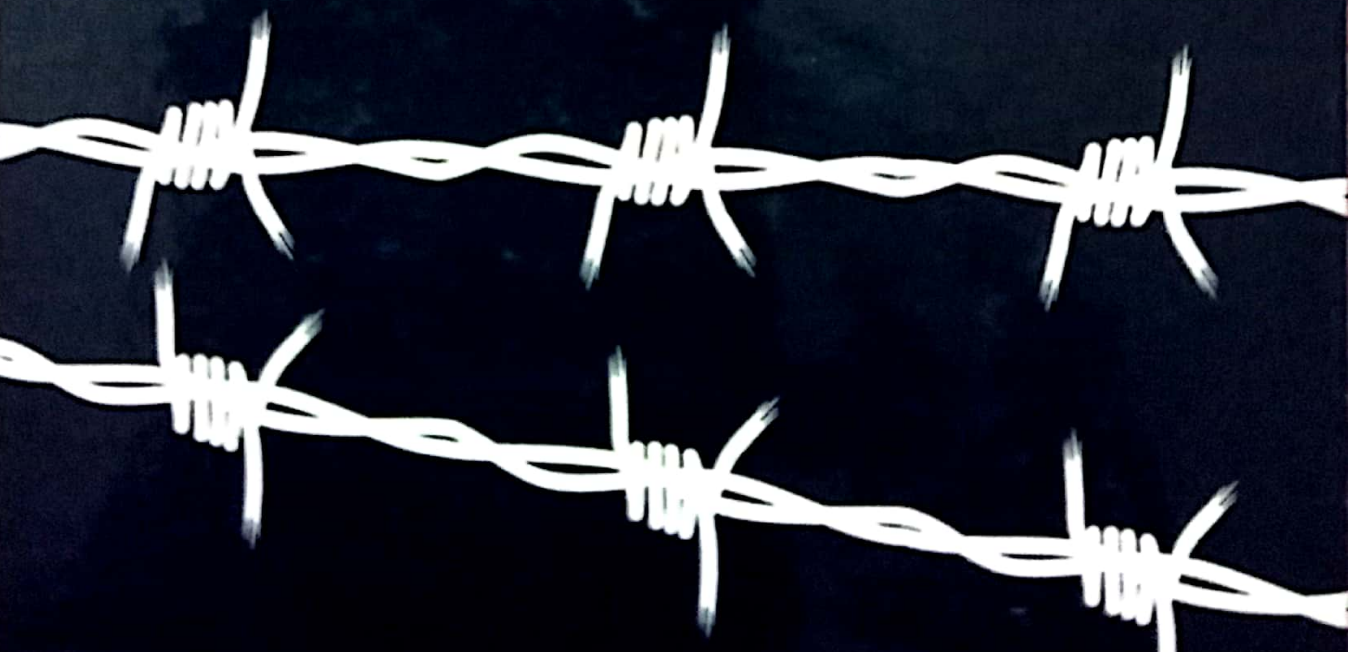


Border, Globalization and Identity

*Edited by Sukanta Das, Sanatan Bhowal,
Sisodhara Syangbo and Abhinanda Roy*



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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

TRANSLATION AS AN AGENT OF TRANSCULTURATION AND IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION IN AN INCREASINGLY BORDERLESS WORLD

SARMILA PAUL

I have titled my paper 'Translation as an Agent of Transculturation and Identity Transformation in an Increasingly Borderless World'. In doing so, I have purposefully replaced the term 'globalization' which the title of this seminar uses- 'Border, Globalization and Identity' - with 'increasingly borderless world', borrowed from Michael Cronin, to restrict to the singular connotation of the term as a process of border-crossing. This will open up the opportunity to deal with the multifaceted relationship between border, culture, and identity. I will divide my paper into three broad areas, revolving initially around the term 'globalization' as a process of crossing borders, providing ample scope for transculturation, often culminating gradually in the transformation of identity, and finally delving into the role played by translation in this whole process.

To begin with, I will deal with the relationship between 'border' and 'globalization'. In Western epistemology, 'border' refers primarily to national geopolitical borders, of which people started to become more conscious during and after the establishment of colonies by Western countries as part of their imperial project, based on the binaries of Western/Eastern, civilized/barbaric, occident/orient, colonizer/colonized, and even pre-colonial/post-colonial. (I am using the term 'post-colonial' as hyphenated to put stress on its temporality.) Such binarizations were accentuated to define and perpetuate the identities of people living in different lands according to their race, class, creed etc. Borders started to accumulate importance with the emergence of a sense of nation and national identity during the nationalist struggles in the colonized nations

and their gradually gaining back freedom, either by ascertaining the territorial demarcation of already existing nations, or by the division of previously existing nations creating newly formed ones. In both cases, mapping borders turned out to be really important, not only through cartography, but also by installing fences. Borders thus played a fundamental role in the formation of identity, along with the specification of national territories. Interestingly, when nationalists demanded the freedom of their nations through anticolonial movements, they were also adhering to the narrow definition of 'nation' incorporating a unitary sense of identity, specified by geopolitical borders. A few people, such as Rabindranath Tagore in India and W. B. Yeats in Ireland, warned against this trap of Western epistemologies, and propounded a cultural cosmopolitanism, whereby individual cultural identities would be retained. However 'globalization', which according to Michael Cronin came into vogue during the 1980s (Cronin 2012, 168) – almost half a century after most colonies had achieved their freedom – appeared to be encompassing and merging such binary divisions. Hence the obvious question comes to the fore: what exactly do we understand by 'globalization'?

Definitions have been abundant since this term first appeared in *Webster's Dictionary* in 1961 (Kilminster, 257, as cited in Scott 1997). For example, Kenichi Ohmae stated that 'globalization means the onset of the borderless world' (Ohmae, 1992). For Manuel Castells, globalization involves usurpation of the 'space of places' by the 'space of flows', while Ankie Hoogvelt defines globalization as a set of transformations that herald 'a new architecture of cross-border interaction'. According to James Rosenau, the differentiating aspects of the globalization process are that they are not hindered or prevented by territorial or jurisdictional barriers (Cox, 03). All of these scholars agreed on this singular connotation of globalization as crossing borders, or territorial and jurisdictional barriers. After discussing many definitions, Al-Rodhan (2006, 05), director of the Program on the Geopolitical Implications of Globalization and Transnational Security, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, accepted the impossibility of providing a single definition for the term, and attempted to add to the list with the following:

Globalization is a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities.

The central issue to be noticed in these definitions is the tendency to dissolve territoriality (Scholte 1996, 49), which may be considered the result of a fast-changing, socio-political-economic scenario. The primary

developments causing these changes are technological advances, along with advances in transportation and communication, which gradually led to 'time-space compression', in the words of Michael Cronin.

However, such changes have their economic, political, and cultural impacts. Achievement of global economic turnover, through the explosion of trans-border financial transactions, or the establishment of supra-state organizations, reasserts the attenuation of national borders. Moreover, emerging issues such as cross-border terrorism, global security concerns, and even global environmental problems bring to the fore the superfluity of borders. Easily affordable experiences of distant events through global media conglomeration, proliferation of tourism, and Internet usage have moulded the relationship between culture and locality (Cox 2007, 04). Multiculturalism and multilingualism have become a mundane reality, producing culture-laden images. Globalization presumably affects the relationships between state, territoriality, culture, and identity.

National borders supposedly have a direct influence on the formation of identity, since they not only demarcate the legitimate territory of the nation, controlling the movement of human and non-human activities between state territories, but also define the rights and duties of its citizens. To a certain extent, the production and reception of cultural identity is defined by national borders, as the omnipotent attributes of identity are superimposed on the citizen from the moment of birth within the national territory through the classification of one's race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and of course language.

If we consider language to be an important factor in the formation of cultural identity, then globalization has led to a scenario which can be best expressed through Stuart Hall's term 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (Cronin 2012, 169), since the speakers of different cognate languages are living in close proximity as never before. Cronin rightly points out that 'linguistic plurality is a daily fact of human existence on this planet and that nothing, but nothing, can happen unless there is somebody who is "bridging the language gap"' (Cronin 2012, 168). As a consequence, people of different language groups often go through mediated experiences, entailing translation as the crux of human experiences on this planet.

This cultural conglomeration has been exemplified differently by Mary Louise Pratt, who in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) has introduced the term 'contact zone' to refer to intercultural spaces where ongoing relations are established between cultures through asymmetries of power. Interestingly, the 'transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities' is also

not as homogenizing as it might appear. For example, in his article 'The Globalization of Nothing', George Ritzer wrote: '[a]ttitudes toward globalization depend, among other things, on whether one gains or loses from it' (Ritzer 2003, 190). Again, 'it is important to recognize that globalization is not a force that needs to be stopped; rather, it is a process that influences each of us in a number of ways, both to our benefit and also to our detriment' (Al-Rodhan 2006,06). Hence, border traversing within the complexity of globalization emanates meaning, making, and identity formation as 'negotiated, processual and endlessly changing', gradually leading towards transculturation (ibid.).

The term 'transculturation' was coined by Fernando Ortiz in 1947 to describe the merging of cultures. However, cultural convergence has not always been the result of mere assimilation, or coming across borders; rather it was primarily the result of cultural domination, something that perpetuated identity formation according to Western paradigms, with the onset of colonialism. Translation produced strategies to represent the 'other', reinforcing the hegemonic versions of the colonized (Niranjana 1990, 773). However, globalization has also problematized the function of borders as demarcating the spatial parameters in which citizenship rights and duties are exercised (Linklater, 1998). It has changed the very texture of locality with its impact. Moreover, the evolutionary nature of globalization adds to it a certain fluidity because of which it is constantly changing with the development of human society. The role of 'translation imperative' becomes all the stronger with the emergence of cultural diversity. In this context, translation, as a multidimensional process of becoming, affects both the translator and translated, hegemonic and subaltern, global and local.

With physical displacement such as migration, or literally crossing a border, translation poses the choice of either being translated or translating, called respectively 'translation assimilation' and 'translation accommodation' by Cronin. Translation into the language of the host culture has been referred to as 'translation assimilation', whereas translation into the source language, where one refuses to be translated, is rendered 'translation accommodation'. This inherent conflict in translation, in the words of Sukanta Chaudhuri 'reflects the balance of relationship between them, that is to say their user-groups, but at the same time subtly modifies that balance' (1999, 13). Therefore interactions and interfaces between two cultural milieus, with the latent politics of power and prestige, become impenetrable whenever translation takes place, especially in the context of globalization.

Attempts have been noticed to homogenize the inherent asymmetries by reductionist definitions of globalization that declare the erosion of national borders and the gradual dilution of state sovereignty. With receding state sovereignty, a transnational identity emerges over national identity. However, national identity is not totally obliterated, because territorial relations do persist in some spheres. Contrary to territorialized relations, globalization has entailed the emergence of supra-territorial social relations that problematize the concept of identity itself. Given the fact that translation is not absolutely free from political and socio-literary forces, it evidently stands as a tool for the manipulation and perpetuation of identity. Obviously 'translation functions as an "ideal territory" (as suggested by Vidal) to challenge the notion of a fixed identity' (Cox 2010, 13). So Cronin prefers 'globalization as translation' to 'translation and globalization' because he feels that 'translation and globalization' subsumes the inherent conflict, whereas 'globalization as translation' acknowledges that it is not a single mode of globalization but rather many translations (ibid.). The clarity of this discrimination leads us to the conclusion that translation is not only the crux of the globalizing experience, but that globalization also has to depend greatly on the performative and transformative nature of translation to legitimize the dichotomies interpellated in identity formation.

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