

Mapping Cultural Identities and Intersections

Mapping Cultural Identities and Intersections:

Imagological Readings

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

MAPPING CULTURAL INTERSECTIONS

MUSTAFA KIRCA AND ONORINA BOTEZAT

In the context of “globalization” the issue of cultural identity has aroused growing attention—i.e. the intense globalization that is occurring in societies around the world today has brought increasing attention to the matters of differing cultures and identities, and to their continuous intersections. Bringing together unique studies which explore the issue of cultural identity, and images of the self and the other, at the intersections of literature, translation, and cultural studies, *Mapping Cultural Identities and Intersections: Imagological Readings* examines identity discourses and self-constructions/de-constructions in various works, and features theoretical and analytical approaches to address its research problems with insights borrowed from multiple disciplines. The theme of the book, “Mapping Cultural Identities and Intersections,” has encouraged the contributors to examine a broad range of issues and topics related to cultural and ethnic identity constructions mostly in Romanian context and to adopt different ways of approaching the concept of ethnicity and translation practices through imagological readings of films, narratives, and art works. This volume aims to explore possibilities for new breakthroughs by examining current studies and new perspectives on cultural identity approach to “translation” as a means of cultural (de)construction, supporting cultural differences and enriching the cultural identities involved.

“Imagology” is a relatively new term in literary and cultural studies, and there are not many works analysing distinctively imagological approaches to literary texts, art works, and cultural anthropology. In this respect, *Mapping Cultural Identities and Intersections* mainly focuses on the application of imagological theories and perspectives in the fields of literature and translation, and specifically in literary works “carried over” from one culture to another. The theme of *Otherness* is exploited from ethnic and social perspectives in a variety of narratives, along with the

discussions of a selection of artworks in Romanian painting and movies from Bollywood, in the narrow objective focused chapters of the book. These include Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers*, Ananda Devi's *Indian Tango*, Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Mike Ormsby's *Never mind the Balkans: Here is Romania*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Sir Sacheverell Sitwell's *Roumanian Journey*, and Arnold Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley*. As a result, the volume is able to treat the Other and the self-image constructions/de-constructions from wider angles, investigating different layers of cultural identities on the one hand, and measuring the literary reception of ethnic identity constitution to reveal both the self and the hetero images, on the other.

The volume's opening chapter by Elif Oztabak-Avci, "Entanglement of the Domestic and the Global: A View of Globalization from Below in Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*," argues that global multinational capitalism creates hierarchies between nations as it causes mass migration of the poor of the "Third World" to labor in the global cities of the world. The chapter discusses in what ways Desai's work under scrutiny exemplifies the political understanding of global hierarchies which render some places more "shitty" than others. To Oztabak-Avci, this is just another form of the known relationship between the so-called "developed" and "developing" countries in the age of neo-colonialism. Accordingly, in Desai's novel, we see that India is regarded mostly as one of such places that one should flee for a better one in cosmopolitan cities. However, by providing scenes of kitchens in the basements of restaurants in New York where immigrants work, Desai's novel offers a view of globalization from below. Oztabak-Avci demonstrates in her detailed study that it is through the understanding of global hierarchies that Desai's pivotal character recovers from the feeling of hatred toward his country and his true self.

In the next chapter titled "Ananda Devi's *Indian Tango*: A Double Helix of the Writer's Responsibility and the Postcolonial World," Adelheid Rundholz argues that the writer in Devi's text has to find ways to recognize the "other" as an autonomous subject and avoid creating stories that could function as normative (or neocolonial) impositions. *Indian Tango* is a complex text in terms of its structure, consisting of two main protagonists and their respective stories, with individual chapters zigzagging between the main characters and the writer. Rundholz shows in her chapter that the diegetic writer, however, who enters the text as an independent visitor, becomes imprisoned by her creative ambition and its product, and that the reversal of the writer/protagonist's perception

constitutes the heart of Devi's novel and raises questions about literature (its writers and their responsibility) in the postcolonial world.

In "Cultural Intersections in Stoker's *Dracula*: Transylvanian and Ottoman Identities as the Vampiric 'Other(s)'" Ertuğrul Koç shows that Dracula neither belongs to the Victorian world nor to any cultural locus in history, although he is an emblematic figure redefining the concept of wisdom for the Victorians. Koç claims that it is this indefinite status of the vampire that makes him a timeless entity representing the interaction between past and present, and the possibility of the emergence of a better paradigm. Hence, Dracula for Stoker is a redeemer and a revolutionist: he releases the inhibited Victorians from their obstructive ethical bondages through giving them the fleshly autonomy of the discarded past. This iconoclast of sterile, gendered sexuality is the *doppelgänger* of the *fin de siècle*, signifying also the sneaky coexistence of opposing powers in the "decent" bourgeois ethos. Nevertheless, Stoker designs the vampire as fighting against a well-equipped empire, against an unconquerable enemy. Even though Dracula is willing to spread his "vampirism" by blood transfusion so as to triumph over the stereotypical bourgeois characters, his final downfall shows the indestructibility of the oppressive and sexist *Weltanschauung*. Stoker's Dracula, the embodiment of the reaction to ethical hypocrisy in the *fin de siècle*, still endures as an archetype for sincerity and for the liberation of the repressed.

Ramona Mihăilă's study, "Romanian and British Cultural Intersections: Nineteenth Century Women Writers and Translators," intends to provide a survey on the translations of the nineteenth-century Romanian Principalities from two perspectives: one of them referring to the British women writers, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Maria Edgeworth, Louisa Grace Bartolini, Louisa Grace Bartolini, Annie Vivanti Chartres, and English-born Romanian Queen Marie of Edinburgh, whose works were translated into Romanian; the other discussing the way the British women translators, Edith Hopkirk, Helen Zimmern, Helen Wolff, Alma Strettell, translated into English the poems, stories, and philosophical prose written in Romanian, German, and French by German-born Queen Elisabeth of Romania. The chapter discusses how the Queen, using the literary pen name Carmen Sylva, adopted her new country and introduced it to the whole world due to her works inspired by the Romanian legends, ballads, folksongs, and stories.

In "Tracing a Narrative of the Self: Intersection of Gender, Religion and Migration in Aboulela's *Minaret*," Sule Okuroglu Ozun demonstrates that Aboulela's *Minaret* challenges the stereotypical images of British Muslims as "victims to a religion which cannot match with western

values". In fact, the events of 9/11 have had a significant effect across the globe, and fostered anti-Muslim sentiment in other western countries as well as the United States. These reactions have (re)produced an exclusive patriotic discourse, drawing from the historical encounters between different groups and the problematic orthodox images of Arabs, Muslims and those who are perceived to be "Others". Focusing on how Aboulela's Muslim female protagonist's understanding of her "self" changes throughout the course of the novel, the chapter illustrates the fluidity of identity and examines how different notions of belonging emerge over time and between cultures. Okuroglu Ozun argues that although the past thirty years have seen an increase in the number of Arab writers who write in English, Anglophone Arab literature did not attain recognition until the 9/11 attacks. Female Arab writers, in particular, have re-examined exclusionary narratives of European societies in an effort to illuminate the tendency to otherize foreign cultures. Aboulela's *Minaret* tells the story of the daughter of a prominent Sudanese politician who, following a coup becomes a political refugee in Britain with her mother and twin-brother Omar when her father is charged with venality and executed. Najwa negotiates both her past, as an upper-class westernized woman living in Sudan, and her present, as a practicing Muslim woman working as a house cleaner for privileged and rich Arab migrant families in London. It is argued in this chapter that her narrative alternates between cultures as well as the past and the present chronotopes to demonstrate that relationships with Others inform how an image of the Self is deconstructed to include a wide range of cultural spheres that all contribute to understandings of the Self.

The following chapter, "Romania through British Eyes: from *Roumanian Journey* by Sir Sacheverell Sitwell to *Never Mind the Balkans: Here is Romania* by Mike Ormsby," brings the two seminal works together to explore the hetero-images drawn by English authors and travelers who visited Romania seventy years apart. By focusing primarily on the portrayal of Romanian culture seen through foreigners' lens, Botezat invokes in her chapter how the Englishness is narrated in the Romanian literature, the importance of culture-bound terms that serve as imago-words, thus translating better images in different cultures.

In every national literature, there is an interest in literary images of certain professions, for the analysis of these portrays the spirit of the age and the nation's unique mindset. For that matter, literary images of physicians appeal to many as representatives of the most humane profession, as the vehicles of spiritual and intellectual values of humanity. In "The Literary Identity of the Physician in American Prose," Yulii

Lysanets provides a survey of differing images of the physician in a variety of prose works of American prose literature from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. The chapter presents a wide panorama of these centuries through the analysis of the corpora of American literature including the works by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Edward Bellamy, O. Henry, Howard Lovecraft, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Ray Bradbury, William S. Burroughs, Joseph Heller, Ken Kesey, Michael Crichton, Erich Segal, Sidney Sheldon, as well as physician writers Richard Hooker, Allen Richard Selzer, Samuel Shem, Tess Gerritsen, Michael Stephen Palmer, Peter Clement and Robert Brian Cook. Exploiting the methods of narratological analysis and receptive aesthetics, Lysanets' study demonstrates that from the nineteenth century up to the present, the literary identity of the physician in American prose literature has undergone significant transformations from an eccentric possessor of "secret knowledge" to a discrediting image of an ignorant and incompetent "quack," from a selfish hypocrite and dehumanized cynic to a heroic and self-sacrificing saviour of people's lives, and finally to a many-sided and all-around developed medical expert ready to investigate the wrongdoings and confront the injustice of the twenty-first century. The findings of the survey disclose the U.S. society's attitude towards the physician's profession in retrospective.

Fabian Ivanovici's chapter titled "Self-shaping and the Lay of the Land: Constructing Identity in Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers*" aims to read Ackroyd's parodic rewriting set in London in 3700 AD against the imagological diachrony of London: the image of the Self as defined against and within the image of the City. Ivanovici maintains that Ackroyd's London in *The Plato Papers* is the unnameable fulcrum wherein the self and the other are endowed with meaning. *The Plato Papers* seems to impose a series of questions: How do we regard the notion of selfhood? How does self-doubt lead to instability in the nebulous process of constructing an identity? How does historiography, in looking to the external world, affect what goes on internally, setting up a system of values that automatically Others all that runs counter to it? And, more importantly, how does space—the City—fit into this complex endeavour? The chapter aims to explore theoretical notions of selfhood and madness, of the self confronted with the liminal, in order to show, in Ackroyd's text that problematizes the matter of the self, some valid venues into drawing a representational account of what it means to engender identity.

Arnold Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley* probes into a family microcosm, which expresses the *Weltanschauung* of a turbulent period in

which there was a strong conviction that socialism would induce a positive change of the system. By focusing primarily on this quality of the play, Laura Monica Toma attempts in her chapter “Disillusionment and the Socialist Dream: the Revolution of the Self in Arnold Wesker’s *Chicken Soup with Barley*,” to analyse the failure of the revolution proposed by socialism as envisaged by the play’s characters, which also involves the disintegration of a family. The chapter discusses issues such as the anatomy of change, idealism, and identity crises by looking at the findings of Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, Karen Horney and Cornelius Castoriadis among others, and it tries to demonstrate that the rise and fall of the socialist revolution is at the core of Wesker’s play to portray the demise of the old values of companionship and the belief that the individual can act upon the world.

Estella Ciobanu, in “Mapping the Exotic Other: Orientalisms and the Odalisque in Romanian Painting,” studies the representation of the odalisque in Romanian paintings, especially by Theodor Aman and Iosif Iser, to map Romanian artists’ implicit mappings of the cultural identity of the Other when compared to French artists’ *vis-à-vis* colonised peoples. Ciobanu claims that Romanian painters learnt their “trade” mostly from their French (and other western) masters, so their depiction of the odalisque owed much to the French Orientalist trend superimposed on the erstwhile allegorised nude genre. Yet, they were also influenced from their encounters with the Turks and Tatars from Dobruja. The Romanian colonisation of Dobruja, however, bears little similarity to the French colonisation of the Maghreb despite superficialities such as the jarring religious differential between the coloniser and the colonised. Unlike their French contemporaries, Romanian artists, the chapter argues, engendered a double cross-cultural mapping of the exotic other and the “essential” other under patriarchy through the intertwining of the western Orientalist “lesson” and their “ethnographic” observation of Muslim people at home. This becomes especially apparent in the works of Iosif Iser, the ethnic “other” within the mainstream ethnic (and religious) culture of Romania, who, quite oppositely, dedicates many of his paintings of the period of artistic maturity to the insider-other of Dobruja.

Bollywood is one of the biggest film industries in the world and has some impact on both the Indian citizens living in India and those living in the diaspora. In the final chapter of the volume, “Othering New York City in Bollywood Films,” Paulina Wenessa Stężycka aims to show, through a selection of Bollywood movies, “Kal ho naa ho,” “English Vinglish” and “New York, New York,” the explicit attempt to create the binary opposition between “Westernness” and “Indian-ness,” with the second one

being superior in relation to the first, and to present New York as “the Other,” being inferior to Indian-ness that is now and then incorporated into the life of the Indians living there. Steżycka manages to bring to the fore the common quality of these movies that New York is presented as a city offering life which is lower in status than the traditional Indian manner of living. The city is introduced as “the Other” which has to be changed by, or filled with, Indian-ness in order to be acceptable. Steżycka’s study further tries to lay bare—through comparative analysis—that the three movies discussed problematize the representation of Indian femininity and traditionalism in the city. The first consideration presents seemingly different but deep-down still very similar figures of female protagonists. Even though a lot of diversity can be found in the city, which, unlike India, offers space for LGBT people to live and love freely, the films, by creating the plot focusing on the Indian order of things, exaggerating the pan-Indian identity and rejecting the heterogeneity of the American society, refuse the importance of this variety that New York offers. This leads to further consideration of the Indian traditionalism incorporated in the city.

The eleven chapters of the collection are intended to discuss the varying perspectives and theories of imagology in the field of literature, translation and cultural studies through established texts and contemporary narratives. They approach theoretical issues concerning self and hetero images and cultural intersections from a variety of perspectives. As this collection of essays discusses, the cultural intersections channel to collective representations of the *Other* and its identity building is at the core of the literary discourse. Beyond genres and literary geography, time and space, there is a permanent imagological and anthropological pattern in terms of perceiving and accommodating the Other. From the daybreak of the colonial expansion to the nowadays globalization, the dialogue between cultures enlarged its tools and means but remained as fruitful as ever. We trust the book will be of interest for scholars and researchers working in the fields of literature, translation, cultural studies, and imagology as well as for the students studying in the same fields and for the general reader.

CHAPTER ONE

ENTANGLEMENT OF THE DOMESTIC AND THE GLOBAL: A VIEW OF GLOBALIZATION FROM BELOW IN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

ELIF OZTABAK-AVCI

We, the rulers, won't pause to look up from our groaning table.
We don't seem to know that the resources we're feasting on are finite and rapidly depleting.
The food's running out in the kitchen. And the servants haven't eaten yet.
Actually, the servants stopped eating a long time ago.

Arundhati Roy—*The Cost of Living*

Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) explores power imbalances in today's world at both national and international levels. The story, most of which takes place in India during the mid eighties, critically engages in the master-servant analogy established in colonial discourses between the colonizer and the colonized by foregrounding and critiquing the continuation of this relationship, albeit in new forms, between the so-called "developed" and "developing" countries in the age of neo-colonialism. Desai makes use of the same analogy to point to the inequities of the Indian nation-state, too, as a consequence of which the disadvantaged social groups in contemporary India are positioned as "servants" of the hegemonic groups. Thus, in the novel, the hierarchies between *and* within nations are considered to be linked particularly in terms of the ways in which they are caused by the "continuing need of the capitalist world economy for cheap labour" (Brah 6).

The employment of the servant figure in *The Inheritance of Loss* in order to foreground the entanglement of domestic and nationalist ideologies in India has earlier precedents in fiction produced in India. For instance, Wajida Tabassum's short story, "Cast-Offs" (*Utran*), written in

Urdu in 1975, features a servant girl, Chamki, who seduces her young mistress's bridegroom-to-be on her wedding night in order to take revenge on her mistress, whose cast-offs she has worn throughout her life: "'Pasha [the mistress], all my life I took your cast-offs. But today, you too...' she [Chamki] started laughing wildly. 'All your life...you will use mine...!' She could not control her laughter" (133). Tabassum's short story, in keeping with the political attitude of the "Progressive Writers Movement,"¹ in which she participated, reflects her revolt against the paternalistic values still dominant in the Hyderabad² region after the Independence. It seems that in her novel Desai makes use of an "old" subversive tool—the use of the servant to critique "domestic" inequalities—in order to point to the parallelisms between the hierarchies in a country house in northern India and in the nation. Yet, what seems particularly "new" in her novel, is the incorporation of an international labor migrant's story and hence a critique of the "domestic" master-servant relationships from a global perspective.

The story in Desai's *The Inheritance of Lost* takes place in the Kalimpong and New York of the mid nineteen eighties. A retired judge, Jemubhai Patel, lives in a country house in Kalimpong, a town in Northeast India, close to the Nepal border, together with his orphaned granddaughter, Sai, his dog, Mutt, and a cook, Panna Lal. The cook's son, Biju, a recent immigrant to New York, works as a waiter in various restaurants. The story is set in the midst of the Nepalese insurgency led by

¹ In their introduction to *Parwaaz: Urdu Short Stories by Women* Syeda S. Hameed and Sughra Mehdi state that the "Taraqqi Pasandi" or the "Progressive Movement" started with the publication of a collection of short stories, *Angarey*, in 1932 (x). The writers indicate that "the stories in it declared war on the existing mores and morals of society, and reflected the new generation's disenchantment with the world. Hunger, oppression, exploitation, sexual repression were the new subjects" (x).

² Before being incorporated into India in 1948, Hyderabad was a large princely state and "about 40 percent of the people lived on feudal estates where powerful owners had their own courts and jails. The feudal system allowed these owners to demand manual labor from both men and women. It was the landlord's privilege to sleep with a new bride on the marriage night. The custom of *adi bapa* required a bonded female servant to accompany her master's daughter to the girl's marriage home. Once there, she had to serve the new bride and provide sex for the groom.... The other 60 percent of the population were settled on lands... [and] ruled by *deshmuks* (overseers) who forced them to labor and beat them at will" (Forbes 218). When considered in the context of the custom of *adi bapa*, Chamki's willingness to have sex with her master-to-be seems to be an act meant to unsettle this custom because in her case it is the servant girl who takes the initiative.

the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in India during the 1980s. The lives of the Kalimpong community are dramatically changed by the end of the novel as a consequence of this violent movement seeking a separate Nepali state in India.

The cook, who works for the judge since the age of fourteen, lives in a hut near the house of his employer in destitute conditions: his salary “had hardly been changed in years. His last raise had been twenty-five rupees” (54). His belongings consist of “a few clothes hung over a string, a single razor blade and a sliver of cheap brown soap, a Kulu blanket that had been once... [Sai’s], a cardboard case... that had belonged to the judge and now contained the cook’s papers, ... Biju’s letters” (13) as well as “a broken watch that would cost too much to mend” (13) and “two photographs hung on the wall—one of himself and his wife on their wedding day, one of Biju dressed to leave home” (14). He keeps all the money he has managed to put aside over his entire life, 250 rupees, in a tin, hid in the garage under the car (10). The cook’s sole source of hope in life is his son, Biju, whom he has encouraged to immigrate to the U.S. Following the boy’s departure, the cook tries to make up for his son’s absence by spending most of his time talking with Sai about his village, late wife, and son. Owners of one of the neighboring houses, Lola and Noni, who also tutor Sai, do not approve of her frequent chats with the cook: “The way she’d been abandoned to the cook for years... If it wasn’t for Lola and herself, Noni thought, Sai would have long ago fallen to the level of the servant class herself... It was important to draw the lines properly between classes or it harmed everyone on both sides of the great divide” (67).

Noni’s concern about maintaining “the great divide” between servants and their employers is reflective of the role of servant-keeping homes in the reproduction of class inequalities in India, which dates back to the preceding century. In *Politics of the Possible*, Kumkum Sangari points out that in India, from the mid nineteenth century on, “home” came up as a “school” to master class relationships (332). Sangari adds that following the emergence of Gandhi as a national leader, the domestic sphere was incorporated into the nationalist project: Gandhi “located the mechanisms of social order and integration inside the family, and saw it as the stable pedagogical unit upon which state formations rested” (345). The home Gandhi “carved for his projected nation-state” was “class-differentiated” (345). Similarly, in “Exploring the World of Domestic Manuals: Bengali Middle-Class Women and Servants in Colonial Calcutta,” Swapna Banerjee draws attention to the “flooding” of the market in Calcutta by domestic manuals written by nationalist middle-class writers in Calcutta

between the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth (4). Such manuals, whose circulation was not limited to Calcutta but which were written and read in many parts of colonial India, addressed mostly the “bhadramahilas” (middle-class women) and instructed them on how to be a “good wife” and a “wise mother” (4) as well as on issues such as “health, hygiene, love, beauty, child-care and sex” (5) and also on “how to behave with servants” (9). As in household books addressing housewives in Britain particularly during the nineteenth century, the notion of the production and maintenance of peace at home particularly through a skilled management of servants was loaded with national significance in the case of Indian middle-class women too. According to Banerjee, this “somewhat excessive concern with appropriate behavior towards servants, missing in the literature of the previous period,” is indicative of the rising middle-class interest in the lower-classes (10). “Viewed in the wider context of nationalism,” Banerjee holds, these writers’ emphasis on supervising and disciplining servants yet in a “humanistic” way—“punish them with a touch of affection” as one of the writers suggests (qtd in Banerjee 12)—indicates the middle class’s efforts to “mobilize mass support against the colonial state” and to “establish their hegemony” over the masses at the same time (13).

In Desai’s novel, Lola and Noni’s efforts to maintain “the great divide” are informed by a bourgeois understanding of the nation-state as a class-differentiated community. Going back to Noni’s worries about the relationship between Sai and the cook as well as the sisters’ efforts to “keep their distance” from their own maid, Kesang, it can be held that her bourgeois concern about maintaining class hierarchies between employers and servants is at the same time a concern about keeping national peace (of the advantaged groups) intact. Noni thinks that “servants got all sorts of ideas, and then when they realized the world wasn’t going to give them and their children what it gave to others, they got angry and resentful,” (67) which seems to reflect her concerns not just about the “insolence” of domestic servants but also of some other disadvantaged groups in India such as the Nepalese in Kalimpong.

The Inheritance of Loss opens with a scene in which the house of the judge, Cho Oyu, is invaded by a group of Nepalese boys involved in the GNLFF movement. The boys ask for the guns owned by the judge and food. Interestingly, they order neither the cook nor Sai to set the table for them but instead the judge: “The judge found himself in the kitchen where he had never been, not once, Mutt wobbling about his toes, Sai and the cook too scared to look, averting their gaze. It came to them that they might all

die with the judge in the kitchen; the world was upside down and absolutely anything could happen” (6). The boys taunt the judge further by criticizing his clumsiness in the kitchen: “‘So slow,’” they say, “‘You people! No shame.... Can’t do one thing on your own’” (8). Desai’s strategy to have the Nepalese boys reverse the hierarchies in the house of the judge foregrounds the connections between the hierarchies in the Indian nation-state and in a bourgeois household. The boys’ making the judge do domestic work is an attack not only against his superior positioning within his household but also in the nation-state. In “Masculinity, Femininity, and Servitude: Domestic Workers in Calcutta in the Late Twentieth Century,” Raka Ray points to the “absence of menial labor” as a major defining feature of the middle or the “*bhadralok*” class in Bengali³ society, which the Gujarati⁴ judge, Jemubhai Patel, picks up as a model.⁵ Ray holds that from the 1880s on, “the ability to hire servants became a mark of *bhadralok* status” (696). So, the reason why the cook and Sai are “too scared to look” at the judge while he is working in the kitchen is that the domestic work he is forced to do threatens his status as a *bhadralok*, which literally means “respectable man or gentleman” (695). The first thing the judge does after the boys leave is to yell at the cook as if wanting to retrieve at once what he has temporarily lost: “‘*Hai, hai*, what will become of us?’ [said the cook]” ‘Shut up,’ said the judge and thought, these damn servants born and brought up to scream” (8), distinguishing himself from the servant class in general.

It should be added that the scope of the hierarchies disclosed in this scene is much larger than that of Kalimpong where the story is set. The tension between the judge and the Indian-Nepalese insurgents has reverberations beyond the local boundaries. The diversity in terms of the characters’ backgrounds suggests that the Kalimpong in the novel could be a microcosmic national/international community: the England-returned

³ Kalimpong is a town in the state of West Bengal.

⁴ Gujarat is a state in the farthest west of India.

⁵ The judge was born in 1919 in Piphit, a Gujarati town. The judge’s own family, as well as his parents-in-law, are Patels, a community largely located in Gujarat, and consisting mostly of landowners, shopkeepers and money-lenders. The judge’s father-in-law, for instance, Bomanbhai Patel, followed his father’s footsteps in the business of supplying “horse feed to the British military encampment at Piphit. Eventually, the family had monopolized the delivery of all dried goods to the army” (89). While the Patels represent a middle-class positioning gained through money-making, the *bhadralok* status can only be reached through educational/cultural capital. In that respect, Jemubhai Patel, “the first boy of their community to go to an English university” (89), deviates from the model of upward mobility among merchant families.

judge, Jemubhai Patel, is originally from a middle-class Gujarati family, who now lives in a West Bengali town having adopted a colonial/*bhadralok* life style; the cook, Panna Lal, comes from a village in Uttar Pradesh, a state in northern India, and his son, Biju, works in the U.S.; the judge's neighbors, Lola and Noni, are West Bengalis, with daughters working for CNN and the BBC in the U.S. and Britain, respectively; and, the Indian-Nepalese, a significant population in Darjeeling, are also scattered throughout India in all major cities. The Nepalese not only in Kalimpong but in all parts of India are a stereotyped ethnic group. Subba holds that in India "Gorkha" is often used as a synonym of *chowkidar* [caretaker; watchman]... [because] the number of Nepalis migrating to India in search of jobs as *chowkidars*, sex-workers... or as waiters in roadside restaurants... far surpass the number of Indian Nepalis holding prestigious positions" (278). The Indian-Nepalese insurgents' humiliation of the judge at Cho Oyu is surely inflected by local inequalities; yet, what they target in the person of the judge seems to be privileged Indians in general and what they reverse, for a very brief moment, when served by the judge, is their own inferior positioning in India.

The novel also highlights the local reasons behind the Nepalese insurgency that pertain specifically to Darjeeling. The narrator states that the Indian-Nepalese are "fed up with being treated like the minority in the place where they were the majority" (9). In an interview with Eleanor Wachtel, Kiran Desai explains that Kalimpong is largely populated by the Nepalese because "it is near Darjeeling, a big tea growing area, and Nepalis were brought in [by the British] as cheap labour to work on the plantations, so they're the majority population" (91).⁶ The speech delivered by a member of the GNLF in the novel indicates that the exploitation of the Nepalese as "cheap labour" has not come to an end as a consequence of India's political independence:

"We are laborers on the tea plantations, coolies dragging heavy loads, soldiers. And are we allowed to become doctors, and government workers, owners of the tea plantations? No! We are kept at the level of servants..."
 "Here we are eighty percent of the population, ninety tea gardens in the district, but is even one Nepali-owned?" asked the man.
 "No."

⁶ According to Lionel Caplan, "the first migrations to Darjeeling began with the appointment in 1839 of Dr Campbell as Superintendent, and by 1891, over half the population of Darjeeling was of Nepalese origin, and one-third had been born in Nepal" (32).

“Can our children learn our language in school?”

“No.”

“Can we compete for jobs when they have already been promised to others?”

“No.” (158-9)

The speech delivered by the GNLF leader Subhas Ghissing in 1985, which seems to inform the speech in Desai’s novel that is partly quoted above, compares “Gorkhas” in India with other ethnic groups such as the Marwaris, Biharis, Punjabis, and Bengalis, who, he argues, “got the justice in India” (62). According to Ghissing, “since Independence the Central Government is continuously neglecting the demands of 60 lakh Nepalese in India... the Centre has provided proper security and guarantee for the soil and future of Bengalis in Bengal but we don’t have any security, future prospects for our generations to come” (62). So it can be held that anti-colonialist nationalism of the Bengali middle-classes, who, Raka Ray holds, were “the first to intellectually challenge British authority over Indians,” (695) has not necessarily entailed an allegiance on their part with the groups rendered disadvantaged and exploited in the nation-state of India. Perhaps, the scene in Desai’s novel which foregrounds the complacency of the privileged classes the most when it comes to acknowledging the problems of the Indian-Nepalese is the one where Noni, Lola, Sai and a librarian comment on the march of the Nepalese while watching the crowd from the window of the Gymkhana library in Darjeeling:

“Must be the Gorkha lot again.”

“But what are they saying?”

“It’s not as if it’s being said for anyone to understand. It’s just noise, *tamasha*,” said Lola.

“Ha, yes, they keep on going up and down, something or the other...,” the librarian said. “It just takes a few degenerate people and they drum up the illiterates, all the no-gooders hanging about with nothing to do...” (201)

Looking down at the Nepalese insurgents from a window of the Gymkhana library, which was once a colonial club that only the British could enter, they dismiss the Nepalese’s protests in their own language as “just noise” and consider their protests for more rights to stem simply from “degeneration” and “illiteracy.” The library, as the location where they make these remarks, enhances the cultural superiority assumed by the Bengali middle-classes in relation to lower classes and minorities. As Raka Ray holds, *the bhadrakalok*, “who came into being in the late nineteenth century, were the first products of English education.... They

place a high value on men of letters, high culture and the intellect" (695). Moreover, the scene suggests that remarks very similar to these could have been uttered by the British looking down from Gmykhana colonial clubs all over India at Indians marching on the streets for the Independence of their country.

The representation of the hierarchies between the Indian-Nepalese and privileged Indians in terms of a colonizer/colonized relationship brings to the fore the double positioning of India, which is underlined throughout the novel. The "domestic" is formulated as a site informed not only by India's subjection to colonialism and neo-colonialism but also India's position as a "regional hegemon"⁷ particularly for the last three decades. In terms of its relationships with the neighboring countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh, which serve as additional sources for cheap labor in India, India has emerged as an "imperial" power in the region. It is precisely this double positioning of India that creates the simultaneous emphasis in Desai's novel on the Indian nation's "fictionality" and "reality." To put it through Rowe et al's terms, "Indianness" is emphasized as a hegemonic ("fictional") narrative that does not include every Indian citizen in a "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7); yet, at the same time, India's and Indians' "real" subjection to the "First World" hegemony is foregrounded.

In her interview with Wachtel, Desai, who is partly Gujarati and partly Bengali, reminisces about her own experience in Kalimpong as a member of a middle-class family:

I didn't really understand [the political trouble]; I was fifteen. It was much later when I was in the States and thinking about what it meant to be an immigrant, and encountering immigrant politics in the Western world, and what it meant for someone like the cook's son in my book to be brought as cheap labor to the States. What does it mean several generations on when you wake up and find that you have a large population, children have been born in the new country and yet your language isn't taught in schools, you have no political power, you have no economic power? So I went back to thinking about what it must have meant for that population in India. (93)

Desai's own positioning as an immigrant in the U.S. helps her realize the discrepancies the immigrants and/or minorities are exposed to in her home country as well as the connections between "economic migrants" (Brah 5) employed as "cheap labor" all over the world. "The same class that's poor in India is poor in New York and is poor in the West," she holds and asks "are we really building our fortunes on the backs of the poor? Can you

⁷ I owe this term to Kumkum Sangari, who has also provided me with valuable insight into India's position in relation to its neighbors.

draw the line so closely? And I think unfortunately that you can” (101). The Nepalese in Darjeeling, and the cook’s son Biju, an immigrant in New York, are connected in terms of their underprivileged positioning in domestic and global economies and the employment of the image of the servant in relation to labor migrations, too, foregrounds this connection. Mr. Kakkar, the proprietor of the Shangri-la Travel in New York, where Biju buys his return ticket to India, describes the globalized world as follows: “Still a world, my friend, where one side travels to be a servant, and the other side travels to be treated like a king” (269). Labor migration is definitely not a phenomenon peculiar to today’s world. However, the early international migrations were “predominantly Eurocentric” in that between 1815 and 1925, for example, “over 25 million Britons were settled in predominantly urban areas of the colonies” (Papastergiadis 7).⁸ In Britain emigration was encouraged as an imperial policy from the late nineteenth century onward and the white-settler colonies emerged as places where the working classes in metropolis gained upward social mobility. So, going back to Mr. Kakkar’s comment on today’s “travelers,” we can say that huge amounts of people “still” immigrate to work particularly in servicing jobs; yet, this time the direction of immigration is from the “Third World” to the “global cities of the north” (Sassen 20) as well as to “the new industrial epicenters within the south and the east” (Papastergiadis 7).

Saskia Sassen’s sociological explorations of the low-paid immigrant labor in “Global Cities and Survival Circuits” may help understand better the positioning of Biju and other immigrants from the “Third World” in the “global city” of New York. According to Sassen, global cities of the world “concentrate some of the global economy’s key functions and resources.” In these cities, “activities implicated in the management and

⁸ Alongside this huge wave of migrations from Europe, the same time period also witnessed indentured labor migrations in large numbers from China, East India, Africa, South Pacific islands, and Japan (Northrup 17). According to David Northrup, “despite the existence of a few earlier experiments, it is fair to say that the new indentured labor trade arose in direct response to the abolition of slavery in the colonies of the Great Britain in the 1830s and to its subsequent abolition or decline in French, Dutch, and Spanish colonies” (17). Regarding specifically Indian indentured labor migration, Madhavi Kale holds, for example, that “between 1837, when the first indentured migrants from India landed in British Guiana and were despatched to a handful of sugar plantations in the colony, and 1917, when the state-supervised system of indentured migration was suspended by the Indian and imperial governments, approximately 430,000 men and women from India migrated under indenture to the British Caribbean, where they worked as laborers, primarily on sugar plantations” (1).

coordination of the global economy have expanded, producing a sharp growth in the demand for highly paid professionals" (2). Sassen holds that the lifestyles of these "highly paid professionals" generate in turn a demand for "low-paid service workers," whose labor enables the former group to have the luxury of "want[ing] it all, including dogs and children, whether or not they have the time to care for them" (6). Sassen considers this increase in the numbers of people employed for service jobs in global cities, "the return of the so-called serving classes," the majority of which consists now of low-paid immigrant workers. Thus, today large numbers of immigrants "get incorporated into strategic economic sectors" (2); yet, Sassen adds, they remain "invisible" in "mainstream" accounts of globalization, which are characterized by attention given to "hypermobility" and "international communication" (1) while "material conditions, production sites" do not receive any emphasis (4). According to Sassen,

globalization thus conceived privileges global transmission over the material infrastructure that makes it possible; information over the workers who produce it, whether these be specialists or secretaries; and the new transnational corporate culture over the other jobs upon which it rests, including many of those held by immigrants. In brief, the dominant narrative of globalization concerns itself with the upper circuits of global capital, not the lower ones. (1)

Desai's novel offers a view of globalization from below by providing the reader with work scenes: particularly, scenes of kitchens at the basements of restaurants in New York where immigrants work. The Gandhi Café, for instance, in which only Hindu immigrants to the U.S. are employed, is not only a workplace but also a "home" because the staff live in the kitchen: "The men washed their faces and rinsed their mouths over the kitchen sink, combed their hair in the postage stamp mirror tacked above, hung their trousers on a rope strung across the room, along with the dishtowels. At night, they unrolled their bedding wherever there was room" (147). When harassed by rats chewing their hair at night, "they took to creeping up and sleeping on the tables. At daybreak, they shuffled back down before Harish arrived" (147). As Da Silva puts it in "Paper(less) Selves," Desai "shines a light into the dark recesses of contemporary capitalist culture. For despite their numbers, Biju and the mostly male groups of people with whom he competes for poorly paid jobs and flea-ridden beds shared round the clock, remain invisible to most New Yorkers whose life style they support" (62). The owners of the restaurant think it is better for the immigrant workers to live in the kitchen because "by offering a

reprieve from NYC rents, they could cut the pay to a quarter of the minimum wage, reclaim the tips for the establishment, keep an eye on the workers, and drive them to work fifteen-, sixteen-, seventeen-hour donkey days....‘We are a happy family here,’ she [Harish-Harry’s wife] said, energetically slapping vegetable oil on her arms and face” (146). The owners of the restaurant reduce the value of the workers’ labor by attempting to blur the boundaries between work and home as well as between employers and family, which is an old tactic used to exploit domestic workers. The Gandhi Café in New York, which “capitaliz[es] on the marketability of the Indian icon called Gandhi” (Ghosh 61), is an establishment owned and staffed by Hindus. In that respect, the hierarchies in the Gandhi Café mirror the class-based hierarchies in the nation-state of India and foreground Desai’s point about the continuation of the exploitation of underprivileged classes outside the boundaries of their “home” country.

Furthermore, the Café, which sells ethnic food, can be considered as one of the migrant labor enclaves that emerged, according to Richard P. Appelbaum, in global cities of the world with the recent “reperipheralization of the core—the coming home of sweatshops to take advantage of the home market and cheap immigrant labor” (298). Harish-Harry, like the capital owner Appelbaum describes, who “finds the best of both worlds” when “the presence of low-cost Third World labor is found in core country metropolitan areas” (304), exploits the readily-available cheap labor of his fellow countrymen. One common feature of migrant labor enclaves discussed by Appelbaum (specifically, the ones constituting the Los Angeles apparel industry) is the ethnic commonality between contractors and immigrant workers, most of whom are illegal, which serves to “outweigh the unpleasant conditions that characterize the work setting” (332).⁹ This may reveal how profitable it is for Harish-Harry and his wife to deploy the notion of “family” to define their relationships with the workers.

In Sassen’s words, *The Inheritance of Loss* “recaptures the geography behind globalization” (4). The attention paid in the novel to immigrant workers employed in the restaurants of New York also reveals the

⁹ Another dimension of the migrant labor enclaves discussed by Appelbaum is the functioning of the contractor, who shares the same ethnic identity with the workers, as a middleman. The contractor stands in between the workers and the factory owner/manufacturer, who is mainly white. In Los Angeles, for example, the workers in the garment industry are largely immigrants from Mexico and Central America (309) while the “upper stratum of the industry is almost entirely white [and] largely but not exclusively male” (311-2).

continuation of power imbalances between the privileged and underprivileged nations. Before finding a job at the Gandhi Café, Biju works in many other restaurants and sees that “there was a whole world in the basement kitchens of New York” (22): at the “Baby Bistro,” for instance, “above, the restaurant was French, but below in the kitchen it was Mexican and Indian;” at “Le Colonial,” “on top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native. Colombian, Tunisian, Ecuadorian, Gambian;” at the “Stars and Stripes Diner,” “all American flag on top, all Guatemalan flag below” (21). In the novel, the restaurant space in a global city emerges as a site where global hierarchies between nations (and their citizens) are materialized: “the sound [of the workers] had traveled up the flight of steps and struck a clunky note, and they might upset the balance, perfectly first-world on top, perfectly third-world twenty-two steps below,” states the narrator (23). The relationship between the citizens of the “First World” and the “Third World” nations at a restaurant in New York foregrounds the emergence of ex-colonized/“developing” nations as servicing nations. The entry of the citizens of the “Third World” to the “First World” is allowed on the condition that they do service jobs. The physical proximity of the “Third World” people is tolerated, in other words, only if they inhabit the shared space as a service provider. In *The Karma of the Brown Folk*, Vijay Prashad points out that this holds true not only for lower-class servicing jobs as in the case of restaurant workers or domestic workers but regarding “technocratic jobs,” as well. Specifically, in relation to South Asian immigrants in the U.S., for instance, he holds that “professional-technical desis [i.e. South Asians] are wanted only in technocratic jobs, not in high remuneration managerial positions. In 1995, the Glass Ceiling Commission reported that despite their high qualifications, Asians did not rise within their firms or institutions” (90). The fact that servicing jobs in the “First World” are increasingly held by immigrants re-activates today the notion of “servant races” deployed in colonial discourses in relation to colonized peoples. In *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, for instance, Nicole Constable holds that it is not uncommon for Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong to be addressed by their employers as “my Filipino” (39), which signals the perception of some national identities solely in terms of the servicing job carried out by the citizens of these nations. As Constable puts it, “Filipinas in Hong Kong, like certain minorities in the United States, may find themselves in situations in which they are assumed to be servants by virtue of their racial or national identity” (39).

Although it is acknowledged in the novel that “the First World/Third World struggle... takes place not only between nations... but also within

nations” (Shohat 100) as in the case of the Nepalese immigrants in India, Desai’s novel still makes use of the terms, “First World” and “Third World” to emphasize the continuation of power imbalances between so-called “developed” and “developing” nations of the world. In “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’” Ella Shohat discusses, among other things, the validity of still employing these “old” terms of political/cultural analysis used particularly in anti-colonial nationalist discourses over the 1950s and the 60s (100). Shohat thinks that the “First World” hegemony has not come to an end at all as a consequence of formal decolonizations (104) and, therefore, emphasizes the applicability of the “First/Third World” paradigm to “a geopolitical critique of the centralized distribution of power in the world” today (107). She holds that “despite differences and contradictions among and within the Third World countries, the term ‘Third World’ contains a common project of (linked) resistances to neo/colonialisms.... The invocation of the ‘Third World’ implies a belief that the shared history of neo/colonialism and internal racism form sufficient common ground for alliances among such diverse peoples” (111). Desai’s use of the “First/Third World” binary in the novel is informed precisely by the kind of critique Shohat makes of neo-colonialism.

Biju’s journey from Kalimpong to New York and then back to Kalimpong again is a story of a transformation. His experience as a labor migrant in New York enables him to position himself as a part of the huge group of lower-class immigrants from the “Third World” as well as to see his connections with economic immigrants in India such as the Nepalese. This entails a radical change in his attitude to racial differences, too, in that he recovers from his racist perception of the *hubshi*, i.e. black people. Furthermore, his revised identity of “Indian” enables him to develop a dissident voice critical of economic and political inequalities in the world forcing poor citizens of “Third World” nations to immigrate abroad. Biju comes to the US with a feeling of hatred toward black people, which he learned in India. “Once a man from his [Biju’s] village who worked in the city had said: ‘Be careful of the *hubshi*. Ha ha, in their own country they live like monkeys in the trees. They come to India and become men’” (76). While waiting in the visa-application line, Biju overhears a conversation among some of the applicants trying to make up a reasonable explanation to be allowed entry to the US: “‘We’ll say a *hubshi* broke into the shop and killed our sister-in-law and now we have to go to the funeral.’... It was a fact known to all mankind: ‘It’s black men who do all of this.’ ‘Yes, yes,’ several others in the line agreed.... They were then shocked to see the African-American lady behind the counter” (185). The racist

privileging in contemporary India of “lighter” skin color over “darker” skin, in relation to citizens of India as well as to foreigners, has its roots in the myth of an “Aryan race,” which was carried over particularly by the British over the colonial period (Kaiwar and Mazumdar 30) to provide a legitimate ground for the British rule from within the Indian caste system itself,¹⁰ and, which is still employed by the Hindu nationalist party, BJP, that “has made a determined effort to heighten the racialization of Indian public culture by proclaiming that the race of ‘Aryans’ are indigenous to India” (Rattansi 169).¹¹

What also emerges in Desai's novel is that not only India but the whole “Third World” is infected by the hierarchies dividing the people of color against themselves. Biju learns, for example, from the kitchens where he works, that “in Tanzania, if they could, they would throw them [Indians] out like they did in Uganda. In Madagascar, if they could, they would throw them out. In Nigeria, if they could, they would throw them out. In Fiji, if they could, they would throw them out. In China, they hate them” (77). The feeling of dislike toward immigrant workers (of color), felt particularly by the lower-classes of the host country (because cheaper immigrant labor emerges as an alternative to their own) hinders workers

¹⁰ British writers played a significant role in propagating an Aryanist historiography, which is based on late eighteenth-century linguistic discoveries of an “affinity” between Sanskrit, “the ancient language of India,” and European languages such as Greek and Latin (Hutton 84). In 1786, Sir William Jones also suggested “a historical affinity between the speakers of these languages” (84). Hutton holds that “in the context of British colonialism in India, the impact of ‘Aryanism was dramatic. For some, the existence of a linguistic affinity was a justification for a benign paternalism. Canon Farrar... concluded that it was proof of the affinity between Europeans, Persians and Indian; British colonialism was a coming home ‘with splendid gifts to visit a member of one common family.’ Samuel Laing gave a public lecture in Calcutta in 1862 ‘on the virtues of Aryan brotherhood,’ though the Indian Aryans were understood as the older brother who ‘once out-stripped us’ but now had ‘fallen behind in the race’” (84). Yet, it was only the higher castes of India that were accepted as belonging to the Aryan race. A distinction was made between the “Aryans” and the “Dravidians” in that Robert Caldwell, a missionary, “developed a myth of the Aryan (Brahmanical) invasion of South India and the subsequent subjection of the Dravidian people to a Hindu caste system in which invaders were on top” (der Veer, Peter Van 49).

¹¹ In *The Politics of India since Independence*, Paul R. Brass holds that “the BJP's drive for national power is based upon an explicit appeal to Hindu nationalism. Its leading slogans are that India is a Hindu country and that Hindus have a right to be proud of their history and culture.... They claim that the large Muslim minority in the country has been ‘pampered’ too long to the detriment of Hindus and the country's unity” (87).

from identifying the “enemy” as neo-colonialism and neo-liberal capitalism instead. “This habit of hate [toward people of color] had accompanied Biju, and he found 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” (77). This mutual “hate” between Indians and Africans particularly has a colonial history. In *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Vijay Prashad indicates that in the late 1700s “about half a million [South Asians] came to the Caribbean and South America to join the recently freed African slaves in a ‘new system of slavery’” and started to work as indentured laborers” (71). This experience of working together with Africans, Prashad holds, was registered by many “stories of fellowship” in that many Indian peasants “lived alongside descendants of Africans in a relatively convivial manner.... The 1882 Cedar Hill Estate strike in Guyana and the 1884 Hosay riots in Trinidad offer intimations of solidarity” (95). Yet, Prashad adds that “the British made every effort to drive a wedge between the two, particularly by making the Indians do more menial tasks than the Africans and separating them into racialized work teams and residential areas” because as a British planter who informed the West Indian Commission in 1897, put it, “the Africans and Indians ‘do not intermix and that, of course, is one of our greatest safeties in the colony when there has been any rioting’” (96). Prashad also brings up the “expulsion” of Indian immigrants from Kenya and Uganda in the 1970s as another example of the ways in which this mutual “hate” was manufactured between Asians and Africans and how it is crucial to the facilitation of neo-colonialism, too.¹²

Yet, Biju gains a “generosity” toward his fellow “Third World” workers, which dismantles the racist hierarchies in his mind. His best friend turns out to be Saeed Saeed, a black and Muslim man from Zanzibar:

Biju considered his previous fight with a Pakistani, the usual attack on the man’s religion that he’d grown up uttering: “Pigs, pigs, sons of pigs.” Now here was Saeed Saeed, and Biju’s admiration for the man confounded him.

¹² Prashad holds: “On 5 August 1972 Idi Amin informed his country that ‘Asians came to Uganda to build the railway. The railway is finished. They must leave now.’ The state shortly thereafter expelled 50,000 Asians. We tend to remember this act only as an example of Idi Amin’s heinousness, and we forget the hand of the British, who did two things: they created the idea that desis are only temporary workers... [who] can only make their lives in their homeland, and second, they made it very difficult for the Asians to enter Britain” (101).

Fate worked his way. Biju was overcome by the desire to be his friend... Saeed was kind and he was not Paki. Therefore he was OK?... Therefore he liked Muslims and hated only Pakis? Therefore he liked Saeed, but hated the general lot of Muslims? Therefore he liked Muslims and Pakis and India should see it was all wrong and hand over Kashmir? No, no, how could that be.... Therefore he hated all black people but liked Saeed? Therefore there was nothing wrong with black people and Saeed? Or Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, or anyone else... (76)

Working as an economic immigrant in New York, Biju loses the ground under his "Hindu" and "Indian" identities, which have been founded till then on his hatred to Muslims in general and Pakistanis specifically as well as on his racist attitude to non-white people. These identities instead begin to be informed by his awareness of the connections between "Third World" people who are forced to labor abroad, including the Nepalese immigrants in his hometown, Darjeeling. Hearing from Mr. Iype, a Hindu newsagent in New York, about the Nepalese insurgency in India, Biju challenges Iype's xenophobic attitude to immigrants in India:

"They should kick the bastards to Nepal," continued Mr. Iype. "Bangladeshis to Bangladesh, Afghans to Afghanistan, all Muslims to Pakistan, Tibetans, Bhutanese, why are they sitting in our country?" "Why are we sitting here?" "This country is different," he said without shame. "Without us what would they do?" (228)

Biju is able to see a parallelism between labor immigrants in Darjeeling and New York in terms of forces pushing them for migration as well as their contributions to the capitalist world economy because he now considers himself a member of a large army of cheap immigrant labor. His national identity, liberated from feelings of hatred particularly toward peoples resembling himself in terms of their underprivileged positioning in the world, does not block from sight anymore the commonalities between them. Biju's "volcanic explosion" to Harish-Harry preceding his decision to return to India attests to the change in his perception of "we," shaped by his newly-formed class-based and racial allegiances: "'Without us living like pigs,' said Biju, 'what business would you have? This is how you make your money, paying us nothing because you know we can't do anything'" (188).

Having spent three years in New York, Biju decides to return to India despite all the poverty that forced him to leave in the first place mainly because he can no longer tolerate loneliness, a feeling that seems to be shared by all the members of what the narrator calls "the shadow class":

“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, towns, got deported, returned home, changed names. Sometimes someone came popping around a corner again, or on the subway, then they vanished again. Addresses, phone numbers did not hold” (102). Immigrant workers, particularly those who are illegal, are a “shadow class” in the sense that they cannot settle down to lead a substantial life; also, since they are “condemned to movement,” it is much harder for immigrant workers to develop class solidarity. As Sassen puts it in “Global Cities: Survival Circuits,” “traditionally, employment in growth sectors has been a source of workers’ empowerment; this new pattern [in global cities] undermines that linkage, producing a class of workers who are isolated, dispersed, and effectively invisible” (2). Biju goes back to India/his father simply because he values being with him in Kalimpong more than having a job in New York. In an interview with Wachtel, Desai holds that “Biju makes an emotional decision over the economic decision and returns to India, realizing, I think, that he needs his father more than anything else, and he needs his family more than anything else, and his father needs his son more than anything else” (102-3): “Year by year, his life wasn’t amounting to anything at all; in a space that should have included family, friends, he was the only one displacing the air,” Biju thinks to himself on his way to a travel agency to buy a plane ticket to India (268).

Before selling him a ticket, the travel agent, Mr. Kakkar, warns Biju: “Biju said: ‘I have to go. My father....’ ‘Ah, soft feelings, they will get you nowhere’... ‘[T]he minute you arrive, Biju, you will start to think of how to get the bloody hell out’” (269). Just as the salesman anticipates, Biju runs into serious problems as soon as he arrives in Kalimpong: the presents he has bought for his father and all his savings he has hidden in his shoes, socks, and underwear and all his clothes are captured by the GNLf boys who give him a lift to Kalimpong. “Darkness fell and he sat right in the middle of the path—without his baggage, without his savings, worst of all without his pride. Back from America with far less than he’d ever had” (317). Biju goes through what is foreseen by Mr. Kakkar; yet, this does not mean that the narrator agrees with the latter on his privileging of economic needs over emotional ones. Rather what happens to him in Kalimpong immediately after his arrival seems to foreground the fact that Biju’s life in his hometown will be at least as hard as his life in New York in terms of material difficulties, which does not correspond at all to the ways in which he imagines his “homeland” as a migrant in New York. One night, Biju “thought of his village where he had lived with his