

# Undergraduate Dissertation

## Trabajo Fin de Grado

### Roanna Gonsalves' "Full Face": A Transcultural Analysis

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## **Abstract**

Migration has always been intrinsic to humankind. However, nowadays, these movements of people have increased due to globalisation, which has brought about an unprecedented interaction among different cultures, therefore giving place to transculturality. The short story “Full Face”, by Roanna Gonsalves, narrates the struggles of Indian immigrants when moving to another country, mainly focusing on working women and more especially, on the protagonist, who is also the narrator and focaliser. In this essay I am going to analyse the development of events in the story from a transcultural perspective, mainly focusing on the protagonist’s journey and her evolution throughout the story, exploring similarities and differences with the other characters. In order to do this, I have divided my analysis into three different sections: “From Bombay to Dubai: Goan Catholics on the Move”, “Australia as the Promised Land” and “Assimilation vs. Segregation”. In the first section I explain the historical background of the characters as Goan Catholics and the personal experience of the protagonist in an officially Muslim country, showing the clashes between the different religions and her feeling of being an outsider. In the second section I explore the idea of Australia as a paradise for the characters as a western and primarily Christian country. However, the protagonist’s evolution makes her realise it is just like any other country with its social and political struggles. Notwithstanding this, it also gives her the opportunity to escape from traditional Indian social impositions and empower herself, but without completely rejecting her Indian roots. In the last section I cover the characters’ interaction with the host country and how their own decisions and experiences makes them assimilate or be segregated. My analysis makes it evident that sharing the same historical and religious background and being exposed to other cultures does not lead towards a homogenised universal culture, but rather towards new fluid ones which share common elements, showing, therefore, the centrality of transculturality in our current world.

## **Resumen**

La migración siempre ha formado parte de las vidas de los seres humanos en todo el mundo. Sin embargo hoy en día estos movimientos de gente han aumentado debido a la globalización, que también comprende la interacción continua entre diferentes culturas, dando lugar a la transculturalidad. El relato “Full Face”, de Roanna Gonsalves, narra las dificultades de un grupo de personajes indios cuando emigran a otro país, enfocándose principalmente en mujeres trabajadoras y más específicamente en la protagonista, quien es también la narradora y focalizadora de la historia. En este trabajo analizo el desarrollo de la historia desde una perspectiva transcultural, centrándome principalmente en la evolución de la protagonista, explorando similitudes y diferencias con el resto de los personajes. Para ello he dividido mi análisis en tres secciones diferentes: “De Bombay a Dubai: Católicos de Goa en Movimiento”, “Australia como Tierra Prometida” y “Asimilación vs. Segregación”. En la primera sección me centro en el contexto histórico de los personajes como Católicos de Goa y en la experiencia personal de la protagonista en un país oficialmente musulmán, mostrando los choques entre las diferentes religiones y su sensación de sentirse como una forastera. En la segunda sección exploro la idea de Australia como paraíso para los personajes, ya que es un país occidental y principalmente cristiano. Sin embargo, la evolución de la protagonista le hace darse cuenta de que es como cualquier otro país, con sus conflictos

sociales y políticos. Por otro lado, también le brinda la oportunidad de escapar de las imposiciones sociales de la India tradicional y empoderarse, aunque sin renunciar completamente a sus raíces indias. En la última sección hablo de la interacción de los personajes con el país de acogida y como sus propias decisiones y experiencias les hacen asimilarse o ser segregados. Mi análisis revela que compartir el mismo contexto religioso e histórico y ser expuesto a otras culturas no conduce a una cultura universal homogeneizada, sino a culturas nuevas y cambiantes con elementos comunes, mostrando, por tanto, la centralidad de la transculturalidad en el mundo de hoy en día.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*The Webster's New World College Dictionary* defines “transcultural” as “involving, encompassing or combining elements of more than one culture” (“Transcultural”). From the very beginning, migrating from one place to another has been part of human lives. These mass movements of people have been influenced by modern means of transport, which just like new technologies have become part of contemporary culture all around the globe and also an extension of the human being (McLuhan). As a consequence, contact and interaction between different cultures is unavoidable, therefore influencing one another in a complex, fluid and relational way. As a result, cultural boundaries traditionally imposed by the concept of nation-state weaken, giving place to transculturality (Welsch).

The short story “Full Face” clearly reflects these influences between cultures, as it narrates the migration of some contemporary Indian characters to other countries. The author, Roanna Gonsalves, masterly portrays the thoughts and feelings of the newly-arrived, as she herself went through this experience. Born and brought up in Bombay, India, she attended St. Xavier’s College in Bombay, where she obtained a B.A. and a M.A. in English Literature. In 1998 she moved to Australia as an international student (“About”). There, she initially combined her studies and academic work with other common jobs such as waitressing and working at a petrol station (Merani), experiences that she will later on use in the creation of her short stories. She obtained a Diploma in Television Production, an M.A. in Professional Writing, a Graduate Diploma in Arts by Research in Social Science and a PhD. She has participated in several seminars, conferences and radio programs and has written a large amount of pieces of work, such as theatre plays, journal articles, short fiction, non-fiction and poetry, receiving numerous awards and grants for the last two decades. “Full Face” is the first short story

of her first book, *The Permanent Resident* (2016), which has been included on several lists of must-read books and on the syllabi courses at a number of Australian and international universities. It is also being studied in the fields of Australian Literature, Postcolonial Literatures and Creative writing (“About”). Her stories have been compared to Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction, but taking a more humorous and playful approach (Condon).

The story begins with the narration of the protagonist —no name— about how she moved from Bombay to Dubai after breaking up with her repeatedly unfaithful boyfriend. In Dubai, there also live her aunt Marilyn and her uncle Joe, originally from Bombay too. One day, rushing into a café to get a coffee, she meets Anil, an air conditioner sales rep of an Indian company, and they start dating. They marry in Bombay, in a Catholic ceremony, and invite her aunt Marilyn and uncle Joe. Soon they think about moving away, and decide to go to Australia, and after a few months her job as a copywriter grants them permanent residency visas. When she arrives in Australia, she is welcomed by Gloria —and old love of her uncle Joe— and her husband. Gloria is a very sophisticated and physically attractive woman, and the protagonist repeatedly expresses her true admiration for her. Nonetheless, as the protagonist is staying in her house, she soon realises that Gloria is another Indian immigrant that after so many years is still trying to fit in, and her admiration for her quickly fades. During her first days in Australia, Gloria introduces her to her beautician, Sheetal, who is also from India. Within one month the protagonist and her husband find a job in a petrol station, which gives them enough money to allow them to move out from Gloria and Tony’s house. Before leaving she goes to Sheetal’s house for another beauty treatment. There she meets Sheetal’s mom, who tells her that her daughter is a victim of gender violence in her marriage. The protagonist offers her help, but Sheetal says that if she wants to help

her she should often visit her for beauty treatments, which she says she will do. However, she soon forgets about it.

As time goes by, the protagonist realises that Anil just thinks and worries about himself, and she cannot help thinking that they are unavoidably growing apart. She tries to close that rift, but unexpectedly she gets pregnant. Anil does not want to have children. However, she convinces him that she will take care of the baby, and that he will not notice the difference. Gloria visits her in hospital to meet the baby, Shakti, and she gives the protagonist some tea towels as a gift, similar to the ones she gave her aunt when the protagonist was a child. She also tells her the terrible news of Sheetal's murder. Her husband tortured and burned her alive. She was taken to the hospital but died on the way, and the husband ran away. Life goes on and the protagonist raises Shakti on her own, which puts her under a lot of stress and tiredness. A few months after the birth, her husband sexually rejects her because of the way pregnancy has affected her body —her “deflected balloons”— and she feels so humiliated that she decides to end their marriage. She finds him another job, makes him move away and reduces their relationship to a legal agreement for child support. A few months later, Auntie Marilyn suddenly dies on her desk while at work. The protagonist calls Uncle Joe and after a while she manages to convince him to get away to Sidney. He visits the country and spends time with the protagonist and the baby, and, above all, he is extremely excited to see Gloria before his return to Dubai. However, Gloria cancels the appointment in the last minute arguing she has to work, which is a mere excuse. After this event the protagonist realises that his fondness for Gloria is no longer present in his voice. The protagonist decides to go back to Dubai for Auntie Marilyn first death anniversary mass. While in the airport, she sees an Indian man being arrested, which she soon enough finds out to be Sheetal's husband and murderer. Already on the plane, she

spills coffee all over the food tray and she mops up the mess with Gloria's present, the delicate tea towels. She intends to take them with her, but in the rush during disembarkation she completely forgets about them and only remembers when in Arrivals she sees Uncle Joe's face. The story finishes with no clear closure, the characteristic open ending of postmodernist fiction that shows the protagonist's evolution as transcending the limits of the story.

The title of the story, "Full Face", can be interpreted in different ways. The term firstly appears in the story referring to the beauty treatment Sheetal offers to the protagonist, who, just like her eyebrows, has to be reshaped for the new country (Gonsalves 20). However, the expression also appears a second time, when Gloria describes Sheetal's murder: "Sheetal's husband. Threw hot wax in her eyes and eucalyptus oil on her body and lit a match. He burned her full face. She went screaming outside. By the time the neighbours realised what was happening, she was charred" (33). The term used in this terrible and grotesque situation highly contrasts with the previous one, related to beauty. In the end, Sheetal's apparent calmness and silence in regard to her violent domestic situation leads to her own horrific death. According to the *Oxford Dictionaries*, the term "full face" means "with all the face visible; facing directly at someone or something" ("Full Face"), and therefore it alludes to the way the characters are finally seen. No halves, no hiding, no masks, but full face. At the end of the story, the protagonist, as well as the reader, can see through appearances and realises how each of them and their lives really are (Kumar). The title of the collection —*The Permanent Resident*— alludes to the struggles that all the characters emigrating to another country suffer. It refers to the bureaucracy and visa expectations that must be met in order to become permanent citizens, but also to the idea of creating a new home in the new country, trying to fit in and become residents in that new culture.



Although the narration focuses on several Indian characters, it is narrated in the first person following the thoughts and the point of view of the protagonist. At the beginning she is another Indian resident living in Bombay, but soon she moves to Dubai and later on to Australia, becoming an immigrant exposed to different cultures and experiencing an evolution along the way. Therefore, in this essay I am going to analyse the development of events from a transcultural perspective, mainly focusing on the protagonist's journey and her evolution throughout the story, exploring similarities and differences with the other characters. In order to do this, I have divided my analysis into three different sections: "From Bombay to Dubai: Goan Catholics on the Move", "Australia as the Promised Land" and "Assimilation vs. Segregation".

## **2. FROM BOMBAY TO DUBAI: GOAN CATHOLICS ON THE MOVE**

Most characters in “Full Face”, as is the case with the protagonist, have been born and raised in Bombay. However, they belong to the Goan Catholic community, which the author masterly portrays in the narrative as she herself belongs to this community (Carvalho). Goa is a south-western state in India which was a Portuguese colony with British infrastructure for around 450 years. Its inhabitants were soon forced to convert to Catholicism as an instrument of social control (Borges and Feldmann), provoking a shift from a Hindu and Muslim-ruled agrarian communal society based on the caste system to a bureaucratic one promoting enterprise and opportunism. This transformation led many to move to other states and countries searching for new economic opportunities, giving place to the Goan diaspora (Mascarenhas-Keyes). Moreover, these common elements with western societies generally made it easier for them to integrate and feel more comfortable in western cultures than Hindus or Muslims, a fact that also favoured their migration (Magocsi). This explains the strong presence of the Goan Catholic community in other places such as Bombay or Dubai, where their Christianity clashes with other two majoritarian religions, Hinduism and Islam.

In the story, the western influence due to globalisation can be perceived in certain elements such as the influence of Obama and his grassroots campaign on the protagonist and Anil, which ignites in her the desire to “stand atop a wooden box in a park and make change happen” (3); and also the importance of Facebook for the characters, clearly a result of globalisation along with the influence of new technologies, social networks and mass media. However, one of the key elements in the story also related to India’s colonisation in the story is the name of the characters, most of them showing a Christian or English origin, such as Marilyn, Gloria, Joe, Tony, Cathy or Scott. The only exceptions are Anil, Sheetal and Shakti, which come from Sanskrit, and

show a direct link with the Indian tradition. In contrast, the protagonist's name does not appear in the story, just referring to herself as "I", which on the one hand happens to be the "eye" through which the reader sees the events, and on the other reinforces the idea of a changing identity in progress. In addition, it also favours any female reader's identification with her as she narrates struggles that may be familiar to many other women immigrants, especially from Asia.

The protagonist is presented as an educated person—as can be seen through all the metaphoric references to authors such as Wordsworth, Baudelaire, T.S. Eliot or Henry Scott—who has studied and worked in advertising. As a way to escape from an unfaithful romantic relationship she decides to move to Dubai, where her uncle and aunt live, and where she meets her future husband. The place is presented as immersed in an atmosphere of permissiveness, where "the laws of [their] homelands were loosened, and love and sex were twins mistaken for each other" (2). It is also described as a place "where trees could be uprooted from one end of the world and transplanted on its main roads like so many livers" (2), making a comparison between trees and immigrants, and transmitting the idea that even if you come from a different place you can grow roots in another. Nevertheless, the protagonist also mentions the superficiality and falsehood that is sensed in Dubai as she talks about being surrounded by "real gold, fake snow, and men who looked but would not leap" (1), which tells the reader that she does not feel at home in Dubai.

Superficiality is also shown through the relationship that some of the characters have through Facebook. As the protagonist says at the beginning of the story: "They were all friends on Facebook — Gloria, Tony, Auntie Marilyn, Uncle Joe— and were always the first to like each other's posts" (4), although they all know about the old love affair between Joe and Gloria. The social platform appears once again when Uncle Joe

decides to travel to Australia after Aunt Marylin's death: "His Facebook announcement about his trip to Sydney elicited more than a hundred likes ... Gloria and Tony both liked his post and publicly invited him to their house for dinner, through a Facebook post of their own" (36). Nonetheless, Gloria ends up cancelling it arguing she has to work, which is, as I said, a mere excuse. The name of the social platform is also linked with the name of the story –*Face-book/Full Face*– which once again recalls the idea of appearances and superficiality, and the fact that although some characters try to hide some parts of their reality, eventually, the truth comes to the surface.

The story also shows a clash between tradition and modernity through the use of tea and coffee, which is embodied by the protagonist and her future husband. While in Dubai, she is presented as a coffee drinker, whereas Anil is a tea drinker: "Not being a coffee man, he had ordered tea" (2). The link between tea and Indian tradition is related to colonialism. Although tea is considered a national drink in India, its popularity and mass consumption began during the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to its colonisation under the British Empire. The drink, originally from China, had gained popularity in the British Isles and, in order to supply the high demand, the Empire used India as the place to grow the plant in vast quantities. Initially, the product was meant to be entirely exported, but as production grew and the prices lowered, Indians started drinking it too. They drank it just as the British did, with milk and sugar. However, they added spices to the original beverage, transforming and adapting it to their own culture (Rowlatt). Coffee, in contrast, was originally cultivated in Ethiopia, and it later spread to the Arabic countries and from there to Europe and America (Crawford). However, lately there has been an increase in coffee consumption in India which threatens the national drink status of tea. This growth could be the result of globalisation and the influence of western culture on the eastern society through platforms such as social networks and entertainment, and

therefore it can be linked with the idea of newness, a rupture with the tradition that tea represents, and another example of transculturality. The war between both drinks (Nealson) portrays the conflict between tradition and newness, in the current Indian society, and is represented in the story by the protagonist couple: she —the coffee drinker— as quoted before, wants to “stand atop a wooden box in a park and make change happen” (3). In spite of her initial expectations, she eventually discovers that Anil —the tea drinker— does not share her zeal.

### 3. AUSTRALIA AS THE PROMISED LAND

As has already been mentioned, the protagonist —as well as most of the characters— belongs to the Goan Catholic community, which makes her part of the ongoing religious confrontation between Christianity, Hinduism and Islam that exists in India. This fact makes her feel like an outsider in her own country and also in Dubai. In contrast, Australia is presented as a very appealing destination as it is a western and primarily Christian country, which makes it sound as the promised land for the Christian characters who have had to coexist with Hindus and Muslims. The new destination is perceived as superior, more sophisticated and higher class than India, thoughts most probably due to colonialism: “Gloria said we were so, so lucky to be living in Australia now. ‘It’s the quality of life here. You just can’t compare it to Bombay ... ‘[H]ere in Australia everyone is equal. This is a Christian country’” (9). These ideas clearly appear in the protagonist’s thoughts at the beginning of the story: “I had heard that Australia had the colour bar. However, everyone spoke English and that itself was good enough. None of this *habibi habibi* that goes on in Dubai, and none of the Hindi-Marathi we were forced to learn in school in Bombay” (3). This view is also reflected in Gloria’s opinion, although charged with prejudice: “Everywhere you go in the world there are racists. What do you think the Hindus are? How many Christians have they murdered, you tell me! ... They kill Catholics but they all flock to our Catholic schools. At least here in Australia everyone is equal. This is a Christian country” (9).

Moreover, this idea of Australia is linked from the very beginning to Gloria, both in the story and in the protagonist’s mind. Gloria is described as an astonishing glamorous woman. She attracts the looks of every man she passes by, and awakes feelings of admiration and envy in the rest of women. However, the protagonist eventually realises that this is merely the façade of a woman with a broken marriage

who still struggles to assimilate: “[T]hese people who after twenty years in this country were still trying to fit in” (13). The evolution of Gloria in the protagonist’s mind and, therefore, her opinion about Australia is conveyed in the story through the symbolic tea towels. They first appear when the protagonist recollects the moment she met Gloria, when she was a mere schoolgirl and was still living in Bombay with her Uncle Joe and Aunt Marylin: “‘Throw away your kitchen cloths, Marylin, this is what true-blue Aussies use’ [Gloria] announced” (6). Being the first time the protagonist has ever heard about tea towels, she is amazed about the sophistication they evoke, only to realise later on that “[they] were actually to be used to wipe dishes” (6), which completely shocks her. Not only because of how delicate they look, but also because of the presence of the Australian flag on them. As a recently independent country, the idea of using what Indians consider a sacred symbol to wipe the dishes is inconceivable for her. However, for Australian people it seems to be just a souvenir, showing the influence of marketing and consumerism powered by globalisation.

The second time tea towels are mentioned is during the visit Gloria pays to the protagonist while in hospital right after giving birth. These new tea towels are given to her as a gift, although this time they feature a kookaburra on a gum tree instead of the Australian flag. The protagonist wonders about Gloria’s intention with such a gift, but they irremediably take her back to that moment when she met Gloria for the first time. However, when she tries to share this memory with her she realises she has no recollection of it at all. Therefore, she just says what she thinks she would like to hear: “‘You have such a great taste. Thank you so much.’ ‘It’s the quality of life here, you see,’ she said, satisfied. I had not a clue in the world what she meant” (32). This last sentence shows that although the protagonist feels nostalgic about that first encounter, her idea about Gloria and Australia has drastically changed.

The third and last time tea towels appear is right at the end of the story when, coming back to Dubai for Aunty Marylin's first death anniversary mass, the protagonist uses these magnificent linen cloths to clean spilt coffee in the airplane. "I proceeded to mop up the spill. They were more than adequate for the task. After I had finished, I held them both in one hand, a crumple of brown wetness where once there was a green gum tree" (39). In this quotation it can be perceived that the sublime tea towels have been transformed into something that has an every-day-life use like napkins, that is, they turn from being something special and delicate to a disposable item. After living in the country and everything the protagonist has experienced there, Australia and Gloria are no more a symbol of sophistication and a superior life to her, but all the contrary. She intends to take the tea towels with her but she forgets them in the plane, and only when she sees her uncle Joe she realises about it. Not only has she changed her mind, but she has left it all behind as well and moves on with her child towards their future.

This final transformation in the protagonist's thoughts is also advanced throughout the story with the use of numerous prolepses which offer a completely different perspective of the country, alluding to the historical extermination of Aborigines:

Years later, I would find an Aboriginal shell midden in my rented backyard near the Cooks River, the ancient compost of lives lived before the land was fleshed with whiteness, before it was quartered with Christianity, refusing to fade away. But at that moment in the car, the weight of this country was not yet upon me. (9-10)

These prolepses show that, eventually, it becomes evident to the protagonist that in spite of being a Western country, the so promised equality and higher quality of life is a mere illusion and that Australia is no exception in having social problems. In fact, the story itself makes a comparison between the problem of castes in India and the Indigenous peoples of Australia, the measures the government has implemented against discrimination and the way some characters perceive them, considering them unfair and



counter-productive for the rest of the country:

Anil said, 'These A-bor-Iginals are like the SCSTs in India, right? They have reservations here for jobs?' 'What's SCST?' Gloria asked. 'Caste system. Hindu buggers,' Tony said. 'Don't quote me on this,' Gloria said, lowering her voice, 'but they get a lot from the government. You name it they get it. But still they are not happy.' 'Reservations, quotas are needed where there is a power difference,' I said. 'Reservations are quite unfair if you ask me,' Anil said. ... 'Come on! These people are not stupid. They can't get to the top because the system is skewed against them.' ... But will they be the best? Gloria asked. 'I agree with you, Anil. Reservations, the quota system, they're for the lazy ones who don't want to work, want everything spoon-fed to them. (17-18)

Furthermore, as Wong states in her book review of the collection, these are not only the thoughts of this particular group of characters, but they also echo those of many people in Australia. The book is therefore used as a means to make social and political criticism of both societies, Indian and Australian, and irony is one of the resources used by the writer in order to achieve it.

Another element used as a symbol linked to Gloria and Australianness is wine. One of the consequences of the Portuguese imposition of Christianity in Goa is that the characters can drink alcohol, which is forbidden by Islam and not very well seen in Hinduism. In the story, wine is presented as a symbol of Australian sophistication. However, it is used in an ironic way to show Gloria's glamour and sophistication as a mere façade, as she presents a three dollar bottle as a high-class top-quality wine: "'See, this is my favourite wine, Queen Adelaide shiraz, top-quality.' ... 'I can almost taste the barrel that his wine was matured in', [Gloria] said, with sultry confidence. 'Yep. Only three bucks a bottle', Tony said" (12).

The transformation of the protagonist in Australia is also due to her expectations of creating something of lasting value in the new country following Gloria's expertise: "I wanted to learn from [Gloria]: how to carry myself, how to do my hair, what perfume to use for work and what for love, how to create something of lasting value in this new world" (10). However, as has been previously stated, the idea of Gloria as a model soon fades away. The protagonist's professional aspirations of working in advertising

gradually disappear too, as the fact of being a woman and having no time to form herself for the job requirements in the country make it impossible for her, resigning herself to working in a petrol station and later enrolling in an education masters. Furthermore, she slowly realises that although she thought her husband and her had the same desires and future expectations she happened to be wrong. Anil only cares about himself. As the story says: “All he saw in his mirror was himself” (30). He also openly rejects having children, even when he finds out his wife is pregnant. “I’m not really interested in being a father” (30). However, she manages to change his mind assuring she would raise the baby on her own: “You won’t have anything to do. I’ll look after the baby. There will be no difference to your life” (31).

Anil’s self-centeredness contrasts with the Indian culture, because as experts claim, it is considered to be collective or communitarian, that is, it is a group and common goal oriented culture that primes society over the individual (Overgaard). His behaviour could be interpreted as the result of the transformation of the traditional Indian society. As Joseph and Inbanathan claim, “[a]s societies undergo modernisation, adults also appear to be less socially oriented, show less compliance with social expectations and role imperatives, and also become more individually oriented, leading to greater differences between the couples” (4). These differences become so significant that, in the end, after giving birth, feeling sexually rejected, humiliated and completely abandoned by her husband the main character decides it is time for him to leave. Gloria phones her, as she cannot understand her decision, and her words reflect the traditional way of thinking of Indian society regarding marriage and divorce: “‘Did Anil ever hit you?’ she asked. ‘No.’ ‘Did he use F’s and B’s on you?’ ‘No,’ I said. Then why on earth did you leave him? Such a decent man’” (35-36). Events transform the protagonist in a way that she goes from being someone who forgives several infidelities by her previous

boyfriend in Bombay to someone that, being unhappy with her husband, stands up for herself, rejecting all the social impositions and telling her husband “Grow up, bitch” (35), deciding to stay where she is and making him move away. Her situation has forced her to take drastic life-changing decisions which contribute to open her eyes and realise that, in spite of her expectations, Australia is no promised land, just a different country with its own social and political struggles.

The protagonist is not the only character with marital problems. In fact, the whole story revolves around the topic of marriage, which also has a great presence in the rest of the stories of the collection, often featuring women trapped in miserable marriages (Prakash). The other female characters in the story share some features with the protagonist: they are all Indian immigrants, working women and married to an Indian man. Besides, they all struggle through their marriages. The most shocking and violent case is that of Sheetal, which has a tragic ending.

Sheetal comes from a poor family and does not have a good education, not even a driving license, as opposed to the protagonist, facts which could explain their different outcome. Sheetal and her family live in poor conditions in some kind of Asian ghetto in Sidney. The husband has financial problems, and physically unleashes his rage and frustration on his pregnant wife. Sheetal’s mother tries to intervene talking to her mother-in-law, but for her domestic violence is totally normal: “That’s what men do. It’s normal. He hasn’t killed her, has he? Then why are you complaining?” (28), which shows the derogative way women are traditionally treated and considered in the patriarchal Indian society. Women are considered inferior to men, suffering a profound inequality and having their rights continuously violated (Alonso-Gómara). Sheetal tries to get a divorce, but the situation is challenging. Her income is low and there is a cultural and language barrier between her and the lawyers, in spite of the fact that all of them speak English. Her husband is completely against divorce, and even takes their

children away from her. He eventually murders her, piercing her hand with scissors and burning her alive. The protagonist, who is aware about Sheetal's marital situation, offers her help but ends up forgetting about it. Therefore, when she learns about Sheetal's death she feels terribly guilty. Perhaps this event has some kind of repercussion in the protagonist's later decision of leaving her husband. With Sheetal's death it becomes evident once again that, in spite of everyone's expectations, Australia is no promised land and grotesque events can equally happen there.

#### 4. ASSIMILATION VS. SEGREGATION

“Full Face” is a story about Indian characters who emigrate to another country and their struggles during the process. One of the main difficulties they encounter as residents is adapting to the new culture, whether they will assimilate or be segregated in their new destination. As stated before, belonging to the Goan Catholic community makes it easier for them to accommodate to the new culture, as the western influence of the Portuguese during colonisation made the native inhabitants modify their social structure and adopt some of the western food habits, similar to those the characters encounter in the new country, Australia. Nonetheless, although it is true assimilation is easier for them than for Hindus or Muslims this does not exempt them from difficulties along the way. They still need to meet the high visa expectations and overcome the cultural differences.

The model of a perfectly assimilated immigrant in Australia is impersonated at the beginning of the story by Gloria, as someone who has evolved and managed to become a true Aussie: “she was not an Indian any more, but had evolved into a foreigner, and therefore was a self-actualised being” (7). Nevertheless, as the story develops, the protagonist and the reader find out that she is actually another Indian immigrant still struggling to fit in. Therefore, her promise of integration and assimilation is a mere façade. She is presented as very attractive and physically sophisticated. However, her house as well as her way of thinking are typical of a Bombayite suburb. She has adapted to her own idea of Australia, which is merely superficial: stylish clothes, drinking wine, buying certain furniture or using Dior perfume. She tries to live up to certain standards, but small details betray her, such as the smell of fish curry in her house or the disposition of the house itself, which becomes clearly evident to the protagonist: “By then it had dawned on me that [Gloria] was just another Catholic Bombayite transplanted into Australia, still a sheep following a

shepherd into a paradise that didn't exist" (11).

Furthermore, Gloria and Tony's migration to Australia could also have affected their marriage, as she was used to certain life standards in India that they cannot maintain in the new country. Although Australia is considered as "higher class", she cannot afford to have help in the house as they would have to pay them "decent wages" (31). Therefore, it is her husband who has occupied the place of a servant, doing the housework and every task Gloria assigns him while she is the one always busy with work outside home. This reverse of the traditional male-female role in Indian society, mainly patriarchal, could have led to the castration of Tony's masculinity. It is very likely that this situation will have led Tony to feel indifference towards Gloria and also to their marital unhappiness. However, unlike the protagonist, changing her situation never crosses Gloria's mind, which is clearly shown in certain aspects such as her impossibility to understand why the protagonist decides to get a divorce or how she avoids meeting Uncle Joe—who she knows has always had feelings for her— during his visit to his niece in Australia.

In contrast, the protagonist's understanding of the country goes beyond Gloria's. She admires the landscape, the scent of eucalyptus in the air and all its promises. She never felt at home in India or Dubai due to the religious differences, and, as an English speaking and western country, Australia seemed a place where to build her future, a promising life. However, events do not develop as she desired. After she sees Gloria is not the empowered and radical woman she expected, she also becomes aware of her marriage gradually disintegrating and her impossibility to find a job in advertising, which forces her to take drastic life-changing decisions. In spite of her expectations, Australia is just a different country with its own struggles in which she still feels like an outsider: "Soon I would realise that I had no way of telling the human from the non-

human from the inhuman in this country where birds cry like babies, where prime ministers are swallowed up by oceans and deputies, and where 40,000-year-old living cultures have been fossilised in the space of two centuries” (8). Therefore, although, initially, she was completely open and desiring to learn how to blend in and be part of the new country, she eventually finds herself incapable of such a task. Nonetheless, being in Australia provides her with the chance to overcome traditional Indian social impositions, although she does not completely reject her Indian heritage with this new empowering perspective, as can be seen in her daughter’s name, Shakti, which according to the Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, is the female equivalent of the god Shiva in Hinduism, meaning power, ability, strength, effort, energy and capability. Therefore, the protagonist’s baby shows her hope for a better future both for herself and her newborn.

Finally, Sheetal’s character presents another perspective in the story. She has migrated to Australia but lives in a poor block of units full of South Asians as if it were an Asian ghetto. Her products come from India and her clients are Asian too. Therefore, although she now lives in Australia, she limits her interactions to the Asian community itself. As Advani et al. state, this situation could be due to the large number of Asian people in the country, which allows them to maintain its distinct culture as the cost of switching culture outweighs the benefits of interaction. In addition, traditionally, Indian people do not trust the system (Overgaard). As Kumar points out, Sheetal belongs to a group of Indians that are conscious of their condition as outsiders and therefore seek refuge among their own, as any violation can impact their visa status. After stating these facts, it becomes clearly ironic that Sheetal is the one in charge of physically “reshaping” the protagonist for Australia, as she has segregated herself from any interaction with Australian culture and society.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the continuous flow of people facilitated by the new means of transport and the globalised use of new technologies and social media has increased the cultural influence between countries, blurring the barriers of the traditional nation-state and therefore giving place to transculturality. As a reflection of this globalised and moving world in which we currently live, “Full Face” is a short story that attempts to represent the contemporary reality of those Indian immigrants who dare to move to another country, especially through the experiences of the nameless protagonist. She perfectly reflects how all those preconceived ideas acquired through western influence shape her thoughts about the country of destination and her new life there. However, after her arrival she eventually realises that her expectations do not match reality, and she is forced to make drastic decisions.

On the one hand, she realises that Australia is no promised land, no paradise, which is clearly reflected in the protagonist’s husband and Sheetal’s terrible death. She also becomes aware of the social and political struggles of the country, which are not that different from the ones of her homeland. On the other hand, being in Australia also gives her the opportunity to break free from those traditional Indian social impositions that submit women and violate their human rights. Nonetheless, she does not completely reject her Indian roots, giving her daughter an empowering Indian name, which shows her hope for a new future in a better world. As has been clearly shown, being exposed to other cultures and the events she experiences during her migrations to other countries clearly transform the protagonist. However, it can be seen that, in spite of having the same birth origin and belonging to the same Goan Catholic community, each character experiences a different transformation. Therefore, “Full Face” reflects the fact that being exposed to other cultures does not lead towards a homogenised



universal culture, but rather towards new ever-changing ones, with elements that spread and become present in completely different cultures, showing, therefore, the centrality of transculturality in our current world.

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