Universidade do Minho
Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas

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The Path to Hybrid Identities through Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

junho de 2021

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STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration.

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The Path to Hybrid Identities through Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

Abstract*:* This dissertation investigates questions of identity within postcolonial studies as depicted in two literary writings, one by Leila Aboulela, *Minaret* (2005) and another by Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (2003). I analyse both works by showing how the protagonists Najwa and Nazneen, respectively, goes through an identity crisis in the beginning and eventually construct a kind of 'becoming' identity position. I emphasise how each character go through transformations, in which their different experiences between time and space continuously shape their identities rather than gaining a fixed or essentialist notion of identity. I particularly show how Najwa and Nazneen, respectively, faced three main stages until reaching in the end a hybrid identity. To this purpose, I frame this analysis within several identity and postcolonial theories, such as Stuart Hall's, Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory of hybridity, and Edward Said's *Orientalism* theory, among others.

Keywords: belonging, Hybrid identity, Identity crisis, Muslim women, transformation.

O caminho para a indentidade híbrida através de *Minaret* de Leila Aboulela e de *Brick Lane* de Monica Ali

Resumo: Esta dissertação investiga questões de identidade no âmbito dos estudos pós-coloniais, tal como retratado em dois textos literários, um de Leila Aboulela, Minaret (2005) e outro de Monica Ali, Brick Lane (2003). Analiso ambas as obras mostrando como as protagonistas Najwa e Nazneen, respectivamente, passam por uma crise de identidade no início e eventualmente constroem uma espécie de posição de identidade em processo. Sublinho como cada personagem passa por transformações, em que as suas diferentes experiências entre o tempo e o espaço moldam continuamente as suas identidades em vez de ganharem uma noção fixa ou essencialista de identidade. Mostro particularmente como Najwa e Nazneen, respectivamente, enfrentaram três fases principais até atingirem no final uma identidade híbrida. Para este fim, enquadro esta análise em várias teorias identitárias e pós-coloniais, tais como a de Stuart Hall, a teoria do hibridismo pós-colonial de Homi Bhabha e a teoria do orientalismo de Edward Said, entre outras.

Palavras-chave: crise de identidade, Identidade híbrida, mulheres muçulmanas, pertença, transformação.

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Introduction

"...neither the one nor the other"
(Bhabha, 1994, p.37)

"None of us is a native of the place we call home. And none of us is a native to this moment in time. We are not native to the instant, already gone, when this sentence began to be written, nor to the instant, also gone, when it began to be read, nor even to this moment, now, which we enter for the first time and which slips away, ... except from memory."
(Mohsin Hamid[1])

An Eastern woman jumped into the crowded boat on the East coast. She had mixed farewell feelings; a nostalgia and sorrow for leaving her innocent childhood place; and hatred of a system that gives indigence and steals women's rights. Heading to the West coast, she sold the little she owned, dreaming of reclaiming her rights of a better life, satisfaction, and self-esteem. She was not fully aware of the surrounding obstacles she will face in a cold sea, silent dark nights, striking waves, expected wild sharks, and unexpected wild men on the jammed boat. The worse happened, the boat collapsed, and everything quickly turned black. She finally recovered her consciousness lying on the West coast beach to find her 'self' as mermaid, a hybrid of her past and her present. But the dawn has come, and the woman woke up full of hope that her dream will inspire her to find her identity, home, and satisfaction in the West. This is how I describe the struggle of identity for some Eastern muslim women who have moved to the West.

Isolation, assimilation, or in-betweeness. Eastern, and especially muslim, immigrant women landing in the West may opt for these hard options to pursue. It is a daunting journey to find the 'self' and the new 'home'. Isolation is neither vital nor satisfactory, mentally and psychologically. In the end, these women often leave their place of birth to survive or to claim back their stolen rights in their eastern patriarchal cultures. On the other side, assimilation is a tough option that may require sloughing these women off some beliefs and principles that are hard to give up. Assimilation is also controversial as it is the other face of patriarchy, leading to surrender and self-deprecation. Away from these two extremes—isolation and assimilation, in-betweenness suggests itself as a convenient compromise

[1] Copied from his article which is published in The National Geographic website. Retrieved through: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/we-all-are-migrants-in-the-21st-century

through establishing a new **hybrid space and identity** that ensures adaptation and integration in the host country together with maintaining the sought self-esteem and satisfaction. This new space is "a place where we construct our identities in relation to varied and often contradictory systems of meaning" (Bhabha 1994, p.38), in which different elements meet and therefore create a new *hybrid* space (p.211). This theory, the hybridity theory by Homi K. Bhabha, got a lot of attraction in the last decades as a major postcolonial theory in the modern and postmodern studies.

Distances nowadays are collapsing and everyone of us is a migrant in a way or another. The whole world looks like a whole large melting pot where everyone should live and adapt despite their differences. The recent openness in business, transportation, and social communication media suggests a new view to promote adaptation and tolerance between cultures and religions. Assimilation to join the crowd, or isolating oneself due to the unwelcome idea of the 'other' are two different choices that should not be an 'obligation' for anyone around the world. This assumption, the **no assimilation-isolation state**, might look like a dream; however, with a world full of impurities, the ***hybrid*** world could be the best choice for a lot of migrants. This is of high relevance to the muslim women today with the immigration waves and integration challenges in the Western community.

The wounds inflicted by the aftermath of the Rushdie affair and 9/11 have not been healed until our recent time. This tension has reshaped the lives of most muslims who are living nowadays in the West. They are viewed as second class citizens to the western world by stereotyping them most of the time as exteriors. The Western political and media discourses "tend to promulgate racialized Orientalist stereotypes" and "create a Muslim enemy Other", in which Muslims are depicted as "irrational, uncivilized, backward, threatening, corrupt, oppressive, deviant, exterior to the dominant culture, and uniquely fundamentalist Others" (e.g., Jackson, 2005; Khan, 1998; Macdonald, 2003; Malcolm, Bairner & Curry, 2010; Martin & Phelan, 2002; Muscati, 2003) (Eid, p.100, 2014). Indeed, this dichotomy of the Self/Other between the Muslim and Western societies left its crucial impact on the sense of identity and home for many people since the rise of the binary Orientalist approach during the eighteenth century. Afterwards, all sorts of human consequences, physical and psychological, have appeared to open a debate between critiques and gave birth to several postcolonial theories in the modern and postmodern studies. Among these theories are Bhabha's theory, Said, Spivak, Fanon and others (Bhabha, 1997; Said, 1995). Postcolonial literature used these theories to study an enormous number of topics concerning the experiences of the colonized such as displacement, emigration, slavery, suppression, difference, feminism, racial and cultural discrimination as well as gender issues.

The journey of the migrants who are seeking a better quality of life is quite problematic. **The shock of change or/and the shock of arrival**, discovering a very different world than what they have imagined, or discovering a new world than what they have already lived before, has all its negative consequences. On the top of this trauma is an identity crisis.

Identity discovery is a prime aspect that is notably experienced in immigration, especially when the home and host countries are significantly different, thus leading to an identity crisis. An identity crisis occurs when there is a big gap between the home and host environments or countries like those differences in freedom, religion, tradition, etc. While this represents a long journey to articulate the new identity for most classes of immigrant societies, the struggle is harder for females. It is even vigorous for both muslim females either coming from patriarchal societies, which restrict their roles and their rights, or from environments where their freedom and independence are already established. The problem of identity crisis got the attention of writers and novelists in the 20th century.

Recently, many authors[2] have tackled the idea of identity crisis either by focusing on the dicothomy of the Self and the Other and highlighting the problems that women, in particular those coming from conservative societies, face; or, challenge the static stereotyped vision around muslim women as being oppressed and focusing on other factors that lead them to face the struggle of finding the 'self'.

In this dissertation, I am focusing on both aforementioned aspects of muslim women. The first is discovering how some muslim woman characters who come from patriarchal societies face the issue of identity crisis due to the shock of arrival. The second aspect is analysing how a story that dispels the narrow image of Muslim women in the West and portrays her as living a normal life in her mother country could face a shock of change that leads her to an identity crisis. In both cases, I argue that many muslim women in the West face an identity crisis that leads them in the end to adopt a hybrid sense of identity. This hybridity could be the best option for their satisfaction and self-esteem, as they don't embrace isolation, living in their left past, nor assimilation and self-denial in the West.

These scenarios are studied through the eyes of Monica Ali in her debut novel *Brick Lane*, and Leila Aboulela's narrative through her amazing work *Minaret*. In both novels, the immigration process of the main characters, Nazneen and Najwa, has been an inflection point in their lives searching for their true identities. For both of them, the sense of hybridity has emerged due to the continuous interaction with people cross-culturally to produce a new idea of belonging.

[2] Such as, Fadia Faqir, Mohja Kahf, Diana Abu Jaber, Leila Aboulela, Monica Ali and others.

Until reaching a hybrid identity, both characters have passed through three main stages, as this will be elaborated thoroughly in chapters two and three. Their first stage could be considered as a 'static' stage since there was no incentive for each character to search for the idea of belonging. The second one is the stage through transformation, in which for both characters some external and internal factors were at the heart of the transition process. During this stage, both characters' personalities were identified as being lost. This loss could never be changed without their incentive to search for a better life or for their personas and moving to an open and engaging host place. The last stage is the hybrid state where, despite the difference of their initial state, both characters have adopted a hybrid sense of identity rather than isolating themselves inside their cocoon of the past or assimilating fully to the Western life by sloughing all their values from the past.

In the following, chapter one, I introduce the question of identity. Being a great problem of colonialism, the crisis of identity will be tackled by defining the term according to several cultural theories, among them, Stuart Hall, who gives two overviews on its definition. In my analysis, I am focusing on his notion of identity as 'becoming', that is subject to the continuous play of history and culture. (Hall, 1992, p.225).

Afterwards, I give a brief outline of the development of postcolonial theory and postcolonial discourse to provide a decent overview of the main theories by Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi K. Bhabha.

Bhabha's theory of hybridity will be the core of my analysis, where he shifts the focus from the conflict between the colonized and colonizer to a third space beyond the binary structure of identity formation. I conclude this chapter by providing a contextual framework for the two major case studies *Minaret* by Leila Aboulela *and Brick Lane* by Monica Ali.

Chapter Two and Three analyze the two bildungsroman novels *Minaret* and *Brick Lane* by addressing how the two protagonists Najwa and Nazneen, respectively, had passed through an identity crisis in the beginning and then constructed a kind of 'becoming' identity position. I emphasise how each character went through transformations, in which their different experiences between time and place have continuously shaped their identities rather than gaining a fixed inherited one. I elaborate how in the end they have chosen a hybrid identity that is far from the two 'antipodes' of the East and West.

In the fourth chapter, Discussion and conclusions, I discuss how Leila Aboulela and Monica Ali showed that the adoption for hybridity could be the most satisfactory solution for some Muslim Eastern women characters, like Najwa and Nazneen, who are striving to find their independent selves without fully adopting the Western culture or fully returning to their traditions. Moreover, I analyze how despite their common aforementioned goal, both authors have applied the idea of hybridity from different perspectives. Other important conclusions are highlighted, too. Last but not least, I have concluded this chapter by giving some further recommendations for future work on the topic of identity formation for Muslim migrants who are living in the West.

Chapter One: Background on Colonial and Post-colonial Theories

1. Question of identity according to Hall and Bhabha

In the last century, a large number of the world's people have experienced colonialism, and their lives have been shaped by its consequences (Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H., 1994). Dealing with the consequences of colonialism, the native's sense of identity has been destroyed. Neither feeling they belonged to their native past, nor to their present colonizer culture, this developed into a crisis in their own identities. Thus, 'Questions of identity' have been among the principal aspects to be studied in the colonial and post-colonial discourse.

Generally speaking, the concept of identity could not be simply defined. It has been a puzzle for most scholars in a broad spectrum of disciplines. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, in *Questions of Cultural Hybridity*, confirm that defining identity itself is a complex task (1996, p.89). Nevertheless, identity is the fact of being who or what a person is. Moreover, cultural identity could be defined as the feeling of belonging partially or totally to different types of ethnic, racial, religious, national, or other social groups that have their own distinct culture.

Cultural identity has several characteristics that opened another large debate between scholars in the fields of cultural studies and others. Some of them believe that it is constructed according to cultural difference through time, and others believe that it is a one-size-fits-all rule, despite the changes and different circumstances within each society. Stuart Hall asserted this and developed a theory that divided the cultural identity into two different types or positions. The first, classifies the identity as 'being' or 'Oneness' that offers a sense of unity and commonality; and the second classifies the identity as becoming, or a process that is "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, 1992, p.225).

The Oneness position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture or collective self that people with a shared history hold in common. Despite people's shifts and divisions through history and the ongoing circumstances, the oneness position adopts the idea that humans still share the same cultural codes, same meaning, references, and ideologies. Such a conception of cultural identity played a critical role in all the post-colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world.

The 'becoming' position recognises that, despite the common or similar points people share, they still hold certain differences, which constitute what they really are or what they have become. It is a matter of becoming and being. Thus it is not a fixed essence from the past that transcends time, but the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, which are under constant transformation.

Bhabha asserts this by saying that: "we find ourselves in the moment of transit; where space and time cross to produce complex figures of Difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (Bhabha, 1994, p.1). Until now, people assumed that identity is "a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action, the logic of something like a 'true self', as Bhabha says. However, "identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself" (Hall, 1989, p.16). Thus, identity is an "unstable effect" of different relations and emerges "... as a kind of unsettled space, or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses." (Ibid.).

This unsettled space has been problematic for those believing in their identity fixation, whether they are considered to be on the colonizer's side or the colonized side. This issue inspired theorists, among them, Homi K. Bhabha, who developed the concept of hybrid identities, a notion that I will use in my study.

Bhabha asserts that cultural hybridity emerges when aspects of one culture merge with another. Furthermore, he believes that through cultural identities, "hybridity refers to the fact that cultures are not discrete phenomena; instead, they are always in contact with one another, and this contact leads to culture mixedness" (Huddart, 2006, p.4). Therefore, identities are never fixed, universal or a one-size-fits-all relation. They are in a process of mixedness, mingling, and changeable dynamic process through history and culture. Similarly, cultural identities are not a fundamental mark that could not transcend time and space, they are rather constructed within different discourses throughout our lives. Stuart Hall confirms this by considering that cultural identities are constructed through our memory, fantasy, memory and even myth (1992).

In this thesis, I analyse the identity as 'becoming' which is constructed according to cultural differences within each society, especially within the post-colonial era.

2. Post-colonial era, discourse and theories

In the following section, I introduce the idea of colonialism and its consequences. Being a great problem of colonialism, the crisis of identity will be tackled by defining the term according to several cultural theories, among them, Stuart Hall. Then, I give a brief outline of the development of postcolonial theory and postcolonial discourse to provide a decent overview of the main theories by Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi K. Bhabha.

Colonialism is the domination of a metropolitan centre that rules a distant territory through the implantation of settlements on their land, which allows them to control the territory for a likely non-specific period of time. This supreme ruling over the subordinate people gives birth to a sense of domination between the two cultures, where the colonizer tries to crush the colonized culture and values in order to impose his own. However, this action does not destroy the colonized culture but only classifies, mutates, and defines it. Consequently, the colonized try to escape from this domination and alienation by resembling the colonizer in the hope to be considered as a part of it. Martin N. Marger defines colonization, or more precisely, the "colonial complex": "(1) colonization begins with a forced, involuntary entry; (2) the colonizing power alters basically or destroys the indigenous culture; (3) members of the colonized group tend to be governed by representatives of the dominant group; and (4) the system of dominant-subordinate relationship is buttressed by a racist ideology." (2000, p.132).

Whereas the term 'colonial' has been used to define the period before independence, 'postcolonial' does not cover the period after colonialism, but the whole culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present time. Moreover, the colonial ruling in the post era does not mean that the age of colonialism is over. Therefore, all the colonial consequences are still alive and active in the form of the post-colonial literature, where the study of the psychological self of colonialism is analysed and studied thoroughly. Post-colonial discourse emerged to address the problems and consequences of colonialism. It also attempts to redefine and reformulate the colonized self.

> Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being (Aschroft, 2006, p.2).

Not only writers who have been affected by colonization dealt with this issue in their writings, however, theorists in the fields of cultural studies, history, and political studies have also studied the consequences of colonization. Several theories have emerged ever since, Frantz Fanon will be the first to be introduced in the following section, before moving on to the concept of Orientalism by Edward Said.

The colonizer-colonized dichotomy by Frantz Fanon

Some years before Edward Said (one of the cornerstones of the postcolonial canon), Frantz Fanon had accused Europe by claiming that it is literally the creation of the third world. He considered that the material wealth and labor originated from 'the sweat and the dead bodies of the negroes, Arabs, Indians and the yellow races', have fuelled the 'opulence' of Europe (1963, pp.96-102). Fanon was among the first to contribute to the colonial literature and postcolonial theories. Born in the Caribbean island of Martinique, Fanon was a French educated black psychiatrist who worked in a hospital in Algeria in the 1950s. After he realized that people's worst mental illness was a cause of colonialism, Fanon starts writing about his political views to the masses. His two fundamental works are *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). In those books Fanon provides a psychological approach to the idea of colonization. In particular, he studied two important concepts: the binary opposition between the native/colonized and settler/colonizer and the idea of decolonization.

Fanon perceived colonialism as a form of domination whose necessary goal for success was the reordering of the world indigenous (native) people. Moreover, he believes that colonialism dehumanizes the people. Particularly, the colonizers' attempt to consider the history of colonized places as one of "barbarism, degradation and bestiality" in order to justify the supremacy of Western civilization (Fanon, 1963, p.210). Equivalent to what Edward Said would argue after, he describes the ways whereby the settlers aim to inferiorize the native peoples, using humiliating words to describe them.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon provides a psychological analysis of colonization and its effects on both the colonizer and the colonized (1986). He explained how the colonizer always rendered them as exotic, odd, uncivilized and inferior. Moreover, the black man is described as being a 'phobogenic object' – inheriting phobias from generation to generation (1986, p.154). On the other

hand, the colonizer was depicted as being the civilized, intelligent, rational being, where the black or 'the negro' was seen as being the other to all the good values possessed by the superior colonizer.

Fanon examined this state of inferiority versus superiority and explained how the colonized attempted to deal with this psychological inadequacy. As a result, the native tried to be as White as possible by adopting the Western values, cultures and religion in an attempt to reject his new culture using the White masks to integrate the European culture. They have tried to embrace the civilized ideals of the Europeans, despite knowing eternally that they will not be accepted by the Europeans. Fanon argued that the native developed a sense of Self as defined by the colonial master through representation and discourse, while the coloniser developed a sense of superiority.

In his manifesto, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon analyzes the role of class, race, national culture and violence in their struggle for national liberation. He mainly discusses the idea of decolonization, which he believes is a violent process as the defining characteristic of colonialism. Fanon argued that Violence "is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect." But if violence is a tool of social control, it may also be a reaction to the oppression of colonialism. Therefore, the process of colonialism creates among the natives a tension and a will to revolt against the insults and superiority of the colonizer. Their anxious feeling towards the settler creates the sense of rebellion to secure their victory and culture. They feel that the only way to upster the supremacy of the settler is by returning back to their, so called, barbaric culture to prove its existence and its value in relation to the West (Fanon, 1963, p.155).

The Self and the Other by Edward Said

Years after Fanon, Edward Said, an Arab-American of Palestinian origin, established the scientific study of postcolonial theory through his path-breaking book *Orientalism* (1978), which is considered a foundational text for postcolonial studies. His work influenced both colonial and postcolonial studies, in addition to his contributions through several political and literary writings to the fields of culture, women, history and ethnic studies.

Said focuses on Orientalism being a manifestation of the postcolonial ramifications. For him, Orientalism is a complex web of thought that "refers to a set of important yet misleading knowledge

claims about the "Orient," a part of the world that has been located both conceptually and physically East of the European West" (Chua, 2019, p1). Said defines Orientalism thoroughly by saying:

> Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) the "occident". Thus a very large mass of writers, among who are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on. [...] The phenomenon of Orientalism [...] deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient [...] despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient." (Orientalism, 1978, p.1-3,5)

According to Said, Orientalism is a set of complex meanings that are interrelated. For instance, Orientalism could be (1) a field of study and/or (2) a cultural representation and political instrument of domination towards the Orient.

Orientalism is considered a field of study that has its impact on cultural studies and literary theories. In Said's version, it is also considered a foundational text for postcolonial studies. The notion of Orientalism described by Said is among the literary theories used to analyse different discourses under the themes of arts, languages, sciences, histories, faiths, cultures, peoples, and nations. According to Bill Aschroft and Ahluwalia in *Edward Said: the Paradox of identity*, Said's work "tackled several issues among them "the struggles with identity, the focus on imperial power and colonialist discourse, the denunciation of political and cultural oppression, the concerns about the material conditions of thinking and writing, and the dissatisfaction with dominant models of literary and cultural theory." (2001, p.2). It is also used to analyse, as is the case with this dissertation, the identity struggles among people coming from the Orient and living in the 'superior' West.

Furthermore, *Orientalism* depicts the worldview and cultural representation of the Western Self towards the East. Said demonstrates in his works how the world according to the Orientalists is grouped into two separate parts, the Orient or East and the Occident or West. This binary opposition between allegedly superior Self/West and allegedly inferior Other/East sets "[...] a European representation of the Orient that is far from being accurate or objective" (Said, 2003, p.67). By defining the Orient as the primitive, exotic, strange, irrational, violent, fanatic and traditional, the West contributed to a great fallacy and a big lie. According to Said, this inaccurate knowledge about the East is not generated through actual facts, but through false assumptions which are derived from literary texts that are limited

by their deep understanding of the reality of the East. Whereas the East has been portrayed as the exotic, strange and inferior, Bertens affirms that this "sensuality, irrationality, primitiveness, and despotism of the East construct the West as rational, democratic, and progressive and so on." (Bertens, 2007, p.205) Therefore, portraying the East as being the passive, non-participatory subject of study, monolithic with a non-changing history gave the West in an indirect way a definition for the Self. The West tends to define itself as being the superior, the most progressive, the most intelligent and as having a wider history through its aforementioned subordination of the East. This was also an attempt "[...] to limit human contact and cross-cultural communication between different cultures, traditions, and societies". (Zhang, 2002, p.180).

Moreover, Said defines Orientalism as being "[...] a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")" (Said, 1995, p.43). This inaccurate cultural representation contributed to a political explanation of this phenomenon. Despite being an objective study for the Eastern civilization or the Eastern world, Orientalism established a kind of political domination in the purpose of self-affirmation of its superiority, authority and even an explanation for its imperialism.

The hybridity theory by Homi K. Bhabha

Around the 1980's a transition took place in post-colonial literature, where theorists started to distance themselves from the binary structure of societies and proposed concepts such as *hybridity*, heterogeneity and mettisage. However, these concepts never denied the pre-existing theories by Fanon, Said and others. Our focus in this work is only on the theory of hybridity, that is explained by Homi K. Bhabha.

Being one of the most prominent theories that addresses issues and problems derived from colonialism, hybridity theory has been tackled by several postcolonial theorists such as "Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, sociologists and anthropologists working in Cultural Studies, such as Stuart Hall and Néstor García Canclini, and postcolonial writers or representatives of 'magic realism' such as Isabel Allende, Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, and Milan Kundera" (Andrade, 2014, p.511). It has also been "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference." (Hoogvelt 1997, p.158).

Hybridity by definition refers to the mixture of "two genetic streams" that resulted in a third new one (Singh, 2009, p.10). The term itself originates from biology and later on has been employed in Linguistics and cultural studies. It also crossed several disciplines and has been used in postcolonialism, identity theories, multiculturalism, globalisation and other fields.

Bhabha (1949), who is one of the influential and most important thinkers in cultural theory and postcolonial criticism, has introduced the idea of hybridity in his two well-known books *The Location of Culture* and *Nation and Narration,* after criticizing the binary structuring of societies that has been explained by Edward Said. Thus, his work has been complemented to Said's work, among others. Bhabha also asserts that Said has been an important figure in post-colonial discourse analysis since his work focused the need to quicken the half-high of western history with the disturbing memory of its colonial texts that bear witness to the trauma that accompanies the triumphal art of empire (Bhabha 1986, p. 149).

For Bhabha the world of colonialism could not be divided into the good (oppressed) and the bad (Oppressor), as being classified by Said. Bhabha (Huddart, 2006), shifts the focus from the conflict between the colonized and colonizer to a third, liminal and hybrid space beyond the binary opposition of identity formation. In his theory, Bhabha describes the hybridity idea as being a third space between the designation of pure Eastern and pure Western identities. It is described as being an "interstitial passage between fixed identifications and opens up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4). Bhabha argues that a new hybrid identity emerges from the interweaving elements of the coloniser and colonised challenging the idea of essentialism or "the belief in invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity." (Fuss, 1991, p. xi). As Ashcroft et al. affirm, Bhabha also believes that cultures and identities could not be pure or fixed (1995), whereas he contends that "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity." (Rutherford 1990, p.211)

In addition to hybridity, Bhabha develops a set of challenging concepts that are central to post-colonial theory: stereotypes, and mimicry. These concepts describe the resistance from the colonized to the colonizer who is stereotyping the East all the time. The third space provides a "spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that initiates new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and the contestation" (Bhabha, 1994, p.1). Bhabha, among others, Fanon for instance, believes that identities are never fixed or idealized and the universal or final answers for certain issues, as explained

by Said, ignores particular moments in colonial suffering that need to be understood and explained in detail.

The discourse of stereotypes has also been explained thoroughly by Bhabha. As has been explained by David Huddart in his book *Homi K. Bhabha*[3], in colonial discourse, the colonizer usually tries to circulate stereotypes to show the inferiority of the colonized (2006). For Bhabha, this kind of stereotyping has never been stable and fixed but productive. The anxieties underlying stereotypes open a space for the colonized to resist colonial discourse. Here the colonizer rather than reassure his own authority, he creates an anxiety at the heart of his identity. This resistance could be done through mimicry, a strategy of doubling and repetition which is a response for the circulation of stereotypes. Frantz Fanon also explained this phenomenon as a process of donning white masks over black skins, as explained above. For Bhabha, mimicry occurs when the colonized is adapting and adopting to the colonizer's culture; however, this adaptation is not slavish mimicry. It is a kind of repeating some of the others' behaviours or cultures but with a difference. A further consequence of mimicry is the undermining of the colonizer's apparently stable, original identity. The fact that anyone could be 'almost white but not quite' implies that no one could ever quite be white. There are no 'facts' of blackness or whiteness, according to Frantz Fanon, and this is a more catastrophic realization for the colonizer than the colonized.

Despite its impact on the post-colonial discourse analysis and its integration in literary criticism, hybridity theory has received some critiques. Some have been against the definition of the term itself and others considered it as useless because of its pervasiveness. For instance, Anthony Easthope, in 'Hybridity and Identity', opposed the concept of hybridity and stated that the term is a contradictory one. Easthope explains that "[t]he desire for Bhabha's writing, then, consists of a fantasy of mastery, the mastery of subject supposed to know, who can remain sure of themselves even when confronted with the appearance of hybridity on all side-in culture, in texts, in their own subjectivities." (1998, p.347). On the other hand, Werbner explains how hybridity in terms of culture studies is theoretically useless, since "[a]ll cultures are always hybrid." Moreover, "[h]ybridity is meaningless as a description of 'culture,' because this 'museumizes' culture as a 'thing.' [...] Culture as an analytic concept is always hybrid [...] since it can be understood properly only as the historically negotiated creation of more or less coherent symbolic and social worlds" (Werbner, 1997, p.15). She also accuses the hybridity theory since in her opinion it "leaves all the old problems of class exploitation and racist

[3] This has been thoroughly explained in chapter 3, entitled The Stereotype, starting from page 35.

oppression unresolved" (p. 20). Due to its ambiguity for some theorists, Hybridity theory has not been welcomed by all (Kraidy, 2002). However, in this study it will be a major theoretical basis for analysing our case studies.

3. Methodology:

In this dissertation, I provide a thematic analysis of the two selected works: *Minaret*, by Leila Aboulela, and *Brick Lane*, *by Monica Ali*. I analyse those works based on the postcolonial theory, in order to study, mainly, the path of transformation through hybrid identities and hybrid cultures in the lives of Najwa and Nazneen — the two Muslim women characters presented in the novels. To do this, I study the stages of development and transformation of these characters from specific perspectives until they reach a state of hybridity. Moreover, I thoroughly analyse the sense of belonging to the *in-between* space or *third space* that is explained by Homi Bhabha, a space which has been adopted in the end by the two women characters. Hereby, I emphasise the external and internal factors that were at the heart of the sense of loss felt by each character.

Minaret and Brick Lane both deal with problems of un-belonging *versus* belonging, identity crisis and formation, misrepresentation of Islam, multicultural societies, and, last but not least, hybridity. Through these works, Leila Aboulela tries to adapt and adopt several concepts at the heart of postcolonial theory, in particular, Bhabha's theory of hybridity and questions of identity explained thoroughly by Stuart Hall. Following Stuart Hall's assertion that despite the common points we share, we also hold some differences that constitute our developing identity, we will try to demonstrate how Leila Aboulela reflects this through the lives of her Muslim women characters and their environment. Despite the fact that her women characters are either Sudanese or Egyptian living in the UK, they are under constant transformation through time and space. This is stated by Bhabha that in some moments we find ourselves in places where "space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (Bhabha, 1994, p.1). This concept of transformation through space and time is studied throughout the novels in order to show how some identities never felt to be fixed within one paradigm and are constructed through a continuous state of change.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of my study follows the theories of hybridity and the third space introduced by Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall. I analyse *Minaret* and *Brick Lane* by addressing how the protagonists Najwa and Nazneen, respectively, had passed through an identity crisis in the beginning and then constructed a kind of 'becoming' identity position. I emphasise how each character went through transformations, in which their different experiences between time and space have continuously shaped their identities rather than gaining a fixed inherited one.

By moving through two worlds and gaining wide experience, the protagonists Najwa and Nazneen, in *Minaret* and *Brick Lane*, respectively, have been able to construct a solid bridge between two cultures. This allowed them to establish a *hybrid sense of the self* within *a third space* where cultural difference operates (Bhabha, 1994, p. 56). This concept of hybridity is a prominent part of the postcolonial discourse. It is "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference." (Hoogvelt, 1997, p. 158). It has emerged due to the increase in cross-cultural interaction with people to produce a kind of mixedness and a new idea of belonging.

Opposed to the idea of binary thinking in terms of culture and identity fixation, which is adopted by Said (1992), Bhabha asserts that "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity that displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiative" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). This process of cultural hybridity offers "something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Ibid.).

Leila Aboulela, together with a recent movement of Islamic authors, tried to write on Islamic women characters in the west, representing them as hybrid identities (for instance, the works of Mohja Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abd Alfattah, 2006). They tried to highlight the idea of spirituality in Islam, since it can be the space that transcends nationalities and location. This kind of third place challenges essentialist models of identity by asserting the uniqueness of each person as a unique set of identity factors. Therefore, portraying the protagonists, Najwa in *Minaret* for instance, as gaining in the end a hybrid 'self' or what is defined by Bhabha as the 'third space'.

Nevertheless, although in *Brick Lane* Monica Ali adopts a hybrid sense for some of her characters, she portrays in some aspects a binary position between the West and the East, as explained

thoroughly by Said (1992). For instance, through *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali highlights the images of the superior West in front of the uneducated, suffering, exotic East. She also highlights some extreme cases of Muslim characters who could not adopt in the end a sense of hybrid identity, as that of the protagonist Nazneen. On the contrary, they struggle to find their western personae and, thereof, tend to choose either extremist directions or return home. Through her protagonist Nazneen, she highlights the idea of hybrid characters that have chosen some properties of their inherited culture and others from the host country in order to find their belonging.

Therefore, the idea of hybridity portrays the sense of belonging beyond the notion of nationalism and pure cultures. It mainly demonstrates the fusion of the first and second space leading to a networked place, which here is defined through Islam, that can be inhabited by multiple factors engaged with one another. In other words, as Pedro Andrade puts it, hybridity "denotes the interstices, the network of relationships, the places and instances that, while merging their essences and experiences, generate new productions and reproductions of themselves." (Andrade, 2014).

For Bhabha (1994) and Hall (1992), the "becoming" position of identity formation is recognised within the differences we share, which constitute what we really are or what we have become. In search for the "becoming" self, Najwa and Nazneen have been struggling to adopt the Western values and yet be Muslim or Muslim-Bengali (in the case of Nazneen). Those two contradictory environments and spaces, for both characters, could not meet together. However, by confronting the two spaces, "merging their essences and experiences", to "generate new productions and reproductions of themselves" (Andrade, 2014), they finally adopted a kind of third place. Their definition for this state of belonging is not an inherited or fixed essence from the past that transcends time. Instead, it is a new definition that they gave for their new positions, which is reflected through being a devoted Muslim in Secular London not Sudan, in the case of Najwa, and staying in Western London not return back to Bangladesh, in the case of Nazneen.

As Bhabha asserts, during certain moments of transit "where space and time cross to produce complex figures of Difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion", our hybrid identities are built and reshaped between different and several intersecting discourses (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1). Thus, Najwa's real identity has been only constructed once she encounters all the different and ambivalent possibilities that could build a Muslim character in the West, and at the same time adopt some of the western traditions. Moreover, Nazneen has chosen to

construct her identity between the different possibilities and differences between her inherited culture and the host environment. In *Minaret*, the author depicts an image of Islam as lifestyle which enriches and fulfils Najwa's inner self, and still lets her be a Westerner at the same time. While this image of Islam is reflected in most of Leila Aboulela's works (for instance, in *Bird Summons*, 2019, too), Monica Ali, in *Brick Lane* shows that Nazneen has not chosen to leave her religion, but it was not her choice to find her hybrid sense of identity. From the beginning of the novel Nazneen was depicted as the traditional Muslim girl. Therefore, Islam for her was not a new experience through which she found salvation. The new space along with her Muslim identity were both at the heart of her self-discovery.

Similar to Najwa, Nazneen has also passed through a liminal space that is designated as a state situated in-between usually clearly defined spaces, periods, or identities, according to Bhabha (Ibid., p .53). This liminality has not been defined by either of the two spaces, Sudan or England, exclusively. Nazneen's "liminal" space was a "hybrid" site that witnesses the production of cultural meaning (Ibid., p.2). Within the new third space created as a result of the cultural encounter between Western and Eastern cultures, different ideologies co-exist and continue without much fragmentation or distinct divisions (Bhabha, 1994).

Chapter Two: Minaret

1. Leila Abouelela's Biography:

A daughter of an Egyptian mother and a Sudanese father, Leila Aboulela has experienced the lives of many Muslim women characters that are depicted in her novels. In 1987, Leila Aboulela along with her family had to move to London, and then to Scotland, due to the economic crisis that happened in Sudan. She began her career as a writer only in 1992, however, her first work *The Translator* was published only in 1999. In her works she demonstrates the concepts of identity exploration, problems of migration and Islamic spirituality as a choice of belonging for many Muslim women in the West.

Aboulela was the first winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing, among other prizes, which distinguished many of her works that have been translated into fifteen languages. Some of her prominent works are *Bird Summons* (2019), *The Translator*, a New York Times 100 Notable Books of the Year, *The Kindness of Enemies*, *Minaret* and *Lyrics Alley*, Fiction Winner of the Scottish Book Awards; her latest story collection, *Elsewhere, Home* won the Saltire Fiction Book of 2018.

As KOÇ puts it: "Aboulela's desire to "write herself into Britain" originates from the experience of migration as a result of which she finds herself in a position where she struggles with the discourse that privileges the West as the best, while subordinating the East." (KOÇ, 2014). Thus by examining the East/West dichotomy, Aboulela's desire was fueled to write about Muslim women characters that live an integrated life in London without representing them as being oppressed or coming from the marginalized places of society. Despite facing some problems back in their mother countries, however, they still hold some good values that could make it easier for them to be integrated in the modern Western world and, thus, construct a new place through Islam. In the interview Aboulela gives to Malavika Vettath, for *The National*[4] describes how her writing gives her "ambition (...) to put practising Muslims in English literary fiction, to write novels that are infused with Muslim aesthetics in the same way that many of the western classics were formed by a Christian ethos."

Aboulela has been praised by other Arab and Western authors, as well as several literary critics. Among them, James Robertson who describes her as "a unique and refreshing voice in contemporary Scottish fiction''. Others also like John Freeman, Sabrina Mahfouz, Ben Okri, and J.M. Coetzee, among others

[4] The National is a middle eastern newspaper that is founded in 2008 and set in Abu Dhabi. UAE.

(Procter, 2009). In the *New York Times*, also, she has been praised as being "[...] a voice for multiculturalism" (Kushkush, 2014).

2. Synopsis of *Minaret*:

Minaret (2005) is a story that highlights the identity struggle experienced by Muslim women in the West. It explores the life of Najwa, a Sudanese upper-class woman, and her struggle to create a modern, yet religious, identity. The events of the novel, which has been long listed for the Orange Prize award in 2005 and has been praised by critics, authors and journalists, take place between 1984 and 2004 in non-chronological order, in which the story jumps between years, back and forth, and between places, Khartoum and London. Ali Smith, the Scottish author, journalist and playwright, describes *Minaret* as being a "wonderful book — readable, subtle and ambiguous, with a shocking clarity of voice. It has a coolness that comes from real skill."[5].

Minaret focuses mainly on the journey of Najwa. Along with her family, Najwa lived in Sudan a completely secular life and was surrounded by a Westernized environment. She has been affected not only by her parents but also by her secular friends at the university. This kind of environment affected Najwa's lifestyle, in which she used to dress in fashionable short skirts, attend parties at nightclubs, drink alcohol, and stay until the morning outside home. This flourishing life, according to Najwa, has been changed dramatically after a coup that led her father into prison. Consequently, the family, including Najwa, her mother and her twin Omar, had to flee to London.

Over time, Najwa's life disintegrated: her father was executed, her brother was sentenced to sixteen years of imprisonment because of drug problems, and her mother died with leukemia. These very unfortunate events forced her to work as a maid. Her previous aristocratic lifestyle faded into the past, and the present became very harsh for her. During these dramatic changes, Najwa started to feel insecure, alone and lost. Her intimate relationship with Anwar (a Sudanese atheist that was her love from university years back in Sudan), who came to London because of political issues, did not provide her with the sense of belonging or family she was searching for. Eventually, Najwa left him after she decided to wear the hijab, since he refused her religious identity and thought that she was brainwashed by Muslims at the mosque in London. Only after turning to live the spirituality of Islam and its rituals,

[5] This has been mentioned on the cover page of her novel, *Minaret*.

did Najwa find herself and fulfilled her loneliness with the acquaintance of the cosmopolitan community at the mosque. There, she became secure and comfortable, with a sense of belonging to a new home.

3. *Minaret's* study and analysis:

> But what makes a place home? Is it wherever your family is, where you have been brought up? The children of many migrants are not sure where they belong. Where is home? Is it where your parents are buried? Is home the place from where you have been displaced, or where you are now? Is home where your mother lives? (Sarup, 1994, p. 94)

A human belongs to where satisfaction belongs. Joy, comfort, and luxury cannot define home; they could even blur the eyes, overlooking that home is at home, and only recognize *that home* outside home. In her best-selling novel *Minaret*, Leila Aboulela addresses the identity crisis and spiritual belonging of a Muslim who was a westernized woman living in Sudan who eventually establishes a hybrid identity through Islam itself, in London.

The novel, which has been longlisted for the Orange Prize, depicts how Islamic or religious spirituality plays a bridge to find one's self and one's own identity, despite the obstacles that the immigrants encounter (some more than others) while they are trying to find their personae in the West. In particular, through *Minaret*, Aboulela highlights the life of the protagonist Najwa that instead of facing a shock of arrival in London, because of the differences between the East versus West spaces, faced an identity crisis, where she could not assimilate her *self* in either space. Given the continued criticism and attacks on Arab Muslims after 9/11, Aboulela and many other writers have created a new space where Arab immigrant women can speak and articulate their identities.

In this novel, Aboulela was trying to reflect the deep inner suffering that marks the lives of several immigrants, such as Najwa. In *Minaret*, one can find echoes of the mental suffering, conveyed through hallucinations and dreams, due to the loss of home, family, and the self. However, by finding Islam as a bridge of spirituality, Najwa could find herself and inner peace therein. By focusing, mainly, on Najwa's life, a Sudanese woman who was born to aristocratic parents, Aboulela reflects that openness in mentality and lifestyle or freedom are not necessarily enough to achieve self-satisfaction and belonging.

In the dynamic West, where multicultural societies emerge easily, "a new concept of home rises in which people explore and form their own identities" (Bhardwaj, 2016). This new cosmopolitan space facilitates the way for some children of Muslim immigrants to the West "not [to be] obsessed by the need to be overly self-protective of their religion and culture in an isolationist manner that, many times, leads to withdrawal from the mainstream society." However, "major priorities for this new generation are leading their lives according to the principles of their faith as well as being full participants in the societies in which they live and of which they are members." (Ramadan, 2004, p.4). This reflects very well the life of Najwa, in *Minaret*, who was raised according to the Western traditions, which is supposed to make it easy for her to integrate in London. To the contrary, she has not adopted any extreme behaviour by not choosing to be either a Sudanese, and not fitting the modern West, or only a Londoner, who rejects her religious values. In her case, and despite being Muslim-born and Arabic, dislocated from her homeland (Sudan), London was the best place for her to articulate her new Muslim self.

Nevertheless, Islam for Najwa was neither the political Islam that some people adopt nor the inherited religion that people embrace through parents without any choice. Through Islam, Najwa found spiritual satisfaction and a lifestyle that could follow and still fit the modern and Western world, so easily. This new life can be considered a third space in which Najwa chose a kind of hybrid identity that is modern and Western, but is spiritually Muslim far from the idea of belonging to one nation.

Najwa's identity crisis existed not only in the host country after immigration, which is more prominente, but had already existed when she was back in her early days in Khartoum. Her identity has been through a process of a continuous interplay of place (Khartoum, London) and culture (Eastern, Western and Muslim) to adopt in the end a kind of in-between space—as discussed by Bhabha (1994). The process of the continuous play for her identity is defined through the words of Stuart Hall as 'becoming' a type of identity. Stuart Hall asserts that 'becoming' identity never has been fixed, inherited or forced, but constituted through her different experiences (Hall, 1992, p.225).

By passing through several intersecting discourses and having the right and freedom to choose and adjust her life to what best suits her, Najwa's identity has been established successfully, though painfully. Her sense of belonging is portrayed through "a moment of transit; where space and time cross[ed] to produce complex figures of Difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (Bhabha, 1994, p.1). In *Minaret*, Aboulela reflects that her female protagonist Najwa adopted a new identity that shows traces of both cultures (Arabic and Western) through a gradual adjustment of the different norms without forgoing the indigenous culture or even restricting herself to a

stable and fixed unique identity. This mixedness between both classic Arabic and modern Western cultures led her to Islam as hybrid third space.

An inner identity struggle due to heterogeneous life patterns interacting with her small community, with a dominant Western cultural orientation, and the larger space of the typical eastern Sudanese culture, left Najwa lost between the two worlds. Indeed, "the difference between the poor and the rich, the educated and the uneducated, the English formed and the local, the devoted Muslims and the moderate ones, the girls wearing Hijab and the ones [who] do not" (Boukhari & Achiri, 2016, p.26) could not help her either assimilate with the typical Sudanese or live as and be a kind of Western citizen in such an Arab-Muslim country. To the contrary, as we will further argue, directing herself towards the Minaret in London, Najwa's resorption and survival from the sense of loss has been established. However, this path towards Islam was achieved only after painful life difficulties and personal experiences that triggered transformations in her identity to find the force that fortifies her displacement.

In this part, I will show that Najwa has passed through three main stages during her self-discovery journey. I name these stages as: Najwa, the disoriented girl, Najwa through transformation, and, finally, Najwa, the 'hybrid'. The first stage focuses on the dichotomy of living in Sudan as an aristocratic Westernised girl that reinforced her sense of alienation and un-belonging to any place. The second stage is the transformation stage, in which Najwa has been through continuous experiences and development, mainly accompanied by the freedom she experienced as a woman in London, which helped her find her "self". The last stage is the self-discovery, when Najwa established a new "hybrid" identity as a Muslim.

Najwa, the disoriented girl

As part of an aristocratic family, Najwa lived a western secular lifestyle in an Eastern Islamic country. The family lived in a small urban modern aristocratic environment that could be observed as a strange foreign body within a typical conservative country. This dichotomy kept Najwa in a continuous interaction with the two controversial extremes at once. Without any incentives or trigger to lead her to ask 'Who am I?' or question the sense of belonging, Najwa was left lost and confused. This was manifested in her social class, ritual practices, family, and friendship throughout her entire life in Sudan.

Aboulela portrays the social class as a clear manifestation of Najwa's alienated identity. Along with her family and relatives, Najwa lived a completely modern open life and was surrounded by a

Westernized environment. This environment affected Najwa's lifestyle, in which she used to dress in fashionable short skirts, attend parties at nightclubs, and drink alcohol. She used to make friendships with people who looked more Western than Sudanese, and stay with them until the morning outside home. Throughout their life in Sudan, Najwa and her brother were very far from living the Sudanese usual daily routines. Their education, music taste, type of friends, nightclub gathering and much more, are prominent factors that made them feel apart from their fellows in Sudan.

Nevertheless, this fancy lifestyle and privileged social class in Sudan have not provided Najwa with a sense of belonging. This appears through comparing herself with her girl friends at the university, who used to wear long robes and headscarf, and still "look wonderful". She was not convinced that her lifestyle and "very tight short skirts" are better. She was sometimes attracted to those girls and described them as being "graceful". This left her in contradiction with her lifestyle as she states: "these provincial girls made me feel awkward. I was conscious of their modest grace" (p. 14). Despite, Najwa's priveleges that she used to enjoy, this has not provided her with happiness. Indeed, the lack of satisfaction made her sometimes question things but without taking the courage to develop them further.

Moreover, the sense of confusion was notable on the spiritual aspect represented by not following the conventional Islamic rituals and religious practices. Their life was completely different from the norm; Najwa's clothing is considered flagrant and her brother used to drink alcohol and take drugs, which are forbidden in Islam. "We weren't brought up in a religious way [...]. They "weren't even friends in Khartoum with people who were religious" [...]. Their "house was a house where only the servants prayed" (p. 95). Through these lines, Najwa explains how they were raised in a non-religious way and that made them feel very different from the typical Sudanese people around them (from servant to friends). In one passage, Najwa describes how she used to drive when they returned home from nightclubs and she used to smell the Hashish from her brother, and she "didn't want to believe it. Hashish? Marijuana." (p.31).

Therefore, the identity struggle Najwa was living was also clear in her sense of guilt towards nightclubs and drugs (Marijuana). She always felt "insecure" whenever she used to come home at dawn from nightclubs and hear "the sound of gushing water, someone spitting, and a sneeze, the shuffle of slippers on the cement floor of their quarters. The light bulb came on. They were getting ready to pray. They had dragged themselves from sleep in order to pray. I was wide awake and I didn't." (pp. 31-32). This detailed and slow description of this scene demonstrates the suffering Aboulela wanted to convey in Najwa's character. Indeed, there has always been a very tiny bit of the Muslim identity inside

her which shows up from time to time. Throughout the novel, Najwa always felt the sense of nostalgia or relaxation toward her religious duties, prayers, Azan, Quran, fasting and the hijab.

Najwa's relationships fell short to establish her identity as well. She used to follow her boyfriend Anwar, who was a very talented and smart student at the university. He used to "smoke every day but drank occasionally. He smoked only cigarettes and didn't pray. He never fasted in Ramadan; he did not see the point of it" (p. 75). Although he did not lead an aristocratic life, he did not contribute or put a great effort in changing Najwa's points of views. His main focus was to always criticise her father's position in the government and their aristocratic lifestyle. This left her in an obvious internal contradiction facing the contradiction of her love to her father and boyfriend and their opposite life and political opinions.

This is similar to her close friendship with Randa, a secular westernised girl. It was hard for Randa to contain her disgust for the veil, saying "we're supposed to go forward, not go back to the middle ages. How can a woman work dressed like that? How can she work in a lab or play tennis or anything? They're crazy. Islam doesn't say you should do that" (Aboulela, 2005, p. 29). To the contrary, Najwa had a passive position without clear opinions regarding these topics. For example, one day, Najwa was reading through the pages of an old *Time* magazine and she finds a description of girls during the Iran-Iraq war: "the Iran–Iraq war, girls marching in black chadors, university girls . . . a woman held a gun. She was covered head to toe, hidden" (p. 29). To this she replied: "what do we know? We don't even pray." Although the image of the Iranian veiled women holding guns was obviously weird and contradictory, Najwa had no argument to answer or hold any position or opinion. She was not keen on criticizing these "extreme" Muslim looks. She was puzzled, as if she is trying to escape from the discussion, either because she is not the type of girl who could argue and convince others, or maybe because her opposed opinion to Randa's disgust of the hijab would make it clear that she is not in a modern world.

Another factor that affects this state of being lost and confused is her sensitive, acquiescent, and fearful personality. She does not have a real charismatic personality or a unique attitude. She used to underestimate her capabilities and praise others and lead herself down. She said to Randa: "You're smarter than me." Najwa's father always used to call them "spoilt kids" and compare them to his hardworking youth life saying: "When I was his age, I was working day and night; I had aspirations" (p. 10). Even later when she moves to London, she says: "I never know which point of view I support. I find myself agreeing with whoever is speaking or with the one I like best. And I become anxious that someone's feelings will get hurt, or worse take serious offence, as sometimes happens, and stop

coming to the mosque" (123). This stays with her for a long time because it is rooted in her personality since her childhood. This personality served Najwa to unintentionally leave inside her a sense of following the mainstream of her surroundings. However, it can be noticed that Aboulela opted to show this personality as a typical character for Eastern women. Indeed, this is more convincing than presenting a special character with too weak or too strong qualities and capabilities.

Here, one can argue that a strong character may likely define his/her own identity, whereas the identity of a weak or passive character may be determined by the "surrounding environment". In Najwa's case, she has been subject to both worlds at once, which gave her little chance to trigger the search for her true self. Therefore, there was a need for an external disruptive factor to ignite this questioning and search for her identity.

A final observation in this stage is that despite her freedom and living as a Westerner, Najwa was not satisfied with her condition. This is a key purpose of Aboulela that probably wants to argue that a modern Western lifestyle in the East may not be sufficient for a woman's sense of satisfaction, despite all the freedom and luxury, and thus, she may find her *self* somewhere else. In the case of Najwa, this was through Islam, in the end of the novel.

Najwa-through transformation

I've come down in the world. I've slid to a place where the ceiling is low and there isn't much room for me to move. Most of the time I'm good. I accepted my sentence and do not brood or look back. But sometimes a shift makes me remember. Routine is ruffled and a new start makes me suddenly conscious of what I've become . **(Minaret, p.1)**

That quiet routine of joy, luxury, and comfort has suddenly been disrupted and fractured following a military coup that led Najwa's family to fly to London. That coup in Sudan was accompanied with a personal coup for Najwa, a mental and spiritual one, that sparked a new phase of identity transformation, eventually leading to hybridity.

Contrary to many other works, which portray the *shock of arrival* from the East to the West (like Monica Ali's *Brick Lane,* for instance), in Najwa's case, the shock was rather a ***shock of change*** in social class, lifestyle, and family loss. Her heart was broken due to her father's execution. She lost the sincere love, care, and kindness of the mother who passed away with Leukemia. She lost her daily companion, her twin brother, who was sentenced to sixteen years in prison (because of drug problems). From living between servants, Najwa was forced to work as a maid. Within all these dramatic changes, Najwa started to feel more insecure, lonely and lost.

Coming from a "stable family—a fractured country but not a broken home" (p.165), the Londoner Najwa suffered internally from losing the sense of being in a family. After her mother's death and her brother's imprisonment, Najwa was left alone without any relatives' support to strengthen her shattered life. This made it more difficult for her to feel integrated in London, where she had always felt familiar before. The family that has been for her "a home" has faded through the past and left her "flattened and small without them?" (Aboulela, 2005, 93). From the tender-hearted feelings of her mother and the dependency state towards her father during hardship, illness or financial issues, Najwa's sense of loss for both of them made her feel very little and broken.

Consequently, Najwa built up in her unconsciousness the gap of having a family through the memories and dreams of the past. She was trying through her memories to recollect the past images between her family, back in Sudan, in order to fulfill her inner suffering of loneliness. She preferred working in houses, rather than in hotels, as in aunty Eva's house or Lamya's house, to compensate for her loss and enjoy the pleasure "to be with a family again, to be with one of mother's friends." (Aboulela, 2005, p. 92).

The lack of responsibilities and qualifications obliged her to find a way in "independent London" in order to secure the minimum means of livelihood. It was impossible for her to find better opportunities given the lack of motivation to continue her studies and pursue a career in her field of study. This prevented her from having a 'good' job and a 'high' social class in society, at least for feeling close to her life in Sudan. She was forced to work for others as a maid or a servant to live a good life. Through these difficult circumstances and financial problems, Najwa felt unstable. Najwa, the "spoilt", as her father used to describe her, had never been drilled to overcome either difficult financial problems or any type of obstacles through their lives.

Najwa's shock of change sparked a continuous transformation phase for a long duration in London. This traumatic change in her life was a compelling incentive to activate the coma of her religious beliefs. However, any change seemed almost impossible without further suffering between her 'before and after state' and facing new challenges and experiences, but this time independently and alone.

This transformation was a result of collision and interaction of new incidents and experiences that served in the development of Najwa's personality. This transformation has found the suitable ground through London's freedom, crucial to gain a chosen 'self' without being forced by others. The breadth of freedom was a great factor that broke the shields surrounding Najwa's self and thus helped her explore the new universe. However, freedom alone was not sufficient to make the change in Sudan

due to lack of incentives and self-reliance. In London, and together with the several incidents and struggles, Najwa encountered during her life a sense of 'becoming' identity that has been classified by Hall as being "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, 1992, p.225). It is this stage where Bhabha asserts "we find ourselves in the moment of transit; where space and time cross to produce complex figures of Difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (Bhabha, 1994, p.1). Therefore, during the stages of transit and transformation between past and present time or space, we start gaining affiliation to ourselves.

The **shock of change** aforementioned sparked Najwa's questioning for where she belonged. However, this transformation was made through a long duration of time full of different experiences. Several external factors, such as her friends or love relations, mosque gatherings along with the constant nostalgia and dreams of the past, helped and shaped the journey through transformation too.

Najwa felt "all kinds of pain, degrees of falling" due to the traumatic experience (Aboulela, 2005, p.44). When Najwa's father was found guilty, the family had broken down. They felt as if they were falling eternally without ever landing. Since it was their first fall to a "bottomless pit", they felt for a moment unfamiliar to each other (Ibid., p. 61). Through Najwa's suffering, it is possible to recall the idea of "suffering of the post-colonial subject" studied by Fanon (Pepicelli, 2011). In order to overcome these sufferings, Najwa has created through memories an imaginary space of Sudan (the past) that resembled her 'backbones'—her family that was stable and unbroken in order to overcome this suffering. Through these memories, Najwa tryed to fill the gap inside her, in order to give her a push to continue her life journey in London. Until that time, Najwa was alone, her childhood friends, relatives and other figures in her life had, all of a sudden, disappeared.

Therefore, due to both the financial problem and loneliness, Najwa started searching for a way to satisfy this deficiency or lack. For the first time, Najwa started feeling more independent and more reasonable. She had no one to depend on, partially or totally. By entering aunty Eva's world, her mother's childhood friend, she created a space for Sudan and a sense of family again, as well as a good job, on which she could rely to live a good life. One could conclude that this gave Najwa an imaginary image of the mother through Eva, who resembles her mother, and who could unintentionally strengthen her weaknesses. Since Eva and her mother had been very close, Najwa and Eva did not have a servant-employer relation. Therefore, this helped Najwa gradually overcome the idea that she was a "servant".

Working at aunty Eva's house, Najwa particularly "needed her company, needed to hear her gossip about Khartoum, needed to sit within range of her nostalgia." (Aboulela, 2005, p.97). Although nostalgia can be seen as something negative which keeps the person in a static state in the past, I believe that it had a positive connotation in Najwa's case. In fact, nostalgia filled the gap that could not be filled in any other way, since it literally meant a "belonging for a home that *no longer exists*". (Boym, 2007).

Najwa's journey of filling the lost home gap continued with the arrival of her university love, Anwar, who raised all the nostalgia for Sudan. Anwar was a Sudanese atheist who came to London because of political issues. Najwa initially 'thought' that she could find through Anwar a sense of refuge and belonging. However, while he always used to influence and shape Najwa's life in Sudan, their relationship in London was different. Anwar was encouraging and pushing Najwa towards the fully-westernized lifestyle, where she started examining a new state of herself. She could almost play a very active role opposite to that one in Sudan.

This transformation of Najwa's personality, from the previous state until now, has been noteworthy. She has become more responsible and independent. Rather than depending on people, like Anwar, as she used to do with the male figures in her past life, Najwa's independent state was prominent. For instance, she spent some of the money inherited from her parents on Anwar's needs and on his benefit. She also drove her efforts at being fluent in English to help him build his job as a writer for a newspaper in London. Moreover, she bought him a computer to pursue his studies and have a job in London. She drove all her efforts, experience, and money for his benefit.

In this change, Aboulela is trying to show that Eastern women could even be more responsible than men through independence and self-reliance. They are no longer expected to be helped and secured, but they are the ones who help and provide security to others. In addition, she is trying to convey how, through the protagonist, this type of effort was a kind of unconscious search for belonging. Once Najwa found that Anwar may resemble home for her, she was putting all her efforts to maintain this feeling. She had the full potential to support and stand by the man exactly as he could do. This is an implicit recommendation and advice to Eastern, Arabic, and Mulsim men to take advantage of the women's strength that would otherwise be buried without being exposed to life challenges, and thus gain experience and independence.

Transformation continued through experimenting the 'before and after". The insisting efforts of Anwar almost convinced her that she had become Westernised and independent (Aboulela, 2005, p.102). She started expressing her pride and satisfaction with his new opinion about her; she says: "He talks about the West, about the magazines I read—Cosmo and Marie Claire. I know you're Westernized, I know you are modern, [...] that's what I like about you - your independence.'(p.77). Beyond this, Anwar also convinced Najwa to have a sexual relation with him, which started to be normal despite the guilty feeling felt by Najwa now and then. They reached the point where they started making fun about it, asking "how many twenty five year old girls in London are virgins? That was when I laughed ... It became a game for us, every time we were out, looking at girls." "Is she? Isn't she? He was right, I was in the majority now, I was a true Londoner now." (p.176) With this relation, Aboulela seems to show that before reaching a stable in-between space, Najwa had to explore and experiment the limits of the different spaces.

Nevertheless, this temporary positioning was not pure and has soon changed. The sense of guilt inside her after her sexual relation to Anwar never disappeared. Whenever she discussed this soreness with him, he put it to having been brainwashed. In addition, despite the great range of freedom that gave her joy, this left an "empty space" that caused her soreness and more self-consciousness (Aboulela, 2005, p.118). Through describing freedom as an empty space, Aboulela tries to convey that being free does not give the sole sense of belonging that one could search for, despite being a right that facilitates the way to develop the self. The inner-self could not be fulfilled 'only' by freedom, which has no limits or borders, in London. Freedom is useful and essential in humans' life; however, Aboulela is trying to look up means that could fill the empty space forever, without depending on the boundaries or rules of a certain country. Therefore, another 'full space' could enter Najwa's life and let her examine some aspects of herself, as will be discussed later.

The **inflection point** in Najwa's question of identity is knowing that the month of Ramadan began without her noticing it, while she was at Anwar's home while drinking and playing cards with his friends. Holding inside her the sluggish and 'inactive' religious feeling that reminds her of Sudan, Najwa felt a deep soreness about her own reality. She had never thought she would become so distant from the Arabic culture and Islam, which were still residing deep inside her. While expressing her painful feelings, not knowing that Ramadan had started, Anwar and his friends commented with mockery and irony: "What kind of fasting? To lose weight?" He believed it was backward to have faith in anything supernatural; angels, djinns, Heaven, Hell, resurrection." (162). He criticised Najwa for her lack of

questioning of religion and religious things (154). Nevertheless, Anwar didn't know that his urge on her to question these things, led her to feel she was way beyond religious life and this was making her feel uncomfortable. Therefore, the discrepancy between her and Anwar started to flow on the surface. After this inflection point, Najwa started to have some independence and courage to make decisions and to say "no". Feeling unsafe, insecure and uncomfortable were prominent for Najwa during their recent relationship (Aboulela, 2005, p.102). She never felt totally comfortable and she went as far as questioning if she "loved him more or less or just the same" (Ibid., p.113-114).

Taking the courage to oppose Anwar, the effect of questioning their difference was vigorous. Najwa for the first time took the courage and decided to leave the place and take a break from their relationship. Despite his insisting calls, she took the decision that their relationship had come to an end. At this moment, Najwa started to be more courageous and felt "a kind of peace" (154) and took a shower that "was like starting afresh, wanting to be clean" (154). This was made possible with the help of Wafaa, at the mosque, who used to call her continuously and opened her eyes again for the religious side. Since the image of Sudan, which has been reflected through Anwar has disappeared completely, Najwa's started trying to search for the gap through Islam itself. She never had the courage before to explore this space, since she "had got the impression from Anwar that the English were all secular and liberal." (154). Therefore, she never felt the Islamic religion could merge with the Westernised environment, only at that moment she gave it a try.

Feeling comfortable and painless were the inner feelings that described Najwa's life when she chosen Islam as her refuge. In search for a place where she could feel at home, "Najwa is only able to find it in Islam" (Pepicelli, 2011). The first visit to the mosque was a positive inflection point in Najwa's life. It made her realise how much it made her happy (cf. Aboulela, 2005, p.118). Moreover, contrary to her past life of being afraid all the time for someone to know about her family problems, Najwa at the mosque felt that nobody here cared about her past life. Therefore, she also freely dared to wear the hijab immediately after her early visits to the mosque. Hijab for her resembled the 'invisibility state' through the self. By being a 'hijabi' woman, Najwa has not chosen to be covered only, but she thought that by wearing the hijab her inner thoughts or past could stay invisible for others.

Najwa's gap for family, Sudan, and friends was fulfilled with the cosmopolitan community at the mosque. Day after day, these 'foreign' women became her new family and the mosque turned out to be the only place where she could find a new community to replace the one she had lost. The new place and 'universal' or 'multicultural' friends, which are far from the materialistic world she used to know,

gave Najwa a sense of relaxation. In "Cosmopolitanism, hybrid identities, and religion", Robert Schreiter also insists on the relation between migrants' religion and their position in Diaspora. He states:

> Migrant religion will tend to take on the form of religion salient in the host country. Those hybrid social spaces so created become sites for the internal dynamics of those communities and, if sufficiently self-confident, away from negotiating with the surrounding social world. Thus, the mosque becomes more than a place to gather for prayers. (Schreiter, 2001, p.84).

The difference has become clear between Najwa, the disoriented and confused girl back in Sudan, and Najwa, the self-transformed. Najwa admits this transformation by saying "[t]hen even while living here in London, I've changed." (Aboulela, 2005, 76). The same girl who had the wide range of freedom in both countries, only became courageous, independent and reasonable after the wide-ranging experience in London. In Najwa's case, while having the wide-range of freedom in both Sudan and London, her personality was not ready for this space. Once she started building independence and self-reliance, the same freedom helped her to shape her life and choose the medium of Islam to spiritually fill her needs, even if it may look a form of restriction to the ultimate freedom of London.

Najwa, the 'Hybrid'

I am happy that I belong here, that I am no longer outside, no longer defiant. (Aboulela, 2005, p.122)

By transcending the boundaries of one place or culture, through producing a new space, Najwa established a hybrid identity through Islam. This new space is "a place where we construct our identities in relation to varied and often contradictory systems of meaning" (Bhabha 1994, p.38), in which different elements meet and therefore create a new space (Bhabha 1990, p.211).

Najwa's discussion with her second love Tamer, the devoted young Muslim who was her employer's brother, leads her to eventually identify herself as a Muslim. She could now loudly say it: "I just think of myself as a Muslim." (Aboulela, 2005, p.76). After they both exchanged the ideas of their belonging, Najwa could proudly proclaim that only Islam is what describes her. Despite being reluctant for the first time, saying that she thought about herself as Sudanese, the devoted Najwa has reached a state where she could really know who she is.

In search for a place where Najwa can feel at home, she was "only able to find it in Islam" (Pepicelli, 2011). Through the successive visits to the mosque, Najwa has discovered how happy she was feeling (Aboulela, 2005, p.118) saying "I am happy that I belong here, that I am no longer outside, no longer defiant." (p.122). Najwa begins to co-exist with other Muslims at the mosque, who keep their national identities aside and stick to their Muslim identity. All feel equal in humanity—not identity; Najwa recognized this sense of equality by realizing in the middle of the prayer that she did not know who is next to her (p.79). This has reflected how the third space that was portrayed through the image of Islam is a place that merges different things together, despite the categorisation of different social classes, races or nationalities.

Islam for Najwa, and for many other Muslim characters (as asserted by Peppecilli (2011)), turned to be a lifestyle in which she could deal with the daily life and build her own community in the cosmopolitan West. Aboulela has chosen Islam for Najwa inside the Secular West, without returning to Sudan, despite the natural option of being a better place for Muslim characters. I believe that Aboulela reflects here the type of Islam that is universal and common for the whole difference we encounter in our lives, from race, social-class, nationality, and others. Thus, in cosmopolitan London, women immigrants should construct either a fixed identity that is fully Western to fit this space or build their new third spaces that is built far from the polarities of national or cultural belonging. Through all this, Aboulela wants to show that this moderation of religious adoption, as being a spiritual path and a lifestyle for Muslim migrant women, helped in healing the cultural gap and constructing their identities.

After being spiritually nourished, Najwa has finally acquired a high level of courage and braveness. She could assess that her love story with Tamer was problematic for him, and she would not hesitate to break this relation. By now, she is the woman that owns her own thoughts that can defend herself and act accordingly. On the other hand, she reached self-satisfaction and established her belonging. She no longer needs a "filling" to her spiritual gap and empty space, as she used to find in Anwar and Tamer.

By embracing Islam, Najwa adopted the idea of hybridity, which is opposed to the notion of culture that is only based on the idea of pure exclusion and inclusion (Bhabha 1994, p.53). Bhabha explains about his rejection for the fixed notion of identity in the postcolonial era, where the emphasis on the idea of rethinking the fixed assimilations for the minorities in the West is adopted, and the idea of the third space emerges (Bhabha 1994, p.175). Opposite to the fixed assimilations, the mix between Najwa's indigenous and current culture has produced a new space that has been located beyond any two different countries.

Chapter Three: Brick Lane

1. Monica Ali's Biography:

Monica Ali (1967) is a British writer who is listed in Granta's Best Young British Novelists for 2003 (Independent, 2011). She was born in Bangladesh to a British mother and a Bengali father, but she lived her whole life in London which gave her access and knowledge of the Western world. Although she studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford University, her works have been translated into 26 languages, which shows the acceptance and welcoming from most people. Her works mostly focus on the idea of belonging, family issues and quest of identity. As Jullie Ellam and Tom Wright state, "[i]n all her novels, the choice of contemporary storylines and focus on the connections between geography, identity and human relationships are strong and compelling themes that mark her out from many lesser imitators." (2007).

Brick Lane is Monica Ali's debut novel that tackles the identity crisis of a Bengali immigrant family living in Brick Lane street in London. It has gained enormous popularity and was shortlisted in 2003 for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction, and was released as a film by Sarah Gavron in 2007.

Monica Ali's second novel, *Alentejo Blue*, set in Portugal, was published in 2006, her third was *In the Kitchen* (2009), and her latest novel is titled *Untold Story* (2011). Through this trio, the themes of her stories are ranged widely, from a rural village (*Alentejo*) in Portugal, to a decaying northern mill town and multicultural London hotel kitchen, and to a 'what if' novel, based on Princess Diana (as it is published in The Royal Society of Literature[6]), respectively.

Monica Ali's works have been praised by many critics, writers, and journalists. In *The Financial Times*, Suzi Feay describes how: "[w]ith the publication of *Brick Lane,* Monica Ali was welcomed as a bright new voice, peeling back the walls of a decrepit housing estate and revealing the complex lives of the Bangladeshi community within. As subsequent novels appeared, it became clear that Ali was a different sort of novelist altogether; a more universal voice, a writer who disappeared entirely within the world of her fiction, confounding those who initially saw her as a mouthpiece for a particular constituency" (as it is published on the site of The Royal Society of Literature).

[6] Retrieved through this link: https://rsliterature.org/fellow/monica-ali/

2. Brick Lane's synopsis:

Brick Lane (2003) is a story that investigates the identity struggle experienced by Muslim women in the West due to the inherited restrictions of their original closed and traditional communities. It explores the life of Nazneen, a typical Bengali girl, and her struggle through creating a self-independent identity in London. This best-selling novel has been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2003. Brick Lane has been praised and affronted by some critics. For instance, it has been affronted for its depiction of the Sylheti community portraying them as being uneducated and conservative. On the other hand, James Wood, an English literary critic, has described Brick Lane as "a great achievement of the subtlest storytelling" (Wood, 2013, p.233).

Brick Lane, brilliantly and mainly, focuses on the journey of the protagonist Nazneen through her life in London after her arranged marriage to Chanu, a forty-year-old "educated man". By exchanging her Bengali village home for a block of flats in London, Nazneen's life is turned upside down at the tender age of eighteen. As a woman and a mother of two daughters and one son (who dies as an infant), Nazneen could not easily integrate the modern world or assimilate herself, especially coming from a patriarchal society, in which women are marginalized by the male figures. Nazneen, who has been told from birth that she "must not fight her fate" (p.3), submits and devotes her life to her husband and culture. However, the nostalgia of the past and the life in London left her torn between the current and past life. Consequently, she struggled and developed a strength that took her from the shock of arrival and of difference to the search for her belonging in London.

Nazneen's journey was not easy since she has never been understood or has been encouraged by her 'educated' and much older husband Chanu. Rather than helping her in this new environment, Chanu started acting like the typical Bengali husband who plays his patriarchal role on his wife. This gave Nazneen a sense of rebellion against the male hegemony. Therefore, Nazneen tried to experience a love affair with Karim, a young Bengali Muslim young man, in order to see herself outside the traditional image of women drawn by her family and society.

While Nazneen tried to construct her 'self' and find her own way, neither her young lover nor her husband provided support to overcome the difficulties that the Bengali Muslim woman faced in London. Nazneen chose to leave Karim and was finally capable of making her own decision and controlling her fate. Through her self-reliance, working, and learning the English language, Nazneen started gaining some agency and control over her own destiny.

In the end of the story, Nazneen is depicted as an independent woman that no longer follows someone else's rules or stands a step behind her husband. She had the chance to break the shields around herself and become more independent, without leaving some of her legacy customs or religion. She has also decided to stay with her daughters in London, while Chanu returns to Bangladesh, which left her and the kids more liberated and with a sense of belonging in this society.

3. *Brick Lane's* study and analysis:

Home is neither where we were born, nor where our families live. Home is where self-satisfaction belongs. Memories and nostalgia could connect immigrants to a presumed home with a sense of belonging; but they may deceive them with an illusionary image until they realize that home is some other place. In her best-selling novel *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali addresses the belonging and identity crisis of an immigrant Bengali Muslim woman, Nazneen, who migrated to London, after her arranged marriage. Nazneen suffered from the sense of alienation and belonging struggle until she achieved a hybrid identity in the West.

Contrary to Najwa, the westernized Sudani Muslim woman in Leila Aboulela's work, *Minaret*, Monica Ali focuses on a typical Bengali woman that starts her self-discovery journey after immigration. Immigration provides a chance to explore different worlds and experience new lifestyles and cultures, but it often results in an 'identity crisis'. While this represents a long journey to articulate the new identity for most classes of immigrant societies, the struggle is harder for females who often come from very strict patriarchal societies, which restrict their roles and limit their rights. In such patriarchal countries, as Bengladish, women are marginalized and live as second class citizens. Most of the time, they are submissive, obedient and naive. They could have neither a voice nor a choice in life; they could not choose their work or be open to other communities. Increasingly, these women feel trapped inside their bodies, living to fullfill the expectations of their societies' demands without any sense of satisfaction in their own lives.

Nevertheless, these typically submissive women often realize these facts after they quit that "cage" and get exposed to open communities. It is there where they get inspired and recognize their value, role, and body. This brings a sense of dissatisfaction with their current "self" and belonging. Their notion of home changes, and they start looking for their belonging somewhere else. In *Brick Lane*,

Monica Ali emphasizes this, through her protagonist Nazneen as a typical example of such immigrant women, in which "the dynamic notion of home where the diaspora is no longer looking backward to the lost shores of mother nation but are making strides in the adopted nation. In this context, "[...] a new concept of home rises in which people explore and form their own identities" (Bhardwaj, 2016).

The novel *Brick Lane,* one of the best-selling Monica Ali novels, which has been shortlisted for several international awards (among them, the Booker Prize Award in 2003), revolves around the issues of identity crisis, clash of cultures and discrimination, displacement, and issues of exclusion and un-belonging. Ali portrays the life of Bengali immigrants by highlighting the stereotypes and obstacles that they encounter while they are trying to find their personae. Considering Edward's Said's *Orientalism* theory, *Brick Lane* is portrayed through a binary opposition between the superior West/London and the inferior East/Bangladesh. Nevertheless, my work will focus less on this binary opposition and more on how the West helps Eastern women discover themselves, transform, claim their rights, and gain self-reliance. When the West is depicted as a place for liberation and freedom; to the contrary, the East is represented as the irrational and inferior Other with no room for transformation. Through this struggle, Monica Ali examines the state defined as 'shock of arrival' and an identity crisis where female immigrants cannot assimilate their *self*. However, some of them, like the protagonist Nazneen, fight to explore and find their persona in this new place, and finally adopt a hybrid identity.

The focus in this chapter is on Nazneen, who is depicted as a complex character throughout the novel. The woman who lacked all sense of freedom has strived in order to find her identity in London. The breadth space of freedom has paved the way for Nazneen to break the shields surrounding herself and thus to explore the new universe through diverse experiences, learnt either personally or through others. These circumstances were key to transforming the typical Bengali woman to reach a 'hybrid identity' at the end of the novel. She embraced several western thoughts, values, and habits without completely giving up on all her traditions and religion, independently. This interestingly conforms with hybridity theorists that argue that hybrid identity can be seen "as constructed from multiple experiences and relationships that are enacted within particular spaces and places" (McCarthey, S. J., & Moje, E. B., 2002).

In the following, I show how Nazneen has passed through three main stages until she reached a state of hybrid self. The three main stages are, namely, "Nazneen, the typical", "Nazneen through

transformation" adopting a 'becoming' sense of identity, and "Nazneen, the hybrid". I hereby emphasize the key incidents that took her from the status of closeness toward transformation and building her own hybrid identity. Finally, I will mention some observations that could explain this transformation considering Nazneen's own personality and life experiences through her self-discovery journey.

Nazneen, the "typical girl":

"[...] an unspoilt girl. From the village." (Ali, 2008, p.10)

In the beginning of the novel, Nazneen is portrayed as a typical woman in a masculine community. She is depicted as being naive, closed and submissive like a "comically solemn child" (Ali, 2008, p.4). Coming from a patriarchal culture in Bangladesh, Nazneen is represented as the marginalized and obedient girl who adopts black-boxed legacy ideas inherited through her parents and community. Indeed, this domination of the man in such a society leaves devastating impacts on women's both lifestyle and mental thoughts. The novel conveys plenty of such "typical women" examples, as the protagonist and other main characters. In this section, I highlight some of these examples which describe Nazneen's transformation from a typical girl, an innocent character, into a a self-transformed one, to establish a hybrid identity in the end.

Nazneen's typical Bengali character is perfectly described through her mother's rooted thoughts that "[i]f God wanted us [(women)] to ask questions, he would have made us men" (Ali, 2008, p.60). In a society where men have more privileges than women and are considered more powerful, women's lives are dramatically affected. In addition to their 'no choice' in marriage, work, dress code, and having a love story, women are often blamed by men also for giving birth to female offspring. They could not have any choice in marriage, work, dress code or having a love relation. Their freedom and self-independence is directly controlled by the men in their lives even if they are living outside their country.

This sheds light on the extent to which the female characters are subordinated and discriminated by the society Nazneen was raised in, which results in little self-esteem. In a society where people favor the birth for a male child (cf. Islam, 1990), Nazneen's birth was even more dramatic. In addition to her 'How You Were Left To Your Fate' story, Nazneen's birth had not been

welcomed by her father, who was waiting for a male to carry his name. He returned home only twice after her birth. Ironically, the cheerful joy of a new father could not exceed his cold argument to the mother: "Never mind...What can you do" (Ali, 2008, p.3). As if he is not blaming her for this 'curse' of having birthed a girl. Nazneen, the typical, had no choice in her marriage. It was her father who chose her future husband, Chanu, on her behalf without her being able to argue, and regardless of the potential conflicts in her mind and heart. Nazneen had seen Chanu's picture having a "face like a frog" only by coincidence (Ali, 2008, p. 6). She knew he was 20 years older, but she had never asked further questions about him (Ibid., p.6). Being subordinated all the time, like her mother Nazneen was even more submissive and grateful to her father because he gave her the chance to "be good wife, like Amma" (Ibid., p.5). This reflects how obedient she was and hopeless to raise a voice to describe her negative feelings towards him. Her only choice was to be submissive to her father and never complain—an idea that was implanted in her mind by her mother's upbringing.

Typical girls, like Nazneen and her sister, Hasina, had no rights to love or have boyfriends. Therefore, Nazneen's father was trying to secure Nazneen's future in an attempt to not allow her to live any love relation or do the same as her sister. Nazneen's father "ground his teeth and an axe besides" when Hasina "eloped (...) with the nephew of the saw-mill owner." We are told by the narrator: "For sixteen hot days and cool nights he sat between the two lemon trees that marked the entrance of the compound and cursing his daughter." (Ali, 2008, p.16). Therefore, it was merely impossible to be accepted by the society or the parents that a female would have a love relation or choose her future husband. This led Nazneen later on, in London, to experience this feeling of love with the young man, Karim, when she was more aware of her emotions and inner feelings.

In addition to the shock of arrival that portrayed the huge difference between Bangladesh and London's life, Nazneen's suffering continued through her life in London where she was trapped, "[...] inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity" (Ali, 2008, p.56). After Nazneen's arrival in London, Chanu, who was another image of masculinity in her life, affected her **choices of going outside, learning the language or even working.**

Chanu discouraged Nazneen to go outside only because "people will start gossiping" (Ali, 2008, p.30). In the Bengali society, for some people, it is considered inappropriate and shameful for the husband to allow the woman to go outside without any need. It may also resemble the failure of the male image and his superiority. 'Why should you go out?' said Chanu; "If you go out, then people will say "I saw her walking on the street." And I will "look like a fool" (Ali, 2008, p.45). Importantly, this

thought demonstrates Chanu's weakness and inability to face the society even though he might not be completely convinced. This will have a great impact on Nazneen's choices later.

Nazeen was deprived by her husband of learning the basic communication means, i.e., the English language, despite being in London. "Where is the need anyway?" (Ali, 2008, p.37) Chanu said; in the end she is "going to be a mother" (Ibid., p.77), as he argues. Nazneen's weak character needed support and encouragement in order to easily integrate the Western world. Despite his fluency and good education, Chanu did not take the advantage to support and teach his wife. This left Nazneen incapable of having conversations with anyone outside home. She always felt shy whenever someone talked to her or opened a discussion. For instance, when Dr. Azad, Chanu's friend, visited them, Nazneen's presence was made visible only through her cooking and looking. At a later point, Monica Ali shows that a little support would be enough for the typical woman, Nazneen, to engage with the community and integrate without communication barriers. When she got lost in the streets of London, she felt pleased to use some of the English words that she had learnt.

Furthermore, in London, where the women are financially independent by working outside or even inside the home, Chanu also discouraged Nazneen in the beginning to find a job. His belief is based on the inherited ideas from his society that the husband could look like a fool because he "cannot feed" his family (Ali, 2008, p. 184). By these words, Chanu confirms again that his wife was discouraged to work since he is not comfortable with this idea due to the society's criticism, rather than being convinced by it (Ibid.). However, in the end, he accepted that she works from home, since he had no other choice after he started losing a job after the other. This conveys how Monica Ali may not necessarily want to instigate women against men, but to shed the light only on the difficult image in this society. This is supported also by describing how Chanu was a kind person; he didn't have the intention to beat Nazneen as other men used to do. He looked gentle and kind, to some extent, with his wife.

Moreover**,** the dress code reflects another significant role in indicating Nazneen's traditional character. In the Bengali culture, the dress code may indicate if someone is moral or not. Therefore, Nazneen was not able to change her clothes since she could be criticised by society. Initially, she used to see "herself clearly, following her husband, head bowed, covered, and she was pleased" (Ali, 2008, p.210). However, she was not totally convinced or satisfied. She felt trapped inside her Sari and thus tried some of the clothes that she was sewing several times in front of the mirror to have another image of herself. However, she lacked the courage to take the sari off because of her image in her community.

For instance, Razia's friends criticized the openness of Razia considering her "a little touched", "crazy", "so English.", and "getting like the Queen herself." (Ibid., p.229). This inherited culture towards women's dress code, does not allow women to change their clothes even when they are living in another country far from their traditions and cultures, which could restrict their freedom and pull them back from integrating in the British culture.

This **lack of freedom** was limited to Nazneen's lifestyle and behaviour, it had a negative mental impact. Her mind was kept locked and imprisoned. In her community, women had to inherit pre-built thoughts and beliefs without the ability to question or deny them. The principle inherited by her family that "what could not be changed must be born and since nothing could be changed everything had to be born" ruled her life and kept her for a while convinced that her family choice was the best for her life. (Ali, 2005, p.16). These traditional thoughts could sometimes lead to dramatic ends, like leaving Nazneen or her son to die instead of giving him medication, just because fighting against fate "can weaken the blood" and "can be fatal" as explained by her mother (Ali, 2008, p.4). The fact that the mother propagates these thoughts to her daughters represents the bigger image of the society, in which the mental capabilities of women are kept idle and untrained. For instance, Nazneen never questioned "the logic of the story How You Were Left To Your Fate" (Ibid., p.4), but she was grateful for her mother's courage and teachings instead.

Nevertheless, after facing all these difficulties in London, the moment of change has arrived for that typical Bengali woman. Nazneen started feeling as if she was trapped inside her past lifestyle.

Within this realm of closeness and "self-nonexistence", the images of the ice-skating girl on the television stand as an **inflection point** that sparked the transition journey of Nazneen's self-discovery. Nick Bentley, in *Contemporary British Fiction*, demonstrates that this is a symbolic scene of freedom and explains it as "a romantic image of the woman freed from the constraints of dress and any image of subordination to the male and the gravity itself" (2008, p.86). With further observation, one can imagine the upper body of the girl as if she is flying, with an independent performance that is freed from all the control and traditional constraints. Furthermore, the white color of the snow can also represent a glimpse of hope. After she watched this scene, Nazneen was in a conflict between her inner thoughts and reality (Ali, 2008, p.27), and she started questioning the need for being free and independent.

Nazneen through transformation:

Naturally, Nazeen's self-discovery journey required interaction with the society to learn new experiences together with the liberty to adopt the suitable ones or to reject those she has considered inconvenient. These were the two main factors that stood at the heart of her identity transformation from the moment she arrived in London. Through the life of Nazneen, Monica Ali reflects what Stuart Hall asserts: that despite the common points we share, we hold also some differences that constitute our becoming identity. After struggling with the typical image of herself, Nazneen undergoes constant transformation through time and space without being fixed within one paradigm. This "space and time cross" produces "complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (Bhabha, 1994, p.1).

In this new environment, Nazneen had a breadth space of freedom that gave her the chance to explore the 'becoming' state of her 'self', her will, and her potential. London's atmosphere also gave Nazneen a sense of courage and confidence to exercise her agency as a woman over the constraints around her. In particular, it was obviously easier to free up her mental capabilities as long as these are internal aspects that cannot be controlled by her husband. This can be seen once she decided to take her son to the hospital and never leave him to fate, contrary to her mother's teachings and decision aforementioned. This was not opposed by her husband since the community in *Brick Lane* will not see this as a "shame". This can be considered an early stage of Nazneen's self-discovery which will substantially grow as she recovers her independence and interacts more with society.

The second important factor in Nazneen's self-exploration is the diverse experiences she goes through on her own or learns from others'. This was necessarily accompanied with her right to be free, enjoy herself in London, without which she would not be able to try new things and make choices. The most important things Nazneen experienced by herself are her choice of dress code and her love relation with Karim, the young man who used to bring her garments to sew.

Nazneen's journey through transformation has given her a chance to think twice of her dress code. She believed that "if she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well... for a glorious moment it was clear that clothes, not fate, made her life" (Ali, 2008, p.277-278). "If she wore a skirt and a jacket and a pair of high heels, then what else would she do but walk around the glass places on Bishop's gate and talk into a slim phone and eat lunch out of a paper bag? If she wore trousers and

underwear, like the girl with the big camera on Brick Lane, then she would roam the streets fearless and proud" (Ali, 2008, p.297). Therefore, Nazneen several times in front of the mirror has tried to wear some of the clothes that she was sewing to see herself like a western girl. This manifests the shaky state that she was going through while searching for herself and trying to have an agency over her body. Monica Ali shows that this state of hesitancy and satisfaction in the clothing was common among the Bengali women in London, although they were not capable of standing up for their culture. However, only a few of them, like Nazneen, and her friends Razia and Dr. Azad's wife, managed to make a decision and change their traditional clothes.

Her love relationship with Karim develops and leads her to change her whole life and to gain access to the Western world and experience new things. Falling in love with him allowed her, for the first time, to become a woman in tune with her sexuality and passion. Karim made her feel free from all the previous constraints that are internalized within her. Since he was not her husband, she felt freed from the constraints of body and clothes when they had a sexual affair together. According to Bei Zhang, he explains in his work that while Nazneen found herself submissive to Chanu, Karim treats her in a different way (p.11, 2010). Contrary to her husband, who thinks learning English is not important, Karim encouraged her to learn the language and read books in order to know what is going on around her, and thus "reading became a sweet and melancholy secret" for her (Ali, 2008, p. 198).

Moreover, Zhang explains how Karim, compared to Chanu, gave Nazneen attention while speaking and also was interested to hear her own opinion (2010). In addition, when Karim was invited to the Bengali Tigers meeting, it was her vote that helped him win the session. Thus, Nazneen felt that it was her own voice which made an impact which made her feel as an active member in the society.

Furthermore, Nazneen recognized the strong personality and identity of Karim, driven by her lack thereof. She was impressed how Karim had "a place in the world", whereas herself, Chanu and even Hasina were all struggling to construct their own identities and feel at home (Ali, 2008, p. 264). Nazneen thought about Karim's certainty, how he walked a straight line while others turned and stumbled. She also thought about his strong personality during the meetings of The Bengal Tigers, while Chanu was struggling, comically, despite his education level, to comment during the meeting and raise his voice; and he finally opted to leave the speech that he prepared "for another time". Karim, on the other hand, had the courage to stand in front of everyone and plan and decide for the march. This experience and admiration for Karim's determination gave her the desire to search for her 'self' and

become stronger and more self-reliant. At the same time, she realized how naive was both her father's choice to marry her to Chanu and her acceptance of this marriage.

Through her identity transformation, Nazneen acquired several experiences through the interaction with others. Nazneen's social relationship, for instance, with her friend Razia and her sister Hasina, were significantly impactful. In particular, Razia's life story was analogous to Nazneen's, which represented a good example to inspire from and pave the way towards transformation. Like Nazneen, Razia was a Bengali Muslim woman, which makes her an easy model to understand and mimic. Coming from the same background and living in the same foreign city, this helped Nazneen find a successful example for the Bengali woman who could integrate easily the Western world. However, Razia represented the strong woman who developed her own independent character far away from the constraints of tradition and subordination to male figures. Throughout the novel, Razia was exposed to all aspects of the Londoners. She was brave enough to experience full freedom; dressing in western clothes, talking English, working, smoking, going outside on her own and raising her children to be independent. Therefore, Nazneen found in Razia the motivation, courage, and strength she could assemble. To the contrary, Monica Ali presented several characters who were not inspiring to Nazneen (like the Tattoo lady or other Bengali friends like Jorina or Mrs. Islam) since they either come from a different background or they are not considered a successful example to fit the modern world—in which they were locked with their traditional culture, as her husband.

The initial admiration for Razia's image resulted in concrete activities that took part in Nazneen's transformation journey. Their close friendship paved the way for Nazneen to finally find a job and become financially independent, as well. It is noteworthy that Razia in the beginning of the novel was not able to work, since her husband would "slaughter (her) like a lamb". Sadly, she was able to work and retain independence only after her husband's death. With this, Monica Ali emphasizes how the authority of the man could impede the development of these Eastern women in the West. It is only after painfully releasing the freedom locks, for example by death, in Razia's case, or necessity, in Nazneen's case, these women had the chance to establish their personae and become self-reliant. By getting a job and making enough money, Nazneen, as well as Razia, felt that they are involved members in the new environment where they could be self-fulfilled as any other woman there. This enormous step towards liberation gave Nazneen the agency to have a choice in her life and be active at home, exactly like her friend Razia.

While Razia inspired Nazneen as a successful example in the West, her sister Hasina also inspired her, however, through some failures in the East. Nazneen's close relation with her sister Hasina had a great impact on her life. By receiving regular letters from her, Nazneen had the chance to see the real Bengali life that she left behind, and to compare it with her life in London. On the other hand, she also had the chance to learn some lessons through her sister reflecting the image of the rebellion woman, in order to find a place in that Eastern society.

Hasina's letters conveyed the image of the true Bengali life that it is now beyond what Nazneen was living during her childhood. The reality of the Bengali women living there shocked Nazneen and gave her the courage to seek a better life. For instance, one of her sister's sufferings is being kidnapped by Mr. Chowdhury, the man who used to help her find a job. She also knew how the women that used to work with her in the same factory were treated as "goats". They were constantly criticized and condemned for not being "good girls", simply because they worked in the same place where men worked as well.

Nazneen kept comparing her arranged marriage with Chanu to that of her sister's love marriage. Hasina describes in one of her letters how love marriage means happiness. She enjoyed being at home and waiting for her husband the whole day. This time for her meant happiness despite being alone. This love story teased the young Nazneen to experience something similar since she was not enjoying her life with Chanu. Therefore, Nazneen tried the love and sex relation with her young lover Karim. Nazneen has chosen Karim since he represents the young charismatic and beautiful guy, contrary to Chanu. With him she felt the warmth of love and passion. Hence, Nazneen has chosen to have a sex affair with him and enjoy her body with the person she loved. Nazneen's love affair with Karim was a revolt on her past life, to experience the agency of the mind, body and desires. By hearing the regular stories of her sister Hasina's love and sexual stories, Nazneen tried to do the same and see what this would bring for her. Again, without the freedom she enjoyed in London, Nazneen could not have had the chance to experience all that she went through. However, these experiences let her choose what best suits her life and identity, although she opted to get rid of some of them.

While the love stories of Hasina were encouraging, the other face of the coin was dark, which took part in Nazneen's transformation as well. Hasina's letters that describe the struggle and domestic violence she was exposed to through her 'love marriage', were at the heart of Nazneen's self-awareness. Despite Nazneens's inner suffering of her arranged non-love-based marriage, she has realized later that love is not the only way to a successful marital life. During a conversation with Nazneen, Dr. Azad explained the difference between normal marriages and love ones: the first one

starts small and grows through life and the other one starts big and decreases. These experiences showed Nazneen that her marriage to Chanu could really become a successful one with time. Despite the love story that she experienced with Karim, for instance, this did not convince her to leave Chanu, since in the end Karim turned out to have almost the same characteristics as Chanu. He was looking for the idealised image of a country girl.

In both cases, learning new experiences or comparing the past with the present, Nazneen's image of home changed after reading Hasina's letters. While having an idealised image of the life in Bangladesh through her dreams, memories or the letters of her sister, the idea of home for Nazneen started changing and eventually disappeared. Her sister Hasina, who had not left Bangladesh, was suffering the idea of un-belonging despite living in the same country. This gave Nazneen the impression that the idea of home is not the same anymore. Therefore, she had the chance now to search for home outside Bangladesh. Moreover, this raised her self-awareness to be an independent woman without either depending on the masculine image in her life, or returning home to find her security and inner peace.

Derived from having no limits on her actions or boundaries on her thoughts in London, Nazneen lived new experiences and acquired others through her friends and sister. Consequently, Nazneen's identity has been transformed from being the typical woman to being more independent and having agency on her body and mind. She has been developing a sense of 'becoming' identity that is "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, 1992, p. 225). Her identity has been subject to her past and current life, both Bengali and Londoner, and last but not least where Nazneen has positioned herself in this new world.

Nazneen, the hybrid:

"I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one" (Ali, 2008, p.339); with these words, Nazneen marks a new shiny phase in her life after a travail of identity transformation. She recognized her identity and strengths, opening a new page in her "self" book, full of self-reliance and self-independence. She could now decide what she wants from the past and the present to define her future. Interestingly, her choice led her to a *hybrid identity* in between the West and the East. She has neither chosen to be completely Western nor to conserve her Bengali culture. Nazneen has finally got rid of the restrains that locked her voice. She can now say "No" to her husband Chanu and to her

lover Karim. Nazneen has finally managed to escape from the oppressive prison of her body. She could choose to keep her sari against the current and the temptations in London. She unleashed the boundaries limiting her mind. She decided to learn English and to keep her faith in Islam. She is now able to make decisions consistent with her own beliefs and thoughts and even against the current or the trend. She established a third space as a result of the cultural encounter between West and East cultures, different ideologies co-exist and continue without much fragmentation or distinct divisions (Bhabha, 1994).

Nazneen's choice to stay in London as a Muslim woman was a big challenge for her as for many other Muslim women living in the West. Despite her ups and downs, in spite of the marital affair with Karim, which is considered prohibited in Islam, Monica Ali has portrayed Nazneen as maintaing her religion, but also as someone who only takes refuge in God when she feels down. She has depicted her protagonist as conveying a good image of a Muslim character, contrarily to that of the extremists in several postcolonial writings. Nazneen's strong personality, something that has been achieved in the end, defends her from being affected by any of the extremist groups portrayed in the novel (like the Bengal Tigers, led by Karim). Monica Ali, for instance, has depicted Nazneen as projecting the image of a mild Muslim character that could fail in some places without losing her ethnic belonging. In several scenes throughout the novel, Nazneen is depicted as praying to God or reading the Quran. Therefore, this shows how Monica Ali wanted to show that the strong relation with God and faith in Islam has not been disturbed, despite the difficulties she encountered and the tempting non-conservative thinking in the West.

Moreover, Nazneen has chosen not to take her sari off although she was free to do it. Again, this highlights how she has kept some of her Muslim-Bengali culture's values. In the beginning of the novel, Nazneen explained how her dress code would determine her fate believing that if she changed it all her life would change. Later on, Nazneen tried some Western clothes in front of the mirror to see how she would look and recognizes her beauty; however, she ended up keeping her sari on free will. This demonstrates a strong determination and self-confidence. In the West, where the hijab is sometimes considered an image of oppression for women, many Muslim women could develop a feeling of hesitation and become uncomfortable wearing Hijab in front of the others. Furthermore, while Razia inspired Nazneen a lot throughout her self-transformation, being a successful Bengali woman in London, her clothing choice has not affected Nazneen's dress code decision. To the contrary, Nazneen has claimed back her freedom and independence. She could now decide her future. She can stand against the men who loved that "girl from the village". Therefore, she has left Karim and chose not to

get divorced from Chanu, although she wanted to stay without him in London. She found that he is a good husband for her and a good father for her daughters.

She has decided to stay with her daughters in London and not to accompany Chanu to Bangladesh. When Chanu asked her to go back with him to Bangladesh, she lifted his head, with determination, and looked into his face saying 'I can't go with you' (Ali, 2008, p. 400). Nazneen stood for herself and her daughters and decided to live independent of any dominance of the male figures in her life. Nazneen enjoyed this independence saying: "I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one" (Ali, 2008, p.339).

Once more, the Bengali woman, Nazneen, has favored living in London instead of returning back to Bangladesh. She enjoyed her freedom in this new home that allowed her to express her potential as an active woman in the society. When her elder daughter expressed her feelings of belonging in London, Nazneen tried to stand up to her husband and stay in London along with her daughters, where both felt the sense of home. As Osborne argues about the second-generation children of Bengali immigrants: "They write about Britain as home. They were born there or have grown up there all their life. They are uncomfortable with the notion of a home elsewhere for they have no sense of exile. Their sole exile is the exile within their own home country" (Osborne, 2016, p.49). We could finally see Nazneen dancing and singing as evidence of her independence and her happiness. Razia and her daughters prepared for her a surprise to go ice-skating (Ali, 2008, p.434); eventually, she could do what she always wanted to do. By choosing to ice-skate wearing a sari, Nazneen was trying to emphasise that the crisis she has been going through has come to an end. She truly experienced Razia's words about England where "you can do whatever you like." (Ali, 2008, p.492).

Therefore, Nazneen has chosen what suits her from her past and present ending up with a hybrid identity. Alghamdi explains Nazneen's accomplishment at the end of the novel by achieving "a coherent identity, a sense of home, and a mode of systemic participation in her new society" (2011, p.133).

Multicultural London has given Nazneen "the audacity to challenge the hegemonic practices of both East and west." (Bhardwaj, 2016). In *The Location of Culture,* Bhabha defines this space: "there is a space 'in-between the designations of identity' and that 'this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (1994, p. 4). For Nazneen, the fixation of being a typical Bengali woman has not provided her a sense of belonging, nor does the full image of a Western woman that

could freely experience her sexuality and desire. Therefore, the space that she built for herself is a third space that merges what best suits her life from both the Western and Eastern culture, as detailed above.

This process is not only adopted by Nazneen in this novel, but it is among many other women immigrants. As Lois Tyson argues, it is a natural process for each immigrant to live this kind of dynamic hybrid life in order to fit the Western culture. She argues: "postcolonial identity is necessarily a dynamic, constantly evolving hybrid of native and colonial cultures" (Tyson, 2014, p. 269). This adoption for hybridity could be the best solution for some Muslim Eastern women characters, like Najwa in *Minaret*, that are striving to find their independent selves without returning fully to their culture or traditions.

Conclusion:

Nazneen's identity crisis in the beginning has not prevented her from finding her way towards a **hybrid 'self'** in the West. Although the identity crisis may look as a typical challenging aspect whose ending could be negative for most of the migrants, it has been a successful journey with a positive ending for Nazneen. This success was not easy due to some hardships that are associated ot a certain group of women characters. As being a typical Bengali woman, Nazneen's submissive character was not enough for a woman to fit the Western world, especially being affected by the ideas of fate and traditional teachings marginalized from the first day of her birth.

Therefore, Nazneen had the chance in London to experience freedom and liberty through her personal experiences, such as work, learning the English language, having a love relation and also through stories learnt from her friends, such as Razia or her sister Hasina. These experiences left her more self-aware of her body and mind. Along with working and being financially independent, Nazneen's agency led her to have a voice of her own and a choice in the environment, where women could have a place without being subordinated to others. By choosing some of the Bangladesh culture that were not preventing her from finding her own 'self', like wearing the sari, staying with her husband and last but not least remaining a Muslim woman, Nazneen has chosen to live a **hybrid life** that merges both some of the Bengali and the English culture together in order to fit the Western world. Her independent character that she reached in the end has given her the agency to choose by herself what best suits her life. The hybrid state that she reached was the salvation of the inner suffering she has been through during her life.

Chapter Four: Discussion and conclusions

"neither the one nor the other" (Bhabha, 1994, p.37)

The immigration of Eastern women to the West raises an integration challenge due to the known cultural gap especially on freedoms and lifestyle. Adaptation to a new home can be possible in multicultural host cities, like London, where immigrants are given "the audacity to challenge the hegemonic practices of both East and West." (Bhardwaj, 2016). By transcending the boundaries of one environment, women can often establish a **hybrid sense of identity** through producing a new space. This is "a place where we construct our identities in relation to varied and often contradictory systems of meaning" (Bhabha 1994, p.38), in which different elements meet and therefore create a new *hybrid* space (p.211).

Our protagonists Najwa in *Minaret* and Nazneen in *Brick Lane* experienced this new hybrid space. Their immigration from the closed East to multicultural London has been an inflection point to search for themselves, despite their suffering in terms of their sense of belonging and identity. This discovery journey has been designed between the breadth of freedom and liberty found in the host city, London, allowing them to experience a new medium of life that has opened for them a *hybrid* space that is "in-between the designations of identity" (Bhabha, 1994, p.4).

However, the hybridity characteristics and journey can be observed differently in the two works, *Minaret* and *Brick Lane*; as I discuss in the following, this is affected by the protagonist's life in the novels as well as the author's perspective and background.

By moving through two worlds and gaining wide experiences, Najwa, in *Minaret,* and Nazneen, in *Brick Lane*, have been able to construct a solid bridge between two cultures which allowed them to establish a *hybrid sense of the self* within *a third space* where cultural difference operates (Bhabha 1994, 56). In this place, their identity transformation was "a construction, a consequence of a process of interaction between people, institutions and practices" (Sarup, 1994). For both of them, the sense of hybridity has emerged due to the increased contact between people cross-culturally to produce a kind of mixedness and a new idea of belonging. During certain moments of transit "where space and time cross to produce complex figures of Difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion", our hybrid identities are built and reshaped between different and several intersecting discourses (Bhabha, 1994, p.1). Thus, the real sense of identity of both Najwa and

Nazneen has been only constructed once they have encountered all the different and ambivalent possibilities that could build a Muslim character in the West, and at the same time adopt some of the Western traditions.

This identity transformation of Najwa and Nazneen represents what occurs among many women immigrants. As Lois Tyson argues, it is a natural process for each immigrant to live this kind of dynamic hybrid life in order to fit the Western culture (Tyson, 2014, p.269). For immigrants, "postcolonial identity is necessarily a dynamic, constantly evolving hybrid of native and colonial cultures" (Ibid.). Therefore, Leila Aboulela and Monica Ali showed that the adoption for hybridity could be the most satisfactory solution for some Muslim Eastern women characters, like Najwa and Nazneen, who are striving to find their independent selves without fully adopting the Western culture or fully returning to their traditions.

However, Leila Aboulela and Monica Ali have applied the idea of hybridity from different perspectives. For Leila Aboulela, religion or spiritual life was a bridge for her protagonist to reach the state of hybridity. For Najwa, in *Minaret*, Islam was the main driver that opened for her a new space to fit the western world. It was neither her previous westernized lifestyle that gave her the sense of belonging nor her choice to return home. Her life through Islam was the search for a new medium that could fulfill her inner sufferings and leave her life in a peaceful mode. Aboulela is trying to show here that Islam is something that transcends boundaries, locations, or any time. Therefore, it could be the best choice of a new space for Eastern Muslim immigrants to fit the western world. For instance, Najwa would not be satisfied with living westernized without her core beliefs and Sudanese (Islamic) values nor with living isolated and marginalized in a multicultural city like London. Hence, choosing Islam as a third space, that is "neither the one nor the other" (1994, p.37), let her feel the sense of satisfaction and belonging in London.

This 'hybridity through Islam' is also prominent in many of Aboulela's works. For instance, in her latest novel *Bird Summons*, the protagonists (Salma and Iman) made it easily to fit the western world by the help of their religion (Islam), which Aboulela depicts as a spiritual path and a lifestyle, rather than drawing it through a binary image, i.e, superior secular west versus inferior Islamic East. For both characters, the journey to a grave of a famous Scotish Muslim (Lady Evelyn Cobbald's[7]) was a

[7] She is known as *Suzan Cobbage* after her convertion to Islam and the first Scotish Muslim woman to perform a pilgrimige to Mecca.

search for home, through which a Scotish Muslim image that could inspire and help them feel the connection to the United Kingdom. Moreover, in her novel entitled *The Translator*, Aboulela depicts also her protagonist Sammar as gaining a hybrid identity through devolution to Islam. In Scotland, Sammar was learning more about her own religion, and the world for her has emerged as one cohesive place (Aboulela, 1999, p.108). When she has practiced her religion, Sammar has adjusted more to the cultural norms and felt more relaxed to establish herself there. Therefore, in many of her novels, Aboulela is constructing the Muslim women characters as hybrid selves that found their identities in the West through Islam.

Nevertheless, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* adopted a hybrid sense for the protagonist Nazneen as a mingled combination of some values and lifestyles from the Western and Eastern Islamic cultures. Therefore, the Islamic values Nazneen adopted after hybridity can be seen as a matter of fact of her native culture, rather than explicitly depicting Islam as third space in particular. For Monica Ali, the idea of religion was not the main aspect that helped Nazneen fit the modern world, but it was only a part of her personality or original culture by itself. For instance, Nazneen's struggle to find her own self was not because she is a Muslim woman. If she was depicted as a Bengali Christian, and not a Muslim character, even so she might struggle to find her sense of identity, despite being common or normal to be a Christian in London. Therefore, neither choosing Islam nor Christianity was the main part of her belonging. The main aspect was Nazneen's adoption of some of the western values on her own initiative, independently, without anyone's interference or dominance.

On the other hand, in her work, Monica Ali's purpose is not trying to find a medium for Muslim women to fit the western world and save their religion. The purpose is more to show that integration could not happen for women in the West without having the right to be free and independent. In my opinion, this is obvious, since Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* still reflects the stereotypical type of image about Islam from a Western point of view, despite portraying Nazneen as saving her religion in the end.

Leila Aboulela, to the contrary, tries to shift the focus from the stereotypical image of the women characters as conservative or oppressed. Opposed to the representation of the submissive and conventional Nazneen in Ali's novel, Aboulela presents Najwa as a westernised woman who already had the freedom to choose what suited her in Sudan. Moreover, contrary to Karim, the conservative fundamentalist in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Aboulela presents Tamer in *Minaret* as an open devoted

peaceful young man. Aboulela has not followed the colonial discourse that insists on the aggressive and threatening image of the young fundamentalist Muslims, as discussed in other works (for instance, Hasan Majed's 2012). In this sense, Leila Aboulela's Muslim characters could easily integrate the modern world and construct a third space that is a hybrid sense of identity, without being stereotyped and constructed as being inferior. Leila Aboulela poles apart from other writers who display a narrow image of the Muslim women in the West. Aboulela dispels this depiction by portraying the women characters as living normal lives like any other person, and hence departing from the binary thinking of Muslim women being inferior to Westerns.

Despite the hybridity aspects portrayed through Nazeen, Monica Ali in *Brick Lane* focuses on the binary position between the West and the East, as explained thoroughly by Said (1992)[8]. Ali shows through the letters of Hasina how the orient is corrupted and backward, while the West is powerful and civilized. For instance, through *Brick Lane*, Ali highlights the images of the superior West in front of the uneducated, suffering, exotic East. While the educated Chanu tried his best to get the promotion, his suffering from racism has impeded his will and plan to stay in London and be a part of the Western culture. Ali also highlights some extreme cases of Muslim characters who struggled to find their western personas and, therefore, tended to choose either extremist directions (such as Karim) or return home (such as Chanu). Therefore, Monica Ali wanted to reflect the Orientalists point of view in *Brick Lane*, where the main focus is on the opposition between the two cultures, emphasizing the struggle for most of her characters to easily fit in.

This process of adopting a sense of hybridity in both works, Minaret and Brick Lane, was not an easy journey. The main characters have passed through three main stages in order to find their personas. Their identities were not "fixed but better understood as ongoing descriptions of ourselves, continually changing and always in a process of becoming" (Barker, 1999). In the initial stage, both characters have been characterized as being 'static', dependent, and marginal women. Despite their lifestyle differences, the westernized Sudanese Najwa and the classical Bengali Nazneen had no incentive to search for their 'belonging'. Najwa who came from Sudan has lived independently and had a wide range of freedom to choose what she wants. Nazneen, on the other hand, had no choice in the most common decisions in her life. For instance, her father was the one who chose her husband without her right to discuss this issue with him. Najwa was living in the city and studying at the

[8] This has been studied in many works, for instance, Aglaia Stavridou 's dissertation. Retrieved through:http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/320891/files/GRI-2020-28376.pdf and Zhang HuiHui dissertation retrieved through: https://www.dissertationtopic.net/doc/2171922.

university, which gave her the opportunity to get in touch with people who think and live differently. However, Nazneen lived her life in a village where she had no chance to study or see people from different cultures. All these differences for both characters were not at the heart of Najwa's and Nazneen's search for their belonging.

The second stage is "transformation" in which both characters' external and internal factors and experiences were at the heart of the transition process. During this stage, both personalities were portrayed as being lost. They struggled looking for their identities, home, and personae. This loss could have never been changed without their incentive to search for a better life or for their personae. Therefore, there was an inflection point that took them from the state of never asking 'Who Am I' to searching for their identities. This dramatic change was sparked by two different types of shocks in the two novels.

In *Brick Lane,* Nazneen has experienced a shock of arrival. This shock was at the heart of her search for the self. The shock of arrival has portrayed the huge difference between Bangladesh and London's life. Her arrival marked the sense of alienation when she found everything in London different from her, i.e., her skin color, daily routine, dress-code, language, and freedom. Being cut off completely from her familiar culture, Nazneen only found the intention to search for her identity. When she recognized all these differences, especially how women have agency on their mind, body and desire, her journey toward self-discovery has been established. At that time, she was conflicted between her inner thoughts and reality (Ali, 2008, p.27), and she started questioning the need for being free and independent.

In contrast to Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, as in many other works that portray the *shock of arrival* from East to West, Leila Aboulela's protagonist (Najwa) in *Minaret*'s experienced a *shock of change* in social class, lifestyle, and family loss. She had no shock of arrival as she was already familiar with London, that she used to visit often before immigration. Najwa's shock of change sparked a continuous transformation phase for a long duration in London. This traumatic change in her life was a compelling incentive to activate the coma of her divine power. However, any change seemed almost impossible without further suffering between her 'before and after state' and facing new challenges and experiences, but this time independently and lonely. This transformation was a result of collision and interaction of new incidents and experiences that served in the development of her personality.

Apart from that, freedom and independence were the two main factors that took Nazneen to search for herself. This is not the case in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*. In general, Aboulela's women characters are depicted as already having freedom before their arrival to the West. In the face of their

identity crisis, they are totally free to choose what they want in life. In *Minaret*, Najwa in the beginning has total freedom of choice, but she has chosen to be dependent on the male characters in her life until she had the incentive to be independent. On the contrary, Monica Ali's portrayal of the muslim women characters, (for instance the case of Nazneen), was totally based on the idea of oppression and subordination to men. Therefore, in *Brick Lane* it has been prominent for Nazneen to gain independence and freedom in order to continue her self-discovery journey and experience many things in order to find her true self. Without having freedom in her life, she could not choose what best suits her.

In my opinion, this difference between the two authors marks their cultural background. Aboulela's arrival from Sudan gave her the tendency to portray the muslim women characters similar to her past cultural life. She had not experienced in her society this big alienation for women who lack their freedom and independence (despite this is found in some other Muslim countries). However, Monica Ali's Bengali background gave her the courage to express the sufferings that most of the Bengali community suffer once they immigrate to the West.

The last stage is also common in the two novels, and it represents the state where the protagonists Najwa and Nazneen eventually established their own hybrid identity, mingling the Eastern and the Western cultures. This hybrid identity represents their self esteem; what they want to be; and where they feel satisfied, independent, and confident. The lens that looked toward the West and the East reflected an image of the West "as a dynamic, complex, and ever-changing society that cannot be reduced to its key religion or any other single factor, while the 'Orient' or the 'world of Islam' is presented as unchanging, barbaric, misogynistic, uncivilised and despotic" (Kumar, 2012, p. 33). This worldview of the Orient as being barbaric and monolithic paved the way for most of the western societies' view of the muslims, and muslim women in particular, as second-class citizens. In a cosmopolitan world, this view toward muslim immigrants should come to an end in order for them to adapt and find their belonging.

Within the limited scope of this work, only one novel by each author, i.e., Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, has been scrutinized for their representation of British Muslim women hybrid identities. An interesting research would be studying more works with the same theme for Aboulela. To my knowledge, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* was the only work published on this theme. Therefore, I am going to mention some other related works by Aboulela that look interesting. For instance, Aboulela's latest novel *Bird Summons* (2019), which is nicely approached through the form of

magic realism, where Aboulela switches from a realistic description of her trio's women lives to an imaginative one. This novel touches upon the lives of three muslim women that are searching for their true selves in the West through the trip to Lady Evelyn's grave in Scotland. This novel would be promising, since it is a new work that involves rich images on multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism through mythical stories.

On the other hand, my work on *Minaret* and *Brick Lane* has tackled only the lives of the protagonists; it would be interesting to expand this research to address other characters. For instance, in *Brick Lane*, it is very interesting to analyse the journey of the second generation, Nazneen's daughters Shahana and Bibi, and how her rich character affected her mother's choice and belonging. Moreover, Razia, Nazneen's friend, could be studied further to show how an immigrant mother managed to fit in London despite the whole community's negative opinion towards her adaptation. In Minaret, it would be interesting to analyse the Egyptian Lamya's personality, who was easily living and studying in London. A prospective research would also be valuable to identify why those characters did not experience the same transformation path as our protagonists Najwa and Nazneen.

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