

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the four works of Hari Kunzru: *The Impressionist*, *Transmission*, *My Revolutions* and *Gods Without Men* from the perspective of the motif of the journey which serves as a linking device for the four novels, and a tool to depict various forms of transformation. The texts of the British writer of a mixed English and Kashmiri Pandit ancestry are particularly concerned with the issues of identity formation, dislocation and divisions in the world characterized by the mutual permeation of cultures and nations. In Hari Kunzru's novels the problem with defining oneself arises from the cross cultural encounters, which have their starting point in the colonial era.

Therefore, the first novel of the author *The Impressionist* is set in the imperial India. The work depicts the journey of a young Kashmiri Pandit boy who discovers that he is actually half English. Being rejected by his traditional pure cast family, on the grounds of his mixed blood, he experiences the feeling of dislocation for the first time. In the course of his journey, Pran Nath is forced to adopt further identities, and cross numerous borders of race, nationality and even sex in order to find his proper place. The boy crosses spatial and literal borders as well, for the journey leads him across a number of Indian cities through England towards Africa. The three locations mark stages in the identity shaping of the boy, for in his colonised homeland he is primarily Indian, although each new identity brings him closer to whiteness. England, in turn, is the place where he is taken for a true British young man namely Jonathan Bridgeman, which, interestingly, does not provide him with satisfaction and inner liberation from racial limitations. Finally, Africa, is the land of the deletion of all the previous identities imposed on him in the course of his journey, which gives the protagonist mental and spatial freedom, for he decides to become a nameless vagabond travelling through endless desert.

The second novel discussed in this dissertation, entitled *Transmission* depicts cross cultural encounters in the transcultural era. The text presents the journey of a young IT specialist who travels from India to America in order to work in Silicon Valley in the high-tech sector. Arjun Mehta, after landing in California, becomes completely immersed in the new reality where the traditions and values which he has transferred with himself are of no importance. The dislocation of the protagonist results from inability to adapt in the impersonal, detached, fragmented and capitalistic environment. It soon becomes clear that identity in the transcultural reality is not only shaped on the basis of race and nationality but also on the grounds of socio-economic status, and the position in the hierarchy of financial power. Realizing that he has been omitted in the transmission flowing through the interconnected, channels of information and commerce both literally and metaphorically, Arjun designs a virus in the shape of a Bollywood

actress Lella Zahir in order to reverse the hierarchies and interrupt the transmission which has not noticed him in its journey.

The third novel, *My Revolutions*, depicts the journey of a young protagonist Chris Carver from political idealism to radicalism and terrorism, after which the man adopts a new identity of Mike Frame, in order to escape the shameful past. However, his journey continues and is marked by his attempts to adapt to the capitalistic reality of the 1990's, and by the constantly recurring memories and flashbacks. The novel presents a further category according to which identity is constructed, which is politics. This idea carves the main protagonist to such an extent that he eventually becomes its mere instrument. At first, the dislocation of Chris is the effect of his lack of identification with the social class he represents. As the novel progresses, the dislocation results from subconscious unacceptance of the aggressive methods of his political revolutionary organization. The dislocation of Mike, in turn, is expressed through longing for the times of ideals and selfless attitudes, and his despise towards the capitalistic age.

The final novel, *Gods Without Men* is a collection of separate stories temporally distant but joined by the mutual space of the Pinnacles rock formation on the Mojave desert. The text presents numerous journeys of different protagonist in search for the unknown which is manifested by a different phenomenon depending on the plot, and its historical period. Therefore, the protagonists make attempts to find the essence of life in God, quicksilver, old Native American dialects, the UFO and technology. The dislocation of the characters originates from the lack of spiritual and fundamental anchors in their lives especially in the substories set in the contemporary transcultural reality. The central story is the one of the disappearance of the autistic boy near the Pinnacles, and his miraculous reappearance after two weeks. Raj returns as a changed and cured boy. Although the mystery of his vanishing is unsolved, there is a suggestion that during absence he visited the remote historical periods in which he gained the fundamental knowledge of the essence of life which transformed and healed him.

It can be observed that the categories on the basis of which identity is constructed or searched for, change in the subsequent novels, for the journeys outlined above occur in different temporal and spatial environments which provide various conditions, circumstances and realities for the conduction of this process. Therefore, the novels follow a transformation of the modes of shaping identity but also of the conditions in which this identity is formed.

Thus, a thesis has been formulated that the eponymous Hari Kunzru's journeys exhibit a certain duality: journeys as identity formations of the particular dislocated protagonists, and literary

journeys across literary disciplines and approaches, genres, conventions, recurring motifs and narrative structures. The mental journeys undergo a change, for, as it has already been mentioned, the identity is shaped with reference to different types of anchors depending on the novel and its presented world. Thus, the characters define themselves through race, nationality, economic status, politics, and religion or other forms of the unknown. The literary journeys, in turn, mark and enable a transformation of the subsequent novels from the postcolonial realm through postmodern to transcultural and, in terms of form, translit. In order to verify the thesis, research of literary devices which construct the journeys has been conducted. In the course of the analysis of the tools, among others: binary oppositions, double identities, or a vertical, up and down structure, it has been observed that the literary devices participating in the formation of the fictitious world possess a dual nature as well. Therefore, an auxiliary thesis has been formed that the dual composition of the novels reflects the divisions and classifications which started in the colonial era and still persist in the age of transculturality, in spite of its border-crossing nature, cultural enrichment, and proclaimed equality.

Moreover, it has been noticed that the four novels are joined not only by the motif of the journey of certain characters but also by the recurring motifs of cave and rocks, which additionally frame the whole collection, and of disappearance, desert and noise. This fact has led to a conclusion that *The Impressionist*, *Transmission*, *My Revolutions* and *Gods Without Men*, indeed constitute an entity, which by means of the motif of the journey follows a transformation of a postcolonially rooted text to a transcultural one or even translit.

The dissertation is a response to the insufficient amount of analysis of Hari Kunzru's novels. The existing research tends to examine the novels' motifs, concepts and narrative structures separately. As a result, the recurring and joining nature of the motifs, as well as the metamorphosis of a narrative structure from chronological to translit have not been discussed yet. Elements and moments of transgression from one literary approach to another have not been traced and examined either. Consequently, the four books have not been treated as an integral picture of the changes in literature and reality yet.

The following research is based on close reading of the novels in question, and an analysis of the already mentioned literary devices supported by articles, book reviews and interviews with the author himself.

The dissertation consists of five chapters. The first section is devoted to methodological approaches necessary to analyse Hari Kunzru's fiction, while the subsequent four chapters

discuss in sequence *The Impressionist*, *Transmission*, *My Revolutions* and *Gods Without Men*. This linear composition of the dissertation highlights the fact that each novel is a further stage of evolution of the recurring motifs, themes, concepts, and factors on the basis of which identity is formed, and narrative structures which appear to be more and more ambiguous and multidirectional as the literary journey of the four novels progresses.

Thus, chapter one presents the theoretical approaches towards the concepts of time and space of the fictitious world, for each journey is a movement in space conducted in certain time. Moreover, both concepts perform a significant role in identity shaping of dislocated protagonists. Hari Kunzru's novels discuss among various issues memory, the repetitive nature of time and the simultaneous rapture and continuity of history and past. The concepts of functional zones and characters of their own locus can be traced in the author's works. However, the postmodern and transcultural approaches towards time and space are the most significant in comprehending the four novels. Therefore, the methodological chapter outlines the basic concepts of these two disciplines. Moreover, section one discusses the most crucial ideas of postcolonialism from which the literary journeys of Hari Kunzru start.

Chapter two concerns the novel *The Impressionist* which is presented as a typically postcolonial text and consequently, the first stage of the literary journeys of the author. The novel is constructed on the linear, chronological narrative which reflects the imperial order of the presented world. The book explores the postcolonial concepts of hybridity and mimicry, depicting not only hybrid protagonists but also hybrid spaces. The chapter draws attention to the fact that the text reinvents the Western bildungsroman convention into the postcolonial bildungsroman which is a metaphor of both the opposition against the oppressor, and the birth of a new nation after the fall of the British Empire. A similar function is observed in the use of the convention of magic realism, which employs elements of magic, mysticism, dreams, folk tales and myths in order to recover the original modes of expression of the colonised nations. Furthermore, the section discusses the double vision of the Orient, which is both threatening and fascinating for the colonisers. Among numerous postcolonial features, few postmodern techniques may be noticed. The appearance of the concept of deconstruction of binary oppositions which build Pran Nath's identity, intertextuality and parody achieved by an ironic reversal of *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, self-reflexiveness of the text and the protagonist's resemblance to Zygmunt Bauman's postmodern traveller who shifts identities frequently and easily announce the inevitable collapse of the British Empire with its traditional rules of the old world order, and the gradual approach of the new trends in literature. The dual

nature of both the motif of the journey, and the devices which construct it suggests the divisions and inequalities among people, which originate from the imperial period.

Additionally, the chapter examines the recurring motifs which have their starting point in *The Impressionist*. The motif of the cave is discussed as a framing device for the first novel and the whole collection, as well as the reinvention of the allegory of Plato's cave. The cave in *The Impressionist* is the location of Pran Nath's birth and rebirth, and the place where he deletes the identities which have been imposed on him in the course of his journey. Moreover, the chapter analyses the further recurring motifs namely desert and disappearance.

Chapter three contains the analysis of the novel *Transmission*. It focuses on the role of technology and enhanced mobility in the transformation of the postcolonially oriented text into a transcultural one both in form and content. The motif of the journey again performs a double role. As it has already been mentioned, the process of identity shaping is in the novel *Transmission* based not only on race and nationality but also on socio-economic status, for the novel depicts a highly capitalistic environment. As far as the literary journey is concerned, the novel breaks with linear presentation of events and instead proposes time, space, and plot shifts supported by impersonal language of e-mails, SMS, and questionnaires. Such narrative structure reflects the fragmented, episodic, unstable and liquid postmodern and transcultural condition. The chapter examines the transcultural metaphors of transmission, stream of information, interconnected networks and the virus, which refer to the flux and fluidity of the transcultural reality. Furthermore, chapter three analyses the transcultural border-crossing identities of, for instance, Guy Swift, a businessman, who crosses spaces by means of a plane, and the concepts of Zygmunt Bauman's postmodern travellers. Both examples of personalities are connected with the theme of dislocation, which in Hari Kunzru's texts eventually leads to disappearance. Disappearance in *Transmission* results from two issues. The first is hyperreality, while the second is disappearance as an effect of the transcultural phenomenon of too many adopted and soon abandoned identities. Additionally, the chapter discusses the recurring motif of noise which appears for the first time in the novel *Transmission* where it is manifested by a computer virus in the shape of a woman Leela Zahir. It is an interruption of signal and transmission which flows through the networks of the interconnected world, and draws attention to the problems of migration, hyperreality, cyberterrorism, Artificial Intelligence, and international pandemic such as COVID-19. However, the novel also repeats the postcolonial concepts of exploitation and mimicry. The analysis shows that these notions are still present in the transcultural reality. Moreover, they are accepted by both parties and realized with mutual

consent. This fact together with the dual nature of the motif of the journey, and the literary devices which shape it, again suggests the still prevailing divisions and classifications of the contemporary world.

Chapter four conducts an analysis of the novel *My Revolutions* which develops the dual composition of the text, moves a step further in the narrative structure and proposes a new category on the basis of which identity may be formed. The novel follows the journey of the protagonist from political idealism to radicalism and terrorism. Therefore, identity in *My Revolutions* is constructed through politics. The novel moves backwards in time in order to show the moment of the rise of transcultural reality. The book associates these beginnings with the international sympathies of the 1970's- the decade of anti-Vietnam war movements, and social revolutions. The dualities are exceptionally significant in the novel in question. Numerous oppositions can be traced such as the double identity of the main protagonist, the 1970's vs the 1990's, idealism vs consumerism, rapture vs continuity of time, history and past. Moreover, the narrative structure of the text constitutes a further stage of evolvement for it is based on chaotic, non-linear narratives and memories triggered by certain people or events. The complex, ambiguous and dense narrative structure reflects the identity chaos and fear of the main protagonist. However, the separate narratives are interconnected by means of bridging characters (one of whom is indeed Mr Bridgeman) and passages describing the repetitive and fluid nature of time and life. This device once again refers to the fragmented yet interconnected nature of both postmodern and transcultural reality. The novel continues the exploration of the recurring motif of noise which in *My Revolutions* is expressed through bombs and the inclusion of various types of information sources such as political pamphlets, flyers and communiques, which interrupt or rather blend in the narrative, reflecting the total identification of the main protagonist with the political cause. The motif of cave which is associated with the place and moment of identity disappearance is also traced and analysed within the chapter.

The final section discusses the novel *Gods Without Men* which is the culmination of Hari Kunzru's literary journeys. The analysis indicates that the previous dual composition is replaced by a multiple structure, for the novel is composed of several substories which take place in various historical periods yet in the same location- the Mojave desert and the Pinnacles. The multiple and complex narrative structure of the novel is named by Douglas Coupland as translit which seems to be an apogee of Kunzru's narrative journeys. A translit novel crosses borders of time and history without being historical. The reader immerses in the given period in order not to comprehend its specifics, but to find connections, echoes and rhymes with the present

time. Therefore, the novel proposes numerous linking elements among which the predominant ones are the Pinnacles rock formation and the cave beneath it. This technique reflects the previously discussed continuity and flux of time and life, the repetitiveness of history and the simultaneous fragmentation and interconnectedness of contemporary condition. Easy and quick access to temporally distant periods, and the constant repetition of the space of the action refers to the transcultural concept of the flattening of time and space. As a result of the presence of multiple substories, the recurring motifs of the journey, cave, disappearance and noise are equally multiplied, for they all participate in the construction of each subplot. The cave, the rocks and the desert in *Gods Without Men* is a location where the protagonists obtain the fundamental knowledge concerning the essence of life and the mystery of death. It is also a portal (in terms of content) or a linking device (when it comes to form) between the various periods of the separate subplots. It is, at the same time the place where the protagonists disappear. Hence, *Gods Without Men* explores and rewrites the previous contradictory concepts of rapture and continuity or transgression and vanishing. The novel introduces the figure of Coyote which is a further linking device, as well as the chaos and noise creator. The novel defines a subsequent category according to which identity is shaped, namely religion, God or different forms of the unknown, the mysterious and the incomprehensible. As it has been noted above, each substory presents an alternative vision of the unknown such as God, the UFO, quicksilver, old Native American dialects and technology. The search for God and the essence of life is the underlying purpose of all the above visions, even of the computer database from the most recent and contemporary substory. This reveals a further function of a modern, translit novel- to visit history in order to find and approach spirituality, which the transcultural period is deprived of. Visiting the history in *Gods Without Men* also traces the origins of racial divisions, classifications, prejudices and stereotypes, and unmask their presence in the transcultural reality.

The analysis of the subsequent books proves that the recurring motifs of the journey, cave, rocks, desert, noise and disappearance encourage the reader to look for connections between the four presented novels, and entitles to treat them as an entity framed by the motif of the cave. Consequently, the reader participates in one continuous yet double journey through different modes of forming identity, and across literary disciplines, conventions, genres, motifs and narrative structures. As a result, the reader witnesses a transformation of the postcolonial novel into a transcultural one both in terms of identity themes, as well as form and composition. Moreover, the dual structure of the motif of the journey supported by the dual, or in case of

Gods Without Men multiple, character of the constructing devices reflects the still present divisions and classifications which govern the world. While in the previous époques these were designed on binary oppositions, in the transcultural reality they seem to multiply.