



Crossing Borders, Breaking Barriers: Exploring Migration, 'Othering,' and Identity in Bangladeshi Women's Fiction—Insights from *Brick Lane* and *The Bones of Grace*

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Abstract

This study examines how Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Tahmima Anam's *The Bones of Grace* portray South Asian migrant female characters through the interrelated themes of "Othering" and identity formation. Employing a comparative literary analysis rooted in feminist and postcolonial theory, particularly de Beauvoir's notion of "Othering" and Butler's theory of gender performativity, the study analyses how migration influences. It alters women's lives in various situations. Comparative literary analyses revealed that in *Brick Lane*, "Othering" is rooted in the structural and cultural constraints of an immigrant enclave in East London, where Nazneen's early passivity gives way to incremental acts of agency and the formation of a hybrid identity. In *The Bones of Grace*, "Othering" is more mobile, shifting across transnational settings as Zubaida navigates complex cultural expectations and undertakes a personal quest for belonging. Both protagonists approach their identity in different ways. Nazneen's process is slow and adaptive; Zubaida's is more conscious. In either instance, identity work serves as a form of resistance against marginalization. These works portray women's fiction as a means of cultural activism. This paper contributes to the research on gendered migration by demonstrating how literature can reveal the diverse experiences of migrating women and challenge simplistic narratives.

Keywords: Othering, identity formation, South Asian women's fiction, Bangladeshi diaspora

1. Introduction

The intersection of gender and migration stands out as a major focus in contemporary social and cultural studies. Migration involves a profound reconfiguring of personal identity, relationships, and cultural affiliation. For women, these changes are significantly shaped by gendered expectations within their new environments (Mahmood, 2016). It is important to probe these experiences, since they demonstrate the way that migrant women negotiate concomitant systems of marginalization and possibility.

Literary fiction offers a compelling lens through which to consider the nuances of migrant women's lives. Fictional narratives offer insights into the psychosocial aspects of migration, often overlooked in statistical or policy discussions (Hage, 2021). Characters' voices in fiction can illustrate the complexities of displacement, belonging, and resistance, providing readers a lived experience of those caught in between cultures. Novels provide an invaluable means of accessing the experiences of women in alien environments, offering insight into their challenges and triumphs (Hussain, 2017).

Women's literary voices from the South Asian diaspora provided rich, nuanced portrayals of migration, otherness, and identity formation. South Asian women writers often center female protagonists in their narratives, resisting earlier traditions in which women were peripheral to men's stories. Their works foreground women's agency, emotions, and aspirations, positioning them as central actors in their journeys. Creative women writers situate their female characters in diasporic contexts, contributing significantly to the field of diasporic literature (Karche & Mane, 2022, p.33). These narratives are rooted in lived immigrant experiences rather than abstract theory, drawing authenticity from the realities of adaptation, loss, and transformation (Hirimuthugoda, 2016, p.135).

However, such representations also grapple with enduring challenges. Historically, male-authored South Asian literature has often relegated women to secondary roles, shaping their portrayal through the lens of societal norms that define women in relation to men (De Beauvoir, 1952). Selinger (2014, p. 4), drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's (1952) notion of women as the "Other," observes that women in such narratives have often been reduced to narrative devices in male-centered plots. Selinger argues (2014, p.12), "that another issue is that within this structure, women are rarely protagonists because they are considered irrelevant due to their gender ... [and are] mainly created as an aspect of the narrative landscape to facilitate the protagonist's story ... women are defined as extensions of men." In contrast, South Asian female authors frequently reclaim narrative space by making women the subjects rather than the objects of the story (Mohanty, 1988). These portrayals delve into the psychological landscapes of female characters, depicting their struggles with societal expectations, cultural preservation, and self-definition.

In these narratives, the themes emerge with the particular force of "Othering" and "identity formation...." "Othering," as developed by de Beauvoir (2011), is the social process by which one group, historically men, places another group – women – as different, secondary, and marginal. In the context of migration, this is especially pronounced, with women being doubly "Othered" in both host societies and, at times, their cultural communities. This marginalization

is further compounded by the intersection of gender with other social identities such as race, class, and religion, creating unique experiences of discrimination (Collins & Bilge, 2020). “Identity formation,” meanwhile, is the negotiation of selfhood amidst this pressure, often involving a fine line between inheritance and adaptation, individual agency and communal belonging (Marcia, 1966).

Judith Butler's (1990) work on gender performativity extends this analysis further, showing how identity is not fixed but continually constituted through repeated acts, gestures, and roles. According to Butler (1990), gender is constructed through the repeated performance of gender by an individual. Butler (1990, p.34) argues that “gender proves to be performance, constituting the identity it purported to be.” Researchers have added to Butler’s notions of gender by defining gender as “a cultural and social construct” (Ahmadi & Karaminejad, 2019, p.142) and being “determine[d] and construct[ed]” by actions (Ahmadi & Karaminejad, 2019, p.142). In other words, it can be argued that we construct and form our gender identity by repeating certain behaviours and actions.

Literary fiction has long explored these themes, yet examining them through the works of contemporary South Asian women writers offers a compelling perspective. The diasporic condition frequently intensifies questions of selfhood and belonging, making it a fertile ground for exploring how “Othering” shapes migrant women’s identities and how they, in turn, resist or transform these definitions. By presenting nuanced portraits of women negotiating cultural, social, and personal boundaries, such works contribute to broader conversations about gender equality, migration, and cultural hybridity.

This study focuses on two significant works in Bangladeshi women’s fiction: Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (Ali, 2003) and Tahmima Anam’s *The Bones of Grace* (Anam, 2017). Both novels focus on Bangladeshi female protagonists whose migratory experiences, while markedly different, engage deeply with the themes of “Othering” and identity. Nazneen in *Brick Lane* embodies the struggles of a first-generation migrant navigating life in London, confronting cultural isolation, gendered expectations, and the slow process of self-assertion. In contrast, Zubaida, in *The Bones of Grace* – a globally mobile woman, grapples with questions of heritage, belonging, and self-discovery across continents, her journey shaped by personal choice as much as circumstance.

A comparative literary analysis of these two narratives facilitates a deeper comprehension of the construction, limitation, and redefinition of migrant women's identities. Nazneen and Zubaida face the pressures of “Othering,” but their experiences differ greatly. Nazneen lives in an immigrant neighbourhood in East London, while Zubaida searches for her roots in various countries. This demonstrates how women find their place in the world in different ways, and highlights the strength of Bangladeshi women in the diaspora. The literature serves as a social tool to build empathy, challenge stereotypes, and deepen our understanding of gendered migration.

1.1 Othering and Migrant Female Characters

The concept of “Othering” remains essential to feminist and postcolonial thought (Spivak, 1988). It gives us a way to think critically about how people and groups are pushed to the edges of society. Simone de Beauvoir (1952) first wrote about the idea of woman as the

“Other” in *The Second Sex*. Judith Butler's work (1990) in *Gender Trouble*, builds on this idea by showing how social and cultural norms shape and reinforce identities all the time. In this study, “Othering” denotes the mechanisms through which women, especially migrant women, are characterized as distinct, subordinate, or inferior by prevailing cultural groups, and by which these women are frequently anticipated to adhere to designated roles rather than affirm their own identities. In diasporic contexts, this process is frequently exacerbated, as migrant women encounter “Othering” from host societies and, at times, from within their cultural communities.

In diasporic contexts, this process is often amplified, as migrant women encounter “Othering” from both host societies and, at times, from within their own cultural communities (Yuval-Davis, 2011). “Othering” has been a common theme in literature, often used to show how power works in human relationships. Postcolonial fiction often depicts colonized peoples as exotic, primitive, or perilous – characterizations constructed to further the agendas of the colonizing entities. These portrayals serve to justify colonial domination and erase the complex realities of colonized societies (Bhabha, 2012). Feminist literature has modified this framework to analyze gender relations, portraying women as the “Other” in contrast to male norms (Butler, 1990). Such portrayals highlight how gendered identities are constructed through power dynamics and societal expectations. In literature written by men, women have often been shown in supporting or background roles, mainly to advance the stories of male protagonists. Selinger ((2014) notes that these depictions often depict women as extensions of male characters, reinforcing the idea of women as unimportant.

Women’s fiction, however, often resists and subverts such portrayals. South Asian female authors have challenged reductive depictions by centering their narratives on women’s lived experiences. The lived experiences of diasporic women often involve difficulty in mediating discrepant worlds (Clifford, 1997). In doing so, they portray “Othering” not merely as an external imposition but as an internal struggle that shapes their characters’ emotional landscapes. These narratives depict women negotiating between inherited cultural expectations and the demands of new environments, revealing how “Othering” can be both resisted and internalized. These diasporic South Asian women are also inclined to form their identities in reaction to the culture they have brought from South Asia, either in conformity with it or in rebellion against it (Lau, 2005, p.253).

This framework is particularly effective for examining the experiences of migrant women as it highlights the intersectionality of their marginalization. Migrant women frequently occupy the intersection of various social identities – gender, ethnicity, class, religion – that converge to produce distinct manifestations of exclusion and discrimination (Crenshaw, 2013). “Othering” is a way to talk about how these women are seen as “different” from the groups that are in charge and how these views make it harder for them to get resources, chances, and a sense of belonging.

In fiction by female South Asian migrant authors, “Othering” frequently serves as a narrative catalyst, pushing characters toward moments of self-reflection and transformation. Through nuanced portrayals, these authors expose the mechanisms of marginalization, from overt racism and sexism to subtle, everyday exclusions (Gillborn, 2006). In Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, for instance, Nazneen’s early experiences in London illustrate the isolating effects of

linguistic barriers and cultural dislocation. Similarly, in Tahmima Anam's *The Bones of Grace*, Zubaida's encounters with different cultures force her to confront how her identity is perceived and, at times, distorted by others.

By placing "Othering" at the center of their stories, these writers want readers to think critically about how society works and to feel for people who live on the edges of it. By doing this, they broaden the range of literary representation, ensuring that the voices of migrant women are not relegated to the edges but are seen as central to the human experience. This paper employs "Othering" as a principal analytical framework as it encapsulates both the structural and individual aspects of migrant women's marginalization, rendering it essential for comprehending the characters' narratives.

1.2 Identity Formation and Migrant Female Characters

The theme of identity formation is closely related to "Othering." This is the process by which people determine who they are considering their past and present situations. Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity provides a valuable framework for comprehending this process, as it underscores that identity is not a fixed essence but is instead formed through recurrent actions, roles, and behaviors. Butler (1990) posits that societal norms influence these performances; however, they may also serve as arenas of resistance where individuals contest and redefine their assigned roles.

In the context of migration, identity formation is often intensified by the need to reconcile multiple cultural frameworks. Migrant women, especially, must deal with the demands of their host society while also keeping in mind the traditions and heritage of their home country. Diasporic South Asian women have to grapple with issues of identity and also have to deal with both the notions and the reality of a distant homeland (Prashad, 2000). This negotiation is seldom uncomplicated; it necessitates the equilibrium of familial expectations, societal conventions, and individual aspirations. The search for identity is one of the most important problems in today's world, and literature is a great way to look at these tensions (Lazarus, 2004, p.2)

In fiction, identity formation has been portrayed in diverse ways. In some narratives, it is a gradual, introspective process in which characters slowly come to terms with their multiple identities. Lau (2005, p.7) mentions, the idea of women characters playing multiple roles in the fiction of South Asian women writers, arguing that such writing reflects "the complexities of the many relationships, familial or otherwise, which South Asian women daily deal with, bringing home the point that the South Asian woman seldom, if ever, acts in isolation" In others, it is marked by decisive moments of rupture – acts of defiance, relocation, or self-assertion that redefine the character's place in the world (Butler, 1990). Women's fiction often depicts identity formation as intertwined with resistance to "Othering" illustrating how women reclaim agency and redefine their sense of self within oppressive structures (Mohanty, 1988). In these works, characters may begin their journeys constrained by external definitions of who they are, only to challenge and transform these definitions through conscious acts of self-determination.

In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen's identity shifts from being predominantly characterized by her roles as a wife and mother in a Bangladeshi immigrant household to one that embodies a

heightened sense of agency and autonomy. Her journey shows how identity can still form in restrictive settings, as she learns to find her place between tradition and modernity. From the start, Zubaida's identity is more fluid because she travels frequently and is exposed to different cultures. However, she is also on a journey to find coherence and a sense of belonging, particularly concerning her Bangladeshi heritage.

In literature, migrant women often grapple with the contradictory aspects of their identities. They have to comprehend the “self” of their native country, the “self” of the host society, and the “self” of their personal lives. Both conflict and fresh ideas can result from this diversity.

This study explores identity formation, alongside “Othering.” These two processes are interdependent. “Othering” produces the circumstances that necessitate identity work. Characters' identities are shaped by their reactions to marginalization. This paper illustrates how migrant women negotiate these interconnected processes by contrasting *Brick Lane* and *The Bones of Grace*.

In today's globalized world, migration and identity issues are urgent. Rising migration flows intensify debates about belonging, cultural integration, and representation. While much research has explored these themes, there is less focus on how female South Asian migrant authors depict them. This study examines *Brick Lane* and *The Bones of Grace* to fill this gap. It contributes to a better understanding of how literature reveals the gendered aspects of migration and broadens discussions on cultural inclusion.

1.3 Global Mobility and Transnational Identities

Recent trends in global mobility significantly impact the experiences of migrant women, presenting both challenges and opportunities in navigating transnational lives. These women often develop what Aihwa Ong (1999) terms 'flexible citizenship,' adapting their strategies and loyalties to navigate the complex demands and possibilities presented by different nation-states and cultural contexts. This can involve strategic engagement with legal systems, economic opportunities, and cultural norms across borders, shaping unique identities that blend elements of their heritage and their new cultural contexts. The rise of transnationalism has also led to new forms of community and support networks for migrant women, as they maintain connections with their homelands while forging new relationships in their host countries (Parrenas, 2005). These networks play a crucial role in mitigating the challenges of migration and fostering a sense of belonging in new environments.

This study looks at identity formation and “Othering.” It shows how these two processes depend on each other. “Othering” creates conditions that make forming identity necessary. Meanwhile, how characters handle marginalization shapes their identities.

In our globalised world, migration and identity are critical issues. Growing migratory flows spark debates about representation, cultural integration, and belonging. These themes have been the subject of numerous studies, but fewer have concentrated on female South Asian migrant writers. This study looks at how they depict these problems, particularly in relation to “Othering” and identity formation.

2. Methods

This study uses a comparative literary analysis to explore the representation of South Asian migrant female characters in *Brick Lane* (2003) and *The Bones of Grace* (2016), highlighting the interrelated themes of “Othering” and identity building. Comparative literary analysis elucidates the similarities and variances in themes across works, enhancing our understanding of how various narratives address identical social and cultural challenges.

2.1 Selection of Texts

The chosen novels were selected for their shared focus on Bangladeshi female protagonists whose life trajectories are shaped by migration, yet whose experiences differ markedly in context and scope. *Brick Lane* offers the perspective of a first-generation migrant navigating life within an immigrant enclave in East London. *The Bones of Grace* also features a main character who moves around the world and has to deal with identity in many cultural settings. Both works have been critically acclaimed for their exploration of gender, migration, and cultural hybridity, rendering them suitable for comparative analysis.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The analysis is based on feminist and postcolonial theories. Simone de Beauvoir’s (1952) notion of “Othering” offers a framework for analyzing the positioning of female characters as marginal or secondary, both within the social structures of their host societies and within their cultural communities. Judith Butler’s (2002) theory of gender performativity enhances the study by elucidating how identities are perpetually constructed through repeating acts, roles, and behaviors, which may also function as mechanisms of resistance. These frameworks together make it possible to look at how “Othering” affects, limits, and interacts with the processes of forming an identity.

2.3 Analytical Approach

The study follows a qualitative, interpretive approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Each text was read closely to identify narrative moments in which the protagonists experience “Othering,” either through explicit social exclusion, internalized marginality, or cultural constraints. The way people navigate the conflicts between tradition and modernity, belonging and alienation, and personal agency and societal expectations was highlighted by a closer look at these occurrences during periods of identity negotiation or transformation.

The comparative dimension of the study involved cross-textual analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017), mapping points of thematic convergence and divergence between the two novels. This allowed for an exploration of how different migratory contexts—localized settlement versus transnational mobility—shape the protagonists’ experiences of “Othering” and identity formation.

2.4 Scope and Limitations

The analysis is confined to the textual worlds of *Brick Lane* and *The Bones of Grace*, with interpretations derived from the novels’ language, structure, and character development.

While secondary literature on South Asian women's writing, migration, and feminist theory informed the analysis, no additional primary texts were included. This scope ensures depth of analysis but does not claim to represent all migrant women's experiences in literature.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

As a literary study, this research does not involve human subjects. Nevertheless, care was taken to represent the texts and their cultural contexts with fidelity, avoiding reductive interpretations and acknowledging the diversity of South Asian diasporic experiences.

3. Results

The comparative analysis of *Brick Lane* and *The Bones of Grace* reveals nuanced portrayals of "Othering" and identity formation in the lives of South Asian migrant female characters. While both novels center on Bangladeshi women negotiating cultural displacement, their contexts – first-generation migration to London versus transnational mobility between the United States, Bangladesh, and other locales – shape the way these themes emerge and develop.

3.1 Othering – *Brick Lane* vs *The Bones of Grace*

In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen's experience as a first-generation immigrant in East London is interwoven with the theme of "Othering." Arriving in Tower Hamlets as a young bride in an arranged marriage, she feels trapped in the immigrant community. She finds it difficult to blend in with both her Bangladeshi community and British society due to her limited command of English. She is unable to fit in with society since her male counterpart prevents her from entering public spaces. Nazneen sees herself as the "Other" due to systemic racism and economic marginalization. These forces seem uninterested in or hostile to immigrants in British society. Nazneen's early passivity serves as an example of how "Othering" shapes identity. People avoid social situations and withdraw as a result.

Nazneen's "Othering" comes from external pressures and her community's gender norms. Her duties as a wife and mother overshadow her dreams. Any deviation from these norms leads to social disapproval. In the diasporic context, Chanu's struggles with work and his strict views highlight how gender and ethnicity restrict women's freedom. Even as she meets people like Karim, a younger Bangladeshi activist born in Britain, her sense of belonging still relies on male perspectives and political goals.

Zubaida's experience of Othering in *The Bones of Grace* is complex but essential. Because of her education and international mobility, she is in a better position than Nazneen. However, her lifestyle does not shield her from marginalization; rather, "Othering" manifests as subtle emotional and cultural shifts. She highlights how expectations still affect a Bangladeshi woman's sexual and familial relationships, even in cosmopolitan settings, when she encounters discrimination for her gender and nationality while studying in the US.

"Othering" in Bangladesh is also depicted in the book, particularly in Zubaida's quest to find her biological mother. By associating Othering with personal history and familial legitimacy,

this illustrates how exclusion can happen within one's own culture. As she negotiates her identity in the face of numerous social and geographic obstacles, Zubaida discovers that “Othering” is difficult. Unlike Nazneen, who experiences Othering as an immigrant, Zubaida shifts between being an insider and an outsider based on her circumstances.

Brick Lane focuses on systemic and social exclusions in an established immigrant setting, even though both books depict “Othering” as a recurring force in the lives of migrating women. On the other hand, as the protagonist progresses through various settings, interpersonal connections, and phases of self-discovery, *The Bones of Grace* examines how Othering can be fluid.

3.2 Identity Formation – *Brick Lane* vs *The Bones of Grace*

In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen’s identity changes over time, frequently against her will. She is initially fully defined by her roles at home. In London, she respects Chanu and follows cultural traditions. Little things like talking to neighbours, learning English, and sewing for a living, however, change the way she sees herself. When Nazneen chooses to stay in London instead of returning to Bangladesh, it marks a key turning point in her life. This highlights her embrace of a hybrid identity, blending British culture with her Bangladeshi roots. In doing this, she shows herself as an independent agent, controlling her social, domestic, and geographical future.

Her identity develops slowly and adaptively. It builds through daily interactions rather than sudden changes. Still, the novel shows that traces of “Othering” persist. Nazneen’s new identity does not erase her cultural heritage. Instead, it develops from her ability to balance her roots with her desire for independence.

In *The Bones of Grace*, Zubaida’s identity unfolds through a more conscious journey. She possesses many cultural identities. These come from her education, global connections, and travel experiences. Yet, her life across borders drives her to seek a stable sense of self, tied to her search for her birth mother. This quest becomes both an absolute and metaphorical path to self-fulfillment.

Zubaida’s mobility gives her more choices than Nazneen’s limited world, but it also makes her feel disconnected from any one place. Fitting in is not how she defines herself. Instead, it weaves together various cultural influences into a cohesive story. Her voyage through the US, Bangladesh, and Pakistan contributes to her self-discovery. They allow her to embrace her Bangladeshi heritage while rejecting the patriarchal norms associated with it.

Nazneen’s identity develops by overcoming social and spatial barriers, while Zubaida’s identity develops through travel and choices. This comparison shows that neither character’s identity is unique or fixed. Instead, it’s dynamic. It is continually reinterpreted in reaction to “Othering.” According to the analysis, migratory women in both novels are greatly impacted by “Othering.” Each character experiences it differently, though, indicating that identity formation is a dynamic process. It is situational and incremental for Nazneen. It is self-directed and mobile for Zubaida. This illustrates how migrant women navigate the intersection of migration, gender, and cultural identity.

4. Discussion

The way that modern South Asian women's fiction addresses the twin issues of identity creation and a comparison of *Brick Lane* and *The Bones of Grace* clarifies “Othering.” The female protagonists in both texts struggle with cultural displacement, but how they deal with these situations demonstrate distinct resistance and self-definition techniques. When viewed through the lens of feminist and postcolonial literary theory, these findings show how complicated it is to show diasporic women in a way that includes gender, migration, and narrative agency.

4.1 Othering as a Literary Strategy

The persistence of “Othering” in both novels reflects a broader trend in postcolonial women’s fiction, where marginality is not merely an incidental theme but a narrative engine. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir’s (1952) foundational work in *The Second Sex* and Judith Butler’s (1990) theories of socially constructed identity, “Othering” here is both externally imposed and internally negotiated. In *Brick Lane*, the physical and cultural isolation of the East London immigrant enclave mirrors Edward Said’s (Said, 1977) concept of “Orientalism” as a form of epistemic and spatial segregation. Nazneen is positioned as the exoticized outsider who exists within but not fully in British society. Zubaida’s “Othering” is more mutable, shifting as she moves across different national and cultural spaces, yet its effect is no less significant; she is rendered marginal at different points by her gender, nationality, and personal history.

In *Brick Lane*, “Othering” is mainly location-bound and stationary, serving as a structural constraint on the protagonist’s freedom of movement. In *The Bones of Grace*, on the other hand, it is mobile, following the protagonist across borders and manifesting as a variety of cultural norms and expectations. This comparison reveals an important distinction in the ways that “Othering” is employed in literature. This reflects what postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha (2012) describe as the “unhomely” condition—where the migrant is perpetually negotiating the dissonance between belonging and alienation, no matter the location.

The gendered dimension of “Othering” is equally significant. Although Zubaida and Nazneen both challenge patriarchal notions of femininity, their reactions vary depending on how mobile they are. Whereas Zubaida's resistance is global, influenced by her capacity to move between and selectively interact with various cultural frameworks, Nazneen's resistance is localized, taking place within the boundaries of her home and community. This distinction is consistent with current literary scholarship that identifies mobility as both a resource and a challenge in migrant women’s identity narratives. (Grewal, 2005).

4.2 Identity Formation as Resistance

Identity creation appears as a counterforce to “Othering” in both novels. The progressive process for Nazneen is based on routine actions that defy her designated position, such as learning English, earning money, and ultimately deciding to remain in London. Butler's (1988) theory of performativity, which maintains that repeated activities progressively result in a reshaped sense of self, is consistent with this gradual growth. Nazneen's choice is

significant because it challenges her husband's power and changes how she sees her place in a complicated cultural identity that makes it hard to call her British or Bangladeshi.

While Zubaida's identity development is deliberate and self-guided from the beginning, as a physical and symbolic act of self-definition, her search for her biological mother grounds her identity in a past that goes beyond the immediate cultural limitations of her environment. According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010), this route is an example of “narrative self-fashioning,” in which a person actively creates their identity by combining personal experiences and diverse cultural influences.

Literarily speaking, these variations show how women's fiction can depict identity work in a variety of ways. *Brick Lane* and *The Bones of Grace* support post-structuralist and postcolonial views that see identity as fluid, contingent, and formed in reaction to changing circumstances. This is different from traditional realist narratives that may have shown identity as a solid thing.

4.3 The Role of Place and Mobility

A key implication of this comparative analysis is the central role of spatial context in shaping both “Othering” and identity formation. *Brick Lane* demonstrates how physical confinement – both geographic and social – reinforces “Othering” while simultaneously making acts of resistance more difficult but also more symbolically potent. Nazneen's acts of agency are more significant because they happen in such limited conditions.

The Bones of Grace, on the other hand, shows mobility as a double-edged sword: it gives Zubaida chances to rethink her identity, but it also makes her feel like she does not fit, which creates new kinds of alienation. This tension is similar to what Caren Kaplan said in *Questions of Travel* (1996): being mobile does not always mean freedom; it can also make you feel broken and uneasy. The novel shows this tension by showing Zubaida as strong because she lives in different countries and is haunted by unanswered questions about her past.

4.4 Women's Fiction as a Site for Reclaiming Narrative Agency

This depiction of “Othering” and identity construction in these novels demonstrates that women's fiction is a genre that can re-appropriate narrative authority for the oppressed—reconstructions of female desire. Historically, South Asian women featured in male-authored fiction were frequently framed in relationships subordinate to the stories of men, as Selinger (2014) observes. In contrast, both Ali and Anam construct narrative worlds in which women's experiences, perspectives, and voices are central to the exploration of migration and cultural negotiation.

By doing so, these works participate in what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010) terms the “strategic use of essentialism”—foregrounding women's shared experiences of marginalization in order to challenge dominant narratives, even while acknowledging internal differences shaped by class, mobility, and personal history. This is particularly evident in how both novels depict the protagonists' consciousness as the primary narrative lens, allowing readers to witness

“Othering” and identity work from the inside out.

4.5 Implications for Understanding Migrant Women's Narratives

The findings of this comparative analysis have several implications for the study of migrant women's narratives:

- Multiplicity of migrant experience – the contrast between Nazneen's and Zubaida's experiences underscores the heterogeneity of migrant women's lives. Migration literature must avoid overgeneralizing "the migrant woman" as a singular category (Anthias, 1998). Instead, they attend to variations shaped by generation, mobility, education, and socio-economic position.
- Interdependence of "Othering" and identity formation – in both novels, "Othering" functions as the catalyst for identity work, creating the conditions under which self-definition becomes necessary. At the same time, acts of identity formation serve as resistance, challenging the very structures that produce "Othering" (Hall, 2015).
- Spatial context as determinant of agency – the degree and form of agency available to migrant women in fiction are closely tied to their spatial positioning (Massey, 1994). Confinement and mobility shape both the challenges and strategies of resistance, influencing how identity is formed.
- Women's fiction as cultural intervention – by centring female perspectives, Ali and Anam contribute to a counter-canon within South Asian diasporic literature that resists patriarchal and colonial narrative frameworks. Their fictions show how, as a means of cultural critique (Spivak, 1999), fiction can expose the workings of marginalization, both overt and subtle, as well as document alternative enactments of agency and belonging.

These findings align with a growing body of scholarship that sees migrant women's fiction as a vital site for theorizing intersectionality in literature. Works by authors such as Jhumpa Lahiri (2004), Kamila Shamsie (2011) and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (2013), similarly explore the tensions between home and host culture, the layering of identities, and the resistance to "Othering." However, notably, *Brick Lane* and *The Bones of Grace* centre Bangladeshi experiences — which are still marginalized in global migration narratives.

The idea of "Othering" as both a fixed and flexible state aligns with recent theories. These theories see marginalization as dynamic and context-based. The differences between the novels show the need for comparative methods. This approach captures variability instead of assuming a single diasporic experience.

By situating *Brick Lane* and *The Bones of Grace* within expansive feminist and postcolonial frameworks, we can analyze the influence of identity and "Othering" on the narrative's structural and thematic components. These novels show how women's fiction can politically and artistically challenge the realities of migration.

Ali and Anam's work is part of a tradition in which fiction reflects and criticizes reality. Their stories show the harsh realities that migrant women must deal with and question the cultural stories that try to define them. The portrayal of "Othering" and identity in these books shows that migrant women's fiction will remain key to understanding the complexities of gendered migration in the twenty-first century.

5. Conclusion

The stories of Nazneen in *Brick Lane* and Zubaida in *The Bones of Grace* are intertwined, illustrating the complexities of the lives of foreign women, shaped by the dual forces of being perceived as “Other” and constructing an identity. Nazneen’s gradual awakening in an immigrant community contrasts with Zubaida’s search for self across borders. These novels demonstrate how gender, culture, and migration both limit and empower individuals.

The analysis demonstrates that “Othering” is not a singular, static phenomenon. In *Brick Lane*, it is rooted in the boundaries of a local immigrant community, reflecting how specific contextual and cultural factors influence the processes of “Othering” (Ahmed, 2013), which limits movement and reinforces traditional gender roles. In *The Bones of Grace*, it glances across geographic and relational borders, showing how mobility paths can change but not erase a life of not-fitting in. Both representations emphasise “Othering” as a driving force behind self-definition, which compels the heroes to reconcile their legacy with their modern ambitions.

Identity formation emerges in these narratives as an active, dynamic process – incremental and adaptive for Nazneen, intentional and mobile for Zubaida. In each case, acts of self-definition challenge the structures that perpetuate marginalization, illustrating Judith Butler’s (1990) notion of identity as performative and continuously negotiated. These literary voyages emphasize that the identities of migrant women are not inherent or exclusively conditioned by their experiences, but are constructed through resilience, decision-making, and tactical negotiation of cultural norms.

By foregrounding female voices, these two novels counter the historical marginalisation of women in South Asian fiction, thereby contributing to the corpus of literature that utilises narrative as a device of social critique. They validate fiction's distinctive capacity to illuminate the gendered aspects of migration, offering perspectives that contest conventional depictions of migrant women as mere victims.

In the present global climate, conversations about migration and belonging are essential, which keeps these stories current. These narratives encourage prompts to think deeply about the social and cultural forces that affect people's lives in different industries, inspiring them to consider and reflect on more fair options. This study shows how different Bengali women tell their migration stories. It affirms the value of comparative literary analysis in revealing how “Othering” and identity formation are portrayed and challenged in women's fiction.

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