

"To Mimic or not to Mimic: That is the Question": Representation of the Concept of Mimicry in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Under Copenhagen Sky: A Comparative Study*

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Abstract

Post colonialism is one of the most important theories in the literary field. It has taken the literary studies by storm. The term postcolonial literature refers to the literary works, produced by the subjects of the ex-colonies, during or after their independence. Homi K Bhabha is one of the most prominent critics of the postcolonial literary theory. Bhabha introduced some of its most famous concepts, like: hybridity, mimicry, and the notion of a “third space”. These concepts were widely discussed in his critical works. Using the analytic comparative approach, this paper tries to investigate the employment of the concept of mimicry in the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* by the Indian-born author Kiran Desai. This is in addition to examining the same concept in the novel, *Under Copenhagen Sky* by the Iraqi writer Howraa El-Nadawy. Actually, both authors introduce characters that suffer from sense of loss and alienation. However, while some characters resort to mimicry as a defense strategy to survive in a different environment, others, on the other hand, refuse mimicry and are resilient towards losing their native identity.

Key words: Post colonialism, Mimicry, Bhabha, *The Inheritance of Loss*, *Under Copenhagen Sky*

المخلص:

تعد نظرية ما بعد الإستعمار واحدة من أهم النظريات في المجال الأدبي. و قد انتشرت هذه النظرية في مجال الدراسات الأدبية انتشار النار في الهشيم. و يشير مصطلح أدب ما بعد الإستعمار إلي الأعمال الأدبية التي أنتجها رعايا المستعمرات السابقة ، في أثناء أو بعد استقلال أوطانهم ، علي حد السواء. و يعد هومي ك بابا واحدا من أبرز نقاد نظرية ما بعد الإستعمار. فقد قام بابا بتقديم بعضا من أشهر مفاهيم النظرية للوسط الأدبي كله مثل: التهجين، التقليد، و مفهوم " الفضاء الثالث". هذا و قد تمت مناقشة المفاهيم السالف ذكرها علي نطاق واسع في أعماله النقدية. تحاول هذه الورقة البحثية توظيف مفهوم التقليد، مستخدمة في ذلك المنهج التحليلي المقارن، و مطبقا ذلك علي رواية: ميراث الخسارة للكاتبة الهندية المولد كيران ديساي. هذا بالإضافة إلي دراسة نفس المفهوم في رواية: تحت سماء كوبنهاجن للكاتبة العراقية حوراء النداوي. في الواقع أن كلتا المؤلفات تقدمان شخصيات تعاني من الشعور بالضياع و الغربة. و بالرغم من ذلك فانه في حين أن بعض الشخصيات تلجأ الي التقليد كاستراتيجية دفاعية للبقاء علي قيد الحياة في بيئة مختلفة، فإن البعض الأخر ، من ناحية أخرى يرفض التقليد ، و قادر علي الصمود أمام المغريات لفقدان هويتهم الأصلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار في الأدب - المحاكاة- هومي ك بابا- ميراث الخسارة- تحت سماء كوبنهاجن.

Post colonialism is an intellectual theory that has come to recognition in the literary arena since the middle of the Twentieth Century. It is mainly concerned with the inhabitants of the previously colonized countries, after the end of the era of colonialism and imperialism. In this respect, the term may denote two things. Firstly, it refers to the land that is now free from the clutches of colonialism, and thus gained its own economic, political, and social independence. Secondly, the term may imply the financial status of the previous colonizers, and their loss of the economic profits, they used to gain from their ex-colonies.

Culturally, however, the term post colonialism demonstrates the different strategies in which race, ethnicity, culture, and human identity are actually illustrated after the independence of the ex-colonies. However, some critics use the term to highlight culture and cultural products that give direct representation of the era of colonialism and its aftermath. Post-colonial literature aims at describing the relationship between the colonizers and the people, they colonized. Thus, post-colonial studies are mainly concerned with the effects of colonization on the previously colonized cultures and societies.

Aijaz Ahmed, a well-known postcolonial theorist differentiates in his book, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literature* between two terms: Postcolonial and Post-colonialism. He

explains the difference by saying: "postcolonial is simply a polite way of saying not white, not European" (30). Moreover, the hyphenated (post-colonialism/post-colonial) tends to refer to the historical period after a nation has been officially recognized as independent, whereas the non-hyphenated form denotes the consequences of colonialism. Additionally, R.S. Malik, in his book, *A New Approach to Literary Theory and Criticism*, also discusses the difference between the hyphenated and the non-hyphenated term saying:

The term Postcolonial (with a hyphen) represents a temporal phase being experienced by those societies which suffered from colonization and are now free, while the term Postcolonial (without a hyphen), connotes much more: it represents a creative mindset and critical approach. (143)

Moreover, Apollo Amoko, in his article: "Race and Postcoloniality," argues that:

Postcolonial studies refer to an effort by scholars in such diverse disciplines as literature, cultural studies, and history to come to terms with the legacy of European colonialism. (132)

Arif Dirik in *The Post-Colonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* highlights three different usages of the term. First, it is used as a “literal description of conditions in the formally colonial societies” (332), secondly, it is used as a “description of a global condition after the period of colonialism” (332); thirdly, it represents “discourse on the above named conditions that is informed by the epistemological and psychic orientations that are products of these conditions” (332). Thus, post-colonial means a cultural study of the impact of colonialism on the literature and arts of the previously colonized countries.

However, in *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin employ the term “to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (2). This is contrary to some critics who envisage the domination of colonialism as mainly an economic one. Leela Gandhi believes that: “colonialism is a necessary subplot to emergence of market society in Europe, and to the concomitant globalization of capita” (24). Therefore, postcolonial literature mainly denotes the literary works produced by the ex-colonies, both before and after they were granted their political independence.

Post colonialism deals with conflicts of identity and cultural belongings. The colonizers, in so many countries, erased the

natives' culture and traditions. Moreover, they also tried to replace the previously eradicated customs with the colonizer's own culture, customs, and traditions. The generations that lived under the colonial reign, in some way or another, adopted some of the customs and traditions of the colonizer. This created a new class torn between the native identity and the new hybrid identity of the indigenous. Therefore, postcolonial literature mainly denotes the literary works produced by the ex-colonies, both before and after they were granted their political independence.

Postcolonial literature is mainly concerned with the literary products of the people of the previously oppressed ex-colonies. Postcolonial literary critics offer a rereading of classical literature. This is with the aim of expressing the colonial discourse, and retelling the story from the point of view of the oppressed, silenced, and colonized objects. A great example of rereading of the colonial classics is *Wide Sargasso Sea* by the Jamaican-born author Jean Rhys. In 1966, Jean Rhys decided to write a modern earlier part to the story of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys tries to give voice to the silenced Bertha Mason. Other literary critics, on the other hand, discuss the issues resulting from the clash between the colonizer and the colonized. Major issues like identity crisis, hybridity, struggle for survival,

subalternity, diaspora, alienation, and loss of identity, are widely discussed in the postcolonial discourse.

Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Henry Lewis Gates, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, are the most prominent critics of the postcolonial theory. Bhabha has played a significant role in formulating many concepts of the theoretical framework of the postcolonial discourse. His literary concepts of hybridity and mimicry have made great contributions to the domain of postcolonial studies. His work, *The Location of Culture*, is regarded as one of the best books that display many aspects of the postcolonial theory.

Mimicry, in colonial and postcolonial literature, is most commonly observed in colonized societies by imitating the language, dress, practices, or cultural attitudes of the colonizers. Actually, mimicry has always been viewed as an opportunistic pattern of behavior. The colonized tries to imitate the person in power: (the colonizer), because the colonized wishes to attain the same power of the colonizer. During this process of imitation, the colonized oppresses twist their native cultural identity.

Mimicry is often seen as something shameful, and any colonized who is engaged in the process of imitating the colonizer, gets out-casted from his own community. However, this was not the case with Bhabha. He believes that hybridity and mimicry are

strategies, used by the colonized in order to resist the ideological and cultural domination of the colonizer. Bhabha does not believe that violence is a way of decolonizing, nor is it a solution of colonization-related issues. In his article "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse ", quoted in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Bhabha argues that: "the colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quiet"(152).

Undoubtedly, hybridity is a fact that cannot be denied in a multicultural society. It is one of the direct consequences of colonialism. Bhabha believes in his article: "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of some Forms of Mimeticism", that: "Hybridity is a creation of a new cultural forms and realities resulting from colonial encounter" (94). This can be evident in adopting more modern artist forms instead of reviving native culture; in order to cope with the present conditions of today. Furthermore, hybridity can denote any amalgamation of the eastern and western culture.

Identity crisis, consequently, is the direct result of the conflict between the native culture of the colonized and the foreign culture of the colonizer. It is a psychological condition emerging from the state of alienation and confusion in cultural identities.

Identity crisis, diaspora, alienation, and loss of identity are all aspects of post-colonialism. These aspects are most commonly used in postcolonial literature. The theme of identity crisis is widely represented in Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* and Hawraa El Nedawy's *Under Copenhagen Sky*.

According to Bhabha, the process of hybridization is a direct result of the consequences of colonialism. In a multi-cultural postcolonial society, it is only natural for the previously colonized to absorb the culture, the language, and even the customs of the colonizer. The colonizer encompasses both cultures: the culture of the colonizer, in addition to his/her own native culture. Although the process of hybridization might occur on the unconscious level, the act of mimicry most certainly occurs on the conscious one. Thus, whether to mimic or not to mimic the domineering culture is a choice, made freely by a hybrid-culture person, in order to get along with his/her multi-cultural society. In fact, Bhabha believes that mimicry is a strategy of resisting. In his book, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states that: "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognition of the other, as a subject of difference" (86). It is a strategy by which the colonized discredits the supremacy theory of the colonizer. Accordingly, this entails the falsification of the claims of power the culture of the colonizer. By being able to exactly mimic the culture of the

colonizer, Bhabha believes that both the colonizer and the colonized are on the same footing.

Hence fore, the act of mimicry by a hybrid person might be or might not be a strategy to combat identity crisis in a multi-cultural society. This depends on the character's own perception of mimicry, either as surrendering to colonialism or a way of combating colonial power. Both Kiran Desai and Hawraa El Nadawy are hybrid authors, who live in multi-cultural societies. Desai was born in the year 1971, in New Delhi, India. She belongs to a highly sophisticated family. Her mother is the renowned novelist Anita Desai. Desai, the mother, was short-listed for the Booker Prize, for many times. Kiran Desai spent the first fifteen years of her life in India. Eventually, she moved, along with her family, to England. Then, she settled in the United States and became an American citizen. Desai succeeded in achieving what her mother Anita failed to achieve; she won the highly prestigious 2006 Man Booker Prize for her novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. Desai, also, wrote other novels, like *Hullabaloo in Guava Orchard (1998)*. However, *The Inheritance of Loss* is still considered her masterpiece.

Similarly, Hawraa El Nadawy is the product of a multi-cultural society. She has two conflicting identities: her identity as an Arab woman, from Arab origins, in addition to her identity as

a Danish woman, due to her upbringing. El Nadawy was born in Iraq, in the year 1984, to both Arab and Kurd parents. Due to political turmoil in Iraq, her family emigrated to Denmark in the year 1991. At first, El Nadawy could not speak Arabic. She had to learn Arabic at home. In the year 2010, she wrote her most famous novel: *Under Copenhagen Sky*. In fact both *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Under Copenhagen Sky*, reflect their own authors' experience of alienation, hybridization, and the clash between the Eastern and Western cultures in multi-cultural societies.

The two novels try to answer one question: how can a hybrid character overcome an identity crisis? Can mimicking the colonizer's customs, traditions, and culture be the answer to get over the problem of cultural identity? Is resisting the colonizer's culture and reviving one's authentic identity the key to solving the identity crisis? Both novels present characters that suffer from alienation and sense of identity loss. Whereas, some characters in the two novels find solace in Bhabha's notion of mimicry, others, on the other hand believe in resisting the colonizer's culture, and reviving their own identity.

Most of the action of *The Inheritance of Loss* is located in India, at the town of Kalinpong. This town is located in the Northern part of India, near the Nepalese borders. This town has

a population of the Gorkhas ethnic minority. The novel presents two types of characters: the ones who mimic the identity of the colonizer in their cloths, customs, language, and life style. Nonetheless, there are other characters who uphold their own identity, and fight the mimicry imposed on them by the colonizer.

The action of the novel occurs in 1980. In this particular year, the Nepalese ethnic minority began a liberation movement, calling for the creation of an independent state for them. They wanted to have their own sovereign state in West Bengal; separated from the existing Indian state. As consequences for this, a violent movement was established in 1986. This movement was called the Gorkhas National Liberation Front (GNLF). This movement represents the backdrop for the events of the previously mentioned novel. Some of the actions of the novel take place in London and in New York.

Whereas, most of the action of El Nadawy's *Under Copenhagen Sky* is located in Denmark. Some of the events take place in Iraq and Syria. The main characters of the novel live in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. The female Protagonist in the novel was born in Copenhagen to Iraqi parents, after emigrating from Iraq. The whole family left Iraq due to political turmoil there.

The loss of identity is the main theme of *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Under Copenhagen Sky*. Cultural identity is a term that denotes our belonging to a certain culture, with its own traditions, customs, and language. However, in both novels there are examples of individuals who lose their own identity by throwing away their own mother culture, religion, tradition, customs, and even their own language. After spending some time abroad in a foreign country, they become infatuated by the foreign culture, and choose to mimic. Eventually, they become mimic men. Examples of these characters are: The Judge and Sai in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Additionally, we have Hoda, her family, and her friends in *Under Copenhagen Sky*. The crisis of identity loss in the two novels is a direct consequence of colonization. The previous victim of colonization has a split in identity. One belongs to his own native identity, and the other belongs to the Western one. This causes the sense of not belonging to both cultures. According to Bhabha, mimicry of the hybrid product of colonializing is actually a resistance strategy against the colonizer's dominance.

The character of the Judge in *The Inheritance of Loss* is a great example of the mimic man. Jemubhai Patel, the main character in the novel, is a retired judge. He is a hybrid character. He was born in India, but his father sent him to England to study

law at Cambridge University. In England, he tries to adopt and embrace the British culture, traditions, and language. Right from the beginning of the novel, the Judge is seen playing the European game: chess. "The Judge sat at the far corner with his chess board, playing against himself" (8). Judge Patal was also very furious because he cannot have a proper five-o'clock tea, which is one of the most famous English habits. " This was a travesty and it undid the very concept of tea time" (10). The Judge lives in an old house in Kalimpong, this house was built by a foreign man from Scotland. He was fascinated by the place, and wanted to live in special part of India. The house was once a great manor with modern extravagances and many chambers. The Judge, most of the time, is absorbed in the chess board and his own memories of the past. He always remembers his past days at Cambridge. There he confronted humiliations, disrespect, and feeling not accepted in a foreign land. In spite of this, the Judge loved the European culture and everything made by the Europeans. He even possesses two rifles made in Holland, and considers them to be his priceless possessions.

Due to his previous stay in England, he harbored a hidden feeling of disgust against all manifestations of poverty in India. When he went to England for the first time, he could not believe

that he can find manifestations of poverty inside the Great Empire, too. Desai describes this saying:

He continued to be amazed by the sights that greeted him. The England in which he searched for a room to rent was formed of tiny gray house in gray streets, stuck together and down as if on a glue trap. It took him by surprise because he'd expected only grandness, had n't realized that here, too, people could be, poor and live unaesthetic lives. (Desai 38)

Sunita Sinha and Bryan Reynolds have come out with similar opinion in this context:

The Inheritance of Loss is not only a story, it is “a perspective, an inside look into post-independence India, with its roots dug in colonialism, its branches embracing Americanism, but its leaves brown and dusty with the very old prejudices that govern people’s minds; an India where a class of people still speak only English and squirm at the mention of their mother tongues; where a mother is proud because her daughter has chosen to marry an Englishman; where a foreigner is treated suspiciously in spite of his honest efforts to lay foundations of indigenous industries; there are thousands of Indians enter America as illegal immigrants—in the eyes of their families, they are

the heroes, but in reality, they sleep with mice on the kitchen floors of restaurants or in the squalid suburbs of big cities. (Sinha, Reynolds XXI)

The Judge incarnates and repeats all the views and opinions of the colonizer about the poor colonized people. He says:

Give these people a bit and one could find oneself supporting the whole family forever, no doubt, because they might have no food, the husband might be behind and with broken legs, and the woman might be anemic and bent, but they 'd still pop out an infant nine months. If you let such people get on inch, they 'd take everything you had. (Desai 264)

Another aspect in the Judge's character is clear in his relationship with his cook, Pannalal. The Judge's treatment of the cook symbolizes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. In this relationship, the Judge mimics the attitude of the colonizer. He treats his poor cook as a slave. He is responsible for everything in the house. He does the cooking, the cleaning, and even takes care of the judge's dog, Mutt. When the cook asks for a raise in his salary, the Judge declines his request and insults him. When the dog gets lost, the Judge is infuriated and threatens to kill the cook, if he could not find Mutt. He even beats him with his slippers. Such incident reveals how the Judge

is mimicking the colonial power. Sunita Sinha has commented on the character of the Judge in the novel saying:" Though the character of the Judge is a third world character, we experience the post-colonial era in all the cruelty of its old, ingrained hatreds and prejudices" (143).

Judge Patal, is a cultural hybrid character, inherits colonial legacy. He practices the same pattern of domination-subordination on the cook. Actually he himself had been the victim of the same pattern of domination and subordination during his stay in England. This shows that colonial culture like the contemporary culture is hybrid. Colonial and postcolonial discourse does not simply present dichotomy between the East and West, self and other, but it also combines the points of conflict or crisis of these binaries. When there is confrontation or interaction of these dissimilar cultures, colonial power imbalance is obviously experienced. Consequently, the autonomy of these categories in the binaries can never be retained. The character of the Judge indicates the legacy of the colonial discourse which is continued far beyond the colonial regime. It certainly has influenced the lives of individuals even in a post-colonial period. In words of Sanghita Sen_:

Kiran Desai, in her novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) attempts to locate the blurring lines of the history of Indian

mental architecture from the colonial rule to the contemporary time. Desai Skillfully demonstrates this through the convergence of the tormented past and an indeterminately positioned multicultural / multiethnic present. All through the narrative woven with assorted and generically complex composition, Desai presents a wide representation of a constructed reality where individuals are engaged in an incessant search for personal identity. Macrocosm and microcosm in the narrative coalesce to interweave each small event into the plot in terms of small event into the plot in terms of construction of an image of the “self” and the “other” that is essentially partial” (Sen 101)

The character of the cook represents the colonized Indian, who has to endure insults and be silenced and marginalized. On the other hand, the Judge represents the British colonizer, with mimicry of the British attitudes, and his Anglicized way of living. This situation is similar to what Bill Ashcroft et al describe in his famous book, *The Empire Writes Back*, this state saying:

The development of recent theories of colonialist discourse (Bhabha, Spivak, Jan Mohammed, etc.) has clearly been one of the most influential results of the appropriation of contemporary post-structuralism

accounts to the field of post-colonial writing. These critics have sought to offer ways of dismantling colonialism's signifying system and exposing its operation in the silencing and oppressing of the colonial subject. (175)

Another aspect of cultural mimicry in the character of the Judge is his use of language. The Judge only speaks and reads in English, though he now lives in India. He feels so proud to do so. The reason for this goes back to his parents. When they sent him to England, in the past, they gave him the advice of speaking English all the time. They even supported this attitude by giving him a new Oxford English Dictionary. Desai elaborates this saying: "With his new Oxford English Dictionary and his decorated coconut to be tossed as an offering into the wave" (Desai 43). This is a clear indication of getting rid of his native identity, and eventually trying to mimic and assume a new European one.

Unfortunately, in England, the Judge feels inferior to the English people; as he is a black-Indian man. His engagement in mimicry is constantly confronted with mockery from the English people for doing so. He just wants to imitate the white; he feels that they are the persons in power. Mimicry is the Judge's own way of getting access to the same power of the colonizer. The Judge is also eager to make his own granddaughter, Sai speak and read only in the English language. For him the people who

speak the Indian language are inferiors to them. He tells Sai: "I cannot send you to a government school; I suppose... you would come out speaking with the wrong accent and picking your nose" (Desai 41).

The Judge also adopts the customs and traditions of the British people. The Judge, his granddaughter and neighbors celebrate Christmas though most of them are not Christians. They celebrate this religious occasion by making food and distributing gifts, according to the English habits and culture. "Vaseline shiny and supple for Christmas, in addition to the Vaseline smell, there was an odor of wet sheep..., and they all joined in, drunk and wild" (Desai 158–159). Furthermore, the Judge hates his wife because she reminds him of his Indian origin; that he wants to deny. He always humiliates her for her Indian traditions and appearance. He takes her to England, and hires a private tutor for her to teach her English. Moreover, he even changes her name from Nimi to Bella; he wants her to be Anglicized, just like him.

The Judge's behavior is correspondent to what Homi.K Bhabha describes in his famous work, "of Mimicry and Man": *The Ambivalence of colonial Discourse*. He says:

Those are the inappropriate signifiers of colonial discourse. The Difference between being English and

being Anglicized, the Identity between the stereotypes which, which through repletion also become different, the discriminatory identities constructed across traditional norms and classification, Simian, Black, the lying Asiatic—all these are metonymies of presence. (384)

In their attempt to imitate the colonizer, the colonized become blurred version. The mimic men are almost the same as the colonial masters, but they are not exactly similar to them. They are as Bhabha mentioned “almost the same but not quiet” (384).

The mimic men live in the middle of two clashing cultures. Consequently, they develop split identities. This is what causes their state of alienation from their selves and their own societies. Another example of these mimic characters in the novel is the character of Sai. Sai is the Judge’s granddaughter. She was born in England. She had to return to India after the death of her parents in a car accident. Sai has no living relative except for her grandfather, Judge Patal. Like her grandfather, Sai suffers from an identity crisis, and she believes that being Anglicized is the best way to solve this dilemma. She adopts the English culture, speaks the English language, and practices the English traditions and habits. She only reads English magazines, and follows English programs. Sai ignores all the issues that concern India at that time. She even looks down upon the poor Indian people Sai

falls in love with her tutor, Gyan. He belongs to the Nepalese ethnic minority in the Himalayan Region. He was born in extreme poverty. He lives in an old mud house. Sai says about this house: “Gyan’s house did not match Gyan’s talk, his English, his looks, his clothes, or his schooling. It did not match his future” (Desai 255). The difference between the two characters: Sai and Gyan is what cause the failure in their relationship. Sai chooses to be Anglicized; to mimic the English culture, and ignore all together her Indian legacy. Whereas, Gyan, on the other hand stands for his own identity, and refuses to surrender to the identity of the colonizer.

Actually, through this partial and mimic representation of the individual, Kiran Desai has effectively confronted and challenged the darkness and gloom of the individual identity which is constructed by the imperial legacy. It is the agency that has induced separation and has controlled the member of the Indian culture, a culture so well known for peaceful coexistence for centuries despite its differences. Desai’s subtle observation of boundaries shows her concern for hybridity, mimicry, diasporic identity and marginalization of characters, the issue of individual space, and the lineage of colonial past and postcolonial present.

Similar to the identity crisis and sense of loss that the characters of *The Inheritance of Loss* are experiencing,

characters in El-Nadawy's *Under Copenhagen Sky* also suffer from alienation and identity problems. Hoda, the protagonist, suffers from an identity crisis. Hoda was born in Denmark to an Iraqi family. Her parents emigrated to Denmark due to the political turmoil back home. The family left their elder son Emad in Iraq till things become more suitable to bring him to Denmark. Hoda lives in the Capital Copenhagen with her family. "in a house similar to any European house, with no relation whatsoever to their Arabic heritage" (Al Ramady 230". The family consists of her parents, her sister, Nakhel, and then accompanied by her elder brother, Emad. Hoda feels alienated and lost; she belongs to an Arab background, but only knows Copenhagen as her birthplace. She even feels identified with the European city. Hoda describes Copenhagen as: "The city of youth and lunacy" (UCS 23). For her: "Copenhagen is a city where its features combine in one place, fits me completely. I do not need to go from one place to another when I miss it, but when I want to see it, I see it as a whole" (UCS 384). This is contrary to her feelings towards Iraq. Hoda mentions Iraq in the novel, as the place of her ancestors. Hoda does not know anything about Iraq, except what her parents tell her. Almirhej believes that: "Hoda has a torn self like most of the victims of the diaspora"(2). Eventually, Hoda feels that she

is losing her Arab identity; her family and friends are actually mimicking the European culture.

Like Judge Patal, Hoda is a hybrid character that chooses to adopt all the attributes of the European culture. Hoda speaks and reads in Danish. Her family ignored teaching her the Arabic Language. Additionally, they are very proud that their daughter is fluent in Danish, and the Danish language is considered her mother tongue. Hoda, herself, confesses this fact saying: "I admit that the predominance is for the Danish, the one that linguistically surrounds me and guides me, it was and will be the only help when I get stuck on uttering some terms "(25).

Religion is another component of the cultural identity. Hoda belongs to a Muslim family; nevertheless, they do not adhere to the Islamic morals or traditions. They never pray. They, also, never consider fasting during the Holy Month of Ramadan. They adopt the Danish culture. Hoda refuses to wear Hijab (the veil). She prefers to be a free young lady, and wears whatever she wants. She claims: "For me, wearing veil is a disaster, and I'm a kind of succumbing to disaster, so I succumb" (96). Hoda's family and friends like to adopt all the Danish culture, language, and traditions. For example, Emad, Hoda's brother, is in an illegal affair with a Danish girl, despite of his Islamic faith. Likewise,

Hoda's friend Zena is also an Iraqi Muslim, but she is very open minded, and is engaged in some illegal affairs.

In spite of the fact that Hoda and her family chose to mimic and imitate the Western culture, Hoda still feels alienated in the Copenhagen society. Her black eyes and dark skin show that she does not belong to the Copenhagen's native culture. This makes Hoda alienates herself from her parents, her friends, and her moral beliefs. For example, when Hoda was sixteen –year old she began a relationship with an old man called Torben. At first, their relationship develops through their chatting on the Facebook, but then Hoda feels that she is not a young girl anymore, and wants to consummate the affair. But suddenly she decides not to commit a sin. Hoda lives all the aspects of identity crisis, from alienation, loss of identity, to indulging in Western life.

Hoda's decision to write an autobiographical novel in Danish, and letting Rafid translate it into Arabic, is a turning point in the novel. Hoda falls in love with Rafid. He reminds her of her Arab origins. Unlike the judge who hates his wife for reminding him of his Indian origin. She starts loving him from a distance, and then sends him an email asking him to translate her novel into Arabic. While translating her autobiography, Rafid discovers Hoda's love. Their relationship develops throughout the exchanged emails between them. As he is a married man, their

relationship becomes impossible. However, Hoda remains in love with him for the rest of her life, symbolizing Hoda's love and longing for the Arabic heritage. Actually, both Hoda and Judge Patal are representative of characters who find in mimicking the Western culture a way to fight their identity crisis.

On the other hand, there are some other characters who try to preserve their own identity, despite the difficulties they face in the Western world. They refuse to surrender to the homogeneity of the culture of the colonizer. In both *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Under Copenhagen Sky*, we find characters struggling in search for their own cultural identity. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, the National Liberation Front is a movement that calls for the creation of a sovereign state for the Nepalese in India. This movement refuses that the Nepalese ethnic minority melt down in the Indian society. They refuse to mimic the Indian majority, in their own way of living; confirming their own distinctiveness.

Gyan, in *The Inheritance of Loss* is an example of the resilient character that refuses to mimic the other. Gyan is Sai's tutor. He is an enthusiastic young man, who criticizes her for her Westernized life style; Both Sai and Gyan develop a relationship. Gyan takes Sai out for dinner in a restaurant. While Sai uses the fork and knife, as a Western girl, Gyan uses his hands, like any ordinary Indian. Later in the novel, Gyan becomes convinced of

the beliefs and principles of the Gorkha Movement of Independence. He becomes affiliated to the movement, and joins the protest. Consequently, Gyan starts to hate Sai for representing the Western culture. He, even, betrays her by informing the Nepalese Protestants that the Judge owns guns in his house. This, eventually, led to the robbery of the house. Later on, he tries to apologize to Sai, but they both come to the realization that their relationship is doomed.

Additionally, Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss* is another main character in the novel that refuses to mimic the Western culture, and lose his identity. Biju is an Indian young man, and the son of the Judge's cook. Biju has always had the dream of travelling to America, and accomplishing the American dream. He emigrates to America in an illegal way. Consequently, he suffers in order to survive. In America, he suffers from being an illegal immigrant, and has to go from one bad job to another. He also has to live in the basement of the kitchen of the restaurant.

Biju suffers a lot in America, and he refuses to change. He works as a waiter in a restaurant that services beef. He has to serve beef to the customers, which is contrary to his beliefs as a Hindu. In Hinduism, eating beef is forbidden for its believers. Biju refuses to change his beliefs, customs, and traditions to mimic the Western culture. He settles his conflicts by leaving the

restaurant, and eventually leaving America, all together. At the end, he goes back to India, and he gets robbed there. The robbers take all the money he had from working in America. This signifies the failure of the American dream. Nevertheless, he is happy to be reunited with his father, and his beloved home country.

The story of *The Inheritance of Loss* is mainly about loss, the loss of identity, nationality and loyalty. The loss in the title is mainly the loss of faith in India felt among a lot of people who overstay tourist visas and become illegal immigrants in the U.S. As A. Shameem has put it: "In her novel, Desai writes of the cultural hybridity of the Post-colonial migrant and the, expatriate condition of hybridity" (Shameem 49).

Likewise, Rafid in *Under Copenhagen Sky* is another character that refuses to surrender to mimicry and the loss of identity. Rafid is the male protagonist of the novel. He was born in Iraq. He has a big family; consisting of five siblings in addition to his mother and father. Rafid suffered a lot under the reign of Saddam Hussien. His brothers were executed by the then-ruling political Régime in Iraq. He had to flee Iraq, and emigrate to Denmark. Like Biju, Rafid cannot get accustomed to the Western culture and the Western way of living. In Denmark, at first he

could not find a job, nor can he learn the Danish language. This causes a state of miscommunication. He says:

When I have got the residency, they take me away into a Remote town in an island called Yoland, where the Arabs are very few. I do not feel lucky to become deaf and dumb in a town in which I cannot understand anyone, and cannot be understood. I do not feel lucky; I try to get rid of my deafness and dumbness by learning that difficult language; which it is not easy to remember its words. (El-Nadawy 77)

After residing in Denmark for a while, Rafid begins his life in Denmark as a translator. He gets married to a hybrid girl called Shaza. All through his life in Denmark, Rafid feels home –sick towards his mother land. He refuses the Danish Culture, and only speaks the Danish language outside his home. Rafid always regrets being forced to emigrate to Denmark and leave Iraq. He tells Hoda: “we, the Iraqi people, of course, are not in favor of immigration, but our land has been filled with blood” (284).

Humiliation, alienation, and estrangement all lead to the sense of solitude and loneliness that are being experienced both by Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Under Copenhagen Sky*. They both live in a state of nostalgia. They always dream of their homeland; and of being reunited with their parents. Rafid, for

instance, always remembers his childhood in Iraq; he misses his homeland. When Rafid mentions the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, he says: “The Euphrates, which I used to pass by when I was a child from time to time. I used to look at it, and it used to answer me with pleasant breeze...As for the Tigris, it is more related to me, because of its memories, and the River’s cool breeze in March” (282–283).

Likewise, Biju misses his motherland, India, and the love of his father. Desai states his own nostalgia to his home town in the novel, by saying:

He remembered bathing in the river, feeling his body against the cool firm river, and setting on a rock with his feet in the water...Biju found himself smiling at the memory of the time when the whole village had watched India win a test match against Australia...He thought of a place when he could never be the only one in a photograph. (Desai 275–276)

At the end, Biju decides to leave America and return back to India. On the other hand, Rafid continues to live in Denmark. He returns to his usual day life after breaking off with Hoda. He goes back to his stressful work, daily routine, and alienation. Both Biju and Rafid find it difficult to adapt to their own new environment, and this is what causes their identity crisis.

In conclusion, both *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Under Copenhagen Sky* present the struggle of their characters to cope with their identity crisis. While some characters, in the two novels, manage to assume new hybrid identities by mimicking the prevailing culture, others, on the other hand, refuse to surrender to the identity loss, and defend their own identity. *The Inheritance of Loss*, The Jude and his granddaughter Sai choose the easy path by mimicking the prevailing culture. They choose to be hybrid personalities, living a western European life, with a modernized life style inside India. On the contrary, Biju and Gyan refuse to renounce their own identity. Biju returns to India from America, and Gyan cuts off his relationship with Sai. Likewise, *Under Copenhagen Sky*, Hoda lives in a state of identity loss. She lives in Denmark and embraces the European Western identity, along with the other members of her family. Similar to the failure in the relationship between Sai and Gyan, the relationship between Hoda and Rafid, also fails.

The novel *The Inheritance of Loss* is essentially a study of losses, loss of culture, loss of identity, loss of human relations, loss of emotional binding, loss of human values, loss of rationality, loss of peace and harmony, loss of humans' faith in each other etc. Sense of loss is an integral part of every character's life; they are insecure and unmoored, struggling to survive in the modern

world, unsure of whether they will ever see the benefits of trying to mimic this civilized world, characters unnecessarily feel inferior due to their Indian heritage. Kiran Desai's characters lose their culture. Although, Biju and his father do not lose their cultural identity, they are trapped in a sense of loss. They sense the loss of homeland, of respect, of a decent life and of money. The Judge loses peace and Sai also loses indigenous cultural values and she also suffers from identity crisis. The biggest loss she feels profoundly is the love of Gyan. Similarly, the characters in *Under Copenhagen Sky* experience the same sense of loss. Hoda feels that she has a blurred identity. She feels a sense of non-belonging to the culture she is mimicking and to her own native culture, as well. Rafid, likewise, feels alienated in his new environment.

Finally, both Desai and El-Nadawy discuss one of the most important themes in the post-colonial theory. Characters in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Under Copenhagen Sky* are confronted with the dilemma of being hybrid and suffer from identity crisis. Their only way to overcome this dilemma is to either choose to mimic the prevailing Western culture, or to uphold to their native identity. It is this on-going struggle, sense of loss, and alienation are what foreshadow one of the most important aspects of the

postcolonial theory in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Howraa El-Nadawy's *Under Copenhagen Sky*.

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