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Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-betweenness in American Culture and Literature

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THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION IN THE CREATION OF TRANSNATIONAL SUBJECTIVITIES IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *LEAVE IT TO ME*

Introduction

In his seminal book *Modernity at Large*, published in 1996, Arjun Appadurai famously stated that "globalization is ... marked by a new role for imagination in social life" (13). Offering his perspective on the phenomenon of globalization, the theorist underscores the role of imagination in the formation of global communities and transnational identities, as well as the issue of agency, which is closely connected to it. Interestingly, Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Leave It To Me* (1997), published only a year after Appadurai's book, seems to be built around the same concept that organizes Appadurai's theory, namely, the power of imagination in the formation of new subjectivities. In this article I intend to discuss the role of imagination in Mukherjee's novel, how it is stirred by global flows and how, in return, it has a powerful impact on shaping the flows, particularly ethnoscapes. It is my concern to indicate how the novelist portrays the creation of "imagined communities" and cultures of violence. Following Appadurai's argument about imagination's connection to agency, the active role of the protagonist in her discovery as well as formation of identity will be explored. As the novel participates in the process of rethinking of national identity, national belonging and the questions of home, the purpose of this article is to show how Mukherjee renders the complexity of identities in the times of global deterritorialization and transnational connectivities, and to reflect on the power of ethnoscapes, which open up space for new imaginaries of belonging.

Globalization and the role of imagination

Similarly to other theorists of globalization (see Bauman, Beck), Appadurai portrays globalization as characterized by liquidity and instability, and makes flows his metaphor for chaos, randomness, and lack of systematic structure. He identifies five global cultural flows: ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape, mediascape, and ideoscape (33-36). Their

names created with the suffix "scape" allow us to understand the fluid, irregular shapes that characterize international capital and indicate that they are not visibly the same from each angle but are influenced by historical, linguistic, and political situations. By "ethnoscapes" Appadurai refers to all those people in constant motion such as migrants, refugees, guest workers or tourists who "affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree" (33). It is difficult for these people to generate permanent "imaginaries" even if they wanted to as they constantly move around. Their mobility results in the production of diverse identities, which are unstable and fluid. While "financescape" is the rise of global capital and exchanges, "technoscape" refers to the development and spread of technology through different national boundaries. "Mediascape" refers to the rise in media production and distribution e.g. newspapers, television, radio, film and social media. These forms of media provide the "narrative" to which different communities live their lives and form "imagined worlds" as reality and fiction become indistinct from one another. By "ideoscape" Appadurai refers to the ideologies of states, which often repeat concepts such as democracy, freedom and rights.

These flows produce a world full of diverse identities, and diversified culture. The traditional distinction between the center and periphery is questioned. Appadurai's reflection is in line with James Clifford's earlier attempt to adequately describe the globalizing world, which mixes and mingles various cultural elements, but does not necessarily stride in the direction of a unified cultural vision. In his *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) Clifford writes:

> This century has seen a drastic expansion of mobility, including tourism, migrant labor, immigration, urban sprawl. More and more people "dwell" with the help of mass transit, automobiles, airplanes. In cities on six continents foreign populations have come to stay-mixing in but often in partial, specific fashions. The "exotic" is uncannily close. Conversely, there seem no distant places left on the planet where the presence of "modern" products, media, and power cannot be felt. An older topography and experience of travel is exploded. One no longer leaves home confident of finding something radically new, another time or space. Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighborhood, the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth. (Clifford 13-4)

What transpires from this fragment is a basic feature of globalization: shrinking of the world, decreased importance of spatial and temporal distances, which results in "the 'exotic' uncannily close" and the perception that "'Cultural' difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness" (Clifford 14). The world is in flux, or, as Appadurai would phrase it, in a flow, bringing into proximity cultural elements of disparate stable structures, which may often result in "unintended effects", that is, hybridizing cultures and producing cultural impurities.

What Appadurai brings into the discussion of the globalizing tendencies and the formation of transnational identities is the role of imagination. As he explains in the

introduction to *Modernity at Large*, it is mainly the impact of the media and human mobility that have the potential of affecting the imagination, and therefore shaping modern subjectivity on a large scale: "Implicit in this book is a theory of rupture that takes media and migration as its two major, and interconnected, diacritics and explores their joint effect on the *work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity" (3). It is indisputable that media are important sources of images, conveying new visions or narratives, and thus creating desires, as well as pointing to the ways of their realization. Moreover, as Appadurai indicates, also people on the move can become propellers of imagination: "few persons in the world today do not have a friend, relative, or coworker who is not on the road to somewhere else or already coming back home, bearing stories and possibilities" (4). The novelty of Appadurai's concept regarding the imagination is that it is no longer the domain of "specially endowed (charismatic) individuals" (5), a matter of creative genius within the aesthetic realm, but it is an element of everyday life, available to ordinary people, and therefore democratic in its nature. What transpires from Appadurai's words is the fact that more people in more parts of the world can think of a greater range of possibilities for their lives due to the increased circulation of images and narratives across the national borders in the global exchange of cultural capital.

The modern social imagination, which can be defined as an organized field of social practices through which individuals and communities picture and work toward new possibilities for how they want to live, may be disruptive for institutions which were previously regarded as the hallmarks of modernity, e.g. the nation-state. Since many people live in diasporas, they are deterritorialized and spread out around the world, they also constantly imagine their homeland, consider themselves a part of it and therefore create what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities", for, as the author of *Modernity at Large* explains, "globalization has … obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments" (Appadurai 9-10). That remains not without an influence on culture, which, as Clifford observed (13-4), is diversified by the new cultural elements introduced in the relatively stable cultural structure. Furthermore, Appadurai argues that culture is no longer equivalent to what Pierre Bourdieu would regard as "habitus", that is, "a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions" (44) but rather "an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation" (44). So what is emphasized is the agency of the subject – active participation in creating culture, the work one has to do in order to maintain one's connections, and, as a result, voluntariness and consciousness of shaping one's identity. The transnational communication, migrations and therefore deterritorialization of subjects may weaken the nation-state, destabilize this structure, which loses control over the lives of their citizens, who form other attachments and thus belong to other structures.

Accordingly, it can be observed that Appadurai puts considerable emphasis on the issue of agency in connection to imagination. Not only does he underscore the active role of the subject in maintaining or refashioning of one's identity but also he indicates the possibility of action as available to ordinary people whose life is some kind of predicament: "even the meanest and most hopeless of lives, the most brutal and dehumanizing of circumstances, the harshest of lived inequalities are now open to the play of the imagination" (Appadurai 54). In other words, even though the results of globalization may be negative and people suffer, they may imagine new lives for themselves, they can still make decisions and act in their particular circumstances, for "The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (Appadurai 31).

Imagination as a social practice in *Leave It to Me*

Leave it to Me is one of the most "transnational" novels in Bharati Mukherjee's oeuvre. In a way it continues the agenda of her earlier novel, *The Holder of the World* (1993), which aims to undermine the belief that new immigrants are a disintegrating element for the US nation. *The Holder of the World* achieves its goal through the portrayal of the cultural complexity of the US pre-national beginnings and the depiction of global liaisons in which the colonial world participated, the mutual net of dependencies of national economies, which were based on international exchanges of people (settlers, slaves, laborers), goods (sugar, cotton, gold), currency, and ideas. With its emphasis on a profoundly multicultural arena of the colonial period, which managed to create a unified and efficient system of co-operation, and led to the emergence of a nation, *The Holder of the World* can be interpreted as an attempt to dispel the US fears of a new, post-1965, wave of immigration (Filipczak, "Reclaiming the Multicultural Past" 4), which is perceived as extremely diverse. *Leave It To Me* portrays the globalizing moment in a full swing and therefore it tries to picture "a number of effects of transnationalism on people and their fates" (Nyman, "Imagining Transnationalism" 403), as well as a redefinition of the notions of belonging and home. This article intends to offer a fuller picture of Mukherjee's envisioning of globalization through the discussion of the role of the imagination and agency in the formation of contemporary subjectivities. This is linked to the theme of conscious decision and voluntariness in choosing one's identity and, consequently, national belonging, which can be identified in her other literary works as well, e.g. *Desirable Daughters* (Filipczak, "I changed because I wanted to" 46-9). Following Appadurai's statement that "our own ethnographies of literature can become exercises in the interpretation of the new role of the imagination in social life" (61), Mukherjee's novel can be considered one such exercise as well.

In the fictional world of the novel, global flows are a constitutive feature of the world and human lives at the turn of the century. Mukherjee constructs her protagonist as a "product" and object of transnational connections, who sets off on the search to discover her identity inspired by other people, and imagines a possibility of a different life. As Jopi Nyman notices, the protagonist is "embedded in the globalization of culture since (and before) her birth" ("Imagining Transnationalism" 403; *Home, Identity, and Mobility* 215). Indeed, since the protagonist, Debby DiMartino, is a child adopted from an Indian orphanage into an Italian-American family, she is an object of international adoption trade, and, as it turns out later, also her biological parents represent transnational networks peculiar to the 1960s and early 70s, since her mother is an American hippie travelling to India and the father is identified as an Asian National. The novel renders how the protagonist's initial lack of knowledge of her roots results in her cultural indeterminacy and confusion, and sets her off on the search to find out who her biological parents are.

Appadurai underlines the role of mediascapes and migrations in the formation of imagination which induces a subject to action. In the construction of her protagonist, Mukherjee initially emphasizes human encounters, they stir Debby's imagination to the point that she no longer wishes to follow the known scripts and predictable outcomes. She aims to uncover her past as well as imagine a possible future for herself. Thus, the first important moment which leads to a conscious shaping of her life is after the social worker, Wyatt, discovers Debby's adoption papers, reads her files and inspires her to crave for more, "I'm saying you've got a chance, don't blow it. You might never have made it out of that orphanage" (13). He fills her imagination with the possible pictures for the future, just like the media would: "You know, Debby, I can tell you're going to be tall and beautiful very soon, and someday you're going to be rich and powerful" (14). At this point she no longer desires easy identification with her foster parents, the DiMartinos, but senses a certain complexity of her roots which awakens her expectations. Already in junior high school, Debby feels that "whole peoples … brawled inside [her]" (15), she had the "monstrous cravings of other Debbys hiding inside" (18), she finally desires that her "other life, [her] *real* life, would find [her]" (18). She is certain she does not want to follow into her sister Angie's footsteps, which would mean imitating her "modest transformation" (18) and going on a predictable route to Manhattan. Another formative person is her first lover, Frankie Fong, who creates in Debby a desire to learn the truth of her origins through the descriptions of his childhood: "Frankie needed to remember, and I needed to discover. He talked. But I wanted more; I wanted details, wanted to know the smell of fishing boats on Thai canals and the sound of monsoon rains on tin roofs" (26). With no memories to hang on to, she feels "robbed of" her Asian childhood (26), yet due to his stories of Frankie's past travels and business she starts

to feel a connection. She wants to learn more about her biological parents, of whom she only knows that mother was a hippie named Clear Water Iris-Daughter, while the father is referred to as an Asian National in the adoption papers. Cherishing a desire to embark on a new life trajectory, she envisions her foster parents as "the aliens" (27) and declares her openness to novelty: "I can imagine myself into any life" (28).

The novel takes up Appadurai's concept about democratization of imagination. According to the author of *Modernity at Large*, imagination should be perceived as an element of everyday life, by no means available only to special or chosen individuals (5). Following this premise, Mukherjee asks a question about whether it is still possible to be considered special in these global times, when both mobility and opportunity (sometimes necessity) to change one's life becomes the experience of large masses of people. When Fred Pointer, the detective hired by Devi, says she is special because "Two continents went into [her] making" (105), Devi's neighbor, Linda, is unwilling to agree with the statement. For her a reason for being special is the very fact of existing, but not the fact of human mobility or intricacies of human life paths: "I'm not saying you aren't special, Devi. … But so's everyone. Take anyone in our building, take anyone in the universe" (117). In the time of global flows, the mere fact of dislocation, crossing the borders, is not sufficient for an extraordinary existence. Ultimately, Debby agrees with Linda: "I accepted Linda's chastisement. Every life is special. Some wondrous events transpire without making headlines" and muses on Linda's life trajectory, which, in the globalizing world, where great numbers of people are on the move for various reasons, and distance is no longer problematic, appears to be one of numerous similar scenarios: "born in a displaced-persons camp in Germany, spoke her first word (*cuidado!*) in Argentina, married a Japanese doctor in Brazil and divorced him in Chile, then found fulfillment as a psychic in the Haight" (117-8). Although Linda's life story is certainly a lot for a single person, it only imitates multiple lives in the transnational times. On the other hand, a question could be raised whether Mukherjee, just like Appadurai, does not overestimate the role of an individual in imagining and thus creating new lives; in fact, despite the media impact and great opportunities for travel, still many people stay put in one place (although not unified ethnically), never leave their region, and remain attached to their surroundings (Pancewicz-Puchalska 98).

Also other characters in the novel demonstrate the power of imagination, that is, how it induces them to action and refashioning of identity. One notable example is the protagonist's Bio-Dad, Romeo Hawk. He is a grandson of a Pakistani who settled down in Indochina. When he tells Debby the story how the family changed their surname, he points to the motives connected with global flows:

> Our surname – your name – was spelled H-a-q-u-e by then. H-a-q to H-a-q-u-e was strictly an economic decision. A penniless man makes his way out of Peshawar or someplace equally

> filthy, and peddles cigarettes, chewing gum, dirty cards in *Indochine* cities. Ib Haq was an okay moniker for that man. His son upgrades Haq to Haque, buys himself a Eurasian whore for a wife, and makes what living he can driving pedicabs on the crowded streets of Saigon. Haque's son, yours truly, Americanizes his name to H-a-w-k, and procures for GIs to-die-for dreams. … We're talking imagination on the grand scale, Miss Dee. (Mukherjee, *Leave* 219)

The change of names results not only from the movement from one place to another but also a desire to live in a different manner. The first change, from Haq – to Haque, is explained as an economic decision, but, in fact, it is rooted in the experience of migration, blending in with the French culture of Indochina. The second change is explained as a kind of Americanization. This decision can be attributed to what Appadurai calls the mediascapes. The impact of the media and their global circulation of images inspire the "Euroasian man", as he is referred to in various parts of the book, to Westernize his surname, as well as his way of life, as he "procures for GIs to-die-for dreams".

Accordingly, the figure of Romeo Hawk showcases the powerful influence of the mediascapes on imagination and in particular its potential of creating cultures of violence. In his discussion of the media impact Appadurai ponders on the effects of circulation of martial arts tradition. He argues that the movie industry contributes to the creation of "new cultures of masculinity and violence" which may lead to the lead to the upsurge of violence even on the international level:

> The transnational movement of the martial arts, particularly through Asia, as mediated by the Hollywood and Hong Kong film industries (Zarilli 1995) is a rich illustration of the ways in which long-standing martial arts traditions, reformulated to meet the fantasies of contemporary (sometimes lumpen) youth populations, create new cultures of masculinity and violence, which are in turn the fuel for increased violence in national and international politics. (Appadurai 40-1)

The motif of martial arts, as well as real and imaginary (movie) violence, is conspicuous in Mukherjee's novel. It extends beyond the national borders and links many characters together, in this way showing its transnational character. The novel demonstrates how the knowledge of pop-culture, which is a major repository of visual elements, ideas, practices circulated by the media, can become a basis for communication, and can therefore connect people in certain "imagined communities". The media presence and their influence is signaled already at the beginning of the novel in the figure of Francis "Flash" Fong, a "star/director/producer of dozens of Hong-Kong kick boxing extravaganzas" (24). Debby's knowledge of Fong's movies wins her a job at Hamilton Cohan's agency, and she is amazed at the discovery of "the Flash connection" (84) between herself and her boss, which perhaps later helps them even to begin an intimate relationship. Debby's biological father, a serial killer, is clearly an example of participation in a culture of violence, while Debby's narration reveals how her consciousness is influenced by

the image of a movie hero Flash, when she compares one of her father's embodiments to him: "Ma Varuna glided off the hotel sofa with the Flash's kick-boxing speed and strength" (208). As she later discovers her father's identity and the fact of him being a serial killer, she describes his hands as "Karate-hardened hands. Flash hands. Killer hands" (214). Finally, it is Nyman's observation that when at the end of the narrative Debby commits parricide, she performs as a kick-boxing actor and as a supernatural goddess. The influence of globally circulated movie images which shape the imagination and propel characters to action is clearly evident in the novel. What Appadurai believes to be the national and international increase of violence due to mediascapes, in Mukherjee's novel is fictionalized in the figure of Romeo Hawk, a deterritorialized serial killer with an Americanized name and numerous fake identities and passports, who operates in various locations around the globe.

The value of agency

Mukherjee constructs her protagonist as a transnational subject, who maintains her identity as fluid and is convinced that this positionality is most accurate in the present global moment. Debby's indeterminacy connects her to numerous deterritorialized subjects populating the novel, while stressing the opportunity of choosing her cultural positioning point to the redefinition of the notion of home and accentuate the agency of the female subject. The protagonist's active role in shaping her life is exposed: it stems from her awoken imagination as well as becomes a necessity for her. The experience of the "old immigration" is considered obsolete: it no longer corresponds with the experience of "new", current migrants, who are often deterritorialized subjects belonging to "imagined communities" and not seeking rootedness in a place.

Accordingly, the novel shows a rupture between a belief in fate and imagination. While the former results in the protagonist's inertia, the latter is an awoken desire to find out the truth of her origins and transform her life, which makes her abandon her family home and search for the answers. The shift from the irrational to the rational is emphasized, complacency with one's destiny is replaced with decision-making and taking action. Thus, when the first man to put Debby on the search for her biological parents, Wyatt, wonders why she never before showed any interest in her origins, Debby answers, explaining her passivity: "I always figured it was fate" (12). In the course of time, it is mainly Debby's imagination at work that influences her behavior, which means her increased awareness of possibilities available to her, and voluntariness in using them. In her search to find out more about her true identity and also to recreate herself, Debby turns into an active subject: "From the families I'd been given, I'd scavenge the traits I needed and dump the rest. If a person is given *lives* to live instead

of just one life (Mama's favorite soap), especially lives she hasn't even touched, she'll be far better off for it" (14). She goes on a journey to discover her origins, that is, the identity of her biological parents and the circumstances of her adoption.

With the emphasis laid on the question of agency Mukherjee does not claim simply that travelling or journeys are an important factor in changing one's personality. Various scholars stress the transforming power of a journey and relocations (Sarup 98, McDowell 210), yet, it seems that for Mukherjee's characters, transformation of identity is primarily a matter of conscious choice and desire to change, which is often verbalized by protagonists or demonstrated in the construction of characters, who may embody entirely different ideas of belonging, despite their relocation, as is the case of *Desirable Daughters*. In *Leave It to Me* the protagonist's willingness to change stems from the awoken imagination that she does not need to imitate the traditional route (as her half-sister Angie did, going to Manhattan) but can picture herself in any way she desires. Ultimately, it also turns out that she does not search for a stable home, or putting down roots, although upon her arrival to San Francisco, she claims the Haight to be "My space, my turf, my *homeland*" (68; emphasis original). Nevertheless, what attracts her to this place is its syncretism and indeterminacy, the features with which she identifies, and which therefore present her more as a transnational subject, participant of global flows, than a US citizen.

In fact, Mukherjee draws a distinction between "old" and "new" immigrants in the US and shows the currency of the often deterritorialized lives, which remain in the net of dependencies and connections instead of displaying a loyalty to just one state. Debby's foster parents, the DiMartinos, are immigrants of the old type, who integrated into American society and built their new home in the US. Their story and cultural positioning are pretty straightforward and one-directional, because they belong to the type of immigrants who "knew who they were. They knew what they inherited" (53). Debby relates to the latter type of immigrants, transnationals, who have the experience of multiple locales and cultures, and maintain connections with various parts of the globe. The problem that appears at the beginning of the narrative, of an adopted orphan's lack of knowledge who she is and where she comes from, may be read, in fact, as a literal statement of the problems with belonging that becomes an experience of migrants for whom deterritorialization is the primary experience. However, not every character in the novel perceived this state as a predicament. For Frankie Fong, it is a natural environment, he is part of media-, finance- and ethnoscapes: this former kick-boxing movie star seeks investments independent of national boundaries. As he is in no need of permanent attachment or "home", Debby states: "Frankie wasn't an immigrant the way that Paolo DiMartino had been. No steerage, no crippling gratitude"

(29). Both Frankie's movies, business and a recreation of his childhood are in flux, in constant global circulation.

The beginning of the narrative is already quite explicit about Debby's vision of identity. She does not wish to be associated with some stable point of reference. When her first lover, Frankie, calls her "exotic" and links her with Merle Oberon[1] (33), he guesses correctly that she has South Asian roots and that she might have been deterritorialized. However, when he tries to fit her in a roughly corresponding cultural frame, she forcefully rejects this vision, giving preference to the position of fluidity, and, perhaps more importantly, stressing the opportunity of choosing her cultural positioning:

> "It's your eyes. … It's the way you walk. Like women in Burma balancing jugs on their heads…" "Hey," I objected, "I don't do jugs!" I didn't give a damn about what women in Burma wore for hats. "I'm adopted." My voice sounded firmer, bolder, the second time. Not *I was adopted*, but *I am adopted*, meaning I want you to know that we've both invented ourselves, you couldn't have found another woman as much like you as I am if you'd taken out personals. (italics in the original, 33-4)

The protagonist represents herself as subject to the process of transformation, not in the past, but at present – continuously refashioning herself. This is what she chooses to do, and thus she takes status of an independent and fully active female.

In multicultural San Francisco characterized by fluidity and instability, the features which are even more explicitly rendered than the hybrid character of the place, the protagonist finds the space of belonging, she claims it as a home, nevertheless, it does not seem to result in her stability or putting down roots. The Haight is an irregular and constantly changing ethnoscape, which may be surprising with its composition, and completely unpredictable. In the rooming house in which Debby rents a room, other residents come from a variety of places: there is a retired Belgian chocolatier, Somali medical student, Serbian photographer, Vietnam vet. There is even a political refugee from Vanuatu, and Debby's astonishment that she has never heard of such a place (97), only reinforces the sense of the unpredictable routes of ethnic flows and their unprecedented scale: "Everything was flow, a spontaneous web without compartments. Somalia, Vanuatu, Vietnam, Belgium, India-Schenectady. Forty years ago it was a big one-family house, probably Italian" (98). In the ever-changing environment the best course of action is acceptance of fluidity, mingling, and indeterminacy, and Debby declares: "Go with the flow … keep your identity – your only asset – liquid" (218).

Consequently, Mukherjee's novel never brings up the issue of fear of others, or strangers, but shows an acceptance of great diversification of identities, taking for granted both the possibility of multiple selves and hybridization of identities. Thus, Debby DiMartino from Shenectady, NY can acquire a new name and identity as Devi

1 A British actress born in 1911 in Bombay (British India then) and died in 1979 in California, US.

Dee in San Francisco, CA, moreover, working for Frankie Fong as a telemarketer she "trie[s] out thirty personas" nightly, and the discovery of her biological parents indicates her "mongrelized" self. Other characters do not display stable identities either; for instance, Debby's Bio-Mom, that is, Jess DuPree's other identities and false passports are revealed (214-5), while her Bio-Dad – Romeo Hawk – is known as Ma Varuna, formerly Bette Ann Krutch of Delaware, so he plays with his gender identity as well. For Nyman Debby's fluidity, and it can be assumed that other characters' as well, functions as a critique of essentialist appeals to authentic ethnicity ("Imagining Transnationalism" 409), while "the treatment of nations and borders in Mukherjee's novel can be seen to criticize, if not to recast, our understanding of home ("Imagining Transnationalism" 412). Nevertheless, it is perhaps more accurate to state that in *Leave It to Me* Mukherjee attempts to present and help us understand a new type of immigrant in the US, whose presence points to the global connections of the US, and the global character of the presence of the US in the world. The novel can be thus a great resource for, to use Paul Lauter's words: "understanding America in the world and the world in America" (14).

Conclusions

Mukherjee's *Leave It to Me* participates in a global, or transnational culture, which has become a component of American cultural life. It is not the homogenization or Americanization of global culture that the novelist tries to record but a "contemporary globalizing of American culture (Lauter 9), a process noticed by not only global theorists but also literary critics, of which Lauter writes: "Whether one is talking about hip-hop or current fiction, what is being produced in the U.S. exists in a text-milieu, if not yet a society, less defined by national boundaries than by international flows of people, goods, dollars, and, of course, cultures" (9). For many writers in western languages, including English, national boundaries are much less meaningful. This is relevant also in the case of Mukherjee's novel, whose protagonist may never leave the US, but remains a "product" and object of global flows, and only in the second place is rendered as a US citizen, though culturally hybridized.

Mukherjee's vision of the role of imagination in the creation of modern transnational subjectivities corresponds with Appadurai's observations of both the power of human narrative or testimony transmitted in direct encounters as well as images and stories circulated by the media. The exposition of imagination is linked directly to the question of agency, engagement in the fulfillment of one's desires and consciousness of one's potency. In this way Mukherjee is consistent in conveying an image of a female protagonist who actively (trans)forms her life.

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Abstract: This article draws on Arjun Appadurai's theory of the power of imagination in modern life expressed in his book *Modernity at Large* (1996). In his attempt to capture the chaotic character of globalization, which he identifies as five different flows, or "scapes", Appadurai notices that the flows are mutually constitutive, while migrations and circulation of the media images, so ethnoscapes and mediascapes respectively, affect human imagination and, in the result, shape modern subjectivities. In the article I attempt to expose the role of imagination as represented in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Leave It To Me* (1997). I explore its impact on the formation of the transnational identities, creation of "imagined communities", and cultures of violence. I also notice its connection to agency, an element which requires considerable attention when analyzing the novel's themes, such as rethinking of national belonging and the questions of home. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to show how Mukherjee renders the complexity of identities in the times of global deterritorialization and transnational connectivities, and to reflect on the power of ethnoscapes, which open up space for new imaginaries of belonging. Mukherjee draws

a distinction between "old" and "new" immigrants in the US and shows the currency of the often deterritorialized lives, which remain in the net of dependencies and connections instead of displaying a loyalty to just one state. The novel never brings up the issue of fear of others, or strangers, but shows acceptance of great diversification of identities, taking for granted both the possibility of multiple selves and hybridization of identities. It can be therefore concluded that *Leave It to Me* tries to draw a picture of "contemporary globalizing of American culture" (Lauter).
Keywords: globalization, imagination, agency, transnational identities, imagined communities