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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the people who never fail to encourage, support, and inspire me: my husband, my father, my mother, my brother, my sister and every member of my extended family—past, present, and future.
Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 2

Chapter One:
Between Tradition and Modernity: Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* and Metaphors of Hybridity ........ 11

Chapter Two:
Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Crescent*: Remembering al-Andalus ................................................................. 44

Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................... 72

Works Cited ........................................................................................................................................ 76
Introduction

In major cities around the world, it is impossible to miss the trend of cultural mixing in music, film, and food. One casual dining restaurant known as the Elephant Bar delivers a “unique dining adventure” by serving “bold Pan-Asian flavor” and “popular recipes from around the world.” Diners may choose from an array of appetizers that includes: Three Cheese Macaroni, Sweet Potato Fries, Vietnamese Shrimp Spring Rolls, Tempura Salmon rolls etc. Regular diners who describe the menu to their family and friends might say it is a hybrid restaurant that mixes American and Asian cuisine. It seems natural to call restaurants and recipes hybrid, but something goes awry when hybrid is used to describe people. Today, the phenomenon of cultural blending is often summed up in the word “hybridity,” but the everyday use of it obscures the complexity of cultural confrontations and ignores the history of its significance in the development of postcolonial studies. Although the term has become monolithic, I do not believe it is necessary to invent another term because many authors of immigrant novels write about cross-cultural encounters and invent metaphors that convey cultural hybridity. Through this thesis, I would like to argue that the discourse of cultural hybridity can manifest in literature as metaphors. To help me demonstrate the capacity of metaphors to convey how people understand cultural hybridity, I apply the fundamental theories of the Cognitive Linguistic View of Metaphor to my reading of the major metaphors in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* and Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Crescent*.

In order to understand the complexity of conveying cultural hybridity, it is necessary to review the enduring etymology of the word hybridity because it presents a broad spectrum of definitions. In her introduction to *Hybridity and Postcolonialism*, Monika Fludernik provides an overview of the shifting definitions of hybridity. Citing the Oxford English Dictionary (OED),
she shows that the first documented examples of the term appeared in Latin as *hibrida* (*hibrida*), in the early 17\textsuperscript{th} century and it pertains to the “offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar; hence, of human parents of different races, half-breed” (qtd in Fludernik 8). Even before the 19\textsuperscript{th} century the term implied a binary of civilized (tame) and uncivilized (wild) characteristics. When “hybrid” appears to pertain to humans in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, it carries racial connotations possibly because of this binary.

“Hybrid” becomes a term of denigration in the discourse of colonial racialism because it was used as a metaphor to refer to interracial descendants. According to Andrew Smith’s summary of Robert Young’s examination of the term, “A whole discourse arose alerting a European audience to the dangers of the miscegenation, warning of a dissolution of the blood of the higher races and suggesting that the resulting mulattos, cross-bred humans, would prove to be sterile or retarded” (250). A fascination with racial purity spurred interest in racial categorization to uphold borders between biological differences. Young asserts that eventually the discourse of race was proven invalid; attention shifted to differences in culture because differences in culture are less contentious than differences in race. Usage of “hybridity” during colonialism continued to maintain the assertion that “there are or were distinct, wholly separate, wholly ‘other’ or incommensurable human cultures” (Smith 250).

Generally, throughout discussions of post-colonialism, the term “hybrid” gains new associative meanings or connotations as more theorists find new ways to recuperate it into critical theory. In order to prove that a connection exists between syncretism\textsuperscript{1} and hybridity, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin\textsuperscript{2} transfer the biological definition of hybrid to “the plane of

\textsuperscript{1} According to Fludernik, “syncretism” points to the direction of multiculturalists scenarios more so than “hybridity” because “syncretism” emphasizes peaceful coexistence (19).

\textsuperscript{2} Aschroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s theories of hybridity and syncretism are presented in their book, *The Empire Writes Back*. 
language and its function of representation” which “acquires a poststructuralist interpretation and utilizes the postmodernist framework of a subversive deconstruction of the signified” (Fludernik 12). Both Homi K. Bhabha’s and Ashcroft’s conceptualization of hybridity further shifted the emphasis to a general theoretical plane and this shift is noticeable in two specific ways. First, “hybrid,” “creole,” and “syncretic” were typically used to refer to African subjects of colonialism. However, after Bhabha’s application of the term to expatriate Indian writing, “hybrid” steadily becomes generalized to refer to any kind of (colored) other (Fludernik 13). Applying the term to a general “other” opened up more opportunities for scholars to apply critical theory toward other kinds of cultural encounters including migrant communities in the metropolis. Due to both Bhabha’s and Kobaner Mercer’s work, notions of hybridity have set a trend in post-colonial critical theory to examine the “exterritorialization of hybridity—from the (formerly) colonized mother country to the diasporic or migrant community” (Fludernik 13).

Although this thesis will take into consideration the various definitions of hybridity, the concepts articulated through the postcolonial lens dominate my discussion because I am interested in the processes of identification among exilic and diasporic migrants. A reliable “textbook” definition of Bhabha’s use of “hybridity” may not exist, but Fludernik’s explication of his work provides some guidelines. Fludernik traces each appearance of “hybridity” and all its syntagms in Bhabha’s work and reports that “hybridity ‘is’ both a locus of identificational agonistics (a site on which hybridity is played out) and a ground of shifting alignments whose différence constitutes the processes of colonial identification…” (author’s italics 46). Bhabha concentrates on the gap between dichotomies because gaps are locations in which the boundary between self and other can be deconstructed, which then suggests that culture is constructed rather than biologically transmitted through “genes or blood type” (Smith 252-253). Therefore,
Bhabha’s recuperation of “hybridity” radically undermines the initial biological underpinnings of the word. Fludernik’s emphasis on the preposition “on” in the phrase “a site on which hybridity is played out” is particularly important for it recognizes spatial conceptualization—a detail that serves as an entry point for Cognitive Linguistics.

To analyze metaphors, this thesis uses the language of the “Cognitive Linguistic View of Metaphor” (or Cognitive Linguistics Conceptual Metaphor, CLCM) as developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. This theory was founded on the belief that Western philosophy and linguistics inefficiently express what people actually find meaningful in their everyday experiences (Lakoff and Johnson x). Published in 1980, Metaphors We Live By argues that metaphors are not just decorative ornaments in prose but are also pervasive in everyday life in language, thought, and action; metaphors are properties of concepts, not words. When Lakoff and Johnson examined how humans conceptualize (think and act), they discovered that human thought patterns are “fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (3). They define the essence of metaphor as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson 5). By studying language, specifically patterns in linguistic expressions, they determine what kind of metaphor structures the conceptualization of an experience. Similarly, I examine the dominant metaphors in Bharati Muhkeree’s Jasmine and Diana Abu-Jaber’s Crescent to understand how these novelists conceptualize cultural hybridity.

I am particularly interested in metaphors that further the perception of hybridity as something performed, learned, and therefore constructed. A useful example of a metaphor that conceptualizes “the overlap and displacement of domains of difference” is found in Bhabha’s own introduction to the Location of Culture (2). He elaborates his complex idea of interstices with Renée Green’s architectural metaphor of a museum building:
The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designation of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities (5).

In the language of CLCM, conceptual metaphors are comprised of a target domain and a source domain. In this example, the target domain that Bhabha seeks to understand is the abstract concept of hybridity. To understand hybridity, he relies on the source domain of the museum building. Through the image of the stairwell connecting floors, he highlights the idea that cultural hybridity is constantly negotiated and open-ended. The experience of negotiating identities is partially understood as the common experience of freely walking up and down a stairwell. The stairwell metaphor implies a hierarchy of social classes in which identities associated with the upper floor/class may enjoy privileges that the lower floor/class does not. However, metaphors tend to highlight and hide certain attributes. The stairwell metaphor in this situation limits identity construction to two directions or subject positions when in reality people are concerned with multiple subject positions. Also, Bhabha augments the metaphor of the museum building with another metaphor—that of “connective tissue” because the image of an inanimate object lacks corporeal connection to a human body. Bhabha’s decision to extend the original metaphor of the stairwell to include the body may be a common technique in works of literature but it has received little attention. Although metaphors allow humans to partially understand an experience, metaphors are effective because the source domain is strictly defined and a creative way to expand the domain is to impose another source domain upon it. As I analyze *Jasmine* and *Crescent*, I examine what the metaphors successfully convey about
hybridity while also observing how and why Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber supplement metaphors with additional metaphors.

Mukherjee’s Jasmine and Abu-Jaber’s Crescent may differ in setting, cultural focal points, and experiences, but both novels present metaphors that promote discussions of similar themes accompanying the challenge of constructing identities from the hybrid zone. These novels portray themes like the pain of loss, the hope of acceptance, the preservation and invention of traditions in ways that challenge a reader to draw connections between objects and concepts that are not typically related. In addition to exercising the reader’s imagination, literary metaphors have the potential to transcend pages and enter conversational language\(^3\). In other words, metaphors potentially provide people a way to communicate deep meaning in an everyday sense. When Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber utilize literary metaphors to convey the experience of cultural hybridity, they build, extend, and elaborate conceptual systems about hybridity and therefore help readers imagine new ways to perceive the experience. The unique metaphors these authors create are absolutely relevant to the study of cultural globalization because these metaphors maintain focus on complex human experiences that are difficult to deconstruct and explain. Just as humans benefit from a diverse diet of nutrients, humans also benefit from a richer vocabulary of self-expression. Metaphors may very well improve the ways in which a person understands his or her experience and also how to relate those experiences with others.

In the first chapter, I examine how Mukherjee depicts cultural hybridity through numerous layers of metaphors in Jasmine. I trace the identity constructions of Jasmine, the protagonist, a Southeast Asian woman who stands in a hybrid zone defined by the conflict

\(^3\) Zoltán Kövecses briefly explains in his Practical Guide to Metaphor that some novel metaphors spoken today were likely created by poets and writers (Kövecses 43).
between tradition and modernity. Jasmine’s cultural hybridity is less about the authenticity of her Indian-ness and more about transforming her original culture to accommodate her new settings as she travels as an illegal immigrant from India to the United States of America during the late 1980s. Published in 1999, Mukherjee’s novel continues to divide the scholarly community’s perception of Jasmine’s agency and subjectivity. On the one hand, scholars like Kristin Carter-Sanborn read Jasmine’s transformations as evacuations of agency while others, including myself, insist that Jasmine’s transformations prove her agency. I analyze her transformations according to both Bhabha’s theories of hybridity and theories of conceptual metaphor to argue that Jasmine is an active participant in her transformations. Jasmine translates the experience of repeated constructions or transformations of her identity primarily through the metaphor of reincarnation. Mechanic technology is another equally important metaphor developed throughout the novel that augments the reincarnation metaphor by highlighting the potential of plurality and mutability through circuitry instead of the violent image of death and rebirth. The juxtaposition of these opposite metaphors underscores Jasmine’s main conflict—the commitment to tradition and the desire for modernity. Through Jasmine’s confrontation of this dichotomy, Mukherjee demonstrates that hybridity, as Bhabha would say, is a space in which boundaries blur and where traditions may transform.

Like Mukherjee, Abu-Jaber’s Crescent also presents several dominant metaphors that work together to convey the protagonist’s cultural hybridity. In the second chapter, I examine the cultural hybridity of Sirine, the protagonist of Crescent, an Iraqi-American woman living in the pre-9/11 setting of Los Angeles, California. Sirine is a talented chef who initially appears to enjoy her hybridity from behind the kitchen counter of a Lebanese restaurant. She takes pleasure in cooking her parents’ favorite Arab dishes because she believes this career allows her to
connect to the memories of her deceased parents, especially her Iraqi father. Her life changes when she meets Hanif Al Eyad, an Iraqi exile who challenges her perception of her Arab identity and motivates her to broaden her connection to Arab culture. Through Sirine’s hybrid identity, Abu-Jaber rekindles interest in Muslim Spain or al-Andalus to demonstrate that Arab Americans can revive the legacy of Al-Andalus through the art of cuisine and storytelling. I examine the ways Han’s influence relocates Sirine’s hybridity from a harmonious space to a contentious space, and how the contentious space perpetuates reconstruction of her Arab identity. Sirine’s uncle simultaneously influences her reconstruction through the narration of the story of his cousin, Abdelrahman Salahdine. This magnificent story frames Sirine’s story and nourishes her imagination of Arab identity. Although al-Andalus no longer exists in today’s modern maps, memories of it as the place in which Arabs, Christians, and Jews flourished together survive today in various art forms. Throughout the novel, Abu-Jaber revives the significance of al-Andalus through cuisine metaphors and the image of Abdelrahman as the “drowned Arab” to show that the construction of Arab identity is more like a re-construction of al-Andalus. Abu-Jaber shows that Arab Americans preserve the legacy of al-Andalus through their struggle to construct a mixed-culture identity. In Crescent, metaphors drawn from the art of cuisine and storytelling promote a method of translation for conceptualizing Arab American hybridity.

By presenting this analysis of metaphors using fundamental theories of Cognitive Linguistics Conceptual Metaphors toward these novels, I hope to show that the discourse of hybridity, as developed in postcolonial studies, relies on systems of metaphors rather than just one metaphor. Despite the numerous definitions of hybridity, Bhabha’s recuperation of hybridity is the concept I rely on because he focuses on processes of identity construction. The following chapters analyze examples of metaphors that conceptualize identity construction in terms of
reincarnation, machines, cuisine, and storytelling. As Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber demonstrate in these novels, metaphors function as active translations of human experiences. I must emphasize that I have only applied a basic understanding of CLCM to this thesis because the scope of CLCM continues to expand—amassing the interest of neighboring scientific disciplines. In my conclusion, I reflect on more ways to broaden the project of understanding human experiences through metaphors in locations of cross-cultural encounters.
Chapter 1: In-between Tradition and Modernity: Representations of Cultural Hybridity in Bharati Mukherjee’s Jasmine

Regardless of how conscious people are of their role in identity construction, identity is a human construct. People who find that they straddle the borderlands of two or more cultures are hardly at ease because defining who they are cannot be determined through a perfect mathematical equation. These culturally hybrid people constantly question who they are, where they belong, and how they should live. Jasmine, the protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee’s Jasmine confronts the problem of defining her identity in an endless cycle of conflict between opposing forces. Jasmine fits Bhabha’s description of hybridity—a state of being caught between dichotomies. Mukerjee depicts Jasmine’s hybridity in a complex web of conceptual metaphors that work together to convey a cultural hybrid process of identity construction.

The protagonist experiences numerous identity transformations throughout the novel. She was first named Jyoti by her grandmother in the village of Hasnapur, India during the 1960s—a place in which young women were expected to attend school for only a short time and marry young. With the support of her mother and her favorite teacher, Jyoti worked hard to defy these expectations and continued to dream of ways to exceed traditional standards. Her enchantment with the English language led her to marry Prakash, a modern Indian man who speaks “first-class English” (68). He aspires for progress and modernization and insists that Jyoti follow his lead. To remind her that she must “break off the past,” he names her Jasmine. Unfortunately, on the same day that Prakash learns of his acceptance to Florida International Institute of Technology, he is killed by a bomb intended for Jasmine. With help from her brothers, Jasmine acquires forged documents to travel to Florida where she plans to complete
sati⁴ or immolation. However, upon her arrival in America, she is raped by Half-face, the smuggler. After murdering her rapist, she alters her plans and chooses to burn just her husband’s possessions.

From Florida, to New York and Iowa, Jasmine gains several names. Lilian Gordon, the woman who rescues Jasmine on her first day in America, cheerfully called her Jazzy as she taught her how to evade Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) by blending into America. The only people in America who preferred to call her Jyoti were Professor Devinder Vadherra and his family in Queens, New York. The Vadherras accept Jyoti into their home but Jasmine finds life with them unbearable, so she asks Devinder to help her acquire a forged green card. She eventually finds work in New York as an Au Pair looking after Taylor and Wylie’s child, Duff. To Taylor, Jasmine is “Jase;” to Duff, Jase is “day mummy.” Jase was content living with Taylor and Duff until the day she spotted Sikwinder in central park. Sikwinder, the man who murdered her husband, had surely recognized her. Afraid of Sikwinder’s next move, she flees to Iowa where she meets Bud Ripplemeyer. To the Ripplemeyers and the people of Elsa County, the mysterious Jasmine is known as Jane Ripplemeyer. Bud and Jane adopt a teenage Vietnamese refugee survivor named Du. Eventually, Du leaves for California to reunite with his older sister. Although Jane is pregnant with Bud’s child, the sudden appearance of Taylor and Duff gives Jane an opportunity to travel with them to California. At the close of the novel, Jane reveals that her decision to leave was not simply about choosing between men but that she was “caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness” (240). This conflict and these events comprise the general plot of the novel and show that identity transformations occur when Jasmine is caught between her past and the future she desires. To depict this conflict and the relationship it has with identity construction, Mukherjee relies on metaphors.

⁴ Also known as suttee, is the practice in which a widow burns herself upon her husband’s funeral pyre.
In this chapter, I rely on the framework of the Cognitive Linguistic Conceptual Metaphor (CLCM) theory to analyze Mukherjee’s dominant metaphors because CLCM regards metaphors as a process of translation. The objective or “target domain” of these metaphors is to translate identity construction. Metaphors, then, become translations of how Mukherjee conceptualizes the construction of identities. In the novel for example, when Jasmine describes her identity transformations in terms of reincarnation, she is drawing upon Hindu beliefs as a “source domain.” Hindu beliefs effectively work as a source domain because it is an ancient belief system that structures the daily lives of entire communities of people. Although I primarily focus on the image of reincarnation, Mukherjee depicts other specific aspects of Hindu beliefs that influence Jasmine’s conceptualization patterns. The image of reincarnation allows for numerous interpretations of identity construction but it muddles the role of memory which is an important aspect of Bhabha’s theory of hybridity and the overall discussion of identity. Theoretically, separate lives should not have access to the same memories and this incoherency weakens the solidarity of the source domain to translate the target domain (identity construction). As with all metaphors, incoherencies are unavoidable. According to cognitive linguistics theorists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, “the very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another…will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept” (10). In order to maintain focus on how reincarnation helps Jasmine perceive her hybrid experience, Mukherjee must obscure certain aspects of reincarnation. The weaknesses of reincarnation as a translation tool requires support, and it finds that support in the most unlikely, opposite form—metaphors of mechanic technology.

Throughout the novel, Jasmine observes the wonders of technology because to her technology and the “promise of America” share opposite sides of the same coin. The key to
defining this essential idea is found in John K. Hoppe’s assessment of Jasmine’s fascination with technology. Hoppe asserts that technology and America function as metaphors that mutually reinforce each other:

While technology is evident throughout the various cultural zones of the text, including even “feudal” Hasnapur, it is America that provides its most “natural” home, its most active focus. America and technology are reciprocal figures, each providing the optimum conditions and frame for the other, articulating each other along a borderline named “mutability.” (232)

Technological metaphors are appropriate for supporting the reincarnation metaphor because both communicate a potential for mutability that is necessary for Jasmine’s survival. Mukherjee presents reincarnation and mechanic technology as two dominant metaphors that represent traditional mysticism and modern science. These metaphors may seem contradictory, but they effectively converge as a partial translation of the experience that is consistent with Homi Bhabha’s description of hybridity. Regardless of her geographic location, Jasmine occupies a theoretical “third space” between narratives of tradition and modernity, and from this third space, she has the potential to transform tradition. Through *Jasmine*, Mukherjee presents cultural hybridity as a cyclical process of constant identity construction that is best expressed through two oppositional metaphors.
Translations of Hybridity with the Reincarnation Metaphor

The novel begins with Jasmine introducing herself, the prophesy, and the two major metaphors of the novel. Speaking as a twenty-four year old woman, Jasmine/Jane narrates:

“Lifetimes ago, under a banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur, an astrologer cupped his ears—his satellite dish to the stars—and foretold my widowhood and exile…‘No!’ I shouted. ‘You’re a crazy old man. You don’t know what my future holds!’” (Mukherjee 3). She regards her past experiences as lifetimes not to exaggerate that many years have passed, but to emphasize that it was an event that belonged to someone else. Thus, the Hindu belief in reincarnation influences her perception of the world and her experiences. She demonstrates her role as a hybrid cultural translator when she interprets the astrologer’s gesture of cupping his ears. In other words, she re-reads this memory and translates it with terms of mechanic technology in order to show that the mystical and the modern share similar concepts but different terms. Both the allusion to reincarnation and the metaphor of a satellite dish are examples of her performative role as a hybrid cultural translator. As Bhabha would say, she is “renew[ing] the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (10). Her ability to see the translatability between mysticism and modernity immediately marks her as a hybrid individual. This opening scene may show Jasmine translating a harmonious intersection of tradition and modernity, but this is not true for every cultural translation she performs. The interlacing of reincarnation and science in the opening sentences foreshadows a conflict between commitments to tradition and desires for modernity. This conflict is underscored by the astrologer’s prophesy—a cultural narrative the protagonist seeks to defy. The opening scene also stages recurring motifs that I will address in greater detail later. For now it is important to understand how the utilization of metaphors becomes a translative process.
The process of translation begins with the act of reading. Mukherjee demonstrates this first step through Jasmine’s retrospective narration of the past. When people generally reminisce the past, their interpretation of a particular memory could be influenced by any number of circumstances. Seven-year old Jyoti may not have associated the astrologer’s hand gesture to satellite dishes because she may not have even encountered such technology in her rural village. Twenty-four year old Jasmine/Jane consciously reads this memory and interprets the astrologer’s gesture as a satellite dish. In addition, Mukherjee emphasizes Jasmine’s ability to read not just the past but also the present, and the future through the image of the “third eye” which is also introduced in the opening scene of the novel. Jasmine interprets the “star-shaped scar” on her forehead as a third eye which is believed to be the mark of a “sage” in Hindu traditions. All references to her scar and her third eye become metaphorical motifs that reinforce the necessity of possessing an ability to read and re-read cultural inscriptions. Throughout the novel, references to the scar seem to relate to an ability to see the ghosts of “invisible worlds” (Mukherjee 5). In a conversation with Taylor, Jasmine/Jase reveals that she believes this scar signals attainment of “Enlightenment” because she can use it to “sens[e] designs in history’s muddles” (Mukherjee 60). What Jasmine refers to as a third eye resembles what writers might call and “editing eye” that scans text for incongruities or ideas that need more clarity. This ability to see invisible incongruities highlights how cultural hybrid people experience the world differently. Where most people may not notice cultural differences, cultural hybrids do and must learn to negotiate with their circumstances. Jasmine attributes her ability to re-read and therefore translate her experiences to her third eye which is also another aspect drawn from the source domain of Hindu beliefs.
From the source domain of Hindu beliefs, Mukherjee also applies the belief in cyclical patterns of time to the translation of identity construction. According to Jeaneane Fowler, a specialist in Eastern philosophy and metaphysics, Hinduism is less concerned with the linear pattern of life. Death is not the end of life, but the beginning of another cycle and this belief is true for both human beings and the universe (Fowler 2). The very structure of the novel observes a cyclical pattern as well. Throughout the twenty-six chapters, the protagonist reflects on her different identities intermittently in a way that highlights the death of an identity as a progressive journey. The narrative of reincarnation serves Jasmine as a mechanism to re-visit and re-read the past to not only map her transformations but also to understand how the duality of Hindu beliefs and mechanic technology influence her transformations. Jasmine’s reliance on her third eye seems to suggest that the tension between mysticism and science is so great that retrospection is sometimes necessary to see the compromise between two opposites. A cyclical perspective of time allows Jasmine unlimited time to re-read her memories. Furthermore, twenty-four year old Jasmine/Jane demonstrates confidence in her ability to perform future translations of Hindu beliefs into mechanic technology when she translates her third eye as “a spotlight trained on lives to come” (Mukherjee 21). The metaphor of the third eye as a spotlight successfully highlights the concept of concentration, and it achieves this success through the duality between the sage’s natural ability to focus (third eye) and mankind’s artificial ability to focus light (spotlight). In Jasmine’s case, hybridity is the cyclical construction of identities upon the shifting grounds of tradition and modernity, and Mukherjee depicts this construction in metaphors that draw from both Hindu beliefs and mechanic technology as source domains.

Cyclical time further highlights the challenge of hybridity because like identity, cyclical time is not fixed—there is no determined beginning or end. The similarity between cyclical time
and identity raises important questions: if identity construction is a continuous process, what motivates the cycle of identity construction and is it the same motivation each time? Through Jasmine’s hybridity, the conflict between tradition and modernity, Mukherjee shows that the process of constructing identities is indeed motivated by an ideal of progress. To put it in another way, Jasmine’s identity constructions are motivated toward progression away from tradition. Jyoti’s motivation to live comes from a desire to escape feudalistic Hasnapur, Jullundhar District, Punjab, India. Instead of marrying a successful farmer, twelve-year old Jyoti would rather be a doctor (Mukherjee 51). If she must marry, she prefers to marry a man that shares the same motivations as her. Prakash Vijh is such a man, but marriage with him reveals that escaping the expectations of tradition is far from easy. Marriage to a modern man does not necessarily mean that Jyoti instantly becomes a modern wife; she must first learn to distinguish between the old world and the new.

Although Jyoti aspired for modernity throughout her childhood, she did not possess a clear vision of how a modern woman would think or behave until she married Prakash. Jyoti embraces his vision of a modern wife and accepts “Jasmine,” his new name for her, as a goal for who she wants to be. Through Prakash, Mukherjee shows that breaking traditions is a method for moving towards modernity. Prakash helps Jyoti see the differences between feudal and modern life styles by breaking traditions including many traditional wedding customs. For example, instead of moving into his uncle’s home after marriage, Prakash continues to live in his apartment in the city with Jyoti/Jasmine (Mukherjee 77). Undoubtedly, Prakash invents “Jasmine” as an identity built upon his understanding of the modern world. “Jasmine” is his rebellious project against the west’s perception of India as a backward culture that is inferior to the West. Jyoti accepts this name and this project because she admits, “My kind of feudal
compliance was what still kept India an unhealthy and backward nation” (77). To Prakash, Jasmine was supposed to be the ideal modern city woman who had the right to argue with her husband and not expect a beating for holding an opposing opinion; she was someone who held off pregnancy until they were wealthy enough to properly care for a child. This ideal Jasmine would “stop regressing into the feudal Jyoti” (92). Although Prakash’s expectations clearly construct the idea of “Jasmine,” Prakash is not solely responsible for Jyoti’s transformation into “Jasmine.”

In order to become Jasmine, Jyoti must learn to think and behave in accordance to Prakash’s discourse of modernity. Mukherjee emphasizes this point through the metaphor of “re-birth”. Just as a parent assigns a name to a newborn child, Prakash assigns “Jasmine” to Jyoti. With this name, she is expected to perform a particular role or identity. And, like a child, Jyoti gradually learns how to perform that role as expected. Mukherjee shows that the construction of an identity is not an automatic process that begins and ends with a new name but rather a gradual process that requires time, experience, and above all—conflict. To continue with the analogy of birth, Jyoti was born to obey a particular narrative or set of expectations put forth by her family; however, to become “Jasmine” Jyoti must disobey her elders and break traditions. Mukherjee links the disruption of tradition to the separation of family members to emphasize that traditions are closely tied to identity and that there are consequences for replacing tradition with modernity. Jyoti’s identity as a compliant daughter often competes with Jasmine’s identity as an

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5 After learning that Prakash would soon travel to Florida, Jyoti threatens to jump in a well but Prakash laughs at her and tells her to stop “regressing” (92). Prakash’s reminder that Jasmine “can’t jump into wells” shows that Jyoti must gradually learn to think like a modern Indian woman.

6 To define “discourse,” I adopt James Paul Gee’s definition which is “ways of saying-writing-doing-being-valuing-believing” (as qtd in Delpit 492). I use Gee’s definition of discourse because I believe it encompasses all the actions involved in the performance of an identity.
assertive wife. Splitting herself into Jyoti and Jasmine makes her feel “suspended between worlds” and this feeling continues to haunt her as she journeys to America.

Despite Jasmine and Prakash’s attempt to erase Jyoti, Jasmine remains suspended between identities and her decisions reflect the negotiations that occur in this third space of in-betweeness. Jyoti wants to become Jasmine but she requires Prakash’s assistance in discerning what aspects of tradition avert the transformation. Immediately after Prakash’s murder, Jasmine reverts back to traditional narratives by planning her immolation; however, unlike other examples of immolations in the novel, Jasmine curiously chooses exile to America. For example, her village friend in Hasnapur, Vimla, threw herself on a burning stove after her husband died. Jasmine’s own mother also attempted sati but her family successfully thwarted her attempts. It is not quite clear if Jasmine believes that traveling to America excuses her regression to tradition, but it does seem like an attempt to strike a compromise between what tradition dictates and what Prakash preaches. Ironically, motivated by a desire to complete sati, she travels west to Florida.

What is it about this tradition that compels Jasmine to muster a way to America just to die? According to Sakuntala Narasimhan, “sati…has now come to mean a woman who burns herself along with the body of her deceased husband” (12). The original meaning of sati changed soon after The Illustrated Weekly of India published a graphic photo essay in 1979 (Narasimhan 6). Within the next year, a two-story temple was erected in the village drawing in visitors by the hundreds. Transportation companies profited from exploiting the ritual that idealized the divine sacrifice of devout widows. Profile studies of the woman who immolated themselves before the Sati Abolition Law in 1829 indicate they were predominantly from impoverished families (Narasimhan 53). It is believed that a link exists between illiteracy and the growing number of widow immolations. Impoverished families, similar to Jyoti/Jasmine’s, are less likely to support
the education of females. The report claims that uneducated females were less likely to discern for themselves the truth about the ancient meaning of sati\(^7\) in sacred texts (Narasimhan 55). Jasmine is an exception to this report; she is literate in Urdu, Panjabi, and English, yet she plans to devote her fidelity to her deceased husband by sacrificing her life. No matter how much she strives to leave tradition in the past, cultural inscriptions are deeply rooted in her; however, there are times when tradition is useful. Her arrival in America reveals the advantage of cultural inscriptions.

The most recognizable form of cultural inscriptions throughout the novel appears as Hindu beliefs and the significance of which appears in Jasmine’s most extraordinary transformation. When she takes revenge on Half-face, she becomes the Hindu goddess of destruction, Kali. The invocation of Kali was not a sudden act of desperation but a progression that begins when she realizes she is alone. Half-face preys on Jasmine most likely because she is the only passenger to arrive without someone to meet. She was so focused on her “mission” that she neglected to consider the precarious details of her illegal passage. Without Kingsland and the other travelers who journeyed with her aboard Half-face’s shrimping ship, she has no allies and no hope of rescue. Kingsland’s knife and his advice not to trust Half-face is the last form of help she receives from anyone before Half-face rapes her. In addition to her small knife, she arms herself with the cultural beliefs deeply inscribed in her. Throughout the scenes leading to and during her defilement she consciously consults her cultural inscriptions to navigate through the situation.

Mukherjee portrays the transformation of Jasmine into Kali with careful attention to Jasmine’s state of awareness as the events unfold. Jasmine’s narration has a purposeful undertone that intertwines memories and cultural inscriptions with technology. There are several

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\(^7\) Sati was originally defined in Sanskrit as chaste and virtuous woman (Narasimhan 11)
indicators of her drawing on her Hindu beliefs. Her scar activates when Half-face slams her face repeatedly on the television screen. She did not bleed but she felt her scar “tightening” from “the heat from the screen on [her] swelling” (113). She describes the attack as if heat-like energy was transferred from the screen to her scar, activating it. Her narration frames Half-Face’s brutal attack into a moment in which technology and mysticism converge to facilitate her next transformation. This scene also demonstrates what Hoppe intended to prove about hybrid subjectivity in his article, “The Technological Hybrid as Post-American: Cross-Cultural Genetics in Jasmine.” Hoppe asserts that Jasmine gains new and empowering subjective possibilities with the aid of her original culture’s narratives, and he bolsters his assertion by referring to Bhabha’s explanation:

> The “right” to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are “in the minority.” The recognition that tradition bestows is a partial form of identification. In restaging the past it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition (Hoppe 231).

In other words, Jasmine is performing a process that involves the restaging of tradition to fit her new setting. When she draws from her Hindu beliefs and resourcefully adapts it to her new setting, she transforms both her identity and tradition. Cultural traditions may empower her, but they are only as useful as her ability to remember them.

Invoking Kali depicts a state of cultural hybridity that transforms traditions to accommodate modern settings. As Jasmine bathes for the first time in a “Western shower,” she
decides that the bathroom was a suitable place to purify her body and soul because it featured “automatic hot water” and it was clean—no smells and no bugs. To her, this bathroom is a “miracle” that contrasts her previous bathing experiences in India, and it permits her a space to ritually cleanse herself and prepare for death. She purifies her soul “with all the prayers [she] could remember from [her] father’s and her husband’s cremations” (Mukherjee 117). Ultimately, she could not purify her soul without the memory of these prayers and the culture that inscribed them into her. Memory is an essential component in the process of transforming tradition and it also helps Jasmine regain focus.

The combination of the “Western” bathroom and her prayers leads Jasmine to say, “[She] had left [her] earthly body and would soon be joining” the souls of her husband and father (117). The verbs in this quote indicate a transitional moment that suggests that the transformation into Kali occurs between the Earth and where souls reside; therefore, this Kali is also a hybrid that exists between two opposite spaces. Kali’s hybridity and Jasmine’s hybridity is by no means an accident. Hoppe explains that “Kali functions as an articulation of Jasmine and vice versa, both inscribed upon and yet also different from each other” (231). Jasmine confirms this phenomenon when she confronts a mirror saturated with steam and sees “a dark shadow” where her reflection should be. The combination of the “murkiness of the mirror and a sudden sense of mission stopped [her]” from slicing her throat. Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction, is also known in various practices as a Goddess of time and change who destroys obstacles or obstructions. I read this scene as a moment in which Kali eliminates Jasmine’s main obstruction: her own forgetfulness of her mission. She cannot commit suicide before she burns her husband’s clothes where his new life was supposed to be, and so she must eliminate Half-Face because he threatens her mission. To complete the transformation into Kali, Jasmine cuts a slit on her tongue. When
she attacks Half-Face her tongue hangs out of her mouth and gushes blood much like the iconic representations of Kali. Jasmine seems to release her invocation of Kali as she burns her suitcase along with her husband’s suit and her “dishonored old clothes” (119).

Jasmine may have embarked on this mission to immolate herself, but the transformation into Kali also reminded her that the “Jasmine” that she and Prakash had created would not perform sati. She had forgotten her original goal to become a modern woman who did not fall prey to distorted traditions. Mukherjee emphasizes this point through the symbolism of the large suitcase Jasmine insisted on protecting. The contents of the suitcase are certainly necessary for her mission but the suitcase slowed her progression both literally and symbolically. She was the only passenger aboard Half-Face’s ship lugging around such inconvenient baggage. The other passengers were prepared to shed their old clothes on the shores of America, but Jasmine was determined to keep hers. Symbolically, she was not prepared to shed some of her cultural baggage. It is significant that Jasmine walks away from the scene of the crime “traveling light” because at the dawn of her first day in America she has a second chance to begin again (121).

To survive, she does not need to discard all her cultural inscriptions. Instead, she must prepare herself to shed all that hinders her progression and learn to reinterpret cultural inscriptions to fit her new settings.

The education Jasmine receives from Lilian Gordon reveals an aspect of cultural hybridity that aims to subvert the dominant culture through mimicry. Lilian’s assumption that Jasmine’s name is probably “fake” frames Jasmine’s next identity transformation as one that focuses on image (Mukherjee 130). Together, Lilian and Jasmine work to create “Jazzy,” an identity that would not only evade INS but allow her to find work in America. After one week of learning how to “walk American,” Jasmine learns to replace her “shy sidle” with “thrust and
cheekiness” (133). As she checks herself in the mirror she describes her reflection, “Jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords, and running shoes” (133). Referring to her reflection with a third-person point of view suggests a promising development of split consciousness; however, a tension develops between what defines “Jasmine” as opposed to “Jazzy.” This swift transformation of her image is so stunning that it leads her to wonder if abandoning the “Hasnapuri sidle” also meant abandoning her “Hasnapuri modesty” (133). Changes to her appearance may seem superficial, but they are enough to cause her concern because cultural values are attached to these elements, and these values define Jyoti/Jasmine’s Indian-ness. More specifically, Jasmine acknowledges the advent of sexual freedom in her ability to shape her image. Her sexual freedom “functions as a measure of her increasing detachment from traditional sexual and, correspondingly, of her assimilation in the New World through her rapid Westernization/Americanization” (Bose 60). She demonstrates the power of mimicry to not only fool the dominant culture, but also to stir anxiety within the transformative process of reinventing the self. Jasmine understands that “Jazzy” is a necessary transformation because according to Lilian, “if you walk and talk American, they’ll think you were born here. Most Americans can’t imagine anything else” (134-135).

To test whether Jazzy is a successful transformation, Lilian challenges her to face modern technology. It is truly significant that Jazzy’s final test features an escalator and a revolving door because Lilian explains that these inventions typically frighten “dark people” like her. Lilian’s explanation reminds the reader that Jazzy, despite her modified appearance, is still seen as ‘other’ in America because of her skin color. Evading INS means that Jazzy must understand her marginal subjectivity in order to hide or discard it. The concept of the escalator baffles her; she muses, “How can something be always moving and always still?” (133). To her, the escalator
becomes a riddle of contrariness that she does not have time to solve. Ironically, this riddle also parallels the paradox of hybridity she experiences. Jasmine’s identities perform both traditional and modern discourses and at the same time, she does not belong to either one exclusively. It’s interesting that she does not recognize that these machines relate to her and perhaps it is yet another way that Mukherjee portrays the confusion that accompanies hybridity. Nonetheless, Jasmine furthers her transformation into the ideal “Jasmine” by passing Lilian’s test. Like her first escalator ride, Jazzy progresses upward and continues to learn to mimic Americans.

To transform into Jane, Jasmine seems to reverse the direction of progress toward modernity by reverting to traditional America. When Jasmine flees to Iowa, she becomes Bud Ripplemeyer’s Jane, a woman playing the role of a rural mother and caretaker—the extreme opposite of Prakash’s Jasmine. Although Jasmine has embraced the west and modern sensibilities of an independent woman, she accepts a traditional role in the farmlands of Elsa County. Is this transformation truly a step toward modernity or a recursion into tradition? Jane/Jyoti even says that the farmers there are similar to the farmers she grew up with: “Modest people, never boastful, tactful…dependent on too many things outside [their] control” (Mukherjee 11). On the other hand, Carmen Faymonville’s reading of Jasmine suggests that it is not a recursion. By reading Jasmine as a traditional American frontier tale, Faymonville views Jane/Jasmine as an American Pioneer woman. She explains that Jane is replicating the settlement patterns of earlier immigrants who pursued the promise of America and:

Mukherjee employs frontier myths to project the psychological and cultural development of Jasmine, who physically and metaphorically travels toward western philosophy. The protagonist moves from India to Florida, to New York, then to the Midwest, and finally to California. (227)
Jasmine has always possessed the Gold Rush mentality, a desire for the frontier that is essentialized in the glorification of “the west” (Faymonville 227). She may live among farmers, but she is farther west—geographically and metaphorically—than her humble beginnings in India. Although it is true that Bud constructs “Jane,” he is not responsible for the transformation of Jasmine into Jane. The identity of Jane is actually a refurbishment of the identity that Prakash had initially built. Prakash wanted Jyoti to play the role of a modern Indian wife, while Bud prefers to see Jasmine as an American wife and it seems that Jasmine is eager to welcome this new role because it is an improvement on the “Jasmine” she and Prakash created. In the heartland of America, Jane/Jasmine experiences another cycle of pain, guilt and confusion as she negotiates the narratives of tradition and modernity.

Like Jasmine, Mukherjee views herself as a pioneer in America who confronts the violence and destruction of identity construction. In a recent interview, hosted by Drexel University, Mukherjee explains her personal discourse of her identity in America by referencing *Jasmine*:

> You’re either here or you are there. You are choosing to let go some of your cultural origins and you’re adopting some new ones. So *Jasmine*, the novel, like the characters in *Middlemen*, open [up] to America and feel that it has to be at the expense of the origins. I have talked about it because I felt this and still feel this in myself—making oneself over, as an American, requires a kind of murder of the self—a slaughter of the old self that there is nothing benevolent or painless about that transformation.⁸

Mukherjee’s reading of herself supports my reading of the reincarnation metaphor; it successfully highlights the violence of constructing an identity that is caught between opposing

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⁸ Transcribed from a video recording of the interview.
forces. Tradition, or what Mukherjee calls “cultural origins,” is something expendable for future identities. The image of multiple deaths also implies an irrevocable “self-splitting” that emphasizes the necessity of destruction. Therefore, mutability is only possible after destruction of a previous identity. Jasmine confirms this belief when she says, “We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams” (Mukherjee 29). Both quotes effectively exemplify the “uneasy and agonistic self-splitting” of Bhabha’s “(ant)agonistic” model of hybridity (Fludernik 19). Although Mukherjee insists that an immigrant must choose between “here” and “there,” there is still a sliver of a moment in which a choice must be made and it is in that moment that she stands in the third space. Choosing between two spaces subjects her to enormous pressure. Conveniently, the reincarnation metaphor features a coping method for Jasmine as she proceeds with her decisions.

Understanding her situation in terms of reincarnation allows her to deal with anxiety and pressures of constant identity constructions and transformations. She deals with experiences of grief and confusion by bundling memories into separate identities and then dismembering the identities into separate past lives. In other words, each of her names (Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, and Jane etc) labels the experience of a different life or identity. It may seem that all the names and nicknames simply refer to aliases or different aspects of a single identity, but she maintains that these identities are separate. She reminds us of this separation whenever she refers to her identities in the third person. In one instance, the protagonist states, “Jane Ripplemeyer has a bank account. So does Jyoti Vijh in a different city” (Mukherjee 7). This utterance is spoken by Jane/Jasmine, but referring to both identities in the third person demonstrates that she readily views them as separate existences. Throughout the novel, it may seem that a flashback is narrated by Jasmine or Jyoti, but the true narrator is twenty-four year old Jane Ripplemeyer.
Jane exists in the present; the memories of Jasmine and Jyoti are narrated and filtered by Jane. She views the creations or transformations of her identities as birthings of the same soul. However, Jane’s apparent ability to recall the memories of the separate lives disrupts the coherence of the reincarnation metaphor because most adoptions of *samsara* affirm that separate lives should not be linked by memory. The deaths of each separate life should seal their respective memories.

Mukherjee’s inconsistent treatment of memory actually works to highlight the pain and burden of it. Through Jasmine’s fickle attitude toward memory, Mukherjee portrays Bhabha’s thoughts on remembering when he says, “Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Bhabha 90). Although these abstract concepts of memories and retrospection resist control, Jasmine manipulates them by perceiving the self as separate identities. In the language of conceptual metaphor theory, Jasmine utilizes the ontological metaphor of “containers” to see a clearer delineation of the structure of memories (Koveces 34). When she perceives her memories as separate identities and identities as containers of memories, she conceptualizes a way to see memories as objects that can be possessed and therefore managed. If she needs to block certain memories she closes the container through a “murdering” of the self. The conceptual metaphor of containers is rather simple and could have been conveyed in the image of a more tangible object like a box or a jar, but these commonplace items lack the corporeal experiences inherent in the reincarnation metaphor. The image of embodied memories repeatedly born and murdered emphasizes the necessary yet traumatic experience of remembering.
Although drawing upon the past helps her at times, she insists that past experiences “must be forgotten, or else it will kill” (Mukherjee 33). This particular aspect of the reincarnation metaphor is so important that Mukherjee reinforces it with the motif of the floating dog carcass. The stench of the dog carcass in the river becomes a haunting reminder throughout the novel that stasis is worse than death. At critical moments, Jasmine often reports that she can smell the flesh of the dead dog she encountered the day she heard the astrologer’s prophesy. Jasmine’s attitude toward tradition reveals that it is no better than the “soft waterlogged carcass of a small dog” glued together by the drifting waters of the river (Mukherjee 5). Jasmine’s conviction to defy fate is synonymous with her attempt to rebel against India’s extraordinary elasticity against drastic change. Fowler explains that Hinduism’s emphasis on tradition instead of history is the reason why India “has remained very much the same despite changes—many of the scenes witnessed today in India are remarkably similar to those of 400 years ago!” (8). Mukherjee depicts this extraordinary commitment to tradition negatively through many characters including Jyoti/Jasmine’s father, Bud Ripplemeyer, and Professorji (Devinder) Vadherra’s family in Queens, New York.

Living with Professorji’s family portrays a life of stasis that is perpetuated by a paradoxical acceptance of America’s simple luxuries and a regression to feudal familiarity. The Vadherras live comfortably in an apartment that is home to a small community of Indian families and appear to tightly hold on to as much tradition as possible. For example, Professorji’s wife Nirmala worked in a sari shop and craved Hindi films, Urdu films and just about any sort of film that satisfied nostalgia for her original homeland. Jasmine’s weariness of such a lifestyle is no surprise. It is possible that some immigrants would be content to live as the Vadherras or even to partake in that life as housekeeper. Jasmine is not such an immigrant; she is unsatisfied and calls
this life “limbo” (149). She describes herself as “deteriorating” and “unfulfilled” as she loses her
ability to speak and comprehend English the longer she lives with them (148). Stasis is worse
than death because it prevents her from “birthing” new identities.

For Jasmine, the possibility of rebirth revitalizes her journey whenever she encounters an
obstacle. Rebirth exaggerates the structural metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY in several ways.
First, rebirth offers an interpretation of life as a series of cyclical journeys instead of just one.
Second, when life is understood in terms of a journey, life is conceptualized as a movement from
a starting point that will end at some destination. The structure of the reincarnation metaphor
parallels this concept of movement by highlighting a progression across land and the creation of
identities. Because Jasmine’s identities are created as she moves west—both geographically and
psychologically, the cycle of creating or transforming identities is also tied to movement. When
she decides to leave Bud she realizes that she “stopped thinking of [her]self as Jane” (240).
Jane’s journey ends at the realization that “the frontier is pushing indoors” (240). Jasmine/Jane’s
pioneering would surely come to a halt if she did not leave with Taylor and Duff because the
birth of Bud’s child would signal a permanent settlement in traditional America. The frontier
extends beyond Iowa and a true pioneer resists permanent settlement. At the close of the novel,
she was unsure who she was and points to “time” as the factor that would determine her new
identity. Although the novel ends without a clear understanding of her latest identity
transformation, the reader should surmise that the new identity is another pioneer embarking on
yet another journey. With each step toward the west she rebirths a new life and a new journey.
In essence, the reincarnation metaphor illustrates a cultural hybridity that encourages decisions
that facilitate opportunities for mobility and progression.
Although many scholars insist that Jasmine lacks agency because she is not solely responsible for creating Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, and Jane, I assert that her participation in the transformation of these identities proves her agency. Kristin Carter-Sanborn reads Jasmine’s transformation into Kali as a “dissociative state” and that Kali actually blocks access to agency (589). The examples Carter-Sanborn locates of Jasmine’s passivity are actually examples of the solidarity of the reincarnation metaphor’s structure. The protagonist did not create Jyoti, her first identity; this name was given to her by her grandmother. Like newborn babies not yet able to speak the name they wish, Jasmine accepts the names given to her. She maintains her belief that each name is a rebirth of a new life whenever she accepts a name; however, she actively works to shape the new life to fit new situations. Like Bhabha’s constitution of hybridity, Jasmine’s “derives from the process of continual moves and countermoves in which agency never comes to rest” (Fludernik 23). The examples provided above collectively demonstrate that Jasmine has always stood in the interstices of tradition and modernity no matter where she travels. Also, the reincarnation metaphor partially translates the experience of re-reading the past—a translation that rests upon her fluency in her cultural origins. She uses her third eye to see the ghosts of past and future selves because she believes that her survival depends on her ability to let go of the past. Should ties to the past obstruct her endeavors to progress, she asserts authority to revise her cultural origins. The reincarnation metaphor shows that her agency never comes to rest because “rest” would mean stasis. Although the reincarnation metaphor provides an effective structure for highlighting the process of identity construction, there are still incongruities.
Augmentations of the Reincarnation Metaphor

For the protagonist, identity is defined as one cycle of experiences and memories that begins with “rebirth” and ends in “death.” However, how does she determine the death of an identity? She may claim to “murder” herself, yet the text fails to explain how or when the “murder” took place. And, at what point does a new identity emerge? The answers to these questions will not be found in just the structure of the reincarnation metaphor alone because of crucial incoherencies. To compensate for the incoherencies, Mukherjee elaborates reincarnation with the support of technological metaphors.

To understand how Mukherjee uses technological metaphors, I return to the opening scene of the novel because Jasmine’s first re-reading of her culture with mechanic terms is set under a banyan tree—“the focal point of village life” (India.gov). According to India’s Reference Annual, the Indian fig tree, *Ficus bengalensis*, “is considered immortal and is an integral part of the myths and legends of India.” Setting the astrologer under the banyan tree, Mukherjee presents Jasmine’s journey to try to defy fate as the beginning of a legend. Mukherjee uses symbols from both South Asian culture and images of the modernized west to tell Jasmine’s story. Uma Paramareswaren criticizes Mukherjee’s use of these symbols because she uses them to stereotype South Asians “in way a way that non-South Asians in the West and non-Americans elsewhere would not identify and therefore tend to accept unquestioningly” (as qtd. in Carter-Sanborn 593). Paramareswaren’s point necessitates the need for a close reading of the main metaphors in the novel especially since *Jasmine* resembles India’s ancient forms of female-centered oral folktales (Parekh 110). Like the female-centered folktales, Jasmine’s identities enter three stages of female empowerment: “silent woman,” “speaking person,” and “teller of tales” (Parekh 110-111). Metaphors signal Jasmine’s transformation into a “speaking person”
and eventually into the “teller of tales”; this is her unique approach for confronting the demands of the old world and present world.

Initially, Jasmine does not seek to question fate through technological terms but instead she interprets the astrologer’s method. She demonstrates her way of confronting fate by translating the astrologer’s gesture of cupping his ears as “his satellite dish to the stars” (Mukherjee 3). For her, modern technology is easier to grasp and perhaps control because fate is not an object that can be held, measured or mapped. An object with a clear, bound form and function is easier to visualize and interact with than something boundless (Lakoff and Johnson 25). Jasmine alludes to this emblematic moment under the banyan tree by referring to the astrologer and the stars throughout her journeys as a reminder of the cultural narrative she seeks to revise. Ironically, Jasmine never relents on her desire to “reposition the stars,” yet she offers a technological re-reading of fate that is just as impossible to defy (Mukherjee 240).

As aforementioned, memory is an aspect of the reincarnation that Mukherjee handles with little consistency. Memory certainly plays a role in the assertion of a cultural hybrid identity but the structure of reincarnation restricts it. For example, “Murdering the self” should also mean the destruction of memories, yet Jyoti/Jasmine maintains access to the memories of the murdered selves. Jasmine/Jane does not have an explanation for this inconsistency until she meets with Dr. Mary Webb for lunch in a University Club outside Elsa County, Iowa. Prior to this meeting, Jasmine relied on her third eye to explain how she sees the ghosts of her past selves; however, afterwards she develops a new way to re-read the narrative of reincarnation.

Curiously, after narrating her revenge on Half-face, Jasmine flashes forwards to a lunch date with Dr. Mary Webb to reflect on her “theoretical” belief in reincarnation. The mystery of Jasmine’s ability to quickly transform identities starts to unravel here. After politely listening to
Mary Webb’s experience with “channeling” previous lives, Jasmine explains that Mary Webb seems to have “jumped a groove like a record arm that gets bumped” (125). This method of channeling seems to allow Mary Webb to retrace her “immortal soul’s mutable, genetic journey” and access the memories of past lives. Jasmine continues to meditate on the image of the record player because prior to this conversation it seems she had not stopped to question how to clearly reconcile the cycles of death and rebirth she experienced when she questions:

“What if the human soul is eternal—the swamis say of it, fires cannot burn it, water cannot drown it, winds cannot bend it—what if it is like a giant long-playing record with millions of tracks, each of them a complete circle with only one diamond sharp microscopic link to the next life, and the next, and only God to hear it all?” (127)

Before Jasmine imagines the eternal human soul as a music record she questions the durability of the human soul against natural phenomena. The way she imagines the soul as an indestructible music record emphasizes her ability to combine mysticism and science. Eventually, she decides she believes this interpretation, and she signals her faith in it by adopting it as a metaphor. In the next paragraph she no longer likens human souls to music records; instead, she accepts it as a rereading of reincarnation when she declares, “…I do believe that extraordinary events can jar the needle arm, jump tracks, rip across incarnations, and deposit a life into a groove that was not prepared to receive it” (127). She rereads Prakash’s death as the event that caused the needle to skip tracks—“blocking Jyoti’s future” from advancing. Just as she found a way to interpret the astrologer’s “satellite dish to the stars,” she has also found a way to understand the complexity of reincarnation through technology. In both figurative structures, Jasmine has little to no chance of defying fate or preventing the needle from jumping tracks. Thus, this passage also shows that the
music record metaphor supports the solidarity of reincarnation’s structure by maintaining similar concepts.

Without conveying the image of violence, the record player metaphor augments reincarnation by revealing a different mechanism for rebirth and death. Instead of conveying the cyclical murdering of the self, the music record conveys the disruption of cyclical tracks. Also, Pushpa N. Parekh’s view of *Jasmine* as a retelling of female centered folk tales gains a renewed significance because the music record highlights the achievement of becoming a “speaking person.” When the music record superimposes reincarnation, silence replaces death and sustains negative connotations. Jyoti is not necessarily dead; rather, her track cannot be heard because the needle has jumped onto Jasmine’s track and it is Jasmine’s turn to be heard. Also, the circular tracks on the record project the concept of cycles more vividly than imagining the daunting image of continuous rebirth and death. Furthermore, the music record clarifies the unity of the separate identities because each track is connected through a “diamond sharp microscopic link.” When the eternal soul is read as a record and each life as a track, then it is possible for a character to possess a unity of separate identities. Each identity exists simultaneously but only one is heard at a time. When she parallels Prakash’s death to the extraordinary event that causes the needle to jump tracks, she continues to locate the responsibility for rebirth and death outside of her—but that does not mean she has no agency.

Both the reincarnation and the music record metaphors seem to portray what Carter-Sanborn calls “displacement of agency” (587). At decisive moments, Jasmine narrates events as if she played an indirect role in the result. For example, in a scene in which young Jyoti kills a rabid dog she says, “I took aim and waited for it to leap on me…the staff crushed the dog’s snout while it was still in mid-leap” (Muhkerjee 57). Her own narration suggests that the staff is more
responsible for killing the dog than her act of taking aim. Jyoti’s passivity here and her numerous transformations leads Carter-Sanborn to conclude that “Jyoti has gone from being the subject to being the object of transformation” (587). Objectifying her transformations disrupts the continuity of the subject. Without continuity, Carter-Sanborn insists that “[Jasmine] abandons agency in the [transformative] moment to her theoretical Other, and it is this Other who determines and delivers her into new form” (Carter-Sanborn 583). Indeed, reincarnation successfully highlights the disunity of Jasmine’s transformations but what Carter-Sanborn does not realize is that Jyoti/Jasmine’s objectification of her identities is largely unavoidable and intentional because these ontological metaphors function as ways to further her understanding of identity construction. According to Lakoff and Johnson, “Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind” because once we do that “we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them—and, by this means, reason about them” (25). Therefore, Jasmine’s metaphorical re-reading of herself is not displaced agency. Creating metaphors is not a passive activity; it requires creativity and keen comprehension of the source domain and the target domain in order to produce a translation. Ironically, she signals her active participation in the transformation of identities by using ontological metaphors intended to objectify her. Objectifying her identities as rebirths or tracks on a music record provides her a discourse to initiate negotiation. Mukherjee dramatizes the value of figurative discourse by showing that Jasmine/Jane did not fully understand her own transformations until she found another way to objectify her experience as Jane, the primary narrator of the novel. Parekh’s reading of Jasmine/Jane as the transformation that enables her to graduate from Jasmine,
“speaking person,” to Jane, “teller of tales,” underscores the necessity for a discourse that restores her control over her story (Parekh 117-118).
Defying Fate with Metaphors of Technology

Although it may seem that Jasmine’s technological translations seek to replace tradition, I see her metaphoric translations as assertive attempts to make fate more negotiable. Long before her marriage to Prakash, she already acknowledged the ubiquitous presence of technology and how it mingles with mysticism. Early in the novel she says that light bulbs are “magic” and have the ability to drive out the “Ghosts and sprits [that] took over in the dark” (45). In this example, she does not distinguish between the world of spirits and science because, for her, the two coexist evenly. In other words, technology seems to possess equal power to spirits. Furthermore, she seems to believe that the power of technology to catalyze change increases in America. When she learns that the Flamingo Court Motel, the place Half-Face raped her, was to be transformed into a luxury hotel she reveals her anxiety and excitement,

“It is by now only a passing wave of nausea, this response to the speed of transformation, the fluidity of American character and the American landscape. I feel at times like a stone hurtling through diaphanous mist, unable to grab hold, unable to slow myself, yet unwilling to abandon the ride I’m on. Down and down I go, where I’ll stop, God only knows. (138-139)

The fluidity of the American character and the American landscape both impresses and intimidates her. She defines America by conflating technology and mutability together as measurements of her progress. Interestingly, she articulates her experience of growing accustomed to quick transformations through the image of a stone hurtling through mist. She objectifies herself again but this time as a stone that lacks control in order to emphasize that once a transformation begins it cannot simply stop midway. Jasmine’s experience as an illegal immigrant is characterized by constant mobility that all too often seems restricting and
foreground but she accepts it anyway like a true pioneer unwilling to abandon a journey. Her first conceptions of America, pioneers and the frontier are all embodied in the characters she admires.

Perhaps she believes technology has the potential to defy fate and possibly restore some control to an individual because Prakash and Du demonstrate the successful mutability of technology. Prakash nurtures her confidence in technology’s potential to compete with fate because he encourages her to learn circuitry. He is responsible for improving her fluency in science and sharpening her vision of an electronic “frontier.” She glorifies Prakash as a kind of pioneer for India’s future because his ingenuity and passion to modernize his homeland is comparable to the patriotism of Gandhi and Nehru. Most importantly, he inspires her to think like an engineer “not just of electricity…but of all the machinery in the world, seen and unseen” because “it all ran by rules, if we just understood them.” Put in another way, machines operate according to rules and the skilled people who may manipulate machines as they please so long as they understand the rules. The universality of these rules allows Prakash to develop a philosophy that levels the world between people who do and do not understand the rules of machinery. Those who know these rules develop a consciousness of individualism, an important aspect of the modern world. His philosophy should comfort Jyoti’s fears of fatalism, but she does not understand that his philosophy is a language of defiance that locates power within an individual. If she had understood, she would have told Prakash that she wanted to leave India not just because he wanted her to. By challenging her to practice her English, Prakash was preparing her to “transition to a Western World View.” Gurleen Grewal argues that the “overnight” transformation from Jyoti to Jasmine lacked preparation to “transition to a Western World View,” but I contend that Prakash attempted to prepare her (189).
because she had “smaller hands” than him. She worked alongside him repairing a VCR and from then on they shared a bond defined by their ability to “probe and heal” broken toasters, alarm clocks, calculators, and electric fans. Jyoti probably recognizes this moment as a “turning a point” in their marriage, but it is Jane who retrospectively understands Prakash’s lessons of individualism (Muhkerjee 89). Therefore, Jasmine does not develop consciousness of individualism “overnight” but steadily and with every positive experience repairing machines (Grewal 189). With Prakash’s encouragement, she anticipates the electronic frontier and life as a pioneering Indian woman who transgresses traditional expectations. In America, her adopted son, Du, continues to revitalize her faith in the technological frontier.

Like Prakash, Du recognizes the potential for technology to subvert the odds. By sharpening fluency in the rules that govern machinery, these two characters teach Jasmine another way to comprehend the world. Du upgrades Prakash’s philosophy by using metaphoric language to articulate the extraordinariness of engineering. When asked where he learned engineering, he exclaims: “It’s not engineering. It’s recombinant electronics. I have altered the gene pool of the common American appliance. I have spliced the gene of a Black and Decker paint sprayer on the gear drive of a Mixmaster…I didn’t have to learn it, it’s what I do.” (Mukherjee 156). Mukherjee emphasizes the significance of Du’s role in Jasmine/Janes faith in technology by showing how he complicates Prakash’s engineering philosophy. First, Du elevates the electrical engineer to the status of a genetic engineer by imposing the metaphor of DNA on technology. Second, he conflates the mechanism for organic life with mechanic processes—blurring the distinction between these domains. Third, he emphasizes his penetration and appropriation of America’s iconic appliances (Mixmaster and Black and Decker). Fourth, he insists that these skills are instinctual and therefore coded into the involuntary recesses of his
cognitive abilities. His confidence in his skills inspires Jasmine to recognize her own potential to access the “promise of America” because she also understands circuitry. Du is certainly a “hero” to Jasmine/Jane because his appearance into her life provides her the comfort of a community unified by shared experiences. When she chances upon him working on his latest project, she attempts to work alongside him and demonstrate her shared ability to comprehend and manipulate circuitry. She reminds him of her “small skinny fingers” to show him that she also has a natural advantage for engineering (178). It is important for her to forge a community with Du because he galvanizes the philosophy Prakash wished to impart onto Jasmine. The presence of people who are masters of reinvention, like Du and Prakash, renew and improve her confidence to face constant identity transformations. Also, Du’s ability to improve the functionality of machines by combining parts from various machines characterizes his hybridity.

Another way to understand the representation of hybridity in Muhkerjee’s novel is to compare the metaphors that Du and Jasmine/Jane champion. Du’s metaphor of genetic engineering does not necessarily reveal his method for identity construction, but it seems to complement Jasmine’s reincarnation metaphor. The construction of new forms of machinery highlights concepts of reinvention and mutability without the slightest trace of pain or trauma. The image of “recombinant electronics” conveys a characteristic of specificity that the reincarnation metaphor lacks. Du knows exactly what gears and parts to take from other machines to create a new one but Jasmine/Jane resists distinguishing whether she draws upon tradition, modernity, or both to complete transformations. At times the reader must assume that she draws from both but the exact recipe remains a mystery. More importantly, Du’s metaphor identifies the engineer as the one responsible for construction. Unlike both the reincarnation and the music record metaphor, Du’s metaphor presents an agent who clearly asserts agency in the
construction of new entities. There is not enough evidence to prove that Jasmine/Jane prefers Du’s metaphor over her own, yet when she compares her transformations to Du’s she explains that hers was “genetic” while Du’s was “hyphenated” (222). These word choices found toward the end of the novel reveal that she evidently appropriates Du’s metaphor into her philosophy. Perhaps she does not find Du’s transformation, “Vietnamese-American,” as remarkable as hers because hyphens oversimplify the contentious nature of identity construction with a narrow bridge between two words (222).

Mukherjee portrays several interpretations of cultural hybridity through several layers of metaphors. The music record and various other experiences of technology mainly augment the reincarnation metaphor by highlighting mutability. Jasmine owes her survival to her disposition to adapt, change, and transform. Each transformation grants her security for a period of time, and re-reading each transformation as a rebirth gives her a language to actively translate the uneasy self-splitting that ensues from constant transformations. Concurrently, technology provides her a language to discuss mutability that highlights progress and hides pain. By combining figurative tropes of mutability from both Hindu doctrine and science, Mukherjee shows that hybrids act as cultural translators who negotiate between diametrically opposed elements. For Jasmine, the duality between the metaphors of reincarnation and mechanic technology challenge her to locate the transformative moment between the past and the future. As much as she would like to break away from the past, she cannot anticipate the future without a foundation in the past. In the following chapter, I continue to explore the ways in which metaphors function as cultural translations.
Chapter 2: The Role of Hybridity in Remembering Al-Andalus in Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Crescent*

To some, “Arab American” is an acceptable description of a person’s ethnic and national identity, but it also smoothes away traces of tension between the history of Arabs and Americans. In this post-9/11 world, the idea that Arabs and Americans share a historical past centuries ago would surprise today’s general public. While most children will grow up memorizing the year 1492 as the year that Christopher Columbus led the old world to the new, most children will not learn that it is also the year that Arabs would seemingly disappear from European and American consciousness until the late 1980s. The past that the Arabs and Americans share must come to light sooner rather than later, and that past is al-Andalus. According to María Rosa Menocal, the land once known as al-Andalus has become “foreign…to the fundamental constructs of westernness we use to define ourselves, and which we thus (when we do, occasionally) as a charming and exotic jewel” (483). Scholars like Menocal are troubled by the “forgetfulness” of western historiography to acknowledge the significance of al-Andalus in the discovery of America and how we construct modern Arab identity. Menocal insists that the preservation of Andalusi legacy lies in imagination and translation. I would like to take Menocal’s suggestion and analyze the ways in which novelist Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Crescent* restores the centrality of Andalusi culture by treating translated texts as credible “original” sources instead of derivative artifacts. Unlike Menocal, my analysis will broaden the definition of “text” beyond written manuscripts and include all forms of cultural artifacts such as recipes, music, art, and oral traditions.

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11 María Rosa Menocal is a scholar of medieval culture and history and is well known in her field for writing *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain.*

12 More specifically, Menocal proposes that it is difficult to interpret and fully translate the “original” manuscript of works produced in Medieval Spain because a particular text may have any number of influences from the flux of Arabic/Muslim, Hebrew/Jewish and Latin/Christian cultures.
In addition to the project of remembering al-Andalus, Abu-Juber’s *Crescent* presents an opportunity to explore the hybridity of Arab Americans, and how people of this mix-raced descent may revive the memory of al-Andalus to the modern world. Throughout this chapter, I recuperate Bhabha’s concept of hybridity because he acknowledges identification as a process that “is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (65). Although Bhabha’s theory of hybridity was intended to describe the colonial encounter between cultures, there are infinite contexts in which the performance of hybridity functions as a subversive space to construct identities. When a hybrid person negotiates identity upon the shifting differences between two or more alignments, he or she occupies the gap in between or as Bhabha calls it, the “third space.” The third space does not necessarily mean “balance,” in fact, “balance” falsely connotes harmony and hybridity should be contentious. The production of an identity is a constant project of revision. Arab Americans negotiate the differences between Arabness and Americaness, and in so doing, may revise the identity of both cultures. In this modern environment, Arab Americans may find ways to subvert the historiography written of Arabs and prove that the forced conversion of Muslims to Christianity, the expulsion of Arabs from Spain, the overall under-representation of Arabs during the Age of Discovery did not diminish their relevancy to the narration of European history. The potential for Arab Americans to subvert the media’s demonization of Arabs and Muslims perhaps lies in the ability of authors like Abu-Jaber to revive the legacy of al-Andalus as it resonates in the daily lives of Arabs with systems of metaphors.

In my analysis, I will use a fundamental understanding of Cognitive Linguistics Conceptual Metaphor theory (CLCM) to analyze Abu-Jaber’s metaphors. The language of CLCM allows me to characterize the negotiation of cultural differences as a translation. In
Crescent, I identify Arab cuisine\(^{13}\) and the story of Abdelrahman Salahdin as source domains for translating Arab identity (target domain). According to Anita Mannur\(^{14}\), identity is fused with culinary practices; the production and consumption of food can affirm ethnicity for certain communities and, paradoxically, resist assumptions that cultural identity is “readily available for consumption and commodification,” (Mannur 7-8). Abu-Jaber portrays this paradox in Crescent by presenting the production and consumption of cuisine as a significant means of interpreting culture; however, metaphors only convey a partial understanding of certain experiences\(^{15}\) (Lakoff and Johnson 12-13). Like all metaphors, culinary source domains\(^{16}\) are limited and may require extension or elaboration in order to further understanding of the target domain. Abu-Jaber’s protagonist, Sirine, instinctually relies on culinary source domains to conceptualize the world but through the course of the novel she draws upon her Uncle’s stories of Abdelrahman as a secondary source domain. Abu-Jaber juxtaposes these two source domains because they each represent conflicting significations. Because cuisine is Sirine’s tangible way to connect to Arab culture, cuisine and the culinary are “real” and perhaps true elements of Arab culture. The stories of Abdelrahman are not tangible and the claims the story makes are difficult to validate, so Abdelrahman signifies the imagined elements of Arab culture. Sirine’s construction of her Arab identity will be built upon information cultivated from both real experiences and imagined experiences. The duality of these “alignments” demonstrates that a system of metaphors is more likely to capture the intricacies of identity construction and cultural dynamics than one metaphor.

\(^{13}\) The Oxforddictionaries.com defines cuisine as “a style or method of cooking, especially as characteristic of a particular country, region, or establishment.” I use Oxford dictionaries.com’s definition of cuisine because the Oxford English Dictionary’s entry has not been fully updated since its original publication in 1893.

\(^{14}\) Although Anita Mannur speaks exclusively for South Asian diasporic cultural texts, her belief that cuisine “occupies a seemingly paradoxical space” also applies to Arab American diasporic texts (7).

\(^{15}\) Lakoff and Johnson stress that metaphorical structuring is partial because if it were total, “one concept would actually be the other, not merely understood in terms of the other” (13).

\(^{16}\) “Source Domain” is the cognitive linguistics term for the conceptual system utilized in order to understand the target domain.
Metaphorical translations synergistically promote ways to imagine Arab heritage and how it perpetuates construction of Arab identity.

The story of *Crescent* centers on Sirine, a thirty-nine year old woman who is the daughter of an American woman and an Arab immigrant man. A romance with Hanif Al Eyad (Han) inspires her to improve her connection to her Arab Heritage because he activates her realization that she is more American than Arab. Han motivates her to seek a balance between her American and Arab identifications. Through her passion for cooking, her uncle’s stories, and her romance with Han she constructs the ethnic identity hidden beneath her pale skin, blond hair, and sea-green eyes.

*Crescent* is divided into two parts, and it has two narrating voices: the omniscient narrator who possesses exclusive access to Sirine’s mind in part one and Han’s mind in part two; Sirine’s uncle⁷, whose narration of the “The Moralless tale of Abdelrahman Salahdin” begins most chapters of the novel. The content of his story often parallels the action unfolding in Sirine’s life and, therefore, functions as a reservoir of metaphors from which Sirine draws to conceptualize Arab culture. The narrator presents Sirine as the beloved Iraqi-American chef at Nadia’s Café that is located in a predominately Iranian neighborhood near the University of Los Angeles, California. She has been living with her uncle for almost twenty-one years because her parents, Red Cross Relief workers, were killed in Africa when she was nine years old. Alongside Um-Nadia and her daughter Mireille, Sirine prepares and serves a culturally diverse community with traditional recipes from her parents’ kitchen. Although Sirine delights in cooking her family’s favorite dishes for nine years at the café, her curiosity in Arab culture did not reawake until she met Han. He is the university’s newest hire in the Near Eastern Studies Department at the University, and Uncle’s ideal lover for Sirine. Han is drawn to her cooking

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¹⁷ Abu-Jaber revealed in an interview with Robin E. Field that Sirine’s uncle does not have a name (Field 221).
and her unique approach to life; for him, she is “the opposite of exile” (158). She is drawn to him by his stories of Iraq and his vast knowledge of Arab culture. Together, they form a relationship built on similar feelings of pain from the loss of loved ones and a mutual need for the other’s unique ability to heal loneliness. Reviving and confronting repressed emotions benefits Sirine but adversely poisons Han. In an effort to satiate Sirine’s curiosity, Han constantly divulges vivid memories of Iraq that he has struggled to repress since the beginning of his exile. Eventually consumed by melancholia and pain, Han abandons Sirine and returns to Iraq. Just before the close of the novel, the narrator implies that Han and Sirine will eventually reunite—a signification that Sirine embraces the never ending struggle to decipher truth from lies as she explores and preserves her Arab heritage.

Unlike many stories about cultural hybridity, Abu-Jaber introduces readers to a hybrid protagonist who does not seem to experience the “uneasy and agonistic self splitting” so common among cultural hybrid experiences (Fludernik 19). It is significant that readers meet Sirine when she is thirty-nine years old because at this stage in her life she is a woman with a strong sense of self who is comfortable with her identity. In the opening dialogue between her and her uncle, he reminds her of her American identity as he jokingly calls her “Miss Hurry Up American” (17). As an Iraqi immigrant, Sirine’s uncle discerns differences between her American and non-American attitudes, and his reminders reinforce her sense of American-ness. Sirine has not experienced an identity crisis because the characters who surround her lovingly remind her that she occupies a “third space.” As long as characters like her uncle, Mirielle, and the regulars at Nadia’s Café welcome her and her cooking, the “third space” is a desirable place. In fact, Sirine admits that she believes that “as long as she could cook, she would be loved” (218). Certainly, her uncle would accept her regardless of her American appearance and her
talent for cooking, but these two characteristics enable her to temporarily supersede contentious formulations of hybridity for nine years—an unusually large amount of time for a hybrid individual to comfortably occupy the third space. However, Abu-Jaber illustrates that there is indeed a purpose for pausing Sirine’s identity constructions.

Initially, Sirine’s identity as an Arab American chef was not welcomed by Um-Nadia’s anti-Iraqi neighbors given the events of the Iran-Iraq War and the Persian Gulf War\(^{18}\). Nadia bought the café in 1991 (then called Falafel Faroah) shortly after Iraqi president Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The former owners of Falafel Faroah witnessed their business decline because of the repeated appearance of C.I.A. agents who intended to discover secret terrorist schemes. Instead of describing how the cook responded to the agents, the narrator explains that he sold the business to Nadia. This subtle omission of information emphasizes the fear felt within the community. According to Dr. Mervat F. Hatem’s\(^{19}\) report, “The Invisible American Half: Arab American Hybridity and Feminist Discourses in the 1990s,” broad anti-Arab discourse quickly replaced anti-Iraqi discourse at the outset of the Gulf crisis. She further explains, “The daily reporting, analysis, and discussion of the crisis denigrated Arab culture, history, politics, and character.” So when news spread that Um-Nadia hired an Iraqi-American chef, Um-Nadia’s Iranian neighbors refused to enter the café. Even after several years had passed since the Gulf War, the Iranian neighbors had not forgotten the aftermath of the Iraq-Iran War. The decisions of nations may affect the environment of a small café in Los Angeles, but a small café does not need the leaders of nations to resolve the tensions between cultural communities.

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\(^{18}\) According to newworldencyclopedia.org, the Iran-Iraq War (also known as the The First Persian Gulf War) was known to the rest of the world as a conflict that persisted from September 1980 – August 1988, but the causes of the conflict stem from border disputes during the reign of various dynasties. After Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1991, the conflict was referred to as the Second Persian Gulf war; today it is simply known as the Persian Gulf War.

\(^{19}\) Dr. Mervat F. Hatem is a professor in the Department of Political Science at Howard University. This particular essay was published in *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in the Age of Globalism*.
Sirine’s identity as a “white” chef versed in the culinary arts of French, Italian, “Californian,” and Arab cuisines seems to make her hybridity more palatable for anti-Iraqi neighbors. Khoorosh, the Persian owner of the Victory Market, “appeared on Sirine’s first day of work announcing that he was ready to forgive the Iraqis on behalf of the Iranians” (23). The narration of this scene suggests that Khoorosh’s motivation to quell anti-Iraqi attitudes comes from a desire to restore harmony within his community. Although the narrator does not clearly state whether Khoorosh appeared prepared with his announcement or that the sight of her motivated it, the narrator effectively conveys that Sirine’s appearance grants her some privilege. Khoorosh, who “stood open-mouthed when he saw white-blond Sirine, then finally blurted out, ‘Well, look at what Iraq has managed to produce!’” (23). It seems he was prepared to forgive the Iraqi people on the condition that the chef knew how to cook fessenjan, but her “blond-white” appearance defies his expectations of what a daughter of an Iraqi man should look like, and the surprise causes him to reconsider his approach to the situation. Sirine’s promise to learn Khoorosh’s favorite walnut and pomegranate stew convinces him to forgive the Iraqi people, but the way this scene is narrated suggests that her appearance softened his judgment. Visually, Sirine does not resemble Khoorosh’s imagined enemy of the Iranians. Her physical appearance allows her to subvert the impasse between Iraqi and Iranian conflict possibly because it is a visual reminder that they are in America now. The history of violent conflicts caused by border disputes between Iraq and Iran does not seem to apply to a café in Los Angeles. Koorosh

20 Abu-Jaber seems to have deliberately chosen not to explain Khoorosh’s announcement; she places the responsibility to learn about the Iraq-Iran War on the reader. It should also be noted that she subtly references the Iraq-Iran war and describes the Gulf War instead of explicitly naming these historical events. Also, when she describes the Gulf War, she focuses on America’s involvement. This is not to suggest that Abu-Jaber does not value Arab-American political relations, but rather that the politics is so important that it should be explored directly. According to Nouri Gana, the genius of Abu-Jaber’s Andalusian revival project is that it “awakens the political in the reader by craftily staging how it bears on the individual and communal on a day-to-day basis” (237). Abu-Jaber provides just enough historical contexts to emphasize the effects of politics on Crescent’s characters and to inspire the reader to seek more knowledge of the subject matter.
completes his act of diplomacy by offering Sirine a potted pomegranate tree, which is sacred to Persian and Arab cosmology because it symbolizes good intentions (Mehta 227). This demonstration of peace on her first day as chef at Nadia’s Café establishes her identity as the illustrious Iraqi American chef of a café located in an Iranian neighborhood. Her mixed-race identity and her talents as a chef show the potential for the café to become a place of tolerance for ancient rivalries and cultural differences—very much like al-Andalus.

Perhaps the reason why Abu-Jaber has chosen to “pause” Sirine’s identity construction for nine years is because the café, like al-Andalus, required an element of constancy. Too much change in a short period of time often threatens the development of solidarity. In the restaurant business, it is unwise for restaurants to replace chefs frequently because it affects the recipes; customers will likely not return if the taste of their favorite dish fluctuates. Likewise, as the chef of the café, Sirine’s identity must resist dramatic transformations because it could affect the environment in the café. Ironically, Sirine’s hybridity provides a sense of constancy to the café and the community because her presence there symbolizes tolerance. To revive the legacy of al-Andalus, Abu-Jaber restages the café as the al-Andalus of “Tehrangeles.” According to Y. Yilmaz, the features of al-Andalus that allowed it to become a plural society were freedom, tolerance and lack of assimilation. Similarly, Nadia’s customers need to feel free to be who they are without fear of prejudice. In order for Nadia’s café to become a place of tolerance like al-Andalus, Nadia must rid the café of C.I.A. agents because their continued presence there would stir suspicion within the community and prevent a sense of security from developing. Also, the cuisine Sirine prepares draws in new waves of customers who are not just interested in “Real True Arab Food” but a public place that welcomes their existence (21). Nadia’s café attracts a diverse spectrum of customers that includes:
…Jenoob, Gharb, and Schmaal—engineering students from Egypt; Shark, a math student from Kuwait; Lon Hayden, the chair of Near Eastern Studies; Morris who owns the newsstand; Raphael-from-New Jersey; Jay, Ron, and Troy form the Kappa Something Something fraternity house; Odah, the Turkish butcher, and his many sons. There are two American policemen—one white and one black—who come to the café every day (23).

This impressive list of regulars is a testament of Sirine’s ability to allure and satisfy the “exilic imbalances” of immigrant appetites while also promoting a positive example of peaceful transnational coexistence (Mehta 208). The consistent presence of the two policemen neutralizes misconceptions of Arabs as terrorists by showing “a reversal in which police aggression against Arabs metamorphoses into a hunger for cultural simulation” (Mehta 225). As they visit the café to enjoy “fava bean dip and lentils fried with rice[,]…they indulge in Bedouin soap operas” and gain some insight to a culture frequently demonized by the media and Hollywood (Abu-Jaber 22). To emphasize the influence of the media, the narrator submits Sirine’s initial suspicions of the customers to the reader: “Sometimes she used to scan the room and imagine the word terrorist. But her gaze ran over the faces and all that came back to her were words like lonely, and young” (author’s italics 33). Sirine eventually realizes that her food serves people who are not so different from her—people who hunger for a way to quench the pain of separating from loved ones.

Like al-Andalus, the café attracts many exchange students and therefore facilitates opportunities for Sirine to safely disclose her position at the “in-between space” of Arab and American culture (Mercer and Strom 41). From behind the kitchen counter, Sirine secretly observes the many exchange students and immigrants from the Middle East as she prepares
meals. The narrator explains that they “cannot help” but to love watching her because she cooks the food that reminds them of their homes and yet she has skin “so pale it has the bluish cast of skim milk” (20). The unexpected combination of her food and the whiteness of her appearance often enchant the customers and sometimes exchange students will confide to her the pain of immigrant life. Many of the students will say to her, “Americans…don’t have the time or the space in their lives for the sort of friendship—days of coffee-drinking and talking—that the Arab students craved” (22). This utterance reveals that students, despite their fascination with her appearance, do not see her as too American that she would not understand them. Sirine’s mixed-race identity establishes the café as a hybrid space for these exchange students to carry out academic pursuits in a land not only foreign to them but at times hostile. Her “whiteness” is a gentle reminder that they are far from home while the food she prepares preserves memories of home. In this chef-customer dynamic, between Sirine and the students, there is no pressure on Sirine to expand her connection to Arab culture.

At the café, she cooks to remember her deceased parents and to refresh her memories of them because she will “only be able to know them through [her] memory now” (210). These secret motivations for cooking translate into comfort food for her customers who also yearn for a sense of belonging. She and her immigrant customers, especially the exchange students, not only share an experience of loss and exile but also a “hybrid space” (Nyman 22). The exchange students who come to America in hopes of improving themselves through education are caught between the promise of a better future and a secure home left in the past. Jopi Nyman explains that “diasporic identity can be addressed as a form of hybridized identity, as it is in this space of in-betweeness where the diasporic subject reconstructs itself…” (22). Sirine attempts to reconstruct her origins by performing the lessons her parents taught her about food (Abu-Jaber
She idolizes her mother as an example of how to occupy the hybrid space as both American and Arab because “her father always said his wife thought about food like an Arab” (56). She reflects on her mother’s ability to summon her father into the kitchen with just the smell of food. If the smell alone could lure him, then surely the satisfaction of eating the food would anchor him to her mother’s side. Each time Sirine cooks she reenacts the power of food to strengthen the physical and emotional bond within families. Her food gives diasporic immigrants an opportunity to reconstruct their memories of family and home. Without her parents, Sirine had to relocate and live with her Uncle, which might have left her feeling “un-homed” but as long as she can assert her identity as a chef of different cultural cuisines, any kitchen functions as her home. Therefore, the café is more than just a “home away from home;” it becomes a stage on which the past can be renewed and preserved.

Sirine’s unique characteristics allow food to become a form of cultural translation. Even before working for Um-Nadia, she was applying her distinctive “ability to live deeply and purely inside her own body, to stop thinking, to work, and to simply exist inside the simplest actions, like chopping an onion or stirring a pot” (22). Her extraordinary ability to focus is reminiscent of prayer and meditation. Through Sirine, Abu-Jaber conflates the culinary with prayer elevating the culinary thus to spirituality. Abu-Jaber presents Sirine as a character who exemplifies the conceptual metaphor that “THE BODY IS THE PLACE OF THE SPIRIT” (Field 224). The cognitive function of this particular conceptual metaphor seems to be ontological because “spirit” receives a clearer delineated structure. The shape or consistency of “spirit” is understood in terms of location which is the human body. Unbeknownst to Sirine, she refines her spirituality by taking care of her body through meditative sessions of chopping vegetables, stirring soups in

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21 During an interview, Abu-Jaber explains that she intentionally sought to work this metaphor into _Crescent_ and I believe it is most obvious in the character of Sirine. Also, in the field of cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphors are typically notated in all-caps.
a bowl, and eating nutritious foods. Neither the narrator nor Sirine parallels cooking with spirituality until the evening she spent at Han’s apartment. She confirms the connection between cooking and praying when she imitates Han’s demonstration of the postures and genuflections for praying. She says, “It reminds me of the way I feel sometimes when I’m working, like when I stir a pot of soup, or when I knead the bread dough” (80). Sirine’s conceptualizations of experiences with culinary source domains are so natural to her that she forgets that some people may not understand her. Furthermore, this scene marks a pivotal moment in Sirine’s identity negotiations because she verbally translates the prayers to culinary experiences. She understands that the language of food is esoteric, but she risks confusing Han in order to communicate with him. She must take this risk because his knowledge and ability to teach her more about Arab culture, including Islam, is invaluable to Sirine’s attempts to reconstruct her Arab identity.

It’s interesting that Sirine works in a café that boasts serving “Real true Arab food” because cooking real Arab food strengthens her confidence in her Arab identity. Through cooking “real” Arab food she believes she is revealing the “true” Arab identity. Sirine’s philosophy for cooking supports this reading. She explains to Han that good food “should taste like where it came from…so that the best butter tastes a little like pastures and flowers” (78). In other words, if what she cooks revives memories of home, then she has successfully recovered an aspect of Arab culture. She aspires to heal Han’s “anesthetized” spirit through cuisine to unlock his forgotten memories of home (210). She believes she can continue to help him unlock more memories if she can feed him food that will connect him to his origins, so she invents Arab American Thanksgiving and prepares all the dishes he mentioned from his childhood memories (210). With satisfaction she watches his reaction to the food:
He holds the spoon in his mouth for a moment. She knows what he is tasting, how
the broth is flavored with pepper and garlic and lustrous, deep smokiness. “And
try this,” she says. Vibrant vegetable greens, garlic, and lemon. “And this.”
Herbal, meaty, vaguely fruity…He closes his eyes and inhales…he touches his
lips. (216)

Han’s reaction confirms Sirine’s ability to revive memories of home through food. Moreover,
Abu-Jaber affirms that Arab cuisine is a significant way to revive memories of the past because
of the immediate effect it has on the body. The color, aroma, texture, and flavor of certain foods
have the ability to anchor memories to the body. Sirine is well aware of the restorative effects of
refreshing sensory memories, so she overwhelms his senses with food that will allow him to take
an imagined journey to his homeland. Her hybridity places in her in a position to help others
cope with the pain of loss and loneliness that is typical of diasporic and exilic people. Her
fluency in the language of different ethnic cuisines also allows her to act as cultural translator for
her community.

Abu-Jaber presents Sirine as a mascot for the café—she symbolizes the possibility that
different cultures can coexist. Sirine and her uncle strive to foster a sense of belonging within
their community during the loneliest holiday for students, Thanksgiving. They try to invite
anyone who has no place to go. Although the narrator modestly describes the event as “a place to
sit and have a bite and a conversation,” the event is actually quite significant because for many of
the attendees it is a cross-cultural symposium that features political, religious, and social
discussions (206). Like representatives of their respective cultures, the guests attend the dinner
prepared to discuss definitions of American identity. A deluxe presentation of rice, pine nuts,
ground lamb, yogurt sauce, sfeehas, mensaf, slices of cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, and
turkey appear on the dinner table. This hybrid assortment of food was made possible mainly by Sirine, who unlike everyone else in attendance has never explored the world beyond Los Angeles. The world comes to her table, and at this table the world coexists through conversation and a feast that reflects their differences. Through this Arab-American Thanksgiving, Abu-Jaber offers her contribution to the search for a metaphor that best conveys America’s cultural dynamics. Unlike the “melting pot” and the “salad bowl,” the Arab-American Thanksgiving conveys a hearty gathering of diverse people who are welcome to commune in a celebration of generosity. Indeed, this scene is emblematic of the novel’s theme of how meals can recreate the sentiments of home (Mercer and Strom 45).

In the same way that Abu-Jaber restages al-Andalus as the café, this dinner revives the historical connection between Arabs and Americans, and oddly enough, it is a hybrid feast of celebration and mourning. Sirine’s Arab American Thanksgiving honors both her mother and Han. The slight change in recipes does not replace her mother; rather, it furthers the hybrid project her mother began—the privilege to be American and “cook like an Arab” (56). Aziz recognizes Sirine’s achievement when he says, “Your cooking reveals America to us non-Americans. And vice versa” (221). He glorifies both her Arab-American hybridity and her culinary skills, but Victor Hernandez corrects him by stating that Sirine is not an “American cook” (221). Victor likens Sirine’s cooking sensibilities and techniques to the chefs of his Mexican heritage who “don’t just dump salt into the pot.” This odd disagreement between Aziz and Victor emphasizes a cross-cultural confusion of how to define “American.” Victor identifies the problem of cultural mistranslation—is her culinary talent an American or non-American trait? The ambiguity of which space may claim her calls attention to the paradoxical way that food affirms and resists universal translations of cultures (Mannur 7). Although Victor’s
comment confirms that Sirine’s Arabness or non-American-ness does indeed manifest through her cooking, nothing he says will relieve her insecurities because he is still part of the same community that accepts Sirine’s hybridity unquestioningly. Despite Sirine’s talent for uniting a multicultural community, Han’s perception of her seems to possess the power to unravel the union of her Arab American Identity—or at least what she believed was a perfect balance of both cultures.
Discerning the Real from the Imagined

By Bhabha’s definition of hybridity, the process of identification should be continuous because the differences between cultures diametrically oppose each other, and yet Abu-Jaber has invented a scenario in which identity construction has and can stop for a period of time. Before Sirine and Han crossed paths, both seem to have found a way to comfortably negotiate cultural differences without a need to reconstruct or transform the self. Sirine conceptualizes the world primarily through food and she prefers to perform her Arabness by cooking “real true Arab food.” Cooking is tangible and therefore more reliable as a means to determine the authenticity of Arab culture, but what about the story of Abdelrahman Salahadin? If this story is filled with exaggerations, what can Sirine gain from it? And, why is it significant that Sirine admits she could no longer discern whether her dreams were about Abdelrahman or Han? A careful look at Han will reveal that he is not just the catalyst that returns Sirine’s hybridity to a contentious state; he is the link between cuisine metaphors and metaphors drawn from the stories of Abdelrahman. Sirine’s desire to reconstruct her Arab identity begins because Han embodies the Arab man she originally wishes to preserve, her father. Abu-Jaber shows that the reconstruction of Arab identity is fraught with challenges because it involves the retrospection of experience, excavation of artifacts, and the deconstruction of stories. The conflict that drives Sirine’s identity construction is not the juxtaposition of her mixed-race identity; rather it is the difficulty of discerning what to believe as she reconstructs her Arab identity. First, it is important to notice how Abu-Jaber presents Han as the link between discerning the real from the imagined.

Unlike the typical customers, his appearance and behavior leave lasting impressions on her that arrests her attention. There are characteristics about him that she cannot ignore. Aside from his attractive looks, she focuses on his “beautiful, lightly accented, fluid voice, dark as
chocolate” that has a dash of English and Eastern Europe “like a complicated sauce” (24). Listening to Han introduce Aziz Abdo at the university’s poetry reading causes Sirine to suddenly miss her father. The way Han spoke of the Arabic language “so eloquently and longingly” elicits feelings and memories of her father the way food and cooking evokes memories of her mother. Suddenly, the link that would connect Sirine directly to her father is found in Han’s voice. Abu-Jaber establishes Sirine’s attraction to his accented voice because it is a sound that she can experience and therefore classify as real. Han’s voice also becomes the voice that continuously challenges her construction of Arab identity. In essence, Han’s voice returns Sirine to the language of her father’s heritage and continually motivates her to keep seeking Arab culture. Like her Uncle, Han discerns differences between American and Arab behaviors but his observations criticize Sirine and leave her uncomfortable. Sirine begins to feel the uneasiness of her hybridity during their first conversation when he describes the way she held prayer beads as “very delightful—very American” (31). Instead of accepting his remark as a compliment she responds with a reply the narrator describes as “self-defense” (31). In this scene and several others, Han often inadvertently causes Sirine to feel embarrassed and/or ashamed of her limited knowledge of Arab culture. These early stages of Sirine and Han getting to know one another resembles the moment at which point a hybrid person realizes their liminality because he or she has begun to detect a conflict. As he gently exposes her ignorance she begins to experience hallucinations that are all characterized by the feeling of being watched.

At the café, Sirine accepts the customers’ gaze upon her, but as her relationship with Han progresses her sense of being watched intensifies into paranoia. Nine years of working at the café sheltered her confidence in her Arab American identity. Surrounded by people who welcome and empathize with her, she had little motivation to interrogate the authenticity of her Arab identity.
and wonder how others perceive her. Abu-Jaber cleverly shows that the processes of identity construction cannot be paused for too long. The contentious nature of hybridity will persist especially in settings like Nadia’s café in which cross-cultural encounters are inevitable. Sirine’s awareness of her hybridity results in hallucinations. The first time she hallucinates was the morning following their first night together. This hallucination marks the beginning of her doubt in her senses. As a chef, she has learned to trust what she can see and feel but after meeting Han, she begins hallucinating. In one particular scene, she is walking around Han’s dimly lit room naked as she observes the “books inscribed with gold Arabic calligraphy, a glass bottle filled with colored sands, a string of beads, a folded-up square of silk, a brass letter opener” (127). In her early morning daze she notices that the “darkness and the fog create the illusion of a gargoyle face peering into the window, as if someone were crouching in a corner of the balcony, watching” (128). This hallucination signifies her slow dissent into the contentious state of hybridity she has forgotten. Naked, vulnerable, and in the company of Han’s possessions—his domain, her senses eerily misfire in the darkness. In this new, unfamiliar environment she negotiates with her senses and tries to convince herself that she saw a mirage created by the darkness and the fog. Throughout this unusual experience, Sirine does not resort to food or cooking to make sense of it. In fact, she is nowhere near a kitchen, which means she cannot escape this unnerving confrontation by “los[ing] herself in the rhythms of the kitchen” (218). Her usual protocol for understanding an experience cannot translate this event. Han’s appearance in her life is sharpening the realization that cooking Arab cuisine fails to completely express her Arab heritage. In other words, the construction of her Arabness cannot end with the satisfaction of just cooking Arab food; to do so would promote a superficial identification with the culture. She must improve her system of selfhood conceptualization by broadening her knowledge of
Iraq. Han helps by comforting her with the “warm cave of [his] arms” which is a new location for her to reconstruct her Arab heritage (128). Together they engage in cross-cultural exchanges in which he orients her to her father’s homeland with his memories in exchange for Sirine’s ability to relieve his exilic pain.

The scene in which Sirine and Han make baklava together best exemplifies the effectiveness of their cross-cultural exchange the narrator utilizes another conceptual metaphor to emphasize how the language of food could unify them. As Sirine and Han work together to prepare the baklava the narrator says,

And while Sirine has never known how to dance, always stiffening and trying to lead while her partner murmurs relax, relax— and while there are very few people who know how to cook and move with her in the kitchen—it seems that she and Han know how to make baklava together (67).

Abu-Jaber’s use of food metaphors throughout the novel is quite effective for illustrating the versatility of culinary source domains, but in this passage another metaphor subtly augments food. The narrator imposes the metaphor of dance onto cooking to isolate attention to Sirine’s uncooperative nature in both dancing and cooking. The conceptual metaphor informing this passage is that making baklava is dancing; Sirine and Han’s successful creation of baklava is understood in terms of dancing. Her tendencies in the kitchen fail her in dancing because that requires her to relinquish leadership to her partner. In the kitchen, she takes the lead and Han, her assistant in making baklava, must precisely accommodate her rhythm. In regards to identity construction, it is important that Sirine remains in control of the construction of her identity. Han certainly influences Sirine’s identification process, but she ultimately completes the construction. Making baklava together proves to Sirine that he can speak her language of food. Trust is
developing between these characters. Acts of cooking together become transformative moments for Sirine’s hybridity that not only transform her present perception of the world but also her past. Later in this same scene, Han helps her re-view the memories of her mother and make her realize that her “mother’s small lessons felt like larger secrets when [she] was a girl: how instructions in the fine dicing of walnuts and the way to clarify butter were also meditations on hope and devotion” (68). He influences her to re-see those moments as traditions instead of just nostalgic memories, which strengthens her connection to her parents. In proving that he can “dance” with her in the kitchen, he proves himself capable of exchanging memories, knowledge, and secrets with her. Additionally, this scene illustrates Sirine’s natural adherence to culinary source domains, but she gradually augments it with tropes from her uncle’s stories.
Arabs: the True, the Lost, and the Drowned

The frame story of Abdelrahman Salahdin ingeniously provides Sirine more ways to conceptualize Arab culture and reconstruct her Arab identity. Fluency in the language of food certainly provides her a versatile source domain for conceptualizing the world and performing cultural translations, but this novel is not entirely about the potential for food to promote multiculturalism. The framing of Sirine’s story through Abdelrahman Salahdine’s infuses *Crescent* with a rich wealth of Arab history. Her uncle is not just a storyteller but a historiographer who interprets a familiar retelling of Andalusian legacy. Nouri Gana reads *Crescent* as a project that “seeks to reinvent Arabness in tandem with rethinking the multicultural under the auspices of the powerful metaphor of Andalusia” (242). Furthermore, Gana believes that Abu-Jaber’s success at portraying the complexity of Arab American subjectivities is due to her day-to-day portrayal of characters (237). Abu-Jaber’s portrayal of how the daily lives of her characters connect to Andalusia is particularly effective because she relies on metaphors.

The most dominant metaphor that links Abdelrahman to Sirine’s life is the figure of the “drowned Arab” but the link does not surface immediately because Abu-Jaber must establish storytelling as a legitimate way to connect to culture. Initially, the link between Abdelrahman and Sirine’s life lies hidden beneath her uncle’s insistence that the “Moralless tale of Abdelrahman Saladin” is not didactic. Although he introduces it to her as a story “of how to love,” he continues to hedge Sirine’s requests for clearer explanations of the story’s significance. Since storytelling is an important Arab tradition, it is necessary for Sirine, as well as the reader, to first learn how to listen. Throughout the novel, Abu-Jaber dramatizes the dynamics of storytelling in order to emphasize the differences between good and bad listeners. Before her

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22 For more information on Andalusian chronotype see Nouri Gana “Search of Andalusia: Reconfiguring Arabness in Diana Abu-Jaber’s Crescent.”
uncle continues with the story he announces, “I would like to point out at this moment, for the record, that accomplished uncles and storytellers are usually rewarded with plates of knaffea pastry” (39). His request marks the intersection between “Sirine’s focus on food and her uncle’s focus on storytelling” (Mercer and Strom 40). The significance of food to Sirine is balanced with the significance of stories to her uncle to ultimately recognize storytelling as a way for Sirine to connect with Arab culture. If she can stand by the kitchen counter at the café silently cooking as she listens to the daily arguments in Arabic and English, she should also learn the “art [of] listening to a story—[which] requires equal parts silence and receptivity” (308). Unfortunately, her motivation for taking the story more seriously does not begin until Han explains that people in Iraq commonly tell fables because “it’s too difficult to say anything directly” (51). She then starts to think that maybe these fables are “secret codes” and it is possible that her uncle is actually teaching her how to love, but what or who does he intend for her to learn how to love? When her uncle first began telling her the story, he interrupted his narration to remind her about Han, which could suggest that he hopes to teach her how to love an Arab like Han. Crescent could be read as a romance between a woman and a man, but Abu-Jaber lays important groundwork to suggest that this novel is also about the trouble with romanticizing the past. Through Han, Sirine vicariously falls in love with Arabic culture so deeply that to lose each other is synonymous with the pain of exile. Regardless of her uncle’s true motivations for storytelling, the influence of his stories surfaces in her daily activities as metaphors that function as signifiers of her progress in reconstructing her Arab identity.

Like culinary metaphors, the metaphor of the “drowned Arab” is also versatile because it features a vast and dynamic source domain that encompasses the entire story of Abdelrahman Salahadin. Every character, theme, prop, food, poem, sentiment, and catchphrase in the story is
part of the conceptual system resourced to understand Arab identity. In other words, Sirine signals her agentive participation in the reconstruction of her Arab identity by alluding to key elements from the story. Of the numerous allusions materializing into Sirine’s consciousness, the figure of the “drowned Arab” dominates her affections and mingles with food metaphors. The conflation of these metaphors demonstrates the synergistic power of linked metaphors to convey an experience. Although the phrase appears a limited number of times, the figure of the “drowned Arab” is generally referenced through water imagery in critical scenes (309).

The literal meaning of “drowned Arab” comes from Sirine’s uncle’s cousin, Abdelrahman Salahadin who “had an incurable addiction to selling himself and faking his drowning” (17). According to Sirine’s uncle, Abdelrahman would sell himself into slavery, wait for his payment, and then “pretend to drown while escaping” (39). He may worry that one day he could surely drown, but he is an adroit swimmer that even sea-creatures admire. One day a mermaid decides that his place should forever be the sea. After Abdelrahman did not return, Camille, Abdelrahman’s mother, decides to sell herself as a slave to Richard Burton—the explorer (not the movie actor) because she wanted him to take her to the source of the Nile River. At the Nile River she hopes to ask the Mother of All Fish the whereabouts of her favorite son and discover whether he had truly become a “drowned Arab.” Camille finds out that not only did her son survive but that he was abducted by mermaids who eventually expelled him so that he could search for Hollywood. Camille’s search and rescue of Abdelrahman spans years but results in a double transformation of both characters that eventually reunite in their homeland. The development of this story aligns with Sirine’s life and provides her a mythological history to draw conceptualizations from.
Han is the link between culinary metaphors and the image of the “drowned Arab” and the evidence is in the way Abu-Jaber conflates the imagery of water around both Han and Abdelrahman throughout the novel. Although Sirine has heard the story of Abdelrahman several times, her interests in the story did not spark until meeting Han because he embodies Sirine’s imagination of Abdelrahman. Sirine has always had confidence in cooking because it is very real to her. Cooking engages all her senses. She has never had a reason to doubt what she experiences when she cooks, so when a man like Han enters her life, the stories of Abdelrahman become believable. Toward the end of the novel when Sirine learns that Han was still alive, the narrator explains that Sirine had confused her memories of Han and Abdelrahman:

Sometimes, in the months after Han left, when she was falling asleep she got confused and couldn’t quite remember if it was Han or Abdelrahman who loved her, if it was Han or Abdelrahman who dove into the black page of the open sea. Was it Abdelrahman who had to leave her, to return to his old home, or Han who was compelled to drown himself, over and over again.

In the construction of Arab identity, Abu-Jaber seems to suggest that stories as fantastical as Abdelrahman’s should not be disregarded entirely, because there is still some truth to be discerned from them. Through the character of Han, Abu-Jaber has provided Sirine a way to mediate between what is real and what is imagined. Throughout the novel, the conflict of discerning the real from the imagined is presented mostly clearly through Sirine’s uncle.

Sirine’s reconstruction of her Arab identity involves negotiating between what is real and what is imagined. Abu-Jaber represents Sirine’s commitment to discovering the “Real true Arab” through food, but another way to discover the “Real true Arab” is Uncle’s stories. When Uncle tells another story about Abdelrahman at a pool party, one of the listeners interrupts and
questions whether Uncle’s story is true. Another listener explains, “That’s the gorgeousness of it! It’s like acting in commercials—you just have to give yourself to it, let yourself be it, and it all comes true” (51). The listener’s explanation is extraordinarily opaque, but it does begin to make sense if you consider how Sirine conflates her memories of Han with her imagination of Abdelrahman. When she accepts Abdelrahman as a positive representation of an Arab man, and accepts Han as a representation of what a Modern Arab man would be like, she reconstructs Arab identity. More specifically, she has reconstructed some semblance of what she imagines her father to be. In doing so, she has successfully recovered her Arab identity.

The story of Abdelrahman is at once mythological and yet historical because it functions as a tool of demythologization. The characters are real but the details surrounding the events are very likely clever embellishments. Abu-Jaber problematizes configurations of truth by blurring the distinctions between reality and fantasy through the frame story. She seems to suggest that people like Sirine, located at the in-between spaces of cultures, reconstruct their Arab identity no better than a well told story with some permissible exaggerations. In regards to the search for the lost Arab, Sirine’s uncle offers this advice, “‘Look at it this way: there is truth inside everything living and dying and more, you just can’t always recognize it at first’ ” (308). The only proof Sirine’s uncle offers: “there is a drop of the drowned Arab in all of us. I know I personally have a great deal of one in me” (309). Regardless if Abdelrahman Salahadin survived and changed his name to Omar Shariff, the uncle is satisfied knowing that he can emotionally, genetically or historically relate to the “drowned Arab” (366). According to Nouri Gana, “the figure of the ‘drowned Arab’ condenses the ways that Arab diasporic and immigrant subjectivities…have passed out of existence” due to the interruption of “authoritative discourses” (240). The year 1492 may mark the departure of the Old World to the newly discovered world beyond the

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Atlantic Ocean, but it also marks the rupture of the Moorish Andalusian occupation of the Iberian Peninsula (Gana 22). Moors were largely written out of American history until the Persian Gulf War and to today’s post-9/11 world. In the same way the uncle obfuscates reality and fantasy in his story, the media and particularly Hollywood obfuscates the “Arab’s sense of who he or she is in the present” (Gana 240). Since the media and Hollywood cannot be trusted to inform the imagination, those seeking to reconstruct Arabness should turn their attentions to al-Andalus.

Through various characters, Abu-Jaber captures the shared feeling of pride and regret among Arabs toward the memory of al-Andalus. In Salma Khadra Jayyusi’s foreword to The Legacy of Muslim Spain, Jayyusi explains:

…the Arabs and the Muslims have all silently and without conferring selected al-Andalus as an ever abiding memory in their hearts. Most of the them will never see it, but all think of it as a living monument and an abiding witness to a great civilization…(XVII).

Al-Andalus may be the fountainhead for inspiring contemporary poets and writers such as Abu-Jaber, but it would be a challenge for just anyone to seek al-Andalus directly through manuscripts. According to María Rosa Menocal, al-Andalus is not only difficult to map geographically but canonically. The terrific tolerance of al-Andalus enabled a flourishing flux of cultures and languages including Arabic/Muslim, Hebrew/Jewish and Latin/Christian colors (Menocal 484). The famed accomplishment of freedom and tolerance that distinguishes al-Andalus ironically hinders the transmission of it. Translation of the texts from Medieval Spain requires knowledge of all three cultures and languages. Even if such a brilliant translator

24 Abu-Jaber had been working on Crescent well before 9/11 and the book was pre-scheduled to release post-9/11. Although she was hesitant to release the novel, believing it too soon for America to accept a book about Iraqi culture, her publishers insisted that it was the perfect time.
participated in the revival of Andalusian texts, Menocal believes that the translations will receive limited recognition because translations of “original” texts are considered secondary. Abu-Jaber responds to Menocal’s concern through Sirine by showing that translations still continue the important work of transmitting knowledge. Sirine would like to learn Arabic but until she does, she should continue to follow her curiosities about Arab culture. Given the history of the Moors and Sirine’s hometown in Los Angeles, Sirine’s hopes of reconstructing an authentic Arab identity rests upon her ability to settle for general truths instead of formulaic recipes.

Sirine’s interpretation of the “drowned Arab” differs from her uncle’s because of the early traumatic loss of her parents. She invests in the existence of Abdelrahman because to her he symbolizes the hope that the lost Arab can be found. Like Aunt Camille searching for her son, Sirine searches for the Arab “drowned” in her American appearance,

All she can see is white. She is so white. Her eyes wide, almond-shaped, and sea-green…Entirely her mother…She thinks that she may have somehow inherited her mother on the outside and her father on the inside. If she could compare her own and her father’s internal organs—the blood and bones and the shape of her mind and emotions—she thinks she would find her truer and deeper nature.

(231)

Abu-Jaber emphasizes Sirine’s struggle to physically represent both her American and Arab parents simultaneously. She feels that she has already disappointed her parents’ expectations because her biological attributes perfectly reflect her mother instead of both parents. Abu-Jaber seems to suggest the search for the Arab in Sirine begins at the body and when it is not found in the color of the skin, the shape of her eyes and nose, it has likely drowned inside the body. Unable to examine her father, she looks to Han—a symbolic substitute for the Arab she cannot
find in herself. That is why she also searches for the true Han. In part one of the novel, Sirine searches for clues about him that would help her decide whether it was “safe” to continue her relationship with him. In other words, she needs to know that she can trust him to remain by her side to continue educating her about Arab culture and function as the visible representation of the Arab her body denies her. The true Arab, the lost Arab, and the drowned Arab are all metaphoric formulations for her invisible identity; to recover even one of the three means recovering an Arab identity apart from her identity as a Chef of Arab cuisine.

The sharing of ethnic cuisine certainly opens opportunities to foster multiculturalism that celebrates difference. *Crescent* may seem like a novel promoting “cuisine multiculturist” but Abu-Jaber shows that even a person who conceptualizes the world through food will eventually discover that food is just one of many entry points into a culture. Abu-Jaber presents a story of cultural revival with Sirine at the center. Through Sirine, Abu-Jaber shows that culinary source domains effectively highlight the link between food, memory, and belonging, but at the same time it limits connection to Arab culture. If Sirine had never met Han, it is very likely that she would have continued to believe that cooking Arab food was enough to reconstruct an Arab identity. The combined experience of growing up listening to stories of Abdelrahman and allowing Han to immerse her with Arab music, poetry, and his dear memories resets her hybridity to a contentious state of negotiation. She may not look like an Arab but she will continue to reconstruct an Arab identity in more ways than just food.
Conclusion: The Escape and Embrace of Culture

Imagination has a significant role in the identification process, and the groundwork of imagination comes from metaphorical thinking. Concepts such as identity and hybridity are not as concrete as a pencil or a pen. In other words, Jasmine and Sirine cannot stretch out their fingers and touch their identity, nor can they organize it neatly into labeled boxes. I define these concepts as abstract specifically because they are not tangible physical objects. These hybrid characters imagine ways to interact with the realm of abstract concepts in order to “grasp” it and therefore understand it. Bhabha imagines hybridity in terms of space, and both Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber build on Bhabha’s spatial conception by incorporating orientation concepts that deal with time (past-future). Through these characters, Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber present different metaphorical models to observe cultural hybridity.

The main hybrid characters I analyze in this thesis each have a different attitude toward their originary culture(s). While Jasmine models the desire to escape from her originary culture, Sirine models the desire to embrace the originary culture that is less obvious in her physical appearance. For Mukherjee, the traditional past is a prison of stasis that resists change. This prison is worse than any known maximum security facility on earth because the iron bars that keep Jasmine prisoner are mentally inscribed in the values and beliefs that define her original identity (Jyoti). By conceptualizing identities as past lives, Jasmine murders Jyoti and any identity that does not aid her escape. Ironically, Jasmine draws the metaphor of reincarnation from her Hindu traditions to conceptualize her escape plan. Concurrently, she also augments the metaphor of reincarnation with metaphors of mechanic technology, and thus, shows that in the case of hybridity, a clean “prison break” from the past is impossible. The way forward will essentially require tools from the past. Imagine if you will, Jasmine as a prisoner wearing the
archaic iron ball and chain of British prisoners during the 17th century. Like that ball and chain fettered to her ankle, traditions can either be burdensome weight or tools for escape; with enough cunning and strength she can one day wield the ball and chain to her advantage and destroy what needs destroying. Mukherjee’s technique of juxtaposing oppositional metaphors underscores the contentious nature of hybridity to perpetuate identification processes. Although it was not my intention to do so, my own analogy of prisons inadvertently portrays Jasmine a criminal. No metaphor can translate another concept completely, but therein lays the beauty and the blessing of metaphors. Creating one metaphor necessitates the creation of additional metaphors.

In Abu-Jaber’s Crescent, Sirine’s hybridity is characterized by a desire to embrace the past. Sirine is biologically half Arab and half American, but Abu-Jaber surrounds Sirine with characters who read her physical attributes as American. Sirine’s mixed-race identity raises questions about how, if at all, a biological hybrid may define identity and to what extent physical attributes influence identification processes. For Sirine, the tragic loss of both her parents motivates her to maintain memories of them, and she feels particularly obliged to remember her Arab father because she believes that what she inherited from her father was something more important than skin color and eye color—her “truer and deeper nature” (Abu-Jaber 231). Through Sirine’s attempts to recover her Arab heritage, Abu-Jaber depicts a model of hybridity that is confounded by the search for truth amidst stories, myths, and lies. Sirine’s mastery of Arab cuisine gives her confidence in her Arab identity until she meets Han because he embodies her imagined image of the modern Arab man. Sirine clings to cuisine and the culinary to understand the world because it is easier to trust what she can see, touch, hear, smell, and taste, but stories and memories are difficult to trust. Abu-Jaber seems to suggest that although the revival of al-Andalus’ legacy is a wonderful project; it will not be easy because there are many
stories, myths and lies to deconstruct. Abu-Jaber relies on cuisine and culinary images to represent truth, while the entertaining stories of Abdelrahman Salahadin represent imagined images of Arabs that are not necessarily lies but are less likely to be true. Nonetheless, Abu-Jaber affirms the value of both cuisine and storytelling in the construction of Sirine’s identity.

More than just ornaments for prose, metaphors provide Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber a way to show the power of retrospection and narrativity. Jasmine ultimately asserts her authority over her identities through her ability to tell her story as she would like it told. The metaphors of reincarnation and mechanic technology allow her to organize her thoughts and make decisions. For Jasmine, survival depended on her ability to read situations and move forward. Although a narrator tells Sirine’s story in Abu-Jaber’s *Crescent*, the novel also emphasizes the need for the reader to own his or her history. Retrospection is a powerful way to construct both one’s identity and the identity of a whole culture. Through Sirine, Abu-Jaber shows that the identification process requires a healthy way to renew memories and an ability to listen to stories about the past. The power to discern the differences between what others insist and reject about Arab identity ultimately grants Sirine the ability to reconstruct what she believes is the “Real true Arab.”

My analysis of the metaphors involved in Mukherjee’s and Abu-Jaber’s representation of hybridity was inspired by Bhabha’s definition of hybridity. To be more precise, all I could find were metaphors that seemed to explain Bhabha’s conception of hybridity. Instead of feeling deterred, I was curious to learn why nearly every scholar who discusses hybridity relies on metaphors. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson answered my curiosity with their theory of conceptual metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson analyzed complex metaphors in poetry and literature to discover that these type of texts present “new ways of organizing and understanding
experience” (251). They realized that metaphors developed by poets and writers are actually combinations of simpler conceptual metaphors. I applied this same idea toward *Jasmine* and *Crescent* and now understand that Bhabha’s theory of hybridity is also comprised of simpler conceptual metaphors. Like the contentious nature of Bhabha’s definition of hybridity, the pairs of metaphors Mukherjee and Abu-Jaber utilize appear as binaries within the novels. I am content to analyze the ways in which these metaphors paradoxically clash and yet spur identification processes. To maintain focus on the literary application of metaphors to represent hybridity, I chose to limit my scope of Cognitive Linguistics to Lakoff and Johnson’s conceptual metaphor theory. The general study of the brain and how the mind actually participates in the creation and understanding of conceptual metaphors would not only require thorough understanding of brain anatomy, but also an empirical study involving reader-response type analysis. In future projects, I believe it would be worthwhile to analyze various representations of hybridity and the receptivity of the metaphors on readers.
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