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The Pastiche of Discrepant “Minoritarian” Voices in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*

The cosmopolitanism of our times does not spring from the capitalized “Virtues” of Rationality, Universality, and Progress; nor is it embodied in the myth of the nation writ large in the figure of the citizen of the world. Cosmopolitans today are often victims of modernity, failed by capitalism’s upward mobility, and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging. Refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community.

(Breckenridge et al. 6)

Cosmopolitanism may be described as the philosophy of one who is “free from local, provincial, or national ideas, prejudices, or attachments; at home all over the world” (*The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia*). The conceptual content of the word presumes universality, a free-moving entity without any deterrent ethnic or cultural moorings, happy in an unquestioning sense of belonging to the world, a citizen of a world “ethically synchronous and politically symmetrical” (Pollock et al. 582). The historical realities of the twentieth century, however, have marked our world as one of almost constant movement and migration, both forced and elective. It has become almost completely deterritorialized, where varied definitions of cosmopolitanism are now needed to accommodate “refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles [who] represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community” (Pollock et al. 582)¹⁴. Cosmopolitics is proposed as an alternate term to accommodate this historical juncture, characterized by immigration bans, deportations, and refugee crises. Cosmopolitics recognizes cultural reconfigurations based on the contact between different cultures, understands the shared “diaspora experience and its narratives of displacement” (Hall 223), and recognizes the transitoriness of the modern world. This is the need of the day. Pheng Cheah advises, “[W]e ought to turn our critical focus to the mutating global field of political, economic, and cultural forces in which nationalism and cosmopolitanism are invoked as practical discourses. *The cosmopolitical* is an apposite term for this global force field of the politics” (31). Papastergiadis adds that movement and migration naturally bring culturally diverse people into contact with each other, and that migrants engaged in a perpetual process of negotiating culture often become “translated beings” who bring their past experiences to bear on their present. Mainstream definitions of cosmopolitanism clearly ignore these facts, and therefore fail to respond to the reality that as the migrants’ “conceptual boundaries are expanded,”

¹⁴ See also Clifford, Ribeiro, Pollock, Werbner, and Delanty.

their “residual differences [need to be] respected” (Papastergiadis 131). As a possible antidote, Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests the idea of a “rooted cosmopolitanism,” one that speaks of a “common attachment to the constitutional institutions that allow people to center their lives on a variety of non-homogeneous cultures [and] yet enable them to participate in and actualize the political community that provides stability for this diversity” (García-Moreno and Pfeiffer xi). And though this seems an interesting remedial idea, it still remains a liberal revision of cosmopolitanism. Appiah’s idea is contested by Homi Bhabha. Bhabha’s scrutiny of “the underbelly of the new cosmopolitanism” reveals that it is comprised of dislocated masses from all over the world (García-Moreno and Pfeiffer xi). Bhabha calls this “minoritarian cosmopolitanism” or “vernacular cosmopolitanism,” one created by the struggles of everyday lived reality where the specificity of experience rewrites the all-embracing universal notion of cosmopolitanism. This chapter examines Kiran Desai’s Man Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, through the lens of Bhabha’s “minoritarian cosmopolitanism,” and builds on Bhabha’s concept by looking at the status of underprivileged migrants who are bound by the same (or nearly the same) history, space, and culture, that births a hybrid pastiche of discrepant narratives written by their individual personalities.¹⁵

The Inheritance of Loss ponders questions of identity through characters marked by a deep sense of deprivation and loss left behind by colonization. The novel chronicles the lives of an Anglophile Indian judge whose educational sojourn in Britain has permanently branded him as an alien both in his homeland and abroad; of his orphaned sixteen-year-old granddaughter, Sai, and her tutor/lover, Gyan; and of his unnamed cook who pushes his son, Biju, to go seek his fortune in the US. Their stories, and those of so many others in the novel, illustrate the various ways that inherited loss persists and percolates through generations. The cook and Biju—the father and son—suffer from a colonial hangover. It is fascinating to watch how this colonial residuum plays out in them both. And though the cook never leaves India, while Biju goes abroad to the United States, they are both caught in a permanent syndrome of experiencing the marginalizing effects of being a person of color in a white man’s world. However, this frame of mind plays out differently in the father and son duo. While the cook desperately craves the stamp of Westernization even in his employment, the son apparently spurns the West (as he never really connects to Western values) and blames his father for encouraging him to go to the United States, where he ends up being flagged as an illegal alien. As the novel proceeds, intriguing variations of these responses to Western values are also exemplified in Saeed Saeed, a Zanzibarian who befriends Biju, and Harish-Harry, one of Biju’s employers, both of whom Biju meets in the United States of America.

¹⁵ I use the term “hybrid” to underscore the heterogeneity of the elements comprising *these particular* pastiches, rather than to suggest the inevitable end product of assimilationist ideologies.

In his sojourn in the United States, Biju deals with racialized bias and stereotyping—offshoots of inherited colonial resentment towards racialized others—and he struggles with a deep sense of confusion that sometimes even makes him buy into the attitude; in this hybrid form, a new minoritarian cosmopolitanism is born. The internalized colonial “habit of hate” that Biju carries with him is rekindled as he remembers his father telling him to beware of Pakistanis; it makes Biju rant, “Pigs pigs sons of pigs, soor ka bacha” (Desai 25). The last few words, in his native Hindi, seem to bring his past (the post-independence hatred between Indians and Pakistanis)¹⁶ into the present of New York. As Biju relives the familiar stereotyping, he unknowingly buys into the neocolonial American frame of mind, “where every nationality confirmed its stereotype” (Desai 25). As a member of the underground community of undocumented immigrants in the United States, Biju interacts with people of other races and ethnicities that previously he had only ever encountered through hearsay. “Minoritarian cosmopolitanism” takes a new turn as Biju rejects his discriminatory attitude towards black people, people of other religions, and even other minorities. Biju is initially confounded by his reactions to Saeed Saeed, a black Muslim from Zanzibar, for “Saeed Saeed wasn’t drowning, he was bobbing in the tides. ... Saeed was kind and he was not Paki. Therefore he was OK? ... Therefore he liked Saeed, but hated the general lot of Muslims? ... Therefore he hated all black people but liked Saeed?” (Desai 85–86). Saeed becomes one of Biju’s closest friends, and the latter alters his perception of race and religion, prompting the turbulent internal monologue quoted above. Later, Saeed playfully dismantles another stereotype for Biju: “I am Saeed Saeed from Africa,” he says, “But don’t worry, man, we don’t eat white people anymore” (Desai 87). Biju’s strong racial prejudices resurface when, at the United States consulate, he recalls having heard other Indians discussing how to frame the purpose of their visit to the United States: “We’ll say a *hubshi*¹⁷ broke into the shop and killed our sister-in-law and now we have to go to the funeral” (Desai 202). And yet, at one point, Biju shuns racial stereotyping when, during his conversation with Mr. Iype, the Indian deliveryman for *India Today*, the latter comments on the political turmoil in Darjeeling at the time: “They should kick the bastards back to Nepal ... Bangladeshis to Bangladesh, Afghans to Afghanistan, all Muslims to Pakistan ... why are they sitting in our country?” Biju quips back, “Why are we sitting here?” (Desai 250–51). Biju’s rejoinder reminds Iype of his precarious position in the United States, and in the process makes the latter’s comment highly ironic; it also sug-

16 The British ruled India for almost 250 years. When they granted independence to India on August 15, 1947, they split the country into two contending nations, India and Pakistan. India they claimed was for Hindus, while Pakistan was for Muslims. This momentous decision led to unprecedented violence, rioting, and loss of lives as families desperately tried to cross over the newly instituted borders—the Hindus fleeing to India and Muslims to Pakistan. In its aftermath, it left behind one of the most horrifying losses that India (or humanity for that matter) has suffered.

17 The word is a racial slur derived from the Arabic word *Ḥabashi* (“Abyssinian”).

gests a radical modification in Biju's own response to racialized others, a fascinating trait of this emerging minoritarian discourse.

Despite Biju's ameliorated attitude, stereotyping and discrimination do take their toll on him. He inhabits what Clifford calls an "observer-participant position," typical of displaced individuals; a part of Biju partakes of Saeed's brutal treatment of a mouse while another part of him acts as an outsider, observing what is going on (98). When Saeed catches the mouse that supposedly was eating the bread in the restaurant, he "kick[s] it up with his shoe, dribble[s] it, trie[s] to exchange it with Biju ... tosse[s] it up till it comes down dead" (Desai 103). Saeed seems to have internalized the harsh ill treatment meted out to him on his arrival in the US, and now transfers it onto the rodent, obviously deriving sadistic pleasure from the despicable act. The pleasure he derives from it acts as an outlet for the accumulated rage and frustration of immigrant life. The harshness of survival seems to have made pathological brutes of both Saeed and Biju (though the latter refuses to participate, he is more than an interested onlooker), whose only way to deal with lived experience is to transfer it onto a harmless rodent. Again, in one of his jobs, when Biju is a delivery boy for a Chinese food outlet, he partakes of the observer-participant position almost as a form of revenge, to virtually compensate for the rejection he faces. This time, Biju reverses the panoptic gaze of power (be it white colonial/Anglo-American or that of his employers) that pins him down in his workplace as the racialized inferior. He reverts back to his native culture as he fortifies himself against the newly-minted, Westernized desires of Indian female students who want "not an Indian boy" but "the Marlboro man with a Ph.D." (Desai 56). Biju's "vernacular cosmopolitanism" is made up of "a mixture of emotions: hunger, respect, loathing" (Desai 57). He mocks the Anglicized transformation of the Indian students as "he put[s] two fingers to his lips and whistle[s] into the window at the girls," then sings to them a Hindi film song whose title translates as "this girl is crazy for me" (Desai 57). Later on in the narrative, he condescendingly sneers at Indians who eat beef at Brigitte's in New York by attributing to them animal-like noises—"chomp, chomp"—as he gloats in his presumed knowledge—"They knew. He knew."—that they were giving up their "religion, principles of one's parents and their parents before them" (Desai 151). Whether to do penance for their sins or to sanitize himself, Biju quits his job at Brigitte's in a frenzy and leaves "a new person, a man full to the brim with a wish to live within a narrow purity" (Desai 152).

Apart from a discriminatory attitude and the resultant stereotyping, several variations of the white frame of mind are introduced in the minoritarian discourses of Biju, Harish-Harry, and Saeed Saeed. Harish-Harry's whitening works on two counts. For one, Harish-Harry buys into the capitalist system of the US in the name of success. His behavior illustrates, as Adriana Stiocan points out, "[Harish's] adherence to the global capitalist credo. ... For example, he allows [the workers] to sleep in the basement of the café with rats, but only pays them a quarter of the minimum wage" (91). In one instance, Biju slips while working in the kitchen, and instead of

the boss taking any responsibility, he threatens Bijū with immediate dismissal and the ease of replacing him:

“If you are not happy, then go right now. Go find someone to sponsor you. Know how easily I can replace you? *Know how lucky you are!!!* You think there aren’t thousands of people in this city looking for a job? I can replace you like this,” he snapped his fingers, “I’ll snap my fingers and in one second hundreds of people will appear. *Get out of my face!*” (Desai 206)

Harish-Harry’s ruthless capitalist attitude, his consistent economic exploitation of other immigrants, is further portrayed by his refusal to help Bijū, or, for that matter, any of his other employees, get a green card. In fact, Harish-Harry’s attitude seems to be reinforced because of his status of legality that Bijū can never¹⁸ claim. His shabby treatment and humiliation make Bijū evade the shameful truth when he recounts to his father by phone that “everything [is] alright” (Desai 254). Through his daily encounters, Bijū comes to understand that the world views Indians as inferior and racialized beings; and yet, he remains defined by the “habit of hate [that] had accompanied [him], and he f[inds] that he possessed an awe of white people, who arguably had done India great harm, and a lack of generosity regarding almost everyone else, who had never done a single harmful thing to India” (Desai 86). The inherited hatred for others, along with the inferiority complex that it engenders, makes Bijū a victim to racial hierarchy as he passively succumbs to exploitation and discrimination.

The sense of white, colonial, or neocolonial hierarchy is further deepened in Harish-Harry by his garish display of wealth. He is defined by the capitalist ideology of the US: “He hoped for a big house, then he hoped for a bigger house even if he had to leave it unfurnished for a while, like his nemesis Mr. Shah who owned seven rooms, all empty except for TV, couch, and carpeting in white. Even the TV was a white TV for white symbolized success out of India for the community” (Desai 166). The insatiable hunger for material goods, all in white, clearly establishes a neocolonial context as Harish-Harry obsesses over his “American dream.” But interestingly, the capitalist commitment of Harish-Harry has to deal with a disconcerting minoritarian problem. And despite his constant privileging of capitalist values, he cannot reconcile himself to his daughter’s assimilating to US culture and wearing “combat boots and clothes in camouflage prints” (Desai 165). Harish recalls that his wife had said to “give her two tight slaps,” but that did not help; he had tried to Americanize himself and rise to the occasion: “ ‘You GO, gurlll!!!’ ”¹⁹ But all he got back was a caustic answer:

¹⁸ Anyone like Bijū who enters the United States with a legal visa but outstays his permitted time of residence becomes an illegal immigrant, one who can never apply for permanent residency (that is, a green card) or citizenship. Thus, Bijū could never lay claim to legality as Harish-Harry could, as the latter would never undergo Bijū’s fate.

¹⁹ This exclamation is ambiguous, and perhaps that is the point of its use in the novel: In African American culture, it is used as an encouragement, but here it seems that Harish is using it to try to tell

“ ‘I didn’t ask to be born,’ she [had] said. ‘You had me for your own selfish reasons, wanted a servant, didn’t you? But in this country, Dad, nobody’s going to wipe your ass for free’ ” (Desai 165). Harish-Harry, as his name indicates, remains a misfit hybrid despite his attempts at acculturation. Biju’s reflections on Harish-Harry reveal the latter’s inability to reconcile the two disparate cultures. The resultant disharmony makes Biju realize that all Harish-Harry had achieved was “a fake version of himself,” a version that would remain in a quandary forever (Desai 293).

Internalization of the white attitude plays out quite differently in Saeed Saeed. His shrewd appraisal of success in the US makes him ignore other illegal immigrants from Zanzibar. Determined to succeed on an individual level, Saeed understands that hiding from his compatriots is his strategy for survival (Spielman 81). Saeed works at Banana Republic, “a shop whose name was synonymous with colonial exploitation and the rapacious ruin of the third world” (Desai 112). He admits that the US is a country of opportunities, offering limitless choices; but he could “spectacularly sabotage the system ... he would pledge emotional allegiance to the flag with tears in his eyes and conviction in his voice. The country recognized something in Saeed, he in it, and it was a mutual love affair” (88–89). Thus, the spectacular sabotage is not a sinister negative in an otherwise string of positives attributed to Saeed, but a nod at the fact that he knows how to play the system. For the destitute and homeless masses, who seek to stay in the United States, they need to not only know how to survive, but also be aware of their priorities and loyalties. Thus, as Saeed’s so-called assimilation is undermined by his spectacular sabotage, his acknowledgment of his various allegiances makes a clear statement of his intentions via the use of italics, capitalization, and grammar (a play on the auxiliary verb in the present tense “am” and in the future tense “will BE”): “*First* I am Muslim, then Zanzibari, *then* I will BE American” (Desai 152). As Spielman suggests, Saeed ranks the US at the bottom of his loyalties (80). In fact, Saeed comes across as a man of few allegiances or loyalties; rather, he is a man who easily appropriates fake personas (Saeed’s fraudulent passport has him registered as Rasheed Zulfickar) and marries for a green card, intending to wait the four years and then divorce and marry for real (Desai 88). And, at one point, Biju’s devotion to Saeed brings about a change in him, too; he foregoes his role of community facilitator—a “sort of role that was common in India [as o]ne’s involvement in other people’s lives gave one numerous small opportunities for importance”—only to transition into an individualistic, selfish messenger boy for Saeed, who refuses to help fellow illegal immigrants (Desai 106). Biju’s metamorphosis denotes an interesting point of departure in the hybrid discourse of minoritarian cosmopolitanism. It suggests more productive approaches that keep alive “the variegated elements of

his daughter to leave. He may not see the irony of inadvertently using a phrase of encouragement as he attempts to discipline his daughter.

hybridity [that] should serve as a point of departure for renewed scrutiny of the conditions and bases of hybridity” (Kraidy 46).²⁰

Despite Biju’s momentary conversion, mainstream discriminatory attitudes confine him to an inferior status that permanently denies him manhood. As Gnanasekaran points out, not only about Biju but also his father, “[t]heir thinking has been conditioned by their being subservient to somebody else in society. This stunted growth of their individual consciousness has resulted in certain preconceptions, rather misconceptions about themselves” (13–14). This misconception manifests itself in reiterated images of denied adulthood: When Biju’s co-workers “visit a Dominican woman in Washington Heights—only thirty-five dollars,” he covers “his timidity with manufactured disgust” (Desai 18). In reality, Biju understands that “[t]hey were men; he was a baby. He was nineteen, he looked and felt several years younger” (Desai 18). Again, when Saeed Saeed boasts of his marriage to the white woman Toys, daughter of Vermont hippies, Biju is stunned. Encouraged by Saeed’s good luck, Biju makes a pathetic bid to impress white women (and maybe qualify for a green card, too, through marriage): He greets them with a smile on his face only to be rudely ignored. The elusive green card becomes a signifier of manhood in the immigrant’s discourse; the untold narrative is that only a citizen qualifies as a man. The terror that every call to the immigration office could reveal his illegal status leaves Biju “so restless sometimes, he could barely stand to stay in his skin” (Desai 91). It leads to deep frustration as he feels a “flash of anger at his father” for virtually exiling him to a foreign land; ironically enough, Biju himself is trapped in it, too, for “he knew he wouldn’t have forgiven his father for not trying to send him either” (Desai 91). Both father and son stand defined by “solid knowledge ... and they defend its solidity by means of suppression, deliberately pushing a thought out of their consciousness” (Spielman 76). In other words, they merely operate within the parameters of knowledge that they know or have been raised in. The colonial ideology of the Civilizing Mission and the concurrent idea of a savage not granted the status of a man play out in Biju’s words as he quips, “I’m civilized, sir, ready for the United States, I’m civilized, mam” (Desai 201). Trapped in a typical minoritarian discourse, Biju dreams of the “After The Green Card Return Home” (Desai 108). He vicariously lives the life of the “legalized foreigners” whose “expandable third-world suitcase[s]” he envies as he desperately begs for virtual adulthood, complete citizenship, even if it means marrying “a disabled or mentally retarded green card holder” (Desai 109). Yet his stunted growth into adulthood is further underlined by one of the last images we have of him: Back in India, Biju stands stripped of all his clothing and luggage with only an effeminate nightgown “with large, faded pink flowers and yellow, puffy sleeves, ruffles at the neck and hem” (Desai 349).

20 See also Papastergiadis (170).

The meaning and implications of names create their own space in this complex pastiche of minoritarian discourse. Ironically, the names of some of the characters cater to both mainstream and minority cultures; the characters remain partially maimed in the confusion of both, until they should find a means to stand up on their own. For example, Biju's name can be considered a phonic play on the French "bijou" (jewel). Clearly, he is a jewel only for his father, who sustains himself with the letters his son sends home: "Biju's letters traced a string of jobs, they said more or less the same thing each time except for the name of the establishment he was working for. His repetition provided coziness, and the cook's repetition of his son's repetition double-knit the coziness" (Desai 19). The repetitive quality of the letters with just a change of the name of the establishment not only portrays the monotony of a banal job but also opens up a space of fabricated reality that leads to the father's delusional boasts of his son's success abroad. In an intriguing turn of the discourse, Harish-Harry seems to be a product of this so-called cosmopolitan "contact zone" with mainstream culture, what Oana Sabo argues is Kiran Desai's "site of contamination, negotiation and conflict" (378). Harish-Harry's name plays on an ambiguity that makes a mockery of both Indian and US values as it refuses to let go of the Sanskrit Harish (which means "king of gods [or of Vishnu/Krishna]") and yet tacks on the Harry by way of a hyphen to create a new Americanized persona. A similar process applies to the restaurant he owns: The Gandhi Café, which claims to play Gandhi's favorite music, serves no beef, and professes to be "an all-Hindu establishment" is clearly a façade (Desai 155). Like his establishment, Harish-Harry is a fake. Even as his dedication to capitalist values proves his loyalty to the US, it hides an animosity almost on the cusp of hatred. He admits to a deep desire to wring the neck of his customers and finally end the fake smiles and greetings: "I can't, but maybe my son will, and that is my great hope. One day Jayant-Jay will smile and get his hands about their sons' necks and he will choke them dead" (Desai 165). Harish-Harry's ultimate revenge will happen only when he or his brother, named Gaurish-Gary (the name Gaurish in Sanskrit means "Lord Shiva," again with the hyphenated appendage of Gary), is replaced by Jayant-Jay, which in conjunction in Sanskrit means "the ultimate victory." The minoritarian discourse, at this point, makes a final statement: The hyphen in the name becomes a mere embellishment, as the name Jayant-Jay draws on Sanskrit words on both counts.

As the hybridity of names transgresses cultural and linguistic boundaries, it challenges all notions of purity and, in the process, often conceals the asymmetry of a name's components. Jan Nederveen Pieterse discusses the intermingling of languages in North America as a "deeply creative process ... [the] ramifications [of which] over time are not predictable because it doesn't fit an existing matrix or established paradigm but itself facility in English with US Americans around him. He frequently reverts to using words from his native language. This creolization of English (the master's tongue) provides provocative insights into Biju's mind. Time and again, Biju uses the native tongue to signify a "translational process of culture's in-betweenness," which Bhabha designates as a significant trait of "vernacular cos-

mopolitanism” (582). When Biju stereotypes the Pakistanis—“Pigs pigs, sons of pigs, sooar ka baccha”—he goes beyond simple creolization of language; he translates from Hindi to English (the literal translation of “sooar ka baccha” is “sons of pigs”) and interpolates a new phrase into the English language (Desai 25). The “in-betweenness” of a culturally hybrid Biju provides him with an opportunity to not only appropriate the English language, but to coin new phrases to accommodate his vernacular lingo. Again, when the female Indian students thank Biju for the food he brings them, and somewhat condescendingly advise him to buy “topi²¹-muffler-gloves to be ready for winter,” he is overcome by a strange feeling; his momentary admiration for their poise and smartness is replaced by a sense of repulsion at how they had tarnished the traditional image of an ideal Indian woman known for her generosity (Desai 56). Biju gets his sweet revenge as he wolf-whistles at them to settle his score. As he pedals away, he sings a song from a Bollywood movie: “O, yeh ladki zara si deewani lagti hai,” which can be translated as “this girl is crazy for me—is in love with me” (Desai 57). By reverting to a Bollywood song in Hindi, Biju buys himself a ticket to the land of fantasy where he makes the last call—it is his act of rejection and not theirs. Often in the bitter cold winters of New York, Biju fortifies himself with “a padding of newspapers down his shirt. Sometimes he inserted pancakes into the padding—his food for survival” (Desai 57).

Interestingly, despite the hardships Biju has undergone, his tactics for survival are not what he has learned in the United States but are the product of the “translational process,” a process that brings back tender memories of a familiar place—“the memory of an uncle who used to go out to the fields in winter with his lunch time *parathas*²² down his vest” (Desai 57). But the process seems to freeze halfway, as the text records: “But even this did not seem to help, and once on his bicycle, he began to weep from the cold and the weeping unpicked a deeper vein of grief—such a terrible groan issued from between the whimpers that he was shocked his sadness was so profound” (Desai 57). As personal memories fade, new collective ones take prominence that not only acknowledge shared culture but create connections between people from diverse cultures and races. Cultural liberalism often recognizes this pluralist existence but fails to acknowledge the inherent critique of modernity that forms the core of these minoritarian discourses. This time, the food culture and the Hindi language create a unique minoritarian space that brings together Saeed Saeed from Zanzibar, Kavafya from Kazakhstan, Omar from Malaysia, and Biju from India. They share Indian food, “samosa and chapatis, jalebis, pilau” (Desai 181). Songs from two films from two very different eras are enjoyed by the group. And interestingly, the lyrics to the songs “Mera Joota Hai Japani” (“My Shoes Are from Japan”) and “Bombay Se Aaya Mera Dost Friend” (“My Has Come from Bombay”) bring the world, or rather,

21 The Hindi word “topi” means “cap.”

22 Parathas are wheat bread.

the international diasporic figure (as the first song goes, different bits of clothing from different parts of the world are worn by the character) to Bombay in India before transporting this heterogeneous figure to alien shores, “deftly yoking together the local with the global” (Rajan and Sharma 151).

From the creolization of language that creates even as it subverts the master’s narrative/tongue, we need finally to recognize the exilic condition in which the immigrant survives. Biju’s reality is a horrifying experience shared by the shadow class of illegal immigrants, who are discriminated against, exploited, and perpetually on the run: “nomads condemned to movement,” a mockery of the cosmopolitan traveler, a victim of “a journey [that] once begun has no end” (Desai 112, 122). They form what James Clifford calls a “disconcertingly hybrid ‘native’ ... strangely familiar, and different precisely in that unprocessed familiarity” (97). Trapped in the basement kitchens of the Baby Bistro, Le Colonial, or the Stars and Stripes Diner, Biju remains a victim of fake colonial structures that boast organized façades of colonial aura and cuisine, built on exploited labor almost exclusively imported from former colonies: “On top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native. Colombian, Tunisian, Ecuadorian, Gambian. ... All American flag on top, all Guatemalan flag below. Plus one Indian flag when Biju arrived” (Desai 23). He feels “abandoned among foreigners” and the condition of insecurity combined with the compelled movement that dictates his life makes Biju understand that it is impossible to cultivate a close human relationship: “[H]e had learned by now. You lived intensely with others, only to have them disappear overnight, since the shadow class was condemned to movement. The men left for other jobs ... got deported, returned home, changed names. ... The emptiness Biju felt returned to him over and over, until eventually he made sure not to let friendships sink deep anymore” (Desai 108, 112). This dehumanizing effect leaves him bitter and an alien to the US. On a broader scale, illegal immigrants, like Biju (considering the sheer number of applicants if nothing else), have little hope of acquiring a green card and applying for US citizenship. Thus: “Saeed applied for immigration lottery each year, but Indians were not allowed to apply. ... There were just too many jostling to get out, to pull everyone else down, to climb on one another’s backs and run. The line would be stopped up for years, the quota was full, overfull, spilling over” (Desai 90).

A deep sense of non-belonging haunts Biju. And even when he is on his way back to India he ruefully admits, “here he was ... without name or knowledge of the American president, without the name of the river on whose bank he had lingered, without even hearing about any tourist sights—no Statue of Liberty, Macy’s, Little Italy” (Desai 314). Despite his never connecting intrinsically to US culture, Biju at one point does buy into materialistic culture by purchasing “[a] TV and VCR, a camera, sunglasses, baseball caps that said ‘NYC’ and ‘Yankees’ and ‘I Like My Beer Cold and My Women Hot’ ” (Desai 295). However, “the pleasures of cultural plenitude and richness promised by global capitalism ... prove elusive, as his experience of a globalized world only brings bewilderment” (Poon 553). When Biju returns to India, his cultural displacement and subsequent isolation are clearly evident. He is decked in his US

garb when he is robbed by the separatist Nepali insurgent group, who steal everything from him, leaving him wearing nothing but his underwear. Biju stands alone: “Without his luggage, without his savings, worst of all, without his pride. Back from the US with far less than he’d ever had” (Desai 349). He is symbolically stripped of all ties—North American and Indian—exiled from both cultures. The only bond Biju possesses is his relationship with his father in India. This, too, has deteriorated, as “they were no longer relevant to each other’s lives except for the hope that they *would* be relevant” (Desai 255). While Biju and his father love each other, the distance between them has caused a withering of their connection.

The various characters of *The Inheritance of Loss*—Biju, Saeed Saeed, Harish-Harry—portray different aspects of the “vocabulary of victimage” (Pollock et al. 582). The characters have to deal with different forms of discrimination, both external and internal, from brutal stereotyping to a nuanced manifestation of the white frame of mind. The process sometimes leaves Biju in an observer-participant position, triggering reluctant or retaliatory responses according to the situation. Victim to a flawed sense of manhood, Biju also remains an exile throughout the narrative. The politics of naming and linguistic hybridization play seminal roles in the complex pastiche of minoritarian discourse. Together they debunk any celebratory notions of multiculturalism and pluralist existence. They provide “a bricolage of context-dependent insights” that deal with historical continuities and disruptions, as they seek to make a statement through the composite voice of all the characters (Steady 4).

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