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**Silence Matters from the “other” to the “Conscious other”: Reading Monica Ali’s
Brick Lane with Gloria Anzaldúa’s “Coatlicue State”¹**

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Abstract

The paper examines the narrative attribution in the novel *Brick Lane* (2004) in relation to the significance of silence from the perspective of a Third World, South Asian diaspora woman. The novel closely manifests the female protagonist’s dialogues and silence(s), which underline the protagonist’s cultural and linguistic ambivalence.

The novel clarifies that a diasporic location of a first-generation woman complicates the patriarchal imposition of silence. The protagonist is not allowed to speak in public and is not even taught the new (host)land language. In that way, the patriarchal silence is doubled with a racist one on new land. Eventually, she learns to express her resistance through her silence. However, the paper goes beyond the dichotomy of oppression and resistance, particularly in the novel. The study will review the protagonist’s strategy of silence within a patriarchal and racist society to cross from the position of the “other” to the “conscious other.” In this regard, the study will first talk about silence which is oppressive and resistive, using the text of Gayatri Spivak, Can the

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Subaltern Speak? (1988) Then it will employ Gloria Anzaldúa's Coatlicue State to see the conceptualization of silence as a survival mechanism (1987). Hence, the study will emphasize the transnational feminist strategy of looking at silence beyond the oppression and resistance as a time to move from the "other" to the "conscious other."

Keywords

Silence, *Brick Lane*, Coatlicue State, Monica Ali, Gloria Anzaldúa, South Asian Diaspora, Diaspora woman

Introduction

Monica Ali (1967-), one of the diaspora women writers, was born in East Pakistan to a Bangladeshi father and an English mother in Dhaka. When she was three, her family moved to Bolton, England. Ali has a mixed Anglo-Bangladeshi identity. Ali's father is Bangladeshi, and her mother is from England; 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 her father's memories. She states that *Brick Lane* is a collection of stories accumulated from Bangladeshis living in Brick Lane in East London and her father (Ali, 2004, Acknowledgement).

The novel produces migratory conflictive stories that go beyond the national geographical boundaries and narrate cross-border encounters. The text reflects a linguistic conflict of those represented in writing; such literature tests the presumed monolingualism of any national geographic boundaries. For instance, 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 directly translates Bangla sentences in English, which produces “broken English.” She offers the linguistic “in-betweenness” or “hybridity,” as Homi K Bhabha refers to, of Bangladeshis living in their colonial land (Bhabha, 1990). 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 the other side of their identity.

This diaspora feminist writing goes beyond the nation-state construct and its geographical boundaries while simultaneously questioning the newly constructed, symbolic boundaries and borders around “imagined communities.”² The novel demonstrates the presence of “border,” “borderline,” and “borderlands.”³ In this respect, this novel reflects the women who find themselves in the position of being “in-between” at the transnational level. Ali represents the “in-betweenness” between Islamic fundamentalism and white liberalism.

In this case study, the novel *Brick Lane* centers around the life of Nazneen, an individual of the composite formation of diaspora. She migrates to another country with her husband. Nazneen

² Here, the term “Imagined communities” is referred from the book *Imagined Communities* (1983) by Benedict Anderson. 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” (Anderson, 1983, 49). The trans-national movement and formation of diaspora is the counter-narrative of the border of nation and state, but, at the same time, most postcolonial and decolonial critics see the idea of nationalism as colonialism’s greatest gift of modernity to the colonies and as a long-lived ideological mainstay (Refer to Miyoshi Masao, 1993, 1; Tölölyan 1991, 7; Zygmunt Bauman, 2001). 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).

³ The definition of Border, Borderline and Borderlands has been taken from the book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). “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).

represents many first-generation South Asian women who do not have any economic or political intention for the movement. Still, they have a social responsibility of being with their husbands. Their displacement is arranged between the others (father and husband). They serve as companions to their male migrants; they do not even choose the land they go to, nor do the men they live with. The patriarchal community from where she comes considers these women the keepers and bearers of the traditions. Most of them are supposed to wear traditional clothes and accomplish religious rites; they perform their duties as wives, mothers, and daughters. They are subject to their familial obligations at home. Still, when the husband's salary is not enough, women must provide an income. It does not mean, however, that they become independent. Their financial independence does not bring any change in their life. Instead, they are double burdened with economic and domestic duties.

The novel, *Brick Lane* (2004), 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, Nazneen becomes increasingly frustrated with Chanu, his lack of decisiveness, his unwillingness to allow her to travel alone and his religious beliefs. Nazneen also maintains contact with her outcast sister, Hasina, who elopes to Dhaka with a man in love marriage. Hasina describes her life working in a factory and then later as a prostitute in her letters. Nazneen gives birth to Raqib, who dies, and then to Shahana and Bibi. Chanu continuously vents his anger at how the Bangladeshis and Muslims are treated in the English community. 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, who soon engages 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.

Brick Lane: The other in “Imagined Communities.”

According to the transnational critics, “nationalism” is the by-product of the nation, which goes beyond the territorial space (Miyoshi, 1993, 1; Tölölyan, 1991, 7) and constructs many “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) based on different factors. In the novel, communities are created by migrants or natives (and sometimes by both) depending upon the factor they want to build the nationalist feeling. They are constructed by different aspects such as race, religion, gender, color, nationality, class, and alluring its subjects. These “imagined communities” decide their laws and rules of inclusion and exclusion and create their own “imagined boundaries” (Gupta, 2019, 103-104).

There are cross-border encounters of such communities in the novel, which are evident in the transnational discussion, especially when that border is between the Third World and the First World. When a woman from the Third World, South Asia, encounters a European, Christian, white society, her identity occupies a position where the local identity faces the global. Anzaldúa explains such encounter “*una herida abierta*” which forms a border culture. (Anzaldúa 1987, 3). However, the in-between space is full of fear and terror where loyalty is questioned; one is divided on the duality; it becomes a space of self-compromise, but some go beyond and take “another route” (20).

Indeed, this search for a new route challenges the dominant discourses based on the self/other's binary oppositions, the oppressor/oppressed. Anzaldúa again defines that the borders are set up to determine the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish "us" from "them" (Anzaldúa, 1987, 3). The binary superior does not let the other evade the fear. Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak also state that there is no complete exclusion; instead, the "others" are excluded in "the mode of certain containment, where the "other" is not outside of politics" (Butler and Spivak, 2007, 5). As far as the novel is concerned, the "others" cannot easily escape it because the one who resides in this state of the "otherness" goes deeper and deeper into the darkness of silence (Anzaldúa, 1987, 44). It becomes a state of inner conflict more than the outer war to break the duality of the self and the other. In this case study, it is interesting to see South Asian diaspora women's inner conflict when they cannot speak or are not allowed to speak in a patriarchal or racial space. It is evident to see silence, which women are using as a survival mechanism in these "imagined communities." In this regard, I will talk about silence, which is oppressive and resistive, using Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). Then, I will discuss Anzaldúa's conceptualization of silence as a survival mechanism, considering the novel as a case study.

Silence Revised: Spivak's "Can the Subaltern (Women) Speak?"

In the novel, the protagonist is presented as taciturn. She does not usually speak in conversations with other characters. Nazneen learns from her childhood that only men talk, and women listen. "You speak, I will listen" is her only answer to many conversations (Ali, 2004, 261).

I connect with such a situation because I also come from a culture where women cannot speak or laugh in front of men. *Ghoonghat* (Hindu veil) is maintained to separate men and women

within the same space. Women are taught to concentrate on their domestic chores and not interfere when men talk. My grandmother told me many times that when she was young and married, she did not speak to her elders and always carried her *ghoonghat* in front of them. She learned to be silent, and her silence symbolized her obedience towards her husband and family. When she was old, my grandfather used to tell me that when my grandmother got angry, she did not speak to anyone. Her silent face was petrifying like *Kali*. From that anecdote, I realized that my grandmother learned to remain silent and that silence was not her choice. She learned silence as her expression, either to show her obedience or her anger. I witnessed that women are silent in my family for two reasons – one when it is repressive and two when it is resistive.⁴

In women's studies, the "voice" has been privileged as the goal and a means to achieve empowerment in western philosophies. Women's silence 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" whereas silence is a symbol of being oppressed and violated: "Silence is oppression, is violence" (Rich, 1979, 204). 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" (Anzaldúa, 1987, 54). 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. The preference to

⁴ Here, the silence is not generalized as the only method of resistance. Silence is one of the methods of resistance and in many Indian households where women are not given space to raise the voice, they use silence as their resistive tool.

speak and raise one's voice marginalizes the silence—those women who prefer not to shout their defiance but defy their actions silently.

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

In this regard, Gayatri Spivak has theorized extensively on the concepts of "silence" and "speak." As a postcolonial critic, 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 introduces the idea of "speaking for" those who are subaltern. Spivak is critical of such "representation" where others speak for the O/others, and the 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 the subalterns allowed to speak?" "Are the subalterns heard?" "What if the subalterns are not allowed to speak?" "What if they speak with their silence?"

After a long and complicated philosophical and historical debate in her text, 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, committed suicide during her menstruation in Bengal's small village 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 that sees women's suicide as only the result of an "illicit affair." Instead, her suicide was triggered by the failure to meet her political task against imperialism in India. Bhuvaneshwari knew that patriarchal dogmas would mislead the suicide of a woman, and her political intention would be covered; hence she committed suicide during her menstruation. Her dead menstruating body speaks against the Brahmanized cultural norms of viewing the female menstruating body as impure. Therefore, her suicide is an unemphatic subaltern rewriting of Sati's social text 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 subaltern position of Third World women within a Brahmanized patriarchal and imperialist discourse. She clears that dominant discourses impose silence on the bodies and are subalterned. Spivak targets the patriarchal, Brahmanical, imperialist, and Western philosophical systems in silencing the subaltern women's voices in their writings. The menstruating silent body of Bhuvaneshwari resists and self-represents against dominant discourses. Hence through this text, Spivak states that the subaltern discourse is "silenced," but they that are "silent."

Brick Lane: Gendering and Racialization of Silence.

In this case study, Nazneen is married to a man who lives in Europe, and then she crosses the border after her husband. She remains silent because she is taught to be silent: Nazneen comes from a patriarchal society where she has witnessed her mother in silence. Nazneen's mother was silent when her husband was having an affair with another woman. Her death was not interpreted as the repercussion of her husband's illicit affair; instead, it was assumed to deteriorate her mental and physical health. The silence was imposed on her, and the hierarchy of repressive silence lives on in her daughter. Although Nazneen changes her country, she carries the baggage of patriarchal silence. There is a difference in time and space between mothers and daughters, but the patriarchal system imposes this silence in different forms with changing time and space.

In the case of Nazneen, silence should not be confused with a "voicelessness" or "wordlessness." Instead, Nazneen participates in conversations that look like dialogues but are monologues where "I" speaks and "You" listens. Luce Irigaray describes the construction of "I" and "You" in a heterogeneous relation in this context. 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 spoken to, the subject spoken about. For communication to function as an exchange between subjects, the locutor and the interlocutor must be interchangeable. Within any conversation between two sexes, the male and female subjects must become alternately "I" and "You." However, 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. Irigaray points out that men speak more and often appropriate the discourse. Even when male and female subjects seem to be in dialogue

they are not. At best, they exchange information concerning their needs, for example. Still, women's requirements do not carry the same priority as men's (Irigaray, 2004, 80).

Analogously, Nazneen does not say anything to her husband; she is always quiet and 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 (Ali, 2004, 99).

Moreover, at the transnational level, women frequently face the language struggle, especially first-generation women who migrate to different countries. The Third World women, like Nazneen, are often taught to be good housewives and are trained to be silent domestic workers: they are not encouraged to step out of the house. Nazneen learns everything from her mother and aunt and is married by sixteen. She does not speak English, and it is because of this, she prefers not to step out of the house in London; she goes to the same Bangladeshi grocery shops every day and walks on the same street. Although Nazneen desires to speak the language of the land where she lives, she is forbidden from learning the language by her husband. It is senseless for her husband for a woman to speak a language that she will never use since she will not be out in "the world of men." Hence, Nazneen speaks only the language representing the "home" of the house and the "home" of the homeland.

When Nazneen comes to Europe, her husband has already internalized the similar racialization process of which he has been a victim. Nazneen's body and knowledge are subalterned, gendered, and racialized by a brown man. Nazneen is silenced as a traditional and outdated woman. She does not know anything about the new country as she belongs to a small village. She cannot break away from the "traditional brown wife who does not know anything" role.

Nazneen's husband disapproves of her willingness to learn English and, at the same time, humiliates her inability to speak English. When she asks him about learning English, he replies, "Let me read. All this talking, talking, and talking." He rolled over again" He ignores Nazneen (Ali, 2004, 74). A few days later, he patronizingly says, "You have heard of William Shakespeare." Without waiting for her answer, he taunts, "Yes, even a girl from Gouripur has heard of Shakespeare..." (91).

Further, in the community, the character of Nazneen presents that Islam as a religion is gendered and racialized by the proponents of Islamic fundamentalists, where dark Muslim men and Muslim women are "othered." Minno Moallen, an Islamic feminist, writes about such alienation: "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..." (Moallen, 1998, 322). The Bengal Tigers' assembly is a platform for the Bengali Muslim men to represent Muslim women and dark Muslim men who are invited as passive, non-participating listeners. In the novel, the fundamentalists and liberalists "speak for" the Third World (Muslim) women in their agendas.

It is undeniable that silence is repressive in this case: silence is something learned. Patriarchy and racism have imposed a long silence on Nazneen. She has no choice but to listen to the patriarchal and racial system. She grows up with family, social, political, and economic values, practices, and norms that enforce silence. She cannot speak outside the home because she did not learn to speak outside or racialized voice. She cannot speak within the "imagined communities" because the patriarchal system, racist system, religious fundamentalists, or western liberalists do not let

her speak. She is “spoken for” or “spoken about” from a limited perspective. In this case study, silence is repressive: she does not choose to remain silent. Without many choices, she prefers to keep herself quiet.

Reading Silence in Anzaldúa’s “Coatlicue State”

Spivak’s text is vital for comprehending Third World women’s silence as she discusses the imperial Brahmanical patriarchal Indian society. Nazneen in the novel is also such a subject, whose voice is “represented” by others and is not allowed to represent herself. However, in this case, the analysis will go beyond the reading of silence as oppressive and resistive to understand the idea of silence from the theory of Gloria Anzaldúa in Ali’s Novel. Anzaldúa introduces the “Coatlicue State” in her book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Anzaldúa writes that Coatlicue is a mythological 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. Coatlicue is the creator of the celestial body, and 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 of duality (Anzaldúa, 1987, 46).

Anzaldúa points out that the one who experiences the “Coatlicue State” lives with an imposed and repressive silence; it is full of fear and terror to sustain the oppression. She explains about silence that it is an ambiance around the person who lives the conflict within of being the “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)

At the same time, the “Coatlicue State” disrupts the smooth flow of life and propels the soul to do its work and increase the consciousness of itself as she exerts, “Let the wound caused by the serpent be cured by the serpent” because the soul uses everything to further its own making (Anzaldúa, 1987, 46). The “Coatlicue State” refers to the condition of profound silence outside, and the internal state passes through conflict, confusion, and doubts. It becomes the state to prepare oneself, to be self-conscious. The consciousness helps to claim one’s 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 the “self” to the “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 internal changes, which come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first occurs in the images in our heads. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 87)

Thus, Anzaldúa’s projection of silence is a period of awareness of the outer world and one’s otherness. She says that “struggle has always been inner.” The inside struggle could be longer or shorter; for instance, Nazneen struggled for fifteen years in this state, talking to herself. 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 Nazneen develops all those years and then decides to react while amid the “Coatlicue State.”

Brick Lane: From the “other” to the “conscious other”

Yes, silence is doubly imposed on the Third World diaspora women. They learn to live with that silence; however, the silence outside does not mean they are silent inside. They see the darkness out, but inside they are full of internal conflict.

In this case study, silence as a mechanism goes beyond repression. Nazneen uses silence as a time for internal monologues and conflicts; it is a time to overcome fear, be self-conscious, and prepare oneself. Although Nazneen remains silent in conversations and pretends to listen to the other, she talks to herself most of the time. She adopts this tool when she does not speak but converses within. She is true to herself in those conversations; even she pretends to be someone else outside of the patriarchal and racist society.

Consequently, in her 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 the words of Anzaldúa, 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 hidden self. Anzaldúa writes about this and the mirror analogy:

There is another quality to the mirror, which 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 judges it. A glance can freeze us in place; it can “possess” us. It can erect a barrier against the world. However, 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 elements 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. The novel has also explained such situations where Nazneen talks to herself. For instance, in the earlier quote, she replies, “If you say so, husband.” At the same time, she talks with her “conscious other,” where she says, “He was talking rubbish, that he was mad.” Hence again, the quote can be read, considering the self (I), the other (you), and the “conscious other” (it):

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 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)

Nazneen carries her unique strategy to resist, i.e., silence to rebel from the novel’s beginning. Early in her marriage, her opposition went unnoticed; regardless, she knew she was capable of withstanding:

Nazneen dropped the promotion (of her husband) from her prayers. She chopped two fiery red chilies 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, 2004, 63)

Her fights started with her kitchen, then her house, and eventually spilled onto the street when Kareem entered her home and married life. This action represents Nazneen's challenge to a patriarchal society where a married woman is prohibited from seeking sexual satisfaction outside her unsatisfied marriage. However, her movement is used to demonstrate that she is a "bad woman," and yet she is not ashamed of her behavior. 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, 2004, 384). Her resistance against him fails, but her consciousness is slowly building every moment about which Anzaldúa says that:

Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, 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)

Nazneen, too kept on crossing the social norms one by one and created her consciousness of being a woman with her sexual desire, willingness to go out, wish to learn a language and work

outside home, and desire to make decisions. Consequently, towards the end of the novel, she speaks about her decision not to go back to Bangladesh and stay in Brick Lane without her husband, which was unexpected by her husband and society. She gets out from the position of the “other” suppressed by the patriarchal and racist society to the place of the “conscious other.”

Conclusion

In this paper, we have made our crossings; first, a forced silence imposed on Nazneen in double forms: patriarchal and racist. Secondly, an understanding that Nazneen chooses her repressed silence as her tool for self-learning. There is no obligation to explain to others but oneself; she does not talk externally, but inside she converses with the “other” of herself. This transformation from “being oppressed” to “being conscious of the oppression” draws a remarkable difference in her. Thus, her resistance starts from within while looking for space, which she can call “home.” The sexualized, gendered, racialized “other” goes on the “conscious other” path, breaking the duality of the other and the self. In this process, silence is used to prepare herself, struggle within, know herself, and encounter the other’s fear, shame, and terror. Being a “conscious other” does not mean that the struggle outside has stopped, but the internal conflict has given way to a stand. Anzaldúa writes, “It is not enough to stand on the opposite riverbank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions,” we must do something about it (Anzaldúa, 1987, 78). This realization can be seen in Nazneen at the end of the novel, where she disobeyed Chanu’s words of going back to Bangladesh. She stays in Brick Lane, London, with her daughters.

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