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The Complexities of Transnational Identity and Nazneen's Concept of Agency in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

Sadia Afreen

Abstract

While Monica Ali's remarkable novel *Brick Lane* narrates the experience of a Bangladeshi community living in the Towering Hamlets of London, it also focuses on the protagonist, Nazneen's struggle both as a woman and as an individual in a foreign country. Be it a process of assimilation or getting entrapped into cultural hybridization, while continuously encountering identity crisis, dislocation, and rotating in an 'un-homed' space, Nazneen was necessarily dealing with the complexities of transnational identity. Deriving from Bhaba's concept of cultural hybridization and the 'unhome,' this paper attempts to analyze the challenges Nazneen faced as an immigrant woman in London. Being married to a man with a patriarchal mindset, and living in a society bound with extreme cultural and religious values, this paper also explores Nazneen's struggle to find an agency in her process of emancipation. Superseding the binary construct of the West and Islamic feminist ideas, and arguing that it was Nazneen's newly gained knowledge that gave her a true agency, this paper also offers an alternative understanding of Nazneen's emancipation process by discussing theorists like Talal Asad, Asma Barlas and Saba Mahmood.

Keywords: Agency, Feminism, Identity, Transnational, Bhaba.

Among the Bangladeshi or Bangladeshi-origin writers writing in English, Monica Ali is a very remarkable name. She was listed as the Granta best young British novelist for her debut book *Brick Lane* even before it was published. *Brick Lane* depicts the story of a Bangladeshi community living in the Tower Hamlets of London in general, while Nazneen being Ali's protagonist, reflects the struggle of a Bangladeshi woman in a foreign country, and the challenges she faces, both as a woman and as an individual. Be it the process of assimilation or getting entrapped into cultural hybridization, while continuously encountering identity crisis, dislocation, and rotating in an 'un-homed' space, Nazneen was necessarily dealing with the complexities of transnational identity. Alienation, loneliness and nostalgia, are some of the prominent factors that construct Nazneen's transnational identity. In spite of encountering these transnational complexities, Ali's Nazneen comes out as a profound character, because Ali portrays her as a woman, who finally finds an agency for her emancipation. Ali sketches the very complexities of her transnational identity, characterized by the hybridity of culture, and 'un-homing the home' as the reasons for her emancipation. This portrayal of Nazneen's emancipation was, however, debated by many postmodern theorists, arguing that Ali's emancipation process was heavily dependent on western modes of feminism which stereotyped and neglected Nazneen's religious identity. This paper will thus take a close look at Nazneen's religious identity in analyzing her emancipation process.

Without categorizing her emancipation process under the west or the Islamic feminist idea, this paper attempts to offer an alternative understanding which derives religious concepts from Asad and Barlas argues that it was her new gained knowledge or insight and her hermeneutic approach towards Islam that not only emancipated her, but also reinforced her Muslim identity. By deriving Saba Mahmood's argument on Muslim women's concept of agency, this paper also argues that even without the hermeneutic approach, Nazneen's Muslim identity, in her emancipation process, was not at all neglected, rather, re-established because of her ability to accept and embrace all the versatilities that life offered her due to her nationality, gender and religion. By the end of the novel, Ali lets Nazneen dwell in a space which is no longer ambiguous. Instead, she is seen to characterize herself with a strong sense of identity and emancipation. Nazneen reflects the simple life of every other Bangladeshi woman, who does not have many choices, and their life is predominantly dominated by the idea of fate. Being a woman in a small village, Gouripur Mymensingh in Bangladesh, Nazneen, thus didn't have a say, when her father arranged a marriage for her with a man who was almost twice her age. Chanu, her husband, though had academic excellence at home, couldn't make much use of it in London and, as a result, they did not live a very affluent life there. Nazneen's life changes drastically when she marries Chanu, leaves her Bangladeshi village, and comes to start a new life in London. She buries away her fear and discontentment of this new life, submits herself to the practice of not "kicking against the fate" and devotes herself to the domestic duties of a dutiful wife.

Leaving Bangladesh, and coming to London, Nazneen becomes a character who necessarily needs to deal with the complex realities of belonging to a diasporic community in general and combat the struggles of transnational identity in particular. Nazneen's process of assimilation and her transnational identity is shaped by un-homing the notion of home, which isn't marked by geography, nation or state, rather by what Bhabha terms the feeling of having a sense of stable identity. Deriving his idea of being unhomed, from Freud's concept of *unheimlich*, Bhabha argues that, if home connotes to the idea of stable identity, then un-home doesn't mean spatial or conceptual reference of home: "To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres." (Bhabha, 1992, p. 141). Rather, it is a moment when an individual goes through a moment of shock and realizes that their sense of stable identity has crumbled down. In other words, then unhome becomes a postcolonial space, where one can see how an identity has become a mixture of unfamiliar and familiar things. Bhabha, states, "The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world" (Bhabha, 1992). Nazneen faces her unhomely moment, when she comes to London, because she loses her association with a stable identity and exposes herself to a mixed-ness, a form of hybridity of the known and the unknown. This is when she faces a shock and realizes that she is not just dislocated but also faces an identity crisis. Nazneen is caught between her Bangladeshi- British transnational identity, thus rotating in an ambiguous space, while facing the anxiety of belonging.

Nazneen's struggle for belonging or being assimilated originated from her extreme social isolation. Living in a small flat at the end of East London, Nazneen hardly ever went out. She spent her days doing her regular household chores of cleaning and cooking. She spent her days all by herself once her husband left for work. Except for Chanu, she had no human contact. She sat in her flat and forced herself the utmost human contact by looking at the tattooed lady across her window. Even in Chanu's presence she felt disconnected most of the time, because of his condescending attitude and in her failure to grasp Chanu's continuous rants about the occident, the Orient and the 'uneducated types'. She agreed to whatever he said and did everything as he instructed. Reflecting Nazneen's extreme alienation, Ali writes "What she missed most was people. Not any people in particular (apart, of course, from Hasina) but just people" (Ali, 2003, p. 24). This factor of being extremely

alienated socially, acted as a catalyst in her struggle for assimilation. Forbidding her to go out since people would talk, and insisting not to socialize even within the Bangladeshi community, reasoning that they are the uneducated locals, Chanu robbed Nazneen's only platform to feel connected and assimilated. Thus, she spent her initial days in London, feeling extremely alienated and enduring the pangs of loneliness all by herself. Nazneen's new-found pathos within the walls of her London home is rightly depicted by Ali, "In all her eighteen years, she could scarcely remember a moment that she had spent alone until she married and came to London to sit day after day in this large box with the furniture to dust, and the muffled sound of private lives scaled away above, below and around her" (Ali, 2003, p. 24). Commenting on the kind of alienation Nazneen faces both socially and psychologically, Hussain opines, that Nazneen reflects the condition of every other South Asian migrated woman who is struggling hard to assimilate in a foreign land, "In this respect, the novel becomes a social text in that it provides an insight into the lives of women who have migrated are learning to adapt to an alien environment" (Hussain, 2005, p. 100).

Like any other migrant woman from the Third World, Nazneen too lacked linguistic skills when she first arrived in London. Her knowledge of the English Language was limited to only "sorry" and "thank you." This language barrier made her feel all the more socially alienated. When she wanted to learn English like her friend Razia, Chanu did not approve of it and reminded her that her priority of being a mother and a good wife should not be compromised with her desire by learning English. Nazneen's helplessness echoes the struggle of every other migrant woman who lacks the capability of communicating due to the lack of their linguistic skill. Commenting on the role of language being a major factor in the assimilation process of migrant women, Wilson writes, "Women who cannot speak English cannot communicate with her neighbors, the police, lawyers, doctors, or advocates. They may even become alienated from their children or working husbands who gain fluency in English, or may become more dependent on family members to interpret the culture for them" (Wilson, 2005, p. 134). Failing to initiate the process of communication, leading to the failure of assimilation, Nazneen thus spends all her time by herself and keeps herself inclined towards the exceptional identity of a dutiful wife. This inability to express and translate her feelings and desire only promotes her fear of assimilation both inside and outside home. Hussain opines, "Ali uses her characters to explore the positioning of Bangladeshi women within Britain, as the novel focuses on their social relations inside and outside the home" (Ali, 2003, p. 91). This estranged social and psychological situation, creates tension in the transnational individual and "evokes a sense of rootlessness, isolation, loneliness and detachment from the wider community" (Ali, 2003, p. 95).

It was during these initial days in London that Nazneen, devoid of any kind of social life, nostalgically thought about her village in Bangladesh. In the quest of giving herself an emotional shelter, Nazneen escaped the harsh realities of London, and dreamt about the fondest memories of her childhood in Bangladesh. "In Gouripur, in her dreams she was always a girl and Hasina always six. Amma scolded and cuddled and smelled as sweet as the skin on the milk when it had been boiled all day with sugar. Abba sat on the choki, sang and clapped. He called out to them and took them on his lap, and sent them away with a rough kiss on the cheek" (Ali, p. 45). Perhaps, this memory was Nazneen's only space where she could deny her present reality and feel she 'belonged', for when she woke up it wasn't the place that she desired to go back to, but the time (Ali, 2003, p. 45). The fact that Nostalgia is a form of escape for immigrants is further established by Akhter, who writes "in case of immigrants, nostalgia is thought of as a debilitating form of escapism and an inability to adapt to change and mobility" (Akhter, 2017). On the backdrop of her diasporic existence,

the immigrant Nazneen thus slips into nostalgia to escape the complexities of her transnational identity.

However, in regard to emancipation, Ali's Nazneen is a triumph, who, amidst these cultural clashes and difficulties of assimilation, successfully finds an agency and ensures her liberty at the end of the novel. The emancipation as Ali portrays wasn't any impromptu indecisive act. Rather, the novel, gradually, unfolds Nazneen's struggle, pinning down every social and psychological factor which transforms her into a strong opinionated woman from just another vulnerable third world migrant woman who spent their lives, as Mrs. Azad puts it, "Some women spend ten, twenty years here and they sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two words in English" (Ali, 2003, p. 114). Nazneen, too, in her initial days, could be identified with one of these vulnerable women, whose lives were constructed within the framework of extreme conventional and patriarchal ideologies. It is through her gradual realization and her desire to break off from this claustrophobic construct, that made her negotiate an agency, which ultimately gave her the desired liberation.

Lack of agency was predominantly an inherent factor in Nazneen's life. When Nazneen's mother repeatedly told her the story of "How You Were Left to Your Fate" (Ali, 2003, p. 15) Ali writes, "not once did Nazneen question the logic of the story" (Ali, 2003, p.15). It is a story whose morals created a concrete foundation for Nazneen's lack of agency. The moral, as Nazneen's mother explained it to her was, everything happens according to God's will, and one is not supposed to "stand in the way of fate" (Ali, 2003, p.14). This moral of not going against one's fate shaped Nazneen not only into a weak individual, incapable of questioning, but also turned her into a woman who believed she was in an absolute powerless state of channeling her desires and leading a life according to her own will. In other words, she lacked from a very young age. Though the term agency is manifested with social, political, and gendered aspects, putting aside those factors and analyzing Nazneen's character not as a migrant Muslim woman from a Third World country, but exclusively as an individual, the kind of agency that Nazneen seemed to lack was as Foss and Domenico puts it, "the capacity to act or make a difference; to have an agency means to feel or to believe that you can change things that matter to you." (Foss, 2013) This lack of agency, dominated her character as she firmly believed that "What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything has to be borne" (Ali, 2003, p. 16). Ali writes, "This principle ruled her life. It is mantra, fettle and challenge" (Ali, 2003).

It was Nazneen's lack of agency that made her marry Chanu, a man who was forty years old and had a frog-like face. Growing up in a male-dominated society, Nazneen could not reject the groom that her father had chosen for her. Instead, she accepted her fate, married Chanu and travelled to London to start a new life. Under the patriarchal norms, she became a dutiful wife, did all her domestic chores and reinforced herself as an individual who had no access to any kind of agency. Be it her going out of the house to buy vegetables, her friendship with Razia, or even her desire to learn English, Chanu didn't see the necessity of it. A typical man in a patriarchal society, Chanu felt the necessity of exercising dominance over Nazneen. He would be the one making choices and giving decisions for Nazneen. Her desire to learn English is not given the least of importance and Chanu denies her, saying that: "You're going to be a mother...Will that not keep you busy enough?" (Ali, 2003). Chanu's attitude towards Nazneen is what a typical patriarchal and religious society in Bangladesh expects a husband to do. The power politics in a religious and male-dominated society always encourages a man to not only overlook his wife's desire but also to prioritize his own. It is under these circumstances that Bangladeshi women, like Nazneen, completely lose their agency, and accept male supremacy. Thus, Nazneen realizes she lives in a world where her desires had no value, but "Men (could do) doing whatever they could in this world" (Ali,

2003, p. 17).

Chanu wasn't a bad husband, as Hasina mentions, he never beat Nazneen like other husbands, who were the "uneducated types". Yet every time he mentions Nazneen how she was so lucky to be married to an educated man and quotes Hume and Shakespeare as a display of his deep academic knowledge, he becomes an exasperating character in the novel. Ali doesn't portray Chanu as an evil husband practicing physical violence against his wife, but definitely places him as a resistant factor in Nazneen's life who is not only blind to her emotional needs, but also, ironically, like the "uneducated type" only treats her like a commodity. Chanu describes Nazneen like a commodity and says, "Hips are a bit narrow but wide enough, I think, to carry children" (Ali, 2003, p. 23). Of course, he doesn't hurt her physically, but the psychological lashes he leaves on her, shatters her completely and robs her of her agency. Fathoming her husband's indifference towards her emotional needs, and realizing her void expectations of love from him, Nazneen exclaims, about herself in despair, "Such a foolish girl. Such high notions" (Ali, 2003, p. 23).

It was under the diasporic complexities of being torn in between her transnational identity and her significant lack of agency that Nazneen grows desperate. She lets Karim enter her life and engages in an extramarital affair. She commits adultery, an unforgivable sin according to Islam. Even though she was bottled up with guilt, yet she couldn't deny his presence, the attraction she felt towards him, and the way he made love to her, "he shamed her. And he excited her" (Ali, 2003, 243). For the first time in her life, she responded to her sexuality with such passion. With Karim, she was nobody's wife, nobody's mother, just a woman reciprocating her feminine needs, - "in between the sheets, in between his arms, she took her pleasure desperately.... She drew him like a moth to a flame" (Ali, 2003, 299). She submitted herself to the fierce power that she couldn't believe that "was inside her, that she was its creator" (Ali, 2003, 300). In her utter disbelief she questions herself, "how could such a weak woman unleash a force so strong?" (Ali, 2003, 300). Her relationship with Karim was a first big step towards finding her agency. In other words, this was her very first agency as it not only made her recognize her inner force, but also made her realize that she could act upon it too. This realization leads her to make her ultimate decision of not going back to Bangladesh with Chanu, but to stay in London with her daughters and start a new life all together. In the process of this realization, and transforming herself from a weak vulnerable woman, to a woman with agency, Nazneen, however, understood that it wasn't Karim that she wanted, for he wasn't much different from Chanu. Even though Karim made her feel loved, Nazneen understood that Karim's needs were just like Chanu's. He wanted just another Bengali wife, or as he would term it as "the real thing" (Ali, 2003, 385) which only connoted to Chanu's idea of "An unspoilt girl. From the village" (Ali, 2003, p. 385). Thus, in the journey of seeking her agency, Nazneen got rid of both Chanu and Karim.

Under Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity and the process of un-homing, Nazneen finds her agency and her way towards emancipation, because of the very complexities of her transnational identity. These complexities slowly unfold her process of emancipation, step by step, and shape her as an individual with an identity. Placing Nazneen in Bhabha's "unhomely" moment, which he defines as the moment of "the shock of recognition" (Bhabha, 1992, 141) due to mingling of public and private influences, terrifies her. She fails to locate herself and make a sense of her identity. Unable to stick to any particular sphere, she rotates in an ambiguous space, which allows not just the expansion of her home, but also the entrance of an outside factor, which invades her home. Nazneen's contact with the outside world happened through Chanu's knowledge only, as she wasn't permitted to go out much.

However, Nazneen doesn't grasp much of Chanu's knowledge and is also indifferent towards his thoughts. Thus, not exposing herself to the outside world and clinging on to her domestic identity of a housewife, she places herself in a position where her current identity remains unthreatened. In other words, in a space charged with diasporic complexities, Nazneen, by not letting herself come in contact with the host culture and by continuing to cling to her simple village girl identity, she continues to deny her process of assimilation. Her assimilation occurs only when her 'home' is penetrated by a beyond factor, which in Nazneen's case is Karim. The beyond factor, as argued by Bhaba in *The Location of Culture* (1994), is a kind of emergence, a vision and a construction that takes one "beyond yourself (oneself) in order to return in a spirit of revision and reconstruction to the political conditions of the present" (Bhaba, p.3). Desperate to make a sense of her identity, Nazneen thus takes refuge in her beyond factor in order to reconstruct and renegotiate her present undefined condition. The beyond factor, Karim uproots her denial of assimilation and redefines her association with home in a new way. Getting caught in this intimate relationship with Karim, both physically and emotionally, Nazneen exposes herself or her 'home' to an outside influence. This intervention of the outside influence can be understood as what Chattopadhyay and Srivastava (2012) explain by quoting Bhaba "as the negating activity that establishes a bridge, where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" (Bhabha, 118). Bhabha's concept of Nazneen's unhoming, thus puts her in an advantageous position that Rushdie argues every exile is privileged with due to their displacement. Nazneen, according to Rushdie's concept of displacement, like other exiles, gets to become the heir of all the cultures in the world and now has the capability to fashion her own cultural identity and since as Bhabha suggests that culture is a dynamic process, it gives the ultimate agency to her transformation. Thus, by the end of the novel, Nazneen is transformed into a strong woman, who has the agency to make her own decisions, and is capable of finding her way to her emancipation. The very complexities of her transnational identity, the hybridity of culture, and the un-homing of her home by a beyond factor, thus, ultimately becomes her agency towards emancipation by pushing her to an unambiguous space.

Though Ali's novel *Brick Lane* received enormous success, and her portrayal of Nazneen's emancipation was applauded, it was critiqued for Ali's significant inclination towards western feminism. Ali's tendency to critic Bengali religious values and glorify the western form of agency tagged *Brick Lane* "as the Western world's other" (Nash, 2012, p. 5). It was argued that Ali's novel was an inadequate understanding of non-western societies and cultures, and it essentially stereotyped and neglected Nazneen's Muslim identity. Ali's *Brick Lane*, thus put under the scrutiny of western secular feminism and Islamic feminism, suggest a complicated understanding of Nazneen's emancipation. Exceeding the Western and Islamic feminism debate, Nazneen's emancipation process can have an alternative understanding. Instead of considering Nazneen's emancipation as a representative of polarity, portraying the victory of secular feminism over the Islamic one, her journey can be recognized as that of an ordinary Bangladeshi Muslim woman's, in a metropolitan area like London. In other words, this alternative understanding of Nazneen's emancipation, goes beyond the binary construct of the east west, the occident-orient and Secular-Islamic feminism debate and brings together her multiple identities of being a Bangladeshi Muslim and also a woman now living in a first world country like England. Under this concept, where Nazneen recognizes herself not as a discrete individual exclusively, belonging to any one of the facets of her identity, but accepts the multifaceted identity aspects in her life, is when Nazneen gains an insight, which lets her see beyond the constructed binaries (Mazloun, 2015, p. 553).

Nazneen, as argued by Mazloun, according to Spivak's idea of displacement, is triply displaced for being a woman, a migrant and also a Muslim, and it is due to this displaced

position that Nazneen acquires a form of understanding, an insight, a distinct knowledge, of home and identity. She outgrows both Chanu and Karim's knowledge and is able to negotiate an identity for herself, without categorizing herself under any of the binary constructs. Whereas Chanu being a failure and going back to Bangladesh, and Karim sticking to his strict Islamic ideologies fit under and promote the stereotypical narration of the west regarding the east, Nazneen, however, supersedes that. Nazneen's perception of this knowledge is evident when she looks at Chanu and understands that he is a lost man in an illusionary world. She goes beyond Karim's understanding of right and wrong, and rejects his extreme religious ideologies. Instead of protests and competition, she suggests celebration as a mode of voicing his opinions.

Ali's novel is necessarily a bildungsroman, which shows Nazneen's emancipation not only through her maturity and experience, but also through her ability to look beyond stereotypical notions. Nazneen's way of comprehending the tension between the east and the west deconstructs the stereotypical construction of these binaries. Nazneen places herself in a space where she can negotiate an identity of her own, by embracing the cultural hybridity she was exposed to. As Bhabha argues, hybridity is a productive space because it creates a space for cultural difference and not necessarily cultural assimilation. Nazneen thus turned the differences into a positive productive space. Nazneen accepts that productive form of hybridity, and refuses to look for a stable home like Kaarim and Chanu through the lens of Islamic activism and the Occident-Orient debate. Because of their original displacement, as argued by Spivak, women can negotiate constructed phallogocentric values and Islamic patriarchal values better than their male counterparts (Mazloun, p. 562). Nazneen, thus, accepts her hybridity and reaches a middle ground, whereas Chanu and Karim fail to do so.

Under this notion of accepting the difference, Nazneen's understanding of religion can be read in the light of Islamic scholars, who reject the idea of Islam being interpreted as a religion manifested by patriarchal ideologies. Instead, they argue that Islam is a tradition that is associated with individuals in variant manners in the formation of their morality and knowledge. Asad argues, "Islam as the object of anthropological understanding should be approached as a discursive tradition that connects variously with the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations (or resistance to it) and the production of appropriate knowledges" (Asad, p. 10). Asad also suggests that it is tradition that plays a continuous role in teaching an individual, and teaching, as Asad puts it, "to be teachable is not only to be able to listen to another person (one's teacher) but also and especially to be able to listen to oneself, that is a skill to be acquired and perfected through tradition" Rejecting both Chanu and Karim, Nazneen essentially was able to listen to herself in the formation of her moral-self. Apart from Asad, Asma Barlas also argues that Islam recognizes men and women as equal beings and rejects all forms of male supremacy. Barlas takes a hermeneutic approach towards Islam and argues that "Male and female are not only inseparable, in the Quran but they also are ontologically the same, hence equal." She suggests, that it is our lack of understanding and misconception that leads us to treat the male and female as binary opposites. "Even though the Quran's account of human creation as originating in a single self is sufficient, to establish women and men as same and equal, Muslims continue to view them as binary opposites and as unequal part because of how they conceptualize the pair itself" (Barlas, 2019, p. 134). Nazneen's upbringing and her knowledge of religion that her mother imparted, always accepted men as the supreme, "if God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men" (Ali, 2003, 80). Though these teachings ruled Nazneen's life for a long period of time, later she rejects this extreme form of religion and refuses to bow down to male supremacy. Nazneen embraces her Muslim identity, and takes a hermeneutic approach

to understanding and practicing Islam, which creates a foundation for her agency and plays a major role in her emancipation process. We see the emancipated Nazneen saying to herself “I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one.” (Ali, 2003, p. 405)

An alternative understanding of Nazneen’s emancipation, even under the strict norms of patriarchy, would be if Nazneen’s emancipation is analyzed under Saba Mahmood’s concept of Muslim women seeking their agency. Mahmood argues, that postmodern feminism has failed to understand the agency of women in Egypt and other Muslim countries, and categorizes them under the binaries of subordination and subversion only, (Mahmood, p. 38) while there are women who are willing to perform their religious activities as a part of their self-identity or seek an agency of their own to create “an architecture of the self” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 31). Nazneen, as argued, never gave up her Muslim identity. She is seen to say her prayers, remember God and acknowledge her sin of adultery, “Now I have earned myself a place in Hell for all eternity. That much is settled” (Ali, 2003, p. 341) and yet, in her strength to stay back in London and in the process of being the ‘architect of the self’ she seeks shelter in religion, and realizes God gave her what she needed most. Ali writes, “She prayed to God, but He had already given her what she needed” (Ali, 2003, p. 484). She does not deny her faith, rather, in the process of her emancipation, reinforces it. She is seen to celebrate her emancipation at the end of the novel, by ice-skating in a saree. Nazneen denies none, rather accepts the versatilities that life offers her. If ice-skating is her metaphorical western identity, her saree essentially connotes her cultural and religious identity. In a space so charged with the differences and tensions of east and west ideology, Nazneen doesn’t reject any of her identities, rather negotiates one from it. Nazneen was able to turn the complexities of her transnational identity into a positive space which shaped her into an individual with a strong and liberated mindset. When Razia declares, “This is England. You can do whatever you like” (Ali, 2003, p. 492), Nazneen understands that she has arrived at a stage where her transnational identity is not a complication anymore. Rather, she is ready to live with all the differences that her country, religion and gender have provided; this understanding completes her search of agency and gives her the true sense of emancipation.

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Bio-note

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