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LIMINAL SELVES IN MONICA ALI'S BRICK LANE¹

Monica Ali'nin *Brick Lane* Başlıklı Romanında Arada Kalmış Benlikler

Şule OKUROĞLU ÖZÜN

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi
Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatı Bölümü
suleokuroglu@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5471-8075

Hale YAĞLIDERE

Öğr. Gör. Kafkas Üniversitesi,
Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu
halecag@hotmail.com

ORCID ID:0000-0001-7804-7755

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Abstract

This study aims to shed light on the liminal identities of Monica Ali's characters in Brick Lane that are shaped by cross-cultural circumstances and the border-crossing experience. This experience causes many changes in the migrant's life in terms of living conditions, social milieu, cultural circumstances, educational opportunities and gender roles. All of these factors are means for the construction of an identity for a settled life in a country. In a foreign country, a migrant wants to survive and experiences a dilemma between the host and home lands. To overcome this dilemma, the migrant realizes his or her actual self by dwelling on the ambivalent nature of liminal subjectivity. In a way, migration generates thresholds in life since the subjects who are in a transitory, middle passage, move through a process that takes them from separation to integration. In this sense, Monica Ali crafts the identity construction of her characters in a framework through transition into reunion in a new way of life. Consequently, this study will analyze the liminal identities of Brick Lane by focusing on the term 'liminality' within the interrelated concepts, ambivalence and third space coined by Homi Bhabha.

Keywords: Bhabha, liminality, ambivalence, identity, migrant, Brick Lane.

Öz

Bu çalışma, Monica Ali'nin Brick Lane adlı romanındaki sınırı geçme deneyimi ve kültürlerarası durumlarla şekillenen karakterlerin arada kalmış benliklerini açıklığa kavuşturmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu deneyim bir göçmenin hayatında yaşam şartları, sosyal statü, kültürel durumlar, eğitim olanakları ve cinsiyet rolleri açısından birçok değişikliğe sebep olmaktadır. Tüm bu hususlar herhangi bir ülkede hayat kurmak için kimlik inşasına giden yollardır. Yabancı bir ülkede, göçmen hayatta kalmak ister ve ev sahibi ülke ve ana

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ülkesi arasında bir ikilem yaşar. Bunun üstesinden gelebilmek için, göçmen arada kalmış özneliliğin bilinmez doğasında yaşarken kendi gerçek benliğini tecrübe eder. Bu bağlamda, Monica Ali yeni yaşam yolunda geçişi yeniden toparlanma ile tecrübe eden karakterlerin kimlik inşasını ustalıkla yansıtmaktadır. Nitekim göç hayatı arada kalmışlıklar sunmaktadır çünkü geçicilikle, ortada kalmışlıkla meşgul özneler dağılmadan birleşmeye doğru bir yol izler. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma Homi Bhabha'nın üçüncü yaşam alanı ve belirsizlik ifadeleri ile 'arada kalmışlık' terimine değinerek Brick Lane adlı romanda yer alan arada kalmış kimlikleri analiz edecektir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Bhabha, aradalık, belirsizlik, kimlik, göçmen, Brick Lane.

1. INTRODUCTION

Britain became a multicultural country after the mass migrations that followed World War II. Although the migration of South Asians started in the 17th century with the arrival of the East India Company, South Asians came to Britain in greater numbers after the Independence Movement. The Nationality Act of 1948 and the need for labor after World War II caused social, economic and cultural changes through mass immigration in the 1950s and 60s. The need for workers in different countries after World War II made it essential to transfer the workers from poor countries in order to have them work in the newly founded factories. In this context, people from different nations moved to Britain in masses. The South Asian Diaspora in the UK refers to immigrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. 'They became the beachhead for a chain of migration that would grow in the 1960s into a large immigration stream' (Kivisto, 2002: 140). It can be said that a multicultural environment has been structured and that dialogue between different nationalities has emerged. 'The complexities of border crossing prevalent in the life of the early diasporians, and the cultural displacement of these people have had impacts on the consciousness of a number of diaspora writers from South Asia' (Okuroğlu Özün, 2013:79). These dislocated subjects try to reach harmony in constructing a self while struggling with the stressful conditions of being colonized and an immigrant.

Ali herself, as a member of the South Asian Diaspora in the UK, has insight into the struggle of immigrant characters to define themselves between cultures. Thus, her novel was selected for this study. Ali is a significant figure who has experience of migrancy; she is an immigrant who knows what is to be between cultures, nations and religions. In fact, she is familiar with the troubles of displacement. In relation to displacement, the ambivalent stance of the subject and the need for a space that is psychically and psychologically constructed are amongst the interactions that Ali has after migration. In this respect, *Brick Lane* is a good example for presenting the changes which the characters experience in England in a multicultural

context; in short, their lives can be observed clearly. Therefore, *Brick Lane* will be discussed in this study through the terms, liminality, ambivalence and border crossing.

With its portrayal of the lives of migrants in England, *Brick Lane* is one of Ali's most significant works. It deals with multicultural characters in changing environments, cultural hybridity and identity formation in a new social milieu. In this sense, *Brick Lane* is based on the struggles of characters who having separated from their original land, try to transit into an alien environment and to be integrated into the new circumstances. Furthermore, it can be said that Ali clearly asserts 'the repertoire of conflictual positions (that) constitute the subject in colonial discourse' (Bhabha, 1994: 110). The conflicts that the postcolonial subject has help Ali see the hardships of postcolonial experiences as well as the changeable aspects of postcolonial conditions. She blurs any border like nation, culture, and gender, and offers liminal stance, cultural ambivalence and third space. Her style of writing is a portrait of her stance between homeland and migrated country. Although criticized by her own people in Bangladesh because she writes about the Bangladeshi people as subaltern in her novel, she adopts a decisive tone towards British colonization. Thus, she reveals the devastating effects of migration to the country which was the colonial centre in the past and is the host country in the present, as well as the ambivalent attitudes of the characters in the new cultural setting that shape their lives. Ali's style of writing puts emphasis on the individuals who are caught between cultures, reflecting the liminal sides of the postcolonial discourse.

Brick Lane focuses on identity construction and border crossing. The title of the novel is the best way to highlight the aim of this study. Bricks are barriers; they are obstacles and liminal spaces for migrants. Brick Lane is a location in London inhabited by Bangladeshis. This location represents the psychological situation of the individuals, Nazneen and Chanu as the main characters of the novel. These bricks are liminal objects before the men and women who migrate to London to have a better life. So, their efforts to gain something good in life and for identification will be realized with the demolition of the bricks and boundaries. In short, personal development will be achieved both physically and psychologically by crossing the bricks or barriers. The liminality of the characters, their ambivalent moves and pursuit of newness and self-assertion are all the results of willingness to cross the borders and to collapse the bricks. Actually, *Brick Lane* is a narrative of a female migrant who proceeds towards self-achievement through consciousness of her own potentiality. So, '[her] subjectivity is constituted

through ongoing, open-ended interaction between [herself] and the world' (Moi, 1999: 391). Thus, in the following part of this study, an analysis of *Brick Lane* will be presented through the concepts of border and liminality.

2. NAZNEEN: A THRESHOLD FEMALE

In *Brick Lane*, Ali's protagonist is a female diasporian, Nazneen, who tries to name herself in both patriarchal and Eurocentric discourses. The novel circles around the multicultural world of Nazneen in England. After an arranged marriage with an older man, Chanu, Nazneen moves to Tower Hamlets in London. She leaves her original homeland in Bangladesh behind; yet, her only contact with the homeland is through letters to her sister, Hasina. Unlike Nazneen, Hasina prefers to stay in Dhaka, fighting for her love, and rebelling against the patriarchally shaped rules imposed on her. The two sisters, cross physical, emotional, psychological and cultural borders in their private lives, as Ali portrays them. She actually views the two different worlds of the sisters as indicators of both a recall of the past with Nazneen's connection to her sister and a reviving of the present life after an arranged marriage dictating a border crossing in the end.

At the beginning of the novel, Nazneen is frustrated since she has left her home behind and experiences the feeling of isolation or alienation in a society whose language, she does not even know save for a few words like 'sorry' and 'thank you'. Her husband, Chanu, the product of a male-dominated society, actually offers a liminal stage for Nazneen in her life, and is the initiator of her transformation. Then, her life is enhanced by Karim, a young, rebellious, fanatic Muslim who is a part of an Islamic organization. That affair is the second twist for Nazneen to gain agency out of the conflict between her traditional self and her own desires. Gradually, she learns to adapt herself to living in a new environment. Ali is a good observer of migrant psychology since she is also an immigrant. Ali attempts to document the cultural, physical and psychological realities of migration. The novel as a whole displays people whose in-betweenness is detailed in gloomy descriptions.

Each character in the novel tries to occupy a productive space in the host culture and strives not to be lost physically and spiritually as they construct a self through different cultures, genders, religions and languages. As a matter of fact, ever-shifting identity is the destiny of those who cross the boundaries of cultures and strive to acquire a place for a self just like the protagonist Nazneen in *Brick Lane*. As both a woman and a migrant, Nazneen strives to learn 'to adapt to an alien environment' (Hussain, 2005:

100).

She seeks a place for herself both psychically and psychologically; and in this sense her identity construction forms itself within the marriage arranged for her by her father: 'Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma' (Ali, 2003: 7). Here, the situation of arranged marriages in Bangladesh is not found odd or interrogated. Also, she is regarded by Chanu as 'an unspoilt village girl':

...not beautiful, but not so ugly either...not tall, not short...all things considered, I am satisfied...what's more she is a good worker. Cleaning and cooking and all that. The only complaint I could make is she can't put my files in order, because she has no English. I don't complain though. As I say, a girl from the village: totally unspoilt. (Ali, 2003: 23)

Chanu's words pinpoint the hardships of Nazneen's life since she is isolated and lonely in Tower Hamlets, a Bengali Muslim enclave in the east of London. Therefore, Nazneen is like 'moth surrounded by a shell of fate, religious hypocrisy and male dominated society' (Pratim Das, 2015: 3). This positioning makes her question her 'self', her liminality between the willingness for transformation to a new woman and the traditional enforcements. However, at the end of the novel, she finds the way from being a naïve housewife to becoming a dignified woman. In this sense, Ali makes readers understand the issues faced by the immigrants and how they are psychologically and psychically entrapped subjects attempting to acquire a cohesive and coherent identity.

Nazneen's numerous conflicts related to her search for a unified identity (downtrodden Nazneen in Bangladesh or male dominated society as well as poor Nazneen who tries to take 'routes' in London to have a space for her own self) are all succinct explanations for her struggles to open up new spaces for a better life. Hence, Nazneen obviously has great and immortal hopes for the betterment of her life, and this attitude delineates a character who wishes to construct her own way in order to find her own identity. In this respect, sometimes 'she has to 'manipulate' her 'beliefs in order to maintain a positive self-image' (Willet, 1998: 198).

'I don't want anything from this life', 'I ask for nothing. I expect nothing.' Hasina jumped and down at that. 'If you ask for nothing, you might get nothing!' But she had proved her mother's point. 'How can I be disappointed?'

*It made sense to Nazneen. Only one thing was not clear.
The cause of Amma's suffering.' (Ali,2003: 102)*

Nazneen actually dodges something that needs to be questioned since even she interrogates her mother's suffering nature. Her double-edged identity between her unconditional bond with tradition (home) and her desire to shift the predetermined roles forces her to move metaphorically. Nazneen's hybridity here denotes her upward mobility towards self-awareness and the transformation of her sense of self. Correspondingly, 'far from a static thing, identity of self or of 'other' is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies' (Said, 2003: 332). The physically, culturally, and linguistically dislocated Nazneen at the beginning of the novel displays a kind of mute subjectivity due to the double consciousness such border crossings encapsulate.

Actually, Nazneen's bond with her origins as well as her eagerness to get newness in her life here gives her agency. Therefore, although she questions where she belongs to, she is not as pessimistic as she would have been if she had lost her hopes for living in a foreign land. She 'began to be aware of herself. Without a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination' (Ali,2003: 56). The physical circumstances in London are important in forming the immigrant identity. In this sense, Nazneen gradually succeeds in not being a part of this catastrophic portrayal since she feels that she is an ordinary part of the world: 'they were not aware of her. They could not see her any more than she could see God. They knew that she existed but unless she did something, waved a gun, halted the traffic, they would not see her. She enjoyed this thought' (Ali,2003:56). In addition to this, although she is imprisoned within the walls of the house by her husband, she spends her time looking through the widows smelling the outer world. As she says: 'You can spread your soul over a paddy field, you can whisper to a mango tree, you can feel the earth beneath your toes and know that this is the place, the place where it begins and ends. But what can you tell to a pile of bricks? The bricks will not be moved' (Ali,2003:87). She feels herself entrapped by the bricks of the house, not being able to take breath as an immigrant woman. Nonetheless, that creates illusions in her mind and blurs the borders of her identity:

When she had come she had learned first about loneliness, then about privacy, and finally she learned a new kind of community. The wife upstairs who used the lavatory in the night. The milkman's alarm clock that told

Nazneen the grueling hours her neighbor must keep. The woman on the other side whose bed thumped the wall when her boyfriends called. These were her unknown intimates. (Ali,2003:182)

Ali portrays Nazneen as an imprisoned soul since Nazneen is alone with ‘the self-reflexive dialogues’; furthermore, she is confined because any ‘attempt to communicate with others is frustrated’ (Zhang, 1996: 133). Generally, postcolonial theory tries to define immigrant subjects through rootlessness, coupled with the sense of otherness; however, the sense of loss also evokes the possibility of different windows to look through. A voyage towards a better life enables these subjects to negotiate to where the appropriate identity is located. The major problem of the migrants is living between national identity and individual identity. This liminal position is actually a process constituted within, not without. The individuals who are eager to find their selves in multicultural circumstances do not want to be a part of a group, since the collective identity annihilates the sense of self-esteem and plots a pessimistic future for a subject. In this sense, Ali gives Nazneen a gradual personal development to negotiate and integrate the separated self. On an ordinary day, Nazneen’s attention is caught by a white woman whose ‘footsteps rang like declarations’ (Ali,2003:374). Her observation leads into her own ideas about how this physicality reflects the instinctive tendency towards change: ‘One step in front of the other. Could it say, I am this and I am not this? Could a walk tell lies? Could it change you? (Ali,2003:374)

The dialogue between self-being (the product of cultural originalities) and self-becoming (the outcome of individual experiences) causes a subject be aware of the other selves. In this sense, the subject is on the perpetual move in order to find the true self. Ali uses her characters to explore ‘the positioning of Bangladeshi within Britain’ (Hussain, 2005: 91). The positioning of the individuals here coincidences with multiple identities. These various identity structures make Ali’s characters liminal amongst the possible mutated identities. A similar point about this notion of characterization assumes a well-organized picture of a woman, delineating ‘Nazneen’ s journey from a dominated, subdued teenager to a gradual metamorphosis into a hesitant, independent mother with a poetic sensitivity beyond her stifling, bleak and cluttered flat on Brick Lane’ (Kanal, 2008: 51). Ali embeds identity formations by displaying ‘considerable transformations’ of the characters (Hussain, 2005: 91).

The life in Banglatowns in England shows that the houses

of the migrants are the border between inside and outside since they fear to wander outside their town to meet English people. The boundaries of Banglatowns are the places for the subjects who are in-between. The neighborhood gives a strong sense of identity and belonging to immigrants and their offspring, it is worrying that immigrants often do not feel safe, accepted, or at ease outside their neighborhoods. (Staden, 2007, 8)

The inhabitants of this place are othered by the mainstream culture. As can be understood from the passage above, the neighborhood fosters the ambivalence and in-betweenness of the migrants in a foreign land. In this sense, the short distance between outside and inside makes them open up their identities to newness. Meeting other people dissolves their desperate situation as liminal figures who are stuck to the borderline between national and international cultures. Nazneen is eager to be social and to sustain her traditional identity since she wants to be accepted as an individual. In a way, clothing is a marker for sustaining a life for Nazneen to change.

If she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well. If she wore a skirt and a jacket and a pair of high heels, then what else would she do but walk around the glass palaces on Bishopsgate and talk into a slim phone? If she wore trousers and underwear, then she would roam the streets fearless and proud. (Ali, 2003: 297)

After coming to a foreign country, she questions how getting dressed changes the identity. While adapting to another self, she feels but she fears. Seeing the difference or the other actually means identifying her or his sense of self through a 'new way of being, an emergent mode of perception and engagement with the world' (McLeod, 2000: 237). The notion of change in new places causes the individuals to be involved in the process of 'both the physical sense of possessions or belongings, but also the less tangible matter of beliefs, traditions, customs, behaviors and values' (McLeod, 2000: 244).

Liminality for Nazneen represents the process of becoming a subject in between East and West who wants to cross the borders both physically and psychologically. Nazneen in a way struggles to define herself beyond the borders, as a subject on the margins. 'The struggle for self-assertion, its excitements, rages, passion, problems, irritations, defeats and conclude, sometimes triumphantly, sometimes with frustration, with ambivalence towards the worth of the struggle' (King, 2003: 58). In

Nazneen's identity formation, her sense of expectation to be accepted by English culture is clear.

Also, as locations change, identities change. Nazneen changes after she learns more English than just 'Sorry' and 'Thank you'. She wants to be visible, in other words, to be recognized by the changing environment in Britain. 'Over the last decade and a half, she had gleaned vocabulary here and there. The television, the brief exchanges at the few non-Bengali shops she entered, the dentist, the doctor, teachers at the girls' schools. But it was the girls who taught her. Their method was simple: they demanded to be understood' (Ali,2003:194).

Nazneen and her daughters here represent the need to be heard, to have an identity through language. They all try hard to attain a new social space to define themselves.

Language carries culture and culture carries particularly...the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and the social production of wealth, at their relationship to nature and to other human beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (Wa Thiong'o, 1986: 16)

As quoted here, language determines the understanding of the world and the values that people have. The characters feel the necessity to speak English correctly since they try to make a connection between England and themselves in order to overcome their marginalization. Therefore, language offers a new space where negotiation is possible. Ali crafts the gradual entry of Nazneen into the mainstream culture through language. Enthusiasm for learning English basically activates Nazneen as an unstable character, although Chanu does not approve of this circumstance as it threatens his original Bangladeshi identity. 'Pub, pub, pub. Nazneen turned the word over in her mind. Another drop of English that she knew' (Ali,2003:28). To survive, Nazneen enhances the new language, and the new culture as well, by beholding 'a strategy of translation rather than representation', by taking over 'the discursive mechanisms of power' (Hicks, 1991: xxiii), so as not to be stuck between the original and new language acquisitions. Amongst the foundations of multiculturalism, language is also a part of the creation of a

new identity related to in-betweenness since the migrant is prone to possess feature of both cultures (global and local). In this sense, Bhabha asserts that the border consciousness of the subjects in the midst of double-sidedness is 'not only double-voiced and double-accented...but also double-languaged' (Bhabha, 1994: 58). All the dimensions related to the blurring of borders denote that *Brick Lane*, in a larger sense, is 'set in the backdrop of Bangladeshi society presents the journey of a woman towards self-actualization that comes only through the sequential and gradual eye-opening experiences which Nazneen comes across in her life' (Hayat et al, 2015: 209-210). Divining a self-assured identity through the catastrophic enforcements of both the patriarchy and othering, Nazneen blossoms, and within the process 'through self-understanding, through vigilance and courage... can begin to change' (Anuradha, 2015: 19).

If ever her life was out of her hands, it was now. She had submitted to her father and married her husband; she had submitted to her husband. And now she gave herself up to power greater than these two, and she felt herself helpless before it. When the thought crept into her mind that power was inside her, that she was its creator, she dismissed it as conceited. How could such a weak woman unleash a force so strong? She gave it to fate not to herself. (Ali, 2003: 299- 300)

Self-actualization is clear as Nazneen tries to resolve the conflicts and to find a coherent identity between her origins and current conditions. This glance at the formation of her identity permits the claim that Nazneen is an asset for the definition of creativity, as revealed in her refashioning as a self-assured woman, already discussed in detail. This is because she embodies, firstly, the partial living-being in the world of the dominated (patriarchy and colonizing), and then she is the framework of 'how newness enters the world' (Bhabha, 1994: 227). Additionally, she embodies the notion of 'newness' combined with border consciousness and liminal personalities that can be 'repackaged to sustain' (Papastergiadis, 2000:15). Furthermore, she illustrates how the vacillating nature of liminal identities can be remade and recreated because of the need to sustain the self in the lands of collision.

In this sense, Monica Ali designs a female character both to declare the independence of a woman as a gender voice and also to represent a subaltern crying out for strength and grasping self-made potentialities to survive not only psychologically but also physically. In the novel, Ali

depicts a female who experiences many turning points in her life. Nazneen also starts earning money and gains her financial independence, whereas Chanu has problems with his job and falls into heavy debt. Nazneen purchases a sewing machine to earn the money to feed her family as well as to pay back the debt of her husband. This gives her feelings of financial and social assurance.

She is exhausted and unhappy with her obligations. This makes her wander in search of happiness, which she finds with her lover, Karim. Unlike Chanu, Karim treats her with respect and pays attention to her opinions and makes her feel important. However, despite this interest in her life and in her abilities, Nazneen faces a conflict between her loyalty to her matrimonial bond and her love for Karim. In fact, this interstitial circumstance in her life empowers her as a key figure in exhibiting the portrait of a lady between two stools and in illustrating the notion that 'however ambiguous and shifting the ground may be, it is not an infertile territory...' (Rushdie, 1991, 15). The fertility present in identity formation reveals a subjectification that is transitory; at last, Nazneen controls her life and gets the power to achieve a social, cultural and gender becoming.

*I have no complaints or regrets to tell you, said Nazneen.
I will tell everything to God. What could not be changed
must be borne and since nothing could be changed,
everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life.'*
(Ali, 2003: 15-16)

Although she believes in God, she questions the boundaries of self: unless anything changes, it must be experienced or tolerated. Nonetheless, her agency on the margins leads her into the presence of possibilities to remap a space for living. As Okuroglu Ozun illustrates: 'temporality refers to accumulation of cultural practices in a certain space celebrating discontinuity as productive concept which he (Foucault) considers as breaks, liminal spaces and thresholds' (Okuroglu Ozun, 2013: 189). The upward mobility of Nazneen towards self-knowledge is along the same lines, with the outcomes of marginality enhancing the 'dynamics of change'. The dynamic juxtapositions inherent in crossing thresholds are essential in bringing forth the discourses of potentialities in order to 'reorder conventional spatial hierarchies' (Okuroglu Ozun, 2013: 193), 'by crisis or deviance' or 'by their perfection or subversion of certain spatial designs' (Decerteau, 1984: 131).

The self on the margins has the potentiality to achieve power

through the process of identity construction. ‘Role conflict and status inconsistency are examples of situations that may be interpreted as identity conflicts. Such conflicts between two identities may come about as a person takes on new role identities’ (Burke et al., 2009: 183). Nazneen gets the power to obtain an assured identity. The newness in identity formation shows that the conflicts and contradictions that the subject experiences are all markers for the acquisition of a new identity.

3. AN ANALYSIS OF CHANU

In *Brick Lane*, Chanu is another diasporian who is caught in-between cultures and religions. He has fantasies and hopes for living in England since he is keen on English literature. On the other hand, he is a minor character that dwells in England as a third world man. In this sense, he wants to return to Bangladesh where he feels comfortable and safe. Actually, his liminal positioning here demonstrates that he not only admires Englishness but also exhibits his strong ties to his native land. Chanu is a disappointed figure who belittles everything in England to make himself feel better. He is described by Nazneen:

My husband says that they are racist, particularly Mr. Dalloway. He thinks he will get the promotion but it will take him longer than any white man. He says that if he painted his skin pink and white then there would be no problem. Chanu had begun, she had noticed, to talk less of promotion and more of racism. (Ali,2003:58)

Apart from Nazneen, Chanu is another character who undergoes transformation as an individual since he is in the midst of identification. He has crossed the borders of nation physically, not psychologically. He wants to change, even though he is strongly bound to his past in Bangladesh. At the beginning, he does not want his daughters to adapt to Englishness or to lose Bengali identity; as the novel progresses, he is less willing to have them adopt Bengali identity either. This transformation shows that he has positive attitudes towards English culture:

Let me tell you a few simple facts. Fact: we live in a Western society. Fact: our children will act more and more like Westerners. Fact: that's no bad thing. My daughter is free to come and go. Do I wish I had enjoyed myself like her when I was young? Yes! (Ali,2003:93)

Chanu's self is between England and Bangladesh while he adapts to his new social milieu. This identity formation points out his marginalization. This marginalization makes him act in an unwesternized way, intentionally or unintentionally. He says:

If you go out, ten people will say, 'I saw her walking on the street'. And I will look like a fool. Personally, I don't mind if you go out but these people are so ignorant... Besides I get everything for you that you need from the shops. Anything you want, you only have to ask... I don't stop you from doing anything. I am westernized now. It is lucky for you that you married an educated man... And anyway, if you were in Bangladesh you would not go out. Coming here you are not missing anything, only broadening your horizons. (Ali, 2003:45)

Initially, Chanu is portrayed as the product of a patriarchal community; thus, he forces Nazneen to be a traditional wife. However, he is also the product of the host culture since he has complexities as a result of border crossing interactions in London. That is to say, Ali depicts Chanu caught between two worlds and remaining in a dilemma about whether to adapt to the host country culture or to adhere to his own culture since for him the West despises the Bangladeshi community and regards them as subaltern voices. He asserts:

All these people here who look down at us as peasants know nothing of history... in the sixteenth century; Bengal was called the Paradise of Nations. These are our roots. Do they teach these things in the school here? Does Shahana know about the Paradise of Nations? All she knows about is flood and famine. Whole bloody country is just a bloody basket case to her. (Ali, 2003:185)

Chanu 'looks down upon the majority of Bangladeshis who are from Sylhet and who are working class... he distances himself from other fellow Bangladeshis' (Hussain, 2005: 103). There is always an in-between space that comes with the problem of assimilating, 'not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put' (Brah, 1996: 205). The border consciousness of the individual embeds the contingency of the routes and the certainty of the roots in a liminal stance.

As quoted, within the utterances of Chanu, we witness the ambivalent and assimilated side of Chanu ‘although he bitterly resists assimilating into British culture, hanging on to his cultural and historical roots and sense of national identity, ...a scholar from the Commonwealth who pursues his university studies in the U.K., acquainting himself with, and steeping himself in, British culture and literature, spouting random quotes from Shakespeare to compliment the occasion’ (Arıkan and Koçsoy, 2010: 494).

As discussed in the theoretical part of this study, border crossing gives birth to enunciations of selves in order to move on, because the evoked images of boundaries, passages, crossings and changes mark an awareness of othering; othering triggers a willingness to enter into differences; entering into differences constructs the potential understanding of the variety of masks, disguises, and passages among the selves. To sum up, deconstructing fixed circumstances allows the subject to transform. In this sense, we can claim that Chanu is not enhanced by the hope of mutated identity; he is a portrait of the transformation and remade self that is constructed by the colonized world.

4. KARIM, SHAHANA AND THEIR IN-BETWEENNESS

Another significant male figure in the novel, Karim, is instrumental in the self-actualization of Nazneen’s identity. His love affair with Nazneen afterwards produces a sense of belonging in Karim since he looks for some objects to identify himself. It enables the anxiety to be visible of those individuals who are stuck in the ‘in-betweenness’ of the change to be portrayed in detail. The threshold position of Karim points out that ‘Karim did not have his place in the world’ (Ali,2003:375). Like Chanu, Karim is not fired by the will of self-determination to construct a sense of identity. ‘The real thing, he said. She was his real thing. A Bengali wife. A Bengali mother. An idea of home. An idea of himself that he found in her’ (Ali,2003:380). In the end, Karim tries to escape his interstitial stance with the marriage to Nazneen. Actually, Karim seeks a psychological location by transcending the borders in his depths. In particular, the psychical dislocation of the people invokes half-life, partial presence and the edge of foreign cultures. In this respect, the sense of location explodes at the center of individuality, both psychologically and physically, as a result ‘of cultural and psychic journeying to learn about the processes which sustain social relations and subjectivities’ (Brah,1996: 202) that are at the center of the world he or she takes for granted. Actually, the feeling of unbelonging as a result of the vacillating nature of Karim in the host land demonstrates his

inner conflicts through his relation with Nazneen:

Karim has a new style. The gold necklace vanished; the jeans, shirts and trainers went as well...Karim put on Panjabi-pyjama and skullcap. He wore a sleeveless fleece and big boots with the laces left undone at the top...Nazneen felt that Karim did not want her to mention the new clothes. The matter was either too trivial or else too important to be discussed. (Ali,2003:312)

To encapsulate, the sense of unbelonging also remaps the threshold position in the host land through in-betweenness, as quoted here. Encompassing the central and the subordinate characters in *Brick Lane*, Ali crucially portrays the subjects on a voyage to find their identities, as we have seen in our analysis of Chanu, Karim and the protagonist, Nazneen, in relation to threshold positions as a result of border crossing in the shifting dynamics of transnational globality. All the figures in the novel actually progress towards self-knowledge and self-recognition. In this respect, their identification processes highlight the constant opportunities to challenge roles socially, politically and culturally.

Additionally, one of the subordinate characters in the novel, Shahana, the daughter of Nazneen and Chanu, also has 'an in-between self'. She smells the threshold air of the migrated land as a migrated subject. She is between her parents' culture and the circumstances in which she dwells currently, through Britain's representations, since she knows English very well. Although Shahana is supposed to learn English at school, Chanu does not want her to speak English at home; he is strict in making use of the native language at home. 'By being brought up in a bicultural and bilingual environment, second generation UK-born immigrants are torn apart between simultaneous but incompatible desires, realities and drives' (Julios, 2008: 13). As a result, Shahana has a psychological breakdown because she is afraid of returning to Bangladesh in consequence of her father's obsession with his origins, and his not being open to newness. Thus, she fears that she too will be the victim of an arranged marriage. Hence, the crucial question of which identity formation will be appropriate for her occupies her mind, as an individual engaging with the issue of how she came to be and who she is. In this sense, 'a second-generation English-speaking Bangladeshi child brought up in the East End of London, for example, may see themselves as being wholly British; however, it is unlikely that the rest of the indigenous white British population may regard them as being 'one of them'' (Julios, 2008: 9). It is precisely noted here that the binarism between the self and the other is

blurred and creates an ambivalent atmosphere in the depths of individuality, especially for second-generation children, leading to drowning in the deep ocean of permanent spiritual displacement. However, Shahana leaves a positive mark in the minds of the reader since she rebels against the past and creates a new beginning in London for her state of awareness. 'I am from London' (Ali,2003:244), her answer to a stranger along the way with her father reveals. Her rejection of the traditional discourses shows that she has a self between the past (her family's exposure) and the present (newness as an individual), a hybrid self:

Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them. If she could choose between baked beans and dal it was no contest...Shahana did not want to go back home. (Ali,2003:188)

Though it seems as if Shahana is assimilated here, actually she reacts against the compulsory assumptions that are imposed by her father since she lives in the midst of the gloomy atmosphere of self-conflict. That is to say, elaborating 'liminality' in a sense of identity, Shahana wants to live her self-made constructions related to her living in London: 'I did not ask to be born here' (Ali,2003:181). Chanu highlights the dilemma in her nature of living between two worlds: belong to the culture of Bangladesh and also experience the conditions of England. Between being English and being Bangladeshi, Shahana makes use of a distinction for her own subjectification; she chooses to become a subject equipped with the new offerings and meanings of London, by not being in the position of the assimilated. Ali negotiates her idea of identity through anger at the conventional structure that her father tries to impose on her, framing 'Shahana, simmering in worst of all things-perpetual embarrassment, implacably angry' (Ali,2003:205). This anger and Shahana's rebellious nature also enable Nazneen to open windows to recreate and refashion memorialized identity. This female warrior not only wants to hang onto the traditional values but also to escape from the enunciations of these values; in the end, she learns to find a space in which to dwell through the liminal meanings of identity-finding. The liminal stance of Nazneen against upbringing between her willingness to become a self and her religious doctrine after her affair with Karim is revealed: 'He was the first man to see her naked. It made her sick with shame. It made her sick with desire. They committed a crime. It was a crime and the sentence was death...beyond

death was the eternal fire of hell...' (Ali,2003:299) She is not insensible; she knows what is wrong, but she gradually reaches the peak point of maturation, of the self-assured woman, through dilemmas and variable conditions. Despite the vacillating nature of her experiences, she finds her own way and she becomes a mature individual, through a self-voyage filled with conflicts and clashes touching upon the realms of the identity-making process.

Through the crisscross motions of a Bangladeshi family, Ali succeeds in evoking the voices of individuals in their separate struggles to find a self that can dwell in the colonizing world. In this sense, it can be noted that Chanu, Karim, Shahana and Nazneen are all figures within a framework of borderlines who struggle to survive in different forms from each other. Chanu and Karim are both stuck in the middle. On the other hand, Nazneen and Shahana become dignified and warrior-like in relation to their subjectivities since they 'become' aware of the potentiality and strength that dwell in their depths as individuals, as the product of both the host culture and a male-oriented society.

Furthermore, we can infer from all these circumstances that border crossing explodes the dynamic nature of identity through the multiple dimensions of turmoil related to self-actualization. 'Identities are not "unified or stable, but are fluid entities which constantly push at the boundaries of the nation-state, thereby re-defining themselves and the nation-state simultaneously' (Ranguin, 2010: 11). Correspondingly, as a direct witness of the South Asian diaspora in England, Ali visits the situation of an immigrant female with a realistic eye since she depicts her subjects 'in the sense of reconstruction of self along with the reconstruction of space in an alien culture: having to adapt the self and its perception of society' (Toplu, 2011: 162). Actually, we watch a performance of 'the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of fixity' (Anderson, 1983: 30).

'She turned to her prayers and tried to empty her mind and accept each new thing with grace or indifference' (Ali,2003:124). Nazneen, in trying to get rid of the unpleasant discourses, and in dealing with the loss of innocence that the religious doctrines of the past bring forth, experiences in the very depths of her being a dilemma, stemming from the border consciousness that creates betwixt positioning in the individual even as it gives force to the idea that 'the border is a place of possibility and agency for new concepts, new narratives, new ideas' (McLeod, 2000: 252). She does not have broken chains with the past, as usual; yet, she experiences cultural

and social collisions and sometimes questions her sense of identity in the middle.

Consequently, ‘...We need to spatialize being. Such a spatialization would render being intelligible in terms of the localization of repertoires of habits, routines and images of self-understanding and self-cultivation within specific domains of thought, action and value’ (Rose, 1996: 304). To spatialize self amongst the domains of multiculturalism and liminal dwellings, Ali awakens the sleeping identity which needs to be transformed and to enter into the dynamics of becoming, evident in the fact that Nazneen is prone to ‘question, refashion and mobilize received ideas’ (McLeod, 2000: 253).

In a similar vein, Nazneen acts as a figure of upward mobility, located in the pastures of agency of change as a self-assured woman, between dominant West and male-dominated East. The message that is transmitted to the reader by Ali in *Brick Lane* is that a woman can reconstruct her sense of self with her own hands, no matter how ignored or deteriorated she might be, since she has a potentiality in her depths. This circumstance of being a woman brings forward the fact that the sense of dislocation that derives from crossing borders makes this subject integrate into new practices of living in an alien world; and she may open up different doors, windows or gates to not being on the threshold through this potentiality to change.

Nazneen is invaded by the inner feeling that ‘renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space’ (Bhabha, 1994: 7), as well as by the need to acquire an understanding or self-recognition of how ‘the gap between the re-represented layers of the past in the present and the actual patterns of the past gives way to a new present, to new perspective and new meanings’ (Okuroglu, Ozun, 2013: 54).

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