
NEGOTIATION OF UN/BELONGINGNESS IN THE “(IMAGINED) HOMELANDS” FROM A TRANSNATIONAL, SOUTH ASIAN, BROWN WOMAN’S PERSPECTIVE: A CASE STUDY OF TASLIMA NASREEN’S *FRENCH LOVER*

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ABSTRACT

Stepping beyond the geographical denotation, “border” has become a topic of discussion in transnational studies from the late twentieth century and continues to challenge the established notion of a nation-state. The rhetoric of border is referred to as “Borderline”, “Borderlands” and the “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” in *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) by the Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa in which Anzaldúa signals the difference between the geographical and metaphorical significance of the frontier. The symbolic meaning expressed in the text allows transnational feminists to enter into a new discourse in order to re-think terms such as nation, homeland and border from a transnational and feminist perspective. This paper aims to look into the negotiation of un/belongingness of a South Asian, transnational brown woman in the “imagined homelands” through transnational and feminist approaches. The study is based on the novel *French Lover* (2002), written by Taslima Nasreen. The term “imagined homeland” is an experiment in this piece of research but, at the same time, it explains the meaning of the space that this term tries to explore. These “imagined homelands” are not merely spatial homelands, i.e. lands of origin or lands of residence. Instead, the referred homelands in question are metaphorically constructed on the ideology of collective groups in a “borderless” and “post-national” world. The paper will critically examine the construction of different “imagined homelands”, referring to them as “global feminist group” and “brown community”.

KEYWORDS: Taslima Nasreen; South Asian Woman; Transnationalism; Homeland; Nation; Nationalism

RESUMEN *Negociando la (no) pertenencia en la «patria (imaginada)» desde la perspectiva transnacional de una mujer de color surasiática: estudio de caso sobre la novela French Lover, de Taslima Nasreen*

Frontera, más allá de su sentido geográfico, ha llegado a ser un tema de debate en los estudios transnacionales a partir de finales del siglo veinte. Este debate constantemente desafía la noción establecida de la nación y estado. Gloria Anzaldúa, una feminista Chicana, menciona la retórica de frontera como “Borderline”, “Borderlands” y “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” en su libro *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) donde ella diferencia el sentido geográfico y metafórico de la frontera. El sentido simbólico en este libro permite las feministas transnacionales a entrar en nuevo discurso a revisar los términos como nación, patria y frontera en su narrativa transnacional y feminista.

El presente ensayo enfocará en la negociación de pertenencia y no-pertenencia de una mujer de color, surasiática y transnacional en las “patrias imaginadas” a través de la teoría transnacional y feminista. El ensayo está basado sobre el caso de estudio de una novela *French Lover* (2002) escrita por Taslima

Nasreen. En este ensayo, el término “la patria imaginada” es un experimento pero, al mismo momento, explica el significado del espacio de que se trata. Estas “patrias imaginadas” no son meramente las patrias físicas como la de origen o de residencia. Al contrario, se trata de las patrias construidas por la ideología del colectivo en un mundo “sin frontera” o mundo “pos-nacional”. Al fin, el ensayo analizará críticamente la construcción de diferentes “patrias imaginadas” por ejemplo el “feminismo global” y el “comunismo de surasiáticos” a través del caso de estudio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Taslima Nasreen, Mujer Surasiática, Transnacionalismo, Patria, Nación, Nacionalismo.

Introduction

Nilanjana moves to Europe (France) from Asia (India) with her husband in the last decade of the twentieth century. One day, a few months after she has moved to Paris, she is sitting alone looking outside the window of her apartment, when a friend asks her over the phone:

So what are your plans? Are you going back?

Nila asks ‘where’?

Where else? To your land?

Do I have a land of my own? If your own land spells shelter, security, peace and joy, India is not my land.

Danielle said, ‘then stay here. Didn't you once say everyone has two motherlands, one of his own and the other France?’

Do women ever have a land of their own or a motherland? I do not think so. (Nasreen, 2002: 291-92)

Nilanjana, the protagonist of the novel *French Lover* (2002), changes her home and homeland after her marriage. The moment she touches the other land and home, her new life begins which both connects and disconnects her from the home and homeland which she has left behind. When she crosses the border from India to France, her Third World identity, her colour, her gender and her nationality collide with a different colour, religion and European identity. As a result, she stands on the threshold of two homelands, physically and metaphorically: between the land of origin and the land of residence, between the metaphorical spaces of two different colours, nationalities and religions.

Taslima Nasreen (1962-) was born in East Pakistan, which later became an independent country, Bangladesh. A South Asian, Muslim, feminist writer, Nasreen is viewed as a controversial figure in Indian and Bangladeshi political writing because of the themes on which she has chosen to

write. *Lajja* (1993), Nasreen's groundbreaking book, is a rallying call in Bangladeshi feminist writing and represents many raped, wounded and silenced women (Hindu and Muslim). Her writing, on the one hand, elevated her to the stage of appreciation while, on the other, it brought her down and forced her to flee Bangladesh for her life after a *fatwa* was brought against her by the Islamic fundamentalists of Bangladesh and India in 1994. She is now an exiled, single, Bangladeshi, Muslim woman who, until, 2004, lived in Europe; in fact, she holds Swedish citizenship but has since returned to South Asia in search of belongingness and closeness to Bangla culture. *French Lover*, written in 2001 in Bangla, is a novel in which Nasreen, perhaps, shares some of her experiences of living in her homeland and a foreign land. In her narrative, Nasreen also questions the significance of "homeland" for a woman.

In the novel, Nasreen presents Nilanjana as an individual of the diaspora, who migrates to another country with her male companion. She does not have any economic or political intention regarding the movement, but she does have the social responsibility to be with her husband. Her displacement is arranged between others (father and husband) wherein she does not choose the land where she goes, neither the man with whom she lives. Instead, the "home/land" picks her.

The displacement of Nilanjana from one "homeland" to another leads to a debate on the significance of "homeland" for her, considering her gender, her colour, her religion and her Third World identity. Indeed, the debate goes beyond the spatial dimension to a metaphorical discussion on the significance of homeland. For instance, Avtar Brah, a transnational, brown writer presents the politics of Diaspora through her own experience. She says that she has had "homes" in four out of five continents: Asia, Africa, America and Europe, and defines the term in her book *Cartographies of Diaspora* as:

The concept of home is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion and exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation "belonging". As Gilroy suggests, it is simultaneously about roots and routes. (Brah, 1996: 192)

According to Brah, Paul Gilroy suggests the importance of the tension between "roots" and "routes" in the study of identity. Taking into account the definition given by Brah, it is pertinent to understand the "roots" and "routes" of a South Asian, transnational, brown woman and the social and political turmoil she goes through, which cause her movement and subsequently,

constitute her identity. Gilroy also states, “The routes keep disestablishing the identity and re-creating it at every instant” (1993: 133). Therefore, in this study, the questions arise: how does the process of inclusion and exclusion take place in the “homelands” when it is a question of a transnational, brown woman like Nilanjana is concerned? How do her roots and routes decide her “homeland”? To answer these questions, it is essential to discuss the term “homeland”, which also constitutes the concept of “imagined homelands” in this study. In this regard, the paper will first deliberate on the terms nation and nationalism, considered as the basis for the construction of the idea of “homeland” and “imagined homeland” as far as postcolonial and transnational theorists are concerned. The subsequent section will critically analyse the “imagined homelands” presented in the novel and the position of the protagonist in these “imagined homelands”.

From Nation to an “(Imagined) Homeland”: A Theoretical Analysis

Nation, as Benedict Anderson rightly says, is an “imagined community”. He claims that the nation and state are influenced, underpinned and even founded by the ideas rooted in the enlightenment and liberalism of the West, that is, “modernity”. He attributes the rise of nationalism to the historical condition of the late eighteenth century such as the development of certain cultural artefacts: print technology and colonialism (1983: 49). Hence nationalism and nation-ness spread among the people who were present within national boundaries as well in colonies. As a consequence, the colonial countries were flooded with the “modern” European ideas of nationalism.

In *Imagined Communities* (1983), Anderson mostly discusses the European nationalism that travelled from imperialist countries to their colonial states, whereas an Indian philosopher Partha Chatterjee emphasises that the nation and state construction is an old phenomenon and is of two different typologies: “Civic” and “Ethnic”. For Chatterjee, the “civic” emerged in Western Europe (France and England, which was later followed by other Western European countries) and “ethnic” flourished in Eastern Europe and Asia, and also in Africa and Latin America (Chatterjee, 1986: 1). Chatterjee elaborates that the civic model seems a rational-liberal and progressive, a legal-political community that seeks to assure equality among its subjects and

identification with a common culture. By contrast, the ethnic conception of the nation is complex, impure and deviant, and emphasises a common descent and ties based on kinship, vernacular languages, customs, and traditions (Chatterjee, 1986: 1-3).

Chatterjee agrees that in both the civic and ethnic typologies, nationalism could be cultural or ethical. Finally, Chatterjee asserts that the Western European experience (together with print technology and the colonial system of power) has exerted its dominating influence on the other's conception of the nation. Thus, Eastern nationalism measured the backwardness of their nations regarding certain global standards set by the advanced nations of Western Europe, and Eastern nationalism subsequently became imitative (Chatterjee, 1986: 3).

Chatterjee critically writes that although the Western nationalism of modernity is defined as a "rational and liberal ideological framework", that is not how nationalism has made its presence felt in much of colonial and recent history (Chatterjee, 1986: 3). In that respect, Anderson also says that the "motherland" was a domain of "dis/interested love and solidarity" that demanded loyalty, patriotic inclination, and self-sacrificing love from its colonial other (Anderson, 1983: 144). "It was astonishing to see the colonised people who had every reason to feel hatred for their imperialist rulers, the element of hatred was insignificant..." (Anderson, 1983: 141).

Furthermore, postcolonial and transnational critics Masao Miyoshi and Khachig Tölölyan, have focused on similar concerns, suggesting that in a post-colonial period, the emphasis has shifted from the bounded spatial entities toward "a borderless world" (Masao, 1993: 1). Even though it is true that the transnational movement and formation of diaspora is the counter-narrative of the border of the nation and state, at the same time, the postcolonial critics see the idea of nationalism as colonialism's greatest gift of modernity to the colonies and as a long-lived ideological mainstay in a "borderless" globalized world (Tölölyan, 1991: 7; Masao, 1993:1). Stuart Hall also argues that the destabilization of the formation of frontier and boundaries engendered by postmodernity can result in the formation of "exclusivist and defensive enclaves." Such rediscoveries of identity can function as forms of fundamentalism, leading to local ethnicities that are as "dangerous as national ones" (Hall, 1991: 36).

Taking modernity as a cue, Arjun Appadurai focuses on electronic mediation and mass migration in the times of globalisation in his work *Modernity at Large* (1996). He argues that “print capitalism” in this globalised world is accompanied by “electronic capitalism”, which can have similar and even more powerful effects. (Appadurai, 1996: 8). The transformation of the imagination is not only a cultural fact, but it is also deeply connected to politics through the new ways in which individual attachments, interests and aspirations increasingly crosscut those of the nation-state (Appadurai, 1996: 10).

Consequently, nationalism is a causal and contributing factor to the modern system of the nation. Since colonial times, nationalism has not been limited to the physical boundaries of the nation; it has spread beyond its boundaries through colonialism, print capitalism or electronic capitalism (Anderson, 1983; Chatterjee, 1986; Miyoshi, 1991; Tölölyan, 1991; Appadurai, 1996). Thus, the modern concept of nation and nationalism continues to form different “imagined communities” beyond geographical boundaries in a “borderless” globalised world. In the next section, we will continue to discuss about the term “imagined homelands” and their construction in a “borderless world”.

“Imagined Homeland”- A Critical Analysis.

Referring to the text of Nasreen, it is possible to claim that nationalism, a by-product of the nation, goes beyond a given territorial space and constructs many “imagined communities” which could preferably be called “imagined homelands”. From the transnational perspective, the one who deterritorialises from one place to another constructs the “imaginary homeland” (Rushdie, 1991: 1) or creates a “home away from home” (Clifford, 1994: 308). For instance, Salman Rushdie, a diaspora writer, creates “imaginary homelands” with his fragmented memories and nostalgia. Analogously, James Clifford talks about the homes which the diaspora population constructs in a faraway new land. The “imagined homelands” that have been referred to in this study have similar characteristics to those which Salman Rushdie and James Clifford discuss. Likewise, these homelands go beyond national territorial boundaries and beyond the duality of the land of origin and residence. However, they are not spatial and are constructed on the ideologies of its creators (collective) rather than memories. In the following paragraphs, we will focus on the term “imagined homelands”.

In *Imagined Communities* (1983) Anderson defines a nation as an “imagined community”, and he states it is imagined because most of the fellow members who live within its boundaries never meet or know each other, yet in the minds of each the image of communion exists (1983: 6-7). Zygmunt Bauman expresses a community as imagined because “that community is not available to us, but we wish to have it”, “it is different from the existing community” and “it is even more alluring” (2001: 4). Likewise, Appadurai talks about “imaginary landscapes” in the post-national world (1996: 31), and these imagined-imaginary landscapes are produced and constructed through different “scapes” as Appadurai mentions (ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape, mediascape, and ideoscape). Hence, “it is no longer mere fantasy, no longer simple escape, no longer elite pastime, and no longer mere contemplation, the imagination has become an organised social practice, and is the key component of the new global order” (Appadurai, 1996: 31). In summary, a community is imagined because, although its members do not know each other, they can recognise each other as members of the same ideological group. It is also “imagined” because, perhaps, there is an illusion with regard to creating a “faraway utopian space”; it is imagined because it is a collective ideological creation, which moves beyond the territory through the different “scapes”.

Moreover, Anderson links the idea of community to that of modern nationhood and Bauman goes beyond the nation and talks about the imagined communities based on the same ideology of the nation in different forms referring to them as liquid modernity (2000). Bauman asserts that the community is a space and that an “imagined community” is a “paradise lost, or paradise still hoped to be found” where everything is “warm and good” (Bauman, 2001: 3). Bauman adds that these communities propose security, confidence, warmth and cosiness based on a demand for freedom, loyalty, selfless love and hatred for others (Bauman, 2001: 4). Anderson, Bauman and Appadurai are all convinced that the “imagined communities” construct imagined “spaces” and conceive that could be far away and unreal. Critics like them have helped us to formulate the idea of “imagined homelands”. They are intentionally called “homeland” in this paper because it is a space created by the communities where the “homeliness” of the homeland is significant, and that homeliness is created by different ideologies. The ideologies of homeliness are based on different factors such as religion, sexuality, gender, colour, nationality, age or caste, which allure their respective subjects and create the identity of a collective group. These “imagined

homelands” are created by “some” for “some” and also for “others”, where the other is forced to believe in the ideology of homeliness. Hence, within such imagined homelands, dis/interested love and sacrifice are demanded from others.

Furthermore, these “imagined homelands” decide their laws and rules of inclusion and exclusion: they create their homeland as well as their “imagined boundaries.” The process of inclusion and exclusion is based on what Butler and Spivak have critically explained in their book *Who Sings the Nation-State?* According to them, there is not a complete exclusion, but “others” are excluded in “the mode of certain containment, where “other” is not outside of politics” (2007: 5). Bauman describes the double function of those who are excluded. He says that assimilation is to strip ““others’ of their otherness, to make them indistinguishable from the rest of the nation’s body, to digest them completely and dissolve their idiosyncrasy in the uniform compound of national identity” (Bauman, 2001: 93). The stratagem of exclusion of the insoluble part of the population has a double function to perform- as a weapon to separate the group or categories found to be too alien or to whip up more enthusiasm for assimilation among the lax, the double-minded (Bauman, 2001: 93).

The Case of Nilanjana: Caught Between “Imagined Homelands”

Nilanjana, an educated twenty-seven-year-old girl, acquires her knowledge of the world from the books she reads, and she comes to Paris curious to see the “new land”. However, she is not allowed to go out and work, so she chooses to hide her work from her husband. In her workplace, Nilanjana gets to know Danielle, a French lesbian feminist and she comes closer to her and shares her life issues with her, and subsequently, Danielle introduces her to a group of middle-class European feminist women in Paris. In that feminist group, her belonging to a Third World nation is associated with the “oriental ideas” of extreme poverty, hunger and innocence. Moreover, they look upon her as a symbol of the “Third World (Indian) woman” who is helpless, oppressed and frequently beaten up by her husband (Nasreen, 2002: 88-99; Mohanty, 2003: 19). At the same time, Nasreen demonstrates the fetishisation of her protagonist by her French

boyfriend as a “brown beauty” and “mystery woman” at their first meeting (Nasreen, 2002: 168-170).

These two different positions of a Third World, brown woman, caught in a hierarchical system, remind us of Sara Ahmed’s analysis of the “fetishisation of strangers” where she uses the metaphor of “strangers” for migrants. She suggests that the process of fetishisation involves, not only the displacement of social relations on to an object but the transformation of fantasies into figures (Ahmed, 2000: 5). She also asserts that the stranger becomes a figure through proximity: the stranger’s body cannot be reified as the distant body anymore. Hence, a stranger is no longer recognised as “outside” the community or as an “outsider” enemy within the community rather an “outsider inside” the community (Ahmed, 2000: 21).

The white French feminists in the novel ask Nilanjana many questions but their answers are already assumed, and her voice often goes unheard (Nasreen, 2002: 126-127). For instance, “Bindi” which is a cultural symbol of most of the South Asian countries, is assumed to be a “permanent tattoo on Indian married women’s foreheads”, “every Indian woman who separates from her husband has been physically tortured by her man” and “women jump into their husband pyre as Sati” (Nasreen, 2002: 123-24). In one scene, Nilanjana is sitting in front of a camera, she has the microphone, questions are asked, but her answers are unheard: her answers are not worth recording. She eventually realises that the feminist interviewer is not happy with her answers and the interviewer says “it was the best platform to let the world know how women are deprived and discriminated against in the Third World” (Nasreen, 2002: 127).

With these examples, Nasreen focuses on the idea of feminism that a Third World, educated woman encounters on a global level where she is on the borderline between inclusion and exclusion. At that borderline, she does not have a voice of her own. So, the question in this case study arises, “Can a Third World, brown woman speak?” Nilanjana speaks but her answers are not heard, or she is not expected to answer. Ann Russo claims that dominant Western philosophies choose to “speak for” others and others are meant to listen. They are allowed to speak to the point where they do not lose their authoritative position of speech because listening is the other’s practice (Russo, 2013: 35). The answers are supposed to be entertaining for the European audience. Being a migrant woman, Nilanjana is in a “double bind” where she has to

answer according to the white French high-class women's expectation, or her answer, in any case, is not even worth recording. In this way, Nilanjana becomes part of French feminist discourse, but only when her subjectivity and her body are used as props.

Recalling Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Nasreen critically shows that Nilanjana, as a Third World woman, "needs to be saved by the occidental white privileged class women" from brown men. Brown women continue to be treated as the "white women's burden". Consequently, in saving other women, the same colonial game of protector and protected is played out. Moreover, it is vital here to remember Bauman's comments, when he says that the one who is protected has to be at the other side, giving up the freedom and voice to assimilate with others (Bauman, 2001: 4). This colonial division is portrayed in the novel with even more potency when the "foreign" for French women (France) is not other European countries, that is, women who are "German, Swiss or Belgian" (Nasreen, 2002: 126). Instead, "foreign" women come from Asia, Africa and Latin America. The differentiation among these groups as European women and other women reconstructs the colonial difference between Europe and the Third World as the "West" and the "rest." To return to *French Lover*, despite Nilanjana's complex positioning, she is essentialised and racialised as the "other" within the "global feminist group". In this brand of feminism, the one who is white and well-dressed with language capability stands at one end, and the other is racialised and gendered as a "Third World brown woman" - an outsider inside.

On the one hand, Nasreen positions Nilanjana's local perspective of a woman's identity contrast to "global feminism". On the other, she presents the continuous engagement of Nilanjana with the South Asian community (Indians and Bangladeshis) living in Paris and India. Throughout the novel, Nilanjana meets Indian friends of her husband, and Bangladeshi immigrants working in her husband's restaurants. Among them, Nasreen shows the differences of class and religion. She also demonstrates the complex relativity of marginalisation and privileges among South Asian women such as Nilanjana's mother, Nilanjana's neighbour, Mithoo, and Nilanjana's relative living in the Paris community. These women serve to underline the fact that there is an inherent difference even among women belonging to the Third World (South Asia). The difference among transnational women, as shown in the novel, is of class within religion and the region

from where they come. Nasreen even mentions in her novel the institutionalisation of the caste system in India. However, she does not discuss the caste further when Nilanjana crosses the border.

Considering the above, Nasreen especially focuses on the essentialisation of Nilanjana's body within the male-dominated Indian diaspora community in Paris and India. For instance, her husband does not allow her to go out of the house, to talk with French women or to have a friendship with them. He shows his disapproval when her French friend Danielle comes home (2002: 76-78). Similarly, when she leaves her husband's home and tries to live in her father's home, she is not welcomed there. Her father tells her: "If you want to stay in this society, you have to do what everyone approves. Either you go back to Paris, or, kill yourself and let us off" (2002: 155). Indeed, she has to play a secondary role as a dutiful daughter and serving wife. If she does not live on their terms, she has to hang herself. In this regard, Susan Strehle compares the structure of the home to the "imperialist philosophies of nation construct". She says that home defines "settling down" (which could be unsatisfactory), "marriage", stability and separation from the outer world and it is a smaller part of a bigger patriarchal space, i.e. nation. It emerges in the valorisation of accomplished "housewifery", which involves managing resources that is not your own (Strehle, 1998: 3-12). Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis go further to say that nation and women include a political economy that is related to the production, distribution, consumption and circulation of discourses. They write "Women are a special focus of the state where they have a specific role of human reproduction for ethnic collectivities and reproduction of ideologies" (F Anthias and Yuval Davis, 1989: 7). Nilanjana is also asked to play the role of a wife who settles down losing her own identity and become a submissive member of a patriarchal home/land and reproducing the same ideology.

Interestingly Nilanjana steps out of the home and is not ready to sacrifice herself as daughter and wife. At that point, Nilanjana leaves her husband and her father behind, but Nilanjana is not wholly excluded from the patriarchal society where she belongs; instead, her exclusion is constructed as Spivak, Butler and Bauman explain in their analysis. Take for example the scene where Nilanjana after leaving her husband's and father's houses stays with one of the Indian families in Paris, where she is raped:

Sunil quickly dressed and then noticed the tears rolling down and wetting her pillow.
‘Are you crying?’ Sunil wiped her tears and said, “Why are you crying?”
---Ifeel my brother, Nikhil, just raped me. (200)

Sunil knows that she has left her husband, and her father has not accepted her in his house. In the eyes of Sunil, Nilanjana is “homeless” without a husband or father, and without them, she is a “no man’s woman”. Nilanjana is excluded from the Indian community living in Paris by those who believe that “A woman who deserts her husband is a fallen woman, she is a slut, and lusty men would jump on her in no time at all” (Nasreen, 2002: 176). To remain a part of the community she needs to be a submissive companion of her male counterpart. Hence, for Nilanjana there remain only two options, i.e. either she stays in the house as a mother/ wife or goes out as a prostitute to serve the patriarchal society.

Thus, Nilanjana is not included in the community of brown men as a brown woman; instead, she is invited as a brown man’s wife. In the novel, these two groups: the “global feminist group” and the “brown community” follow similar nationalist ideologies which go beyond geographical boundaries and territorial spaces. Within these two situations, as a Third World, transnational, brown woman, Nilanjana must remain as either the sexualised or racialised “other”. These “imagined homelands” promise her security and protection by demanding the loss of her subjectivity and her eligibility for participation. Here it is appropriate to quote Hall when he asks “How can one avoid becoming trapped in the place from which one begins to speak? What seems like a necessary point of enunciation, a rediscovery of place, a past, a context, a grounding, can become exclusive, limiting, closed and essentialised (Hall, 1991: 38).

Un/belongingness within the “Imagined Homelands”

Nilanjana finds herself in a position where her loyalty is being questioned on both sides; she is expected to choose between the ideological homelands, and to show her complete faith. She is asked to give up her freedom and in these cases “dis/interested love and sacrifice become significant in these domains” (Anderson, 1983: 144). Despite her sacrifice, she is “othered” in the “imagined homelands” in a way what Sara Ahmed calls an “outsider inside” (Ahmed, 2000:

10). Likewise, Butler and Spivak explain an outsider inside as “those who effectively become stateless, but are still under the control of power” (Butler & Spivak, 2000: 8).

The reaction of Nilanjana against both sides, brings allegations to her, on the one hand, in the patriarchal society when she goes against her father and her husband (Nilanjana is thrown out, asking her to “hang yourself”). She is accused of “being whitened” by her husband when she invites her French friends. On the other hand, her French friends accuse her of being submissive to her husband for not going against the “oppression of brown men to brown women”. In both cases, Nilanjana is either sexualised or racialised. She is demanded to be obedient, selfless and loyal at the cost of losing her half-identity either of a woman or a brown. Nilanjana stays in the position of confusion of her belongingness and un-belongingness in these “imagined homelands.” She is treated as a “traitor” to these constructed “imagined homelands,” and her “in-betweenness” becomes a taboo.

This situation of in-betweenness is painful because of the vulnerability of struggling between un/belongingness, where her ambiguity questions her loyalty and her identity. There is a fear inside her of being abandoned, the accusations of being faulty and damaged, or of being unacceptable. Anzaldúa states that the one who stands at this situation of in-betweenness is blocked, immobilized; he/she cannot move forward or backwards. To avoid the rejection, some conform to the values of these “imagined homelands”, and push the unacceptable parts of their identity into the shadow and try to move across both sides (1987: 20). Nasreen has depicted women who have succumbed to “imagined homelands” through her protagonist. For instance, Mithoo commits suicide because of what is considered “undesirable” in the patriarchal system, that is, her dark skin and slowly waning youth. Nilanjana’s mother submits herself to the patriarchal attitude of her husband. They are the “other” of these “imagined homelands” and are burdened with dis/interested love and solidarity. These women and the protagonist herself are used for the “double function” of inclusion and exclusion of what Bauman explains (Bauman, 2001: 93). Hence, the “in-betweenness” becomes a situation of conflict between inside struggle and outside norms where some of us submit to the outside norms and kill the inside struggle. Anzaldúa, as an in-betweener herself, expresses the pain of her “in-betweenness” in one of her poems “To live in the Borderlands means you”:

You are the battleground
Where enemies are kin to each other,
You are at home, a stranger,
The volley of shots have shattered the true
You are wounded, lost in action
Dead, fighting back. (Anzaldúa, 1987: 194)

Anzaldúa uses the terms such as “stranger at home”, “shattered”, “wounded”, “lost in action” and “dead” to describe her inbetweenness. Nasreen also presents her character as the one who stands in such a position, where she is a stranger in her father’s and husband’s home; she is a stranger in the global feminist group and brown community; she is wounded, shattered and raped. However, unlike Mithoo and her mother, Nilanjana chooses another route “to fight back”. As Anzaldúa states “Some of us take another route. We try to make ourselves conscious of the shadow-beast, we see and try to wake up the shadow beast inside us” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 20). Her stand at the in-between position is her movement towards the consciousness of her “othered” identity.

Towards a Conclusion

Nilanjana’s answer “I do not think so...” to the question “Do women have a country of their own?” challenges the reader to rethink transnational studies from the perspective of a Third World, brown woman. It shows her belonging and un-belonging to (n)either side, where she has to be divided and categorised by her color and gender. It also reflects her inability to speak in gendered and racialised spaces, i.e. “death”, and, at the same time, her answer shows her consciousness of being in an in-between position; and her consciousness of being the “other” and her search for her homeland: “fighting back”. Nilanjana leaves her husband’s house and does not stay with her father; she moves out of Sunil’s home after he rapes her. She continues her search and keeps surmounting all the hurdles. Finally, she realises that “there is no home/land for a woman”. At that point, she shows her double critical position: in opposition to the racist (white) feminist group, while, at the same time, she targets the patriarchal brown community. In this regard, Nasreen helps to dilute this dichotomy of the homelands by creating a space between them. This position of Nilanjana in the novel exhibits the consciousness of an inbetweenner which Anzaldúa terms as “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza”, particularly where she states:

This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out the synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness- a mestiza consciousness. (80)

As far as the novel is concerned, being in the border space does not mean that the racialisation and sexualisation of the body end, now she has the consciousness of being in an in-between position, her bordered identity, her multi-identity. It becomes a space of negotiation, a space of rejecting the false need to fix herself within the boundaries of “imagined homelands”, i.e. with “global feminist group” or “brown community”. Nilanjana’s statement “there is no country for women” is a clear declaration of her knowledge that if she is “othered” due to her sex, gender, caste and ethnic color in her country, then she is also racially and sexually “othered” in the other’s country. “Tell me, is there a good place on this earth? Where would you say there is a total safety? There is poverty, sorrow and superstition there, as it is here. This country has racism, so does India. Women are raped in Calcutta, as they are here” (Nasreen, 2002: 293). Hence, the choice of living in Paris does not end her problems; she will continue to experience the social exclusion of her sex, gender, color, and class. However, although it becomes a space of continuity, it also becomes one of transition.

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