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BETWEEN CULTURAL OBLIGATION AND FEMALE AGENCY: NEGOTIATING DIASPORIC WOMANHOOD IN MONICA ALI'S BRICK LANE AND JEAN KWOK'S GIRL IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract

This study examines female agency as a negotiated practice rather than a simple escape from cultural obligation in Monica Ali's Brick Lane and Jean Kwok's Girl in Translation. The novels place Nazneen and Kimberly inside different structures of duty: marriage, motherhood, filial responsibility, migrant debt, paid labour, language brokering, and expectations of respectable femininity. Drawing on Patricia Hill Collins's relational account of intersectionality, Collins and Bilge's intersectional framework, Floya Anthias's concept of translocational positionality, and Uma Narayan's critique of cultural essentialism, the study asks how agency develops when gendered choices are constrained simultaneously by family relationships, class, migration, language, race, and institutional inequality. Close comparative analysis shows that neither protagonist moves from passivity to freedom through a single act of rebellion. Nazneen's agency grows through small refusals, paid sewing, friendship, sexual and emotional self-knowledge, rejection of Karim's proposed future, and her decision to remain in London with her daughters. Kimberly's agency develops through language mediation, educational achievement, resistance to Aunt Paula's "life debt," refusal to abandon Yale, and an adult life built through work and intergenerational care. Both narratives complicate liberal models of autonomy because the women continue to value obligations that connect them to others. Their agency is relational: it emerges by revising the terms of duty rather than erasing dependency. The study argues that diasporic womanhood in these texts is best understood as a shifting negotiation between responsibility and self-definition, where freedom is measured by the capacity to participate in obligations without allowing those obligations to become permanent claims over one's future.

1.INTRODUCTION

Female agency in diasporic fiction is often described through a familiar movement: a woman begins inside restrictive cultural traditions, encounters a more liberal host society, and gradually becomes autonomous. That sequence is attractive because it gives the narrative a clear direction, but it can flatten the conditions

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under which choices are actually made. It also risks treating family attachment, cultural memory, care, and obligation as residues of oppression that must disappear before agency becomes possible. Monica Ali's Brick Lane and Jean Kwok's Girl in Translation resist such a clean movement. Their protagonists become increasingly capable of making consequential choices, yet neither becomes independent in the sense of being detached from other people. Nazneen's decisions are shaped by daughters, marriage, friendship, community, money, religion, and migration. Kimberly's are shaped by her mother, poverty, labour, language, school, romantic attachment, pregnancy, and the long history of debt to Aunt Paula. Their agency is therefore relational and materially situated.

The two novels begin from different forms of obligation. Nazneen is raised to believe that "What could not be changed must be borne" (Ali, 2004, p. 25). This ethic of endurance shapes her arranged marriage and early life in London. She initially interprets action itself as a challenge to fate. Kimberly's narrative opens with another language of fate, but she immediately rewrites it. After recalling a Chinese saying about winds that push people along the paths of time, she insists that she has been pulled forward "by the force of my decisions" (Kwok, 2010, Prologue, para. 2). The contrast is useful, but the novels do not simply place one woman on the side of passivity and the other on the side of choice. Nazneen gradually discovers the capacity to act, while Kimberly repeatedly learns that decisions are made under conditions she did not choose.

This study argues that both texts understand agency as the ability to renegotiate obligations rather than abolish them. Nazneen does not become free by ceasing to be a mother, friend, Muslim woman, or member of a Bangladeshi diasporic community. Kimberly does not become free by abandoning Ma, Chinese language, or family duty. What changes is the authority of obligation. Duties that once appear absolute become open to interpretation. The women begin to distinguish care from submission, gratitude from permanent debt, marriage from destiny, and belonging from obedience. An intersectional approach is necessary because cultural obligation never operates alone. Gender expectations are intensified or modified by class, race, immigration status, language, age, generation, and access to institutions. Collins (2019) argues that intersectionality is strongest when power is understood relatively rather than as a simple addition of separate disadvantages. Collins and Bilge (2020) likewise stress that social divisions work together in context. Anthias's (2008) concept of translocational positionality is especially useful for diasporic narratives because it treats identity and belonging as shifting with location, time, and social process. Nazneen is not simply a Bangladeshi woman in Britain; she is differently positioned as wife, mother, garment worker, lover, friend, Muslim, migrant, and eventually business partner. Kimberly is differently positioned as child migrant, translator, sweatshop worker, scholarship student, daughter, lover, mother, and surgeon. Agency changes as these positions change.

Literature Review

Studies of Brick Lane have often described Nazneen's development through gender, cultural identity, hybridity, and autonomy. Poon (2009) emphasizes the provisional character of migrant knowledge and shows that Nazneen's understanding develops through ordinary encounters rather than an abstract theory of assimilation. Hasan (2018) focuses on transplanted gender norms and the attempt to reproduce female seclusion in diaspora, while Prasasti (2018) examines the relation among patriarchal conduct, desire, work, and identity. Yousef (2019) reads Nazneen through Bhabha's hybridity and third space. Rezaie (2016), however, warns that interpreting the novel as a straightforward triumph of liberal autonomy can reproduce stereotypes of Bangladeshi culture. This warning is central to the present study because a theory of agency based only on escape would miss the relational forms of self-definition the novel develops. Research on Girl in Translation has highlighted similar intersections from a different social location. Gasztold (2021) reads the novel as a revision of the immigrant success narrative, with particular attention to Chinese immigrant women, class, labour, and adaptation. Tuffahati and Suardi (2025) examine female

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identity through power relations, while Uysal and Kuleli (2026) show that Kimberly's role as a child language broker is both enabling and burdensome. The novel's educational trajectory is therefore inseparable from responsibilities that exceed the conventional role of a child. Kimberly's success does not emerge outside family duty; it develops while she is translating, working, studying, and managing institutional encounters for her mother.

Collins's (2019) account of intersectionality provides a framework for reading these overlapping relations without reducing them to a list. The important question is not whether Nazneen experiences gender plus race plus class, or whether Kimberly experiences ethnicity plus poverty plus language difficulty. It is how these social relations reorganize one another. Nazneen's gendered dependence on Chanu is intensified by limited English, restricted public mobility, immigration, and her lack of independent income. Kimberly's filial responsibility acquires unusual force because Ma does not speak English, Aunt Paula controls access to work, and piece-rate factory labour leaves the household economically vulnerable. What appears to be "cultural obligation" is therefore produced through several structures at once. Anthias (2008) offers a complementary vocabulary through translocational positionality. Her approach rejects fixed categories of identity in favour of social positions that shift across contexts. This is useful for both novels because the protagonists possess different forms of power in different spaces. Nazneen may be subordinate within marriage yet increasingly competent in paid sewing and friendship networks. Kimberly may be poor and linguistically insecure at one stage of school yet become the family's most capable institutional translator. At Harrison Prep she has academic status but conceals factory labour; in Chinatown she understands family survival but lacks the class mobility of her classmates. Agency is therefore neither a permanent trait nor an individual possession. It depends upon position (Ramzan & Javaid, 2025).

Narayan's (1998) critique of cultural essentialism also matters because obligation is easily misread when ethnic culture is treated as its sole source. Both novels contain gendered expectations linked to Bangladeshi or Chinese identity, but neither allows those expectations to explain everything. Poverty, racialization, insecure work, migration, housing, and institutional barriers reorganize family roles. The aim is not to deny the cultural meaning of arranged marriage, filial obligation, respectability, or family hierarchy. It is to examine how those meanings are intensified, contested, or transformed under diasporic conditions. Agency in this study is therefore defined as situated capacity to interpret, refuse, revise, or redirect the demands placed upon the self. This definition differs from a model of independence in which agency exists only when a person is free from dependency. Care relationships remain central in both novels. The question is whether those relationships permit reciprocal recognition and meaningful choice or whether they become claims that absorb a woman's future. The study addresses three research questions:

1. How do cultural and familial obligations acquire authority over Nazneen and Kimberly?
2. Through what everyday practices do the protagonists develop agency?
3. How do decisive acts of refusal change, rather than eliminate, their relationships to family and belonging?

Methodology

The study employs comparative qualitative textual analysis of the supplied editions of Brick Lane and Girl in Translation. Attention is given to scenes of marriage, domestic labour, paid work, education, language brokering, romantic relationships, motherhood, economic dependence, family debt, and explicit decisions about future life. Rather than organizing the analysis as two separate character summaries, the study follows recurring processes through which obligation is imposed, internalized, negotiated, and revised. The theoretical reading is intersectional and relational. Collins (2019) and Collins and Bilge (2020) guide the analysis of interacting power relations; Anthias (2008) is used to track changing social positions; Narayan (1998) prevents cultural obligation from being treated as a fixed ethnic essence.

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Analysis And Findings

Inherited Scripts Of Duty And Endurance

Nazneen's early relationship to obligation is organized by the story of fate learned from her mother. "What could not be changed must be borne," the narrator explains, and because Nazneen initially assumes that almost nothing can be changed, almost everything must be endured (Ali, 2004, p. 25). Fate is not presented merely as a religious belief. It is a gendered social lesson. Her mother models endurance as female virtue, and Nazneen carries that lesson into an arranged marriage she does not choose. When Chanu later controls her mobility, education, and domestic role, she possesses an interpretive framework that turns resistance into a violation of proper conduct. The novel is careful, however, to show that endurance is not culturally uniform. Hasina refuses the path selected for her and makes a love marriage; Razia openly challenges community judgment; Shahana resists Chanu's plans for Bangladesh. These contrasts matter because they prevent Nazneen's early submission from becoming evidence of an essential Bangladeshi female identity. The "script" is socially powerful, but it is contested within the same cultural world. Chanu's response to Nazneen's desire for English lessons reveals how gendered obligation is reproduced through domestic logic. When Nazneen asks to attend college with Razia, he tells her that motherhood should keep her busy and frames education as impractical once a baby arrives (Ali, 2004, pp. 108-109). His reasoning does not explicitly forbid learning as a cultural taboo. Instead, it converts childcare into a total claim on her time. The restriction therefore appears reasonable and domestic rather than coercive. This is an example of how power can operate through ordinary assumptions about who is responsible for care.

Kimberly's obligations begin from a different position. She arrives in New York with Ma, and the family immediately depends on Aunt Paula for housing and factory work. Ma insists that they cannot remain a burden and that she "must work" (Kwok, 2010, Chapter 1, para. 71). Work is initially framed as dignity and repayment, but the relationship quickly becomes exploitative. Kimberly joins her mother in the garment factory because there is nowhere else for her to go and because the household needs her labour. She later understands that children in the factory are unofficial workers whose contribution is necessary to their families' income (Kwok, 2010, Chapter 2, para. 106). The family duty Kimberly assumes cannot be reduced to "Chinese filial piety." It is produced through migration debt, poverty, Ma's limited English, and Aunt Paula's economic control. Collins's (2019) relational model helps clarify the point: age, gender, class, immigration, and language reshape the meaning of daughterhood. Kimberly is a child, but she performs adult economic and linguistic labour. Her responsibility appears cultural because it occurs within a Chinese immigrant family, yet the conditions that make it so heavy are also structural. The novels therefore begin with different forms of compulsory responsibility. Nazneen is required to endure because wifehood and motherhood are treated as the proper horizon of her life. Kimberly is required to work because family survival depends upon it. Neither protagonist initially has the material resources to separate duty from destiny. Agency begins when they notice that obligations can be interpreted rather than merely obeyed.

Language, Labour, And Everyday Agency

One of the strengths of Brick Lane is that Nazneen's agency develops through small actions before it becomes visible in major decisions. After Chanu dismisses her concerns about Hasina, Nazneen's "heart" becomes "ablaze, with mutiny," and she begins what the narrator calls "Small insurrections, designed to destroy the state from within" (Ali, 2004, p. 89). She alters food, socks, files, and domestic tasks. These acts do not change the structure of her marriage, and they are partly comic, but they matter because she has begun to imagine herself as an actor rather than the passive location where fate occurs. The phrase "small insurrections" captures a form of agency that is easy to miss if liberation is measured only by

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dramatic exits. Nazneen initially lacks independent income, advanced English, and secure public mobility. Her first acts therefore operate inside the domestic sphere available to her. Poon's (2009) account of migrant knowing is useful here: Nazneen learns what she can do by acting experimentally. Agency is discovered through practice rather than possessed in advance.

Paid sewing later gives these experiments a material basis. The work is initially arranged in a way that preserves domestic seclusion: cloth and finished garments move through the flat, and Nazneen can earn without entering a conventional workplace. Prasasti (2018) notes that Chanu's attempt to select a form of work compatible with his own gender expectations unexpectedly changes Nazneen's life. Income gives her knowledge of money, competence, contact with Karim, and eventually participation in a female work network. Labour is not automatically liberating, but it shifts the balance of what she can imagine doing. By the novel's end, sewing has moved from isolated home piecework toward collaborative enterprise. Nazneen proposes design changes and insists on additional payment, while Razia secures orders and sells their work (Ali, 2004, p. 672). The significance lies less in entrepreneurship itself than in control over value. Nazneen is no longer only performing tasks assigned by a husband, middleman, or customer. She contributes judgment, sets terms, and imagines the work as something women can organize together.

Kimberly's development also occurs through labour, but her route is more explicitly tied to language. Ma's limited English makes Kimberly the household's mediator. As she grows older, she says she "grew into the space" left by Ma's foreignness and took over interactions involving taxes, shopping, returns, and outside institutions (Kwok, 2010, Chapter 8, para. 21). Uysal and Kuleli (2026) interpret this role as child language brokering. The practice gives Kimberly practical authority, but it also imposes emotional and administrative work on her long before adulthood. Language therefore produces a double form of agency. English allows Kimberly to protect Ma, understand institutions, and pursue education; at the same time, every increase in competence generates new family obligations. She cannot simply use English for herself because the household depends on her ability. This tension demonstrates why agency should not be equated with individual freedom from others. Her competence is relational: it matters because it changes what both women can do.

The factory creates a similar contradiction. Kimberly's labour is exploitative, yet the discipline and technical speed she develops there become part of the endurance that later supports academic achievement. The novel does not romanticize this transfer. Piecework pays almost nothing, and Kimberly's mother earns far below a reasonable wage even when working hard (Kwok, 2010, Chapter 8, para. 51). The factory gives Kimberly skills only because an unjust system demands them. Agency can emerge from constraint without making the constraint desirable. Anthias's (2008) translocational positionality helps explain Kimberly's movement between factory and school. In one space she is an immigrant child worker whose poverty must remain hidden; in another she is an exceptional student with access to elite education. Neither identity is false. Her agency consists partly in learning how to move between them, but the cost is secrecy and exhaustion. She tells Annette that factory work is not an abstract political issue but her family's livelihood, and that protest could make them lose their jobs. The scene shows how limited options can make compliance a rational survival strategy even when a character recognizes injustice.

Family Obligation, Education, And Self-Definition

Education functions differently in the two novels but exposes a common question: who is allowed to invest in a woman's future? Nazneen wants English lessons, yet Chanu treats education as unnecessary because motherhood should define her needs. Kimberly's education, by contrast, becomes the family's primary hope, but even this support is complicated. Ma values Kimberly's schooling while also depending on her factory labour and translation. The daughter must excel academically without withdrawing from the responsibilities that make academic work difficult. Kimberly's acceptance to Yale changes the balance because it gives her a route out of Aunt Paula's economic system. When Paula accuses Kimberly and Ma of ingratitude and insists that bringing them to America created a "life debt" (Kwok, 2010, Chapter 13,

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para. 38), Ma finally rejects the claim: "We've already repaid our debts to you" (Chapter 13, para. 43). The statement is a major act of agency, but it is not Kimberly's individual rebellion. Mother and daughter act together. A relationship previously marked by dependency becomes the basis for collective refusal. This moment complicates a generational model in which immigrant parents represent tradition and children represent freedom. Ma has enforced gendered expectations at earlier points, including ideas about proper Chinese-girl behaviour, but she is also the person who ultimately validates Kimberly's break from Paula. She acknowledges the fear involved and says that it is time for them "to make our own way" (Kwok, 2010, Chapter 13, para. 48). The shift demonstrates that cultural obligation can be renegotiated from within family relationships. Nazneen reaches a parallel but distinct point when Chanu decides to return to Bangladesh. For years his plans have structured the family future. His desire to go home is partly a response to racism and disappointment in Britain, but he assumes that wife and daughters will follow. Nazneen eventually refuses. Her decision is not simply a preference for London; it is the first time she claims authority over a life-changing movement that Chanu has treated as his decision.

Her rejection of Karim matters for the same reason. Karim offers a future that appears more passionate and culturally confident than her marriage, but he also imagines that future for her. When Nazneen tells him she does not want to marry him (Ali, 2004, pp. 629-630), she refuses the idea that emancipation requires replacing one man with another. The refusal is an important correction to interpretations of agency centered mainly on sexual transgression. The affair contributes to self-knowledge, but agency becomes clearest when she can end it. The two novels thus link self-definition to control over temporal direction. Chanu and Karim both possess plans for Nazneen; Aunt Paula and, later, Matt possess possible futures for Kimberly. Female agency emerges when the protagonists become participants in deciding what comes next. This does not mean they control every consequence. It means the future can no longer be treated as an obligation already written by someone else.

Decisive Refusals And The Costs Of Choice

The climactic decisions in both novels are often described as evidence of independence, but their emotional complexity makes a relational reading more persuasive. Nazneen's refusal to leave London means separation from Chanu, a man she has come to understand with more sympathy than she had at the beginning. The novel does not turn him into a simple villain. His disappointments, racism experiences, intellectual pretensions, affection for his daughters, and longing for Bangladesh all remain part of the decision's cost. Nazneen chooses differently without needing to deny his humanity. After Chanu leaves, she tells Shahana and Bibi that "Staying or going, it's up to us three" (Ali, 2004, p. 671). The line marks a striking change from her mother's doctrine of fate. Yet it is not a declaration of solitary independence. The pronoun is "us." Nazneen's agency is exercised in relation to her daughters, and their preferences matter. She does not replace patriarchal authority with maternal authority; she opens the decision to a small collective. Kimberly's refusal to abandon Yale is equally clear. When Matt imagines a future together, she tells him, "I can't give Yale up" and asks him instead to come with her (Kwok, 2010, Chapter 13, para. 153). The statement is not a rejection of love. It sets a condition: intimacy cannot require the erasure of the educational future she has struggled to build. In intersectional terms, Yale represents more than personal ambition. It is an exit from sweatshop labour, a route to class mobility, and a means of reducing the family's vulnerability.

The pregnancy plot makes agency more ethically complicated. Kimberly fears that telling Matt will bind him to marriage and Chinatown, and she initially prepares for an abortion. Her reasoning centers on the life she believes she and Matt should choose freely rather than enter through obligation. She tells Ma that she dreamed of them choosing a life together "step by step" and that tying him to her through a baby is not part of that imagined relationship (Kwok, 2010, Chapter 13, para. 224). The decision is shaped by a deep concern about coercion, but it also entails withholding information from Matt. The novel therefore

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does not present agency as morally simple. Ma's response is significant. She first asks whether Kimberly intends to terminate the pregnancy, then assures her, "We'll manage" (Kwok, 2010, Chapter 13, para. 219). Later, after Kimberly changes her mind during the ultrasound, Ma helps raise Jason. The final chapter states that Kimberly and Ma bring him up as "the two women who were his only parents" (Kwok, 2010, Chapter 14, para. 127). The household is not a retreat from ambition. Kimberly defers Yale for a year, works multiple jobs, later graduates with honors, and proceeds to Harvard Medical School (Chapter 14, paras. 129-130). Care and professional agency are made compatible, though only through enormous labour.

This outcome resists two familiar narratives. The first is that motherhood necessarily ends a woman's educational future; the second is that agency requires avoiding dependency. Kimberly's ability to continue depends heavily on Ma. At the same time, Ma's later security depends partly on Kimberly's professional mobility. Their relationship is reciprocal across time, even if it was unequal during Kimberly's childhood. Collins's (2019) emphasis on relationality is therefore particularly apt: power and dependency shift rather than disappear. Nazneen's ending likewise depends on female networks. Razia's friendship, shared work, and practical support make life in London possible after Chanu's departure. The final ice-skating scene is often read as an image of freedom, but its relational context matters: her daughters and Razia bring her to the rink. Agency is socially supported. The scene does not depict an isolated individual finally released from community; it depicts a woman entering a new activity because a different community has formed around her.

Discussion

The comparison suggests that cultural obligation has at least three forms in the novels. The first is normative obligation: expectations about what a good wife, daughter, mother, or culturally respectable woman should do. The second is material obligation: work, money, translation, housing, and childcare responsibilities generated by migration and class position. The third is affective obligation: love, loyalty, gratitude, and the fear of harming people to whom one is attached. These forms overlap, which is why agency cannot be measured simply by whether a protagonist says yes or no to tradition. Nazneen's arranged marriage, domestic labour, and limited education are normative and material at once. Kimberly's factory work and language brokering are material, but they are sustained by affective attachment to Ma and by a moral language of family responsibility. Aunt Paula's power is especially effective because she fuses all three forms: she controls economic resources, claims familial authority, and describes obedience as repayment of kindness. When Ma and Kimberly reject the "life debt," they are not rejecting gratitude; they are rejecting the conversion of gratitude into unlimited control. The same distinction clarifies Nazneen's development. Her early endurance is not simply false consciousness. It provides order, moral meaning, and continuity with her mother's life. What changes is her judgment about whether endurance should govern every situation. By the time she refuses Bangladesh and Karim, she is no longer willing to treat suffering or obedience as proof of virtue. Agency emerges through reinterpretation of values she once accepted absolutely.

This pattern challenges models that identify Westernization with liberation. Nazneen's life in London exposes racism, economic insecurity, and anti-Muslim hostility; Kimberly's life in New York exposes sweatshop labour, poverty, and institutional misunderstanding. The host society supplies resources - schools, legal status, employment opportunities, public institutions - but it also produces constraints. Likewise, diasporic family and community can restrict women while also supplying care, language, memory, solidarity, and survival networks. The novels therefore refuse a moral geography in which one side is culture and the other is freedom. Intersectionality helps explain why the protagonists' agency becomes possible at different moments. Nazneen can refuse Chanu more decisively after she has acquired work experience, friendship, local knowledge, and daughters whose attachments to London align with

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her own. Kimberly can confront Aunt Paula after educational success provides financial aid, institutional recognition, and a viable housing plan. Their choices are not expressions of an abstract will that was always equally available. They become actionable when social positions shift (Bhutto & Ramzan, 2021). This does not reduce agency to resources alone. Both characters make risky choices before complete security exists. Nazneen's early walks, domestic "insurrections," and affair occur before she knows what future is possible. Kimberly takes on translation and educational competition while still working in the factory. Yet material conditions affect the cost and reach of action. A theory of agency that ignores those conditions would turn structural inequality into a matter of personal courage. The comparison also shows the importance of temporal perspective. Obligations that are experienced as burdens at one stage may become chosen commitments later. Kimberly's childhood care for Ma is partly compulsory because the family has no alternative; as an adult, continued intergenerational life with Ma is no longer reducible to compulsion. Nazneen's motherhood initially helps Chanu justify keeping her from college, but her relationship with her daughters later becomes a source of collective decision-making. The meaning of dependency changes when participants gain greater ability to interpret and renegotiate it.

Conclusion

Brick Lane and Girl in Translation portray female agency neither as passive accommodation nor as a clean break from culture. Both novels begin with women carrying obligations that appear larger than individual preference. Nazneen inherits an ethic of fate and enters a marriage in which domestic duty, limited mobility, and motherhood narrow her choices. Kimberly enters a migrant household in which poverty, factory labour, language, and debt make her responsible for adult tasks while she is still a child. These obligations are real, but they are not culturally self-explanatory. They are intensified by migration, class, racism, language, and access to institutions.

Agency develops gradually as the protagonists learn to distinguish responsibility from surrender. Nazneen's small domestic rebellions, paid sewing, friendship with Razia, growing local knowledge, refusal of Karim, and decision to remain in London form a sequence of increasingly consequential acts. Kimberly's language brokering, school achievement, challenge to Aunt Paula's debt claim, refusal to give up Yale, and later combination of motherhood with professional education form another sequence. Neither trajectory is smooth, and neither removes dependence from the women's lives. The study therefore proposes a relational reading of diasporic female agency. Freedom in these novels is not the absence of obligation. It is the capacity to participate in obligations without allowing them to become total claims over identity and future direction. Nazneen remains a mother, friend, Muslim woman, and member of a Bangladeshi diasporic world; Kimberly remains a daughter, Chinese speaker, mother, and participant in an intergenerational household. What changes is their authority to decide how those identities will be lived. Seen in this way, the novels replace the opposition between cultural duty and individual autonomy with a more difficult question: under what conditions can responsibility be chosen, revised, or refused? Their answer is grounded in social relations. Agency becomes possible through income, education, language, friendship, institutional access, and family alliances, but it also requires interpretive change - the recognition that inherited obligations are not beyond judgment. Diasporic womanhood is therefore negotiated in the space between care and self-definition, where belonging persists but no longer functions as a command to surrender the future.

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