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From national allegory to cosmopolitanism: Transformations in contemporary Anglo-Indian and Turkish novels

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Chapter Four

Beyond the Nation: Hybridity

Intellect and love are made of different materials... Intellect ties people in knots and risks nothing, but love dissolves all tangles and risks everything. Intellect is always cautious and advises, 'Beware too much ecstasy,' whereas love says, 'Oh, never mind! Take the plunge!' Intellect does not easily break down, whereas love can effortlessly reduce itself to rubble. (Shafak, *The Forty Rules of Love* 66)

In Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* (2010), the protagonist Shams of Tabriz thus announces one of his forty rules of love, in which he compares the substance of intellect with that of love to champion the latter: love is both challenging and liberating. Love can break itself into pieces but it can also heal itself. The fragment points towards the contradictions of love. For instance, as Shams stresses, when a person loves deeply, his heart rather than his mind becomes his guide. The love that is described by Shams is both passionate and mundane, and at the same time spiritual and otherworldly. Shams accentuates this otherworldliness as he offers insights into an ancient philosophy based on the unity of peoples, nations and religions, and the presence of love in all of us. In *The Forty Rules of Love*, love surpasses difference.

However, in his criticism of love in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), the main character Gyan's observation signals that love may also have a different quality:

But so fluid a thing was love. It wasn't firm, he was learning, it wasn't a scripture; it was a wobbliness that lent itself to betrayal, taking the mold of whatever he poured it into. And in fact, it was difficult to keep from pouring it into numerous vessels. It could be used for all kinds of purposes. . . . (Desai 194)

Love exists in the material world but it has an elusive and ethereal quality. From Gyan's contrasting point of view, it is something unpredictable, therefore treacherous. The passage above arrives right after Gyan's first awareness of the feeling of love. It is significant because

later in the novel he becomes ashamed of the love and gentleness he has shown Sai in the ‘masculine atmosphere’ of rebellion that takes place against the bloody backdrop of the Kalimpong border dispute (177), resulting from the revolt of the Nepalese inhabitants who, as the major population, demand their Gorkhaland back. In Gyan’s understanding, love involves difference or division, underscoring heterogeneity.

In its divergent connotations, love becomes a metaphor for both Shafak and Desai to tackle the interplay between the cultures and economies of the East and the West. As I discuss in the present chapter, both through their writerly personas and their novels, the respective authors underline the need to move beyond national or racial limitations. They do so through their distinct articulations of a new conception of identity that, as Stuart Hall has memorably suggested, “lives with and through, not despite, difference: by hybridity” (401-2). In their joint effort to emphasise cultural difference, Shafak and Desai take hybridity as a site of change where fixed identities are called into question. Taking my cue from how love is deployed in Elif Shafak’s *The Forty Rules of Love* and Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, my aim here is to map out the different forms of hybridity in the two narratives to see what kinds of hybridity are politically critical and what kinds are not. As the novelists and their works are of different origin, understanding hybridity in its context — that is to say, differentiating one form or conception of hybridity from another — is important to consider especially when investing the term with the potential of creating alternatives.

My argumentation is twofold. Firstly, I examine Shafak’s and Desai’s attempts to go beyond cultural boundaries by means of fiction through the examination of their deployment of the themes of love and companionship. In the course of my analysis, I also draw on the authors’ personal testimonies, interviews, as well as other secondary material. Shafak describes herself as a storyteller, a displaced individual “tied to a profound and constant feeling of nonbelonging” and as a citizen of the world. Similarly, Desai claims that literature

is located beyond flags and anthems, as well as beyond simple ideas of loyalty (Rochester). Both writers lay stress on multiple belongings; their vision is informed by the idea of citizenship of the world, which encourages hybridity as the ‘spirit of the times.’ Another similarity between Shafak and Desai is that they are both contemporary female authors whose respective visions of the world incorporate a new universalism “as a constellation of elsewheres, that is, as coinciding with the nation, impacted by the global, so ramifying beyond these spaces” (Boehmer 194).

Secondly, I move to the analysis of these works to see whether the authors have achieved their professed aims of crossing the national boundaries through their fiction. As I try to demonstrate, love becomes the metaphor for both authors to renegotiate globality, under the general heading of the blurring of the boundaries. In an effort to delineate a connection between the two cultures, however, an important question remains to be asked: if globalisation is so often seen as the crossing of boundaries, how can love in the two novels gain a critical purchase on globality if that theme similarly revolves on the crossing of boundaries? In *Commonwealth* (2009), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri warn us against love’s possible “corruption,” which takes two primary forms: “identitarian love,” love of the same, which culminates in the extremes of patriotism and even fascism; and “love as unification,” when two become one, as in so many prevailing marriage metaphors (182-83). The possible answers to this final question will help me to differentiate between different modes of hybridity, critical or not.

Both novels have become national bestsellers in Turkey and India respectively, dominating their home markets. Elif Shafak’s novel was awarded with the Prix ALEF - Mention Spéciale Littérature Etrangère and was nominated for 2012 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and Kiran Desai won the 2006 Booker Award with *The Inheritance of Loss*. In that way, both novels have also become cultural exports. In the process of moving

beyond their national and cultural boundaries, these texts are transformed by the context of their reception; their meanings are inevitably reshaped to fit the needs and the tastes of first-world markets. I will attempt to analyse whether this cultural flow from the semi-periphery to the centre is dominated by the balance in power relations governing first world-third world interactions. Finally, I consider the ways in which global capitalism contributes to the commodification of the authors' works, questioning to what extent Shafak's and Desai's works have themselves become cultural commodities of the global capital.

Critical hybridity?

First developed by theorists such as Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Edouard Glissant, who aimed to describe the creolized identity of post-slavery Caribbean populations, the idea of cultural hybridity has been introduced into the literary realm through the term "mongrelisation" by Salman Rushdie (394). However, it has not been until Homi K. Bhabha's theoretical coinage that the concept has become crucial to academic critical discourse. Bhabha's emphasis on cultural hybridity has made the term become a key metaphor across many spheres of cultural research, theory, and criticism, and one of the most widely used and criticised concepts in postcolonial theory. Bhabha displaces hybridity from its racialised connotations derived from its use in biology to the field of culture. He explores hybridity in the context of the postcolonial novel, celebrating it as a manifestation of the resilience of the subaltern and as the contamination of imperial ideology, aesthetics, and identity, by "natives" striking back at imperial domination. Bhabha emphasises the potential of hybridity to subvert and re-appropriate dominant discourses.

In his collection of essays, *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha claims that hybridity is the name of the site where transformations occur as identities are called into question. This space is described by Bhabha as a 'stairwell':

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, presents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (4)

The importance of hybridity is that it problematises boundaries. Bhabha suggests that a hybrid identity is formed in this space marked as 'in-between' and 'liminal'. The liminal space between the cultures of the coloniser and (post)colonial subjects makes both undergo a process that recasts their identity. This reconstructed identity renders possible, according to Bhabha, the third space of enunciation. The third space is not of the centre or of the periphery, or the First World or the Third World, but is a space that lying as it does in both, negates the possibility of such dualisms. In this context, hybridity makes it possible to address the contradictions and internal differences in the making of identity. In other words, embracing the hybrid nature of cultures encourages us to move away from the exclusionism inherent in alleged notions of cultural purity and authenticity. In so doing, it releases the imagination to conceive of the world in new ways.

Along with the contribution of hybridity to (post)colonial analysis and cultural studies, the critical responses it has received are also central to this chapter. These critiques mainly dwell on the implications of hybridity. According to Marwan M. Kraidy, who analyses hybridity in the context of mass media and communication, hybridity is mired in two paradoxes (321). The first is that hybridity is understood as both subversive and pervasive, exceptional and ordinary, marginal and mainstream. Pnina Werbner similarly

writes, “the current fascination with cultural hybridity masks an elusive paradox. Hybridity is celebrated as powerfully interruptive and yet theorised as commonplace and pervasive” (1). If everything is hybrid, then there is no need for a special category of hybridity unless specific forms of hybridity are historically and structurally distinguishable from others. The second paradox is that hybridity’s foggy circumference, its openness, allows for unpredictable, arbitrary, and exclusionary closure (Kraidy 322). As its nature is based on elasticity and openness, it can be appropriated by anyone to mean practically anything. The criticism underlines the danger of depoliticising the term.

Arif Dirlik observes a similar downside to Bhabha’s conception of the term and claims that Bhabha has transformed hybridity into an abstraction with no particular location (105). Dirlik observes that Bhabhaian hybridity and its associated concepts of “thirdspace” and “in-betweenness” have been emptied out in their application “to be rendered into universal standardisation” (105). That the concept is quite opaque renders opaque the situations to which it is applied. When it is abstracted from its socio-historical context, it blurs, in the name of difference, the distinctions between different differences (106). In Aijaz Ahmad’s terms, this is “speaking with virtually mindless pleasure of transnational cultural hybridity, and of politics of contingency,” and it “amounts, in effect, to endorsing the cultural claims of transnational capital itself” (12). Ahmad warns against the failure to notice the cultural demands of transnational capitalism, urging the reader to foreground the historical trajectory of hybridity in different contexts.

Elif Shafak’s experience as an author captures this blurring of identities in a real context. In an interview, she says:

There’s a fuzzy category called multicultural literature in which all authors from outside the Western world are lumped together. I never forget my first multicultural reading, in Harvard Square about 10 years ago. We were three writers, one from the Philippines, one Turkish and one Indonesian – like a joke, you know. And the reason why we were brought together was not because we shared an artistic style or a

literary taste. It was only because of our passports. (Shafak, “The Politics of Fiction”)

The idea of multiculturalism that Elif Shafak hints at here is one possible consequence of the obscurity the term hybridity creates. Her experience exemplifies that, despite the intention to challenge homogenisation and essentialisation of cultural identity, the elusiveness of hybridity makes it potentially reduce all complexity to a “statement of mixture” (Friedman 87 qtd. in Dirlik). It also points out that hybridity is hegemonically constructed in the interest of the social dominant. The situation Shafak has been put in can be explicated as the act of establishing hybridity as a discursive context in which the literary industry is largely motivated by American customer expectations. As Kraidy claims, this is hybridity as corporate multiculturalism (328). Kiran Desai’s experience is another illustration of this situation. When asked to comment on the interest of Western publishers in female writers from the Middle East and Asia, she acknowledges the commercial interest of the global literary market by recounting the experience of a Nigerian writer: “when she went to a publisher to print her novel, she said the response that she got was, “Nigeria isn’t in fashion right now; the trend is India” (Igrek).

The point in revealing the limits of hybridity is neither to rule it out, nor fully side with it. Rather, the purpose is to map out a possible form of critical hybridity that can effectively respond to the novels and the authors in question. To use Jan Nederveen Pieterse’s words:

Acknowledging the contingency of boundaries and the significance and limitations of hybridity as a theme and approach means engaging hybridity politics. This is where critical hybridity comes in, which involves a new awareness of and new take on the dynamics of group formation and social inequality. (“Hybridity” 239)

The challenge introduced by hybridity entails a critique of the unending celebration and display of difference (Papastergiadis 58). Robert J. C. Young also underlines the importance

of “oppositional hybridity” and notes that it can serve as unified abstract resisting totalising modes of power, be it state, cultural ethnocentrism or literary canon (24-25). Employing a critical perspective on the hybridities at play in the selected texts increases relevance to the extent that identities are moulded by the exigencies of life under globalisation. Privileging theories of cultural hybridity and transnational, free-floating subjectivity over historical and geo-political specificity masks the contingencies of capitalist structures of power that inform people’s experiences in different ways and at different locations (Behdad 231-32). Examining various manifestations of hybridity with regards to historical and geo-specific distinctions in *The Forty Rules of Love* and *The Inheritance of Loss* is as important as scrutinising the general influence of globalisation over them.

Forms of hybridity: “we are all one”

A personal commitment to move beyond borders underlies Shafak’s fiction. In an interview, she states:

My past and my fiction have been deeply shaped by the notion of borders and the endeavour to transcend these ... Like Gloria Anzaldúa points out, borders are sites where different cultures, as well as identities, classes, races, and genders collide and coexist. I also wholeheartedly support Anzaldúa’s quest for a “new mestiza,” a mixed race, political identity. I see this as a never-ending quest, a perpetual transition. This open-ended transformation and “crossing over” helps us to overcome the limitations forced on us by dualistic patterns of thought, such as East/West, traditional/modern, feminine/masculine, etc. (Chancy 82)

Two conceptions of hybridity are highlighted above. First, Shafak mentions her writer-self as bearing on the idea of borders as they encourage her to think beyond given identities. She emphasises the potential of borders as sites where nations, cultures, traditions, politics and ideologies come into contact with one another. Secondly, borders also mark the conjuncture where the Orient and the Occident collide and form a hybrid locality. In this context, she

perceives Anzaldúa's notion of "mixed race" as an idea that helps interrogate the essentialist view that regards the nation-state as consisting of a homogenous race. Shafak's personal commitment to cross over implies the existence of differences in unity. In *The Forty Rules of Love*, love is instrumental in this sense of enabling characters to go beyond their given identities and localities.

The interactions of the Eastern and Western cultures and the reciprocal relationship between perceptions of the present and past are integral to the deployment of love as the overarching theme of the novel. Imbricated with Sufist interpretation of Islam, the novel touches on the transcendental nature and influence of love with respect to issues of belonging. The four main characters of the novel, Ella, Aziz, Shams of Tabriz and Rumi the Master, constitute the backbones of the story. The friendship between Rumi and Shams fosters feelings of companionship between Ella and Aziz. Very briefly, the plot centres on Ella's inner transformation, which commences with an editing job of Aziz Zahara's novel *Sweet Blasphemy* that is about the friendship between Rumi and Shams of Tabriz who lived in thirteenth-century Konya in Anatolia. As Ella reads the novel, she becomes curious about the author Aziz who, at the time, lives in Amsterdam.

Ella is a typical middle-class, middle-aged and unhappily-married white woman whose life evolves around her husband and children. She feels trapped despite her gracious suburban life in Northampton, New England. Her teenage children are growing away from her; her husband is distant and unfaithful. She possesses no "survival techniques to help her cope with life's hardships on her own" (Shafak 3). Aziz Zahara is a formerly Scottish Sufi who has adopted a new name and destiny. He is a traveller, "a wandering dervish at heart" (Shafak 324) and a photographer by profession. He travels with his new name following the precepts of Sufi philosophy as laid down by Shams of Tabriz, who claimed that love is a kind of journey in which, "east, west, south, or north makes little difference. No matter what your

destination, just be sure to make every journey a journey within. If you travel within, you'll travel the whole world and beyond" (86).

The two stories of Ella and Aziz, and that of Rumi and Shams, intermingle in accordance with Shafak's desire to move beyond the borders of nations and belief systems. Her intention resonates with Shams's perception of love: "All you need to do is keep in mind how everything and everyone in this universe is interconnected. We are not hundreds and thousands of different beings. We are all One" (Shafak 135). This vision of hybridity is informed by the idea that everything is ultimately one. Seeing everything as the same means ignoring individual differences as well as disregarding the historical background that informs the respective stories of love in the novel: whereas Ella and Aziz's love story stems from a modern widower's quest for love, Rumi and Shams' story of love is a response to the religious clashes of the thirteenth-century Anatolia. Seeing hybridity in this manner, therefore, risks becoming assimilationist, as it sees everything as ultimately one. The inner journey that Shams describes is accompanied by a spatial journey which brings him to Anatolia, the place that Aziz Zahara writes about in the "Foreword" of *Sweet Blasphemy*:

Beset with religious clashes, political disputes, and endless power struggles, the thirteenth century was a turbulent period in Anatolia. In the West, the Crusaders, on their way to Jerusalem, occupied and sacked Constantinople, leading to the partition of the Byzantine Empire. In the East, highly disciplined Mongol armies swiftly expanded under the military genius of Genghis Khan. In between, different Turkish tribes fought among themselves while Byzantines tried to recover their lost land, wealth, and power. It was a time of unprecedented chaos when Christians fought Christians, Christians fought Muslims and Muslims fought Muslims. Everywhere one turned, there was hostility and anguish and an intense fear of what might happen next. (Shafak 19)

From a historical point of view, Anatolia has always been a land of diverse tribes and empires, with citizens who endorsed heterogeneous beliefs and lifestyles. In order for the text to be attractive to its contemporary, first-world reader, an exotic place (from a different time)

emblematic of the text's message must be inserted into the text. Hence, this brief "Foreword" is necessary in order to bridge the temporal and the spatial gaps between the third-world backbone of the story and the perception and expectation of the first-world reader. Shafak's professed will to go beyond national borders stands in tension with the inclusion of local history as the background of a love relationship, implying that literary transnationality is haunted by its origins in the nation. The universality the author seeks to achieve via the characters is informed by local history. Although the author attempts to transcend national borders, it is evident that such worldliness can only be achieved through the recognition of the historicity of cultural legacy. Consequently, this dependency risks creating a reification of the very boundaries the narrative aims to overcome.

That the theme of companionship and love derives its force from Sufism is another platform on which the attempt for unity between cultures of the East (content) and the West (reader) is performed. In *Sweet Blasphemy*, the rules of love that are laid out by Shams are actually the precepts constituting Sufism or Islamic mysticism, which aims to bring the soul into relation with the sanctity of the other world, thus orienting it to divine truth. After a night of drinking, Shams carries Suleiman home. When Suleiman asks whether it is real or metaphorical wine that the Sufis praise, Shams answers:

What difference does it make, my friend? There is a rule that explains this: When a true lover of God goes into a tavern, the tavern becomes his chamber of prayer, but when a wine bibber goes into the same chamber, it becomes his tavern. In everything we do, it is our hearts that make the difference, not our outer appearances. Sufis do not judge other people on how they look or who they are. When a Sufi stares at someone, he keeps both eyes closed and instead opens a third eye—the eye that sees the inner realm. (Shafak 141)

As the quotation shows, all places can become prayer rooms for the Sufi: it does not matter where one is. Shams underlines the importance of our hearts as they make the real difference. Therefore, he encourages the idea of difference among believers of God. In order to

understand these differences, one should “open a third eye,” which is intuition. It is a means of getting back to and knowing the things themselves in all their uniqueness and their ineffable originality. Paradoxically, in the path to become ‘one’ with God, one should notice the dissimilarities amongst those believers.

According to Paul L. Heck, “Sufism is itself a complex form of religiosity but constitutes an integral part of Islam” (13). It constitutes the “peace-loving, amiable and convivial” interpretation of Islam. As Heck proposes, “It is best to speak of the politics of Sufism in terms of engaged distance –engaged with society but in principle distant from worldly power” (14). In this respect, Shafak’s usage of Sufism fails to acquire specific political significance. It is ultimately not about worldly power but about character formation as the fruit of the refinement of one’s soul. Taking into account the possibility of a critical hybridity and Shafak’s own quest for “political identity” as indicated above, the novel thus demonstrates different and potentially contradictory aspects of hybridity: it presents love as having the power to surpass borders, it encourages unification and universalism, and enables a quietist detachment from worldly matters.

In the novel, Sufi mysticism and tourism are fused. To the extent that, as Amireh and Majaj have argued, “literary decisions come together with market strategies and assessments of audience appeal (ranging from the interest in the “exotic” to feminist solidarity),” Shafak’s book literally travels to other places (Amireh and Majaj 5). Ella, the editor of *Sweet Blasphemy*, acquires a charged significance in this regard in that she represents the Western readership of *The Forty Rules of Love* within the novel. She is the one who is going to explore this exotic other man, “Aziz,” and his equally exotic “world,” which hints at the desire of the West to learn, explore and dominate that which belongs to the East. From a different angle, the character of Ella illustrates Shafak’s critical perspective as her novel features a Western protagonist rather than the non-Western one she is expected, if not

demanded, to imagine. This can be read as the attempt of the author to present her writerly persona as international and beyond the limits of third-world fiction. But in both cases, taxonomy is both inevitable and expected as the relationship between the third-world writer and her text on the one hand and market forces on the other hand shape First World readers and mediators.

For the story to be comprehended by its western audience, some culture-specific terms are inserted at the back of the novel in the form of a glossary:

baqa: permanency that comes after annihilation, a higher state of life with God.
baraqa: blessing
dervish: someone who is on the Sufi path
fana: annihilation of the Self while physically alive
faqih: a scholar of law
faqir: a Sufi practicing spiritual poverty
ghazal: a type of poetry common in Indo-Perso-Arabic civilization
hadith: the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad
inshallah: "If Allah wills it"
maktab: elementary school (Shafak, *The Forty Rules of Love*)

The glossary informs the Western reader about the meanings of culturally specific terms. In that respect, one cannot help but notice differences in spelling. For instance, the words "inshallah" and "dervish" are originally written with the "ş," a Turkish letter. Because the sound of the letter reminds English-speaking readers of the "sh" sound, the original word "inşallah" is transformed into "inshallah," the word "derviş" into "dervish." All these changes in the spelling of words point at an endeavour to gratify the reader, causing the text to transform itself. *The Forty Rules of Love* was originally written in English, and only then translated to Turkish under the title *Aşk*. In Turkish language, "aşk" is commonly used to express love, passion, or adoration. In 2010, it was translated into French with its title as *Soufi, Mon Amour*. The novel is adapted to different European audiences. The universality of love easily accommodates different literary markets.

Another limit that needs to be considered with regards to the attempt of the author to move beyond borders is the specific way intertextuality is employed in the novel. Aziz's text *Sweet Blasphemy* is full of references to *The Mathnawi*, written by Jalal ad-Din Rumi (nicknamed Mevlana). It is Rumi's greatest poetic work, composed during the last years of his life. The book is a compendium of Sufi stories, ethical teachings, and mystical teachings, which are all deeply permeated with Qur'anic meanings and references. *Sweet Blasphemy* starts with an epigraph (before the Foreword), which acknowledges the direct relationship it has to *The Mathnawi*:

Sufi mystics say the secret of the Qur'an lies
in the verse Al-Fatiha,
And the secret of Al-Fatiha lies in
Bismillahirrahmanirrahim
And the quintessence of Bismillah is the letter ba,
And there is a dot below that letter. . . .
The dot underneath the B embodies the entire
universe
ب
The Mathnawi starts with B,
Just like all the chapters in this novel. . . .(Shafak, *The Forty Rules of Love*)

All chapters in *Sweet Blasphemy* start with the letter B indeed, once more suggesting that everything is ultimately one. As I have tried to explain above, this is a vision of hybridity that hinges on a mystic unity. Creating a hybrid amalgam, the deliberate intertextuality in the text is used as a tool for exploring and accentuating positive relationships between the cultures of the East and West. Apparently, it is such hybridisation that would enable the text to move beyond national and cultural boundaries, encouraging the reader to reconsider both the text and its intertextual space in a comparative, universalising light. However, it should also be noted that the way intertextuality is deployed causes the two parallel narratives (Ella's story and Aziz's novel) to unsettle that aim. Multiple temporal and spatial dimensions with multiple first-person narrations underlie the structure of Aziz's *Sweet Blasphemy*; however,

Ella's story comprises third-person narration focusing on Ella herself, as the stand-in for the Western reader or consumer of this vision of a hybridity both exotic and otherworldly. In other words, the balance in content that the author seeks to construct is not fully supported by the form.

Shafak adds a critical voice in her novel to maintain a relative balance between its orientalist perspective and occidentalist content: that of Kerra's. As a Christian-Muslim convert, she is happily married to Rumi, who took her as his wife "despite all odds" (*The Forty Rules of Love* 178). One of the novel's wise and sophisticated characters, she says:

Anatolia is made up of a mixture of religions, peoples, and cuisines. If we can eat the same food, sing the same sad songs, believe in the same superstitions, and dream the same dreams at night, why shouldn't we be able to live together? I have known Christian babies with Muslim names and Muslim babies fed by Christian milk mothers. Ours is an ever-liquid world where everything flows and mixes. If there is a frontier between Christianity and Islam, it has to be more flexible than scholars on both sides think it is. (178)

Compared to the unifying, universalizing characteristic of Sufism as part of Shafak's vision of hybridity, a different kind of hybridity seems at stake here. Underlining the permeability of borders and the fluidity of identities, Kerra demonstrates the active political significance of heterogeneity. Furthermore, the possibility of the peaceful coexistence of East and the West, Islam and Christianity is reinforced here: Kerra's vision is not about a "beyond" where everyone is the same and one, but about the intimate coexistence of differences and similarities. The theme here is not love, but food and sustenance. The dichotomy is not so much transcended, but rather permeated. That this insight is bestowed upon Kerra is no coincidence. A non-Western female character that believes in the heterogeneity of this world is granted a voice. Shafak's commitment to move beyond oppositions and to underline the incommensurability of differences echoes in Kerra's words.

As I have tried to show, the theme of hybridity is a common strategy employed by many authors of transnational literatures as it enables them to cross over national, regional or cultural boundaries. In Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*, love as a theme becomes a strategic mechanism to engage the politics of hybridity. The novel presents the reader different versions of hybridity, one that focuses on seeing everything as ultimately the same, (Sufism) and another version that emphasises the coexistence of differences –particularly through the voice of Kerra. Yet, as I have discussed, at times the novel also gets caught in the readership expectations of the First World, which renders the narrative vulnerable to further reification of national borders.

Two narrative strains, different hybridities

When talking of the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*, and of her own life as well, Kiran Desai says,

The characters of my story are entirely fictional, but these journeys [of her grandparents] as well as my own provided insight into what it means to travel between East and West and it is this I wanted to capture. The fact that I live this particular life is no accident. It was my inheritance. (Desai, “Human warmth is such an innate part of India”)

In the quotation, Desai's literary identity as an Anglophone writer coming from the Third World, as well as the parallels between her life and her characters are emphasised. She also underlines her subjectivity that stems from this parallelism, helping her to encapsulate instances of hybrid belongings in her writing. Her characters represent hybridity as ‘migration melange’, which results from the contact between the migrant (Indian) and the host culture (American). As a common observation, Desai is one of those second generation immigrants, who, “in the West and elsewhere, display mixed cultural traits which can be

exemplified as, “ a separation between and, next, a mix of home culture and language (matching the culture of origin) and an outdoor culture (matching the culture of residence)” (Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture* 73). *The Inheritance of Loss* greatly bears on the association between the writer and her characters.

Similar to *The Forty Rules of Love*, *The Inheritance of Loss* is concerned with various forms of border crossing. Desai’s narrative oscillates between the events of the mid-1980s (centring on the disputed Indo-Nepalese border province of Kalimpong) and the struggles of a local resident, Biju, to make a living in the U.S. Unlike *The Forty Rules of Love*, the two parallel stories belong to the same narrative temporality, at times moving towards, at others moving away from each other. As its title implies, the novel is about personal losses that are experienced in the aftermath of decolonisation marked by intense globalisation and economic liberalisation. More specifically, via its usage of spatial journeys, the novel focuses on the fuzziness of boundaries, as well as the contingency of notions of nationality.

One of the two narrative strains communicates the story of Sai, who lives with her grandfather, a retired judge, in Kalimpong on the Indian side of the Himalayas at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga. Sai has been removed from St. Augustine Convent when her parents die in an accident in Moscow and is sent to her maternal grandfather, the retired judge, Mr. J.P. Patel. The judge’s finances are on the decline so he cannot afford to send Sai to a convent school. It is decided that she is to be taught by Nona, the unmarried sister of Lola Banerjee, who dwells at MonAmi. But by the time Sai turns sixteen, Nona has exhausted her knowledge of physics and mathematics. Thus she meets Gyan, a young student of accounting and a descendent of a Nepali Gorkha merchant. Gyan is employed by her grandfather to teach her science and math. They soon fall in love and an intense relationship develops. Hired to tutor Sai in her studies, the Indian-Nepalese Gyan belongs to the district, which was “fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted

their own country, or at least their own state, in which to manage their own affairs” (Desai 10).

In love with Sai, Gyan later turns to privilege his national identity over his love for her, and starts to feel a contradiction in his interpretation of love:

So they played the game of courtship, reaching, retreating, teasing, fleeing how delicious the pretense of objective study, miraculous how it could eat up the hours. . . . Gyan was twenty and Sai sixteen, and at the beginning, they had not paid very much attention to the events on the hillside, the new posters in the market referring to old discontents, the slogans scratched and painted on the side of government offices and shops. “We are stateless,” they read. “It is better to die than live as slaves.” “We are constitutionally tortured. Return our land from Bengal” . . . “Gorkhaland for Gorkhas. We are the liberation army.” Quite suddenly, everyone was using the word *insurgency*. (Desai 138-39)

The quotation signifies the concurrent development of Gyan and Sai’s relationship and the growth of Gorkha liberation. Gyan and Sai’s love, when understood in its pure sense of love between two people unifying, disregards outside realities. However, within the context of national belonging, love loses its grip on unity and starts to stand between Gyan’s commitment to his roots and his love for Sai. In the face of nation-related forms of belonging the love relationship between Sai and Gyan dissolves and starts to resonate with Hardt and Negri’s comments on the corruption of love when it is based on the conception “love of the same.” It is potentially a dangerous form of love. Because Gyan’s family is poor and of Nepalese decent, Sai’s upper-class and westernised status represents the very domination that the insurgency insists have been oppressing families like Gyan’s for centuries. Hence, the fragment signifies not only the link between love and politics but also the undermining of the love relationship between Sai and Gyan by the political divisions generating the insurgency. In this respect, hybridity (as informed by love relationship) remains critical only as a critique of essentialism and does not offer the potential to explore the liberatory possibilities of love. Considering contemporary nationalism (in postcolonial India) and the long historical effects

of globalisation (including imperialism), the fate of the pair's love relationship is overshadowed by the impossibility of moving beyond national borders as these boundaries still remain in power.

Furthermore, the characters hold different perspectives on love. For Sai, love is something purely personal and should not be marred by politics. While her elders discuss “terrorists, guerrillas, insurgents, rebels, agitators, instigators, and they all learn from one another, of course –the Neps have been encouraged by the Sikhs and their Kalistan, by ULFA, NEFA, PLA; Jarkland, Bodoland, Gorkhaland; Tripure, Mizoram, Manipur, Kashmir, Punjab, Assam,” Sai only thinks of “how she turned to water under Gyan's hands” (Desai 142). As I have mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Gyan perceives love as involving difference and heterogeneity. This can be observed in his active involvement in the Gorkha independence movement when he realizes his own national identity.

In terms of setting, characterization, and plot, the text is constructed in such a way as to highlight the crossing of boundaries. The settings at the Indo-Nepalese border and in the USA are examples of territorial vagueness. Located in the northeast of Himalayas, Kalimpong is a foggy territory claimed by several communities. It is a place “where India blurred into Bhutan and Sikkim,” forming a “messy map,” a region in which the dissolving mist makes “ridiculous the drawing of borders” (Desai 9). Some characters also criticise the multiplication of new states after the partition of India, blaming the incompetent coloniser—“Very unskilled at drawing borders, those bloody Brits” (Desai 129)—as well as hinting at the porosity of frontiers: “It's an issue of a porous border is what. You can't tell one from the other, Indian Nepali from Nepali Nepali” (Ibid.) In addition, part of the other narrative strain of the novel, the New York restaurants are microcosms of America, capturing the clamour of the postcolonial condition: “There was a whole world in the basement kitchens of New York” (Desai 24).

The characters and their circumstances enable Desai to emphasise additional facets of border confusion. Sai's father, a space pilot, and her mother, a college student (Mr. and Mrs. Mistry), were killed in a car accident in Russia, where Mr. Mistry was sent to in order to become the first Indian pilot in space. The upbringing she received from her parents, who were "both educated with an eye to the West" (Desai 29), as well as the influence of sharing a life with her grandfather who was "calmed by the tight [Western] calendar" (Desai 69), serve as allusions to Sai's identity. This fusion is emphasized further by the education she has received from the convent. The place taught her that "cake was better than laddoos, fork spoon knife better than hands," and that "English was better than Hindi" (Desai 33). Those cultural comparisons already accepted and internalised in Sai's generation:

Any sense that Sai was taught had fallen between the contradictions, and the contradictions themselves had been absorbed. "Lochinvar" and Tagore, economics and moral science, highland fling in tartan and Punjabi harvest dance in dhotis, national anthem in Bengali and an impenetrable Latin motto emblazoned on banderoles across their blazer pockets and also on an arch over the entrance: *Pisci tisci episculum basculum*. Something of the sort. (Desai 33)

As the passage shows, the contradictions between the cultures of the East and the West are "absorbed," and have given way to the creation of a space that allows one to acquire a new sense of identity: the space between these contradictions allows Sai's identity to develop. In that sense, Sai does not have to resist hybridity. When she falls in love with Gyan, her identity is not torn into two, but doubles, one part strengthening her self-awareness, and another part forming her response to Gyan (Whale 126). In contrast to Gyan, she is honest about her identity, which maintains a constancy in her sense of her self, and although her identity becomes intangible and fluctuating, Sai and Gyan become "melted into each other like pats of butter" without losing their individuality (Desai 143).

Sai's grandfather Judge Jemubhai Papatlal Patel and the cook are the only characters that bespeak the way colonial history is absorbed and internalised:

Jemubhai Popatlal Patel had, in fact, been born to a family of the peasant caste, in a tentative structure under a palm roof scuffling with rats, at the outskirts of Piphit where the town took on the aspect of a village again. The year was 1919 and the Patels could still remember the time when Piphit had seemed ageless. First it had been owned by the Gaekwad kings of Baroda and then the British, but though the revenue headed for one owner and then another, the landscape had remained unaffected; a temple stood at its heart and by its side, a several-legged banyan tree; in its pillared shade, white-bearded men regurgitated their memories; cows moed oo aaw, oo aaw; women walked through the cotton fields to collect water at the mud-muddled river, a slow river, practically asleep.

But then tracks had been laid across the salt pans to bring steam trains from the docks at Surat and Bombay to transport cotton from the interior. Broad homes had come up in the civil lines, a courthouse with a clock tower to maintain the new, quick-moving time, and on the streets thronged all manner of people: Hindu, Christian, Jain, Muslim, clerks, army boys, tribal women. (Desai 64)

The judge's hometown is an illustration and foreshadowing of the contradictions that will later be apparent in his identity. The comparison between the inert, ageless condition that Piphit is associated with and the transformation the town undergoes serves as the backbone of the confusion he experiences in Bishop's College at Cambridge, the place he was sent to become a judge. Ironically, he was raised by his father who owned a business "procuring false witnesses to appear in court" (Desai 64). The transformation of the judge is problematised at his arrival in Cambridge. As he sees the portrait of Queen Victoria in the entrance to the school building, the respect he feels for the British is tinged with the estrangement he suffers. This sentiment becomes manifest in his social life, particularly in his communication with his landlady, Mrs. Rice:

His landlady brought his dinner tray right to his door. A treat: a quadruplet of handsome oily sausages, confident, gleaming, whizzing with life. Ready already for the age when food would sing on television to advertise itself.

"Don't work too hard."

"One must, Mrs. Rice."

He had learned to take refuge in the third person and to keep everyone at bay, to keep even himself away from himself like the Queen. (Desai 122)

The judge posits a third person outside of himself, an entity who is not fully identical with the one who is speaking. Speaking in the third person helps the judge to hold his identity at bay, which may imply that he tries to protect himself, but at the same time, it depersonalises him. As far as Bhabha's conception of thirdspace is concerned, this liminal space between the self and the outside is understood to charge it with a transgressive quality that offers new insights on the colonial and postcolonial condition. However, as the author's characterisation demonstrates, the judge shows little potential for transgression and world-creative sensibility. Indeed, as the novel explains, he is one of those people who "suffered the rotten luck of being in the exact wrong place at the exact wrong time" (Desai 265). Fate determines the course of life in this world. The potential of critical hybridity is subject to coincidences and it cannot be something systematic.

The characterisation of the cook serves as another illustration of the ways in which colonialism frames the hybrid postcolonial situation of the subaltern in the novel. It also symbolises the transformation of the postcolonial subaltern into a stranger to his own culture, as well as an Anglophile whose

desire was for modernity: toaster ovens, electric shavers, watches, cameras, cartoon colors. He dreamed at night not in the Freudian symbols that enmeshed others but in modern codes, the digits of a telephone flying away before he could dial them, a garbled television. (Desai 62)

The way globalisation shapes the current viewpoint of the cook is voiced through his aspiration for electrical equipment. What the narrative underscores by mentioning "the Freudian symbols" is that the cook has already internalised the concept of modernity by associating it with comfort so that there is no point in questioning its *raison d'être*. The description implies that the motivation as to why the cook has ended up with such associations is of no particular relevance for the narrative. Unlike Sai's version of hybridity,

which stems from the space between the cultural contradictions of the East and the West, the cook's identity is split which results in resenting the Eastern part of his identity.

The second strain of the novel narrates the story of Biju. Besides his own belief in and desire for modernity, the cook has projected his unfulfilled dreams onto his son Biju, and has sent him to the United States of America illegally, the new global centre, in the hope of providing him with a better future. The characterisation of Biju is vested with particular significance in the narrative. As a migrant, he is the only character that is supposed to represent the newly acquired consciousness of the world citizen that has been fostered by multiple belongings. Unlike his father, Biju is not hypnotised by what the new world has to offer; on the contrary, he is one among many immigrant labourers whose human rights are violated by the immigration law of the host nation, which hinges upon class demarcation lines in the context of globalisation. As an illegal transnational labourer, Biju is excluded from the community of the Americans, such as his employer:

Biju had started his second year in America at Pinocchio's Italian Restaurant, stirring vats of spluttering Bolognese...

"He smells," said the owner's wife. "I think I'm allergic to his hair oil." She had hoped for men from the poorer parts of Europe – Bulgarians perhaps, or Czechoslovakians. At least they might have something in common with them like religion and skin color, grandfathers who ate cured sausages and looked like them, too, but they weren't coming in numbers great enough or they weren't coming desperate enough, she wasn't sure ... (Desai 54)

The quotation above exposes the viewpoint of the first-world resident with regards to the visibly-drawn borders between the cultures of the East and the West. As far as the expectations of the owner's wife is concerned, the physical appearance of an immigrant is acceptable to the extent that he or she looks similar to them, that he or she represents a culture common or familiar to them. That which is specific to Biju's culture (his hair oil) is not something tolerable, hence, is disposable. Furthermore, it is cost efficiency that

determines the acceptability of the migrant into the host culture, as Biju's fellow citizens are more "desperate" than the ones the wife wants to hire. The position of the third-world immigrant is also described in the kitchen of the restaurant Biju works in:

Biju at the Baby Bistro.

Above, the restaurant was French, but below in the kitchen it was Mexican and Indian. And, when a Paki was hired, it was Mexican, Indian, Pakistani.

Biju at Le Colonial for the authentic colonial experience.

On top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native. Colombian, Tunisian, Ecuadorian, Gambian.

On to the Stars and Stripes Diner. All American flag on top, all Guatemalan flag below.

Plus one Indian flag when Biju arrived. (Desai 23)

The bio-political taxonomies of the immigrant as contaminating "other" become apparent. According to John Masterson, the way the description is organised draws "our attention to the palimpsestic qualities of both discourses and spaces commonly associated with globalisation" (422). Nationalities are presented in a hierarchy, on top of which the American flag waves. In a *crème de la crème* restaurant, behind the exquisitely cooked, presented and priced Haute Cuisine dish, lies the hand of the illegal immigrant, whose sole desire is to acquire a Green Card. Within the context of global capitalism, then, cultural hybridity here reaffirms rather than questions the continuing presence of national categories. One cannot shake the feeling that, as Bertold Schoene argues, "the USA is a capitalist upstairs/downstairs society, which, as political statements go is neither any news nor indeed a discovery that captures a USA-specific truth" (139).

In a similar way, depictions of airports and aeroplanes serve as metaphors for global flows of people, culture and commerce that are other facets, underscoring socio-economic distinctions. After having a kind of epiphany when Biju decides to return to Kalimpong, India, he sees that

Like a failing bus labouring through the sky, the Gulf Air plane seemed barely to be managing ... Oh yes, they were going home, knees cramped, ceiling level at their heads, sweat-gluey, fate-resigned, but happy.

The first stop was Heathrow and they crawled out at the far end that hadn't been renovated for the new days of globalisation but lingered back in the old age of colonisation.

All the third-world flights docked here, families waiting for their connections, squatting on the floor in big bacterial clumps, and it was a long trek to where the European-North American travellers came and went, making those brisk no-nonsense flights with extra leg room and private TV, whizzing over for a single meeting in such a manner that it was truly hard to imagine they were shitting-peeing, bleeding-weeping humans at all. Silk and cashmere, bleached teeth, Prozac, laptops, and a sandwich for their lunch named The Milano.

Frankfurt. The planeload spent the night in a similar quarantined zone, a thousand souls stretched out as if occupying a morgue, even their faces covered to block the buzzing tube lights. (Desai 313-314)

Describing the situation of the economy class passengers, the first section of the three passages hints at the pervasiveness of binary thinking. Although it is alluded to as a point of departure and arrival for diverse cultures, underlining the presence of pluralities, the airport metaphor fails to explain why dualisms still exist in “the new days of globalisation”. Indeed, as the second section underlines, the third-world citizens are like bacteria: single-celled microorganisms that are parasitic in nutrition, and that are noted for their biochemical effects. Furthermore, it also conveys the gap between the first-world and third-world citizens to the extent that even the basic bodily activities of the former remains beyond the imagination of the latter. The airport in the last section, repeats the alienation of third-world passengers. Read as a whole, the passages not only signify the amplification of American neo-liberalism, but also the impossibility of true socio-economic mobility for the third-world citizen.

His hopes dashed (as are his father's), Biju observation does not offer the reader a sense of global density or world-creative sensibility. With respect to the politics of hybridity, while one stream of the novel appears to criticise and overcome the existence of borders, offering cultural hybridity as a strategic means to this end, the second strain of the novel lays

bare and confirms the renewed existence of hierarchies and borders between different parts of the world. Instead of political agents, the characters remain subjects of fate, trapped in their roles and positions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my aim has been to map out forms of hybridity in *The Forty Rules of Love* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. I have compared and contrasted the two novels by analysing the ways in which a thematic love can be related to a politics of hybridity. Hybridity plays a central role in understanding difference in contemporary societies. As cultural constructs the two narratives hint at differing forms of hybridity through their various conceptions of love and companionship. The variety in forms of hybridity found in the narratives underlines the endeavour of historicising hybridity in different contexts of literary production. However, as I have tried to show, when the operating context changes, so does the critical potential of hybridity. Particularly, the power of global capitalism makes it more problematic to present hybrid thinking as a remedy to its consequences.

Love homogenises differences in *The Forty Rules of Love*, therefore, rendering them invisible. The novel demonstrates a continuum of hybridities, from the unification of all differences to the need to move beyond borders and the enduring presence of singularities. This emphasis on singularities renders the use of hybridity in the novel critical, although the inclusion of Sufi metaphysics suggests a distance between its precepts and the world in its reality. As it becomes evident in the title of the book and the deliberate insertion of the glossary, the anticipation of western readership, along with the decisions made by market choices ultimately makes the narrative unstable and reifies the existence of boundaries. In the

two different narrative strains of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, the novel appears to engage hybridity critically and politically. Love involves heterogeneity. Displaying the love relationship between Sai and Gyan on the one hand, and Biju's attempts to climb the social ladder on the other, the novel not only emphasises migrancy and multiple belongings, but it also confirms the vulnerable position of the migrant in the face of global capitalism. In both their writerly personas and their novels, Shafak and Desai aim at presenting hybridity as a response to the ill-effects of globalization. Yet both *The Forty Rules of Love* and *The Inheritance of Loss* are precariously situated in the world literary system: between the worlds of postcolonial literary production and transnational capitalism, they have become cultural commodities of the global capital.