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London in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*: Intergenerational Trauma and the Limits of Healing

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* is one of the most often explored contemporary urban novels. Set in Tower Hamlets, a borough of London dominated by Bangladeshi migrants, Ali's novel is a textbook example of urban diaspora fiction. *Brick Lane* has been analysed from the vantage point of city studies, gender, and diasporic cultures: the transformation of Nazneen, an East Pakistani woman who settles in Tower Hamlets, has been the focus of critical attention since the publication of the novel.[1] *Brick Lane* offers an insight into translocal visions of the city from the perspective of migrant characters, primarily the main character, Nazneen. This article traces her transformation in London, which is fostered by walks, encounters in her neighbourhood, and memories from her homeland, often projected onto the Western cityscape.

Monica Ali is a British novelist of Bangladeshi origin, born in Dhaka to a Bangladeshi father and English mother in 1967. The family moved to London when she was three years old. *Brick Lane*, published in 2003, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in the same year, and was made into a film in 2007. The title refers to a street at the heart of London's Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets: Britain's best-known Asian street. The novel caused controversy in Britain because of Ali's alleged negative portrayal of Sylhetis, an ethnocultural and religious group from north-east Bangladesh. Part of the Bangladeshi community protested against the film and started a campaign against it in 2006. As Mrinalini Chakravorty points out, the issues the affair raised revolved around free speech, cultural values, racial and linguistic authenticity, and ethnic pride.[2] Ali was also critiqued by Germaine Greer, who claimed that even though her main character is Bangladeshi, her point of view is British.[3] However, Salman Rushdie defended Ali and argued that she had a right to decide how to present her diasporic community.[4] This incident clearly shows

1 See, for instance, Alistair Cormack's "Migration and the Politics of Narrative Form: Realism and the Postcolonial Subject in *Brick Lane*," *Contemporary Literature* 47, no. 4 (2006): 695–721; Garrett Ziegler's "East of the City: *Brick Lane*, Capitalism, and the Global Metropolis," *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 1, no. 1 (2007): 145–167; Mrinalini Chakravorty's "*Brick Lane* Blockades: The Bioculturalism of Migrant Domesticity," *Modern Fiction Studies* 58, no. 3 (2012): 503–528.

2 Mrinalini Chakravorty, "*Brick Lane* Blockades," 506.

3 "She writes in English and her point of view is, whether she allows herself to impersonate a village Bangladeshi woman or not, British" (Letter to *The Guardian*, quoted by Chakravorty, "*Brick Lane* Blockades," 507).

4 Rushdie claimed that "to suit Germaine Greer, the British-Bangladeshi Ali is denied her heritage" ("Letter to the Editor," quoted by Chakravorty, "*Brick Lane* Blockades," 508).

that the issues thematised in the novel, namely, the question of diasporic cultures, heritage, and identity, are at the heart of contemporary cultural debates.

This article explores *Brick Lane* as a diasporic bildungsroman that depicts the limits of psychological and social development in the Western metropolis. Similar to other diasporic novels such as Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, and Doris Lessing's *In Pursuit of the English*,[5] Ali's novel portrays how the main character transforms in London after migrating from a postcolonial country. In the case of *Brick Lane*, this transformation is fostered and limited by the neoliberal city, as Garrett Ziegler points out.[6] However, it is not only the neoliberal market economy that has an impact on Nazneen's bildung in *Brick Lane*; I contend that her narrative also needs to be analysed in the context of the intergenerational trauma she is coping with in London. Nazneen is depicted as a trapped and traumatised character, who is primarily engaged with coming to terms with the past, which is shown by how she perceives space, including both interior locations and cityscapes. The memories that evoke her childhood spent in East Pakistan are projected onto the urban environment. Therefore, I argue that London does not simply demarcate the limits of her freedom in the novel: the city is also a creative space in *Brick Lane*, which is brought to life by the translocal images Nazneen projects onto the built environment as she is coping with her traumatic memories. In this sense, London becomes a place of healing in the novel.

As a diasporic Bildungsroman, *Brick Lane* does not simply mimic the conventions of the classical genre, as Ziegler assumes, but also shows how the Bildungsroman can be adapted to construe contemporary migrant narratives. Ali's novel, not unlike the classical Bildungsroman, which is often seen as the symbolic form of Western modernity,[7] implies that socialisation primarily consists in "the *interiorization of contradiction,*"[8] as, for instance, Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* showcases. Attempts to interiorise contradictions and establish a sense of continuity between past and present also characterise the stages of Nazneen's bildung as she settles in

5 As Chloé Buckley and Sarah Ilott put it: "[i]n contemporary British literature novels such as Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), and even Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) have portrayed London as the backdrop for playful experiments with and performances of identity, ending with a sense of optimism about the future." Chloé Buckley and Sarah Ilott, ed. *Telling it Slant: Critical Approaches to Helen Oyeyemi* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2017), 5.

6 According to Ziegler, London "becomes a site of liberation for 'Third World' migrant women only insofar as it exists as a site for financial exchange, for working and buying and selling, for the blood and breath of the capitalist economy since the main character becomes a more empowered and self-conscious woman by the end of the narrative" (Ziegler, "East of the City," 145).

7 The Bildungsroman has been regarded as a classical European genre: according to Moretti, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* marks the birth of the Bildungsroman in European culture, which he defines as a "form" that made possible "the Golden Century of Western Narrative." Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), 3. Moretti believes the Bildungsroman disappeared in the 20th century, "Eliot's and Flaubert's being the last masterpieces of the genre." Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 9.

8 Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 10.

London. Unlike in classical Bildungsroman, however, the closure of the novel is ambivalent: Nazneen learns to internalise irreconcilable opposites and control her childhood trauma, yet the way she is seen from the outside is incommensurable with this inner triumph. As my analysis will show, the novel's concluding image might be read as an allusion to Nazneen's healing and a testimony to this cultural incommensurability at one and the same time.

Intergenerational Trauma in Brick Lane

Brick Lane is set in the public housing council flats of Tower Hamlets, where Nazneen settles in the 1980s, at the age of 18. The third-person narrative is focalised mainly through her perspective. She is married to a man much older than herself, with whom they have two daughters. Her husband, Chanu, is a frustrated intellectual: he has a degree in English from the University of Dhaka, quotes Shakespeare and Hume fluently, yet suffers from a lack of recognition in London. Nazneen is portrayed as a traditional village girl who comes to Britain as a housewife; at the beginning of the novel, her only role is to help her husband and children. Nazneen is portrayed as a vulnerable character: she is by no means an "avenging migrant," to use Homi Bhabha's phrase,[9] who comes to London to conquer the city, as Gibreel Farishta in Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. Her primary aspiration seems to be to reconcile the memories of her homeland with her new experiences. These memories are often associated with open spaces in the novel, such as vast fields and the limitless horizon, and appear to be nostalgic recollections, yet on a deeper level, they reveal that Nazneen is coping with intergenerational trauma.

Brick Lane begins with the moment of Nazneen's birth, which is portrayed as a traumatic event: the prematurely born baby seems to be too weak to survive. Her mother is told that there are two routes that she can follow: "Take her to the city, to a hospital. They will put wires on her and give medicines. This is very expensive. You will have to sell your jewellery. Or you can just see what Fate will do."[10] Her mother, despite the pressure of the family, chooses the second option: "No, she said, we must not stand in the way of Fate."[11] This short episode portrays Nazneen's birth as an event that she barely survives, foreshadowing the main themes of *Brick Lane:* the question of choice, empowerment, free will, as well as the opposition between village, associated with homeliness, love, and fatalism, and the city, which

[9] Bhabha calls Gabriel Farishta, one of the main characters of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* an „avenging migrant": "… through Gibreel, the avenging migrant, we learn the ambivalence of cultural difference: it is the articulation through incommensurability that structures all narratives of identification, and all acts of cultural translation." Homi K. Bhabha, "Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 169.

[10] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (London: Black Swan, 2003), 13–14.

[11] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 14.

is described in terms of technology, money, and modernity both in South Asia and in the Global North.

Nazneen grows up in a rural environment, which explains why East Pakistan is primarily associated with vast fields and lakes in the novel. The memory of these natural sites reappears in the narrative after Nazneen moves to London, serving as an antithesis to her claustrophobic life in the city. Even before she migrates, the fields acquire a significant symbolic function. When Nazneen learns who she has to marry, for instance, she immediately looks at the vast fields to distract her thoughts:

> The man she would marry was old. At least forty years old. He had a face like a frog. They would marry and he would take her back to England. She looked across the fields glittering green and gold in the brief evening light. In the distance a hawk circled and fell like a stone, came up again and flew against the sky until it shrank to nothing. There was a hut in the middle of the paddy. It looked wrong: embarrassed, sliding down at one side, trying to hide. The tornado that had flattened half the neighbouring village had selected this hut to be saved, but had relocated it. In the village they were still burying their dead and looking for bodies. Dark spots moved through the far fields. Men, doing whatever they could in this world.[12]

The image of openness, associated with the vast fields, contrasts Nazneen's present state of mind, which is also expressed in terms of colours: the fields glitter in green and gold. However, the image is far from peaceful: the hawk circling in the distance and the hut out of place evoke danger and disorder, and the memory of the tornado flattening the neighbouring village suggests that the glittering surface hides severe loss and pain. These visions describe the dangers and difficulties people in Bangladesh[13] face every day. On a deeper level, however, they are also associated with a painful event in Nazneen's childhood, which is at the heart of her intergenerational trauma: the sudden death of her mother.

I call Nazneen's trauma intergenerational because the loss of her mother, Rupban, is not only an individual tragedy, but an event that carries broader implications. Rupban's death has a cultural dimension which Nazneen and her sister, Hasina, inherit, as they are socially and psychologically conditioned to adopt the life their mother had.[14] The death of Nazneen's mother is presented in the novel as a

[12] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 17.

[13] East Pakistan, where Nazneen was born, became Bangladesh in 1971 after the East Pakistan War.

[14] The concept of intergenerational trauma was first used to describe the traumatic experiences transmitted by Holocaust survivors to their children, then it was applied to the traumas transmitted in oppressive societies. According to Agnella Connoly, psychoanalytic publications showed "the presence of intergenerational trauma not only in the children of Holocaust survivors but also in the children of the survivors of repressive regimes." Angela Connolly, "Healing the Wounds of Our Fathers: Intergenerational Trauma, Memory, Symbolization and Narrative," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 56 (2011): 607–626.

minor event: it is briefly mentioned among Nazneen's recollections when she is already in London:[15] her mother was found in the family's store "staked through the heart by a spear"[16] at a time when "Abba disappeared and stayed away for days."[17] Did he have a lover? Was she killed? Did she commit suicide? It is not clarified at this stage, as if the narrative were incapable of registering such shameful secrets, yet later, Nazneen's sister's letter reveals that Rupban committed suicide.[18] Nazneen never mourns her mother properly either, which shows that the event is not integrated into her conscious memory. Rupban's death is presented as an accident,[19] which shows that the community is unable to cope with the shame and guilt the tragic event evokes. Both Nazneen and her sister, Hasina, try to escape from this fate and the feeling that women's lives have no significance, and their deaths have no consequence. This is precisely why their trauma is intergenerational: Rupban's death is not only an individual example of the mistreatment of women in East Pakistan but part of Nazneen's legacy spanning generations of women.

The emotions Nazneen struggles to overcome in London stem from this heritage. The role of her reminiscences is twofold: on the one hand, they help Nazneen escape the narrow and bleak world she sees from her windows in Tower Hamlets, which is dominated by "dead grass and broken paving stones";[20] on the other, she is trying to reconcile the way she felt as a child with the emotions she experiences in the metropolis, which is a significant element in her bildung. However, the feeling of loss and pain always interrupts her nostalgic recollections:

> Nazneen fell asleep on the sofa. She looked out across jade-green rice fields and swam in the cool dark lake. She walked arm in arm to school with Hasina and skipped part of the way and fell and they dusted their knees with their hands. And the mynah birds called from the trees, and the goats fretted by, and the big sad water buffaloes passed like a funeral. And heaven, which was above, was

[15] In the film version the event is less marginalised: Nazneen's mother drowns in a lake at the beginning, which is quite likely to be the result of suicide.

[16] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 46.

[17] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 46.

[18] "Amma always say we are women what can we do? If she here now I know what she say I know it too well. But I am not like her. Waiting around. Suffering around. She wrong. So many ways. At the end only she act. She who think all path is closed for her. She take the only one forbidden. Forgive me sister I must tell you now this secret so long held inside me…Amma go past kitchen. No one is there. She go into store room…She take spear and test on the finger. She take another and put it back. And third one she take before is happy." Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 434–435. See also: Shrimoyee Chattopadhyay, *Non-Conforming Women in Neoliberal Cities: Re-thinking Empowerment in Contemporary Diaspora Fiction and Film* (University of Debrecen, Doctoral Dissertation, 2023): 134–135.

[19] Mumtaz, Nazneen's aunt, claims that '"She had fallen' … and the spear was the only thing holding her up" (Ali 46).

[20] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 17.

> wide and empty and the land stretched out ahead and she could see to the very end of it, where the earth smudged the sky in a dark blue line.[21]

The vision that offers an escape to Nazneen is, again, associated with openness: the jade-green rice-fields, the singing birds, and the endless horizon stretching out offer a sharp contrast to the rooms where she spends her days in London. However, sad buffaloes pass "like a funeral,"[22] heaven above is "empty,"[23] and both the pond and the sky are "dark,"[24] suggesting that sadness, death, and destruction linger in the back of her mind. The recurring visions of open fields disturbed by dark images suggest that she is trying to come to terms with her traumatic childhood.

Later in her life, Nazneen starts to cling to these memories, as if they provided a sense of order in her chaotic, disorderly life. She is afraid of losing her childhood vision:

> The village was leaving her. Sometimes a picture would come. Vivid; so strong she could smell it. More often, she tried to see and could not. It was as if the village was caught up in a giant fisherman's net and she was pulling at the fine mesh with bleeding fingers, squinting into the sun, vision mottled with netting and eyelashes. As the years passed the layers of netting multiplied and she began to rely on a different kind of memory. The memory of things she knew but no longer saw.[25]

Though Nazneen is aware of the fact that she cannot trust her memory, she still relies on these visions: despite the pain they evoke, nostalgic reminiscences seem to provide a sense of safety for her in the alien metropolis. As opposed to the vivid images the village evokes, such as the lake, a fisherman and the sun, London is seen as a rotten and lifeless place:

> She began to spend time at the window, as she had in those first few months in London, when it was still possible to look out across the dead grass and concentrate and see nothing but jade-green fields, unable to imagine that the years would rub them away. Now she saw only the flats, piles of people loaded one on top of the other, a vast dump of people rotting away under a mean strip of sky, too small to reflect all those souls.[26]

Observing people from the window does not help Nazneen feel less confined; on the contrary, she projects the pressures she experiences in her life on the environment. Once the memory of the village and the jade-green fields disappear, she is

[21] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 21.
[22] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 21.
[23] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 21.
[24] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 21.
[25] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 217.
[26] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 364.

afraid of the emptiness they leave behind. The openness of the fields is contrasted with her claustrophobic flat, which is depicted as the place of madness:

> She walked into a lunatic's room. Signs of madness everywhere. The crushing furniture stacked high, spread out, jumbled up. Papers and books strewn liberally – lewdly! – over windowsills, tables, floor. Alarming rugs every colour, deviously designed to confuse the eye and arrest the heart. Corner cabinet and glass showcase panting with knick-knacks. Yellow wallpaper lined up and down with squares and circles. The clutter of frames for space on the walls.[27]

The yellow wallpaper recalls Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," which is narrated by a woman confined to the bedroom by her husband.[28] Confinement and mental health are central issues in both texts: although Nazneen is allowed to leave the flat, her husband always makes it clear that her proper place is inside the house, and the chaotic room appears as the spatial metaphor of her state of mind. It is also telling that there is not enough space in the room for Nazneen to fully see herself in the mirror: "To see herself she had to stand on the bed and look in the curly-edged dressing-table mirror."[29] It is disorder, fragmentation, and constraint, then, that Nazneen feels in London: unable to reconcile the vision of openness with the claustrophobia and decay that characterise her life in Tower Hamlets, she is clinging to her childhood memories despite the pain they evoke. These emotions also reveal, however, that the main psychological issues Nazneen is coping with stem from the intergenerational trauma she has inherited: the fate of her mother, which she seems to be unable to avoid.

Spaces of Healing and the Limits of Nazneen's Empowerment

It is not only Tower Hamlets and Nazneen's flat onto which unacknowledged emotions are projected in *Brick Lane*. Although Nazneen has a very limited view of the city at the beginning of the narrative, as she starts to walk outside, she encounters a few sights such as a hospital, shops, and grocery stores. Her first walk is especially memorable. Nazneen leaves the flat alone and walks as a flaneuse, quietly observing the streets and projecting images she is familiar with onto the built environment. The episode is focalised through her perspective: "Nazneen craned her head back and saw that the glass above became dark as a night pond. The building was without end. Above, sometimes, it crushed the clouds."[30] Nazneen is trying

[27] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 140.

[28] Similar to Nazneen, the main character of "The Yellow Wallpaper" spends her days in the room and has to hide her journal from her husband as Nazneen hides her sister's letters.

[29] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 141.

[30] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 56.

to make sense of what she sees by projecting familiar images onto the unfamiliar cityscape: the ceiling of a skyscraper is compared to a night pond, for instance, reminiscent of the lakes in the village where she grew up.[31] Later, she compares the buildings to cows: "The clouds rushed at the top of buildings as if they were to smother them in murderous rage. The buildings stood their ground impassive as cows."[32] The narrative offers a translocal view of London as rural images from Nazneen's childhood are projected onto the Western metropolis, not unlike images of the Rhodesian veld in Lessing's *In Pursuit of the English*.[33] Again, besides the vision of openness symbolised by the endless building reaching up to the sky, dark echoes of "murderous rage" appear, suggesting that the image is very similar to the traumatic memories discussed in the previous section: Nazneen is trying to reconcile her recollections with what she sees in the present moment, which is an important step in her healing.

However, attempts at reconciliation seem to produce incommensurable images in *Brick Lane*. The fact that these worlds are incompatible is evident on the level of the plot as well: Nazneen's husband returns to Bangladesh alone, and she decides to stay in London with her two daughters. She also refuses to marry Karim, her lover, who sees the pure village girl in her, which suggests that Nazneen is no longer able to identify with this image. London does not seem to be their home either: in a memorable episode before Chanu leaves for Bangladesh, they are portrayed as tourists after having lived in Tower Hamlets for thirty years. Exploring the city centre and Buckingham Palace for the first time, Chanu asks a stranger to take a photo of the family, claiming that they are from Bangladesh. The stranger, who has no idea that Bangladesh is different from India, wants to take a photo of them for himself, as if Chanu and his family were a curiosity in central London: "'Do you mind if I get a shot of all of you together for myself?' He toted his own camera. And by way of explanation he added, 'I'm hoping to get there one day, India'."[34] The family is depicted as a spectacle, a sight to capture in central London. Whereas Nazneen's lonely walk showed how she saw the city, this episode reveals how she and her family are seen from the outside, and in both cases, the result is a profound sense of cultural and visual incommensurability.

Ideally, the photo is one of the documentary types of evidence that records continuity, yet the picture the stranger takes reflects a sense of lack:

31 In the film version, Nazneen's mother drowns in a pond. *Brick Lane*, dir. Sarah Gavron, 2007.

32 Monica Ali, *Brick Lane,* 60.

33 Ágnes Györke, "Stories from Elsewhere: The City as a Transnational Space in Doris Lessing's Fiction," in *Times of Mobility: Transnational Literature and Gender in Translation*, ed. Jasmina Lukic, Sibelan Forrester, and Borbála Faragó (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2019), 157.

34 Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 296–297.

> As she posed again, Nazneen realized that today was the first time they stood together as a family for the camera. It filled her with a mixture of panic and hope, the possibility of holding things together with the unexpected ritual of family life. When the film was developed, a few shots were only blurs of colour, like a glimpse through a doorway when the monsoon washed away the shape of things and of the family together nothing could be made out except for the feet.[35]

Though Nazneen wishes to "hold things together," this seems to be impossible in this novel: the photo lacks exactly the completeness she is striving for. Shots are blurred, faces are invisible, and the image that creeps into Nazneen's mind seems to be out of place again: she compares the blurred photo to the impact of the monsoon, a strong seasonal wind that affects the Indian subcontinent. This reveals yet another attempt to create a sense of continuity between her past and the present, which fails spectacularly in this novel.

Brick Lane differs from classical Bildungsroman exactly for this reason. The experience of continuity between past and present, the internalisation of apparently irreconcilable opposites, which Moretti regards as the most significant aspect of socialisation, seems to be impossible in this novel due to the cultural incommensurability Nazneen experiences. *Brick Lane* ends with an ambivalent image that expresses this sense of incommensurability clearly. Nazneen's daughters and her best friend, Razia, take her to ice-skating, which is a dream-come-true for Nazneen, since she has admired this sport on TV for a long time. Nevertheless, she protests: "you can't skate in a sari,"[36] while Razia is encouraging her: "this is England, you can do whatever you like."[37] According to Chakravorty, the image is the parody of migrant assimilation: "the final words reveal the extent to which the experience of multicultural hybridity is arrested by the limits of a cultural imaginary in which the spectre of a Bangladeshi woman skating in a sari can only be seen as a parody of migrant assimilation."[38] It is hard to believe that this is a triumphant conclusion indeed: Razia's superficial remark, which echoes the ideology of neoliberalism, does parody the notion that England is an "open space" where everyone can feel at home.

However, the concluding image is more ambivalent than Chakravorty assumes. Besides suggesting that ice-skating in a sari parodies migrant integration, it also sheds light on Nazneen's inner bildung, which reveals a different story. First, whereas at the beginning of the novel, Nazneen was not able to pronounce the word "ice-skating"[39] and thought of the sport as an elite, luxurious pastime, she is ready to try it at the end. Second, the way in which the ice-skating rink is described suggests that Nazneen has reached a new stage in healing her trauma. The rink is portrayed

35 Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 297.
36 Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 492.
37 Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 492.
38 Mrinalini Chakravorty, "*Brick Lane* Blockades," 506.
39 Since there are no double consonants in Bengali, Nazneen was only able to say "ice-e-skating."

as an open space, similar to Nazneen's recurring childhood memories, yet this space is controlled by firm boundaries: "In front of her was a huge white circle, bounded by four-foot-high boards. Glinting, dazzling, enchanting ice. She looked at the ice and slowly it revealed itself. The criss-cross patterns of a thousand surface scars, the colours that shifted and changed in the lights, the unchanging nature of what lay beneath."[40] The ice-skating rink recalls the image of the open fields that haunted Nazneen throughout the narrative, but this is no longer a dark and uncontrollable vision. She is ice-skating in an open yet bounded space, the boundaries of which are clearly demarcated. Though the colours and the lights are changing on the surface, which has scars, not unlike Nazneen, the ice-skating rink reminds her of something unchangeable and eternal. The "unchanging nature" of the ice and the earth underneath creates a sense of continuity between Nazneen's past and the present, as if she found a sense of stability in the present moment, which is no longer irreconcilable with her memories. This vision suggests, I would claim, that Nazneen learns to tame the trauma of her childhood and reconcile her nostalgic memories with how she feels in the Western metropolis. Furthermore, it is not only Nazneen's individual childhood trauma that is integrated into her life story at this stage: the vicious cycle of intergenerational transmission is also stopped as Nazneen carves out a space in London that makes her feel like a person whose life, unlike the life of her mother, matters.

To conclude, *Brick Lane* is a diasporic Bildungsroman that depicts Nazneen's bildung yet problematizes the very notion of development in the diasporic context. Although she is able to integrate the intergenerational trauma that haunts her throughout the narrative, Nazneen is seen as a spectacle, an expression of cultural otherness, by the end of the narrative. The final image of the novel shows the limits of Nazneen's newly discovered empowerment, since it suggests that her inner triumph is irreconcilable with how she is perceived by others in London.

Abstract

This article explores Monica Ali's Brick Lane *as a diasporic Bildungsroman that depicts the limits of psychological and social development in London. Similar to other diasporic novels such as Sam Selvon's* The Lonely Londoners*, Buchi Emecheta's* Second-Class Citizen*, and Doris Lessing's* In Pursuit of the English*, Ali's novel portrays the main character's transformation in London after migrating from a postcolonial country, showcasing how the Western metropolis fosters yet delimits her development. This article points out that the transformation Ali's protagonist goes through needs to be analysed in the context of her intergenerational trauma: Nazneen's memories, which evoke her childhood spent in East Pakistan, not only haunt*

[40] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*, 492.

her in London but are also projected onto the urban environment. Therefore, I argue that London, apart from demarcating the limits of Nazneen's freedom, becomes a creative and healing space in Brick Lane.

Keywords: London, urban space, 21st-century fiction, intergenerational trauma, diasporic Bildungsroman

Rezümé
London Monica Ali Brick Lane *című regényében: Intergenerációs trauma és a gyógyulás terei*

Tanulmányom diaszporikus fejlődésregényként olvassa Monica Ali Brick Lane *(magyar fordításban:* A muszlim asszony*) című művét, amely a Londonban megélt társadalmi és lelki átalakulás határait beszéli el. Akárcsak Sam Selvon* Magányos Londoniak (The Lonely Londoners), *Buchi Emecheta* Másodrendű állampolgár (Second-Class Citizen) *és Doris Lessing* Az angolok nyomában (In Pursuit of the English) *című művei, Ali regénye is egy posztkoloniális országból érkezett főhős történetével foglalkozik, amelyen keresztül bemutatja, hogy milyen módon hat a karakter fejlődésére a nagyvárosi lét. Tanulmányom arra mutat rá, hogy Nazneen intergenerációs traumával küzd Londonban: traumatikus emlékei nemcsak kísértik, hanem gyakran rávetülnek a város tereire. Ezért amellett érvelek, hogy a nagyváros nem csupán a fejlődés határait jelöli ki a regényben, hanem kreatív játéktérként a gyógyulást is szolgálja.*

Kulcsszavak: London, városi tér, 21. századi irodalom, intergenerációs trauma, diaszpórikus fejlődésregény