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Analysis of Themes in Monica Ali's Brick Lane

Bachelor's Thesis

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Declaration

I declare that I have written my bachelor thesis independently under the guidance of my supervisor and that I used only sources listed in the bibliography.

Olomouc

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is going to focus on themes of assimilation and immigrant identity, along with impact of sexism and racism in diasporic communities, through lens of migrant literary theory and feminist theories in relation to Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*.

Postcolonialism and its aftermath has shaped the way we view Britain today, not only from the standpoint of economy, politics, and culture, but it also has its fair share of influence in literature. Some might even go out of their way to say that it is the most defining subject in 21st century literature, since it has impacted such a large part of the world. This thesis is going to focus on novel *Brick Lane*, and analyse themes tied with postcolonialism, namely, loss of identity, self-definition, belonging, racism, and feminism. I aim to find and elaborate on these themes in *Brick Lane*, in connection with the respective theories, and compare different responses to similar circumstances in various characters.

Firstly, I will introduce terms "Migrant Literary Theory" and "Feminist Theories", which serve for elaboration of several themes dealt with in *Brick Lane*. Secondly, I give space to the introduction of the author and a short summary along with the background information on the release of the mentioned novel. Subsequently, I move to the main part of this thesis, the examination and analysis of the concrete themes. The chapter on the importance of fate will mostly focus on the main character's perception of fate and its effect on her self-definition and assimilation. The chapter on assimilation and immigrant identity ponders upon different ways of first- and second-generation immigrants connecting to a new society and culture, using characters from the novel to examine various outcomes. Lastly, I would like to discover and analyse feminist themes in not only the main character Nazneen, but also multiple minor female characters and identify their connection to the issues of sexism in Islamic religion both in London, as a frequent place of migration, and Bangladesh.

1.2 Monica Ali

In literature, which deals with loss of identity and transition between two worlds, with different views, customs and values, there is need of a certain type of mediator. Monica Ali is a British novelist born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, her father being Bengali and her mother English. Ali's family had to escape the civil war in Dhaka, and they fled to England, when she was three years old. Ali's origin along with being raised in Britain enable her to see both sides of the barricade with credibility. This fact is consequently reflected in her works. "*Brick Lane* could be said to be a novel that centers on the notion of translation-the bearing across of words, identities, and cultures..." (Cormack 2006, 708). She is capable of breaking barriers using her faculty and allowing the reader to comprehend the presented issues. Her novels do not only have engaging stories, witty dialogues, and scenes depicted with hauntingly detailed description, but its depth rises mainly from intricate characters, whose background, behavior, aspirations, and beliefs enable the reader to grasp their perspectives, imagine them in the real world and understand their struggles. Ali has published five books thus far, starting her writing career in 2003 with her novel *Brick Lane*. The debut publication was given extraordinary recognition in the eyes of many critics and the public in Britain and around the world, receiving various prizes and nominations for the most prestigious awards such as the Booker Prize, the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and the George Orwell Prize. In addition, it was translated into more than 26 languages. This novel skyrocketed Ali into being described by *Granta* as one of the most promising young writers of the 21st century, however since then Ali's publications have not received as much critical praise. For example, Ali's third novel *In the Kitchen* spent significantly less time in the spotlight than the first hit publication. It received rather negative reviews, at times being called uninteresting and "... too long (as *Brick Lane* was), the writing is inconsistent, with a surfeit of cliché, but it's a serious and intelligent, if ultimately unsuccessful attempt at tackling the state of the nation." (Birch, 2009). One of the possible explanations for this critical underachievement could be the matter of authenticity. Unlike '*Brick Lane*', where the setting and plot resemble that of the author and various parts of the novel correspond to first-hand sources that Ali derived from. In an essay called "*Where I'm Coming From*", Ali answers the question of her inspiration for the novel *Brick Lane*. "I cite a number of factors. My experience, for instance, of conflict between first- and second-generation immigrants. The stories that my father used to tell about village life. A book of case studies about Bangladeshi women garment workers in Dhaka and the East End of London, disparate lives drawn together by the common goal of self-empowerment." (Ali,

2003). Whereas *In the Kitchen* is something more experimental for Ali, as Birch explains in the previously cited article, "...she takes risks that don't always succeed." She takes a route of analyzing similar issues from the perspective of, among others, mostly Eastern European view. If we were to compare the main protagonists with the author, we could say Ali has more in common with Nazneen than Gabriel, only considering ethnicity and gender. While this is the case, Ali simultaneously indicates that there is no direct reference to her family's lives in the plot and all the characters are fictional. Since then, Ali has released several novels, but none of them have reached the success of *Brick Lane*.

1.3 Migrant Literary Theory

The term postcolonialism is referring to nations, which were formerly oppressed by colonial nations, in this case, the United Kingdom. Britain became the most powerful colonial nation, claiming lands from all over the world, mostly countries in Africa and Asia, as their own for their economic prosperity. After the oppressed nations gradually claimed independence throughout the 20th century they were to reset and rebuild former imperial social, political, and cultural norms, which led to loss of identity and alienation across these societies. Theme of postcolonialism in the works of Ali is major and despite not being the only significant factor of the novel, we can safely say it is one of the most important ones. The complexity of the novel lies in the correlation of themes such as feminism, escapism, isolation, and loss of identity - both personal and community wise, with literary theories tied to postcolonialism.

The reality, that postcolonial studies have become too broad to address a variety of different issues, I decided to investigate themes analyzed in *Brick Lane* in a more specific and understandable way using a branch of postcolonialism called migrant literature. In other words, as Pourjafari and Vahidpour (2014) describe it, “literature of migration is considered by the critics to be a branch of it [Postcolonial literature] which investigates what happens when two cultures clash.” (682) Migration is a phenomenon having history of hundreds, if not thousands of years, but with the impact of colonialism, it has escalated its range enormously. It is necessary to define the difference between immigration and exile, crucial in the degree of free will, with immigration being voluntary and exile being forced upon the inhabitants. Another aspect of this distinction is also described by Carine M. Mardorossian (2002) – “migrant literature emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the past and present and the impossibility of return whereas the discourse of exile tends to focus on what was left behind and the possibility of return”. (17) People usually migrate to become more materialistically stable, for personal or social benefits. Migration has a massive impact from not only economical, and cultural standpoint, but also in forms of art such as literature, which lead to origin of academic theories of postcolonialism, namely a branch of it called migrant literature. Shailja Sharma (2001) stresses its importance when naming migrancy “the reigning trope of the twentieth century”. (597) Migrant literature centers around the idea, that the sheer relocation is just the first step, but it is rather the mental adaptation creating complications. This theory analyzes different experiences of immigrants and helps understand their way of living in a host country and investigates the reasons of leaving their home country in the first place. It shows immigrant’s separation from the newly joined society, along with the

impossibility of returning home at the same time, as it no longer exists in the way the individual experienced it, which leads to alienation. Therefore, migrant literature enables writers to be vocal about the emerging issues tied with joining entirely new society and culture, which include dissociation from identity, struggle with assimilation, displacement, sexism, and racism. The defining aspect in assimilation is often the level openness to new economic and socio-cultural standards, which is made difficult due to factors such as low employment opportunities, the language barriers and racism. Additionally, the frequent issues of discrimination of any kind lead to enhanced feeling of alienation in the host country, escalating the struggle to assimilate, with the immigrants resorting to solutions of returning to their home country, opting for complete closure from the outside world in their separated communities or escape through drugs, which is the case for dissociated second-generation immigrants mostly. The entirety of the aforementioned is the combination of some of themes discussed in *Brick Lane*, which are going to be referred to, consequently analyzed, and presented in detail later in this thesis with specific examples from the novel.

1.4 Feminist theories

Many studies have been made on current intentions and definitions of feminism, as it has shifted over the course of time, however the relevant definition for this thesis, given the context, is the original widely known meaning. As articles on today's definition of feminism has suggested, feminism means striving for equalization of rights, example of these include political power, equivalent compensation for work and fair and respectful treatment. (Jackson, Linda A., Ruth E. Fleury, and Donna A. Lewandowski 1996, 690) Feminism is also aptly defined by Bell Hooks (1984), as "...movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression." (24) This social and political movement has long history, beginning in 1920s with the first of four waves of feminism, which focused on women's suffrage. Although there has been enormous impact of feminism with visible improvement in women's rights, still in today's world, there are cultures, in which visible gender inequalities remain. Marziyeh Bakhshizadeh (2018) states in a chapter on gender norms in Islam, that "at the current situation of women in Iran as an Islamic country shows that women are still deprived of economic, political, and cultural rights." (11) Amongst many examples, this includes the necessity of permission to get married, women's evidence not taken as trustworthy in court and the tolerability of polygamy for men alone. Because religion is often regarded as an additional factor which contributes to the oppression of women, as the religious texts often depict women in a subordinate position, it is a significant concern in studies of feminism. (White 1992, 7) With relation to this, Iman Hashim (1999) also points out that: "Although these charges are levelled at all the major religions, Islam in particular has a reputation for being 'anti-woman' and for supporting a segregated social system where women are economically and politically marginalized." (7) Islamic cultures often oppose modern ideas of feminism, as Islamic scriptures and traditions clearly establish cultural roles for each sex, best fitting to their distinct natures. (Afshar 1985, 259) In modern Islamic feminism, different interpretations of the Quran are being identified, arguing that Islamic texts can be interpreted advocating for gender equality. (Hashim 1999, 11) As feminism is tightly connected to postcolonialism and migrant literature, Ali with her novel *Brick Lane* lays emphasis on themes of feminism in both in Dhaka and London. The oppression of women in Islamic religion is the particular focus of Ali's novel and in part of this thesis, using multiple female characters to illustrate gender inequalities.

2. Brick Lane

2.1 Plot Summary

The novel *Brick Lane* depicts a story from perspective of a young girl Nazneen, whom we see undergo assimilation in Britain as an immigrant from Bangladesh. She and her sister Hasina are children of a rich man, and they grow up in a small village called Gouripur. They have an especially religious mother Rupban, who spends most of her time weeping. Only later we find out that she committed suicide by falling on a spear out of jealousy, as her husband has affairs with different women, while she, as a woman, has no say in it. The sisters are separated when Nazneen is sent to London through an arranged marriage, while Hasina runs off with her boyfriend and is disinherited by their father. Nazneen's husband Chanu is much older and has lived in London for years prior. Chanu is a man striving for success, wealth, and respect, he spends most of his time reading, he has degrees from literature and philosophy, which he is very proud and boastful about. However, he is a much older man and certainly not what would a young girl hope for in a husband. They live in a part of London called Tower Hamlets, which is strictly Muslim inhabited. Nazneen is mostly not allowed to leave the house by herself and when trying to get a job or trying to learn some English, she is shortly reminded that it would be disrespectful for her husband and others would think he cannot provide for his family. She is also told that there is no need and time, as she is going to be raising children and keeping the household intact. Her only interactions are mostly women from the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets, her friend Razia and older woman Mrs. Islam. Their first son Raqib is born, which brings Chanu the idea of returning home, since he is afraid of the English society corrupting their first-born and with his patriarchic nature and escalating situation around terrorist attacks on the world trade center, it leads him to want to come to make this decision. Raqib stops breathing at night and dies. We hear from Hasina in letters to Nazneen, helplessly observing the terrible misfortune she has through the years as an abandoned woman in Dhaka. As time passes, Nazneen gives birth to two daughters, Shahana and Bibi, and Chanu makes a concession of buying a sewing machine for his wife to earn extra money to travel back to Bangladesh. Nazneen meets a young Muslim Karim through her job and falls in love with him. He seems to be everything her husband is not, seemingly knowing his place in the world, but after some time Nazneen finds out he likes her for the same reasons Chanu formerly did, which is being the authentic obedient village girl, not spoiled by the western society. Nazneen crumbles under pressure of the guilt from the affair, escalated by the situation between Chanu and his oldest daughter, as Shahana wants nothing

to do with Bangladeshi culture and does not want to travel to Dhaka, and she collapses. The time of Nazneen's recovery leads her to realize that her relationship with Karim is not what it seems like, since they both see in each other something they are not and want different things, upon which she ends the affair. Nazneen sees a man confident and happy in his place in life, only hiding behind insecurity and confusion about his identity and Karim sees a girl from a small village in Bangladesh, whom Nazneen no longer is. Mrs. Islam turns out to be a money usurer, whose victim ends up being no one else than Chanu, when he borrows money for the sewing machine and a computer, which delays their time of departure. Chanu is finally ready to take the step of travelling back to his home country, but it is soon obvious, that no other member of his family longs for that. Nazneen's husband cannot see himself staying in London, as everything he had hoped for failed and leaves the Tower Hamlets and leaves Nazneen to be the head of the family. Hasina fails to stay out of trouble and lastly, we hear about her, she quits her job as a nanny in a wealthy household and she runs off with the local chef. Karim travels back to Bangladesh to the roots, he had always felt closer to. As a year goes by, Razia and the daughters take Nazneen ice-skating, expressing their freedom and independence, ending the plot with Nazneen being able to enjoy herself, even while wearing a sari.

2.2 Praise and Controversy Surrounding *Brick Lane*

Even though *Brick Lane* is to this day the most successful book of Ali's, it also received a negative backlash. "Provoked in part by these successes, a group of angry men who presented themselves as residents of the neighborhoods around the real Brick Lane, the high street of the Bangladeshi area of the East End, staged protests and wrote letters condemning the novel, declaring anger at Ali's depiction of the area, at her tenuous connection." (Brouillette 2009, 427) There are instances, where the Sylheti group of Bangladeshis in Britain (Indian and Bangladeshi people from the area of Sylhet) is exposed to racially fueled stereotypes in the book. Nazneen's Bangladeshi husband Chanu is often very vocal in describing Sylheti people as uneducated and ignorant and forbids his wife from talking to them. "This area is very respectable. None of your Sylhetis here. If you see a brown face, you can guarantee it's not from Sylhet". (Ali 2003, 106) These depictions led to protests and demands for corrections of the book. "...the Greater Sylhet Welfare and Development Council, which represents many of Britain's 500,000 Bangladeshis, has written an 18-page letter to the author outlining their objections to the 'shameful' way the book depicts the community. They feel the book portrays Bangladeshis in Brick Lane as backward, uneducated, and unsophisticated." (Taylor 2003) The objections were not successful and were dismissed in the end. Another issue according to the Bangladeshi community was with the reality, that the author does not represent the Bangladeshi community and her perception of this reality is therefore not trustworthy and authentic, as Monica Ali speaks barely any Bengali and she has lived in Bangladesh only her first three years of life. Ali herself commented on this in a journal in 2003, "...the 'two camp' split in my case brings me back to the idea of the periphery. How can I write about a community to which I do not truly belong? Perhaps, the answer is I can write about it because I do not truly belong. Growing up with an English mother and a Bengali father means never being an insider. Standing neither behind a closed door, nor in the thick of things, but rather in the shadow of the doorway, is a good place from which to observe."

3. Examination and Analysis of the Themes

3.1 Importance of Fate

Since the day Nazneen was born, she was told that she owes her life to fate, that there is no point in fighting against one's fate, because it will find its way and punish her for not obeying. The novel's first pages reveal a story of how she was left to her fate as an infant. "As Nazneen grew she heard many times this story... It was because of her mother's wise decision that Nazneen lived to be the wide-faced, watchful girl that she was. Fighting against one's Fate can weaken the blood... Not once did Nazneen question the logic of the story... What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life." (Ali 2003, 15-16) However, fate for Nazneen is strictly her duties, something a good woman, daughter, wife, mother, friend, and sister is expected to do from society, religion or simply by someone else's expectancy. It is the only option in a small Bangladeshi village, especially for women. By these principles she strives to be the perfect version of a Bengali woman, even if it means to sacrifice her own happiness and to never expect improvement. It depicts the notion, that women in particular cultures, in this case concerning Islamic religion, tend to not have the gender equality, that the Western world has established in modern society. "On the whole, relative to non-Muslim areas, differences in gender status in the Muslim world are greater in modern times than they were in the past." (Keddie 1990, 78) Therefore, the mindset of not having her life in her own hands and letting life wave her around as other people please is, with the arrival in London and the mere possibility of self-exploration, gradually questioned by Nazneen's conscience, as she assimilates and grows more experienced, confident, and independent.

The reason I regard this theme so highly is that I would argue the subject of fate is central to the novel, as Nazneen's perception of it defines her as a person, helps her overcome sexist establishment and it shapes her identity. Therefore, in this chapter I will analyze Nazneen's assimilation and self-definition in regards with fate. Her view on this uncontrollable entity slowly transfers and her identity shapes into a strong and independent woman. This theme is thus also tightly connected to feminism, displacement, cultural assimilation, and loss of identity - motifs, which are also fundamental to the novel and important to more characters than just the main protagonist. Being raised with belief fate is essentially the sheer restriction, which separates Nazneen from making her own choices and living for more than just other people's demands.

Nazneen and her sister Hasina are clearly in contrast with each other concerning

viewpoint on fate. Unlike Nazneen, Hasina is especially spontaneous, disobedient, and reckless, perhaps her personality allows her to extricate herself of despair, which their mother presents them life to be. She elopes at a very young age for a love marriage, whereas Nazneen, like the dutiful daughter she is, obeys what was predestined for her and is selected for an arranged marriage. Much later in the novel we see Nazneen perplexed of the way Hasina views life. Unlike Nazneen, Hasina holds herself accountable for the choices she makes and does not blame fate. (Ali 2003, 340-341) This contrast almost leads us to the conclusion that even though Nazneen leads objectively happier and more stable life, she is contrarily less content, as she does not stay true to herself and stays imprisoned in her own existence.

“Life made its pattern around and beneath and through her.” (Ali 2003, 41) In spite of being separated from her life in Bangladesh, Nazneen is still at home in her mind, living in her memories and suffering, as her only entertainment is housework and making up interactions, while being isolated in an apartment for weeks. Nevertheless, she prefers to live in denial and does not allow herself to dispute the ways of fate. “If I were the wishing type, I know what I would wish”. (Ali 2003, 18) Due to the abrupt transition from everything she knew to nothing she knows, she ends up spending her days daydreaming about her home village. However, unlike other characters, she eventually makes progress in assimilating. Her reoccurring fascination with ice-skating on the television could be a metaphor for longing for independence and freedom. In the state of this confusing alienation, it shows sparks of curiosity in Nazneen, perhaps subconscious need for something new and freeing. Another example also depicts Nazneen’s stoic personality, needing the bare minimum to be seemingly content. “...the days were tolerable, and the evenings were nothing to complaint about [...] she flicked through the channels, looking for ice e-skating”. (Ali 2003, 41)

Just as Nazneen does, her mother, about whom Nazneen reminisces in her memories, also entrusts her life to fate. Amma sticks to hopelessness rather than action. She somewhat represents a person, who has given up on life, she feels helpless and drowns in depression as she believes that her purpose in life is to experience pain and hardship. “Just wait and see, that’s all we can do.” (Ali 2003, 46) She is most likely also the person who transferred this mindset onto her firstborn. Nazneen is, however, in a situation different than her mother, because unlike in her little village in Gouripur, where there is no other option than choosing to let fate decide. Living in London eventually allows her to slowly distance herself from the restrictions a woman would have in her home village. We could simultaneously assume that if Nazneen stayed in Bangladesh, her life would mirror her mother’s life, as their personalities

were somewhat similar at the start and London gave Nazneen the space to explore her own individuality. Nazneen's decision of taking, or not taking her ill son to the hospital, similarly to her mother's decision when she was born, makes her question the story of *How You Were Left To Your Fate* for the first time and form her own opinion. She used to admire her mother for her stubbornness and belief in God, but this experience moved her stance. "At once she was enraged. A mother who did nothing to save her own child! If Nazneen [...] had not brought the baby to hospital at once, he would have died. The doctors said it. It was no lie. Did she kick about at home wailing and wringing her hands? Did she draw attention to her plight with long sighs and ostentatiously hidden weeping? Did she call piously for God to take what he would and leave her with nothing? Did she act, in short, like her mother? A saint?" (Ali 2003, 135-136) With her own decision, her son's life was saved, and she did not let fate decide. This gave her trust in herself, however, Raqib shortly after dies, which makes Nazneen uncertain in her decision in the end. Was fate punishing her for not submitting, as her mother formerly did? The fact that she takes her mother as an alarming example, serves Nazneen at this point, since the anger fuels her to act oppositely and be decisive and independent.

When Nazneen falls in love with Karim, apart from remorse, it gives her self-esteem and feeling of worth. Karim's pseudo-radical views on the world and the will to act excite Nazneen, as he seems like the opposite to Chanu, he is also more religious and talks to Nazneen rather than at Nazneen. We can see the protagonist having transient moments of grasping escape from her fate, from her duties, her identity, her clothes, even her family. "...she was gripped by the idea that if she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well. [...] And if she had a tiny tiny skirt with knickers to match and a tight bright top, then she would. [...] For a glorious moment it was clear that clothes, not fate made her life." (Ali 2003, 278) But as a religious woman, Nazneen is in despair concerning the affair, but in no means capable of containing her love and passion. Instead, she blames it on fate. "How could such a weak woman unleash a force so strong? She gave in to fate and not to herself." (Ali 2003, 300) The logic behind belief in fate is different for Nazneen, as she usually thinks of it as a power not to be questioned, but this time she uses it for self-justification, even though she knows it is her own thoughts and actions. This serves as a confirmation of Nazneen's view on fate slowly shifting, realizing that her life is not uncontrollable anymore.

Nazneen finds compensation for belief in fate in her own identity and independent decision-making and every experience throughout the years in England strengthens her. At the end of the novel, we see sentimental dialogue between Nazneen and the daughters, implying

Nazneen's shift in identity, no longer wanting to rely on fate, not letting her life be controlled by anyone and letting go of her mother's hopeless mindset. Nazneen ceases to tell the story about How You Were Left to Your Fate, because it is too boring and there are better stories to be told.

3.2 Assimilation and Immigrant Identity

The process of assimilation for Islamic immigrants to the Western civilization is a difficult task, not only because of obstacles such as language barrier, cultural and social differences, and prejudicial hatred towards Islam, which especially increases after the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. Effects of which are incorporated into the plot of *Brick Lane*, as it shows global impact on innocent Muslim lives across the globe. It is also because of factors, as the immigrants themselves being afraid of modifying their identity with other cultures and preferring to preserve their original identity unaltered or being stuck in between the two cultures, resulting in alienation from both. Identity and assimilation of immigrants and their descendants is a theme heavily discussed in *Brick Lane* and described in most, if not all the characters. This chapter will elaborate on issues concerning identity and assimilation of first and second-generation immigrants.

First-generation immigrants differ in the extent they are willing to adapt their identity towards their new homeland and how their assimilation to the new country affects their life, upbringing of their children and overall happiness. Despite both characters of Nazneen and Chanu being first-generation immigrants, their identities in assimilation evolve oppositely. It could possibly be related to the age gap between Chanu and Nazneen, different values and personalities or gender, which cause different openness to assimilation. Whilst the last possibility is proved, when it is only the male characters feeling strongly bonded to the original societal setting and women are contrarily mostly content with the new country. Nazneen, as a young person, who does not particularly compare or judge other cultures, does not feel the need to resist any alteration of her identity, conversely, she is curious and wants to adapt, while also maintaining her original identity. She aims to embrace some of the advantages of the new country and develop so-called dual identity. Callan (2005) describes this as “additive acculturation, in which the ability to function in another culture is added to our repertoire of skills without displacing our prior cultural identity”. (471) Chanu’s only assimilation in England is the bare minimum he needs to make a living. With contempt of everything British, except literature, he barely steps out of the Tower Hamlets. A place, which for him, and other first-generation Bengalis, becomes a small Bangladesh in the middle of London. A comfort area, which obstructs them from the need of assimilation. Moreover, assimilating in any kind leads to exclusion and judgment from the Bengali community. Chanu is fearful of distorting his identity and he wishes for his wife the same, being as traditional as possible and without any western influence. He also fears public perception of not being able

to provide for his family or not having his wife under his control, claiming that her leaving the apartment, learning the language, or finding a job would result in him looking foolish. (Ali 2003, 45)

However, as Nazneen becomes more and more independent and has her own life in England, she realizes that her home is no longer in Bangladesh, but in Britain. “The village was leaving her”. (Ali 2003, 217) She ceases to dream about returning home and feels comfortable with her life in the big modern western city with all its conveniences. “When she thought of Gouripur now, she thought about inconvenience. To live without a flushing toilet, to abandon her two sinks, to make a fire for the oven instead of turning a knob... “ (Ali 2003, 77-78) Also concerning her two daughters, who grew up in London and would have to face the cultural transition that Nazneen had to undergo originally. Contrariwise, Chanu’s original plan of becoming a successful man and returning home with a fortune fails horribly and he is the only member of the family unable to assimilate, having to return to Bangladesh without his family. It is difficult to identify if Chanu’s assimilation failed in relation to his high expectations of life in England, his stubborn insistence on refusing anything but his ancestors’ traditions or his personality. He is incompetent of having affectionate relationships with people close to him, prioritizing history books over human interactions. Although it may be a mixture of all these variants, his struggle to use his degrees for a respectful job is, for a prideful man, the most likely. M.C. Waters and T. R. Jiménez (2005) cite socio-economic studies, which state that after about twenty-year period, immigrants catch up to native-born individuals in terms of wages and employment rates. (108) This is of course influenced by many factors, such as language proficiency and discrimination in the workplace and although English is not the slightest issue for Chanu, he is convinced that being promoted will take him longer than any white man. (Ali 2003, 72) While this might be true, Chanu in thirty years, does not manage to follow through with any of his plans and aspirations and seems to give up on his life in London. This would suggest that his inability to assimilate is due to misfortune in work career connected to racial prejudices or it is more of a personal issue.

Ali uses especially contrasting characters to highlight different types of assimilation and possible reasoning for it. In terms of first-generation immigrant characters, good example of contrast is the character of Chanu and Nazneen’s friend Razia. Chanu refers to people like Razia as ‘not the respectable type’. Chanu and most of the Bengali community is very judgmental of people, who adapt their lives towards the western culture, because their fear of losing their original identity is bigger than the need of assimilation. This includes the way of upbringing children, the way they look, what they wear and what they do for a living. Even in

comparison with rotten money usurer Mrs. Islam, Razia is in the eyes of Chanu depicted as the bottom of society. Razia is one of the few first-generation immigrants truly grateful to be living in London, because of the things it can provide for her children, mainly healthcare and free education. She is quick to learn English, she starts wearing tracksuit and stops wearing a sari. She begins working in a garment factory to support her children, because even though her husband is very hard working, he barely fills his role as a father. He sends most of the money he makes back home, prioritizing his homeland community in Bangladesh, and neglecting his wife and children. She serves as a role model for Nazneen as she becomes fully independent and is able to provide for her children as a single mother, deciding for adoption of a new culture for the sake of practical advantages as she becomes fully westernized and assimilated in London.

Conversely, Chanu, laying emphasis on history, literature, and culture, prioritizes preserving his and his family's identity over the practical advantages of living in London. He is convinced, that accepting anything British would lead to him losing Bengali identity. Moreover, his struggles in London lead him to forget his dreams and instead he aims to earn as much money as possible and return home instead. "You see, when the English went to our country, they did not go to stay. They went to make money, and the money they made, they took it out of the country. They never left home. Mentally. Just taking money out. And that is what I am doing now." (Ali 2003, 214) Not mentally leaving home is what him and many other immigrants do. Instead of exploring new places and experiencing new things, they stay in the comfort of their apartments and in the company of only their families and like-minded people in order to preserve their identities and save money. Ali outlines this, as Chanu takes his family to see the sights only after decades of living there, as they are to leave for Bangladesh soon. "Thirty or so years after he arrived in London, Chanu decided that it was time to see the sights." (Ali 2003, 289) From Chanu's standpoint, Britain is no longer safe environment for them. Apart from fear of increasing drug usage amongst the youth and violence against Muslims following attacks on the World Trade Center, Chanu needs to return home for his identity to be coherent again.

Second-generation immigrant children face different struggles concerning identity. Zana Vathi (2015) describes effects of growing up as a child of first-generation immigrants: "...transnational ties lead to and become a form of 'cultural hybridity'. This can encourage the construction of multiple ethnic identities...". (9) In other words, children of first-generation immigrants are exposed to more than one culture, developing so called 'dual identity', which can lead to confusion, struggle with inclusion or leaning towards one of them,

displacing the other. One of the theories of assimilation is described by Waters (1990), that the more time is spent in the host country, the more probable it is for the second-generation immigrants to identify their ethnicity towards the prevailing majority. (14) This was especially the case for Nazneen's daughter Shahana, who rebelled against Bangladeshi culture, knowing nothing but life in London and preferring fitting in rather than being dissociated from the majority. However, Chanu wants his daughter to grow up to be a traditional Muslim woman, forbidding her of wearing revealing clothes and speaking English at home, which results in beatings and loud arguments. Chanu wants his daughters to be raised the way he was in Bangladesh, but the influence from the new society becomes prevalent with becoming adolescent and their identities grow further apart. Piedra and Engstrom (2009) describe that a gap in experience between immigrants and their children can erode the parent-child bond caused by some immigrant families' inability to reconcile the cultural capital from the world they left behind with the demands of the new society. (270) There are also examples of worse examples of solving disagreements between immigrants and their children. Nazneen's neighbour Jorina and her husband want to prevent their daughter from distancing herself from traditions and getting in trouble, so just to be certain, they send her back to the village, after she has been raised in England for sixteen years. "...the brother has gone bad, and they wanted to save the daughter... now she can't run off for a love marriage." (Ali 2003, 49) The importance of keeping the children on the traditional path and fear of them deviating from it precedes maintaining healthy relationships in the families.

A different outcome of identity dissociation for second-generation immigrants is also described by Vathi (2015). "...the 'second generation decline' framework developed by Gans in 1992 is based on the assumption that, facing discrimination, the second generation will turn to the ethnicity of origin and establish subcultures opposing the mainstream in reaction to low expectations of educational and job market performance." (7) This describes the character of Karim, who is a young second-generation immigrant man. He struggles with defining his own identity, as he falls in the middle of the two cultures he had been exposed to. "Karim was born a foreigner. When he spoke Bengali, he stammered." (Ali 2003, 448) Finding it hard to find a partner, as he refuses to date women his age, since they are too westernized for him, he falls in love with Nazneen. Or rather, with the fact that she is as authentic of a Muslim woman, as he can have. "She was his real thing. A Bengali wife. A Bengali mother. An idea of home. An idea of himself that he found in her." (Ali 2003, 454) He finds his purpose behind leading a radical group of Muslims, which is supposed to fight for Muslim rights, inequality and troubles concerning young Muslims, including addiction to hard drugs in the estate. However,

after the group ceases to have purpose anymore and disbands, he leaves for Bangladesh, assuming his identity is better customized to the environment of his ancestors. (Ali 2003, 486) The uncertainty in his identity is apparent from his clothes, as at the beginning he wears jeans and gym shoes, but later starts wearing more traditional Islamic clothing. This shows his imprisonment in between the two cultures shifting towards his parents' identity. Signs of insecurity in Karim, such as stammering when speaking Bengali or being ashamed of not ever visiting Bangladesh eventually lead Nazneen to realize that their relationship is based on imagination from both sides, and they go their separate ways.

Interesting perspectives on issues of clashing cultures is shown in an awkward interaction between Chanu and his friend's wife. As it seems, Mrs. Azad has encountered none of the issues with alienation or identity crisis, as the other first-generation immigrants have, perhaps partly because her husband, as a doctor, became successful enough to retain a comfortable lifestyle for his family. According to a study by J. G. Reitz and S. M. Sklar (1997), immigrants with lower occupational status and socioeconomic background typically exhibit stronger ethnic affiliations. (249-250) This would prove that Chanu's impossibility of launching his career due to ethnic discrimination or lack of qualifications and abilities is directly connected to the degree of possible assimilation and it could partly explain his fierce need of rejecting the adjustment to a new country. Mrs. Azad has her identity clearly determined and is fully assimilated in society. She is aware of the cultural differences, and she is not afraid to make compromises in relation to them. "Listen, when I'm in Bangladesh I put on sari and cover my head and all that. But here I go out to work. I work with white girls and I'm just one of them. If I want to come home and eat curry, that's my business." (Ali 2003, 114) When Chanu makes his unexpected visit and goes on to give a rant about the importance of preserving one's identity, she gives him her absolute opposite opinion. "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's 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 2003, 113) Instead of judging the cultural differences, she embraces them, and she chooses to change her habits and appearance to fit in and be accepted more easily. However, for Chanu, this is an unimaginable national treason, as he is bitterly convinced that everything about British culture is inherently inferior. "'You see, they feel so threatened' ... 'Because our culture is so strong. And what is their culture? Television, pub, throwing darts, kicking a ball. That is the white working-class culture.'" (Ali 2003, 254) Replacing his strong roots with something he despises is not an

option, however, by being hateful towards other cultures than his own, he becomes just as ignorant as the people he complains about.

Razia, Nazneen, Chanu and Mrs. Azad represent four different developments in assimilation for first-generation immigrants. With Razia and Mrs. Azad, not being afraid of suppressing the former cultural identity to allow a new culture to shape their personalities, while disregarding being judged for distancing themselves from wearing traditional clothes or speaking only Bengali, gaining new freedoms and options as women. Nazneen not being ready to give her Bangladeshi identity up entirely, but also wanting to explore and experience new things freely. This is symbolically depicted at the end of the novel, when Razia takes Nazneen ice-skating and she can live without restrictions and enjoy what she likes, while being also able to wear a sari. Whereas, not following through with any of his plans, failing and refusing to accept the western society, Chanu prioritizes maintaining his roots and traditions unaltered and he travels back home and preserves his identity, even for the cost of leaving his family behind. Moreover, the fact that it is only the men in the novel, who are more strongly bonded to their original country and are not satisfied with the new country emphasizes the theory of gender inequalities in Bangladesh, as opposed to more gender balanced environment in London. Second-generation immigrants on the other hand can either struggle in the newly joined society, being the minority and not feeling accepted or not feeling as authentic of a member of the country of origin as they would like to be. An example of this is not being confident in their language abilities or not ever living in their 'true' homeland, which is the case for Karim. This leads to confusion and loss of identity, as the person does not know in which category they belong. Different outcome is the case for Shahana, who was able to accept both of her identities, but prefers to adhere to the culture of the country she was born in, which results in estrangement from relatives, who only accept the original culture, in this case, Chanu.

3.3 Feminism and Sexism

In the chapter on importance of fate, the focus was mainly on the central character Nazneen and her perception of fate, which included some feminist themed examples in the novel, e.g., one sided polygamous relationship of Nazneen's parents. However, this chapter concentrates on feminist themes in a more profound way. It will dive into greater details and analyze examples of gender inequality in *Brick Lane* to attain a better understanding of this complex theory. Although feminism as a social and political movement has impacted various cultures and religions across the globe, this chapter is focusing on feminist themes and issues of sexism connected to Islamic religion in both Bangladesh, as an Islamic country, and Britain, as a frequent destination of immigration. Especially for migrants from former colonies. *Brick Lane* is focusing on women's emancipation, on contesting traditional roles in society and exposing cultural, interpersonal, and internalized sexism.

Many women in *Brick Lane* are depicted as strong personalities, who can assume the leadership positions, indicating that women are capable of the same things as men, even in unfavorable conditions. The novel pictures women characters' reality of having to overcome the obstacles of religious sexism in everyday life, not only from the main heroin's perspective, but from her sister's letters and other minor characters' experience. Bangladeshi people worship two main religions, one of which being Hinduism and the other Islam, the latter being predominant. Conservative Islamism, which both the sisters were upbrought in, frequently enables inequitable conditions for women.

Nazneen and Hasina are targets of discrimination based on gender since their birth. When Nazneen defeats the odds and survives being born prematurely, her father Hamid upon being told he has a daughter, says: "What can you do?" (Ali 2003, 14). What is more, when Hasina elopes with her boyfriend for a love marriage, she is quickly disowned by the father and threatened to be killed if she were ever to come back. All this, while the father of the family can leave for days because of his affairs with no one batting an eye. This leads to his hypersensitive and permanently agitated wife ending up seeing no other option than committing suicide. "Males in many cultures were allowed to be legally polygamous; in any case their de facto polygamy was not censured." (Keddie 1990, 79) Nazneen finds out only much later in the novel, that the reason her mother died was because of jealousy. "If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men." (Ali 2003, 80) This shows Amma tutoring her daughters, it perfectly illustrates the hierarchy between men and women in Gouripur, gender inequality being a real issue and it leads to having this for the standard

behavior in families, which perpetuates it onto following generations. This gradually improves with assimilation in Britain, not only for Nazneen, but other women too.

Nazneen's relationship with Chanu shifts throughout the novel in relation with Chanu's closeminded sexist views on marriage and traditional roles in society. Early into Nazneen's new life in London, she overhears Chanu's opinion on her. He talks about 'getting a wife' as acquiring a new piece of furniture, as a new appliance with the additional capability of bearing children. One of his main positive evaluations is that she is "a girl from the village: totally unspoilt". (Ali 2003, 23) This for him means, that she has been raised in the traditional gender divided environment in Bangladesh and is going to subdue and know her role in the established family scheme. He does not want any British influence to change her traditional values. Therefore, when Nazneen says she wants to learn some English, Chanu dismisses her saying: "Where is the need anyway?" (Ali 2003, 37) or tells her there is no time for such things, as she is going to be busy raising children. Nazneen is also mostly forbidden of travelling alone, her only concerns are keeping the household intact and cooking for her husband. Her only amusement is watching the streets from the window. In Chanu's eyes, these are the only things Nazneen should care about and exposing her to the country she immigrated to too much could lead to her identity changing. The peculiar thing in Chanu's and Nazneen's marriage is that it evolves with time and experience. When hard times of their first-born son Raqib getting sick occur, the traditional roles in family, which Chanu very much lays emphasis on, shift. Chanu takes up on cooking, he becomes the temporary caretaker of the family and realizes that he is nothing without his family and finally starts seeing his wife as a person equal to him. It is due to the circumstances that Chanu allows his wife to work, as they need the money to escape the threats of England, with Chanu seeing the situation so urgently, that he seems to overcome a blow to his ego and his sense of tradition.

"The natural and traditional role of woman is that of wife and mother". (Saleh 1972, 194) This used to be the role for women, which was supposed to suit them best and fulfill their lives to the fullest, according to Islamic doctrines from the seventh century. Although this cannot be taken as fully relevant and current, we see multiple woman characters being treated in relation with these ancient doctrines. Nazneen's close friend Razia lives in a household deprived of possibility of future being at her disposal. Since her husband sends most of their money back home and she is forbidden of working herself, their standard of life is increasingly lower, despite the possibility of improvement being available. "If I get a job, he will kill me. He will kill me kindly, just one slit across here. That's the sort of man he is." (Ali 2003, 123) First-generation immigrant husbands often find it too embarrassing to endure

if their wives, as women, are to secure a job and provide for their children. Their public image of a provider and a man would be threatened, and they would be looked upon as less capable. Razia is no longer occupied by raising children since they are at school, and she has nothing to do. She was only released of her restrictions because of her husband's tragic, and somewhat absurd, death. Apart from shock, Razia seems to not escape the feeling of relief, as she says to Nazneen: "I can get that job now. No slaughter man to slaughter me now." (Ali 2003, 139) It is only her husband's accidental death that frees Razia from being boxed into the traditional role, instead, she becomes the head of the family. She changes not only in psychological, but also in physical sense and she distances herself from her femininity. Clothes perform an immense function in the novel. Just as Nazneen formerly wanted to distance herself from her duties with the form of changing to western clothing, with skirts and T-shirts, Razia breaks away from traditional sari, as well as feminine clothing altogether. She only wears her favourite Union Jack sweatshirt, perhaps in the need of separating herself from attracting male attention, as she yearns for independence. She manages to detach herself from the traditional role, she becomes a role model for Nazneen, and she strives for the best life conditions for herself and her children.

The novel is strong in not only showing a character overcome this injustice, but also shines light on examples of women's lives being destroyed. Ali is not afraid of using drastic images to demonstrate sexism in lives of several minor characters. "It is her husband who have done this with his brother and sister. Brother and sister hold tight, and husband pour acid over head face and body" (Ali 2003, 270) Hasina writes Nazneen in her letters about her friend Monju, who was brutally deformed by her husband for not letting him sell their child. The husband goes without being punished because of the state of the society and juristic system in Dhaka. Haleh Afshar (2017) discusses how the patriarchal court stands by men's evidence, while women are taken less seriously and trustworthy. (258) Ali uses these minor characters and small plot lines to show women's helplessness in patriarchally established societies. What is more, Hasina's whole life story is the prime example of this inferiority. Her lover, whom she runs away with, Malek, starts beating her, because she is not as compliant as he would imagine. The concept of domestic abuse is mentioned frequently in the novel, and it is depicted to be the husband's right in case the woman disobeys the man. After Hasina leaves her boyfriend, she then undergoes series of accidents, in which she is always the one to get punished at the expense of other men, her version of reality is never taken seriously and she, as a good-looking woman, is blamed for her beauty. From multiple characters, she is advised to hide her looks, in order not to attract any unwanted attention, which is a common outlook

on ignoring other people's poor behavior and focusing on restricting the oppressed person's freedoms.

Another element of being a woman in Islamic cultures is the so-called purdah. Purdah in literal meaning means 'curtain', however, the intended interpretation is a set of rules and restrictions for women originated in Qur'an. Elizabeth H. White (1977) defines it as "...the practice of secluding women from contact with men outside of the immediate family. This may be accomplished through virtual imprisonment in separate quarters in the home, veiling in public and the provision of segregated public facilities." (31) These restraints are based on stereotypical division of sexes, depicting women as helpless in practical situations, "in need of protection", and unable to be independent. This is also accommodated with the outlook on women's purity as something of essence and in need to be preserved. Creating these barriers for women, while men are not held accountable for most of their actions, results in purdah serving as an additional tool to control women. It is not men who, however, lay explicit emphasis on keeping purdah in the novel, it is the women. Women in *Brick Lane* feel the necessity to prove adhering to purdah and it is treated as a scale of respectability and as gossip is often the only entertainment for housewives in the community, compliance to purdah also determines acceptance among the London Borough of Tower Hamlets' residents. Example of this is Mrs. Islam, who tries to cover up for her business of money usuring with claiming to adhere to purdah and being deeply religious, perhaps lying to herself as well, as she deceives and manipulates her victims on daily basis. Another woman from the Bengali community, Hanufa, is excluded from the female friend group for attending a massage course because of her husband's back problems. "It was un-Islamic behaviour and, apparently, the imam at the Jamme Masjid had preached against that very thing." (Ali 2003, 391) Although level of respectability on basis of purdah was enabled largely by women as well as men, it is a judging tool for mostly first-generation immigrants, originating from fear of change and loss of traditional societal setting.

4. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to identify and analyze issues that go along with immigration. In relation with postcolonial novel *Brick Lane*, I chose themes of self-definition, immigrant assimilation and feminism as the foundation for this text. I based my analysis on specific examples from the novel and supported the claims by literary theories and various independent primary and secondary sources. The main focus was on proving the possibility of escaping the traditional gender roles, establishing different types of assimilation of first and second generation of immigrants and describing the issues of sexism in Islamic culture.

The chapter 'Importance of Fate' served to depict the main character Nazneen, her families' background, compare her view on fate throughout the novel and how it defined her as a person. I analyze the way she was upbrought in order to understand her behavior and personality at the start of her life in England and compare her to other family members. I explain Nazneen's feelings of displacement and alienation in her early years in Britain and her mental struggle in choosing between pleasing others or working on herself and being happy. Based on Nazneen's experiences in London, along with reading her inner monologues, I was able to determine fate as the leading cause of her identity being restricted. I analyzed the cause behind Nazneen's mindset and identified the forced idea of fate that repressed Nazneen of being in control of her own life and as she gradually managed to overcome this, she became assimilated on her own terms, that is, being independent and capable, while also staying true to her former identity and culture. I was able to conclude that sexist practices across generations are tied to the environment, but they can be surpassed. The aspect of this analysis was, however, not the sexist societal foundations, but the forced mindset of dependence and incapability in the oppressed women living in gender unequal societies. In this case labeled as fate, which was suppressing Nazneen from gaining control of her life.

In the following chapter, I argue that assimilation, therefore accepting cultural values and norms of a new country, can have strong influence on immigrant identity, resulting either in positive, or negative outcome. The former would be creating a hybrid identity and adapting in social and economic aspects, resulting in leading an objectively happier and more convenient life. And the latter, losing the original identity without managing to assimilate, which can lead to being trapped in between the cultures, being displaced, and feeling alienated in the host country. The case can also be being overly attached to the cultural heritage of the home country for any assimilation to occur, which is driven by fear of losing the original identity, resulting in similar consequences. While attaining comfortable

assimilation in the host country, the conditions are often being aggravated by obstacles of racism and sexism. After considering the evidence, one of my assertions was that employment status and financial background affects assimilation. In my comparison I determined differences in identity confusion and issues that come along with accepting more than one identity. I distinguished distinct types of assimilations in first-generational immigrants and identified issues that second-generational immigrants face and analyzed the reasoning behind their decision making. For one of reasons for different results in assimilation in first-generation immigrants, I determined aspects of age, personality or more importantly gender, as the characters with stronger bond to the home country in the novel are men. I found that a possible reasoning for second-generation immigrants in choosing an identity can be due to low expectations in educational and job market opportunities. I also elaborated on possibility of estrangement from relatives due to choosing one of the two identities for second-generation immigrants and their struggle in belonging to neither.

In my last chapter, I resume to address the topic of feminism and sexism, which had been marginally addressed in the previous chapters, but here I examine aspects of sexism in Islam in more depth. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze Ali's examples of gender inequality in characters from the community in Tower Hamlets, like Razia, Nazneen and Hanufa, but also from Dhaka, like Nazneen's sister Hasina and her friend Monju. I also examine the reasoning for the shift of gender roles, which happens between Chanu and Nazneen, as she is originally considered in terms of being able to clean and cook but grows into much more. I argue that it was the arranged marriage, that saved Nazneen from leading just as sorrowful life as her mother did, because life in London enabled her to escape the sexist state of society in Gouripur. I try to find a connection between some of the characters' sexist views to religion, as it is most often referred to as the source of these opinions. It is however not only religion, but also state of society, that restricts women from seeking justice and gaining freedom, as we understand from the plotlines in Bangladesh. I assign the gossip to the sexism which remains in the immigrant community's subconsciousness, as the women themselves obstruct each other of change. Although the topic of feminism is vast, I managed to highlight several examples of gender inequality in *Brick Lane*, controlling and stereotypical viewpoints, as well as instances of women overcoming these inequalities and becoming more than just wives and mothers.

5. Resumé

Cílem této bakalářské práce byla analýza tematiky postkolonialismu a imigrace spjatá s románem *Brick Lane*. Zabývám se jak tématy sexismu v podmínkách islámské kultury a náboženství, tak ustanovením genderových rolí a možnostmi jejich přeměny v moderních společnostech. Dalším z mých hlavních cílů bylo popsání různých odezev na drastickou změnu prostředí skrz imigraci a problémy jako je ztráta identity nebo neschopnost asimilace u imigrantů v prvních i dalších generacích. Při zkoumání těchto problémů čerpám nejen z výše zmíněného románu, ale také z mnoha jiných primárních a sekundárních zdrojů. V první části mé práce se zaměřuji na bližší seznámení s autorkou *Brick Lane*, Monicou Ali. Popisuji její původ, jelikož právě s ním je tento román úzce spjatý, poté se věnuji i její dosavadní spisovatelské kariéře a jejím úspěchům v tomto oboru. Zároveň také porovnávám recenze ze dvou jejích románů a popisuji možné důvody pro negativní zpětnou vazbu na druhý z nich, přičemž jako možnou příčinu udávám stránku autenticity. Další dvě kapitoly věnuji literárním teoriím emigrantství a feminismu, přičemž v první z nich začínám historií a definicí celého odvětví postkolonialismu a zdůvodňuji použití a klasifikaci této teorie pro tuto bakalářskou práci. Popisuji rozdíl mezi exilem a imigrací, vysvětluji význam imigrace nejen z literárního hlediska a v teorii píšu o problémech, s kterými tato literární teorie pracuje. Příklady těchto pojmů jsou například neschopnost asimilace, disociace od původní identity nebo rasismus – tedy témata, která jsou později rozebrána v jednotlivých kapitolách. Následná kapitola obsahuje druhou literární teorii, která stála za výzkumem této bakalářské práce, tedy literární teorie feminismu. První se věnuji definici feminismu, ať už v minulosti, nebo v dnešní podobě. Jako základ pro tento už všeobecný pojem jsem se rozhodl citovat různé zdroje definicí. Krátce píšu o historii feminismu a zaměřuji se blíže na konkrétnější podmínky relevantní pro tento text, tedy muslimské národy a kultury. Udávám konkrétní příklady sexismu v islámských zemích a snažím se najít původ těchto názorů a nastavení společnosti. Přestože některé zdroje mluví o původu sexistického rozřazení pohlaví v islámských doktrínách, cituji moderní feministické zdroje tvrdící, že Korán je možné interpretovat jako text, který stojí o genderovou rovnoprávnost. V pozdějších kapitolách udávám konkrétní příklady odkazující na tento teoretický podklad.

Předtím než přecházím k hlavní části této práce, věnuji jednu kapitolu stručnému shrnutí románu *Brick Lane*, jelikož nejde o všeobecně známý román a kontext děje je podstatný pro pochopení jednotlivých příkladů z knihy. Pro lepší porozumění tohoto textu ovšem doporučuji knihu přečíst. Dále také krátce probírám negativní zpětnou vazbu od

samotné bangladéšské komunity v Londýně, která je cílem celého děje. Popisují, jak se obyvatelé reálné Tower Hamlets bouřili proti světlu, v kterém je autorka popsala a zpochybňovali autenticitu jejího díla. Samotná Ali se však vyjádřila k těmto kontroverzím a hájila svůj nezaujatý postoj svým bangladéšsko-britským původem. Žaloby a žádosti o přepsání románu byly zamítnuty.

Třetí kapitolou přecházím k hlavní části této práce. Zaměření této kapitoly je hlavně na ústřední hrdinku Nazneen a její způsob myšlení, který jí byl od narození vštěpován. V tomto případě jde o její osud, který pro ni znamená víc než pro obyčejného člověka. Znázorňuje to spíše její povinnosti a způsob oddanosti a poslušnosti, kterým se jako žena musí řídit, aby nebyla potrestána. Touhle částí jsem se snažil znázornit možnost přeměny tohoto způsobu myšlení, a tím pádem i jejího svobodného samostatného rozhodování s příjezdem do Londýna, jelikož v její rodné vesnici je pro ženu taková možnost nepředstavitelná. Analyzuji tedy vývin identity hlavní hrdinky v nezávislou ženu a způsob, kterým asimilace v Británii změnila její povahu v souvislosti s ujmoutím kontroly nad jejím vlastním životem. Porovnávám taky Nazneen s její sestrou Hasinou, která je povahově zcela odlišná a její názor na entitu osudu je také jiný, což ji vede k opačným životním rozhodnutím. Jako předpokládaný původ toho způsobu myšlení považuji jejich matku, jelikož svým dcerám radí všechno vzdát a oddat se osudu – ženy podle ní totiž nemají na výběr. Jako jeden z hlavních posunů v Nazneen jsem zvolil moment, kdy se instinktivně rozhodne jinak než její matka a vezme svého syna do nemocnice, místo ponechání ho na pospas osudu. Zmiňuji také další příklad její postupné přeměny a zakončuji tuto kapitolu závěrem, že postupným sebe rozvíjením se Nazneen dokázala vymanit z omezujícího způsobu života a překonat vidinu osudu jako síly, která jí brání v samostatnosti a svobodě. Vývoj Nazneen je u konce, když je schopná žít a starat se o svoje děti jako kompletně soběstačný a silný člověk.

V kapitole o asimilaci a identitě imigrantů rozebírám aspekty těchto témat v různých postavách z *Brick Lane* a analyzuji hlediska, která na ně mají dopad. Jako hlavní rozdělení v této kapitole jsem použil propast mezi první a druhou generací imigrantů. Prvním bodem této kapitoly bylo srovnání jiných odezev k tomuto drastickému přemístění a co jsou příčiny těchto rozdílných reakcí. Srovnávám manželský pár Nazneen a Chanua, v kterém Chanu bojuje s přijetím nové kultury podstatně více. Jako možné důvody zmiňuji rozdílný věk, pohlaví, odlišné druhy osobností nebo čistě silnější vazbu k domovské zemi. Nenávist, kterou má Chanu k Anglii také může být přiřazena k selhání v jeho kariérních ambicích. Pro lepší porozumění rozdílů v asimilaci také srovnávám Chanua s kamarádkou jeho ženy. Razia je opačný příklad ve vazbě na původní kulturu a tradici pro získání praktických výhod pro sebe a

svoji rodinu. Nemá totiž problém se vzdálit od tradičního oblečení a je odhodlaná se učit nový jazyk, což přispívá k snadnosti její asimilace a podmínky v Londýně jí umožňují zabezpečit svoji rodinu. Zatímco Chanu dělá, co může, aby zachoval svoji původní identitu a kulturu jejich domova bez změny, roste mezi ním a zbytkem rodiny napětí. Je totiž jediný, kdo se nedokáže a odmítá asimilovat. Shledávám, že hlavním důvodem pro Chanua není strach z rasismu ani problémy s drogami u mladistvých, kterých říká že se bojí, ale hlavně strach o ztrátu jeho identity. Přes všechny jeho neúspěchy a neschopnost se asimilovat musí utéct zpátky do Bangladéše. Poté popisují dva různé případy problémů s identitou u druhé generace imigrantů. První problém je v rodinných komplikacích mezi otcem a dcerou, když Shahana upřednostňuje kulturu země, ve které se narodila a vzdává se tradic a zvyků země svých rodičů, což vede k odcizení a hádkám mezi příbuznými. Rozhodne se přidat k většině, zapadat mezi své vrstevníky, což je pro vlasteneckého rodiče jako je Chanu nepřijatelné. Druhý případ je Karim, milenec Nazneen, který je zmatený ze své vlastní identity, jelikož nezapadá ani mezi Brity, ani mezi Bengálce. Soubor jeho samotného se sebou jde vidět například z jeho oblečení nebo koktání, když mluví bengálsky. Určuji, že když Karim vidí, že kultura jeho předků je diskriminována, staví svoji identitu právě na tuto menšinovou stranu. Když ale zjišťuje, že jeho boj za bengálské občany není potřeba a nedokáže najít pravou bangladéšskou družku, nezbyvá mu, než opustit jeho rodné místo a emigrovat do země jeho předků. Mým posledním závěrem byl argument, že se vazba ke kořenům částečně odvíjí od profesního postavení a socioekonomického zázemí, což by odráželo kariévní neúspěchy ve spojení s kompletním zavržením britské společnosti.

Poslední kapitolou této práce bylo téma feminismu a sexismu, které se váže k islámské kultuře a náboženství. Ve větší hloubce zde analyzuji postavy žijící v Londýně, jako Nazneen, Raziu a Hanufu, ale také utlačované ženy v Dháce, jako Hasinu nebo Monju. *Brick Lane* je plná feministických motivů, tudíž jsem vybral ty nejnázornější z nich. Jedním z takových je vztah rodičů Nazneen, plný nevěry a lži ze strany jejího otce. Ačkoli je polygamie ze strany mužů v takové kultuře přijatelná, žárlivost jeho ženy vede k sebevraždě. V tomto textu zmiňuji i řadu jiných sexistických zločinů na ženách, například Monju, která odmítá prodat svoje dítě, a tak je brutálně napadena, nebo Hasinu čelící každodenním strastem jakožto atraktivní žena ve společnosti mužů. Také analyzuji posun klasických genderových rolí u několika postav, například u Nazneen a Chanua, kterým se pořadí vyprostit se ze sexisticky nastaveného manželství. Snažím se také spojit pravěké islámské doktríny s modernějším nastavením některých společností. Přestože tyto výroky už nelze považovat za aktuální, mnoho domácností v *Brick Lane* bylo vázáno pravidly, která zakazovala ženám pracovat a

ovládat rodinný rozpočet. Tuto kapitolu jsem zakončil vysvětlením a analýzou termínu „purdah“. Definuji tento výraz a udávám příklady ze zmiňovaného románu. Poukazuji na to, že jsou to nejen muži, kteří soudí porušování pravidel purdah, ale mnohdy i ženy. Odbočování od ustanovených restrikcí a zvyků následuje vyřazením ze společnosti originálního původu. Z těchto příkladů vyplývá, že tento seznam pravidel funguje hlavně jako měřítko přizpůsobení se nové zemi, sloužící k určení věrnosti původní kultuře.

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7. Annotation

Jméno a Příjmení:	Jaroslav Janečka
Katedra:	Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky
Vedoucí práce:	doc. Mgr. Pavlína Flajšarová, Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2023

Název práce:	Analýza témat v románu <i>Brick Lane</i> od Monica Ali
Název práce v angličtině:	Analysis of themes in Monica Ali's <i>Brick Lane</i>
Abstrakt práce:	Tato práce pojednává o tématech asimilace, identity a feminismu v prostředí islámské společnosti, kultury a náboženství. Práce používá román <i>Brick Lane</i> pro porozumění těchto motivů a pokouší se najít zdůvodnění a analyzovat problémy, kterým imigranti ve společnosti čelí.
Klíčová slova:	Asimilace, feminismus, identita, <i>Brick Lane</i> , Monica Ali, islám, Tower Hamlets
Abstrakt v angličtině:	This thesis focuses on themes of assimilation, identity and feminism regarding Islamic society, culture, and religion. For better understanding of these themes, the novel <i>Brick Lane</i> is used for additional explanation and interposition of concrete examples. The goal is to explain and analyse issues, which immigrants today face.
Klíčová slova v angličtině	Assimilation, feminism, identity, <i>Brick Lane</i> , Monica Ali, Islam, Tower Hamlets
Přílohy vázané k práci	-
Rozsah práce	36 s
Jazyk práce	anglický