

DIGITAL BELONGING AND EMOTIONAL DISPLACEMENT IN DEVIKA REGE'S *QUARTERLIFE*

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed contemporary experiences of belonging, mobility, and identity. While geographical distance once defined the migrant and diasporic existence, digital communication now enables continuous participation in multiple social and cultural worlds. Devika Rege's *Quarterlife* (2023) captures this transformation through its portrayal of young urban Indians negotiating globalization, class mobility, political change, and networked forms of connection. This study examines the novel through the concepts of digital belonging and emotional displacement. Drawing upon Stuart Hall's understanding of cultural identity, Dana Diminescu's notion of the connected migrant, and contemporary discussions of networked publics, the study argues that *Quarterlife* presents digital connectivity as a paradoxical condition. Although digital networks create opportunities for affiliation and participation, they simultaneously intensify emotional uncertainty, social fragmentation, and feelings of unbelonging. Through the experiences of characters such as Naren and Rohit, Rege exposes the gap between connectivity and community, revealing the limitations of technologically mediated forms of belonging. The study asserts that the novel redefines home not as a fixed geographical location but as a fragile emotional space continually negotiated across physical and digital environments. Therefore, *Quarterlife* contributes to emerging literary conversations concerning migration, identity, and belonging in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Digital Belonging, Emotional Displacement, Networked Identity, Digital Diaspora, Contemporary Indian Fiction, Devika Rege.

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed a profound transformation in the meaning of belonging. Advances in communication technologies have altered the ways individuals sustain relationships, participate in communities, and imagine home. For earlier generations of migrants, geographical distance often implied emotional and social separation. Contemporary mobility, however, unfolds within a world of constant connectivity where digital technologies enable individuals to remain simultaneously present in multiple social spaces. As a result, belonging is no longer determined solely by physical location but increasingly shaped by networks of communication, virtual interactions, and transnational exchanges.

Literature has become an important source for examining these changing conditions. Contemporary novels frequently depict characters whose lives are structured by digital communication, global

mobility, and fragmented identities. Rather than portraying migration as a movement from one stable location to another, recent fiction foregrounds uncertainty, multiplicity, and continuous negotiation. Within this context, Devika Rege's *Quarterlife* (2023) offers a significant exploration of contemporary belonging in urban India.

Set against the backdrop of economic liberalization, political transformation, and technological expansion, *Quarterlife* follows characters whose aspirations and identities are shaped by both local realities and global networks. The novel's protagonists inhabit a world saturated with digital media, online communication, and transnational mobility. Yet despite unprecedented connectivity, they struggle with loneliness, disorientation, and a persistent sense of incompleteness. Rege presents a generation that is connected to everything yet fully at home nowhere.

The novel's engagement with digital culture becomes particularly evident through its representation of social media networks and political discourse. Rohit's reflections on his digitally connected circle reveal the fragility of online belonging. He observes that the group once appeared to represent "the voice of a generation," only to realize later that it was merely "a clique" (Rege 144). The passage exposes the tension between visibility and representation that characterizes many contemporary digital communities. Connectivity creates the appearance of collective belonging while concealing social exclusions and ideological boundaries.

Equally significant is the novel's portrayal of emotional exhaustion in an age of constant communication. Rohit admits that he is "over-connected but no longer feels at the centre of things" (Rege 143). This seemingly simple observation captures one of the central paradoxes of contemporary life. The abundance of connections does not necessarily produce emotional fulfilment. Instead, excessive connectivity often generates uncertainty, fragmentation, and alienation.

This article argues that *Quarterlife* presents digital belonging as an unstable and contradictory condition. While networked forms of communication create opportunities for affiliation across geographical and cultural boundaries, they simultaneously intensify emotional displacement. Through its portrayal of return migration, digital communities, and urban cosmopolitanism, the novel reveals the limitations of technologically mediated belonging. Rather than overcoming alienation, digital connectivity frequently reproduces new forms of distance and exclusion.

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What forms of belonging emerge within the digitally connected world of *Quarterlife*?
2. What relationship exists between digital connectivity and emotional displacement in the novel?
3. In what ways do class, mobility, and digital culture shape contemporary experiences of home and identity?
4. How does Rege redefine belonging in an era of continuous communication?

By examining these concerns, the article contributes to ongoing discussions concerning digital culture, migration, and contemporary Indian fiction. More importantly, it demonstrates that *Quarterlife* offers a compelling literary account of life in an age where connectivity has become both a source of belonging and a condition of displacement.

Literature Review

Recent research has increasingly examined the relationship between digital technologies, migration, and belonging. These studies collectively demonstrate that contemporary experiences of mobility are no longer defined solely by geographical movement but also by digital connectivity, emotional attachment, and networked forms of participation.

In “Digital Placemaking and the Datafication of Forced Migrants” (2021), Saskia Witteborn investigates the ways displaced individuals construct forms of belonging through digital practices while simultaneously being subjected to systems of surveillance and datafication. The study argues that digital spaces function as sites of identity formation and community building, yet they also expose migrants to new forms of control and categorization. Witteborn's work highlights the contradictory nature of digital belonging, where empowerment and vulnerability coexist.

Claire Moran's “The *Connected Migrant*: A Scoping Review” (2022) provides a comprehensive overview of research on digital migration. Examining seventy-five studies, Moran demonstrates that digital media play a significant role in migrants' information-seeking practices, community formation, and settlement experiences. The review emphasizes that contemporary migrants remain continuously connected to multiple social worlds, challenging older understandings of migration as separation and rupture.

Silvia Almenara-Niebla's “Digital Emotivescapes: Everyday Media Practices of Sahrawi Refugee Diasporic Women in Spain and Mauritania” (2022) introduces the concept of ‘digital emotivescapes’ to explain the emotional dimensions of digitally mediated belonging. The study demonstrates that digital communication sustains affective ties between dispersed communities and reveals the central role of emotion in contemporary forms of diasporic attachment.

Hannah Morgan's “Living Digitally Like a Migrant: Everyday Smartphone Practices and the (Re)mediation of Hostile State-Affects” (2023) shifts attention toward the everyday emotional consequences of digital connectivity. Morgan argues that smartphones function not merely as communication devices but as affective tools through which migrants navigate uncertainty, surveillance, and exclusion. The study underscores the intimate relationship between digital technologies and emotional experience.

In “Feeling at Home? A Dynamic Analysis of the Impact of Discrimination, Refugee-Specific, and Participation Characteristics on Recently Arrived Refugees' Belonging” (2024), Roxy Damen, Jaco Dagevos, and Willem Huijnk examine the factors shaping migrants' sense of belonging. Their findings suggest that belonging is not a fixed condition but a dynamic process influenced by participation, recognition, and social engagement. The study reinforces the importance of examining belonging as an evolving emotional and social experience.

More recently, Claudia Minchilli and Sandra Ponzanesi's “Digital/Postcolonial Belongings: Migration, Digital Practices and the Everyday” (2025) explores the role of digital technologies in sustaining migrants' local and transnational networks of belonging. The article argues that digital practices have become central to the everyday negotiation of identity, community, and postcolonial subjectivity in contemporary migratory contexts.

Research Gap

Although recent scholarship has significantly advanced discussions of digital migration, digital belonging, and networked identities, most studies remain situated within sociology, media studies, communication studies, and migration research. Existing scholarship primarily focuses on lived experiences, digital practices, social participation, and technological infrastructures. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the literary representation of digital belonging and emotional displacement within contemporary fiction.

Furthermore, while studies by Moran (2022), Almenara-Niebla (2022), Morgan (2023), and Minchilli and Ponzanesi (2025) emphasize the importance of digital connectivity in shaping migrant identities, they do not examine how these concerns are imaginatively represented through literary narratives. Similarly, contemporary criticism on Devika Rege's *Quarterlife* has largely focused on

politics, class, nationalism, and urban transformation, leaving underexplored the novel's engagement with digital belonging and affective displacement.

The present study addresses this gap by examining *Quarterlife* as a literary exploration of digitally mediated belonging. By bringing together digital migration studies and contemporary literary criticism, the article argues that Rege's novel presents connectivity as a paradoxical condition: digital networks create possibilities for affiliation while simultaneously generating emotional fragmentation, uncertainty, and a persistent sense of unbelonging.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study examines *Quarterlife* through the interconnected concepts of digital belonging and emotional displacement. Rather than approaching migration as a condition defined solely by geographical movement, the article considers belonging as a dynamic process shaped by communication, mobility, memory, and affect. Three complementary perspectives inform the analysis: Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity, Dana Diminescu's concept of the connected migrant, and Zizi Papacharissi's understanding of networked publics.

Stuart Hall's influential formulation of cultural identity provides a useful starting point for understanding the novel's treatment of belonging. Hall argues that identity is not a fixed essence but "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of being" (225). Identity emerges through ongoing processes of negotiation rather than through stable attachments to place or origin. Such a perspective is particularly relevant to *Quarterlife*, where characters inhabit multiple social, cultural, and geographical worlds simultaneously.

Dana Diminescu's concept of the connected migrant further illuminates the novel's engagement with digital culture. Challenging earlier representations of migration as separation and rupture, Diminescu contends that contemporary migrants remain connected to their social worlds through digital communication. Mobile technologies, social media platforms, and online networks enable continuous participation in communities across geographical boundaries. Migration therefore unfolds within conditions of connectivity rather than isolation.

The article also draws upon Zizi Papacharissi's work on networked publics. Papacharissi argues that digital spaces facilitate new forms of participation and community formation while simultaneously generating fragmentation and ideological clustering. Digital connectivity creates opportunities for interaction, yet it does not necessarily produce collective belonging. This tension between connection and exclusion resonates strongly with Rege's representation of digitally connected urban subjects.

Methodologically, the study employs qualitative textual analysis and close reading. Attention is given to characterisation, narrative structure, recurring motifs, and representations of digital communication. Selected passages from the novel are examined in relation to contemporary debates on migration, digital culture, and belonging. Rather than treating technology as a background element, the article considers digital connectivity as a significant narrative force shaping emotional experience and social identity within the text.

The combination of these perspectives enables a nuanced reading of *Quarterlife* as a literary exploration of contemporary belonging. The novel reveals that digital connectivity expands opportunities for affiliation while simultaneously producing new forms of emotional displacement. Belonging emerges not as a stable condition but as a fragile and continually negotiated process situated between connection and estrangement.

Digital Belonging and the Illusion of Community

One of the most striking aspects of *Quarterlife* is its portrayal of a generation whose understanding of community is deeply shaped by digital communication. Social media platforms, online

discussions, and virtual networks occupy a significant place in the everyday lives of the characters. These digital spaces appear to offer participation, visibility, and collective identity. Yet, Rege repeatedly exposes the fragility of such forms of belonging, revealing a gap between the promise of community and the realities of exclusion.

This tension becomes evident through Rohit's reflections on his politically engaged social circle. Describing a group of friends and acquaintances active on digital platforms, he recalls that they "retweeted, even trolled," creating the impression that they represented "the voice of a generation." However, following a major political upheaval, Rohit arrives at a troubling realization: what he once regarded as a generation is "really a clique" (Rege 287). The observation exposes the limitations of digital collectivities. What initially appears as broad democratic participation gradually reveals itself as a socially and ideologically restricted network.

The significance of this moment extends beyond individual disappointment. Rege critiques the tendency of digital communities to mistake visibility for representation. Social media activity creates an illusion of consensus because individuals are often surrounded by those who share similar educational backgrounds, political beliefs, and cultural values. The resulting network appears expansive while remaining fundamentally exclusive. Rohit's realization disrupts the assumption that digital participation automatically produces meaningful public engagement.

The novel's portrayal of digital culture resonates with Papacharissi's discussion of networked publics. Digital platforms undoubtedly facilitate communication and interaction, yet they also encourage the formation of selective communities that reinforce existing perspectives. Rather than functioning as open democratic spaces, online networks frequently become sites of ideological clustering. Rege captures this phenomenon by portraying characters who remain highly informed and politically engaged while simultaneously disconnected from broader social realities.

The illusion of community is further reinforced by the performative nature of online participation. Political opinions, cultural preferences, and social identities are constantly displayed, circulated, and validated through digital interactions. Such visibility creates a sense of belonging, yet this belonging often depends upon performance and recognition rather than genuine solidarity. The characters participate in communities that appear stable but are ultimately vulnerable to political disagreement, social change, and personal disillusionment.

Rege's representation of digital belonging therefore remains deeply ambivalent. Connectivity expands opportunities for interaction and participation, but it also exposes the limitations of networked affiliation. The novel suggests that contemporary subjects increasingly seek belonging through digital spaces, only to discover that these spaces frequently reproduce the exclusions and inequalities they appear to transcend.

By foregrounding the discrepancy between connection and community, *Quarterlife* challenges optimistic narratives surrounding digital culture. Belonging within the novel is never guaranteed by participation alone. Instead, it remains contingent, unstable, and continually subject to negotiation. The digital sphere offers the possibility of collective identity, yet it simultaneously reveals the fragility of that promise.

Being Over-Connected: Emotional Displacement in the Digital Age

If digital belonging constitutes one of the central concerns of *Quarterlife*, emotional displacement forms its emotional and philosophical core. Throughout the novel, Rege presents characters who remain continuously connected to people, places, and information yet experience a profound sense of uncertainty regarding their location within these networks. The novel repeatedly challenges the assumption that connectivity naturally produces community, suggesting instead that digital

communication often intensifies feelings of alienation. Emotional displacement in *Quarterlife* emerges not from isolation but from the burden of perpetual connection.

This paradox is most clearly articulated through Rohit's self-reflection. At one point, he acknowledges that he is "overworked and can't see what anything is adding up to" and that he is "over-connected but no longer feels at the centre of things" (Rege 283). The statement captures a defining feature of contemporary digital existence. Connectivity, often celebrated as a means of overcoming distance and loneliness, becomes a source of exhaustion and emotional disorientation. Rohit's predicament is not characterized by the absence of relationships or information. Rather, it stems from an excess of both.

The phrase 'over-connected' deserves particular attention because it challenges dominant narratives surrounding digital culture. Much public discourse presents technological connectivity as inherently empowering. Social media platforms, messaging applications, and online communities are frequently described as tools that strengthen relationships and expand opportunities for participation. Rege's novel offers a more complicated perspective. The characters remain connected to numerous networks simultaneously, yet these networks rarely provide emotional stability. Instead, they create competing demands, fragmented loyalties, and an overwhelming awareness of multiple realities.

Rohit's experience illustrates this condition. His professional responsibilities, political engagements, social relationships, and digital interactions intersect continuously, leaving little space for reflection or emotional grounding. Information circulates rapidly, and every event appears to demand an immediate response. The resulting condition resembles what contemporary scholars describe as information saturation, a state in which the abundance of communication diminishes rather than enhances meaningful engagement. Rege transforms this sociological phenomenon into a deeply personal experience. Rohit's emotional exhaustion reflects the psychological consequences of inhabiting an environment defined by constant connectivity.

The novel further suggests that digital communication alters the temporal dimensions of belonging. Traditional understandings of home and community often depended upon continuity, stability, and shared experiences developed over time. In contrast, digital interactions privilege immediacy and simultaneity. Characters remain present in multiple conversations and communities at once. They encounter events as they unfold across different geographical locations and social contexts. While such immediacy expands awareness, it also fragments attention. The individual becomes distributed across numerous networks without achieving a stable sense of presence within any of them.

This fragmentation is evident in the characters' relationships with place. Physical locations remain important throughout the novel, yet they no longer function as exclusive sources of identity. Digital communication enables continuous engagement with distant communities, reducing the significance of geographical boundaries. However, the weakening of spatial limitations does not produce emotional certainty. Instead, characters often find themselves suspended between different worlds, unable to identify a single location as the definitive centre of their lives. Belonging becomes dispersed across multiple sites of attachment.

The emotional consequences of this condition are particularly visible in the novel's representation of return and mobility. Characters who move across national and cultural boundaries remain connected to their previous environments through digital networks. Family members, friends, political developments, and cultural conversations remain accessible regardless of geographical distance. Such accessibility appears to challenge older experiences of migration characterized by separation and loss. Yet, Rege demonstrates that continuous connection generates its own forms of

displacement. The migrant remains attached to multiple worlds simultaneously, creating divided emotional investments and competing forms of identification.

This tension resonates with Dana Diminescu's notion of the connected migrant. Diminescu argues that contemporary migrants experience mobility through communication rather than disconnection. *Quarterlife* extends this insight by exploring the emotional consequences of such connectivity. Continuous communication may reduce geographical isolation, but it does not eliminate feelings of unbelonging. In some cases, it intensifies them. The characters remain emotionally invested in multiple locations without fully inhabiting any one of them. Their lives become characterized by simultaneity rather than rootedness.

Rege also links emotional displacement to the performance of identity within digital environments. Social media platforms encourage individuals to curate versions of themselves for public consumption. Professional achievements, political opinions, personal experiences, and cultural preferences become visible through digital interactions. Such visibility can foster recognition and connection, yet it also introduces pressures associated with self-presentation. The self increasingly becomes an object of management and performance.

Within *Quarterlife*, this performative dimension contributes to emotional instability. Characters frequently negotiate the gap between public visibility and private uncertainty. Their online identities often project confidence, competence, and engagement, while their internal experiences reveal anxiety, confusion, and dissatisfaction. The discrepancy between appearance and reality generates additional forms of emotional labour. Belonging depends not only upon participation but also upon the successful performance of participation.

The novel's engagement with political discourse further reinforces this theme. Digital platforms provide opportunities for civic engagement and public debate, yet they also expose individuals to ideological conflict and social polarization. Rohit's growing disillusionment with his online community illustrates this process. What initially appears to be a collective political project gradually reveals itself as a limited social formation unable to account for broader political realities. His realization that the supposedly representative "generation" is merely "a clique" destabilizes his sense of affiliation and belonging. The collapse of political certainty becomes inseparable from emotional displacement.

Significantly, Rege does not portray emotional displacement as an exceptional condition affecting only migrants or cosmopolitan elites. Instead, it becomes a defining feature of contemporary life itself. The novel suggests that digital technologies have transformed the emotional architecture of everyday existence. Individuals increasingly navigate overlapping networks of communication, affiliation, and obligation. While these networks expand opportunities for connection, they simultaneously undermine the stability traditionally associated with home and community.

The concept of home undergoes a particularly significant transformation within this context. Home is no longer represented as a fixed geographical location to which one can simply return. Nor is it entirely replaced by digital networks. Instead, it emerges as a fragile emotional construct sustained through memories, relationships, and ongoing acts of negotiation. Characters seek belonging across physical and digital landscapes, yet these searches rarely culminate in resolution. Home remains an aspiration rather than an achievement.

Sara Ahmed's understanding of affect provides valuable insight into this process. Ahmed argues that emotions create attachments between individuals, objects, and communities. Belonging depends upon these affective attachments rather than solely upon legal, cultural, or geographical forms of membership. *Quarterlife* illustrates the fragility of such attachments in a digitally mediated world. Connections multiply, but attachment becomes increasingly difficult to sustain. The

characters are surrounded by networks of communication yet continue to search for emotional grounding.

Ultimately, emotional displacement in *Quarterlife* is not presented as a temporary condition awaiting resolution. Rather, it becomes a structural feature of contemporary existence. Rege's characters inhabit a world in which connectivity and alienation coexist, where participation does not guarantee belonging, and where technological proximity often conceals emotional distance. The novel therefore challenges celebratory narratives of digital culture by revealing the affective costs of life in an age of permanent connection.

Far from overcoming displacement, digital belonging generates new forms of uncertainty. The characters remain connected to everything and everyone, yet they continue to experience incompleteness, fragmentation, and emotional restlessness. In exposing this paradox, *Quarterlife* offers a compelling literary meditation on the emotional consequences of networked life in the twenty-first century.

Return, Memory, and the Crisis of Home

If digital belonging and emotional displacement constitute the central tensions of *Quarterlife*, the idea of home emerges as the site where these tensions become most visible. Throughout the novel, home is neither a stable geographical location nor a secure emotional refuge. Instead, it appears as a contested and continually shifting construct shaped by memory, mobility, class aspirations, and digital connectivity. Rege's narrative repeatedly questions the possibility of return, suggesting that contemporary subjects inhabit a world in which home exists simultaneously as a place of attachment and estrangement.

Migration studies have traditionally associated return with closure, reconciliation, or recovery. The migrant's return to the homeland often signifies the restoration of a disrupted relationship between self and place. *Quarterlife* complicates this assumption. The novel presents return not as a resolution but as a confrontation with change. Characters who move across national and cultural boundaries discover that neither they nor the places they revisit remain unchanged. The homeland persists in memory, but the reality of return exposes the instability of that imagined continuity.

This tension is particularly evident in the experiences of Naren. His transnational mobility positions him between multiple social and cultural worlds. Having acquired professional success and global exposure, he returns to India carrying experiences, values, and expectations shaped by life elsewhere. Yet the act of return does not restore a lost sense of belonging. Instead, it reveals the distance that has emerged between past and present. Familiar spaces become unfamiliar, and previously stable relationships acquire new complexities. The returnee occupies a liminal position, simultaneously insider and outsider.

The significance of Naren's experience lies in its challenge to conventional understandings of home. Home is often imagined as a location capable of providing continuity and certainty. Rege rejects this romanticized perspective. The novel suggests that mobility transforms both the traveller and the destination. The homeland exists not as a static entity waiting to welcome its returnees but as a dynamic social space shaped by economic, political, and cultural change. Consequently, return becomes an encounter with difference rather than a recovery of sameness.

Memory plays a crucial role in this process. The characters' attachments to home are mediated through recollection, nostalgia, and personal history. Memories provide a sense of continuity amid the disruptions of mobility. However, memory also idealizes and simplifies the past. The remembered home often differs significantly from the lived reality encountered upon return. Rege repeatedly exposes this discrepancy, illustrating the tension between emotional attachment and material transformation.

The relationship between memory and belonging becomes increasingly complex within a digitally connected world. Earlier generations of migrants often experienced memory through absence and distance. Contemporary subjects, however, remain connected to familiar places through photographs, video calls, social media updates, and digital archives. Such technologies appear to preserve continuity across geographical boundaries. Family celebrations, political events, and everyday routines remain visible regardless of physical location.

Paradoxically, this continuous visibility does not eliminate nostalgia. Instead, it often intensifies awareness of separation. Digital technologies allow migrants to witness events from which they remain physically absent. The result is a peculiar form of proximity that simultaneously emphasizes distance. Characters remain emotionally invested in places they no longer inhabit while struggling to establish equally meaningful attachments elsewhere.

This condition reflects one of the central paradoxes of digital belonging. Connectivity creates the impression that geographical movement no longer entails loss. *Quarterlife* demonstrates that emotional displacement persists despite technological advances. The ability to maintain contact with multiple locations does not resolve questions of identity and belonging. Rather, it multiplies them. Characters become attached to several places simultaneously without fully belonging to any of them.

The novel further associates the crisis of home with broader social and political transformations in contemporary India. Urban development, economic liberalization, and changing class structures alter the landscapes through which the characters move. Familiar neighbourhoods evolve, social relationships shift, and cultural values undergo transformation. Home therefore becomes difficult to locate because the social realities that once sustained it are themselves unstable.

Rege's portrayal of urban India emphasizes this instability. Cities function as spaces of opportunity and aspiration, attracting individuals seeking education, employment, and social mobility. At the same time, urban environments are characterized by rapid change, social inequality, and emotional anonymity. The city becomes both a destination and a site of displacement. Characters pursue belonging within these environments while confronting the fragmentation associated with contemporary urban life.

Class mobility further complicates experiences of home. As characters acquire educational credentials, professional success, and access to global networks, they often move away from the social worlds that shaped their early identities. Such mobility generates opportunities for advancement but also produces forms of estrangement. Individuals may no longer feel entirely at home within their communities of origin, yet they remain only partially integrated into the elite spaces they aspire to enter. The result is a condition of in-betweenness that mirrors the broader tensions explored throughout the novel.

Importantly, Rege does not portray this crisis of home as a purely negative experience. The instability of belonging also creates possibilities for self-reflection and transformation. Characters are compelled to reconsider inherited assumptions regarding identity, community, and attachment. The absence of a singular home encourages more flexible and plural understandings of belonging. Home becomes less a fixed destination than an ongoing process of negotiation.

This perspective aligns closely with Stuart Hall's conception of identity as a continuous process of becoming. Identity, according to Hall, emerges through historical and cultural negotiations rather than through essential or immutable foundations. *Quarterlife* extends this insight by demonstrating that home itself is similarly constructed. It is produced through relationships, memories, and emotional investments rather than guaranteed by geography alone.

The novel's engagement with home ultimately challenges binary distinctions between presence and absence, mobility and rootedness, belonging and displacement. These categories no longer function as opposites within a digitally connected world. Characters remain present in multiple locations through communication technologies while simultaneously experiencing emotional distance from each of them. Home becomes dispersed across networks of memory, affect, and interaction.

By the conclusion of the novel, no definitive resolution to this crisis emerges. Rege resists the temptation to offer simple answers regarding identity or belonging. Instead, she presents home as an unfinished project continually shaped by movement, connection, and change. The characters' journeys suggest that belonging cannot be recovered through return alone. Nor can it be secured through digital connectivity. It remains a fragile and evolving condition sustained through ongoing acts of negotiation.

In this sense, *Quarterlife* offers a distinctly contemporary reimagining of home. The novel acknowledges the opportunities created by mobility and communication technologies while remaining attentive to their emotional consequences. Home persists as a powerful source of attachment, but it no longer exists as a singular or stable location. It survives instead as a network of memories, relationships, and aspirations that accompany individuals across physical and digital landscapes.

Conclusion

Quarterlife presents belonging as a complex and evolving condition shaped by digital connectivity, mobility, and emotional experience. Through its portrayal of characters negotiating social media networks, transnational aspirations, and changing political realities, the novel reveals the paradox of contemporary life: individuals remain constantly connected yet frequently experience isolation and uncertainty. Drawing on concepts of digital belonging, networked publics, and the connected migrant, this study argues that Rege redefines home not as a fixed geographical space but as a fragile emotional construct sustained through memory, relationships, and ongoing negotiation. The novel ultimately challenges optimistic narratives of digital culture by demonstrating that technological connectivity cannot fully resolve questions of identity, community, and belonging. By foregrounding the tensions between connection and displacement, *Quarterlife* offers an important literary intervention into contemporary debates on migration, digital culture, and emotional life in the twenty-first century.

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