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Shattered Dreams
An essay analyzing Chanu's assimilation process in *Brick Lane*

Brick Lane has stimulated a wide range of debates regarding Monica Ali's portrayal of the inhabitants of the area from which the novel has taken its title. This essay claims that assimilation is the key theme of the novel, and that the desire to achieve it is represented most strongly in the character of Chanu. The latter's primary goal is to assimilate himself into the English society in which he now lives. In order to demonstrate just how complex this assimilation process is, Chanu is discussed in relation to society's influence on him and four concepts of post-colonial theory, namely "double consciousness", "unhomeliness", "mimicry" and "hybridity" (all are defined below). The four concepts reveal important features of the assimilation process, including Chanu's experiences of exclusion, racism and failure. Further, it will be demonstrated how Chanu in the end shows development and is able to move on in spite of his failure.

By analyzing Chanu in the light of the above four post-colonial concepts, the reader gains an enhanced understanding of Chanu's struggles and reactions. Five key episodes have been chosen to show how Chanu ultimately fails to adapt to his environment. The first is found early in the story and concerns a conversation between Chanu and Dr. Azad in which Chanu contemplates how he felt about coming to England (Ali 34). This particular episode is chosen in order to analyze Chanu's expectations when he first arrived in London, showing why these could not be fulfilled. It also depicts Chanu's view of himself and his compatriots. The second episode concerns when Chanu is talking to Nazneen about Shakespeare and how he views his compatriots' habits at the marketplace (Ali 91-93). This episode depicts Chanu's admiration of certain aspects of English culture and is also representative of his contradictory view of England and English people. Furthermore, it reveals his attitude towards the Bangladeshi people.

The third episode takes place during a visit to Dr. Azad's house; Chanu discusses with Mrs. Azad the tragedy of being an immigrant (Ali 112-114). This passage displays Chanu's feelings regarding a matter which clearly illustrates his frustration with his situation. In the fourth episode, Chanu confesses that he has lied to his relatives in Bangladesh by telling them that he is a successful man (Ali 132-133). The episode illustrates Chanu's disillusionment and his disappointment in himself. The fifth and final episode concerns when Chanu realizes that Nazneen is not going back with him to Bangladesh, (Ali 477-479) and his reaction to this fact. But it also shows that Chanu has changed and that a development has taken place in him. The

five episodes chosen have been selected from different parts in order to illustrate Chanu's attempts to assimilate at different points in time.

Presented below are definitions of the four concepts of post-colonial theory applied in this essay. The term "double consciousness" has been defined by Tyson as a consciousness or way of perceiving the world that is divided between two antagonistic cultures, that of the colonizer and that of the indigenous community (421). One reason for this divided view of the world is that "Rules of inclusion and exclusion operate on the assumption of the superiority of the colonizer's culture, history [...] and the assertion of the need for the colonized to be 'raised up' through colonial contact" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 37).

The second term, "unhomeliness" is closely connected to double consciousness as it refers to the state of being between cultures, of not belonging to either, which creates a psychological limbo. Tyson defines unhomeliness in the following way: "Being unhomed is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee" (421). Tyson continues by noting that the feeling of unhomeliness results from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives (421).

"Mimicry", the third concept of post-colonial theory applied here originates from the colonizers' creation of so-called "colonial subjects"; such people were manipulated into considering themselves as inferior to British superiority. As a consequence, attempts were made to imitate the colonizer's ways of living, looking and dressing in order to raise their status (Tyson 421). Bhabha notes on the concept that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other [...] Mimicry is [...] a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" (*The Location* 122).

The fourth, and final concept used is "hybridity", a widely employed term within post-colonial theory. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin note that hybridity "commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (108). Loomba states that "one of the most striking contradictions about colonialism is that it needs both to 'civilize' its 'others' and to fix them into perpetual 'otherness'" (145). According to Loomba, the contradiction lies in the fact that "even as imperial and racist ideologies insist on

racial difference, they catalyze cross-overs, partly because not all that takes place in the contact zones can be monitored and controlled” (145).

Since its publication in 2003, *Brick Lane* has been variously received by critics. Some regard it as a celebration of integration (Perfect 110); others as a monocultural text disguised in a multicultural package (Chakrabarti n.pag.). Perfect, for example, claims in his article that the novel is a “multicultural Bildungsroman”, arguing that Ali reveals the immigrant protagonist’s as well as the multicultural metropole’s ability to adapt (119). Although this could apply to other characters in the novel, this essay claims that Chanu does not have this ability to adapt. In other words; Chanu does not succeed in assimilating into society, as will be discussed below.

While Perfect argues that Ali celebrates multiculturalism, Chakrabarti claims in his book review that she writes under the influence of the publishing industry’s demands for commercial success (n.pag.). In doing so, Chakrabarti claims that the author obscures the “dark side of multiculturalism- the real multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural society that the majority of us do not want to see” (n.pag.). He is referring here to the fact that Ali chose not to depict the Brick Lane bombings in 1999. He also argues that the story focuses exclusively on the closed environment of the apartment, that Ali fails to include the outside world and that this produces a false picture of the Bangladeshi community and its inhabitants. Chakrabarti applies this in particular to Chanu, claiming that Ali’s omission of what causes Chanu’s recurrent failures makes the reader believe that “his failure is of his own making” (n.pag.). In this, Chakrabarti refers to the challenges and obstacles which Chanu, in reality would have faced in society and which are not described in the novel. As a consequence, Ali fails to give the reader a deeper understanding of Chanu. Chakrabarti’s argument is broadly agreed upon in this essay as Chanu in fact is depicted in a way that could make the reader perceive him as merely a failure without understanding the possible reasons for his struggle to assimilate. In order to give the reader a more nuanced understanding of Chanu’s stagnation, the underlying reasons are discussed below.

Cormack discusses Chanu in the following way: “He constructs a mythic Bangladesh to compensate for his failure to succeed in English culture” (702). This example refers to a passage in the novel where Chanu demands of his daughters that they recite poems of Tagore in order to recognize and understand their roots (Ali 185). Cormack observes that Chanu

refuses to see the discrepancy between his “Golden Bangladesh” and the reality that is revealed in the letters from Hasina (702). As this essay demonstrates, this is one of Chanu’s issues; he creates a utopia in order to escape the thought of his failure to succeed in England.

What Cormack, on the other hand, does not discuss is the fact that it is not only Chanu’s daughters’ awareness of their roots that is of importance in this passage. Chanu’s experience of rootlessness plays a significant role in his struggle to assimilate. Cormack continues by describing Chanu as a character with a compromised identity who “desperately lurches between an outmoded aspirational Englishness [...] and a version of himself as an ‘educated man’ who has stooped to the condition of moneymaker in order to return to an unsullied home” (703). Although Cormack presents a picture of Chanu which is similar to what this essay presents, he does not discuss in detail the underlying reasons for Chanu’s failure to adapt and to make a good life for himself and his family. These reasons will be discussed and investigated in this essay to show the complexity of Chanu’s assimilation process.

Fernández argues that *Brick Lane* depicts the plurality of ways in which ethnically diverse people live, narrate and make sense of their multicultural experiences. Fernández also points to the characters’ dissimilar levels of integration in what she calls “a monolithic community” (145). This observation is relevant to what this essay discusses as the characters’ assimilation processes have various results and aspects of post-colonial theory influence the characters in different ways. What is more, Fernández shows how community heterogeneity is depicted in the novel through Chanu’s reflections on the Asian population of Brick Lane. As an example, Fernández chooses the episode in which Chanu contemplates his arrival in England (Ali 34). Fernández links this to Chanu’s resistance to the homogenized view that he feels English people have of all Asians (Fernández 151).

This resistance is part of Chanu’s struggles; he does not want to be compared to the Bangladeshi people living in his community because he sees himself as someone better than them. His view prevents him from assimilating into the Bangladeshi community as well. Fernández also mentions Chanu’s frustration concerning his daughters’ lack of interest in their cultural roots (152), but like Cormack, she does not discuss Chanu’s feelings of rootlessness. This omission is significant as it enables the reader to gain a deeper understanding of Chanu, as will be demonstrated shortly.

Bentley discusses how Chanu changes throughout the story and notes that he initially has an encouraging, yet naïve view of Britain as a land of opportunity. Bentley continues by noting that Chanu's "initial celebration of English culture and learning show him at first to be an appropriated colonial subject", but when he learns that England is not at all what he expected it to be, he becomes bitter (91). However, Bentley argues that this new knowledge makes Chanu more realistic in his view on his position in society; "This bitter, yet more realistic position shows Chanu coming to terms with the economic realities of post-colonialism" (91). This analysis of Chanu's altered view of his own situation is closely related to this essay's aim; to show how Chanu is held back in stagnation caused by the effects of colonial ideology. However, Bentley also notes that Chanu develops throughout the story. He is initially perceived as uncaring, but towards the end he displays qualities that make him stand out as a more sympathetic man (90). This change in Chanu is also included in this essay to show his complexity and how his relation to his family is eventually influenced by his development.

The first episode chosen for discussion takes place during a dinner party held by Chanu and Nazneen where Dr. Azad is the only guest (Ali 34). As they eat, Chanu talks about the possibility of his being promoted at work. The passage below is illustrative of Chanu's disappointment in his lack of success in this area, and how his expectations have not been fulfilled as he had hoped. Furthermore, it depicts Chanu's view on himself and his fellow countrymen:

When I came I was a young man. I had ambitions. Big dreams. When I got off the aeroplane I had my degree certificate in my suitcase and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid out for me [...] That was my plan. And then I found things were a bit different. These people here didn't know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads. (Ali 34)

As this passage shows, Chanu's expectations turn out to be unrealistic. Looking back, contemplating his arrival in England, he is filled with disillusionment, which follows him throughout the story. When he first arrived, he thought that there were no limits to what he could achieve, but he soon learns that limitations are an integral part of being an immigrant in England. These restraints are most apparent in his job situation, where he does not make the

progress he had expected. He feels that this stagnation is due to racism and discrimination because colleagues less educated and loyal than him are promoted before him.

Chanu's pride in being awarded a degree is evident not only in this example but throughout the story: he makes sure that he distances himself from the peasants by pointing out that he is an educated man. This aspect of Chanu's personality is related to mimicry, which as Tyson notes, is common among colonial subjects who desire to imitate the colonizing culture in order to, on the one hand achieve acceptance from the colonizer, and on the other, avoid the shame of being regarded as inferior due to their different cultural origins (421). This notion is based on a belief in English superiority; by gaining a degree in English Literature, Chanu believes that he will become the equal of any Englishman.

However, Chanu does not know that a degree from Dhaka University is not valued in England. Far from being respected and accepted, he is discriminated against, which causes great bitterness. What Chanu comes to realize, is that he will not be looked upon as equal in spite of his attempts to mimic parts of English culture. Bhabha defines the process of mimicry as "the process by which the colonized subject is reproduced as "almost the same, but not quite" (*The Location* 122). This is exactly what Chanu experiences; namely that he will not be considered an Englishman no matter what he does. He faces a reality which he was not prepared to meet and the embedded racism in English society makes it impossible for him to fulfill his dreams.

The exclusion which Chanu experiences must be seen in connection with parts of English society's view of immigration. Bentley notes that one of the strongest influences on both Britain and its former colonies, is the legacy of colonialism, both in terms of its new position in the new world order after 1945, and the changed nature of its population at home (17). This change, caused by immigration, made Britain a multicultural nation. As discussed below, the altering of British society and culture has not been an exclusively unproblematic process.

Bentley notes that the immigrants coming to Britain were often settled in deprived areas and that there was, and still is resistance from some to this development of communities (17). Taking this view into account, one can assume that the fact that Chanu lives in Brick Lane contributes to the exclusion he experiences. The resistance that certain members of successive governments felt about the matter was often shown in attempts to create unnecessary fear

among the British population by presenting images of being invaded by immigrants (Bentley 17). One of these politicians was Enoch Powell, a conservative Member of Parliament. In 1968, he delivered his speech *Rivers of Blood* to a Conservative Association meeting. He made this speech to warn for continued immigration into Britain and for the consequences this would have: “Whole areas, towns and parts of towns across England will be occupied by sections of the immigrant and immigrant-descended population” (“Enoch Powell’s Rivers” n.pag.). He continued by discussing the third element of the Conservative Party’s policy which concerns the equality of British citizens:

As Mr. Heath has put it we will have no ‘first-class citizens’ and ‘second-class citizens’. This does not mean that the immigrant and his descendant should be elevated into a privileged or special class or that the citizen should be denied his right to discriminate in the management of his own affairs between one fellow-citizen and another or that he should be subjected to imposition as to his reasons and motive for behaving in one lawful manner rather than another. (“Enoch Powell’s Rivers n.pag.)

Considering that a poll at the time suggested that the majority of the English people agreed with Powell’s opinions, one can comprehend how this influenced the lives of immigrants in England. Powell’s words clearly convey the acceptance of discrimination in Britain and are also directed towards the employer’s right to discriminate against immigrants concerning employment and promotions. Ali’s depiction of Chanu’s experiences in the job-market is clearly colored by this common acceptance of racism and exclusion. His skills are not appreciated as he has the wrong skin-color.

The notion of double consciousness adds a new dimension to the above episode. As noted in the definition part above, this divided view of the world springs from the assumption of the colonizer’s superiority and the assertion of the need for the colonized to be elevated through colonial contact. Chanu refers to his fellow countrymen in a way that clearly demonstrates that he resents them; he stepped out of an airplane, he notes, with a degree in his hand, while they jumped off a boat “possessing only the lice on their heads” (Ali 34). Chanu considers himself to be raised up by his education and cannot accept that he is excluded in the same way as his compatriots whom he regards not to have the skills necessary to be considered his equal.

Chanu also notes that these people here are unable to see the difference between him and the immigrants arriving by boat. Fernández discusses “the inadequacy of homogenizing communities according to their race or their ethnicity” (151) and this is precisely what Chanu points out; he resents being compared to people who, in his opinion, are below him on the hierarchical ladder. In his view, the Bangladeshi community is divided into two categories: the illiterate and the intellectuals. He, as an educated man, belongs, in his own opinion, to the latter. Consequently, he looks upon the illiterate compatriots as inferior. However, as it turns out, his degree does not give him any advantages in England. Considering this, one could assume that Chanu would alter his view of people whom he looks upon as ignorant and peasants, and come to realize that he and they are looked upon in the same way despite their different backgrounds. This could probably have given him some feeling of belonging, at least to the Bangladeshi community. He is, however, still distancing himself from them and in this he remains in the psychological limbo between two different cultures, not belonging to either of them.

Another dimension to Chanu’s comment “these people here” is that it is mocking, “The English people” being a more polite alternative. Chanu’s choice of words indicates his complex feelings and attitude towards English society. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin note that mimicry has become an important term in post-colonial theory as it describes the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized. Part of this ambivalence lies in the fact that mimicry is never far from mockery (125). Chanu wants the acceptance of a superior society, but at the same time he is offended by the fact that this society looks upon him and his compatriots as equals in spite of his degree. He is provoked by the fact that his efforts to adapt to English culture and values does not give him the status he considers appropriate and this makes him mock the English people. He appears to be questioning their intelligence because, it should, he believes, be easy to see that he is on a higher level academically than many Englishmen. It is his disappointment that is the underlying reason for his negative attitude. By ridiculing the English he reduces his own feeling of failure.

In discussing the complexity of the definition of Britishness, Baucom notes that:

To be identified by the courts or government ministers as British is not at all the same thing as to identify oneself with Britishness. Nor, [...] do legal pronouncements that virtually everyone born within British territory is British

guarantee that all those who have thus been identified as Britons will accept the Britishness of one another. (11-12)

This discrepancy is essential in Chanu's experience of exclusion in several areas of the society in which he lives. The experience of racism contributes to Chanu's feeling of unhomeliness which causes him to be in constant search for stability and belonging. Even if he is rightfully a British citizen, he was not born in England - and moreover, he is not white. Racism in England, with its strong historical roots makes it impossible for Chanu to be accepted. In line with the development of social Darwinism in the nineteenth century, people were, and still are, ranked according to skin color or other physiological traits (Harrison 73). Racism prevents Chanu from progressing; ironically, however, Chanu is also a discriminator: he looks upon his compatriots with the eyes of a colonizer and on the English people with the ones of the colonized. Chanu's problem in this is that he is not himself regarded as European and this places him in a psychological vacuum. He is reaching upwards for the acceptance of the superior European and kicking downwards at his fellow countrymen.

Chanu's experience, which is a form of double consciousness, also colors the episode discussed below. This episode contains both comments by the narrator and Chanu's own words. The first part concerns Chanu's opinion about the tradition of haggling in the market place: "He would not haggle. He would not 'abase' himself, or 'act like a primitive'" (Ali 91). Again, he reveals an arrogant attitude towards some of the Bangladeshi immigrants; he will not degrade himself by behaving in this primitive way. Considering that haggling is more commonly used as a bargaining strategy in Asia than in England, Chanu views this custom as demeaning. Once more, he reveals a colonial mindset in which European traditions and habits are considered as the civil ones compared to other cultures that are regarded as primitive, consequently he regards his compatriots' behavior as undignified. In this way, he distances himself from his cultural roots. Chanu's attitude is a form of Eurocentrism in which European culture is used as "the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted" (Tyson 420). Chanu's attitude is contradictory, as he at the same time is greatly offended by the racist society in which he lives.

Chanu's contradictory view of both English society and his fellow countrymen is further depicted in the second part of the above episode, where he is talking to Nazneen about the Open University and about English Literature:

I'm fed up with the Open University [...]. They send you so much rubbish to read. I'm returning to my first love [...]. English literature at its finest. You've heard of William Shakespeare. Yes, even a girl from Gouripur has heard of Shakespeare. (Ali 91)

His disparaging comments serve only to demonstrate his sense of failure. He is unable to face up to the fact that he cannot complete his course. He looks upon his education program as rubbish, but admires another part of English culture, namely its literature and Shakespeare in particular. Chanu considers his knowledge of English Literature to compensate for his lack of success in other areas and he seems to use his degree to reassure himself, and others, of his competence. According to Chanu, one of his finest qualities is that he is well-read in English Literature; he does not miss any opportunity to impress those around him by quoting poems and talking about his credits from Dhaka University. However, his reason for attending the course at the Open University is that he realizes that his former education taken in Bangladesh is not sufficient in England. His disillusionment unfortunately prevents him from completing the course; and once more, he blames circumstances for his failure. This time he is doing so by claiming that the content of the course is rubbish.

When Chanu asks Nazneen if she has heard of Shakespeare, he answers the question himself: "Yes, even a girl from Gouripur has heard of Shakespeare" (Ali 91). This reveals that his view of his fellow countrymen even includes his own wife; they are ignorant peasants who do not know anything about the things that really matter in life, such as English Literature. However, he considers Shakespeare to be so well-known that even an ignorant person like Nazneen should know about him. Again, he reveals the colonial mindset that is a part of his consciousness as he treats his wife with the same disrespect as he himself experiences in England.

Edward Said describes Orientalism as "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient [...] by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (3). By contrasting itself positively to the Orient, the West gained authority of the East. This is what Chanu does in his relationship to his wife and children. He is justifying himself by pointing out others' lack of knowledge and intellect. He wants recognition based on his intellect and consequently he wants to gain authority and respect, also in his own home. Unfortunately, the result of him teaching and patronizing them is that he creates a distance between himself and his family. His attempt to compensate for the lack

of respect he experiences outside his home, by the patriarchal ruling of his family, does not reward him with the respect he wants.

The quality of producing an unstable sense of self that is characteristic of the concept of double consciousness (Tyson 421) is clearly visible in Chanu. He does not know where he stands, and this makes him unsuccessful both in assimilating into English society and in relating to his own family. His failure is multi-layered: his struggles to achieve a stable identity cause him to be an outsider, even in the domestic area. He is in fact an oppressor of both his wife and children.

The third episode also shows Chanu's thoughts regarding his situation as an immigrant and is the part in which he most clearly expresses this in words. This passage reveals that he is aware of the reality of this situation. In some passages he is perceived as unrealistic about his position in English society. However, in his speech to Mrs. Azad, he displays a more realistic view of this matter. Furthermore, the grief over his failure and situation emerges through his words: "This is the tragedy of our lives. To be an immigrant is to live out a tragedy" (Ali 112). He uses the word tragedy, which brings forward how severe he considers his situation to be.

Looking at this sense of tragedy through Chanu's feeling of being caught between two cultures explains both the aspect of double consciousness in his personality and his notion of unhomeliness. He is not progressing because he cannot see through the injustice he experiences in English society and this in turn causes stagnation. He spends his life drifting because he cannot stabilize his sense of self due to the contradictory feelings he has regarding both English society and the Bangladeshi community.

The concept of mimicry concerning Chanu's tragedy is applied to show how his attempt to mimic the values, habits and culture of a society he partly resents does not help him to assimilate. Like Bhabha, Loomba notes on mimicry that even if the colonial subjects can mimic English values, they can never exactly reproduce it. She also notes that this "perpetual gap between themselves and the 'real thing' will ensure their subjection" (146). This is part of Chanu's tragedy: he is held back by this oppression executed by English society. He is not rewarded with an appropriate job or the acceptance that he so badly wants. The gap between him and any Englishman will always remain and simultaneously it will always place him at

the bottom of the social hierarchy. The gap described above contributes to Chanu's position as it negatively affects his sense of self and makes him unable to progress.

In response to a series of race riots in England, which took place during the summer of 2001, UK Home Secretary David Blunkett called on immigrants in Britain to develop a sense of identity and a sense of belonging in Britain in order to gain social cohesion. Blunkett continued by stating that "We need to say we will not tolerate what we would not accept ourselves under the guise of accepting a different cultural difference". The Home Secretary also said that "We have norms of acceptability and those who come into our home- for that is what it is- should accept those norms just as we would have to do if we went elsewhere". Finally, he urged the English to "celebrate their roots and identity more, to feel more confident about welcoming those from other cultures" ("Immigrants should try" n.pag.). In other words; immigrants in the UK must strive to copy English values and abandon the ones of their origin culture which are not acceptable in England. Furthermore, this reveals the Eurocentric mind-set that complicates the establishment of a productive and dynamic hybrid identity. Looking at Mr. Blunkett's words, it is probable that many immigrants in England have a divided view on the values that they are expected to adapt to. Furthermore, it is not difficult to understand the struggle of mimicking a culture which looks upon your cultural values as non-acceptable. This divided outlook also applies to Chanu's character and it makes it hard for him to establish the wanted English identity as he would have to let go of his Bangladeshi one.

Unhomeliness contributes to Chanu's feeling of not belonging anywhere. This limbo which emerges when a person is separated from his or her homeland (referred to as the "diaspora") often results in the feeling of unhomeliness. Part of Chanu's struggles to create a stable identity lies in the fact that he is exposed to a culture which he cannot fully respect on the one hand, on the other he strives to copy this very same culture. Even if he left Bangladesh by his own choice, he has not found a new home in the sense that he feels accepted and respected. This regards both his work-situation and his relationship to his family.

The notion of unhomeliness that Chanu experiences is a result of the fact that his interests are in conflict with the society in which he lives. Bhabha notes the following on the matter of colonial cultural alienation:

The social instinct is the progressive destiny of human nature, the necessary transition from Nature to Culture. The direct access from individual interests to social authority is objectified in the representative structure of a General Will-where Psyche and Society mirror each other, transparently translating their difference, without loss, into a historical totality. (*The Location* 77)

The conflict between Chanu's interests and society's General Will lies in the fact that his expectations are not being met as he had hoped and this makes it difficult for him to relate to society in a dynamic and creative manner. Furthermore, it creates a notion of alienation as Chanu feels marginalized by English society due to the discrimination he experiences. This feeling of exclusion creates a negative circle in which Chanu's experience of racism and alienation causes a conflict in his identity, which in turn leads to stagnation which prevents him from progressing.

When Mrs. Azad asks Chanu to explain the above discussed tragedy he gives the following speech:

I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I'm talking about the terrific struggle to preserve one's sanity while striving to achieve the best for one's family. (Ali 113)

Mrs. Azad strongly disagrees with Chanu on this matter and their opposite opinions show that they are at quite different levels in the assimilation process. While Mrs. Azad looks positively upon the Westernization she has undergone, Chanu has a completely different view on this as he is not able to combine Bangladeshi and English values, and he does not experience the sense of freedom that Mrs. Azad thinks so highly of. While Mrs. Azad has adapted to the values of English society, Chanu has not done so, and consequently they look at this matter from two different points of view. One aspect of this different outlook is that the two characters do have different positions in society. Mrs. Azad is the wife of a doctor, presumably with a good economy, which in turn gives her a higher status. Chanu works as a taxi-driver and lives in a low-status area. These different positions in society place them on different levels in the social hierarchy.

Looking at the psychological aspect of the relationship between culture and individual, Bhatia and Stam note that understanding a self involves “a reciprocal relationship between self and other”. This understanding is described as including “moments of clarity and communication and moments of ambiguity and alienation”. The creation of “new horizons” does not “stem either from the self or from a suppression or abandonment of the other and his or her preconceptions; rather, the developmental shifts result from the “selective reconstruction” of the dialogical encounter” (426). This explains Chanu’s and Mrs. Azad’s different levels of development in assimilating and shows how the concept of hybridity influences them differently. While Mrs. Azad chooses to embrace the new culture and combines the new and old, Chanu seems to approach English culture in a more skeptical manner. A reason for this difference between the two characters is that Chanu seemingly has a stronger bond to Bangladeshi culture than Mrs. Azad and that he feels greater loyalty towards it. He also conveys a tendency to dwell upon situations where he, in his own opinion, is treated unfairly.

Tyson notes that “many ex-colonials [...] feel they must assert a native culture both to avoid being swamped by the Western culture so firmly planted on their soil and to recuperate their national image in their own eyes and in the eyes of others” (423). This need of strengthening a national image applies to Chanu as he does desire the feeling of belonging, and as long as he does not achieve this in England, he needs to bring forward Bangladeshi culture’s and history’s greatness as it is his homeland and where he initially belongs. Chanu needs to underline this in order to re-gain his pride and the notion of self-respect. However, for Mrs. Azad it is not a question of pride as she does not experience that she has lost it in the adapting process; she has combined values from the two cultures and is enriched by this.

Chanu’s struggles to form an identity can be seen in clear connection with culture, and what is more, he seems to think that he cannot belong to both English and Bangladeshi culture, in other words, he cannot combine them. If he had done this, he would be considered a dynamic and productive hybrid able “to embrace the multiple and often conflicting aspects of the blended culture” (Tyson 422). Mrs. Azad and Chanu’s different ways of dealing with what Chanu calls the clash between cultures depict the complexity of the term hybridity. While Mrs. Azad welcomes her new freedom made possible by Western values, Chanu sees no advantages in this as his life is characterized by limitations rather than freedom.

Chanu's view of Western society's influence on his children is also depicted in this episode. Bentley claims that part of Chanu's resentment towards the Westernization of his daughters is caused by the fact that their transformation weakens his patriarchal power (92). This notion makes Chanu feel that he fails in yet another area, namely fatherhood. His children's opposition towards him takes away the control he has over them. As his daughters were born in England, they do not have the same relationship to Bangladeshi culture as their father and this makes it hard for him to influence and raise them on the basis of Bangladeshi values. Chanu sees their Westernization as a reminder of his own unsuccessful assimilation process, and it makes him an outsider even in his own home.

Chanu is put in a dilemma by Mrs. Azad's view of Western culture and its impact. He considers Dr. Azad to be appropriate company as they both are educated men. When discovering that Dr. Azad's wife is far from what Chanu would consider appropriate, he is puzzled and bewildered. Furthermore, the Azads' daughter displays an attitude and behavior which Chanu does not approve of. His being put in place by Mrs. Azad further adds a new dimension of humiliation on Chanu's part as the doctor does not correct his wife. Chanu is in this situation being questioned on his knowledge, and his authority is being weakened in front of his wife and friend. His struggles are also ridiculed by Mrs. Azad's response: "Crap! [...] Why do you make it so complicated?" (Ali 114). She continues by pointing out what she really considers the tragedy to be: that immigrants do not take the opportunities given in their new society. She indicates that any immigrant has a choice of not assimilating. Chanu's final comment: "Each one has his own tragedy" (Ali 114) reveals that he is out of words; he has nothing more to say. He is degraded and in Mrs. Azad's opinion he has himself to blame for his failure to assimilate. Chanu is in this situation losing yet another illusion; his relationship to Dr. Azad as an insurance of his intellectual status is being threatened by the fact that the doctor does not openly defend Chanu.

The fourth episode serves to illustrate Chanu's increasing disillusionment and grief over his ultimate failure to assimilate. The first signs of a developing insight regarding his role in this All this time they thought I was rich. Why should I stay here in this foreign land, if it did not make me rich? I let them think it. It suited them and it suited me. failure emerges here. In the following passage he talks about his relatives in Bangladesh:

All this time they thought I was rich. Why should I stay here in this foreign land, if it did not make me rich? I let them think it. It suited them and it suited me.

Actually I told them some things that are not true, have never been true. Made myself a big man, but there...[...] I could be big. Big man. That's how it happened [...] So when the begging letters come and I blame left and I blame happened right, what I should be blaming is this, right here. (Ali 132-133)

The narrator continues: "He moved his hands up over his chest, to show how his heart, his pride, had betrayed him" (Ali 133). Both Chanu's own words and the narrator's convey a great sense of grief and despair. Chanu's words reveal an awareness of his own role in his failure to assimilate. Instead of blaming his surroundings for the exclusion and discrimination he experiences, he looks within himself and recognizes his own role in the failure of becoming a success in England. This insight makes Chanu stand out as more realistic than he was before and it also depicts him as a more introspective man than he was first perceived to be.

The above passage reveals a sense of regret on Chanu's part. He has spent so many years struggling and the result is not at all what he expected and wanted it to be. Still, he has remained in England and feels shame thinking of his relatives' expectations of him. He cannot bring himself to tell them the truth. Part of his regrets includes the notion of the possibility of his being successful in Bangladesh if he had chosen not to move to England. He seems to look back at the years and consider them a waste of time and he feels that it is too late for him to achieve anything at this point.

Furthermore, Chanu feels that he has lost his pride in his attempts to adapt to a society which does not respect him. He has degraded himself by taking a job that in his opinion is below his standard in order to support himself and his family. Bhabha quotes Renée Green: "Multiculturalism doesn't reflect the complexity of the situation as I face it daily [...]It requires a person to step outside of him/herself to actually see what he/she is doing" (*Nation* 3). Chanu has approached society by expecting that his status as an educated man should grant him success and although this approach has shown itself to be unsuccessful, he has continued doing so. Now, he has finally looked at himself from another perspective and realizes that he must alter his ways.

The above episode reveals that Chanu is more complex than he first appears to be. In the earlier part of the story he is perceived as a rather insensitive man who rules over his little family like a true patriarch. Furthermore, his view on what is appropriate company for him

has revealed that he links appropriateness to intellectuals and people with power. He has aimed high but has not been able to reach his goals due to his stagnation.

Chanu's stagnation is partly caused by the fact that he is not able to see through the injustice in society. It holds him back in every area of his life. He is so bitter that he cannot be creative and dynamic in his process to assimilate and adapt. Another reason is that he is so torn between English and Bangladeshi culture that he cannot see himself belonging to both. Instead of combining the differences in the two cultures into one hybrid culture, he is trapped between them. He is on the one hand painting a golden picture of Bangladesh, and on the other looking upon his fellow countrymen as primitive and illiterate. Simultaneously, he is impressed by parts of the British culture such as English literature, but also resents the racism he experiences. His struggles do not only lie in the instability he feels concerning the two cultures but also in that he has such a divided view on them. He is also so split in his feelings regarding both English and Bangladeshi culture that he does not know how to act.

The fifth and last episode concerns when Chanu realizes that Nazneen is not going back to Bangladesh with him and his reaction to this:

All these years I dreamed of going home a Big Man. Only now, when it's nearly finished for me, I realized what is important. As long as I have my family with me, my wife, my daughters, I am strong as any man alive. (Ali 477)

He says this before Nazneen has told him that she is not following him back. He has finally come to terms with the importance of his family and moved away from his bitterness concerning his career and the lack of respect that he has experienced. This shows another side of Chanu and it reveals that he has accepted his failure and is willing to move forward. He no longer dwells upon his failures; they are no longer that important to him and do not control him anymore. There is a sense of liberation over this passage; Chanu has decided to go back to Bangladesh and he realizes that his family is the most important thing in his life.

His reaction when he learns that Nazneen is staying in England is characterized by acceptance as he simply replies: "I can't stay" (Ali 478). He does not try to convince Nazneen to come with him, nor does he judge her for this decision. He just accepts this fact without any further comment. This shows how Chanu has come a long way in his relationship to others; he is not putting himself and his needs above Nazneen's although the consequence of her choice has a

great impact on his future in Bangladesh. The narrator illustrates their feelings in the following way:

They clung to each other inside a sadness that went beyond words and tears, beyond that place, those causes and consequences, and became a part of their breath, their marrow, to travel with them from now to wherever they went. (Ali 478)

In addition of revealing a great sense of sorrow, this passage also displays Chanu and Nazneen's forgiveness towards each other. Even if the separation hurts them both, they are prepared to go through with their plans without blaming each other for the other's decision. They accept that this is what they have to do in order to achieve what they want. The necessity of Chanu's return is obvious; he does not have a chance in England. He still has ambitions and in order to fulfill his dreams he has to leave the country and try to make a new start in Bangladesh.

Although Chanu has lived in England for many years, he has not been able to form a cultural identity that reflects the common historical experiences in English society. Hall describes how there are at least two different ways of thinking about the term cultural identity. The first view includes the notion of "one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self' [...] which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common". Another, different view "recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'" (Williams and Chrisman 393-394). Hall claims that the latter view is necessary in order to gain an understanding of "the traumatic character of the colonial experience" (Williams and Chrisman 394). Chanu's experience of exclusion has greatly influenced his establishment of identity. As a result of discrimination and racism he has developed an identity including the notion of being different from the collective "one true self".

Chanu has at last found a base from which he can build a stable identity; his family. When he learns that he is going to be separated from them, he accepts it and goes on with his plan of returning to his homeland. This is a sign of development on Chanu's part; even if he has ultimately failed in England, he has the courage to go back and begin a new life in Bangladesh. He shows a will to complete a project, which is a new feature in his personality. The lack of insistency has been one of the reasons for Chanu's stagnation. Now, when he is at a point of great change in his life, his insight seems to make him able to actually retrieve what

is needed for him to progress. Even if Chanu's return to Bangladesh could be argued to be the final proof of his failure, it is argued here not to be that simple. He has finally actively done something to improve his situation. This is considered here to be a sign of progress and development. What is more, Chanu will no longer be separated from his homeland and this in turn could make him able to form the stable identity that he has struggled to gain while living in England.

The change in Chanu is further depicted when he talks to his daughters in this same passage:

Be good girls, do as your mother tells you, finish your homework every night, don't waste time on television and all that rubbish, read Tagore (I recommend *Gitanjali*), don't think that there's anything you're not good enough for, remember that. (Ali 479)

Chanu's words to his daughters show his altered approach towards them; he is encouraging them instead of merely being judgmental and dominating. He still wants them to read Bangladeshi literature to remember their roots, but he trusts Nazneen to know what is best for their children as he tells them to listen to her. He lets go of the need to control them, and reveals a new respect towards his wife. Even if the episode displays that Chanu is sad, it also brings forward an optimistic air to Chanu's words. He wants his daughters to feel confident and to believe in themselves. His encouragement shows that Chanu has not lost all his illusions and that he does not transfer his bitterness to his daughters. He wants them to see that they have an opportunity to succeed, even if he did not.

Chanu shows that he has developed in this last episode and that he in fact allows his family to be happy, despite that this happiness is not something he has control over and is not a part of. He sacrifices his own needs in order to do what is best for them. He sees past his egoism, which has characterized him throughout the story and this must be considered a positive development. This change in Chanu's behavior towards his family conveys a greater sense of belonging even if they are to be separated; at least he belongs to them.

Looking at Chanu in the light of post-colonial theory provides a greater understanding of the difficulties he experiences concerning his assimilation process. It is clear that the sense of double consciousness causes him to struggle in forming an identity and that his feeling of unhomeliness places him in a vacuum between two cultures. The ambivalence Chanu feels concerning English culture and values is also depicted through his attempts to mimic this

culture. He is caught between the desire for acceptance from society and his resentment towards it. This study also shows that Chanu's failure in combining Bangladeshi culture with the English one prevents him from becoming a dynamic hybrid. By studying the underlying reasons for his failure, the complexity of his character emerges and reveals a more nuanced picture of him. It is also clear that Chanu suffers from the racism that exists in English society and that this holds him back to such a degree that he is unable to progress.

However, as discussed in this essay he also develops throughout the story. This development is most clearly seen in his relationship to his family, but it also influences his capability to go through with his plans although they are altered. This reveals a strength that initially was not seen in him. His return to Bangladesh is considered to be something positive. He has given it his best in England without succeeding and he chooses to return to Bangladesh. He is actively taking action instead of blaming circumstances and surroundings for his failure.

To study Chanu's attempts to assimilate into English society has also raised further questions, and a topic for future research could for example be to compare the different characters' ability to adapt to a new culture. It is clear that the assimilation processes of the characters have different outcomes and an interesting study would be to investigate how factors such as place of living, social status due to profession, and attachment to native culture influence the characters in their attempts to assimilate.

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