

NORMATIVE DIMENSIONS OF TRANSNATIONALISM IN SOUTH ASIAN FICTION OF MIGRATION

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Abstract

This paper examines the extent to which transnationalism is conceived as a normative reality by South Asian authors from diaspora, such as Anita Desai and Kiran Desai. The analysis considers the connections maintained by South Asian immigrant characters with their home countries in order to formulate hypotheses regarding their need for trans-border communication. By discussing the function of letters and the impact of the immigrants' temporary visits back home, the argument suggests that these types of transnational connections modify certain configurations of non-migrant identities. Considering the patterns of interpersonal relationships established across distances, this discussion analyzes the extent to which transnationalism acquires a local dimension.

Keywords: communicative travel, linear transnationalism, migration, physical travel, social network

1. Introduction

This paper acknowledges the importance of migration as a pressing issue of our times, foregrounding manners in which it is reflected in narratives of relocation by authors who have experienced transnational mobility. The primary corpus of the paper is made up of three novels, *Fasting Feasting*, *Clear Light of Day* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, whose authors' life trajectories involved the crossing of borders on their way from India to America. The present research relies on the assumption that fictions of migration provide a valuable insight into individual experiences of resettlement that are usually missing from the more group-oriented sociological research. In other words, this discussion considers the potential of creative literature to provide biographical approaches to the sociological conclusions about migration (White, 1995: 14). This analysis also invokes recent theoretical positions that interrogate the increased popularity of terms such as hybridity, fragmentation, fluidity and rootlessness. More specifically, S.P. Moslund's study questions the glorification of the migrant subject as the normative type of consciousness of our times. The author considers that the contemporary critical discourse, with its focus on metaphors of fluidity (migrancy/ uprootedness,

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cultural flows, becoming, nomadic identities) overlooks the enduring relevance of centripetal coordinates (settlement, rootedness, being) in the fabric of contemporary identities (Moslund, 2010:14). Far from minimising the significance of migrancy and cultural flows, this approach suggests a more comprehensive perspective that would balance all these parameters (movement and stillness, cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity, cultural being and cultural becoming). Following this astute observation, the investigation of the primary corpus discusses the interactions between South Asian characters who do not experience migration and their displaced relatives, highlighting the manners in which the axis of transnational migration intersects with local configurations of identity. This peculiar overlap suggests the idea that the forces of emplacement and displacement are not parallel dimensions, but merging realities. Since transnational patterns of mobility have the potential to modify local configurations, this illustrates the difficulty to maintain clear cut distinctions between the migrant /hybrid /nomadic /heterogeneous perspectives and the settled/ homogeneous/ pure conditions. The next section presents the main theoretical notions employed in the analysis of the primary corpus, discussing the difference between diaspora and transnationalism, the diverse patterns of linear transnationalism as well as the manners in which this phenomenon is considered to have acquired a normative dimension.

2. Theoretical background

Transnationalism is envisaged as a critical framework for the naturalized frame of the nation (Briggs et al, 2008: 3). As a general term, it refers to cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social formations straddling nation-states. Transnationalism is facilitated by globalization, designating manners in which developments in transportation, technology and communication have accelerated the speed, intensity and impact of various linkages (Vertovec, 2009: 2). The present discussion considers the cultural studies approach that interprets transnationalism as a special type of consciousness generated by individuals' multiple identifications, de-centered attachments and simultaneous being here and there (Vertovec, 2009: 5, 6). Transnationalism is associated with a mode of cultural reproduction that relies on intersection of cultural patterns. These processes of cultural blending have been described by various terms (creolisation, syncretism, bricolage, cultural translation, hybridity) and have been analyzed in relation with global media (television, music, film, visual arts, diasporic literature) and communication (Vertovec, 2009: 7).

2.1 Transnationalism vs. diaspora

This section discusses the differences between diaspora and transnational paradigms, outlining the need for an approach to migration that considers the intersections between the two terms. The classical definition of diaspora implies a

sense of irremediable rupture with one's homeland paralleled by a wish to return to it and a sense of alienation in the host country. At the same time, diaspora formation is conditioned by coercive elements at home that enforce departure (political repression, starvation, etc) (Meinhof and Triandafyllidou, 2006: 200, 204). Relying on a diasporic interpretation of migration processes, the traditional approach to migration regarded displacement as a "unidirectional movement [...] a permanent change of home place" (Gustafson, 2004: 68) triggered by push and pull factors. Studies produced within this trend employed methodological nationalism that defined migration as a movement from one nation-state to another and focused on the immigrants' integration within the receiving country (Gustafson, 2004: 68). Going beyond this manner of analysis, the transnational outlook on migration takes into account both the sending and the receiving countries, stressing the relationships between them in the form of interactions across national borders. This direction of research highlights the role of migration networks constituted through transnational interpersonal relationships. In accounting for patterns of transnational migration, this vista intersects with theories of globalization that foreground the interconnectedness of places and nation-states (Gustafson, 2004:68).

While transnational social spaces are not new phenomena (Pries, 2003: 8), their novel dimension is rendered by the migrants' enhanced ability to travel back and forth between homes, discarding the diasporic connotations of absence, loss and alienation (Ascroft, 2010: 75). Due to technological innovations in communications and transportation, "networks of transnational identification" have become more important in the shaping of diaspora identities. Thus, diasporas are at once global and local, they signal processes of multi-locality across geographical cultural and psychic boundaries (Brah, 1996: 21). According to Clifford, the transnational connections activated via globalization processes are conceptualized as lateral axes of diaspora (1994:318).

As this subsection demonstrates, a large theoretical trend points out that binary categories (home society vs. host society/ global vs. local) used to analyse migration cannot explain the simultaneous involvement of migrants in the social and political life of more than one nation-state (Basch et al, 2003: 5). According to their study, transnationalism denotes "processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (2003: 7). This theoretical perspective redefines immigrants as transmigrants, i.e. immigrants who build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders by their engagement in networks of relationships that connect them to two or more nation states simultaneously. Along similar lines, Ong considers that postcolonial transnational subjects call into question not only stability in cultural identity, but also ties to a single nation-state, or even to a single imagined community (quoted in Kearney, 1995: 558). As a conclusion, contemporary theories of transnationalism consider it a transgression of the diasporic paradigm, in the sense that it retains the element of displacement/mobility while adding the regime of multiple national belonging. At the same time, the

transnational discourse sets out to discard the connotations of exilic loss, foregrounding the emergence of trans-border patterns of communication.

2.2 Linear transnationalism

According to recent trends in transnational research, novel forms of enhanced mobility affect the fabric of daily life, interfering with family structures. Itzigshon and Saucedo-Giroguli define linear transnationalism as the ensemble of practices that link immigrants to their families and places of origin (2005: 899). Along similar lines, Briggs and McCormick consider that the transnational dimension intersects with the domestic sphere of family and the household, fact that transforms the family into a flexible transnational space (2008:18). Lima's socio-anthropological perspective establishes that the transnational ties consolidate family coherence, despite distance, as they determine "transnational experiences to form a fluid continuum, rather than a radical divide compartmentalizing life into two separated worlds" (2003: 91). Lima also attempts to capture/render the role of transnational families at a symbolic level, considering the cultural consequences of the ties that span several borders:

the transnational family is also a vehicle for the circulation and fusion of customs, practices, habits, forms of consumption, and expectations. Transnational families are therefore vehicles—better yet, agents—for material exchanges and the creation, re-creation, and transformation of cultures. Such families are thus also important elements in the creation and survival of transnational social spaces. (Lima, 2003: 91)

Interestingly, the intersections between transnational channels and family relations transform individuals into creative cultural agents. The circulation of messages across physical borders contributes to the emergence of new cultural and social meanings that are reshaped by all family members, whether in the home country or abroad. Considering these theoretical positions, the present analysis investigates the impact of transnational ties upon the configurations of the Indian families, focusing on transformations that take place at the local level. The discussion will establish the extent to which these ties affect the outlook of non-migrant characters, foregrounding the intersection between rooted and rootless realities.

Given the dispersed geographic locations and the political conditions of travel, Indian immigrants employ various mechanisms for maintaining transnational connections: phone calls, letters and sometimes physical relocation. In order to discuss this range of transnational ties, I will rely on Larsen's classification of transnational channels into physical travel, imaginative travel (memories, texts, TV, soap operas) and communicative travel (letters, postcards, telegrams, telephones, faxes, emails, instant messages and videoconferences) (Larsen et al, 2006: 47- 48). The novels analyzed in this paper present only two categories of the

transnational connections mentioned above, namely communicative travel via letters and physical travel. Considering the intersections between transnationalism and family relations, the next section discusses theoretical debates regarding the transformation of transnationalism into a normative reality.

2.3 Normative transnationalism

A transnational perspective on migration considers the connections between countries of origin and societies of settlement. Moreover, the idea of normative transnationalism introduces a shift of focus from nomadic identities to the identity transformation in the countries of origin, as non-migrant characters become involved in transnational networks. Contemporary theories of transnationalism have established that increased communication between immigrants and their native spaces has produced a “normative transnationalism” in which both migrants and relatives at home are increasingly aware of what happens in the sending contexts and abroad” (Jackson et al, 2004: 3). This aspect of transnationalism accounts for the ways in which non-migrant individuals eventually change their outlook as recipients of messages sent across transnational ties:[...] “even those who have never themselves moved from the home context are powerfully affected by events, values and practices among their transnationally connected relatives and co-villagers abroad” (Vertovec, 2009: 15). According to the same theoretician, the analysis of transnational phenomena relies on three fundamental concepts: social networks, social capital and embeddedness. The social network approach defines each person as a ‘node’ linked with others in a network. This perspective enables the discussion of interpersonal relationships that transgress institutions and boundaries of neighborhood, kinship, class, workplace (Vertovec, 2009:32). This research trend also analyzes the flows of material and non-material resources and the nature of ties between the members of the network. The notion of social capital refers to the individuals’ ability to employ access to resources enabled by their membership in certain social networks (Vertovec, 2009: 36). The idea of embeddedness describes how economic action is socially situated and cannot be explained wholly by individual motivations since individuals are also positioned within the networks of personal relationships (Vertovec, 2009: 37). In the fiction analysed, the notion of embeddedness illustrates how the characters’ motivation to leave for America springs from an economic necessity that does not express their individual option to relocate. For example, Biju and Arun are embedded in transnational networks and their displacement is a strategy adopted by their families in order to acquire social capital. Along similar lines, Tara’s temporary visit to India places both her and Bim in a transnational network of close family interaction.

The next part of the present paper is dedicated to the investigation of the primary corpus, discussing the main types of linear transnationalism, the characters’ status of nodes in transnational networks and the causal relation between migration and

the elevation of social status. Considering the interpersonal relationships established across borders between migrants and their families, this section will analyze the extent to which transnationalism acquires a local dimension in the fiction under scrutiny.

3. Corpus analysis

3.1 Communicative travel

The Inheritance of Loss presents two parallel migration scenarios to the UK and the US in the colonial and free India. The ambitious Jemubhai Patel leaves India in 1939 to pursue higher education at Cambridge. After returning home as a member of the Indian Civil Service, he becomes a judge in the district of Uttar Pradesh and eventually in West Bengal (the city of Kalimpong). In the late 80's, Biju, the son of Jemubhai's cook, emigrates to America where he becomes a restaurant worker. Unable to acquire legal status in the US, Biju comes back home and reunites himself with his father. *The Inheritance of Loss* presents letter writing as an important form of maintaining transnational family relations, employed by Biju and his father. While Biju struggles to make a living in New York, his father is keen on supporting the emigration plans of other villagers, counting on his son's ability to interfere. The cook's reliance on Biju turns his son into a node within a transnational social network maintained through letter writing. The dissemination of news at the local level via letters illustrates how these means of communication blend distant realities with the local concerns of an Indian community. On the one hand, these letters reveal the father's and son's limited social capital, given that they cannot afford faster means of communication. On the other hand, the letters from America have the effect of increasing the cook's social capital in India. This is why, he intends to preserve Biju's letters as a reminder of his son's successful enterprise abroad: "One day he'd return them to Biju so his son would have a record of his journey and feel a sense of pride and achievement" (K. Desai, 2006: 20). The cook's reaction to his son's letters illustrates the father's sense of social elevation created via his participation in communicative travel. For example, after he receives one of his letters, the cook informs his neighbours that Biju is "the manager of a restaurant business" (K. Desai, 2006: 84), although he purposefully mistranslates Biju's news. Thus, the content of Biju's letter is extended from a private to a larger social context, since his father informs everyone in the market that his son "works for the Americans" (K. Desai, 2006: 140). The cook's awareness of his marginality in the village hierarchy generates his obsession to acquire a more important position. Hence, he relies on Biju to contribute to the increase of his prestige by acting as supporter for other Indians eager to make it in America.

The following excerpts illustrate the role of letters in supporting the creation of unofficial channels of immigration. Moreover, they illustrate the way in which

linear transnationalism engulfs both migrant and non-migrant characters in networks of communication that modify local perceptions:

'Biju beta' ", he wrote *'you have been fortunate enough to get there, please do something for the others...'* " *'Very bright boy, family very poor, please look after him, he already has a visa, will be arriving...Please find a job for Poresh. In fact, even his brother is ready to go. Help them. Sanjeeb Thom Karma Ponchu, and remember Budhoo, watchman at Mon Ami, his son...'* (K. Desai, 2006: 95) (original emphasis)

The cook's requests reveal his highly distorted perception of Biju's situation that is also maintained by his son's mystifying accounts. The exchange of letters helps Biju conceal the actual circumstances of his life abroad. For example, the first letter posted by Biju after his arrival in New York presents an optimistic image of his new life: "Respected *Pitaji*. No need to worry. Everything is fine. The manager has offered me a full-time waiter position. Uniform and food will be given by them. *Angrezi khana* only, no Indian food, and the owner is not from India. He is from America itself" (K. Desai, 2006: 14) (original emphasis). Biju's words reveal the boy's affection for his parent that makes him express an idealized version of his otherwise arduous existence in New York. In this account, his expected success is rendered by an association with non-Indian references (English food, American owner). This fact illustrates both characters' belief that higher standards are directly related with Western contexts. A similar example illustrates how Biju intentionally mistranslates his American experience out of concern for his father. The cook considers that getting fat in America is an obvious sign of welfare and therefore he asks Biju whether he has put on weight "like everyone in America" (K. Desai, 2006: 233). Although Biju has significantly lost weight, he lies to his father in order to protect him from the harsh truth of his condition: "Yes", Biju had said, I am growing fat- ten times myself [...] and was shocked when he went to the ninety-nine-cent store and found he had to buy shirts at the children's rack" (K. Desai, 2006: 233). In a similar vein, Biju's account of his (actually miserable) position at the "Queen of Tarts" renders an optimistic picture meant to cater to the cook's expectations: "I have a new job in a bakery and the boss leaves us in complete charge" (K. Desai, 2006: 83). By repeatedly invoking a sense of achievement in the USA, Biju's letters function as a means of double enforcement, of his self-esteem and of the parent's pride:

But although Biju's letters traced a string of jobs, they said more or less the same thing each time, except for the name of the establishment he was working for. His repetition provided coziness, and the cook's repetition of his son's repetition double-knit the coziness. 'Excellent job', he told his acquaintances, 'better even than the last'." (K. Desai 2006: 17)

The cook takes advantage of his son's presumed achievements in the USA, in order to gain appreciation from his community. Thus, while Biju struggles to survive in

the basements of New York, his father enjoys the benefits of superiority at home. The normative dimension of transnationalism surfaces in the way in which the cook's social position literally improves on account on his promises to facilitate emigration from India to the USA: "they brought him chickens as gifts, little packets of nuts or raisins [...] and he was beginning to feel as if he were a politician, a bestower of favors, a receiver of thanks" (K. Desai, 2006: 94). The community's gratitude for the cook generates an increase of his social capital, given that his access to certain resources is facilitated. This suggests that the cook's involvement in communicative travel has the potential to efface local hierarchies, bridging the gap between socially different categories: "He told the doctor, who had come in to collect the vaccines that she stored in the Lark's fridge. 'My son has a new job in New York'. Her son was there as well. He shared this with a doctor! The most distinguished personage in town" (K. Desai, 2006: 85). Hence, the cook feels socially equal to the village doctor through their children's connection to the West that seems to cancel a significant social distance. The parents' local triumph foregrounds the slight transformation of the local perspectives as a consequence of the (non)-migrant individuals' involvement in transnational social networks.

Similarly, Anita Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting* illustrates the role of letters as connectors between Indian and American realities and modifiers of social perceptions at the local level. The first part of *Fasting, Feasting* presents the life of an Indian family, made up of the parents and three children: Uma, Aruna and the male offspring, Arun. While introducing the family routine, the narrator foregrounds the patriarchal oppression experienced by the older daughter, Uma, who is denied education and access to the labor market. The second part of the novel features the Indian son's (Arun) migration to America and his impressions about an American family with whom he lives for a while (the Pattons). As well as *The Inheritance of Loss*, *Fasting Feasting* presents male migration as a non-voluntary process, since Arun's departure is initiated by his father. Arun's father (Papa) expresses low esteem for Indian traditions, associating his ancestors' ways with ideas of submission and insignificance. In this context, he considers acquiring higher education in the USA as a male duty to emancipate from a backwards culture: "Papa did not even bother to counter Mama's arguments; he did not expect her to understand the [. . .] the value of a foreign degree, the openings that would create later in life, the opportunities" (A. Desai, 2000: 120). Western education is implicitly considered superior to the Indian one, being linked to the idea of fortunate possibility. As with Kiran Desai's cook, Papa's admiration for the West derives from his awareness of his poor origins: "Perhaps Papa's memories of [. . .] the painful beginnings in dusty provincial courts filled him with this almost manic determination. Was he fulfilling through Arun a dream that he had had there under the streetlights, or in the shabby district courts?" (A. Desai, 2000: 121). Papa's resolution to send Arun to America turns the latter into a passive instrument for fulfilling the parent's own aspirations. Arun does not oppose his father's ambitions,

although he clearly resents the obligation to study the whole day: “He carried his bag of books and pencil boxes and geometry tools as a coolie might *stagger* along under an *oversized load*” (A. Desai 2000: 118; emphasis mine). The verb “stagger” and the idea of “oversized load” highlight Arun’s difficulty in coping with an obligation that exceeds his abilities. His automatic performance of this assigned duty turns him into a depersonalized individual. The dissolution of his will is illustrated by his lack of reaction when he reads the letter of acceptance from an American university:

Uma watched Arun, too, when he read the fateful letter. She watched and searched for an expression, of relief, of joy, doubt, fear, anything at all. But there was none. [. . .] This blank face now stared at the letter and faced another phase of his existence arranged for him by Papa. (A. Desai, 2000: 121).

Arun’s lack of expression illustrates the gradual erosion of his individuality, as a result of family pressure. His lack of interest in going abroad translates as a reluctance to engage with the new cultural environment. This is why his letters home contain neutral accounts of his activities and the weather, without personal notes regarding his new cultural experience: “He might just as well have written from the local college hostel, Uma thought in disappointment” (A. Desai, 2000:123).

Notwithstanding Arun’s absent enthusiasm, the letters he sends home reveal the normative dimension of transnationalism since they create a sense of social elevation in the Indian family. More precisely, the son’s connection with the Western space is regarded as badge of family prestige, which seems to surpass the son’s accomplishments abroad:

Arun’s letters arrived, pale blue aerogrammes. They would finger the crisp glossy paper in turn, marvelling at its quality that somehow endured through the journey. It seemed like evidence of Arun’s own endurance, his survival. His actual message, written on the inside, was not nearly so potent. (A. Desai, 2000: 122)

The letters are regarded as special objects, signifiers of a different space, associated with superior standards. Their “glossy paper”, indicating high quality is implicitly associated with the American world, which is imagined as a space of refined values. Therefore, Arun’s transplantation into a Western country associated with superlative attributes, transfers a sense of distinction to his entire family. This example suggests that communicative travel includes Arun’s family members in a transnational network, despite their static life. Moreover, letter writing from America to India and vice versa strengthens the family’s transnational status along with their self-esteem. While Arun’s letters home improve the family’s social self-perception, the letters he receives from India have the potential to modify his American routine, irrespective of his will. This fact reinforces the idea of a normative side of transnationalism, suggesting the symmetric way in which

transnational forces can act. More specifically, the letter posted by Arun's family becomes a means to set up transatlantic arrangements regarding Arun's summer accommodation. The composition of the letter is depicted as a collective enterprise since the father dictates its contents to Uma. Anita Desai displays subtle irony and humor as she presents letter writing as an elaborate manifestation of patriarchal authority. At the same time, the characters' minute preparation for this event foregrounds the importance they assign to letters as connectors with a different world:

Uma has spread all the writing materials on the table, first removing the embroidered tablecloth so as not to stain it with ink, or have it cramp her writing. She draws up a chair and bends over it, lips clenched inwards as she waits for Papa to begin dictating the letter. She knows she must get it right: the aerogramme costs money, it cannot be torn up like a sheet of paper and thrown away, a fresh one used instead. (A. Desai, 2000: 124)

In this letter, the father informs Arun that Mrs. O'Henry, an American Baptist missionary in Delhi, asked her sister in America (Mrs. Patton) to offer Arun free accommodation during the summer vacation. Therefore, the Indian family finds a way to interfere with their son's life from a great distance, by means of communicative travel. This example suggests how letter writing creates a transnational social network, whose members from India are able to get involved and monitor Arun's American life. At the same time, Papa's and Uma's efforts to design a letter to America are imbued with their awareness of fulfilling a significant task:

His deep frown indicates how great a labour this is, as great for him as for Uma. Both are perspiring and have to stop to mop their necks and faces frequently. The aerogramme is looking damp and wilted as well; it is not of the same quality as those Arun uses, in America. (A. Desai, 2000: 126)

The characters' intense participation in the letter writing process foregrounds the social importance connoted by their belonging to a transnational network that connects the family with the Western world. Thus, the repeated references to the quality of the paper make up an explicit comparison between Indian and American standards that place value on the latter. This fact suggests that the Indian family holds a binary perspective that places India on an inferior position. In this context, letter writing marks the opportunity for status elevation by allowing the family's insertion into a transnational regime of communication.

Interestingly, *Fasting, Feasting* also suggests that the perceptions of American characters' can be shaped by letters from India. For example, Arun's American host, Mrs. Patton, manifests an exotic attraction to India, willing to show Arun that she is interested in his background. As discussed in a previous study (Stoican, 2015: 129-130), Mrs. Patton fails to form a significant bond with Arun, given that

she cannot turn her superficial interest in Indian cultural practices (vegetarianism, yoga, astrology, etc.) into a deeper commitment. For the purpose of the present analysis, it is worth mentioning that most of her knowledge of India has been transmitted by means of communicative travel, via her sister's (Mrs. O' Henry's) letters: "my sister's written and told me how different your food is from ours. She's lived there – oh, twenty years or more, and writes me these amazing letters. My, I'm amazed by what she tells me, I am. India – gee!" (A. Desai, 2000: 78). Mrs. O' Henry's written accounts on Indian cultural specificity are not featured in the novel, they are simply invoked as Mrs. Patton's other connections with to India, besides Arun. Although they do not trigger significant changes in Mrs. Patton's cultural outlook, communication by letters signals the American character's participation in linear transnationalism. This element may account for the higher degree in which Mrs. Patton is able to establish a connection with Arun, as compared to the rest of her family.

The next section briefly discusses the dynamics of family relations generated by linear transnationalism in the form of physical travel, in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*. The analysis argues that Tara's temporary visit back home includes her non-migrant sister (Bim) into a transnational network and this change of status eventually modifies some of Bim's old beliefs.

3.2 Physical travel

While *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Fasting Feasting* illustrate mechanisms of linear transnationalism as letter writing, *Clear Light of Day* foregrounds the transformation of family dynamics triggered by physical travel. This novel presents the evolution of an Indian (Hindu) family with an emphasis on the destinies of the four siblings (two girls - Bim, Tara and two boys- Raja and Baba). After the parents' death, Tara gets married to an Indian diplomat (Bakul) and leaves for America. The eldest brother, Raja, marries Benazir (the daughter of their Muslim neighbour, Hyder Ali) and moves to Hyderabad, leaving Bim in charge with the family affairs. Bim considers herself abandoned and betrayed by her brother, who offers her no support in managing the whole situation. However, she remains in her parents' house, taking care of the retarded brother Baba and pursuing a teaching career. The novel starts with Tara's temporary return from the United States to Old Delhi, presenting the effects of her visit on Bim. Tara's visit re-enacts the family past, making Bim reconsider her attitude to family relations and identity formation. The central argument between the sisters refers to Bim's unwillingness to forgive Raja for having abandoned her in his youth. Bim's resentment to Raja justifies her refusal to visit him in Hyderabad. Her bitterness suggests that she rejects the possibility of individual development outside the family sphere.

In order to highlight Bim's anachronistic vision, the author defines this character as a "custodian of old memories" (A. Desai, 2007: np). At the same time, the author confesses that by creating Bim, she celebrates the Indian women who succeed in being individuals despite all pressures and "without necessarily stepping out of the house or seeing the world" (A. Desai, 2007: np). Although Bim is strongly rooted in the setting of Old Delhi, she is able to reassess her judgments in the absence of an actual relocation, but via her access to Tara's novel interpretations. The conflict between the two sisters reveals a clash between different visions of identity, since Tara promotes the idea of individual mobility, while Bim is attached to the idea of performing duties in the native space of Old Delhi. In a previous paper (Stoican, 2012), I provided a detailed account of Bim's transformation along transcultural lines. In that study, I interpreted Bim's change as a consequence of her heated debates with her sister, whose understanding has been modified by her relocation. While Bim is the promoter of duties and a holder of an accusing stance, Tara introduces a fresh outlook on family relations, promoting the values of freedom, flexibility and individualism. Therefore, I argue that *Clear Light of Day* illustrates the normative dimension of transnationalism given that Tara's visit at home reconfigures Bim's rigid understanding of the relation between family duties and individual freedom. Tara's ability to mediate the conflict between Bim and Raja reveals the impact of her transnational condition on Bim's ability to redefine her conception of individual responsibilities. Bim's eventual understanding illustrates her ability to blend her ideals of independence with an altruistic care for her loved ones. Her example suggests that the transformation of one's perspective can occur in the absence of actual relocation. Despite her reluctance to be mobile, Bim's encounter with Tara turns her into a node in a transnational social network, which generates her inner change.

4. Conclusions

This paper has highlighted ways in which the transnational networks established between the immigrants and their families have the capacity to reconfigure the self-perception and status of certain non-migrant characters. The analysis has established that the maintenance of transnational ties through communicative travel (letters) and physical travel (temporary visits back home) interferes with and eventually modifies local patterns of identification. While the cook's social image improves once he experiences linear transnationalism, Arun's father's self-esteem also increases as a consequence of his son's westward migration. More specifically, Arun's letters transfer a sense of prestige to his family, conveying a sense of superiority associated with his access to American education. At the same time, the letters sent by Arun's parents from India to America have the potential to modify his American routines, too. This process illustrates how Arun's relatives can participate in his American life, without experiencing relocation. In a slightly different manner, the non-migrant female character in *Clear Light of Day* changes her inherited beliefs after she filters her sister's different perspectives, shaped by

migration. The debates between Bim and Tara illustrate that the latter's transnational mobility is transferred onto Bim and has the potential to modify her rigid assumptions.

These processes suggest that transnationalism can acquire a normative level in the sense that it does intersect with both rooted and migrant identities. This fact demonstrates that borders can be crossed despite some characters' inability to engage in actual mobility. While *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Clear Light of Day* present the effects of normative transnationalism along the axis USA to India, *Fasting, Feasting* demonstrates that American realities can also be modified by transnational channels that travel from India to America. These findings indicate that literature of migration offers heterogeneous perspectives on identity transformation that are not restricted to the fashionable thematic areas of mobility, migrant transformation and nomadic fluidization. While these are important topics, the novels analyzed demonstrate that fiction of migration offers more nuanced illustrations of identity transformation, also foregrounding the manners in which transnational migration is likely to affect rooted individuals, generating cultural/social changes in local/settled contexts.

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