

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF *THE SAINT OF INCIPIENT INSANITIES* BY  
ELIF SHAFAK AND *BRICK LANE* BY MONICA ALI BY FOCUSING ON  
THE LOSS OF IDENTITY

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by

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## ABSTRACT

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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF *THE SAINT OF INCIPIENT INSANITIES*  
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ON THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY**

Multiculturalism became one of the prominent topics of both literature and politics in the last decades. As a result of globalization, cultural pluralism and transcending the boundary of national identity came on stage as the indispensable realities of today's world. There is an increasing demand on the issue of multiculturalism and it became one of the most controversial topics throughout the world with both its critics and supporters. In terms of the immigrant's relationship with the other citizens of the hosting countries, various terms like assimilation, discrimination, othering and loss of identity are used. In this thesis multiculturalism and loss of identity are the focused ones, yet there are also references to the others through the course of the work.

In this work, the concept of multiculturalism and dealing with plural identities will be discussed initially by talking about both pros and cons of the issue and later, in the light of those ideas, it will be deeply analyzed with references to two novels by Elif Shafak and Monica Ali.

Chapter 1 concerns with the general information about the emergence of post-colonial theory and the effects of it on literature. After that, the possibility of living in culturally diverse societies is discussed. The following chapter concerns with multiculturalism as a branch of post-colonial theory. Chapters 3 gives brief information about the authors and their works. The following chapters deal with two novels separately; there is an analysis of the psychology of characters in both novels as individuals trying to succeed in foreign cultures. Finally, there will be a comparative part of the two novels in the light of the ideas developed.

Key Words: multiculturalism, inbetweenness, displacement, loss of identity, notion of home, belonging, cultural diversity

## KISA OZET

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Haziran 2007

### **KÜLTÜREL FARKLILIKLARIN KİMLİK OLUSUMU UZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİ: ÇOKKÜLTÜRLÜLÜK KAVRAMININ *BRICK LANE* VE *ARAF* ROMANLARI UZERİNDEN İNCELENMESİ**

Son yıllarda çokkültürlülük hem edebiyatın hemde politikanın en önemli konularından biri haline geldi. Kültürel çoğulculuk ve ulusal kimlik kavramını asma cabaları günümüz dünyasında küresellesmenin kaçınılmaz bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıktı. Çokkültürlülük meselesine artan bir talep oluştu ve bu kavram bütün dünyada karsıtları ve savunucularıyla geniş olarak tartışılmaya başlandı. Yurtdışında yaşayan göçmenlerin otekiyle olan ilişkileri kapsamında asimilasyon, ayrımcılık, otekileştirme ve kimlik kaybı gibi çeşitli kavramlar kullanılmaya başlandı. Bu tez kapsamında çokkültürlülük ve kimlik kaybı konularına yoğunlaşılacak olmasına rağmen, konunun akısına göre diğer kavramlara da atıfta bulunulacaktır.

Bu çalışmada çokkültürlülük ve çoğulcu kimlik konuları lehte ve aleyhte görüşler kullanılarak tartışılacak, daha sonra ise konu Elif Safak ve Monica Ali romanlarına yapılan referanslarla derinlemesine ele alınacaktır.

Birinci bölüm belirtilen konularla ilgili genel bir bilgi ve bu konuların edebiyattaki yansımalarını ele alır. Somurge dönemi sonrasında ortaya çıkan edebiyat teorisi ve bu teorinin edebi eserleri nasıl şekillendirdiği ile ilgilidir. Daha sonra kültürel çeşitliliğe haiz toplumlarda yaşamın mümkünluğu ve çokkültürlülük kavramı derinlemesine ele alınmıştır. 3. bölüm tez kapsamında ele alınan yazarlar ve eserleri hakkında kısa bilgi vermektedir. Daha sonraki bölümler ayrı ayrı romanları incelemeye ayrılmıştır; yabancı kültürlerle basetmeye çalışan roman karakterlerinin psikolojilerini ve herbirinin birey olarak hayata tutunma cabalarını anlatır. Son olarak, ortaya çıkan fikirler ışığında iki romanın karşılaştırmalı bir analizi yer almaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler; çokkültürlülük, arada kalmışlık, aidiyetsizlik, kimlik kaybı, vatan kavramı, aidiyet, kültürel farklılık.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is possible to see people from different cultures in close interaction with each other and it was very unusual before then. There is either the 'risk' or the 'opportunity' of coming into contact with the 'other'; the situation changes according to the perception of multiculturalism of the individual. This process forces the members of homogeneous cultures to turn away from the nationalist discourses. As the differences are more tolerated than they used to be, cultural pluralities increase and as a result, the idea of the nation state is on the way to replace itself with the state politics of multiculturalism. There is a growing tendency in countries like Australia and partly England to protect the cultural identity of its immigrants instead of trying to assimilate them.

Multiculturalism has been reflected in literary works long before it turned into state politics. After the colonial period ended, and the inhabitants of colonized countries gained the right to tell their own stories, a very vibrant literature emerged which talks about the cultures that could not come on stage until that time. There is no more the supremacy of Western authors, rather the books of others who write about ethnic minorities or similar subjects are on bestseller lists. Besides, the stories of minorities are highly demanded by Western readers most probably because of the growing curiosity of people on the issue.

Elif Shafak and Monica Ali are two talented writers who are able to tell the story of both the 'other' and the 'self' by constituting a close interaction of the



former and the latter in their novels regardless of their characters' diverging nationalities. As they have personally experienced the state of being multicultural, the way that they tell the stories affects the readers. Their novels create a sense of empathy in the minds of the readers, thus providing a better understanding of the 'other'. For instance, Shafak's novel which is discussed in this thesis offers the idea of interacting with anyone regardless of any types of social and cultural boundaries. The book helps to widen the perspective of the reader and teaches multidimensionalism. Similarly, Ali's book reflects that it is possible to improve an individual's identity by being in interaction with the 'outsiders'; In other words, if there is something to be learned in this life, it is only possible to learn it from the one who is different or who 'does things differently'. This thesis aims to approach the issue from a different perspective. It offers the idea that it is not proper to avoid interaction with people belonging to other cultures and religions with the fear of losing the values the person already has. It is a benefit, not a loss, and it is also a way of developing a better future.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1.1-THE EMERGENCE OF POST-COLONIAL THEORY AND ITS RELATION TO LITERATURE**

Colonialism is a type of domination which involves political and economic control over a dependent territory. It is generally regarded as the dominion of Europe over the rest of the world. The question when colonialism started is a controversial issue as it is not a term that came out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which the effects of it were obviously seen throughout the world. There are various examples of colonialism with different applications starting with the ancient Greeks and Romans in the course of world history. However, with the emergence of industrial revolution, colonialism changed decisively. Africa turned into separate colonies from self-governing communities. For centuries, colonial power exploited the natives economically by using the underground resources of African territory besides destroying the native traditions and culture of that people. Thus, colonialism has strong effects on literary studies that appeared in the postcolonial era although it had emerged as a political phenomenon in the beginning. After the process the countries gained independence, colonial and postcolonial works came out as a result of the relation between literature and history. These works constitute postcolonial literature, and in relation to this, postcolonial theory emerged and dealt with works written in previously colonized or the colonizing countries.

Fiction is regarded as a representation of history. The reason is that "... both fiction and history, while having marked differences, also share vast similarities. Both history and literature invoke the principle of selection and derive their material from specific cultures and historical experiences (Ogude, 88). Thus, the fiction works written in the process after independence effectively reflects the degeneration of culture. These narratives had a very important function other than telling about the destruction that colonialists caused; they functioned as a tool for "decolonization" which is one of the most important elements of postcolonial theory. Colonial powers destroyed the traditions and cultures of the nations they had exploited and replaced them with their own "values". After the process of independence, it was not easy for the natives to get rid of Western way of life at once. Davis talks about three stages of gaining cultural independence in her essay about black American literature;

The first stage is "primary dependence" wherein .. the literature depends heavily on the culture of the colonial master who controls the internal politics,... and the culture of the colony... In the second stage, "secondary dependence", wherein a search for alternative ideas and styles occurs along with the nationalization of imported ideas and styles. Third stage is "full independence" which involves a national audience capable of supporting an independent literature..., creation of a national literary language similar to the colonialistic language, but not synonymous with it (Davis, 15)

Each stage evolving from the earlier stages contributed to the process of "decolonization". Through his novels and especially non-fiction work *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o created a discourse on cultural decolonization by focusing especially on the issue of language. He focuses on the relation between language and culture; they are inseparable and thus, if the former

is lost, it would not be possible to protect the latter. The colonial language functioned as a tool for destroying the effects of pre-colonial traditions of the natives and by replacing English with the native language, Europeans attempted, unwittingly to erase their past. He criticizes the idea that English and other European languages are the means of uniting African people, and the idea that it is impossible to succeed it with multiple African languages. He rejects accepting colonial language in their culture because according to him, language is not only a means of communication, but also a carrier of culture;

A specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality, but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history...Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other... Language carries culture, and culture carries language, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world (Ngugi, 15-16).

Thus, by providing the domination of the colonial language, the maintenance and manipulation of economic and political system as well as constituting cultural hegemony became easier. Ngugi has similar discourse to Fanon's about the relation between language and culture. Fanon also thinks that "To speak... is above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization (int)". According to him, to speak the language of a country inevitably results in accepting the "collective consciousness" of that society.

There is another issue that is expressed by Ngugi about the issue of language and its function in postcolonial literature. The writers of the colonized societies continued to write in foreign languages and by doing so they perpetuated

the neo-colonial process which they have been complaining about. He claims that those works are far from being a part of African literature, and they can only be described as “Afro-European” literature. What is the weakest point about that kind of literature is that they fail in representing the real African people, especially peasantry because English speaking natives only exist in those fictions, not in real life. According to him, it is ironic that the peasants whom the novels mostly deal with, are not able to read any of those works.

Ngugi strictly criticizes the people of his nation who function as a tool in that neo-colonial process. “There are no grey areas in Ngugi’s colonial and post-colonial world. One is either a patriot or a traitor (Ogude, 99)”. He claims that cultural and educational dominion of the colonial oppressor resulted as a kind of “mental slavery” which caused the emergence of “national bourgeoisie”, a term initially used by Fanon. Fanon’s ideas on national bourgeoisie have reflections in the post-colonial novels of Ngugi.

Ngugi seems to be echoing Fanon’s critique of the national bourgeoisie as shallow and uncreative, a class which works at naked imitation of its European counterpart without helping the African masses because it cannot simply sever its links with the Western bourgeoisie, which it serves. (Ogude, 92)

Frantz Fanon is one of the most influential critics of the postcolonial world. He focused on the “psychology of colonial domination”. He grew up in a black bourgeois family and conceived of himself as French as he was a black man brought up like a white, however he was aware of the effects of racism and

colonization. Before he left France, he had published his ideas about the issue in *Black Skin White Masks* in which he shared his experiences as a black intellectual in a racially mixed Western society. He focused on the psychological aspects of the colonization period and approached the issue from the point of view that “racism generates harmful psychological constructs that both blind the black man to his subjection to a universalized white norm and alienate his consciousness. A racist culture prohibits psychological health in the black man (int)”.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* which he had written just before he died, and was published with a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre in the year of his death, he talked about the issues related to colonialism. Homi Bhabha wrote a foreword for the latest edition of the book and he stated that Fanon’s work was called as the “Bible of decolonization” by Stuart Hall who is a prominent scholar in the area of cultural studies.

Fanon describes the colonial society as a divided world and explains the reason of this division;

Looking at the immediacies of the colonial context, it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to. In the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. (Fanon, 5)

Fanon expressed his feeling of irritation because of that discrimination caused by the colonial power but what is worse than that is the emergence of a class which he called “national bourgeoisie” in the postcolonial process. They

took power after the colonial period but they are not different from “the bourgeoisie of the mother country”. Fanon calls them underdeveloped and narcissist and they only replace the former colonial settlers;

The national bourgeoisie discovers its historical mission as intermediary. As we have seen, its vocation is not to transform the nation but prosaically serve as a conveyor belt for capitalism, forced to camouflage itself behind the mask of colonialism. (Fanon, 100-101)

The national bourgeoisie increasingly turns its back on the interior, on the realities of the country gone to waste, and looks toward the former metropolis and the foreign capitalists who secure its services.

(Fanon,111)

He thinks that this opportunist class tries to control the colonized people to the same extent as the colonial oppressors try to do. He claims that intellectual leaders betray the working class by exploiting their feelings such as independence and political freedom but after the independence is declared, they forget about the needs of the people and just be interested in their own profits.(Fanon, 112)

Fanon offers “national consciousness” as a solution and he proposes the colonized nations refusing to get involved in such deeds; “On the contrary, the underdeveloped countries must endeavor to focus on their very own values as well as methods and style specific to them (Fanon,55). In the conclusion part of his book, he preaches to his people about the things they should do in order to reject the colonial system which “enslaved them for its own purposes and glory..... has taken over leadership of the world with fervor, cynicism, and violence (Fanon,235). He proposes to make a new start with new ideas and create a new nation. (239)

Homi Bhabha is another scholar who has made significant contributions to postcolonial theory especially with his ideas on hybridity, colonial ambivalence, mimicry, and binary thought that produces dichotomies. He comes from a small ethnic minority in Bombay; his family is from the descendants of Persian immigrants to India.

The issue of binary oppositions and stereotypes constitute an important part of his discourse on colonialism. The concepts such as center/margin, white/black, colonizer/colonized are a part of Western discourse through which the colonizers attempt to justify their politics in the colonized countries. By using stereotypes and binaries, the colonial discourse portrays the colonized as inferior because of their race and they are presented as 'fixed realities'. Thus, for the colonized any types of differences are eliminated by the colonial masters;

...stereotype gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it. .... The stereotype, then, as the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of a similar fantasy and defence- the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture. (Bhabha, 107)

Instead of focusing on the oppressors and the oppressed, he preferred to talk about ambivalence and negotiation. He proposes hybridization as a 'third space' that results in the emergence of new cultural forms. He believes in the possibility of interaction among different cultures and nations, and instead of totally rejecting what the colonizer offers, it is better to renew it in the culture of



the colonized and by this way, constitute a new and hybrid culture. It is not possible to evaluate the “colonizer” and the “colonized” as separate entities while defining the concepts, so he suggests “negotiation” in order to produce a mutual representation of cultural differences. In the light of his ideas, it can be said that cultures must be evaluated as complex intersections of multiple nations and it is wrong to talk about the culture of a nation as a unique entity. The scholars working on cultural studies refer to Bhabha’s ideas especially while talking about multiculturalism.

Bhabha also talks about “mimicry” as a desire for turning into a reformed “other”. The mimic man is the one who behaves like a white person and appreciates his values but on the other hand he is aware of his difference from the other because of his race. In his essay “of Mimicry and Man”, he talks about the issue by relating it to ambivalence;

..... mimicry represents an ironic compromise ...the colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. .... The discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. (Bhabha, 122)

He argues that what is dangerous about mimicry is “its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority (Bhabha, 126)”. By referring to Lacan, he argues that mimicry is like camouflage rather than an attempt of change. “It is not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance....(126).” As a result of this

act of repetition, originality is lost and what is left is a second-hand figure and a “... power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no ‘itself’ (129)”.

Another prominent theorist of postcolonial studies is Octave Mannoni who attempts to explain the mentality of colonization and racism in general and he focuses on psychological aspect of colonization besides talking about economical, politic and ethical aspects of it. His famous work *Prospero and Caliban* “... sets out to describe colonial situations as primarily the results of misunderstanding, of mutual comprehension (Mannoni,31). He offers to evaluate the colonialism as a psychological study because people prefer to see the colonial situation only as a systematic exploitation of a difference in standards of living rather than seeing it as a case of the interaction of two different types of personality.

Mannoni puts forward two important concepts related to the psychology of the colonialism. The first one is the “inferiority complex”. He states that Europeans in Madagascar-actually all the others in colonized countries- are in need of being highly respected by the ‘others’ and the natives are already in need of something to depend. The feeling of dependence “meets exactly the psychological need of the ‘colonial’ European (Mannoni,11) and an inferiority complex occurs for the colonizer who has “a grave lack of sociability combined with a pathological urge to dominate(102)”. Being surrounded with dependents is a way of “appeasing an ego eager for reassurance (11)”.

Mannoni also talks about mimicry but with differences from the analysis of Bhabha. He argues that the natives accept everything in detail but they do not

accept European civilization as a whole. As a result of this attitude, the colonizer thinks that the native is ready to mimic them but he can never succeed in emulating them. The natives reaction is away from being a mere reflection of his master's action but the master who expects a "slavish imitation" of himself fails to see that it is something entirely new. According to Mannoni, "... it is just because we look for a too faithful copy that we tend to see the actual result as grotesque mimicry (Mannoni,23)".

Another concept Mannoni talks about is the "dependency complex". Malagasy people are in a strong need of reliance on the colonizers because of the lack of stability caused by the Europeans in the process of colonization. He explains the reason of this dependency psychology with the characteristic differences between the Europeans and the Malagasy people. In the beginning of chapter two of his book, he explains the situation;

When faced with a serious difficulty, the typical European tends to rely on his self-confidence ... his main concern is not to prove *inferior* either to his own idea of himself ..But the main concern of the Malagasy, when his security is threatened, is not to feel *abandoned*. He has practically no confidence in himself .... but relies on certain protective powers without which he would feel utterly lost. (Mannoni,49)

This psychological need and fear of abandonment constitutes "dependency complex". However, Mannoni's attitude towards the colonized is regarded as ambiguous by Maurice Bloch who wrote the foreword for his book. Although he is opposed to colonial exploitation and racism and wishes for the end of it, the book is written by "a Frenchman who became the head of the information services of the colony (foreword to Mannoni, Bloch, v)." He is also criticized by Fanon that he gives no other choice to

Malagasy people other than being inferior or dependent. According to Fanon, he fails to see that it is the racist way of thinking that creates an inferior on behalf of itself.

While talking about postcolonial theory, it is inevitable to talk about Edward Said who is one of the prominent scholars of the field with his book *Orientalism*. The book raises the question of "... whether modern imperialism ever ended, or whether it has continued in the Orient since Napoleon's entry to Egypt two centuries ago (Said, xxi-xxii)."

Said drew attention to the relationship between knowledge and power. He gives us the key to understand the power relationship between the West and the East to analyze how the West affects knowledge of and for the East, and to depict how the latter is affected by this knowledge and existed in it.

He gives the definition of orientalism in the introduction part of his book; "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (Said,2)".

Said's work provided a critical view of how the West tries to understand the Other due to the reason that 'knowing the Orient' was part of the project of dominating it. He supported his ideas with the ones belong to Michael Foucault, Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams.

Michael Foucault is one of the French philosophers who contributed much to postcolonial theory. Said refers to his discourse about the relationship between knowledge and power. If the true knowledge is not provided in the process of constituting the discourse about the Orient, that knowledge turns into fiction and as a result, an illusive Orient is created. That kind of knowledge turns into power which enables the West to gain authority over the Orient. Said draws on Foucaultian idea to claim that Orientalism became a means of European imperialism. The journalist and writers who visited the East made up an 'ill-formed' opinion of the Orient and Said was surprised that some of the historians agreed on some of those fictitious view. In the beginning, Orientalists translated the writings of the East into their language because they believed that, in order to conquer them all, they should have the knowledge of those people. Sais widely discusses the issue in his work and he makes a distinction between the pure and the political knowledge; he says that the true knowledge should be 'non-political'. (Said,9)

Another term Said drew attention to is the issue of 'hegemony' which is developed by Gramsci. His use of hegemony refers to the domination of ruling class over subordinate classes, which is gained by the consent of the latter. Their consent is provided at the end of the process of moral and intellectual leadership, thus, 'hegemony' is provided over the minds and spirits besides the physical power. In other words, the working class is not forced to accepting its inferior position, instead, willingly accepts the situation. Gramsci refers to Marx's idea of 'false consciousness' which explains the situation; "the individuals are ideologically blinded to the domination they suffer (int.)".

Said expresses that Orient is the subject of Western hegemony. The imperial power applies hegemony over the Eastern societies. He explains the relationship between Orient and Occident as "... a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" and he goes on explaining Gramsci's theory of hegemony; "In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others, the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West (Said, 7)".

In *Orientalism*, Said also draws on Raymond Williams' idea of cultural materialism. Williams challenged the standard elite culture and he was against the pacification of the working class by the dominant cultural and political discourses. He thinks that culture belongs to everyone and a 'common culture' can be created. Said expressed that Williams' ideas helped him to develop his understanding of 'the way cultural domination has operated'. According to Said, this kind of cultural imperialism should be challenged because much of the finest contemporary literary works written in English do not reflect the culture of England or America as none of them include peasantry and immigrants among their characters. Those works serve to strengthen Western cultural hegemony with the mission of educating colonial subjects and imposing Western ways of life to them.

## 1.2-THE COLONIAL DRAMA

In his famous non-fiction work *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Albert Memmi portrays the “two protagonists of the colonial drama”. He set out to depict the decolonization process of North Africa but he states that the situation is similar in the other colonized countries.

He was born in Tunisia where French and Italian colonizers were settled. In the colonial society he depicts in his work, the culture of the colonizer is imposed on the colonizer but a total assimilation is never allowed due to the reason that it would be a threat for the colonial system. Through the cultural domination, the colonizer provides the emergence of a class of people among the colonized who are given higher status in comparison with the ‘others’ and their behavior against the colonized ‘other’ is very similar to the colonizers’. Memmi names this group ‘francophiles’ which is similar to Fanon’s ‘national bourgeoisie’. The colonizer perpetuates his system by supporting this class but avoids giving it an equal status with his own. Thus, they are forced to live in “painful and constant ambiguity” by the colonizer, and this is similar to the situation what Homi Bhabha calls as ‘colonial ambivalence’.

Another point Memmi expresses in his work is the ambivalence the colonialist experiences which he names “Nero Complex”. It is the state of dilemma that the colonizer has to deal with; On the one hand, he is irritated by his situation in the colonized country as a man usurping the rights of the natives, but on the other hand, he is aware of the fact that the removal of the colonized will

end his profits. Thus, “This intolerable contradiction fills him with a rage, a loathing, always ready to be loosed on the colonized (int.)”.

### **1.3-UNLEARNING ONE’S LEARNING**

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is one of the prominent contemporary literary theorists and she is best-known with her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in which she “juxtaposes the radical claims of twentieth century French intellectuals such as Michael Foucault and Gilles Deleuze to speak for the disenfranchised and the self-righteous claims of British colonialism to rescue native woman from the practice of Hindu widow sacrifice in nineteenth century India (Morton, 56). In this essay, she focuses on the mistake of western intellectuals as they silence the voices of the oppressed groups by speaking for them. She argues that ‘speaking in the name of somebody’ is not a solution. This kind of representation always involves interpretation and gives false information to the audience about the subject that is spoken for. Thus, there will be no difference between the colonizer who misrepresented the colonized and the intellectual who ‘speaks for’ the colonized. Stephen Morton expresses clearly the situation;

.... the benevolent, radical western intellectual can paradoxically silence the subaltern by claiming to represent and speak for their experience, in the same way that the benevolent colonialist silenced the voice of the widow, who ‘chooses’ to die on her husband’s funeral pyre. As I go on to suggest, in both of these examples, the benevolent impulse to represent subaltern groups effectively appropriates the voice of the subaltern and thereby silences them. (Morton, 56)



She took the term 'subaltern' from Gramsci who used it in the meaning of 'inferior rank' and it refers to "... groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes (Ashcroft, 215)". Ashcroft goes on by stating that the term has been adapted to postcolonial studies from the work of the Subaltern Studies group of historians but Spivak criticizes their assumptions due to the reason that in their discourse, "there is no way in which the oppressed or politically marginalized groups can voice their resistance, or that the subaltern only has a dominant language or a dominant voice in which to be heard (Ashcroft, 219)".

Another point she expresses in her essay is implied with the title. The act of speaking requires two sides; a speaker and a listener. When the subaltern attempts to express herself with her speech, she is not heard or not recognized by the listener.-the pronoun she is intentionally used here as Spivak thinks that the woman fits better into the meaning of subaltern together with the colonized- By asking that question, she did not mean to give the subaltern voice, instead, she means to allow it to speak. Spivak was misunderstood by some of the critics; they thought that she pointed to the disability of the subaltern and therefore, needs to be represented. Actually, it is ironic because although she is a highly regarded scholar throughout the world, as a woman from a subaltern community, she is misunderstood by those critics. She stands as an example of the situation she talks about in her essay.

Chinua Achebe has a similar discourse about this issue. In his essay “Impediments to Dialogue between North and South”, he explains the attitude of the white person who never tends to behave the Africans as their equal;

In confronting the black man, the white man has a simple choice: either to accept the black man’s humanity and the equality that flows from it, or to reject it and see him as a beast of burden. No middle course exists except as an intellectual quibble. For centuries Europe has chosen the beastly alternative which automatically has ruled out the possibility of a dialogue. (Achebe, 23)

Achebe criticizes the Western way of thinking that Africans are not able to talk even about themselves and their countries. He quotes the critic of an American reviewer on his book *Arrow of God*; “Perhaps no Nigerian at the present state of his culture and ours can tell us what we need to know about that country, in a way that is available to our understanding...in the way... T. E. Lawrence brought Arabia to life (Achebe,26)”.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **2.1-- MULTICULTURALISM AS A BRANCH OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY**

The term multiculturalism is often used by the scholars of cultural studies in order to describe the cultural and ethnic differences of a nation and it is a very controversial concept that has both supporters and critics. The defenders claim that it is necessary not to block the doors of interaction, so this situation will

enable the diverse sections of societies to understand and respect each other, and as a result, peaceful coexistence will be possible. On the other side, opponents claim that the issue of multiculturalism is something useless for a society other than making minority ethnic groups 'feel good' and it may cause divisive acts.

Multiculturalism is considered among issues related to postcolonial theory as it is about the difference of cultures in societies which are highly populated by immigrants. Homi Bhabha is one of the theoreticians who widely discusses the issue in *The Location of Culture*. As a member of an ethnic minority in Bombay, he experienced the situation of belonging to different cultures at the same time. He talked about the concept of hybridity which suggests the idea that the person might belong to many cultures at once and national boundaries do not function in the process of identity formation. In the colonized societies, every element of the colonial culture is renewed in the culture of the colonized and a new form of culture emerges as a result of this interaction. He calls a space for "negotiation and translation": "... a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics (Bhabha, 37)".

Postcolonial writers are engaged in "the unlearning of one's own privilege" that Spivak has pointed out and thus, postcolonial discourse deconstructs the master narratives of the West and the boundaries among the different cultures are demolished. A hybrid culture is offered in their works which emerged as a result of redefining culture within multiple relations of difference.

(Giroux, 21) Postcolonial discourse is a tool for creating the 'space for negotiation' that Bhabha talks about:

Post-colonial discourses represent a space in which to retheorize, locate and address the possibilities for a new politics based on the construction of new identities, zones of cultural difference, and forms of ethical address that allow cultural workers and educators alike to transform the languages, social practices, and histories that are part of the colonial inheritance. (Giroux, 22)

Multiculturalism offers diversity and the individual in a multicultural society is regarded not as a member of society at large but as a unit of a smaller group ethnically, racially or culturally defined. (Bissoondath, 214) In such societies, individuals are not imposed a dominant culture, instead, they are free to maintain their cultural differences. However, it is controversial to what extent multiculturalism is able to provide a cohesive society.

Multiculturalism has heightened our differences rather than diminished them; it has preached tolerance rather than encouraging acceptance; and it is leading us into a divisiveness so entrenched that we face a future of multiple solitudes with no central notion to bind us. (Bissoondath, 192)

Most of the people who migrate to other countries, especially the first generation, have the problem of adjusting to the norms of their new social surroundings, and by the time they experience the dilemma of whether staying 'original' or turning into the 'other. They are between two opposing forces: "...- on the one side, the imperatives of blood and belonging, ethnicity, language and race, and on the other the sanitized attractions of a modern state (Spencer,6)". This

turning into somebody else feeling irritates them in time. However, identity is not something that starts developing at one point in life and then stops at another. On the contrary, as Woodward stated in her book by referencing to Hall's idea about identity, it is "..... a production, which is never complete; always in process and always constructed within, not outside, production." (Woodward 1997). This means that, a person does not have to leave his/her national identity and adopt the culture prevailing there when he/she goes to another country. In the light of these ideas, the issue of belonging to different cultures at once will be discussed by making references to two novels; *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* by Elif Shafak, and *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali. Both of the writers are prominent names in the area of postcolonial literature.

## **2.2-- MULTICULTURALISM AND TRANSNATIONALISM**

There is a growing interest among the contemporary writers from all around the world to the terms like 'transnationalism', 'multiple belonging' and 'multiculturalism' and these terms had become the indispensable words for scholars of both literature and politics as Bhabha stated in his interview with Mitchell:

It is hard, I suspect, for many intellectuals to remember what life was like before terms like "multiculturalism, and "the postcolonial" became the lingua franca not only of the academy, but of an international realm of public discourse. Foundation heads, corporate CEOs, university presidents, and political leaders now bandy these phrases about; they have become the buzzword of the new, transnational world order, as well as of new academic regimes like "cultural studies".(Mitchell,81)

Although there are some differences in terms of their meanings when they are separately analyzed, these terms generally offer the same type of personality; people spending an important part of their lives in another culture –or cultures-, have the sense of belonging to their host culture as well as the others, and consequently not feeling totally connected to any of them. What they get in the end is a blended culture. Some of them make use of their situation and enjoy the experience of living or growing up in cultures not their own, however, the rest of them think that having a stable home during their life is a source of strength and for this reason, they fail getting the benefits of living in diaspora. In other words, ‘going back home syndrome’ never stops following and they can not get rid themselves of the feeling of rootlessness. They are afraid of experiencing some kind of assimilation that they will end up losing all their cultural differences. Actually the problem starts when there is a tendency to categorize people into some stereotypes. Brown explains how stereotypes are imposed to people by the common culture, referring to the ideas of Bogardus and Laskar;

Individuals tend to think of other individuals as belonging to a class or caste rather than considering them as individuals. .... younger children do not possess these generalized concepts; that they are only in the attitudes. Thus small children play freely together, totally unaware of any social implications of observable differences of race or nationality, but became conscious of their social import through the acceptance of adult stereotypes implied in such phrases as “Nigger”, “Kike”, or “Wop”( Brown 329).

So, the awareness of the ‘self’ and the feeling of distinguishing ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ is something indoctrinated and takes shape in time. In colonial societies,

the natives were made to think that they are 'inferior' because of their skin colour and it is the only cause of their misery. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon depicts the absurdity of the situation with a sense of comedy through Galahad, one of his characters in the book;

And Galahad watch the colour of his hand, and talk to it, saying, "Colour, is you causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can't be blue, or red or green, if you can't be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know is you! I ain't do anything to infuriate the people and them, is you! Look at you, you so black and innocent, and this time so you causing misery all over the world! (Selvon, 88)

Starting from childhood, every person experiences the process of discovering the 'others' as well as discovering 'the self', and the situation is very well depicted by Portaro in his essay:

Each awareness of the other requires a renewed sense of myself , knowledge of who I am. Without that my fear might drive me either to depression or violence..... which may explain at least in part the widespread epidemics of depression and sociopathology not only in America, but elsewhere. Mind you,it is a delicate ballet; I am immune to neither depression nor violence, but I am mindful, in my reflective moments, that fear is the source of dis-ease. And the greatest of those fears is the loss of the self, that momentary demand that now comes at us continually, to define who I am in relationship to every other with whom I come into contact, into relationship (Portaro 203).

In the process of identifying 'the others' in his mind, the person will be able to make stronger definitions for himself at the same time. So, the result is that;

“...pluralism and individuality go hand in hand” (Portaro 203). Thus the formation of ‘the self’`s identity is dependent on the presence of the ‘other’, who do things differently. It is only by this way that a person can be aware of or construct his identity. The coexistence of different cultures in a place without any dominating one, makes the differences acceptable and helps to overcome any forms discrimination rather than turning the plurality into a source of fear.

### **2.3-DUAL OR MULTIPLE BELONGING**

As a matter of fact, an individual shelters various identities during his /her life; a local identity coming from the place where one lives, a cultural identity coming from the language one speaks or the faith and ethnic roots the person belongs to, a social identity coming from occupational condition, and a national identity coming from the citizenship of a country. It is possible to give more examples. Yet, the most important of all is that every individual is a citizen of this world and it does not give beneficial results when one of those identities surpasses the others or causes them to be forgotten. Such a situation gives rise to fanaticisms and great losses. Nationalism is one of the causes of that type of radicalism.

The classic nationalist discourse is not in favor of double or multiple attachments culturally, due to the reason that the situation would lead to disunity and divisions in society, but actually the basic problem of cultural conflicts in a society arises from exceedingly traditionalist and nationalist movements. Senocak mentions the dangers of nationalism in his article that focuses especially on



Turkish nationalism;

Nationalism has become a losers' ideology. Especially in authoritarian societies which have failed to make the leap into the global economy, nationalism is employed by the enemies of an open society as an instrument to maintain the status quo. Societies in transition are also affected by this phenomenon. Nationalism, the ideology of the losers, exploits nationalist feeling and aggressively turns it against dissidents. (Senocak 2005)

As the interaction among the different culture groups increases, people will get the chance to have a multi-dimensional world view. If more information is learned about other cultures, whether by living in different cultural environments or by interacting with the people in diaspora, people will learn not to be ignorant of sorrows or joys of nations all around the world, thus feel more 'human'. As they are aware of the danger, a group of academicians decided to develop some multicultural strategies as the situation was not so bright;

The schools were failing, the streets were burning,. Something had to be done for ghetto children something to raise their self-esteem and engage their energy and attention. .... In a multiethnic highschool in California, teachers give no special attention to ethnicity and hold all students to a common standard. Without rejecting their own identities, the students interact positively and un-self- consciously across ethnic lines. Although such a school is unusual today, it exemplifies the possibility of a more egalitarian future (Higham 204).

As it is stated by Higham, the only permanent solution of this problem is education. If children of minorities have the chance to express themselves under

the condition that all types of discrimination is demolished, it would be possible to talk about a better future for the world in which everyone is treated equally.

The key to interact with other people regardless of any prejudices is true knowledge. “Knowledge is understanding. A lack of knowledge promotes stereotypes, misunderstanding and fear” (Lawrence). In the following lines of her essay, Lawrence tells that incomplete information leads people to a faulty conclusion. This idea stated by Lawrence reminds Foucaultian theory of knowledge-power relationship. If there is not an accurate knowledge, there can be no truths but only ‘ill-formed’ opinions about the people we try to communicate. Thus the act of interaction fails in the beginning as the people on the other side are regarded as totally ‘foreigners’. A witty public campaign fragment about the issue depicts the situation ironically. It was written; “ your Christ is a Jew, your auto Japanese, Your pizza Italian, Your democracy Greek, your coffee Brazilian, your vacation Turkish, your numbers Arabic, your letters Latin, And only your neighbor is a foreigner?” (int.Stanford Electronic Humanities).

Multiculturalism has widely affected scholars of literature and there is an increasing interest to the issue especially in culturally diverse societies of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The study of multicultural literature can function as a way of understanding and appreciating the differences;

The multicultural explores the ways that enable forms of agency and identity within a decentered world. .... scholars working within multicultural fields help to reveal not just the discontinuities present in the institutional creation and preservation of culture. They present configurations of power and knowledge based in marginal

communities and histories. They explore realms of justice and morality constructed locally, specifically, often in opposition to master narratives. They work within the larger cultural movement that rejects master narratives of Western culture in order to give voice to the illegitimate knowledge of the multicultural. (Perez-Torres, 178)

All the students related to multiculturalism are aimed for putting away the conflicts arising from culture wars. As it is known by everyone that in the story of creation – which is approximately the same in all holy resources -, in the beginning, God created only Adam even though he had the power to create all the races at one time. We were just one in the beginning; there was even no discrimination of gender. Then, humanity was divided into races so that they can interact and learn from each other. However things did not go on like that; “The Pandora’s box of difference” (Neill, 3) was opened, and the reason of being created as diverse races and cultures was forgotten. It resulted as painful culture wars in the past, and humanity looks forward to living in a more peaceful world where diversities are regarded as richness rather than an issue of conflict.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **3.1-WHY DO THE WORKS OF ELIF SHAFAK AND MONICA ALI TAKE PLACE IN THIS THESIS?**

The novels that are going to be discussed in this thesis reach out to people in many countries in terms of the issues the stories raise; identity, the clash of cultures and values, physical displacement or being in mental exile, the struggle to survive in a new environment and so on. Both Elif Shafak and Monica Ali deal

with the issue in very impressive ways as they personally experienced the state of being multicultural.

Elif Shafak was born in Strasbourg and she spent her teenage years in Madrid, Spain and Amman, Jordan before returning to Turkey. After studying political science in Turkey, she held teaching positions in the United Kingdom, Turkey and the United States. As a result of coming from a multicultural background, she is a very successful teller of multicultural stories. Her fiction is a perfect reflection of her nomadic life. The characters in her books generally have different identities, and actually, this is her basic principle in life; she believes that all people have plural identities but most of them prefer to repress their multicultural tendency. She believes in the possibility of a cosmopolitan democratic approach that will ‘challenge all sorts of nationalist and religious boundaries’;

I am connected to different cultures, and that is I think, a part of the reason why I believe it is possible to be multicultural, multilingual and multifaith. On the other hand, I am not sure this is a good time to be multicultural because to tell the truth, on many sides, you are kind of being rejected. – It is difficult -. I am in no way attached to the national identity (Shafak,NPQ).

So, she feels herself transnational but this situation does not prevent the prejudice that is grown against her. She challenges stereotypes and she perfectly does it with ironic humor. The people in Turkey criticize her for not being in favor of a national identity, whereas in countries where she spent some part of her life, she is regarded as a Middle-Eastern woman writer. She is irritated by being evaluated

according to her nationality rather than her ideas. She describes this dilemma and the difficulty of the situation that the person ends up with the feeling of belonging nowhere;

When I was in Spain, in a cosmopolitan elite school, I experienced that whoever you are in the eyes of others, you are first and foremost your nationality. Then when I return to Turkey, I felt as if I am a latecomer, an outsider. I am both inside the Turkish culture and yet I have these other links that many other people in Turkey do not have, so, you do not know how to deal with that feeling of being foreigner in your country. (Shafak,NPQ)

Shafak is an author from a threshold culture; Turkey is an in-between country because of several reasons. First of all, the shift from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic has been a radical change; it is regarded as a shift from a multiethnic empire to a united nation state. It has also been a transition from traditional to modern and the supporters of both movements exist in the country with the dominance of the former. Turkey literally connects Asia and Europe which is a concrete example of the fact that it belongs to neither. On the one hand it is an advantage that the country is famous for sheltering this plurality-as a support to Shafak's multicultural discourse- but on the other hand it creates an ambiguity for a group of people as it is neither regarded as a Western nor an Eastern country. However, Shafak is able to embrace tradition and modernism skillfully and her fiction is a perfect reflection of her cosmopolitan approach. She is an outspoken critic for political and social taboos in Turkey and as a result of this she became the first person to be charged with 301 because of a work of fiction and was accused of denigrating Turkishness. As she has grown up in Europe, she is not affected from Turkish nationalism. Actually she is an

extraordinary example in this respect because generally the Turks in diaspora usually have a contradictory manner; they regard nationalism as something that can be lost easily and prefer to be more radical in their nationalism. While describing her position in life, she talks about the story of grape in Mathnawi; three people are fighting for three different types of grapes; which is best; yellow, green or black one? For Shafak, dervish is the person who takes three of them, squeezes and leaves the dregs and takes the essence of it. (Akman 2004) She feels herself very close to the Sufi tradition and says that Sufi is after the essence, not outside appearances. She is in favor of living together without assimilating the differences as the grandchildren of the multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual Ottoman Empire.

Monica Ali is the other writer that will be discussed in this thesis. Her background is also multicultural. She is the daughter of a white British mother and a Bengali father; her parents met in England while the father was there because of his job. After they got married, they moved to Bangladesh where “people came from miles around to see this white woman. Sometimes she would have to get up in the middle of the night and get dressed because people had walked for days to meet her” (Cavendish,32). The family had experienced the difficulty of the culture clash as “her mother`s parents mocked her father`s Bangladeshi culture, sniping at ‘the gaudiness’ of saris and how ‘they do not even know how to use cutlery’” (Cavendish, 32). Monica grew up in London but she always thought that it is enriching for her not to lose one part of her heritage (int. with Ali, Yousuf). As a child, she experienced the dilemma of whether behaving as the daughter of a Bangladeshi father or adopting into the new British culture.

She talks about her inner conflict as a little girl who was expected to be a good 'Bengali girl' by her father;

..... worrying about belonging, how to fit in, is part of childhood, but it was definitely heightened for me, ..... knowing how to behave one moment if I was going to my father`s Bengali friends, and how to behave in a completely different context and situation. I was always an outsider, always standing outside, observing and trying to figure things out. (int.Yousuf)

Her writings explore the divisions of East and West and much more besides. Her characters are usually in a voyage of discovery of the 'self'. She narrated her intercultural experiences – or conflicts- in her first novel, *Brick Lane*. She talks about the 'dual identities' which were unknown or not accepted by most of the people. She is against the idea of a mono cultural society;

You know the idea of something like are not we all living in a multicultural melting pot now. Well, that is not the picture I paint in the book and that is not how I see it happening. That is not a reality, at least not for the people about whom I am writing. What is interesting to me is that people are prepared to see this other side of Britain and recognize that it is a world apart, it is part of what makes England now. (Nasta 2004)

It is ironic that Ali is strictly criticized by some Bangladeshi immigrants in London because they think they are misrepresented in her novel. They claim that she can not tell their story because she is not actually one of them. She is irritated by being called as 'Asian British novelist' just as Shafak disliked being named as 'Middle-Eastern woman writer'. Although Shafak and Ali have very different ethnic- cultural background and live in different cultural and native

societies, the experiences they have as women writers in male- dominated cultures show significant similarities on the social level. Their ideas about transnationalism and the diversity of human culture are widely criticized by large masses as well as they are appreciated.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **4.1- BRICK LANE: CULTURAL LOCATION OF THE NOVEL**

*Brick Lane* is a novel that can be regarded as post-colonial as it fictionalizes about the presence of Bangladeshi immigrants as a racial minority in London. We might use Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity as a strategy for reading it because throughout the book, the characters search for intersections between the dominant and the minority culture. Bhabha's concept of hybridity provides us to describe the characters' personal dilemmas from a different perspective, away from the polarities coming from the 'victor-victim' relationship. He argues that, "if the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs (Bhabha, 160)".

Brick Lane is the historic street in London's East End, and its inhabitants are generally Bangladeshi Muslims outside of South Asia. It is "the most colorful, sensual and aromatic street in the East End" (Cohen 2006). Although the inhabitants of the area are mostly Bangladeshi people, they do not live isolated



from the multicultural environment surrounding them. They are in interaction with the culture prevailing outside their world mostly by means of the second generation born in diaspora. As a result of this indirect interaction, first generation immigrants may also experience the process of cultural transformation which might be painful at times.

The book tells the story of a Bangladeshi family's migration to London and this state of being exile creates their story. Being in exile causes them to be distanced both from their home and from their present location. In Ali's book, we trace the story of Nazneen, who was sent to England after an arranged marriage-it was an important part of Indian culture- and as a result of that inevitable marriage the couple migrated to London where her painful and lonely search for identity began.

After the book had been short-listed for the Man Booker Prize, the idea of making the film of the novel came out. This idea was strictly criticized by the inhabitants of Brick Lane, due to the reason that "there will be problems within families, between generations, because young people will lose respect for their parents. And they will feel ashamed to be Bengali" (Cohen 2006). However much Ali is criticized by her own people, the critics are only groups of minorities in number. The book attracted great attention as it very strikingly depicts the story of an immigrant family and the clash each first and second generation experience.

Actually, Ali does not deserve the charges about not reflecting the real experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants or misrepresenting them, because there is

not only one type of Bangladeshi person in the area of Brick Lane. So, it is not correct for someone to dismiss the novel by saying that 'this is not my story'. She depicts very well the inner conflict of having a 'dual identity' through Nazneen, the culture clash second generation experiences through Shahana, and the struggle the parents give for the sake of being faithful to the 'homeland' through Chanu, and we see how painfully he fails to survive in that culture war. The form of her discourse has the effect of decentering the perception of the traditional Bangladeshi people.

It is a certain fact that Monica Ali is regarded as one of the most important ethnic minority writers of her generation by the publishers in Britain, and she is successful in terms of speaking out against English national identity. It is obvious that there is a growing up tendency to multiculturalism in England and the situation has wide effects in the literary field. Andrea Levy writes, "Britain is finally beginning to gather up its more distant voices and listen to the rich stories that they have to tell, stories that are as central to the history of Britain and of British Literature as anything that we are more familiar with (Levy 2004)." As a matter of fact, Britain seems to be more successful on the way of establishing a multicultural society when it is compared to United States. In the latter, the idea of 'melting pot' is in demand and the reflection of both approaches can easily be observed in novels of Ali and Shafak. The characters in Ali's novel are generally successful in dealing with the new cultural landscape surrounding them in Britain, whereas, Shafak's characters end up with surrender in their voyage of discovery of the 'self'. The characters in *Brick Lane* ;

.... do not, in fact, embrace modern Western values with blind enthusiasm. Rather, they try- with varying degrees of success – to retain what they feel is best in their own Islamic culture. .... they consider themselves only temporary sojourners in Britain, staying primarily to earn enough money to one day return home prosperous. Nevertheless, Western ideas penetrate their lives and change them in ways they could not have predicted. (Hower,197)

#### **4.2- A JOURNEY TO DISCOVER ‘THE SELF’**

The protagonist of *Brick Lane*, Nazneen, is a young Bangladeshi woman who struggles for personal freedom and independence throughout the story. The gradual rejection of her former identity and alienation from the past allows her to re-invent her self and create a new future away from her husband. However the process of her self-discovery is a painful one. She has to deal with the ‘binary divisions’ that Bhabha talks about; she is perceived as the ‘other’ in the society where she is an immigrant and she is captivated at the cross-roads of cultures and identities-British and Indian-.

She has a traditional story in the beginning; she had been a simple village girl in Dhaka until the time she was forced to marry to a man about twenty years older than her. The couple moved to London as soon as they got married as the man had been living there for a while. Everything seemed to be going well in the beginning: “The days were tolerable, and the evenings were nothing to complain about” (Ali, 27). Actually, it was not her style to complain or to wish about something as she was brought up in this way by her mother; “My child must not waste energy fighting against fate. That way, she will be stronger (Ali, 3)”. This

principle was guiding her life and owing to it, she accepted the role of fate in her life, so she had stopped questioning the things in her life so long ago. However, we see the little signs of her future rebellion in the very beginning of the book. While thinking about her position in life, she said to herself; “If I were the wishing type, I know what I would wish (Ali, 7)”.

Although there is no affection between the two, Nazneen was glad that her husband is gentle to her. However, her communication with her husband was incomplete. She was disappointed when she had heard him describing her to someone on the phone; “A blind uncle is better than no uncle. I waited too long to get a wife (Ali, 11)”. Following this disappointment, she started to feel irritated-or her consciously surpassed irritation came out- because of her forced isolation in a Tower Hamlets flat which was described by her as ‘a large box’. She felt herself physically displaced in that very different culture from the one she physically had left behind. Her mind was full of her past memories and the reader witnesses her past and happy life in a series of flashbacks. Even though she has left Bangladesh and left her family back, the culture in which she had grown up is a large part of who she is. She is torn between Bangladesh and England, between self and other, tries to resolve ambiguities which define the identity she is trying to construct. She restricts her conversations to a continuous internal monologue; the reader seldom witnesses her dialogues within the quotation marks signifying direct speech, especially the ones with her husband. Her inability to establish linguistic communication with her husband increases her feeling of displacement.

The first evident signs of her discovery of the ‘self’ showed up during her

watching of 'ice-e skating' on television. She sat across the television every afternoon and watched ice-skaters, away from all her anxieties. She was "... whole and pure. The old Nazneen was sublimated and the new Nazneen was filled with light, glory (Ali, 27)". A similar thing happened while she was looking at an English magazine. She replaced herself with the female ice-skater whom she had likened to a Hindu goddess. Just in the time she was daydreaming of 'traveling across the ice' with her partner, she was interrupted by her son as he had woken up and was looking at his mother 'skeptically'. Old Nazneen recalled the new and said she was dreaming foolishly but her mind never gave up 'pulling her off here and there'.

After she started to question the things around, she frequently remembered her sister Hasina, who never preferred being fatalistic as their mother continually recommended. She eloped with her lover at an early age. Although she failed to materialize her dreams, Nazneen again and again thought of being an independent woman as her sister, especially at times when she gets a letter from her.

Nazneen was sitting at home all day long in the beginning because she was prevented by her husband to go out due to the reason that he would be humiliated because of her appearance and ignorance. Chanu plays the 'mimic man' that Bhabha talks about; he seems to be Westernized in appearance but he fails to be one in his mind as he does not let his wife to go out unless she changes her appearance. She chose to be silent against Chanu`s claims but there was a silently growing rebellion inside her. She took the first courageous step of proving herself when she went out alone without the permission of her husband, then got

lost, and finally succeeded to get back home by asking the directions to someone in a Bangladeshi restaurant. This walk in the streets is a great deal for her, at least in her early months in the country as a simple village girl. The sense of independence from her husband is her small triumph, and it is very important in her struggle for independence. The reader can feel her pleasure coming out of this rebellion from the imaginary dialogue she made with Chanu when she got back home;

*Anything is possible. She wanted to shout it. Do you know what I did today? I went inside a pub. To use the toilet. Did you think I could do that? I walked mile upon mile, probably around the whole of London although I did not see the edge of it. And to get home again I went to a restaurant. I found a Bangladeshi restaurant and asked directions. See what I can do! (Ali, 45)*

In the process of her self-discovery, the second noteworthy thing was talking about her wish to Chanu – we see that the wishing type inside her is coming out- about going to college with Razia, a compatriot living in the neighborhood, for English lessons. The deprivation of communication in her own language imprisoned her in their flat, with only a few common words of English. She wanted to break up the walls surrounding her and preventing her from contacting the outside world, and she realized that learning the language of that ‘host’ country might be a way to facilitate her communication and also it might be a way to understand the ‘others’. However, her little step was repulsed by her husband due to the reason that she was going to be a mother.

Experiencing a transition from submission to self-assurance, she started to

question her marriage. She was wondering why her father married her off to this man? (Ali, 78). She thought about the options if she had known the results of this marriage beforehand. She could not describe the feeling coming to her at times as an explicit evidence of her remorse coming out of the feeling that she is betraying her cultural identity;

It crawled across her shoulders and nested in her hair and poisoned her lungs. . . . . She made bargains with it... no more dreaming of ice, and blades, and spangles. No more missed prayers. No more gossip. No more disrespect to my husband. She offered all these things for it to leave her. It listened quietly, and then burrowed deeper into her internal organs..(Ali, 79)

Nazneen tries hard to fulfill her mission as a traditional Bengali housewife. She wears traditional clothes, cooks traditional food, and respects her husband. Yet, this is not the life she expected. When she stepped out of the house, she saw the 'other world' there and saw the deficiency in her life at home. She started to have a dual living after a while she had met the outside world; physically, she is the obedient and traditional housewife, and mother,-mostly by the effect of the 'colonial brainwashing' which suggests the inferiority of woman-but inside, she is bringing up a new Nazneen who has her own unique identity. The readers witness this situation in a dialogue between the couple; Chanu talks her about something she has no idea but answers him approvingly; 'If you say so, husband'. "She had begun to answer him like this. She meant to say something else by it; sometimes that she disagreed, sometimes that she did not understand or that he was talking rubbish, sometimes that he was mad (Ali,76)." It is certain that Chanu has no idea about her feelings as he is unaware of her ability to comment

on the things going around. Nazneen is the only person who seems to appreciate his knowledge and listening to him with no opposition, and he feels pleasure that as an academician-only he supposes to be one-his opinions are worth listening to.

As the story develops, Nazneen started to be affectionate to her husband. When they took a daytrip to the sights in England, Shahana, the elder daughter, behaved as a total troublemaker from the beginning to the end. She continually repeated her demands from her mother; getting a tattoo, having the lip pierced, sun protection cream and so on. Nazneen wanted to please her husband who was struggling to make them happy. She bribed Shahana by promising to buy her the 'long, dangly' earrings she had wanted just in return for a little smile her father imploringly demanded while trying to take a family photo. Later on, she refused to join the girls for a walk around the lake just for the reason that "to leave Chanu there stranded on his back would be to dishonor him" (Ali, 245). Chanu wanted to have a family photo –which was going to be the first and the last one- and he requested from a young British to take it. After taking the photo, the expected question came from the 'stranger'; 'Whereabouts are y`all from?'" (Ali, 244). The answer was easy for Chanu that he definitely feels as a Bangladeshi. However, it was not the same for Shahana; 'I am from London', she said. Nazneen did not seem to care about the answer to that question as she seemed to transcend that idea of belonging somewhere. Actually, it was a frequent question that she had to answer because of her non-English accent. Things had been easier since the time she started to feel at home, regardless of her environment and tries to find a way to create home around her, also for the family. Her idea of home totally changed after she had come to Britain just in the way Gardner discusses in her book by



referring to Rapport and Dawson, about Bengali elders in London; “home` once have been considered as stable and safe, now it has become something fluid: a set of practices, memories and myths rather than a stable or fixed place (Gardner 2002).” So, she accepted the answer of this question just because she accepted her new identity as an immigrant and her perception of home had totally changed. This indicates that she succeeded to integrate this new identity into who she is. That day, she “realized that today was the first time they had stood together as a family for the camera. It filled her with a mixture of panic and hope, the possibility of holding things together with the unexceptional ritual of family life (Ali, 244).” From her feelings the reader can sense that she started to be a self confident woman who sees the power inside her and wills to do the thing her ‘educated’ husband is not able to do; to stick the family together.

Nazneen is no more the village girl separated forcibly from her land; she does not share Chanu`s idea that Bangladesh is the real home for them, and everything will be much better if they go back there. During a conversation among the family members, he read the results of a survey from the newspaper. The survey, which was led by professors at the London School of Economics, states that Bangladeshis are the happiest nation in the world. He made great effort to persuade his rebellious daughter Shahana that the source of the survey is a reliable one. Yet she disregarded that information and to Chanu`s surprise -and also to the readers- Nazneen refused to believe in it. He was greatly astonished as he had not expected that reaction from his obedient wife; “his eyebrows shot up high, leaving his small eyes vulnerable, unprotected, like two snails out of their shells”(Ali,291). When he asked the reason of her refusal, she said the reason was

her sister; she was not happy. After that, she had the courage to tell him all the things that were hidden from him about Hasina until that time, without the fear of any accusations that might come from her husband to her. The fact that Nazneen unconsciously expressed was a bitter one which Chanu pretended not to see; “Though immigrants in London must deal with the culture shock and racial prejudice, they rarely encounter the desperate conditions experienced by people in the lands they have left” (Hower,197)

Another important point is that we see a woman transforming her passivity into free will. It was not long ago that she did not have the courage to express her true feelings to Chanu. When she had Shahana and saw her growing up as a confident individual, and defending her ideas against her father, Nazneen could not help admiring her. It is as if Ali has given Shahana the duty to express the feelings of her mother who prefers to repress the new Nazneen coming out of her. In chapter 6, She tries on a pair of her husband’s pants, looks at herself in the mirror, takes the trousers off, puts her skirt back on and pulls it high ‘like the Western girls’. And she asks herself ‘where is the harm?’ It was long before Shahana was born, and years after, she sees her daughter doing the things she had imagined a long time ago; she inwardly felt a pleasure as she is able to do things her mother could not dare to do.

Nazneen gradually learns to respect her husband but there was something missing in this precarious marriage; their relationship was not a love affair, and to her surprise, she starts an affair with Karim, who was the middleman collecting and delivering the garment work to her. As the family desperately needed extra

income, she started to work at home with a sewing machine. There are significant external changes in her life: She becomes economically independent. Yet, much more important changes take place in her mind. With the monetary contribution she made to the family, she started to feel more independent and this feeling might have driven her to this fault. However much she seems to be holding to her religion, her faithfulness did not prevent her to commit adultery. Karim is one of the prominent members of a radical Islamic gang named Bengal Tigers constituted by a group of Bangladeshi youth. The members of the gang were away from being a Bangladeshi in appearance; they were wearing jeans and the young man were carrying packets of Marlboros. The members of that group remind Mannoni's theory of mimicry; they accept most of the things related to the colonial culture but they refuse to accept European civilization as a whole. It is not possible to distinguish them from the 'others' in appearance. Karim was just as them; he was wearing trainers, a gold chain around his neck; there were no signs of his roots in his appearance. The thing that affects Nazneen in Karim was his being just the opposite of Chanu; he was the man of action. He prefers to do things rather than just reading or commenting on them. Actually, Karim stands in the place of 'other' for Nazneen as Ali gives him the role as the mediator of her desire for cultural integration. The relationship between the two comes out as a result of Nazneen's self-awareness but consequently, this awareness turns into self-criticism as she is able to distinguish the reality from the ideas in her mind about Karim.

As a matter of fact, Nazneen is much more religious when she is compared to Chanu. She frequently recites from Qur'an, she tries not to miss her

prayers and makes effort to prevent herself from doing something that will conflict to her faith. However, when her affair with Karim started, she went beyond her limitations and started to neglect her religious duties. During the visits of Karim, she 'forgot' covering her hair. She joined the activities of the radical group Karim belongs to, without letting her husband know what she was doing. She went to the meetings of Bengal Tigers but she was not an active member of the group. She was there because of Karim as she wanted to be appreciated by him. Actually, she is suffering from what Mannoni calls as 'inferiority complex'; she is in need of being respected by someone and Karim is the mediator between Nazneen and the colonizing culture. He was one of the speakers in one of the meetings, and he talked about Bosnia, Chechnya and the necessity of fighting back. At the end of the meeting, he gave her some newsletters to read. Chanu had never given her something to read because of seeing her as ignorant, instead, he insisted on talking about the things in a way she did not understand. Nazneen liked the state that Karim does not humiliate her by thinking of her ignorance, instead, he made her feel that she also had something to do for Muslim brotherhood, at least by acquainting herself with the suffering Muslims around the world. After she returned home, she put the newsletters on the table so that Chanu will see them. "*You are not the only one who knows things*. But when she heard him coming she hid them" (Ali, 198). Actually, we see her in a state of dilemma here. She still could not get rid of the colonial teachings of her mother that a woman's fate is to remain silent. She feels she has no right talking about those serious matters, her duty is just being a traditional housewife. She remembers her mother saying; "If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men" (Ali, 60).

She is also in a state of confusion about her affair with Karim. As a Muslim woman, she is in constant doubts; she is always worried because of doing the wrong thing and taking the wrong path. However, later on, it is interesting that she tends to justify her unacceptable deed of adultery – as she knows that she will burn in hell- by means of her fatalistic point of view. She again remembers her mother`s words at the time she was telling her about the baby Nazneen`s struggle to survive; ‘We must not stand in the way of fate’. By basing on the reason of her sinful action to the teaching of her mother, she goes on committing, even excusing it, instead of putting an end to it as there is no choice other than submitting to fate according to her. In terms of her relation with Karim, her belief was clearly inconsistent with her behavior. It is fascinating to hear from him that she was the real thing (Ali, 321) when it is compared to Chanu`s comments about her in the very beginning of their marriage; she was just an unspoilt girl from the village in the eyes of her husband. The difficulty of choosing either going back to Dhaka with her husband and children or staying in London with her daughters-in other words staying with Karim- brought her to a crucial point. On the one hand, she was on the threshold of stepping into a new life but on the other hand, she was afraid of being ungrateful for the blessings of God. She is in a dilemma between ‘home’ and ‘exile’, ‘self’ and ‘other’. The prick of conscience she felt did not let her sleep one night and after performing wudu, she took down the Qur’an and read from the sura “The Merciful”;

Pearls and corals come from both. Which of your Lord’s blessings would you deny? Mankind and jinn, We shall surely find the time to judge you! Which of your Lord’s blessings would you deny? .....

“In all those years, I have never –not once- regretted my choice of bride. She thought of her daughters. What beautiful gifts from God. (Ali, 340)

She thinks about the things that will happen when they go back to Dhaka; it would be a disaster for Shahana and also for Chanu even if he is not aware of the reality. In the process of deciding to take the true path, she was able to see the reality about the things going on, and especially about Karim. He was so charming in the beginning with the new world he presents to Nazneen; with his jeans and trainers, the intellectual speeches and with talking about ‘all the things that lay hidden just outside her window’ (Ali, 377). However, she was not the ‘simple village girl’ anymore; she changed drastically during the course of the novel. By her immigrant experience in London, she becomes aware of the different aspects of life and from that time on, she was able to evaluate Karim not with admiration but with a realistic point of view. It is surprising that she thinks he was ‘the same as her. May be not even that’ (Ali, 377). She started to feel pity on him as he was born a foreigner in another country and did not have the cultural plurality she was experiencing as a person who took place in both culture of her own and in another. She realized that “she saw only what she wanted to see in the beginning.” When she looked back, she “saw that the disappointments of his life, which would shape him, had yet to happen” (Ali, 377). Nazneen’s ability to distinguish between the idea of Karim in her mind in the beginning and its reality is an important step of her personal liberation and consequent self-invention. It enables her to realize the difference between the idea in her mind and the reality. This ‘disappointment of reality’ provides her an opportunity to create a personal space-just as Bhabha talks about- in which she can choose how to exist by

combining the values of her past and present life. She courageously withstands her disappointments with reality. Nazneen was just filling the gap in Karim that was coming from the feeling of lack of home inside him and as soon as she was aware of reality, she decided to leave him and to stay in London for a better future both for herself and the daughters.

Nazneen is not a multicultural hero as she makes mistakes in the process of adopting to the new environment surrounding her, but during her years of stay in London, initially as an isolated village girl and later on a mother of three children –one is dead-she has formed an identity which is more Western than Eastern. She chose to be neither ‘white’ nor ‘black’ and preferred to follow in the footsteps of her new identity. She grew to be more confident and with this confidence, she had the strength to stay in London with her daughters after Chanu had left, succeeded to create a ‘third space’ both for herself and the daughters. Her decision to stay in London is not a simple staying; rather, her decision involves a remaking of home.

Chanu is the other leading character in the book. He is an educated man and seems to have self-assurance, but in fact, he is a vulnerable character. Although he lives in London, Bangladesh is the real home for him and he never gives up longing to return to his homeland, because he has the fear that his family would be ‘spoiled’ by the foreign culture of the host-country. For this reason, Brick Lane had always been a temporary home for him and he never wanted to be fully settled in there. He demands his family members do the same and wanted his children to grow up in the Bengali culture. On the other hand, it is interesting that

he humiliates his compatriots in Brick Lane by accusing them of ruining their image in the eyes of white people; “These people are peasants. Uneducated. Illiterate. Close-minded. Without ambition.” (Ali, 15-16). “They do not ever really leave home. Their bodies are here but their hearts are back there. And anyway, look how they live: just recreating villages here” (Ali, 19). Interestingly, he is not aware that he is just suffering from the disease that Dr. Azad, who is one of the respected Bangladeshi doctors in the area, diagnosed as ‘Going Home Syndrome’ in a conversation with Chanu about the people having the similar psychology.

Chanu is a man of contradictions; On the one hand, he continually talks about the clash of cultures and generations and complains about the corruption of youth in a culture that is not theirs. On the other hand, he cares little about his home culture and tries to seem Westernized. In a conversation with the wife of Dr. Azad, he said there is no harm in drinking alcohol as it was the part of culture in London. “Back home, if you drink you risk being an outcast. In London, if you don’t drink you risk the same thing (Ali, 85-86)”. As a contradiction to this idea, he expresses that he wants to take his son back ‘home’ as he does not want him to rot there with all drunks. His theory was repulsed by Mrs. Azad, who defended the inevitability of the interaction between the cultures and it was the harsh face of the reality. The possibility of building up a hybrid culture was not easy for Chanu to understand and Mrs. Azad expressed her anger against his ambivalent position in life;

“Why do you make it so complicated?” said the doctor’s wife.



“Assimilation this, alienation that! Let me tell you a few simple facts. Fact: we live in a Western society. Fact: our children will act more and more like Westerners. Fact: that is no bad thing. My daughter is free to come and go. Do I wish I had enjoyed myself like her when I was young? Yes! (Ali, 88-89)

Chanu is in a state of colonial ambivalence that he is in need of praising his nation whenever he gets the chance and seems to be an admirer of his country but interestingly, he tries to justify his opinions with the support of Western sources. He talks about the glorious days the country had experienced and the times it was called ‘the Paradise of Nations’, and he grumbles that his daughter Shahana only knows about flood and famine instead of the glorifying words of Warren Hastings about Bengali people. It is ironic that his evidence about the greatness of his nation is the praising words of an English statesman who was the first governor-general of British India.

Chanu claims to be an academician but he was highly disappointed that he had not been regarded as one in London. He prepared a speech to make in a Bengal Tigers meeting which is titled: “Race and Class in the UK: A Short Thesis on the White Working Class, Race Hate, and Ways to Tackle the Issue (Ali,346).” It is unfortunate for him that his ideas are not appreciated by the academicians and as a result of it, he uses his ideas to affect Nazneen, the only person that listens to him, although he realizes that she just pretends to listen to him; usually, she has no idea about what he is talking about. He wanted to challenge Karim with his opinions as an academician, and by this way prove his superiority over him in the eyes of his wife. The readers witness the vulnerable side of his character however much he seems to be sure of himself. At the end of the meeting, he felt defeated

by the activist Karim and ‘tucked’ his speech inside his folder ‘to save for another day’.

As the story improves, it comes out that the expected promotion will never come and Chanu highly experiences ‘the immigrants’ dilemma of belonging’ and realizes that his plans will never come true. He feels defeated and devastated by the disappointment of being denied by the new culture surrounding him. Actually, it is controversial whether he chose to play the defeated immigrant or it was just the conditions that dragged him to that point. In the beginning, he preferred to be contented with his past greatness; “I have a degree from Dhaka University in English Literature. Can Wilkie quote from Chaucer and Dickens or Hardy?”(Ali). However, boasting about the past was not sufficient to prosper in Britain. He insisted on focusing and also made his family focus on the dangers of the clash between Western values and their own. He explained his view about the issue to Dr. Azad in a conversation, about his son Raqib, who was going to die soon after; “I do not want him to grow up in this racist society. I do not want him to talk back to his mother. I want him to respect his father (Ali, 86)”. He said that the only way to provide it is to take him back ‘home’. As the conversation goes on, he talks about the ‘immigrant tragedy’ as an effort to justify his opinion of going back;

I am talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I am talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one’s identity and heritage. I am talking about the children who do not know what their identity is. I am talking about the feelings of alienation endangered by a society where racism is prevalent. ...(Ali, 88)

However, putting his ideals into practice was not as easy as he had planned. His idea of returning home was not welcomed by her family, especially by her rebellious daughter Shahana. She is the only physically reacting member of the family as an interpreter of the feelings of her mother and partly her little sister Bibi. She conflicts with her father nearly about everything. She wears jeans despite her father's strong opposition and she threatens her mother with running away if they try to take her back to Bangladesh. Through the end of the story, we see that her threats were not just indiscretions as she put them into action and ran away just a few days before Chanu had arranged the returning.

The difference between the two sisters is explicit during the course of the novel. Shahana is the rebellious second generation immigrant whereas Bibi seems to be more willing to the demands of her father. Chanu was teaching them Tagore poetry as the first step of their journey back to home. Shahana neither wanted to learn it nor she wanted to listen to Bengali classical music; in other words, she did not want to go back home and reminded her father each time that 'she did not ask to be born there'. Nazneen is used to tell her daughters stories from time to time and the story of 'How You Were Left to Your Fate' is Bibi's favorite whereas Shahana finds it very boring and wants another story from her mother.

When we trace Chanu from the beginning to the end, it is not difficult to see that he has a dual identity; on one hand, he is an individual with pretensions to scholarship, hopes to be respected by people, but on the other hand, he is a part of a 'group' that is disrespected and denigrated in many ways. His hybrid identity is

a tragedy because it can not get rid of the idea of white dominance and black submission. After his daughters grow up, he faces a new type of identity, properties of which do not exist in the old one. He had to accept the fact that his daughters were going to a multicultural school-as they are affected from the others- the kind different from the ones in Bangladesh. He had to give up teaching them the works of traditional Bengali scholars as the girls were not interested in any of them. As a father, he refused to make some changes in his identity for the sake of his daughters, instead, he preferred to talk about the good days that will come when they go back to their homeland. He ignored the reality that they did not know anything about 'the good days in the homeland' as they grew up in that host culture and they are in favor of the one they are used to.

By breaking away from the original culture, he was harshly confronted with the reality that he does not have power to cope with this situation. In the beginning, it was Chanu who had higher expectations in life, had an optimistic point of view whereas Nazneen was totally fatalistic. Later on, Chanu turned into the devastated one, while Nazneen was unexpectedly improving herself on the way to her self-discovery. Surprisingly, she succeeded to have positive experience and rejected the state of being in-between. She found herself a more moderate way. Her journey to Tower Hamlets began with her isolation from the outside world, but after some time, we see her gradual exploration of life outdoors. She was wise enough to use the cultural diversity to her advantage and constituted a new, stronger identity by using the values of the new culture and the one she already had.

We follow Chanu through his confessions about the things he did wrong. He confesses that however much he tried, he gained nothing in the end; “All these years I dreamed of going home a Big Man. Only now, when it is nearly finished for me, I realized what is important. As long as I have my family with me, my wife, my daughters, I am as strong as any man alive (Ali, 402)” He finally understood that while he was looking for more all those years, the real prosperity in life is his family, which he failed to stick together. His dreams of a new life failed, but anyway, he hopes to recover emotionally by returning to homeland. Unfortunately, he had to pack up all his troubles and took them back with him, even with more problem as he had to leave his family in London. He became the hero of the situation Gardner talks about; “..... certain perceptions of life in Britain, for those who have moved, their experience of life in the ‘promised land’ is often one of emotional pain and loss (Gardner 2002)”. His life back in Dhaka was not the same as he had dreamed before going back. In one of the telephone conversations, Nazneen asked him if his life is how he expected and Chanu answered her back with the famous saying of Heraclitus; ‘You can not step into the same river twice’. He understood that change is what is real, and the inevitable thing; permanence occurs seemingly and everything in the world is condemned to change.

Razia is one of the other Bengali immigrants in the neighborhood and she is the only friend Nazneen has. When we compare her to Nazneen, we can not say that she is also a self-improving character like the latter. She left all Bengali traditions behind, such as wearing a sari as she was ‘tired of taking little bird steps’. She reminds of Bhabha’s definition of mimicry. Similar to the mimic man

he describes, Razia behaves like a white person and appreciates his values but on the other hand she is aware of her difference from the other because of her race. She is indistinguishable from the ordinary 'Western type' in appearance, which is ironic since she can not claim to be Western as a dark-skinned Bangladeshi immigrant in the eyes of 'other's. In fact, she is not a strong character; she prefers to ignore the misfortunes she and her children have to come across and goes on her way as if there was no problem. She has two children; Tariq and Shefali. Tariq became a drug addict and it took a long time for Razia to accept it. There seems to be no sense of danger in Razia's world at first glance but she was not able to protect her son from the dangers of the outside world. She had to confess everything when the furniture in the house was all gone. Her perception of being a Westernized mother was wrong; she led her son out of home and provided him a limitless freedom without thinking the consequences. Her process of Westernization was much more in appearance rather than a type of cultural plurality; she had a 'breakfast bar' in her house, she was using slang while talking, was wearing trousers and sitting "like a man, right ankle resting across left knee and the big black shoe nodding up and down" (Ali, 96). The only thing she carried to her new life from the old one was gossip. She says that it was the Bangla sport and she loves to do it.

Her identity transformation was different than Nazneen's, however, it is undeniable that she contributed much to her friend's self improvement although she was not able to apply the same to her own life. She functions as a mother for Nazneen during her transition period from the traditional to the modern. Nazneen can talk about her affair with Karim to Razia. She was aware of the opportunities

of freedom in that host country just from the beginning and was a great support to Nazneen from the beginning to the end. The book ends with her sentence which gives the clue about their new life in London without any limitations of their traditions; “This is England” she said. “You can do whatever you like” (Ali, 415)

Hasina is Nazneen`s sister and the readers are acquainted with her with the eloping event. .It worried Nazneen that ‘she kicked against fate’ (Ali, 10), which was not possible for her no matter what happens. She came on stage as the strong willed sister in the beginning. She revolted against her fate and ran away with her lover but in the end, what she gets is not victory but misery. She also ran away from her violent husband, then she was raped, started to work in a factory, led an immoral life for a while and finally was rescued by a wealthy couple who employed her as a nurse maid. However, her rebellious character did not leave her; although she was kindly behaved by her employers, she preferred to run away with the cook of the house. Through the course of the novel, the reader traces her struggling with the hardships which are the results of her choices. The information about the flow of her life comes from the letters she wrote to Nazneen by which we have the chance to see the huge differences between the lives of the sisters. Both of them struggle to lead lives other than the ones prescribed for them but they ended up in divergent ways. Hasina stands as a failing character in the book and what happened to her is left ambiguous by the author. Her struggle against her fate ended up with misery; it is not difficult to guess that she can never succeed the thing her fatalistic sister did.

Mrs. Islam is another character who is a perfect hypocrite and representative of the corruption in society. The first information about her comes from Razia that she was a 'usurer'. She says she gives the money to people 'from the goodness of her heart' but people understand the reality when they borrow some from her. No matter how much they pay back, it is never sufficient to settle the debt. The rumors about her and her sons were dreadful; the brothers were going to bars and behaving immorally. One of them was said to have illegitimate children from a white girl and the other was said to be in prison for some time in the past because of an assault or fraud. What is interesting is that Mrs. Islam is very successful in perceiving people that the "rumor surrounded them but it did not touch them" (Ali, 372). She said the money they collect from people was for madrassa and complained that nobody cared about it. Nazneen and Chanu had the same problem with her; the more they paid back, the more she wanted. Nazneen, who became the woman of strong will in time, objected her and told she was not going to pay any more *riba*.

Mrs. Islam and her sons stand for the totally corrupted type of immigrant identity which is in no way connected to the idea of multiculturalism. They represent Fanon's national bourgeoisie as they had adopted all Western values that the colonizers use to oppress the natives and they maintain the mission of the colonizers in their society. They have unjust income as they exploit their compatriots with the never-ending interest they demand. They are in a state of "mental slavery" and they try to control people to the same extent the colonial masters do.



## CHAPTER 5

### 5.1- UNDERSTANDING ELIF SHAFAK'S NOTION OF IDENTITY

#### IN THE LIGHT OF HER PERSONAL BACKGROUND

“Is the writer the one who belongs nowhere?” wrote Edward said in his autobiography *Out of Place*. If it is so, it might be easier to find a way for a better understanding of mutual dependencies between individuals and nations, and also it would be quite useful in resisting the discourses of nationalism that close the doors to other cultures. If we asked the question above to Elif Shafak, ‘the woman of color’, she would definitely say yes as an answer. She is a prominent multicultural woman writer in Turkey where patriarchal discourse is dominant, and the country is ‘home’ for people in great numbers utterly defending nationalist discourse and are brought up with national feelings. She is widely criticized by Turkish nationalists because she wrote her fifth novel, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* in English, and she is accused of betraying her nation.

Actually, writing her novel in English surprised a lot of people because it was the first time a woman writer did it since the time Halide Edip Adivar, one of the prominent novelists of the time the Turkish Republic was founded, had written her novel *The Clown and His daughter* in English, and published first in London. Shafak is charged with some sort of cultural betrayal; “While my nationalist critics kept asking where would I now belong, ‘either to Turkish or to English Literature?’, I believe their question is wrongly and rigidly formulated. I believe it

is possible to be ‘both.... and ...’ instead of ‘either.... or ...’ in this world or at least in the world of fiction” (Shafak, 2005).

Elif Shafak is a controversial name in her ‘homeland’ not only because of the reason stated above. She is also one of the few courageous scholars discussing some political taboos on which very few people dare to comment on or write about in the way she does. As it is known by everyone that her second novel written in English *The Bastard of Istanbul*, deals with the Armenian issue and she treated the subject with an explicit sense of empathy, thus, she was accused of ‘denigrating Turkishness’ and put on trial. She was later acquitted of the charge.

The basis of her writings is away from all stereotypes and any kind of prejudice, she tends to bring together the old and the new, both traditionally and linguistically. It is ironic that she is appreciated neither by traditionalists nor by reformists in Turkey because each accuses her of being on the ‘other’’s side. In fact, she is a perfect reformist –but not like the ones totally rejecting the old-: Unlike the other writers whose books are translated into other languages, she changed her surname from Safak -with a tilde under S- to Shafak when her books started to be published in English. The reason is that she thinks she is not the same person while writing in English, so she renames herself for the English publications of her books. It is not a betrayal to leave the tilde under S as some of the Turkish nationalists claim rather she regards it as a richness. Her decision to write a novel in English is extraordinary, and what is more, it is interesting that she decided to do it in that way just after she had started to dream in English. By doing so, she took a risk and wrote the second novel that is written in English in

Turkey, after a long period after the publication of the first one. It may be regarded as a risk because of two reasons; first of all, she might have guessed the reactions of nationalists and the situation is open to prejudice. The second thing is that writing in another language for the first time is an ambiguous thing in the beginning as there is the possibility that the author may not reach the same quality in her expressions as her readers are used to. However, Shafak is in favor of ambiguity, not certainty, and she won great acclaim for her book and was greatly supported by both academics and the public. As she successfully reached her goal, she consolidated her image of being a 'multicultural writer' in a country where monoculturalism is the dominant force.

## **5.2- CULTURAL LOCATION OF THE NOVEL**

America is the 'world of wonders' for most of the people and there are lots of people who watch for an opportunity to take a refuge in there whether by legal or illegal means. Today, the place is the first option for young people who want to obtain their higher education, and every year, a great number of them arrive in there from different parts of the world. It is the society of migrants and suits people whose past was somehow wounded. Generally, in the other parts of the world, people have strong connections with their roots, culture and familial ties, and the feeling of continuity is demanded. However, the situation of the migrants in United States is different; they come into a 'melting pot' in which differences are eliminated and the dominant culture is imposed on anyone either instantly or gradually. There are some who are able to deal with this monotony but the psychological process can be very devastating for them. Shafak's novel

deals with those types of people; It is the story of 'others' in a foreign country, they are either on the threshold of alienation or just experiencing it. In the beginning, each of them feel restless because of this alienation psychology but later on, in order to get rid of this feeling, they make an effort to create a family as they are consoled by the existence of each other. Other than this, Shafak also talks about people who experience 'exile as a state of mind': One of her characters has a constant feeling of 'displacement' despite living in her homeland. As the story develops, we trace the steps of her characters' transformation; they somehow learn to welcome the interference of other cultures into theirs, and make a way to go on their lives with much plurality. However, it is controversial to what extent they are able to hold together their past and present.

The book is a post 9/11 story and Shafak tries to explain to readers what it means to be an outsider in America. She says that in the post-9/11 world, where identities and labels have become much more important than before, what people need to say is; 'your pain is my pain'(TNYT). The novel questions the idea of national, religious and cultural belonging. The characters are lonely and foreign in terms of their religions, cultures and languages. She indirectly attracts our attention to the divisions in the American society after the demolition of the Twin Towers. Two of the prominent characters in the book are Muslims and one of them experiences the difficulty of being a Muslim after 9/11 in United States. She not only talks about Muslims but also Americans who feel displaced in their homeland.

Shafak`s book opens with lines taken from the *Mathnawi*. There are two

birds from different species but have something in common; both are lame and they have been somehow unable to fly with their flocks and so, chosen to fly together. Shafak also uses this example in one of her essays, as an objection to a similar example given by Omer Seyfettin, one of early 20<sup>th</sup> century authors in Turkey, with a contrary discourse. The leading character in one of his stories asked; “Did you ever see an eagle fly with a crow?. The answer is negative as “every bird flies within its own flock” according to him. (Shafak, qantara). By comparing these two voices, one of which is nationalist whereas the other is an embracing one, Shafak points to people of both kinds;

On the one hand are the ones who believe that they are in no need of , if not better than, others. They want to live with and within people who are just like them; people with the same religion, the same geneology, and the same prospects. They have little faith in ‘foreigners’. On the other hand are those who believe that we are all dependant on one another financially, culturally and socially that there exists no room in this world for uncompromising nationalism but only for constant give and take between nations and peoples. (qantara)

Generally, the people who are ‘foreigners in a foreign land’ have a common psychology. As soon as they go to another country for whichever reason, they tend to look for compatriots and until finding one, they prefer to hang around alone, refusing to communicate with others. Shafak evaluates it as an ‘ego-centered’ type of behavior as everyone wants to see just a reflection of himself / herself in the mirror. The citizens of host countries also have the same psychology the example of which was seen in France. There is a certain discrimination against the migrants in the country. They do not want to accept those people as French

even if they were born there and have the French passport. They are regarded as the 'other' as long as they have a darker skin or an Eastern name.

Shafak is not in favor of the term 'cultural mosaic' as she thinks it is a dangerous metaphor. However much the pieces of mosaic seem equal to each other, actually there are ghettos in it; each piece is distinguished from the other with borders. What is needed to talk about is the metaphor of 'ebru', which is an Ottoman art, and in which the colors are combined with each other in harmony. (Sazak 2005). A healthy communication with people is only possible when the discrimination between "those we know" and "those we do not know" disappears, and thus surpassing all national and nationalistic boundaries.

### **5.3-THE SPIRITS ON THE THRESHOLD: THE ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL IN THE LIGHT OF THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY**

*The Saint of Incipient Insanities* tells the story of a group of young people coming from different countries, members of different cultures and religions, and Shafak focuses on multiculturalism, in-betweenness, displacement and clash of identities through the frame of the characters' intersecting lives in Boston.

The novel opens with that scene; Omer, a post-graduate from Turkey, is sitting in a bar with Abed from Morocco, complaining to him about the differences English made to his life –actually his name-. He feels the pain of losing the dots in his name as he had carried them during the twenty or more years

until he came to United States. In fact, it is not just the dots he lost; seemingly it is his culture, his familial ties but actually it is the feeling of displacement which he surpassed all those years he stayed in that country. This uneasy feeling came out as an indirect confession under the pretext of losing the dots.

The story starts in The Laughing Magpie bar, and later on, it goes back in time, to the period when Omer first came to Boston for Ph.D. He is supposed to be a Muslim as he is Turkish but he somehow became an agnostic, actually which is typical of many of his generation , who, most of their lives did not need to call themselves as ‘Muslim’ due to the reason that they did not feel as one at any point in their lives. He is part of the Turkish culture in which –generally- the people are too busy to prove that they are different from the other Muslim countries. He denies his Muslim identity not with his words but with his life and habits. As a matter of fact, he was not even a “Muslim in heart” which is used to define the non-practicing members of the religion; the expression just refers to their cultural identity. Omer is too much away from being a practicing Muslim as he is introduced to the reader as a blind drunk who had passed his last five hours in a bar, besides, he is away from being a Muslim as a piece of a cultural identity.

In the conversation they had in the bar, Omer calls Abed as ‘spider-minded’ which is a very common expression in Turkey used by so called reformists and leftists to describe devoted Muslims. Abed accepts this expression but calls himself ‘pious’ Muslim whereas Omer is a ‘lost’ one according to him. Shafak describes Omer’s ambiguous position in life in the very beginning of the book;

“Lost” was precisely what he was, and what he had been more than anything for the last five, ten, fifteen years of his life...a graduate student of political science unable to accommodate himself either inside the torrent of *politics* or on the little island of *scientists*; a new-to-the-job husband finding it hard to breathe amid the flora and the fauna of the marital institution; an expatriate who retained a deep sense of not being home here, but not knowing where that home was anymore, even if he had had one sometime in the past; a born Muslim who wanted to have nothing to do with Islam or with any other religion whatsoever; a staunch agnostic less because he denied knowledge of God than because he denied God knowledge of himself...(Shafak, 14)

With all his dualities, Omer very well fits into Shafak`s definition of ‘being on the threshold’. He is a man of non-belonging; he dislikes the idea of being either ‘this’ or ‘that’-just as Shafak does-. Thus, in-betweenness is not a temporary situation for Omer, on the contrary, it is a philosophy of life.

Through her displaced and in-between characters, Shafak challenges the discourse about the dangers of standing on the thresholds which is a common superstition; the reason is that it is the ‘gathering place of the djinni’. She renamed her book for its Turkish publication as ‘Araf’ which is translated back in the English as ‘purgatory’ and takes place in the books of Muslims, Christians and Jews, and it nearly stands for the same meaning in all; it is the place for the ones whose good works and sins are equal and waiting for the Day of Judgment, and it is mentioned as a place ‘in-between’, between hell and heaven.

As a young Turkish man, Omer experiences this situation of being in-



between in terms of culture more than the others; Turkey or being a Turkish fits into the expression of 'threshold'. It is a common perception that when Turks go to the West, they are regarded as 'Eastern' or vice versa. On the one hand, in the eyes of other Muslim countries, Turks are not exactly Muslim but on the other hand, the citizens of European Union do not approve Turkey's membership because of its Muslim identity. There is a great number of people in Turkey experiencing this dilemma; as they try to be more Westernized in order to improve the country's image in the eyes of the West, they go away from their roots and usually, they end up with succeeding in neither. Omer grew up as a stranger to his own culture and when he came to Boston as one, he realized that he is not that much 'foreign' to it. He is listening to post-punk, he is a coffee addict like many of the Americans, instead of tea which is usually the first option of a Turkish for a hot drink. Similar to many young people at his age, he is well educated but has no idea about his own culture. Due to that reason, he feels no connection with his past, other than rare flashbacks to the times he spent with his cousin.

It did not take long time for Omer to realize how much he was familiar to the American culture as he grew up under the effect of it even if he was not aware of the situation. There are various factors that helps to improve this familiarity; especially the 'S factors';

He already was an avid fan of *Seinfeld*, a devoted *Sandman* reader, addicted to *The Simpsons*, ..... an ever- great devotee of *Southpark* and everything in and around it, a well trained admirer of the queen of punk, Path Smith.... Given his relentless coffee- holism, he was

ready to become an instable customer of Starbucks. .... As the list expanded in a similar vein, he seemed relatively well-equipped with regard to S-factors. (Shafak, 74)

Like many of young people in Turkey, may be also in other countries, that popular culture is imposed on people by the help of technological devices and by the time, it turns into a life style for most of them. However, as we follow his life in the United States, we see that those factors have not prepared him for life in that foreign country. In addition to his familiarity with American culture, he was differing from the other Turkish migrants who came to the country for similar reasons. He does not like the idea of being included into a 'network of Turkish friends'. Actually, it is the current situation for all the other migrant groups coming from the same country. They tend to create similar national networks and by this way, they start the 'othering' process just in the beginning. Omer 'preferred to remain outside flocks' (Shafak, 81) and as a result of this, became the housemate of two other post-graduates ; Piyu is a from Spain and he is at dental school despite his fear of sharp objects, and Abed is from Morocco; he is working on biotechnology engineering and he is a man of argument. Both of them attend the same university.

Although they come from different cultures and traditions, Abed and Omer have a common point; they are both Muslims. However, the perception of being a Muslim to the two is totally irrelevant. This difference came out in the first morning at the breakfast table. Abed was surprised when Omer does not mind pork and he realizes that his Islam is nothing more than a simple word written in his identity card. He was also an alcohol addict. As the time went by,

they got used to each other and discovered that they suffered from similar experiences of ‘the difficulty of being a non-American in America’, and enjoy the multicultural ambience of their apartment.

It is fascinating and useful to witness the colorful dialogues that take place among these three eccentric housemates, but in spite of the common points they have, each of them experiences inner conflicts that they have difficulty in confessing even to themselves. For instance, Abed seems to be proud of his cultural values more than the two, but actually he feels so embarrassed when he comes across some Muslim girls wearing headscarves and causing some embarrassing acts –such as letting a baby crawl on the dirty floor- while the ‘others’ around are staring at them. Due to similar reasons, he feels shocked when he gets the news that his mother is coming to visit him. By an unlucky coincidence, her arrival is on the same day with a crazy party given by Piyu’s girlfriend in the house. However, much to Abed’s surprise Zahra, his ‘not-even-a-word-in-English mother’, keeps up with the situation easily, communicating with the guests and has a close interaction with all those people ‘she does not know’. It is obvious that Zahra is much more self-confident than his son. However much he tried to prevent her interaction with his friends, Zahra is unconsciously able to find a way to make contact with people around her, especially with Omer’s girlfriend Gail whom she had not liked in the beginning. Abed is irritated by Gail’s never-ending questions to his mother about his own culture because he thinks that she just pretends to be really interested in ‘her’. In fact, he is ashamed of his own customs and thinks that an American girl like Gail can not be curious about her ‘third world sister’.

The other housemate Piyu is a pious Catholic and the primary aspect of his personality is his obsession of cleaning. He says that he is irritated by the prejudices against Hispanics, but in fact he is ashamed of their attitude which makes people think that all migrants can make it there other than Hispanics. His inner conflict was about the attitude of his compatriots just as Abed 's, and it was also impossible for him to confess it. Although he is proud of his culture 'as a part of European civilization', he is not eager to keep up the ways of the ceremonial meetings that take place in the family of his girlfriend Allegra, who was born in the States as a child of her fifth generation immigrant parents. She has a huge family of aunties and Piyu is confused by the crowded family of his Mexican-American girlfriend in many ways.

Omer is not a man of settlement; he has a nomadic spirit. In the very beginning of the book, we learn that they –he and his wife- moved to a new house for a 'fresh start'. This situation reminded him of his ancestors' nomadic but happy life in the steppes of Central Asia. We find him yearning for those days and he is unable to understand their preference of settling down in "the land that would become the modern Turkey". "On the saddle of a man`s horse there was no room for family albums, ..... love letters, or adolescence diaries ...Only freedom that merits the name, so pure and plain, could ride a man`s horse (Shafak ,19). It is unexpected from a character like Omer who is drifted aimlessly in the flow of life to write a thesis titled "Blood, Brain and Belonging: Nationalism and the Intellectuals in the Middle East" with the supervision of famous literary critic Spivak who is one of the prominent scholars of postcolonial studies.

In the following pages, we are introduced to his wife Gail with her cats; West and The Rest. It is a reference to Stuart Hall's discourse about the issue as we understand from Omer's irritation of the male one- The Rest. "It was he that annoyed Omer most, with his insatiable hunger to be adored by the female cat" (Shafak, 25). In Hall's discourse, West is the model which 'the Rest' must go after. Actually this is also what irritates Shafak; she says that 'the Rest' is always in an effort to improve its image in the eyes of Western countries. The evidence of the situation in the novel is through Gail's observations when the couple paid a visit to Omer's family in Istanbul. Before coming to Turkey, she was;

ready to confront a series of political, international, religious, and historical questions about American foreign policy in the Middle East, the *clash of civilization*, ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, the West's delay in putting an end to the killings of Bosnian Muslims, prospects on the colossal issue of "Islam and woman," the war on Iraq, instabilities in the world oil market. (Shafak, 330)

Instead, much to her surprise, people in Istanbul had some different questions to ask a foreigner; "1. Where do you come from? 2. Do you like Istanbul 3. Do you like the food? It was as simple as that.... How do I look from outside?" (Shafak, 331). The situation is an explicit evidence of Hall's discourse. The privileged issue of the citizens of Eastern countries is to be liked by Westerners.

Despite being in the foreground with her psychological problems, it is certain that Gail is an intellectual but an extraordinary one. She is an admirer of Zizek, the Slovenian philosopher who is called as 'the Elvis of cultural theory'

because of his outrageous studies and opinions. She created a world where no one could reach her, even her husband. This extraordinary couple presents us an argument about identity and belonging in the frame of postmodern and postcolonial theories through the colorful dialogues between the two and among their group of friends over the course of the book.

Names have a crucial role in Shafak`s novel. She believes that names are not just combination of letters but deeper than that. She is fascinated by the Islamic tradition that as soon as the baby is born, his/her name is said into her ear “so that the name can sink in.” She also talks about the Jewish tradition that when a person is sick, they change the name of that person and by this way the sickness would follow the old name (Frank and Mc Donald 2005). So, according to Shafak, changing a person`s name is a crucial step for changing the point of view in life in order to understand the ones who are different.

Shafak is inspired by the plurality of names and regards it as a richness. It is also a part of her personal story that she published her books in English with a different surname. The reflection of this idea is explicit in her characters. Each of them has an affair with their names, either it is positive or negative. As it is stated in the beginning, Omer is suffering from losing the dots in his name as a reference to his anxieties related to his culture and identity. Piyu`s name is actually Joaquin but he wants to be called with the former “for some reason”; most probably it reminds him of an irritating side of his character in the past and by changing his name, he got rid of that feeling. Abed has no problem with his name as we understand it when he stated to Omer that it was “exactly what he wanted to be

called.” (Shafak, 92) It shows that he is not that much neurotic about his identity, in fact, more sure of himself than the others. Gail is the most interesting character in terms of her relationship with her ‘names’. She appears with several names in different parts of the novel. She did not like the idea of a stable identity with a constant name; she needed to change it. In the beginning, she is introduced to readers as Gail but as the story goes back in time, it comes out that she was Zarpanidit before. During one of her psychotherapy sessions –she has obsessive compulsive disorders, panic attacks and social phobia- she told her therapist that she envies the birds, not because of their wings just as everybody does, but because of their names as they have hundreds of them even for one species. (Shafak,57) Later on, she applies for a job in a newspaper and introduces herself as Gartheride.

Another important character in the book is Allegre whose experience in life is different from the others. She is of the fifth generation and was born and raised in United States, so her life presented a sense of continuity; there was no place for difficulties. The problem was that she was a plump girl when she was little and the never-ending diets turned into a traumatic bulimia. This weakness she feels inside led her to have two opposite qualities; On the one hand she is a perfect cook: It is as if her only purpose in life is cooking, on the other hand she suffers from bulimia: She can not fully enjoy the meals. There is a duality between her inside and outside; she eats and then she gives it back. Allegre`s situation suggests the idea that however much a person seems perfect, there is also a weak side completing it as every individual shelters opposites in his/her character. Anyway, Allegre plays the perfect woman and she is the person who

introduced all those characters to each other. She widens the three friend's social circle by adding another weird girl to their group; Her name was Debra Ellen Thompson-it was exactly what she wanted to be called as she did not like her name to be shortened by others-.

One of the most interesting parts of the novel is the scene in which all those people who seem to have no common points come together for Allegrè's birthday dinner; Omer, Abed, Piyu, Allegrè, Gail, Debra Ellen Thompson. It is a colorful, multicultural dining table. They try to find a common subject which each of them might have an opinion about it and, they started to talk about the fasting practices of Muslims. Actually, the thing going on was more than a conversation. Shafak describes the ambience perfectly; "... each on the alert like a sentinel....(Shafak, 143)" in case of possible attacks to their identity or nationality. They ordered 'six different dishes and six distinct soups' as if representing six different characters and Piyu suggested 'sharing' them each. It suggests the idea that they are open to interaction and they have something to share in life despite all the differences. They started to talk about the Muslim concept of 'sabr' which is 'patience'. Gail suddenly cut in the conversation. She talked about how Mexican, Filipino and Salvadoran people are exploited because of that 'sabr' thing they are talking about. She said that the worst thing about the situation is that they 'endure gratefully' because they are thought to do so by the 'fatalistic teachings'. Everyone around the table was shocked as none of them expected such political comments from that weird-looking girl; it is obvious that she was not an ordinary chocolate maker but an intellectual one.



The conversation went on between Abed and Gail; the former asked her suggestion and the latter answered with a radical proposal; to change their names, and in relation to it, trying to change their personality for a while. In other words, they would live like the 'other' and while doing that, they would learn to ignore the distinctive features causing all types of racist and nationalist feelings. From the way he answered Gail, Abed's irritation of his nation's image in the eyes of the West came out again. He reminded her of the expression 'Walking Bedsheets' which is used for Moroccan women in the famous movie *Casablanca*.

As the conversation progresses, more contradictions came out. Abed was talking about The Sufis and their state of trance, the reason of which is explained by Omer as 'hallucinogenic drugs, like mescaline or LSD or something (Shafak, 148). Abed was appalled and "looked in awe at his Muslim brother (148)." It is obvious that he is worried about Omer's unruly ways but at the same time, he is also worried about stereotypes of Arabs in America.

Despite all those conflicting ideas, what was good about that night was the situation that any of them was not in a struggle to prove his/her rightness. The situation was just like the example Elif Shafak gave in an interview about the acting of individual voices of instruments in harmony (Frank and Mc Donald 2005). The birthday dinner ended up with the gifts presented to Allegra; Two Muslim brothers, Omer and Abed, bought a pearly cross at the end of a golden chain.

Gail has a different kind of struggle in life. She had no multicultural

background and while her friends were dealing with the difficulty of ‘being a stranger in a strange land’, she experiences ‘exile as a state of mind’. She feels less at home than her friends. Although she seems to dislike stability, she looks for peace and this act of searching causes her to travel in the margins and to jump from one thing to the other. She tries to find fulfillment in the feminist rites, Thai Chi and Reiki séances and even right beside Abed`s mother Zahra.

In the process of searching for fulfillment, Gail was asking some questions to Abed about his religion, just in the way she asked to Zahra about Eastern culture. It is as if she had found the thing she was looking for all those years as she was finding peace in her conversations with Abed. She wanted him to tell her about ‘the notion of hell’ in Islam but she was much more interested in ‘the thing about the books’. Abed tells her “he who is given his book in his left hand will be burned in the fire of Hell (Shafak, 294).” It is ironic that Omer-who is her husband at that time-was so indifferent to that conversation as a Muslim.

After a while, the couple paid a visit to Omer`s family in Istanbul. It was difficult for Gail in the beginning as she had so much prejudiced information about the country;

She was trying to learn new things about Turkey while at the same time trying to unlearn some old Things –Midnight Express-, human rights violations, the Kurdish question, bits and pieces of tarnished Information she had a sound feeling the Turks would not like to be reminded of. (Shafak 326)

However, later on, she adored the city especially because of the ‘concoction’.

There were two faces of the city; On the one hand there is the “beautiful scenery,.... a landscape of sea of bottomless indigo with picturesque mosques” and on the other hand is the “grimy, narrow, snaky streets, tangled, crammed, crumbled houses with windows wide open onto the life throbbing outside....” (Shafak, 327) Gail was mesmerized by ‘the complexity of her ugly majesty’. As she is the woman of dualities, she liked the dual sides of the city and found a reflection of herself in the city.

As a person experiencing ‘being a stranger in her homeland’, she quickly noticed the same kind of people in Turkey. There are two categories as far as she observed; in the first there are more Western and modern people who were highly educated whereas in the second, there is a group who are less Western and ‘less in power’. The members of the first category are regarded as ‘tourists’ in the eyes of the others. However, what is more interesting than this duality is that no matter what category those people belong to, the only thing they care is the same; how is their image in the eyes of a foreigner? The people are suffering from the hierarchy of nationalities, from which Shafak also personally suffered; the school she attended in Madrid was a cosmopolitan one and she had to deal with the discrimination and the cruel expressions of her classmates. “Being a Dutch or English was most prestigious. An Indian girl and I in the class were in the lowest ranks. I will never forget the children shouting “Pope killers” when they had heard that I was Turkish. It was just after a Turkish terrorist had intended to kill the Pope (Chancy 2003).” It was not important for the ‘others’ what kind of girl she was. Her nationality was a step further. She was just an outsider in the eyes of her friends and interestingly, she had a similar feeling when she had come back to

Turkey. She felt as a latecomer in her homeland just like the leading character of her novel; her feeling of 'being a stranger in a strange land' never totally disappeared (Chancy 2003)

Gail adored Istanbul, especially by the view of the Bosphorus Bridge which very well depicts the position of the country as a place in-between; As the taxi was going along the bridge from where Istanbul appears with all its beauty as a city established on two different continents, Gail felt that she certainly belonged that place as a person who feels connected to nowhere in the world. The bridge was neither in Asia nor Europe, just in the middle and for this reason she preferred to stay there eternally; she committed suicide in this inbetweenness.

The relationship among those people who came together with a common feeling of belonging somewhere developed gradually but then lost despairingly. In the beginning, those friends tried to challenge to each other's identities which were constituted before but as a result, they realized that they are in a state of questioning their own identities and prejudices. Those people some of whom were awarded for their success with scholarships and who are regarded as successful with the things they have done in life unite in the common property of having disordered psychologies. Shafak skillfully depicts the psychology of her characters who live in a foreign land and a foreign culture and their never-ending quest for finding a solid ground. It is controversial whether they have been successful or not but by committing suicide, Gail remains in the minds of the readers as the most extraordinary of all; She moved from one obsession to another and the place she chose as her final destination was somewhere away from her

'homeland'. Omer strikingly questions her situation in the end of the novel with a sentence which stands as the essence of whole book;

She won't die. No she will not. People do not commit suicide on other people's soil, and this is not her homeland. But did she ever have one? Who is the real stranger- the one who lives in a foreign land and knows he belongs elsewhere or the one who lives the life of a foreigner in her native land and has no place else to belong?  
(Shafak,350-351)

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **6.1-COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO NOVELS**

Elif Shafak and Monica Ali are two gifted writers whose paths at some point cross but who also differ in other ways. They are propped by the publishing industries as prominent multicultural contemporary writers both inside and outside their countries as their books are translated to a dozen of languages. Their personal stories are multicultural and as a result of it, they skillfully told the stories of people who lead their lives in cultures not their own. Their books are about ethnic identities and the confusion the characters experience, and the theme of change and constancy is predominant in their works. Both novels include interactions of contradictions; health-mental disturbance, sadness-happiness, love-hatred, anger-sympathy, optimism-pessimism and so on. These are the feelings that the characters in both novels move constantly from one to the other.

To start with, the settings of the two novels are two separate countries; Shafak's story takes place in the ethnically mixed country of America where the immigrants are supposed to assimilate and fit into the theory of 'melting pot'. The members of different ethno-religious communities go there and they tend to focus on the common points of them with the people around and assimilate their differences. Can Dunder, one of the prominent Turkish journalists, uses the metaphor of vegetable soup for United States. Different vegetables are put into a pot, boiled and the soup is cooked; there is the taste of each vegetable in the soup but they turned into another thing with their appearance and their taste (Dunder 2005). The situation is a bit different in England where the story of Monica Ali takes place; the country claims to be a multicultural one especially with the latest state politics in terms of protecting the rights of minority groups, and making them feel that their cultural values are as important as the culture of the majority in the country. The situation is also stated by Andrea Levy; "Britain is finally beginning to gather up its more distant voices and listen to the rich stories that they have to tell, stories that are as central to the history of Britain and of British Literature as anything that we are not familiar with" (Levy 2004)

The second thing I want to focus on about those novelists is their approach to multiculturalism; it differs in some ways. Shafak prefers to bring together the extraordinary inhabitants of the 'global village' in a story; the characters are from different parts of the world; America, Turkey, Morocco, Spain and there is also a Mexican-American. They come together under one roof and discuss issues about their ethnic roots, the state of foreigners in America, cultural relativity of religious matters and so on. As their discussion and interaction among them improves they

realize that they come up with very similar things although they had lived in completely different cultures and countries until the time they came together in a foreign land. They learn to respect each other's way of lives and realize that there is something to be learned from each other as individuals whose stories, pasts and names are different from each other.

The situation is a bit different in *Brick Lane*. Monica Ali's Tower Hamlets is inhabited by Bangladeshi immigrants and it is not possible to see the traces of any other nationalities. However, she is able to depict the process which the immigrants had to experience whether by assimilating into the corrupted side of British culture or by succeeding to establish a new identity by composing the old and the new. The journey of Ali's characters on the way to reach the knowledge of 'the self' is accompanied by some unseen factors which the author does not directly mention but makes the reader feel deep inside. For instance, the reader never has direct access to the factors that lead to Shahana's emulation of British ways of life other than magazines and television. There is no clue about the outside world that Chanu or the daughters are in interaction with.

In relation to this factor, there is also another difference between the two works. The characters in Shafak's novel come into a culture to which they are already familiar with. Soon after they had come to America, they realized that they were not foreign to the culture of the country as they had thought to be. They grew up familiar to the elements of American culture by the help of technological devices. However, the positions of Azad family and other Bangladeshi immigrants are different; they had come out of a culture which has nothing to do

with the one domineering in London. Nazneen was a simple village girl from Dhaka and so were the other Bangladeshi women in the area. The only person who has a bit familiarity with the culture of the host country was Chanu who had been living there for some time before he got married.

Despite the differences between the two novels in terms of their style and cultural location, there are also some similarities. In both works, we read the lives of people who are living in a culture of not their own and somehow in a state of cultural plurality. Ethnic and cultural identities of the characters are so various that the situation provides some kind of imaginative freedom to both of the writers that they willingly mix customs and vocabularies of their characters; the result is fascinating in both works.

Another common point of the characters of both novels is that other than their physical journey to other countries, they are in a constant state of a psychological journey in which they are in an effort to find the things they are looking for; a place to belong, a discovery of the self or feeling at home wherever the place is. It is possible to say that Ali's characters are more optimistic and more successful than Shafak's as they are certain about their purpose in life. Nazneen, Razia and the daughters succeeded to go on their lives as a result of astonishing self improvement other than Razia's failure about Tariq. Chanu seems to be a losing character, but in fact, as a person who saw his failure, we can say that he is also able to discover his true identity. On the other hand, Shafak's characters are more pessimistic with lesser expectations in life. Seemingly, most of them reached their goal at the end of their journey; Gail committed suicide just in the



place she wanted, Abed succeeds to feel more adopted to American culture than before whereas he also feels connected to Morocco as much as he used to. However, we can not say that they are totally successful; Omer ends up losing not only his wife but also his direction in life -did he ever have one?-. Allegre and Piyu had to face the harsh face of the reality in the end, that the latter discovered his girlfriend's bulimia; their end is left ambiguous by the author.

The only similarity among the characters of the two novels is between Abed and Chanu. From the beginning to the end of their stories, they function as 'chronic complainers' about the stereotypes of their nations in diaspora; Chanu is ashamed of the Bangladeshi women in the neighborhood as they are ignorant and dowdy in appearance. He does not want his wife to be friends with them. Similarly, Abed is irritated from the stereotype of Arabs in America. He is ashamed of women wearing headscarves and causing humiliating deeds in the eyes of the Americans. Both are educated men; Chanu has a BA degree in English Language and literature and Abed is working on biotechnology engineering but this state of being educated do not prevent them to have inferiority complex – similar to Mannoni's idea about the issue-about their state of belonging to an Eastern country.

However, there are differences between the two men; despite being Muslim, they differ in terms of practice. Chanu's religion is just a word written in his identity card as he does not do his prayers, even drinking alcohol. Abed is different; although we do not witness his prayers, he is careful about the prohibitions of Islam, preferring to hang on his religion among the multireligious

friends surrounding him.

There is another similarity between the two novels in terms of the lack of two synchronous factual events in the course of the novels; *The Brick Lane Bombing* and 9/11 events. First of all, in Shafak's book, Omer came to Boston in mid-June 2002, after a short period of time suicide attacks had occurred. Boston is the city where the planes took off and crashed into buildings of World Trade Center and Pentagon, caused the death of three thousand or more civilians and following that, the event caused a great amount of hatred against Muslims in and outside the country. The event functioned as a tool to increase the racist and divisive discourse in the United States and some other parts of the world. In the novel which includes two predominant Muslim characters, there is not a tiny reference to the event. It is interesting that the novel characters, especially Omer who writes a thesis titled "Blood, Brain, and Belonging: Nationalism and the Intellectuals in the Middle East", do not talk about the growing hatred against Islam in the post 9/11 America although they frequently talk about cultural and ethnic issues.

The situation is similar in *Brick Lane*. In 1999, bombs exploded in the Brick Lane area of London which is the historic home of immigrants, especially Bangladeshis for a long time. The time line of *Brick Lane* intersects with the time of Brick Lane bombing. Azad family and the other inhabitants of the area would have witnessed the dreadful racist attack. However, Ali does not talk about a simple detail about the event. It should have been an indispensable event to talk about in a novel which talks about the lives of Bangladeshi people living in Brick Lane.

## CONCLUSION

In contemporary world literature, issues related to identity and ethnic minorities are highly demanded both by the readers and the writers. The problems of people in diaspora are told through fiction works and they affect the readers more than the political debates. The stories of characters who falter among different cultures teach people something very essential for a society: It does not give good results to impose a certain identity on people. When individuals are set free to be whatever person they want to be, it is possible to create cosmopolitan societies which embrace people regardless of their ethnic roots or nationalities.

This thesis contributed much to my personal development; it widened my perspective about multicultural and multidimensional societies. The issue that is discussed in this work is universal and currently debated throughout the world both by the politicians and historians as well as by the literary critics.

In another research, I would like to widen the frame of my research to cover the works of other ethnic writers such as; Jamaica Kincaid, Nuruddin Farah, Abdulrazak Gurnah and Zadie Smith to compare and contrast their use of the concept of identity and multiculturalism. I intend to analyze the psychology of the characters who deal with national and ethnic boundaries and how they are reflected on contemporary novels.

I would also like to study the works of woman writers such as Elif Shafak, Zadie Smith, Anita Desai to compare their approach to female characters to those of male writers in order to analyze the problems of being a woman in male dominated societies.

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