



Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies

**(Dis)locating Homeland:**

**“In-betweeness” in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* and Taslima Nasreen’s *French Lover*.**

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**Submitted to University de Granada, Spain**

**Instituto Universitario de Investigación de**

**Estudios de las mujeres y de Género**

**2018**



**UNIVERSIDAD  
DE GRANADA**



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## **Abstract**

This paper relies on an analytical reading of the novels *French Lover* (2002) and *Brick Lane* (2004), written by Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali respectively, to review the meaning of homeland from the perspective of Third World, transnational, South Asian brown women. Fundamentally, using the framework of feminist, postcolonial, and transnational theory, the above mentioned literary texts are studied alongside the theoretical concepts of the “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” and “Coatlicue State” proposed in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) through the comparative analytical approach. This paper will explore a debate which ranges from the modern concept of the nation to the production of “imagined homelands” at a transnational level, which is based on the same nationalist theory. It will examine the “othered” position of the women within and in-between these “imagined homelands.” Furthermore, the research will look into the mechanism of survival adopted by transnational, South Asian, brown women within/in-between these “imagined homelands,” who view silence as their strategy to move from the position of the “other” to the “conscious other.” Finally, it will explore an alternative idea of homeland as an “in-betweeness” which is proposed in the novels: “border(home)land” opposed to “imagined homelands.”

*Keywords:* Homeland, nation, in-betweeness, South Asian Women, transnationalism, silence.

## **Resumen**

Esta tesina analiza las novelas *French Lover* (2002) de Taslima Nasreen y *Brick Lane* (2004) de Monica Ali con la finalidad de examinar el significado de patria (homeland) desde la perspectiva de las mujeres de color transnacionales que vienen del sur de Asia a vivir en Europa. Usando principalmente teorías feministas, poscoloniales y transnacionales, los textos literarios mencionados anteriormente se estudian junto con los conceptos teóricos “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” y “Coatlicue State,” que propone Gloria Anzaldúa en su libro *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), a través de la metodología comparativa analítica. En este contexto, el trabajo explorará un debate que abarca desde el concepto moderno de la nación y nacionalismo hasta la producción de “patria imaginaria” (“imagined homeland”) a nivel transnacional, que también se basa en la misma teoría nacionalista. Además, examinará la posición de la “otra” de las mujeres dentro y entre estas “patrias imaginarias.” La investigación observará el mecanismo de supervivencia adoptado por las mujeres dentro y entre estas “patrias imaginarias,” que ven el silencio como su estrategia para pasar de la posición de la “otra” a la “otra consciente.” Finalmente, explorará una idea alternativa de “patria” como un “in-betweeness” que se propone en las novelas: “border(home)land” opuesta a “patrias imaginarias.”

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मेरी दादी, जो हमेशा हमको आगे चलते रहने को कहती थी! मेरी मम्मी, तुमको बहुत धन्यवाद क्योंकि तुम कभी मेरा साथ नहीं छोड़ी चाहे हम तुम्हारे पास हो या दूर! आप दोनों के वजह से ही हमको लड़ने का ताकत मिलता है! इस काम को लिखने के हर पल में हम आप दोनों के बारे में सोचे, जैसे एक बहुत दूर है लेकिन फिर भी मेरी सोच में जिंदा है और मम्मी तुम इंडिया में हो लेकिन तुम्हारा चेहरा देखना ही हमको सबसे ज्यादा खुशी देता है! हम माफ़ी भी मांगते हैं तुमसे क्योंकि तुम हमको हमेशा याद करती हो और हम इतने दूर हैं की तुमसे मिल नहीं पाते!

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# **1. Introduction**

The act of writing is the act of making soul, alchemy. (Anzaldúa, 2009, 28)

## **1.1. From Personal to Political Reading**

Nilanjana and Nazneen moved to Europe (namely France and England), in the last decade of the twentieth century, after their marriage. Nilanjana came from India to live in Paris, whereas Nazneen left Bangladesh and moved to London. One day while Nilanjana was looking outside the window of her apartment in Paris, her friend asked her:

So what are your plans? Are you going back?

Nila asked ‘where’?

Where else? To your land?

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

Nazneen came to London after her marriage when she was seventeen years old, and she is now the mother of two girls. One day her youngest daughter held her hand and asked her something similar:

Do you want to go?

Nazneen told the girls the story of “How You were Left to Your Fate.” She began with the words I was a stillborn child, and she ended with that was God’s will.

‘You did not answer. It was not an answer.’

‘It was my answer,’ said Nazneen. (Ali, 2004, 216-217)

I met Nilanjana and Nazneen while I was living away from my country, India; I was attracted to them and got to know them. They narrated their lives, and in their narration, I started unravelling my life. I did not meet them on the streets in any physical world but in works of fiction. They are the female characters of the fiction novels *French Lover* (2002) and *Brick Lane* (2004) by the diaspora writers Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali respectively. In these works, Nilanjana and Nazneen crossed the border and somehow stood at that position where they had to decide their “homeland.” While I was reading these novels, I started living their lives thinking that I was Nilanjana or Nazneen. Whenever I referred these novels to my friends, they enquired about me - “was that my story?” -I was not Nilanjana or Nazneen, but in some way or another I had associated myself with them.

I was twenty-six when I moved to Granada to do a master’s course in Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Granada in the south of Spain. It was the first time that I moved away my country. I felt different, perhaps, because my identity had changed when I crossed the border. I did not see myself only as a “woman,” other aspects became evident to my identity(ies) such as my brown color, my Indian look, my broken accent in Andalusian Spanish, and my dressing style. I did not notice these aspects in me when I was in India, but these aspects became significant on the other side of the border. That is why, in the streets of Granada, I felt “different” when others looked at me and also when I looked at myself in the crowd. At the same time, among *granadinos*, who have an exotic image of India, I represented the “coolness” of yoga, spirituality, and Indian goddesses. The global and the local presence of my identity(ies) confused my position between privileges and marginalizations. Should I feel privileged as an Indian carrying the coolness of “my country” or feel the “other” among others?

Indeed, I crossed the international border and travelled eighteen hours on a flight to reach Spain in 2016. Nonetheless, I started crossing many boundaries, borders and territories since I was seventeen. The first time I traversed the border of my home was not a happy departure. I left my home/land and never returned the “same” or the home/land never remained the “same”.<sup>1</sup> From that moment, I continued crossing borders. However, my roots were always with me: I felt that “I am a turtle and I carry my ‘home’ wherever I go” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 21). In crossing linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious, state, and national boundaries from Khagaria (Bihar) to New Delhi to Nawada (Bihar) to Vellore (Tamil Nadu), Granada (Spain) and Bologna (Italy), I carried different stories which became my memories.<sup>2</sup> While writing this thesis and reading the novels mentioned above, I re-lived those memories of pain, cry and anxiety. For instance, I cried when I remembered the horror of a seven-year-old girl who was sexually exploited by her family relative, I lived the fear of a 17 years old girl whose parents were planning her marriage, I passed through the apprehension about leaving the home behind, I lived the segregation of caste and class distinction, and suffered from the lack of opportunity to speak for not being an “English speaker.”

Currently, I live in Granada, and as a part of the GEMMA programme at Granada, I meet new feminists and new feminisms almost every day. Sometimes we argue with each other, and other times we laugh together. With some, I share my political issues, and with others, I share my life. GEMMA has taught me the process of unlearning and learning in feminism(s); it became a space where I understood the complexity and diversity of feminism(s) at the global

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<sup>1</sup> Here, I am using the term home/land to refer to home and homeland at the same time. Basically, home as smaller space and homeland which is larger but in this case it is referred to a state inside the nation, the state where I “belong” to.

<sup>2</sup> Khagaria (Bihar) is a small district where I was born. New Delhi is the capital of India where I studied after my schooling. Nawada is a small district in Bihar in India where I got married and then I lived with my husband in Vellore in Tamil Nadu. I came to Granada in September 2016 and then moved to Bologna for six months and again came to Granada to complete my master’s.

level. However, within that, sometimes I have found it difficult to position my “local stories” as an Indian girl when the majority of the classroom originates from Latin America and Europe. Of course, there was still a diversity among them too, however, because of my colonial background my Latin American friends interpellated me as a part of a “colonial other” as a “we”. They presented themselves as my “protector”: should I feel the “sisterhood” with Latin American feminists for being “protected” by them from the “others”?

While reading the novels mentioned above, I crossed psychic borders where I encountered many questions, I kept crossing the border between my past and present, my memories and nostalgia, and my experiences. When I read their conversations, I stopped and tried to answer my questions “Do I want to go back?” or “Where do I belong?” I felt I was standing in the same situation where I saw Nilanjana and Nazneen: a space of internal conflict. Hence the personal reading of these three individual lives opens up a political discussion for me to understand the answers of these women, together with mine.

## **1.2. Structure of this Thesis**

Considering the above discussion, the texts by Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali are significant works to review homeland from the perspective of Third World, transnational, brown (Muslim/ Hindu) women. This thesis will rely on the analytical reading of the novels *French Lover* (2002) and *Brick Lane* (2004). In the analysis of these primary texts, I will be using the theory “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” and “Coatlicue State” proposed in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Fundamentally, using the feminist, postcolonial, and transnational theories, the thesis is divided into the following chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to conceptual review of the theories and terms used in the

thesis. The first part of the chapter will position this research study within the debate of the postcolonial, decolonial and transnational theories. Then, I will specifically talk about the transnational writings, focusing on the novels *French Lover* and *Brick Lane*. I will address the “politics of location” from the perspective of the female subject of this study. The latter part will focus on the theories of Gloria Anzaldúa, that is, “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” and the idea of “Coatlicue State” (1987).

The second chapter critically examines the construction of different “imagined homelands” and their “imagined boundaries” in a “post-nation” and a “borderless world” (Appadurai 1996, 8; Miyoshi 1991, 1). In this regard, I will explore the debate from “nation,” “nationalism” to “imagined homeland”<sup>3</sup> in the transnational discourse. This study will be based on the two case studies of the novels. The chapter ends with the presentation of the female protagonists at the “in-between” position of “imagined homelands,” looking for their identity. The chapter also ends with questions that “what is the strategy used by these women to survive within/ between “imagined homelands?”

In this context, the third chapter will study “silence” as a mechanism employed by the women to survive within these “imagined homelands.” This chapter will focus on the significance of “silence” in these two case studies from the text of Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) and Gloria Anzaldúa’s “Coatlicue State” (1987). These case studies see the significance of silence beyond the dual symbol of repression and resistance.

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<sup>3</sup> The term “Imagined homelands” is influenced by the idea of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983), Zygmunt Bauman’s explanation of *Imagined communities* (2001) and Arjun Appadurai’s *imagined landscape* (2000). However, in the second chapter, I have critically analyzed the term from the perspective of third world brown migrant women. In the case study of *French Lover*, I am referring to “global feminism” and anti-racist brown communities as “imagined homelands.” In the second case study, I refer to Islamic fundamentalism and white liberalism as “imagined homelands.”

In the last chapter, I will explore the alternative idea of homeland proposed in the novels, calling it “border(home)land” in opposition to the “imagined homelands”. In this chapter, I will work with the theory of Anzaldúa’s *Nueva Conciencia Mestiza* (1987), “Double critique” of Abdelkhebir Khatibi (1983), and the term “negotiation” discussed by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Gayatri Spivak (1993).

### **1.3. Comparative Feminist Approach**

To work on the research, I have applied the comparative feminist approach defined by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her work *Feminism without Borders* (2003). I will use this approach in two different phases. The first phase will be a textual comparative feminist study where I will be working with the two novels as primary literary texts. In the analysis of these texts I will use the work of Gloria Anzaldúa *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Therefore, this part of the research will follow a close reading of these texts together with a comparative analytical approach. Here, with the close reading, I am referring to the text of Jasmina Lukic and Adelina Sanchez who suggest that close reading is a useful method of interpretation for feminist analysis. Knowing that, in this paper I would employ a reading which is comparative and analytical. In the latter phase, the comparative approach is used in a more metaphorical form to study the lives of three women (that is, the two protagonists of the novels, and me) as the texts. Hence in every chapter, I will discuss the case studies of these novels and finally I will present my experiences with a comparative approach.

With the comparative feminist approach, Mohanty proposes the idea of bridging the “local” and the “global” politics of knowledge, where the local and the global are not defined in terms of physical geography or territory but exist simultaneously and constitute each other

(Mohanty, 2003, 242). Here, Mohanty suggests going beyond the geographical definition of the global and the local towards a metaphorical understanding of these terms. She proposes that the One-Third world and the Two-Thirds world paradigm makes more sense in a postcolonial comparative feminist approach.

Western/third world, or North/south, or global/local are seen as oppositional and incommensurate categories, whereas the One-Third and Two-Thirds differentiation allows for teaching and learning about point of connection and distance among and between communities of women marginalized and simultaneously privileged along numerous local and global dimensions. (Mohanty, 2003, 243)

In this research, my analytical reading is based on the similar perspective of the One-Third world as well as the Two Thirds. Primarily because at the global level, these novels differentiate themselves as peripheral women's writings from the mainstream European feminist/women writing. The texts such as "Under the western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourse"(1984) by Mohanty, an Indian in the US academia and *This Bridge Called My Back* (1984) by Anzaldúa et al. lucidly write about the marginalization of Non- European women (women of color, third world women and Chicana) in European feminist writing. Mohanty says that "the universal image of third world women is constructed by adding the third world difference to the sexual difference, assuming the western women as secular, liberated and having control over their lives (1984, 353). The text by twenty-nine (non-European) feminist authors, *This Bridge Called my Back*, challenges the feminist definition that includes or emphasizes only the vision, idea and notion of white women (Anzaldúa et al., 1984). In this context, this difference at a global dimension from European feminism consciously or unconsciously relate the texts of two different sides of the world. Thus Anzaldúa, Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali as

Chicana writer and South Asian writers living/ lived on foreign land find a common interest of writing.

Interestingly, the texts present the complexity of privileges and marginalizations among their subjects along the local dimension. For instance, Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali focus on the migrant women who are relatively marginalized and privileged at the transnational level. Similarly, Anzaldúa represents the complex identity of Chicana’ “in-betweenness” within the cultural, lingual, and political framework between two physical worlds, i.e. Mexico and the USA. Hence, the approach of this thesis is to work with the complexity of marginalization and privileges at the global and the local level and the One- Third and Two –Thirds World.

Moreover, the comparative approach to these texts also reminds us of what Mohanty says about comparative approaches being the way to position historical narratives of experience about each other. To compare in this way is to theorize relationality as both historical and simultaneously singular and collective and determines how and what to learn when we feminists cross cultural and experiential borders. In a comparative approach, differences and commonalities exist in relation and tension with each other in all contexts. What is emphasized are the relations of mutuality, co-responsibility, and common interests, anchoring the idea of feminist solidarity (Mohanty, 2003, 243). Considering these lines, I do recognize the cultural and historical difference between the texts and the writers which I am using in the research: the novels by Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali representing South Asian migrant women living in Europe, and Gloria Anzaldúa’s text which refers to Chicana women. These women carry a baggage of different cultural and historical background, but, in spite of the differences of their experiences, location and history among Chicana women and South Asian migrant women, I see that there are “relations of mutuality, co-responsibility, common interest and the idea of feminist



solidarity” when their texts are brought together. The question of homeland has been very significant in these texts as far as Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa and South Asian writers Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali are concerned. In this context, I will be using the theory of “Coatlicue State” and “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” by Anzaldúa in the texts of Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali to visualize the collective idea of homeland from the comparative perspective. Besides, when Anzaldúa’s idea of the “Coatlicue State” and the concept of “silence” in South Asian transnational women writers are studied together, then there is a production of collective knowledge to understand “silence” as a mechanism of survival which goes beyond the metaphor of repression and resistance. Also, when the answers of the protagonists of the novels are studied together with the theory of “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza,” there is a possibility of seeing homeland differently as “border(home)land.” In this context, I agree with Mohanty that this cross-cultural feminist work moves through the specific context to construct a real notion of “universality” and democracy rather than colonization. This comparative approach interconnects the histories, experiences, and sufferings of women of different feminism(s) (Mohanty, 2003, 244). In this regard, Mohanty also calls this comparative feminist approach a feminist solidarity model (Mohanty, 2003, 243).

In the second phase, the comparative approach is based on the collective reading of the individual experiences of these three women. Here, I would state that there are not only two novels but two different worlds, of two women together, with the third woman who is in continuous dialogue with them. All these women are on different *boats* looking for the answer to their collective questions “Do I want to go back?” and “Where is my homeland?” While reading these novels one by one, I started living the lives of the female characters present in the novels. I lived in anxiety, fear, terror, and my experiences. My experiences helped me to understand the

relationship between subjective and collective experience. Avtar Brah writes that “experience does not reflect a pre-given ‘reality’ but is the discursive effect of the process that constructs what we call reality” (Brah, 1996, 11). In this context, this part of the comparative approach is more about positioning myself and my experience in the research with the two other women and their experiences. In Sandra Harding’s word, I would say that I am placing myself as a “researcher” in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter (Harding, 1987, 9). Following Harding, I am not only presenting myself in this research as a researcher, but my experiences, my class, my race, my caste, my beliefs and my gender are comparatively placed within my thesis work. Hence in this piece of research, I am using the comparative feminist model to study the texts and the three women’s lives considering the local (the One Third/ Two-Thirds world) dimension towards the “understanding of common interest.”

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## **2. Chapter1: Conceptual Review**

This chapter is a conceptual review of the theories and terms used in this work. I have divided the chapter into two sections. The first section starts with a small reflection on postcolonial and decolonial studies, which will lead to the theoretical framework of this research paper; I will focus on transnational theory and transnational literature, specifically the two novels and their writers. The second part will be dedicated to the theory of the “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” under which I will be discussing the meaning of border, borderline, and borderland. This discussion will lead to focus on the notion of borderland, the position of the women who metaphorically reside at the borderland, the mental state of the women who live there, and their search for a new homeland. In this regard, I will put particular emphasis on the theoretical ideas of the “politics of location,” “Coatlicue State,” and “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza.”

### **2.1. Reflection on the Decolonial, Postcolonial and Transnational studies**

While writing this thesis, I kept questioning myself several times “should I cross the border from postcolonialism to decolonialism?” I discussed my theoretical ambiguity with my supervisor, Adelina Sánchez, and she asked me to write my reflection on “standing on the *bridge*” between the two. Thus, to position myself and my research paper within the theoretical framework, I will introduce a small debate between Walter D. Mignolo, a decolonial intellectual, and Sara Ahmed, a postcolonial scholar. Mignolo suggests that the idea of “post” is entrenched within the logic of the “modern” side of the imaginary since modernity has been conceived as a progress, chronology, and superseding a previous stage. In this sense, postcoloniality follows the same logic (Mignolo, 2000, 91). Mignolo’s critical thinking about postcolonial ideas has

challenged my theoretical background. Further, the important point which Mignolo refers to, is that, “it is confusing when “hybridity,” “mestizaje,” “space in between,” and other equivalent expressions become the object of reflection and critique of postcolonial theories, because they suggest a discontinuity between the colonial configuration of the object or subject of study and the postcolonial position of the locus of theorizing” (Mignolo, 2000, 94).

As a counter voice, Sara Ahmed, a Pakistani migrant residing in England, defines postcolonialism as a complex study of rethinking how colonialism operated in different times in a way that permeates all aspects of social life, in both colonized and colonizing nations (Ahmed, 2000, 10). I agree with this thought of Ahmed that postcolonialism is about the complexity of the relationship between past and present, between the histories of European colonization and contemporary forms of globalization, and between the “self” and the “other” and that is, the relationship between the two, not simply the binary division of past/present and self/ other. As a response to decolonial studies, I would again quote Ahmed when she proposes that

postcolonialism should not be reduced by either a notion that the present has broken from the past( a narrative that assumes that decolonization meant the end of colonization) or that the present is simply continuous with the past ( a narrative that assumes colonialism is a trans-historical phenomenon that is not affected by local contexts or other forms of social changes). (2000, 11).

In this regard, “hybridity,” “mestizaje,” “space in between,” allow us to understand the complexity that lies beyond the binary division from the West/East, North/South to the interstitial zone of the “in-between spaces.”

Moving further, the “in-between spaces” become a topic of discussion in postcolonial studies heading towards transnational studies. As Homi K. Bhabha states “the very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities- as the grounds of cultural comparativism- are in a profound process of redefinition” (1994, 5). In this study, the border spaces permit us to focus on the transnational movement of diasporas, which revises the nation-state construction in a “borderless world” (Miyoshi, 1991, 1).

In this respect, the last decades of the Twentieth Century became a moment where in-depth transformations of the system of economic production began to alter traditional social and symbolic structures at both global and local levels. In the West, the shift from manufacturing, towards a service and information-based structure, entails a global redistribution of labor. Here, the rest of the world (especially developing countries) provides most of the underpaid, offshore production. Such global redistribution of labor attracted transnational movement, which created new kind of “diasporic” formations in different countries of the West. Significantly, the globalized world moved towards a “borderless” (1997) and “post-nation” (1996) world as Miyoshi and Appadurai refer to. However, a “borderless world” is full of boundaries where the “self” and the “other” encounter each other. As Bauman warns us “in our fast globalizing world one thing that is not happening is that boundaries are disappearing. Rather, they seem to be erected on every new street corner of every declining neighborhood of our world” (Bauman, 2001, 16). When these boundaries collide, then they produce a border space which becomes a topic of political debate from a transnational (feminist) perspective.

## 2.2. Transnational Novels: *French Lover* and *Brick Lane*

Considering the above discussion, transnationalism, as Susan Friedman sees it, that this understanding of immigration is relatively new because it reflects a shift from nation-based paradigms to “transnational models emphasizing the global space of ongoing travel and transcontinental connection” (2006, 906). In their article, Adelina Sánchez and Sonia Fernandez, claim that transnational writing offers a way of thinking beyond national boundaries, not a mono-perspective from one linguistic, social or cultural view points, but conceptualization that is bi- or multi-perspective. They say that “transnationality allows a simultaneous multiplicity of exchanges and adaptations. It works on several levels since it contemplates the national together with what happens within the constraints of national borders and also outside these” (2018, 4).

Referring to this debate on transnational writing and their writers, I will now focus on the writers and their writings to locate them within transnational studies. Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali have different backgrounds of their displacement, situated within a complex historical and colonial circumstance. Their novels are fictions but are based on their personal experiences- Taslima Nasreen lived in France for several years during her exile whereas Monica Ali lived in England and collected the stories from different Bangladeshi women, as well as her father who is from Mymensingh in Bangladesh. Taslima Nasreen (1962- ) was born in East Pakistan, which later got separated from Pakistan as an independent country, Bangladesh. Monica Ali (1967- ) was also born in East Pakistan, in Dhaka, to a Bangladeshi father and an English mother. When she was three, her family moved to Bolton, England. Nasreen and Ali had similar Bangladeshi cultural and historical roots, but then their migrant routes were different which made their stories different. Taslima Nasreen grew up in her country and lived there until 1992. A South Asian, Muslim, feminist writer, she is viewed as a controversial figure in Indian

and Bangladeshi political writing because of the themes on which she has chosen to write.

Nasreen's writings have become a critique of the Hindu or Muslim fundamentalists who, under the banner of religion, suppress women and their rights, and kill, rape, and exploit women.

*Lajja* (1993), Nasreen's groundbreaking book, is a rallying call in Bangladeshi feminist writing and represents many raped, wounded and silenced women (Hindu/ 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 Islamic fundamentalists of Bangladesh and India in 1994. She is now an exiled, single, Muslim woman who, until, 2004, has been living in Europe; in fact, she holds Swedish citizenship but has since "returned" to South Asia in search of belonging and closeness to Bangla culture. Muslim leaders in Kolkata revived an old fatwa against her to leave the country and now, she is a political exile who lives her life outside her country in India with the desire to go back to her land. She considers India as her second home but her movement has been legally and socially forced and she has been prevented from returning.<sup>4</sup> She suffers various manifestations of nostalgia. As Caren Kaplan writes about the nostalgia of an exiled writer "Nostalgia for past; for home; for a 'mother tongue', for the particulars that signify the experience of the familiar once it has been lost. Such nostalgia is rooted in the notion that it is "natural" to be "home" and that separation from that location can never be assuaged by anything but return" (Kaplan, 1996, 33).

From one author to another, Monica Ali moved with her parents to England when she was very young. She has a mixed Anglo-Bangladeshi identity as her father is Bangladeshi and

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<sup>4</sup> The movement of Taslima Nasreen should not be confused with the "voluntary exile," as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, an exile writer from Kenya, emphasizes on the difference between "voluntary exile" (expatriate) and "forced exile" (a victim of state terror) (1993, 104). Aijaz Ahmad, moreover, focuses on the difference of exiles on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality (1992, 85). Hence, these aspects are important in the analysis of the displacement of a writer.

her mother is from England, as such, Ali represents the second generation mixed-blood identity living in London. She does not have clear memories of her past, but she crossed the border through the memories of her father. She states that *Brick Lane* is a collection of stories which she accumulated from Bangladeshis living in Brick Lane in East London, and from her father (Ali, 2004, Acknowledgement).

Transnational writing, as far as the novels by these writers are concerned, produces migratory conflict stories which go beyond the national geographical boundaries and narrates cross-border encounters. Their texts also reflect a linguistic conflict of the one who writes and of those who are represented in writing; such literature tests the presumed monolingualism of any national geographic boundaries. For instance, Monica Ali writes in English, and most of her works are published in England, however, in her novel *Brick Lane*, she has beautifully shown the linguistic complexity among the Bangladeshi migrants. She uses a direct translation of Bangla sentences in English which produces “broken English,” and this shows the linguistic “inbetweeness” of Bangladeshis living in their colonial land. Besides, second generation Bangladeshis living in London do not want to speak Bangla, which shows the change in their identity and their apparent rejection of that side of their identity. Unlike Ali, Nasreen writes in Bangla, and most of her works are later translated into Hindi, English and other languages, crossing more than just national boundaries in the process. She presents her linguistic conflictive identity within third world countries like India and Bangladesh where she negotiates between the Bangla of Bangladesh and Bengali of West Bengal, India in her daily life.

These transnational feminist writings go beyond the nation-state construct and its geographical boundaries while simultaneously, questioning the newly constructed, metaphorical boundaries and borders around “imagined homelands.” Their novels demonstrate the presence of



“border,” “borderline” and “borderland.” As transnational feminist critics, Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón and Minoo Moallem, also see that “transnational debate deconstructs the rhetoric of the margin and centers to recognize the complex and nuanced manifestations of transnational circulation of peoples, goods and information in the present moment” (1999, 4). In this respect, these novels will be used as a reflection on the women who find themselves in the position of being “in-between” at transnational level. In her novel, Nasreen emphasizes the “global feminist group” and the brown community to accentuate the “in-betweenness” of her protagonist caught between them. Equally, Monica Ali represents the “inbetweenness” of her protagonist between Islamic fundamentalism and white liberalism. Both writers present the encounter of the local and the global, and the domestic with the foreign, at the transnational level. In this context, it will be interesting to talk about both novels to bring in some transnational issues which go beyond the national geographic construction and which are critical to the newly constructed idea of the “imagined homeland.”

### **2.3. Summary of the novels**

*French Lover* portrays the life of Nilanjana, who, after her marriage in Calcutta, settles in Paris with her husband. Her marriage is a result of the failure of her romantic relationship with her boyfriend who abandons her on the proposal of marriage because of caste difference. Nilanjana leaves her country and settles in Paris with colorful dreams of love and romance; her dream, however, is shattered when her husband treats her as merely an object of pleasure. Nilanjana eventually finds a job in a factory, packing computers in boxes, which she continues clandestinely. This self-reliance motivates her to leave her husband and his house when she is awakened to her subjugation and wants to live independently. Nilanjana comes across Danielle in the same factory, and the two gradually become friends. Her mother’s illness gives her the

chance to go back to India and live with her parents, however, after her mother's death, she is expected to return, but because of her continuous refusal her father is impelled to send her forcibly. When she does return to Paris, she does not return to her husband's house and instead stays with her brother's friend Sunil in Paris but after being raped by him in his house, Nilanjana leaves the place and uses the money inherited from her mother to rent an apartment. Meanwhile she comes across Benoit Dupont, a Frenchman and enters into a "forbidden relationship." In the end, she leaves him and aborts her pregnancy.

The novel, *Brick Lane*, centers around the life of Nazneen, a Bangladeshi immigrant who is married off to Chanu Ahmed, a man many years her senior, in a loveless arranged marriage. She relocates to London to start her new married life with her husband; however, as the years pass by, Nazneen becomes increasingly frustrated with Chanu and his lack of decisiveness, as well as his unwillingness to allow her to travel alone because of his religious beliefs. Nazneen also maintains contact with her outcast sister, Hasina, who elopes to Dhaka with a man in a love marriage. In her letters, Hasina describes her life working in a factory and then later as a prostitute. Nazneen gives birth to Raqib, who dies and then gives birth to two daughters, Shahana and Bibi. Chanu continuously vents his anger out at the way the Bangladeshis and Muslims are treated in the English community, and he begins to get more worried about the escalating drug use in the community becoming even more determined to return to Bangladesh. He loses his job and then allows his wife to work. During Nazneen's sewing work she meets Karim and they soon engage in an affair. However, she eventually ends her affair with him. Chanu leaves for Bangladesh alone, and Nazneen and her daughters remain in London where she begins her sewing business.

At the end of both novels, Nilanjana and Nazneen do not choose to go back to their “Home/land.” It does not mean that all the transnational South Asian women who appear in the fictional writing have a similar ending. For instance, Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*, tells almost the opposite ending where the protagonist does indeed go back to her homeland (2003). Hence, the motive of transnational literature is not to move towards a single paradigm but to find ways to hold different theoretical accounts and approaches in productive conversation with one another. In the case studies of *French Lover* and *Brick Lane*, Nilanjana and Nazneen both claim different interpretations of “homeland.” Their answers, the rhetorical question, “Do women have a country of their own?” and the defiant resignation of - “let fate decide!” invite a close reading of the texts.

### **3. Situating Gloria Anzaldúa’s “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza”**

#### **3.1. Border, Borderline and Borderland**

Border writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004), belongs to the Chicana population who lived in Texas, which was once Mexican land. The Mexican population became migrants in their own land in the nineteenth century when the United States frontier moved towards the south. In her text, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The Nueva Mestiza* (1987), she defines the border based on her Chicana identity, her “in-betweenness” in Mexico and the USA. Anzaldúa states that the “Border *es una herida abierta* where the “third world” grates against the first and bleeds. Moreover, before a scab forms, it haemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds is merging to form a third country - a border culture” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 3). She then goes on to argue that the “borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish “us” from “them” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 3). Finally, she goes beyond the duality defined by the border and says that “a

borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants”

(Anzaldúa, 1987, 3). She also suggests that “The borderland is not a comfortable territory to live in; this is the place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape. Hence, living in the borderland is like trying to swim in a new element, an “alien” element” (Anzaldúa, 1987, Preface).

In this piece of research, the definition of physical border and the metaphorical meaning of border line, and borderland are paramount and ubiquitous. Anzaldúa explains the borderland in order to understand the “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” (1987). Anzaldúa underlines that the “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” develops at the borderland and among those who are “prohibited” and “forbidden”. For instance, they could be women in phallogocentric society, or lesbian in a heterosexual society, Chicanas in the United States, or brown and black in the white racial, power structure. In this work, I am using this theory to understand the position of South Asian, transnational women and their search for the “homeland.” These women, as we see in the novels, are already in the position of “others” of the binary opposition. The women from both the novels move from the position of “other” towards the borderland. Anzaldúa proposes the idea of the Nueva Conciencia Mestiza, that is mestiza, *conciencia de mujer* (a consciousness of woman) - a consciousness of the borderlands - which lives on the border space, on the “barb wire” (1987, 25).

In the above paragraph, I mentioned the position of the “others” for the South Asian, brown,<sup>5</sup> transnational women who try to achieve the Nueva Conciencia Mestiza. In this regard,

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<sup>5</sup> In this research study, I am using “brown color” to refer to women of South Asia (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). This particular population has been referred to as brown population in the comparative work by Debra Castillo and

color, colonial background, class, gender, religion and nationality are significantly used to decide the positionality of the “other.” The position of the “other” attracts a discussion on the different subject position – the “self” and the “other.” Rosi Braidotti in “Becoming Woman: or Sexual Difference Revisited,” talks about majority/ the “self” and minorities/ the “other” as positions. She uses the term “becoming,” referring to Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of “becoming a minority,” in her article as achieving the consciousness of “being minority” (2003, 54). She says that

‘Becoming minority’ is the task for the majority and the minorities, and both need to untie the knots of envy (negative desire) and domination (dialectics) that bind them so tightly in the oppositional duality.<sup>6</sup> In this process, the “self” and the “other” will necessarily follow asymmetrical lines of “becoming,” given that their starting positions are different. (Braidotti, 2003, 55)

For the majority/the “self,” there is no possible becoming, other than in the undoing of its central position altogether. She says that there is a structural dissymmetry in the starting position of the “Same” and of the “Other,” their lines of “becoming” are suitably discontinuous. In other words, some becomings operate as much-needed dislodgement of a dominant subject position. Others, as “other” mark the conditions for the affirmation of new subject positions and thus lay the foundations for possible futures. The difference between the two modes of becoming is not a

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Kavita Punjabi from the USA and India respectively, who have majorly worked on border issues between India and Bangladesh and the USA and Mexico. In their work, they call Asians and Latin American as ethnically same color people- Brown people (2011, 10). Besides, in her text “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Spivak also uses “brown color” in her analytical reading “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (1988, 92). Therefore, in this research, the use of brown color has been influenced from such readings.

<sup>6</sup> “Becoming” is a figural mode of expression, which displaces the vision of consciousness away from phallogocentric premises.

matter of relativism, but of major power dissymmetries and hence of structural differences (Braidotti, 2003, 53- 55).

### **3.2. “Politics of Location”: The female feminist subjects of the study.**

The distinction between the “self” and the “other” is equally crucial to differentiate the position of the “others,” because those who are at the margins cannot be seen as equally “other”. The politics of location is vital for us to understand that some are less equal than others, remembering the construction of the “O/other” and the One-Third World and the Two Thirds World represented at the global and local level in postcolonial studies (Spivak, 1988, 77; Mohanty, 2003, 227). In this regard the “politics of location” has been debated by transnational feminist writers such as Chandra Mohanty (1995), Lata Mani (1990), Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (1999), after when it was proposed by Adrienne Rich in 1980s. Interestingly, in this research the politics of location includes race and imperialism, experiences and knowledge, “intersectionality” of different aspects and “new geography of identities” which is transnational (Mohanty, Crenshaw, 1984; Friedman 1998).

In this piece of research, Nilanjana and Nazneen invite an analysis based on the politics of location. They are the individuals of the composite formation of diasporas, who migrate to other countries for their husbands. They do not have any economic or political intention for movement, but they do have a social responsibility of being with their husbands. Their displacement is arranged between the Others (father and husband) as companions to their male migrants, they do not even choose the land where they go, neither do the men with whom they live. Instead, the “home/land” chooses them.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Uberoi in ed. Hoiberg, 2000, 153- 154

These women are not only the subjects living in other countries (Europe), but they serve to underline the fact that they carry difference among themselves within the communities which come from the “Third World” (South Asia). The difference among transnational women, as shown in the novels, is of class within religion and region from where they come.

Further, they do not belong to the group of women of the “new land” where they live, nor to the one who are living on the land from where they came. Surprisingly, they do not even return to “their land” as Indian or Bangladeshi but as Bangladeshis who have lived in Europe and carry that European-ness with them. They are the first-generation South Asian women who find themselves in a different position to the second or third generation, transnational women. Considering their position on both the sides of the border, as discussed above, it is necessary to consider the theory of the politics of location to understand the construction of the O/other and the One Third and the Two Thirds World.

The term “politics of location” was coined by Adrienne Rich in a series of essays, examining the limits of feminism in the United States in the 1980s - Rich suggests that the “us” of white women should take responsibility for seeing “other” women from Euro- American centric feminism (Kaplan, 1994, 138). In this context, Mohanty and many other “Third World” feminists said that the subject “woman” is not a monolithic essence or unitary category, as “Third World woman” defined once and for all (Mohanty, 1984, 19; Spivak, 1993, 137; Brah 1996, 95-102). Furthermore, in her essay on “politics of experiences” Mohanty has integrated this specific criticism together with race and imperialism (1995). “Experience must be historically interpreted and theorized if it is to become the basis of feminist solidarity and

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To underline the system of ‘arranged marriages’ based on religion, caste and class. Women are given by the father to other men through the ritual of *Kanyadaan*.

struggle, and it is at this moment that an understanding of the politics of location proves crucial” (Mohanty, 1995, 82). In her article “Multiple Mediation” Lata Mani argues for a revised “politics of location” that demonstrates that the “relation between experience and knowledge is now seen to be not one of correspondence but one fraught with history, contingency, and struggle” (Mani, 1990, 26). Avtar Brah defines “politics of location” to mean the gendered spaces of class, race, ethnicity, religion, region, age, shifting cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries of journeys across geographical and psychic borders (Brah, 1996, 204). Hence, these intellectuals with a Third World background deconstruct the theory of the “politics of location” according to the complexity of their locations. In this regard, Nilanjana and Nazneen offer the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experiences, defined by intersecting variables such as race, class, looks, age, education, lifestyle, sexual preference, religion, region, ethnicity and linguistic difference where the intersection of these categories depends on trans-territorial and transnational process.

Considering the above discussion, the “politics of location” is based on the “new geography of identity,” which Susan Stanford Friedman suggests goes beyond gender and specifies the different “positionality” of a subject as multiple oppression, multiple subject positions, contradictory subject positions, relationality, situationality and hybridity (Friedman, 1998, 25-27). Together with Friedman’s analysis, Mohanty, Mani and Brah offer a way in which to tackle patriarchy and also to move beyond it. It underlines the complexity of privileges and marginalizations at transterritorial and transnational approach. This approach warns the overrepresentation of the “North” and the “South” within feminist theorizing about gender dynamics, despite considering the O/other and the global and the local worlds of the One-Third and the Two Thirds.



### 3.3. “Coatlicue State”

After discussing the borderland and borderland’s subjects, I will investigate the “Coatlicue State,” which illustrates the “mental state” of subjects who live in the borderland. In her work, Anzaldúa concentrates on the process of achieving the “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” through the “Coatlicue State.” The theory of Coatlicue is very crucial in comprehending the mechanics of silence among the South Asian, transnational, brown women. Coatlicue is a mythological term which Anzaldúa explains:

An Aztec goddess of death and birth. She has a human skull and serpent for a head, a necklace of human hearts, a skirt of twisted serpents and taloned feet. She is the creator of the celestial body. She contained and balanced the dualities of male and female, light and dark, life and death. Simultaneously, depending on the person, she represents duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective-something more than mere duality or synthesis or duality (Anzaldúa, 1987, 46).

Anzaldúa uses the term Coatlicue to talk about the “mental state” of the person who is in the state of the “in-betweeness,” and struggling to get out from the position of the “other.” This state is critical because it stresses the acceptance of one being minority, woman, and the “other.” Braidotti expresses that those who are already “other” may first need to go through a phase of “identity politics,” that is, claiming a fixed location before getting into the struggle against its construction (Braidotti, 2000, 36). Anzaldúa, in this regard, also exerts that the struggle has always been “inner” and then is played out in “outer” terrains, she claims that “Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (1987, 87). She also claims that this process of the “Coatlicue State” seems to be a painful mental and emotional state of

perplexity as the site of conflict between inner voice and outer voices. It is a stage of awareness, consciousness, and knowledge of being different from others. “The knowledge of being different is very painful because after knowing “it” (the otherness) one can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. One is no longer the same as before” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 48). This “new other” is conscious about the otherness and hence leaves from one side, free from the bind of the duality of the oppressor and oppressed, to reach the borderland. I would say that the “Coatlicue State” is the movement from the stage of the “other” to the “conscious other” in these case studies. However, getting out of the duality does not signify the neutrality of the subject, whereas “a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle” and it becomes the position of standing against, or reacting against, dominant views and beliefs. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 80)

Therefore the “Coatlicue State” becomes significant in interpreting the “silence” of transnational women in the research presented here. As in this study, I would interpret the “silence” of these women as not only repressive or resistive, but as beyond the duality, as a time and space where one moves from being the “other” to the “conscious other.”

### **3.4. Negotiation: Third Space and Deconstruction**

Considering the above discussion, I believe that those subjects who leave the position of the oppressed and move toward the “conscious other,” belong to the border space. This is a space which is in constant transition, and which is a part of a long struggle. It is the space of “negotiation” and “double critique.” These two terms are used to discuss the homeland of the women, they form the basis for the term which I am proposing to coin in the conclusion: “border(home)land.” The word “border(home)land” constitutes the significance of “negotiation,”

“double critique,” and “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza.” I am using the term “negotiation” as defined in the work of Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Bhabha works on terms such as “Hybridity,” “Ambivalence,” “Negotiation” and “third space,” in *The Location of Culture* (1994). These terms, according to him, describe how colonised people have resisted the power of the coloniser in the postcolonial period. Gayatri Spivak enters the postcolonial debate mostly through subaltern discourse (1993). Bhabha describes the term “negotiation” as a rejection of the priori, pre-constituted principles and moves towards the dialogical discursive exchange (1994, 25). In one of her article “Feminism and Deconstruction, Again: Negotiations” Spivak defines “negotiation” as “the deconstruction of established structures daily practiced but often disavowed, like the Law, institutional education, and ultimately, capitalism. Negotiation is not a collaboration but producing a new politics through critical intimacy” (Spivak, 1993, 130).<sup>8</sup> Bhabha states that “negotiation is not negation, it conveys temporality, that each position is always a process of translation and transference of meaning. It denies the essentialist logic” (Bhabha, 25- 27). Thus, both these critics see the term “negotiation” as an attempt to display the importance of the hybrid position where the transformational value of change lies in the re-articulation, or translation, of elements that are neither the one nor the other but something else entirely which contests the terms and territories of both. Hence the critics conclude that the term negotiation is an idea to rethink the logics of causality and determinacy, or the movement of theories towards the periphery and inclusionary. The theories must always be in constant transition, they cannot be inherently fixed: as Bhabha states, “If opponents of all important ‘truths’ do not exist, it is indispensable to imagine them” (1994, 23).

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<sup>8</sup> Spivak discusses in her article “Feminism and deconstruction: Negotiation,” that deconstruction is not simply a reading of the narrative of the decentered subject rather it is a morphology which sees the limits of epistemology. (1993, 125)

### 3.5. “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza”

Bhabha and Spivak have focused on the word “negotiation” as temporality. This negotiation is double edged at the global and local level simultaneously, that is, if we see through Anzaldúa’s “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza.” It carries the notion of “double critique,” a term coined by Abdelkebir Khatibi, a Moroccan intellectual. He proposes “double critique” at the point where the distinction between inside and foreign collapses: it is critical to be both, thinking of both and at the same time neither of them (Mignolo, 2000, 67). Considering the terms negotiation and double critique, it become easier to understand what Anzaldúa wants to say, when she talks about “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza”:

It should not be confused with an assembly where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a 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. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 80)

The “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” as consciousness cannot hold concepts in rigid boundaries.

Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible, one can stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La mestiza has to shift out of habitual formations constantly; from convergent thinking to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and towards a whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 79)

Although Anzaldúa writes from her own Chicana perspective, she claims that “borderlands are present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch”(Anzaldúa, 1987, Preface).

This chapter will form the theoretical base for the further chapters that follow, and it has discussed the concepts which are relevant to this thesis, especially the second part of the chapter which investigates the “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza.” This theoretical discussion starts from the definition of the border, borderline and borderland which introduces the physical meaning of the border and then the metaphorical significance of borderline and borderland. The borderline is indispensable for the next chapter which features a discussion on the construction of “imagined homelands” in a “post-national” and “borderless world”. Using the theories of Benedict Anderson, Zygmunt Bauman, Appadurai and Susan Strehle, I will analyze the “imagined homelands” and the process of the essentialization of their subject based on gender, color, class, religion and nationality. This marginalization is based on the dividing line between “us” and “them.” The definition of borderland goes beyond the dividing line and explores the “in-between” space. Then, at the theoretical juncture of the borderland, it is crucial to discuss those who are considered borderland inhabitants and their “politics of location.” The “Coatlicue State” offers a tool to understand the mechanism of the survival of the women within “imagined homelands” which I will talk in the third chapter. Finally, in the last chapter, I will discuss the “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” together with the texts to move toward an alternative idea of the border(home)land.”

#### **4. Chapter 2. Critical reading: Nation to “Imagined Homeland.”**

The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behaviour; these habits and patterns are the enemies within. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 79)

From the place of the ‘meanwhile,’ where cultural homogeneity and democratic anonymity articulate the national community, there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, minority discourses that speak betwixt and between times and places. (Bhabha, 1994, 229)<sup>9</sup>

Nilanjana and Nazneen, the protagonists of the novels, have not only changed their homes but their homelands. The moment they touch the other’s land and the other’s home, their new life starts which somehow connects and disconnects them from their home/land, which they left behind. Being in different homelands, it becomes interesting to question what exactly constitutes homeland for these South Asian, brown women who cross the border. Here, the word homeland brings many other terms in a debate such as “nation,” “roots,” “origin,” and “belonging.” This chapter will start with a critical analysis of the concept of nation, nationhood and nationalism, which is crucial in the decision of “homeland,” “roots,” “originality,” “belonging,” and “non-belonging.” To discuss the concept of nation and nationalism, I will refer to the texts of Benedict Anderson (1983), Partha Chatterjee (1993), Anthony Smith (1991), Anibal Quijano (2000), Masao Miyoshi (1993), Zygmunt Bauman (2001), Arjun Appadurai (1996) and Susan Strehle (2008). After this, the chapter will get into the deliberation of the different ways by which nationalism is a continuous process of the construction of new

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<sup>9</sup> The ‘meanwhile’ is the sign of the processual and performative, not a simple present continuous, the present as succession without synchrony- the iteration of the sign of the modern nation –space (Bhabha, 1994, 229).

“imagined homelands.” The term “imagined homelands” in this research is an experiment, but at the same time, it explains the definition of the “space” which I want to refer to. I argue that “imagined homelands” are not merely imaginary territories of “origin” or “residence” but its significance is metaphorical: as a political construct as well as an analytical category. The debate examines “imagined homelands” in a post-national period where postcolonial and decolonial intellectuals claim that “modernity” continues to exist in different forms.<sup>10</sup>

*French Lover* and *Brick Lane* allow us to discuss different cases in which such modern discourses continue to exist globally in different forms. For instance, Nasreen’s *French Lover* makes us think about the construction of “imagined homelands” through “global feminism” and local brown community and through the position of a South Asian, transnational, brown woman, who is positioned between the two. At the same time, *Brick Lane* enters into the debate between “Islamic fundamentalism” and “Western liberalism” and their construction of “imagined homelands” through the Third World, South Asian, Bangladeshi, brown, Muslim woman’s body and subjectivity. Therefore, the chapter will argue that although transnational discourse challenged the modern concept of “nation” and its geographical boundaries, the concept of nationalism continues to carry its fruit in creating “imagined homelands,” which are even more problematic because their territory and boundaries are mostly invisible.

#### **4.1. From nation to nationalism**

In the novels, the transnational female subjects belong to different diaspora communities.

Nilanjana, a Hindu Bengali, comes from West Bengal, India and lives in a Bengali community in

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<sup>10</sup> In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai uses the term post-national in reference to the cross-border movement of people and media (1996, 8). Fatima El Tayeb also uses the term post national frequently to indicate globalized world when transnational movement rapidly increased at global level (Tayeb, 2011, xxxix). Thus, I refer to their discussion while using the term post- national.

Paris after her marriage. Nazneen, a Muslim Bengali, lives in Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane in London's East end.<sup>11</sup> Their movement from one "home/land" to another elicits a debate on the significance of homeland according to these female characters. This debate goes beyond the territorial search for the homeland between the land of "origin" and the land of "residence." The debate is metaphorical, based on the answers of these women.<sup>12</sup> To get into the argument, I start this discussion from Avtar Brah, a transnational brown woman writer who focuses on the analysis of "home" of the South Asian diaspora living in England in her work *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996). She was born in Punjab and later during the twentieth century migrated with her parents to Uganda having lived in the USA in 1960s. However, her family together with other Asians were expelled from Uganda during Idi Amin's reign in 1972, and as refugee, settled in Britain while visiting from the United States where she had been a student from Uganda, and eventually secured an academic position in England.<sup>13</sup> Avtar Brah presents the politics of diaspora by saying that she has had "homes" in four out of five continents: Asia, Africa, America and Europe and has struggled with the question of "Home". She writes that:

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)

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<sup>11</sup> Nilanjana and Nazneen share common border between their countries, India and Bangladesh. They share similar language Bengali (different cross border dialect of Bengali) and culture; however, they are differentiated by religion.

<sup>12</sup> Here, I am referring to the answers of Nilanjana and Nazneen which they gave in their conversation. I have mentioned the conversation in the introduction of the thesis.

<sup>13</sup> *Mississippi Masala* (1991), one of the movies directed by Mira Nair, narrates the story of those Indians who moved from India to Uganda to the USA during that time.



According to Brah, Paul Gilroy suggests the importance of the tension between “roots” and “routes” in the study of identity. To understand the “roots” and “routes” of South Asian, transnational women, it is crucial to go through the social and political turmoil which cause their movement and subsequently constitute their identity. Gilroy states that “The routes keep disestablishing the identity and re-creating it at every instant” (Gilroy, 1993, 133). Taking into account the discussion of Brah it is important to define the “roots” and “routes” of Third World, South Asian, transnational, brown women. How does the process of inclusion and exclusion work when these diasporic women are concerned? And, equally, “Who can be excluded and who can be included?” To even begin to answer these questions, it is essential to start the discussion from the terms of nation, nationalism, and nation-ness.

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

Anderson talks about the “nationalism” which travelled from imperialist countries to their colonial states. However, Partha Chatterjee considers that nation and state construction is an old phenomenon, and that there are two different typologies of nation and nationalism: “Civic” and “Ethnic” considering that nation and state construction is an old phenomenon. For Partha

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, 1996, 1). Anthony Smith, a British intellectual and the writer of *National Identity* (1991), also emphasises the difference between both models. Chatterjee and Smith conclude that the civic model is 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 emphasizes a common descent and ties based on kinship, vernacular languages, customs, and traditions (Smith, 1991, 13; Chatterjee, 1993, 1-3).

Smith says that nationalism could contain “civic” and “ethnic” elements. Nationalism could be mixed rather than simply one or other, depending upon the historical and contemporary contingencies. For Smith, “it is this multidimensionality that has made national identity flexible and allowed it to combine effectively with other powerful ideologies and movements, without losing its character” (Smith, 1991, 15). Smith and Chatterjee both seem to agree that in both concepts nationalism is primarily a cultural phenomenon which could be cultural or ethical. At the same time, postcolonial intellectuals such as Anderson and Chatterjee assert that together with print technology and the colonial system of power, the Western European experience has exerted the most powerful influence on the Other’s conception of the unitary conception of the “nation.” Eastern nationalism measured the backwardness of their nations regarding certain global standards set by the advanced nations of Western Europe, and Eastern nationalism consequently became imitative (Anderson, 1983, 49; Chatterjee, 1993, 3).

Anibal Quijano, a decolonial voice in the debate, also says that nation and states are an old phenomenon. However, what is called the “modern” nation-state is a particular experience:

he defines this modern concept of nation-state by linking it with a colonial, capitalist, and Eurocentric system of power. He uses the word Europeanization to describe European modernity and modernisation and goes on to say that the modern nation-state involves the modern institutions of citizenship and political democracy, but only in a way in which citizenship can function as legal, civil and political equality for socially unequal people (Quijano, 2000, 557). In the modern global world system, there is a set of elements that point to a different concept of modernity that gives an account of a historical process specific to the current world system. Quijano clearly says that the structure of each sphere of social existence is under the hegemony of an institution produced within the process of formation and development of that same model of power, i.e. global modern world system (Quijano, 2000, 545).

These postcolonial and decolonial critics assert that the nation-state is an old phenomenon which was carried out in different cultures in a different manners, but the colonial territories of the European imperialist power became an entity of western nationalism during colonial time. In this regard, Anderson exerts that “even in the case of colonised people, who have every reason to feel hatred for their imperialist rulers, it is astonishing how insignificant the element of hatred is” (Anderson, 1983, 141). He further says that the “motherland” or “home” (the colonial motherland) becomes a domain of “dis/interested love and solidarity” which demands loyalty, patriotic inclination, they root themselves in love often profoundly self-sacrificing love (Anderson, 1983, 144). Chatterjee says that although the western nationalism of modernity could be defined as rational and liberal ideological framework that was not how nationalism had made its presence felt in much of colonial and recent history (Chatterjee, 1993, 3). So, dis/interested loyalty towards the colonial “motherland” was demanded from the

colonised land, but its people were not wholly considered a subject of “equality within their legal- political community, their laws, and institutions” (Smith, 1991, 13).

In addition to this, Masao Miyoshi and Khachig Tölölyan, who are both postcolonial transnational critics, have continued to focus on similar concerns suggesting that colonialism’s principal mode of investment and organisation of space was via the bounded territory of nation and state, and the latter’s extension into the colonies. Miyoshi says that in the postcolonial period, the emphasis shifted from the bounded spatial entities toward “a borderless world” (Masao, 1993, 1).<sup>14</sup> It is true that the trans-national movement and formation of diaspora is the counter-narrative of the border of nation and state, but, at the same time, postcolonial and decolonial critics see the idea of nationalism, nationhood, and nation-ness as colonialism’s greatest gift of modernity to the colonies and as a long-lived ideological mainstay. Tölölyan says that “infranational and transnational alternatives to the nation-state has led to a realignment of collective emotional investment, nationalism and other forms of loyalty which will compete for a long time” (Tölölyan, 1991, 7). So, in (post)colonial and (post)modern times, the byproduct of the modern discourse of- “dis/interested loyalty” is demanded from the O/others within the “imagined communities.” Zygmunt Bauman refers to this movement from the modern concept of the territorial nation to a postmodern, conceptualised “imagined communities” as the liquidification of a solid concept for “the modern” in postmodernity (2001). In this regard, he uses the term liquid modernity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The term “borderless world” in this research is taken from the title of the article. “A borderless world? From colonialism to transnationalism and the decline of the Nation- State,” (1993) by Masao Miyoshi.

<sup>15</sup> The term “liquid modernity” offers two interpretations. It could be explained as a return to modernist themes which shows the limitations when it had come to explaining the significance of social changes. At the same time, the metaphor ‘liquid’ offers another interpretation as fluidity- a sense of rootlessness (Fernandez & Sanchez, 2018, 2). However, I am concerned with the preoccupation which Baumann wants to show when he writes liquid modernity.

Taking modernity as a cue, Arjun Appadurai focuses on the electronic mediation and mass migration in his work *Modernity at Large* (1996). He theorizes that “print capitalism” in this globalised world is accompanied by “electronic capitalism,” which can have similar and even more powerful effects. As electronic capitalism does not work at any territorial limit, but rather, works with the wireless internet network world (Appadurai, 1996, 8), the movement of images in videos, audios or photos has shrunk the global world to a stage where movement is not only from Europe to the Third World, but it is increasingly centripetal movement from the Third World to Europe. The transformation of the imagination is not only a cultural fact, 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. Nationalism is not limited by physical boundaries of the nation, it actually disseminates outwards from its boundaries (Anderson, 1983; Chatterjee, 1993; Quijano, 2000). In this study, I want to add that the modern concept of nationalism also forms different “imagined communities” beyond literal, geographic boundaries – this is a topic which I will talk about further in the next section. I will refer to these communities as homelands based on the discussion of Anderson, Bauman and Appadurai while critically analysing the construction of “imagined homelands” from a transnational and feminist perspective. I will consider that “imagined communities” produce essentialist identities which are “timeless” and homogenised and the essentialist identities are produced through racialization, sexualisation and the genderisation of others (Bhabha, 1994, 206- 212). Indeed, as Bauman affirms, within homogenised communities, there are “people who do not fit” (Bauman, 1997, 46).

## 4.2. “Imagined Homelands”: A critical analysis

Referring to the texts of Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali, it is possible to claim that “nationalism” which is the byproduct of the nation goes beyond the territorial space and constructs many “imagined communities” which I will refer as “imagined homelands.” From the transnational perspective, the one who deterritorializes from one place to other constructs one’s “imaginary homeland” (Rushdie, 2010) or creates a “home away from home” (Clifford, 1994, 308). For instance, Salman Rushdie, as a transnational migrant writer, creates “imaginary homelands” with his fragmented memories and nostalgia of the past. Analogously, James Clifford talks about the homes which the transnational diaspora population constructs in a new land. I am referring here to the “imagined homelands” which have similar characteristics to those which Salman Rushdie and James Clifford explain. These homelands go beyond the national territorial boundaries, beyond the duality of the land of origin and residence. However, the imagined homeland in this study is critically differentiating itself from the one which the two aforementioned writers explain in their writing. These “imagined homelands” are not spatial, and are constructed on the ideologies of its creators (collective) rather than memories. So, I will discuss the term “imagined homelands” which will be critically studied through the case studies.

Benedict Anderson in his work *Imagined Communities* (1983) defines a nation as an “imagined community” and he says 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 that is “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). Appadurai talks about the “imaginary landscapes” in the post-national world (1996, 31), these imagined- imaginary

landscapes are produced and constructed through different “scapes” as Appadurai mentions (ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape, mediascape, and ideoscape).<sup>16</sup> People, technology, money, images, and ideas create the imagination of these homelands. 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 organized field of social practices, and is the key component of the new global order (Appadurai, 1996, 31). So, I have used the term “imagined” taking into account the characteristics of “imagined” as explained by them. It is imagined because, perhaps, its members do not know each other, but they can do recognize each other as members of the same ideological group. It is “imagined” because there is an illusion of creating a “faraway utopian space,” it is also imagined because it is not an individual ideological creation but a collective one, which moves beyond the territory through the different “scapes.”

Anderson’s community is linked to the idea of nationhood and Bauman goes beyond the nation from solid modernity to liquid modernity when referring to imagined communities.

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,

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<sup>16</sup> These landscapes are the building blocks of imagined world, communities and also imagined homelands- Ethnoscape- the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers etc. constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of nations to hitherto unprecedented degree.

Technoscape- technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries.

Financescape- the currency markets, national stock exchanges, commodity speculations move megamonies through national turnstiles at blinding speed, with vast, absolute implications for small differences in percentage points and time units.

Mediascape and ideoscape are closely related landscapes of images. Mediascape refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspaper, magazines, television station, and film production studios). Mediascape, whether produced by private or state interests tend to be image centered, narrative based account of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places.

Ideoscapas are also concatenations of images, but they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it (Appadurai 1996, 33-36).

3). Bauman adds that these communities propose security, confidence, warmth, and cosiness based on a demand of freedom, loyalty, selfless love and hatred for others (Bauman, 2001, 4). Furthermore, Appadurai, as a transnational writer, uses the word “landscape” talking about the community constructed in the post-nation world (1996, 8). Anderson, Bauman, and Appadurai have all convinced me that the “imagined communities” construct imagined “spaces,” at the same time, these intellectuals have helped me to formulate the idea of “imagined homelands.” I prefer to say homeland because it is a space created by the communities where the “homeliness” of the homeland is significant - I am using the word homeland as a space created by “some” for the “some” and the “others.” In this study, homelands are referred to the spaces created by migrants and “natives” (and sometimes by both), homelands are constructed by different aspects such as religion, sexuality, gender, color, nationality, age or caste which allure its subjects.

It is also important to refer to Susan Strehle for a definition of the homeland from a transnational feminist perspective; a metaphorical reading of Strehle’s definition clears the way for me to make the point which I want to say. She suggests that home and homeland are based on “imperialist philosophies of nation construct.” Home/land defines “settling down” (which could be unsatisfactory), “marriage,” stability, separation from the outer and a patriarchal space. It emerges in the valorization of accomplished “housewifery,” which involves managing resources not your own. (Strehle, 1998, 3-12) Strehle’s definition of homeland compared with home and nation, gives the appropriate idea of the homeland which I am referring to in this thesis.

These new post-national constructed “imagined homelands” need to be problematized within the transnational feminist perspective where I emphasise: the subjects are brown South Asian, Third World, transnational (Hindu/Muslim) women. These women cross the border with their gender, their color, their religion, their caste, their class, their national identity, and their



culture. These “imagined homelands” decide their laws and rules of inclusion and exclusion: it creates its communities as well as its “imagined boundaries.” In their work *Who Sings the Nation-State?* Butler and Spivak write that there is not a complete exclusion but the “others” are excluded in “the mode of certain containment, where the “other” is not outside of politics” (2007, 5). Bauman lucidly explains the process and definition of assimilation and exclusion of the body. He says that assimilation is to strip the ““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 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). Here, Spivak, Butler, and Bauman explain the process of inclusion and exclusion where the one who is excluded is an outsider on the inside (an outsider inside).

Therefore, in these two sections, I have tried to explain the construction of “imagined homelands” in a post-national world where the concept of the nation still exists. In the next section, we can see the construction of these “imagined homelands” through the different case studies of two transnational novels. Firstly, I would talk about Taslima Nasreen’s portrayal of a South Asian, Indian, transnational, brown, Hindu woman and her presence within the Feminism in Paris and her brown community. In the second case study, I would focus on the novel by Monica Ali and discuss the position of Bangladeshi transnational brown Muslim woman between “Islamic fundamentalism” and “Western liberalism.”

### 4.3. The case of Nilanjana: between white women and brown men

In the novel *French Lover* (2002), written by Taslima Nasreen, Nilanjana, the protagonist, comes to live with her husband in the Indian Bengali diaspora in Paris. In her first few days there, her husband introduces her to several Indian families where she carries herself as an Indian wife in Indian dress (*Saree*), smiling and not speaking anything except answering questions.

Nilanjana, as an educated twenty-seven-year-old girl, acquires her knowledge of the world from the books she reads and she comes to Paris with the curiosity 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 and secretly starts working in a factory where she meets some French women- she gets to know one in particular, Danielle, a French lesbian feminist and Nilanjana comes closer to her and shares her life issues with her, and subsequently, Daniele introduces her to a group of feminist women in Paris. Nilanjana gets into the group where she is associated with the “Oriental ideas” of extreme poverty, hunger, and innocence and they associate her with documentaries made about the poverty of her country and her people. Besides, they have essentialized her as “Third World (Indian) woman” helpless, oppressed and frequently beaten by her husband (Nasreen, 2002, 88-99).

A clear hierarchical structure is produced among all these women, starting from white women, white queer women, and then brown South Asian women, where the color of the women becomes more significant than their gender and sexuality. At the same time, Nasreen recognises the fetishization of her protagonist by her French boyfriend as “brown beauty” and “mystery woman” in the first meeting (Nasreen, 2002, 168-170). These two different positions of Third

World brown women, caught in a hierarchical system, remind us the analysis of Sara Ahmed's analysis of the "fetishization of strangers" where she uses the metaphor of "strangers" for migrants. She suggests that the process of fetishization involves, not only the displacement of social relations onto an object, but the transformation of fantasies into figures (Ahmed, 2000, 5). She suggests that the stranger becomes a figure through proximity: the stranger's body cannot be reified as the distant body. She points out that a stranger can no longer be recognized 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 *French Lover* ask Nilanjana many questions but their answers are already assumed, and her voice often goes unheard. These presumptions by women around her lead her to feel excluded from the group of women (Nasreen, 2002, 126-127). For instance, "*Bindi*" which is a cultural part of most of the South Asian countries, is assumed as a "permanent tattoo on Indian married women's forehead," "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 realizes 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).

Hence, Nasreen focuses on the idea of a feminism which a "Third World" educated woman encounters daily on a global level where she feels that she is voiceless. So, the question again arises, "can a third world woman speak inside European feminism?" In this case study, she speaks but her answers are not heard, or she is not expected to answer. Ann Russo expresses that

the 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 which, in any case, is apparently not even worth recording. Nilanjana becomes part of French feminist discourse, but only when her subjectivity and her body are used as ‘props’.

Recalling Spivak’s text “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 are continued to be treated as “white women’s burden.”<sup>17</sup> 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 are “German, Swiss or Belgian” (Nasreen, 2002, 126). Instead, “foreign” women come from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The difference among these groups as European women and other women reconstructs the colonial difference between Europe and Third World as “West” and “rest.” Helma Lutz, Ann Phoenix and Nira Yuval- Davis write about these constantly fortifying boundaries between Europe and rest. They say that the boundaries between Europe and the rest of the world are constantly being fortified. Since measures to exclude ‘others’ go together with

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<sup>17</sup> This analysis is influenced by the close reading of the text “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by Gayatri Spivak when she talks about the *sati* and when she is critically analyzing the patriarchal and imperialist system where she says “white women are saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 1988, 92).

the construction of cultural, religious or ‘racial’ otherness, racial minorities within the European Union have gradually become the targets of this ‘othering’ (Lutz, Phoenix & Yuval-Davis, 1995, 5).

Avtar Brah adds that “‘European-ness’ continuously and repeatedly constructs itself through racist and nationalist discourses according to time and space” (Brah, 1996, 161). Étienne Balibar uses the word ‘neo-racism’ which refers to the new configurations of racialised formations: this deals with the several types of neo-racist notions, such as the racialised gendered body. Hence, it creates an idea of creating ‘Europ-ism’ where the racial purity is central (Balibar, 1991, 83). Interestingly, Braidotti in her article “Difference, diversity and nomadic subjectivity,” writes that from the 1990s the European market flourished and labour market redistributed with the demand for migrants who were economically beneficial. At the same time, they represent the power structure as they are always and repeatedly forced to perform the racial “other” (2000). Brah also asserts that South Asian women are even more vulnerable as they represent cheap labour in Europe and they are racially and sexually “othered” (Brah, 1996, 165). To return to *French Lover*, despite Nilanjana’s complex positionality, she is essentialized and racialised as “other” inside the feminist group. In this brand of feminism, the one who is white, well-dressed with language capability stands at one end, and the other is racialised and essentialized as a “Third World brown woman.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In this context, postcolonial feminists such as Brah (1996), Spivak (1993), Mohanty (1984), Yuval Davis (1996), Lata Mani (1989) and Kumari Jayawardena (2017) to name a few, have reacted against the Eurocentric image of “Third world women” in their writings. Nira Yuval-Davis in her work *Gender and Nation* writes that “the Third World women feel that Western women are constructing them solely regarding what seemed to them to be barbaric customs and subjugation, without taking into account the social and economic context in which they existed” (1996). In her articles, Mohanty has criticised the construction of “Third World woman” as composite subject as in western feminist discourse and tend to “speak for” them (1984). Moreover, Lata Mani’s debate on Sati in Colonial India demands a reading pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial period (1989). Yuval Davis states that such Eurocentric act of writing had the effect of removing Third World women from history and freezing them in time

From a transnational perspective, Taslima Nasreen recognises that Nilanjana is a part of the South Asian community (Indians and Bangladeshis) living in Paris, she even mentions in her novel the institutionalisation of the caste system in India. However, she does not mention the caste further when Nilanjana crosses the border. Nasreen focuses on the Indian community where she presents Bengali, Punjabi and some Bangladeshi where the class difference is lucidly visible.

Nasreen complicates the position of Nilanjana whose body is gendered within this class hierarchy. Take for example the scene where Nilanjana after leaving her husband tries to live with one of the Indian families where she is violated:

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?”

---I ....feel 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. Nilanjana is “homeless” without a husband or father to protect her. Nilanjana at this point is seen as unprotected or “No man’s woman.” Nilanjana, without husband and father, 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).<sup>19</sup> To remain part of her community she needs to be a companion of her male counterpart. In this regard, Nira Yuval- Davis writes in detail that nation and women

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and space, and eternally constructing them as politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western feminism (Yuval- Davis, 2008, 117).

<sup>19</sup> Taslima Nasreen has portrayed a typical ‘Indian family’ where daughter is married off to a man. The marriage becomes a symbol of Kanyadaan where father gives daan. Kanya=Maiden and Daan=Donation, which may be seen as the Donation of a Maiden. It is a tradition where the bride’s father presents his daughter to the groom, entrusting him with her future wellbeing. Grievously, the daughter is not expected to ‘return’ to her father’s house, she becomes a guest to his house after marriage.

include a political economy that is related to the production, distribution, consumption, and circulation of discourses. Women are a special focus of the state where women are concerned as a social category with a specific role – particularly human reproduction of ethnic collectivities, of boundaries of ethnic groups, reproduction of ideologies (Yuval Davis, 1989, 7).

Nilanjana is not included in the community of brown men as brown women instead she is only invited as brown men's wife. For Nilanjana there are only two options remained either stay in the house as mother/ wife or prostitute as "outsider inside."

Here, these two groups the "white feminist group" and the "brown community," which Nilanjana encounters, are based on similar nationalist ideologies. Within these two situations, Nilanjana, as a brown Third World transnational woman must remain as either sexualised or racialised "other" within these "imagined homelands." "White feminist group" and brown community have formed their own "imagined homelands" where Nilanjana is an "outsider inside." These "imagined homelands" promise her security and protection by the demanding the loss of her subjectivity and her eligibility to participation.<sup>20</sup>

#### **4.4. The Case of Nazneen: Between Islamification and Islamophobia**

On the one hand, the Taslima Nasreen's novel discusses "global feminism" and brown South Asian community, while on the other; Monica Ali focuses her intention on Islamic fundamentalist and Western liberalist groups. In her novel, she does not show any individual encounters between Bangladeshi and English people, rather she focuses on the two different communities living in Brick Lane itself. She presents the conflict of a Muslim woman's

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<sup>20</sup> In her novel Taslima Nasreen projects the power difference between Indian and French women, and Indian men and women within the constructed "Imagined Homelands." However, she also recognizes the blurred spaces within those "imagined homelands." Nilanjana, for instance, continues her relationship with Daniele, her French friend, until the end.

subjectivity, body and her engagement with fundamentalist religious groups and liberalist groups in London, England. Ali's novel was first published in 2003, after the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, which inevitably became an essential focus for *Brick Lane* where her female protagonist is caught up in the debate of Islamification and Islamophobia.

Nazneen, as a migrant woman, carries her local religious rituals at the global level and encounters the other outside which bears the same name, "Islam," and calls her "own," but she is also witness to a Western liberal community that she feels she does not belong to. Ali presents two different ideologies through two distinct demographic groups, the radical *Bengal Tigers* and the Islamophobic *Lion Hearts*. The concept of religion from both sides leads a point of debate to understand the relation of transnational women within both domestic religion and foreign liberalism.

In the novel, Ali presents many female characters, such as the elderly Mrs Islam, Razia, Nazneen and Hasina. Hasina, the sister of the protagonist Nazneen, lives in Bangladesh, whereas Nazneen moves to London after her marriage, where, in the "new land," she finds Mrs Islam and Razia when they all live in the same area. Though all of them are from the same country of origin and religion, Ali casts them as different figures through their religious beliefs and class division; however, Ali does not necessarily picture the caste conflict within the Muslim community in Brick Lane. Mrs Islam thinks that she is the messenger of God (Islam) as she keeps her eyes on young boys and girls of the community, sees whether they go to madrasa, or ensures that they follow Muslim customs. Ironically, although Mrs. Islam purports to "keep purdah in (her) mind" she does not truly practice it, nor does she wear a veil, even going as far as to say that "you have to give up your culture to accept theirs. That's how it is" (Ali, 2004, 29). Despite Mrs. Islam's hypocrisy there are other characters in *Brick Lane*, such as Razia who are



influenced by the “outside” liberal culture and language in London which Razia specifically finds “attractive,” and she abandons the religion to which she belongs. Nazneen belongs to a Muslim community, wears a *burqa* and lives in England; she does not only carry the identity of a woman, but her color, her look, her colonial identity, her language, and her Islamic religion and religious dress. This makes her look not only different, but “other”. She is a figure of alterity in a country of whiteness, the English language, and the Christianity of colonial dominance.

In the novel, the Bangladeshi Muslim community lives in Brick -Lane and follows Islam, but there is also a radically devout faction known as the Bengal Tigers, who often call religious meetings. Interestingly, there are Muslims from different countries, colors and languages who become part of the group and are connected through Islam. Even though they come from different countries and speak in different languages, the name of the religious group is still the Bengal Tigers which connotes a particular country and its language. For instance, the Bengal Tigers group meetings are organised by men and mostly dedicated to male members where a few women gather. In these gatherings, men give their opinions and talk about the discrimination of Muslims all over the world while Muslim women are left out, and those who occasionally raise their voice in the meetings are discouraged:

The crowd was represented as “brothers,” and two girls in the crowd raised the voice saying “And sisters.” The person who was speaking glared at them “The Quran bids us keep separate. Sisters, what are you doing here anyway?” (Ali, 2004, 285)

However, there are occasions in which women are encouraged to get involved and sit in on meetings, there is one instance where, Karim invites Nazneen to come into the group and listen to them. The presence of women in the group is nominal and they are only tolerated as

passive members. They are supposed to be listeners to the male orators, but they are not merely treated as observers, they must also be diffusers of their messages: Nazneen becomes a medium through which those ideas enter the house. Here as a transnational woman, Nazneen is not only sexually essentialized as “other” within the religious group, but it is her subjectivity which is co-opted to transmit their religious beliefs. Minoo Moallen, an Islamist feminist, says that transnational women are treated as a force to carry the mission of religious groups, where religious fundamentalists:

regard women as an essential force in the creation of group cohesion and continuity, making sure that woman transmit group values to their children. Thus, a group can share its identity through the conduit of women’s bodies and women’s powers of social reproduction. (Moallem, 1998, 328)

Moreover, in the novel, there is no point at which Nazneen’s husband is invited to attend a Bengal Tigers meeting whereas Karim asks her to bring her husband with her. This represents, at one level, a specific form of socio-cultural misogyny that privileges men by subjugating women to support the patriarchal structure of most social groups.

On the other hand, anti-Islamic Lion Hearts disseminates a pamphlet that states that: “All over the country, our children are being taught that Islam is a great religion. But the truth is clear. Islam burns with hatred. It gives birth to evil mass murders abroad. In our towns, it spawns vicious rioters” (Ali, 2004, 406). Clearly, the enmity of this pamphlet in the Brick Lane community symbolises the total rejection of Islamic culture. Moreover, in the novel, Monica Ali shows the media’s presentation of “the fall of the World Trade Center” in 2001. This repetitive presentation of the falling and burning of the Twin Tower in New York City brought all non-

Islamic people together against Muslims, and falsely reduced them all to radical fundamentalists. This “othering” legitimises the Western discourse based on the modern dichotomies of secular/religious, civilised/ barbaric, and Euro-America/ ‘the rest’. In this neo-racialization, the world divides and recreates by religion as Non- Muslim (Christianity) and Muslim.<sup>21</sup>

What is also at stake in this debate are, women’s bodies brought to bear by “fundamentalists” and “liberalists”. In *Brick Lane*, Ali gives voice to the different perspectives in society, for the, Bengal Tigers the onus is to “KEEP YOUR BREAST TO YOURSELF. And we say this. It is not us who like to degrade women by showing their body parts in public spaces” (Ali, 2004, 258). Their appeal to modesty is written in retaliation to the Lion Hearts, who had thrown the first stone: “HANDS OFF OUR BREASTS. The Islamification of our neighbourhood has gone too far... How long before the extremists are putting veils on our women and insulting our daughters for wearing a short skirt?” (Ali, 2004, 257). In both the situations, the liberalists and fundamentalists groups are creating their “imagined homelands” where they are imposing their ideologies on the women. Fundamentalists base their argument on the naturalness of the role of women and their body, which for them means to be covered in their cultural dress, inside the house, in service, and which is valorized for reproduction. Only within these essentialized roles are women seen to be respectable, whereas Lion Hearts believe these cultural more to be an imposition of religious norms in the society which affect “their” (Western) women. However, within this imagined homeland, the inclusion and exclusion of members is based on ideology, while, at the same time within each group, there is the construction of self and the O/other, where the O/other is forced to meet the demand of a dis/interested, sacrificial dedication. These groups

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<sup>21</sup> The division of Muslim and non-Muslim is not limited to the division between European Christianity and Islam there also the division in South Asian countries, such as India, of Muslim and Hindu where the similar Eurocentric discourse of Islamophobia has been propagated.

are homogenised and have essentialized the others by color, region, gender and sex.<sup>22</sup> Minoo Moallem writes, “The transnational women are generally placed in the dichotomisation of fundamentalism and liberalism where her body, subjectivity and her participation are demanded seeking solidarity under the sign of the otherness” (Moallem, 1998, 332).

For example, Razia, Nazneen’s Neighbour, is an example of a transformed woman who rejects wearing Muslim clothes such as the *burqa*, and moves towards Western liberal ideas. She starts learning English, to cut her hair, wears goggles, smokes, and works outside with other English women. Such change within a woman is treated as the “liberation” of women or a non-Islamification, and therefore she is not considered as the part of the imagined homeland of fundamentalism. Here Razia’s rejection to submit herself represents her exclusion from the religious group, however, she remains as the one who is always talked about and given as an example of a traitor who has betrayed her religion: a “bad Muslim woman.”

Nazneen, on the other hand, practices her rituals every day and believes in them- she has created her thoughts and connection with God which she learnt from her mother. She believes in the fate of god in every decision of her life whether it is the death of her mother, her marriage with Chanu, the death of her first child and the return to her country. She does Namaz five times a day and feels that it keeps her away from all committing sins and keeps her on the path of piety. However, Nazneen is also Razia’s friend, and, like her, wants to enjoy her life. She wants the freedom to go out on the streets, not to simply buy groceries, but to feel the air and see the world; she wants to wear the dresses which she stitches for English women; she does not want to be a “good Muslim” or “bad Muslim” woman; she does not want to be locked inside the

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<sup>22</sup> Monica Ali has not referred to any caste issues among the Bengali community living in Brick Lane.

boundaries of “fundamentalism” and “liberalism”; she sees herself locked within the boundaries of imagined homelands where she has to sacrifice her freedom or her tradition like either her mother or Razia.

In their novels both Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali talk about these cross-border encounters which are evident in the transnational discussion, especially, when that border is between the Third World and the First World. When women from Third World, South Asian (Hindu/ Muslim) backgrounds encounter European, Christian, white society their particular identity occupies a position which interrogates the dimensions of both the local and the global levels. After discussing the conflictive position of Nazneen and Nilanjana, where exactly are these transnational women stand in terms of this game? Are they part of those “we” which develops the “we-ness” of their “imagined homelands”? Where is their homeland, and how will they negotiate? How do women like Nazneen and Nilanjana negotiate their status in ambivalent situations? Before going into the question of “where is their ‘homeland?’” we need to understand their “inbetweenness”. Therefore, in this thesis, we ask these questions through these novels which bring into focus Western feminism, communal solidarity, and the fraught relationship between fundamentalism and liberalism. All these aspects of the lives of transnational women lives have played a significant role in positioning them within this debate.

#### **4.5. In-between: Divided Loyalties<sup>23</sup>**

Both Nilanjana and Nazneen somehow find themselves in a position where their loyalty is being questioned from both sides; these women are expected to choose between their ideological homelands and settle or to show their complete faith by giving up their freedom. In

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<sup>23</sup> The title ‘Divided Loyalties’ has been borrowed from Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) where she discusses the inbetweenness of women of color between anti-patriarchal and anti-racial discourse.

these cases, both the women are “othered” in their “imagined homelands” in what Sara Ahmed calls the “outsider inside” (Ahmed, 2000, 10). Butler and Spivak explain that “those who effectively become stateless, are still under the control of power” (Butler & Spivak, 2000, 8), while Anderson says that “dis/interested love and sacrifice become significant in these domains” (1983, 144), and Susan Strehle notes that these communities emerge in the valorization of accomplished “housewifery” (1998, 4).

The reactionary position brings allegations from both sides, for instance, on one side, Nilanjana is accused of “being whitened” by her husband and by her Indian community. On the other, her French friends accuse her of being submissive to her husband for not going against the “oppression of brown men to brown women.” Nazneen is standing between “good Muslim” and “bad Muslim” woman. They are “traitors” to these constructed imagined homelands and their “in-betweenness” becomes a “taboo” because of the rigidity of the boundaries of these imagined homelands.

This situation of in-betweenness is painful because of the vulnerability of struggling between un/belongingness, where their ambiguity questions their loyalty and their identity. There is the fear of being abandoned, the accusations of being faulty and damaged, or of being unacceptable. The one who stands at this situation of in-betweenness is blocked, immobilized, cannot move forward or backwards. To avoid the rejection, some conform to the values of these “imagined homelands,” push the unacceptable parts of their identity into the shadow and try to move across both sides. Both writers have depicted other women around their protagonists who have succumbed to “imagined homelands.” Monica Ali presents Razia as someone who has tried to assimilate into a group of liberal women, and in so doing has left her Muslim community behind because of this she is categorized as a “bad Muslim woman” and is further racialized in

the group of white women where she works. Equally, Taslima Nasreen portrays the character of Mithoo, who commits suicide because of her what is considered “undesirable” in the patriarchal system that is, her dark skin and slowly waning youth. These women are the “other” of these “imagined homelands” and are burdened with dis/interested love and solidarity. These women, and the protagonists themselves, are used for the “double function” of what Bauman explains as – “the stratagem of the exclusion of the allegedly indigestible parts of the population or to whip up more enthusiasm for assimilation among the lax, the two-minded and the halfhearted” (Bauman, 2001, 93). As Anzaldúa writes that “To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of culture; push the unacceptable parts into the shadows” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 20).

These divided loyalties, this “in-betweenness,” is a situation of inner and outer conflict and its compromises accompany a time of doubt, or a challenging of one’s own disinterested, sacrificial act towards these “imagined homelands.” Anzaldúa, as an inbetweener herself, expresses her “inbetweenness” in her poem “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)

Does this mean that Ali and Nasreen, in similar vein to Anzaldúa, allow their protagonists to know where to go? Is it easy to decide where to belong? And how do they respond to their

inbetweenness? Interestingly, unlike Razia and Mithoo, they choose another route as Anzaldúa states “Some of us take another route. We try to make ourselves conscious of the shadow- beast, we see and try to waken up the shadow beast inside us” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 20).

It is clear from the stories of the protagonists that they do not stop at this moment in fact; they employ their strategies to survive in the “imagined homelands” about which I will continue to talk about in the next chapter. In the end of the chapter, I would conclude that the concept of nationalism continues to create “imagined homelands” in a “borderless” and “post-national” world. In this regard, I have referred to the two case studies of the two novels *Brick Lane* and *French Lover*, and finally, I have finished the chapter with a study of the in-betweenness of the two female protagonists of these novels between “these imagined homelands.” In the next chapter, I will explore the mechanism used by these women to survive, to resist, and to overcome this duality of “imagined homelands.” Interestingly, both novels have projected the concept of “silence” beyond the duality of a status as resistive and repressive to the time and space of movement from the “other” and to the “conscious other,” as the one who stands against the construction of the “imagined homeland.” In discussing the concept of silence, I will refer to Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and Anzaldúa’s chapter on the “Coatlicue State.”

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## **5. Chapter 3. Silence Matters: from the “other” to the “conscious other”**

In the last chapter, I deliberated on the continuous formation of “imagined homelands” and their boundaries. I critically analyzed the sexualized and racialized position of the women within these homelands, where, at the transnational level their local identities encounter the global and, the two borders meet and create an “in-between” space. As discussed, “inbetweeness” is not a space of comfort, being “in-between” is to be full of fear and terror where loyalty is questioned; where rejection is avoided by either a compromise of self, or by taking “another route” in Anzaldúa’s words.

This search for a new route challenges the dominant discourses which are based on the notion of binary oppositions of the self/other, the oppressor/oppressed. The binary superior does not let the “other” evade the fear. To quote Butler and Spivak again, there is not a complete exclusion, rather the “others” are excluded in “the mode of certain containment, where the “other” is not outside of politics” (Butler & Spivak, 2007, 5). Neither of the “others” can easily escape it because the one who resides this state of the “otherness” goes deeper and deeper into the darkness of silence (Anzaldúa, 1987, 44). It becomes a state of inner more than the outer conflict to break the duality of the self and the other. Hence, in this chapter, it is interesting to understand the inner conflict of these women when they are not allowed to speak. It is evident to see silence which these women are using as a mechanism of their survival in these “imagined homelands.” In this regard, I will talk about silence which is oppressive and resistive, using the text of Gayatri Spivak “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and then I will discuss Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of silence as a mechanism of survival.

In both the novels under discussion here, both Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali presented their protagonists as somewhat taciturn, in that they do not usually speak in conversations with other characters. In *French Lover*, Nasreen's protagonist, despite being rebellious, is still not allowed to speak; her husband does not allow her to talk with the people of her brown community in Paris without reason, and she generally does not have any reason to talk. Her father does not even listen to her, he only speaks, and the conversation ends:

If I do not get along with my husband, how is that a disgrace?' 'It is.' Anirban insisted. If you want to stay in this society, you have to do what everyone approves of. Either you go back to Paris or kill yourself like Mithoo and let us off. This is my last word. (Nasreen, 2002, 155)

On the other, Nazneen learns from her childhood that only men speak and women listen. "You speak, I will listen" is her only answer to many conversations (Ali, 2004, 261).

I connect with these situations because I also come from a culture where women are not allowed to speak or laugh in front of men. *Ghoonghat*<sup>24</sup> is maintained to separate men and women within the same space and women are taught to concentrate on their domestic work and not interfere when men are talking. My grandmother used to tell me that when she was young and married, she did not speak to her elders and always carried her *ghoonghat* in front of them. She learnt to be silent, and her silence symbolized her obedience towards her husband and family. When she was old, my grandfather used to say that when my grandmother used to get

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<sup>24</sup> Ghoonghat is a kind of veil which is mostly used among North Indian Hindu society.

angry, then she did not speak to anyone. Her silent face was petrifying like *Kali*.<sup>25</sup> I realise from that anecdote that my grandmother learnt to remain silent and that silence was not her choice. She learnt silence as her way of expression, either to show her obedience or her anger. I witnessed that in my family women are silent for two reasons – one, when it is repressive and two, when it is resistive. However, my experiences and these novels take me further to understanding that silence, seen from a different perspective which goes beyond repression and resistance to the time and space that one takes to transit from being the “other” to being the “conscious other.”

In Granada, being a single Indian woman in a classroom, not speaking Spanish fluently and “not speaking a lot” gave me the status of “poor girl” in the classroom. Most of my Latin American friends said: “You do not speak” in the classroom. Firstly, I was scared of speaking Spanish and making mistakes in Spanish, and secondly, I did not know from what position I should speak. At that moment, I chose silence as my “time” and “space” to create my position where I could stand without losing my historical, cultural, and colonial background. I wanted to speak my thoughts, which were different from Latin American and European ones, but then I lacked the words and expressions to create a difference. Hence, my perspective made me think, together with these transnational women, beyond the idea that silence is merely repressive or resistive.

In the transnational discussion, women frequently face the language struggle, especially first generation women who migrate to different countries. Third World women, like Nilanjana and Nazneen, are often taught to be good housewives and are trained to be silent domestic

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<sup>25</sup> *Kali* is an Indian mythological goddess who symbolizes the anger. <https://spiritualityhealth.com/blogs/downward-blog-a-life-in-yoga/2017/06/08/julie-peters-kali-goddess-rage-and-resistance#>

workers: they are not encouraged to step out of the house. Nilanjana, who comes from an educated family, has gone to university and though she speaks English, she does not know French. She suffers because she wants to go out of the house but because of the language difference, she often feels like an outsider, while, in *Brick Lane*, Nazneen learns everything from her mother and aunt, and is married by the age of sixteen. She does not speak English and it is because of this that she prefers not to step out of the house in London, she goes to the same Bangladeshi grocery shop every day. Therefore, Nilanjana and Nazneen are limited to their home where they speak their domestic languages. However, Nilanjana and Nazneen both desire to speak the language of the land where they now live, but are forbidden from learning the language by their husbands. For the men, this based on the grounds that it would be senseless for the women to speak a language they will never use, since they will not be out in “the world of men” Under these restrictions, they only speak the language of domesticity, which represents both the “home” of the house and the “home” of the homeland.

Despite not knowing the language, Nilanjana has a rebellious part within her and she resists more with her acts than with her voice, whereas Nazneen leaves the situation to god’s will. Neither of the women speaks much in the novels, and when they do they are in the contested zone of “in-betweenness” within these “imagined homelands” where they prefer to remain silent. Interestingly, the silence, which has been maintained by the transnational women in these novels (forced/chosen), lasts until the end, bringing the curiosity to apprehend it as a move beyond the repressive and the resistive.

### **5.1. Silence revised: Spivak's "Can the Subaltern (women) speak?"**

The idea of "voice" has always been privileged as the ultimate goal of, and means to achieving empowerment in Western philosophies, following on from the binary notion of speaking and silence, the empowered and the oppressed. In fact, a similar discourse can be found in the field of women's studies; the silence of women has been read as "a lack of time, privacy, compulsion to serve men and care for children, exclusion of women from higher education and men's domination of public spheres of knowledge production" (Malhotra, 2013, 11). The second wave of feminism has pointed out the need to "speak" and "to be heard" where silence is a symbol of oppression and violence: "Silence is oppression, is violence" (Rich, 1979). Nonetheless, women of color also ask women to speak up. "Your silence will not protect you" (Lorde, 1984). Gloria Anzaldúa asks women (Chicana, queer, women of color) to "overcome the tradition of silence" (1987, 54). All these women/feminist studies show the fear of being lost and erased from History in dominant discourses. Hence, in this duality of speaking and silence, those who speak have been assumed as empowered whereas those who fight with their silence are marginalised. The preference to speak and to raise one's voice marginalises the silence and those women who prefer not to shout their defiance but to silently defy with their action.

Nonetheless, silence has also been read from an ideological perspective. Robin Clair states that Silence is an aesthetic expression and it equally expresses the anger. Hence silence should not be confused with any kind of absence. "If silence can marginalise and oppress the "other" members of society, it can also express protection, resistance, and defiance. It may afford opportunities for emancipation or perpetuate the disappearance of the "other" (Clair, 1998, 20). Silence has many faces, and it is a risk for any researcher to read: oppressive silence cannot be decoded as resistive and vice versa.

In this regard, Spivak, as a postcolonial critic, has theorized extensively on the concepts of what it means to use “silence” and “speak”. She is critical of those philosophies which enable themselves to be the one who “speaks of/for” the “others,” those that think that “speaking” is the empowered space and who introduce the idea of “speaking for” those who are subaltern. Spivak is critical of such “representation” where others speak for the O/others, and O/others are not heard. She emphasizes the word “representation” to explain the act of speech (the speaker and listener). Often, the subaltern attempts a self-representation or perhaps a representation that falls outside the official institutional structure of representation - in this respect, she asks the eponymous question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” This question throws up many other questions together: “Are subalterns *allowed* to speak?” “Are the subalterns heard?” “What if the subalterns are not allowed to speak?” Why are they not allowed to speak?”

In her text, after a long and complicated philosophical and historical debate, Spivak gives an example of the suicide of a young Bengali woman, Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri, which makes the whole text comprehensible. Bhuvaneshwari, a sixteen year old woman, commits suicide at the time of her menstruation in a small village in Bengal in 1929. Her suicide is interpreted within patriarchal discourse as “the outcome of illegitimate passion” or “too old to be not yet a wife.” However, her menstruating dead body is a counter-discourse of patriarchal and imperialist discourse. Her suicide at the time of menstruation challenges the discourse which sees the suicide of women as only the result of “illicit affair.” Also, she commits suicide because of her failure to meet her political task against imperialism in India. Her menstruating body is a reversal of the interdict against a menstruating widow’s right to immolate herself; she must wait until her menstruation. Her suicide is an un-emphatic, ad hoc, subaltern rewriting of the social text of *Sati* and a hegemonic account of the blazing, fighting, familial Durga to a low caste

woman (Spivak, 1988, 104). Spivak's text forces us to understand the subalternity of "Third World women" within a *brahmanized* patriarchal and imperialist discourse, taking into account the caste, class and religion of women. Silence is imposed on the bodies by the dominant discourses and is "subalternized." Spivak targets the patriarchal, imperialist and Western philosophical system in silencing the subaltern women voices in their writings. The menstruating silent body of Bhuvneshwari resists and self-represents counter dominant discourses. I conclude that the subaltern discourse is "silenced" knowledge, but it is not they that are "silent".

## **5.2. Silence is repressive: Gendering and Racialization of silence.**

In the case of both *Brick Lane* and *French Lover*, the transnational Muslim/Hindu women are married off to men who live in Europe, and who then cross the border after their husbands. They remain silent because they are taught to be silent: these women come from a patriarchal society where they have witnessed their mothers in silence. Nazneen's mother was silent when her husband was having an affair with another woman and the case with Nilanjana's mother was similar: their mothers never spoke and finally died in silence. Their death was not interpreted as the repercussion of the illicit affair of their husbands outside the house, instead, it was assumed to be due to their mental and physical deteriorating health. Silence was imposed on them, and the hierarchy of repressive silence lives on in their daughters. Although Nilanjana and Nazneen change their countries, they carry the baggage of patriarchal silence, and, although there is the difference in time and space between mothers and daughters, the patriarchal system continues to impose this silence in different forms.

In these case studies, silence should not be confused with a "voicelessness" or "wordlessness." Rather, these women participate in conversations which look like dialogue but

that turn out to actually be a monologue where “I” speaks and “you” listens. In this context, Luce Irigaray describes the construction of “I” and “you” in a heterogeneous relation, here, I am also focusing on a similar construct. Irigaray says that “there are three partners in communication, all different fulfilling functions in the exchange: I, You, He/she/it (male, female, mixed), that is, the subject speaking, the subject spoke to, the subject spoken about. For the communication to function as an exchange between subjects rather than merely as a transfer of information locutor and interlocutor must be interchangeable. This evokes the concerns of sexual difference, which means that male and female subjects must become alternately “I” and “You.” But in this system what becomes apparent is the impossibility of a dialogue between female and male subjects, because “I” and “you” do not occupy equivalent positions for both sexes. Men and women are not alternately locutor and interlocutor, which could require a real exchange of words. Irigaray interestingly, points out that men speak more and often appropriate the discourse; she adds that it is also true as far as meaning and rules are concerned. Even when male and female subjects seem to be in dialogue, in reality, they are not. At best, they exchange information concerning their needs, for example, but women’s needs do not carry the same priority as those of men (Irigaray, 2004, 80).

Thus, in terms of the novels in question, both Nilanjana and Nazneen experience the conversations that Irigaray discusses. Nilanjana tries to speak, but her husband never allows her speak; she says that she wants to eat ice cream, so, in place of taking her out he brings ice creams to the house so that she can shut her mouth and prevent further questions. He takes her out only when *he wants* to but not when she wishes to. Nazneen does not say anything to her husband, she is always quiet and ever attentive to her husband:



“Nazneen did not know what he was talking about. ‘If you say so, husband.’ She had begun to answer him like this. She meant to say something else by it: sometimes that she disagreed, sometimes that she did not understand or that he was talking rubbish, sometimes that he was mad. But he heard it only as, ‘If you say so, husband’ (Ali, 2004, 99).

It is also important to note the fact that these women come to Europe after their husbands have already racialised the gendered silence, and the knowledge of women is subalternised, genderised and as well as racialised by “brown men.” The husbands of the protagonists carry a similarly racial attitude, which they borrow from white society and combine with their patriarchal dogmas. Hence, Third World women are silenced as a “traditional,” and “outdated,” group who “belong to the small town and who “don’t know anything” about the new country. Neither of the women are allowed to break out of their “traditional brown wife who does not know anything” role. For instance, Nazneen’s husband disapproves of her willingness to learn English, and, at the same time, humiliates her inability to speak English like him: “Let me read. All this talking, talking and talking.’ he rolled over again” (Ali, 2004, 74). A few days later he patronizingly says, “You’ve heard of William Shakespeare” and without waiting for her answer, he taunts “Yes, even a girl from Gouripur has heard of Shakespeare” (Ali, 2004, 91).

In the case of *French Lover*’s Nilanjana, there is the silence of a racist patriarchal politics is doubled by the racial imposition coming from a white society. The white person speaks, and the non-white person listens. As Ann Russo suggests, “talking, speaking out, demonstrating your knowledge, and making yourself known are often taken as the signs of “real” engagement, leadership, and contribution in many middle-class feminists, queer and social justice organizations” (Russo, 2003, 35). Furthermore adding to Russo’s comment here, I would say

that these organisations follow pre-existing structural oppressions regarding color, which is by indicators such as class, university education, language, and age.

Silencing others is often the tool to erase the historical presence of “the others,” and this has become one of the major feminist research challenges to revise the idea of the silenced voice. Taslima Nasreen is one of those women writers who writes about violated women killed in Bangladeshi religious disputes because of the demolition of Babri Masjid (1992) in India (Nasreen, 1994). After her exile Nasreen travelled to European countries and in 2002 her novel *French Lover* was published. This novel goes a step further in exhibiting the silencing of Third World transnational voices in white feminism. Recalling Ann Russo, in her essay suggests an alternative idea by bringing the racialised gender to the center and decentering of white feminists whenever the question of color comes. However, the alternative idea of recognising the presence of brown women actually fails in the novel of Taslima Nasreen. Nasreen shows that since the brown women migrant body and its presence in Europe cannot be denied, their voice is often fetishized and subalternized in dominant narratives. Nilanjana, for instance, is invited to the feminist group in Paris where she is interviewed and given the opportunity to speak, but the control of the microphone and the video is still in the hands of the white, middle-class, feminist group (Nasreen, 2002, 123- 128). This form of apparent recognition of transnational brown women in white gatherings is “the form of listening which is possible as long as the one does not feel bad, excluded, or blamed” (Russo, 2007, 37). Thus, what Spivak exhibits in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is the answer this question, which she has answered (ironically) in her essay by showing that “the subaltern cannot speak”, but, more subtly however, she convinces her readers that “they can speak” and “they do speak” but shows that others do not want to hear (Spivak, 1988, 104).

In the case of Nazneen, Islamic religion is gendered and racialized by proponents of fundamentalist Islam, where dark Muslim men and Muslim women are “othered.” Minno Moallen, an Islamic feminist, writes that “It (a religious group) becomes a generic signifier constantly used to single out the Muslim other, in its irrational, morally inferior, and barbaric masculinity and its passive, victimized, and submissive femininity” (1998, 322). In addition, language and class overlapping based on color and the gender of specific Muslim demographics; the assembly of the Bengal Tigers is simply a platform for the Muslim Bengali brown men to speak and represents a space where Muslim women and dark Muslim men are only invited as passive, non- participating listeners.

In the novels, white color, men, the fundamentalists, and the liberalists “speak for” the transnational, brown (Hindu/Muslim) women in their projects. In the power system, the privileged can speak because they carry their gender, their class, their color, their abled body, their language, and their university settings. Listening therefore represents a decentering, which is a space that causes discomfort, and which symbolizes what it means to be unimportant to a conversation or the powerlessness of being appropriated by “others”. In *French Lover* and *Brick Lane*, transnational women are silenced by colonial hierarchy, the imperialist system and by patriarchal dominance, which continues to impose its power dynamics on these women.

It is undeniable that silence is repressive in these cases: in fact silence is something learnt. Patriarchy and racism have imposed a long silence on both Nilanjana and Nazneen, and both of them have no choice but to listen to the patriarchal and racial system around them. They grow up with the familial, social, political, and economic values, practices, and norms that enforce their silence. They cannot speak outside the home because they are not allowed to learn to speak outside, or their voice is racialized. They cannot speak within the “imagined

homelands” because the patriarchal system, racist system, religious fundamentalists, or western liberalists do not let them speak. They are “spoken for” or “spoken about” from a limited perspective. In these case studies at least, silence is repressive: they do not choose to remain silent and without many choices they prefer to keep themselves silent.

Silence is maintained and sustained to build fear and terror, and vice versa: it is implemented to make its subjects obedient. In these case studies, Mithoo’s suicide and Razia’s so-called anti-Muslim acts, and Hasina’s disobedience are used to terrorise other women. Their examples are often quoted by male characters in the novel to silence them. After Nilanjana’s argument and her unwillingness to return to her husband’s home, her father asks her to hang herself like Mithoo. The patriarchal system always fills them with fear so that they do not speak. In Paris, Nilanjana is raped by an Indian relative; she is not able to tell this incident to anyone. In all these cases she is forced to endure silence because she knows that her rape will be a taboo, and mark her out as a “one who leaves her husband. What else can one expect?”

Nazneen, on the other hand, is not allowed to speak. Her mother and aunt always taught her to remain silent while, her father and husband exhibit that patriarchal pride which avows that any woman who lives outside of this structure will end up in prostitution like her sister, Hasina. This prompts Amma, Nazneen’s mother, to claim: “If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men” (Ali, 2004, 80). Similarly, Razia is often given as an example of a “bad Muslim woman” among the other Muslim women living in Brick Lane.” These examples are generally repeated by men among women to silence them every time they try to question anything or speak up.

### 5.3. Reading Silence in “Coatlicue State”

Spivak’s text is vital for the comprehension of the silence of the body of Third World women body as they go through a discussion of the imperialization of *brahmanized* patriarchal Indian society and the practice of *Sati Pratha* within it. The women in these novels are also the subaltern subject, whose voice is “represented” by others, and they are not allowed to self-represent themselves. Hence, the silence in both the novelistic case studies is sexualized and racialized in these “imagined homelands.” I will try to go beyond the reading of silence as oppressive and resistive to understand the idea of silence in this research. In this case, I will refer to Anzaldúa who introduces the “Coatlicue State” in her book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The new Mestiza* (1987). She explains that silence is an ambience around the person who lives the conflict within of being “other”:

As she falls... lost in the silence... of the empty air... turning... turning at midnight...turning into a wild pig...how to get back all the feathers... put them in the jar...the rattling ...full circle, and back...dark...windowless...no moon glides across the night sky...night sky...night sky” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 41-42).

Anzaldúa makes the point that one who is experiencing the “Coatlicue State” lives with a silence which is imposed and repressive, it is full of fear and terror in order to sustain the oppression. At the same time, she writes, “Let the wound caused by the serpent be cured by the serpent,” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 46) because the soul uses everything to further its own making. The “Coatlicue State” is that which disrupts the smooth flow of life, and is exactly what propels the soul to do its work and to increase its consciousness of itself. Subsequently, the silence which is

imposed becomes the tool through which the other moves from the state of the “other” to that of “conscious other.”

The “Coatlicue State” refers to the condition when there is profound silence outside, but where the internal state passes through the conflict, confusion, and doubts. Hence, it becomes the state to prepare oneself, to be self-conscious. Consequently, it helps to claim one’s own state of being the “other” as the “conscious other” to make the otherness stand within and fight outside the construct of “otherness.” It becomes the space of breaking the duality of the “other” and “self” to “conscious other.” As Anzaldúa writes:

The struggle has always been inner and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 87)

Thus, Anzaldúa’s projection of silence is to be aware of the outer world and the one’s own otherness. She says that the “struggle always been inner” and that is why the silence outside does not mean silence inside. The inside struggle could be longer or shorter, depending on the person who lives within it- in *French Lover*, Nazneen struggles for fifteen years in this state talking to herself, while Nilanjana’s struggle is relatively shorter. To quote Anzaldúa again:

our greatest disappointments and painful experiences- if we can make meaning out of them – can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. The Coatlicue state can be a way station, or it can be a way of life. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 46)

In this respect, it is interesting to see how both characters have decided to react while in the midst of the “Coatlicue State.”

Yes, silence is doubly imposed on transnational women, and they learn to live with that silence, but the silence outside does not mean they are silent inside. They see the darkness outside, but inside they are full of internal conflict.

In both of the literary case studies, I will explore silence as a mechanism which goes beyond repression. Nilanjana and Nazneen have used silence as a time for internal monologues and conflicts, a time for getting over the fear, a time for talking with oneself, a time for self-consciousness, and a time for preparation. Although both of these women remain silent in conversations and pretend to listen to the other, most of the time they talk to themselves. These women adopt this tool when they do not speak, but they converse within. And in these conversations, they are true to themselves, even as they pretend to be someone else outside in the patriarchal and racial system. Consequently, in their conversations, there are not two but three: the self (I) who talks, the other (you) who listens and the “conscious other” (it) who exists inside the other. In other words, the one who lives inside is the mirror reflection of the one who listens; the “conscious other” is the reflection of the “other.” The “other” sees through the mirror and sees one’s part. Anzaldúa writes about this and the mirror analogy:

There is another quality to the mirror, and that is the act of seeing. Seeing and being seen. Subject and object, I and she. The eye pins down the object of its gaze scrutinize it and judge it. A glance can freeze us in place; it can “possess” us. It can erect a barrier against the world. But in a glance also lies awareness, knowledge. These seemingly contradictory aspects- the act of being seen, held immobilized by a glance, and “seeing through” an

experience – are symbolized by the underground aspects of ... the *Coatlicue* State.  
(Anzaldúa, 1987, 42).

The image talks with her in silence and gives the answer which she does not express to others. Monica Ali has also explained such a situation

Nazneen did not know what he was talking about. ‘If you say so, husband.’ She had begun to answer him like this. She meant to say something else by it: sometimes that she disagreed, sometimes that she did not understand or that he was talking rubbish, sometimes that he was mad. But he heard it only as, ‘If you say so, husband’. (Ali, 2004, 99)

Nilanjana also seems to perform her actions in silence. When she leaves her husband’s house, and does not answer him, this act transports her out of the idealized model of woman as “obedient daughter” and “submissive wife” into the presumed category of “slut.” All this patriarchal discourse never listens to the silence of a woman rather it threatens and tortures her of being “conscious other” “if she (Nilanjana) does not want to live with her husband then should hang herself like Mithoo” (Ali, 2004, 155). Crucially, Nilanjana’s conversation with herself in silence reveals another story of an unhappily married daughter leaving a husband behind her. At the same time, her act of leaving her husband’s house in silence is a challenge to the existing hierarchized system the father carries a relation outside the marriage and leaves her wife suffering in silence, whereas the unhappy daughter leaves her husband behind.

Additionally, Nazneen also carries her unique strategy to resist- silence. Early in her marriage, she had resisted but it went unnoticed, regardless she knew she was capable of resisting:



Nazneen dropped the promotion (of her husband) from her prayers. She chopped two fiery red chillies and placed them, like hand grenades, in Chanu's sandwich. Unwashed socks were paired and put back in his drawer. The razor slipped when she cut his corns. His files got mixed up when she tidied. All her chores, peasants in his princely kingdom, rebelled in turn. Small insurrections, designed to destroy the state from within. (Ali, 2003, 63)

Although her challenges are growing, she keeps fighting her silent war. It starts with her kitchen, then her house, and eventually spills into the street when she lets Kareem enter her house and her married life. This action, in particular, represents Nazneen's challenge on a patriarchal society where a married woman is prohibited from seeking sexual satisfaction when there is no marital happiness in her life. But her action is used to demonstrate that she is a "bad woman," and yet she is not ashamed of her behaviour. She wants her husband to know that she is sleeping with another man: "Let my husband find out, Nazneen prayed. Let him kill me. Chanu was not so obliging. Can't you see what is going on under your nose, she demanded silently of him every day" (Ali, 2003, 384). Her resistance against him fails, but her consciousness is slowly building, and every moment,

Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesia*, a crossing. I am again an alien in a new territory. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape knowing, I will not be moving. Knowing is painful because after "it" happens I cannot stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 48)

In this chapter, we have made our own crossings; first a forced silence which is imposed on transnational women in double forms: patriarchy and then racism; and, secondly, an understanding that these women choose their repressed silence as their tool for self-learning. For them there is no obligation to offer an explanation to others, but to oneself, they do not talk externally, but inside they converse with the “other” of themselves. This transformation from “being oppressed” to “being conscious of the oppression” draws a remarkable difference between them. Above all, they become conscious of their “otherness” which they encounter in the “imagined homelands” where they live. Thus, their resistance starts from within while they are looking for a space which they can call “home.” Here the chapter ends, the sexualized, gendered, racialized “other” goes on the path of “conscious other,” breaking the duality of the “other” and the “self.” The chapter has looked at silence as a time to prepare oneself, as a time to struggle within, as a time to know oneself and as a time to go through the fear, shame and terror of being the “other.” Being a “conscious other” in this sense does not mean that the struggle outside has stopped, but that the internal conflict has ended. As Anzaldúa writes, “It is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 78), we must do something about it.

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## **6. Chapter 4. Homeland – revisited**

You say my name is ambivalence? Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and legged body. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web. Who, me, confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me. (Anzaldúa, 2009, 2)

In the last two chapters, I examined the construction of “imagined homelands” in a post-national world considering the transnational, South Asian, brown women’s perspective. In the conclusion of this chapter, I discussed these women as being sexualized, gendered and racialized from within these “imagined homelands,” where they are bordered as the other of the “imagined homelands” and those who are expected to display their “dis/interested love and sacrifice.” At the same time, these women create their own border space, because they exist at the threshold of the multiple “imagined homelands.” In the following chapter, I further discussed the mechanism used by these women to survive in these “imagined homelands” from the position of being the “other.” To be at “the border space is painful; it is full of fear and terror” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 3) and in this respect, I have exhibited silence as space and time employed by these women to move from the position of being the “other” to the “conscious other.” They live as “conscious other” at the in-between space. In this process of their movement towards their newly achieved “in-between” space, they answer the questions “Do they want to go back?” and “Where is their homeland?” In this chapter, I will analyze the answers of Nilanjana and Nazneen.

In both novels, the women writers go beyond the modern definition of the territorial nation and its boundaries to discuss homeland, from the perspective of transnational, South Asian, brown women. These women suggest a key divergence in the version of homeland from

that of the transnational male perspective, as far as the novels are concerned. I will start talking about the male designed homeland in the novels, and from there, I will be able to draw the alternative conceptualization which Nasreen and Ali portray in their novels. To discuss the proposed idea of “homeland,” I will move to the metaphorical meaning of homeland which challenges the limits of the geographical duality of homeland. This has traditionally been pictured as either the “origin” or the “place of residence,” as that which questions the “imagined homelands,” breaks with the illusion of the past and future and tries to move beyond the delusion of the “return” to the past and search for the future, as an attempt to reach the faraway material or imaginary land.

The geographical homeland as “origin” has been seen and felt by many transnational “exiled” diaspora writers (male or female) - as the land which is continuously imagined through memories and nostalgia. Salman Rushdie, for instance, a postcolonial intellectual and a British-Indian writer, is a well-known male transnational writer whose themes are based on his memories of his past. *Midnight's Children* (1995), *The Satanic Verses* (1997), *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), and *Shame* (1995) are his most famous works and address them explicitly. In his collection of essays *Imaginary Homelands* (2010), Rushdie asserts that he cannot forget his roots and tradition, nor can he return to his past, except in a sort of “imaginary” manner. He writes his novels through the fragmented memories of his homeland, while sitting in a room looking down on the European streets outside his window. By living in a state of cultural symbiosis, the migrant writer can only create *imaginary homelands*, fictions of a mind, which is neither here nor there.

It may be that writers in my position, exiles, emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated

into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge- that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the things that were lost; that we will, in short, create fictions and actual cities or village, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indian of the mind.

(Rushdie, 2010, 10)

Apart from his nostalgia for his past, Rushdie celebrates his uniqueness as a migrant (male) writer, having both Indian and British historical and cultural background in his writing. This creates a hybrid or a crossroad between his past and present. He creates his “imaginary homeland” through his fragmented memories and lives together with a nostalgia concerning for the past which complicates and mystifies his present. He is an “insider and outsider at the same time” (Rushdie, 2010, 19). The writing of Salman Rushdie is itself a “complete” and complicated corpus, they are the texts of a migrant (male) writer who says that he does not want to reject his past and at the same time, wants to live his present.

Where, in this thesis, I have considered the work of two female diaspora writers who have a different migratory background. Taking into account Salman Rushdie alongside the female writers, it is important to recognize the difference in displacement based on class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Ahmad, 1992; Ngugi Wa Thiong, 1993). Taslima Nasreen, for instance, is an exiled Bangladeshi woman writer who expresses her nostalgia in her books *मुझे घर ले चलो* (2010, Take Me to Home), and *निर्बसन* (Exile).<sup>26</sup> Although she has lived in Europe for ten years, and despite holding Swedish citizenship, she prefers to live in, or at least closer to

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<sup>26</sup> I have done the translation of title of the books in English. Taslima Nasreen writes in Bangla (Bangladeshi) and most of her works are translated in English but the above mentioned novels do not have its English translation.

her country. She lives in India but calls Bangladesh her home and India her second home.

Nasreen has written autobiographical novels on her exile reflecting on her pain of separation, nostalgia, and the memories of her sorrowful past. Having travelled to Europe and the USA, she is still waiting for the call from Bangladesh, while, in India she lives on a temporary visa. She does not celebrate the hybridity of her past memories and her complex position in the present, rather, she demonstrates her non-belonging to either side as a brown woman in a patriarchal and racist society in her novels and essays such as *No Country for Women* (2002) and *French Lover* (2002).

Seeing these two writers' internal complexity, the difference in their movement, the place of their residence, their gender, their sexuality and their class, the significance of homeland is explicitly different. As writers, they have presented the complexity of positionality in their writing in a differing ways. Rushdie creates his "imaginary homeland" in the unique combination of his fragmented memories of past and re-lives them in the present through his writing. While Taslima Nasreen, as an exiled woman writer, lives with the nostalgia of her past but she is critical of both the homelands: her past and her present from the position of a woman writer. Apart from these writers (who have been repeatedly had fatwa against them), Monica Ali crossed the border at the age of three, and therefore it is likely that she has no memory of traversing the border. She represents a different generation which does not live with the memories of one's own experience but with those of others.

Nonetheless, the writing of these transnational writers somehow allows for the shift from nation based paradigms to "transnational models emphasising the global space of ongoing travel and transcontinental connection" (Friedman, 2006, 906).

Rushdie's hybrid psychology elucidates the duality of the two male migrant characters of the novels- Chanu and Kishan- who are unable to accept either definition of homeland.

Homeland is an origin, somewhere "to return to," or a present residential space which one must "adapt to." Rushdie is concerned with the hybridity of the nostalgia of the past and an adaptation in the present by a male migrant writer. Moreover, Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali show the limitation of the meaning of "homelands," "origin," or "residence" in their novels: either a "desired land" or a "land without hopes" among the male characters.

### **6.1. Homeland – "a land of hopes."**

Monica Ali pictures the homeland as an "imagined land," far away, in the imagination, full of opportunities, a land without racism, that is welcoming, culturally assimilated, populated by obedient families, as a land without foreign corruption but replete with respect for elders and men. Taking the example of Chanu in the novel *Brick Lane*, homeland for him is a place to return to his "origin" as a solution to all the existing problems that he finds in the other's land. He feels that "Bangladesh is the happiest country in the world" (Ali, 2004, 350). He imagines Bangladesh (the present) through the lenses of an imaginary past as "the land of gold and knowledge." He has a photographed image of his homeland which continues to be the same in his memories and keeps deleting any new knowledge about his land which might break the perfect image of his homeland. For instance, he ignores the condition of Hasina, the sister of his wife, who is an example of the current plight of Bangladesh; deluded, he continues blaming Hasina for her violation, prostitution and disrespectful life (Ali, 2004, 351). Chanu keeps on teaching his daughters about Bangladesh; he forces them to speak Bangla, read Bengali history. However, his daughters do not connect themselves with the memories of her parents. They do not themselves feel Bangladeshi but call London their homeland.

Chanu always hopes a return which will be different from any other Bangladeshi because he carries an English legacy of living having resided in the colonial land for years and acting as though he were “English.”

## **6.2. Homeland- “a land without hopes.”**

In *French Lover*, Nasreen’s male diaspora character, Kishan, is the husband of Nilanjana who does not want to return to his country, India. For him, homeland as an “origin” is a distanced place, a place of poverty, unemployment, with no future prospects. Instead, *Videsh* (the foreign land) is a land of promise, hope and opportunity- for Kishan, his future lies in Paris. He marries a French girl and settles in there with a residential card and owns two restaurants in Paris, after their divorce, however, he marries Nilanjana who comes from India to live with him. Many Bangladeshi men in the novel, who come to find a job and settle in Europe like Kishan, end up working as cheap labour without documents. Despite being doubly othered by their color, class and colonial identity, they lie to their family about their menial jobs and try to maintain the image of *Videsh* as “land of illusion”. They do not want to go back home, nor do they want to tell their family the truth of being an undocumented, Third World, illegal migrant: most of them do not have the money to go back (Nasreen, 2002, 34).

These definitions of “homelands” as an origin – as a desired land to return to, or as a residence- a land of future to adapt are significantly demonstrated by the attitudes and perspective of transnational men in the novels. In the course of this research, I intend to study the other discourses which the female protagonists are drawing on, that exist beside these notions of the homeland in transnational studies. In the process of coming toward the answer, there are some questions which will need to be solved: for instance, “Is the return to “origin” the same for



the transnational women as it is for Chanu?,” “Is the rejection of returning to the homeland similar to the one which Kishan does?,” Does the homeland accept them as it accepts Chanu?

These questions bring us back to the interrogative conversations from where this thesis began. Both Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali position their transnational female protagonists in a situation where they face the questions “where do they want to go?” “Where do they want to belong to?” Do they want to go back? Nilanjana and Nazneen respond with “leave it to fate” or “there is no country for women,” which stand as a direct challenge to many hegemonic ideologies.

The answers must be seen from the position of these two women. They are not only transnational migrants but South Asian, transnational women who are also in the role of wives and mothers that carry their color, their religion, their class, their nationality, and their colonial background. If transnational lives challenge the modern concept of the nation, then South Asian transnational brown (Hindu/ Muslim) women carry a bigger project, as far as these novels are concerned. They go beyond the concept of nation in defining their homeland with their gender, their color, their Third World identity making it complex and unique. They question the boundaries of “imagined homelands” within which they live and construct the “in-between” space between the borders of the “imagined homelands.” They also challenge the duality of an “origin-al” homeland and the “residential” homeland from women’s perspective. They break the illusion of past and future, the dream of a “return” to the past and the misapprehension of utopian, faraway future. Instead, they create a reality which they find no/where, but now/here. In this context, they propose a new homeland which goes towards a “border(home)land.”

In *French Lover*, Taslima Nasreen asks: “Do women have a land of their own?” Do they have a land of “origin,” or is it the land of their residence? She rejects/being rejected by the land from where she comes, but also by the land she arrives at. Monica Ali’s protagonist says “let fate decide!” But who decides that fate- the Islamic fundamentalists or the Western liberalists?

### **6.3. “Let fate decide”- Nazneen**

Being situated in the in-between, in the space between liberals and fundamentalists, I see an intriguing dialogue between Nazneen and her daughter. Her daughter asks her: “Do you want to go?” In Nazneen’s response, the conversation then leads towards the discussion of her homeland:

Do you want to go? Biwi turned her broad face to look up at her mother as if she would catch the reply between her lips.

Nazneen told the girls the story of “How You Were Left to Your Fate.” She began with the words I was a stillborn child, and she ended with that was God’s will (that I live). It was the way she always told it.

‘You did not answer. It was not an answer.’

‘It was my answer,’ said Nazneen. (Ali, 2004, 216-17)

Nazneen leaves her village after her marriage when she is sixteen and carries the image of her home with her. Monica Ali has exquisitely painted Nazneen’s past through the fragmented memories of her village and her childhood. Nazneen often goes back to the memories, in which she used to converse with her mother, her aunt, and her neighbours, so as to understand, compare and respond to her present life questions. She learns about her religion and God from her mother,

and is taught “How everything was left on God’s fate”. Unlike her mother, she encounters a present which is distinct from her mother’s: living in London, she has a rented flat on Brick Lane, two daughters more rebellious than she was, new Muslim women around her, and different groups with dissimilar interpretations of Islam. In every step of her life, she compares and negotiates her present with the past and comes to her convincing conclusion.

Certainly, she wants to go back to meet her sister, but not to a country more abstractly, Nazneen seeks the moments when she lived with her sister. Nazneen does not think that “Bangladesh is the happiest country in the world,” rather, she sees Bangladesh through Hasina’s letters which gives her a panoramic view of the changing life in Bangladesh, the patriarchal system, its political changes, the poverty and the corruption (Ali, 2004, 351). Her sister always tries to escape from the rules of patriarchy. For instance, she elopes with a lower caste man, and eventually leaves him due to domestic violence; she works in the house of an old man who rapes her; she enters into prostitution, and marries another man who used to beat her. Although Hasina continues to escape from patriarchal dominance, she cannot avoid continually falling into its traps. Unlike her sister, Nazneen always stays back and lets “fate decide”. Nazneen witnesses two women’s lives: the past through her mother and the present of her far away original homeland, she remembers her mother and witnesses the life of her sister. Perhaps it could be said that she lives two women’s lives silently, that is, the life of her mother in her fragmented memories, and the epistolary present of her sister. Between these two women, and between the past and present, between her mother’s submission and her sister’s repeated escape, Nazneen looks for her own life.

On “foreign” land, Nazneen is not limited to her mother and sister. In London, she meets different types of women in Razia and Mrs Islam, and encounters different aspects of Islam-

through the Bengal Tigers and the Lion Hearts (who make her sceptical about her own faith.) Every new discussion on Islam around her, makes her question and probe her faith. These circumstances are highlighted in the novel to underscore the debate between her religion and the outside. For instance, when Chanu tries to appease high-class Muslims (such as Dr. Azad), Nazneen being his wife, is forced to behave akin to her husband which agitates her. To calm her anxious mind, she opens a random page of Qur'an which says:

To God belongs all that the heaven and the earth contain. God is self-sufficient and worthy of praise. She said it over a few times, aloud. She was composed. Nothing could bother her. Only God if he chose to. Chanu might flap about and squak because Dr Azad was coming for dinner. To God belongs all that heavens and the earth contains. (Ali, 2004, 20)

She does not say anything to her husband, but Nazneen knows that she always stands with him somewhat disingenuously; she does not follow his thought, but creates her own (even if it does contradicts her husband.) Besides that, she meets with Karim who leads the Bengal Tigers; Karim updates her on Muslim activity in the world at large, where he supports the fundamental activities of his Muslim groups. In conversation with him, she is not heard, but used as a mouthpiece for his words:

Karim says 'a devout Muslim is willing to sacrifice himself for his religion. Nazneen says "a Muslim cannot commit suicide. He who kills himself with a sword, or poison, or throws himself off a mountain will be tormented on the day of Resurrection with that very thing (Ali, 2004, 383).

In most conversations, she talks to herself because she is not allowed to speak up. She does not try to convince others, but is self-reflexive and conscious about her religion in considering what Islam actually is. She notices that her husband and Kareem try to convince others, and, for her, their proselytizing only serves to make them more dubious. At the same time, her divergent versions of Islam do not necessarily mean that she is assimilating into the white liberalist idea of Islamophobia, because she understands that changing her dress and throwing her *burqa* and *saree* away is not going to liberate her.

Suddenly, she was gripped by the idea that if she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well. If she wore a skirt and a jacket and a pair of high heels then what else would she do but walk around the glass palaces on Bishopsgate, and talk into a slim phone and eat lunch out of paper bag? If she wore trousers and underwear, like the girl with the big camera on Brick Lane, then she would roam the streets fearless and proud. And if she had a tiny skirt with knickers to match and a tight bright top, then she would-skate through life with a sparkling smile and a handsome man who took her hand and made her spin, spin, spin. (Ali, 2004, 278)

Hence, Nazneen is in continuous conversation with the original homeland and residential homeland at a local and global level. She lives in a complicated border space between past and present, between her mother and her sister, between different Islam(). Therefore, Monica Ali engages her reader in a metaphoric reading of Nazneen's answer to "let the fate decide" her "homeland." Maybe Ali, who is herself between two religions, uses "fate" as her trick to position the protagonist: Nazneen is taught to believe in God's faith- for everything that happens in her life. She entrusts her last decision to God; at this point her definition of God becomes symbolic for her. Is God what the Bengal Tigers define? Or is God the negated figure apparently

dethroned by the Lion Hearts? Should she also follow the “fate” as her mother? Or escape from it like her sister? Intermingled with these questions, there is the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of her faith in her God, together with the conversations with her husband, Kareem, and Razia.

#### **6.4. “Do women have a country of their own? – No, they don’t.”**

Towards the end of *French Lover*, Nilanjana, the protagonist, leaves her husband and, is forsaken by her father and brother too. At the end, she decides to leave, Benoit, her French lover as well standing alone, she looks out of the window. After her altercation with Benoit, she calls her French friend Danielle who asks her where she wants to go now:

So what are your plans? Are you going back?

Nilanjana asked ‘where’?

Where else? To your land?

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

Then stay here. Did not you once say everyone has two motherlands, one 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, 291-2)

Nasreen demonstrates the illusion of Nilanjana of going back to her home/land; she “returns” to her “home/land” looking for the one which she left before her marriage, but of

course it is not the same one she left before coming to Paris. And it is not only the destination that would have changed, the actual process of returning has changed too: she leaves her country as the wife of Kishan and would return a separated woman. Her “home/land” demands that she play patriarchy’s gendered role of a wife and a mother. Her role as a wife comes above all, even her father and brother hold back their relationship with her, or when her father insists, “either you go back to your husband or hang yourself like Mithoo” (Nasreen, 2002, 155).

Her city Calcutta (India) suddenly became a place where she never belonged now she did not feel Calcutta was her own. She began to feel as if she had never known it, never played in the dust and grime of the city and never whispered to the breeze on the Ganga. For Nilanjana, Calcutta was now a *burning ghat* (pyre). Now there was no one called Calcutta, nothing called Calcutta. (Nasreen, 2002, 157)

As a character, Nasreen lucidly shows how the “return” of a transnational woman is not easy, and not the same as it would be for a transnational man. Avtar Brah, in this context, writes that,

Homeland, as the origin is an essential term, is only a myth where it is not possible to return because it does not exist anymore. The homeland which is left was a different place years ago or months ago and it does not remain the same. It could be possible to visit the geographical territory that looks like the origin. (Brah, 1996, 192)

It is not only that homeland as an “origin” changes, but also that the person who leaves that origin changes in turn, for instance, now Nilanjana is conscious of her otherness. Consequently, the meaning of home and homeland changes for Nilanjana. The meaning of home and homeland is socially constructed according to the convenience of the patriarchal system, in

which women have to be functional as wife or slut, submissive as a secondary member in a patriarchal system and to show their obedience without any question. Thus, the return to the origin-al is impossible for a woman once she leaves her home/land.

Nilanjana is sexualized and racialized as well when she comes to live in Paris either by her brown community or White society and therefore, in either of the imagined homelands her sexual and racial body is ignored, as we have already seen the previous chapters. She is homeless within. She is demanded to be obedient, selfless and loyal, at the cost of losing her half -identity (as a woman or as brown). So, within these homelands, she continues to live in either racial or patriarchal coloniality; this explains Nilanjana's answer of not belonging to either side. She forces the reader to see the complexity of what it means to be a Third World, brown, transnational woman. Her answer points to the non-belonging of those "imagined homelands," where she has to be divided and categorized by her color and gender. Despite this, her answer makes us rethink transnational studies from the perspective of a brown, Third World woman where she has a doubly critical position: in opposition to the racist (white) feminist group, while at the same time, targeting the patriarchal brown community.

## **6.5. Rejecting Home/lands**

Nilanjana, on the one hand, rejects/is rejected by her home/land because her home/land demands the similar role of a wife from her— as an unhappy wife, showing dis/interested love to the home/land. Nazneen does not go back with her husband; apart from her growing sentimental relation with her husband, she never feels that she is his wife. He asks "You are coming with me, then? You'll come? 'No,' she breathed... 'I can't go with you,' she said" (Ali, 2003, 478) here, their return to a home/land demands similar roles to those which they were sent out with.



Strehle's comparison of home with homeland expresses that both are based on the same theory of women's suppression:

Like home, homeland connotes a settled, homogeneous place of mythic origins.

Homeland is the country-sized space of the home, of kin and belonging, and therefore of sentimental unity. In the settled spaces of home and nation, women are read as representing what they cannot exercise, while the system of representation naturalises their subordination and renders it invisible. (Strehle, 1998, 2-3)

The novels, together with Strehle's observation, provoke us to think multilaterally. The protagonists of the novels finally stay in the "foreign land," however, they do not surrender themselves to the "new home/land." Interestingly, the novels contain the similar plot, where the protagonists have a love affair outside their marriage, and in so doing they repeat the history of affairs which their fathers committed. In the contradictory situation of fathers and daughters, the fathers are not questioned for their illicit affair; it is their wives who are blamed for not fulfilling the men's desire. It is the protagonists who are stigmatized as adulteresses, as bad women. Nilanjana and Nazneen only turn to infidelity because they are not sexually or emotionally satisfied in their relationship while looking for a "new home." Towards the end of both novels, Nazneen and Nilanjana decline or end the relationships with the men they meet in the "new land." They had assumed that these new men would be different from the men in their homeland, but, in the end, both women realize that they had never really left that particular paradigm.

In the closing pages of these novels, there is the realization that changing the home (land) has not changed their lives, it has only slightly shifted the paradigm there is an inevitability where "It seemed that just as Chanu had lost an invisible audience, Karim had gained one" (Ali,

2004, 407). Equally, in *French Lover*, Nilanjana experiences the same with Benoit who “looked up with a smile of satisfaction, ‘you know something? I will put you in my own house. Pascale (his first wife) can rent a place somewhere else’” (Nasreen, 2002, 289). At the denouement of *French Lover*, Nilanjana decides to have an abortion and dismisses the proposal of marriage, while, analogously, Nazneen concludes that she does not want to continue her relationship with Karim.<sup>27</sup> In the end, both women dismiss the “new home /land,” and the dual rejections of both men symbolize the rejection of the both “home/lands.”

### 6.6. Rejecting Faraway Homeland

In both case studies neither of the women chooses to go back to the “home/land” from where they come, but neither do they stay at the new “home/land.” In this, they both refer to the patriarchal home/land of both sides: Kishan to Benoit, Chanu to Kareem. Hence, their illusion of “home/land” breaks and they choose to create a new homeland instead of searching for an illusory home/land. Their choices criticize the idea of projecting a homeland for women that is “a faraway utopian land” for women (Kaplan, 1999, 6). Caren Kaplan suggests that most Euro-American novels project an idea of the open emptiness of the desert, sea, or sky as metaphors for infinity and timelessness. Space is “there” (1996, 149). These metaphorical mirages somehow construct the similar “absolute imagined space” marked by “fixity” and “inertness” of seeing the homeland “there” whether it is material or metaphorical.

Monica Ali portrays, for instance, small vignettes, where what might not be important for some, is a way of “feeling at home” for others. For instance, the final scene of the novel that

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<sup>27</sup> In this case study, Karim’s identity is also very interesting. He was brought up in Brick Lane by Bangladeshi parents. He does not speak Bangla, but represents Bangladeshi community living in Brick Lane. Nazneen, in Karim, finds a young Muslim who has an Anglo-Bangladeshi identity.

depicts the image of Nazneen's long-desired chance to go ice skating, which she always saw on television:

She opened her eyes. In front of her was a huge white circle, bounded by four- foot- high boards. Glinting, dazzling, enchanting ice. She looked at the ice, and slowly it revealed itself. A woman swooped by on one leg. No sequins, no short skirt. She wore jeans. She raced on, on two legs. 'Here are your boots, Amma' said her daughter. She turned round. To get on the ice physically - it hardly seemed to matter. In her mind, *she was already there*. (Ali, 2004, 492)

Taslima Nasreen also dispels the false illusions of a new future for her protagonist; she leaves her husband and moves ahead in search of a better place, but it is not until the end of the novel that she realizes that there is no better homeland-

Tell me, is there a good place on this earth? Where would you say there is a total safety? Aren't there addicts in Manila? Robbers, murderers? There is poverty, sorrow and superstition there, as it is here. This country has racism, so does India. Women are raped in Calcutta, as it is in here. This Rue de Vouillé, where only white people stay, do you think murders never happen here? Of course, they do. One could have happened just today! (293)

From their relative positions, they propagate that "feeling at home" is not limited to any particular country, nation, or homeland: it is a moment which can truly be lived anywhere. These women do not engage in the idea of rejecting either their "original" or residential homeland as desired or undesired homelands, in fact, their choice suggests that their homeland exists at the transnational level. Nilanjana's homeland does not fix its meaning in looking for a "safe" and

“secure” home/land- she ends up finding a home in a place which is “insecure.” Nazneen does not see any faraway home/land for herself. Instead, she is *already* there. These novels demarcate the idea of “border(home)land” that is not geographically or imaginarily fixed. It is about constant movement, to be in the continuous present sense of living despite “lived” and knowing one “will live,” is to be “becoming” than “being”. There is no rejection of ‘lived’ as the past, but it remains as the memory which both the characters carry but do not lock themselves within. They do not see a future where they will find a space for themselves: it is “no/where” but “now/here.”

Consequently, Nazneen and Nilanjana reject the illusion of living between the past and future, both spatially and metaphorically. Nazneen chooses to go beyond the memories of her mother and the letters of her sister. She does not submit to the past like her mother neither she keeps running away in search of faraway future. She chooses an in-between space between the memories of the past and illusions of the future, instead, she sees herself *already* there. She decides her god and then “let fate decide” her life. Moreover, Nilanjana’s case shows that the “return” to place, time, or memory is not the same journey as it would be for transnational men. Her home/land has changed, and she has also changed. She is accepted only when she is submissive to her land and her home, where, in a patriarchal society, both women conclude that the change of home/land does not change their “otherness” at either local or global level.

Both women challenge the “imagined homelands,” which are patriarchal and racial, and which follow the similar modern construct of nationhood. Their answers move towards a border-space where the global meets the local; here they encounter a space between borders, a space where the prohibited and othered live. The borderspace where their othered identities meet and “feel at home” represents a space where their plurality is recognized, where their loyalty is not

questioned, where their in-between is accepted, and where their flexibility becomes part of their living. This borderspace is inclusive, and questions the rigidity of the “imagined homelands” from a non- position where it can doubly negotiate at the local and the global levels.

## **6.7. “Border(home)land”**

Nazneen and Nilanjana’s answers -“let fate decide” and “do women have a country of their own?” - show their in-betweenness, and their belonging and non-belonging to (n)either side. It shows, the complexity of their position as being a Third World transnational, brown women; their inability to speak in gendered and racialized spaces; their consciousness of being in this in-between space; and their consciousness of being “other” and the search for their homeland. In this regard, both Ali and Nasreen help to cross this dichotomy of the homeland to enter into the space between them: what I have ventured to call the – “border(home)land.” The border (home)land, as seen from the Third World, South Asian, transnational women, – is inclusive of a plurality of their identity, and flexible in each case (whether it is religion, class, color, gender and nationality).

This space becomes a space of plurality because Nilanjana and Nazneen show their complex identities, of being a woman, a Muslim, a brown and they continuously stand at the borderspace because of this pluri-identity. As Anzaldúa says “she learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She has a plural personality; she operates in a pluralistic mode. She turns this ambivalence into something else- the third element” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 79). Because of their pluri-personalities, they do not want to fall on either side of the “barb-wire” of the border, where their gender, color or religion would be made individually significant. Instead, they create a new “border space.”

With a body of multiple identities, their in-between position becomes a space of double negotiation, which operates on a local level as much a global one. As discussed earlier, Homi K. Bhabha describes the term “negotiation” as a rejection of a priori, pre-constituted principles in a movement towards a dialogical, discursive exchange (Bhabha, 1994, 25). Gayatri Spivak (as I have already quoted earlier in this thesis) defines “negotiation” as the deconstruction of “established structure like the laws, institutional education and capitalism. Negotiation is not collaboration but producing a new politics through critical intimacy” (Spivak, 1993, 130). Nasreen and Ali have both placed their character where they find momentary satisfaction by refusing the subordinate and secondary role of Woman. Together with this, Nilanjana’s answer of not belonging to either white feminism or brown communism, and, in turn, Nazneen’s rejection of Islamic fundamentalism and Western liberalism, brings about the new discussion of transnational women lives. This “not belonging to either side” marks a departure from both sides towards the “border space” where the border is shared with both, that is, as woman, as brown, as Muslim and as woman. They adopt a double critique function when they enter the space of the border. This term “double critique,” (*pensée autre*) coined by Abdelkhebir Khatibi, a Moroccan sociologist, disrupts all sorts of binary definitions. A double critique therefore presents the need to be critical of dualities, to think from both traditions and at the same time, from neither of them. A double critique releases knowledge(s) that have been subalternized and the release of those knowledge(s) makes possible “an other thinking.” “An other thinking” is a way of re-thinking difference and identity without recourse to absolutes and “isms”. It is an “archaeology of silence” and resistance of recuperation within a closed system (Khatibi, 1985, 14).

In these novels, both women have positioned themselves using the coordinates of a “double critique.” For instance, Taslima Nasreen, via Nilanjana, is critical of “global feminism”

and her brown community, together with the complexity of gender, color, class, and culture. Nasreen proposes a way out of dichotomies through a double critique and the search of “an other thinking” – she is not ready to accept either of the countries as her home if there is no space for women. Monica Ali positions this complex situation of a Muslim woman between the Western idea of liberalism and Islamic Fundamentalism. This double-edged critique goes beyond the binary concept with its critique on double-sided nature of these competing ideologies. So their position shifts from fixity between Western ideology and Eastern ideology, to the space of negotiation on both sides. It is these characteristics of Nilanjana and Nazneen that create their “border(home)land.”

The “border(home)land” exhibits the *Nueva Conciencia Mestiza*, particularly where Anzaldúa states that:

this assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor it is a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a 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. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 80)

For Anzaldúa, the key is to extricate oneself from an essentialized category which is based on a dualistic Eurocentric discourse in other words, the dividing line which demarcate categories such as – the oppressor and oppressed, between brown and woman, between a return to memories and the achievement of the future illusion, between imagined homelands, between home/lands. The “*Nueva Conciencia Mestiza*” also projects a space of “conscious other,” it celebrates the multiplicity of identities, and operates in the interstices between the past and the future, at borderspace between “imagined homelands.” Therefore, Anzaldúa and the women

from both *French Lover* and *Brick Lane*, cross the border and arrive at the Nueva Conciencia Mestiza- where the complexity of their positionality recognises their plurality of being a woman, together with their Third World identity, brown color, their class, and their religion, all of which is complicated by their geopolitical location.

As far as the novels are concerned, “Nueva Conciencia Mestiza” does not mean that the racialization, sexualization, gendering of the body, and religion ends- in fact, they are now represented as the “conscious other” to protect themselves in their border space. It becomes a space of negotiation, a space of rejecting the false need to fix themselves within the boundaries of “imagined homelands.” It is a space of continuity and transition, for instance, Nazneen’s husband calls her from Bangladesh, astonished, to tell her that Hasina has vanished with a young boy, while Nazneen knowingly answers, “She isn’t going to give up” (Ali, 2004, 486). Equally, Nilanjana’s statement “there is no country for women” is a clear declaration of her knowledge, that, if she is othered by her sex, gender, caste and ethnic color in her country, then she is also racially, sexually “other” in other’s country. The choice of living in Paris does not end her problems; she would rather experience the social exclusion of her sex, gender, color, and class than in her “homeland.”

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## 7. My Homeland

To provide my own answer for the question of homeland I need to revisit the responses of both the protagonists, that is, both Nilanjana's "Do women have a country of their own?- No they don't" and Nazneen's "Let fate decide." Standing between two borders, Nilanjana chooses none of them, and Nazneen creates her faith in-between. In this process, I have considered the position of these women and have intended not to see my life through their lens, but I have somehow lived vicariously through them. As far as I can remember, while reading the novels, one after the other, I began to live their lives. I selected two novels written about two women's lives so that I did not lose myself in one over the other. Together, Nilanjana and Nazneen helped me to balance my position; neither of them let me lose myself. I tried not to speak for them but to speak with them. I understood with them that when a woman crosses the border then she carries her local to the global where "the third world grates against the first and bleeds, where a line divides the "self" and the "other," where an undetermined and vague borderland is created" (Anzaldúa, 1987, 3).

I have, in many aspects, been privileged as a traveler, as I have been able to cross the border alone as a single, independent woman with a scholarship to study a master's in Women's and Gender studies at European university. Of course, when I crossed the border, my local aspects came with me i.e. my married life, my family, anything which continually reminds me that belong to my land. Skype, What's app, and Facebook have always taken me to the imaginary worlds which I see through the monitor of my laptop, opening out onto other worlds- outside the window, but the windows giving out onto the Spanish streets below me too, I have connected two different worlds, cultures, languages, and people; I was living between my laptop

monitor and the window of my room. Sometimes, I remembered that I have to go back to my country and people, and, other times, I have referred to Granada as *my* city, the rented room as *my* room, *my* people. I imagined the reality and lived the imaginary: “in-between.”

I keep remembering my movement from Khagaria to New Delhi, where I moved from an interior to the capital; my local identity as a woman kept fighting against the patriarchal rules which used to intersect class and caste. Here, within the Third World, I continue to move between the One-Third World to the Two Thirds World and vice versa. As a small town girl in New Delhi and a Delhiite in my small town, I was already living different feminism(s) when I used to position myself as a feminist of these two different worlds. I would see myself in Khagaria with my mother, and in another, in New Delhi, shouting against the rape that happened on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2012. The global dimension of my position has been altered in many aspects; I entered into global feminism and encountered different voices, Latin Americans and Europeans (the majority from Spain, from England or, Belgium for example). These encounters occurred within and outside the classroom, and it took some time to fully understand the division between “we” and “they” inside feminism(s). In defining “we” and “they” there were aspects beyond gender such as color and colonial background. Being an Indian between these structures, I questioned gender structure together with color and colonial history. However, there was the realization that I do not fit into either of them – “we” or “they.” In this regard, the texts such as “Politics of Translation”(1993) by Spivak and “Dislocating the Sign: Toward a Translocal Feminist Politics of Translation”(2004) by Claudia de Lima Costa and Sonia Alvarez intercept, and ultimately undermine, the assumption among Third World women that all Third World women are “similar,” and “good.” Instead of dividing myself between “we” and “they,” between the binary opposition, I tried to look for my homeland, somewhere “in between.”

I still do not believe how I dared to leave my home behind and go far from my mother and my people. Maybe, I was wrong; I never left my home/land behind. Instead I carried it within me. Hence at this point in time, I choose to include a piece of my writing scribbled on a piece of paper which could define my homeland:

*I am not a bridge, over which people step,*

*I am a flowing river below that bridge.*

*I move between rigid lands and touch the shore*

*play with them and break them with every hit*

*I am never alone,*

*sand, plants and fishes are my company*

*we move together, but then we separate*

*I don't save them, neither do they save me.*

*I am constantly moving "in-between."*

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## 8. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have tried to situate Gloria Anzaldúa's theoretical concepts "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" and "Coatlicue State" in the analytical reading of the novels of Taslima Nazreen and Monica Ali through comparative feminist approach. In spite of carrying different cultural, social and colonial and historical backgrounds, I have understood that her concept of the "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" and the "Coatlicue State" can be studied in the analysis of the South Asian, brown, transnational women. The question of the "in-betweenness" of transnational women in these texts plus Anzaldúa's theoretical reading of "Nueva Conciencia Mestiza" allows the polyvocality of these texts to be comprehended by the feminism(s) of "differences". As Mohanty suggests, a "comparative feminist studies" is one of the most useful and productive pedagogical strategies for feminist cross-cultural work. It is this particular model that provides a way to theorize a complex relational understanding of experience, location, and history to construct a real notion of "universal" and of democratization rather than colonization (2003, 238).

These novels open up the revision on the construction of nation and state, nationalism and homelands, from the transnational feminist approach by placing transnational South Asian Third World brown women at the center of their writing. The projection of their female characters goes beyond gender to encompass other aspects which intersect this category, such as color, class, religion, nationality, colonial identity, age, and university education. Therefore, these novels focus beyond patriarchy, intersectionality and Adrienne Rich's "politics of location" to a revised definition of the "politics of location" which considers, the race, imperialism, experience, and a cross border spacio-temporal idea. Both *French Lover* and *Brick Lane* have

brilliantly crafted the complexity of transnationality by taking memories and nostalgia into account, in tandem with the cultural and historical influences of the past and the pressing challenges of the present. The writing in these novels carries a metaphorical sense, which offers an intense understanding of transnational women's lives.

Furthermore, these transnational women writers have shown in their work that nationalism is the causal and main contributing factor to the modern system of the nation. It continues to exist in the form of "imagined homelands" in a "post-national" and "borderless" world. Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali have explored the processes of assimilation and exclusion of that South Asian, transnational, Third World, brown women experience in different "imagined homelands." In both novels, women carrying their gender, color, religion, and nationality do not fit into the "imagined homelands," which continue to follow the modern colonial attitude (which manifests itself as racist feminism and patriarchal anti-racism, and Western Islamophobia and Islamic fundamentalism.) Importantly, in the conclusion of the second chapter we have seen the "in-betweenness" of the characters between these "imagined homelands." In the third chapter, I have explored how Nasreen and Ali have demonstrated silence as a strategy to survive within and between these "imagined homelands," when it offers the time and space to ready oneself for the movement from the "other" to the "conscious other." Their projection of silence defies the duality of reading silence as a symbol of repression or resistance. These writers have used silence to show their character's movement towards their emancipation, where their voice is unheard and where other discourses fail to hear them.

Both writers have created their counter-space in a transnational discourse; they both defied in their own way the constructed notion of "home/land" in their novels. They are defying the taxonomic limits on transnational, South Asian, brown women (which would otherwise write

them into the duality of homeland, as “origin,” and their current country of “residence.”) In the fourth chapter, the writers produce a critical reading of the limitation of homeland as illusion between the past and the future, between origin-al homeland and residential homeland, between the illusion of memories and the illusion of faraway future. Nasreen and Ali, individually and uniquely, target the limited definition of homeland in their novels. They have produced counter-discourse of home/land as “border(home)land,” which moves ahead of the duality of original and residential homeland to the “feeling at home.” It also moves ahead of any physical or permanent stability within the boundaries of home/land to the momentary and fluidity of a “border(home)land.” They have projected the “border(home)land” as an inclusive space in a constant state of temporality; their idea of creating such a space does not promise any solution of “a faraway illusion land,” only space which is “no/where” to “now/here.” Equally, this does not mean that transnational women who come to this space are “safe” and “secure.” Instead, they have both shown that this “border(home)land” is full of intimidation, that, this space will continue to face new challenges and remain on the path of struggle. As Anzaldúa notes: “knowing is painful because after “it” happens one cannot stay in the same place and be comfortable. She is no longer the same person as she was” (Anzaldúa, 1987, 48).

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## **9. Continuing our exploration**

The two novels which I chose to work on somehow limited my position. As far as my reading of these novels is concerned, Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali tried to convince me that caste does not cross the border with the gendered body. Although Nasreen represented the caste system within the country, she never mentions it again among the Indian community living in the foreign land. My question and curiosity cannot remain personal. It is a political question which I want to rephrase in my further research. Does caste not cross the border in the case of Third World, South Asian, transnational, brown women? How does the caste system work in a foreign land? Does the lower caste cross the border in the same way as the higher caste? Are all the South Asian (Indians) treated equally among themselves irrespective of different caste? How does caste influence the gender, class and race of the South Asians in the new land?

While living in Europe, I thought I did not belong to any caste because there is no caste system. However, my Indian body carried its caste with it. I encountered it everywhere, from the university to the streets. First, in the streets of Granada, I found an Indian couple who talked with me, and in the conversation, they intentionally asked my surname, and, inevitably, they understood my caste. Second, in an international conference organized in Barcelona, an Indian professor saw my name on the programme and asked whether I was Gupta from Bihar or Bengal? Gupta as surname belongs to higher caste (Brahmans) in Bengal, whereas in Bihar, it comes from a subsection of the lower caste (The Other Backward Caste). Third, I experienced it inside my classroom where my GEMMA friends referred to my surname in relation to the names, saying that most of the academics have “Gupta” as a surname. They misunderstood my

caste with the others which come from elite ones. At that moment, I felt that my position was very complex and it would be difficult to explain to them.

Through these three incidents, I realized, much more, that caste *does* indeed cross the border. This brings a lot of questions to a researcher, belongs to a lower caste, writing his/her thesis on transnational discourse. In this regard, again the world cannot be divided into the Third World and the First World, the West and the East but it emphasizes the study of the complexity of caste, class, gender, and race analysis in a transnational study. Taslima Nasreen and Monica Ali present the class difference among migrants, but they escape from the discussion of caste. Perhaps they assume caste difference within the structure of the class.

Shefali Chandra, a US based Indian academic, says in her article “Whiteness on the Margins of Native Patriarchy: Race, Caste, Sexuality, and Agenda of Transnational Studies” that a range of postcolonial scholars have detailed the relationship between race and gender although the authors have consistently remained mute about the politics of caste-based sexualities in informing Indian gender hierarchy. (2011, 129) Her case study is based on the pre-colonial India where she specifies the intersection of caste with sexual and racial discrimination among Indian prostitutes in comparison to white women (2011, 128). In this context, postcolonial writers such as Gayatri Spivak are critical of European philosophers to be aware of the limitations in their study of the racialized and gendered bodies referring to subaltern woman. I claim, however, that revising subalternity by taking the caste system into the account is crucial, not least because caste complexity does not end with the word “subaltern” or merely by dividing the whole complexity between “Brahmans” and “lower caste,” as Spivak repeatedly does in her text (1988).



In this regard, Sonam Roohi's ethnographic research titled as "Caste, kinship and the realization of 'American Dream': high skilled Telugu migrants in the USA" looks into the caste and kinship which play an important role in shaping transnational desires. She focuses on the concentration of high caste individuals in high skilled jobs, whereas lower caste, migrant Indians comprises the unskilled laborforce (2017, 2757). Sonam Roohi's analysis invites many more ethnographic works to explore the function of caste, class and race from the feminist perspective in Europe. Hence, I would say if we as South Asian postcolonial, transnational and feminist scholars do not bring this problem in our research papers, then I feel that we are still following the institutionalised brahmanized colonial discourse. To end the thesis I would recall Homi Bhabha's words that "theories have to be in constant transition, it cannot be fixed. "If opponents of all important 'truths' do not exist, it is indispensable to imagine them" (Bhabha, 1994, 23).

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