



London's Roles as the Third Space in Reforming Immigrants' Identity in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

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ABSTRACT: The intricacy of immigrant identity reformation in transnational cities such as London necessitated a thorough examination, primarily through the perspective of postcolonial theory. This research addressed the main foci: what role London played as a Third Space and how it shaped immigrant identity formation. This study aimed to analyse the role of London as a Third Space in the identity reformation of immigrant characters in *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali. The researcher employed Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the Third Space in a postcolonial approach and used a descriptive qualitative method to conduct the research, in which the data were compiled in the form of quotations from the novel. As a result, this research revealed four leading roles of London, including a space of resistance and transformation, a platform for negotiating belonging, a site of economic and social mobility, and a catalyst for identity formation. Furthermore, the immigrant characters encountered cultural hybridity in different forms according to their personal experiences and choices. This research affirmed that immigrant identity was fluid and constantly negotiated within transnational spaces such as London.

Keywords: third space, cultural hybridity, identity formation, London, immigrant, *Brick Lane*

1. Introduction

In today's era, globalization has had several effects on society. One of them is that it increases people's mobility. It has caused some cultural movements and interactions between different communities. Many people from developing countries move to developed countries and massive cities such as London. Big cities, including London, have become the centre of multiculturalism, which means there are not only native Londoners who live there but also immigrants from various countries. Eliot (1949) once stated, "Modern migration has transplanted a mixture of social, religious, economic or political determinations and migrants have taken with them only one part of the original culture and the new culture ..., what has developed on the new soil is bafflingly both alike and different from the parent culture. Moreover, in such situation, culture sympathy and culture clash emerge."

London has become a place where immigrants need to negotiate their identity and try to fit into the new society. Most people face struggles when it comes to blending with the natives, mainly in the form of racial discrimination. Therefore, London plays various roles in response to those problems. The definition of "role" in this case refers

to how the existence of London as a city became an important aspect of the way immigrants wrestle with their mentality and thoughts. It is not only becoming a physical setting but also acts as a symbolic space where people are allowed to reconstruct their identity. In his research, Ali (2023) stated, "To meet in a third space, they can go to new countries and regions to bring their own cultural values along with those of the host nations." Thus, Ghasemi et al. (2018) stated, "Both the colonizer and the colonized make a mutual relationship which is just possible in the third space." According to them, "In the third space, the relation between the colonizer and the colonized is not the top to bottom supposed relation. Both of them have benefits for each other."

The concept of "Third Space" was introduced by Homi K. Bhabha. It was stated that the third space is a hybrid space where two or more cultures meet and create new identities. According to Bhandari (2022), Bhabha's statement regarding third space identity is intended to surpass the domination of the colonizer by creating an in-between space. With the existence of the third space, the author wants to clarify the existence of the first and second spaces as well. First space, in this context, is the original culture, while the second space is the adopted culture. Living in such a vast country where it is not their hometown cannot be labelled as easy. One might often find that there is no place where they belong, so most people want to 'fit in' with society. When facing those thoughts, different people had different ways of doing things. Some might fully adopt the culture of the society where they live, and some might preserve the culture of their hometown. However, the problem is when they want to adopt the new culture and at the same time maintain their original culture.

Identity can be defined as something that describes a person as well as where they belong. According to Jackson (1999), identity is defined as "that which confers a sense of personhood," and he adds that "it refers to self-definition" of the efforts in the way to get to know who someone is. On the other side, Eriksen (2002) defines identity as "being the same as oneself as well as being different," and in accordance with that, he also gave a statement about the essence of cultural hybridity, which is that "identity does not have to be permanent; the immigrant can retain his or her ethnic identity (being oneself) and adopt foreign habits (being different)." This statement by Eriksen supports Bhabha's theory about "in-between" space, which shows pictures of how we simultaneously see something different but alike.

As mentioned above, immigrants are most likely to have cultural hybridity in terms of their identities. Kalra et al. (2005) describe hybridity as a "process of cultural mixing in which immigrants adopt the aspects of the host culture and rework, reform and reconfigure them in production of new hybrid culture or hybrid identities." That problem leads to one more thing called identity formation. What is meant by identity formation is when diasporic immigrants experience a cultural change where they need to adopt a new culture while still not wanting to let go of or erase their native culture. So, they are in search of what spot in society they are most suitable for. Eventually, they will blend with the new society and find their new identity in the middle, which will make them comfortable. Nyongesa (2018) stated that "Minorities who dwell in communities with majorities that are very different from them experience similar identity formation challenges like immigrants who join dominant host communities overseas." Identity formation experienced by immigrants is a continuous process where identity is shaped

by strong interactions rather than by the current country or the origin country, which means that the changes in identity are not something fixed but, instead, something that is constant.

Aamir (2024) stated, “When individuals are faced with diverse circumstances throughout their lives, they are confronted by different social expectations.” These societal expectations make immigrants even more pressured. It also influences their choices in everyday life, which, in the end, will form their behaviour and lead to identity changes. At this phase, people will explore the roles in society until they find the one that they think best suits them in that environment. It can expand the possibility of having different experiences, but it also causes more difficulties in keeping the self-identity we have maintained all this time (Giddens, 1991).

The struggles immigrants face to fit into a new cultural surrounding while maintaining their own culture is a topic that has been popular among researchers to study. By choosing this topic, the researcher wants to hold a deeper analysis, to be precise, of how Bangladeshi immigrants attempt to be part of society despite all those struggles and, at the end of the day, finally form their own identities as a result of the blending. This is why, by focusing on forming their identities, the researcher could bring some new perspectives on the psychological and social struggles of immigrants. It also portrays how immigrants live in Western societies by showing their experiences.

The researcher proposes to use Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of the third space to analyse this novel. This topic has been quite popular in postcolonial studies. Several previous researchers have conducted research using this theory, but with different objects. On the other hand, Ali’s *Brick Lane* has also been analysed using this theory. One of them is Ali (2023), in his paper entitled *A Postcolonial Analysis of Monica Ali’s “Brick Lane.”* It analyses Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* using Homi K. Bhabha’s perspective in a wider and more extensive context, including mimicry, hybridity, third space, and ambivalence. However, this research will dig more specifically, focusing on the role of London itself. The researcher wants to conduct this research to find out what London’s true role as the third space is in facilitating the process of forming a new identity for Bangladeshi immigrants. Thus, the researcher also wants to contribute to the renewal of postcolonial analysis of the novel *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali, especially using Homi K. Bhabha’s theory on the aspects that have not been studied in more depth.

2. Method

To conduct this research, the researcher proposed a descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative methods employ a range of designs, discrete stages of data processing, and input in the form of text and images (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The ability of qualitative research to systematically explain the facts and characteristics of the data is the reason the researcher chose it. To aid in the analysis of social and cultural phenomena, the social sciences also developed qualitative research tools, including ethnographies and case studies.

“The meaning individuals or groups attribute to a social or human situation can be explored and understood through qualitative research” (Gunawan & Eripuddin, 2019). Ary et al. (2010) stated that “descriptive research design is to obtain information concerning the current status of phenomena and to provide a detailed verbal

description of settings, situations, and participants.” According to Sinaga et al. (2020), “content analysis focuses on analysing and interpreting recorded material to learn about human behaviour.” An in-depth understanding of human behaviour and its causes is the goal of qualitative research.

This research aims to analyse a novel by Monica Ali entitled *Brick Lane*, which was released in 2003. This novel was the debut novel of a British Bangladeshi writer. It was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and then got a movie adaptation in 2007 under the same title. *Brick Lane* follows the story of Nazneen’s life. Nazneen is a Bangladeshi woman whose life was not fully her own from the very beginning. She was eighteen when she got married to an older man named Chanu and moved to London. This novel explores how Nazneen adapts to the community when, at first, in English, she could only say “sorry” and “thank you”. Nazneen could not do anything she desired because her husband believed women needed to stay home and serve their husbands. She is not even allowed to learn English because he thinks that she does not need to talk to anyone. Eventually, she slowly got on her feet after facing various challenges that helped her. On the other hand, *Brick Lane* also tells the story of Nazneen’s sister, Hasina, whose life is totally opposite to Nazneen’s. She draws pictures of the struggle of immigrants, especially women, in shaping new identities amidst the pressure of society and culture.

The researcher takes on several roles throughout the study: data identifier, data collector, data interpreter, and data analyst. The data used in this research comes from the novel by Monica Ali entitled *Brick Lane*. In the way of collecting the data, the researcher performed a close-reading method and highlighted the utterances that are relevant for the research.

In order to complete the objective of the study, the researcher takes some procedures to analyse the data include identifying instances from the dialogues, settings, etc., of hybridity, cultural conflict, and identity transformation; applying Bhabha’s theory about hybridity and third space by examining how characters exhibit mixed cultural identities and analysing the way characters negotiate between dominant and marginalized cultures to form a new identity; interpreting how hybridity challenges colonial authority and constructs new cultural space, and how it affects the characters; and drawing a conclusion after the data had been reported in this study.

3. Findings and Discussion

In this research, the primary object is the immigrant characters. Immigrants are defined as people who “physically migrate to another country” (Cherry, 2022). On the other hand, identity formation can be interpreted within two contexts: 1) The formation of identity of people from birth (diasporic); 2) The identity formation of people who already have their own identity becomes the consequence of identity negotiation (immigrants). In this research, the researcher focuses on the second point, the immigrant characters. There are six immigrant characters who is going to be analysed. Those six characters include Nazneen, Chanu, Razia, Mrs Islam, Dr Azad, and Mrs Azad.

3.1. The Roles of London as the Third Space in Immigrants’ Identity Formation

Based on the research that had been conducted, the researcher found four roles of London in its act as a third space in the identity formation of immigrant characters in

Brick Lane, as follows: London as a space of resistance and transformation, a platform for negotiating belonging, economic and social mobility, and a catalyst for identity formation.

3.1.1. London as a Space of Resistance and Transformation

In this context, the resistance refers not only to physical action but also to forms of thought and emotion. Some characters are able to perform some actions, but other characters can only show emotional resistance due to the limitations they have in acting.

Nazneen is the primary character of the novel. She is the centre of the story, which means all the other characters revolve around her. While living in London for many years, she experienced several things that led her to resist the cultural differences and transform into a new kind of person.

“‘You know, when I married your mother, I thought I was getting a simple girl from the village, and she would give me no trouble.’ He was playing the fool for them. Rolling his eyes and puffing his cheeks. ‘But she is the boss woman now. Anything she says, your father goes running off and does it.” (Ali, 2003, p. 191)

This passage shows how Nazneen was an innocent girl from the village. It shows how she was being obedient all the time to her husband in the early period of their marriage. This utterance, “and she would give me no trouble,” highlights the point that she is going to be doing just ordinary things that cause no problems. The phrase “But she is the boss woman now” is contradictory. It indicates that as years passed, she grew and became a woman with the authority to control the household. It shows how she resists the ‘ordinary’ things she had done and transforms into a person who knows what she aims for. It can clearly be seen that the gender dynamic and the shift of power reflect the resistance towards the traditional expectations and stereotypes of passive village girls.

The person who is most often around Nazneen is her husband, Chanu. Chanu is a Bangladeshi man who has lived in London for years before marrying Nazneen. Alongside Nazneen, he also experienced the resistance and transformation while surviving life in London. Chanu was such a patriarchal man in the early stages of their marriage. He married Nazneen not because of love, but because he was looking for a wife who could take care of him and his house. He did not allow Nazneen to learn English and limited her in socializing. He did not allow her to work. Even though he had already lived in London for years, he still resists the cultural norms in that city, where women can also work at the same level as men. He believes that women, especially wives, should stay home and only take care of the household. Added that his wife was an obedient wife who always did what he asked her to do. This phrase, “Anything she says, your father goes running off and does it,” indicates that Chanu eventually transforms into a more understanding man, and they even sort of switch roles. Chanu, who is used to ‘ruling’ the family, now does what his wife asks him to do. The line “He was playing the fool for them. Rolling his eyes and puffing his cheeks,” exposes how Chanu, even though showing the statement with a playful expression, admits that Nazneen’s role in the family is now more dominant than what he expected back then.

“Suddenly her entire being lit up with anger. I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one. A charge ran through her body and she cried out again, this time out of sheer exhilaration.” (Ali, 2003, p. 405)

This passage evidently presents the moment when Nazneen glorifies her independence in terms of personal values, after everything she had been through. She had reached the peak of her emotion and resistance towards the social structure and culture that had been ruling her entire life. That social structure not only regulates her as an immigrant, but also as a woman, and how she should act as a wife. At this point, it is no longer a self-realization, but she has established her stance that will change her future. In this case, London’s role as the third space plays an essential part in reforming Nazneen’s perspective. It created a space for her to absorb the meaning of herself, leading her through the moment of transformation. With this, a new identity will slowly shape within the declination towards the capitulation that had been forced and pressured her this whole time.

“Razia unwrapped the sweet and put the wrapper back in her pocket. She was wearing a garment she called a tracksuit. She would never, so she said, wear a sari again. She was tired of taking little bird steps.” (Ali, 2003, p. 95)

Other than Chanu, Razia is also the person who is often around Nazneen. She is also a Bangladeshi woman who moved to London. Among all the immigrant characters, Razia is the one who most demonstrated resistance to the homeland culture, which is Bangladeshi culture, which was the result of London's role as a space of resistance and transformation.

Throughout the novel, Razia consistently shows her resistance towards Bangladeshi culture. One of the ways she is showing it is through her style of clothes. This passage, “She would never, so she said, wear a sari again,” exhibits her refusal towards the sari, Bangladeshi traditional attire. This indicates that she has now encountered a transformation from a Bangladeshi traditional woman into a modern immigrant. This quotation, “She was tired of taking little bird steps,” points out how the sari is illustrated as a type of clothing that limits our movement. It can also be interpreted as a symbol of restraint in her culture of origin. Contrary to that, it is stated that, “She was wearing a garment she called a tracksuit.” A tracksuit is described as a type of clothing that makes it easier for people to move. Razia now chooses to wear a tracksuit instead of the sari, which portrays how she seeks freedom. London, as the city where she lives, provides space for Razia to find her freedom both as an immigrant and as a woman.

“Razia snorted and tossed her head. 'Hands are bad! The only thing that's bad is her heart. Look at my hands. For the past two months I have worked only on leather. Let me see her hands! Perhaps they would benefit from a little honest work.' She drew her mouth tight and made it lipless. 'When I was a young girl, I had the most beautiful hands in all the country, East and West.’” (Ali, 2003, p. 314)

Razia rejects the traditional gender norms of her origin culture, where physical work is often seen as degrading to women. She declines the beauty standard that is set in

society, which is usually associated with physical appearance, such as “smooth and beautiful” hands. This is supported by the part, “When I was a young girl, I had the most beautiful hands in all the country, East and West.” She brought up her past to suggest that in the present time, she prefers to work hard to create good economic conditions for herself, not caring about the stereotypes that have prevailed in traditional culture. It also shows how she has already undergone a transformation from a housewife to an independent working woman.

“Winter and summer she wore the same thing: a cardigan over a sari, black socks, carpet slippers. She would not change for the seasons. They did not bend to her and she would not bend to them.” (Ali, 2003, p. 88)

Mrs Islam is one of the side characters who plays a crucial part in the story. She is an older woman who has already lived in London for decades before Nazneen came there. Inversely proportional to Razia, she showed quite a strong impression of resistance to London’s culture. She is experiencing disruption in the process of her identity reformation. Below are the excerpts that support the reason.

Mrs Islam strongly shows her opposition and resistance towards cultural assimilation of the adopted land and the form of declination towards external norms, such as the way of life, which must be adjusted to the characteristics of the country’s location. Mrs Islam refuses to acclimate herself to the seasons, which reflects the culture of her current residence. She preserves how she styles her dress, which manifests her origin or cultural identity, regardless of the geographic context where she lives. The resistance towards external pressure becomes the highlight of this excerpt. It can be interpreted as a space where she cultivates her identity as a Bangladeshi. Notwithstanding her act, it doesn't apply to all aspects of her life, and it could also be slowly changing. By this, even though Mrs Islam had shown a solid resistance, she did not undergo the complete transformation.

“A woman in a short purple skirt leaned against the doorpost. Her thighs tested the fabric, and beneath the hemline was a pair of dimpled knees. Her arms folded beneath her breasts. A cigarette burned between purple lacquered nails. She had a fat nose and eyes that were looking for a fight. Her hair was cropped close like a man's, and it was streaked with some kind of rust-coloured paint. 'Yes?' she said, in English. 'I think we have the wrong house,' Chanu muttered to Nazneen. 'Who you looking for?' said the woman, in Bengali this time.” (Ali, 2003, p. 58)

Dr Azad is one of the characters who have contributed to Nazneen and Chanu’s lives. His appearance is consistent from the beginning to the end of the story. However, not much information is provided by the author regarding this character. This excerpt shows how London’s role as a space of resistance and transformation works for him and his family.

Dr Azad’s character is described as someone who has already settled both mentally and economically in London. London allows Dr. Azad's wife to adopt a lifestyle that challenges the patriarchal cultural norms of their home country. Dr Azad, as the head of the family, has the authority to lead the family to become what kind of persona. He does

not really show how his mind settles about the culture and sets out to be an ordinary Bangladeshi immigrant image in public. However, he has a family that is really westernized, and he proposes to hide that fact. From his perspective, this reflects the identity clash where he is a part of the conservative community, which expects his wife to act within the cultural standard; on the other hand, he lives in London, which provides a space for freedom. The fact that he deals with a wife who has already been westernized in total proves that he has also already negotiated with the reality of London.

The woman mentioned in this passage is the wife of Dr Azad, who is also a Bangladeshi immigrant, shown by the excerpt, "'Who you looking for?' said the woman, in Bengali this time.". She is described as a woman who presents with a very Westernized style, which includes wearing miniskirts, dyed hair, smoking, and having a confident posture. She demonstrates a personal form of resistance to the role of the submissive and polite wife through her choices of dress, body language, and smoking habits. This kind of behaviour is not common among the Bangladeshi people because it contradicts Bengalis' traditional norms. It is shown by Chanu's reaction when meeting her, showing surprise and discomfort because these women reject all codes of appearance for "respectable" women according to their culture of origin.

Mrs Azad is a character who only appears in one scene, but his appearance gives a powerful impression of the results of London's role as a space for resistance and transformation. The appearance of Mrs Azad provides completeness of Dr Azad's presence and makes them into one family unit.

3.1.2. London as a Platform for Negotiating Belonging

As the immigrant characters live in a new society that had a different culture from their origin, they often negotiate the sense of belonging. The following discussion reveals how the characters negotiate their belonging throughout the novel. Below are the following excerpts that support the notion.

"They knew that she existed (just as she knew that He existed) but unless she did something, waved a gun, halted the traffic, they would not see her." (Ali, 2003, p. 56)

Nazneen, as the main character, experiences the impact of London's role as a platform for negotiating belonging. She often questions her existence and her position in society. As an immigrant, Nazneen often experiences some sort of cultural hybridity. One example is when she walks on the street, and nobody pays attention to her. This excerpt shows the feeling of invisibility while she is in a public space in London. Even if she is physically present, her existence is ignored by the dominant community, which is the native London people. They only give some considerations if Nazneen, as a representation of the minority in London, makes an extreme movement, such as stated in the excerpt, "waved a gun, halted the traffic." From the excerpt, it can be interpreted that Nazneen is seeking recognition and a position in society. It can be categorized as a negotiation of belonging and existence. Hence, this 'invisible' feeling caused an inner struggle for Nazneen as she is still in the process of pursuing her arrangement and assimilation amidst the city life that is totally different from her lifestyle in her country of origin.

“And most of all she thought of what he had that she and Hasina and Chanu sought but could not find. The thing that he had and inhabited so easily. A place in the world.” (Ali, 2003, p. 264)

After living in London for years, Nazneen continues to pursue a sense of belonging. This line, “A place in the world,” mentions neither Bangladesh nor London; instead, it emphasizes the word “world” that indicates that she is no longer feeling completely part of Bangladesh, and starting to feel like part of London. Simply put, she is in the middle where he feels like she does not belong to anywhere. In this case, Nazneen envies one of the characters named Karim, who is a second-generation diaspora, the son of immigrant parents, who was born and raised in London and considers it home. This excerpt emphasizes the process of prospecting and negotiating, which involves the feeling of belonging and existence.

“This is the tragedy, Chanu had said. Man works like a donkey. Working like a donkey here, but never made a go. In his heart, he never left the village.” (Ali, 2003, p. 140)

Alongside Nazneen, Chanu is also a part of London’s role as a platform for negotiating belonging. Nevertheless, his perspective is different from Nazneen’s. While Nazneen constantly changes her perspective throughout the novel, Chanu seems to be firm in his stance. This excerpt mainly contains the idea that Chanu is still emotionally attached to his homeland despite having physically moved to a new place. He uses the idiom “works like a donkey” to describe how a man does hard and tedious work. The following sentence, “Working like a donkey here, but never made a go,” indicates that even if Chanu had already worked hard to support his family in London, he never achieved real success. “Never made a go” can also mean that he felt he never managed to ‘belong’ to London in terms of economic, social, and cultural aspects. In Chanu’s mind, he never fully reached a sense of belonging because of he feels like London’s culture does not recognize him, and at the same time, his belonging to his homeland began to fade.

Instead of totally releasing or transforming his old identity, Chanu prefers to maintain a life of nostalgia for his homeland. In this case, London acts as a space for Chanu to negotiate with his identity and belonging through a way of thinking and action. For example, throughout the novel, he is described as a man who devoted himself to learning, working, and reading Shakespeare’s works, but at the same time, he also desires to ‘go home’ to Dhaka. This indicates the sense of belonging that is far from intact.

3.1.3. London as an Economic and Social Mobility

The following discussion reveals how the characters experience economic and social mobility while being immigrants in London.

“If she worked fast, if she didn’t make mistakes, she could earn as much as three pounds and fifty pence in one hour.” (Ali, 2003, p. 213)

Nazneen first came to London as a housewife, without any job or activity. She is only there to manage the household. However, after several years have passed, she and her family, including Chanu and the kids, face some economic changes. Chanu, who was previously an office worker, eventually quit his job and became a job seeker. Nazneen, whose soul actually has a desire to develop, plus the family's unstable economic situation, urges Nazneen to do something, to find a job. At first, Chanu does not allow her to work because he believes that women should stay at home, but regarding the economic situation of the family, which is unstable, Chanu finally lets her work but still stay at home. So she does sewing work and eventually becomes passionate about it. In this excerpt, it illustrates Nazneen's desire to collect as much money as possible. She felt she could already rely on herself to earn a living and send money to her sister in Bangladesh. She wants to increase the opportunities for economic growth for herself and his family. It indicates that London has an influence on Nazneen as an immigrant to improve the economic situation and achieve a better living.

"I did this and that. Whatever I could. So much hard work, so little reward. More or less it is true to say I have been chasing wild buffaloes and eating my own rice." (Ali, 2003, p. 34)

Chanu is the character who most shows the ups and downs of his career during his life in London. At the beginning of the story, he is told that he works in an office and has a stable income. However, due to the pressure of racism he experienced, he resigned and started again from the beginning. He experienced ups and downs on his journey to make a good economy for himself and his family back in Bangladesh.

This passage shows the struggle Chanu encounters as an immigrant man who is pursuing a career in the city of London. Being an immigrant at work is not the same as being with local people. Chanu experiences racism in terms of the system of work. This excerpt highlights the personal struggle that is filled with hard work, but it does not get the results commensurate with the effort. In this passage, Chanu mentions an idiom, "I have been chasing wild buffaloes and eating my own rice." It is a metaphor for a wasted effort or a life cycle that does not produce significant progress. This reflects the class struggle, hampered social mobility, and stagnant economic conditions despite the fact that he had been trying so hard at work.

"When I am gone, my sons will be all right. See how weak my pulse comes? But I have provided for them. Not too little, and not too much either because why should they squander what I have built? I would rather give it to the mosque. I would rather give it to the school and let those who have brains make use of them." (Ali, 2003, p. 308)

Despite appearing conservative and religious, Mrs Islam is a figure who has taken advantage of economic opportunities in London. She has become an informal moneylender in her community, demonstrating that she has achieved financial stability and control, something that is difficult for women in her position to achieve in her home country. It emphasizes the role of London as a centre of economic and social mobility by opening access for immigrants to pursue a good economic condition and to build a social position. The line "my sons will be all right" suggests that Mrs Islam not only cares about the current condition but also about the future of his sons. She is ensuring that the

future of her sons will be guaranteed thanks to all the efforts that Mrs Islam has made during her life in London. In this case, it indicates that although London is full of cultural challenges, it still acts as a social and economic ladder for those who are able to adapt and take advantage of opportunities.

“When we first came – tell them, you tell them – we lived in a one-room hovel. We dined on rice and dal, rice and dal. For breakfast we had rice and dal. For lunch we drank water to bloat out our stomachs. This is how he finished medical school. And now – look! Of course, the doctor is very refined.” (Ali, 2003, p. 113)

This statement came from Mrs Azad, Dr Azad’s wife. She recounted what their life was like when they were in the early stages of moving to London as immigrants. The line “we lived in a one-room hovel. We dined on rice and dal, rice and dal,” shows how their economic condition was not so good at that time. It can also be defined as a symbol of immigrants’ poverty. It is shown in the excerpt that Dr. Azad still completed his medical education despite those limitations. It also illustrates the shift from lower to middle or upper class in London society, proven by the line “And now – look! Of course, the doctor is very refined.” Nevertheless, despite the success he achieved, it is not free from the great struggle he encountered.

3.1.4. London as a Catalyst for Identity Formation

As the primary character, Nazneen experienced the visualization of London’s role as a catalyst for identity formation more than others. She experienced an identity reformation where previously she was a village woman who was innocent, obedient, and bound by her native culture, to a woman who began to be open-minded and had complete control over herself.

“Nazneen could say two things in English: sorry and thank you. She could spend another day alone. It was only another day.” (Ali, 2003, p. 19)

This excerpt shows Nazneen’s limitations in English, which reflects her alienation in a new environment as an immigrant. The line “It was only another day” illustrates her loneliness and acceptance of the situation. It reflects the early stage of the process of her identity formation in a new place. It can also be interpreted as how she begins to adapt and understand herself in a new context while experiencing the limitations in terms of a language barrier. This condition is an example of how London acts as a catalyst for Nazneen’s further journey in reforming her self-identity, especially as an immigrant trying to understand her position and existence in a new society.

“While she sat, she was no longer a collection of the hopes, random thoughts, petty anxieties, and selfish wants that made her, but was whole and pure. The old Nazneen was sublimated and the new Nazneen was filled with white light, glory.” (Ali, 2003, p. 41)

This excerpt illustrates a moment of internal transformation for Nazneen. In Bangladesh, Nazneen was shaped by a culture that emphasized female submission and obedience. However, in London, she slowly begins to change, although in the early

stages of marriage, she also lives in a patriarchal structure because of Chanu. She is no longer torn apart by anxieties, petty hopes, and personal desires, but instead, she achieves a new form of wholeness and purity. This shows the process of forming a new identity, which is more complete from 'old Nazneen' to 'new Nazneen.' The phrase "The old Nazneen was sublimated" signifies that the old version of Nazneen is a passive, obedient, and shaped by others' expectations. Following that, the phrase "filled with white light, glory" symbolizes freedom, enlightenment, and power. It indicates that these whole things make this a powerful example of identity reformation by both internal and external experiences.

"I don't stop you from doing anything. I am westernized now. It is lucky for you that you married an educated man. That was a stroke of luck.' She carried on with her chores. 'And anyway, if you were in Bangladesh, you would not go out. Coming here you are not missing anything, only broadening your horizons.'" (Ali, 2003, p. 45)

"Razia, on the other hand, I would not call a respectable type. I'm not saying anything against her. But what is her background? Her husband does some menial sort of job. He is uneducated. He is probably illiterate. Perhaps he can write his name. If he can't write his name, he will put a cross. Razia cuts her hair like a tramp. Perhaps she calls it fashion. I don't know. Her son is roaming around the estate like a vagabond, throwing stones and what have you." (Ali, 2003, p. 83)

Chanu's character undergoes a rather complicated identity change. At first, he felt that he had been westernized, but as time passed, he felt like a Bangladeshi again. These two excerpts show how, at the beginning of the story, Chanu sees himself as an 'educated' man because he has a degree from Dhaka University and the Open University, and he has a nice office job. On the other hand, not infrequently, he looks down on people from his own community. In this case, he is talking about Razia and her family. This shows that his identity as a Bangladeshi immigrant is starting to be eroded because of his idealistic thoughts of wanting to be part of the British community, proven by the statement, "I am westernized now." It also implied that he does not view people in his community as being on the same level as him. But on the other hand, he still has a patriarchal side to him. Proven by the first quote, where he restricts Nazneen from leaving the house.

"Nazneen wanted Razia to slip into these other voices, to become the old Razia once again. She studied her friend. Nothing lit up her eyes today. Not anger, not fear, not pain. How long had it been since mischief starred in those deep gold flecks?" (Ali, 2003, p. 393)

Razia is one of the characters who is stable in terms of identity change. In Razia's case, London plays a role as a place that influences her family's life path to the point that Razia loses her identity. This quote illustrates Razia's identity change from a once cheerful and vibrant person to someone who appears tired, flat, and devoid of emotional vitality. The bitter experience of being an immigrant mother in London tests her resilience and reforms her identity. When her son, Tariq, falls into drugs due to a broken social environment, Razia's identity as a mother, a strong woman, and part of the community begins to shake. In this context, London catalyses identity formation

because the city allows for individual freedom and a wide range of lifestyle choices. In this context, Tariq, who chooses a free lifestyle but deviates too far. On the other hand, this also presents a threat to the stability of immigrant families due to clashes of cultural values, economic pressures, and promiscuity. Razia experiences a clash between the expectations of her immigrant parents and the harsh realities of living in a big city. Razia's emotional transformation in this excerpt shows how London shapes, changes, and even erodes parts of an immigrant's identity, both internally and externally.

"'I used to think all the time of going back,' said Dr Azad. He spoke so quietly that Nazneen was forced to look directly at him, because to catch all the words she had to follow his lips. 'Every year I thought, "Maybe this year." And I'd go for a visit, buy some more land, see relatives and friends and make up my mind to return for good. But something would always happen. A flood, a tornado that just missed the building, a power cut, some mind-numbing piece of petty bureaucracy, bribes to be paid out to get anything done. And I'd think, 'Well, maybe not this year.' And now, I don't know. I just don't know.'" (Ali, 2003, p. 32-33)

Dr Azad experienced a fairly firm identity change. At the beginning of his life as an immigrant, he had the same mindset as most other immigrants, namely the desire to 'go home'. However, over time, many incidents happened to him, so his identity reformed into something new. In this passage, Dr. Azad is pouring out his inner struggle as an immigrant who intends to return to his homeland, but the reality and life in London slowly change his identity and orientation. It is seen from his attitude in daily life that Dr Azad did not show any feelings that led to a desire to return to his homeland. That was because he had settled in London both economically and mentally. Nevertheless, behind that, he also used to harbour feelings of wanting to 'go home'. However, over time, those feelings faded and eventually. This line, "And now, I don't know. I just don't know," proves that he is now at a stage where he does not know whether he wants to return to Bangladesh. His ignorance reflects an identity that is beginning to reform in London. In other words, he no longer feels fully belonging to his homeland, but also not fully "English."

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to reveal the role of the city of London play as a third space in the reformation of immigrant character's identity in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* experience cultural hybridity. Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory approach is used as the basis for the analysis. Based on the results of discussions and research that have been conducted previously, the following are the conclusions drawn by the researcher. First of all, this research found that, as the third space, London has four roles that support the identity reformation of immigrant characters. To begin with, London acts as a space of resistance and transformation, where London provides a space for the immigrant characters to resist one culture and experience identity transformation. The resistance carried out by immigrants is not all uniform. Depending on the experience of each character, some characters experience resistance to one culture, either the original culture or the new culture, but one character can also experience resistance to both cultures with different intensities and contexts. Next, London acts as a platform for negotiating belonging. London provides space for immigrants to negotiate where they

belong. Overall, the characters analysed in this study show almost equal attachment preferences between homeland and current country. Next is economic and social mobility. London, as a developed city, provides opportunities for immigrants to try to achieve social and economic mobility. Some characters, such as Dr Azad and Mrs Islam, are examples who have succeeded in rising socially and economically while living in London. Lastly, London acts as a catalyst for identity formation. The city creates a space of cultural ambiguity that allows characters such as Nazneen, Dr. Azad, and Mrs Azad to renegotiate their identities amidst the tug-of-war between their home culture and Western culture.

Thus, Brick Lane represents immigrants not as a single experience, but as a complex, flexible identity process influenced by the interaction of society and culture. Compared to previous research, this research produces more specific results regarding London's role as a third space and how immigrant characters experience cultural hybridity. This study is expected to contribute to the study of postcolonial identity and open up opportunities for further analysis of the representation of hybridity in other migrant literary works.

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