

Postmodernism and Clash of Culture in Ali's *Brick Lane*

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This study purports to investigate the clash of cultures as encoded in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). The study aims to underpin the problem of immigration from East to the West and the human suffering as a tragic resultant consequence. Being the first fictional work of Ali as a modern British novelist, the work treads the path of human situations through a Bangladeshi immigrant's milieu in a modern critical sense. The scope of the study will be limited to *Brick Lane*, which bridges the gap between Eastern and the Western cultures in one artistic fabric and universe. One finding of the study is that the source of the victimisation of women is not always the result of the post-colonial view. It might be also the result of the traditional culture in which the characters live. The significance of the study lies in the fact that it is the first academic analysis of the veins of Ali's novel from a critical point of view. The study is rounded up with concluding remarks elicited from the critical analysis.

Key words: *Literature, postmodernism, culture, narrative, worldview.*

Introduction

Literature, in the broadest sense, is a body of artistic works. Literary works like poems, plays, novels and short stories are constructed in a foregrounded language, which is different from standard language. The texture of literary texts is deviant in the sense that they tread the path of connotation rather than denotation. Still, the function of literary texts is not just to delight; literary texts are socio-cultural universes that communicate a given message. Modern critical trends anatomise the nature of the messages transmitted by the language of texts.

In the history of ideas, there are always pairs of contradictory terms that allude to contradictory worldviews. Two of these terms are modernism and postmodernism. These interrelated disciplines vary in certain aspects. Abrams (2009, p. 201-204) delineates the two terms by saying that modernism is 'widely used to identify new and distractive features in the



subjects, forms, concepts and styles of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the twentieth century, but especially after World war I (1914-190).’ This literary movement is characterised by ‘a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but of Western culture in general’ (ibid.).

Historically, the term postmodernism was applied to literary theory after World War II (1939-45). Postmodernism “involves not only a continuation, sometimes carried to an extreme, of the counter traditional experiments of modernism, but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inevitably, become in their turn conventional, as well as to overthrow the elitism of modernist ‘high arts’ by recourse for models to the ‘mass culture’ in film, television, newspaper cartoons and popular music” (ibid.). The ‘post’ in postmodern suggests ‘after’. Postmodernism is best understood as a questioning of the ideas and values associated with a form of modernism that believes in progress and innovation. Modernism insists on a clear divide between art and popular culture.

A new dimension has been given to postmodernism in that the term refers to a more general human condition in the ‘late capitalist’ world of the post 1950s’ (Keep et al., 1993). This may imply that postmodernism is characteristic by its cultural code. But what is culture really?

From an epistemic point of view, culture is the way in which a human group lives in the world. It consists of visible and invisible patterns of thinking. Still, the most revealing ostensive view of culture is that of Tylor (1871), who defines culture as ‘that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society’ (Tylor, 2019). Culture, in its essence, is a symbolic form of communication. Its symbols represent a human group’s knowledge, skills, values and son on. These human activities and traditions are passed from one generation to another.

Culture is not the only difference between modernism and postmodernism. Bressler makes another distinction between the two terms. The difference concerns truth and reality. For a modernist, like franklin, ‘truth is to be discovered scientifically, not through the untruly and passionate imagination or through one’s feelings or intuition. Indeed, what is to be known and discovered via the scientific method is realty’ (Bressler, 2007, p. 98-9). While modernism stresses the objectivity of truth, postmodernism stresses its subjectivity. Like modernism, postmodernism does not designate any one style of art or culture. On the contrary, it is often associated with pluralism and an abandonment of conventional ideas of originality and authorship in favour of a pastiche of ‘dead’ styles.

For a deconstructionist like Derrida, there is no such thing as objective reality; ‘all definitions and depictions of truth are subjective, simply creations of human minds. Truth itself is



relative, depending on the nature and variety of cultural and social influences in one's life' (ibid.).

In spite of their differences, modernism and postmodernism fundamentally deal with the complexity of human nature, the target of all literary genres. One of these genres is the novel. There is a general consensus amongst novelists, literary historians and people of literature that the core of a novel is its narrative (Cuddon 1998; Mikkagan 1984; Abrams 2009). A novel is 'a fictional prose narrative of substantial length' (Sengupta et al., 2004, p. 278). With the development of the structural movement in the twentieth century, the term narratology has been widely circulated in fiction. The term deals with 'how a story's meaning develops from its overall structure (its *langue*) rather than from each individual story's isolated theme' (Bressler, 2007, p. 351). Narratology deals with the interpretation of the parameters or principles underlying the structure of a narrative work of art. Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* falls within the scope of what constitutes a modern narrative. This study, therefore, is an attempt to explore the modern issues and techniques constructed by the writer to communicate her own vision. The study, in its structural design, construes three main parts preceded by a brief introduction on modernism, postmodernism and necessary postmodern literature. Part One delineates the notions of narrative and metanarrative. Part Two is a critical analysis of Ali's selected narrative data. The critical analysis is rounded up with a set of conclusions, while Part Three concerns the worldviews encoded in the narrative fabric, in addition to the stylistic technique used in narration.

Part One: Narrative and Metanarrative

The dramatic break of modern novels from tradition has led to the emergence of postmodern novels or, more generally, postmodern literature. Postmodern literature is 'literature characterised by reliance on narrative techniques such as fragmentation, paradox and the unreliable narrator' (Postmodern literature, 1). Examples of postmodern novelists include Becket, Borges, Pynchon, Acker, Ellis, etc. A postmodern novel encompasses the diversity of trends. The proliferation of a novel in the modern time is because this literary genre 'has proved so pliable and adaptable to a seemingly endless variety of topics and themes. No other literary form has attracted more writers and more people who are not writers, and it continues to do so despite the oft-repeated cry (seldom raised by novelists themselves) that the novel is dead' (Cuddon, 1998, p. 561). New fictional methods and techniques have been experimented with during the twentieth century. These methods have violated the classical norms of fiction; they have tried to delete prominent elements or break the normal expectation of the reader's awareness. These devices have come to be referred to as *nouvea roman* (the new novel), in France in the mid-twentieth century. Sometimes they are termed as antinovel. By the force of such fictional techniques, novels displace other literary forms and become the art of the century.

A novel is an extended form of fiction. As an imaginative work of art, a novel penetrates the human conditions; it analyses the complexity of human nature. So, it is no wonder a variety of narrative modes, such as epistolary novels, proletarian novels, historical novels, non-fictional novels, involute novels and antinovels exist. These fictional works have witnessed various styles and devices that aesthetically distort the norms of traditional fiction. The most revealing form of narrative is metafiction or metanarrative. Before going a step further, it is of interest to make distinctions between tripartite expression novels, *novelettes*, stories, novels, narratives and fiction respectively.

If a novel is a matrix of a prose narrative of a sizable length (with fictional characters), a *novelette* is 'a short novel' and a *novella* is also a short story, particularly applied to the early tales of Italian and French writers, such as Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (Dictionary of Literary Terms, 2007, p. 120-1). Akin to these terms is the *story*; it is a 'piece of prose, usually narrative in form and made up of a series of incidents related to a central situation' (ibid). This interrelatedness among these terms can be witnessed in novels, narratives and fiction. A novel is a fictitious story, normally in prose. A narrative is 'a story, whether told in prose or verse, involving events, characters and what the characters say and do' (Abrams, 2009, p. 208-9). Fiction is any literary narrative, whether in prose or verse, which is invented instead of being an account of events that actually happened.' (ibid, p. 116). Abrams, however, narrows the scope of the terms by stating that fiction denotes only narratives that are written in prose (the novel and short story) and sometimes is used simply as a synonymy for novel (ibid.)

What is characteristic of these terms (which are circulated in fiction novels) are the two principles of fiction and narration. These works of art are imaginatively invented. They are the products of imagination and not purely bibliographical accounts of writers. In addition, these imaginative artistic works have a construction used to give certain details to an event or episode. In a postmodern narrative, the narration is deliberately broken in a way that ultimately breaks the expectancy of the reader. This is a device of the prose form called metafiction or metanarrative. Metafiction is a term widely used in postmodern novels to refer to the self-referential aspect in fictional writing. Patricia Waugh (1984, p. 84) introduces a comprehensive definition of the term by saying that metafiction is 'fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.' For Waugh, metafictional works are those works that 'explore a theory of writing fiction through the practices of writing fiction' (ibid.).

Modern theorists specify the common metafiction devices exploited in the literature of fiction. They can be (1) a story about a writer who creates a story; (2) a story that features itself as a narrative or as a physical object as its own prop or MacGuffin; (3) a story

containing another work of fiction within itself; (4) a story addressing the specific conventions of story, such as titles, character conventions, paragraphing or plots; a novel where the narrator intentionally exposes him or herself as the author of the story; (6) a story in which the characters are aware that they are in a story; and (7) a story in which the characters reference the author or their previous work (ibid). The reader, while reading this fictional story, is fully aware that what they read is a story and makes a distinction between the dream-like world and the world of reality. In its construction, metafiction breaks the traditional techniques of narration; there is an intentional violation of the storytelling. The writer who invented this term is William H. Gass in a 1970 essay entitled *Philosophy and the Form of Fiction*. Unlike the antinovel or anti-fiction, metafiction is fiction specifically about fiction, i.e. fiction that deliberately reflects upon itself (ibid). These literary devices have led to the dramatic development of the novel in the twentieth century.

Part Two: Monica Ali: Narrative Analysis

Creativity is unbounded; it has nothing to do with geography, religion, race or colour. It is the mental power to imaginatively produce works of arts which depict modern human situations. This is true for Monica Ali, the British modern novelist. Born in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1967, Monica Ali immigrated to Britain while she was a child of A Muslim teacher and a Christian counsellor. Because of the civil war in East Pakistan in 1971, the family had to move to England for their safety and their four-year-old daughter. The family felt unease from their English relatives and strangers alike. Ali's father confessed that he experienced racism (Monica Ali,1). The hard times of emigration had great influence on her fictional writings. Ali entered Wadham College of Oxford University and graduated with a PPE degree, (Philosophy, Politics and Economics). She went to work in the marketing department of a small publishing house and moved to a similar job at another house before joining a branding agency (ibid.). One study comments on the multicultural biography of Ali. It says Ali is 'both Bangladeshi and British lived as former colonies so we cannot consider to be one part or another' (Nilsson, 2010, p. 4). This multicultural background has a great influence on dealing with the issues of the two spheres.

Brick Lane, Ali's first novel, was published in 2003. The main character is Nazneen, a Bangladeshi woman who emigrated with her husband to live in London. The novel's title is taken from a street at the heart of London's Bangladeshi *Brick Lane* community. *Brick Lane* was highly celebrated by journalism and literary criticism. In his review in *The New York Times*, Michael Gorra wrote 'Monica Ali already has a sense of technical assurance and an inborn generosity that cannot be learned. *Brick Lane* inspires confidence about the career that is to come' (p. 2). After finding her own voice with confidence, Ali wrote her second novel, *Alentejo Blue, Into the Kitchen* in 2006 and her last novel *Untold Story* (2011). The protagonist in *Brick Lane* is a young Bengali woman in London, while the protagonist in *Alentejo Blue* is an old peasant in Portugal. The story, in Walter's words, is 'structurally

piecemeal, a collection of vignettes with no forward thrust at all. All the vignettes take place in Mamarrosa, a picturesque village in Portugal. The only thing that holds together is its geographical unity' (the Guardian, 1). The characters, whether native citizens or English people, integrate socially in a tavern in this pretty village. The novel is a sort of cross-cultural domain within the European environment. If immigration and post colonialism are the prominent themes of *Brick Lane*, poverty and disparate individuality are the main themes in the poorest country in the European Union.

In her third novel, Ali has returned to her multicultural domain. In *Into the Kitchen* (2009), Ali projects a different trajectory. It is of a hotel restaurant in central London, and it has insights into human nature with all its expectations and contradictions. *Into the kitchen* is a micro sphere (identity) that represents the macro sphere (life). In Ali's third novel, 'the setting is the Imperial Hotel, a venerable but decaying London. The hero is Gabriel Lightfoot, a middle-aged chef on the cusp of too many changes' (Arana, 1). Ali's last novel is *Untold Story* (2011). The story is indirectly concerned with the career of Diana, Princess of Wales. It is an alternative history of the late princess. Because of that analogy between the main character and the image of Lady Diana, and because the novel portrays indirectly the British royal icon who faked her death, the novel has been highly criticised by certain British writers and journalists.

Ali's fictional works might be different in terms of cultural constraints or minor details, but still there are certain affinities among these novels. In her first novel, the characters, the themes, and the setting are but the imaginative creation of reality. Here, language gives reality a structure; it builds up the mental image of the universe. These novels never deal with mythic characters. Though myths and epics are also stories retold, the characters with their ecstasy and despair are derived from the real world. This may bring Ali's fictional works closer to Charles Dickens' in portraying London life in the mid-nineteenth century, as in his *Hard Times* and *Oliver Twist*. Ali, in her fictional writings, has not entirely left the traditions of novel craftsmanship. The sequence of episodes follows one another in a normal way.

Brick Lane discusses several topics. These include the problems of immigration, clash of cultures and drug addiction. These issues are not fictional; they are part of the problematic issues of modern communities. Dealing with such modern problems of mankind in a narrative work may give this work its modernity, especially if they are written in modern literary style. The onset of *Brick Lane* describes Nazneen, a newly married Bangladeshi woman in her first experience of transition from her village to London. She has to experience the new culture for almost two decades. An arranged marriage leads her to Chanu, a man twice her age: though he has a good collection of books and furniture, he is a man of inaction; he says more than he performs. Chanu does not allow her young wife to leave their building alone or to work. The

novel, in its earlier episode, describes the traditions of the Bengali community, which is purely oriental. This simplistic Eastern-Pakistani setting is dramatically changed when Nazneen has immigrated with her husband to London, where they will start a new everyday life adventure. The Bangladeshi community in London where Nazneen lives is culturally divided into two parts: a part which tries to follow the traditions of the west, while the other wants to keep the old traditions. In addition to Nazneen and Chanu, the narrative community includes Mrs. Islam, a wealthy widow, Dr. Azad, a successful professional, Karim, a young Bengali man who formed the Bengal Tigers, Razia, Nazneen's best friend, and Hasina, Nazneen's younger sister. In this divided atmosphere, Nazneen is enchanted by ice-skating, which she knows and learns from television.

The birth of Nazneen and Chanu's child, Raqib, brings a turning point to narration. The parents realise that the new Bengali generation in London is preoccupied with alcohol and drug addiction. Like some other Bengali citizens, Chanu decides to go back home. The death of Raqib, the newly born baby, brings Chanu closer to his wife. Due to the narrative discourse, Chanu is in debt to Mrs. Islam, who seems to be a usurer. Because of this hard time, Nazneen starts doing some sewing work at home, while Chanu accepts a job as a cab driver with Kempton Kars. The trauma of death unmasks the hidden side of women in eastern society through the letters corresponded between Nazneen and Hasina.

Things do not go easily; Nazneen feels the pressure of heavy life on her. She has to balance the daily cost of living and the cost of travelling home. She suffers mentally. After her nervous recovery, Nazneen has the spiritual power to stop Mrs. Islam from trapping them and to be more determinate in her home affairs. The end of the novel witnesses an unexpected conclusion. While Chanu decides to go home, Nazneen refuses; she decides to stay with the support of Razia, telling her husband that the pull of the land is stronger than the pull of blood (*Brick Lane*, Summery & Guide, 2). The women of the Bangladeshi community in London establish a sewing business with some of their other friends and they make a good living catering mainly to white women who pay high prices for Bangladeshi/Indian style products (ibid). Not only that, Nazneen fulfils her dream of ice-skating and feels free to skate, even in her traditional sari.

Immigration, fate, female empowerment, and a clash of cultures are the main themes of Ali's *Brick Lane*. *Brick Lane* is not an autobiographical novel about the writer's personal life, but echoes immigration in her early life. Therefore, her personal experience still has a great impact on her narrative creation. This may explain the assumption that there is an indirect link between authors and their creative visions. *Brick Lane* is the story of Nazneen, a young Bengali woman who is newly married and immigrates with her husband, Chanu to London. The first challenge that Nazneen encounters as an immigrant is language. The writer (quoted in Nilsson, 2010, p. 2) describes the main character by stating that 'Nazneen could say two



things in English only: sorry and thank you. She could spend another day alone. It was only another day.' Ali, according to Nilsson (ibid), indicates that Nazneen's inability to speak is the major cause of her loneliness.' As a housewife living in a foreign country, Nazneen keeps watching the ice skaters on TV; her dream is to skate on day. The image of skating becomes a symbol of free will, since it appears several times throughout the novel. Nazneen, in her new experience, should learn not only how to live the marital life but also how to communicate with the new culture in London.

Chanu, an important character, is an elderly man who has become Nazneen's husband. She is impressed at first by her husband's credentials and his collection of books and furniture but becomes more and more annoyed with him. Chanu talks but doesn't act. He plans a lot but he doesn't accomplish his goals. Like most Muslim men from their part of the world, he won't allow her to leave their estate alone or to work (*Brick Lane* Summary and Study Guide, 12). However, the death of their first child brings the little family close together. What is characteristic about Chanu is his contradictory charisma. Though he tries to be a part of the new culture, Chanu is strongly tied to his tradition. Chanu (Nilsson, 2010, p. 11-120) responded to his wife's plea to go out alone in the following manner: 'Why should you go out?', "If you go out, ten people will say, 'I saw that she is walking on the street.' And I look similar a fool. Personally, I don't pay attention of you to go out but these people are so unaware. What can I do?" 'Besides, every things that you needed I brought it for you.' Chanu then affectedly adds, 'If you was in Bangladesh you will not go out' (Ali, p. 45). In this light, Ali tried to highlight a certain Muslims' doctrine that women should stay at home while men are responsible of getting things from outside.

Nazneen's best friend in the foreign community is Razia Iqbal, whose character witnesses contradiction between her vision and her actual acts. She believes in romantic love, but when the experience of love sweeps up her daughter, she refuses the doctrine of love and romantic relations. In addition to Razia, the other characters are Mrs Isalm, Dr Iqbal, Hasina and Karim. Mrs Islam is a wealthy widow. Iqba is a successful professional, whereas Hasina is Nazneen's sister who reveals certain aspects of social life through their correspondences. Karim is a Bangladeshi man to whom Nazneen is physically attracted.

Part Three: Fiction and Worldview

Rarely are there fictional works of art that deal seriously with the problem of immigration and the clash of cultures. Ali's sharp-witted tale explores immigrants' dilemma of belonging. Nazneen moves to London's Bangla Town in the mid-nineteen-eighties after an arranged marriage with an older man. Seen 'through Nazneen's eyes, England is at first actually baffling, but over the seventeen years of the narrative, she gradually finds her way, bringing up two daughters and eventually starting an all-female tailoring business' (*Brick Lane*, 1-3).



In addition to the concept of emigration, fate is a basic theme in *Brick Lane*. To foretell Nazneen's future life, Rupban, Nazneen's mother (who has great power on her life), has pulled some more feathers and watched them float under her toes. 'Aah, ' she says. 'Aaaah. Aaaah.' Things occurred to her. For seven months, she had been ripening like a mango on a tree. Only seven months. She had put those things that had occurred to her aside (*Brick Lane, Lane*). The narrator describes Nazneen's cultural worldview under the power of her mother's strong character. 'As 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 the wide-faced, watchful girl that she was. Fighting against one's Fate can weaken the blood. Sometimes, or perhaps most times, it can be fatal. Not once did Nazneen question the logic of the story of 'how you were left to your fate' (ibid). The course of the narration shows that Nazneen chooses her destiny by her free will.

A related problem to the new cultural world is drug addiction. The Bengali youth turn to drug addiction. As a response, Nazneen vows to go back home after giving birth her child. It seems that many Bengali families have the idea of returning home because of such problems, but they have no money to go back. As the drug problem in their London community gets worse, even affecting Razia's son, Tariq, and as adolescent daughters become more westernised, Chanu becomes more determined to bring his family back home.

Fictitious characters reveal more about the complexity of human life than one knows in real life. These fictitious characters are not the creation of imagination on paper; they are a crucial part of the fabric of actual life and human experience. The difference between people in novels and people in real life is that a novelist reveals more about characters than we can possibly know in life. The source of the clash between the British and the Bengali communities is of misunderstanding due to the lack of comprehending each other. As a Muslim, Nazneen feels strongly tied to her pious life, to the society in which she lives and the future in which her children will live. Islam, to her, is an attitude towards life. It is a significant part of her culture. Even when she fulfils her wish of skating, she skates with her *sari*.

Cultural points of view are organically related to the concept of worldview. Another term that is related to ideology is the concept of worldview. The term is widely circulated in philosophy, anthropology, literature and cultural studies. It is 'the sum of ideas which an individual within a group or that group have of the universe in and around them'. (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 15, 1968).

Geertz (quoted in Dundes, 1968, p. 303), proceeds with the assumption that 'The cognitive and existential aspects of a given culture are designated by the concept of worldview; It is the assumed structure of reality.' He concedes to say that 'people's world-view contains their most comprehensive ideas of order, of nature of self and of a society' (ibid). The term itself is



of German etymology. In Shaw's words (1972, p. 399-400), worldview or 'Weltasicht' is 'an attitude toward life and reality.'

Life is a journey, and over the course of her journey across the new culture, Nazneen has met other characters. Those characters are at a crossroads. Some try to get rid of the traditions of their native society and to acquire the traditions of the new society, and some endeavour to keep these traditions and rituals. Ali's *Brick Lane* is the story of those who have immigrated to other lands and the problems they encounter there. Through a series of letters that span thirteen years, *Brick Lane* begins to tell the story of Nazneen's younger sister, Hasina. Hasina eloped in a love marriage and ran off to Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh (*Brick Lane* Summary and Study Guide Description, 1.2). Though the two women live in different countries and cultures, they have a common ground between their lives: they follow the lessons taught to them by their mother (Amma) before her death. One of these lessons involves fate. Amma warned her daughters not to struggle against fate and to treat life with the same indifference with which life would treat them (*ibid*). Both women decided not to follow these lessons and to create their own lives by their free will.

Brick Lane, being a story, concentrates on that gap between cultures. Chanu, Nazneen's husband, tries to become part of the new Bengali-British community, but he feels that the view of others is unfair. Although he communicates with other Bengalis, he cannot stop feeling the feeling of discrimination. He says, 'To white human beings we are all the same humanity: dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan. But these white people are unschooled, illiterate, close-minded, without determination... I don't care about them, but what can you do?' (quoted in Nilsson, 2010, p. 9; Ali, 28). Chanu refers to this degradation of races by using the pronouns we (i.e. referring to Bengalis community) and them (i.e., referring to the British community). In *Brick Lane*, Chanu indicates that the white men are racist, but by his outcries, he also expresses a sense of racism towards the host community. Protests by Bangladeshi leaders express worries over Monica Ali's description of the major male character, Chanu. They believed that he reflects negatively on the real male members of the Bengali in *Brick Lane*. The novelist Nilsson conclusively approves that Chanu is an unreal character; his feelings are not hers (quoted in Nilsson, p. 10). She also maintains that the leaders of the Bengali community 'continue to confuse reality with fiction'. They have obviously assumed that the comical traits of Chanu are borne of private westernised opinions pertaining to Bengali male religious and social values and the result of post-colonial discourse and the concept of 'othering' (*ibid*).

Novelists follow different narrative techniques to unlock the episodes of their letters. Ali follows the epistolary or letter-technique for that narrative purpose. Hasina's letters describe the hardship in Dhaka as she describes the political climate there. In addition, the letters shed

more light on Hasina's private life. She runs away from her first husband, works in a garment factory and is soon fired because of a jealous woman's lies.

After a period of homelessness, Hasina finally ends up in a home for destitute women where she stays until she is rescued by Lovely Begum, a woman with a different set of problems (ibid). What is distinctive about the letter technique is that it is used not just to proceed in the narrative progression, but also to highlight the issues of the community where the characters live and communicate with each other. Problems like environmental pollution, mob violence, child labour, child trafficking, HIV/AIDS and domestic violence are among the issues which expose the human situations in different communities. The letters reveal the hidden and sometimes the contradictory sides of the characters. In case of Chanu, for instance, the antagonist fancies himself a frustrated intellectual and continually expounds upon the 'tragedy of immigrants' to his young wife (and anyone else who will listen), while letters from downtown Hasina provide a contrast to his idealised memories of Bangladesh (*Brick Lane*, 1).

The other witty technique that Ali has used in creating the narrative fabric of *Brick Lane* is the interference of fiction with reality. A character like Chanu, severely criticises 'othering' for degrading his race. Now the question is whether this is true or not? Nilsson picks up this thread to comment on Ali's artistic technique of mixing fiction with reality. The confusion between reality and fiction in *Brick Lane* tells us that Ali successfully creates her characters on two literary levels; as real Bengalis and as fictional characters. She gives them both western and relating characteristics. This allows Ali to pre-determine the fate and the way of the characters within the limits of the novel and at the same time neglect reality. Ali uses these procedures successfully in the novel. However, these two conflicting notions of fact versus fiction in *Brick Lane* can cause confusion. The reader may be forced to question the author's realism, her reform of *Brick Lane* and the Bengali immigrant community or to accept her point of view as plausible in the plot and the result of the novel as a fictional work.

The fiction-reality interference is not restricted to the novel as a literary genre. It can be found in poetry and drama as well. Concepts like racist discrimination, empowerment, and power abuse are circulated under the rubric of post-colonialism or colonial studies. Dictionaries and encyclopedias explain this term from different stances. Post-colonialism is an academic discipline featuring methods of intellectual discourse that analyse, explain and respond to the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism (Post-colonialism, 1). Postcolonialism responds to the human consequences of controlling a country and establishing settlers for the economic exploitation of the native people and their land. Drawing from postmodern schools of thought, post-colonial studies analyse the politics of knowledge (creation, control and dis-attribution) by analysing the functional relations of social and political power that sustain colonialism and neo-colonialism. As a critical theory,

post-colonialism presents, explains and illustrates the ideology and the praxis of neo-colonialism, with examples drawn from humanities-history and political sciences, philosophy, Marxist theory, sociology, anthropology, human geography, the cinema, religion, theology, feminism, linguistics and postcolonial literature. The anti-conquest narrative genre presents the stories of the colonial subjugation of subaltern men and women.

In its literary construction, the relationship of post-colonialism and immigration is clear in the veins of Ali's *Brick Lane*. Before going a step further, certain studies highlight the realities of the immigration of Bengali people to UK. British rule in India started in 1833 after long trading relations because of the British East India Company (founded in 1606). It ended in 1947 with India declaring independence. What came later was fatal: India was divided and Pakistan was founded in 1947. The Mangla barrage was built and people were displaced. The immigration wave started in the 1950s and had its peak at the beginning of the 1960s. The largest group of immigrants besides the Indians were the Pakistani and Bangladeshi, who lived in the West Midland and in Greater London. Most of them were Muslims. Until 1962, all Commonwealth citizens were allowed to immigrate to England. Still, the problems encountered by the immigrants were discrimination and racism. Moreover, many Muslims stick to their original culture instead of adopting British culture and becoming British Muslims. In addition, victim mentality involves the British and the immigrants. The immigrants live a ghetto life in isolation (Post-colonial and Migration, 1-3).

In this light, it is not altogether wrong to say that Ali's *Brick Lane* is an imaginative work of art based on the actualities of Bangladeshi immigration to London. Nazneen encounters social forces: the force of language and the force of Chanu, who doesn't allow her to be free because of his Islamic restrictions. Western discourse, however, does not recognise deep-rooted eastern socio-cultural traditions. This is one aspect of the relationship between Monica Ali as a writer and Nazneen as a fictional character. Ali's multi-culturalism influences and affects the character expansion of Nazneen. Firstly, Nazneen is a nervous and perceptive housewife, eventually becoming an independent and strong individual. She establishes these beliefs and ethnic behaviours in both Eastern and Western culture, unlike her creator Ali (ibid.).

Conclusions

The critical analysis of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* has shown that the clash of cultures occurs when across-cultural domains come into opposition. The Bangladeshi culture in London, represented by Nazneen, has to choose either to keep its traditions or to acquire the traditions of the other. As a result of the differences in languages and cultures among different communities, motifs of suffering exist in such multicultural societies. The analysis has shown that a character can change their human situation by his or her free will. Still, the source of



the victimisation of women is not always the result of what is envisaged in the post-colonial view; it might be the result of the traditional culture in which the characters live. While the other community exercises a sort of racism towards ethnic immigrant groups, the members of the group exercise that degradation against each other as well. Though fictional in form, this tragic human situation is real in actual life. In this sense, Ali's *Brick Lane* depicts the human situation in a constant, tragic but brave world.



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