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Transitional Identities and the Unhomed Space in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Tishani Doshi's *The Pleasure Seekers*

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Abstract

The diaspora appears to be an expansive space, in which the individual must constantly move through a complex maze of ever evolving identities that are embedded in the specific conditions of his or her diaspora. These evolving identities determine and influence the way in which an individual relates to the diasporic experience and imagines himself/herself and the home. This article explores and analyses the conflicts, affirmations and appropriations of the "home" comprehended through the processes of "unhoming," "dislocation" and "identities" as they emanate and evolve within the diasporic space, in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Tishani Doshi's *The Pleasure Seekers* (2010). The in-between space that separates and bridges the private and public spheres at the same time, is analysed for the agency it exerts in subjecting identities to the conditions of hybridisations, fixations or states of constant transit. Contemporary theorists from the Postcolonial and Diaspora literatures suggest a move away from essentialist conceptualisations of the nation and culture to a more discursive discourse in contextualising the complex process of home-making. This article attempts to foreground the subtle interactions between the processes of home-making and visualise emergence of an altered notion of home and identities that transgress the fixations of locating and dislocating.

Abstract in Malay

Isu diaspora nampak seperti suatu yang luas, yang mana seseorang individu mesti sentiasa bergerak dalam jaringan kompleks yang mempunyai identiti-identiti yang terus berubah dan termasuk ke dalam keadaan khas diasporanya. Identiti berubah-ubah ini menentukan dan mempengaruhi cara seseorang individu mengaitkan dirinya dengan pengalaman diasporanya dan membayangkan dirinya dan negaranya. Artikel ini memeriksa dan meneliti konflik, penetapan dan makna "home" yang difahami menerusi process "unhoming," penjauhan dari lokasi dan identiti-identiti yang dapat dilihat dan bertukar dalam kawasan diaspora dalam novel *Brick Lane* (2003) dan *The Pleasure Seekers* (2010). Bahagian antara kawasan yang memisahkan dan menjadi jambatan antara sfera awam dan sendiri pada masa yang sama, dianalisa untuk mencari bagaimana ia menyebabkan identiti-identiti tersebut berada dalam keadaan percampuran, tetap atau keadaan transit yang berterusan. Ahli teori semasa dari perpektif kesusasteraan postkolonial dan diaspora mencadangkan perubahan dari perlunya mementingkan

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konsep kenegaraan dan budaya kepada perbincangan wacana yang mengenengahkan proses "home-making" yang kompleks. Artikel ini cuba meletakkan dasar interaksi antara proses-proses "home-making" dan membayangkan suatu cara melihat konsep "home" yang berbeza dan identiti yang memisahkan sempadan antara yang kawasan yang di jumpai dan tidak dijumpai.

Keywords
Home, unhome, in-between space, identities, diaspora, dislocation

Keywords in Malay
"Home," "unhome," kawasan di antaranya, identiti-identiti, diaspora, perpindahan

The connotation of home in postcolonial discourse centres itself around the idea of a national culture that according to Fanon is "the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence" (120). The nationalist discourse is found to have essentialised the concept of the nation and culture such that these two ideas took on the form of tradition that Clair Dwyer defines as "a return to purity, the recovery of certainty and fixity, suggesting a sense of home as fixed, pure and bounded connected to an evocation of 'roots' or 'Heimat (home/land)'" (187). The ramifications of such evocation of roots assume various manifestations in postcolonial literatures, such as tradition becoming central to maintaining the nationality of a character in a foreign land. The notion of identity becomes rigid and non-assimilatory, leading to the characters featured entering into conflicts with their environments, thus reiterating the Orientalist's vision of the East in essentialist terms, allowing the Occident to continue exerting their hegemonic stance. The non-assimilatory, fixed identification resists change, and by doing so renders the national tradition vulnerable and prone to instability, owing to its inability to respond to a new environment.

For example in *The Inscrutable Americans* (1991), a novel by Anurag Mathur, Gopal, a young Indian male from the small town of Jajau in Madhya Pradesh, is found negotiating the cross-cultural eddies of his conservative self and those of the United States. Gopal does not eat any food offered on the plane apart from cashew nuts for fear of breaching his religious faith. Gopal is often found resisting American cultural influences in order to strictly abide by his Indian traditional beliefs that represent the cultural roots given to him by his parents and grandmother in the town of Jajau. The author does not show Gopal facing the kind of identity crisis typical of second generation diaspora characters like Shelly in "Homecoming," a short story by Canada based writer, Sunera Thobani. This story is one among many from the collection in Rafiq Fauzia's

Aurat Durbar (1995) that showcases the diasporic experiences of women, all written by women writers living in Canada, the United States, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka. On the contrary, Gopal's character is given the situatedness of an essentialist national tradition that makes him stand out in his environment. The author can position Gopal in this essentialist space because he is a first-time migrant journeying abroad and will return to India after acquiring technical skills. Would it be possible for the author to keep Gopal's zealous cultivation of Indian tradition unchanged, if he were to permanently occupy the diasporic space? Would he then be seen adhering to his national identity in a somewhat different way? Is it possible that Gopal's attempt to perpetuate the tradition of his country would face resistance from succeeding generations whose identities would be much more complex and dispersed across nations? There is perhaps no simple answer to these questions except that Gopal's diasporic condition will commit his subjectivity to the stresses of cross-cultural tensions that are likely to problematise his appropriation of the nation and himself in relation to each other.

Contrary to Gopal's resistance to American cultural influences, in *The Pleasure Seekers* (2010) by Tishani Doshi, a writer of hybrid origin based in India, Babo Patel one of the key protagonists, is keen to assimilate western culture as he intends to marry his Welsh girlfriend Siân Jones and settle in London. Despite certain religious and traditional prohibitions regarding food, women and drink, he adopts these conventions so that he can marry Siân. He says to Fred Hallworth, the man in charge of exports in London where Babo works: "(I)f I'm going to marry her and live here in London, then I'm going to have to live like people here. I can't keep holding on to these traditions" (30). Like Gopal, he too is a first-time migrant journeying abroad, but wants to blend into the new culture and in turn to be assimilated into it. But the "if" in Babo's declaration makes his assimilation conditional and bounded as his desire to transform is restricted to and mediated by his love for a person. It would be interesting to visualise how Babo would respond to assimilation without the intermediary subject of Siân. Babo's conditional notion of assimilation indicates a stiffness that lacks the supple reflexes of forming dispersed identities or being hybrid. Having explored how fixity of identification constrains assimilation, it becomes pertinent to the reader to understand identity from a transitional and formative dimension through a set of uprooted and dispersed characters in the section on *Brick Lane* that follows.

Brick Lane (2003) by Monica Ali, a South Asian diaspora writer settled in London, explores the difficulties in the formation, adherence and non-adherence of dispersed identities among its characters through the process of unhoming. The novel is seen to pursue two points thoroughly. The first is the expansion of the home through the process of unhoming and the other is the espousal of the dislocated character as a counter-hegemonic representation of

the diasporic individual. *Brick Lane* traces the journeys of various characters in space and time, as they in turn journey through the transformations of their selves. For instance, the reader notes the journey of Nazneen, an eighteen-year old girl, who is displaced from her homeland in Gouripur, Bangladesh to Towers Hamlet in inner London, following her marriage to Chanu and how she copes with her dislocation. Chanu, Nazneen's middle-aged husband, the reader finds, has been living in London for several years and is a character who inhabits a space of permanent dislocation which can also be interpreted as being in a state of transit. The other man in her life Karim is a second-generation migrant born and brought up in London, though seemingly British, he cannot be seen as rooted in the host nation as his ideologies and choices are found appropriating the homeland Bangladesh in very subtle ways. The rich variety of the circumstances surrounding these characters is underlined by three focal points: home, unhome and dislocation. The expansion of the home is laid open to outside influences and conversely the outside world invades the privacy of the home. This confluence and mingling can be understood as the kind of "unhomely" (Bhabha 13) space that occupies either the uncomfortable position of the private or the public sphere. Bhabha explains the terror of experiencing the "unhomely" moment as it represents to the individual not only as a dislocation but also an unfamiliarity of recognising oneself in this moment of dislocation. The "un" in unhoming functions as an antonymic prefix that opposes the root word "home." If abroad is considered the antonymic opposite of home, then "unhome" occupies a dislocated space that is in between the home and abroad. But even in this dislocation the notion of home is kept intact owing to the presence of the root word "home" in "unhome." The terror associated with the loss of the recognisable self becomes dynamic when it leads the individual to build a bridge between the two spaces of the home signified by the private sphere, and abroad signified by the public sphere. The bridging becomes a pragmatic act because home exists as a sublimated presence even in the unhomed space, thereby weakening the intensity of dislocation. This bridging allows the individual to move between the two spheres without having to station oneself in a particular spot. Such a situation not only allows the individual to be located across many sites but provides him or her the flexibility of exercising multiple subjectivities. In being multiply subjective is achieved the condition of expansion of the home into the public sphere while the public sphere penetrates the home.

Such a situation is evident in the evolving topographies of Nazneen's home. Her home in Towers Hamlet in London is a constricted site that encloses her within the role of a dutiful housewife. Her contact with the outside world occurs through Chanu and his constant debates about the superiority of the Occident over the Orient or the Orient over the Occident. But Chanu's

dialogues fail to impact on Nazneen's diasporic subjectivity that is still rooted in the domesticity of her household chores, and derive from her experience of the village homestead in Bangladesh. That Chanu's eloquent dialogues fail to impregnate Nazneen with a notion of her position with respect to the outside world can also be understood as Chanu's failure to step out of the home in the metaphorical sense. The certificates, and knowledge of Shakespeare, that are meant to make Chanu an eligible member of British genteel society not only disqualify him from a promotion at office but also fail to offer him free admittance into the home of Dr. Azad, a well-to-do Bangladeshi physician. The "otherisation" faced by Chanu pushes him back into the home space as he fails to secure a footing for himself in the public sphere. Therefore Chanu seeks solace in verbal musings; his learning is the only space where he manages to create an identity for himself. But such a space proves ineffectual in inspiring Nazneen to interact with the outside world. The dialectical arguments engaged in by Chanu employs, what Samir Dayal in the article "Diaspora and Double Consciousness" terms as "signifying irony" (56). A narrative uses signifying irony in the neocolonial discourse to critique the stereotypical representations of the non-West that the West creates, thereby resisting creation of a fixed imagery with definitive features of the "model immigrant" (50), that needs to be imitated. Perhaps the lack then of such a model compels Nazneen to continue associating herself with the safety of her home that poses no challenge to her current identity. This argument can be extended by stating that the diasporic individual (in this instance Nazneen) resists adherence to an image provided from outside till the home is penetrated by the "beyond" and severely dislocates the individual within her safest precincts. What does she do now? She struggles to root herself but the ground beneath her feet, so to speak, has been stripped from her. She now seeks a new route to root herself. She participates in this intervention from the beyond personified by Karim, and enters into an intimate relationship with him. Therefore the agency of imagining the self, earlier bestowed upon the West-centric creation of the non-West, shifts to that of being created by oneself.

Karim, the young second generation Muslim immigrant from Bangladesh enters Nazneen's home as a provider of raw material for the sewing enterprise Nazneen has undertaken to earn a livelihood for the family. His ideas about the state of Muslims all over the world rouse in Nazneen a sense of community beyond Towers Hamlet. "She learned about her Muslim brothers and sisters…. She discovered Bosnia" (259). She donates money for the children in Gaza refugee camps. But these discoveries do not turn Nazneen into a revolutionary like Karim; rather, they initiate a stepping out of the traditional confines of thought and practice. Her relationship with Karim realigns her association with her home in a new way. In the act of giving up her body to Karim, Nazneen exposes an intensely private site to an outside influence. She finds herself

divided between her loyalty to Chanu, her commitment to her children and her love for Karim. This is the condition of the "unhomely" for Nazneen, that frightens her as she is unable to locate herself in the suddenly expanded site of the home that is now dispersed between herself and Karim, the children, Chanu, Hasina, her village in Gouripur and Towers Hamlet forming intermediate stops between them. Karim represents the beyond, the world outside that penetrates Nazneen's home. This penetration can be understood as the "negating activity… that establishes a bridge, where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" (Bhabha 13). Nazneen chooses to inhabit the relocated home and allows the presencing[2] of her estranged self to dwell in it. The initial fright of the experience transforms into a dynamism that leads her to negotiate between the many sites of associations and subjectivities. Nazneen stays back in Towers Hamlet with her children while Chanu travels back to Bangladesh. Ultimately, she decides against marrying Karim and tells him, "I wasn't me, and you weren't you… we made each other up" (498). The recognition of making "each other up" strips the relationship of its artifice that had prevented Nazneen from situating herself in the unhomed space. Her existence which had once sought meaning through Karim has, however, been freed from such a dependency. The space that Nazneen comes to occupy towards the end of the novel does not conform to her earlier concerns experienced during the period of her life with Karim. This is a new space with its share of struggles and uncertainties, but Nazneen commands this space and in that articulates a new home, a new sense of belonging. Therefore, the process of unhoming can be seen as powerfully instrumental in arriving at new translations of oneself and the home in the novel.

While Nazneen experiences unhoming within the immediate precincts of her home in Towers Hamlet, for Siân, one of the protagonists in the semi-autobiographic debut novel, *The Pleasure Seekers* by Tishani Doshi, unhoming cuts across nations. Unhoming in *The Pleasure Seekers* can be viewed from a macro-social dimension within the framework of marriage, especially on account of being a union between people from two different nations.

Tishani Doshi, herself a product of two cultures – Welsh and Gujarati – explores in the novel the generational change in the notion of "home" in a family which accommodates a diasporic individual. Babo Patel, a Gujarati from Chennai, goes to London to further his education but falls in love with a Welsh girl called Siân. Their intent of marriage is initially rejected by Babo Patel's family. But they gradually accept Siân, who settles in India following her

[2] By presencing Bhabha refers to the boundary that marks the presence of dissident or dissonant voices of minority groups, women, the colonised etc. In the text this reference is extended to the other self of Nazneen that begins to presence itself in her new circumstance.

marriage to Babo. Therefore their cross-cultural marriage becomes a site to explore the notion of home, not only by the subjects of the marriage but also by the products of such a marriage, namely Mayuri and Bean, Siân and Babo's daughters. The politics of unhoming can be felt at the macro level of the community expressed through the practice of arranged marriages.

It may be useful here to bring in Pratyusha Basu's paper, "Producing (Un)homely Spaces: Gender Differences, Gujarati Culture, and the South Asian Diaspora" since it focuses on the formation of diasporic homes of Gujarat's Patidar community through arranged marriages. According to Basu, the Patidars or Patels comprise a significant portion of the contemporary South Asian diaspora. By linking the contemporary form of arranged marriage to colonialism, she evaluates the persistence of arranged marriages in the diasporic community. She says that this persistence can only exemplify a devotion to tradition in the midst of diasporic change (119). In *The Pleasure Seekers,* Prem Kumar and Trishala want their son Babo to marry Falguni Shah, the daughter of their close friend, Kamal and Meghna Shah. But Babo loves Siân, whom he meets in London, and decides to marry her. The marriage between the two subverts the cultural bind of a colonially constructed norm that continues to dominate the essential practice of marriage between certain communities.

Bhabha's essay "Unhomely Lives: The Literature of Recognition" states that the intervention of the "beyond" brings about the relocation of the home and the world and initiates some individuals into unhomeliness, that is the condition of cross-cultural initiations (Bhabha 13). Babo and Siân's marriage initiates this cross-cultural intervention and brings the sense of relocation of the home not only for their individual selves but also for Babo and Siân's family in India and Wales respectively. The domestic space of Prem Kumar's home at Sylvan Lodge, Madras becomes a site where this "beyond" intervenes in the form of Siân. By accepting Siân as their daughter-in-law, Prem Kumar and Trishala break the borders of their Patel family traditions not only to welcome her into the Patel home but also in the process to initiate an acceptance of them into her private sphere. The "unhomely" moment for Siân is her departure for India to be with Babo and to leave the place where they began their lives together in London. The "unhomely" moment for Babo is when he is tricked into coming back to Madras and not allowed to marry Siân. Siân's condition of unhomeliness makes her relocate her home away from her home, whereas Babo's thrust towards unhomeliness has him recreate a new home space within his home. Together they build a diasporic home out of their unhomely experience which dismantles the binaries of home and abroad, the self and other. Thus, Siân experiences the borders between her home in Wales and India blurring. Siân's unhomely experience is characterised by ambivalences and ambiguities which affirm a profound desire for social solidarity (Bhabha 26-27). The ambivalences and ambiguities in Siân's unhomely experience arise because

she has accepted Babo but has not been able to assimilate into his culture completely. She constantly desires for social solidarity by which she can be recognised and from where she can find her identity. The intervention of the "beyond" in Babo and Siân's private spheres lies in establishing a bridge which captures the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations (Bhabha 13).

Despite her decision to stay in India with Babo, Siân's unhomely experience restrains her from completely relocating her home with her in-laws. In her profound desire for social solidarity she searches a place of her own with Babo. Following her marriage to Babo, Siân wonders, "Was this how it was going to be from now on? *One foot in, the other foot out*. Would it always feel like you never belonged no matter where you went, who you found to love?" (81). In seeking out social solidarity, she finds refuge and comfort with Ms Douglas, a third-generation descendant from England living in India, who grew up "with the idea that home is a place you've never been to" (91). Ms Douglas' nocturnes and Hungarian Rhapsodies help Siân overcome her homesickness. Moreover, she joins the Overseas Women's Club of Madras to mingle with diasporic individuals living in India. Thus, even though the novel depicts a widening of home as physical space for Siân, she experiences a loss of her recognisable self owing to the fears associated with unhomely experience.

Another cause for this terror emanates from an inability to give up a part of the self to assimilate the other which resides outside, in the public sphere. While missing home, she admits: "*I am always beginning because I cannot surrender a part of myself*" (84). In the process of building a bridge between the two spaces of home – and the public world – she feels at a loss, at not being able to bring these spheres together, of neither being able to completely assimilate nor being able to completely dissimilate.

Babo and Siân's cross-cultural marriage defies rigid ideologies and national fixities as exemplified by Nat, Babo's cousin who is sceptical about whether Babo and Siân's relationship will eventually succeed: "They are from different worlds. East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet" (Doshi 40). Nevertheless, Babo and Siân's unhomely state offers a perfect example to the reader that the twain, East and West may meet even if they do not mingle. They attract and repel each other at the same time. In their private spheres, both have assimilated and accepted each other but have not extended their assimilatory efforts to include what belongs to the other. Without Siân, Babo's own home becomes an alien space and with her he feels at home. He says, "*I am at home in the world anywhere you are*" (103). For Siân too her husband's presence is a "safe warm place which she could call home" (108). With Siân entering Babo's life, his private sphere with regard to his religious ideologies are

broadened, unlike the narrow views held by his parents, Prem Kumar and Trishala. This broadening is caused because of the traditional banalities being disturbed by the unhomely (Bhabha 21) which strains fixations of certain habits and practices of life. Babo regards Trishala's objection at Siân's not being a Jain and her unfamiliarity with their customs and culture as narrow-mindedness. In his opinion, Jainism teaches one to realise a free and blissful state and Siân has helped him achieve this state. Thus his love for her not only leads him to broaden his private sphere but also compels his parents to expand their private spheres by way of accommodating Siân. The presence of a diasporic subjectivity thus resists the "here" and "there," "then" and "now," "home" and "abroad" perspective (qtd. in Blunt 185).

A similar movement between the private and public spheres can also be noted in *Brick Lane*. Nazneen's stepping out of the private sphere can be juxtaposed against Karim's stepping into one. For Karim, Nazneen is the "real thing" (419). To him she represents the homeland, its customs and traditions that are slowly getting eroded from the existing diasporic population. The private sphere represented by home or family, becomes a space for assiduous adherence to such customs. The home also becomes a significant nucleus in the schema of social networks established among the migrant diaspora. According to Judith Brown, "close clustering of people with similar lifestyles and expectations sustains particular ethnic consumption patterns, reconstructing a sense of home in daily life" (80). Towers Hamlet is in reality a similar cluster in inner London that is occupied by Bangladeshi immigrants. While such a cluster offers the security of home, it is deeply controlling and constricting. Nazneen aspires to step out of this claustrophobic clustering with the intent of fostering broader social networks, whereas Karim wants to enter the security of the home nucleus as he fails to forge enduring linkages in the public sphere that he operates from. Both these movements are driven by dynamics of subjectivities and identities that undergo constant making and unmaking in the diasporic individuals. The making and unmaking of subjectivities passes through an in-between state that may be termed as "hyphenated identities" (81). Jasbir Jain in her essay "The New Parochialism: Homeland in the Writing of the Indian Diaspora," posits a rotating characteristic to such an identity in context of the politics of locating oneself such that a diasporic individual goes through a process of fragmentation before arriving at an assimilated self. Such an instance is observed in the short story "Homecoming" by Sunera Thobani.

A case of hyphenated identities afflicts Shelly's notion of the home in "Homecoming." Shelly the protagonist of the story, is a second generation immigrant in Canada, who feels displaced in her parental home and seeks home elsewhere. She goes through the hyphenation of (Shahsultan)-Shelly-Mrs. James-Shelly-(Shahsultan) reflecting bell hooks' meditation on the journey of discovering the self, "not just who I am in the present but where I am coming

from" (qtd. in Blunt 187). Stuart Hall extends the points of identification or hyphenation in context of "one experience, one identity" (435) or that identities are formed by multiple experiences of not just where we come from and who we are but also what we will become in the future (435). Therefore the home space characterises the dynamism of several identifications spread over time, nationalities and subjectivities that displaces the notions of a home from a single physical space to several locations. Shelly's journey of locating herself through the myriad identifications of the feeble but culturally determinative persona of Shahsultan to the partly assimilated diasporic individual Shelly who becomes the wife of Charles James, a secondary character in the story and Shelly's white husband and experiencing the rude realisation of the extent of dislocation of becoming Mrs. James brings her back to the identifications of being Shelly and Shahsultan in an affirmative light. The journey through the hyphenations affects the way Shelly looks at home. She steps into the private sphere with a deeper sense of belonging that was lost to her when the story began. But the process of hyphenation becomes necessary in order to seek some form of stability or a surer comprehension of where lies my home and what are my roots. The essentiality of the sequestration faced in traversing the hyphenation according to Satchidanandan, in the essay "That Third Space: Interrogating the Diasporic Paradigm," becomes a necessary condition affecting a need to return to the roots (16). Shelly undergoes a similar sequestration in Charles's home before embarking upon a return to her *self*. However, the roots one returns to yields less of the fixities of pure culture and draws nourishment from a hybrid notion of home and culture acquired through the journeys undertaken between the public and private spheres. Such a notion is further explored in *Brick Lane*.

The question of "Home" in *Brick Lane*, then, leads the thoughtful reader back to the character of Chanu who appears to be permanently dislocated. The nature of his dislocation is as incomplete as is his rootedness. Chanu does not appear to command any of the spaces that he occupies and neither does he emulate the lone drifter. He has never successfully engaged in any enterprise. "No, the degree would never be finished. The promotion would never be won. The job would never be resigned. The furniture would never be restored. The house in Dhaka would never be built. The jute business would never be started" (91). The passage represents a series of beginnings undertaken by Chanu, none of which have reached their destinations, leaving Chanu suspended in between the comings and goings of events, in between spaces that are neither home nor abroad. This disconcerting in-between represents the transitional identity in the making (Fusco 149). The diasporic nature of the transitional identity is a constant; it does not reach the fixity of a destination, nor does Chanu.

Bean in *The Pleasure Seekers* faces a similar predicament. Travelling between continents that her parents belong to, for Bean home is neither here in India nor there in Wales. She wonders "*Why do I always feel like I'm visiting wherever I go?... Is this how you felt when you first came to India, Mama?...* One foot in, the other foot out" (248). Hers is a diasporic subjectivity constantly moving between the binaries of home and abroad. What appears to be disconcerting about Chanu's character, on the other hand, is that on closer scrutiny it reveals a subtle rebellion in conforming to the role of the quintessential model immigrant, portrayed to perfection by Dr. Azad, who is a well-to-do physician in London, and who keeps putting off his visits to Bangladesh. Mrs. Azad considers herself a British national "I work with white girls and I am just one of them" (116). The supposed assimilation of the Azad family offsets the conflicts of assimilation and difficulties of fragmented identities that evoke a comprehensible reality against the veneer of a model immigrant. While Nazneen manages to negotiate between the multiple sites of her variable subjectivities, for Chanu the inability to negotiate and remain suspended etches a new kind of space within the diasporic arena. In contrast, Bean's state of suspension is offset by the stable notion of home perceived by her elder sister Mayuri. Bean's predicament is portrayed as a generational attribute that she acquires from her mother. Both Chanu and Bean are identities that will forever be in the making without reaching any degree of stability in the intermediary positions that they oscillate between.

The suspended position that troubles the characterisation of Chanu's portrayal can also be seen as an attempt to occlude the western gaze in framing the other. How would Chanu imagine himself without the derisive gaze of his western counterpart? Is not a large part of his reverie and musings a reaction to the appropriation of his western counterpart of himself? Samir Dayal's question is pertinent in this context: "How in a transnational context, does the non-western subject constitute its own modernity as independent from western modernity?" (53). The question problematises the identity issue as the diasporic identity is always seen in reference to or as a reaction against the image of the immigrant fabricated by the west. An independent conceptualisation of one's modernity which would seek a novel understanding of the nation and a modified practice of culture or in other words a modernity acquired by the diaspora in its own terms as suggested by Vijay Mishra (197), until realised will continue to remain in a state of suspension. Therefore, the state of suspension is problematic and is continually in quest for an answer, which is not absolute and which perhaps is constantly deferred. But every deferring creates a space that has been travelled, that has been understood, and that becomes relational to the bygone space. It is this relationality that possesses what Paranjape calls "internal coherence" (11) characteristic of a cohesiveness, offering continuity to the multiplicity of identities in the diasporic space.

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