

Transnationalism and mental spaces: a perspective on the global mind

Article history

Received: 15.07.2024

Reviewed: 28.09.2024

Accepted: 29.09.2024

Available online: 02.10.2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56177/eon.5.3.2024.art.3>

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Abstract: The concept of transnationalism has become increasingly relevant in today's globalized world, as people and ideas move across borders more freely than ever before, developing a unique mental space that is influenced by their diverse experiences and interactions with different cultures. Understanding transnationalism and mental spaces is crucial to comprehending the complexities of identities, as it sheds light on how individuals negotiate their multiple cultural identities, in a world that is constantly changing and interconnected.

Keywords: transnationalism; transnational space; transculturation; mental space; transcultural literature.

Titlu: „Transnaționalismul și spațiile mentale: o perspectivă asupra minții globale”

Rezumat: Conceptul de transnaționalism a devenit din ce în ce mai relevant în contextul actual al globalizării, pe măsură ce oamenii și ideile depășesc granițele mai mult decât oricând, dezvoltând un spațiu mental unic, care este influențat de experiențele și interacțiunile lor cu diferite culturi. Înțelegerea transnaționalismului și a spațiilor mentale este crucială pentru înțelegerea complexității identităților, deoarece este relevant modul în care indivizii își negociază identitățile culturale multiple, într-o lume care este interconectată și în continuă schimbare.

Cuvinte-cheie: transnaționalism ; spațiu transnațional ; transculturație ; spațiu mental ; literatură transculturală.

Introduction

Transnationalism refers to the interconnectedness of people, ideas, and cultures across national borders. One key aspect of transnationalism is the idea of mental spaces, which are the cognitive landscapes that individuals inhabit. These mental spaces are shaped by a variety of factors, including personal experiences, cultural influences, and societal norms. They can be fluid and dynamic, evolving as individuals engage with different cultures and communities. Understanding transnationalism and mental spaces is crucial for grasping the complexity of contemporary global interactions. Transnationalism is a concept that encompasses the idea of people moving across physical borders, as well as mental boundaries. It is a complex phenomenon that involves individuals maintaining connections to multiple places and cultures simultaneously. This dynamic process of transcending geographical borders fosters the development of intricate identities that are shaped by the interactions between different cultural perspectives and experiences. At its core, transnationalism highlights the fluidity of identities and the interconnectedness of individuals across different parts of the world. It challenges traditional notions of citizenship and nationality, emphasizing the importance of understanding oneself as part of a broader global community. This shifting landscape of cultural exchange and hybridity enables individuals to navigate between various cultural frameworks, creating unique mental spaces that are not confined by traditional borders.

TRANSNATIONAL SPACE

Transnationalism and transculturation

To conceptualize transnationalism, we must analyse migration from a global perspective. Globalization is a key factor in the transnational literary studies and has to be seen, as “a long historical process that always shapes identities and cultures across national borders”(Paul

2020). For this reason, as Homi K. Bhabha emphasized in 1994, "the very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities-as the grounds of cultural comparativism - are in a profound process of redefinition" (Bhabha 1994, 5). The process of globalization increased the number of literary works produced by formerly marginalized and suppressed populations.

Globalization has had a profound impact on societies around the world, transforming how individuals interact with one another and how cultures evolve. Transnational literary studies have become crucial in understanding the complexities of globalization, as they allow scholars to analyze how literature reflects the intersections of various identities and cultures. Homi Bhabha's works explore the postcolonial experience and the negotiation of cultural identities in a globalized world, revealing the ways in which globalization has shaped our understanding of selfhood, belonging, and human connection.

Through his analysis of hybridity and the in-between spaces where cultures collide, Bhabha sheds light on the transformative power of literature in shaping our perceptions of who we are and where we belong. By delving into the impact of transnational literary studies on identities and cultures through the lens of Homi Bhabha's works, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ever-changing landscape of globalization and its implications for individuals and societies worldwide.

Globalization, defined as the interconnectedness of societies, economies, and cultures across the world, has brought significant changes in the ways in which individuals perceive their identities and cultures. The field of literature is one of the main areas where the effects of globalization are noticeable. Transnational Literary Studies, a field that examines the ways in which literature transcends national boundaries and engages with issues of migration, diaspora, and hybridity, has become increasingly important in understanding how globalization shapes our understanding of identities and cultures. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, for example, examines how individuals negotiate multiple cultural influences and identities in the context of globalization, challenging traditional notions of fixed and static identities.

By examining key concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, and the third space, we will uncover the ways in which literature serves as a powerful tool for understanding and navigating the complexities of a globalized world. Born in India and educated in England, Bhabha's own experiences of living between cultures and navigating the complexities of colonial and postcolonial societies have shaped his unique perspective on issues of identity, power, and representation. His work, *The Location of Culture*, explores the concept of hybridity and the ways in which colonial and postcolonial subjects negotiate their identities in the context of cultural difference and colonial domination. Bhabha's notion of "third space" challenges binary oppositions and provides a framework for understanding how identities are constructed in the interstices of dominant discourses.

Transnational literary studies have played a significant role in shaping and influencing identities and cultures around the world. Furthermore, transnational literary studies have allowed for the dissemination of stories and narratives that transcend borders and boundaries. The works of authors coming from diverse backgrounds offer to the readers perspectives and insights into different cultures. This exchange of knowledge and ideas not only enriches our understanding of the world but also fosters a sense of interconnectedness and empathy among individuals from various cultural backgrounds. In addition, the study of transnational literature enables us to critically examine power dynamics and hierarchies that exist within societies. Bhabha's theory of "third space" challenges the notion of fixed binaries, such as colonizer/colonized, and disrupts established power structures. By engaging with literature that unpacks complex issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and class, we are able to deconstruct dominant narratives and challenge oppressive systems.

One of Bhabha's key contributions to the discourse on globalization is his concept of hybridity, which challenges traditional notions of cultural purity and underscores the fluid and dynamic nature of identity formation. Through his analysis of hybridity, Bhabha reveals how

the intersection of diverse cultural influences in a globalized context can give rise to new forms of identity that transcend fixed categories and boundaries. This notion of hybridity highlights the transformative potential of globalization.

In conclusion, Homi Bhabha's works serve as a powerful lens through which to examine the impact of globalization on identities and cultures. Through his nuanced analysis of concepts such as hybridity and mimicry, Bhabha invites us to reconsider our assumptions about cultural authenticity and diversity, ultimately pointing towards a more inclusive and interconnected world.

By studying transnational literature, we can gain valuable insights into the ways in which individuals and communities navigate the complexities of globalization. Through examining the works of authors from diverse cultural backgrounds, we can better understand the impact of colonialism, migration, and globalization on shaping contemporary identities. Transnational literary studies provide us with a lens through which to examine the ways in which individuals negotiate their multiple identities and experiences in a rapidly changing world.

As Paul Jay, in *Transnational* argues that:

"Writers themselves became part of a new and increasingly mobile literary transnationalism, and literature itself became both an economic and cultural commodity that, in the age of the internet, began to cross nation-state borders with increasing ease. Literature in English began to proliferate from writers in the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and South Asia, and translated works from all over the globe accelerated in circulation." (Paul 2020)

He also theorizes on the idea that a transnational perspective turns critical attention from universal toward the particular, from the centre to the periphery, focusing not on what makes people the same but more to the understanding of what makes people different:

"Where British, American, or French literary studies may be interested in how literary expression might embody and reflect forms of ethnic, racial, and cultural belonging that are seen by some as singular and monolithic, a focus on literature as a transnational mode of expression is usually oriented toward the other and toward understanding difference." (Paul 2020)

He asserts that "English literature is becoming increasingly difficult to understand without recognizing its relationship to a complicated web of transnational histories linked to the processes of globalization" (Paul 2020, web). He wants to make a distinction between the two terms: global and globalization, arguing that the terms global and globalization are often used interchangeably with transnational, but there are differences between them. Global refers to any entity or phenomenon that relate to the entire world, while transnational refers more to the phenomenon of moving across, beyond or transcending borders.

The term transcultural goes beyond the traditional concept of culture. At the macro-level, contemporary cultures are characterized by hybridization, as a consequence of migration. Wolfgang Welsch, in his study *On the Acquisition and Possession of Commonalities* argues that transculturality is gaining ground not only at the macro-cultural level, but also at the micro-level of individuals:

"For most of us, multiple cultural connections are decisive in terms of our cultural formation. We are cultural hybrids. Today's writers, for example, are no longer shaped by a single homeland, but by different reference-countries. Their cultural formation is transcultural." (Schulze-Engler and Helff 2009, 8)

Through the lens of transculturality, individuals can move beyond rigid stereotypes and simplistic categorizations, leading to greater empathy, respect, and communication between diverse communities. This leads to a deeper appreciation for the richness and diversity of human experiences, ultimately breaking down barriers and promoting a more inclusive and equitable society. Furthermore, transcultural theory highlights the importance of dialogue and

exchange between cultures, recognizing that interactions between different cultural groups can lead to the creation of new hybrid identities and forms of expression. This process of transculturation not only enriches cultural landscapes but also challenges traditional notions of cultural purity and authenticity, encouraging individuals to embrace their own multicultural identities and experiences.

Further on, Amy Gutmann, when talking about cultural formation puts it: "Most people's identities, not just Western intellectuals or elites, are shaped by more than a single culture. Not only societies, but people are multicultural" (Gutmann 1993, 183). The American anthropologist Aihwa Ong, in her studies on the changing societies and cultures asserts that transnationality symbolizes the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space. According to him,

"the prefix 'trans' denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something. Besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to the transversal, the transactional, the translational, and the transgressive aspects of contemporary behaviour and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states of capitalism" (Ong 1999, 4).

Referring to the canonical notion of culture we may say that Caribbean literature is a representative starting point. It is largely recognized that all cultures are transnational, in the sense that they are no longer bounded to a particular location, but they are continuously and constantly renegotiating their identity.

In her study, "Transcultural Perspectives in Caribbean Poetry", Sabrina Brancato says that 'transculture' must be understood as "an on-going hybridization, a process of embracing and releasing; no longer an island but, rather, an ocean of waves. (...) and research on Caribbean cultural identity has often drawn on theories highlighting the openness and flexibility characterizing the region (Brancato 2009, 233). She also coins terms as 'literatures of movement' or 'mobile cultural identities':

"As readers of Caribbean literature, we need to be aware that these seemingly postmodern tropes do not arrive as abstract theory but rather emerge from the lived reality of mobility, plurality and relativity over the centuries. The cultural specificity of Caribbean literature is not at risk in this almost postmodern configuration as these features are distinctly Caribbean ones." (Brancato 2009, 234)

Transculturation is another term coined also in the Caribbean literature analysis. It has been used for the first time by the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, back in the 1940s in the context of a study on Afro-Cuban culture. The term is used to describe the process of assimilation of a dominant culture by a marginal group, implying the differences in terms of the power held by two cultural groups which come into contact, on the other hand allowing the marginal group to use, in a creative way, the culture of the dominant group.

It is known that the main concern of the Caribbean literature is identity, self-definition, and the exploration of multiple cultural traditions. Caribbean identity is defined in terms of creolization and hybridity. Sabrina Brancato admits that she prefers the terms 'transculturality' as "a more general term covering both phenomena, creolization and hybridity. Whereas 'creolization', being geographically bounded, excludes the diasporic dimension of Caribbean people living or born abroad, 'transculturality' accounts for both the diasporic and the local reality" (Brancato 2009, 239).

Transcultural identity focuses on the colonial experience and on the oppression of a group by a dominant one. A transcultural person is connected to more than one culture, with multiple belongings, experiencing the feeling of belonging here and there, depending on the degree of attachment of his roots and of adapting to the host culture. 'Where do I belong' is a key question marking the literature produced by exiled writers. The sense of painful alienation

is even stronger in the case of postcolonial writers, as they feel they belong neither to the place they come from nor to the new place they chose to live in.

TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL AND MENTAL SPACES

Transnational social spaces

One of the most influential studies on the idea of transnational interconnections has been made by the German sociologist Thomas Faist. He uses the term “social spaces” instead of “social fields” and develops one of the most systematic theories of transnationalism:

“By transnational spaces we mean relatively stable, lasting and dense sets of ties reaching beyond and across the borders of sovereign states. They consist of combinations of ties and their contents, positions in networks and organizations, and networks of organizations that cut across the borders of at least two nation states.” (Faist 2004, 3)

He draws a clear distinction between space and place, where place refers to ‘locations with physical characteristics’ while space for Faist denotes the links between different territories or places where manifest “the cultural, economic and political practices of individual and collective actors” (Faist 2004, 4). I mention below some of the mental spaces’ features, as the author describes them:

- Mental spaces may be created and (re) accessed through what Fauconnier calls “space-builders”.
- Mental spaces may be related one to another by what Fauconnier calls “connectors”.
- Mental spaces may contain only mental entities.
- An entity in one space may be related to another entity (or entities) in other spaces by connectors.

Faist's work delves into the ways in which geographical borders are increasingly becoming permeable due to advancements in technology, communication, and transportation. He argues that these factors have led to the formation of transnational social spaces, where individuals maintain connections and relationships across multiple locations, transcending traditional notions of nationhood and identity. Central to Faist's theoretical framework is the idea that social relations are not confined by territorial boundaries, but instead flow across borders through various mechanisms such as migration, communication, and trade. He argues that these transnational networks play a vital role in shaping the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of contemporary societies.

Transnational social spaces are combinations of ties, positions in networks and organizations, and networks of organizations that reach across the borders of multiple states. These spaces denote dynamic social processes, not static notions of ties and positions. (...) The transnational social spaces inhabited by immigrants and refugees and immobile residents in both countries thus supplement the international space of sovereign nation-states (Faist 2004, 191-92).

There is a marked difference between the concepts of globalization and transnational social spaces, that is to say, transnationalization: transnationalization overlaps globalization but typically has a more limited purview. Whereas global processes are largely decentred from specific nation-state territories and take place in a world context above and below states, transnational processes are anchored in and span two or more nation-states, involving actors from the spheres of both state and civil society (Faist 2004, 192).

Faist concludes that the notion of a singular political or cultural trajectory envisaged by the canonical theories of assimilation and ethnic pluralism, and container concepts of immigrant adaptation have to be questioned. Since the factors conducive to the formation and maintenance of transnational social spaces – eased technological means of communication, incomplete nation-state formation in many countries of emigration, discrimination and multiculturalism in the countries of immigration – show no signs of abiding but rather of further

spreading, the concept of border-crossing expansion of social space has become more important to grasp issues of transnational membership (Faist 2004, 217-18).

Migrant literature invites readers to mentally represent the situation of the exiled characters in Britain, their ties with their home countries, evoking fictional transnational social spaces. Transnational social spaces in literature take the form of mental representations and, therefore, should be conceived of as mental transnational spaces. Novels presenting the arrival of immigrants give voice to the shock they experience due to the contrast between the new reality in Britain and the fresh memories of home.

While Faist conceptualized the transnational social space, Gilles Fauconnier (1985) developed another concept: the notion of 'mental spaces'. He argued that the processing of thought and language involves the construction of so-called mental spaces:

"Mental spaces are very partial assemblies constructed as we think and talk for purposes of local understanding and action. They contain elements and are structured by frames and cognitive models. Mental spaces are connected to long-term schematic knowledge, such as the frame for walking along a path, and to long-term specific knowledge, such as a memory of the time when you climbed Mount Rainier in 2001." (Fauconnier 2007, 351)

In conclusion, Thomas Faist's work on transnational social spaces has provided valuable insight into the complexities of contemporary societies. Through his research, Faist has challenged conventional notions of borders and boundaries, highlighting the fluid and dynamic nature of social spaces.

Hartner and Schneider (2015), in their study *British Novels of Migration and the Construction of Transnational Mental Spaces* propose an approach that combines the sociological concept of transnational social spaces with the concept of mental spaces used in cognitive narratology. With what they call a 'transnational cultural narratology,' they aim at introducing a concept that does justice to the transnational dimension of migration literature as well as to the narrative strategies the texts use, and the effects of reading which such fictions engender. They claim that these narratives establish what we describe as 'transnational mental spaces.' (Hartner and Schneider 2015, 411)

Over the last decades, a large body of works has been published which engages with experiences of migration, often from the point of view of immigrants or their children. Studied under the label of 'Black British Literature' or 'Black and Asian British Literature' (e.g. Innes 2002; Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe 1997), those works frequently portray experiences of social exclusion, hybrid identity and the challenges of growing up in a multicultural society. Initially, most immigrants arriving in Great Britain after World War II came from the Caribbean, India/Pakistan and West Africa, i.e. from parts of the globe once under British colonial rule. (Hartner and Schneider 2015, 413)

Transnational cultural narratology

Transnational cultural narratology combines the sociological concept of transnational social spaces with the concept of mental spaces. Transcultural literature is rooted in (im)migration, as well as in postcolonial and diasporic conditions. It may be considered as the youngest representative of the 'Literatures of Mobility'. Arianna Dagnino argues in her study *Transcultural Literature and Contemporary World Literature(s)* that "these literatures include those works of fiction which are particularly affected and shaped by migratory flows, wanderlust, and travel experiences, diasporic-exile-postcolonial conditions, expatriate statuses, and, more recently, the multiple trajectories of transnational and nomadic movements" (Dagnino 2013). In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha observes that

"Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees - these border and frontier conditions - may be the terrains of world literature." (Bhabha 1994, 12)

Cultural hybridity, in Bhabha's framework, is a space of in-betweenness where different cultural practices, beliefs, and values intersect and interact. It is within this liminal space that new identities and meanings are constructed, often challenging dominant narratives and power structures. Bhabha argues that cultural hybridity disrupts the stability of fixed identities and offers a potential site of resistance, subversion, and creativity. Through his analysis of liminal spaces and in-between identities, Bhabha challenges us to interrogate rigid notions of identity and embrace the fluidity and multiplicity of our cultural experiences. By understanding and engaging with these intersections, we can deepen our understanding of the complexities of power dynamics and create a more inclusive and tolerant society.

Conclusions

The study of transnational literature offers a rich and diverse exploration of the global mind and mental spaces in our interconnected world. Through transnational literature, we are able to transcend boundaries and embrace a more inclusive and empathetic worldview. In recent decades, the phenomenon of transnationalism has become increasingly prevalent in our globalized world. Transnationalism refers to the interconnectedness between individuals and communities across national borders. This interconnectedness has profound effects on social and mental spaces, shaping the way we interact with others and perceive the world around us. Through transnational connections, individuals may develop a sense of belonging to multiple communities. Moreover, transnationalism also influences our mental spaces, shaping our thoughts, beliefs, and identities. Exposure to diverse cultures and ideas through transnational connections can broaden our worldview, challenging stereotypes and prejudices in our minds, leading to a better understanding of complex societal issues and a greater sense of empathy towards others.

Furthermore, transnationalism can also create a sense of displacement and fragmentation within individuals' mental spaces. Constantly moving between countries, adapting to new environments, and maintaining connections with individuals across borders can result in a sense of rootlessness and disconnection from traditional notions of home and belonging. In conclusion, transnationalism plays a critical role in shaping individual mental spaces and cultural identities.

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