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The steadfast and the wavered in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Aboulela's *the Translator*

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Abstract

People from the colonized countries in the past moved to the United Kingdom to seek better lives. The researched novels depict this with the main characters of two different Muslim women. They must maintain their Islamic values while also adapting to English lifestyles and social relationships. The objective of the research is to identify patterns relating to how the concept of istiqamah (holding fast to Islamic principles) was practiced by Muslim woman characters in two novels, namely Brick Lane and The Translator, as well as the challenges faced by these characters in the novels. The research, being qualitative research, took the data from the two literary works in the form of primary data. The secondary data was taken from reviews of novels and other books. . Analysis of data was conducted by taking the excerpts from the novel being relevant to the theoretical concepts. The theory used is comparative literature, that is the application of religious concept(s) to literary works. The results showed that two different patterns in holding to istiqamah can be observed; one character is still steadfast in the principle, while the other changes. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct research by adding more novels having the same themes.

Keywords: *Brick Lane; istiqamah; Muslim; women; the Translator*

INTRODUCTION

Maintaining Islamic faith is of profound importance for Muslim women from Muslim countries who begin living in the UK, as it provides them with a strong sense of identity, spiritual grounding, and moral guidance in a new cultural environment. The transition to life in the UK often presents challenges, such as exposure to unfamiliar social norms, different gender dynamics, and sometimes, religious misconceptions or discrimination. In this context, holding firmly to Islamic values allows Muslim women to navigate their new lives with confidence and resilience. Faith serves as a source of inner strength, offering emotional support during the process of adaptation. It also helps them preserve their cultural and religious heritage, which can be a vital connection to their homeland and family traditions. Maintaining practices such as prayer, modest dress, dietary rules, and community involvement can foster a sense

of continuity and stability amid change. This kind of idea will be seen in two different works, namely Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. The ability to hold to Islamic principles (*istiqamah*) while the characters are facing contradictory challenges is a very important topic to discuss as it may happen to any Muslims living in the West countries. This is the reason why the two novels were studied comparatively to see the possible different results.

The Translator* and *Brick Lane

First published in 1999, *The Translator* is a novel that tells a story about a woman named Sammar who lives in the UK and works as a translator. She lived and got married there and even continued living in the UK after her husband died. She worked and eventually met a co-worker whom she wanted to marry. Unfortunately, he was not a Muslim. On the other hand, *Brick Lane* tells the story of a woman named Nazneen. Having grown up in an Islamic household in Bangladesh, Nazneen was close to God. However, she was then sent to England in an arranged marriage to a man twice her age when she was eighteen. They lived in Brick Lane, London. Nazneen could not speak English well and needed someone to socialize with. Her husband was no better, consistently dominating the household and her.

The two novels are similar in that the main character is a Muslim woman from the Eastern part of the world who migrated to the UK. They both had lost someone dear to them, one being their husband, while the other was their child. What distinguishes them is that one of them, Sammar, is educated, while the other is not. The author proposed one question based on the interest in the novels *The Translator* and *Brick Lane* and the topic of Muslims and their Islamic principles: how do Muslim women stick to the Islamic principles (*istiqamah*) while facing the problems in their lives? By the term *istiqamah* means that the Muslim woman characters do not do any activities against Islamic laws such as zina.

Previous research on the subject of the novels *The Translator* and *Brick Lane* has been done before, though not together in the same paper. A study (Al- Khayyat & Abu Amrieh, 2023) explored how *The Translator* (1999) and *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015) employ weather conditions to formulate the Islamic identity construction of the two characters in both novels, namely Sammar and Natasha. Zannoun (2019) discussed the various positionalities and binaries in *The Translator*. By using postcolonial theory and feminist theory as well as Lila Abu-Lughod's notion of emotional discourse as a pragmatic act, the research examined the depiction of place and identity as formulated entities embedded in emotion. Another research (Al-Adwan & Amrieh, 2013) on Aboulela's *The Translator* investigated how Islam and its rituals played very important roles in governing Muslims' lives and their relationships with others, including in solving cross-cultural relationships. In the research, the conflict between personal interest and religious teachings was solved by privileging the teachings. Previous studies on Aboulela's novel "The Translator" have explored various aspects of the work. Researchers have examined the author's literary style, focusing on rhetorical devices and prose flexibility (Albashir & Alfaki, 2015). The novel's intercultural discourse has

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been analyzed through the lens of Bakhtin's dialogism, highlighting its polyphonic nature and potential for cultural negotiation (Abu-Shomar, 2020). Some scholars have emphasized the novel's portrayal of Islamic spirituality and its impact on a Muslim woman's daily life, moving beyond East- West dichotomies (Edwin, 2013). Additionally, the concept of translation in the novel has been critically examined, revealing how it challenges Western notions of translation and conversion while positioning the author as an ideological agent of cultural change (Steinitz, 2013). These studies collectively demonstrate the rich complexity of Aboulela's work and its significance in discussions of culture, religion, and translation.

Relating to *Brick Lane*, studies have been conducted which among others are by Kouta (2022) and by Chattopadhyay and Shrivastava (2012). The former research discussed the application of self-determination theory (SDT) in looking into the main character in the novel, namely, Nazneen. It investigated how the fate of Nazneen as a Bangladeshi woman was controlled by extrinsic factors, including arranged marriage and other factors relating to patriarchal conditions. Yet, she was finally able to achieve psychological development in which she could free herself from her husband's dependency. In the second research, the topics were transitional identities and the unhomed space as seen in Ali's *Brick Lane* and Tishani Doshi's *The Pleasure* "Brick Lane" has been extensively studied for its portrayal of diasporic experiences and cultural identity. The novel is recognized as a Bildungsroman, exploring the development of a female immigrant's autonomy and identity in the South Asian British context (Singh & Tiwari, 2025). Ali's use of focalization subverts the traditional white Western and male gazes, presenting the narrative through the perspective of a Bangladeshi woman (Pereira-Ares, 2013). The novel delves into themes of cultural dislocation, displacement, and the complexities of living in a multicultural world (Lone & Sharma, 2024). It also examines the clash between Eastern and Western cultures, highlighting the challenges faced by immigrants and the potential victimization of women due to both post- colonial and traditional cultural factors (Mutlag & Mutashar, 2020). These studies collectively emphasize "Brick Lane's" significance in exploring cultural identity, gender roles, and the immigrant experience in contemporary British society.

From the studies that have been conducted, there has not been any study applying the concept of *istiqamah* in the novel to see the behaviors of the characters in relation to their persistence in holding on to Islamic values. The study will see the two main characters in each novel, namely Nazneen in *Brick Lane* and Samar in *The Translator*. The objective of the study is to see how two different Muslim lady characters face the challenges and make attempts to survive.

METHODS**Type of research**

The research type was descriptive qualitative. The data to be collected is collected qualitatively and presented descriptively (Creswell, 2013), The type of materials to be gathered takes the form of the experience of characters in the novel. This research explains the character's beliefs and behaviour.

Source of data

The primary data were taken from the two novels: *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali dan *The Translator* by Leila Aboulela. The data included sentences and paragraphs that are relevant to the researched concepts. The secondary data were taken from reviews of both novels and from books relating to theory and research.

Theoretical framework

The theory to be employed is comparative literature, namely the use of a concept from another discipline, in this case from Islamic to be applied in literary studies. This is proposed by de Zepetnek (1998), stating that Comparative Literature includes “the knowledge or application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature”. The concept is to be applied in this literary research in *istiqamah*.

According to Dr Badi (2024), an Islamic scholar, the Islamic concept of *istiqamah* is derived from the word ‘Qiyam’ in Arabic, which implies ‘the continuity of doing something, following up with it and making sure that it is done in the right way and there is neither deviation nor swerving’. The word can be found in the Qur’an surah 11 ayah 112: ‘Therefore, stand firm (on the straight path) as you are commanded and those who turn in repentance with you. And do not transgress, for He (Allah) sees well all that you do’ (Badi, 2024).

Further, the challenge of *istiqamah* can be drawn from the explanation by Khurram Murad (2010, p. 85) who discussed the impediment to *istiqamah*, which among other lustful sexual passions. According to him, “true Believers are able to control their sexual desires and, in the process, preserve their chastity” (Murad, 2010, p. 86). The inability to control the desire will lead to fornication or adultery (*zina*). Murad explained (Murad, 2010, p. 87) that *zina* may cover *zina* of the eyes, the hands, the feet, the mouth, the heart, and the genitals. Besides, he stated (Murad, 2010, p. 88) that *khalwa* (privacy between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman) should be avoided, provided the possibility of committing *zina*.

Data collection technique

The data, which were in the form of sentences and paragraphs, were collected by reading novels several times. After that, sentences and paragraphs that were relevant to the concepts discussed were classified.

Data analysis technique

Two methods were used in this paper to find out how the two main characters in the novels, Muslim women, stick to Islamic principles in facing their problems in life, and what causes these actions.

The first method was by reading the novels and choosing the relevant data for the analysis. This was done by closely reading the novels and paying attention to how the main character acts before and after living in the UK regarding Islamic principles.

The second step was taken by grouping the data based on the criteria

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and creating an analysis for them. Based on the data obtained from the novels, the author grouped them, specifically on how both main characters stick to the Islamic principle when facing their problems in life, and how living in a Western country affects that.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the question that has been proposed, the result shows that there are differences between the two novels in how Muslim women stick to Islamic principles in facing the problems in their lives. The result will first discuss how the main character in the novel *Brick Lane* sticks to her Islamic principles, followed by the main character in *The Translator*, and finally analyze the similarities and differences between the two characters in terms of their Islamic principles.

Istiqamah and its challenges in Brick Lane

The first one is in the novel *Brick Lane*. The novel written by Monica Ali is divided into several parts. The first part focuses on when the main character, Nazneen, was born and lived in Bangladesh. When Nazneen was born, she almost died. However, she did not and lived. She decided and was taught that this had to do with the power of fate and God. Because of this,

"Nazneen believed that whatever happened, you were left to your fate, which God decided. Going against this fate could weaken your blood, and the consequences could even be fatal" (Ali, 2004, p. 12).

That was why Nazneen was so close to God as a child. She told everything to Him and did she have any regrets about living (Ali, 2004, p. 15). She believed that it was His fate that put her on earth.

Growing up, Nazneen was very submissive. This is because she, as a Bangladeshi and Muslim, believes that, based on the Islamic principle, a woman has to listen to her parents and, after that, her husband if she is married (Badriah et al., 2023; Nurmila, 2013). Furthermore, the fact that Nazneen never had the proper education did not help. She lived with the mindset that women must obey the elders and men. This made her a person who would always do what others say and fear speaking up. At the age of 18, Nazneen was arranged to get married to a man much older than her. She had no choice but to accept it. She was brainwashed to think that she must obey this and forbid herself to wish otherwise. She constantly told herself, "If I were the wishing type, I know what I would wish." (Ali, 2004, p. 15). Since Nazneen was born into a woman- submissive society, she was afraid to question others' choices made for her, and this, of course, made her closer to God. Since she had no one to talk to or to vent to, she would do so to God. This made her stick to her Islamic principles.

The next part of the novel revolves around when Nazneen first lived in England after getting married. Being in a new place does not mean changing the way one thinks. It might change a person's perspective and focus, but not their way of life or attitude (Hamilton, 1963). This also applies to Nazneen. Coming from an Islamic family, Nazneen kept her beliefs and principles even after moving to England. Whenever feeling uneasy or worried, she would turn to the Qur'an or perform prayer. An example of this can be seen when Nazneen

was making dinner for her husband's guest, Dr Azad. She panicked, scared that she might forget something and mess up the food. To calm herself, she recited a verse from the Qur'an:

To God belongs all that the heavens and the earth contain. We exhort you, as We have exhorted those to whom the Book was given before you, to fear God. If you deny Him, know that to God belongs all that the heavens and earth contain. God is self-sufficient and worthy of praise. (Ali, 2004, p. 19)

The words from the Qur'an calmed her down. By reading that, she knew nothing could trouble her because she knew they all belonged to God. She believed the power of the Qur'an was so strong that every time "she had let her mind drift and become uncentred again" (Ali, 2004, p. 21), she would recite verses from the Qur'an. Even without knowing the meaning, she felt at peace. This is in accordance with research that proves learning, reciting, or listening to the Quran can assist Muslims in reducing stress, sadness, and worry (Rozali et al., 2022):

Another time, when Nazneen was out to buy a new sari, she got lost and looked around the street. She could see people, but they could not see her. They only knew she existed, just like God existed. Nazneen realized that she had compared herself to God and panicked. To calm herself, she once again recited her favorite surah from the Qur'an. (Ali, 2004, p. 53).

Performing prayer is another way Nazneen used to cope with feeling anxious. As mentioned previously, Nazneen had stopped wishing for things other than what her current life had given her. Even so, the thought would still come whenever she was alone. Due to this, apart from reciting the Qur'an, Nazneen also performs prayer to relax (Ali, 2004, p. 37). Not only did it give her the tranquility that she needed, but it was also a way for her to communicate with God since she did not have anyone to share her feelings and thoughts with.

Nazneen also prayed after discovering her pregnancy, consulting Dr Azad, and going home. She performed the midday prayer because in Islam, praying could put away her worries and anxieties. She was grateful for how healthy her baby was and how her sister, Hasina, replied to her letter all the way from Dhaka. Nazneen felt at peace:

Although she could think about God. And the words of the prayer. Glory be to my Lord, the Most High. God is greater than everything else. (Ali, 2004, p. 68)

As stated in Surah Ar-Ra'd verse 28, Allah mentioned that a person may feel anxiety but overcomes it by remembering Him. Performing the prayer is one of the ways that a Muslim can do to remember and get close to Him and remove any worries or anxieties (Elvina, 2022). In this case, Nazneen also felt at ease, and her anxieties got better whenever she prayed and remembered Allah.

Nazneen's arranged husband, Chanu, is described as someone who does not listen, is overproud, and talks too much. In front of him, Nazneen

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could only do so little and act as a good wife. She did not have anyone to talk to when stressed, nor could she do so. Her husband did not think she needed to learn English, so she could only talk to him and a few other people from Bangladesh, who were limited in the area where they lived. Nazneen convinced herself that she was okay with the situation and no longer wished for something other than the fate she had been given. However, whenever she was alone, she constantly overthought, and those wishes returned. To overcome this, Nazneen went back to the Islamic principles by turning to God and praying:

She began to pray five times each day, rolling out her prayer mat in the sitting room to face east. She was pleased with the order it gave to her day, (Ali, 2004, p. 37)

Nazneen's Islamic faith started to falter after she gave birth to her first son, Raqib, or so she had thought. She used him as an excuse for missing her prayers. However, it was not him but the mind-opening magazine she had read. Never seeing the world outside caused Nazneen to have a narrow mind. She did not have dreams; she focused on God and serving her husband. When she first read the magazine after giving birth, the dreams and wishes she had suppressed started showing. However, she soon felt guilty and returned to the Islamic principles again. She even sought her mother's contentment:

"Look," she said to Amma (who was always watching), "look how good I am now." (Ali, 2004, p. 88)

When Raqib got sick, it brought Nazneen even closer to God. She prayed for him just as she had prayed for herself and her other family members. She believed that only God could cure her son, just like she believed that He is the Almighty. She knew that without God's power, her will was nothing:

It was God alone who saved the baby. It was His work, His power, not her own. Her own will, though it swelled like the Jamuna and flowed like a burst dam, was nothing as to His. (Ali, 2004, p. 122)

Furthermore, Nazneen knew that Raqib getting better was God's fate, just like how she lived, even when the doctors said she would die when she was born. She knew it was all in God's hands (Ali, 2004, p. 128). This shows that the Islamic principles she had held since she was a baby did not diminish. There might be times when she was guilty of missing prayers, but that was what made her human. Being close to God also made Nazneen believe in His power, especially to answer her prayers. Therefore, that was what Nazneen did. While her son was ill, her husband lost his job, and her sister was lost, Nazneen made dua and recited dhikr. Even when her son finally died, Nazneen accepted that it was God's plan and prayed:

And she squeezed Raqib from her mind. That way lay the abyss. So she swallowed hard and prayed hard, and she used prayer, in defiance of her vows, to dull her senses and dull her pain. (Ali, 2004, p. 188)

The next part of *Brick Lane* is years later, focusing on Nazneen when she met the nephew of the shop owner she sewed for, Karim. He was everything her

The next part of *Brick Lane* is years later, focusing on Nazneen when she met the nephew of the shop owner she sewed for, Karim. He was everything her husband was not. He was young, he listened to her, talked to her like she was an equal to him, and respected her. The first time Nazneen went against Islamic principles because of him was when she did not wear something to cover her hair when he was visiting her house to get the sewn clothes. As mentioned in the Qur'an in Surah An-Nur (24), ayah 21:

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments. (Quran.com, 2016, 24:21)

What is meant by adornments is hair, body shape, and underclothes. When showing it to people of a different sex, it is described as shameful and evil. Before meeting Karim, Nazneen had always covered her hair using a sari when going out or having other men over. With Karim, at first, she forgot to wear it, but eventually, Nazneen became too comfortable and did not care. Karim's visits to Nazneen's house soon became frequent. At first, this only caused her to compare him to her husband. She then constantly thought about him and allowed him to stay longer at her house, knowing it was improper for a man and woman to be in the same room since it could lead to adultery. However, Nazneen still thought nothing was wrong with their exchange, even though her conscience felt guilty. In Qur'an chapter 4, verse 32, Allah forbids *zina*, or unlawful sex, and everything that leads to it. With Karim so close to Nazneen, the two alone in a closed space, the *syaitan* tempted them. It started with the accidental touches that occurred "by the slimmest, smallest whisker" (Ali, 2004, p. 234). Unsurprisingly, all the accidental touches led to the major sin, *zina*. Nazneen formerly felt anxious yet rebellious. Forgetting her Islamic principles, she only focused on how free Karim made her feel. She could laugh for the first time in a long time.

Of course, the happiness Nazneen experienced did not last. In Al-Muddaththir verse 8, Allah has promised that every person will be responsible for their actions. By doing *zina*, there were consequences that Nazneen faced. According to Al-Bukhari, taken from Samurah bin Jundub radhiyallahu 'anhu, a companion of the Prophet PBUH, one of the punishments of a person committing *zina* is Allah giving them a troubled heart and anxiety. After committing *zina* with Karim, Nazneen did not feel at peace. She constantly felt guilty towards her husband, God, and her children. She even felt disgusted towards the deeds that she had done to the point where she vomited and collapsed (Ali, 2004, pp. 296-297). Moreover, Nazneen was so anxious that nothing could calm her, not even reading the Qur'an, when before, every problem she faced would be lighter when she recited ayahs of the Qur'an. Now, Nazneen realized that *zina* would cause her to be in hell for eternity:

Now I have earned myself a place in hell for all eternity. That much is settled. At least it is settled. (Ali, 2004, p. 314)

Even while knowing and realizing the sins that she had committed, Nazneen still kept repeating the deed. As mentioned by Al-Bukhari, taken from Samurah bin Jundub radhiyallahu 'anhu, a companion of the Prophet PBUH, another punishment of committing *zina* is that Allah will blacken and darken the heart (Hasmia, 2020). What is meant by this is that big sins will be regarded as nothing, and the sinner will not feel any remorse or guilt for sinning. Although

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She lay and waited for disgust to stalk its way over and into her. But nothing came. Only the warmth of his body radiating into hers. She had begun to drift into sleep when Karim turned on his side and started to talk. (Ali, 2004, p. 316)

A believer would feel the shame and wrongfulness of their immoral act. They would feel scared that God is watching and of the consequences they would have to face. However, for Nazneen, when doing *zina* with Karim, she could only feel his warmth.

Nazneen finally came to her senses when one day, after she and Karim committed *zina* again, he searched the online web and came across a hadith that explained what adultery is according to Islam and how the heart longs for it, but those who have solid Islamic principles will not commit it:

The adultery of the eye is the look, the adultery of the ears is listening to voluptuous talk, the adultery of the tongue is licentious speech, the adultery of the hand is beating others harshly, and the adultery of the feet is to walk to the place where he intends to commit sins. The heart yearns and desires for such vicious deeds. The loins may or may not put such vicious deeds into effect. (Ali, 2004, p. 320)

This was like a slap to the face for Nazneen. She knew that her relationship with him had only been *zina*. She knew she could not think of marrying him because she had two young daughters who needed care. She knew that she had to obey her husband because he was still her husband, and in the Qur'an Surah An-Nisa verse 34, women should be trustworthy when protecting their husband's honor. Nazneen went back to praying and reading the Qur'an.

She thought of her husband, sitting on the sofa that evening, serenely picking his toenails. When he had come home he had kissed her on the forehead and told her, 'In all these years, I have never – not once – regretted my choice of bride.' She thought of her daughters. What beautiful gifts from God. For once she felt calm. None of her Lord's blessings would she deny. She began to read again. 'Mankind and jinn, We shall surely find the time to judge you! With your Lord's blessings would you deny?' (Ali, 2004, p. 377)

She realized her husband and children were God's blessing for her; she should be grateful and not deny them.

Istiqamah and its challenges in *The Translator*

The novel *The Translator* is about Sammar, a woman from Khartoum who spent her childhood in Scotland. Growing up in a Western country made Sammar confident in herself. Even as a Muslim, she was not afraid to speak her mind when needed. The patriarchy also did not seem as harsh as living in the East. In addition, she went to school. When Sammar was seven, she moved to Khartoum to live with her family. She fell in love with a cousin named Tarig and married him. They moved to Aberdeen since Tarig had to pursue his medical degree. However, not long after, Tarig died after getting hit by a car. Not able to accept his death, Sammar abandoned her son and left him with her aunt. She left to work in Scotland as a translator alone, where she met the Scot she worked for, Rae Isles, an Islamic scholar. *The Translator* is divided into two parts: Sammar lives in Scotland and when she returns to her hometown.

Living in Scotland was lonely for Sammar since she had no family there. She also often felt sad when remembering her late husband. However, instead of using alcohol and other harmful things to release the sadness, Sammar turned to God. When she had to pack up all her husband's things after he passed away, Sammar told herself that only Allah was eternal and everyone would die eventually (Aboulela, 2018, p. 9). When she could not sleep, Sammar recited God's name or ayahs from the Qur'an, and she always woke up feeling much better afterward.

The command to pray has been mentioned multiple times in the Quran. As the Prophet PBUH mentioned when asked about Islam, it is about the "five prayers in one day and night," while the rest are additions (Asy-Syafi'i, 2022, pp. 1-2). Based on Surah An-Nisa verse 103:

When the prayers are over, remember Allah—whether you are standing, sitting, or lying down. But when you are secure, establish regular prayers. Indeed, performing prayers is a duty on the believers at the appointed times. (Quran.com, 2016, 4:103)

It can be seen that praying must be done by every Muslim. It is their duty, so they must pray to become good Muslims. It shows that a Muslim is a believer when they pray five times. In the novel, Sammar lived in Scotland, where finding a place to pray is difficult. However, it is shown that Sammar performed prayer, even in places considered unsuitable for it:

On days when Diane was not in, Sammar prayed in the room, locking the door from inside. She had an old shawl which she kept in the drawer of her desk and used as a prayer mat. It had seemed strange for her when she first came to live here, all that privacy that surrounded praying. She was used to seeing people pray on pavements and on grass. She was used to praying in the middle of parties, in places where others chatted, slept or read. (Aboulela, 2018, p. 73)

Based on the text above, it is mentioned that Sammar was "used" to praying in random places, meaning that she had done it multiple times. This showed that even though she had moved to another country where most people were non-

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Muslims, Sammar still held on to the Islamic principles she had known growing up.

Sammar worked as a translator at a university for a man named Rae. She fell in love with him and wished to marry him. In Islam, it is stated that Allah has perfected the creation of everything, including humans. He has made them in pairs so they could marry (Qur'an Adh-Dhariyat verse 49). The command of marriage has also been written in Surah An-Nur verses 32-34, which states that a person must marry a single person. If they feel that they are too poor to do this, Allah will enrich them. Moreover, marrying in Islam is part of human worship of God:

Anas reported God's Messenger as saying, "When a man marries he has fulfilled half of the religion; so let him fear God regarding the remaining half. (at-Tabrizi, 2025, 13, 17)

Based on the hadith above, it is shown that marriage has a crucial role in a Muslim's life. This is why Sammar, after falling in love with Rae, wished she could marry him. However, the big problem is the fact that Rae is not a Muslim but rather an atheist. In Islam, it is generally forbidden for a Muslim to marry another of a different faith (Saleh et al., 2023; Siregar et al., 2024; Surawardi & Maulidi, 2022). As mentioned in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 221, in order to marry a person of interfaith, that person must first convert to a Muslim and believe in Allah. This became a problem for Sammar. She knew it was against Islamic principles to marry someone of a different faith, so she knew she would not marry him.

*"Are you going to marry someone who's not a Muslim?"
"Of course not, that would be against the sharia." (Aboulela, 2018, p. 89)*

Because she held on tightly to her Islamic principles and her faith was stronger than her love, Sammar set aside her feelings for Rae and kept praying to Allah instead. She kept her relationship with Rae professional, even rejecting him when he asked her to go on a trip together. The fact that Rae is not a Muslim and Sammar could not marry him did not lessen her faith in Allah. Instead, it strengthens her relationship with Him. Sammar said to Rae that Allah was the healer when he was sick; she sought forgiveness from Allah after she was hugged by Rae when she was telling him she was leaving for Khartoum; she thanked Allah for helping her with her dark thoughts:

Once there was a time when she could do nothing. When she was held down by something heavy. Clogged up, dragging herself to pray, even her faith sluggish. Yet Allah had rewarded her even for these imperfect prayers. She had been protected from all the extremes. Pills, break-down, attempts at suicide. (Aboulela, 2018, p. 116)

The excerpt above shows how much Sammar's faith in Allah had impacted her life. When she had no one, Allah helped and protected her.

After returning to her hometown, Khartoum, it was easier for Sammar to worship. The majority of the population and Sammar's family are Muslims, making it normal for them to involve God and Islam in every aspect of life. Saying the word "Insha' Allah," swearing by Allah Almighty, reciting the Qur'an, rolling out prayer mats to pray, and listening to the loud azan were all seen as common. Due to this, it was easy for Sammar to strengthen her relationship with God.

Although Sammar constantly thought of Rae and how he was doing, her focus changed into making amends with herself, her son she had abandoned, and her relationship with her faith. When Rae eventually visited her in Khartoum, he converted to Islam, and she was ready to marry him.

From both the novels *Brick Lane* and *The Translator*, it can be seen how the two characters stick to their Islamic principles when facing problems in life. The author will start by mentioning that both characters came from countries where men oppress women. However, Sammar had the chance to grow up in Scotland, while Nazneen did not. This caused Sammar to be more vocal when expressing her thoughts and wants, especially when marrying someone, since in Western countries it is believed to be easier and freer for women to express their opinions and wants (Nader, 1989). At this time, Nazneen was close to God because she did not have anyone to talk to and vent to. Nazneen's marriage was an unhappy one because her parents arranged it. On the other hand, Sammar loved her husband, so she was happy with him before he passed away. Nazneen did not receive any love from her husband; instead, he oppressed her.

After both got married, they moved to the United Kingdom. Nazneen could only stay home without friends, family, or anyone to talk to. Sammar, however, only spent a while with her husband before she worked as a translator after he passed away. In this stage of their life, both stuck to the Islamic principles to overcome the anxiety and worry they had to endure. In Islam, it is often when a person hits rock bottom that they understand the meaning of patience and turn more sincerely to God, seeking His mercy and guidance (Hariyanto & Fathurrahman, 2022). The sense of helplessness can deepen one's submission and reliance on divine will. Nazneen struggled to fit herself into a new environment, and Sammar tried to repress the trauma of her husband's passing away. The two characters prayed, recited the Qur'an, and performed dhikr. When Nazneen had a baby boy and lost him, her faith became rocky. She still believed in God but sometimes missed a prayer or two.

When Nazneen met Karim, he was like a breath of fresh air for her. He talked to her, listened to her, and told her things she never knew. He was not there to oppress her like all the other men in her life. When her focus in life changed to him, that was when she started to lose her deen. She started with not wearing her hijab, missing even more prayers, committing *zina*, and even not finding peace whenever she read the Qur'an. Her world became centered around Karim. She even considered marrying him. When she finally realized she was a mother and a wife, she finally returned to God. Sammar, on the other hand, did not lose her faith in Islam after meeting and falling in love with Rae. If anything, it made her even closer to God with the hope that he would convert to Islam so she could marry him. She knew that God had helped her in the past and could help her more.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the novels *Brick Lane* and *The Translator* depict how women uphold Islamic values when tackling life's challenges. In the former novel, the main character holds a weak deen. Even though Nazneen grew up in an Islamic household, the lack of education and the oppression caused her to project her

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emotions onto finding someone to listen to her. After she finds that person, her relationship with God falls apart. She no longer asks Him for anything; she instead becomes obsessed with the person. In solving her problems, she no longer sticks to her Islamic principles.

Meanwhile, the other novel, *The Translator*, demonstrates how strong a woman's deen is that she holds on tightly to her Islamic principles. Even when Sammar's environment does not support her, she still continues to stick to it. This is due to how she was raised, having a good education, and people who listen to her. Due to this, Sammar always tries to surround herself with religious Islamic people, so she does not lose her *Iman*. When she falls in love with someone who is a non-Muslim, she holds herself and waits until he converts.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

The authors confirm responsibilities for the following. **Muh Arif Rokhman** designed the research framework, identified relevant theory, drafted the initial manuscript. **Shafira Ainun Dzikriyya** collected and analyzed the data and contributed to manuscript revisions. Both authors discussed the results, made contributions to the interpretations and findings, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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