

## A Glimpse of Transnationalism and biculturalism in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*

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### **Abstract –**

This article tries to examine the issue related to Transnationalism and Cultural Diversity in Kazuo Ishiguro's works. Kazuo Ishiguro is widely known writer of translated and published works of Anglo-Japanese literature. He not only crossed the border of a nation, language but also genre. He has made his life more comfortable in various nation. Now Ishiguro has become as one of the most famous international writers of this age. He has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017 for his literary contribution.

**Keywords -** Kazuo Ishiguro, Transnationalism, multiculturalism, identity etc.

“I keep thinking about this river somewhere, with the water moving really fast. And these two people in the water, trying to hold onto each other, holding on as hard as they can, but in the end it's just too much. The current's too strong. They've got to let go, drift apart. That's how it is with us. It's a shame, Kath, because we've loved each other all our lives. But in the end, we can't stay together forever.” (Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* p.288)

England has been counted as one of the most powerful countries. It is also well-known among whole world by the name of British Empire with its colonies and multi-cultural structure and her economic power. The British literature from its very beginning has witnessed socio-cultural, economic and political changes in the life of the nation. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* is the novel that is rich of cultural values. In this novel Kazuo Ishiguro depicts many

cultural and multicultural aspects. this novel includes the phenomena of caste, gender and cultural transformation. The novel describes clearly the culture of British society and how it influences many aspects of the society life, including the family life, the neighborhood relationship, Formal and Informal relationships, political condition and identity so on. We can say that cultural values of current age can be changed with particular time period and there are three major cultural values explained in this novel, they all are about the transformation of culture, caste and gender in post-colonial era.

Ishiguro's well-known reputation as a major novelist rests on a reasonably small literary output-five novels in two decades. The novels continue to won prizes and recognitions: his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, received the Winifred Holt by Award of the Royal Society of Literature; *An Artist of the Floating World* received the Whitbread Book of the Year Award for 1986; *The Remains of the Day* was awarded the Booker Prize for 1989, and *When We Were Orphans* was short-listed for the Booker in 2000. Kazuo Ishiguro was born in a worldly famous Japanese city of Nagasaki in 1954. At a tender age of five, he moved to Great Britain where he later attended the University of Kent and obtained his Bachelor's degree in English and Philosophy. He then continued to develop his writing skills by attending the creative-writing course at the University of East Anglia where he obtained his Master's degree. Before his career as an author, he worked as a community worker and wrote songs and lyrics for popular bands.

The concept of Transnationalism indicates a different type of analytical aspects that emphasizes the relations and movements between different inhabitants, nation-states, territories, and regions in the world. "It expands on and departs from older concepts of identity that were based on national borders and allows a focus on subjectivity constantly being inflected by different political, cultural, economic, and social factors."<sup>2</sup>

Transnationalism refers to the exchange of ideas, culture, technology and expansion of economic, political, and cultural developments across the boundaries of nation-states in the global era. The term was first appeared and popularized in the 1990s.

When we go through the novel we find that there are many small scenes in which someone with little or no knowledge of Japanese culture acts in a way that can be seen as impolite in Japanese culture but not necessarily in other cultures. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono's grandson could be seen as a new generation who does not take politeness as seriously as the older ones. He is often scolded for forgetting his manners in front of his grandfather such as, "Abandoning his pose, he rolled on to his back and began waving his feet in the air" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 15) and he is scolded again later in the scene when he impolitely asks "Oji!

Is the monster prehistoric or isn't it? I want an answer!" (*An Artist of the Floating World* 15). This is more acceptable while he is young nonetheless, he is reprimanded because it will not be tolerated when he is older.

Other aspects of Japanese culture depicted in the novels which cover a wide angle of Japanese culture like clothes, art, religion and festivals. Traditional Japanese clothes, kimonos, are considered stereotypical of Japanese culture. Kimonos are also often associated with certain customs such as weddings and celebrations. In the novel it is mentioned how "Sachiko had dressed or the day in a light-colored kimono tied with an elegant sash – a costume, I suspected, reserved only for special occasions" (*A Pale View of Hills* 104), which shows the importance of kimonos on special occasions.

*When We Were Orphans* is an ambitious novel written by Kazuo Ishiguro. This novel makes a point to address various universal themes that range from biology to religion.

*When We Were Orphans* is one of bestselling novel of Kazuo Ishiguro. It is set in England and

Shanghai prior to World War II. It is a story of Christopher Banks, a detective, the narrator and protagonist of the story. who come to search for his lost family. He was born in early-twentieth-century Shanghai. He is orphaned at age nine when his mother and father both disappear under suspicious environments. He was Born and grew up in Shanghai's an International place, in surrounded by people of diverse nationalities: The Chinese, the Japanese, the Germans and the Americans. Here Christopher lives along with his parents till their disappearance.

Widely acknowledged among readers as a detective novel and in this novel Ishiguro explain about a British detective, Christopher Banks, who is recently returning to his old village or childhood "home village" in Shanghai. His parents were disappeared in mysterious situation so he determined to solve the mystery of his parents' disappearance, doing his best to fit in to British society, after that Christopher tries to assimilate with his new life so he goes to a special boarding school. Later, his father's friend wants that Christopher should not live there so he makes some arrangements and he is Sent to live with his aunt in England, after that he become a renowned detective and, more than twenty years later, he come back to Shanghai city, at that time the Sino-Japanese War going on and is showing violent form and it became uncontrollable, he come here to search his parents and solve the mystery of their disappearances. One day Banks asks a family friend, uncle Philip, with a childlike naivety how to become more English. (Ishiguro76) He is amazed by the Christopher's question, especially when the boy adds that his parents are those who believe that he is not English enough. He meets with a person named Philip who familiar about the multicultural environment of that country in which Christopher grown up. Ishiguro has revealed the truth that "his mother was in Nagasaki when the atomic bomb was dropped". She was in her late teens and, like Etsuko, survived the bombs. In fact, when we go through *When We Were Orphans*, we find that Ishiguro's personal history creeps into this novel as well, allowing him to visit his complex relationship with not only Asia and Japan, but with

internationalism as a World Literature writer, it seems that the transnational writer may be likened to an orphan. His most of works, set in Nagasaki where his mother belonged, bring him to his Motherland, but on the other hand *When We Were Orphans*, set in Shanghai, where his father grew up, with the “sensitivity of a Chinese man,” brings him nearer to his Fatherland.

In the whole story it may moderately seem like a mixing of two different culture in a different way. on one hand he gave description of Christopher Banks, who is white, but feels that Shanghai is home, and the other hand he gave description of his childhood friend, Akira, an immigrant Japanese boy in Shanghai who does not want to return to Japan. Definitely, this idea of mixing two culture is offered by Uncle Philip, who posits the dream of a fantasy, liberal universe using the International Settlement as a Model. The irony of development is that Christopher is white, so if he is a mongrel, he is only so on the inside, in ways that remain invisible. Finally, Banks is forced to confront the “real world” when he accidentally leaves the International Settlement and enters the warzone of Chapei where he chances upon his childhood friend Akira, whom he has not seen for twenty-two years.

Furthermore, if he feels that his Japanese name and face act as a restriction, as if he were only yellow on the outside, and British on the inside, here the Novelist may try to explain the views of two people who belonged from different place and culture. In this story most of incidents moved around the life of Christopher Banks, who is white, but feels that Shanghai is home, rather seem more like a mix of his thoughts and other side His childhood friend, Akira, an American, Canadian and British immigrant Japanese boy who lived in Shanghai. He was too much attracted by the culture of Japan. So he does not want to return to Japan. Indeed, Uncle Philip, offers the idea of mixing is offered. He posits the dream of a fantasy, liberal universe using the International Settlement as a new model.

Many contemporary writing deals with the problem of identity in itself, in isolation, yet it is held the monopoly on the subject, as though identity were self-assurance in the absolute. Ishiguro also write about national identity and internationalism. His novels are closer to these themes. He supports the ‘legitimacy’ of his observation of England, giving in to an entrenched unsettledness that finds its ultimate expression in writing for translation. It is, to a great extent, a condition of narratively and functionality. Whether reflective of a conscious choice, or a structural tendency, the result of the pressures of the publishing industry at this point in global literate times, he internationality involves a **certain kind of environmental, political and cultural activities, as an international writer, he follows** a specific style and art of explaining incidents.

The main focus of the novel, the Intercontinental Settlement nestled within Shanghai, which itself was semi colonized, and semi-occupied at the time, is more telling than it may initially appear. When Ishiguro firstly come back to Asia after many years he wrote a novel with Japanese theme but with a white protagonist. The pre-defined space of the Transnational Settlement represents the **fantasy of cosmopolitanism that critics seek to read in Ishiguro’s renowned novels.** The tense space of Shanghai and the International Settlement within it in which *When We Were Orphans* is set exists as a mixture of various cultures, classes, and even languages, and thus demonstrates and exposes the fantasy of universalism in the form of a “global village” and its eventual shortcomings. It is the sequential crumbling of the peaceful International Settlement in this novel, buoyed after all by Shanghai’s grey economy, dirty money, and set amidst growing international strife that indicts precisely the naïve reader or critic who would propose to read Ishiguro a historically, or sweepingly as a cosmopolitan writer, without an informed consideration of his Japan novels. *When We Were Orphans* is Set in an “international” bubble in another East Asian city, not Nagasaki, but one more well known for being international, the novel resists the Orientalizing and aestheticizing screen through which

Ishiguro's Japan novels have been conveniently read, revealing precisely such problematic reading practices inherent in the field of World Literature today.

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Since the Western and Eastern cultures are in many ways different, many stereotypes for both sides have been created throughout history. Ishiguro discusses the stereotypes West has of Japan and Japanese people in an interview where he said:

It's never stated, but Western readers are supposed to think these are people who are going to commit mass suicide, and of course they do nothing of that sort [...] The Japanese are in love with these melodramatic stories, [...] but people in Japan don't go around killing themselves as easily as people in the West assume [...]. (Mason 343)

Because of Ishiguro's way of treating his Japanese characters the same way as any other character, it gives the reader the opportunity of seeing things from the character's perspective. This enables the reader to see beyond their own culture and put themselves in other people's shoes. It can be said that "among other things Ishiguro strives to breach geographical and cultural boundaries that many take for granted and are having to question in an era of increased globalization and cross-cultural exchange" (Sim, Kazuo 5). In this era of globalization, it is

important to understand other cultures. While Ishiguro's novels do portray stereotypes and stereotypical behavior that are associated with Japan and Japanese people, there are, in addition, elements that break them down. These elements come from the thoughts of the characters in the novels as Ishiguro shows how individuals think and in so doing differ from the stereotypes. Ishiguro has been able to do this efficiently because of his own multicultural background.

This is an important factor in both *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* that are studied in this thesis. This oscillation between the 'insider' and the 'outsider' as well as the portrayal of the societies in an unidealized way is what gives the novels an approachable feeling.

Ishiguro uses narratives as a way to give the world in his novels a shape. The world shaped in *A Pale View of Hills* and *An Artist of the Floating World* is Japan. For Ishiguro, its shape is a narrative, most literary critics agree, is a meaning-making activity, a highly deliberate rhetorical construct. It is a way we give shape to the world around us and the world of our experience. By creating a narrative out of these experiences, we impose an order and a structure on thoughts and ideas that otherwise would be uncontrollable. (Burton 37)

Because of his life in both Japan and Britain, Ishiguro can effectively use narrative to describe both cultures. He is in a position where he can view both cultures from the outside and inside to create a more realistic depiction of the cultures.

#### **References-**

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