Traumatized Immigrant: Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

Travma Geçirmiş Göçmen: Monica Ali'nin *Brick Lane*'i

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Abstract
Postcolonial fiction and trauma are almost coalesced into one another as a result of the nature of postcolonial cultural condition. Trauma emerges as one of the most important and inevitable themes in postcolonial novels written, in particular, by the British authors of colonial origin. In *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali portrays the tragic destiny of Nazneen, a young Bangladeshi woman, forced into an arranged marriage, when she is eighteen, to a Bangladeshi man in his forties living in London. It is a story of trauma, migration and adultery. After her mother's suicide, Nazneen's father arranges her marriage to Chanu and sends her away from home to the Imperial centre. As a postcolonial Bangladeshi immigrant, Nazneen not only suffers from the trauma of her deceased mother but also from the trauma of her arranged marriage that results in the birth of a son who dies when he is only a few months old. In addition to her personal breakdown after a series of tragic events, she inevitably undergoes cultural clashes. This study discusses Nazneen's traumatic background and her postcolonial identity and questions whether or not her tragic situation stems from the postcolonial cultural condition.
Keywords: trauma, migration, postcolonial condition, Monica Ali, culture

Öz
Sömürgecilik sonrası edebiyat ve travma, sömürgecilik sonrası kültürel durumun kaçınılmaz bir sonucu olarak, neredeyse birbiriyle iç içe girmiş durumdadır. Travma, özellikle sömürge kökenli Britanyalı yazarlar tarafından yazılan sömürgecilik sonrası romanların en önemli tematik ögelerinden biri olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. *Brick Lane* romanında Monica Ali, daha on sekiz yaşındayken, Londra'da yaşayan, kırklı yaşlarındaki Chanu ile görücü usulü ile evliliğe zorlanan Nazneen'in trajik öyküsünü anlatır. Bu bir travma, göç ve evlilik dışı ilişki öyküsüdür. Annesinin intiharından sonra Nazneen'in babası Chanu'yla görücü usulü ile evlenmesini ister ve onu Londra'ya, imparatorluğun merkezine gönderir. Sömürgecilik sonrası bir Bangladeşli göçmen olarak Nezneen sadece ölen annesinin travmasını değil, zorla evlendirilmesinin ve bu evlilikten doğan ve daha iki aylıkken ölen bebeğinin travmasını da yaşamaktadır. Art arda gelen trajik olayların yarattığı ruhsal çöküşün yanı sıra, kaçınılmaz kültürel çatışmaların da içine düşer. Bu çalışma Nazneen'in travmatik geçmişiyle birlikte onun sömürgecilik sonrası kültürel kimliğini analiz etmekte, trajik olayların ve travmaların sömürgecilik sonrası kültürel durumun bir sonucu olup olmadığını sorgulamaktadır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: travma, göç, sömürgecilik sonrası durum, Monica Ali, kültür

Introduction

Postcolonial novels written by the second generation of postcolonial writers including Zadie Smith, Monica Ali, Bernardine Evaristo and several others at the

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end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century include stories of traumatic experiences. This generation of novels particularly written by female authors display the problems of migrant women who find themselves not only in problematic situations caused by their postcolonial condition, but also in troubles caused by traumatic results of patriarchal cultural practices. These traditional and cultural practices of arranged marriages, enforced dowries, and performing traditional wifely functions such as slaving in the household and giving birth to children by readily adopting a feminine lifestyle like being housewife become causes of traumas in the migrant women's new lives in which they expect a life of welfare in Britain, their new dwelling place. This so-called dream-come-true life turns out to be yet another confinement in the household as in the case of Monica Ali's Nazneen in *Brick Lane*, instead of bringing welfare. In addition to that, the life they are forced to migrate into is soon filled with the dreams of going back home to have a fresh start.

This kind of traditional postcolonial reading of these novels still acknowledge the colonial past and tend to ignore the individual migrant experience. Instead, I would argue that there is more to say about the personal trauma caused by migration than to comment on the imperialist practices. Although cultural reading and analyses, interpretation of the postcolonial cultural condition still invite the discussions of post-independence cultural outcomes, the migrants ' cultural situations are commonly shared by all immigrants whether or not they are postcolonial. Therefore, I read *Brick Lane* as not necessarily a novel of postcolonial migration but as a novel of economic migration that focuses on Nazneen's individual dilemma and trauma, as she would not have been enforced to migrate and marry a man older than herself had she not come from an economically disadvantaged background in Bangladesh.

Purpose and Method

Whether the migration we discuss about is postcolonial migration or economic migration, all types of refugee movements may have traumatic results. Since postcolonial fiction and trauma are almost coalesced into one another as a result of the nature of postcolonial cultural condition, trauma emerges as one of the most important and inevitable themes in postcolonial novels written, in particular, by the British authors of colonial origin. Since postcolonial experience involves "a process of othering" in Elleke Boehmer's words, "the writing of trauma" has always been in the centre of the aesthetics of postcolonial writing which reflects "a particular collective experience of crisis, pain, distress, or shock" (87). The same dilemmatic categorization may also be applied to the condition of all sorts of migrant whether or not they experience postcolonial migration.

In *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali portrays the tragic destiny of Nazneen, a young Bangladeshi woman in distress and shock. As a postcolonial Bangladeshi immigrant, Nazneen not only suffers from the trauma of her deceased mother, who killed herself which was a shock for Nazneen, but also from the trauma of her arranged marriage that results in the birth of a son who dies when he is only

a few months old. Ali puts, in the centre of her story, what Nadia Alman labels as "the myth of immigrant ascendancy" which is "replicated and contested" in postcolonial novels set in London (3). Ali ironizes this myth and reflects Nazneen's breakdown and her husband's failure. In addition to Nazneen's personal breakdown after a series of tragic events, the novel heightens, as asserted by Michael Perfect, "sensitivities towards its representations of cultural difference" (110) and centres around how she plunges into cultural conflicts inevitably. The purpose of this study, then, is to analyse Nazneen's traumatic background and her postcolonial identity and question whether or not her tragic situation stems from the postcolonial cultural condition that involves cultural differences pointed out by Perfect.

Findings

Sara Upstone argues that Monica Ali's novel, in a very similar way to Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, reflects "the increased trauma" which, in the first place, comes from home despite "having no clear geography of belonging" (244). Upstone's idea of increased trauma refers to the trauma of migration on top of all her traumatic experiences such as the untimely death of her mother, her enforced marriage at a young age to a man she does not know. In the novel's prelude, Monica Ali, confirming Upstone's argument of lacking the geographical belonging for traumas, quotes from Heraclitus: "A man's character is his fate." (Ali 10). Thus she declares the fact that Nazneen's life is predestined at her birth. Her mother Rupban gives a premature birth to Nazneen and everyone thinks that she is stillborn. At the outset of the novel, then, it is indicated that her traumatic life is not only a result of her arranged marriage and postcolonial identity, but also a result of her mother's traumatic labour which predestines Nazneen's life:

> Banesa picked up Nazneen by an ankle and blew disparagingly through her gums over the tiny blue body. "She will not take even one breath. Some people, who think too much about how to save a few takas, do not call a midwife." She shook her hairless, wrinkled head. (Ali 12)

Her birth in the colonial conditions marks the cultural environment which she was born into. Banesa, the midwife, represents the subaltern colonial identity; and, as the compensation of her service, asks for the chicken that Nazneen's mother was plucking just before her labour pains began: "Of course I offer my service free. Maybe just that chicken there for my trouble. I see it is old and stringy." (Ali 13) The fact that Banesa asks for the chicken stands out as an example of non-monetary financial system based on exchange of goods and services. Nazneen's life, therefore, is almost about to be exchanged for a chicken when she suddenly begins to cry:

> Mumtaz took hold of Nazneen, who was still dangling by the ankle, and felt the small, slick torso slide through her fingers to plop with a yowl onto the bloodstained mattress. A yowl! A cry! Rupban scooped her up and named her before she could die nameless again. (Ali 13)

It is only by a twist in her destiny as a baby that she acquires an identity. Thus, her name that would remain with her for the rest of her life is given to enable her to die with a name. Her traumatic colonial background is marked by her name which gives her a stereotypical postcolonial immigrant identity when she moves to Britain, despite the fact that her migration involves a marriage instead of colonial reasons. Hence, she is destined to live with an identity which was actually attached to her for her death, by which Nazneen is left to her destiny:

> As Nazneen grew she heard many times this story of How You Were Left To Your Fate. It was because of her mother's wise decision that Nazneen lived to become the wide-faced, watchful girl that she was. Fighting against one's Fate can weaken the blood. (Ali 15)

Nazneen's first trauma occurs when her mother commits suicide. Her mother's untimely death leaves her helpless against her destiny. She can neither be a part of her traditional female identity, nor develop her own independent role as a young woman. François Kral considers the situation of postcolonial immigrants as represented by Ali as "trapped between two worlds, with one foot on each continent" and as individuals who "develop a double identity" and gain access to "two different systems and to two radically opposed pictures" through, in most cases, traumatic experiences. (73) As in the common practice of postcolonial immigrants in London, an immigrant man from their village living in London wishes to marry her and take her to London:

> Soon after when her father asked her if she would like to see a photograph of the man she would marry the following month, Nazneen shook her head and replied, "Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma." But as she turned to go she noticed, without meaning to, where her father put the photograph. (Ali 16-7)

At first she does not consider this as an unacceptable situation. She notices the age difference between herself and her future husband, but the economic situation of her family and her loneliness as a result of her mother's death leave her obliged to accept this marriage without questioning. The outcome of this marriage is adopting a new culture imposed upon her, a situation that Nadia Valman calls "cultural transplantation" (3). On the other hand, she does not live in a cultural environment in which she can voice her preferences about the person she intends to marry which naturally results in a second trauma in her life after her mother's death:

> The man she would marry was old. At least forty years old. He had a face like a frog. They would marry and he would take her back to England with him. She looked across the fields, glittering green and gold in the evening light. (Ali 17)

Upstone reads the novel in connection with the earlier postcolonial texts and argues that Ali also generates characters with "going home syndrome" and a sense of belonging "to a larger strategy of connecting to the past in order to secure emotional survival." (337) However, although the one that is in this "going home syndrome" is Chanu, her future husband, it is Chanu who takes him to Britain. Thus, in a typical destiny of the member of a formerly colonized post-

imperial society, her fate leads her to marry a man in his forties and she is forced to live in London leaving all her life, land, home, family and her dreams behind. As soon as she gets married, she sees herself in her husband's eyes, when Chanu speaks to someone on the phone and tells about Nazneen:

> "Not tall. Not short. Around five foot two. Hips are a bit narrow but wide enough, I think, to carry children. All things considered, I am satisfied. Perhaps when she gets older she'll grow a beard on her chin but now she's only eighteen. And a blind uncle is better than no uncle. I waited too long to get a wife." (Ali 23)

Her new life, her enforced marriage, her loneliness in her new dwelling place and her husband's categorisation of her as his potential child-giver make her realise the truth about her situation and leaves her helpless: "A blind uncle is better than no uncle. Her husband had a proverb for everything. Any wife is better than no wife" (Ali 23). Upon hearing these, it occurs painfully to her that she is wrong to assume her husband wishes to marry Nazneen because he loves her. After realising that she only functions as a wife and a child bearer, she begins to get acquainted with her cultural surrounding and notices the differences between her enforced lifestyle and the liberal culture in her new country. Perfect argues that the English that Nazneen "develops over the course of the novel" takes place at the same time as "her move towards independence and liberation" (112). Yet, her struggle to reach an independent identity and grasp of the new culture that surrounds her is limited by how much her husband introduces her and how well she can pronounce the words. As they watch ice-skating on television one night, she asks her husband, who looks indifferently, about it:

> "What is this called?" said Nazneen.
> Chanu glanced at the screen. "Ice skating," he said, in English.
> "Ice e-skating," said Nazneen.
> "Ice skating," said Chanu.
> "Ice e-skating."
> "No, no. No *e*. Ice skating. Try it again."
> Nazneen hesitated.
> "Go on!"
> "Ice es-kating," she said with deliberation. (Ali 36–7)

Her husband tries to correct her mispronunciation due to her Bangladeshi phonetics. However, he claims that she would be "unlikely to need these words in any case" (Ali, 37). Chanu's reaction to her interest in ice-skating shows, in the hindsight, his unwillingness to let Nazneen enjoy what a liberal society suggests and his prediction about her future life in which she will not have any opportunity and need to do ice-skating, and thus, she will not need vocabulary regarding that sport. On the other hand, ice-skating symbolically turns into a leitmotif functioning as an important and idyllic recall of liberty in the novel and Nazneen searches the TV channels at nights to watch ice-skating after her husband goes to sleep. Nevertheless, her wifely functions that include cutting her husband's corns on his feet are far from giving her such liberty:

> "Ish," said Chanu, breathing sharply. "Did you draw blood?" He looked closely at his little toe. He wore only his pyjama bottoms and sat on the bed. Nazneen knelt to the side with a razor blade in her hand. It was time to cut her husband's corns again. (Ali 39)

Chanu, on the other hand, is an immigrant who has an office job that makes him feel unsuccessful since he thinks he deserves a better position in the office as a reward of his English literature degree from Dhaka University. So he always reads at home in the evenings putting a distance between his intellectuality and his wife's ignorance. When Nazneen tells him that she wants to go to college to learn English, Chanu gives a reaction very typically of a patriarchal man who wishes to keep his wife's intellectual level below himself:

> "Razia is going to college to study English."
> "Ah, good."
> "Perhaps I could go with her." …
> "Where?" He rolled onto his back to look at her. His belly showed.
> "To the college. With Razia."
> "What for?"
> "For the English lessons."
> "You're going to be a mother." (Ali 76-7)

Being a mother will keep her busy in Chanu's view and if the only reason for Nazneen to go to college is to keep herself busy, she will have enough to do with the babies whom she cannot take to the college. Chanu's stereotypically masculinised reaction to a woman's dreams of having education by pointing out her duty of having babies as an alternative is not only a typical, ordinary immigrant family's problem, but also the problem of masculine worldview of which Chanu is no exception.

On the other hand, Chanu attempts to improve himself and his family's life conditions by being in touch with more experienced and successful Bangladeshi immigrants in England to take them as role models. His most admired fellow country man is Dr Azad who visits them for dinner in their home from time to time. Dr Azad is the symbol of immigrant success in Chanu's point of view. He represents everything what Chanu wishes to achieve in England: welfare, respect, life in a well-off neighbourhood and a permanent job. One thing Chanu does not understand about Dr Azad is that the doctor never invites them to his home, whereas Chanu expects such an invitation in return for doctor's visits to Chanu's household for dinner. One day they just go and knock on the doctor's door without being invited. In doctor's house where they feel unwelcomed by his wife, Chanu talks about his dreams of success in England: "behind every story of immigrant success there lies a deeper tragedy" (Ali 113). When Dr Azad asks him to "kindly explain (that) tragedy" (Ali 113), he states that he is

> "talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent." (Ali 113)

Dr Azad's wife is a fully Westernised woman. She represents an élite, well-off, educated and cultured Bangladeshi immigrant who would isolate herself from the rest of the immigrants from her own country of origin. She is in no way one of the other immigrants whom Chanu describes as peasant types and is certain that she has more social acceptance than people like Chanu and Nazneen. She displays by her attitude that she is not very happy with their visit and implicitly notes that they do not necessarily need to be paid a return visit as if they were still living in Bangladesh. She thinks that immigrants cannot succeed unless they adapt themselves to the host culture and she reacts against Chanu's theories about the immigrant success:

> "They go around covered from head to toe, in their little walking prisons, and when someone calls to them in the street they are upset. The society is racist. The society is all wrong. Everything should change for them. They don't have to change one thing. That," she said, stabbing in the air, "is the tragedy." (Ali 114)

Mrs Azad's exclamations about the immigrants go beyond criticism and she openly accuses them of not putting any effort to change themselves, but instead they expect their host society to change their behaviour for the sake of immigrants. Her additional criticism is from a secular point of view as opposed to religious immigrants' expression of themselves: the immigrants go around covered from head to toe referring to the hijab worn by Muslim women as an expression of their religious identity to which they feel more attached after migration as a form of self-protection. Mrs Azad's secularised Western vision is, in a self-orientalist way, contemptuous, which forces the young Muslim immigrant men to take a radical stance against the Western dominant ideology. On the other hand, this causes a psychical trauma, according to Ania Loomba, who claims, in a reference to Frantz Fanon, that traumatic experiences occur as soon as "the colonial subject" is aware of the fact that they "can never attain the whiteness" that they have been instructed (310). Chanu's disappointment, then, is not only a disappointment caused by an unwelcoming attitude in a fellow countryman's home, but also caused by realization that he and his wife may never have Mr. and Mrs. Azad's social acceptance in a white society.

Nejat Töngür argues that while Monica Ali gives a "detailed picture of devout Muslim youth" mostly "agitated and infuriated by racist gangs" she also "portrays young Bangladeshis" born and raised in London who are therefore "adapted to British culture" as they express "their distaste with Bangladeshi culture, language and life style" (562). In connection to what Töngür states, Mrs Azad's assertions have alternative functions too. Nazneen, as a shy and silenced immigrant wife, watches and listens to the doctor's confident and Westernised wife, she begins to acquire a consciousness that makes her realise the differences between the relaxed, liberal Western values and her restrictive traditional culture. Therefore, her husband's patriarchal attitude becomes more visible to her.

In the meantime, she gives birth to a son named Raqib, who would limit her searches for an independent identity. Despite the limitations of having a baby,

she loves being a mother, but her happiness is interrupted by the trauma of her son's death when he is only a few months old:

> "They said they will release the body quickly. They said they know we are Muslim. They know, they said they know, about how quickly we like to bury our dead."
> How quickly we like to bury our dead. She began folding clothes. She picked a stray thread from a vest, pulled fluff off a jumper. Chanu came to her and held her arms. He prised her fingers from Raqib's jacket. To get her to sit he had to push her onto the bed. She let him take her hand in his. (Ali 144-5)

The first part of the book ends with Raqib's death and the second part begins when they have two daughters thirteen years after this trauma. Chanu has given up his dreams of getting promotion that would suit his education and become a taxi driver, which puts an end to his dreams of overcoming the hegemonic Western culture and being an integrated part of the society both culturally and economically instead of admitting a stereotypical immigrant lifestyle. Nazneen has started sewing business at home on a sewing machine bought by her husband, stitching buttons and zips on clothes brought to their flat from the producers by a middle man called Karim.

Her interaction with Karim, which is a totally business relation in the beginning, turns into a secret love affair. When Karim comes home to collect the clothes, they make love during Chanu's work hours in the taxi. Pin-chia Feng, who reads the novel as "a quintessential *Bildungsroman*" focusing on "a female immigrant", suggests that this is a novel that represents "the ways in which South Asian women cope with the problems" of selfhood, subjectivity and South Asian British identity (16). At the same time, it challenges "the traditional definition of South Asian Muslim womanhood and provides a way out of the brick lane of an ethnic ghetto" (Feng 16). Nazneen, as in Feng's suggestion, challenges the ordinary identity of female immigrants, by simply overthrowing the confining patriarchal understanding of her cultural origins.

Karim is a young man who represents the freshness, youthfulness and freedom. He is also involved in a political group struggling for immigrant Muslim rights against racism. Nazneen finds this very exciting and from time to time she goes to the meetings run by Karim and listens to the talks that give her courage and excitement. Although their secret love affair gives her remorse, she cannot refrain herself from this relationship and they make love on the bed she also sleeps with her husband. Nazneen begins to live a double-sided life that makes her really happy. Yet, at the same time, she feels sinful and regretful and as Arıkan asserts, "feels the pain of committing a crime" which does not comply with her religious identity (502). This dilemmatic situation arising from her pleasure and feeling of guilt "causes a traumatic situation" for her (Arıkan 502). On one hand she continues to produce and earns money to look after her daughters complying with the traditional roles of a mother as expected in her cultural origins, and on the other, she sets herself free to enjoy a youthful love. During their happy times, Chanu, who always pursues the hope of making a glorious return to his homeland like all immigrants, appears to have given up

the hopes of return. One day he decides to get out of their immigrant populated neighbourhood and explore London, which he has never done in years. His conversation with the bus conductor shows his dilemma of belonging and not belonging:

> "Where've you come from mate?"
> "Oh, just two blocks behind," said Chanu. "But this is the first holiday for twenty of thirty years."
> The Conductor swayed. (Ali 291)

Chanu represents an immigrant identity that arrives in London only to make a living without even trying to explore the city. This type of immigrant identity is actually a type that Chanu defines as peasant types. However, he finds himself in that situation while he tries to prove his intellectual level by asking the conductor whether "the British Museum rate[s] more highly than the National Gallery" (Ali 290–1), to which he answers: "In my rating system," explained Chanu, "they are neck and neck." (Ali 291) By doing so, he attempts to localise himself and tries to adjust his psychology to settling down in the city by exploring its attractions. This makes Nazneen hopeful. However, one day Nazneen gets ill and stays in bed for weeks:

> Chanu woke in the night and, he told her later, missed her heartbeat. He found her on the kitchen floor, vomit dried on the corners of her mouth, eyes open and unseeing. He had turned on the light, but she did not blink. He carried her to the bedroom and laid her on the bed. It was the only time he had carried her, and she wished that she remembered it. (Ali 324)

She cannot continue her sewing business during her illness which keeps her away from seeing Karim. The illness generates a temporary period of discontinuation in their secret relationship during which they reconsider the nature of their intense feelings. Nazneen finds it difficult to resume, because when she sees Karim after a long time, she finds that he has changed into a radical, an identity that Nazneen wishes to stay away due to the fact that he is transformed into yet another Islamist of her own cultural background:

> Karim had a new style. The gold necklace vanished; the jeans, shirts and trainers went as well. Some of the parents were telling their daughters to leave their headscarves at home. Karim put on Panjabi-pyjama and a skullcap. He wore a sleeveless fleece and big boots with the laces left undone at the top. (Ali 376)

He turns into a man who asks Nazneen to marry him to continue the relationship, while Nazneen wishes to be an independent woman who decides to stay in England. She, too, has a transformed identity. Her transformation into a free-spirited woman is not an escape from and rejection of her national and cultural identity, but it is a choice, a quest, a new form of liberty that she embraces. Nazneen is no more an ignorant migrant wife, but an independent woman who makes her own decisions about her life and fate. On the other hand, the identity that Karim has adopted during the period of Nazneen's illness is a narrow-minded worldview that confines the type of female identity that Nazneen wishes to possess. Karim adopts this new life style not only to express

his cultural and traditional background but also to have a reactionary standpoint against the Western cultural values.

On the contrary, Chanu does not have any tendency to have a political stance to resist the Western cultural values. Instead, he wishes to turn his back on the West to cover his failures to fit in and gloriously return to homeland to make a fresh start with his wife and daughters. While Chanu prepares to return home and buys plane tickets, Nazneen begins another journey within herself to find her independent female identity that would take her out of her boundaries. By going back home, she does not want to multiply her traumatic experiences that she has suffered since her childhood. She wants to pursue a dream of becoming a self-reliant woman with her daughters. The morning before their journey, Chanu, who has long understood his wife's decision, asks her once more:

> "You're coming with me, then? You'll come?"
> "No," she breathed. She lifted his head and looked into his face. It was dented and swollen, almost out of recognition. "I can't go with you," she said.
> "I can't stay," said Chanu, and they clung to each other inside a sadness that went beyond words and tears … (Ali 478)

Upon this, Chanu respects her decision. He is aware of the fact that Nazneen was not in love with him and she was enforced into accepting a marriage that turned her into an ignorant housewife, instead of transforming her life into a more prosperous one. He accepts it and considers it as something very obvious from the very beginning. Contradictorily, Chanu returns to where Nazneen came from and Nazneen stays in the city where Chanu came from to take her with him. In other words, Nazneen chooses to establish a more liberal, prosperous lifestyle which she has been denied, while Chanu wishes to return to a more confined, conservative and conventional life in which he could feel safer, as he has never been able to fulfill the dreams of an immigrant to become a rich Westerner. There is also a shift in their roles. Chanu acquires the traditional identity that once belonged to Nazneen, while Nazneen turns into an ambitious immigrant in London to seek for success and welfare: "Chanu had called his daughters. 'There's been a change in the plan.' He rubbed his face with his palms, getting the blood to flow again. 'I have suggested, and your mother has agreed, that the three of you come later'" (Ali 479). When Chanu goes back to Bangladesh on his own, Nazneen starts a new life. She continues her sewing business with other companies, sends her daughters to school, and regularly has phone calls from her husband who asks her about the girls but never asks them when they would return. As a result, they all have a mutual pact not to talk about it. This unwritten treaty between them changes the gender roles after migration. While Nazneen turns out to be the more powerful character, Chanu loses his patriarchal power and finds himself having to go back home. The contradiction that arises here is that although Chanu has hoped to prove and re-establish his patriarchal identity by going back to the homeland, he loses his control and authority over his family. Nazneen, despite being a delicate, weak and vulnerable woman in the beginning of the novel, turns into a powerful woman who can establish her female identity

on firm grounds. On the other hand, she is given a chance by her daughters and her friend Razia to realise a dream she has been wishing to come real. She goes ice-skating

> "Here are your boots, Amma."
> Nazneen turned round. To get on the ice physically – it hardly seemed to matter. In her mind she was already there.
> She said, "But you can't skate in a sari."
> Razia was already lacing her boots. "This is England," she said. "You can do whatever you like." (Ali 492)

Conclusion

As a result, the liberal Western values symbolised by the ice-skating boots are combined with traditionalism. This traditionalism here is ironically emphasized in order to reflect the hybridization of not only the immigrant identity, but also the hybridization of the host culture by combining western ice-skating outfit with Bangladeshi traditional garments. England is depicted as a place where you can even ice-skate while wearing a sari. The statement "you can do whatever you like" can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the surface meaning suggests that England provides you with the liberty of doing whatever you wish, which includes building up one's independent identity and independent lifestyle. Secondly, the deep meaning suggests that you can also preserve your own cultural identity while you are integrated into the English lifestyle and Western values. In Angels Poon's words, *Brick Lane* claims to homogenize "the immigrant experience" by pointing out the hybridity of all migrant characters who turn into "apolitical" cosmopolitans (428), and thus homogenizing them into uniform, liberal western cultural representations. On the other hand, Poon also argues that Nazneen's story is also a success story of postcolonial women who "struggle for autonomy" (428). Yet, this autonomy does not only reflect itself as self realization of Nazneen's identity as a woman, but also stands out as her integration into western culture. My contention here is that the novel contains stories of both failure and success. As Chanu decides to go back home without any wealth and without his wife despite his dreams of making a glorious return, Nazneen contends to stay in Britain and struggle for her own identity to build up her own future.

On another scale, to return to the major argument of this study, all of the above mentioned cultural clashes, identity problems, attitudes, dilemmas and hybridity problems in the examples quoted from the novel are also a part of the immigrant experience in general, without necessarily being a part of postcolonial experience. The total outcome is not only a cultural issue, but an economic issue as well, which forces economically disadvantaged individuals to migrate, even in the case of postcolonial immigrations. Immigrant experience is a homogeneous experience that creates inevitable situations of cultural hybridity.

To conclude briefly, the novel's conclusion presents England as a place of freedom and compromising cultural values. The novel also suggests that Nazneen's traumatic life is not only a result of postcolonial and post-imperial cultural condition, but also the result of her gender based problems which are also multiplied by her cultural origins. Having been forced into an arranged marriage and lost a child, her life is intermingled with cultural trauma. Monica Ali's text therefore is not to be interpreted as a consequence of postcolonial trauma only, but also as a result of the oppression of female identity in a gender-based reading. Her problems of belonging and unbelonging also stand out as one of the initiators of her search for identity. In this case, Nazneen turns into a culturally oppressed Asian woman. In short, *Brick Lane* traces the story of a trauma that has migrated to Britain. Thus it is not only the story of a traumatized immigrant but the story of a migrated trauma.

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