

## Memory and Structure in Meatless Days

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Original site:

<http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/post/suleri/cook5.html>

Because memory rather than a timeline propels Suleri's narrative, her memoir demands its own sequence and disregards chronology. Settling instead for a spatial lag between event and occurrence, Suleri's alinear approach further complicates the discursive landscape of colonial-postcolonial nations. For example, upon hearing of her mother's death, Suleri denies the event its finality by reveling in her ability to savor her mother's life for an additional eight hours by virtue of the time difference between Pakistan and the United States.

Positing history as nothing more than personal stories of association, Suleri shares her childhood method of measuring time. "We do not have to subsist on the litany that begins, "After General Ayub came General Yahya; after the Bhutto years came General Zulu Haq" but you can also add; "Qayum begat Shorty and his wife; and they begat the Punjabi poet only called Khansama; he begat Ramzan and Karam" (34). Significantly, this juxtaposition refuses a fixed opposition of empowered-powerless, and instead this anecdote draws attention to the impossibility of leaders without servants and vice-versa.

In **The Rhetoric of English India** Suleri postulates that, "the simple correlation of gender with colonizer and colonized can lead only to interpretative intransigence of a different order, through which an attempt to recognize marginality leads to an opposite replication of the uncrossable distance between margin and center" (15). For example, depictions the feminized landscape of India ravished by a masculine will to colonize proffers neither specificity nor context, while relying on problematic forced binaries that reify otherness and invite further othering. Salman Rushdie suggests a possible nuanced gender dynamic amidst his otherwise masculinized narration, **Shame** that allegorizes Pakistani history:

I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities,

to see my plot refracted, so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and "female" side. It occurs to me that the women knew precisely what they were up to -- that their stories explain, and even subsume men's. (173)

Here, the ambiguously homogenous entity "the women" refused their complete excision from history and narrative and made its presence known. And as a result this transfer defies the common slippage that yokes nation and patriarchy in a singular shell. With this peculiar tension between nation and masculine authority in mind, turning to Suleri's characterization of Pip, her father, simultaneously calls upon and rejects this gendered coding of the colonial-postcolonial dynamic. Indeed, her narrative canvasses Pip's anecdotal hurly-burly tendencies with a rather reproachful tone at times.

Significantly, Suleri unabashedly aligns Pip with a masculine rhetoric of Pakistani nationalism. However, by inscribing her own tales of nationhood and the sorted politics of Pakistan, Suleri denies national narrative a complete patriarchal articulation. She points to her father's tyrannical dependence on history and women, as examples of his insistent Now that carries the family from Pakistan to England and back again in an attempt to catch up with Pakistani history. Furthermore, following the death of his wife and the departure of all his children, Pip's reliance on women surfaces when he adopts a daughter!

For Suleri, Pakistan and Pip seem to merge almost too easily as a selfsame entity. And before announcing her journey to the United States to her father Suleri, reasons, "But we were coming to a parting Pakistan and I." With good reason Suleri fears Pip's reactions to her planned departure, for she intimately knows his determinacy to hold on most tightly to those things that in his mind he was the sole proprietor. Thus, contrary to Surraya's refusal to grip and take hold, Pip's life consists of multiple demanding loyalties. Describing her feared encounter Suleri intimates, "For a while he looked at me as though I were not a nation any more, that I was a minority" (123). Here Pip cannot apprehend why his daughter would want to leave the comfort of history nor fatherhood for a less welcoming landscape. Paradoxically, his reproachful concern does not seem to extend to his wife's early sacrifice in leaving England. But Suleri herself seems confused by her parent's marriage. She muses over her mother, "Could she not see that his desire for her was quickened with empire's ghosts, that his need to possess was a clear index of how he was possessed?" (**MD**, 163). Therefore, the lingering haunts of empire evident in Pip's insistent allegiance to the nation of Pakistan, and his zealous need for authority and possession make the colonial-postcolonial divide difficult to ascertain.

Closing her narrative exploits Suleri recalls her friend David's query, "For whom are you writing?" To both David and the reader she replies, "But surely it was preferable to pick up an empty shell, a structure bleached with the promise that it was once home?" (173). Here Suleri suggests that this meatless form, like the body or an identity, can find consolation in its former inhabited space, like the brazen significance that characterizes Suleri's family and friends. Despite her adoration for Surraya's achieved meatlessness, Suleri admittedly has yet to make the radical separation of mind and body. Drawing attention to weather and the repeated difference of seasons, Suleri shares her appreciation for the intensity of summer. "I was elated -- at the single-mindedness of summer: something is coming to **strip us to the bone** , I thought, something to make our thoughts live in interior spaces" (171). Stripped to the bone like the bleached mollusk, the memory of her mother and the company of women, all of these significant things continue -- meatless.

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