

**Spectacle of Otherness: Race, Gender and Cultural Representation in *White Teeth* and
*Brick Lane***



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*Brick Lane***

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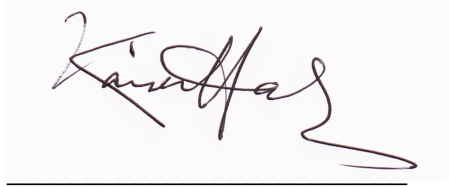
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kaiser Haq', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kaiser Md. Hamidul Haq, PhD

Professor and Dean

Department of English and Humanities

DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



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Dedication

I dedicate this to my parents and siblings, who have always been by my side and supported me throughout the years, as well as my teachers. They have consistently believed in me, which has always motivated me on my path. I now have confidence in my abilities and myself thanks to their motivation. This essay is my simple way of expressing my gratitude and love for them.

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Abstract

“What does it feel like to belong when every glance reminds you that you don’t?” This question frequently haunts the lives of immigrants portrayed in contemporary diasporic literature, especially in a society that is still shadowed by colonial legacies and multicultural tensions. To explore these things, this study aims to investigate how the terms racial otherness, gendered identity, and cultural representation are constructed, perceived, contested, and interwoven with each other in the narratives. Both the novels expose the dark reality of migration. In *White Teeth*, Smith uses satire and multi-generational narratives to expose the challenging effects of colonialism and the fluidity of cultural identity that make the immigrants "other," while in *Brick Lane*, Ali focuses on the interior lives of Bangladeshi immigrants, particularly women, to illustrate resistance against patriarchal and racialized oppression that make them "other." By using postcolonial and cultural theory, the study examines how these texts challenge dominant stereotypes and actual representations of immigrants, offering diverse perspectives. Finally, this study explores that *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* not only reveal the mechanisms of othering in a postcolonial society but also serve as counter-narratives that reclaim agency and voice for marginalized identities within the British cultural landscape.

Keywords: Other, Race, Gender, Culture, Marginalized, Diaspora, Immigrant, Hybridity, Third-space, Orientalism

Chapter 1: Introduction

The term "Spectacle of the Other" is first coined by Stuart Hall in his book *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (1997). This theory is prominent in the analysis of how marginalized groups, particularly ethnic minorities, and racial differences are represented in media and cultural discourse as different from dominant ideology. Through this concept, Hall depicts how Western or dominant power constructs "otherness" by promoting stereotypes, differences, and racialized narratives through media and literature. "Othering" works through binary oppositions, where dominant refers to the Western, white, and men, whose identity is seen as normal, while the other is the Eastern, ethnic, and racial minorities, immigrants, and women, who are considered exotic. This creates a 'us' vs. 'them' mentality. On the other hand, "otherness" has been central to sociocultural discourse, particularly in postcolonial and multicultural contexts. Literature is one of the best mediums for exploring the experiences of marginalized groups, showing the challenges they face in societies that construct their identities in opposition to the dominant ideology. These kinds of stereotypes and otherness are highly visible in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), two of the contemporary British novels that uphold the issues of race, gender, and cultural representation within immigrant communities in Britain. Both novels depict the struggles of first- and second-generation immigrants as they explore their lives in Britain, presenting how they are perceived as "other" by mainstream society.

The novels *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* explore and discuss themes of cultural hybridity, systemic ethnic and racial discrimination, and the negotiation of identity in a multicultural British society. These themes are aligned with Stuart Hall's "Spectacle of Other" and Edward

Said's "Orientalism" theory, where they discuss how marginalized communities are represented and how their identities are shaped through dominant ideological frameworks in their migrated country. Hall's "otherness" theory presents that media and cultural texts that construct and create stereotypes about marginalized groups make them other based on their race, gender, ethnic identity, and culture. Said's "Orientalism" theory similarly shows the West's perception of the East as an exotic and inferior counterpart, a dynamic that can be applied to the experiences of immigrants in Britain in Smith and Ali's novels.

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* examines the experiences of first- and second-generation immigrants in multicultural Britain, particularly through the families of Samad Mia Iqbal and Archie Jones. The representation of different races, cultures, religions, and genders is vivid in this novel. Through the characters of this novel, Smith wants to show how these things shape a person's identity as an immigrant in a Western country. The representation of race, religion, and colonial history in the novel matches with Stuart Hall's "Spectacle of the Other," where racial and ethnic minorities are often seen in stereotypical ways that reflect societal anxieties about difference (Hall 225). Smith's novel upholds how racial identity is both constructed and contested in multicultural Britain, especially through the characters of Archie Jones's wife, Clara Jones, and his daughter, Irie Jones, and then Samad and his twin sons, Magid and Millat. Hall argues that representation is central to the production of meaning and the construction of cultural identity (Hall 15). The characters of Samad Iqbal and Irie Jones struggle with imposed identities that align them with fixed notions of "otherness," as they are not like the dominant groups. Samad, a Bengali Muslim immigrant, experiences a crisis of identity as he struggles between his traditional heritage and the expectations of British society. In his migrated land Samad is considered as 'other' because of his religious and ethnic identity. His attempts to impose two

different cultural identities onto his twin sons, particularly Samad's decision to send his son Magid to Bangladesh to keep his traditional Bengali heritage, highlight the anxiety of Samad to preserve authenticity in a diasporic setting. The same struggle is seen in Irie Jones's character as she is a mixed-race character. She is struggling between her Jamaican and British identity, reflecting the instability of racial identity in postcolonial Britain. She is someone who embodies cultural hybridity in multicultural British society. Hall's concept that "identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think" is evident in Irie's journey toward self-acceptance (Hall 274). Her struggles with self-image and identity underscore the systemic racial and gendered expectations placed upon non-white individuals in Britain (Smith 198). In this way, *White Teeth* reveals how otherness operates not only through race but also through gender and class and work as an evidence of immigrants struggle to create identity and live a life as an outsider in the country they migrated to.

In *White Teeth*, Samad's character is also framed through the lens of Edward Said's Orientalist perspective. Edward Said's theory of Orientalism critiques the way Western discourse constructs the East as an exotic, inferior Other (Said 3). Samad's Bangladeshi roots and his religious identity as a Muslim are the main reasons he's struggling in Britain; his British identity exoticizes his background, reducing him to simplistic cultural markers. He is in between his own heritage and the imposed British identity. In British society, he is seen as an 'other' whose culture, religion, and race are not aligned with the dominant group. This othering put him into a third space, a postcolonial term by Homi K. Bhabha.

Furthermore, the key aspect is that the representation of gender in Smith's *White Teeth* aligns with Said's thoughts about the intersection of race and patriarchy. Through the character of

Samad's wife, Alsana Begum Smith challenges the West's gaze on submissive Eastern women. Alsana's characteristic is shown as passive, often associated with Muslims in Orientalist narratives. In this novel, the depiction of Alsana serves as a critique of the universal homogenizing tendency within Western and postcolonial discourse. Later, her resistance to performing traditional gender roles within her family represents the struggles of first-generation immigrant women. Women are expected to fulfill both patriarchal and cultural expectations worldwide, they are considered inferior and othered in front of their male authority. In this novel, Alsana is marginalized by both Western ideologies for being a Muslim immigrant and by the patriarchal, male-dominated society for being a woman.

As gender intersects with race in this novel, it shows how women of color are represented and constrained by societal expectations. The intersection of race and gender is shown through the characters of Clara Bowden and Irie Jones, the wife and daughter of Archie Jones. Clara represented a hyper-visible form of otherness due to her skin color, physical structure, Jamaican heritage, and religious background. Western ideology makes Clara an 'other' for her race and gender. The same goes for her daughter, Irie, even though she has a multifaceted identity, being both British and Jamaican. Irie's body and hair become sites of racial spectacle as she navigates societal expectations and the hypervisibility of her racialized body. Smith critiques the fetishization of mixed-race individuals.

In *White Teeth*, various cultures interact and create a multicultural society. Yet, Smith's portrayal of multicultural Britain in the novel engages with the idea of cultural representation as a spectacle. People from other cultures are considered as other, and their own culture is also seen as inferior to the host culture, and the immigrants were forced to celebrate the host culture to

adapt and survive here. This shows systematic inequalities in other cultures. Through humor and satire, Smith exposes the duality of Britain's self-proclaimed diversity, showing how immigrants and their descendants are still subject to exclusion and marginalization. The native British character Marcus Chalfen's project "The FutureMouse" serves as an allegory for the scientific and cultural imperialism of British society; this event reflects how authority and knowledge production are monopolized by the privileged groups. Marcus's attempt to control genetic outcomes mirrors the societal impulse to control and define racial and cultural identities, reinforcing the notion that the spectacle of otherness is not only social but also institutional.

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* also explores immigrant struggle and experience in Britain but with more focus on gender and cultural oppression, particularly through a Bangladeshi woman, Nazneen, who migrated to London with her husband. This novel shows her struggle as an immigrant, cultural displacement, and navigating identity. Through the Nazneen journey, Ali examines how race, gender, and cultural identity are constructed as spectacles and make her 'other' within London society. Unlike *White Teeth*, which focuses on multiple generations and perspectives, *Brick Lane* offers an intimate portrayal of the female immigrant experience, examining how racial and gendered otherness intersect. The intersections of colonial history, patriarchy, and Nazneen's self-actualization in the novel expose how racialized and gendered individuals are perceived and empowered.

Monica Ali portrays race as a spectacle in *Brick Lane*, especially in the way British society frames immigrants' identities. The setting of the novel is in East London, a multicultural space that serves as both a refuge and a site of marginalization for Bangladeshi immigrants. As a migrant in London, Nazneen was forced to adapt to the host culture, but still, she is perceived as

an outsider, as well as others. Race plays an important role in shaping Nazneen's experiences in Britain. She has frequently faced racial discrimination for being a Bengali immigrant, which reinforces her status as an outsider. Her husband, Chanu, was also perceived as an outsider, though he had lived in London for several years. He often discusses his frustrations with systemic racism he faced in employment and social activities, despite his education and aspirations, he is also always seen as "other" in British society (Ali 112). Their experiences in British society align with Hall's argument that racial minorities are positioned as perpetual outsiders, regardless of their attempts at integration (Hall 230). Edward Said's theory of Orientalism is also applicable here as he critiques how the West constructs the East as an exotic, inferior Other (Said 3). In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen's position as an immigrant woman makes her subject to both Western Orientalist fantasies and patriarchal constraints from within her Bengali community. British society takes her as the silent, oppressed Eastern woman, an image created by media and cultural stereotypes. Nazneen is initially depicted as a submissive wife, expected to conform to traditional gender roles within both her Bangladeshi and British contexts.

In the novel, gender is a crucial factor that makes women different and perceives them as 'other' in both their Western and native contexts. Women in *Brick Lane* have to navigate patriarchal and cultural expectations. In the first half of the novel, Nazneen represents the stereotype of the docile, obedient wife to her husband and is expected to perform all the roles her husband as well as her community and British society impose upon her. Making women 'other' based on their gender is not just limited to Nazneen in British culture; his sister, Hasina, also faced discrimination in Bangladeshi culture. Hasina is here presented as a contrasting figure who takes a different path by rejecting the traditional expectations of her culture. Throughout the novel, Hasina's letter to Nazneen provides a different perspective on female autonomy and

survival. Hasina's journey highlights how women's experiences of gendered spectacle vary based on context. *Brick Lane* exposes these two sisters' journeys in two spaces, while Nazneen is exploring her identity within the British immigrant experience, Hasina's struggles in Bangladesh underscore the global nature of patriarchal control over women's lives.

Like Smith's *White Teeth*, Ali's *Brick Lane* critiques the so-called celebration of multiculturalism in Britain. The Bangladeshi community in *Brick Lane* is both hyper-visible and marginalized. They exist within a framework that exoticizes their traditions also while denying their true belonging. Their native culture becomes a spectacle for themselves too, as they can no longer celebrate their tradition and lifestyle within British society. Gradually they have to adapt to British culture, as their Bengali culture is inferior to the British culture. The racial and cultural spectacle extends beyond individual characters to the very setting of *Brick Lane* itself, which becomes a symbol of both community strength and socio-economic exclusion.

Research Objectives:

The study aims to examine how the novels *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* construct the term "spectacle of otherness" through race, gender, and cultural representation. Both novels explore the complexities of immigrants' identities in contemporary Britain. This study will show how the characters of these novels face systemic discrimination, fulfill imposed societal expectations, and adapt to cultural hybridity. By analyzing these texts, the study will reveal how the "spectacle of otherness" is constructed by Western power and to what extent these works depict dominant representations of race, gender, and culture. Furthermore, by applying Stuart Hall's theories on cultural identity and representation and Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism," this paper explores how immigrant identities are shaped in novels within a

Western context. Through this theoretical lens, this dissertation will investigate how these novels reflect the broader discourses of race, migration, and cultural marginalization in Britain. The study will also focus on the depiction of gendered otherness in these novels, especially through the representation of female characters and how women in *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* deal with patriarchal norms within their cultural communities while simultaneously facing racial and gendered discrimination in multicultural British society.

Research Questions:

1. How does the novels *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* constructs "spectacle of otherness" through race, gender and cultural representation?
2. How do the characters in these novels navigate the complexities of cultural hybridity and systemic discrimination?
3. In what ways do these novels depict gendered otherness and how do female characters negotiate cultural and patriarchal constraints?

Research Methodology:

To conduct this study, I followed qualitative research methodology. For conducting this dissertation, this study also applied an interpretive approach based on textual analysis and postcolonial literary theory. It upholds Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* through a close reading of narrative structure, character development, and thematic content, particularly focusing on the representation of race, gender, and cultural identity. For the theoretical framework, it uses the "Spectacle of Other" theory from Stuart Hall's *cultural representation*, Edward Said's "othering" from *Orientalism*, and Homi

Bhabha's "hybridity" and "third-space" theories. These theories assist in interpreting how "otherness" is constructed and contested in the texts. The analysis helps to define cases of cultural stereotyping, resistance, and negotiation of identity. Ultimately showing how both the novels, in different ways, engage with and critique prevailing narratives in a postcolonial, diasporic, and multicultural framework.

Significance of the Study

This study will assist readers in understanding the ongoing discourse on diaspora and postcolonial narratives by providing a critical examination of how immigrants are considered to be outside the Western perspective based on their race, gender, and culture. By focusing on two contemporary, postcolonial, diasporic texts, *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane*, this dissertation highlights the mechanisms through which racial, gender, and cultural identities are constructed and redefined. These novels shed light on the lived experiences of immigrants in Britain, depicting their struggles with cultural adaptation, societal expectations, and systemic discrimination in British society. The findings of this study will help to understand how literature upholds and reflects the sociopolitical realities of immigrant communities.

Limitations of the Study

As the study mainly focuses on the critical analysis of race, gender, and cultural representation in *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane*, there are some limitations to consider. First of all, this paper specifically focuses on two novels and does not explore other British immigrant literature and the immigrant struggles worldwide. Then the study primarily uses Stuart Hall and Edward Said's theories for the theoretical frameworks, while these theories are highly relevant, but other postcolonial, gender, and intersectionality theories could provide further insights to bring the broader discussion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The concept of 'otherness' in diasporic postcolonial literature is central to understanding how racial, gender, and cultural identities are constructed and represented. Edward Said's theory of 'Orientalism' from his books *Orientalism* depicts that the West often sees the East through a lens of exoticism, stereotyping non-Western identities as the 'other' (Said 3). This concept extends to contemporary diasporic literature, where cultural, racial, and gendered identities are frequently framed within dominant Western discourses. Then Stuart Hall's concept of the 'Spectacle of the Other' also defines these discourses. Hall in his essay "Spectacle of Other" argues that the 'other' is constructed through binary oppositions such as white/non-white, civilized/uncivilized, and modern/traditional, which serve to establish dominant power structures (Hall 225). In media and literature, 'other' is often presented as exoticized, stereotyped, or marginalized, creating a spectacle that defines racial and cultural identities through the Western gaze. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, both novels, engage with the spectacle of otherness by depicting the struggles of immigrant communities in Britain, particularly through the lens of race, gender, and cultural hybridity. Most of the selected papers in this review section tend to look at various theoretical aspects for drawing connections among race, gender, cultural hybridity, diaspora struggles. The works of Ali and Smith contribute to a dynamic representation of contemporary British society. This paper also discusses themes such as postcolonialism, third space, hybridity, displacement, and belonging. The works of Ali and Smith are critically acclaimed and have been recognized as part of the contemporary British literary canon, yet they are often categorized by ethnicity.

Rogers, Katina's paper "Affirming Complexity: 'White Teeth' and Cosmopolitanism" depicts Zadie Smith's critical discussion on cosmopolitanism, presenting that while promoting tolerance and global citizenship ideals, it also overlooks the complexities of individual histories and identities. The author here shows how Smith's characters represent the challenges of navigating cultural hybridity and revealing the limitations of a purely cosmopolitan perspective. The paper also discusses how second-generation characters are struggling with their identities in a multicultural society and how their experiences are influenced by both cultural heritage and contemporary societal pressures. Overall, the paper discusses the discourse on post-colonial literature by providing a critical analysis of how Smith's work complicates traditional notions of cosmopolitanism, identity, and history.

McMann's paper "BRITISH BLACK BOX: A RETURN TO RACE AND SCIENCE IN ZADIE SMITH'S 'WHITE TEETH'" portrays the complexities of belonging and identity in modern Britain. The paper discusses important themes explored in the novel, such as race, identity, and the complexities of multiculturalism in contemporary British society. The profound discussion on racial identity in post-World War II Britain highlights how immigration from Commonwealth nations has challenged traditional notions of "Britishness." This racial identity is not just a simple binary but a fluid concept that is shaped by social and historical contexts. Then, the paper again discusses how these scientific discourses have historically been intertwined with racial ideologies, and it seeks to demystify these connections by analyzing the implications of genetic narratives in the novel. The experiences of female characters, particularly Irie Jones, highlight the struggle in the male-dominated narratives. It also shows the intersections of race, gender, and agency through female characters. This paper contributes to the discourse on hybridity and multiculturalism by putting the novel into a postcolonial framework.

Matt Thomas' paper "Reading White Teeth to Improve Intercultural Communication" argues that Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* serves as a critique of Western misinterpretations of Caribbean culture. This misinterpretation ultimately leads to cultural segregation rather than understanding. This paper closely examines the second-generation characters such as Irie, Millat, and Magid to illustrate how their experiences reflect the assimilation dichotomy. Irie's struggle with her identity and her desire to assimilate into Western culture highlight the challenges of cultural miscommunication, then Millat's rejection of Western values further emphasizes the conflict between assimilation and cultural preservation. Matt also critiques Western culture's unwillingness to acknowledge its own multicultural condition through the characters' interactions and the societal pressures they face, which often lead to cultural fragmentation. Overall, this paper defines that the novel *White Teeth* works as a significant text for contemporary society to understand cultural assimilation and identity.

The paper titled "From White Teeth to Britz: Multi-Ethnic Britain on British Primetime Television in the 2000s" By Barbara Korte discusses the multi-ethnic representation on *White Teeth* in British television post-2000. It analyzes the adaptation of *White Teeth* for television and highlights the shift from negative portrayals to positive representation of ethnically marginalized minorities in mainstream media. The paper critiques the optimistic portrayal of race relations in the novel. This paper shows how the adaptation of *White Teeth* is analyzed as a significant cultural artifact reflecting Britain's multi-ethnic complexity. The paper upholds how the *White Teeth* series was launched during a time of high racial tension but manages to present it in a hopeful way. This paper also explores the generational conflicts in the immigrant families, it shows the difference between the first-generation and British-born second-generation, which led to the complexities of identity formation in a diasporic context. The paper discusses the role of

satire and humor, like "Goodness Gracious Me (Korte 228) and "The Buddha of Suburbia." (Korte 228) These statements play a crucial role in addressing and challenging stereotypes about ethnic minorities, contributing to a more diverse representation in British television. In conclusion this paper discuss the implications of these representations for the future of British television, suggesting that ongoing dialogues about race, identity, and representation are essential for fostering a more inclusive media landscape.

Alistair Cormack's paper "Migration and the Politics of Narrative Form: Realism and the Postcolonial Subject in *Brick Lane*" examines the cultural hybridity in *Brick Lane* and its impact on narrative form and subjectivity. Through this paper, Cormack argues that cultural hybridity has both thematic and formal implications. Representing Britain's hybrid society through realism is important to understanding multicultural experiences. Through the central character, Nazneen, this paper highlights the political effects of realism in the postcolonial context, where traditional forms may restrict a more radical understanding of subjectivity. *Brick Lane*, in a variety of ways, stages debates about the nature of immigrant subjectivity. The novel is particularly interesting as an examination of the double bind female migrants face, treated as alien by their host nation and as commodities by the men in their own communities (Cormack 8).

Through the paper "BRICK LANE BLOCKADES: THE BIOCULTURALISM OF MIGRANT DOMESTICITY" Mrinalini Chakravorty reveals the complex interplay between biopolitical control and cultural identity, especially in the context of immigrant experiences. Through this paper, she critiques the fixed relationships between culture and the biopolitics of gender and sexuality, depicting that these dynamics create barriers to true assimilation and belonging for characters like Nazneen and Razia. The narratives draw a connection between the

experiences of immigrant women and the societal expectations placed upon them, limiting their agency in the host land. Language also works as a barrier. The struggle of characters reflects the ongoing societal issues such as race identity and the experiences of immigrants in a third space. Chakravorty also sheds light on the importance of racial identity claims within the South Asian community in Britain and reveals that the external enforcement of cultural norms is placed on the characters' attempts to find their identities. This aspect upholds the ongoing struggle for recognition and acceptance in a racially charged environment.

The paper "East of the City: Brick Lane, Capitalism, and the Global Metropolis" by Garrett Ziegler gives several significant contributions to the understanding of individual identity in relation to urban spaces, mainly in the context of globalization and capitalism in the novel *Brick Lane*. The impact of globalization on the rapid changes in people and cultures within a capitalist world system is vivid in this novel, and Ziegler showed it. This ongoing transformation affects the migrant communities, especially in urban areas like London. "The global city of London, as a space that consolidates international movements of capital, individuals, and ideas, is the dominant social frame for Nazneen's development" (Ziegler 11). This paper also explores how a global city like London serves as a site of liberation for the 'third-world' migrant women, here, this liberation is contingent upon their participation in the capitalist economy, which ultimately shapes their opportunities and identities. For a character like Nazneen to navigate the city, one must engage with its economic flows. This paper discloses how urban spaces, particularly in a globalized context, shape individual identities and experiences, particularly for marginalized communities.

The paper "(Re)Thinking the (Post)Nation(al), Europe, and (Trans)Culture/Ality" by Bavjola Shatro explores several significant contributions to the fields of cosmopolitanism, transcultural studies, and comparative literature. It also discusses both *Brick Lane* and *White Teeth* as part of its examination of contemporary novels within the context of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in English literature. The paper shows the significance of a transnational and transcultural perspective in understanding these works, reflecting the complexity of identity within a multicultural society. Shatro upholds how in this novel the aspects of gender and language serve as driving forces behind the identity formation. In this paper both novels are seen as negotiating the challenges of living in a multicultural environment. They elaborate on the interactions between different cultural identities and the impact of globalization on personal and collective narratives. "Cosmopolitanism and the post-national also constitute what is "new. As Dagnino considers her book an experiment in creative nonfiction (89), the book recounts in an imaginative way the in-depth interviews of the author with these writers (Part 1) and then systematically investigates and theorizes the impact of creative transpatriation on transcultural writing within the framework of transcultural comparative studies (Part 2). (Shatro 5)

To conclude, most of these papers have enlightened various concepts and ideas for understanding in-depth how various theoretical lenses can be interconnected with each other. These papers discuss immigrants problems in host countries and their struggles from diverse angles, such as racial and gender discrimination, cultural conflict and adaptation, capitalism, and also the generational problem

Chapter 4: Spectacle of Otherness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Representation in *White Teeth*

The novel *White Teeth* is a debut novel by the British author Zadie Smith. The center of this novel is the lives of two wartime friends, Archie Jones, a working-class Englishman, and Samad Mia Iqbal, a Bangladeshi immigrant, and their families in British society struggling to find their place and meaning from the end of World War II into the late 20th century. Their struggles are inherited by their children, but they face new challenges such as identity crisis, religion, race, gender, and cultural assimilation.

The spectacle of race in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* depicts how the immigrants in British society othered them based on their physical and cultural characteristics. Stuart Hall argues that difference is constructed visually, linguistically, and symbolically to mark and contain the "Other" (Hall 229). In this novel we find the description of three races, such as the Native English, the Jamaican, and the Bangladeshis. Samad Mia Iqbal is the prime example of this construction of 'other.' Throughout the novel, Samad is othered because of his cultural and religious beliefs. "It's the root, the root that's important... Nothing grows well in alien soil" (Smith 112). This line reflects Samad's fear of hybrid identity, as well as his nostalgia for a purer, pre-colonial origin. The profound and ongoing consequences of discrimination based on race in British society are vivid, and Smith portrays this racism through Samad's struggle for identity and dignity, his sons' conflicted paths, and their struggle for a sense of belonging. Their experiences reflect the frustrations of immigrants who feel alienated and ignored in the migrated country. Despite being a past soldier in World War II and a person from a rich heritage, Samad was working as a waiter in O'Connell for being an immigrant in England, which fuels his resentment, as Samad states that "the English are the only people who want to be pitied when

they lose" (Smith 112). This statement of Samad shows his bitterness toward a society that both marginalizes and patronizes immigrants. From this bitter experience, Samad bitterly says, "I should have been in a position to choose my life... I should have been a doctor, a lawyer, a scientist, or a professor" (Smith 49). But he gets stuck serving the Englishman who sees him as inferior. These lines show how the Western countries systematically create racial barriers that deny immigrants working ability and opportunities as equal as white Britons. Samad's reputation, achievement, and identity seem invisible to the eyes of British society. Samad's identity crisis is reflected through his relationship with the British. The Britishers always remind him that he is not like them, someone inferior and othered. In a moment of frustration, he utters, "We are not all the same! I am not English, I am not European, and I was not born in the Caribbean!" (Smith 115). His frustration shows it comes from the mistreatment he gets in British society. The West sees him as an outsider, as Edward Said expresses, the Orient is not a fixed reality but a Western construction; similarly, Samad becomes a figure shaped by orientalist stereotypes and his own internalization of colonial discourse (Said 2). Because of the extreme racial marginalization, Samad feels disconnected in British society, and he feels a nostalgic attachment to his cultural and religious identity. As he is struggling with his dual identity, he strongly feels an attachment to his tradition and homeland, seeing them as a source of dignity and moral superiority while living in the British society that considers him "other." From the disappointment, he says, "We are not related. We are not even the same species" (Smith 115). This creates a division between him and the English people. But Samad's attempt to maintain his cultural purity is becoming complicated by his own failures as he gets involved in an affair with his kid's music teacher, Poppy Burt Jones. This shows his hypocrisy as he tries to preserve a rigid cultural identity in British society that constantly pressures immigrants to assimilate.

Through this novel, Smith depicts how the British education systems establish racial hierarchies and alienation. Samad's struggle between protecting his cultural heritage and fitting in English society is vivid throughout the novel, as he is afraid that his sons, Magid and Millat, will lose their religious and cultural roots in England. Samad says about the British education system, "These bloody English schools, they put ideas into your children's heads" (Smith 145). This line shows his perception of the Western education system that indoctrinates children in Western values and encourages them to reject their ancestral heritage. They imposed the idea that Western culture is superior while their ancestral heritage is inferior, barbaric, and not a standard to follow. As a result, Samad makes the decision to send Magid back to Bangladesh for exercising their own culture and tradition, it shows his desperation to "save" at least one son from Western corruption. But things didn't work like he planned; Magid grows up to embrace English rationalism and science even more than Millat, highlighting the futility of resisting cultural hybridity in the second generation of immigrants. "He no longer spoke Bengali. He refused curry. He ironed creases in his jeans" (Smith 346). These details show how cultural assimilation can itself be a form of spectacle, mirroring Hall's critique of the commodification of identity within multicultural narratives (Hall 241).

Samad's other son, Millat, is born and raised in London as a second-generation immigrant; he also faces racialization. He is also taken as 'other' and constantly reminded of his outsider status, though he makes efforts to fit in British society. Millat is now living in 'third space' to adapt to the British ideology. Smith notes that Millat's life is "a long, sustained performance of cool" (Smith 295), suggesting that his tough exterior masks a profound sense of exclusion and confusion about his identity. He is also alienated from his Bengali heritage as he gets involved with KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation). But Millat is not fully

aware of his religious belief because of his fragmented dual identity, as Smith makes clear that “Millat didn't care for Allah. He cared for the fashion, the danger, and the outlawed image” (Smith 342). Millat becomes a spectacle not only in the eyes of British media but within the narrative itself. His radicalization is not merely about religion; it is about asserting an identity in a world that persistently otherizes him.

The experience of being othered is becoming a daily thing for the Iqbal family. They face the 'otherness' through social exclusion, cultural stereotyping, and limited opportunities more than the English. For example, the liberal English characters like Marcus and Joyce Chalfen represent a patronizing form of racism. Their acts are exposed through how they treat Millat and Irie as exotic projects rather than as individuals. Joyce Chalfen refers to them as "new blood" for the Chalfen family, exposing her unconscious belief in white superiority (Smith 326). Though they talk about plurality and multiculturalism, they treat the immigrants as outsiders and not equal to them.

The struggle of the Iqbal family is vividly present in the novel's climactic scene at the "FutureMouse" exhibition as different cultural, religious, and scientific forces come into collision violently. This incident symbolizes the contested and fragmented nature of multicultural Britain. However, the tension between fate and free will in *White Teeth* also upholds the racial struggle of the Iqbal family. Samad continuously says that "fate will find you" (Smith 135), highlighting a deep-seated fatalism rooted in the immigrant experience. No matter how hard they try to control their destinies, Samad and his family are constantly pulled back by the realities of race and otherness in Britain.

Another example of being othered for race is the experiences of Clara Bowden, her mother Hortense, and her daughter Irie. In Smith's *White Teeth*, they reflect the complex and painful realities of race and racial discrimination in Britain. For their Jamaican roots, each woman explores their identity in different ways, but all their experiences show the deep sense of 'otherness' imposed by the predominantly white British society. Smith upholds how racism shapes the people's relationships, sense of belonging, and self-perception through the struggle of these British Jamaican women. Hortense is continually ignored by British society as she is religiously backwards and mainly a Black woman. She came to Britain with a view to having a good life ahead, but she faces the harsh reality of racism and social exclusion. She often speaks of herself as a chosen person, claiming, "Jehovah's going to lift up the righteous and the meek and the true" (Smith 24). This shows her belief in divine justice that reflects her need to find solace amid the racial injustices she experiences in Britain. As her religious pride isolates her, she finds Britishers godless and immoral, yet she remains marginalized in the multicultural British society. Even in her religious activism, she is racially alienated. Hortense's experiences in Britain depict the tragic disillusionment that many immigrants faced. Coming to Britain with a hope to get a better life, they only find themselves just an outsider.

As Hortense doesn't find equal treatment like natives, her daughter Clara Bowden also inherits this complex relationship with British society. Though Clara tries her best to assimilate into British society, her life is marked by the struggle between her Jamaican heritage and her desire to be English. To escape from her racial "otherness," Clara gets involved in a relationship with a White working-class English man, Archie Jones. Her action is also an attempt to escape the narrow confines of her upbringing and to blend into mainstream British society. Still, Clara's marriage to Archie does not bring her full acceptance in British society. Instead, it highlights her

persistent "otherness." Her Blackness and ethnic identity remain a visible symbol of difference. Smith describes Clara's attempts at invisibility: "Clara had been trying to look inconspicuous for twenty years, but her body wouldn't let her." (Smith 75). This line vividly captures the fact that no matter how much Clara tries to assimilate, her racial identity makes her hyper-visible in a society that privileges whiteness. Clara is also 'othered' by Archie's colleague when he shares the news that his wife, Clara, is pregnant; one of his colleagues says, "I'm not being funny...but isn't your wife, well, colored?" (Smith 69) This line shows how Clara is treated by the White people and how they establish stereotypical white beauty standards. Clara's racialized experience is also reflected in how the Joneses are perceived by the elite White people. Their interracial marriage is viewed with a mixture of curiosity and disdain, showing that Britain's tolerance often masks deep-seated prejudices. Even Clara herself is somewhat passive about her racial identity, often choosing to ignore racial slights rather than confront them. Her silence reflects a survival strategy but also a resignation to perpetual marginalization.

The intersection between race and otherness is more vivid in the character Irie Jones, daughter of Clara and Archie Jones. As a second-generation immigrant, Irie faces heightened internal conflict over her identity; she grows up with a sense of alienation from both her Jamaican heritage and her migrated British culture. As a result, she feels that she doesn't belong fully to any culture. Smith explains it: "Irie wanted to disappear, to slip into the ground and join the thousands of tiny skeletons that had been pressed into the foundations of England" (Smith 266). This chilling image speaks to Irie's desire to erase her visible difference and finally belong to any particular one identity. Irie's physical appearance, especially her hair, becomes a battleground for her racial identity. As an immigrant in Europe, she internalizes Eurocentric beauty standards and is desperate to have straight hair like the other white European girls,

especially like her peers, to show the Smiths. She says, "It was all wrong—her body, her hair, her skin. She was all wrong" (Smith 225). Irie's feelings of inferiority reveal the conflict effects of systemic racism, which teaches her to see her Blackness as a flaw rather than a source of pride by establishing stereotypes about ideal skin color. The education institutes of England are responsible for internalizing the racism, which marginalized the students of color as well as race. Irie's struggles at school, coupled with her interactions with the Chalfens—a liberal, middle-class white family—further expose how racial discrimination operates under the guise of benevolence. Joyce Chalfen, in particular, sees Irie and Millat as exotic "projects" to be molded. She describes them as "new blood," indicating her view of them as commodities rather than individuals (Smith 326). This patronizing attitude underscores how racism persists even among those who consider themselves progressive. Furthermore, Irie's encounters with the Chalfen family, particularly with Joyce Chalfen, deepen her sense of otherness. Joyce treats Irie not as an individual but as an object of liberal fascination. Joyce refers to Irie and Millat as "new blood" (Smith 326), displaying a patronizing form of racism that reinforces Irie's alienation. As Hall notes, stereotypes of the Other can also take the form of "benevolent" racism, where minorities are romanticized as "exotic" but still not fully accepted into the mainstream (Hall 265). Irie's discomfort within the Chalfen household shows that even progressive, well-meaning white Britons often perpetuate racial hierarchies unconsciously.

In the novel *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith shows a world where discrimination based on gender is deeply associated with racial and cultural oppression. All the major female characters, such as Hortense, Clara, Alsana, Neena, and Irie, are considered Other," not just because of their racial and cultural identities, but also because they are women living within patriarchal structures that seek to control, marginalize, and define women according to their will. Stuart Hall's theory

of the "Spectacle of the Other" explains how society imposes fixed, exoticized, and inferior meanings onto marginalized bodies (Hall 229). In *White Teeth* we see how women's bodies and identities are similarly fixed through gendered expectations, showing them both hyper-visible and invisible in their communities.

Although Hortense Bowden doesn't face gendered discrimination that vividly, still her experience reflects Hall's idea that the "other" is both marginalized and hyper-visible. As mentioned before, her racial and religious identity makes her a difference and an outsider, while at the same time she is subjected to the gaze of a society that views her difference as something strange and deviant. Like Sarah Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus" from Stuart Hall's essay "Spectacle of Other," who was paraded across Europe in the 19th century as an exotic spectacle, Hortense is both erased from full humanity and displayed as an example of the "other." The historical exploitation of Baartman's body as a site of racialized fascination parallels the way Hortense's blackness and religious fervor are marked as alien and grotesque within British society.

In the name of cultural assimilation, Clara's life is shaped by both racial and gendered expectations. As a young woman, she desired to be beautiful like white girls, but this desire and identity are constructed through male desires. Her marriage to Archie Jones reflects not love but a survival choice. After marriage, Clara submits to a life that erases much of her individuality and autonomy. Their marriage reflects her further domestication. Archie, despite marrying Clara, rarely engages with her inner life. "Archie simply thought of Clara as beautiful. Not difficult, not complicated, not profound. Just beautiful" (Smith 84). Here, through this line, Smith shows Clara is reduced to an aesthetic object, reflecting patriarchal desires that value women for appearance, not for intellect. Suddenly she begins to surrender her religious upbringing, family ties, and

personal ambitions, entering a marriage where she is neither seen nor heard meaningfully. This passivity and silent acceptance of imposed responsibility reflect the gendered subjugation she is encountering. She exists on the margins of her husband's life, with little influence over major decisions. This marriage shows how patriarchal norms strip women of voice and agency.

The novel *White Teeth* is a prime example of how narratives of diaspora, identity, patriarchy, and familial issues cross generations and borders. Alsana Begum, Samad Mia Iqbal's wife, represents these things mostly because of her identity as a Bengali Muslim housewife in London; she stands at the crossroads of tradition and rebellion, then oppression and resilience. Alsana's journey reflects the struggle of immigrant women's complex negotiation between cultural displacement, marital expectation, and gendered subjugation. While the male character of this novel faced discrimination for race and culture, the female character faced these things with gendered expectations from a patriarchal, male-dominated society. Alsana is trapped between two worlds and fulfilling her cultural and gender expectations that are imposed on her. She becomes the victim of arranged marriage; her marriage to Samad Mia Iqbal, much older than she and whom she barely knew before marrying, is one of the finest examples of how patriarchal society imposed gendered norms to restrict women's autonomy, as Alsana claims, "I had seen the man only twice before the wedding day," she tells a friend bitterly, "and both times he had his back to me" (Smith 84). This statement shows how women like Alsana don't have any choice to choose their partner; women are expected to be obedient and silent in matters of marriage and identity. In her marriage, Alsana is often dismissed and dominated by Samad and 'a spectacle of other' in front of her husband's eyes; her husband sees himself as the intellectual and moral authority in the household. This makes Alsana think of herself as an inferior and have no connection with her husband: "Now every time I learn something more about him, I like him

less" (Smith 115). Samad's treatment of her as an "other" changed her attitudes like this. Alsana just silently fulfilled all the responsibilities society imposed on her for being a woman and being obedient to her husband without asking any questions.

White Teeth not only upholds the struggle of first-generation immigrants but also their descendants, as it offers the complex portrayal of multicultural Britain through the intersecting lives of immigrant families and their children. Among the second-generation characters, Irie Jones, daughter of Archie and Clara, plays the role of a poignant figure of racialized and gendered otherness. She represents the challenges faced by young Black women in a postcolonial context. Through her, Smith examines history, ideology, cultural beauty standards, and gender expectations. As mentioned before, gender is another key source to make Irie 'other.' She is expected to be a typical woman who is polite, modest, and passive while continuously facing sexual subjugation and invisibility. Through Irie, Smith portrays how second-generation immigrant girls are imposed with the task of constructing identity in a society that offers them fewer reflections of themselves as women with their autonomy. Her journey shows how young women of color must fight against gender norms and racial stereotypes to define themselves on their terms and not be considered as 'other.' Irie also feels marginalized because of her sexual awakening. Her unrequited love for Millat becomes a complex and painful marker of her self-worth. Millat's frequent disinterest in her juxtaposition with his attention to white girls reinforces how the social devaluation of Black female bodies is seen.

After getting the rejection from Millat, Irie feels embarrassment and invisibility; she imagines herself becoming someone as "visible and beautiful, someone who can be desired" (Smith 270). Irie's fantasy reflects the stereotypical gendered aspect of racial discrimination, where Black women like Irie are often desexualized or hypersexualized but rarely given the

dignity of being loved in mainstream narratives. But the twist comes surprisingly when she has sex with both Millat and Magid. Iries, this action is not framed as romantic but as a radical step of her agency and autonomy. By choosing both brothers, she breaks the stereotypical sexual and gender norms, and then she symbolically refuses to choose between them and, by extension, refuses the binaries imposed on her. Her action toward this situation: “She decided not to decide. Not to pick. Not to choose. Irie would be both mother and father. She would be sun and moon” (Smith 531). Through this action she breaks out of the roles prescribed for her, such as dutiful daughter, unrequited lover, and confused hybrid, and claims authorship over her body and her future.

Neena Begum, the niece of Alsana Begum, stands out in the novel *White Teeth* as a woman who actively challenges the traditional gender roles and cultural expectations, but still she is 'othered' for challenging the norms. Neena also faces discrimination for being a British-born woman of Bangladeshi descent. Her race, gender, and sexuality all position her as an outsider and 'other.' Neena is a lesbian and a feminist, which makes her a direct challenge to the conservative, patriarchal values of her extended family. Alsana refers to her as “the liberal, the bloody embarrassment” and adds, “She’ll never get married. She doesn’t want a man” (Smith 187), revealing how Neena’s refusal to conform to traditional female roles is met with ridicule and shame. While Neena asserts her independence and lives with her white girlfriend, Maxine, she remains an outsider both in her cultural community, where queerness is taboo, and in British society, which still racializes her. Her professional success and personal freedom do not shield her from being viewed as deviant or inappropriate. Despite being born in the UK, she is still seen as neither fully British nor fully Bangladeshi, a common experience for second-generation immigrant women. Neena’s role in the novel shows how women who resist marriage,

heterosexuality, and cultural obedience are pushed to the margins. Yet her character also represents resistance as she refuses to accept the limiting scripts written for her, embodying a kind of feminism that is radical in both a Western and South Asian diasporic context. Through Neena, Smith explores how gendered and cultural expectations can alienate women who don't fit neatly into any one category while also celebrating the agency of women who forge their own path.

In *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith presents a rich and complex portrayal of cultural representation, using her diverse characters to explore the tensions between heritage, assimilation, and identity in multicultural Britain. The novel spans generations and cultures, primarily focusing on Bangladeshi, Jamaican, and British working-class families, and examines how characters carry, negotiate, or resist their cultural backgrounds. Characters like Samad Iqbal struggle to preserve their roots in a foreign land, famously declaring, "We are split people... trying to live in two different places at once" (Smith 161), a line that reflects the fractured identity many immigrants feel. Meanwhile, Alsana and Hortense serve as cultural gatekeepers, clinging tightly to tradition and religion as a way to preserve dignity and identity in a society that often marginalizes them. However, the younger generation, such as Irie Jones and Millat, complicate these ideas. Irie, in particular, feels disconnected from both her Jamaican and English heritage and yearns for a coherent identity: "It's different for me. I want to belong. I want roots" (Smith 351). Her struggle embodies the second-generation experience, where culture is inherited but not always understood or embraced. The split between Magid and Millat symbolizes the impossibility of a seamless cultural synthesis. Magid, sent to Bangladesh by his father to maintain traditional values, ironically becomes more British in his worldview, while Millat, who stays in London, embraces a fundamentalist reaction against Westernization (Smith 405). This

reversal critiques the myth of cultural purity and underscores the unpredictable nature of diasporic identity.

Religious and colonial legacies also play central roles in cultural representation. Samad's fixation on his supposed heroic ancestor, Mangal Pande, reveals a desire to find dignity within colonial narratives. However, his glorification of the past often conflicts with the realities of his present, suggesting the difficulty of reconciling history with modern identity (Smith 119).

In addition, the school scenes in *White Teeth* reflect institutional approaches to multiculturalism that often reinforce stereotypes. Teachers and administrators attempt to celebrate diversity but end up essentializing the students' backgrounds. This performative multiculturalism illustrates Hall's theory of the spectacle of the other, where cultural difference is commodified and simplified for mainstream consumption (Hall 232).

Smith also critiques the myth of a unified British culture, using irony and satire to expose how multiculturalism is often celebrated superficially while deeper cultural tensions remain unresolved. Through her vibrant, flawed, and diverse characters, Smith resists stereotypes and presents culture not as fixed or pure, but as fluid, hybrid, and often in conflict. Ultimately, *White Teeth* reveals that cultural representation is never one-dimensional, it's shaped by memory, migration, race, class, and gender, making each character's relationship to their culture both personal and political.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "hybridity" and the "third space" provides a powerful lens to analyze the characters identity negotiations in *White Teeth*. According to Bhabha, "third space" is where new cultural identities emerge through the interaction of different traditions, challenging the authority of dominant narratives (Bhabha 56). In *White Teeth*, characters like

Irie, Millat, and Magid explore this space as they are trying to reestablish their cultural heritage with their British upbringing. Three of their lifestyles in British society with their false sense of belonging align with Bhabha's concept.

Chapter 5: Spectacle of Otherness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Representation in *Brick Lane*

Monica Ali's debut novel, *Brick Lane*, is a contemporary, powerful novel that explores topics like migration and the complexities of race, gender, and cultural identity within the context of British multiculturalism. The novel follows the life of a Bengali immigrant woman in London and her surrounding characters. Through Stuart Hall's "spectacle of the other" theory, this paper will examine how marginalized groups, particularly those marked by race, ethnicity, and gender, are constructed and represented through dominant ideology in cultural texts as well as in media. "Difference is not merely acknowledged but performed and exaggerated to reinforce systems of power and hierarchy" (Hall 225). Through the experiences of the characters of this novel, Ali explores how racial, gendered, and cultural dislocation positioned them as "other." In his essay "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," Hall explains that representation in cultural texts and media creates meaning through difference. Through the term "Othering," he argues that it is a process in which individuals or groups are defined in opposition to the dominant identity or ideology, especially white, Western, male, through binary oppositions: civilized/uncivilized, rational/irrational, and modern/traditional (Hall 234–238). This process constructs the "Other" not as a real person but as a fixed image, a spectacle consumed by society. Similarly, Edward Said's "Orientalism" also works here as it exposes how the West always represented the East (the Orient) as other, primitive, exotic, and irrational. Said explains that the "Orient" is not a geographical location but a discursive invention, a fantasy produced by colonial power and sustained through cultural representations (Said 3–5). The theory of Hall and Said works together to depict how immigrants like Nazneen and her husband Chanu are often seen not as individuals

but as representations, fixed spectacles through racial, gendered, and cultural stereotypes grounded in British society.

The novel *Brick Lane* vividly portrays the racialized experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants in London, as the heart of the novel is deeply rooted in the depiction of racial discrimination and otherness, which shapes the experiences of immigrants. The Bangladeshi characters in this text are marginalized by both social attitudes and institutional structures, and through the development of the narrative, it repeatedly exposes the mechanics of racialized othering in postcolonial Britain. Nazneen's husband, Chanu, the first-generation immigrant in this novel, is the prime example of facing racism based on race in Britain primarily through systemic exclusion and cultural marginalization. Despite being an educated individual, his efforts to assimilate, and his belief in meritocracy, he is simultaneously considered as 'other' and faces discrimination because of his racial and ethnic background. Through his character Ali, he reveals how racism is operated by the dominant groups. This making a difference based on race makes Chanu frustrated as he articulates his frustrations with racial discrimination in employment and society: "I have seen plenty of white men with less education than me, less intelligence, get ahead while I sit here, in this hovel, watching my dreams unravel like a cheap sari" (Ali 31). Chanu's statement reflects the structural inequality and the bitterness it engenders in immigrants who feel undervalued despite their qualifications. Chanu's continuous frustration portrays how Western society never appreciates the intellectual person from outside their country. They give opportunities based on skin color, as Chanu expresses, "I am qualified. I have experience. And yet I'm always passed over. Why? Because of my name. Because of the color of my skin" (Ali 55). This experience of Chanu's highlights the invisibility of merit in racialized labor markets. He came to London with a view to fulfilling his British dream, but it has now become his

frustration as his race becomes a permanent obstacle for him. Chanu's bitterness grows as he realizes that his professional stagnation mirrors the way Britain treats its non-white citizens, not as equals, but as permanent guests whose presence is tolerated but not welcomed. "I have a degree from London University. I am not a fool. But still, I am not promoted. Still, I am passed over for someone with half my qualifications" (Ali 55). This moment shows how Chanu facing racial inequality in the workplace highlights that he is not evaluated by his abilities but by his racial identity. In so-called multicultural British society, his South Asian background marks him as an outsider, regardless of his continuous attempts to conform. This reflects what Stuart Hall describes as the "spectacle of the Other," where people of color are seen through fixed stereotypes rather than as individuals (Hall 229–231). All the racism Chanu experiences makes him internalize these things and ultimately makes him attempt to rationalize it or blame himself, which speaks to the psychological toll of racial exclusion. As a result, he was in a dilemma to make the decision between holding his pride in his heritage and a desire to educate his family in order to become proper British citizens. But it's an illusion that knowledge of Shakespeare or English manners will bring respect, but they live in a society that continues to judge people of color by their differences. Furthermore, Chanu's co-workers view him as foreign and socially awkward, and his attempts at cultural discussion or professionalism are not taken seriously. This reflects Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism," where non-Western individuals are depicted as backward, irrational, or out of place in modern Western contexts (Said 7–8). So racism in Brick Lane is not violent or loud, but it is well-structured attitudes of Britishers where they limit opportunity, erase complexity, and promote the idea that to be brown, foreign, and male is to forever remain on the margins of British society.

The protagonist of *Brick Lane*, Nazneen, experiences racism in a different form in a deeply internalized way than her husband, Chanu. The intersection of her race, gender, and religious identity put her in a socially marginalized position as a Bangladeshi immigrant in East London. While she is not directly subjected to the harsh racial abuse always, yet her existence in public spaces is 'othered' and racialized. For her religious identity as a Muslim and woman of color, she becomes hyper-visible and continually invisible as an individual with autonomy. Hall's idea of "spectacle of others" is evident in Ali's portrayal of Nazneen's early experiences in London, where she is perceived more as an exotic figure than as a person with agency. For example, when Nazneen walks through the estate in Tower Hamlets, she feels hyper-visible, as Ali expresses, "Men looked at her as if she were something strange and rare... and she felt them peeling her skin with their eyes" (Ali 33). Her racialized and gendered body becomes a site of both surveillance and fetishization for the natives, which aligns with Hall's notion that spectacle reduces individuals to signifiers of cultural difference. There is an act where Nazneen begins sewing from home for a white employer. Suddenly she becomes economically visible in a system that now exploits her labor while disregarding her dignity for being an immigrant Muslim woman. While her employer speaks of her and the other immigrant women with patronizing admiration, treating their culture as decorative but inferior to their cultures. This is the best example of Said's "Orientalism," the West consuming Eastern women as objects of cultural curiosity while denying them subjectivity (Said 6–7).

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* not only focuses on institutional racism but also shows the microaggressions and harsh hostility faced by the immigrants in public places. In one scene, the protagonist Nazneen is intentionally harassed by a white man who yells at her and spits on the ground as he passes. "He made a retching noise and spat. Then he walked off with a swagger,

whistling” (Ali 139). This moment reflects the clear racialized hate as well as the gendered racism. In this particular moment, Nazneen is walking alone with her veil that depicts her as visibly Muslim; as a result, her image is depicted in British ideology as associated with submission or backwardness. The man’s action is an act of symbolic domination, meant to reinforce the message, “You do not belong here.” The actions of this man also align with Hall’s concept of racial stereotyping as a tool of power. The spitting man doesn’t just express hatred, but he also represents the power relation between native vs. Immigrant, positioning himself as a native and Nazneen as a contaminant. Such everyday racism compounds the psychological burden on immigrants, who are forced to navigate a society that routinely devalues their presence.

British society is not only racist towards first-generation immigrants but towards the second generation too. Karim, a second-generation British-Bangladeshi character in *Brick Lane*, presents a complex and evolving response to racism and cultural exclusion. Through his character Ali, he portrays how his racial identity, Islamophobia, and masculinity intersect in post-9/11 Britain and how these pressures contribute to a performance of identity that aligns with Stuart Hall’s concept of “the spectacle of the other” and Edward Said’s “Orientalism.” While Chanu internalizes racism through disappointment, frustration, and retreat, and Nazneen endures it quietly until she finds her voice, Karim represents a more reactive and politicized form of resistance. In post-9/11 Western countries, Karim is othered for both his racial and religious identity. In the novel, Karim enters Nazneen’s life as a young man involved in a grassroots Islamic activist group. His increasing religiosity and political fervor reflect a common reaction among marginalized youths who, despite being born in Britain, are never allowed to feel they belong. He articulates this alienation directly: “They think we’re all the same. We’re all fanatics.

We're all trouble" (Ali 368). This statement of Karim highlights the monolithic stereotype of Muslims in Western media, mainly after the 9/11 attacks in the USA. Such representation is also explained by Hall as such representations reducing individuals to a spectacle, flattening identity, and turning cultural difference into a threat (Hall 244–246). Though Karim is British by birth, he is racially and religiously othered. His beard, jubba, and increasing public religiosity mark him visually and symbolically as part of a collective identity that is seen as foreign, deviant, and dangerous. The "orientalism" theory of Edward Said is deeply relevant here, as in *Orientalism*, the "Orient" is not just exotic; rather, it also sees the "Orient" as dangerous. After the 9/11 event, this notion extends to the racialized Muslim man, who is portrayed as an extremist, a threat to Western liberal values (Said 8). Karim now becomes an "orient."

Through Karim's character, Ali shows how his identity is not static; rather, it is a constructed performance that he creates in response to the racism and alienation he experiences. As Hall argues, identity is not a fixed essence but a shifting, unstable process created through representation (Hall 229). So aligning with Karim's join to Islamic activism is not only a personal conviction but also a way of claiming visibility and power in a stereotypical system that has marginalized and "othered" him. Karim takes action on it and says, "We have to take our identity and make it our own. Not what they give us, not what they allow" (Ali 369). This statement of Karim shows his desire to rearticulate the meaning of being brown, Muslim, and British in his own way. From the very beginning, Karim finds himself trapped between two competing systems of spectacle. In British society he is considered a racial and religious 'other,' a threat, a terrorist, a Paki, and a stereotype. Though he is British by birth, he still faces these things for his heritage. Later his failed relationship with Nazeen, where he fails to build a meaningful relationship, and his ultimate disappearance from the narrative reflect his final

alienation. Karim's character is complex and deeply human, but also deeply symbolic, as he represents what happens when a person is never allowed to belong and never offered a narrative of selfhood outside of the hostile binaries of Us/Them, East/West, and Modern/Traditional.

Shahana, the eldest daughter of Nazneen and Chanu, plays the role of a crucial character as she reflects the cultural and generational tensions. Monica Ali uses Shahana's character to explore the complex ways in which racism, cultural identity, and resistance shape the lives of second-generation immigrants. Though Shahana does not consider herself Bengali, still she is viewed as an outsider in London society. She is a rebellious girl; her rebellion works as a symbol of how young brown girls growing up in a racialized society must encounter the pressures of both Western-imposed culture and her familial expectations to lead a traditional Bangladeshi life. Shahana is not mature enough to feel the effects of racial discrimination, and her dual identity means she is also constantly facing racial discrimination, even though she tries to assimilate to British culture. She feels alienated in front of her peers; her desire to be "normal" like her white peers is undercut by constant reminders of her difference as someone "other." There is an event where she is verbally harassed on the street. "They shouted, 'Paki, Paki, Paki, go home, go home'" (Ali 342). This line shows how her efforts to fit in British society collapse; however hard she tries, they still consider her a foreigner. It reflects that British-born immigrants' children are still viewed as outsiders; they are treated based on their skin color, race, religion, gender, and culture. Here Shahana is not seen as a young individual but as a member of a racialized collective. No matter how much she tries to align herself with Western norms, she is forcibly returned to her status as "other" through these violent encounters. Shahana's character offers a sharp and honest look into what it means to be a young brown girl growing up in a White majority society. Through her rejection of tradition, her confrontation with racism, and her

assertion of agency, she challenges the binaries that both British and Bangladeshi cultures impose on her. The novel shows how Shahana is racialized, gendered, and marginalized, yet she refuses to be reduced to any of the roles assigned to her. Her journey is not about choosing one identity over another but about resisting all imposed identities, carving out a space where she can be seen not as “other” but as fully human.

There are some other minor characters who are also constantly bothered for their racial and religious identity. They face racial discrimination in different ways. Characters like Mrs. Islam and her sons, and then Razia and Tariq, deepen the novel’s exploration of racialized identity, community belonging, and cultural displacement in contemporary Britain. Mrs. Islam and her sons try to impose their power over other immigrants, but they are also dominated by White supremacy. They actually internalized racism, but from Hall’s perspective, these characters demonstrate how racialized subjects sometimes replicate the very structures that “other” them. The spectacle of power they present within the Bangladeshi community masks their broader disempowerment in British society. Nazneen’s close friend Razia is trying hard to adapt to British culture by wearing Western dresses and speaking bluntly and then working to establish herself as a working woman, yet she is also viewed as “other” by the British. She doesn’t get the full dignity from British society. Later, her son Tariq also becomes a victim of the same society Razia tries to adapt to. He gets involved in drugs and ends up in prison. This incident reveals how second-generation boys of color often become criminalized, even when they are born and raised in the UK. Tariq is racialized not just in how society sees him but in how institutions treat him, through surveillance, discipline, and marginalization.

Through *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali shows the spatial segregation and the ghettoization of the immigrant. Ali critiques the racial segregation through the depiction of the Tower Hamlets

district, where the environment is grey and claustrophobic and symbolically reminds the immigrant of their marginality. In the Tower Hamlets district, “The lift stank of urine. The graffiti on the stairwell was in English, and none of the residents could read it” (Ali 113). This statement captures the dislocation of Bangladeshi characters both physically and linguistically in their migrated place. They are living in a space that they did not design, in a land that does not speak their language. As a result, the architecture of their lives is shaped by their economic and racial marginalization and exclusion. They live in public housing, often neglected by the state, and are surrounded by symbols of their invisibility. For this case, Hall’s theory of “difference as spectacle” can apply here in spatial terms. As the immigrant areas are mapped as dangerous, “ethnic,” or alien. These zones become both stigmatized and hyper-visible, seen by the media and the dominant group as spaces of crime, conservatism, or extremism, which ultimately make the immigrant racially “other” in their migrated country.

Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* provides a powerful intersectional lens of how race and gender intersect and also a critique of gendered discrimination and the construction of women as the “other” within both immigrant and patriarchal frameworks. This novel examines how gender intersects with race to produce a unique form of marginalization for immigrant women. Using Stuart Hall’s “Spectacle of the Other” and Edward Said’s “Orientalism,” it becomes clear that the women in the novel are not just racialized but also gendered as passive, voiceless, and subordinate both in British society and within their own communities. This dual burden creates a layered system of oppression where women are “othered” twice over, firstly as racial minorities and then as females within patriarchal structures. In his “spectacle of other” theory, Hall claims that women of color are frequently represented in stereotypical binaries such as “virgin/whore” or “docile/oppressed” to maintain social hierarchies (Hall 229). This analysis highlights that

female characters in *Brick Lane* are constructed as “other” through their racial and gender identities, which are used to confine, silence, and discipline them. Over the course of the narrative, however, Ali also offers glimpses of resistance, transformation, and redefinition.

Women in Ali’s *Brick Lane* are frequently expected to be submissive, stay at home, raise children, serve their husbands, and uphold family dignity. While British society constructs Bangladeshi women as culturally “other,” their internal Bangladeshi community dynamics often reflect and reproduce patriarchal control. From the very beginning of the novel, Nazneen is seen to play the role of the submissive, obedient wife, which is the expectation of a patriarchal society common in both the West and the East. Born and raised in a Bangladeshi village and married off to an older man in London, Nazneen’s life begins with the expectation that she will be a passive and compliant housewife. “What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne” (Ali 16). This statement is from Nazneen’s mother, which reflects the internalization of patriarchal ideology, where women’s endurance is valorized over their resistance. So Nazneen’s early life is shaped by this ideology that women must suffer in silence and fulfill societal expectations. Here Nazneen’s position, as well as other positions, is constantly submissive, which aligns with Hall’s notion of “spectacle of the other,” where he discusses how racial and gendered “others” are not allowed to represent themselves; instead, they are defined by dominant ideologies. The image of the veiled, silent Muslim woman becomes a symbol of cultural backwardness in the Western imagination, an image that Ali deliberately critiques throughout the novel. After Nazneen is married to Chanu, her early life in London is shaped by patriarchal norms. She arrives as a teenage bride with little say in her own marriage and almost no autonomy. Her husband, Chanu, assumes the role of the decision-maker and intellectual authority in the home. He often dismisses her views and opinions on different things,

frequently marginalizes her, limits her mobility, and treats her as a passive recipient of his wills and ambitions. Their marital relationship is captured when Nazneen claims, “This is what she was for: to wait. To serve. To be silent and accept.” (Ali 24) Nazneen’s attitude shows how the gendered expectations and cultural duty are fused, leaving no place for women to be individual and autonomous.

Nazneen’s husband, Chanu, describes himself as an educated individual and sees himself as a modern man, but he also possesses the patriarchal attitudes. He tries to control Nazneen’s life and movements, observe her behavior, and impose traditional roles on her. To establish his power over Nazneen, Chanu asserts, “A woman’s place is in the home. That is what I believe. A man is a man, and a woman is a woman. They are not the same thing” (Ali 27). Chanu’s view on women’s roles reflects the gender binaries that reinforce the patriarchal ideologies. Chanu’s thoughts on women as fundamentally different, lesser, and in need of control. Nazneen, as his wife, is infantilized and stripped of agency. In the migrated English country, she cannot speak English fluently, cannot navigate the city, and cannot make decisions without consulting him. This mirrors the way colonial discourses painted Eastern women as voiceless and oppressed, legitimizing both cultural domination and internalized patriarchy. Nazneen’s gender identity is not only othered by her husband but also by British society too. Her life in British public places is also governed by gendered restrictions. In her earlier life in London, she is discouraged from going outside alone, which reflects a deeply rooted fear of social perception and female sexuality. But when she finally starts to walk alone around her neighborhood, she is subject to stares, whispers, and even aggression from men. In one instance, she is harassed by a man on the street: “She lowered her head, felt the heat in her face. The man made a clicking sound with his tongue” (Ali 122). This incident exposes the gendered vulnerability of women in public places.

As mentioned before, Nazneen is not only marked as racially “other,” but her gender makes her a target of sexualized attention and control. We can interpret this through Hall’s lens, in which the female body of color becomes an object of spectacle and subject to both fetishization and degradation. The West has a long history of representing Eastern women as either exotic and hypersexual or passive and pure, exemplified in historical texts like the story of the “Hottentot Venus,” which served as a grotesque exhibition of female racialized otherness.

Another key aspect of gender discrimination is the economic dependency of women on men in *Brick Lane*. Women in the immigrant community are discouraged from working outside of the home, and even when they do, their labor is not equally valued as men’s. Nazneen begins sewing clothes at home to support her family, but her work is not appreciated and acknowledged as true labor by Chanu. She eventually starts handling money and negotiating with clients, consequently gaining confidence, but her labor remains within a gendered framework that sees women’s work as supplementary and invisible. As Ali writes about it, “Nazneen handled the money, the deliveries, and the men. She thought, I can do it all. And then she thought, I am doing it all” (Ali 250). This line shows Nazneen’s transformation, as she moves from economic invisibility to recognition. Her growing awareness of her capability becomes a quiet rebellion against gendered norms. By the end of the novel, Nazneen undergoes a significant transformation. She ends her affair with Karim, chooses not to return to Bangladesh with her husband Chanu, and begins living independently with her daughters in London. Her decision to stay is monumental. It marks her first act of self-definition beyond the roles assigned to her as wife and mother. The novel closes with a symbolic act of freedom when Nazneen ice-skates with her daughters in a London park: “She let go of her daughter’s hand and pushed forward, gliding by herself, perfectly balanced” (Ali 411). This moment represents liberation through

embodiment. Nazneen is no longer watching life from the margins; she is now part of it. The image of her skating alone yet confidently is a visual metaphor for autonomy, movement, and balance—things long denied to her as a gendered “other.”

Moreover, the women in the Tower Hamlets community are subject to policing not only by white British society but also by their own men, who fear cultural contamination. Razia, who defies these norms by cutting her hair and working outside the home, becomes a social outcast, reflecting how non-conforming women are ostracized even within their own ethnic group (Ali 126). Ali’s portrayal thus intersects with Hall’s argument that the “spectacle of the other” is not just imposed externally but can be internalized and reproduced within minority communities. In this context, female characters like Nazneen and Razia are both viewed and treated as racially different by the dominant culture and gendered within their own communities, which exposes the layered nature of discrimination they endure. Within her community, Nazneen is also pressured to conform to the ideal of the “good” Bangladeshi woman, such as being obedient, modest, and domestic. This ideal is constantly reinforced by figures like Mrs. Islam, a local matriarch who wields religious and moral authority over the other women. Nazneen begins to rebel by working as a seamstress, having an affair with Karim, or expressing her opinions. She eventually threatens these ideals and is quickly met with judgment. In *Brick Lane*, Mrs. Islam and other women are not simply victims of patriarchy; they also act as its agents, enforcing gender roles through shame, gossip, and exclusion. This internal policing highlights the complex dynamics of gender oppression, where women themselves participate in reproducing systems that disempower them.

Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* is a wonderful creation that presents a complex view of cultural identity, particularly in how immigrants negotiate their traditions within a Western society where

their own culture is considered inferior, uncivilized, and “other.” The novel is deeply concerned with cultural hybridity and the tension between maintaining heritage and adapting to a new environment for a better future. Nazneen’s struggle is not merely between East and West but also between tradition and transformation. The domestic sphere is the primary site where cultural expectations are imposed, but also where they are contested. The food she cooks, the clothes she wears, and the language she speaks all become markers of her cultural positioning. Her two daughters, particularly Shahana, represent a generational shift in cultural identity. Shahana rejects the idea of returning to Bangladesh and resists the cultural values imposed by her father. “I’m not going. You can’t make me. I was born here” (Ali 263). This declaration of Shahana affirms her British identity, despite her Bangladeshi heritage, and underlines the complexities of belonging for second-generation immigrants. By the novel's end, Nazneen occupies the "third space" in *Brick Lane*. She does not completely embrace British culture, nor does she stay trapped in her Bangladeshi upbringing. This shows her living in Bhabha's concept of "third space," living in between. Nazneen's persistence in London demonstrates a binary rejection of cultural identities. Britain's life offers her autonomy. In contrast, Chanu's decision to go back to Bangladesh is nostalgic and inflexible and a denial of an identity that does not cope with the hybrid aspects of diaspora life.

Through Chanu, the novel also critiques cultural romanticism, which idealizes a Bangladesh he no longer understands. His plan to return to his homeland is driven more by nostalgia than practicality, and when he finally decides against it, it becomes a symbolic acceptance of their life in Britain and the impossibility of cultural return (Ali 385).

The depiction of the Sylheti community in the novel is not monolithic; instead, it captures a spectrum of experiences, attitudes, and transformations. Through this, the novel contributes to a more complex and layered representation of cultural identity in a diasporic context.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

By intersecting the terms race, gender, and culture, the novels *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* provide the meanings of belonging and authenticity in a multicultural society. The study exposes how the “spectacle of otherness” is not just a tool of domination but also a mirror of how immigrant identities are forged by the dominant group and their ideologies. Aligning with Stuart Hall’s ideas of cultural representation, Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism, and Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, this study not only reflects the challenges of negotiating identity in multicultural Britain but also celebrates the transformative potential of cultural hybridity.

For further discussion, this dissertation could invite an expanding dynamic engagement with additional theoretical frameworks to explore the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and migration more vividly. For instance, the postcolonial perspectives on feminism, particularly the theory of "subalternity" by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and then Gilbert and Gubar's feminist theory of the "madwoman," would deepen the analysis of gendered representation of women in these novels and their cultural "otherness," how colonial legacies, patriarchal structures, and global capitalist systems intersect to shape the women's experiences in a diasporic context. Aligning with these, a further study can be explored on Shaila Abdullah’s *Saffron Dreams*, where the author intersects Islamophobia, migration, and gender in a complex way that shapes the lives of the characters of the novel. Then, Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* also would provide a broader comparative discussion for exploring the transnational dimensions of diasporic identity, generational conflict, and cultural negotiation within postcolonial transnational and British literature.

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