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Cultural Conflict and Feminist Identity Crisis in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*: A Comparative Study

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الصراع الثقافي وأزمة الهوية النسوية في روايتي *Brick Lane* لمونيكا علي و *The Map of Love* لأهداف سويف: دراسة مقارنة

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the themes of cultural conflict and identity crisis in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*. Both novels offer powerful portrayals of female protagonists as they navigate the tensions of cultural hybridity, colonial legacy, and gendered expectations. Through the characters of Nazneen, Anna, and Amal, the novelists dramatize the psychological and social negotiations that arise when individuals are situated between opposing cultural forces- whether as immigrants in diasporic London or as political actors in colonial and postcolonial Egypt. The study argues that identity in both narratives is portrayed not as a fixed or essential entity, but as a fluid, contested space shaped by factors, such as migration, alienation, cultural memory, and resistance are the primary causes behind the formation the Arab diaspora. Drawing on postcolonial theory- particularly the works of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Leela Gandhi- this research highlights how Ali and Soueif construct hybrid identities and complex female subjectivities that challenge both patriarchal structures and imperial narratives. Ultimately, the paper reveals that despite their differing historical and geographical settings, both novels converge in their critique of cultural domination, and in their portrayal of women as agents of transformation in the postcolonial world.

تهدف هذه الدراسة المقارنة إلى استكشاف موضوعي الصراع الثقافي وأزمة الهوية في رواية (بريك لين/ *Brick Lane*) للكاتبة البنغالية (مونيكا علي) ورواية (خريطة الحب/ *The Map of Love*) للكاتبة المصرية (أهداف سويف). تقدم كلتا الروائيتين تصويراً قوياً للبطلات وهنّ يواجهن توترات الهجنة الثقافية، وإرث الاستعمار، والتوقعات القائمة على الهوية الجنسانية حيث أنّهن ومن خلال شخصيات (نازنين وأنا وأمل)، تجسد الكاتبتان التفاعلات النفسية والاجتماعية التي تنشأ حين يجد الأفراد أنفسهم عالقين بين قوى ثقافية متعارضة- سواء كمهاجرين في لندن كأحدى مدن المهجر أو كشخصيات فاعلة سياسياً في مصر أثناء حقبة الاستعمار وما بعدها.

فضلاً عن ذلك، فإنّ الدراسة تُؤكِّد على أنّ الروائيتين لا تُعرضان الهوية بصورة كيان ثابت أو جوهري، بل تصوّرانها كفضاء متغير متنازع عليه، تتشكل بفعل الهجرة والذاكرة الثقافيّة والمقاومة، فأنته ومن خلال توظيف نظرية "ما بعد الاستعمار"، ولا سيما في أعمال هومي بابا وإدوارد سعيد وليلا غاندي، توضّح هذه الدراسة الطريقة التي بنّث فيها الكاتبة (مونیکا علي) و(أهداف سوييف) هويات هجينة وذوات نسائية معقدة تتحدى البنى الأبوية والسرديات الإمبريالية. وفي النهاية، يخلص البحث على أنّه وبالرغم من اختلاف السياقات التاريخية والجغرافية للروائيتين، إلا أنّهما تلتقيان في نقدهما للهيمنة الثقافيّة وفي تصويرهما للمرأة كفاعل أساسي في إحداث التحول في عالم ما بعد الاستعمار.

Keywords: Identity, Diasporic Literature, Hybridity, Multiculturalism, Third space

Research Problem

This section outlines how cultural conflict and feminist identity crisis are portrayed and discussed in Ali's *Brick Lane* and Soueif's *The Map of Love*. Both works introduces female protagonists as strugglers to accommodate their native culture with the Western globalization and patriarchal structures.

Research Questions

1. How do *Brick Lane* and *The Map of Love* describe the cultural complexities encountered by females divide between old-style and modern environments?
2. How do the female protagonists navigate their identities within male-controlled and colonial cultures?
3. How does each the writers expose the feminist search for their identity formation?

Research Objectives

1. To study how cultural conflict outlines the experiences of the colonized women in both novels.
2. To study the connection between women perception and postcolonial identity in the works of Ali and Soueif.
3. To compare and better understand women identity crises in postcolonial literature.
4. To enrich the continuing discussion on culture, and identity in modern English literature.

Significance of the Study

This paper is important because it adds to the postcolonial feminist criticism by undelaying the fact that female identity is a process of negotiation within cross-cultural environments. It also highlights the role of literature as a tool with which women express themselves beyond East and West, tradition and modernity. Furthermore, this study enhances the comparative literary discourse to understand how feminist authors represent feminist consciousness in postcolonial countries.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research is confined to Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999), concentrating on the portrayal of cultural conflict and feminist identity crises within postcolonial environment. The research examines the postcolonial women's struggles to form their identities in a cross-cultural system of patriarchy, colonialism, and diasporic resettlement. However, the study never indulges in political discussion

1. Introduction

The issues of identity, nostalgia, cultural conflict, longing and desire for home have become a subject of interest for Ali and Soueif. Language, culture and history are the three major constituents of diasporic identity. As writers of diaspora fiction, they focus on portraying their characters as silent victims; yet, preservers of the traditions and cultural heritage of their homelands. Ali and Soueif portray their characters as strong, capable of facing difficulties, tolerant

and adaptable who endure the hardships and tribulations imposed by fate. The two writers focus on the female characters who courageously try to build their lives from the fragments reflecting their desire to cling to life. In their struggle to form identity, these characters may sometimes act Literature is, in unusually, which reflects their innate desire to live their lives on their own terms. fact, a creation of human soul, mind and psyche which sketches a particular age. It has long been practiced in both oral and written forms. It is an expression of words and emotions within the framework of social milieu. It contains miseries, humor, joy and human dilemma. As a result, literary works express human life experiences, emotions and feelings. The themes of cultural conflict and the negotiation between two identities within host societies constitute major concerns in postcolonial literature studies, as literature deals with the experience of going through their original culture and the culture of the host country. Gandhi argues that such individuals suffer from the difficulty of belonging, thus unable to identify their own identity due to the impact of colonialism as well as their diasporic experiences, which further complicates their sense of self.¹ Since the origin of civilization, man has been shifting from place to place gladly though sometimes forcefully. Globalization resulted in the migration of people from their home to an alien one in search for various personal reasons. The present age of science and technology brings together people from all over the world. Everyone wants to migrate from his or her home country in search of economic benefits, better future, education, trade, or better positions and perks. But the migration, in turn, results in fundamental problems to the immigrants in alien environments. This cross- cultural migration originates different serious issues such as, cultural conflict, identity crisis, displacement, and exile. The migrated people have their own cultural background and try various ways in order to accommodate themselves. In the host land, they undergo various problems like, cultural alienation, dislocation, exile or identity crisis.

articulate trauma and The literary works of expatriate writers, however, are bound to painful experiences they encounter in host land. This leads to the appearance of various diasporic issues as they attempt to adapt themselves in their new environment. The controversial topics such as, the struggle for identity, culture, alienation, sense of loss, homelessness, and so on, are elaborated upon in various literary treatises by those expatriate writers. There is, however, an increasing rise in immigration with the advent of globalization and the question of identity is gaining an enormous momentum in modern cultures and societies. When diasporic authors try to understand identity, the question, which rises in migrants' minds, remains unsolved: who am I, and to where do I belong? As a matter of fact, identity is shaped through the relationship between the individual and the surrounding society. It can be solved with respect to tradition, religious freedom, culture, financial opportunities and superior life styles. A man has to experience many sorts of identities, such as cultural, social, national, racial, class identity, or even familial identity. As a result, a diaspora experiences the confusion of identities as what to reject and what to accept. This identity formation is beyond control because some expatriate people have multiple identities while others experience confusion and get victimized by this clash. During globalization, nonetheless, individuals migrate to host countries in search of improving their financial chances, but they challenge the issue of their identity in the sense that they knowingly or unknowingly begin to abandon their cultural identity and accept unacquainted lifestyles in the new environment. The developed countries encourage mental subordination in order to achieve power, luxurious economy to enslave the brains, who in turn surrender their intellectual independency and readily adapt to new lifestyles. The constant shift of people from the parent land to the host one is marked

Gandhi, L. (2019). *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. (2nd ed., p. 76). Columbia¹ University Press.

by an escalating focus on identity formation. If they adjust, they will make their destiny, if not, they get victimized by a cultural crisis. Actually, identity crisis refers to the complexity which results from the search for identity from one's land into alien culture and trying to adopt the alien culture in vain. Both cultural conflict and identity crisis are a normal outcome of the people's shift from their homeland to a new host land.

In modern times, migration or labor mobility is the prominent issue in most of the parts of the world. Generally, people immigrate either by choice or by force to another country in search of an appropriate shelter or better future opportunities. Consequently, the decision to leave one's country of origin to another location disconnects individuals from familiar and social institutions, family members and adjustment. Furthermore, globalization is the process of intermeshing of the global economy, politics and culture, gradually transforming them into a unified global system. Similarly, culture, though non-material, considered as one of the most formative factors of a person's identity. The mesh of cultures in any locale causes identity crisis. Notably, Erickson is the proponent of the term "identity crisis" and did his best to popularize the term in the cultural studies. The term 'identity crisis' is originally derived from the work of the psychologist Erik, who is known for the theory "psychosocial development" in (1950)². However, culture is an essential aspect that forms mindset and it shows the reasons behind people's actions and interactions in their social groups. It is the most important factor that outlines our outlook in order to explain how people behave within their own communities. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that every community has its own set of social norms, ethics, beliefs, morals, and ways of living. The identity which is passed down to people by their ancestors thus shapes their ways of speaking, living and so on. From a psychological perspective, a person is always ready to retain the identity, which is inherited by birth from his social hierarchical structure. Hence, one can say that cultural identity is a perception of heart and mind. Therefore, cultural heritage and ethnic integrity are grounded in an individual to make and shape his individuality. Culture identity simply answers individuals' questions as who they are and how they are viewed by other people in any social environment whether native or foreign. In other words, the interdependence of culture and identity help define our sense of self. Similarly, Scisco's argument highlights 'nativism' as he addresses the people of a particular community stating that, "The local history of the nativist movement... possesses a special interest not attached to its existence." (1901, pp. 1854–1860) Thus, people tend to express their sentiments and feelings in their native languages. It is, therefore, important to note that people in diasporic places should keep their native languages alive while living in a foreign culture. However, culture is not associated with language only, but it encompasses race, religion, district, food, clothes, traditions, dialect, manners and persuasions. Moreover, culture pertains to spiritual and educational variety. On the other hand, migration implies evacuating from his native location to another location. Ultimately, the movement of the migration is to imitate the locals in terms of all rituals, customs, traditions, ethnicity, and so on.

In the postcolonial world, cultural clash and identity crisis are a certain reality. Since all people live in this world like a family, technological advancement and globalization have accelerated the cultural clash. Social theorists, such as Taylor, therefore, believe that cultural clash is inevitable when people move from one place to another for their proper adjustment or even forced adjustment. Furthermore, Gandhi, in her book *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, further discusses 'identity' to include issues of cultural principles, proposing that the postcolonial topic must persistently examine its tenets within structures of hereditary authority. She writes: "Postcolonial identity is often marked by a deep ambivalence- a tension between inherited tradition

Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1950. Chapter 7, "The ² Eight Ages of Man."

and imposed modernity” (1980, p.142). Consequently, migrant people either get bewitched by technological advancement or fall into the trap when they get puzzled by the language and culture of the other country. Thus, cultural awareness is an essential instrument to minimize the cultural differences. As a result, migrants are compelled to opt for assimilation and get mingled in the alien culture. Clearly, the study of any country is not possible without properly understanding the culture of that host country. It is a valid concept that every man is born in society and rightly justifies the proverb that man is a social being which can, therefore, be redefined as man is a cultural being. Tylor defines this term in his *Primitive Culture*³ as an integrated whole including knowledge, faiths of people, creative ideas, morality, norms and traditions which the people follow willingly without any hesitation.

Moreover, people around the globe meet and part in manners and norms that both unite and differentiate them. On the one hand, they share common characteristics and values, yet on the other hand, they differ since each is born and raised in different cultures, with different sets of beliefs and values. In this regard, migration is perceived as an important factor as it pertains to the issue of cultural conflict. Admittedly, cultural conflict can be defined as that type of conflict in which different cultural values and beliefs clash to create confusion either through religion or by means of any other issue like customs, norms, race, ethnicity, and so on. In multicultural societies, there exist different social groups that have different cultural values and ideas which can, inevitably, lead to cultural conflict. Culture not only deals with language, music, moral life or literature, but also, it addresses regulations and conditions which are basically related to the social community. Hence, society and culture are interdependent elements that no society exists without culture and vice versa.

Furthermore, literature is a powerful medium of exhibiting identities forged by the social, psychological and cultural forces. The cultural identities of the protagonists combination of the fiction of the selected authors are skillfully expressed. In this context, they employ cultural in as dominant ideologies to mold and impose these cultural identities, enabling their forces as well protagonists are smooth survival in the societies. Consequently, the cultural identities of the adapted or become nostalgic for their fractured by the cultural clash and they in turn either homeland. Particularly, the female protagonists in the narratives compromise with the cultural selves and make their survival positive. They either accept identities by repressing their individual the norms of the foreign society or else face rejection by the diasporic community. In such a circumstance, accepting the new foreign social culture becomes a must to understand cultural identity. Ultimately, the set of values, customs and beliefs that link an individual to the outer world, forms the basis of culture. Indeed, it is culture which defines the individuals' existence and eventually influences their behavioral models, thoughts and actions. Embracing a particular culture does not necessarily denote adopting the traditions of that culture carried forward over the years, but rather, it also signifies the acceptance of the traditional clothing, food preferences and everything that is related to their culture. An individual maintains a connection to his existential heritage through his cultural identity, and this, of course, helps him keep his sense of stability and survival possible. Consequently, they engage with other individuals who are practicing similar customs, norms and value systems. Thus, cultural identity refers to connection with a specific group drawn on the basis of culture. Moreover, the process of accepting a cultural identity involves imbibing, accepting and learning the customs and traditions, practices and social norms, beliefs and values, communication modes, social hierarchy, cultural heritage and social structure.

Tylor, E. B. (1871). *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy,* ³ *Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (Vols. 1- 2). John Murray, 1871.

However, cultural identity is complex since an individual may connect with many cultural groupings. Cultural identity is no longer simple or rigid as in the past, but has become flexible, complex, and constantly changing as a result of cultural friction and globalization. As Bhabha argues, “the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness,’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present but the site of cultural negotiation” (1994, p. 2). In addition, “...are central, dynamic, and multifaceted components of Lustig remarks that cultural identities one’s self concept” (2013, p.133). He clarifies that these cultural identities are unstable and constantly changing with the passage of time within social context. Therefore, an individual’s life hierarchical patterns. experiences the same and brings about a change in his cultural identity and

their cultural system results in the loss of self- sense Conversely, distancing oneself from his cultural heritage, the more likely in the social groups. The more an individual goes far from struggle between an individual’s self and his cultural he is prone to lose his sense of identity. The cultural barriers. To preserve one’s cultural decorum in the heritage might result from cross foreign cultural influences, an individual usually speaks their own language at multidimensional this home within their family, thus remaining bonded to their linguistic beliefs or by transmitting For instance, there are inheritance to the next generation in order to sustain its credibility. to another over the years numerous examples of immigrants who have migrated from one place in order to gain financial assistance. Undoubtedly, these immigrants have made everlasting the country that they belong to. Behind this, there economic, social and political contributions to opportunities and better life styles. However, to might be many reasons like seeking liberty, job and customs of their native identity develop a hybridized identity, one has to erase some norms for proper accommodation. Upstone observes that “hybrid identities emerge from the disjuncture of migration and the experience of cultural marginality” (2009, p. 68). In such contexts, diaspora identities and suppress native culture, sometimes prioritizing the use of the host can fracture their language over their hierarchical native language.

The present study explores Ali’s *Brick Lane* and Soueif’s *The Map of Love* in terms of diasporic formula as well as quest for identity in the patriarchal setup. The novels weave these themes together, combining the various boundaries experienced by the individuals with a selection of realistic examples from the society. The targeted novels realistically express their search for identity and cultural clash experienced by them in the alien lands. Living in a diasporic, colonized and patriarchal structure, Ali and Soueif express ages of feminist silence as they struggle to achieve identity crisis in their works. In this sense the act of narrating themselves is simply an act of carving for identity in the regions where they experience a dual sense of self, distinct from their native one. Consequently, these women feel that they are marginalized in the male- dominated society and by other forces such as colonial powers and poverty. Ali’s *Brick Lane* and Soueif’s *The Map of Love* suggest a convincing study of how cultural clashes outline and destroy the diasporic identities. Both narratives explore the difficulties encountered when they migrate between two places of different cultures, as is in the case of Nazneen when she moves from the countryside, in Bangladesh, to London, or from Egypt to England. As Boehmer notes, “Postcolonial identities are shaped by an interplay of historical circumstance and narrative reinvention.” (2005, p. 233) accordingly, both novelists, however, project their characters from various times, place and cultural viewpoints to highlight how clashes between different cultures result affect people’s minds and social lives.

Ali sets *Brick Lane* in the heart of London’s immigrant neighborhood as Nazneen, a woman from Bangladesh, fights to familiarize herself in the foreign culture of London while attempting not to lose her identity. The novel, realistically, portrays the actual images of the host environment such as isolation, integration and transculturation in such a way that Nazneen’s identity, as part of

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the diaspora in an alien community, is prone to damaged, thus becoming how migrating to alien cultures can challenge people's identity, making the character uncertain about complying with the new cultural norms of the host country. Conversely, Soueif, an Egyptian author, writes *The Map of Love* as a historical love story situated during the colonial Egypt. In her depiction of various female characters such as Lady Anna Winterbourne and Amal al- Ghamrawi, Soueif explores the impacts of colonialism, women's contribution to nationalist struggles, and the inherited trauma caused by cultural disconnection, suggesting that "individual subjectivity cannot be separated from national history or colonial memory" (Jarmakani, 2004, p. 415). In both novels, females are situated as principal characters in discussing cultural identity within masculine and colonial structures. Therefore, postcolonial literature develops to be an important field for discussing the issues of cultural clash and identity crisis since it examines the lives of multi-national people with various cultures. The present paper studies Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999) as two postcolonial texts which devote a special attention to the issues of displacement and identity. Both writers use feminist heroines to shed light on their personal struggle in multinational societies, thereby, showing how this struggle reflects the tensions between the native and host countries.

2. Diasporic Literature

Many writers from Asian and African countries have migrated to European countries, particularly the UK and USA, in order to express their suppressed feelings. Commonly, diasporic writers have limited freedom to express themselves in their homelands, where expression is often restricted. Mishra has asserted this idea by arguing that, "Expatriation [provides expatriate with] the sense of freedom... he is backed by a sense of security that arises from his having a national identity, as also the security of going back to it if all else fails" (Naipaul, 2002, p. 271). Diasporic literature is often used interchangeably with expatriate and exile literature. All these words highlight the common idea of maladjustment, displacement, alienation, identity crisis, nostalgia and fragmentation as a subject-matter in their literary outcomes. Therefore, expatriates are in the process of adjusting themselves with the foreign culture; they personally experience the cultural crisis and have to live a life with hybrid identity. This inner division largely contributes to their fragmented identity with fractured psychological state of thinking. While living with dual identity those expatriates make full efforts to be on a particular side of the identity, either they want to retain the identity of their homeland, or they desire to familiarize themselves with the new identity in the host land. Thus, this double identity directly results in a crack in their internal identity. With this disturbed psyche they have to go into a social and cultural encounter of various origins. The force of disturbance in their psyche becomes the creative force for their writings. In *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism*, Rushdie argues, "One physical alienation from India at almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of redeeming precisely the thing that was lost, that will, in short, create fictions not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of mind." (1991, p. 10). Expatriate writers, even with voluntary migration, face emotional dislocation and nostalgia, struggling to adapt within foreign cultures. They experience cultural incompatibility and try to retreat into their own psychological world. This tendency refines the power of their imagination and helps them create new worlds in their writings in the sense that they explore the thematic concerns of location, displacement and replacement. The desire and remembrance of the past is clearly visible in their writings. Expatriate literature becomes a platform in which the writers are either crushed by the society or fall victim to inner conflicts expressing their cracked emotions and a longing to return to their native land.

Diasporic writing is undoubtedly a constructive source for studying the psychological patterns of migrants. These diasporic experiences are resulting from geographical alien customs, displacement, estrangement, and the problems of proper adjustment, desiring for the homeland, the burden of beliefs, heritage, and cultural differences. The Asian writers had to achieve dual responsibilities. They pen down their thoughts about their homeland for the inhabitants of the country they have adopted and call for their diasporic experiences to the readers of the land where they were born. Accordingly, diasporic literature must be examined from a cultural point of view. Writers living in foreign countries live on the margins of two cultures and people who live on the margins help create a cultural theory. It is essential to understand that any migration, whether occurring out of personal choice or out of necessity results in a dislocation, which in turn hurts their perceptions. Thus, the growing diasporic literature becomes a crucial field for promoting cross-cultural understanding.

Boehmer describes the immigrant and diasporic people as ex-colonial by birth. Moreover, these writers work “within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic and political connections with a national background” (233). Accordingly, postcolonial theory studies immigrant and diasporic identities as celebrations of migrancy- most notably in authors like Rushdie. Similarly, it has been argued that the migrant often possesses a double consciousness, a leftover native one and a First World one. One way of locating the immigrant’s intellectual-cultural position, therefore, is through Jan Mohamed, who makes a mention of the ‘specular border intellectual’ arguing that “standing at the border of two cultures, looking critically at both, neither assimilating nor combining either of them” (1992, p. 218). Consequently, hybridity is an extension of this condition of looking toward both, being both between two cultures. A concept elaborated by Homi Bhabha, hybridity is the rejection of a single or unified identity, and a preference for multiple cultural locations and identities. Indeed, hybridity can take the form of revival of a pre-colonial past, such as folk or tribal cultural forms and conventions within nativist or even reactionary movements, or alternatively, it adapts the contemporary artistic and social productions to present-day conditions of globalization, multiculturalism and transnationalism. Thus, hybridity, as seen in postcolonial theory, is the answer to the dangers of cultural binarism (us/ them) and the fundamentalist urge to seek ‘pure’ cultural forms. Diaspora theorists propose that the idea of ‘home’ is a mythic one, a place of desire and longing that sits oddly with the present, chosen location of the immigrant. Brah writes, therefore, “Home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no-return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin” (1996, p. 192).

Subsequently, diaspora is presented through many transformative signs. In this sense, the persistent changes, within and outside it, have forced readers and scholars to re-read it as a radically different domain of academic research due to forces such as globalization, liberalization, global economic interdependence, cultural interpellation and transnationalism. Historically, the development of diaspora from ancient times until the present day suggests how it evolved across various time stages. Therefore, this evolution has compelled scholars to revisit it both synchronically and diachronically. Because of this, its epistemic denominations and chameleon-like manifestations have necessitated looking at it as an enigmatic event in human history. However, scholars of sociology and postcolonialism have been interested in diaspora as it studies the communal culture and sometimes political feelings of people who left their home, cultural and sometimes political feelings to it. In this context, Cohen argues that a diaspora is “a community that lives outside its country of origin but maintains active connections with it” (2008, p. 7). Ultimately, these connections may manifest through language, religion, tradition, or a collective memory of the homeland.

Diaspora communities were not formed just because people wanted to immigrate, rather, there are also compelling external reasons that made them do this, such as colonialism, persecution, enslavement and wars. For instance, Safran defined diasporic communities, focusing on basic characteristics such as: “dispersion across multiple regions, a collective memory of the homeland, a sense of alienation from the host country, the desire for eventual return, and a commitment to maintaining cultural distinctiveness (1991, p. 83- 4). Moreover, immigrants are not immobile or identical communities; they developed with the passage of time, and consequently, both the indigenes and diaspora communities influence each other to the extent that their diaspora people mix and share from one another. Thus, this mixture of cultural identities creates cross identities that challenge the key features of belonging and nationalism. Accordingly, Bhabha terms this kind of hybridity, ‘third space of enunciation’⁴ where innovative diction and terminology appear through cultural mixing and translation. Diasporic communities are usually cross-national, that is to say they stay connected to their motherland. Instead, they maintain strong, cultural, and familial ties by remitting money back home and engaging in political activities. In this concern, Tölölyan argues that diasporas are “the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (1996, p. 13). Consequently, this transnational feature helps these communities exert an impact both in their host and home country.

2.1 The Indian Diaspora

Historically, Indian diaspora is globally considered as one of the most prevalent and diverse as it has existed for hundreds of years spanning a number of stages such as the colonial period, migration of skilled people, and the contemporary era of globalization. Specifically, a variety of diasporic Indians moved from diverse Indian regions, such as Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, and Punjabi communities residing in the UK, Canada, and East Africa. Later, in the middle of the twentieth century, Indian experts and workers with special skills started migrating to United Kingdom, United States of America and Canada to pursue their high education and improve their economic situation in the West. Consequently, Indian researchers, doctors, engineers, professors and scholars have played a major role in the scientific, technological and academic development of these countries. According to Thomas, “The Indian diaspora, in the United States, has emerged as a model minority, excelling in educational and economic fields” (2008, p. 62).

Among many topics that the Indian feminist diaspora literature has tried to shed light on is the women’s identity, their marginalization, and the injustices inflicted upon them as a result of gender bias and patriarchal domination in society. Consequently, “South Asian women writers’ portrayal of south Asian women is the most widespread and dominant... the diasporic women writers are the creators and keepers of the global literary image of South Asian culture, and this trend is likely to continue” (2005, p. 238).

2.2 The Arab Diaspora

Arab diaspora, on the other hand, refers to the dispersion of Arabic- speaking peoples to diaspora has resulted from multiple other parts of the globe. Historically, throughout history, this historical motives, such as trade, Islamic missionary missions, persecutory displacement, armed civil struggles, and livelihood migration. As a result, these factors have led to the formation of diverse societies in North and South America, as well as in Europe and Asia, thereby contributing to the cultural diversity of their host societies. Nevertheless, despite its integration in the

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford University Press, ⁴ 2005. Print.

indigenous communities, the Arab diaspora has remained attached to their homelands in terms of language, inherited customs, and national culture. During the era of Islamic conquests, Arabs migrated to the lands under their rule, either for trade or for the dissemination of knowledge and sciences. However, Arab diaspora took its modern form in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Specifically, the first noteworthy Arab migration occurred in the late 1800s, as a great number of Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian people moved to America due to economic suffering and Ottoman subjugation. Notably, the majority of these immigrants were writers and traders whom Khater refers to as ‘Mahjar’⁵. Accordingly, he notes that these individuals “created the first global Arab communities outside the Islamic world and redefined Arabness in modern contexts” (2001, p. 38). In particular, in Brazil, Argentina, and the United States, Arab settlers founded successful businesses and cultural communities, merging their civilization with local traditions. Moreover, Said highlighted this fact saying that “Arab immigrants brought with them not only goods and services, but also stories, myths, and historical consciousness that shaped diasporic self-understanding (1979, p. 178). Additionally, the Arabic language and literature played a vital part in this development, mainly through the literature of Mahjar that sought to reconcile nostalgia for the homeland with the actualities of new lives overseas. Later, amid twentieth century, the second major wave of Arab migration occurred motivated by decolonization, civil instability and dictatorship regimes in Arab countries. Events, such as the Palestinian ‘Nakba’ (1948), Civil War in Lebanon (1975- 1990) and the Gulf War (1990- 1991) significantly contributed to the expansion of the Arab diaspora. Similarly, individuals from these lands fled their countries in search of refuge and political justice. Hence, “Arab American identity cannot be understood without acknowledging the role of racialization and imperialism in shaping Arab diasporic subjectivities” (Naber, 2012, p. 6). However, the Arab diasporic novel has been keen to highlight cultural identity, adaptation, and a sense of belonging or lack thereof. In short, a number of factors, such as migration, displacement, and adaptation are basically the normal reasons for generating Arab diaspora in which the displaced Arabs experience various senses of alienation, conflict of culture and identity. In this point, the role of diaspora comes to connect the diasporic Arabs to their culture and place of origin by negotiating integration while preserving their distinctive home identity and culture in the new environment.

3.1 Cultural Conflict and Feminist Identity Crisis in *Brick Lane*

Culture has been defined as the ability to appreciate and understand the other cultures. Accordingly, Montague claims, “While this particular ability has many sources, it is generally derived from varied, sympathetic and understanding contacts between people who differ from each other in some respects.” (1968, p. 96) Similarly, Harris makes it clear that like biological changes, cultural contact ‘requires adaptation for survival and development’ (1980, p. 350). Normally, culture includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, work of art, rituals and ceremonies and so on. Consequently, the existence and use of culture depends upon an ability possessed uniquely by human beings. The English anthropologist Tylor defined culture rightly: “Culture . . . is that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” (1871, p. 575). As a result, as the colonizing countries began to lose their control on their colonized lands overseas after the First and Second World Wars, many countries had fought to regain their independence. Resultantly, mass immigration emerged and many countries began to have multi-cultural structures in the twentieth century. The multi-ethnic and multi-cultural structure which is formed by those immigration movements made a great impact on the indigenes as well as immigrants. Furthermore, a multiplicity of races and cultures has been added to the cultural richness, yet

⁵ ‘Mahjar’ refers to the Arab writers and traders who played a key role in forming modern Arab diaspora in North and South America

generated major cultural clashes in society due to differences in social traditions, language, norms, and lifestyles among native and diaspora. It is mainly accepted that "migration... always creates problems and even the best integrated groups suffer under such circumstances." (Glazer, 1997, p. 52) Espin also points out that immigrant identities experience many problems: "The immigrants struggle with the strain and fatigue derived from the new society, which affect self-esteem and may lead to alienation; confusion in terms of role expectations, values and identity; shock resulting from the differences between the two cultures; and a sense of uprootedness and impotence resulting from an inability to function competently in the new culture" (1999, p. 19). As such, writers of dissimilar ethnic, cultural, and immigrant backgrounds have dealt with these issues. In this connection, Monica Ali, as a child of an English mother and a Bangladeshi father, began to portray the migrant way of life in multicultural Britain. Consequently, she dealt with the diaspora issues in an attempt to give voice to immigrant experiences in the new multi-ethnic Britain. In her first novel, *Brick Lane*, Ali sheds light on both the modern and hybrid London with the prominent themes such as migration, intermarriage, identity crisis and religion, thus illustrating different voices. Moreover, Choudhary points out, "In exploring the experience of migration and the issues of identity, Ali is responding to a situation where location and culture combine to present conditions that would have been beyond conception in the nineteenth century colonial world order" (2008, p. 294). In the novel, the area 'Brick Lane' "becomes representative of a holding area, a temporary zone for immigrants who have not yet fully settled in England." (Hussain, 2005, p. 2) Ali, for her novel, which reveals the immigrant problems in a complex way, selects a woman character as the protagonist. Furthermore, Bentley comments "Ali is trying to depict the experiences, through her foremost character Nazneen, of a group of Bangladeshi women that have hardly before been represented in British fiction." (2008, p. 84) Thus, she deals with the immigrant issues in a bilateral dimension by portraying the migration topics from a gendered viewpoint. Notably, she not only handles the difficulty of being an immigrant, but she also acknowledges the problem of being an immigrant woman. Specifically, "Ali uses her characters to explore the positioning of Bangladeshi women within Britain, as the novel focuses on their social relations 91) Up to this point in the novel, Nazneen is still inside and outside the Home." (Hussain, 2005, p. 91) Nazneen is still regarded as a passive and an unusual diasporic character in London community, and consequently, this creates a cultural conflict since she cannot completely merge her eastern cultural customs with the western traditions. As such, Ali criticizes this duality in behavior as Nazneen starts viewing herself "a shadow walking through someone else's story" (Ali, 2003, p. 93). Ali presents the prominent problem of immigrant women as she experiences a double alienation in the society's pessimistic picture. Moreover, "The story portrays Nazneen's journey from a dominated, subdued teenager to a gradual metamorphosis into a hesitant, independent mother with a poetic sensitivity beyond her stifling, bleak and untidy flat on Brick Lane" (Kanal, 2008, p. 51).

However, Nazneen, who experiences double alienation, is able to destroy the constrictions at the culmination of the novel. Thus, her novel shows "how, after migration, the position of women in families and in the wider community undergoes considerable transformation" (Hussain, 2005, p. 91). Ali's *Brick Lane* portrays the lives of Bangladeshi immigrant families in England depicting a culturally diverse cultural structure. The reality of alienation which has social, psychological and philosophical dimensions is revealed bilaterally in typical immigrant- woman cases by the character of Nazneen, the protagonist. Indeed, Nazneen, as both a Bangladeshi immigrant and a woman coming from a male- controlled society, certainly experiences social and psychological alienation in certain periods of her life. Similarly, the Bangladeshi characters undergo different forms of identical distortion through their emigrant experiences; most of the characters are originally dependent on their memories from the homeland to overcome the isolation

and lonesomeness. In this novel, Ali highlights Nazneen, Karim and Chanu as diasporic characters who show success, confusion and failure in the host land. For instance, Nazneen manages to develop into an individual of strong personality, whereas Karim initially fails to identify his heritage, but finally admits that he should be loyal to his heritage by defining his own life through religion. On the other hand, Chanu is portrayed as a failing immigrant who is always tormented by the past life and memories of native land. Basically, the usual aim of migration has been to improve one's future perspectives through education and work. Due to differences in cultural and religious backgrounds, a diaspora encounters a problem in recognizing his or her identity in a multi-cultural environment. Lastly, the question of finding one's 'true heritage' has been important both in respect of the emigrant and their later generation as these findings make them create a better future. To find the heritage, they had to face their self-consciousness as this helps them understand their dependency and face the reality. Only then, for a migrant to find their true independence he/ she has to face the dependent side of their personality, only by improving and transforming their personality they can achieve true 'independence'. Moreover, Rushdie argues that the person who experiences exile and emigration faces a certain amount of estrangement their personality, which consequently creates the urge to hang on to the few remaining roots that they have in the new land. Similarly, this kind of urge is the reason why various characters in the book depend on their native customs to stay connected with the country they left behind. Moreover, the yearning for native land makes them dependent on the dream of going back. Only in few cases, a migrant will go through transformation and ultimately, emerges as an independent character who can adapt to the existing alien society. Correspondingly, similar to the quote by Rushdie the prime diaspora characters Nazneen, Chanu, Hasina, Karim and Dr. Azad in *Brick Lane* encounter the harsh realities of expatriate, migration and finally the transformation among the two cultures. These experiences make the characters recognize their real identity as independent people from both the failure and success they had.

Specifically, *Brick Lane* mainly explores the question of identity in a different society. For example, Chanu who is a moderately educated man with a job and experiences troubles managing normal life in London. Meanwhile, Nazneen, considering her gender, youth and background, is the person who at last succeeds irrespective of her husband's restrictions. Nazneen needs to manage and settle in a society totally unique in relation to the one she was naturally introduced to, and along these lines, feels amazingly desolate. She does not know the social codes in England- a consequence of being both a lady and a Bangladeshi. Though she needs to take courses in the English language, her husband believes it is useless. Instead, he focuses on the significance of training, something that settles on his choices concerning his partner self- opposing. Being a man, he needs to control his wife as he fears what different Bangladeshis in the group will say in respect to him. Julios emphasizes the importance of education and language learning in the new nation. Indeed, to communicate in English is a part of the identity of the British people (2008, p. 14-5). However, when migrants gather in little social orders in their new nation, the need to know the new language is not usually that reasonable: "Such population movements into the UK have resulted in the development of large enclaves of minority ethnic linguistic settlements in certain urban and metropolitan areas across the country. London, for instance, has become home to the largest concentration of Sylheti⁶ speaking Bangladeshis in the United Kingdom and anywhere outside Bangladesh" (Ibid. 15).

This is evident in *Brick Lane* where assimilation proves difficult. Besides, lack of English skill greatly adds to poor academic performance and school failures. Lonesomeness is comparably Nazneen confronts suffering, and gradually finds her related to identity almost through the novel.

Sylheti is a dialect of Bengali spoken by the Sylheti in Bangladesh. ⁶

Loneliness adds to uncertainty which, eventually real self and her identity in the new area. contributes to problems of identity. Living back in Bangladesh, Nazneen was not in need of the same requirement to determinedly create her identity as it is formed in an automatic manner. In England, this requirement is considerably more distinctive; Nazneen needs to adjust in with her new nation and society and also with her new partner and the Bangladeshi people group in London. She needs to answer how to live in a totally new fashion. The social differences of Nazneen appearances are numerous. Due to the Nazneen's limited mastery of English, she struggles to communicate with the new cultural environment. Nazneen is incapable of understanding the conversation of her husband though they are discussing the highly respected figures in the British literature. She fails to understand her husband's professionalism when he talks about his achievements, his forthcoming advancement, books and his multidimensional ventures. While preserving her Bangladeshi culture, she adapts to London society. Julios comments, "Migrants discuss that language, employment and education are important parts of acquiring an English identity. Nazneen learns the language, finds her British identity and place in London" (2008, p. 145- 6).

Brick Lane sheds more light on the Bangladeshi immigrants in London, who instead of engaging and melting into the life of a large city, like London, in which different races reside; however, they preserved their customs in food, clothing and lived in adjacent buildings as if they still live in their homeland. It is truly a fictional saga of those immigrants who remained on the margins of the city of London, content with the small jobs and trades they engaged in, and the dream of most of them was to collect sums of money to return to where they came from, but the children who were born in Britain do not know anything about the country of their fathers. The only city they know is London or some of the London neighborhoods in which they live or those close to it. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states, "It is in the emergence of the interstices- the overlap and displacement of domains of difference-that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (1994, p. 2). The protagonists dwell in spaces where cultures intersect, merge, and conflict- physically, emotionally, In this novel, it clearly noticeable that there are various levels of cultural and ideologically. conflicts between the East and the West, many of which relate to the contradictions between the individual and the group, loyalty to traditions and the requirements of modernity in the West, which makes it a difficult task for the diasporic individuals to reconcile with the members of the host society in forming a new identity in this broad social space. Upstone denotes that Ali's novel "reveals the hybrid identities that emerge from the disjuncture of migration and the experience of cultural marginality" (2009, p.68). Nazneen's family and Bangladeshi community, who respect the Bangladeshi values that they brought from their motherland to London, impose these values. This conflict between the imported Bengali values and cultural legacies on Nazneen to uphold. and those values of London society causes an internal conflict inside Nazneen as she is forced to balance her inherited identity with the opportunities and advantages offered to her by the new In *Brick Lane*, family life develops into a small model of this cultural conflict. society in London. Accordingly, Savory argues, "the home is a contested space where cultural values are reproduced and resisted, especially regarding the roles of women" (2011, p.112). The transfer of patriarchal power into the diaspora is symbolized by Nazneen's planned wedding to Chanu that ties her to a life of devotion and submission. Nonetheless, Nazneen defies the traditional structures that were imposed upon her when she gradually engages with the wider British society, particularly via her relationships with Karim. The constant, dynamic, stressful battle over identity that occurs within In other words, the novel probes into the cultural immigrant families is apparent in this behavior. conflict between the diaspora and the society of London, emphasizing themes of social isolation

and racialization. Quayson notes, "... the immigrant subject is often positioned as 'other' within the host society, facing systemic marginalization and stereotyping that complicate integration" (2000, p.75). Nazneen becomes eventually conscious of her 'estrangement in London society.

3. 2 Cultural Conflict and Feminist Identity Crisis in *The Map of Love*

The diasporic characters in *The Map of love* occupy an intermediate space; they neither belong to the West nor East. In other words, they are neither fully integrated into the Western society nor do they remain as Eastern individuals in their home countries. This happens, of course, due to the long-term colonialism and the view that colonizers adopt about the East. In this regard, the West holds the view that it is superior and stronger than the East. This means that colonialism does not only portray the East as a geographical reality, but rather as "an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence [in the discusses the cultural clash through multiple time West]" (Said, 1979, p. 5). *The Map of Love* periods and characters of Egypt under and after the British colonization. Soueif uses the stories of Anna Winterbourne, the British widow and, Amal Al-Ghamrawi, the Egyptian scholar, to show how cultural identity was formed and reformulated in light of the tensions between the colonizer and the colonized and between modern and ancient traditions. The novel shows the colonizers' inability to dominate the Egyptians, so they attempted to control the Egyptian culture instead. Said explains that the West tried to portray the Eastern people as weak and illogical who are deserved to be dominated by the Western colonizers, "Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (1979, p. 3). This colonial perspective is presented via the relationship between Anna, an Englishwoman, and Shereef Pasha, an Egyptian nationalist. At the beginning, Anna adopted a biased view of Egypt thinking that Egyptians are just backwards and ignorant. Later on, she begins to change her perspective as she meets Egyptians and learns about the Egyptian culture and society. Here, Said's theory of Orientalism helps the readers understand the West's attempt to portray the East as a backward people and that they have the right to dominate and control it, "the contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" of the West (1979, p. 2). Said's theory of 'Orientalism' helps to clarify the nature of colonial relations in *The Map of Love*. Soueif criticizes the British view of the East as backward and strange, which supported a strict dualism between East and West. This contradiction is evident in the experience of Anna Winterbourne, who enters Egypt loaded with prejudices, but over time she reconsiders *The Map of Love* presents the cultural conflict in a those perceptions and frees herself from them. context, linked to the history of British colonialism in Egypt and the rise of the national broad movement. Using Said's idea of 'Orientalism', it becomes clear how colonialism presented the East as a different and inferior entity to justify its control over it. The novel interweaves private love stories with political conflict, making the cultural conflict go beyond the boundaries of individual life to include the national and global level. In his book, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Gandhi further says that the post-colonial individual does not easily know his identity. He must decide between what he believes are his values and principles, and the laws, social customs that he inherited from the colonial era. He is always in conflict or negotiation between what he wants and believes on the one hand and what is imposed on him by force or previous tradition on the other. She writes: "Postcolonial identity is often marked by a deep ambivalence- a tension between inherited tradition and imposed modernity" (1980, p.142).

Language plays a crucial role in the cultural conflict portrayed in the novel as this case is clearly explained in Soueif's use of a bilingual narrative that interlinks English and Arabic as a symbol for the intermingling cultural and political factors which form the identities of the female characters. In this sense, Gandhi highlights the significance of language in shaping the postcolonial identity arguing, "Language mediates the tension between self and other, tradition and modernity, enabling the postcolonial subject to negotiate complex allegiances." (1980, p. 147)

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Through presenting the language of the orientalist characters, the novel sheds light on how language plays a dual role in making them feel alienated and isolated in the sense that they differ from the language and culture of the host society. At other times, however, it gives them the opportunity to approach and communicate with others serving as a bridge for social communication. In addition, the novel employs the idea of place as a space of meeting between two cultures wherein the characters experience the feeling of alienation and alienation, and at the same time, find a new opportunity for interaction and change. Thus, the novel uses language and place to shed light on the struggle between the sense of estrangement from other members in London community and openness for communication.

The novel is not used as a space full of events and tensions, where this tension is evident through the struggle over identity and meaning. This implies that people try to determine who they are and what their value is in a world changed due to displacement. For this reason, place has become a means of cultural negotiation between overlapping cultures, "Postcolonial space is always a site of tension, in which the struggle over meaning and identity is enacted" (Ashcroft et al, 2007, p. 177). Boehmer further notes that "postcolonial women writers use their narratives to interrogate the intersections of gender, race, and colonial power" (2005, p. 230). Thus, the novel discusses the challenges that women face because of social and cultural rules. *The Map of Love*, through the experiences of the female characters, Anna and Amal, generally discusses the experiences of women who try to adapt and deal with dominant patriarchal structures and how they try to find a place for themselves and achieve their will in a society that imposes strict cultural and social restrictions "postcolonial women's narratives often reveal the double bind of resisting both imperial domination and indigenous patriarchies" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 228). Painful historical experiences do not end in their effects with the passage of time, but rather continue to affect the way people think and understand their identity, culture, and belonging in the present. Fanon (1967) argues that "the colonized subject lives in a state of internal division and conflict." (p. 25) is a notion evident in the characters' struggles to make up with their chronicle with the shared history. Such sorts of discussions among recurrent among generations illustrate how cultural clash and identity crisis are not stationary, but rather nonstop processes that grow and are subject to memory, past, and political variations.

In *The Map of Love*, Soueif describes Egypt not merely as a country of stationary cultural norms but as a lively place rich with culture which undergoes various crises on identity. This denotes that identity in postcolonial Egypt is neither fixed nor stable; it struggles between maintaining culture and building a new identity that conforms to the postcolonial Egypt. Thus, the colonial effects are still observed even after it ends. For this reason, Anna's attempts never come to a stop in comprehending and experiencing the struggle between pre-colonial and postcolonial. It becomes obvious that Amal experiences a serious predicament as she tries to balance periods between the pre-colonial and postcolonial eras in terms of preserving her identity and her pride in her home culture as well. Ashrawi highlights this issue by arguing that "Postcolonial identity is necessarily paradoxical, defined by a continuous negotiation between historical wounds and imagined futures" (1995, p. 190). This paradox is in fact that central issue which establishes Soueif's perception of cultural belonging.

This discussion highlights the significance of diasporic struggle to establish their identity and preserve native culture in the new postcolonial country. Accordingly, Fanon's ideas make it easier for the reader to comprehend and understand this conflict in a better way, "The colonized subject lives a life split between the internalized oppressor and the desire for authentic selfhood"

(Fanon, 1967, p. 23). To conclude, this inner conflict of hybridity becomes obvious as Amal deals with Anna's recollections and experiences of the past as she struggles between the traumas of the past and the future in which she seeks to establish a new identity and a sense of belonging in the new postcolonial country.

Conclusion

The study concludes that female characters in *Brick Lane* and *The Map of Love* are portrayed as silent victims, though tolerant, adaptable, docile, and determined to challenge the either in a conventional patriarchal community or in a colonized environment. hardships of life They have tremendous strength to bear the sufferings which lie ahead for them. Such female characters display courage as they reconstruct their lives from fragmented experiences, thereby express their affirmation to life. In their pursuit of establishing their self- identity, they may at times appear abnormal and unconventional; however, such traits provide a glimpse of their innate desire to live life according to their own principles. *Brick Lane* and *The Map of Love* illustrate how identities originate and are constantly negotiated in cross- cultural communities to create hybrid forms of belonging that set East cultural traditions against West modernity. Both diasporic novelists propose subtle answers to the diasporic female topics they study in their novels, but the type of these answers varies in style, scope, and framework. In *Brick Lane*, Ali suggests a firm personal determination to cultural conflict of belonging through Nazneen who repeatedly sustains control of her life and chooses to make her own decisions rather than surrendering to patriarchal guidelines and social conventions. In *Brick Lane*, Ali demonstrates that women in diaspora are capable of generating novel identities while still keeping their cultural background. In contrast, Soueif's *The Map of Love* proposes an image with broader historical and political basics in empowering, wherein international harmony and discourse of cultures show strong roles in the creation of diasporic self- identities. Through the female characters, Anna and Amal, Ahdaf shows how gaining power results from the knowledge of their culture and tradition so that they build up global cultural understanding. Neither novel provides a final clear answer for the issues of cultural clash and identity crisis. Both assert that identity of diaspora is constantly changing and formed by personal experiences and cultural history.

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