location of modernity, freedom, and choice, in opposition to the East, as the location of tradition, repression, and violence (Grewal 2005, p. 64; Srikanth 2004, p. 186). These critics argue that stereotypically American values are celebrated, and adapting to white, middle-class American standards is put above the development of a hybrid identity (Carter-Sanborn 1994, p. 583; Grewal 2005, p. 67).³ Most recently, though, the teleological identity development so many critics observed in *Jasmine* in the 1990s and early 2000s has been called into question. Maryam Mirza, for example, suggests that *Jasmine* in fact questions the tale of upward social mobility in the United States (Mirza 2019). Erin Khuê Ninh goes even further in questioning established critical opinions of the novel by claiming that “Jasmine’s resumé suggests less her successful assimilation than her perpetual liminality” (Ninh 2013, p. 146): Rather than merely turning American she “arguably navigates not one but all of the[] key positions of the third-world woman” (ibid.), and Ninh vigorously refutes the tale of Jasmine’s ultimate assimilation (ibid., p. 155). This article argues for a third line of interpretation. It neither seeks to affirm or refute the question of assimilation, which appears to have been sufficiently addressed in the literature. Rather, it seeks to position *Jasmine* as a woman who does not need to *adapt* to a certain national identity,

³ For more criticism, see Debjani Banerjee’s, Alphana Knippling’s, and Gurleen Grewal’s Contributions in Nelson (1993), (Brewster 1993) or (Drake 1999).

because her identity already includes all the elements that she supposedly only acquires on her journey of assimilation of values deemed to be “American” (such as flexibility, adaptability, the idea of the melting-pot, etc.). She does not *adapt* to, but through her tornado-like uprooting *releases*, these values from their connection to the land and an exclusively white and protestant “American” cultural identity.

From the very beginning, critical engagement with the novel also engaged extensively with questions of gender, femininity, romance, and womanhood (see, for example, [Bronfen 1994](#); [Crane 1993](#); [Roy 1993](#); [Shankar 1995](#)). Feminist and gender issues have consistently proven fruitful topics for discussion until the present day, as illustrated, for example, by Bhattacharya’s analysis of the undoing of patriarchal oppression ([Bhattacharya 2019](#)), Nadkarni’s take on feminism in *Jasmine* ([Nadkarni 2012](#)), Kaur’s recent contribution to the edited edition *Exploring Gender in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora* ([Kaur 2015](#)), or Reddy’s critical assessment of the role *Jasmine*’s beauty plays in her othering ([Reddy 2013](#)).

While criticism has provided particular attention to issues of identity formation and American neoliberal values, it is striking, considering how *Jasmine* disrupts U.S. culture in an unquestioningly symbolic location, how little attention has been paid so far to the disruptive effects she has on the land itself. While a contribution to *The Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature* analyzes the novel’s representation of Iowa, it does not discuss *Jasmine*’s effect on the land, nor her disruption of its almost mythological qualities ([Zambare 2015](#)). Hoppe has analyzed the inscription of technology in *Jasmine* but does not extend his analysis of her influence on the American landscape beyond the comment that

“the sign of *Jasmine*’s flexibility is her ability to appropriate the ‘pioneer/explorer’ rhetoric that had once belonged to Anglo-Americans . . . imagining the land as wilderness/frontier/open possibility imaginatively and thus claiming it for their use, in a mutated and shifting echo of the process the European settlers used as they imaginatively emptied and re-wrote the New World to serve as their destiny”.

([Hoppe 1999](#), p. 154)

Comparing *Jasmine* with Jack Schaefer’s 1949 novel *Shane*, Matt Burckhardt discusses the representation of the Indian and American farmers’ situation. Although he briefly states that *Jasmine* “subtly unsettles conventional conceptions of the US West and its residents” ([Burkhart 2008](#), p. 19), Burkhart is mostly concerned with the effects of global capitalism and “neocolonial forces” on agricultural development ([Burkhart 2008](#), p. 6).

None of these critics specifically address *Jasmine*’s disturbance of the American landscape: To them, she is merely either adapting to or “transform[ing] . . . the demography of the dominant group” ([Koshy 2004](#), p. 157). This article will approach the topic from the opposite angle. It deals with the effects *Jasmine* has on the land and its cultural meanings, which the heroine disrupts through both careful observation and active interference, thereby destroying the local and exclusive symbolism of the landscape. *Jasmine* can be considered to be “reading beyond the nation” ([Walkowitz et al. 2007](#), p. 535), as the heroine’s story is not one of simple assimilation or passing, as Koshy argues ([Koshy 2004](#), p. 133). Rather, she herself has a significant effect on the land: coming with her own expectation of stereotypical Americanness, *Jasmine* regards it from an entirely new perspective, re-interprets it, gives it new meaning, and eventually subverts the entire cultural landscape.

The landscape *Jasmine* spends most of the novel in, and on which she has the most disruptive effect, is one imbued with heavy symbolic, cultural, and historical meaning: the American Midwest, America’s so-called heartland. From the arrival of white settlers there, the land quickly became the symbolic location of national identity. In order to justify their presence in a landscape that had in fact

been inhabited for centuries by Native Americans,⁴ European settlers rendered the foreign lands more familiar by means of the pastoral: the pastoral mode allowed them to legitimize their presence and over the centuries helped to develop myths of origin that supported their claims to the land. To distinguish America from Europe and to compensate for the perceived absence of history, they inscribed landscape characteristics from home into the supposed wilderness and compared it to Arcadia and Eden, thereby both claiming the land and creating a sense of home (Casteel 2007, pp. 8, 193). Walt Whitman's 1865 poem "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" was an influential element in the construction of one interpretation of the settlement of the American West. Whitman brought up the idea of an American identity located in the land: while the East, to him, represented European feudalism, the wilderness of the West promised the America of the future (Smith 1950, p. 48). Similarly, "Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 identified the frontier as the most decisive factor in shaping American political and social institutions and in creating a specifically American national character" and "inaugurated an exceptionalist discourse based on experiences of and with the land" (Paul 2014, p. 311). Hence, the landscape of the Midwest is closely associated with ideals and institutions that define "Americanness": American exceptionalism and manifest destiny, transition, movement, and possibility, conquest, and settlement of the land, as well as "visions of an agrarian ideal that for a long time has been seen as standing for authentic Americanness" (ibid., p. 312). To this day, therefore, the landscape of the Midwest "has been a locus, however vaguely defined, for developing epic cultural scripts of Americanness" (ibid.). Anthony D. Smith, in his book *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, terms such spaces "ethnoscapes". The term describes a "historic and poetic landscape, one imbued with the culture and history of a group, and vice versa, a group part of whose character is felt by themselves and outsiders to derive from the particular landscape they inhabit" (Smith 1999, p. 150). Arjun Appadurai, in *Disjuncture & Difference*, extends and complicates the concept with regard to immigration. He argues that human movement and shifting social groups create discrepancies among cultural flows that affect the politics and homogeneity "of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree", making the conception of a culturally stable cultural landscape problematic (Appadurai 1997, p. 297).

The gendered connotation of the West is closely bound up with these elements. It was regarded by the early settlers as a culturally "vacant continent beyond the frontier", "drawing population westward" (Smith 1950, p. 4; Marx 1989). American settlers "idealized the 'virgin' land and the frontier as sacred elements of their self-images, and ... instruments and rewards of a providential destiny" (Smith 1999, p. 153). The frontier is the place where the wilderness is turned into pastoral, where wilderness and civilization meet, and has thus often given rise to imagery of male penetration of female "virgin land": "images of sexual violence and conquest of the 'virgin land' have often been used to describe the possession of the West" (Campbell and Kean 2012, p. 150). The American continent was seen to be vacant and free, calling for an imperialist push westward and offering a "testing ground for manhood" in opposition to the civilized femininity of the East (ibid.). This served the purpose of asserting the settlers' right to claim the land because it had been supposedly vacant, and gave it a decidedly female connotation, that invoked male rights over female bodies. Consequently, the notion of an American heart- or homeland invoked by the Midwest ethnoscape comes with heavy gendered and ethnic baggage: historically and culturally, it is a space of male, white dominance, and because of its importance for the history of the overall country, serves to extend such connotations to a supposedly homogenous American identity. As a result, the pastoral mode and the Midwest ethnoscape carry special relevance for the novel, as they both support claims to a supposedly homogenous American home/land. As we will see in the remainder of this article, Mukherjee problematizes both concepts

⁴ Despite *Jasmine's* potential to open up American national identity to minority presences, one of the novel's unquestioned weaknesses is the fact that it disturbingly ignores the claims of Native Americans to the land. *Jasmine* may subvert the image of the male, white, Christian pioneer, but she still re-enacts through her movement the routes of early, European-born American settlers. The novel evades any discussion of how the settlement of the American West in fact required the removal of Native populations first.

through the disturbing insertion of her protagonist in the Midwest ethnoscape. *Jasmine* challenges the American landscape as the spatial location of an uncontested American identity in two ways. Firstly, the author disrupts the pastoral ideal through her protagonist's presence and comparative perspective. She shatters a symbolic space that has proven so decisive for the American self-image by exposing the American landscape to be neither pastoral nor unique. Instead, we are presented with the devastating consequences the American farmers' exclusionary conceptualization of home/land, which is deeply indebted to the type of American identity established above, has both for the land and the people. Secondly, by inserting her heroine into the Midwest ethnoscape, where Jasmine exposes the dysfunctional relationship between the people, the land, and the values it once represented, Mukherjee not only disturbs naturalized notions of homeland, but she also severs the relationship between "Americanness" and the land, opening up a heterogeneous, accessible American cultural identity.

3. It's "Ripplemeyer Land": The Pastoral and American Conceptualizations of Home/Land

As has been shown above, the pastoral mode proved essential for European settlers' claims to the land, and we must therefore look first to Mukherjee's way of destroying the pastoral ideal. The loss of the pastoral ideal is a motif that runs through the novel and is particularly important in regard to the ethnoscape of the Midwest. There, pastoral Eden is long lost, and it is the farmers' mistaken sense of entitlement to the land that causes its destruction. This destruction affects both the farmers themselves and their land. The farmers feel that they have historical justification for owning the land and that, by means of their farming, they will create the abundant harvests of Arcadia. They share a stable, naturalized notion of home/land that is based on a sense of male, white entitlement to the land. As Casteel points out, the nation is a territory defined by shared descent and historical identity. History is of primary importance to the concept of ethnoscaping (Casteel 2007, p. 5). As the inhabitants of ethnoscaping derive their ethnic identity from the landscape and the past embodied in it, it serves as a legitimization of why one owns the land in the first place and infuses it with the weight of responsibility toward one's ancestors and the soil. To the farmers, then, in the spirit of the frontier, nature is but a piece of vacant property they have claimed and thereby made their own (Campbell and Kean 2012, p. 147); it is the historically stable "Ripplemeyer land" and "Lutzes' ground" (Mukherjee 1989, p. 7). However, in *Jasmine*, such a possessive attitude toward the homeland is shown to be destructive both for the land and the people, as it stands in opposition to the values of fluidity and movement that ought to make American national identity: there can only be "commitment to the land or to the self", the two are mutually exclusive (ibid., p. 228). To the young, the past is nothing more than a heavy burden, working against their wish for freedom and individualism—the very character traits so closely connected to the symbolism of the American West. Jasmine's neighbor Darrel Lutz, who has inherited a highly technologized farm from his father, is, at only 23 years old, already severely limited by the identity the past of the place he has inherited enforces on him. Because in America "farm boys grow up guilty if they desert the family ground", Darrel's only escape from the stifling pressure such a concept of home creates is suicide—whereas Jasmine, not being tied to the land by history in the way he is, can leave and look for fulfillment elsewhere (ibid.). Because of Jasmine's entirely different conceptualization of home, she is free to reinvent herself continuously, while Darrel is tied to a land that does not in fact represent home to him anymore. He sees his future in New Mexico, where he dreams of opening a RadioShackRS franchise. Despite the fact that she sometimes wishes for "smooth planes of . . . history" herself, in the course of the narrative it becomes obvious that such smooth planes only ever existed as ideals (ibid., p. 214), and Jasmine's presence brings this realization close to the American heartland:

"Everywhere else the same thing is happening: I see a way of life coming to an end. Baseball loyalties, farming, small-town innocence . . . What I'm saying is, release Darrel from the land. There are different mysteries at work . . . The banker who steps out of marriage to live with an Indian is the same as the Iowan who dreams of New Mexico. They've been touched with the same virus".

(ibid., p. 229)

Furthermore, the land itself resists the farmers' efforts to enforce pastoral stability on it. As Gifford points out, the idealized representation of nature in the pastoral often emphasizes "fertility, resilience, beauty and unthreatened stability in nature" (Gifford 2015, p. 8). All of these characteristics are exactly what the Iowa farmers aim at. However, in their drive towards stability and profit, they have abandoned the values that once defined "Americanness": fluidity, movement, and openness. In their attempt to create their stable and fertile Arcadia, American farmers relied increasingly on technology to create the notion of plenty and to live up to the ideal of "no sweat [being] needed in harvesting" (ibid.). Significantly, farmers are never depicted in what ought to be their everyday place of work, namely the fields. If we get an impression of the Midwestern farmer's daily labor, it is labor supported by, or based entirely on, technology. The most obvious example is the deceased dad Gene Lutz, who relied heavily on technology and well-established farming techniques, in a desperate and eventually unsuccessful attempt to establish stability and fertility. Gene annually bought himself "the latest gadget from the implement dealer: immense tractors with air-conditioned cabs, equipped with stereo tape deck . . . all power and no mobility" (Mukherjee 1989, p. 9).⁵ Instead of nourishing their relationship to the land and being flexible in response to nature's demands, the farmer uses power to enforce his will.

Significantly, the image of the male farmers forcing their will on the feminized "virgin" land by means of technology evokes images of gendered violence and rape (Campbell and Kean 2012, pp. 147–49), especially when seen in context with Jasmine's own story of having been "raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms" (Mukherjee 1989, p. 127). As Heike Paul has pointed out, Jasmine "recreates a central American topos, which is closely linked to the history of American immigration and settlement: the frontier." To her, Jasmine is a "phallic woman" who "reverses the roles" enacted at the frontier and contests its sexualized character by her relationship to her environment (Paul 1999, p. 111). Mukherjee makes her protagonist a woman, and what is more, an undocumented immigrant woman, thereby revising the dominant discourse of traditionally male and white pioneers: Jasmine conquers America without laying claims to, or forcing her will onto, the land. She moves flexibly through the landscape, treating it as an open frontier that provides the space for constant renewal. Although they want it to be theirs, the farmers, by contrast, have lost the connection to the land. In an attempt to (re)create a vision of Arcadia that would underline their historic and ethnic claims to a stable, homogenous homeland, they seek to enforce a pastoral idyll on a landscape that is resisting their violent efforts. "Something's gotten out of hand in the heartland" (Mukherjee 1989, p. 155), one character observes, and it is not just the style of farming but also the disturbed relationship the people have to their homeland, disturbed by the corruption of American values.

What is more, through her role as a flexible female pioneer, Jasmine exposes the pastoral ideal that the farmers strive for to be an illusion from the moment she sets foot on American soil. In fact, the landscape Jasmine encounters after her arrival does not seem very different from the one she has left behind. The scenery she encounters upon arrival is exactly the type of landscape Americans would locate in the Third World: from the swamps and the "jungle" of Florida Jasmine moves on to the drought-created desert of Iowa. The natural environment in India, by contrast, is described as green and abundant (Mukherjee 1989, pp. 54–56). The author has often been criticized for "representing India as traditional and unchanging in opposition to a fluid and modern America" (Grewal 2005, p. 70). This criticism is often too harsh, as the novel also draws "parallels between . . . the comparable perils of rural communities beset by multinational agrobusiness in India and Iowa" (Burkhart 2008, p. 19). Jasmine disturbs foundational myths deeply entrenched in the American landscape through her comparative perspective: her initial surprise quickly turns into an acknowledgment that the American landscape is not in fact specifically American:

⁵ A more detailed discussion of technology and farming in *Jasmine* can be found in Hoppe.

“A sandy trail tunnelled through a distant row of mossy trees. Battered trucks full of produce kept pulling out. More trucks, filled with labourers, turned in. It was as though I’d never left India . . . I had travelled the world without ever leaving the familiar crops of Punjab”.

(Mukherjee 1989, p. 128)

What is more, the frontier myth is turned around: The land is neither empty “virgin” land, nor is it ethnically white, but Jasmine encounters countless undocumented immigrants upon arrival: “I had been in America nearly a day and had yet to see an ‘American’ face” (ibid., p. 129). Jasmine’s disappointment at not finding the mythical America she expected exposes gendered and ethnic conceptualizations of home. The illusionary pastoral ideal at the basis of the American self-image is exposed to be a fiction, a perverse artificial creation. Jasmine’s first impression of America is not at all pastoral: Her first sight of the coast is a nuclear power plant, and having landed on shore she wades through “Eden’s waste” (ibid., p. 107). A symbol of the ever potentially present but infinitely deferred pastoral is Lilian Gordon’s wooden house in the swamps. The notion of beautiful landscape is always there yet never visible, “just beyond” something dirty and disgusting that obstructs the view and makes the real America (ibid., p. 130). Paradoxically, the first person to make the pastoral ideal visible is the investor who eventually buys the site and turns it into a holiday resort (ibid., pp. 137–39). He thereby artificially creates the Arcadia that does not actually exist, exposing it to be a myth (ibid., p. 138). Jasmine’s shock at realizing that the America she expected to find does not exist (anymore) is huge: “I wish I’d known America before it got perverted” (ibid., p. 201). This exclamation suggests that Jasmine is not only referring to the mere physical landscape she encounters; what has been perverted in her eyes are the values American national identity was once built upon.

Jasmine’s arrival in America, retracing the movement of the original pioneers from East to West, thus deeply disturbs the foundational myth of the American homeland: the pastoral ideal. Nowhere in America does she find the mythical landscapes she expected, there is nothing uniquely American or idyllically pastoral about any of them. Instead, Arcadia is either an artificial creation designed to fool tourists or an ever-evading ideal that refuses to be enforced on the land. The farmers in the most “American” of landscapes, the Midwest, destroy the land through their obstinate longing for stability, their drive toward profit, and their loss of connection both to the land itself and the ideals it once represented. To them, home is a very limited space, a physical location, literal homeland. Their attempts to recreate the American pastoral by “technological rape” of the land remain unsuccessful: the American heartland, usually considered the “breadbasket” of the country, is turned into an infertile grey desert (Mauk and Oakland 2009, p. 29). Jasmine, on the other hand, experiences nature as alive (Mukherjee 1989, p. 4) and feels a deep connection to the land. Jasmine frequently compares herself to the earth, feeling “millennia old” (Mukherjee 1989, p. 34) and “torn open like the hot dry soil, parched” (Mukherjee 1989, p. 38). By virtue of its cultural heritage, the Midwest ethnoscape embodies a notion of home/land as exclusively male, white, and of Anglo-Saxon descent. Rather than offering Jasmine the “healthy soil” Professorji promised, the America she finds is the location of her inner dehydration (Mukherjee 1989, p. 84). By inserting her protagonist, a female, undocumented, non-Christian immigrant into this space and having her disturb such essentialist notions of home, Mukherjee challenges conventional notions of the American homeland. She destroys the very foundational myth of American national identity as stable, male, and white through the resistance of the “virgin land”, reminding her readers that America was built on fluidity, movement, and heterogeneity.

4. A Tornado Shaking the Homeland: Disturbing Ideals of Stability and Permanence

Not only does Jasmine’s presence smash the foundational pastoral myth of the American homeland, but by inserting her heroine into the symbolic ethnoscape of the American Midwest, Mukherjee also contests the concept of the Midwest as a sedentary, culturally homogenous landscape imbued with national identity. Here, *Jasmine* disturbs naturalized notions of home not only on a narrative level but also on a meta-textual level. Firstly, Mukherjee breaks up the traditional opposition between

the local, rural, and supposedly ethnically pure backland as the spatial location of national identity, and the allegedly global city, the traditional location for immigrants. This enables her to insert her heroine in the farmers' rural homeland in the first place, where, secondly, on the narrative level, Jasmine disrupts their sedentary lives. Although she eventually leaves again, her disturbing presence in the American heartland will have stripped bare the ethnoscape of its limited, naturalized connotations and symbolically opened up the notion of an American home/land for immigrants to come.

Mukherjee's subversion of stable notions of home begins, then, in a space diametrically opposed to the national landscape of the Midwest. In postcolonial and especially postmodern studies, a strong focus has traditionally been placed on what has become known as "global cities" or "world cities", which seem to be the perfect "model of the contemporary world" (Chambers 1994, p. 27). Cohen sees the urban space as a mobile space that gives the migrant, being cosmopolitan by nature and therefore more suited to such an international space, an advantage over people who have spent all their lives in one country. In this environment, migrants can act as a bridge between cultures (Cohen 2008, pp. 146–50), and the city seems to offer "new forms of flexible citizenship. In global cities, previously marginalized groups—refugees, sex workers, informal labourers—can now claim rights as groups rather than as individuals, thus opening up citizenship to new political articulations and contestation" (Varma 2012, p. 7). However, like Cohen, Varma naively ignores the heterogeneity of immigrants themselves. As Casteel carefully points out, in placing migrant characters in the city, a step that seems so obvious and conveniently fitting at first, authors in fact reject migrants' claims to belonging to the new environment. The opposition between multicultural city and ethnically homogenous country can also be used to exclude the migrant from participation in the national project when the city becomes the only space suited for them: "The two poles of contemporary diasporic discourse—movement and sedentarism, or the global and the local—find their spatial counterparts in the customary opposition between the city and the country. Conventionally, the city has been widely perceived as the space for diversity and movement, while the country is negatively associated with homogeneity and containment" (Casteel 2007, p. 4). To those wishing to exclude migrants, the global city provides the perfect space: a space detached from its national context, representing the global, where they can be safely contained, away from the exclusive, "national" landscapes: The country is the immobile location of ethnically white Americans and political conservatism, while the city is the location of diversity, movement, and mobility (Casteel 2007, pp. 4–6).

Indeed, it seems for a brief moment that *Jasmine* will follow a similar trajectory: Jasmine first moves in with her late husband's teacher in Queens, and then becomes au pair to a young couple on New York City's Upper West Side. Intrigued by consumerism and unlimited choice, she quickly falls in love with the father, Taylor, and the American way of life he represents: "I fell in love with what he represented to me. It seemed entirely American" (Mukherjee 1989, p. 167). "I fell in love with his world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful self-absorption. I wanted to become the person they thought they saw" (ibid., p. 171). However, like the pastoral landscape, this ideal is also illusionary and corrupt: Taylor opens up a palette of mere shopping choices to her, suggesting that "freedom as a form of empowerment" is a result of participating in the consumerist ideals of the United States (Grewal 2005, p. 65), while never actually providing Jasmine with the means to free herself. Mukherjee has drawn criticism for her representation of Jasmine's story as the only one of successful assimilation, while all other immigrants in the novel continuously struggle (Koshy 2004, p. 158). Yet this is part of her subversion of the global, multiethnic city as the perfect location for immigrants to settle down.

In *Jasmine*, the two worlds of white Americans and recent immigrants are kept entirely apart, and the metropolis becomes the location of restraints and limited perspectives. Every ethnic and social group remains within its own little space, "retired behind ghetto walls" (Mukherjee 1989, p. 145). Indian immigrants in Flushing live in houses "so specialized as to language, religion, caste, and profession that we did not need to fraternize with anyone but other educated Punjabi-speaking Hindu Jats" (ibid., p. 146). Separated from them, the white educated middle classes live across the river, in close proximity to Columbia University. The two worlds never collide or mix: the city is no multicultural melting-pot,

where people from different cultures come together and happily mingle, but instead the immigrants in the city have sealed their hearts and lead unhappy lives. “Home”, to them, is somewhere else. The Vadheras are in emotional exile, having closed themselves against anything American (ibid., p. 153). Professorji’s wife Nirmala only watches Hindi films in order to escape the reality of her everyday life (ibid., p. 145), and “[i]n this apartment[s] artificially maintained Indianness” (ibid.), Jasmine feels like “a prisoner doing unreal time” (ibid., pp. 145, 148). Because she never gets in contact with Americans, she gradually loses her command of the English language (ibid., p. 144). The heroine is highly aware of the confinement the city enforces on her. Freedom to her lies “beyond the rivers” (ibid., p. 145), outside Manhattan and further to the west. Instead of being the cosmopolitan melting-pot, the global city becomes a space of confinement and eventually even danger where Jasmine is “exposed” to the threats from the past (ibid., p. 189). In the heart of New York, Jasmine bumps into the man who killed her husband, which only triggers her escape to the most iconic of American landscapes, the Midwest.

There, through Jasmine’s presence, the novel ironically exposes the notion of an ethnically homogenous American home and heartland. While the global creeps ever closer, the inhabitants of Baden County still refuse to acknowledge this and, by a process of rejection, denial, and othering, fight the idea that their homeland may be changing. This is symbolized by the frequent references to a place called “Out There”, about which Americans do not wish to gain detailed knowledge and where everything “un-American” is located. In an act one could call “local othering”, they create an imaginary landscape in their mind, opposed to the Midwestern environment representing America and full of characteristics stereotypical of what they think of as the Third World. Jasmine notices this with ironic detachment: “Out there. I am not sure what Mother imagines. On the edge of the world, in flaming deserts, mangled jungles, squelchy swamps, missionaries save the needy. Out There, the darkness” (ibid., p. 21). Ironically, these are the very landscapes she has encountered upon arrival in the United States. In the farming community’s simplified view of the world, “Out There” becomes a place in its own right, the place where suffering is located and where American aid is needed. As Jasmine notices when the mailman tries out his Nepalese on her (ibid., p. 207), they are not interested in differentiating between all the different countries that constitute “Out There”. Its crucial purpose is to keep all those elements at bay, to not allow them to come too close to their own lives. American charity aids are merely the selfish result of their wish to keep “Out There” out there: Mother Ripplemeyer sells quilts for African children and Bud decides to adopt Du after having seen a television documentary about boat people in Thai prisons, something to which the experiences of the Vietnamese people such as Du are not related to in the least (ibid., p. 17). Even Taylor is no exception here: although he works for Amnesty International and can describe South African torture methods in detail, he does not want to hear about what Jasmine has experienced on her way (Mukherjee 1989, pp. 59–61). All of them refuse to see that “Out There” is not an abstract place opposed to their stable homeland, but is already entering, disturbing, changing it in the shapes of Jasmine, Du, and all the other immigrants. “Out There” does not remain as off-limits as the Americans, locating it in Asian swamps and African deserts, would like it to be. The global creeps closer: “Out There” turns from an abstract place “on the edge of the world” (ibid., p. 21) to Des Moines (ibid., 158), and eventually their own fields (ibid., p. 205).

Jasmine collapses this neat division between the American homeland and “Out there” through her very presence, and she does so not only by disturbing people’s lives by making a married man fall in love with her, but also by laying claim to the physical soils, thus challenging notions of a pure American homeland. Mukherjee has been criticized for “depicting Asian-American femininity as an eroticised and domesticated” other and for portraying her heroine as a woman who consciously exploits this exotic otherness (Koshy 2004, pp. 132–23). Grewal and Srikanth equally accuse the author of catering to traditional Western Orientalist desires in its representation of Asian-American women (Grewal 2005, p. 63; Srikanth 2004, p. 186). Koshy extends this criticism to the diametrically opposed representation of the lives of women in India and the U.S. and argues that Jasmine exploits her sexuality to “establish the legitimacy of the Asian claim to the United States” (Koshy 2004, p. 132).

Such accusations do not cut to the chase, however. Rather than it being Jasmine who exploits her own difference, the farming community's exoticization of Jasmine is part of their effort to keep the global at bay. As Cohen points out, in contrast to the global city, exaggerated localism has developed as a counter movement to globalization, comprising varying aspects of "nationalism, ethnic particularism, religious fundamentalism, racism, sexism and other forms of social exclusion" (Cohen 2008, p. 147). This is precisely what the inhabitants of Elsa county do: since the construction of a national community depends on the construction of an opposite (Bhabha 1990, p. 59), the American people she meets seek to firmly place her in the position of the "other". Jasmine's ethnicity, religion, and cultural heritage are used to exclude her from participation in the idea of the nation (cf. Ashcroft et al. 2001, p. 155). Mary Webb, for example, consults Jasmine as an expert on reincarnation (Mukherjee 1989, pp. 123–26), and particularly the men who love her, Bud and Darrel, stress her otherness. In their orientalist perception, Jasmine is the Indian "maharani", bringing Eastern wisdom to rescue them (ibid., pp. 35, 216). Paradoxically, Bud, Darrel, and even Karin feel the need to be rescued by Jasmine, they do not perceive her "Easternness" as a threat to their way of life, which is in fact the aim of the tornado Jasmine's destructing force (ibid., pp. 200, 203). It is their failure to truly accept Jasmine into their American community, as exemplified by such exoticization, that gives her the full-blown force of a tornado. As Jasmine makes clear herself, all she wanted was to belong, and it is the Americans' attempts to shield their homeland from perceived destruction that causes Jasmine to disrupt their notions of home: "I can honestly say all I wanted was to serve, be allowed to join, but I have created confusion and destruction wherever I go. As Karin says, I am a tornado" (ibid., p. 215). In addition to that, Jasmine's disruption extends to the physical land itself. In contrast to the male-dominated frontier and fields, the garden is traditionally the ground of femininity, as, according to settler accounts, delicate women can only flourish if nature has been tamed (Campbell and Kean 2012, p. 155). One day, Darrel gives Jasmine an oriental herb garden set, which prompts her own active involvement with harvesting. While the farmers, due to their disturbed relationship to the land, struggle to reap the crops, Jasmine easily manages to grow herbs. She seems connected to the land on a deeper level, her fate having been announced under a banyan tree and her being able to hear the "she-ghosts" in the forest at home (Mukherjee 1989, pp. 3–4).⁶ Similarly, she is more attuned to the suffering of the land in Iowa than the farmers are, feeling "parched" like the "hot dry soil" (ibid., p. 38). What is more, she uses the herbs she grows to subvert the land itself. (Darrel encourages her to cook Indian food (ibid., p. 10), and she herself notices that people "get disappointed if there's not *something* Indian on the table" (ibid., p. 9), which actually supports her claim to the land: by combining agricultural products typical of the American Midwest, such as pork roast, with traditional Indian food, she "subvert[s] the taste buds of Elsa County" (ibid., pp. 10, 19). Midwestern agriculture is deprived of its local character and combined with international flavors to become a global food experience. Her disturbance makes clear how the sense of home that the Iowan farmers nurse, of homeland as stable and their sense of belonging as natural, are in fact dangerous illusions that constitute their vulnerability.

Bharati Mukherjee uses her heroine's physical presence in a space not conventionally designated for the immigrant to disturb naturalized notions of a homogeneous, ethnically white, male-dominated, and Christian American homeland. The global city, often the space where migrants can be safely contained in a supposedly multicultural, cosmopolitan environment, is a constant threat to the migrants' arrival: it keeps them isolated, it allows the past to catch up with them, and prevents them from successfully participating in the American values of liberalism and consumerism. The novel thus evolves beyond the simple dichotomies of global city and local country, and it is only this transgression that enables Jasmine to truly challenge naturalized notions of home. Having left the global city behind, Jasmine moves on to Iowa, the American heartland, where she truly disturbs the neat division between

⁶ The issue of fertility affects not only the harvesting farmers but the white women's fecundity as well. While Mary Webb and Bud's ex-wife Karin are (involuntarily) childless, Jasmine gets pregnant despite the physical challenge of Bud's disability and brings in Du as an adopted child.

home and “Out There”. Jasmine subverts the America she expected to find, the America of white men, pastoral landscapes, and moral ties to land and family; an America that is shallow and fragile. Through her presence, she liberates the Midwest ethnoscape from its ethnic and national inscriptions, opening it up to anyone who still values the American Dream—regardless of their religion, sex, or skin color.

5. Conclusions

Bharati Mukherjee has been frequently criticized for her representation of Jasmine’s assimilation of the concept of “Americanness”. The novel operates within the conventions of what Eric Hayot terms the “ethnic Bildungsroman, the novel of successful assimilation” (Walkowitz et al. 2007, p. 531). Koshy extends the common criticism of Jasmine’s “assimilation” to an ethnically white American standard and argues that *Jasmine* is not even “a novel of assimilation but a novel of passing” as Jasmine is “acting out the dominant scripts of exotic otherness as an avenue to the American Dream” (Koshy 2004, p. 133). Doubtlessly, Mukherjee’s unquestioning celebration of American values and her orientalizing representation of an Asian woman who distances herself from other immigrants, as well as her portrayal of a backward and almost anarchical India, deserve the criticism they have heretofore received. As Burkhart argues, even the values Jasmine embraces so willingly, such as the American ideal of flexibility and liquidity as preferable to stability and tradition, have to be seen critically in light of Jasmine’s selfish decision to leave her husband for a younger man further west (Burkhart 2008, p. 16). Nevertheless, such harsh criticism of Jasmine’s alleged assimilation of the American standard seems rather unjustified in light of Mukherjee’s treatment of the American landscape and homeland.

As this article has argued, *Jasmine* is in fact not a simple and unquestioning celebration of an immigrant’s successful assimilation of the American Dream, nor does it merely provide “a transformation of the demography of the dominant group rather than an alternative vision of Americanness” (Koshy 2004, p. 157). Instead, the novel subverts foundational myths of American national identity through the presence of a female undocumented immigrant in the very landscapes traditionally symbolizing and justifying an exclusionary, white, male, Christian American national identity. *Jasmine* can be considered to be “reading beyond the nation” as it suggests “that national histories may have regional variations and that regional variations can complicate assumptions about ethical superiority” (Walkowitz et al. 2007, p. 542). Through her presence in the land, through her comparative perspective, and through her constant uprooting and disturbing both of her own life and the lives of the people she encounters, Jasmine subverts the foundational myths so deeply connected to the land: the pastoral, the frontier, and the West. First, her multicultural perspective allows us to acknowledge that the supposedly unique landscape is neither pastoral, unique, nor specifically American. She thereby shatters the pastoral ideal of the American landscape, a concept that is so essential to male, white claims to the land and thus national identity. Second, Mukherjee places her protagonist in crucial locations of American national identity: the global city, symbolizing the ideal of the melting-pot, and the Midwest ethnoscape. The symbolic meaning of both locations is disrupted by Jasmine’s presence. The supposedly multicultural metropolis, where immigrants are assimilated into the melting-pot that makes America, is exposed to be a space of exclusion and danger, while the location of an apparently essential, natural, and homogenous national identity, the Midwest, is deeply disturbed by Jasmine’s tornado-like presence. By inserting a female immigrant into this environment, Mukherjee challenges traditional perceptions of who has the right to grow roots in a historically grown and culturally shaped environment and who may lay claim to the values it represents. *Jasmine* thus critiques the “specific identifiers . . . employed to create exclusive and homogeneous conceptions of national traditions” (Ashcroft et al. 2001, p. 150). Through Jasmine’s disturbance of the American homeland, the novel exposes myths of national unity and homogeneity. The novel opens up American national identity to anyone who can truly identify with the values that once made America, “before it got perverted” (Mukherjee 1989, p. 201).

Thus, *Jasmine* shows that Bhabha's "Third Space" is in fact everywhere, that the neat division between the local and the global cannot be maintained in our world anymore—and above all, that this need not necessarily correlate with a corruption of those values that once defined American national identity. Postcolonial theory teaches us that "home" and the nation are both narrative constructs, "imagined communities" (Anderson 2006). Myths such as the idea of America as a Promised Land, the pastoral, or the frontier provide crucial foundational elements to national identity that are deeply entrenched in the landscape, and thus in the literal "homeland". However, such narratives are severely limited in terms of gender, religion, or ethnicity (Ashcroft et al. 2001, p. 155). Having first dismantled the pastoral legitimization of European settlers that established a naturalized, essentialist notion of home as white and male, and having subverted the traditional opposition between an untainted, homogenous "home/land" and a heterogeneous global city, Mukherjee inserts her heroine into the most American of all landscapes, where she disturbs the land both literally, through her gardening, and metaphorically, through her personal relationships. The author thereby opens up the American landscape to open notions of home and flexible conceptualizations of belonging. Stable, naturalized notions of home/land are replaced with an emphasis on fluidity, individualism, and freedom. *Jasmine* proves the country to be the rightful location of both the immigrant and the born American, thus opening up the land for future generations of transnational Americans. Eventually, she moves on further west, claiming the entirety of the continent for those who are to come after her. Contrary to all the criticism it has received, and in line with the fact that Mukherjee herself defies a simple categorization in terms of her national belonging, the novel itself can thus be read as a literary postcolonial disturbance of American national literature.

Historically, the United States has always been a country of immigrants. Therefore, contemporary fears of immigration might be a result of what Mauk and Oakland refer to as a "historical dilemma": opposed to the need for a national unity, there is the "reality of ethnic diversity", which was supposed to be overcome by assimilation to the Anglo-American standard in a huge melting-pot (Mauk and Oakland 2009, p. 10). In a time when Americanness is once again increasingly associated with the old, stereotypical values of white, male, middle-class dominance, *Jasmine* expresses a claim for everyone to participate in the American Dream that has rarely been more relevant than today, as white supremacist, masculinist, and nativist rhetoric increases in the US and the president is pushing Americans' fear of immigration. The novel reminds us that the myth of the melting-pot "envision[s] the US in a state of perpetual change and transformation that is partly assimilation, partly regeneration, and partly emergence, and emphasizes the continuous integration of difference experienced by both immigrant and longer-established sections of the population" (Paul 2014, pp. 258–59). Through her disruption of a homogenous, white, Protestant landscape, *Jasmine* brings the melting-pot ideal to the heartland of America, opening up a country that was once built on the values of solidarity, openness, and hope, to those people who increasingly face exclusion from it. Although she briefly tries this lifestyle when living in New York City, she does not simply assimilate an established standard, but imitates earlier immigrants' behavior in abandoning her homestead and seeking her fortune further west. After all, even the original pioneers were immigrants, not to mention the mostly Dutch and German farmers who populated the Midwest in the nineteenth century. The novel thus "link[s] together the experiences and struggles of diverse groups of people and places, that help us confront and respond to the cultural and political conflicts of our times" (Powell 2007, p. 10) and proposes a fluid understanding of home that has acquired new relevance in light of recent political events.

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