

Reproducing Feminism in *Jasmine* and "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Asha Nadkarni

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN'S 1892 SHORT STORY, "The Yellow Wallpaper," has been an urtext of American feminism since its 1973 republication by the Feminist Press. Nonetheless, celebrations of Gilman's naturalist story too often ignore the extent to which the gender oppression it depicts is raced and classed. Published over a hundred years later, Bharati Mukherjee's 1989 novel *Jasmine* would seem to address the very issues that Gilman ignores.¹ Instead of being driven mad by patriarchy, *Jasmine*'s illegal immigrant protagonist escapes from India to the United States where she is allowed to take control of her destiny and "become an American."² While Gilman's tale of a privileged white woman's descent into madness may serve as an allegory for many Anglo-American Second Wave feminists, *Jasmine* seemingly offers a happier narrative of feminist development—one that does not end in madness and one that is ostensibly available to all.³ As anyone who has read *Jasmine* will realize, however, its happy ending is brought about through a largely uncritical narrative of assimilation. Just as Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" depends on a race- and class-specific account of patriarchal oppression, *Jasmine* models a form of US exceptionalism (as the protagonist's westward trajectory suggests) with an exclusionary feminist twist; although *Jasmine* is successful in freeing herself of

the marks of difference that would trouble her accession into the United States, her experience does not apply to most immigrant women.

Both works, moreover, display a distinctly racial logic. I will use the concept of "eugenic feminism" to describe this logic and argue that a coherent feminist subjectivity in both "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *Jasmine* can only be forged by rejecting all racial and ethnic difference.⁴ For Gilman, the problem of creating a feminist self is a potentially maddening process of freeing that self from her color, one that is too easily betrayed by the messiness of biological and cultural reproduction itself. Likewise, to "become American" in Mukherjee's novel means employing a purifying process similar to that upon which Gilman's story turns. As such, eugenic feminism shapes an identity in negative terms, repeatedly returning to raced and classed others to define them as precisely what must be abjected in order for a "pure" feminist subject to emerge. In this essay I read *Jasmine* as a successor to Gilman's classic feminist tale in order to argue that even a "multicultural" feminist progress narrative can contain a eugenic impulse.

Originally appearing in the *New England Magazine* in 1892, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is Gilman's semi-autobiographical story of taking Dr. S. Weir Mitchell's "rest cure" to alleviate her depression after the birth of her daughter.⁵ The story charts the narrator's growing madness and preoccupation with the wallpaper of her sickroom and ends with her identification with the woman she sees "crawling" (55) behind the "bars" (52) of the prison-like pattern. Her ability to free the woman behind the wallpaper is made possible by her descent into a madness that by the end of the story is almost entirely complete. Early readings by Elaine Hedges, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Annette Kolodny, and Jean Kennard take up the story as a universal text of women's struggles against the patriarchal structures that constrict them, casting the narrator as a heroine who chooses to become mad rather than assume her proper place in the patriarchal order.⁶ Forbidden to write, the narrator's main task becomes one of interpretation — of trying to read the wallpaper — and it is precisely this process of interpretation that becomes both maddening and ultimately liberating. If the narrator, as the universal feminist subject, can free herself through writing and interpretation, so too can US academic feminists engaged in similar tasks.

In her groundbreaking analysis of race in "The Yellow Wallpaper" (also published in this journal), Susan Lanser takes issue with precisely this claim: she argues that such universalist readings create a feminist subjectivity for the story's narrator and reader through a violently reductive interpretive act. As a corrective, Lanser "risk[s] overreading" the wallpaper by interpreting it in racial terms.⁷ Focusing specifically on the yellow color of the paper and excavating examples of Gilman's anti-immigrant and anti-Chinese sentiments in her other writings, Lanser links descriptions of the wallpaper to nativist tropes. She thus confronts interpretations of the wallpaper as the narrator's unconscious to argue that the wallpaper also encodes a political unconscious. In doing so, she suggests that "the white, female, intellectual-class subjectivity which Gilman's narrator attempts to construct, and to which many feminists have also been committed perhaps unwittingly, is a subjectivity whose illusory unity, like the unity imposed on the paper, is built on the repression of difference."⁸

A self-identified "American writer of Bengali-Indian origin," Bharati Mukherjee could be understood as excavating the difference that Gilman (and celebrations of Gilman) habitually repress.⁹ While Gilman feared a United States changed by immigration, Mukherjee embraces it. *Jasmine* tells the tale of a Punjabi village girl named Jyoti who illegally immigrates to the United States after her husband Prakash is killed by a Sikh separatist named Sukhwinder. Throughout the novel Jyoti moves through a dizzying series of relationships and name changes – from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jase to Jane. Prakash names her Jasmine; in New York her employer and would-be lover Taylor names her Jase; and the present tense of the novel finds her as Jane, pregnant and living in Iowa with a local banker named Bud. Through these various changes of identity and place, *Jasmine* tells what seems to be a straightforward immigrant tale from a "feminist" perspective. As an often-cited quotation from the *Baltimore Sun* on the Fawcett Crest paperback edition describes it, *Jasmine* is "the story of the transformation of an Indian village girl, whose grandmother wants to marry her off at 11, into an American woman who finally thinks for herself."¹⁰ Indeed, early critical assessments of *Jasmine* embraced it on these grounds, positing (as Victoria Carchidi does in a 1995 article in *MELUS*) that *Jasmine* narrates the transformation of its heroine from "a victim or

a passive agent to someone willing to make hard choices in pursuit of an identity not offered by the easy, preexisting patterns from which she can choose."¹¹ In other words, as Carchidi puts it, Jasmine becomes "more truly American."¹²

In response, critics such as Inderpal Grewal, Gurleen Grewal, and Fred Pfeil have argued that *Jasmine* depends upon a developmental (and, frankly, racist) opposition between the United States and India as sites of feminist freedom and unfreedom respectively.¹³ As such critics suggest, even though Mukherjee claims to be "trying to extend" the "American mainstream," her project is not as radical as it would seem.¹⁴ In order for Jasmine to become a US feminist subject, she must violently rid herself of all but the most superficial kinds of differences. Her exotic good looks and cooking are acceptable, but anything that would present a real challenge to the idea of white America must be excised. In this consumer version of culture, difference is simply the foreign spice that seasons the United States without changing its actual constitution. Even though *Jasmine* is seemingly a novel about the diversity of the "new America," it can only deal with meaningful differences by assimilating them and by relying on a biological genetic language to assert the fitness and unfitness of different women for US feminist citizenship.

My claim is that *Jasmine* is the story the yellow woman in the wallpaper would tell were she set free in the 1980s United States. In pairing these two unlikely works I argue that even as *Jasmine* pictures a feminist future very different from Gilman's, it nonetheless relies on a eugenic narrative similar to that upon which "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Gilman's other works depend. In each case feminist progress is obtained by radically excluding all difference. While this meshes quite cleanly with Gilman's larger nativist politics, it would seem at odds with Mukherjee's stated commitment to chronicling a United States changed by its immigrants. How is it that two such different texts (the first emblematic of a recovery of foremothers that too often ignored the racial implications of such recuperations, and the second representative of a later "multicultural" embrace of women from diverse backgrounds) can display such a similar logic? In asking this question I do not mean to reinforce a temporal narrative whereby the concerns of race and sexuality are somehow belatedly

added on to a feminism coded as heterosexual and white; rather, I mobilize this familiar narrative of feminist progress to uncover the eugenic impulse it contains. Finally, I argue that reading these works alongside one another reveals another anxiety within eugenic feminism: not only is there the fear that a heroic feminism will be compromised by "others," but there is also a fear that those "other" women might do it (feminism) better.

THE PROBLEM OF HYBRIDITY

When celebratory readings of "The Yellow Wallpaper" focus on issues of writing and interpretation, they ignore that at the heart of the story lies an anxiety about biological reproduction. The very provocation for this story, significantly, is childbirth and the "rest cure" prescribed in its wake.¹⁵ Biological reproduction is vexed in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and, as in Gilman's other works, it is a potentially polluting process. The wallpaper is described in terms of "bloated curves" (48) that spawn "interminable grotesques" (49). As the narrator puts it, "there are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them" (54). What makes the wallpaper so monstrous is that it is constantly multiplying and breeding—it has a life of its own. Interestingly, Gilman's characterizations of the wallpaper index something more than a general anxiety about procreation and proliferation; they mirror her pronouncements on immigrants. In a 1915 article called "Letting Sleeping Forefathers Lie," for instance, Gilman describes immigrants as "accumulating swarms" of "uncongenial material."¹⁶ Likewise, her 1916 novel *With Her in Our Land* portrays a United States crowded with immigrants as "bloated and weak, with unnatural growth, preyed upon by all manner of parasites inside and out, attacked by disease of all kinds."¹⁷

In these writings Gilman fears Asian immigration in particular, worrying that Asian women represent a degenerate and over-exaggerated femininity.¹⁸ She posits that because excessive distinctions between the sexes mean excessive fecundity, Asian women raise the specter of what E. A. Ross deemed Anglo-American "race suicide": the fear that "native" (i.e., white) Americans "might wither away before the heavy influx of a prolific race from the Orient."¹⁹ For Gilman "race suicide" has particular consequences for feminism as she believes that Anglo-American women

are necessarily the standard-bearers of feminist progress. Specifically, she worries that Asian degeneracy would halt and potentially reverse America's ascent towards a more egalitarian, utopian society. In a 1914 essay titled "A Human World," she indicts both Indian and Chinese women for embodying passive and degenerate femininity and worries that they will pollute the United States with their reproductive practices.²⁰ As such, they not only show the evils of excessive sex distinction, they also reveal the dangers of a society that views such sex distinctions as normal: "If being born in China, we grew up with foot-bound women, we assumed that women were such, and must remain so. Born in India, we accepted the child-wife, the pitiful child-widow, the ecstatic *suttee* as natural expressions of womanhood."²¹ Here Gilman uses the familiar formula of citing barbaric practices toward women to impugn a society as a whole. Her point, however, is not simply to mark such societies as debauched and be done with it; rather, she consistently evokes Asia as an "object lesson" for the United States: unless the United States begins to move toward more egalitarian gender relations, the entire country will go into decline, just as the once-great Asian civilizations have.²²

This understanding of Gilman's nativism bears importantly on my reading of "The Yellow Wallpaper." Lanser's account presents the narrator's attempt to free the woman behind the wallpaper as "trying to purge her of her color, to peel her from the yellow paper, so that [the narrator] can accept this woman as herself."²³ This process of birthing a feminist self must rely on a eugenic process of cleansing that self of racial difference, but, as the distressing end of the story suggests, this can be a dangerous and potentially annihilating process. What originally begins as a collaborative relationship between the narrator and the woman in the wallpaper—"I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled" (56)—quickly turns adversarial: the narrator hides a rope in her room so that "if that woman does get out, and tries to get away, [the narrator] can tie her" (57). As an allegory for the relationship between women of color and white feminism of the kind embodied by Gilman, this is quite telling: the narrator rescues the woman in the paper only to reimprison her in a new way. At the same time, "The Yellow Wallpaper" reveals the danger of even that project: instead of the narrator freeing the woman in the wallpaper she *becomes* the

woman in the wallpaper, crawling around the room tied by her own rope. The stakes of freeing the woman in the wallpaper from her color in order to incorporate her into the white feminist self are therefore very high. It is not simply a matter of incorporating difference, because the very fact of difference will destroy. Indeed, the end of the story suggests that miscegenation leads to madness. Given this, what does it mean to read Jasmine as the Asian woman escaped from the wallpaper and wreaking havoc in the world around her?

While it would seem that the multicultural United States depicted in *Jasmine* would embrace hybrid figures instead of associating them with ruin, I argue that hybridity similarly confounds *Jasmine's* narrative of feminist development. Even though on the surface *Jasmine* is the story of an Indian woman becoming an American, it does not narrate the creation of a hybrid subject born from the melding of Indian and US cultures. Instead, throughout the novel Jasmine is always figured as an exceptional subject, and one of the things that makes her exceptional is her distance from her ethnic identity, even when in Punjab. The very fact that she survives an attempt at female infanticide signals that she does not really count as Indian: "my grandmother may have named me Jyoti—Light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter" (40). The idea that Jyoti (oppressed Indian woman) is necessarily opposed to Jane (liberated US woman) sets up the problematic configuration of First versus Third World women that structures *Jasmine*. It also subscribes to developmentalist assumptions that implicitly posit the West as the site of modernity. By saying that "Jyoti" is really "Jane," moreover, the novel argues that Jasmine is never actually Indian at all. After all, even at the moment of birth she escapes the future plotted for her by her "foremothers," as signified in her survival and her rejection of her grandmother's naming.

Here, as throughout *Jasmine*, Mukherjee insistently links modernity to the United States. While *Jasmine's* India is not simply one of backward villages, it is nonetheless an incomplete postcolonial modernity characterized by a state of uneven development in which the "feudal" and the "modern" struggle for precedence. The modern (particularly as embodied in consumer electronic goods) is described as a "frontier" (88), an image whose unmistakable associations with the United States are confirmed by

the “gadgets” “flooding” Jullundhar, brought back by “relative[s] in Canada or the United States” (88). Furthermore, this mix of feudalism and modernity is understood to be dangerously perverse in its Indian manifestation; the electronic goods from the West are turned into bombs by the Sikh terrorist group, the Khalsa Lions. When one of these bombs kills Prakash, Jasmine declares “Feudalism! I am a widow in the war of feudalisms!” (97). Jasmine’s exceptionalism is thus linked to a frontier narrative of US exceptionalism, one that is at play even in India.

Indeed, Jasmine’s exceptional nature allows her to first inhabit and then exceed the postcolonial modernity represented by her husband Prakash. Prakash is described as a “modern man” who “trash[es] some traditions” (such as bringing Jasmine to live with his extended family after marriage, and having children), arguing “there’s no room in modern India for feudalism” (76). Constantly confronted with a “backwards” society (for instance, he is forced to “cook the books” for his boss, Mr. Jagtiani), Prakash finally declares that a “real life” is only possible in the United States (81). When he is killed by a terrorist bomb, however, it is Jasmine who must fulfill his mission. Even though she originally conceives it in “feudal” terms (she plans to become a *sati*, or ritually immolate herself, on the campus of the technical college Prakash would have attended), her rape by and subsequent murder of the immigrant-smuggler, Half-Face, becomes instead a symbolic *sati* that frees her to embark upon a new (and, in Prakash’s terms, “real”) life in the United States.²⁴

Once in the United States, Jasmine continues to be marked as exceptional. Lillian, the Floridian woman who rescues her after she kills Half-Face and escapes from the hotel, claims she is a “special case” (135). Because of Jasmine’s ability to “walk and talk American,” Lillian decides she isn’t to be “a picker or a domestic” and lends her money to travel to New York (135). However, Jasmine’s exceptionality, in this moment and throughout the novel, is purchased at the representational price of portraying the other women around her as somehow lacking (particularly the other non-white women, such as the women from her village in Punjab, the Kanjobal women she lives with in Florida, the Punjabi women in Queens, and the other nannies in New York). In fact, Jasmine is perplexed when grouped with other women of color by her New York

employers, who tell her "you're probably tired of Americans assuming that if you're from India or China or the Caribbean you must be good with children" (168). Jasmine's puzzled thought is that "the Chinese [she] had always thought of as genetically cruel to women and children ... and [her] experience of Caribbeans was a mixture of fear and pity" (169). While this statement exposes Jasmine's own racism, the text gives us no indication that we should read this portrayal as a condemnation. Even if we understand Jasmine's statement as simply an index of her ignorance, the fact remains that Jasmine can only be pictured as a feminist woman of action by portraying all the other women of color in the novel as stagnant and backward.

It is also significant that Chinese cruelty is marked as "genetic," as throughout the novel Jasmine's exceptionality is explicitly named as biological. Jasmine may be brown, but the novel insists on her genetic difference from other people of color. For instance, her adopted Vietnamese son, Du, is also an immigrant, but he is not like Jasmine. As she describes it: "[m]y transformation has been *genetic*, Du's was hyphenated" (222, my emphasis). This is because he "will always be attached in occult ways to an experience [white America] can't fathom" (231). While Jasmine has turned her difference into something recognizable and safe (if exotic), Du's difference is an "occult" presence that he cannot erase. The word occult is suggestive here, with its hint at entities hidden in blood. This connection is made overt by Mukherjee's use of "occult" just five pages earlier to refer to "blood tests for 'occult' presences" (226). The occult attachments by which Du is held are in his blood; he cannot escape them. But such ties do not bind Jasmine, whose US identity is genetic in its naturalness. This genetic sense of identity seems to contradict the more famous declaration of identity formation in the novel: "we murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams" (29). While this violent process suggests an active subject who must "murder" previous identities in the name of reinvention, the idea that Jasmine's "transformation" is "genetic" suggests a much more passive process. It also models a specifically eugenic model of identity in the United States: you are either born American or you are not. Du can become "hyphenated" but not assimilated: he will never really be American. Jasmine, on the other

hand, is always already American, as demonstrated by her exceptional nature even when she is in India. Describing what it means to be an American in a 1989 interview in *New York Magazine*, Mukherjee characterizes it as "a quality of mind and desire."²⁵ This seemingly metaphysical description, however, is belied by the fact that *Jasmine* repeatedly contends you are either born with this "quality of mind and desire" or not. You are either Jasmine, defying her fate, or you are her friend from the village, Vimla, who immolates herself when her husband dies of typhoid. As this last suggests, Jasmine's genetic exceptionalism can only be represented as such by abjecting all the other brown women in the novel (presumably because they don't have the same "genetic" power of transformation), thus showing exactly how exclusive such an identity is. Jasmine can "become American," but only by a miracle that marks her as American at birth. Thus even the moments within the novel where Jasmine is characterized as operating in an Indian idiom (such as her frequent references to her "third eye" and her marking herself as Kali when she murders Half-Face) do not represent any real challenge to the narrative of genetic exceptionalism. Instead, such moments paradoxically function to naturalize her narrative of assimilation; for instance, her belief in fate (termed "very, very, very Indian" by Taylor) in fact posits her genetic fitness for life in the United States as predetermined (59). Once again her journey to the United States is determined by the "quality of mind and desire" with which she was born. Moreover, references to her Indianness serve to disassociate Jasmine from the violence she commits—particularly her murder of Half-Face—and thus also serve to disavow the formulation of identity formation as "murder." In this way, "Indianness" functions as an alibi for Jasmine's narrative of exceptionalist assimilation rather than presenting a meaningful challenge to it.

Therefore, feminist difference in *Jasmine* is merely additive, not foundational. The strategy whereby Jasmine's genetic predisposition allows her to "become an American" ultimately cannot accommodate or adequately deal with issues of racial hybridity. Jasmine describes Du as a "hybrid," but her usage suggests merely a stance toward the process of Americanization. The novel ends with the specter of racial hybridity unresolved. When Jasmine sets out for California with Taylor, she is pregnant with Bud's

unborn child. In this sense, the novel is moving us toward the birth of this hybrid child. Even so, the fate of the child is unknown and indeed must remain outside the bounds of the novel. Because *Jasmine* offers us cultural difference reduced to its essentialized (and easily categorized) components, hybridity confounds its representational order and thus reveals the eugenic impulse at play. If the essential mode of reproduction throughout the novel is the rebirthing of the self (a process that always involves death and loss), we are forced to ask what price the birth of a hybrid child might exact. The novel leaves us with this question hanging in midair. Just as in Gilman's story where the narrator's becoming hybrid renders her mad, in *Jasmine* the possibility of racial hybridity signals the limit of the text's ability to confront difference. The process of Americanization that *Jasmine* describes therefore is not only exclusive but also elusive: the fact of racial difference cannot be repressed but threatens to erupt around the issue of hybridity.

REPRODUCING FEMINISM

I call attention to the problem of racial hybridity to show how it interrupts the process of feminist development at work in each text. In doing so, I argue that what is at stake is not only the feminist subjectivity being forged by the protagonists, but also what these two canonical works tell us about commonplace narratives of feminist progress. After all, as Lanser reminds us, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is "one of the texts through which white American feminist criticism has constituted its terms."²⁶ Similarly, *Jasmine* remains a key text of Asian American studies, despite the heavy criticism it has received, and in fact is often "the text used to represent the South Asian immigrant experience" in courses and anthologies.²⁷ Indeed, Mukherjee serves as the one example of a South Asian woman writer (and therefore represents both South Asian postcolonial and South Asian American women writers) in *The Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*—a work that, not coincidentally, also features Gilman.²⁸ Mukherjee's easy inclusion in a feminist canon is especially interesting because while Gilman positioned herself as a feminist foremother, Mukherjee understands herself as critiquing precisely the kind of Second Wave feminism that celebrates Gilman.

Gilman styled herself a feminist pioneer with a distinct view to the future, as the *Forerunner*, the quarterly journal she singlehandedly produced for seven years, forcefully declared. By calling herself a “forerunner” Gilman explicitly positioned herself as a feminist progenitor, a sentiment echoed in the frequent invocations of Gilman as “foremother.” As Alys Weinbaum reminds us, however, such celebrations of Gilman run the risk of ignoring the articulation of feminism and racism in Gilman’s time as well as our own.²⁹ While recent scholarship has unearthed the ways in which Gilman’s feminism is inextricably linked to her racism, I return to these debates to argue that what is at stake is not only the status of feminism and racism in Gilman’s work, but also a larger anxiety over the proper subject of feminism.³⁰ As such, I am less interested in “exposing” Gilman’s complicity in the racist and nativist discourses of her day than I am in thinking about what it means to reclaim her as a foremother. Such an approach may be guilty of the charge of “presentism” levied by Judith Allen against Gilman’s supporters and detractors alike in her impressive new study of Gilman, *The Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, but in this case perhaps presentism is precisely the point. Why do we choose to resuscitate certain aspects of Gilman’s writings and philosophies and not others? If, as Allen argues in her conclusion, “Gilman’s feminism reaches across the decades, indeed, the centuries, to successor feminisms,” what does this tell us about the notion of “feminist trajectories” in general?³¹

I thus call attention to the language of “foremothers” to argue that it establishes a generational model of feminism centrally concerned with feminism’s proper reproduction. In doing so I am hardly the first to note that a generational model replicates the reproductive structures that much of feminism challenges, but I believe reading this generational conflict through Gilman shows that the reproductive metaphor at work is quite specifically a eugenic one.³² This eugenic metaphor functions through a particular understanding of temporality and the idea of feminist progress: the past and present need to be cleansed of difference and conflict in order to ensure feminism’s future. A 2000 collection of critical essays promisingly titled *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* illustrates this point. Each essay in the collection may make a nominal gesture toward Gilman’s “racism, ... ethnocentricity, ... homophobia,” but all except for

Gary Scharnhorst's ultimately dismiss these concerns as anachronistic, while at the same time insisting on Gilman's continued relevance for feminism today.³³ Gilman's racism is "of her era" and thus "outdated." She could not help but be a woman of her time, and that time (unlike ours) was one of open and obvious racism and nativism. In nearly the same breath that this aspect of history is being acknowledged and mobilized in the form of an excuse, however, these critics insist on the contemporaneity of Gilman's concerns. What this temporal sleight of hand requires, then, is that we rescue a diachronic narrative of progress and enlightenment from the polluting muddiness of historical contingency. And it is also precisely through a eugenic reproductive mechanism that this happens: we only reproduce those aspects of Gilman's thought that are "fit" to inhabit the present moment, while repressing those aspects that are "unfit" for further generation.

The fear that a focus on Gilman's negative aspects will render her unfit for feminist generation, and in fact trouble feminism's onward march, is predicated on the idea that feminism is necessarily a progress narrative. Just as the daughters in Gilman's utopian novel *Herland* are all descended from one mother and all revere and honor her through the process of improvement itself, what Susan Gubar terms an "Edenic" narrative of feminism could be tempted to understand the recognition of differences within feminist discourse as the snake in the garden.³⁴ The main problem with accounts of feminism that see it as a linear progression over time is that such a progress narrative works through a model of correction and addition; for instance, in this model an attention to issues of race is merely added to feminism's heroic narrative, as opposed to being something that troubles that narrative's very foundation. Similarly, such a narrative ignores the rich history of women of color and antiracist feminism, instead naturalizing Second Wave feminism as heterosexual, middle class, and white. By arguing that attention to race and sexuality is merely additive instead of foundational, it creates a eugenic (i.e., purifying, self-perfecting) model of feminist reproduction.

In *Jasmine* and in her other writings (particularly her 1975 novel *Wife*), Mukherjee critiques the account of feminism I've just sketched (what Chela Sandoval terms "hegemonic feminism") from precisely the terrain

of difference.³⁵ In painting Jasmine as a feminist hero she attempts to trouble what she labels in an interview “the Ms. magazine way.”³⁶ Criticizing such feminism for being both overly prescriptive and imperialist, Mukherjee describes Jasmine as “an activist—or a woman of action—who ends up being far more feminist than the women on Claremont Avenue who talk about feminism.”³⁷ In this she means to challenge a hegemonic feminism that would make women from the global South objects rather than subjects of feminist discourse. In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee uses a conversation between Jasmine and Wylie (Jasmine’s employer in New York) to similarly criticize a generational narrative, likening it to an overdetermined narrative of reincarnation. When Jasmine tells Wylie that her mother tried to strangle her at birth, Wylie “missed the point and shrieked at [Jasmine’s] ‘foremothers’” (40). For Jasmine, “the point” is about individual strategies instead of a grand narrative of oppression; to understand it as such is as misguided as believing her “mother’s past must have been heavy with wrongs” to have given birth to five girls (39). Wylie’s reaction is furthermore linked to US imperialism, with Jasmine characterizing it as “Agent Orange” and saying it is “overkill” (40). Finally, Mukherjee calls attention to the hypocrisy of Wylie passing judgment on Jasmine’s “foremothers” by pointing out the exploitative relationship between them, telling the reader that Jasmine was Wylie’s “undocumented ‘caregiver’ during [her] years in Manhattan” (40). In this moment Mukherjee shows how, as she says in an interview, Wylie’s “feminism and professionalism are built on the backs of under-employed” women from the global South.³⁸

While this last is an important point, the version of feminism Mukherjee puts in its place is also problematic. She rightly notes that “for some non-white, Asian women, our ways of negotiating power are different,” but what is troubling is that the power she refers to is that of “sexuality.”³⁹ Placing Asian women’s agency in the realm of sexuality and reproduction seems eerily to echo Gilman’s fears of white-race suicide: because Asian women are “too feminine” (that is, too given over to their sex characteristics), they are more reproductive than white women of “good stock.” Susan Koshy’s reading of *Jasmine* in her 2004 book *Sexual Naturalization* gives us further insight into this by looking at how such nativist fears are recoded. In taking up Mukherjee’s figuration of Jasmine as

an exotic who uses her difference from white American women to her advantage, Koshy develops the idea of a "sexual model minority."⁴⁰ This phrase refers to the commonplace notion, emerging in the 1970s, that while white American women reject traditional gender roles in the name of feminist equality, Asian woman naturally and happily embrace the retrograde model of femininity their white "sisters" discard. In short, the Asian woman as sexual model minority represents the "perfect match between family-centrism and sex appeal."⁴¹ Jasmine as a sexual model minority gives us further insight into the yellow woman in Gilman's story. After all, Gilman's story is ultimately a polemic against the notion that women are only fit for reproductive labor because intellectual strain will turn them mad. However, drawing upon the idea of the sexual model minority suggests another reading: what if the narrator's interpretation of the woman in the wallpaper is incorrect? What if the woman in the wallpaper is not begging to be free, but is actually mocking the white woman with her more dutiful conformity to gender roles?

What is particularly provocative about this notion is that despite her more faithful fulfilment of domestic roles, Jasmine is a figure for feminist success in the novel (that is, by the standards of liberal feminism she is a self-determining, autonomous individual). In fact, Jasmine consistently bests the other women in the novel, and, as we've seen, the novel marks Jasmine as exceptional through this process of comparison. Thus, as Koshy reminds us, Jasmine's "feminism" is in keeping with her status as a sexual model minority, as it is an "exorbitant feminism defined in *comparison* to white American women and in *competition* for white men."⁴² Mukherjee makes Jasmine a dubious feminine heroine by "coding ... interracial eroticism as the medium for the Third World woman's liberation."⁴³ Jasmine's feminism, in the end, depends on a sexual and reproductive competition that deems her more fit than the women around her.

A scene in Jasmine's obstetrician's office illustrates this well. In this scene, which takes place in the present tense of the novel, Jasmine is living in Iowa and is pregnant with Bud's child. While Jasmine waits for her appointment, the older white woman next to her starts crying. Tellingly, the woman is crying because she's having trouble conceiving after "wait[ing] too long," thinking she'd be "the next Adrienne Rich" (34). As

she sobs into the book she's reading, Jasmine notes "there was a man's picture on the back of the book, just about the right size for the woman's head: I almost laughed out loud" (31). The woman's dilemma is parodied in the grotesquely comic image of a man's head on her neck, an image that mocks as masculinist her desire to pursue her creative aspirations. Not only is she not "the next Adrienne Rich," but her desire to become a poet has meant she's unable to have children. Of course the irony is that Jasmine, in Mukherjee's words, "ends up being far more feminist" and is also more reproductive.

As Jasmine attempts to comfort the woman, the sympathetic moment between them takes a turn when the woman says to Jasmine "you have nice hips," ... [giving] the 'you' a generic sweep. You teeming millions with wide hips breeding like roaches on wide-hipped continents" (34). Here, Mukherjee makes this white woman heir to the discourse of "race suicide" that Gilman espoused. The woman's lack of fertility stands in direct contrast to Jasmine as a "generic" representative of her "wide hip[ped]" race "breeding like roaches." And yet even as Mukherjee critiques this racist logic, she recapitulates it. After all, the whole novel works to show how Jasmine is indeed "more fit" than the other women around her. This is true in her native village, and it is true in Baden, Iowa. In this sense, Mukherjee unwittingly presents the flip side to Gilman's fears: the immigrant woman as emblem of exceptionalism. Throughout the novel Jasmine's power is located in her ability to displace the women around her (for instance Karin, Bud's ex-wife). But the problem is not just that Jasmine signals the return to a retrograde femininity; rather it is that she is, for Mukherjee, a new kind of feminist hero.

Even in these moments where Mukherjee is launching a critique against a hegemonic feminism that is, in her words, "built on the backs of under-employed" women of color, she is unsuccessful for two reasons. The first is that she is wedded to the idea of a progress narrative in which some subjects are more fit than others for feminist development. She does not dispute the logic of an "us" and "them" (as her portrayals of other women of color in the novel suggest); rather she insists that Jasmine is not one of "them"—or, as she says in an interview in relation to her own experiences of racism, she's not "a smelly, dark, alien other."⁴⁴ Of course

we could read this last comment as Mukherjee parroting and critiquing racist language, but it seems her real problem is being grouped with other immigrants. As she states in the same interview, "you never got the benefit of the doubt, if you were a Canadian citizen of Indian or South Asian origin."⁴⁵ This comment seems to be less a critique of racism than pique over not being given "the benefit of the doubt." The second problem is that she ultimately accepts the terms of the debate as a 'sexual contest. Where Gilman looked at Asian women and feared race suicide, Mukherjee just recodes this as a positive difference in the new America. Instead of a "prolific influx from the Orient," Mukherjee gives us a "sexual model minority," but ultimately they are they are just different sides of the same coin.

CONCLUSION: IMMIGRATION AND EUGENIC FEMINISM

By way of conclusion I turn to Gilman's and Mukherjee's writings on immigration. In doing so, I consider how each speaks to a national project at two distinct moments in immigration history. While Gilman viewed the first major wave of immigration from Eastern Europe and Asia with alarm, Mukherjee is part of the post-1965 wave of immigration and understands herself as celebrating a United States changed by its new immigrants. Despite their different historical moments, both appear to reject racial qualifications for national belonging, taking recourse instead to a language of "culture" and "psychology." I argue, however, that such language masks biological understandings of the fitness and unfitness of certain subjects for national belonging. In tracing the continuities between these two writers, therefore, I chart a connection between the nativism of Gilman's time and more recent assimilationist rhetoric, showing how a language of social Darwinism becomes translated into a developmental narrative about the ability of some, and inability of others, to become American.

While Gilman believed only certain kinds of people should be allowed to naturalize as US citizens, she does not resort to standard nativist rhetoric in making her claims; on the face of it, her requirements for citizenship are not based on race or ethnicity. In a 1914 article titled "Immigration, Importation, and Our Fathers," Gilman argues that those "intelligent enough to know about another country ... strong enough

to break home ties and old customs; and competent enough to pay the passage" should be allowed to immigrate to the United States, provided he or she is "of *assimilable stock*."⁴⁶ Lest there be any doubt about what "stock" is "assimilable," Gilman goes on to say: "Our imported millions of Africans and their descendants constitute a problem ... and many millions of Hindus, even if free immigrants, would make another problem."⁴⁷ In explaining this seeming contradiction between immigration open to all "intelligent" and "competent" enough to reach the United States and immigration restricted on the basis of "stock," Gilman turns to the idea of national psychology:

The American nation consists of certain Ideas, Ideals, Qualities, Modes of Conduct, Institutions. Blood does not of itself constitute Americanship. There are Americans hailing from all countries but they agree in those qualities which make America.

This national psychology is what must be shared for true citizenship, and it is the sense of an alien, an irreconcilable psychology, which makes the American citizen of whatever stock, shrink from the overwhelming flood of unassimilable characteristics.⁴⁸

If being American is not a question of biology or "blood," if race and nation are not identical, then nationality becomes a question of culture or development. Here, then, US culture is defined in terms of ideas, customs (or "modes of conduct"), and institutions. What separates some potential immigrants from others is not race, but their capacity to develop. As Gilman elaborates in her 1916 sequel to *Herland*, *With Her in Ourland*, "all that 'America' means ... is a new phase of social development, and anyone can be an American who belongs to it."⁴⁹ At the same time, she also insists, "the human race is in different stages of development, and only some races—or some individuals in a given race—have reached the democratic stage."⁵⁰ Gilman thus uses a civilizational discourse of social evolutionism to argue that development is inherently racial.⁵¹

Mukherjee likewise makes immigration into an issue of "psychology" (as we saw in her assertion that being American is "a quality of mind and desire"), elaborating on her assimilationist stance to state that it takes a certain kind of person to immigrate and assimilate. She details her

position in a 1996 essay called "Two Ways to Belong in America."⁵² In it she compares her relationship to the United States to that of her sister's: even though both have lived in the United States for thirty-five years, Mukherjee is a naturalized citizen, while her sister, Mira, retains her Indian citizenship. These "two ways to belong" are for Mukherjee illustrative of vastly different stances towards the United States. By choosing US citizenship Mukherjee "was opting for fluidity, self-invention, blue jeans and T-shirts." Her sister, however, represents those who "stayed rooted in one job, one city, one house, one ancestral culture, one cuisine, for the entirety of their productive years." This stark contrast leaves no space for a more complicated notion of diaspora in which diasporic subjects occupy multiple positions and maintain multiple allegiances. "Belonging in America" is an all-or-nothing proposition: you either "transform" yourself into an American (i.e., assimilate) or you "stayed rooted" in the culture of origin. Like Gilman, then, Mukherjee emphasizes the ability to jettison one's culture of origin in the name of transformation. While she does not make any claims about "assimilable characteristics," she does seem to suggest that to become American requires acceding to what María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo describes as a "developmentalist regime of subjection." The resultant subjectivity, as embodied in Jasmine herself, emphasizes "agency as free will, ... consciousness as autonomous and self-determining, ... [and] progressive transformation as transcendence over the restrictions of clan or caste (ethnos)."⁵³

While this developmental subjectivity does not rely on the race-based social Darwinism of Gilman's pronouncements, it is nonetheless heir to the logic she describes. In Mukherjee's formulation, though, racial descriptions get sublimated into temporal ones. As the title of her essay "A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman" states, Mukherjee thinks of herself "as a four-hundred-year-old woman, born in the captivity of colonial, pre-industrial, oral culture and living now as a contemporary New Yorker."⁵⁴ Using what Johannes Fabian has termed the "denial of coevalness," she paints India as premodern "captivity" in contrast to a United States defined by contemporary and forward-moving energy, a formulation that willfully denies the extent to which the underdevelopment of India is related to larger structural inequalities that benefit the United States.⁵⁵

While this scheme differs from Gilman's civilizational one in its sense of the mutability of individuals (provided an individual casts off the particulars of a native culture they can develop into a US citizen), it nonetheless preserves a logic in which the only way to become a modern subject is to assimilate to hegemonic US culture. Moreover, while the *imperative* to develop might apply equally to all, for Mukherjee the *capacity* to develop applies to only a select few. As in *Jasmine*, where the protagonist describes her transformation as "genetic" rather than "hyphenated," some people are simply born American while others are not. Such reasoning allows Mukherjee to claim that "wherever [she] travel[s] in the (very) Old World, [she] find[s] 'Americans' in the making, whether or not they ever make it to these shores.... dreamers and conquerors, not afraid of transforming themselves, not afraid of abandoning some of their principles along the way."⁵⁶ Although this statement mirrors Gilman's pronouncement that "there are Americans hailing from all countries, but they agree in those qualities which make America," it differs in that to be American for Mukherjee is linked to transformation and "conquest," not race. In other words, it is linked to the subject's ability to develop. As Saldaña-Portillo aptly notes, in this shift from Gilman's time to Mukherjee's,

we have left behind the social Darwinism of British and Anglo-American colonialism, in which evolution is determined by one's proximity to an appropriately potent whiteness, without fully abandoning its racial legacy. In its stead we have a model of development in which modernity was determined by one's proximity to this risk-taking, decision-making, frugal, nonornamental (i.e. elemental), productive, fully masculine, national subject.⁵⁷

Although Saldaña-Portillo stresses that to be a national subject is to be "masculinist, whether the agent/object of a development strategy is a man or a woman, an adult or a child," I am interested in how her formulation applies to the feminist nationalist subject.⁵⁸ She rightly notes that the discourse of development interpellates national subjects as masculine, but my focus here is on the ways in which Gilman and Mukherjee understand nationalism as a feminist problem. After all, for both Gilman and Mukherjee the sense of different nations being at different stages of development has specifically feminist consequences. For Gilman, the issue with

US culture is that men are allowed to develop to their full potential while women's development is stilted. This is not only bad for individual women, it is detrimental for society as a whole. Gilman turns to Asia to prove this point: because women in Asian societies have developed their "sex" characteristics over their "race" ones, these once great civilizations have now fallen. Therefore, the key to national reproduction is the creation of properly feminist subjects. Mukherjee also seems to suggest that women (like Jasmine) are more fit than men to become national subjects, and that to immigrate is in itself a feminist move. For her, immigration is "about transformation—psychological transformation—especially among women."⁵⁹ The fact that women are more transformed by the United States than men relies on her belief (as in *Jasmine*) that the "old world" is "repressive, traditional ... caste-bound, class-bound, [and] genderist." Immigration in this equation is about women finding feminist freedom in the United States. While men come to the United States for "economic transformation" and are "afraid of pollution," women's adaptability and ability to transform make them paradigmatic immigrant subjects: "we've all been trained to be adaptable as wives, and that adaptability is working to the women's advantage when we come over as immigrants."⁶⁰

Linking women's adaptability to their training as wives in their culture of origin (a logic that again caricatures such cultures as uniformly patriarchal), Mukherjee understands immigration through a marriage metaphor in which women represent feminist change and progress, and men represent tradition and conservatism. In "Two Ways to Belong in America" she repeatedly likens immigration to marriage (saying "America spoke to me—I married it"). Doing so not only sidesteps the real economic and social issues pertaining to immigration, it also genders immigrants as wives who must adapt themselves to a masculinist nation. In this metaphor the immigrant, no matter whether they are man or woman, is gendered as female. Nonetheless, women have a particular advantage because, paradoxically, patriarchy in the culture of origin (which teaches women to be adaptable as wives) enables immigrant women's success. Mukherjee codes this success as a movement from repressive tradition to a "new world" of freedom and choice. In doing so she reverses the typical mobilization of gender within nationalism, where women represent

the conservative forces of tradition and men are the actors for progressive change, and instead posits women as the "risk-taking, decision-making . . . national subject[s]." ⁶¹ While seemingly contradictory (women's adaptability as wives in their culture of origin allows them to become successful liberal feminist subjects in the United States), this account agrees with that of the sexual model minority, in which conformity to traditional gender roles is one of the keys to feminist success.

Perhaps Mukherjee describes immigration as marriage because in her case the relationship is more than metaphoric—she was able to naturalize because she married a US citizen. With this act she claims to be "renouncing 3,000 years (at least) of caste-observant, 'pure culture' marriage in the Mukherjee family" for "cultural and psychological 'mongrelization'" in the United States. Such a narrative ignores the history of US anti-miscegenation laws and immigrant quota systems, just as her use of the marriage metaphor makes heterosexuality a prerequisite for full citizenship. Additionally, her overall assimilationist stance, which seems to suggest that you have to get rid of all aspects of the culture of origin in order to become a modern US subject, contradicts her stated support of "mongrelization." In an article in *Mother Jones* she explicitly critiques a multicultural discourse that would celebrate an attachment to the culture of origin, arguing that "the multiculturalist emphasis on race- and ethnicity-based group identity leads to a lack of respect for individual differences within each group, and to vilification of those individuals who place the good of the nation above the interests of their particular racial or ethnic communities."⁶² Here the "good of the nation" is necessarily at odds with "the interests of . . . particular racial or ethnic communities" inhabited by individuals who have not transcended their clannish identifications to become fully modern subjects. Therefore, even though Mukherjee rejects multiculturalism for a "melting pot" where both the immigrant and the United States are changed by their encounter, ultimately she's only talking about superficial differences. While it is true that the America she depicts is not all white by any means, what we have instead are differently raced subjects in different stages of assimilation. Thus while her eugenic feminist stance is more inclusive than Gilman's in that it seems to chart a narrative of feminist development open to

women of all races, in fact her assimilationism insists any connection to the culture of origin is an unhealthy attachment to the past that must be overcome in the name of feminist progress. The irony here, as Inderpal Grewal points out, is that despite Mukherjee's rejection of a hyphenated or multicultural identity, her novels are read through such identities precisely because they offer assimilation in many different colors.⁶³

Thus my point in pairing Gilman and Mukherjee is to say that, because it is populated by people of color, *Jasmine* could be read as a feminist tale that confronts the issues "The Yellow Wallpaper" tries so desperately to contain and repress; it is thus a story fit for the "new America," as Mukherjee herself would put it. But I argue it is really a version of Gilman's story in brown face: it still relies on a eugenic feminist logic. Modernization theories of development would dictate that the particular (i.e., "traditional culture") must be transcended for the universal trajectory of development. Likewise, the mode of feminism to which both Gilman and Mukherjee subscribe seems to require the jettisoning of particularities in the name of feminist progress. Therefore, the extent to which a work such as *Jasmine* can be accommodated within a feminist canon is itself suspect, particularly given Mukherjee's own stated antagonism to a US feminism she implicitly characterizes as white. At stake is not only the assimilationist nature of Mukherjee's text, but also the ease with which it can be assimilated to the very narrative of heroic-feminist progress that it supposedly seeks to disrupt. In this sense, feminist-progress narratives (which led to the recovery of "foremothers" such as Gilman and the inclusion of writers such as Mukherjee) depend on a developmental narrative that cannot but be racialized, because even in their call for inclusion they operate in a eugenic mode.

NOTES

1. Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (New York: Grove Press, 1989). Hereafter all references cited in the text.
2. Michael Gorra, "Call It Exile, Call It Immigration," review of *Jasmine*, by Mukherjee, *New York Times*, September 10, 1989, Sunday Book Review. This quote is featured prominently on the cover of the Grove Press edition of *Jasmine*.
3. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship," in their *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979).
4. See Dana Seitler, *Atavistic Tendencies: The Culture of Science in American Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 175–98. While my use of this term acknowledges Seitler's formulation, I use the phrase "eugenic feminism" to refer not only to a historically specific relationship between feminism and eugenic movements but also to a trope within feminism that insists that difference must be removed in order for feminist advance.
5. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper," in *The Yellow Wallpaper: A Bedford Cultural Edition*, ed. Dale M. Bauer (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998), 41–59. Hereafter all references cited in the text.
6. Elaine Hedges, "Afterword," in Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1973); Gilbert and Gubar, "Infection in the Sentence"; Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Re-reading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," *New Literary History* 11, no. 3 (1980); Jean E. Kennard, "Convention Coverage: Or, How to Read Your Own Life," *New Literary History* 13 (Autumn 1981). For a more thorough discussion of these and other readings of "The Yellow Wallpaper" see Elaine Hedges, "'Out at Last? 'The Yellow Wallpaper' after Two Decades of Feminist Criticism," in *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Joanna B. Karpinski (New York: G. K. Hall, 1992).
7. Susan S. Lanser, "Feminist Criticism, 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and the Politics of Color in America," *Feminist Studies* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 424.
8. *Ibid.*, 435.
9. Tina Chen and S. X. Goudie, "Holder of the World: An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee" *Jouvert* 1, no. 1 (1997).
10. Review of *Jasmine* from the *Baltimore Sun*, quoted on the cover of the paperback edition Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1989).
11. Victoria Carchidi, "'Orbiting': Bharati Mukherjee's Kaleidoscope Vision," *MELUS* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 93.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Inderpal Grewal, "The Postcolonial, Ethnic Studies and the Diaspora: The Contexts of Ethnic Immigrant/Migrant Cultural Studies in the US," *Socialist Review* 24, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): 45–74; Gurleen Grewal, "Born Again American: The Immigrant Consciousness in *Jasmine*," in *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (New York: Garland, 1993), 181–96; Fred Pfeil, "No Basta Teorizar: In-Difference to Solidarity in Contemporary Fiction, Theory and Practice," in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Minneapolis:

- University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 197–230. For more sympathetic readings of *Jasmine* see Anthony C. Alessandrini, “Reading Bharati Mukherjee, Reading Globalization,” in *World Bank Literature*, ed. Amitava Kumar (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 265–79; Samir Dayal, “Creating, Preserving, Destroying: Violence in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*,” in *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (New York: Garland, 1993), 65–88; and Malini Johar Schueller, “Globalization and Orientalism: Iyer’s Video Night in Kathmandu, Alexander’s Fault Lines, and Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*,” in her *Locating Race: Global Sites of Post-Colonial Citizenship* (Albany: University of New York Press, 2009), 73–100.
14. Bharati Mukherjee, “A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman,” in *The Writer on Her Work Volume II: New Essays in New Territory*, ed. Janet Sternberg (New York: Norton, 1991), 34.
 15. Critics have focused on the wallpaper as representing either a repressed or overabundant female sexuality. See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, “‘Fecundate! Discriminate!’: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Theologizing of Maternity,” in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Optimist Reformer*, ed. Jill Rudd and Val Gough (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 200–16.
 16. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Letting Sleeping Forefathers Lie,” *Forerunner* VI (October 1915): 261.
 17. Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Minna Duskow, eds., *Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Utopian Novels: Moving the Mountain, Herland and With Her in Ourland* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 320.
 18. In *Women and Economics* Gilman uses Asian (or in her term “Oriental”) cultures to represent the “injurious effects” of “excessive sex-distinction”: “in the Oriental nations . . . the female in curtained harems is confined most exclusively to sex-functions and denied most fully the exercise of race-functions. In such peoples the weakness, the tendency to small bones and adipose tissue of the over-sexed female is transmitted to the male, with a retarding effect on the development of the race.” Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1898), 46.
 19. Edward Alsworth Ross, “From ‘The Causes of Race Superiority,’” in *The Yellow Wallpaper: A Bedford Cultural Edition*, ed. Dale M. Bauer (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1998), 212.
 20. In reading *Jasmine* as the yellow woman in the wallpaper, I don’t mean to create an easy equivalence between the immigration histories and racial positionings of Chinese and Indian women in the United States. Instead, I make this link to underscore how narratives of feminist development in what would seem to be two very different times and texts exhibit similar reproductive anxieties. Moreover, the slippage between Chinese and Indian is warranted in regard to Gilman’s larger writings and theories. While many of her anti-immigrant writings do indeed target the Chinese (as her choice of yellow for the wallpaper suggests), she was equally opposed to “Hindu” immigration to the United States, and convinced that both the Chinese and Indian were “modern ancients”—degenerate representatives of once-great but now fallen civilizations.
 21. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-Made World* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2001), 202.
 22. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *With Her In Ourland*, published in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Utopian Novels*, ed. Minna Duskow (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 298.

23. Lanser, "Feminist Criticism," 429.
24. For an elaboration on how Jasmine's rape by Half-Face kills her former self, see Cathy Schlund-Vials, "Reading and Writing America: Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*," in her *Modeling Citizenship: Jewish and Asian American Writing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).
25. Celia McGee, "Foreign Correspondent," *New York Magazine*, January 30, 1989, 22.
26. Lanser, "Feminist Criticism," 415.
27. Grewal, "The Postcolonial, Ethnic Studies," 45.
28. Kathy J. Whitson, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).
29. Alys Eve Weinbaum, "Writing Feminist Genealogy: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Racial Nationalism, and the Reproduction of Maternalist Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 271–302. See also her *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
30. In addition to Lanser, Sietler and Weinbaum see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Thomas Peyser, *Utopia and Cosmopolis: Globalization in the Era of American Literary Realism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).
31. Judith A. Allen, *The Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 367.
32. For more on generational conflicts within academic feminism see Devoney Looser and E. Ann Kaplan, *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Robyn Wiegman, *Women's Studies on Its Own: A Next Wave Reader in Institutional Change* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). See also a special issue of *Differences*: "Notes from the Beehive: Feminisms and the Institution," *Differences* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1990).
33. Mary A. Hill, "'Letters Are Like Morning Prayers': The Private Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman," in *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Catherine Golden and Joanna S. Zangrando (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 51.
34. Susan Gubar, "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 881.
35. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
36. Bharati Mukherjee, "An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee," by Michael Connell, Jessie Grearson, and Tome Grimes, *Iowa Review* 20, no. 3 (1990): 21.
37. *Ibid.*, 25–26.
38. *Ibid.*, 22.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Susan Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization: Asian Americans and Miscegenation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 135.
41. *Ibid.*, 137.
42. *Ibid.*, 146.
43. *Ibid.*

44. Mukherjee, "An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee," 12.
45. Ibid.
46. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Immigration, Importation and Our Fathers," *Forerunner* 5 (1914): 118.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Gilman, *With Her in Ourland*, 318.
50. Ibid., 323.
51. For more on the racial underpinnings of civilizational discourse see Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.
52. Bharati Mukherjee, "Two Ways to Belong in America," *The New York Times*, September 22, 1996.
53. María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 43.
54. Bharati Mukherjee, "Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman," in *The Writer on Her Work: New Essays in New Territory*, vol. 2, ed. Janet Sternburg (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 27.
55. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
56. Mukherjee, "Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman," 27.
57. Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination*, 42.
58. Ibid., 9.
59. Mukherjee, "An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee," 15.
60. Ibid., 15, 16, 19.
61. For the most influential version of this argument in relation to Indian nationalism see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
62. Mukherjee, Bharati, "American Dreamer." *Mother Jones* 22, no. 1 (February 1997): 32.
63. Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 71–72; and Grewal, "The Postcolonial, Ethnic Studies."

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