

Psychological Border(ing) and Identity Crisis at Borderlands: Analysis of Abdullah Hussein's *Emigre Journeys*

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- Othering
- Psychological Borders
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Abstract

*Borderlands are not only physical areas but are also thought of as mental and psychological spaces for the inhabitants. Gloria Anzaldua (1987) talks about the psychological borders dichotomizing them as safe and unsafe spaces, highlighting the fact that the ensuing manipulation, anger and hatred become the key features, when people from different regions, with varying cultural backgrounds, occupy the same territory. This situation leaves a considerable impact on the psyche of immigrants and they become identity conscious. Using Anzaldua's notion of psychological borders as the theoretical framework, the present study analyzes Abdullah Hussein's *Émigré Journeys* with a focus on identity consciousness, hybridity and psychological conflict. This research is an attempt to show the role of psychological borders in the construction of the identity of the main characters as others. It focuses on three questions: What are the psychological borders and how are they developed by both hosts and immigrants? How do psychological borders play a role in the treatment of immigrants as "other" in Abdullah Hussein's *Émigré Journeys*? In what ways do psychological borders keep the immigrants at the periphery and generate radicalized images of the members of the immigrant community? The study attempts at exploring that the host community others the Muslim immigrants because of the presence of psychological borders and the Muslim immigrants face maltreatment and hatred from the host side.*



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1. Introduction

In a geographical context, a border is a line of distinction between two entities of the landscape. The concept of border is much more in a political and social context. Borders imply the creation of disputed space where two geographical and cultural entities meet. They question the authenticity of the physical, cultural, and political segregation among the countries that are created by the borders. Borders and borderlands are not static and stable but fluid and contested spaces. The political, social, educational and economic aspects are blurred in these contested spaces. The purpose of the formation and maintenance of borders is either political or social. They are created to establish hegemony over another. The process of control differs; it depends upon the differences can be thought of as mental and psychological spaces as well as physical spaces, art and literature in the socio-political complexities of cultures. Borderlands can also be the territorial zones that include lands, social policy, and ideology. Such types of borders are meant to create division between “Us” and “Them”.

The discourse that revolves around the theme of Borderlands deals with the ideological construction of “insider” and “outsider”. Such discourse generates a national, racial, cultural and psychological sense of division rather than physical barriers between nations. They also help in the understanding of how globalization has affected the treatment and representation of the people who cross the physical borders. Borders are inconsistent just like the people who created those borders for different purposes.

2. Literature Review

Other than the oft-understood geographic locations, borderlands are also thought of as living spaces, where the on-the-border status of such places may make the inhabitants experience a divided (read Bhabha’s “hybrid,” 1994) self, resulting in their consequent suffering from mental health issues (Sherry, 2017; Hernández-Wolfe, 2011; Seegel 2016; Russel et al., 1999) as well as psychological problems. (Chatzipanagiotidou, 2018; Prokkola, 2009; Bugarski, 2012; Bottos & Rougier, 2006) Anzaldua (1987) talks about the psychological borders, dichotomizing them as safe and unsafe spaces, by highlighting the fact that the ensuing manipulation, anger and hatred become the key features when people from different regions, with varying cultural backgrounds, occupy the same territory. Lorber (1999) asserts that this situation leaves a considerable impact on the psyche of immigrants and they become identity conscious. Notwithstanding the fact that these territorial zones stand as a composite of land and social policy, the consequently ensuing ideology and identity/(crisis) requires in-depth analyses of the inhabitants (Gasparini, 2014; Meier, 2013; Kipgen, 2019; Tronvoll, 1999; Beaugrand, 2018; Nasser, 2019). Traumatic experiences lead a victim, in some cases, to construct a survival force by determining himself to be a protector of his own life (Waheed, 2019). Finding the purpose of one’s life can have a significant impact on one’s approaches towards life (Shahid & Hashmi, 2019). The discourse that revolves around the theme of Borderlands deals with the ideological construction of insider and outsider. Such discourse generates a national, racial, cultural and psychological sense of division rather than physical barriers between nations (Rembold & Carrier, 2011; Bakshi & Dasgupta, 2019; Agnew, 2008; Hanif & Ullah, 2018). They also help in the understanding of how globalization has affected the treatment and representation of the people who cross the physical borders, which are inconsistent just like the people who created those borders for different purposes.

The psychological border is something that is within each of us. It can also be understood as an individual or collective state of mind that is stimulated every time we

think of literal or symbolic crossing (Bottos & Rougier, 2006; Ullah, 2015). This mentality is geopolitically determined, as those who are not considered as the other would be having different worldviews as compared to those who are considered and treated as an outsider or other (Rembold & Carrier, 2011). In addition, this concept of psychological borders has also been presented by Gloria Anzaldua in her book, *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, published in 1987. She has a viewpoint that the psychological borders are present everywhere and they are not clung to one specific geographical area. These invisible borders can be observed when members of two different races, societies and cultures come into contact with one another.

Since physical and psychological borders are created for the security of a nation, the outsiders are often thought of as a threat to the security of that very nation, and the identities of those people are questioned in the name of human welfare (Bakshi & Dasgupta, 2019; Agnew, 2008). The present study aims to trace the contribution of psychological borders in the treatment of Muslim immigrants as “other” in the novel: *Émigré Journeys* (2000) by Abdullah Hussein. The study aims to highlight the impact of maltreatment and hatred of the host community on the psyches of Muslim immigrants. Moreover, the current research, while applying Anzaldua’s (1987) theory of psychological borders on the selected data, aims to foreground the different phases that an immigrant faces while living in a host community.

3. Research Methodology

The present qualitative study aims to explore the contribution of border crossing and psychological borders in the marginalization of the Muslim immigrants and in making them confused about their identities in the novel: *Émigré Journeys* (2000) by Abdullah Hussein. Close reading is used as a method for the analysis of the selected novel. It is a strategy that allows a reader to dig deep into a text by three main steps: Reading and re-reading the selected text to gather meaning, spotlighting important context and clues to figure out the meaning and provide evidence in the support of answers to comprehensive questions by using the text. Books, articles, reviews and internet sources regarding the topic have been consulted. The text of the selected novel has been studied in detail and examples have been quoted from the text. Analysis of the characters has been done in the light of the selected theoretical framework.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Anzaldua’s (1987) point of view on borderland theory with a special focus on psychological borders as a framework has been selected in order to explore the impact of psychological borders on immigrants’ lives. According to Anzaldua (1987),

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (p. 3)

She has presented the concept of the study of psychological borders in her book *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. She further asserts that the psychological, sexual and spiritual borderlands are not specific towards the southwest. Actually, the Borderlands are physically present wherever at least two societies edge each other. They are present where individuals of various races share the same region, where under

(the lowest social class), lower, middle and privileged societies touch. Hatred, outrage, and maltreatment are the conspicuous components of the landscape (Anzaldua, 1987).

The selected novel has been analyzed on the basis of three tools taken from Anzaldua's (1987) book i.e. Identity Consciousness, Hybridity, Psychological conflict. The tools are taken for rich and systematic analysis of the selected data. Following are the major tools selected for the present study:

3.1.1. Identity Consciousness

It is regarded as self-awareness of the immigrants with reference to their personal identity that when the natives of the host country start realizing that the 'other group' or the group of immigrants is a threat to their own identity, this realization becomes one of the major causes of marginalization of immigrants and it is also a major contributor for the binary notion of 'us' and 'them' or othering. As Anzaldua (1987) states,

Certain faculties not only in me but in every border resident, colored or non-colored dormant areas of consciousness are activated and awakened. They want to rejoin the flock. They want to go with the herd. Nothing is comfortable but home. (p.i)

3.1.2. Hybridity

Hybridity, as its name suggests, is basically about mixture of any two things or aspects and in the context of the present study, it is about the culture mixing two separate races or societies. The blend of two separate cultures or civilizations results in Hybridity. For the present research, this tool is taken to analyze how the minority group or immigrants adopt the culture and language of in-group or host community for the sake of acceptance in their herds. Mainly hybridity, in the sight of the current study, is for the purpose of getting acceptance in another community while giving a try to cross the psychological border by following the norms of natives and associating yourself with them to show that you are like them. According to Anzaldua (1987), some of the immigrants become hybrid unconsciously as they just follow their head immigrants while some of them consciously adopt hybridity in order to avoid rejection by the host community. As she states, "to avoid the rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture; push the unacceptable parts into the shadows." (p. 20).

3.1.3. Psychological Conflict

Psychological conflict, in the sense of the present study, comes into existence after the adaptation of hybridity by an immigrant. It shows its symptoms when this half-breed of the native culture and half-breed of the foreign culture is not accepted in either culture or community. The conflict arises after being rejected by the native communities of the host country and when the fears of rejection from the community of homeland take birth in mind (Anzaldua, 1987).

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Émigré Journeys (2000), Abdullah Hussein's masterpiece, is a novel about the pathetic condition of Muslim immigrants of South Asia in Britain. The novel starts with Amir's, the protagonist, struggle of becoming a successful person in his life and further narrates the miserable condition of his life while living in Britain as an immigrant.

Amir, to pursue his dream leaves his homeland and moves to Britain with new hopes. He narrates his struggle to achieve a good position in a host society and talks about the hurdles that he has faced in his journey. He depicts the execrable life of all Muslim immigrants in Britain. In addition, his life also represents that how the natives of Britain treat Muslim immigrants and how they marginalize them. The entire novel is not all about Amir's life. Beside the story of Amir's life, the novel adds the story of Parvin, Amir's daughter, who possesses her mind which is opposite to the mind of Amir. The entire novel revolves around these two main characters. The themes of the novel are migration, Muslim immigrants, hybridity, sense of belonging, othering, marginalization and Euro-exceptionalism.

Anzaldua (1987) has highlighted that immigrants are unaware of the presence of psychological borders until they come across the native community where they feel marginalized because of the maltreatment from natives'. Moreover, the only way of survival, as asserted by Lorber (1999) as well, for the immigrants is to accept the label of 'others' on them and do not resist the maltreatment and hatred of the natives. Amir personally falls into the category of those immigrants, according to Anzaldua's (1987) notion, whose sense of identity consciousness is active and awoken. His sense of belonging to his own people and culture was activated from the day his father warned him; however, it was developed further when he came across the foreign culture and community. He was one of those immigrants who wanted to go home and rejoin their own people instead of mixing themselves with the foreign culture and sacrificing their original identity for the sake of social and cultural acceptance among the native people. "we came home...do as real men do everywhere, dream of lump sums of money and ways of escaping." (p. 11).

In most cases, natives treat immigrants in a bad way because of their hegemony as a majority group over the immigrants. Their bad behavior towards immigrants is the result of the psychological border which they have built around them to protect their social life (Bottos & Rougier, 2006). Moreover, after observing such kind of attitude of natives, the immigrants give space to the sense of un-belonging towards the native people and land. In addition, the natives always feel insecure in the presence of immigrants. They consider immigrants a threat to their social life and cultural identity. "when the white people saw our people arriving in numbers and settling down. Then they began to leave." (p. 23). This argument can be more strengthened by the incident that happened to Amir when he was caught by the law authorities for the crime that was committed by some other person. "With no word of warning, his right leg appeared below me as if from nowhere and the knee crashed into my testicles." (p. 215). Furthermore, the questions that had been asked from Amir were clearly indicating the natives' sense of insecurity at the arrival of Muslim immigrants. "Do you people come here to press up against decent women?" (p. 216). Such attitude, as per Anzaldua's (1987) viewpoint, gives reasons to immigrants to think about their own being and to guard themselves from the hatred and maltreatment.

Hatred and maltreatment, as Anzaldua (1987) states, are the main components of the place where at least two races meet each other and these two components come into existence as a result of the psychological border. A similar situation occurred in the novel where the natives treated the immigrants worse than animals and othered them by their behavior and attitude. "In those days, they complained of the smell and covered their noses while passing by." (p. 24). These were the moments when natives gave more strength to the psychological border between them and the immigrants by their attitude and maltreatment and these moments did not allow the herd of the immigrants to cross the psychological barrier. As a result, the herd of immigrants activate their sense of un-belonging to the host culture and started seeking the company of their own people. "These were the places where all our people gathered in those

days...thus cafes were the first places where the melodious sounds of our ghazals and quwalis arose in this land.” (p. 24).

The immigrants are always marked with a separate label of ‘others’ and this tag of ‘others’ disturbs their psychological phases. The immigrants are not given respect and rights in the new land that they were having in their own land. “They will always have these marks on them. It is not a matter of wealth or poverty, but of respect.” (p. 44). The sense of un-belonging takes birth in immigrants and they acknowledge that the culture and people of the new land have no room for them. “In the new country, there is no family of men to which they belong.” (p. 44). Such attitudes result in a sense of being othered in immigrants and they become conscious about their own identity. No matter how long do they live there, they would not be able to gain the trust of natives and the mark of ‘others’ would always be with them wherever they go. “This is the reason that I have a regard for the principle that we should mix and mingle with the family that is our own people.” (p. 44).

Living a secure and respectable life in a foreign land is always a question mark for immigrants. The presence of psychological borders between them and the natives always create new challenges for them in the shape of hatred, outrage, maltreatment and disrespect. They are disrespected at the very moment when they come across a native community. They have no access to the rights which a State is providing to its people in a foreign land as they are not considered as people of that land. “We had no medical cards, so no doctor. There was a telephone but it was an instrument of fear fixed to the wall on the ground floor which no-one touched, and if it rang, nobody answered.” (p. 59). In addition, Amir and his friends faced a similar situation. They were totally ignored by the natives and they were pushed to the fringe. “You die, your problem.” (p. 64). The weird behavior of natives drove the immigrants to muse about their own being and Amir after the incidents of maltreatment and hatred asked his fellows to stick to their own people and did not trust the natives in any matter. “But you cannot depend on these people to be always on your side in everything. They may be good to you for a time. But in the end you can only put your faith in your own people.” (p. 152-153).

The pathetic condition of immigrants is evident when they cross the geographical border of their own land and enter into the territory of some other land—a place of new people. It is highlighted by Anzaldua (1987) that the immigrants face psychological border after crossing the physical one and the presence of psychological border between immigrants and natives is responsible for the pathetic condition of immigrants in a foreign land where the majority group others the minority group and the minority group becomes the victim of maltreatment and hatred. The fear of being ‘othered’ and questioned is always present in immigrants’ minds after experiencing the effects of psychological borders when they cross the physical borders. After becoming the victim of maltreatment and outrage of natives, the immigrants become more conscious about their own being and they start gathering their people in their own circle in order to feel protective. The immigrants in the novel had a fear of the same kind. They felt unprotected when they went out of their own social circle. “When you are not free, all you fear is the outdoors; you can come in and be in a place of safety.” (p. 163). They searched for comfort and found it nowhere but in a herd of their own people.

Immigrants who try to cross the psychological border for the sake of social acceptance are the immigrants who avoid the rejection of the native community adopt the cultural traits of natives and push the unaccepted parts of their personality into the shadows. Such immigrants are known as hybrids (Anzaldua, 1987). In addition, being aware of the tendency of un-acceptance of the immigrants in native communities, Amir tried to train his daughter, Parvin, at the early age of her childhood to cross the psychological border and to get acceptance from the natives in their communities. “Remember, it is

of the paramount importance that you learn English. Forget Punjabi.” (p. 33). Amir was much aware of the presence of psychological borders. He had experienced the unacceptance, hatred and outrage from natives’ side. However, he trained his daughter to merge with the natives in her early age and to erase the psychological border, ‘the unnatural boundary’, in order to get acceptance from the host communities. The state of hybridity, according to Anzaldua (1987), is a physical and mental state that an immigrant adopts in order to show his sense of belonging with the native culture and community.

An immigrant sacrifices his original being for the sake of social acceptance in a host land. Amir’s daughter, Parvin, did the same as she was guided. For the sake of social and cultural acceptance, Parvin sacrificed her original being and she herself had observed a change in her. “Now that I have lost half of my first language, it has turned the whole way round. Everything I remember is in translation.” (p. 34). The change in her was not just limited to her language. Everything that she was doing to cross an invisible border was changing her entire personality and she was personally observing this change in her. “Looking at myself in the mirror, I saw someone else standing in my place.” (p. 36).

Crossing the physical boundary and entering another world was easy for Parvin; however, in this new world, a lot of challenges were waiting for her. Although she had shared her original identity for the sake of acceptance yet the new land soon appeared to her as a land of aliens, people who had no care about her existence around them. “This was the land of jinns.” (P. 39). Furthermore, the language that she had adopted also appeared to her as a weird language, a language of some other people. She did not find any sense of belonging with the language and culture of natives. “Speaking another language appeared to me as jinns.” (P. 40). The immigrants are pushed into a state of psychological conflict when they face maltreatment and outrage of natives towards them even after sacrificing their original identity. Parvin faced a similar situation after entering into a state of hybridity. The incident that happened to her in her junior school was the first moment from where she took her first step towards the state of psychological conflict. She was shocked to see the reaction of native children at her school who did not accept her into their groups because of the tag of an immigrant on her. The native children tortured her physically and mentally as she was not from their own people. “Julie’s voice called out once or twice, ‘Hey, Parvin, come on out.’ Inside the cubicle, as minutes ticked away, all life drained out of my legs, I couldn’t move... couldn’t even cry, fear had dried the tears in my hot eyes.” (p. 72)

All the outrage and maltreatment of natives towards the immigrants is the result of the symbolic border which Anzaldua (1987) refers to as the unnatural boundary and psychological or invisible border. These borders push the immigrants to the periphery when they try to merge with the natives and the harsh attitude that they receive from the natives’ side mark them as ‘others’. Parvin, in the novel, also felt marked after facing the maltreatment and harsh attitude of natives. “I felt marked. It was as if a drop of some indelible liquid had seeped through my fabric and spread into a stain that would not be removed.” (p. 77). Although she was considering herself as one of them yet their behavior showed that they did not accept her presence in their social circle. Moreover, they were calling her with different other names at her back. “Parvin the milk bottle.” (p. 77). The presence of a psychological border was now vivid to her and she became more conscious about her sense of belonging with her own people and community. Moreover, she had faced difficulties and maltreatment at streets and pubs because of her immigrant status. “The men on the table didn’t let up, they kept taunting us and laughing and drinking and shouting.” (p. 193). Furthermore, the physical torture that she faced in street from the natives also shook her thoughts and sense of belonging with the host communities. She observed that at that time nobody took a stand for her

from the natives' side and everybody othered her equally. "There were people all around us looking on, but nobody even tried to stop the two men from shoving us." (p. 194).

The treatment of natives forced Parvin to chew over her own being. The mark of being 'othered' was vivid to her and it was present with her at every step of her life indicating her identity as an outsider. Parvin realized that she had lost her original identity and the natives were not accepting her even after becoming hybrid. The mark of being socially excluded from the native communities was haunting her and had shaken the foundations of her hybrid identity. "I was not able to shake off the feeling of dirt that had stuck to me from the very first day." (p. 75). Anzaldua's (1987) viewpoint is very clear regarding the phase of psychological conflict which states that a hybrid is always pushed into the state of psychological conflict when he has been questioned about his identity and loyalty by the natives and by his own people as well. After all the incidents of maltreatment and hatred, a new phase of the psychological conflict began in Parvin. She had entered into the circle of those immigrants who were lingering between the sense of belonging and un-belonging with the host community and their own people. It was time for her to recognize and accept the tag of 'othering' on her and the mark of being marginalized by the natives. "I remember it with both shame and pride as if I had finally recognized the mark of dirt-stain on me and accepted it." (p. 81).

Being a victim of psychological conflict, Parvin raised questions on her own identity at various moments. The land and its people to whom she had a sense of belonging once was now belittling. The treatment of natives at school and streets forced her to awaken her sense of un-belonging to the native people and forced her to ponder on her own identity. "Afterwards, no matter what I was thinking or whether I was in another world altogether, when I came home I knew that on the other side of my door was a different smell and a separate world." (p. 96). Parvin was now separating herself from the native community. She had realized that the natives would never give her respect and they would never accept her in their social circle. The culture that she wanted to accept as her own and the people for whom she had accepted a hybrid identity were now people of some 'other world' for her. "I emerged into the world of others, crossing from outside to the outside." (p. 97). The sudden change that came into her personality was a reaction to the psychological border. The hatred and disrespect, which Anzaldua (1987) refers to as conspicuous components of a culturally diverse landscape, that she faced from the native side were the outcome of the presence of a psychological border between her and natives.

An immigrant, according to Anzaldua (1987), when lingers between the sense of belonging and un-belonging drags himself to the state of psychological conflict. When this sense took birth in Parvin, she started feeling guilty of her efforts to cross the psychological border and she started blaming herself for her hybrid identity. "I have not crossed that bridge without a sense of pride and a great deal of shame." (p. 138). She had realized that she paid a huge amount for the sake of crossing the 'unnatural boundary' in the shape of her originality. She felt proud and ashamed both at a time for the act and this was an indication of a psychological conflict within her. In Parvin's case, it was obvious from the very beginning that Amir paved the way for her to get acceptance from the natives through the state of hybridity; however, in the end, he himself started criticizing her for her hybrid identity. "That was to put you on the road of success only in the beginning, not to become like them." (p. 173). Parvin felt marked as a socially excluded entity from the moment when she faced criticism from her own father, who led her to become a hybrid.

Parvin was neglected from both sides of her hybrid identity. On the one hand, the natives had disrespected her and did not accept her in their communities, while on the

other hand her own community also raised questions on her identity and sense of belonging. Her own father, Amir, disregarded her and called her 'Shaitan' because of the duality of her identity. "Do you not see, Salma? This is not my daughter speaking but him, this is the actuality of Shaitan I tell you, nothing but Shaitan, do you not hear the change in her voice?" (p. 240). Everything that happened to her brought a change in her personality. Moreover, after feeling marked and othered by both sides, she gave up pursuing her sense of belonging with any side of the psychological border. She accepted the state of psychological conflict as a permanent state and started living in fear, which is one of the components of psychological conflict as per Anzaldua's (1987) notion of psychological conflict.

Parvin was othered by both communities, her own and the natives, and instead of pursuing her sense of belonging with any other community, she started thinking about her own identity. "I want this, a language, like God has a language and my mother has hers and my father his own." (p. 246). She had acknowledged that she did not belong to any of the two communities because of her hybrid state and none of them was going to accept her as their own member. The hatred and outrage of the natives and the maltreatment that she had faced by her own people forced her to live in a permanent state of psychological conflict.

5. Conclusion

The present study has shown that the immigrants are not given a warm-hearted welcome from the other side of the border because of the psychological borders. Overall, the current research is an attempt of looking deeper into how the immigrants are dealt with when they enter another land and it is a tiny contribution to shed light on the way immigrants are looked down upon and because of this ill-treatment from the natives, they face certain challenges that either result in hybridization or psychological conflict.

The study has identified the presence of psychological borders between the foreign natives and the immigrants. It has further answered the question of the development of psychological borders while quoting suitable examples from the selected novels and with the support of Anzaldua's (1987) notion of psychological borders. Moreover, it has explored that the psychological borders are responsible for the inhumane treatment that the immigrants receive on the other side of the border. It has been clearly noticed that the borders do not only exist in the form of physical entities but also they define the mental consciousness of a certain group of people. The borders are created for purposes and often those purposes are socio-political. Those who crossed the borders do not occupy a respectable place on the other side of the border. The study has highlighted the role of psychological borders in marginalizing the immigrants and allowing the natives of the host community to treat the immigrants as "outsiders" and "others". The crossings of these borders have a considerable impact on the lives of immigrants.

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