

## Transnationalism in Gabriel Okara's 'Once Upon A Time'

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### Abstract

*This paper attempts to explore the nexus between transnational approaches and their manifestations in addressing the ongoing questions regarding nation, culture and the language of the community. The Transnational spotlight is on the connections that migrant establish between countries which showcases tensions and ambivalences resulting in constant negotiations, reinventions and remediations of national traditions. As the term, transnationalism suggests, transnational literature is located in the age of the national state, however also taking place in the pre and post-national conditions. This paper foregrounds the methodology interrogating the past terminologies of the national and global hierarchy thus creating a historical reality and residual idea in the literary cultural space. It is a blurring of the geographical boundaries to create a unique way of traversing the continents and culture. This leads to a greater degree of connection between individuals, communities and societies across borders bringing about changes in the social, cultural, economic and political landscapes of societies of origins*

*and destinations. This paper further intends to study Gabriel Okara Once Upon A Time using a transnational approach, where the speaker longs to regain his innocence, by reflecting on the two phases of his life. The poet portrays the advent of the Western imperialism of which he was a victim and the cry of the colonised against the colonisers. This paper foreshadows the rudiments of Western Imperialism in terms of culture. It also shows how manhood has changed from the past. Nostalgia about the past is detailed by the poet to his son which in terms of reality is said to be a Utopian dream for the poet and where he firmly registers that for him giving up the past is difficult and to live in the present is an alienated feeling.*

Key Words: **Transnationalism, Ambivalence, Western Imperialism**

India is a vast country with numerous linguistic cultures. These linguistic cultures have their individual ways of viewing literary creativity. The functions that literature performs in India are not necessarily what the European sociology of literature stipulates. The range of literary transactions in India is wide. These transactions cannot be classified in the accepted Western typology of the mainstream, the popular and the folk. A study of the bhasa literatures may show that literature in the Indian languages has been a matter of revolt and heresy rather than that of imposition and authority. In the minimum, Indian literature has ingrained in it a spirit of multilingualism and multiculturalism. - G.N. Devy “The person who finds homeland sweet is still a tender beginner, he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong, but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign place”. Today transnationalism seems to be everywhere, at least in social science. That is, across numerous disciplines there is a widespread interest in economic, social and political linkages between people, places and institutions crossing nation-state borders and spanning the world. The expansion of transnationalism as a topic of study has been

tracked by Gustavo Cano (2005). As any current internet search will reveal, this expansion of interest is evident in a rapidly increasing number of publications, conferences and doctoral projects within the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, geography, political science, law, economics and history, as well as in interdisciplinary fields such as international relations, development studies, business studies, ethnic and racial studies, gender studies, religious studies, media and cultural studies. And as particularly detailed in the bulk of this book, such interest is growing in migration studies too.

Homi K. Bhabha from *The Location of Culture*:

A history of roots predicated on purist cartographers of the homeland is abandoned in favour of a history of routes predicated on itineraries of travel, hybrid exchanges and shifting localities

Nation embodies a coherent culture united on the basis of shared descent or at least in incorporating with a historically stable coherence

The myth of nationhood masked by ideology perpetuates Nationalism in which specific

identifiers are employed to create exclusive and homogeneous conception of national traditions . ‘The discourse of cultural specificity and difference, packaged for transnational consumption’ through global technologies, particularly through the medium of ‘microelectronic transnationalism’ represented by electronic bulletin boards and the Internet- Gayathri Spivak.

The increasing interaction and mutual exchange across the borders of national cultures and languages today means that contemporary literature to an ever lesser extent reflects the context of one single nation and culture, but operates in an open and transnational field. Transnational literature reflects the permanent flow, transfer or circulation of people, cultures and ideas. These border crossings also imply tensions and ambivalences resulting in constant negations, reinventions and remediations of national traditions in new literary forms. As the term suggests, transnational literature usually is located in the era of the nation state. However, similar phenomena also took and take place on pre- and post national conditions. Transnationalism is a key factor in

contemporary migration management. Migration policies need to be informed by the realities of Transnationalism, both positive and negative. Migrant transnationalism – a broad category referring to a range of practices and institutions linking migrants, people and organizations in their homelands or elsewhere in a diaspora – is a subset of a broader range of transnational social formations . Although some early literature on migrant transnationalism in the early 1990s might have seemed to suggest such, it is not assumed that all migrants today engage in sustained social, economic and political engagement across borders. Indeed, modes or types of transnational contact and exchange may be selective, ebb and flow depending on a range of conditions, or develop differently through life cycles or settlement processes. We all know what Transnationalism is. Transnationalism is quite similar to that of Diaspora. Identifying types, specificities and differences surrounding migrant transnationalism is perhaps a conceptually burdensome task, but it is an arguably necessary one. Differentiation provides clearer ways of describing the infrastructures, conditions or contexts of transnational relations.

Transnational infrastructures and their impacts among migrants vary with regard to a host of factors, including family and kinship organization, transportation or people-smuggling routes, communication and media networks, financial arrangements and remittance facilities, legislative frameworks regarding movement and legal status, and economic interdependencies linking local economies. To be brief we could also apply this theory in Bible. The extract from Exodus, of moving to the promised land sets forth an example of Transnationalism. The Lord chosen people Israelites, generation to generation were clutched in slavery by the Egyptians under the ruling king of Egypt. In order to free the Israelites, God sent Moses. The journey was tough. Moses did not take up the shortest or the easiest route. They very carefully reached the Jordan River to enter the promised land. Their first camp on their journey was at Marah, where the Lord made bitter water turn sweet. After leaving Elim, the people murmured for food, God sent Manna. Moses then led Israel towards Mount Sinai, dwelling there for a while and again moved north through a fear filled inspiring wilderness. All these comes in the book of Deuteronomy in the Holy Bible. On

taking into account only the Exodus, we tend to analyse this concept of Transnationalism where by the migration must be considered both positive and negative. When we read Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy in the Holy Bible we get to foreshadow the Egyptians-Israelites conflict. The latter part of the story goes like this..The Israelites reach Mount Nebo where Moses later dies in sight of the land he had desired to enter. It then falls to Joshua to lead Israel into the land, ending a journey which had begun 40 years earlier. In recent years, transnationalism has reshaped debates across the humanities and social sciences by providing a new theoretical lingua franca for describing extensive multi-regional exchanges and connections. Yet, as with similarly encompassing and unavoidably murky concepts, what transnationalism stands for exactly remains open to debate. While the prefix is indicative of an effort to represent cultural movements, along with economic and political processes, which strive towards a borderless, post national world, the noun also reminds us of the polarizations that this project mobilizes. As this collection of essays helps to illustrate, the ambiguities surrounding the concept of transnationalism, and the space it

provides for theoretical interventions cutting across the historically constructed boundaries of the nation, make it a productive but slippery construct difficult to situate in relation to both national and other postnational formations. Transnationalism signals a movement towards the crossing and breaking open of national boundaries; while also it can be thought of as a way of naming the tensions between formations such as globalization and the nation-state, which, in the face of the continued interrogation of national boundaries, has proven to be a tenacious construct. Were we to offer one word to serve as an entry-point into our discussion of transnationalism, we would suggest “traverse”. “Traverse”, in common usage, means to cross over or move through a particular space or obstacle; originally it also meant to discuss, dispute and oppose. The latter meaning is now obsolete, but it would serve us well to keep it in mind while considering the implications of what we have called “traversing transnationalism”. Running together, these two meanings of “traversing” translate into paying attention to how transnationalism’s focus on circulations and crossings among different spaces, different scales – subnational, national, outernational, and

global – and different temporalities, including pre- and postnational, does not occur for its own sake, but enables the critical interrogation of these spatio-temporal coordinates, for which the transnational serves as a substitute. Therefore traversing transnationalism allows formodels of transnational relationships, whether operating on a planetary or more modest scale, to appear as figures of thought and contestation.

Edward Said from Culture and Imperialism says,

“We should remember that it is the ‘inter’ - the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the inbetween space - that carries the burden of the meaning of culture”.

On the transnationalistic view let us analyse a poem of Gabriel Okara..Gabriel Okara’s “Once Upon a Time” deals with innocence becoming adulthood. Okara addressing his son and sharing how the cultural values have been changed. He could realize that a drastic change has been taken place in the people’s attitude. He feels that once the African community once had these values like hospitality, kind-heartedness, simplicity,

love and affection but in a matter of time everything has vanished completely. And there was no other responses in this poem, even is son did not respond. “The person who finds homeland sweet is still a tender beginner, he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong, but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign place”. “Once Upon a Time” showcases the vacuity in human relations and particularly when involves two countries when there is no belief in a transnational confluence. In other words, Gabriel Okara suggests through his poem the negative conscious and the absence of transnational spirit. “Feel at home” - This shows the nature of feeling comfort and as natural as possible, and making anybody feel at home everywhere. But Okara brings in the concept of ‘Exilic consciousness’ which means ‘never feel at home’. It denotes two ideas - foreign power controlling over the nation and foreign conscious suffer, dealing with discrimination. This portrays Exilic Consciousness and its adverse consequence by using the expression “feel at home”. When the expression “feel at home” means being happy, secure and comfortable, Exilic Consciousness will disallow all these three. In this context, the source of Exilic

Consciousness which is diverse sources of discrimination is addressed. The only way to go beyond the pangs of Exilic Consciousness is to have a transnational spirit which makes a person “feel at home” anywhere and everywhere. Okara then talks about ‘many faces’ which foregrounds the limitations and problems of mimicry. The need to indulge in mimicry is primarily because what is mimicked is greater and stronger than what does ‘the mimicry’. During the process of mimicry, artificial masks are worn, rendering the real face both useless and obsolete. The multiple masks that Gabriel Okara deals with the total absence of naturalness and spontaneity. Later, the poet problematizes the language which is usually used to express what is genuinely thought and felt. When the poet says, ‘good-riddance’ becomes subtext of ‘good-bye’. The language foregrounds the confusions in consciousness, through domination and pointless control. By problematizing language, Okara says that concrete unconsciousness can only be resolved when differences are transcended. In other words, diversity must be recognized but should not be the means of discrimination. As observed earlier, the essence of Transnational perception is

confluence. The word, 'confluence' highlights the power of human mind to live with differences with mutual respects and reciprocal warmth. Hence Okara's "Once Upon a Time" talking about innocence and adulthood, actually deals with a happy consciousness of confluence and its binary discrimination and its natural consciousness domination. Also, this section is in the form of a dialogue between adulthood and innocence, between conflictual discrimination and confluence. The old man's desire to be like the innocent boy is a desire for the spirit of acceptance and accommodation. This section also says the adulthood must give up knowledge system in order to be innocent and genuine. The deepest human desire is actually for oneness. The last section of the poem talks about important process of transformation by using words like 'un-learning' and 're-learning'. The consciousness of children is not discriminatory. The ideal way to live for an adult is to regain the consciousness of a child. In the context of the poem, one can say Transnational Consciousness is childlike and has to be retained at all costs. The poem celebrates childhood and innocence and by extension a transnational consciousness which used to be there "Once Upon a Time"

in every human being's life when he/she was a child. This paper presents Gabriel Okara *Once Upon A Time* using a transnational approach, where the speaker longs to regain his innocence, by reflecting on the two phases of his life. The poet portrays the advent of the Western imperialism of which he was a victim and the cry of the colonised against the colonisers. This paper foreshadows the rudiments of Western Imperialism in terms of culture. It also shows how manhood has changed from the past. Nostalgia about the past is detailed by the poet to his son which in terms of reality is said to be a Utopian dream for the poet and where he firmly registers that for him giving up the past is difficult and to live in the present is an alienated feeling. Transnationalism and diaspora are two key concepts by which to organize our understanding of nation, identity, and globalization in today's world. They are also terms that are often used interchangeably. These two concepts tend to overlap with globalization theories in describing the conditions that give rise to new forms of migration, mobility, and mediatization. This volume shows that while there is no simple resolution to these intersections, there is a need to understand

how these concepts and categories articulate with and against each other. Taken together, the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism promise a broad understanding of all the forms and implications that derive from the vast movements of populations, ideas, technologies, images, and financial networks that have come to shape the world we live in today. If the keywords that have organized the fields of diaspora and transnational studies thus far have involved historically charged terms (i.e., nation, nationalism, ethnicity, culture, politics, economics, society, space, place, homeland, home, narrative, representation, alienation, nostalgia, and all their cognates), it is because the conditions they pertain to are so variegated that their understanding requires a multifocal, and indeed interdisciplinary, approach. The chapters in this volume address these entanglements from a variety of perspectives and will cover a wide range of topics and methodological approaches.

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