An Ethics of Belonging: Recognition, Representation, and Migrant Literature

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NORTH AMERICA
Canada
United States
Russia
Sweden
ASIA
Britain
France
EUROPE
AFRICA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
INDIAN OCEAN
Australia
SOUTH AMERICA
Origin of refugees
Destination

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Note: The cover image is an infographic taken from Sergio Peçanha's and Tim Wallace's *New York Times* article published on June 20th 2015, titled "The Flight of Refugees Around the Globe." The image is meant to dramatize the fact that in 2014 "nearly 60 million people [were] displaced around the world because of conflict and persecution," which is "the largest number ever recorded by the United Nations."

Introduction

Representation and Recognition: A Theoretical Trajectory

In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the "Cyclops" episode brings Leopold Bloom into a heated discussion with the myopic nationalist, aptly named Citizen "I," and his companion named John Wyse. Wyse poses a question to Bloom: "But do you know what a nation means?" (Joyce 12.1419). Bloom innocently responds to this question, saying that a "nation is the same people living in the same place" (12.1422). Afterward, when "everyone had the laugh at Bloom," Bloom, then, nervously responds: "--Or also living in different places" (12.1428). What then ensues is a long discussion among the nationalists John and "I," espousing nationalist, hateful sentiments, proclaiming an urgency to take "what *belongs to us by right*" (12.1470 [emphasis mine]). Disturbed by the "insult and hatred" that he hears, Bloom offers one of the most significant reflections in the novel:

> --But it's no use says, says he. Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everyone knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life
> --What? says Alf.
> --Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred (12.1480-85).

Characters like Bloom and Citizen "I" embody polarizing sentiments existing in national politics and social values. But, what can we learn from them? The fact that other characters sneer at Bloom for suggesting that a nation should merely constitute the "people living in the same place," indicates a widely-held sentiment that a nation is strictly exclusive to those who share a 'horizontal comradeship' of an 'imagined community (as Benedict Anderson would say) rather than, as one character says, "universal love" (12.1489). Built into the nationalistic (and quasi-Fascist) views of citizen "I" is a hatred for the Other, since the Other lies outside of the exclusionary national system. Yet, as Bloom says, that view is not what "is really life."

To say what "is really life" is another way of expressing what is a 'good life' or, even, thinking about the things that *matter* in life. I will admit here that I agree with Bloom's side of this discussion: that nationalist fervor and hatred are *not* the basis of a good life. But, then, whom do we consider a part of our ethical horizon? Is it only those who are part of our 'imagined community,' or does also it include those who "live together in the same place"? Or, furthermore, are these boundaries of ethical recognition even relevant *at all?* To pursue these questions, there are some things we need to analyze, first, about the structure of our society and, second, our language, that can help build a wider perspective beyond the confines of nation and shared history.

Furthermore, is there a universal subject who is worthy of our ethical responsibility? If so, how do we locate this subject? Finally, I would like to return to citizen I's sentiment about taking "what rightfully belongs to us," for this is a notion that takes shape in a nationalist and cross-cultural discussion. Who is this so-called "us," and who decides what is a "rightful" belonging? Additionally, what does it mean not only *to* belong, but to *feel a sense of* belonging to or within a group, society, or nation?--or, even for a nation to "belong" *to* us, for that matter? To tease out these questions, I turn to a broad philosophical trajectory, showing how different minds who derive from a Hegelian tradition have handled these questions. I will then follow up by discerning the special role literature can play in opening up these questions.

In a long philosophical tradition, extending back to Aristotle, 'ethics' or 'the ethical life,' refers to the set of principles, values, and judgments established within a society; they constitute the *ethos* of our normative ideals and gesture us toward the demands of moral goodness, the principles of good living, as well as the political system *(polis)* that interlaces that social body of existence. These principals arise within certain social and historic contexts, as disparate groups rely on a variety of customs, mores, and epistemic premises to reinforce what constitutes a 'good life' within that society. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, a text which discusses the development of ethics and social life through the theoretical lens of historical materialism, Axel Honneth argues that the "existence of well-established, 'ethical' relations [...] can only be established through a struggle for recognition" (xi). In other words, relationships within a social system have variously relied upon the relative capacity for individuals to achieve mutual recognition--acknowledging an individual's differential claim to autonomy and self-realization.

With this precondition of "mutual recognition," the 'ethical life' in society only manifests when intersubjective recognition is achieved. In this sense, different societies have their own approaches toward mutual recognition (some within a hierarchy) that validate their system for ethical judgment. Yet, for Honneth, an ethical system that is all-inclusive must expand the horizon of recognition, intelligibility, self-realization, integrity, and autonomy to every subject's singular existence. Honneth's understanding of ethics, built upon a foundation of mutual recognition, derives from Hegel. Looking to Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*, we can anticipate the requirements for and, indeed, the limitations of ethical relations under his conception:

> What predominates in the state is the spirit of the people, custom, and law. There man is recognized and treated as a rational being, as free, as a person; and the individual, on his side, makes himself worthy of this recognition by overcoming the natural state of his self-consciousness and obeying a universal, the will that is in essence and actuality will, the law; he behaves, therefore, toward others in a manner that is universally valid, recognizing them—as he wishes others to recognize him—as free, as persons. (Hegel §432).

This condition for legal, state-based recognition under Hegel's definition designates a universalized ontology for "rational" being that sticks to a "specific constitution of modern legal relations"(Honneth 108). Yet, what the next few pages will show, Hegel's conception derives from inherited humanist prejudices of his time. What I will show below (and throughout this analysis) is a way to expand this system that questions the bounded ontological system of Man and Being, yet sticking with Axel Honneth's push toward 'mutual recognition.'

Returning to Honneth, we view the progression of social development as a manifestation of the 'struggle for recognition.' This structural view of history is not unique to Honneth, and we find echoes of this historical materialism through Hegel, Karl Marx, and Georges Sorel. As oppressed classes, cultures, or populations continue to feel their rights to actualization compromised, conflicts arise between groups in the struggle to achieve 'self-realization' and 'mutual recognition.' As Marx says, for example, the ability for labor to achieve recognition within a capital society is through the exchangeable value of its production—a representation of value disembodied from the workers themselves. The dialectic relation between labor and capital is an asymmetrical recognition, leaving production and labor activity disproportionately in the control of capital owners, estranging workers from the affirmation or realization of their internal capacities. Instead, the representation of labor's humanity is disembodied from their "species being," since "each man views the other in accordance with the standard and the position in which he finds himself as a worker" (Marx "Estranged Labor" 77). Thus, for Marx, private property deprives the worker from having his or her "nature" recognized in a capital society; it is the "necessary consequence...of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself" (79). Responding to this point, Honneth argues that capitalism "inevitably destroys the interpersonal relations of recognition mediated by labour" (Honneth 146). Honneth continues:

> [I]n being cut off from the means of production, workers also have the possibility for independently controlling their activity torn away from them, control that represents the social precondition for their being able to recognize each other as cooperative partners within a context of community life (Honneth 146).

By considering the means to fulfill recognition in a political economy, Honneth is aware that the social structure of capital society, with the antagonisms between labor and capital, inhibits political and economic recognition, as well as the self-realization of labor.

Using this theoretical survey, we are nearly equipped to start addressing at least one of concerns that started this essay: considering the 'structure' of society that compromise our ethical considerations, the answer lies partially in the system of social and political *representation.* If we continue from the analysis of recognition in a capital society, for example, we become aware that labor lacks sufficient representative value in the market economy. Indeed, also in other ways, marginal groups remain underrepresented and disenfranchised politically, economically, and socially. Limitations exist where the public discourse is unable to give a voice to marginal groups; where systemic features discard individuals beyond the purview of public recognition. Yet, if we accept Honneth's thesis that recognition historically underlies the development and precondition for ethical society, then these asymmetrical systems necessarily limit our ability to achieve an ethical life.

Of course, there is more to this ethical problem; and our inquiry relies upon the other questions that we started with: *who* are these supposed subjects of ethical consideration, and how do we locate them in a globalized society? The solutions to these problems lie largely in the achievement of recognition—an argument we extract from Axel Honneth, and the history of his analysis shown in Hegel, Marx, and Sorel. But, it is not enough to merely *say* that we need to recognize *everyone* in order to achieve an ethical life (especially for an increasingly globalized society). Rather, we must first explore the problems of 'otherness' and 'difference' that are present in ethical and critical discourse. For, indeed, 'struggle for recognition' and 'self-realization' necessarily require an encounter with the Other and with difference; and the ability to actualize and recognize differences avoids succumbing to a bounded ontological system of Being, as Hegel was guilty of doing. The theoretical questions of 'comprehending otherness,' and its consequences for ethics will be broached in the following section.

Levinas and the Demand of the Other

One cannot begin a survey of ethical difference without confronting Emmanuel Levinas; as his thorough analysis of 'otherness' and 'alterity' has had a major impact on cross-cultural and cosmopolitan ethics. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas offers his definition of 'ethics': "For me, the term ethics always signifies the fact of the encounter, of the relation of myself with the Other: a scission of Being in the encounter—without coincidence!" (Levinas 28). Simon Critchley, in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, suggests that, for Levinas, the "meaning of ethics" is found in the relation that one has "with the Other" and in the "unique demand" that one receives by the Other: "The Other who approaches me is a singular other who does not lose him or her self in a crowd of others" (Critchley 17). For Levinas, 'alterity' is presupposed in the encounter with the Other; the "knowing self" cannot impose a metaphysical, ontological ego that "reduces the distance between the Same and Other" (Critchley 4). That is to say, if we present an essentializing constitution of Being (such as Immanuel Kant's "enlightened man," or Martin Heidegger's "*Dasein*"), then opposition "fades" between the "knowing subject" and the Other (Critchley 5). The "ethical," therefore, for Levinas, is "the location of a point of alterity" that cannot be reduced to the Same—reduced to the essence of the knowing subject.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas notes that identifying an individual as such does not consist merely "in letting itself be identified from the outside by the finger that points to it"; rather, it consists in "identifying oneself from within" (Levinas 289). From this assertion, Levinas's ethics is almost compatible with Honneth's; namely, that ethical life for interpersonal relationships requires "self-realization" (Honneth 172) or "identifying oneself from within" (Levinas 289). Yet, there exists an unresolvable paradox in combining these two ethical conceptions. For Honneth, self-realization is contingent upon an individual's capacity to achieve 'mutual recognition,' and to have his or her autonomy conceded by those outside. But, for Levinas, this encounter with the Other already assumes that his or her essence cannot be grasped or comprehended. So, an ethical relation cannot merely assume that the Other is a singular entity that is self-realized in virtue of being recognized. For, this capacity still functions with the socially-produced system of representation that we noted above when discussing the disparity between labor and capital.

This problematic leads us to confront the fundamental nature of the language we use to speak about—indeed, *represent*—the Other. For Jacques Derrida, Levinas's main interlocutor, "nonviolent language would be a language which would do without the verb *to be,* that is, without predication" (Derrida "Violence and Metaphysics" 147). According to Derrida, utilizing a language with 'predicates' such as *is* or *to be* commits the essentializing violence that we noted above with regard to Levinas. When language names the Other in an *a priori* metaphysics of Being, enclosed with predicates, the other's nature is brought in a closer, comparable relation to the 'knowing self', measured as a universalizable, generalizable, and comprehensible Sameness. Rather, to loosen the “grip” or “seizure” of comprehension (Derrida “Hospitality” 362), our relation to the other must be equipped with the assumed ‘alterity’ of the Other; and it is, our “responsibility” toward the Other to resist predication, and concede the precondition of incomprehensibility (Critchley 18).

So, to return again to our questions: our ethical considerations are toward the Other, and arises based on our encounters with and demands from the other’s ‘alterity’. Yet, it does not suffice merely to point a finger “from the outside” (Levinas 289) in affirming recognition. For, if one asserts that the totality of the Other’s essence is determinable from the outside, then in that assertion he or she commits the violence of “predication” (Derrida “Violence and Metaphysics” 147). And the limitations, therefore, seem to be found not only in the structural confines of a political economy (as we saw with Marx); but they also arise in the habits of our language--in our ambition to comprehend an objective, unifying system of Being, whereby the gap between the self and other can be closed by metaphysical deduction. A new question emerges here: who is impacted most by these limitations? That is, who ‘struggles’ the most for ‘recognition’ in an increasingly globalized, multicultural society? To pursue this question, I turn to the work of Gayatri Spivak, who has rigorously confronted these questions throughout her critical writings.

Spivak: The Need for the Subaltern’s *Vertretung*

“Subaltern,” says Spivak, means “to be removed from all lines of social mobility” (Spivak *Aesthetic Education* 430); and the singularity of subalternity “cannot be generalized to hegemonic logic” (430). That is to say, those whose social, political, or economic standing is “based elsewhere” are not permitted “the formation of a recognizable basis of action” (431). Deprived of access to social mobility, the subaltern cannot, thus, obtain the necessary recognition to be considered for an ‘ethical life,’ as we have established with Honneth’s ethical system. In other words, Spivak’s notion reiterates the troubling problem that Honneth began with above: while we wish to offer our ethical considerations to the Other, the subaltern other is not defined in any normative or epistemic terms that afford recognition for an ethical life. Instead, hegemonic systems efface the singularity of subalternity that is "based elsewhere."

Spivak, like Honneth, takes Marx as an inspiration for conceptualizing subalternity. In her highly influential essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak recalls Marx's analysis of the peasant proprietors of France in his *Eighteenth Brumaire* and disentangles the two meanings of the word 'representation' in German that tend to be lost in English. *Vertretung* connotes 'representing' as a representation-by-proxy, instantiated in the substitution or embodiment of the subject; as Spivak says, *Vertretung* is "[t]reading in your shoes, wearing your shoes"(Spivak *The Post-Colonial Critic* 108). *Darstellung*, on the other hand, tends to convey a portrait—a dis-embodied re-presentation of the subject, symbolically portraying the subject merely in a socially-recognizable, economic or marketable domain: "*Darstellung—Dar,* 'there,'--' same cognate. *Stellen*, is 'to place,' so 'placing there'" (Spivak *The Post-Colonial Critic* 108). According to Spivak, the two terms are "related," yet the collapsed distinction in the English 'representing' reinforces an "essentialist, utopian politics" (Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 276), and, arguably, produces a cynicism among those who lack social mobility. The portrait-proxy (*Darstellung-Vertretung)* conflation enables the regimes of Western hegemony to use 'representation' to "speak for" the subject just as well as it "speaks as" the subject; and consolidated power can affirm its control by validating the symbolic authority of representation (*Darstellung)*. As Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean argue, "the danger lies in collapsing the two meanings, mistaking the aesthetic or theatrical sense of representation—as re-staging or portraiture—for an actual being-in-the-other's-shoes" (Landry and Maclean 6). Therefore, as long as economic exchange is *representative* and capitalism is governed by the *representative fiction* of exchange value, the subject whose identity does not measure up to the value-system of this power regime remains unrecognizable.

This examination of *representing,* along with the meanings that are fastened to it, is the linchpin of this entire analysis. For, in my reading of Spivak, the 'portrait' meaning of 'representing' (*Darstellung*) is the meaning by which economic and class-forming systems grant ethical recognition and consideration to individuals, and holds a more prominent, figurative value in a capital society. But, only insofar as a subject's identity meets the epistemic and discursive standards manufactured by a social system can he or she be sufficiently portrayed. As we noted above, even the language we use to portray the Other in our encounters is highly vulnerable, given our habitual tendency to rely upon predicates and metaphysical deduction. The ability to be replicated in a portraiture or be re-articulated in language seems the prerequisite for society to measure the value of the subject and, thus, grant ethical consideration. Without 'representing' through 'proxy' or 'substitution'—that is, without *Vertretung*—the specificity of subjective experience may evade our *episteme* (to use Foucault's term). That is, the subject's voice may fall out of the purview of social re-cognition, if it cannot be genuinely "re-staged" (Landry and Maclean 6) or reiterated. By effacing the distinction between *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*, we de-emphasize and, thus, sacrifice the singularity of the subject (especially the subaltern subject) that could achieve recognition in an ethical society.

However, before we recoil from retaining the use of 'represent' or 'representation' at all in our system of social recognition, we may also acknowledge another domain in which representations emerge: through the art of literature. For, what is literature, if not, among many things, an *aesthetic* representation? Literature's reliance upon rhetorical language, narrative cues, evocation, and self-expression allows readers the chance to participate along with a disinterested and singular artistic voice. These aspects contribute to a long-standing conception of literature as creating a unique experience for readers, developing their imaginations through inventive literary forms. Even for Spivak, as we will see in the next section, literature's representative capacity enables an epistemological development that can expand the globe's normative horizon. Utilizing theories from Spivak's recent work, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, I shall expand the unique role of literature and language in ethical life.

Epistemological Performance: Re-shaping the Ethical Imaginary

In a short essay on Stuart Hall, Spivak considers the virtue of literary fiction: "The power of fiction is that it is unverifiable. To learn to read fiction is to work with this power" (Spivak *Aesthetic Education* 369). Though an obvious statement, this suggestion still leads us to an important feature of literature: that it enables us to embody worlds that we cannot necessarily corroborate through the external reality we *in fact* experience. This property of literary representation remains especially true not just in *unrealistic* narratives (e.g. science fiction, fantasy, etc.), but in narratives that illustrate different cultural, national, or historical realms far outside of the reader's immediate surroundings. We enter the minds and lives of characters who dwell in worlds qualitatively distinct from our own, and experience conditions that we would otherwise have no insight into.

Conceiving literature's educational value, Spivak notes that a training in the study of literature, or an "aesthetic education," is understood as "the training of the imagination for epistemological performance" (Spivak *Aesthetic Education* 345). The literary text "gives rhetorical signals to the reader, which lead to activating the readerly imagination" (323), and "literature, as a play of figures, can give us imaginative access" to the experience of "the impossible" (352). Assuming a text's ability to "weave" or create a "web"--deriving originally from the Latin *texere:* to weave (318)--we discern a capacity to 'weave' new 'textures' through language; feelings induced by rhetorical and aesthetic signals. With this capacity to weave a new textual fabric, we arrive at the imagination training of literature—its inventiveness and singularity of its language. As Derek Attridge notes in *The Singularity of Literature*, the "inventiveness" of literary art arises in the "creative shapings of language" (130) combined with the "author's creative labor" that is centered on the "manipulation of ideas, the construction of arguments," and the "representation of existing entities in a new light, or the imagination of hitherto non-existent entities" (Attridge 107). The creative force of literary language provides the inventive capacity to induce a "performance" of "otherness," that we, as readers, embody through the strategic arrangement of words and linguistic patterns.[1]

To return to the previous section's discussion of Spivak and the implications of 'representing,' we will recall that when hegemonic regimes claim to 'represent' the economic totality of discourse, they merely 'represent' in the 'portrait' sense of the word (*Darstellung*), and collapse the distinction between 'portrait' and 'proxy' *(Vertretung).* As a result, by using the two words as indistinct concepts power disregards the marginal subaltern voices that dwell outside of the dominant, normative discourse. Yet, exercising the imaginative capacity through "epistemological performance," literature seems to manifest as an aesthetic representation that retains the capacity to 'stage' as well as 'embody' the subject's voice. For, through the texture of its inventive language, and as an expression of subjective experience, readers imagine themselves in the position of the Other, recognizing the inventive "performance" (Attridge 130) demonstrated through narrative. So, optimizing our social and ethical life, literature can engage the reader's imagination in a manner which affords the Other recognition, not through merely an institutionally validated representation, nor in the confines of metaphysical language, but as a way to place one's self within the weaving texture of the Other's singularity.

As a condition for shaping an ethical life, imaginative narrative offers a kind of representation that circumvents, on the one hand, the grip of autonomous language (as we learn from Derrida), and the epistemic violence of social, normative, and political discourse. Literature offers us the opportunity to navigate the textured landscapes of inventive language, training our minds through "epistemological performance" and participate in a dialogic relation with the voice of the other. As an aesthetic experience, it urges us to "tread" in the other's "shoes" (Spivak *The Post-Colonial Critic* 108); literary art represents—both in the sense of '*Vertretung*' and in the sense of '*Darstellung*'--by staging the narrative of the other, while asking the reader to engage with and embody the experiences evoked in the aesthetic.

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[1] One may also see this echoing what the Russian Formalists (namely Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson) have called "*literaturnost,*" or "literariness."

To return to Honneth and the urgency for ‘recognition,’ literature invites readers to recognize the Other, not merely by the Other's capacity to conform to our normative horizon of values and social systems, but by demanding our recognition of the other’s singularity inscribed in narrative. We operate with ‘alterity,’ to use Levinas’s term, and engage with the text’s own singularity. As Attridge notes, “[t]o find oneself reading an inventive work is to find oneself subject to certain obligations—to respect its otherness, to respond to its singularity, to avoid reducing it to the familiar and the utilitarian even while attempting to comprehend it by relating it to these” (130). And, indeed, a text demands the reader’s mind to work with inventive, literary language; to work with, as Spivak says, “the unverifiable,” and resist comprehending its otherness by relating it to ingrained presuppositions. It is under this same principle that we train our capacity to avoid universal, metaphysical assumptions that calibrate our relation to the other and instead concede the incomprehensibility that we are poised to embody in a responsible, responsive manner.

In our current climate of global proliferation and contact between cultural differences, the ‘ethical life’ of society has to meet the demands of this system. That is to say, increased cultural multiplicity mandates an ethical perspective that can accommodate a broad dialogic communication between individuals and their differences. What the previous analysis has attempted to show is the myriad ways in which different theorists have dealt with this concern. What arrive at is a view inherited from Gayatri Spivak, Simon Critchley, and Derek Attridge that expresses the efficacy of a literary imagination for overcoming the limitations in the ‘ethical life’ and recognition. In building up our imagination, literature not only asks us to embody differences, but also presents us with a picture of how differences are felt and expressed from these perspectives; as an art form it asks us to question where the tensions arise for subjectivity, and stages these conflicts in the form of inventive language. Different types of literature present disinterested accounts of subjective experience in unique ways. I would like to argue that one genre offers us both the imaginative representation and, at the same time, the questions built into the ethical concerns of a cross-cultural society: the genre of migrant literature.

In its various formulations, migrant literature often presents a picture of marginal experience that is two-fold. On the one hand, an individual is underrepresented politically and socially, given little social mobility to guide his or her social position. This aspect is demonstrated, for example, in issues of citizenship, access to employment, language capabilities, and voting rights. These issues culminate in limiting the representative potential of marginal groups, and, indeed, are not exclusive to migrant experience. However, on the other hand, characters in migrant literature also find themselves with an internal ethical conflict. That is, the subject often asks where her ethical concerns ought to aim, and how wide-ranging his or her own ethical, normative, and epistemic horizons are. How one decides to speak (and through which language), whose memories one chooses to identify with, and where one's loyalties are placed are all questions that are addressed and complicated in migrant experience. In other words, the first question we started with is echoed: to whom do we owe our ethical responsibilities? Or, to put it in another way, who *belongs* within the ethical horizon? A specific outline of migrant literature and its current cultural presence, along with a discussion of how it will be utilized in my analysis will be in the next and final section.

Migrant Literature in an Ethics of Belonging

"Globalization," says Azade Seyhan, in *Writing Outside the Nation*, "has in many ways created opportunities for diasporas to emerge, survive, and thrive" (11). In this climate of burgeoning migration and transnational consciousness, "writers become chroniclers of the histories of the displaced whose stories will otherwise go unrecorded" (12). Creating narratives of migration, Seyhan argues that texts of this sort generate a conversation regarding the "larger issues of identity, exclusion (from real or imagined communities), memory, language politics, translation, and the psychology of loss" (13). I would add to this conceptual framework by suggestion that migrant literature also enacts the ethical concerns that ensue from these issues. The consequences I have in mind are the ones alluded to above: how one achieves a sufficient recognition, mobility, and representative value in the social discourse. This argument, therefore, requires not just an “existential” understanding of “displacement, expatriation, and marginality,” (Seyhan 13) but an *ethical* one. We critically investigate the various strands of migrant experience by acknowledging not only the facts inherent in migrant subjectivity, but how they elicit the ethical questions of social life, and the capacity to achieve recognition from a displaced and marginal subject-position.

Following Crystal Parikh, and her text *An Ethics of Betrayal*, I argue that migrant literature (coinciding with “diaspora” and "emergent literatures") furnishes a “conceptual space of otherness, preserved against the totalizing demands of both nationalist and minority discourse” (12). So, in the narrative of migrant literature, we are inescapably in the space of ethics, encountering both the self and the Other who are irreducibly distanced from one another, and demanded to maintain mutual ‘alterity,’ as we learned with Levinas. Yet, the several complications noted above, regarding language, representation, and self-realization, are still dramatized throughout the experience of migrant literature; both in the political, economic, and linguistic sense of representation, as well as in the complications in expanding the social imaginary to present a more inclusive normative discourse, where all voices can *belong* and feel a sense of *belonging*.

In order to pursue this conversation more concretely, this project will analyze four novels that fall under the category of migrant literature. Using these novels, I will introduce them as different “conceptual spaces” where we can inquire into the deep ethical questions of social relations. Through a close reading of each novel, I will demonstrate examples where ethical questions are raised and ethical encounters are enacted. Invoking the terminology and theories derived from Axel Honneth and Emmanuel Levinas, I appropriate their discussion of intersubjective relation and recognition as a useful conceptual strategy for shedding light on the ethical encounters instantiated in these novels. Furthermore, taking into consideration the rigorous outline of *representation* and *epistemological performance*, demonstrated through Spivak, along with the efficacy of narrative ‘inventiveness’ (from Attridge’s *The Singularity of Literature*), I will show where these aspects of ethical otherness manifest at a narrative and meta-narrative level. Using the interpretive tools I inherit from these thinkers, I will combine their terms and apply them in the ways that I have used and explained them above, to avoid repeating and re-defining them throughout this analysis.

This thesis will be divided into two parts, followed by a conclusion. In Part One, I will examine two novels; the first being *Americanah* (2014), by Chimimanda Ngozi Adichi, and the other being *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), by Mohsin Hamid. These novels are reflect two different transnational experiences, the latter being Pakistani-American, the former Nigerian-American. Yet, both novels carrying out a “-American” migration context offers several points of thematic overlap beyond their national linkage. Both having been written in a similar time and place, these novels effectively demonstrate contemporary anxieties about otherness and immigration that permeate the American socio-political landscape. In Hamid’s novel, the moment arises in a distinct post-9/11 context, where hostilities are palpably manufactured toward the main character, Changez, and these hostilities illicit the ethical concerns of representation. In Adichie’s novel, Ifemelu blogs about racial issues during a time in American discourse where hesitations toward addressing race are a source of hostile mis-communication. The result is a rich metadiscourse on recognition, difference, otherness, and language that each reflect the state of American race relations. In fact, for both novels, we can gain insight into how the polemics of political rhetoric, media propaganda, and the axioms that inform socio-cultural relations contribute to and shape a problematic ethical imaginary. To introduce these novels, though, I will start this first section by offering a critique against race-related police violence, using last year's contentious trial in Ferguson, Missouri and the conflict surrounding the unjust killing of Michael Brown. This discussion will broadly account for a much larger and more general critique against the asymmetry of power relations in the U.S., where racial discrimination and police violence continue to persist.

But, by utilizing a recent social event that has continued relevance today, I will shed light on how these events connect with ethics and social responsibility, while emphasizing the role literature has in potentially resolving ethical conflicts.

In Part Two, I slightly shift the cultural-ethical focus, exploring Charlotte Mendelson's *Almost English* (2013) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000). Both novels set in an English context, they each generate an ethical discourse similar to the previous section, namely presenting the conflicts and tensions existing in interpersonal relations. Yet, the main focus I would like to present in this section is to shed light on the personal, internal conflicts of national memory and identity. For *White Teeth*, several cultural and national backgrounds come into contact and continually resonate in the consciousness of several generations. What we find are struggles not only to assimilate and adapt to a new environment (as we expect and see in every novel in this analysis), but issues that force older generations to confront their families legacies, traditions, and identities. In *Almost English*, similar questions arise regarding how one adapts to a new setting and how much is sacrificed in the assimilation process. Politics of language, self-identity, and familial responsibility play a prominent role in informing the conflicts throughout this narrative. What results from both of these novels, therefore, are concerns about the ethical considerations one maintains toward the self, the nation, and one's seemingly split, fragmented identity.

Upon completing these analyses, I would like to conclude in demonstrating the consequences of utilizing migrant literature as the "conceptual space" for a discussion on ethics. Incorporating the important questions of representation, ethical consideration, and recognition with I began this analysis, coupled with migrant literature, I would like to argue that this project culminates in an ethics of "belonging", and that belonging is *itself* an ethics. That is to say that this project raises questions what it *means* to belong, how we evaluate different states of belonging (or *not* belonging); analyzing how one feels (or does not feel) a sense of *belonging* in a transnational context, how we understand and *recognize* belonging, and who rightfully *belongs* within our ethical imaginary. The theoretical questions, political effects, and psychological pains associated with displacement, and dispossession will all contribute to and account for an ethics of belonging.

Section One

Multiple Voices, Embodied Imagination: *Americanah* and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

I.

Ferguson, MO and Lethal Mis-recognition

During the past year, events in the United States have motivated a national and international conversation regarding the state of racism and, specifically, race-related police violence. The disproportionate level of police brutality toward African American men and women is endemic to American society, and has been for several decades. But, the recent attention given to this issue over the past few years (especially within the mainstream American media) raises interesting and important ethical questions.

Before this year, the country was shaken by the events in Sanford, Florida, when George Zimmerman, a Sanford resident and (so-called) "neighborhood watch," gunned down and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. Citing a "stand your ground" law, Zimmerman was then acquitted of all charges against him. The details of the conflict are still unclear; but, the tragedy and wide-spread confusion are alive in social and racial discourse. Questions about perceptions and motives, the structure of the legal system, and the problems of media representation all reflect the irreconcilable contradictions in the American political system that have yet to find resolution. But, Zimmerman's own actions seemed to reflect a familiar narrative: the fact that senseless violence against the black community continues to go unprosecuted, indicating a troubling asymmetry and uncalibrated ethical, political, and legal consideration against minority groups.

The agony from this event intensified when, on August 09, 2014, Ferguson, Missouri police officer, Darren Wilson, shot 18-year-old, Michael Brown, who was unarmed, following an altercation between the two. Not surprisingly, reports of what actually occurred between Brown and Wilson are varied and, in some ways, inconsistent. Responding to reports of a convenience store robbery nearby, Wilson followed Brown down a neighborhood sidewalk and urged him to stop. Instead of succumbing to arrest, Wilson alleges that Brown approached and began assaulting him inside of his police car, leaving him with minor bruises and injuries. Brown then ran from the police car in the opposite direction before turning around to face Wilson. As Wilson alleges, Brown raised his arms and began running back toward the police cruiser (to indicate surrender?--to reinitiate assault?). Despite whether Wilson's testimony summarized here matches any real accounts or eye-witness testimony, Wilson alleges that he feared for his life and was, therefore, justified in drawing his gun to fire the last and fatal shots at Michael Brown.

The standard responses to this story, understandably, question Wilson's justification for defending himself with a gun. Leaving aside whether gun violence should ever be so pervasive in conflicts between police and citizens, it is not unreasonable to assume, as social critic John McWhorter says, that "if the guy lurching back toward Wilson had been white, just maybe he wouldn't have fired those last shots" (McWhorter). As is well-understood, this kind of prejudice against the black community has a long history in the U.S. (along with the attending riots that ensued): in 1965, the famous Watts Riots in Los Angeles "burned for six days after a police officer struck a woman in the head with a nightstick" (Jackson), and the riots in 1992 (also in Los Angeles), following "the brutal police beating of Rodney King and videotaped shooting of 15-year-old Latasha Harlins" (Jackson). This deeply troubling and tragic historical phenomenon reflects a treatment of the black community that is complex, yet worth disentangling—especially for our present discussion. For, it is becoming increasingly clear that philosopher Charles Mills was accurate in his reaction to the events that took place in Ferguson: "Black citizens are still differentially vulnerable to police violence, thereby illustrating their second-class citizenship" (Mills). This idea of 'second-class citizenship' should be kept in mind as we proceed through the rest of this analysis.

The last year and a half has demonstrated a terrifyingly consistent revelation into the disproportionate police violence across the U.S. Even more horrific has been the extent to which these acts of violence go unpunished and how few officers are held accountable for these killings. The reactions to not only the case in Ferguson, but to other recent stories have boiled down to a discussion about perceptions of race and the persistence of racial discrimination. These issues are certainly at the core; especially since police in the U.S can legally justify killing citizens merely on the basis of *perceived* feelings of threat, and these perceptions that generate fear are often shaped by prejudices about African American people (prejudices which, themselves, are unjustified, and produced by a long history of ideological racism that dates back several centuries).

But, the reason I would like to shed light exclusively on the conflict in Ferguson, rather than the police killings of Kajieme Powell in St. Louis, Eric Garner in Staten Island, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Akai Gurley in Brooklyn, Walter Scott in Charleston, Abner Louima in Brooklyn, Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Sean Bell in Queens, Oscar Grant in Oakland, Amandou Diallo in the Bronx, John Crawford in Dayton, or Freddie Gray in Baltimore—all occurring within the last few years (and some just weeks before I write this)—is because of a long, extended story about the Ferguson community's relationship to power and its broader implications toward social ethics and recognition. The discussion about the dynamics of an underrepresented, marginalized community in Missouri is a story largely neglected; and, even when the power dynamics *are* acknowledged, most emphasis is placed on the hostility between the police and citizens, and little is granted to *why* this hostility manifests, and how the current power structure inhibits a peaceful coexistence between disparate racial and cultural societies. This is not to say that a critical insight into the effects and manifestation of power is likely to drastically shift the perennial violence that exists globally. But, it does offer an important lesson into the ethical discourse that I am attempting to broach throughout this thesis. This tragedy shows us exactly what is at stake when the asymmetry of power relations inhibits social coexistence, and when we fail to realize that the black community as well as other minority groups have equal claim to our ethical responsibility. My hope is to undo what I see as an apparent de-emphasis occurring throughout the media and in the public domain; that, we should be fully aware of our responsibility and inattentiveness toward an underrepresented, marginal communities.

To give a sufficient account for Ferguson's prominent position in this analysis, I will recall our summary of representation, wherein we have an apt space for exactly how this can affect not only our relationship to fictional characters; but, real life of the cultural or racial Other who exists in our own social time. We will recall from Spivak that the notion of representation (*Darstellung)* as a disembodied portrayal, able to be "re-staged" (Landry and MacLean 6) or reiterated, symbolically portrays the subject merely in a socially-recognizable, and usually strictly economic space. It is this form of re-presentation-by-portrait that underlies the structure of our current global political systems; not only the market economy, but citizenship, normativity, and language. Without meeting the discursively-produced standards of recognition (i.e., exchangeable value, translatability, resemblance to a 'norm'), the subject is neglected from the social discourse. The capacity to be reproduced in a portrait or be re-iterated in 'predication' seems the prerequisite for society to grant ethical value. In its over-reliance upon this symbolic representation, the political regime of today enacts an "asymmetrical obliteration" of the "trace" of the Other in its "precarious Subject-ivity" (Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 281). Subjects lie beyond the margins of consideration, ignored by regimes of power when their qualities are not use-able, repeatable, or exchangeable. If we take this idea seriously, then the apparent disregard for a predominantly minority, lower-class community in Missouri should not be much of a surprise. Furthermore, one should always bear in mind the places and people media and power tend to ignore, as they continue to go underrepresented for not belonging to a dominant discourse. As Spivak says, those whose social position lies in the margins are not permitted "the formation of a recognizable basis of action"

(Spivak *Aesthetic Education* 431). Being in this position is to find oneself disenfranchised from the dominant discourse and silenced by increasingly consolidated power.

There is also a big issue to discuss regarding to the role of power *within* Ferguson. In this context, the same issue applies: the needs and safety of this community are largely ignored. For, as Rebecca Leber reported recently in *The New Republic*, "Ferguson's population is 67 percent black, but African-Americans make up just 5.6 percent of the police force"--a statistical disparity, she notes, that is "basically normal in the U.S." (Leber). A 94-percent white majority in the police force is a staggeringly high percentage, but is further troubling when one considers the supposed function of police. As Mark Greif notes, "police are different things to different people. Not because each person has his or her own subjective view on the constabulary, but because the meanings of the functions of police vary with a citizen's identity, as one or another possible target or beneficiary of policing" (Greif). Greif continues, noting that although the "most admirable and defensible of the exemplary police activities may be 'keeping the peace,'" one mode of keeping the peace--"enforcing racial terror"--may be the "worst thing police do habitually" (Greif). "Racial terror," Greif says, "creates enormous complications for any ordinary theory of what American police do, for it carves a fundamental division between the experience of African American and non–African American citizens and the expectations they have of police" (Greif). The ability to 'keep the peace,' by providing safety during conflict in a civil democracy constitutes the noble function of police, and has embodied their position throughout history. But, the ability to ensure the peaceful harmony in society bears a few social and theoretical limitations.

In his article "On Becoming More Human," Lawrence Jackson concedes that police fail to recognize "the *humanity* of their African American male victims" (Jackson). Jackson follows up, suggesting that "you have to have a shared collective memory of the past to recognize another human being" (Jackson). As we learned from Axel Honneth, intersubjective recognition and understanding of the Other's singularity provides the condition under which a flourishing ethical relation can manifest. It is not only a "collective memory of the past," but the understanding of the Other's claim to self-realization that allows us the empathy and expanded horizon for ethical recognition. So, in order for police (or any organ of power) to provide the benefit of safety, rather than the threat of violence, that power has to consider the Other a worthy "beneficiary," as Greif says. Hostility, however, presents itself under the fear of an unrecognizable Other, and a disregard for those who do not belong within the ethical schema.

Yet, beyond attempting to reinforce the narrative of racial profiling and discrimination, I would like to suggest that it is the ethical horizon that needs re-shaping.[2] For, the asymmetry of racial disparity in the region of Ferguson does not only indicate a persisting racism "beneath the surface of the white American soul," (McWhorter), but a limited ethical consideration for those who lie at the margins of the dominant majority's ethical purview. It presented little surprise, therefore, when the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division released a 102-page investigation on March 04, 2015 into the Ferguson Police Department, detailing the extent to which Ferguson's "law enforcement practices overwhelmingly impact African Americans," (U.S. Dept. of Justice 4) due in part "to intentional discrimination on the basis of race" (U.S. Dept. of Justice 4), and that these practices undermine "community trust and cooperation" (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2). Furthermore, an aspect confirming the symbiotic relationship between power, discipline, and the political economy, suggests that, in addition to the plaguing racial bias, there exists in the police department a strong "focus on generating revenue" (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2). This revenue is often generated through frivolous traffic citations and the accumulation of extraneous court fees. The fact that these police practices disproportionately affect African American citizens confirms the interrelationship between the productive forces of an economy, the ability to exploit the less fortunate for the advantage of economic growth, and the conservation of power in law enforcement. As Michel Foucault states, "[d]iscipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (Foucault 97). As long as African Americans are treated, as Charles Mill suggested, as "second-rate citizens," with little or no representational value in the political, economic, or legal domain, then they can be controlled or exploited, and productivity can be generated on the backs of the most vulnerable.

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[2] This is also, no doubt, the basis for the #BlackLivesMatter campaign that spread throughout social media and within the activist campaigns, protests, and marches that followed the Darren Wilson trial.

Added injury arises when we remember that, on November 24, 2014, officer Darren Wilson was acquitted of all charges against him, and was found not guilty in the murder of Michael Brown. As mentioned previously, this is an unfortunately common story, where police officers can commit (so-called) justifiable homicide as long as they can prove that they feared for their lives. Despite whether Wilson can prove that he did not act on the basis of racial discrimination (which seems unlikely given the Dept. of Justice's scathing report), the extension of the ethical consideration and recognition goes beyond just resolving the social pathology of racial bias (as important as that is). The deeper story lies in the interstices of a social discourse that commits an "epistemic violence" against the racial Other—the other whose story is unheard, and whose struggles are ignored. The implication in the Dept of Justice report that the practices of the Ferguson police undermined "community trust and cooperation" is the crux of the problem. Without committing themselves to the understanding of and empathy toward the black community whom they are meant to serve, police officers, like Darren Wilson, will continue to only lend compassionate to those whose voices, appearances, and lives resemble their own. When one's sympathy and, indeed, empathy are only directed toward those whom one can sufficiently comprehend (i.e., with standard, essentializing, unitary qualities of Sameness), then the underrepresented, voiceless subaltern cannot speak, and the epistemic violence becomes a real, deadly violence.

Returning our attention to Spivak, we concede that Michael Brown and the Ferguson community as a whole lacks sufficient representation, in both senses: representation-by-portrait (*Darstellung)* and representation-by-proxy (*Vertretung).* As a result, they are given little regard by elite power, be it the white majority, the police, or the state of Missouri itself. Testimony in court, while carried out in accordance with standard procedure, could have benefitted from the community's testimony to their continued mistrust of police; the jury deserved to hear the persistent hostility, fear, violence, and discrimination experienced on a daily basis within the Ferguson community; and the prosecution could have conveyed the historic pattern of racial violence perpetrated by police in the United States. Perhaps, then, the jury and the world could hear a side of the story that is otherwise silenced by powerful discursive regimes.

On the final concluding page of the Dept. of Justice's report, they make a suggestion to the local law enforcement to "reform its approach to law enforcement" by forming "partnerships" and having "frequent, positive interactions with Ferguson residents, repairing and maintaining police-community relationships." They then include a suggested reading: Jim Baruck's essay, "Putting the 'Local' Back in Local Law Enforcement". As valuable as these strategies may be in mending the relationship between the police and the Ferguson community, it is doubtful that they will ensure a convivial, peaceful coexistence within that region. Baruck's essay may give sound advice for local police enforcement, but Baruck--the chief of police in Milliken, Colorado--only has one perspective: the perspective of the police, by police. The true education that power needs is an "aesthetic education"--a "training of the imagination for epistemological performance" (Spivak *Aesthetic Education* 345). An exercise in the imagination through not just one voice, but several, can establish a wide imagination, a wider understanding of how others struggle to be recognized within American society. A democratic society requires the voice of "the people," and to ensure a more democratic system, voices need to be acknowledged and heard—not manufactured from one unilateral perspective or position of power. The following section will contribute to our ethical thesis, suggesting the need for "several stories," rather than one "definitive story". For, the ability to share different perspectives, and a multiplicity of narrative voices can give testimony to how others feel and reflect in a deeper way, asking us to embody and envision their struggles, voices, and perspectives.

II.

The Call for Multiple Stories: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Mohsin Hamid

In a TEDTalk recorded five years prior to the publication of *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie inveighs against the "dangers" of a relying upon the "single story" of other places and people, and how this over-reliance damages our capacity to sustain harmonious, interpersonal connections:

> I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar (Adichie "The Danger of a Single Story").

Reflecting on her own encounters with unfamiliar cultures, Adichie stresses how stories shaped her own imagination, shedding light on how they continue to generate a false consciousness throughout the world. She emphasizes, for example, the inadequate representations of Africa throughout Western and global media. She notes that 'popular images' combined with Western(ized) literature depict Africa as a place of "beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner" (Adichie "The Danger of a Single Story"). Yet, Adichie continues by arguing for the value of sharing several stories, generating an expansion of human imagination, particularly with respect to Africa:

> Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes: There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo and depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria. But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe, and it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them (Adichie "The Danger of a Single Story").

For Adichie, the proliferation of popular images and Western literature, oversaturated with one single narrative stems from power. And "power," says Adichie, "is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person" (Adichie "The Danger of a Single Story"). Linking this conception of power to the theories outlined in the introduction, I find distinct connections to what has already been discussed by Marx, Levinas, Derrida, and Spivak: historically speaking, the ability to manufacture representations of the Other, or of other cultures, has been one exclusively enjoyed by hegemonic or colonial power.

Power has discursively produced its own unitary, essential image of the cultural Other, so that those in control can use this "definitive story" to self-differentiate and, at the same time, subjugate the cultural other. We can add Edward Said to this theoretical corpus, who notes in *Orientalism* that this single narrative is one which Western imperial power "not only creates but also maintains; it is...a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world" (Said 12). Said continues, noting the relationship that this 'definitive story' has to imperial power:

> [I]t is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what 'we' do and what 'they' cannot do or understand as 'we' do). (Said 12).

For Said, this discourse on the Other (or in his case, the exteriority of "the Orient") is carried out by various forms of 'representation'--a "collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism" (Said 23)--and contributes to the interplay "between society, history, and textuality" (Said 24). It presents, as Spivak says, a "remotely orchestrated, far-flung and heterogenous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" (Spivak 281). Indeed, this "collective body of texts" generates this "definitive story" to which Adichie refers; and this story is the representation that power relies upon in order to justify its controlling aims, independent of the supposed "truth" or veracity of this story. Rather, the story that is manufactured by power is merely the one which is most useful for political advantage and control, especially if we remember what Marx says in the "Eighteenth Brumaire," "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (608). Indeed, if the only story we have of Africa is the story of "catastrophe" and violence, as Adichie says, then Western power can incorporate this narrative to negotiate its justification for colonization and invasion.

I have already outlined Spivak's discussion of 'representation' that provides an important framework for ethical and political systems. It is worth restating here that the dominant structure of a political economy relies upon the exchange-able currency of representation that power can utilize and recognize. When it comes to achieving political or social representation, the subject must succumb to the mechanisms of control in order to be given a relative ethical standing. Yet, one of the historic problems in intercultural, cross-national relations has been the conceptions of Otherness that impose a 'single story' or narrative that disregards the singularity of individual experience and the multiplicity of identity. Instead, the dis-embodied 'single narratives' manufactured by power are the only ones that exist in the political domain, the social discourse, and the ethical imaginary. Anything that falls beyond the purview of a single comprehensible narrative, or is incoherent to the regimes of discourse, gets dispensed with and cast from our consideration. The aim of this thesis, to reiterate, is to show how migrancy is effected by this "discursive formation," and, yet, how the stories inscribed in migrant literature are far from being just a single story—the stories are multiple narratives enacted by multiple voices.

In a coinciding gesture along with Adichie's argument that it is "impossible" to engage with people without first engaging with every story, Mohsin Hamid, in an interview about *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, offers a similar discussion about mending social relations and ethical recognition. He notes the achievement of a cosmopolitan society and harmonious cross-cultural relations is only possible by resolving our capacity for empathy: "I believe that the world is suffering from a deficit of empathy at the moment" (Hamid "Harcourt Interview"). In order to overcome this deficit of empathy and envision a better social world, Hamid believes that "the core skill of a novelist is empathy: the ability to imagine what someone else might feel" (Hamid "Harcourt Interview"). For Hamid, the novelist offers the expertise to conjure an imagination and an empathy to ameliorate the social problems that plague the globalized society. How this relates to his development of *The*

Reluctant Fundamentalist will be outlined below. Suffice it to say, for now, that his novel contributes to a much-needed expansion of our ethical imagination and empathetic capacities.

For both Adichie and Hamid, the need for stories (and multiple stories) underlies the difficulty in recognizing our “equal humanity,” as Adichie says. We will recall that the issue of *representation* is an issue of requiring a more expansive, multidimensional re-presentation that does not get consumed and silenced by “essentialist, utopian politics.” What literature and, I would argue, migrant literature in particular has produced is a conceptual space to see where both forms of representation collide. For both novelists (whose work we will examine in more detail in this section), their respective accounts of migrant experience impart the empathetic imagination and myriad narratives that can cultivate our ethical imaginations. Multiple, interrelated narratives of the self, nation, memory, otherness, and belonging are weaved into each novel, creating a complex deterritorialized space of subjective expression. Turning to the novels by Adichie and Hamid, I will show how their works enact a discourse on empathy, ethical recognition, representation, and subjective experience. I will first turn to Adichie’s *Americanah*, which is a complex novel that gives us several means by which to approach our ethics of belonging. Central to this issue is race, and the complexities that arise are the various confrontations with race and discrimination. For this novel, racism is tied to national narratives and the identitarian structures of power, and several characters are caught within a tangled web of discrimination, dispossession, and disenfranchisement. The development of the novel’s plot and how we come to recognize its position in our global ethical system will be emphasized below.

III.

Americanah: Confronting Race, Contradicting Identities

Published in 2013, *Americanah* depicts several overlapping, yet distinct experiences of migrant life. Ifemelu and Obinze, who were young teenage lovers in Lagos, each depart from Nigeria to seek new fortunes and opportunities outside of Africa. Ifemelu takes a fellowship at Princeton, starts a successful blog about her observations of race in America, and finds herself navigating through several social circles and turbulent romances. Obinze, whose visa application to the U.S. is denied, moves to London instead and works odd jobs on a fake visa, before being eventually deported back to Lagos, only to start up an unhappy marriage. Ifemelu's Aunt Uju also resides in this narrative, coinciding with Ifemelu's move to America. Aunt Uju moves to America after a military general (with whom she maintains an affair) dies in a fatal plane crash. She consequently loses his financial support and moves to America to try to find work as a doctor. However, her struggles to pass tests for the medical license and to find work are misfortunes typical to migrant life. Aunt Uju also raises her son, Dike, to be both aware his Nigerian heritage, yet forces him to conform to American behavioral patterns of behavior. When Ifemelu speaks to Dike in Igbo, Aunt Uju says to "only speak English" to avoid confusing him. Ifemelu responds by saying that they "always spoke two languages in Lagos"; however, Aunt Uju insists: "This is America. It's different" (Adichie *Americanah* 109). The national space they exist in, therefore, is a space of conflicting identities and counterposing customs, whereby characters are unsure of their fragmented and split identity, demonstrated by social struggles developed throughout the novel.

These several voices culminate largely in narrativizing feelings of dispossession and crises of identity arising from migrancy and diasporic experience. They dramatize the lives of immigrants "who were well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else" (Adichie *Americanah* 276). First, looking to Ifemelu's story we will explore how her perspective leads to a trenchant discourse on race and identity in the American socio-political landscape. Then, taking the stories of Obinze and Aunt Uju, we will shed light on how different stories coalesce into one rich, conceptual space for an ethics of belonging.

Ifemelu's Entrance into the "Hallowed American Club"

Ifemelu’s process of integrating into the American elite life entails self-sacrifice and compromising her self-identity. She mentions several instances of forgetting “she was someone else” (Adichie *Americanah* 130), and pretending to “be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club” (3), drastically changing her hair style to “look professional” for a job interview (204); she specifies different moments of laughing at jokes (even ones that she does not understand), and acting offended when she is *supposed* to be offended (221). She even makes concerted effort to “practise an American accent” for a short time (134), until she later gives it up upon meeting Blaine (173), with whom she maintains a long-term relationship later in the novel. In these behavioral changes, Ifemelu self-consciously manipulates her actions, her voice, and her sense of self to achieve incorporation and recognition to the American social milieu. In these instances, not only is she performing and emulating the behavioral traits that are validated by society; but, she even assumes the ethical horizons and normative principles that permeate social life. Ifemelu’s migrant experience forces her to push against her selfhood so that her new social environment can recognize the identity that was invented for her.

This forged identity confinement that a social environment forces a subject into gestures toward the theme of race that interlaces this novel. Part of Ifemelu’s experience of displacement is expressed in the blog she starts after a few years of living in the U.S.; a blog titled *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*. As its titled suggests, Ifemelu’s posts are composed of scrupulous examinations of the state of race in American society; additionally, they dramatize her own encounters among the liberal elite—all written from the unique position of migrancy. One such post concisely illustrates the artificial and discursively manufactured nature of racial and ethnic identity: “Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian. America doesn’t care. So what if you weren’t ‘black’ in your country? You're in America now" (220). The post then proceeds to prescribe behavioral protocols for the 'Non-American Black' when found in different social situations. The advice ranges between restaurant tipping habits, avoiding hostile debates with white conservatives, and how to respond appropriately to racial slurs. All of these strategies offer two counter-posing and somewhat contradictory effects. On the one hand, following this advice avoids the traps of discriminatory generalization, and associating with black stereotypes in America. However, on the other hand, they are also behavioral traits that meet the approval and invented standards of the white liberal elite:

> If you are a woman, please do not speak your mind as you are used to doing in your country. Because in America, strong-minded black women are SCARY. And if you are a man, be hyper-mellow, never get too excited, or somebody will worry that you're about to pull a gun. When you watch television and hear that a 'racial slur' was used, you must immediately become offended. Even though you are thinking 'But why won't they tell me exactly what was said?' Even though you would like to decide for yourself how offended to be, or whether to be offended at all, you must nevertheless be very offended (220-1).

This blog post illustrates one of the crucial, basic features of migrant experience: the ambiguous position of having to assimilate properly to a new environment, but one in which behavioral expectations are already furnished ahead of time. First, in stating that a man "must be hyper-mellow," otherwise "somebody will worry that you're about to pull out a gun" should sound familiar when we recall our discussion of police violence above. The reaction to what is often called "furtive movement" is the basis under which police justify their suspicion of violence; that is, seeing a person move in a way that appears threatening. Yet, this perceptual tendency is not limited to police; rather, the society as a whole has a tendency to perceive aggressive behavior through racial profiling and discrimination. As Ifemelu's blog post suggests, this is a common experience felt throughout the black community that has fostered extra care to avoid seeming "too excited," rather than "hyper-mellow." Otherwise, enacting behavior that compromises the expectations of normative, ethical discourse can lead to false perceptions of violence--whether the threat is real or not.

When Ifemelu points out that "you must immediately become offended," even though "you would like to decide for yourself how offended to be, or whether to be offended at all," she is referencing a specific tendency that exists in liberal American discourse that is, arguably, detrimental to racial and social progress. The condescending efforts throughout social media to decide who are supposed victims and, consequently, position ourselves as their advocates is not only insulting, but harmful. Moralizing about a person's requirement to feel victimized in a given situation deprives that person of the ability to make that decision for him or herself. It is a way of deciding that *someone else's* self-respect and dignity are matters for *our* concern, rather than accepting that they are capable of deciding for themselves "how offended to be or whether to be offended at all." Indeed, these efforts are usually well-intentioned, and are meant to advance an awareness about how certain words and actions have been historically oppressive toward minority groups; and, this is not to evade social accountability by saying that we are not responsible for the language we use.

But, often we are unable to detach our own egos from a situation, especially those of us who thrive on the validation and perceptions of our peers. We are, instead, quick to judge, without getting a grip on the full facts. Reacting aggressively, for example, to the jokes of stand-up comedians or the tactless comments that politicians tend to give, without first critically engaging with the context or informing ourselves about how someone feels from her *own* perspective, limits social accountability and moral authority. In other words, we place our judgement on the authority of one "single" or "definitive" story, where there may be multiple stories to consider. It is a way appearing progressive and liberal for the sake of self-congratulation and social validation. Moreover, deciding for people that they have to act offended not only deprives them of the freedom to express their offense on their own terms, but also perpetuates stereotypes that white liberal society has accustomed itself to: that a 'true' black person is someone who is offended by any mention of a racial slur. Yet, these are erroneous racial stereotypes produced in a system where categorical divisions between 'whiteness' and 'blackness' are built upon behavioral assumptions and perceptions that are falsely constructed, yet perpetuated by media representation and public discourse.

When Ifemelu states that when “you make the choice to come to America, you become black”(Adichie *Americanah* 220), she diagnoses a unique American-African immigrant experience that works on two levels. First, the obvious suggestion is that ‘Non-American Blacks’ become ‘black’ in the sense that they are grouped into a homologous category, discriminated against and stereotyped on the basis of skin color, thereby perpetuating divisiveness through prejudice. The second level, which is related to the first but has its own implications, is the fact that ethnic and cultural nuance is forgotten. That is, in the U.S., ‘black’ is habitually used as an all-encompassing racial designation for people with dark-skinned complexion, independent of whether or not their ethnic heritage is African-American, whether they are American citizens, or whether they are descended from the Trans-Atlantic slave-trade. As a result of this habitual classification, a universalizing perception is created that treats individuals according to an essentialist category of identity; it is a way of foregoing engagement with differences, and determining existence by a metaphysical, unitary principle of sameness.

In this sense, we can recall from Derrida (and his response to Levinas), the damage of reductionist language, and the way to avoid the ‘violence’ of metaphysical language: “nonviolent language would be a language which would do without the verb *to be,* that is, without predication”(Derrida “Violence and Metaphysics” 147). For, predicates would, as Critchley suggests, reduce “the distance between the Same and Other” (Critchley 4), and loses the “singular Other” in a “crowd of others” (Critchley 17). We can also draw a connection with Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s notion of arborescence in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which restricts the subject by imposing “the verb ‘to be’ (Deleuze and Guattari 26). The effect of the arborescent ‘image of thought’ is the “all-encompassing totality,” or “the principle that converts being into being-for-us” (Deleuze and Guattari 441). In each case, reducing being and subjectivity into a totalizing, metaphysical system of identity predicates forms an 'image of thought' that is used to control the Other, determining his or her behavior, and restricting his or her autonomy of expression. This is why Ifemelu has to pretend to be offended, but also must avoid being 'strong-minded' or 'scary' (Adichie *Americanah* 220). Behaving in this manner not only staves off embarrassment; it is to operate according to how the liberal white elite wants her to behave, lest she compromises the 'image of thought' that they have assumed in advance.

This critique against essentialism, specifically in black experience, is crucial for maintaining the idea of 'multiple', rather than 'definitive' stories. As bell hooks suggests, in "Postmodern Blackness," the critique of essentialism must also emphasize "the significance of 'the authority of experience'" (hooks 2514). She continues:

> There is a radical difference between a repudiation of the idea that there is a black 'essence' and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle. When black folks critique essentialism, we are empowered to recognize multiple experiences of black identity that are the lived conditions which make diverse cultural productions possible. When this diversity is ignored, it is easy to see black folks as falling into two categories--nationalist or assimilationist, black-identified or white- identified. Coming to terms with the impact of postmodernism for black experience, particularly as it changes our sense of identity, means that we must and can re-articulate the basis for collective bonding. (hooks 2514).

This statement accentuates the notion which began this section: that diversity of experience, found in multiple narratives, ought to inform our perception of the Other, and reinforce our normative, ethical imagination.

In *Americanah*, the American society that Ifemelu is ridiculing has, in many ways, bypassed the engagement with diversity, to fabricate an essentializing image of black experience. Not only is Ifemelu (and the audience she is addressing) placed within the confines of a coercively manufactured identity, utilized by elite power to sustain their self-differentiated authority; but, for Ifemelu, the assimilation process is a *performance.* What we expect from migrant experience, is a performance that is meant to blend into society, acting in accordance with the behaviors that one observes. For Ifemelu, though, and the 'Non-American Black' whom she addresses in her blog, one has to act according to the differentiated features that the society has fabricated for black minorities--not to blend in, per se, but to rather be recognized with distinct and differentiating features of identity. Acting offended, acting ‘hyper-mellow, not acting ‘strong’ or ‘opinionated’--all scripted traits that the elite power has written for Ifemelu that constitute their version of ‘black’ difference and black behavior. Making these assumptions, though, about how one is expected to behave or respond neglects to realize what hooks refers to as the ‘authority of experience,’ and ignores the “multiple experiences of black identity” (hooks 2514).

The use of authorized narratives and legitimized experiences relates to a conversation that Ifemelu witnesses, where one character states, “We are very ideological about fiction in this country. If a character is not familiar then that character becomes unbelievable”(Adichie *Americanah* 336). Shan, the character who makes this statement, offers an important preface to this argument, and a metadiscourse on the novel as a whole:

> You can’t write an honest novel about race in this country. If you write a novel about how people are really affected by race, it’ll be too obvious. Black writers who do literary fiction in this country, all three of them, not the ten thousand who write those bullshit ghetto books with bright covers, have two choices: they can do precious or they can do pretentious. When you do neither, nobody knows what to do with you. So if you’re going to write about race, you have to make sure it’s so lyrical and subtle that the reader who doesn’t read between the lines won’t even know its about race. You know, a Proustian meditation, all watery and fuzzy, that at the end just leaves you feeling watery and fuzzy (Adichie Americanah 335-6).

Another character responds to Shan, saying, “Or just find a white writer. White writers can be blunt about race and get all activist because their anger isn’t threatening” (Adichie *Americanah* 336). This exchange between characters dramatizes one of the objects of this analysis: the ideological and discursive production of representation . In this sense, consolidated power distributes the narrative production that “isn’t threatening,” but only that which feels “all watery and fuzzy” (Adichie *Americanah* 336). In other words, this authorized body of literature is the “collective body of texts” (Said 23) that Said refers to; and in this collective body of texts, the experience of racism and racial identity is the one endorsed and legitimized by power—not the narratives of how “people are really affected by race” (Adichie *Americanah* 335), but the one whose characters are most “familiar” (Adichie *Americanah* 336) to the consuming audience. And, what this narrow, unilateral production of stories results from is what Said sees as the "intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world" (Said 12). As Said suggests, this capacity to 'control' and 'manipulate' this world (in this case, the world of racial experience) preserves the different, yet overlapping kinds of power: 'political,' 'intellectual,' 'cultural,' and 'moral' (Said 12).

The "ideological" nature of literary production in America, therefore, constitutes the dangerous 'single narrative' of which Adichie is most critical. For, to ignore the real stories of racial experience and encounters with race, the engagement with and recognition of this singular experience—especially ones which are *least* familiar—becomes lost in the ethical discourse. Determining whose stories *belong* within the American literary canon based on the familiarity of these stories to the ideological system is to lose the multiplicity of subjective experience. For Adichie, Ifemelu's migrant experience is not a universal one, but one whose specificity should nevertheless be acknowledged. Indeed, what this narrative shows how migrant literature provides us with the narrative tools to engage with and understand the singularity of marginal, disenfranchised experience. In *Americanah* the presence of overlapping, heterogeneous perspectives and accounts of migrancy instantiates the multiple narratives that shape our imagination necessary for the ethics of belonging.

Obinze and Aunt Uju: Struggle for *Darstellung*

Living in London, Obinze struggles to achieve the recognition necessary to be given proper social and political consideration; unable to gain access to a visa, his statelessness and undocumented status deprive him not only of work and economic prosperity—they also place him in the margins of ethical visibility. Sitting outside of a tube station in London, Obinze reflects upon his status as people pass by him: "They walked so quickly, these people, as though they had an urgent destination, a purpose to their lives, while he did not. His eyes would follow them, with a lost longing, and he would think: *You can work, you are legal, you are visible, and you don't even know how fortunate you are*" (Adichie *Americanah* 227). Obinze's time in London is characterized by his internal struggle with identity, and the external obstacles toward (legal and political) representation. A series of financial negotiations offer the only leverage for Obinze to find work and the ability to live in England: he pays out several hundred pounds to a group of Angolans to arrange a marriage "exactly two years and three days after he arrive[s] in England" (Adichie *Americanah* 227), and, in order to gain employment, has to pay a man named Vincent Obi and assume his identity. These characters take advantage of Obinze's need and desperation for a visa, documentation, and representation, and, thus, continue extorting money from him. At the same time, Obinze's struggle reflects the common turmoil of dispossession and disenfranchisement. Talking to a mother and her son at a cafe in London, the son asks Obinze if he lives in London. He replies, 'yes,' and then reflects: "but that yes did not tell his story, that he lived in London indeed but invisibly, his existence like an erased pencil sketch; each time he saw a policeman, or anyone in uniform, anyone with the faintest scent of authority, he would fight the urge to run" (Adichie *Americanah* 257). This moment demonstrates the more typical sentiment found in several narratives of migrancy: the loss of voice, existing in the margins of visibility, as an antithesis to authority. He may live among the people of London, and share not only proximity with English citizens, but also have a similar life to other ''asylum seekers" and other Nigerians who are caught in the interstices of social and economic representation (Adichie *Americanah* 259). Yet, he laments: "He never felt so lonely" (Adichie *Americanah* 259).

In his situation, Obinze lacks the sufficient representative value to gain consideration and recognition in London society. In his loneliness, Obinze feels that his singularity is unheard, ignored from the social milieu. Reflecting that his "existence" is like an "erased pencil," Obinze's identity lies in the margins of the social and political imaginary, disregarded and unrecognized by the political realm. Without a visa and without employment, Obinze is deprived of the re-presentation-by-portrait (*Darstellung)* that hegemonic power legitimizes. This means that by being un-incorporated into the representative schema, Obinze remains invisible, like an "erased pencil". The society has virtually no responsibility to care for Obinze; and his undocumented life, therefore, restricts his mobility and visibility. Dwelling in the margins of society, he understands that his only means of surviving is through self-compromise: marrying a stranger, using a false identity, working thankless and menial jobs (such as cleaning toilets). The social power has no responsibility to ensure his dignity and capacity for self-realization; he exists outside of the social discourse, without documentation to provide him with a socially-recognized, validated representation. Moreover, the people who have visas, such as his former classmate Emenike, look to him with indifference: "Emenike's obliviousness had upset him, because it suggested a disregard and, even worse, an indifference to him, and to his present life" (Adichie *Americanah* 263). The specificity and singularity of Obinze's predicament is beyond the purview of anyone's ethical imagination; even fellow Nigerian immigrants, such as Emenike. For, without the ability to represent himself, and impose his presence into the social discourse, Obinze is unable to demand the empathy and consideration of others. It remains difficult and, perhaps even impossible to imagine that he is someone equally worthy of dignity and consideration when the social and political power only relies upon the authority of legal and economic representation—either through negotiable value of monetary exchange, voting rights, or citizenship. Yet, without conforming to the rigidly coded standards of identity—that is, without having the comprehensible characteristics that hegemonic power can universalize, then a person's singularity remains invisible and silenced. In this case, the English political and social discourse only recognizes citizenship and employability as representable qualities worthy of consideration.

Aunt Uji's story is placed alongside Ifemelu's, entering the same time and place, yet reinforcing the heterogeneous nature of migrant life. Aunt Uji arrives in the United States before Ifemelu, and brings her son Dike with her in order to start a new life. In Nigeria she worked as a consultant at a military hospital, having recently graduated from the university. At first, "Aunt Uji did not want to leave" (Adichie *Americanah* 46). In fact, "she had, for as long as Ifemelu could remember, dreamed of owning a private clinic, and she held that dream in a tight clasp" (Adichie *Americanah* 46). However, after the death of a married General, with whom she was having an affair and from whom she was receiving support, she is forced to escape the wrath of his angry relatives, and go to America on a visa. Once there, her ambitions remain unfulfilled as she struggles to pass the tests for a medical residency. Without passing the test, Aunt Uju is unable to gain employment, despite being well-qualified in Nigeria. Entering America, Aunt Uju's abilities are undervalued, since her credentials are only favored when they are determined under the auspices of standardized tests. Yet, as Aunt Uju says, "they weren't testing actual knowledge, they were testing our ability to answer tricky multiple-choice questions that have nothing to do with real medical knowledge" (Adichie *Americanah* 109). This issue reflects another common narrative of migrant life: meeting the standards of another country or place in order to be accepted, even if those standards are arbitrary and disenfranchising. Yet, regardless of her factual qualifications, the official standards are those to which she must comply in order to be valued in the American job market. Simply because she happened to be born in Nigeria, the difference in her background and experience is discriminated against, given no recognition in the medical field; Aunt Uju's 'struggle for recognition,' is her struggle to have her abilities recognized and realized within the socio-economic system. Without the credentials, which, arguably, are just another form of symbolic re-presentation (*Darstellung*), Aunt Uju is given little ethical consideration, and remains invisible to the social imaginary.

Like Ifemelu, Aunt Uju also re-shapes her behavior and appearance to be socially-accepted. Ifemelu notices upon her first time seeing Aunt Uju in America that "America had subdued her" (Adichie *Americanah* 110). Hearing her aunt pronounce her own name "*you-joo* instead of *oo-joo*" (104), Ifemelu confronts her: "Is that how you pronounce your name now?". Aunt Uju replies, "It's what they call me"(104). It is from this moment onward that readers continue to see the various ways in which the characters are forced to change their mannerisms and behaviors when entering a new place, starting with changing hairstyles and accents. Ifemelu later notes that "the old Aunt Uju would never have worn her hair in scruffy braids. She would never have tolerated the ingrown hair that grow like raisins on her chin, or worn trousers that gathered bulkily between her legs" (Adichie *Americaah* 110). It is at this moment where Ifemelu deduces that Aunt Uju's new environment had "subdued" her. Yet, after confronting her Aunt about taking down her hairbraids in the following chapter, her Aunt Uju gives her an insight that resonates through the rest of the novel: "You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do in order to succeed"(Adichie *Americanah* 119). Aunt Uju had "deliberately left behind something of herself, something essential, in a distant and forgotten place"(119). Yet, as we acknowledged in the previous section, Ifemelu, too, has assumed the pretensions of American society in order to properly assimilate. What ensues for both characters during their experience in a new country are the several tactics to fit in and assimilate into the social system. Otherwise, without the right appearances, accents, credentials, hairstyle, or opinions, Ifemelu and Aunt Uju remain at the margins of the ethical horizon, given little recognition or value.

It is important to acknowledge that the experiences between the three characters—Ifemelu, Obinze, and Aunt Uju—are distinct, yet similar encounters with migrant life. Obinze and Aunt Uju run into the problem of achieving political and economic representation, and, thus, struggle in a system of consolidated power hegemony, subsumed under an "essentialist, utopian politics". Ifemelu's position, however, is unique among other accounts of migrancy: she rises through the elite society, obtaining a prestigious fellowship, and even given a visa. Yet, we learn through following her life in America that these symbolic representations still do not endow her with the value and worth necessary for equal, ethical consideration. By turning our attention back to her racial identity, we see that the issues of ethical acceptance and belonging are more complicated.

Regardless of her ability to represent herself in the economic sense (*Darstellung)*, Ifemelu still lacks the representation (*Vertretung*) that enables the recognition of “multiple experiences of black identity” (hooks 2514) . Unless she performs according to the manufactured ideals of the white elite, and presents herself as the image of ‘black’ minority in America, Ifemelu is just as invisible as Obinze and Aunt Uju. For, in order to be visible, and avoid blending into a “crowd of others” (Critchley 17), Ifemelu too must comply with the way her new environment requires her to, “in order to succeed” (Adichie *Americanah* 119).

The measure of success, for all three of these characters, and the means to achieving social and ethical value is not through their abilities, nor through their morals, beliefs, or intellect. Rather, the capacity to achieve recognition is to belong to the narrative that was designed for them by power. That narrative either includes Aunt Uju passing the compulsory medical tests, Obinze getting the political representation through a visa and employment, or Ifemelu conforming to the ideals of normativity. In each case, these narratives commit an essentializing violence of universal identity and behavior, making them the “definitive story of that person”(Adichie “The Danger of a Single Story”), leaving aside the multiplicity of experience—experiences that are already marginal and underrepresented. By illustrating several different, yet interrelated and interacting experiences of migrant life, Adichie shows that there is not one “definitive story” of migrancy, identity, or humanity in general. The stories are multiple and various, giving us several ways to confront and embody the complexities of migrant life and the necessity for a broader ethical scope.

IV.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist: (E)valuating the Other

Reacting to the upheavals and hostilities of post-9/11 discourse in the U.S., Homid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* narrativizes the often-neglected story of Pakistani-Americans who (among many others) were targets of aggression. Written in 2007, Hamid’s novel offers a first-person account of

Changez (the Urdu word for Ghenghis [Khan]),[3] and narrates his life story as he leaves his home in Lahore to study Finance at Princeton University. Graduating first in his class, Changez achieves a coveted position at Underwood Samson & Company, a "valuation firm" that tells clients "how much businesses were worth, and they did so, it was said, with a precision that was uncanny" (Hamid 5). Entering into a position of such high esteem, Changez's position in American society starts as one endowed with avid respect and admiration. However, set in 2001, during the 9/11 attacks and through the after-math, Changez suddenly finds himself immersed in a narrative of panic and ensuing hostility within the political space; his selfhood and national loyalties, along with his capacity to be recognized within the political structure are all subsequently compromised.

Much like Ifemelu, Changez too obtains a position at Princeton, and is able to navigate his way through the upper echelons of the American elite. For both Ifemelu and Changez, this social position is rather unique among the more common accounts of migrant life; typically, we find characters closer to Obinze or Aunt Uju, where one perceives a difficulty of achieving high status and success in a new environment. Yet, as this analysis will continue to stress: these qualities do not necessarily ensure ethical consideration and epistemological recognition in the social discourse. For, while Changez's story starts with esteem, recognition, prestige, and approval, it ends with hostility, neglect, scorn, and exile.

Moreover, the nature of Changez's occupation at Underwood & Samson provides an interesting symbolic register for our discussion of ethics, recognition, and representation, especially in the context of migrant literature. Not only is this position one of high prestige and regard; but, being part of a "valuation firm" makes Changez the agent of power and discourse, determining the relative *worth* and exchangeable value of other companies, based on the ability to contribute to and ensure profit. In other words, he and the company he works for rely on *representation* of worth, that is portrayed simply through the *representative fiction* of exchange value, profit, and contribution to economic growth. This system of valuation and evaluation is the asymmetrical representation that Spivak theorized in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Only by demonstrating an adequate value of exchange or profitability that power deems worthy of recognition will the companies that Underwood & Samson evaluates survive. But, these values are only assessed under the symbolic, dis-embodied system of capital accumulation and exchange.

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[3] Of course we can also see "changes" here, and note the ways Changez's attitudes undergo *changes* throughout the novel.

If their products or commodities are profitable and marketable (comprehensible and translatable), then investors will neglect these companies, based on the assessment that Underwood & Samson produces. To put this another way, the firm that Changez works for utilizes a system of ethical assessment through economic calculation; and if the standards of profitability are not satisfied, then these companies are de-funded and, therefore, silenced. The next section will delve deeper into the practices of Underwood & Samson, and Changez’s role in the company, parsing the process by which he and the firm make ethical judgments, and how these effect, control, and silence companies and their workers. The reason for pursuing this part of the story so thoroughly is so that I can then move reinforcing the internal irony and paradox in this novel. For, Changez’s active role in the company and complicity in its consequences is paralleled, then, with how he is treated at the novel’s conclusion—he is treated in the same manner in which his firm treats other companies: as an unworthy assets with no recognizable value in the broad ethical and political system.

Calculating Ethical Worth: Recognizing Value

Hired as an analyst, Changez’s position in Underwood & Samson requires him to meet with companies, assessing their relative value and profitability based on the services or products they offer. Meeting with business managers, he determines whether the features they offer are worth investment, or are viable companies, capable of surviving a global market. For example, asked to travel to the Philippines to analyze a recorded-music business, Changez and his co-workers spend an entire month vigorously deciding on this company’s particular value. He reflects that, upon completion, they “built a complex financial model with innumerable permutations” (Homid 66). Yet, beyond these models of calculating financial value, Changez boasts about his visits to the various company branches: “I spent much of my time in front of my computer, but I also visited the factory floor and several music shops. *I felt enormously powerful on these outings, knowing my team was shaping the future.* Would these workers be fired? Would these CDs be made elsewhere? *We, indirectly of course, would help decide* [emphasis mine]” (Homid 66).

Proud of how “enormously powerful” he feels, Changez is executing a power of domination over the “workers” and products of this company. He is decidedly discriminating between what factors are worthy of power’s ethical responsibility, and which ones are not sufficiently recognizable within the confines of capital interest. However, Changez’s standard for determining this value, and assessing the worth of the workers and products, is based on a disembodied representation (*Darstellung)* that does not ‘speak as’ the Other, but merely reproduces them into an exchange form that allows power to foreclose the possibility of recognition. Rather, Changez displaces the record company and its components—workers, products, factories—beyond the margins economic responsibility and recognition, simply because Underwood & Samson decided so. Not unlike the French peasants whom Marx describes or Spivak’s subaltern subject, the record company and its employees are silenced; representation in the capital market is merely a symbolic, monetary portrait (i.e. their monetary exchange value), rather than a proxy for real identities and voices. Without a high monetary value, these companies have no voice, nor do their workers.

Later in the novel, Changez is assigned the task of valuing a publishing house in Valparaiso, Chile. The climate in the novel has shifted now, however, and the Changez’s identity and relationship to American power is ambiguous, and his loyalties are torn. Meeting with the chief of the publishing house, Juan-Bautista, Changez is confronted with an unexpected inquiry into the ethics of his occupation and of Underwood & Samson: “‘Does it trouble you,’ he inquired, ‘to make your living by disrupting the lives of others?’ ‘We just value,’ I replied. ‘We do not decide whether to buy or to sell, or indeed what happens to a company after we have valued it.' He nodded; he lit a cigarette and took a sip from his glass of wine" (Homid 151). Skeptical about Changez's self-justification, and noticing his reticence to answer, Juan-Bautista shifts:

> Then he asked, 'Have you ever heard of the janissaries?' 'No,' I said. 'They were Christian boys,' he explained, 'captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army, at that time the greatest army in the world. They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilizations, so they had nothing else to turn to' (Homid 151).

Following this interaction, Changez begins reflecting to himself. He begins to feel an outrage at his own identity and, at the same time, his feelings of betrayal; betrayal to not only his home of Pakistan, but to those whose lives are not so removed from his own:

> There really could be no doubt: I was a modern-day janissary, a servant of the American empire at a time when it was invading a country with a kinship to mine and was perhaps even colluding to ensure that my own country faced the threat of war. Of course I was struggling! Of course I felt torn! I had thrown in my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain (Homid 152).

This moment demonstrates Changez's anagnorisis. Being indoctrinated into the power regime of American imperial interest, and the economic interests of Underwood Samson, Changez had been conditioned to only consider the livelihood and relative worth of others based on models of profit and gain, thinking "nothing of overturning" their lives "for its own gain". Yet, what Changez realizes at this moment is that hiss complicity in the hegemonic power structure was exactly the one to which his own family and country fell prey; it took Juan-Battista's insight to reflect back to Changez exactly the consequences of his actions.

He only realizes, much later in his life, that he had "entered" America in "the very same social class" that his "family was falling out of in Lahore" (Homid 85). This instance re-articulates the internal irony and paradox of Changez's social position. Rather than being committed to the margins of society, Changez has control over the lives of the Other, and determines their relative worth through monetary exchange. But, at this moment, he realizes that this undertaking restricts him from a thorough expansion of his ethical imaginary; his place within the corporation is removed from embodying the struggles and existence of the Other whom he controls (in this case, the companies that are valued by Underwood & Samson). Yet, furthermore, it also keeps him from realizing the harm of his actions, and how deeply and effectively they can harm one's life. It is when he begins to realize how much his treatment of other companies parallels the U.S.'s treatment of Pakistan and its neighboring countries that he begins to understand: "I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain" (Hamid 152). Leading up this moment, Changez witnesses a shift in American and global discourse. As the 9/11 attacks unfold, Changez sees firsthand the change in language, treatment, and attitudes toward himself and Pakistan. The next section will outline how the 9/11 attacks on the world trade center not only re-shaped and shifted American discourse, but how they also disrupt Changez's ethical standing in America. Using this event, we will shed light on the ambiguities of Changez's own ethical position, complicating the ethics of belonging, thereby realizing the complexities that arise in his migrant existence.

Changez's Empathetic Imagination

The novel's turning-point occurs when Changez, while still in Manila, is watching television as the 9/11 attacks on the world trade center occur. He sees the events unfold on the news and reflects: "I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared at one—and then the other, of the two twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed" (Homid 72). After witnessing these attacks, we get one glimpse at Changez's internal conflict and one of the difficult, paradoxical features of migrant existence. For, at the time that Changez witnesses these attacks, he feels little compassion for the victims of the attacks, or for the destruction involved. He reflects upon his initial reaction:

> But at that moment, my thoughts were not with the victims of the attack—death on television moves me most when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over multiples episodes—no, I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees (Homid 73).

This moment leads us to one of our complications in an ethics of belonging. Until this point, we have mostly discovered characters whose recognition is stifled by power, and to whom little ethical responsibility or consideration is given. We have witnessed characters who fall victim to the "remotely orchestrated, far-flung, heterogeneous project" to constitute the "subject as Other," resulting in the "asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity" (Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 281). And the "story" of the Other, as Said says, "exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power" (Said 12).

Yet, what we notice here, based on how Changez's rumination, is that he, too, lacks the sufficient imagination for ethical recognition, sympathy, or responsibility. He notes that fictional representations on television move him emotionally and compassionately, since he has "built up relationships with them over multiple episodes" (Homid 73). Changez here, however, does not understand why he feels not only a lack of sadness or compassion for the victims, but is rather captured by the supposed "symbolism": "I was the product of an American university; I was carrying a lucrative American salary; I was infatuated with an American woman. So why did part of me wish to see America harmed?" (Homid 73). This final question is never fully answered, and we are never clear whether Changez understands how these emotions arise through the rest of the novel. However, we can imagine that his own ethical horizon is confined not to America, but to his own home, Pakistan, and those with whom he maintains a more direct relationship.

His consideration for America is merely as a source of power—the power of income, investment, and globalized industry—and represents an abstract entity, with an asymmetrical relation to him. Therefore, rather than seeing any self-connection to the victims of 9/11 or with the U.S., he merely sees the attacks against the country as 'symbolic'. He says that he was a "product of an American university," with a "lucrative American income." But, again these relationships to America are merely symbolic representations (*Darstellung*), that portray an exchange relationship, replicable in the confines of capital market. Changez's only relationship to America is through the negotiations of salary, and America itself is merely an abstract entity that offers the mechanisms for lucrative advancement. Changez, however, is only emotionally moved by this with whom he has "built a relationship"--like the fictitious characters on television, or with those whom he can directly relate. His only allegiance to the U.S. therefore is through money and power; but, the kind of bond needed to expand his ethical imaginary is one where he can deeply feel, empathize, and embody the lives of the Other. He, instead, can only recognize the 'symbolism' of America—the America whom he views as the symbol of wealth, power, and control.

Let us consider this 'symbolism' from another angle. After all, it is not just Changez's symbolic relationship *to* America; but, rather, it is *what* American *symbolizes* and how Changez sees that position carried out in the 9/11 attacks. We ought to acknowledge, first, the fashioned self-image of the United States. As Benedict Anderson suggests, a nation is an 'imagined political community.' The use of the word 'imaginary' in this context is deliberate, because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"(Anderson 6). Furthermore, as Anderson says, "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings"(Anderson 7). The important thing to realize here is that this idea of a nation, on Anderson's terms, applies to any nation that imagines itself as a cohesive, "united" community, attaching itself strongly to a set of ideals, values, and historical narratives.

Through their shared experience, a nation self-produces its identity among its inhabitants and citizens, and disseminates it to the rest of the globe. The U.S., indeed, enacts this idea through the ubiquitous rhetoric of prudent pragmatism and exceptionalism ("greatest nation on Earth"), as well as in their claim to democratic virtue and fidelity to free market neoliberalism. When Changez, therefore, reflects upon the "symbolism" of it all, he is noting the symbolic "attack" and "collapse" of the nation's self-certainty and constructed values--values that seemed to be targeted the most during the 9/11 attacks (at least, from the American perspective). As extremist groups carried out violence against a world trade center and the U.S. Pentagon, the American belief in the nation's exceptional position in the world and continued prosperity became compromised. As Changez reflects, these attacks "brought America to her knees" (Homid 73).

Through the rest of the novel, Changez's antipathy for America is exacerbated as post-9/11 discourse develops, with the 'with-us-or-against-us' rhetoric propagated by the political media. As Crystal Parikh suggests, the "war on terror that September 11 inaugurated marshaled the lexicon of loyalty, betrayal, responsibility," built into the "discourse of retribution and war" (Parikh 160-1). American attitudes toward Pakistanis had developed a hostility that was perpetuated through propaganda campaigns designed to rally their people into fighting a war against terror groups in Afghanistan. At the same time, America's actions, as Changez reflects legitimized "through its actions the invasion of weaker states by more powerful ones, which India was now proposing to do to Pakistan" (Homid 131). Seeing these actions committed against Afghanistan and Pakistan, Changez can ethically align himself with these victims; for, these actions directly impact not only him, but his home, his family, and his national identity.

As the novel concludes, Changez's U.S. visa expires and, thus, he returns to his home in Lahore. Being unable to finish his assigned tasks at Underwood Samson, his mentor Jim fires him, seeing him no longer as an asset to his company, as he is unable to stick to Underwood Samson's guiding principle: to "focus on the fundamentals" (Homid 98). This idea also helps us understand the title of the novel. For, after all, he is reluctant to carry out and ally himself with the fundamentals of the company and, perhaps, the fundamentalism that permeates American political and economic discourse (i.e. market fundamentalism, patriotism, etc.). After returning to Lahore, Changez devotes his life to being a university lecturer, joining student demonstrations and protests, passionately deriding American globalization initiatives, and encouraging the Pakistani right to sovereignty and independence (Homid 179). Having understood, therefore, the impact of power, war, and recognition toward Pakistan and its neighboring countries, Changez's ethics of belonging expands in a manner that recognizes the oppressed subaltern; he begins realizing the consequences of allowing national, consolidated power structure to have the capacity to legislate and advance its political ambitions. He understands how he was once complicit in this enterprise, as a "janissary" for Underwood & Samson. However, now that he sees how these same kinds of initiatives affect his own life, and how they are being executed in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Changez devotes his life to reacting against the unethical practices of power.

While Changez's attitudes toward America and 9/11 may discomfit readers, and ask us to question 'ethics' in this context, we must understand what our author is attempting to accomplish through this character. In the interview mentioned above, Hamid sheds light on his motivation for writing the novel, and using Changez as the protagonist:

> By taking readers inside a man who both loves and is angered by America, and hopefully by allowing readers to feel what that man feels, I hope to show that the world is more complicated than politicians and newspapers usually have time for. We need to stop being so confused by the fear we are fed: a shared humanity unites us with people we are encouraged to think of as our enemies (Homid "Harcourt Interview").

For Hamid, Changez symbolizes a character whose voice is generally ignored and underrepresented in the dominant discourse. But, for Hamid, "the core skill of a novelist is empathy: the ability to imagine what someone else might feel"(Hamid "Harcourt Interview"). Indeed, in this case, introducing a characters whose views may conflict with the readers, Hamid shows us how "the world is more complicated"; how we ought to "unite" with people whom we would otherwise "think of as our enemies" (Homid "Harcourt Interview"). Through texture of this novel and Changez's first-person account, we can build up our "imagination" for "epistemological performance," (Spivak *Aesthetic Education* 345) embodying the Other who otherwise falls beyond our ethical consideration or horizon. Changez's story is not the one that media presents, nor is his existence one that many can readily imagine for themselves. Rather, the representation that is ensured in this novel offers the re-presentation-by-proxy (*Vertretung)* that is conveyed in the narrative art. For this analysis, the existence of Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* or that of

Ifemelu in *Americanah* are both subjectivities that are irreducible, unable to be categorized or subsumed in “predicates” (Derrida “Violence and Metaphysics” 147). The lives of these characters, and those whom we discover in several other narratives do not comply with a universalizing story or all-encompassing signifier. Rather, the feelings of belonging, the struggle to be recognized, and the need for our embodied imagination are granted through the exploration of multiple narratives. We cannot assume an explanation that merely reduces migrant experience to estrangement, or disenfranchisement. Rather, the complications and ethical questions are broadened to examine the language we use, and power’s role in shaping the stories we hear. And, in the chapters that follow, we will question further how other national identities and different novelistic structures create several more concerns for representing and recognizing the ethics of dispossession and belonging.

Section Two

Performing the Civilized Self in the English Nation: *Almost English* and *White Teeth*

It is impossible to escape the impression that people commonly use false standards of measurement--that they seek power, success and wealth for themselves and admire them in others, and that they underestimate what is of true value in life.
-Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*

[I]t makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, *peanuts*, compared to what the immigrant fears—dissolution, *disappearance.*
-Zadie Smith *White Teeth*

I.

History, Race, and English Nationalism

In the previous section, we discussed Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, which enabled us to understand the role of 'imagined stories' and 'horizontal comradeship' in shaping a nation's idealized values, shared history, and sense of communion that resonate both among its citizens, and throughout the world. We direct our attention now to England, and understand its 'imagined' communion and political unity in a similar way. To extend the idea of 'imagined communities,' I turn to Homi Bhabha who, when considering Anderson's conception of national identity and unity, poses the question: "How do we understand that 'homogeneity' of modernity--the people--which, if pushed too far, may assume something resembling the archaic body of the despotic or totalitarian mass?" (Bhabha, "DissemiNation").

For Bhabha, the social cohesion and the "spatial expression of a unitary people" finds the most "intriguing image of itself" in literary interpretations that portray the "great power of the idea of the nation in the disclosures of its everyday life" (Bhabha, "DissemiNation"). In this assertion, Bhabha notes, for example, Bakhtin's description of a "national vision of emergence" demonstrated in Goethe's *Italian Journey*. Goethe's reflections on everyday life use the 'landscape' as a metaphorical tool to dramatize the space of national identity: “The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression” (Bhabha, “DissemiNation”). That is to say, the landscape offers the spatialized dimension for everyday life, collective unity, and the “microscopic, elementary, perhaps random, tolling of everyday life” (Bhabha, “DissemiNation”). These representations, found in narratives that depict social life of the everyday and the typical experience of a culture, confirm what Anderson refers to as a “sociological organism.” According to Anderson, “[t]he idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (Anderson 26). Anderson notes, that the “cultural roots” of the nation-state and imagined community are found in the understanding of simultaneity of activity.

Although a citizen of a particular nation may never meet or even know “more than a handful” of the total population of fellow-citizens, and has “no idea what they are up to at any one time,” he nevertheless has “complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity” (Anderson 26). This understanding of national identity confirms a shared cultural unconscious and understanding of pervasive ideologies that underlie social landscapes. Especially since, “culture,” according to Paul Gilroy, can be “presented as a field articulating the life-world of subjects (albeit de-centered) and the structures created by human activity” (Gilroy 17). In this sense, culture can be said to manifest itself in the simultaneous activities and perspectives shared among a national consciousness. Although, as Gilroy suggests (and as we will elaborate below), “the contemporary tendency towards ethnic absolutism...comes to view [culture] as an impermeable shell, eternally dividing one ‘race’ or ethnic group from another” (Gilroy 17). We are already familiar with the divisions in ethnic groups and categories as they exist in the American context. Moreover, the militancy of American post-9/11 rhetoric led to a nationalistic ethos that was both alienating and violent (especially as we saw in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*). In this sense, we apply similar views to the understanding of a national "essence" that is unitary and absolute in England.

What this unitary vision generally includes, though, is not only a shared cultural perspective, nor a landscape of spatial cohesion, but a teleological sense of progress instantiated in a unifying history. "History," says Kant, "lets us hope that...that which seems confused and irregular when considering particular individuals can nonetheless be recognized as a steadily progressing, albeit slow development of the original capacities of the entire species" (Kant 3). These so-called 'original capacities' are, in this sense, the set of essential qualities that define 'particular individuals' and which find expression throughout a historical narrative. According to Kant, this is a view which presents a vision of mankind and the realization of rationality unique to humanity, thereby determining the social development of higher civilization:

> Thus society in which freedom under external laws is connected to the highest possible degree with irresistible power, that is, a perfectly just civil constitution, must be the highest goal of nature for the human species, since it is only by solving and completing this task that nature can attain its other goals for humankind (Kant 8).

Despite Kant's hope for "perpetual peace" and a "cosmopolitan perspective," his idea of a "universal history" shown in a teleology of social progress provided by "Nature" leads to a troubling Eurocentric paradigm. Walter Mignolo responds to Kant's views here, noting that Kant "assumes that the entire planet eventually will be organized by the terms he has envisioned for Western Europe and will be defined by his description of national characters" (Mignolo 736). This view of history, therefore, compromises Kant's "cosmopolitan perspective" by encoding a universal organizing principle for the world society.

The consequences, though, of a unifying history are not just international but also *intra*-national. The discursive practices of power that systematize a universal history and normative principles of identity also divide cultures between dominant power and marginalized subjectivity. For Benedict Anderson, in challenging Tom Nairn's argument that racism and nationalism are fundamentally related "in that the former derives from the latter" (Gilroy 44), suggests that "nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations" (Anderson 136). For Anderson, rather than finding its origins in ideologies of nation, "dreams of racism actually have their origins in the ideologies of class...: above all in claims to divinity among rulers and to blue or white blood and breeding among aristocracies" (Anderson 136). Though a compelling argument on Anderson's part, Gilroy responds to Anderson's argument and suggests that this notion is not viable in the English/British case:

> The politics of 'race' in this country is fired by conceptions of national belonging and homogeneity which not only blur the distinction between 'race' and nation, but rely on that very ambiguity for their effect. Phrases like 'the Island Race' and 'the Bulldog Breed' vividly convey the manner in which this nation is represented in terms which are simultaneously biological and cultural (Gilroy 45).

In this sense, the "dreams of eternal contaminations" that Anderson sees in the origins of racism are also present in the inculcation of English nationalism, homogeneity, and belonging.

In his article, "Re-writing Englishness," Nick Bentley notes that the recent attention given toward English national identity stems from the idea that "England and Englishness is currently experiencing a period of transformation (some say that this has always been the case) and together they point towards a moment of crisis in the idea of the nation" (Bentley 483). Bentley notes that one of the elements that is "fueling this debate" on Englishness is the discourse around "multiculturalism." He argues that, in this debate, "Englishness and multiculturalism can be conceived as having a dialectical relationship, which sometimes regards them as an opposition, whilst at other times over-lapping, and even mutually supportive" (Bentley 483). In several instances, Bentley demonstrates an apparent tension arising between the supposed 'diversity' that is found in 'Englishness' and the tendency to "reinvigorate older ideas of the nation as timeless and essentialist" (Bentley 484); in other words, an apparent conflict between supposed heterogeneity on the one hand, and English homogeneity, on the other.

Furthermore, also incorporating Anderson's conception of the 'imagined community,' Bentley argues that the “imagined” status of the nation has two consequences. Firstly, “the fact that it is difficult to objectively test an imaginative construct means that it can be manipulated to produce a powerful ideological discourse for a disparate group of people. Secondly, because it is unfixed, it is open to varying interpretations and claims” (Bentley 485). That is, nationhood is produced by the shared narratives of a given community, manifesting itself through ideological discourse, and is inscribed in the common myths, histories, and memories of a particular nation. But, it is also fabricated for the sake of self-differentiating a national image to conserve discursive power and appeal to ideological or political gains.

In his critique of Peter Ackroyd, who has recently undertaken an initiative to describe England and so-called ‘Englishness,’ Bentley ridicules the “contradiction at the heart of Ackroyd’s text”:

> For Ackroyd...Englishness is located in a constant dialogue between the past and the present, where the past is the dominant interlocutor. It is determined by a ‘territorial imperative’ that identifies the geo-graphical space of Englishness; and it is characterized as an ‘enchanted circle,’ hermetically sealed and transcendent of any actual events that might threaten to disrupt the sanctity of Englishness, such as imperialism, colonial exploitation or the slave trade, despite his claims of its heterogeneity (Bentley 484).

This critique is not unique to Ackroyd, and Bentley’s ridicule is directed precisely toward the tendency to define and reproduce an essence of Englishness. This strict adherence to normative behavioral protocols, and the perpetuation of nationalist sentiments is the foundation of this present analysis.

As an epigraph to *Imagined Communities,* Anderson uses an excerpt from Daniel Defoe’s satiric poem, “A True Born Englishman,” as a way to both preface the notion of an imagined political cohesion, and ridicule the ideal of purity underlies the rhetoric of nationalism. Defoe’s poem, for its breadth and humor, is worth quoting at length:

> Thus from a mixture of all kinds began,
> That het’rogeneous thing, an Englishman:
> In eager rapes, and furious lust begot
> Betwixt a painted Britain and a Scot.
> Whose gend’ring off-spring quickly learn’d to bow,

> And yoke their heifers to the Roman plough:
> From whence a mongrel half-bred race there came,
> With neither name, nor nation, speech nor fame.
> In whose hot veins new mixtures quickly ran,
> Infus'd betwixt a Saxon and a Dane
> While their rank daughters, to their parents just,
> Receiv'd all nations with promiscuous lust.
> This nauseous brood directly did contain
> The well-extracted blood of Englishmen.
> (Defoe "A True Born Englishman")

For Defoe, this poem does not necessarily inveigh against Englishness *per se*, but xenophobia as an ugly by-product of the strive toward national purity. English identity, therefore, in its attempts to sustain a unifying, cohesive imaginary, also tends toward an exclusionary intolerance for otherness. Defoe, though, sees this tendency as contradictory to the development of England's history itself since, for him, it is "from a mixture of all kinds began/That het'rogeneous thing". In a preface to the 1703 edition of the poem, Defoe defends his ridicule:

> I only infer that an Englishman, of all men, ought not to despise foreigners as such, and I think the inference is just, since what they are to-day, we were yesterday, and to-morrow they will be like us. If foreigners misbehave in their several stations and employments, I have nothing to do with that; the laws are open to punish them equally with natives, and let them have no favour (Defoe "1703 Preface").

This intolerance for "foreigners" that Defoe is criticizing sustains the basis for Benedict Anderson's idea that "dreams of eternal contamination" are built into racism, as well as that which Paul Gilroy sees in English national identity: the fear that the entry of foreigners would compromise national values, and undermine the comradeship of the social imagination. In *British Civilization*, an extensive study of British culture and history, John Oakland notes that the national identity "has largely been identified with the stability and distinctiveness of centralized state institutions, as well as focusing on national myths" (Oakland 58). This fundamental adherence to national myths, unifying histories, and belief in the "stability and distinctiveness" of English state institutions comprise the "imagined" political cohesion and shared consciousness in English national identity. Any compromises that immigrants bring, therefore, to this "national myth" or belief in the national stability is treated with fear and consternation among the citizens.

The experience of migrancy, in the English context, tends to constitute an encounter with these fears, and continues to navigate the oppositions and obstacles that stem from these fears. On the other hand, in addition, migrants often struggle to conform to the customs and norms of English character (much like we saw in the U.S. migrant literature). Often, though, the difficulty of internalizing the values set by English civil society while, at the same time, keeping or dispensing with one's home national values presents the conflicts throughout migrancy and migrant literature; and they are not only the difficulties in speaking the language and carrying out the characteristics of English life, but also the struggle to ally with the history, myths, memories, and political values of English national identity.

When it comes to the ethical consideration of social society toward migrancy is often determined by these standards of customs, norms, and English character or essence. Moreover, migrants in this context often experience split in their sense of "self," their loyalties, and sense of belonging; often the characters we discover ask questions about whom they identify with, whose myths they belong to and to whose history they subscribe. With the idea of an imagined community, there is always a difficulty of bringing oneself into the imagined myths, narratives, and memories of the English nation, while at the same time, retaining one's imagined comradeship with his or her homeland. As Salman Rushdie says, in *Imaginary Homelands,* migrant authors and writers in exile are "haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (10). But, says Rushdie, this urge always comes with the knowledge that they will "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (10). It is this urge to "look back" and create "imaginary homelands," with new meanings and stories. The migrant preserves the memory of his imaginary homeland, since the "past" is, as Rushdie says, "a country from which we all emigrated," and its loss "is part of our common humanity". Yet, the "writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form" (Rushdie 12).

Even as generations succeed those in exile or migration, the sense of a lost past and the need to secure its imagined presence constitutes a fragmented sense of self. In the case of the two novels in this analysis, *Almost English* and *White Teeth*, the 'imaginary homeland' is actually *home*, and the new country is actually not new at all, but rather the society the characters have always known. So, the characters' ethical responsibility to retain the past, and to preserve the myths of home are complicated as generations develop, as the sense of a lost past is less urgent. As we will see, first with *Almost English* and*,* later, with *White Teeth*, the characters are tasked with deciding whose past, nation, and identity they belong to, and which space of belonging presents a mutual ethical exchange.

II.

Almost English: Homegrown Foreignness and Civilization

In an interview where she discusses *Almost English*, a novel which illustrates Marina Farkas's and her family of Hungarian immigrants' difficult life in West London, Charlotte Mendelson describes her depiction of culture and migrancy within the novel:

> There is thankfully more and more multi-ethnic fiction coming up out of Britain but I don't think there's very much fiction about people who are like Marina and her family... Marina's not that foreign but she's a bit foreign. And there's an awful lot of people in England with grandparents who are immigrants who look like they could be Anglo-Saxon but actually they don't feel like that at all. (Mendelson "Invisible Alien").

This statement presents us with the ambiguous and unique place that the characters in this novel have, and enables one viewpoint into the meaning of the book's title, *Almost English.* The novel sheds light on Marina's experience as a 16-year-old growing up in a household of foreign relatives, with foreign customs, language, and cuisine. At enormous financial sacrifice, Marina's family sends her to Combe Abbey, to a public boarding school, in hopes of preparing her for the chance to become a scientist at Cambridge. Among her classmates, Marina hardly fits in with the high-pressure standards of appearance and aristocratic mannerisms. She reflects in the beginning of the novel: “Combe is not her family’s salvation but their nemesis, she can see that now. Everyone there is so healthy. Everyone at home is weak and flimsy, and growing more so, while she is away from them. Perhaps without homesickness, she would have felt less oppressed by responsibility” (Mendelson 26). The hostility and persecution toward Marina and, at the same time, her feelings of alienation are among the many struggles that are built into her existence; they arise not just from her half-Hungarian heritage, but in her ‘almost English’ appearance and mannerisms. The conflicts for in her trial to assimilate among her peers and reconcile her cultural identity.

Part of the requirement of fitting into English society is the need to exist among ‘civilized’ people, and carrying out acceptable normative behavior that her classmates (and society as a whole) have established for her. Dreaming of the “sophistication” of going to boarding school (Mendelson 44), and then taking on “a new posh accent” (75), throwing out “all her toiletries, her London clothes”--all so that she can “start again” a new life at Combe (161), Marina takes active and concerted effort to distance herself from her home in Westminster Court. Marina reflects to herself: “And, unbeknownst to anyone at Combe, she lives with old people in a little bit of darkest Hungary, like a maiden in a fairy story” (17). Yet, as she attends Combe, among the sophistication of her classmates, it occurs to Marina that “[t]hese things are too shameful to be spoken of” and she “keeps them in her rotten heart” (17). She is desperate to hide her life at home which, she fears, would be a source of ridicule and persecution from her classmates.

As the novel progresses, we see her desperation to be accepted in English society and among her peers: “Dear Lord, she thinks, please let me be adequate. Let my baseness be concealed” (Mendelson 96). Marina becomes romantically involved with Guy Viney, a classmate in the year below her, whose family status and class present a dialectic contrast to her immigrant family and home life in Westminster Court. Invited to join Guy at his family’s countryside home in West Knoyle, Marina reflects that their home is “[s]o comfortingly old-fashioned, so cheerfully Philistine” (126). She, then, gives a detailed description of her impression of the room “at the heart of the house":

> What does it matter if there are generations of dog fur in the corners and moths deep in the velvet curtains; if the wiring, with one further mouse nibble, will plunge the house into darkness, or flames?...The parquet is coming up in the corners, and the window frames are quite obviously plugged with newspaper; if you slept in here alone you would wake up with chilblains, at best. This room says: you see, we are too grand to care (126).

Using an almost Flaubertian description that points out mundane elements within supposed beauty, Marina's rumination suggests that this room is not, in fact, very extravagant, yet it is still a stark contrast to the small Westminster flat where she currently resides. This room does not actually appear to be full of as much class and sophistication; but, the presence of the Viney family and their high-class status leads her to think: "The gulf between us...is unbridgeable" (149). Marina sees the foreignness of her home and her surroundings to be another world entirely compared to the truly English, civilized life of the Vineys.

The notion of 'civilized' and 'civilization' is recurrent throughout the novel, and mostly arises in Marina's encounters with Alexander Viney, Guy's father and renowned television historian. Running into him at Combe Abbey, he asks her if she is a "civilizing influence" on his "oaf of a son" (Mendelson 177), and later tells her that she "can't really be civilized and well-rounded, without knowing history" (222). After meeting Alexander Viney and his family, Marina insists: "I want to be civilized, of course I do. God, I think about it all the time, you know, books and things" (180). Marina fears that, if she lacks the refinement of being civilized and sophisticated, the Vineys would not accept her as a worthy companion for their son, Guy, and that her classmates would not recognize her as someone who deserves to be among them. Her heritage and humble living situation otherwise make her feel "base" 208) and "vulgar" (248), compared to the refined, sophisticated, "civilized" life that she sees in Guy's family.

This idea of "civilization" has a long history in social and cultural theory. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud says that "the word 'civilization' describes the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes--namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations" (26). Furthermore, says Freud, "no feature...seems better to characterize civilization than its esteem and encouragement of man's higher mental achievements--his intellectual, scientific and artistic achievements--and the leading role that it assigns to the ideas in human life" (31). For Freud, it is through social approval and the standards that a community agrees upon that produce the limits and boundaries of "civilization". "Civilization," therefore, according to Freud, "has to use its utmost efforts in order to set limits to man's aggressive instincts and to hold the manifestations of them in check" (49). To be considered 'civilized', according to Freud, means to behave according to the normative, socially-conditioned standards of humanity--distinguishable standards of human rationality, intellect, and self-restraint, as distinct from the "brute" behavior of animals. These standards are manufactured in order to demarcate the boundaries between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable,' 'normal' and 'abnormal,' 'mad' or 'civilized' behavior. As Foucault states in *Madness and Civilization*, "[c]ivilization, in a general way, constitutes a milieu favorable to the development of madness" (217). Subversions of these standards are treated with disdain and, often, incarceration or treatment in order to sustain the borders of 'civilization'; discursive practices, therefore, codify and confine 'unreason' and 'madness,' lest they compromise the structures that define reason and sanity.

This view of civilization is a vestige of Enlightenment-era thinking with regard to humanity's unique rational capacities and the hierarchies of Being that separate man from animal. We should be familiar with this tendency from previous sections, and with several ideas outlined in the introduction. For, as we learned from reading Hegel and Kant, the essentializing signifiers of Being that have historically shaped the legal and political systems of society often marginalize subjects whose existence are outside of the recognized system of identity. And, in order for an ethical system to reach an all-inclusive breadth, it requires the precondition of mutually recognizing one another's claim to self-realization and autonomy. Marina and her family's struggle to be civilized is the ‘struggle for recognition’ that Honneth theorizes. By acting out civilized behavior, emulating the customs and language of the Vineys, for example, Marina can be worthy of their attention and favor. Moreover, Alexander Viney’s persistence in encouraging Marina to study history, rather than her original course of study in science, indoctrinates her into sharing his English aristocratic values--values that regard history, in Kant’s (and Hegel’s) sense, as a teleology of universal social progress. Attentiveness to English national myths and history enables Marina to conform to the ideals of Englishness, and distance herself from the foreignness of her home life and immigrant family. As Marina sees it, these behavioral protocols are the only ones that will grant her acceptance among her peers at school, and win the favor of the Vineys.

The Dialectic of Barbarism and the Farkas’s Almost English Speech

This discussion of civilization gestures us toward Walter Benjamin’s famous dictum: “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (Benjamin “On the Concept of History”). Traditionally, the use of ‘barbarism’ embodies the dialectic counter-part to ‘civilization,’ and designates its always-present antithesis. As Brett Neilson says, “in its most general sense, the word [‘barbarism’] signifies slavery, class exploitation or any other brutal system of social domination. Benjamin associates it with the ‘horror’ felt in contemplating ‘cultural treasures’ that ‘owe their existence’ not only to ‘great minds and talents’ but to the ‘anonymous toil of their contemporaries” (Neilson 79). As a moment in Kant’s trajectory of a ‘universal history,’ barbarism “occupies the middle position in the temporal-historical sequence: primitivism, barbarism, civilization,” and a “barbarous society has moved beyond the hunting and gathering economy of primitivism but has not yet developed the institutions of civil society (an elected government, a market economy, an independent judiciary, etc.)” (Neilson 79). This ‘temporal-historical sequence’ constitutes the teleological view of social progress that we encountered in the previous section--seeing ‘the institutions of civil society’ as the *telos* or aim of social history. If we return to Anderson's imagined communities, Neilson notes that this imagined community "derives its sense of uniqueness from its relations with other communal groups, which, as in the case of imperialism, can be complicitous as well as hierarchical" (Neilson 84). The "concept of barbarism" leads us to consider why relations of cultural difference end up as "relations of cultural dominance" (Neilson 84). That is, understanding how 'barbarism' exists within modernity and throughout history allows us to realize the dialectic asymmetry that exists as between dominant and subjugated subjects.

The "initial sense" of the word barbarism "derives from the ancient Greek βαρβαρος meaning foreign, or literally 'stuttering'" --a name "given by the Greeks to express the sound of foreign languages" (Neilson 83). Indeed, under modernity, as Neilson suggests, "barbarism...becomes a global phenomenon, describing the mutual misunderstandings and hierarchical relations that structure the disjunctive connections between communities" (Neilson 85). This idea brings us back to the notion of asymmetrical recognition. We will remember from discussing Marx, for example, the disproportionate relationship between labor and capital, whereby the 'value' of the workers' collective humanity is unrecognizable, in a system that only recognizes the exchangeable (or, in other words, *translatable)* value of commodities and capital. The dominance, therefore, of capital (and capital owners) in relation to labor is a constant asymmetry, given the structures underlying the political economy. In the case of barbarism, the same pattern of subjugation exists. A social or cultural realm that registers as *incomprehensible* or *foreign* is understood as 'barbaric,' rather than 'civilized,' enabling civil society to continue its dominance over otherwise underrepresented groups.

But, this issue of foreignness and foreign languages operates heavily in migrant literature and, indeed, migrant experience more generally. For Marina's Hungarian relatives, their foreign language reinforces their 'uncivilized' and thoroughly un-English position. Existing outside of the unifying English language that shares a singular history, the Farkas's, therefore, do not constitute part of England's 'imagined story'. However, the function of Hungarian language in this text is a unique one, and undermines what we would generally assume about the presence of a foreign language. Parts of the narrative show the family's Hungarian language roots and Mendelson deliberately leaves them untranslated in the text itself (although she provides readers with a translating dictionary in the back of the book). Yet, when these phrases and words occur throughout the text, they are not always, as we would expect, incomprehensible and *unfamiliar.* Occasionally, the foreign phrases are characterized as nonsensical gibberish: "Roszi switches into Hungarian: ongy-bongy, ongy-bongy" (Mendelson 149). But for most of the text, the Hungarian language is treated as a comforting and familiar presence, as a reminder of home. Moreover, for the reader, even though the language is foreign, Hungarian is familiarizing and the reader grows more accustomed to how it looks and sounds, making the language more recognizable to us, and allowing us to feel more akin to its presence. Both Marina and her mother do *not* speak Hungarian--an inability that their relatives treat "like a small physiological malformation"(Mendelson 75). But, when Marina is in Combe, she reflects: "[S]he misses her Hungarians;...she thinks certain words in their accent, for comfort;...in term time she so longs for their voices that her heart leaps when she hears a foreigner on the streets of Combe, and is always disappointed" (133). Marina yearns for the strangely familiar, or 'uncanny,' feeling that comes with the sound of her foreign relatives; and it is the feeling that brings her back to her home where she feels most welcome.

Another linguistic manoeuvre that Mendelson employs throughout is not just the use of Hungarian, but her artful use of Hungarian accents. These moments where the Farkases are speaking English, but doing so with strong accents and muddled pronunciation reinforces another meaning to the book's title: bringing in *almost* English speech patterns, these phrases look and sound similar to English, but are *not quite* English. Phrases like '*Dar*-link' for 'darling,' *Nair*-vairmind' for 'nevermind,' and '*Donnt*-be-fanee*,'* for 'don't be funny.' Yet, the effect of this narrative strategy is quite the opposite of being unrecognizable. Rather, as Laura (Marina's mother) thinks in the beginning of the novel, the sound of the word '*Von*-darefool' (for 'wonderful') resonates as a "rare comprehensible word in an opaque wall of conversation" (Mendelson 9). These moments give readers a singular experience of *recognizing* something that would otherwise be *unrecognizable* in a place where one would not be used to this kind of accent. But, in this text, the presence of the Farkases and their accents are, if anything, the *most* recognizable and clear parts of the text. When they speak, the reader is most oriented, knowing exactly who is speaking and where we are in terms of setting. The Farkases constituting the 'barbaric' (in the original sense of the 'stuttering' or incomprehensible) foreign counter-part to Englishness and the civilized English language, made more ironic by the fact that they are easily recognizable characters. Reading these parts in the context of the book's title, *Almost English*, we could suggest that the 'almost English' lingo that the Farkases speak holds the foremost *narrative* position, even while their immigrant status leaves them, otherwise, in the margins of society. This ability to render the Farkases recognizable in this sense constitutes one of the unique values of literary narrative. The representations of an otherwise disenfranchised group can be granted a prominent place, at the foreground of the narrative, while the other characters blend into a "crowd of Others" (Critchley 17). These utterances *interrupt* the standardized, lawlike structure and grammar that governs the English language, compromising the homologous unity of the language. Indeed, the Farkases not only interrupt the narrative and structure, but the 'imagined story' of England, speaking their voices amid the "opaque wall of conversation" that permeates daily life.

Belonging to a Foreign Home: Marina's Hungarians

The tagline for *Almost English*, displayed on the book's cover, is "Home is a foreign place: they do things differently there." This is a reference to the opening lines of L.P. Hartley's novel, *The Go-Between*: "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there" (quoted in Rushdie 9). Salman Rushdie "invert[s] this idea," referring to an old photograph in his room: "[I]t reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (Rushdie 9). In the tagline for *Almost English*, though, the meaning of "home" and "foreign place" are entangled in both Rushdie's and Hartley's sense; and, indeed, much of the novel itself relies upon this interplay between "past," "present," "home," and "foreign." For Marina her home in Westminster Court is her present home; but, her home *is* a foreign country, composed of her foreign relatives whose language she does not speak and whose customs are different from the England in which she was born. It is a space where permeable walls separate the values of English life from those of the Farkases--their cuisine, their language, and their traditions; while these walls also mark the nexus at which the two cultures meet and interpenetrate.

Furthermore, the 'past' that is foreign is also *present* in Marina's home--a family past from which she descends, but which is still foreign to her. She reflects on how little she knew of her own family's past:

> No one tells her anything about her family; it's ridiculous how little she knows. She can't even remember the name of Rozsi's town, so she can't look it up and, if you ask the littlest thing about where they came from, their father's factory or whatever it was, bee farm, let alone mention their parents or the other sisters, they start crying instantly, like turning on a tap (Mendelson 287).

Marina later finds out that her family's past has been punctuated by betrayal and loss--not only casting a dark shadow over their historic hindsight, but re-contextualizing their present situation of poverty and marginality. Moreover, her family's hesitation to allow Marina to associate with the Vineys is clarified when we realize that Alexander Viney and his father are partially to blame for the Farkases loss. Due to a "stolen estate" and "a tangle of disloyalty half a century ago, among cornfields and silver birches none of them will ever see" (Mendelson 360), the Farkases lost an expected fortune that was given over to the Viney family. For Marina, therefore, the *past* of her family, was much a foreign place, and her home was a monument to a past deliberately forgotten; yet, once this painful history was revealed, the past and her home became part of her present, and the home to which she belonged and her understanding of where she stands in her ethical responsibility are re-oriented; her sense of belonging has dramatically shifted.

After her mother explains the events of the past that resulted in her family's lost business, Marina reflects: "I just can't believe it. They insulted my family" (Mendelson 361). For Marina, this revelation re-informs not only her loyalties and ethical responsibilities, but also her sense of self. Furthermore, we can reformulate some more questions in the ethics of belonging: with whose actions, history, and memories does Marina associate? To whom does she owe her ethical considerations? With whom *ought* she feel a 'horizontal comradeship,' and which imagined community is she incorporated into? The aristocratic life and sophistication of the Vineys may be attractive at first. But, after learning that Alexander Viney was complicit in her family's downfall, suddenly their success and prosperity appear less respectable. Upon the book's conclusion, Marina sees "now that what happened with Mr Viney...has intensified the contamination: the danger to her family, the betrayal" (370). The reverence for his family's success, and the admiration for his fame are dissolved, and Marina decides with whom she truly associates, trusts, and belongs. Her home may be foreign, and their past may exist in another country; but they are still a part of her, her history, and her ethical imaginary. They are, also, very much *hers* or, as she says, "her Hungarians" (Mendelson 133); she feels an amiable connection to them, but feels an ownership not only over their actions, but a responsibility to their dignity and well-being. She belongs, therefore, in more than one place: "England, which the Farkases so love" (Mendelson 263), and to her home, the "foreign place" where they "do things differently". Both places have equal right to her consideration and responsibility. But, what Marina teaches us, is that it is more than being part of an 'imagined community' and shared history that demands our care and responsibility.

The ethical horizon expands wider depending on whose singularity and need for self-realization one recognizes; and it need not be confined to birthplace, exchange, representation-by-portrait, or language. It should be a dialogic process of engaging with the private lives and existence of those whom we may not otherwise notice. Furthermore, Marina embodies a character who is confronted with the task of self-determining and deliberating over her own loyalties and responsibilities; now, in contrast to the previous section, we place the emphasis on the individual subject, rather than the discourse as a whole. As we will see with *White Teeth*, the conflicts that exist at the individual level are deeply complicated, and force several questions with respect to how characters direct their considerations and ethical values.

III.

White Teeth: Multicultural London

Since its publication in 2000, the critical literature on Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* has been full of references to the multicultural, multi-ethnic hybridity that inhabits the novel. Entering the lives of three families--the Joneses, the Iqbals, and the Chalfens--the narrative emphasizes the ways in which different cultural, ideological, and religious fundamentalisms come into contact (and conflict) throughout fifty years of living together in London. As one character, Marcus Chalfen, reflects, the world he exists in is a "great ocean of idiots, conspiracists, religious lunatics, presumptuous novelists, animal-rights activists, students of politics, and all other breeds of fundamentalists" (Smith 418). At the same time, the nature of 'roots' or 'rootedness' plays a large role in re-negotiating characters' identities throughout the novel. Fulfilling the legacy of one's family, while ensuring that history and identity are represented in an ecumenical fashion inform many of the characters' *ethos* and adherence to cultural beliefs. Deciding how to educate the next generation and preventing assaults against one's foundational beliefs are aspects compromised throughout several decades, as intergenerational, cultural, and normative ideals begin to confront one another. As Nick Bentley suggests, *White Teeth* is a novel that "emphasizes and addresses the multicultural make-up of late-twentieth/early twenty-first century England," and explores the "complex interaction between a range of different ethnicities that make up contemporary British life and in doing so show differing conceptions of and attitudes towards both Englishness and multiculturalism" (Bentley 495). It presents, therefore, a portrait of England through the second half of the 20th century, the multicultural and heterogeneous landscape that constitutes London society.

Moreover, the narrative offers not just different ethnicities and identities, but the different *histories* that attend them; and, as Laura Moss points out, "beyond national history is the personal struggle with history felt by the characters" (Moss 11). These views on personal history present a multifocal narrative vision, giving us characters who are themselves fragmented and dislocated. In an interview Smith says that the "people in *White Teeth* are immigrants....who felt separated or cut in two, who had moved from one country to another, who had that sense of leading two lives" (Smith *PBS.org*).[4] The suggestion here is the feeling in which one's life exists in more than one place, with more than one identity and more than one history. A character, like Samad Iqbal, leads "two lives" in the sense that he moved to England from Bangladesh, but "somewhere in the world there is this other Samad who still lives in Bangladesh and is very good and religious and proper" (Smith *PBS.org*). Samad, therefore, not only questions which history and identity he belongs to, but version of his cultural identity does he impart on his children; how does he write their history, and how does he maintain his sense of self through the education of his children?

As we saw in *Almost English*, this novel gives us a similar view of migrancy and its experience felt across generations. *White Teeth* presents us Samad and Alsana Iqbal, a couple who, after a traditional arranged marriage in Bangladesh, moved to London after World War II. As immigrants, they struggle to assimilate within a new nation following the trauma of war, while trying to reconcile conflicting histories and identities within a different national space. Clara Bowden, too, who marries Archie Jones, departs from her Jamaican roots and overbearing mother's Jehovah's Witness teachings, and starts to try to live comfortably within a new English society. Yet, the novel also follows the residual consequences toward ensuing generations; Irie, the daughter of Archie and Clara; Millat and Magid, the sons of Samad and Alsana. As Molly Thompson suggests, we are given "a story of intergenerational tensions and cultural conflicts within and between its protagonists. Indeed, the text suggests that, as a result of belonging to different generations and holding a diversity of cultural beliefs, the possibility of feeling at 'home' in this multicultural world is unlikely" (quoted in Watts 852). The complicated myriad of characters and the multiplicity of migrant experience resonates throughout several decades, presenting a variety of conflicts and the different methods characters undertake in dealing with uncertainty. The following sections will analyze different characters, particularly emphasizing the Samad and the Iqbal family who dwell in the interstices of a transnational existence, and how they handle their responsibilities to family, identity, and history. I will then speak broadly about how intergenerational tensions play a significant role in a multicultural landscape, both for the immigrant families, and those who are natives; the coexistence of different kinds of tensions and complications will create a multiplicity of perspectives on how several contexts and positions of belonging create an uncertainty within one's ethical responsibilities--are they toward one's self, one's family, or one's nation?

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[4] This is from an interview with PBS's *Masterpiece Theatre,* and they do not specify an author.

Samad Iqbal: Responsibility to a Family Legacy

Moving to East London from Bangladesh, and having served in the British Army during World War II, Samad Iqbal now leads what he feels to be an unfulfilling life as a waiter. He spends most nights taking abuse and condescension from co-workers; "never seeing Alsana; never seeing the sun; clutching fifteen pence and then releasing it" (Smith 58). For Samad, his need to defend his own dignity and preserve the honor of his family creates "the urge, the need, to speak to every man, and, like the Ancient Mariner, explain constantly, constantly wanting to reassert something, anything" (58). When Samad and Archie fight in World War II in the "Buggered Battalion" (90), Samad admits to Archie that "nothing was closer, or meant more to him than his blood" (98)--both in the sense of his family's past and legacy, and the future generation that carries on his values. Early on, we are told "there was no stronger evocation of the blood that ran through him, and the ground which that blood had stained over the centuries, than the story of his great-grandfather" (99). For the many years that follow, Samad devotes his energy to telling and re-telling "the much neglected, 100-year-old, mildewed yarn" of Mangal Pande (99), who is reputed to be "the drunken fool" who started the “Great Indian Mutiny of 1857” (254); considered to be a “traitor” and “coward” in England (251), but in India is regarded as “as a freedom fighter against British rule” (D’Souza “Mangal Pandey”). He maintains this strident ambition to save Pande’s reputation since, as he says, “petty English academics” try to “discredit him, because they cannot bear to give an Indian his due” (99). But, says Samad, “he was a hero,” and every act that Samad undertook during the war and thereafter “has been in the shadow of his example” (99). This aspect of Samad’s character presents a condition of his immigrant status, fulfilling a need to construct a past and personal history that saves his family legacy and reputation.

Though these events are subject to discrediting by “petty English academics” and dispute within the national history, Samad nevertheless passionately defends them; he passionately does so regardless of whether the “actual...events may have been very different” (Seyhan 72). Azade Seyhan notes that transnational authors use “narrative and cultural coordinates to offer another version of their lands’ history, a version free of official doctrine and rhetoric” (Seyhan 20). In Samad’s case, his goal is to revive “heroes” that he believes are unfairly represented (and underrepresented) in the English historical narrative. Samad insists on this version of the story, though, not based on its veracity, but based on how well it evokes “the blood that ran through him, and the ground which that blood had stained over the centuries” (Smith 99). Seyhan notes that “the memory and image of nation continue to inhabit the exilic imagination” (Seyhan 125). Yet, Samad’s memory exists in “two places,” two nations; it associates him with the “people of Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, formerly India, formerly Bengal” (Smith 211); and also dwells in British war history. As Archie tells him, “‘They don’t speak well about Indians back home; they certainly wouldn’t like it if you said an Indian was a hero...everybody would look at you a bit funny” (99-100). Samad reacts to Archie, urging him to resist judgment when hearing his peers speak of India:

> Please. Do me this one, great favour, Jones. If you ever hear anyone, when you are back home--if you, if we, get back to our respective homes-- if you ever hear anyone speak of the East,...hold your

> judgment. If you are told 'they are all this' or 'they do this' or 'their opinions are these', withhold all judgment until facts are upon you. Because that land they call 'India' goes by a thousand names and is populated by millions, and if you think you have found two men amongst that multitude who are the same, you are mistaken. It is merely a trick of the mooonlight (100).

For Samad, his aim is to counteract the narrow views about Bangladesh, India, and the "East," more generally, resisting the imposed image and story of the East. From Said we know that that this imposed image is a manifestation of a "collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism" (Said 23)--a discourse that "not only creates but also maintains; it is...a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world" (Said 12). Samad, in a sense, is critiquing this tendency that discourse has to manufacture a definitive, or 'single story' (as Adichie would say), and works against this story for the sake of his self-image, family, national history, and personal memory.

Samad's demand to Archie as well as his internal obligation to safeguard his great-grandfather's legacy foreshadow later moments in the novel when this topic becomes the subject of ridicule and laughter. When Archie and Samad go to O'Connell's, the local pub where they have their ritualistic debates and discussions, Mickey, the "chef, waiter, and proprietor" (Smith 184), is hesitant to hang a picture of Mangal Pande. Samad pleads with him, noting that he would "consider it a great favor" (247) as a loyal customer to O'Connell's for fifteen years: "A very long time in any man's estimation" (249). What follows is a long argument among the customers at O'Connell's about Mangal Pande, and, what is revealed through this argument are the disparate versions of history that different individuals endorse. Moreover, we see which versions of history are inscribed into the social imaginary, and how they contrast the version which Samad emphatically defends.

It is important to note that we should *not* necessarily assume that every memory or alternate history--whether it is personal, family, national, or cultural--is erroneous or false; sometimes, rather, Samad is correct in asserting that certain actors in historic events are discredited, "because they cannot bear to give an Indian his due" (Smith 99). Even for Mangal Pande's story, we need not be *so* comfortable that this version of history is necessarily wrong. Nevertheless, the point of which we ought to be aware and, indeed, critical is the tendency within discourse and other institutions to deliberately erase memories for the sake of preserving a unifying, moral and political image. Institutions often exclude other memories (or memories of the Other) from the represented narrative, independent of whether or not these multiple stories are true or incompatible. Which memories a community decides to value and which ones they do not are matters for our concern, along with the ethical system that determines which events belong to the social (or national) imagination.

Looking into the picture of his great-grandfather that is eventually hung on the wall in O'Connell's, Samad reflects: "They had been through this battle many times, Samad and Pande, the battle over the latter's reputation" (250). Samad knows that he is among the minority who see his great-grandfather as "an unrecognized hero," as opposed to the majority that weighs in higher toward "[a] palaver over nuffin'" (250). Every time the authorized and more popular version of the events is repeated, Samad is sent into "spasms of fury," because, to Samad, when a "man has nothing but his blood to commend him, each drop of it matters, matters terribly; it must be jealously defended" (255). Samad's willful and vehement denial of the events (of which we are given an 'authorized' account of) stems from his feelings of responsibility toward his family's history; he senses that he owes it to his family and personal identity to maintain his position regarding Mangal Pande, notwithstanding the widely-held and likely belief that Pande, "half drunk with bhang and wholly drunk with religious fanaticism" (254), started a "mutiny" and "caused unnecessary casualties. English *and* Indian" (257). The version of events that best appeals to his family legacy, history, and "blood" is the one that demonstrates the "shadow" of his great-grandfather's heroic success, not the memory of his failures. Samad, therefore, discards these unsavory stories and deliberately denies reality for the sake of his family. He feels a close tie with Mangal Pande and, therefore, an ethical ownership over his reputation.

These moments of conflict, defense, and debate indicate a split in Samad's identity, where he, as Smith says, has the sense of "leading two lives" (Smith *PBS.org*) and living in two places at once. He lives in London and exists among English friends, but the roots his family's past belong in Bangladesh. Moreover, attached to these "two lives" are two separate and, often, contradictory memories and historical accounts. Samad and others who embody a migration, exilic, or transnational consciousness live with the confrontation between disparate historical discourses; the "homeland" and the imagination of that homeland's past that comes into contact with the present nation's alternative or counter-memory. One of the ethical compromises that, in turn, arises from this interaction is the consideration over which version of history is most suitable to the community's shared identity. Azade Seyhan explicates this notion in terms of authorized historical narratives:

> Memory is a phenomenon of conceptual border zones...What is remembered and forgotten in the larger social world and the public sphere in which the individual dwells is controlled by public, political, and educational institutions. The study of history implies a moral dictate. History serves as an exemplum that urges us to learn from the achievements and mistakes of the past. History as a form of public and institutional memory not so much speaks for the past but rather presses the present into the service of an officially sanctioned version of the past. (Seyhan 31).

Seyhan makes this statement in the context of authorized and legitimized versions of national or global history. Educational institutions "officially sanction" views of the past that comply with or support the imagined image of the nation, and its attending ideological aims. Presenting a favorable image of a nation--especially its role in war--helps to bolster and affirm that nation's power as well as its moral position.

This idea of an authorized history can be expanded to relate to a family's history and its generational legacy. The stories passed on from each generation to the next preserve and reproduce an image of the family's history that conditions their moral image; they give a shared story of how the members of a given family identify with one another, offering a common history that is confirmed and upheld through the generations. Furthermore, much like national history, a family history is not only an archive of the past that serves as an "exemplum" urging us to learn from "the achievements and mistakes of the past," but it also enacts a pedagogical function of securing values that have carried through several generations--pieties, religious doctrines, and sacred traditions with which a family affiliates and identifies. For Samad, the idealization that he maintains for his great-grandfather and the vehement defense against his honor are values that are embedded in his identity; for, as he says, a "man has nothing but his blood to commend him, each drop of it matters, matters terribly; it must be jealously defended" (Smith 255). The responsibility he has toward his family is built upon understanding the necessity of his great-grandfather's, his own, and his family's dignity. Part of his ethical command is to prevent any assaults against that dignity and strengthen its image, even if they are susceptible to erasure when we relocate our attention to a different national or cultural space.

Educating Youth and Filial Piety

Samad reinforces his ambition to protect the dignity of his heritage when he forces his son Magid (in what amounts basically to a kidnapping) to leave for Bangladesh to train him in Muslim values and create for Magid "deep roots on shore, deep roots that no storm or gale could displace" (Smith 193). "Roots," Samad reflects, "were what saved, the ropes one throws out to rescue drowning men, to Save Their Souls" (193). Finding himself given over to the temptation of an affair with his children's music teacher, Poppy Burt-Jones, Samad suddenly feels compelled to establish "roots" since, "these were good, these were untainted principles" (193). Feeling as though he had gone astray from his Muslim principles, Samad aims to protect his son from carrying out the same transgressions.

Samad feels as though his family's migration to London is partially to blame, since, without his "roots" intact, he was "pulled down to the depths by a siren named Poppy Burt-Jones" (Smith 193). He reflects upon sending Magid away, and justifies it on the basis of what he observes among the English social life--especially the behavior he encounters at the restaurant:

> By Allah, how thankful he is (yes, madam, one moment, madam), how gladdened by the thought that Magid, Magid at least, will, in a matter of four hours, be flying east from this place and its demands, its constant cravings, this place where there exists neither patience nor pity, where the people want what they want now, right now (We've been waiting twenty minutes for the vegetables), expecting their lovers, their children, their friends and even their gods to arrive at little cost and in little time, just as table ten expect their tandoori prawns... (207).

In this reflection, Samad clearly he sees his restaurant as an extension of social decorum permeating London (and the Western world, more generally)--a place where people have "constant cravings," and where "there exists neither patience nor pity, where the people want what they want *now*" (207). Samad is making this commentary on society, but is partially betraying his own tendencies and appetites that led him into an extra-marital affair; he experiences shame and, perhaps, self-loathing for being corrupted by "people who would exchange all faith for sex and all sex for power, who would exchange fear of God for self-pride, knowledge for irony" (207). Samad is ashamed of having grown so accustomed to this "place and its demands," and decides that his best salvation is to ensure that the next generation does not make the same mistakes. This choice demonstrates Samad's self-appointed liability to his past and his need to uphold the principles that derive from his Muslim roots. He feels that his sense of self and belonging are tethered to his past and his "blood," and feels that his ethical responsibility is to sustain the traditions with which he associates, against those of his present nation. As Seyhan says, the immigrant parent's "cultural habits are ingrained and allow for no recasting" (Seyhan 74). But, for Samad, since his cultural habits *were* compromised, the burden of "refashioning cultural practices to avoid embarrassment and misjudgment falls on the children" (Seyhan 74). For Samad, however, it is not just to avoid embarrassment and misjudgment, but, rather, for the sake of his own damaged ego and self-image.

This initiative backfires, though, when, upon his return to London eight years later, Magid, older and more educated, arrives, to his father's dismay, "with his bow-ties and his Adam Smith and his E.M. bloody Forster and his atheism!" (Smith 424), rather than having immersed himself in Muslim and Bangladeshi traditions. Magid's development during his time in Bangladesh is not a reflection of filial piety and responsibility, but rather a reflection of who he always *felt* he *belonged* to, ever since he was a teenager. We learn early in the novel Magid suffered from a "far deeper malaise":

> Magid really wanted to be in some other family. He wanted to own cats and not cockroaches, he wanted his mother to make the music of the cello, not the sound of the sewing machine; he wanted to have a trellis of flowers growing up on one side of the house instead of the ever growing pile of other people's rubbish; he wanted a piano in the hallway in place of the broken floor of cousin Kurshed's car; he wanted to go on biking holidays to France, not day-trips to Blackpool to visit... (151).

Since his childhood, Magid has felt a dissatisfaction toward his present state, partly due, as Z. Ezra Mirze says, "to his racial difference" and to his "class," and that "[b]oth of these components lead him away from the life he wants to lead (Mirze 194). He, embodies, moreover an historically familiar vision of adolescence and the characteristic opposition to older generations. It is a characterization of Magid that is consistent with a general vision of youth as it exists in modernity and echoes themes that have occurred in literary texts for nearly a century.[5] Magid's self-realization in his later years indicates a connection to and association with English social values, rather than those found in Bangladesh, despite his heritage and family background. Samad furiously shouts his disappointment when he hears of Magid's enthusiasm for English traditions: "'Damnit, you are a Muslim, not a wood sprite!" (Smith 152). Samad is insisting here that Magid *belongs* to his Bangladesh and Muslim roots, and that it is a betrayal to his family and their past to ally himself so deeply with English/British customs. Magid's internal connection to British culture undercuts his father's demand for filial piety and what he sees as the indispensable sanctity of family "blood".

The "Root Canals" of Second-Generation Immigrants

As second-generation immigrants, Magid and his brother Millat feel, to a similar degree, the identity crises that stem from displacement and rootlessness. Millat reflects that he "was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs;...that no one who looked like Millat, or spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat, was ever on the news unless they had recently been murdered" (Smith 234).[6] The Iqbals and others who are part of the "century of the great immigrant experiment" (326), experience the ubiquitous fear of "dissolution" and "disappearance" (327). The "tragedy of the Iqbals" is their "original trauma" of re-enacting "the dash they once made from one land to another, from one faith to another, from one brown mother country into the pale, freckled arms of an imperial sovereign" (162). The disparate ways in which characters handle these fears underscores the multiplicity of migrancy and migrant experience--sometimes clinging relentlessly to one's history, or actively detaching from it. These choices redirect the subject's ethical horizon toward different values, traditions, histories, and responsibilities. The categories of bounded existence and belonging, subsumed under culture, nation, and religion, are compromised and deterritorialized in migrancy.

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[5] The first line of his reflection alone, for example, where he states "wanted to be *in some other family*," reminds me of Ursula's reflection in D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*: "I want some other life than this" (Lawrence 248).

Millat's strategy for self-actualization opposes Magid's, as he departs in the direction of fundamentalist Islam, and joins a radical, militant group called KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation).[7] He is convinced that his fear of dissolution and disappearance are a betrayal of the country he lives in; as he says, "It's a fucking insult!...We've taken it too long in this country!" (Smith 233). He believes that there's a "spiritual war going on," and that, as a group, KEVIN need to make their "mark on this bloody country" (295). Millat forms a bond with this group, and compensates for his feelings of alienation by devoting himself to the cause of promoting Islamic fundamentalism. Unlike Magid, who feels little need to secure and preserve his Muslim upbringing, Millat feels that the threat to Islam is a threat to his identity and sense of selfhood. As a result, he overcompensates and fastens himself to a group in order to establish a feeling of belonging and connection with people who uphold similar values. Despite its militant ideological underpinnings, Millat nevertheless finds it his ethical responsibility to adhere to the principles of

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6 It is interesting to consider Millat's reflection that he is a "Paki no matter where he came from," and how it relates to Ifemelu's blog post in *Americanah* that suggests that "when you come to America, you become black." In the same light, habitual and, sometimes, derogatory classifications are a natural part of migrancy, especially when it comes to discriminating and judging on the basis of skin color and ethnicity.

7 The connection to my name is purely coincidental.

KEVIN, since they represent the identity that is closest to his own and calibrated to his heritage.

This move toward a fundamentalist and militant ideal stabilizes the feeling of belonging that is not threatened by contamination or disruption from the outside (or, in this case, from *inside* England). What this group fails to realize is that their fundamentalist *ethos* is not altogether different from the nationalist essence of England that they are trying to undo. In both cases, a universal history and absolutism of identity, values, and traditions culminate in an exclusionary system that disregards any alternative or critical viewpoint. So, the unitary and essentialist ambitions that are found within nationalism are not limited to nationalism, but are rather capable of being expressed by those who are displaced from their homeland. The restructuring of the ethical horizon now responds not only to the dictates of power and of national discourse, but extends from the subjective desires of the individual. With Millat, we see him following in step with the tendencies toward universalism that exist in English nationalism, yet deploying a similarly militant attitude to resist against it. So, the conflict and, indeed, irony in his actions present a paradoxical vision of his migrancy, where he may not be part of the nationalistic discourse, but does, nevertheless, deploy the principals and *ethos* that inform its more troubling effects.

Irie, too, the daughter of Archie and Clara Bowden, experiences a longing to reconcile the break with her past. At first, she feels infatuated with the Chalfens who were “more English than the English,” and wants to “merge with them” (Smith 328). But, later on, as she takes a break from the Chalfens--a break that was “quite therapeutic” (402)--she begins thinking of her mother’s home, Jamaica, as her “homeland”:

> No fictions, no myths, no lies, no tangled webs--this is how Irie imagined her homeland. Because homeland is one of those magical fantasy words like unicorn and soul and infinity that have now passed into the language. And the particular magic of homeland, its particular spell over Irie, was that it sounded like a beginning. The beginningest of beginnings. Like the first morning of Eden and the day after the apocalypse. A blank page (402).

This phrase evokes Rushdie’s *Imaginary Homelands*, and our understanding that the experience of displacement leaves authors with the “urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt", compelling them to "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (10). As Irie looks upon the vision of this homeland, she reflects that "*this* is where she came from. This all belonged to her, her birthright, like a pair of pearl earrings or a post office bond" (Smith 400). She establishes an ownership over this homeland, while inscribing it into a vision of herself, as part of the past from which she derives and as an integral component of her identity. The "magical spell" that this homeland has over Irie is the feeling that it conjures 'roots,' or 'root canals' that are otherwise absent in her self-image.

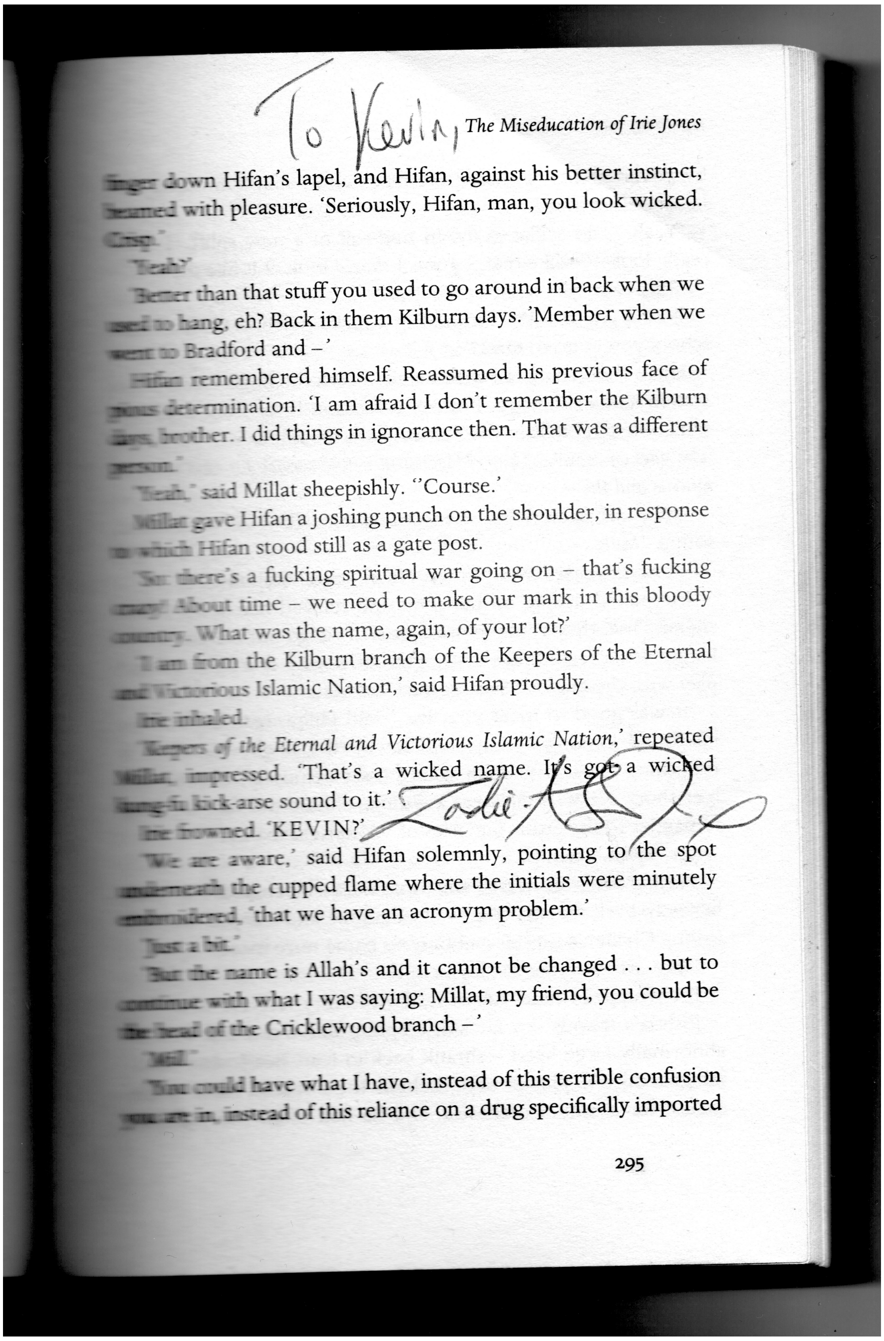
Irie's internal feelings, particularly in terms of her split, 'in-between' heritage and identity, reflect the notion of 'hybridity,' codified and introduced by Homi Bhabha. According to Bhabha, the "Third Space" of hybridity is, "figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither one nor the other*, properly alienates our cultural expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics" (Bhabha "The Commitment to Theory" 2359). In terms of her selfhood, Irie, according to Laura Moss, is "the figure of racial and cultural hybridity who best reflects the everyday nature of hybridity in the present" (Moss 13). Irie's Jamaican-English, second-generation immigrant status constitutes contact between separate places occurring within her subjective narrative. Combining Bhabha's idea of hybridity with the views (mentioned earlier) regarding the "spatialized expressions" of the "disclosures of its everyday life" (Bhabha, "DissemiNation"), we see that Irie's singular subjectivity embodies the presence of hybridity and multiculturalism in the everyday disclosures of North London. What this vision also includes, though, is the imagined "fantasy" of her homeland, and the metaphorical "poetics" of hybridity that "transfers the meaning of home and belonging," (Bhabha, "DissemiNation"), and renegotiates Irie's relation to her Jamaican "roots." Bhabha refers to this tendency among "wandering peoples" as a "mythical return," whereby the distant *Heim* or homeland is "repeated in the void" (Bhabha, "DissemiNation"); in the repeated gesture made toward the "dream" of the homeland, the imagination of the lost homeland registers as the *"unheimlich"* (or Freud's "uncanny") that occurs within the hybridized third-space.

This past, for her, is ungraspable, removed from her present, and dislocated from her selfhood. The fantasy that Irie sees as her home and her "urge to reclaim" an imaginary homeland, as Rushdie would say, reflects the *unheimlich* experience, illustrating a both strange *and* familiar "fantasy" that "sounded like a beginning. The beginningest of beginnings" (Smith 402). Her position as a "hybrid figure" reflects her in-between subject-position, as she recalls her Jamaican roots that she sees as one distant, foreign fantasy; and she, in turn, becomes an un-generalizable, non-unitary and hybridized subject, encountered as an "uncanny" figure within a homogeneous imagined community. Irie identifies herself as a "stranger in a strange land," peering into England as a "giant mirror," and, yet, seeing herself as someone "without reflection" (Smith 266). Since she does not recognize herself within this "strange land," Irie willingly, for example, endures "near-torture in a hair salon in order to straighten her Jamaican-English hair" (Moss 14), merely so she can fit in among the English, "for even just one day" (Moss 14). She is desperate to reconstruct her appearance in order to achieve an image worthy of recognition among the English, and to feel herself reflected in its imagined community, rather than being perceived as an unfamiliar stranger.

As *White Teeth* shows, though, with the continued displacement and migration of populations, generations will continue develop into multi-ethnic hybridity, culminating in a 'normalisation' (Moss 13) of hybridity. Presenting North London as this conceptual 'Third Space' of hybridity, there is the suggestion that *unheimlich* will always become integral to English culture, despite "fears of the nationalist," who is "scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation" (Smith 327). The "uncanny" encounter with distant, dreamlike pasts will inevitably dwell within the political (and metaphorical) disclosures of everyday life. Yet, moreover, Irie not only embodies and the hybrid figure, but enables the multiplicity and intermingling of ethnicity. When she conceives a child at the end of the novel, that is either Millat's or Magid's (we never learn which of them is the actual father), Irie's actions further disrupt "notions of binaries" and point "to the prevalence of racial and cultural multiplicity in the future in Britain" (Moss 13). The developing generations, starting from Irie, Millat, and Magid onward, destabilize the pre-given systems and fixed, structural confines that inform the unified national imaginary.

Magid, Millat, and Irie share a circumstance similar to Marina in *Almost English.* They are second-generation immigrants who aim to reconcile the tensions within themselves and identities. They may not be directly impacted from displacement, since all four of these characters were born and raised in London; but, the residual uncertainty and fragmentary history are present in their family's traditions, values, and language. For each of these characters, the ethical questions and judgments are not merely focused on the broad discursive power's determination of agency and mobility according to rigid standards of existence (although all of these characters experience that discrimination to some extent). Rather, for them, and even for Samad as an immigrant, the judgments lie within the self--with the individual, to determine who and what are built into the ethical imaginary, and what categories are most relevant for constructing ethical judgments. For all three of these characters, determining where they belong and whom they feel responsible for depends on their circumstances; yet this principals seems to always fall according to an internal determination of identity and association, and tends to surface as a need to reclaim a displaced past.

Moreover, in their national context, living in London, all of these characters, at one point or another, are faced with the possibility and, perhaps, the desire to "merge with" the English, and, even those who are "more English than the English" (Smith 328), joining the "sophistication" (Mendelson 44) of "civilized" (Mendelson 180) English life. The yearning to assimilate to a new environment and become accepted by the social community are certainly understandable, incentivizing characters to *perform,* speak, and dress in a manner that seems English *enough.* However, often this adaptation to a new set of normative values requires a compromise within the self, and a sacrifice to one's family and history (we see this especially with Magid, for example). In a multicultural and globalizing world, these tendencies are certainly natural and, as many anthropologists would agree, the attending generational conflict has a long history in human society. Yet, now these narratives and viewpoints open up different questions with regard to ethical responsibility and an ethics of belonging. For, when it comes to individuals, determining their loyalties and responsibilities to their nation, family, culture, religion, language, or history, the issue does *not* seem to be a matter of representation, recognition, and value (although, perhaps some might use inheritance and endowments as part of their consideration for family responsibility). Rather, it is a question of where they feel they rightfully belong, and whether they *owe* their ethical considerations to their family or nation; it is a matter of whether these are *negotiable* to their existence, and whether they have presented themselves as *part* of their culture, religion, or language. In short, they figure out whether their homelands and past belong to them, and whether they belong to their homelands; and this category of belonging informs those to whom they grant ethical responsibility. As I conclude this thesis, I will elaborate on this category further, and question whether ‘belonging’ is the only basis and limit we have for determining our ethical horizon.



To Kevin, The Miseducation of Irie Jones

finger down Hifan's lapel, and Hifan, against his better instinct, beamed with pleasure. 'Seriously, Hifan, man, you look wicked. Crisp.'

'Yeah?'

'Better than that stuff you used to go around in back when we used to hang, eh? Back in them Kilburn days. 'Member when we went to Bradford and –'

Hifan remembered himself. Reassumed his previous face of pious determination. 'I am afraid I don't remember the Kilburn days, brother. I did things in ignorance then. That was a different person.'

'Yeah,' said Millat sheepishly. ''Course.'

Millat gave Hifan a joshing punch on the shoulder, in response to which Hifan stood still as a gate post.

'So there's a fucking spiritual war going on – that's fucking crazy! About time – we need to make our mark in this bloody country. What was the name, again, of your lot?'

'I am from the Kilburn branch of the Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation,' said Hifan proudly.

Irie inhaled.

'*Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation*,' repeated Millat, impressed. 'That's a wicked name. It's got a wicked kung-fu kick-arse sound to it.'

Irie frowned. 'KEVIN?'

Zadie

'We are aware,' said Hifan solemnly, pointing to the spot underneath the cupped flame where the initials were minutely embroidered, 'that we have an acronym problem.'

'Just a bit.'

'But the name is Allah's and it cannot be changed . . . but to continue with what I was saying: Millat, my friend, you could be the head of the Cricklewood branch –'

'Mill.'

'You could have what I have, instead of this terrible confusion you are in, instead of this reliance on a drug specifically imported

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On July 9th, 2015, I was fortunate enough to see Zadie Smith give a reading of her forthcoming novel at the Shakespeare & Company bookstore in Paris. I finished writing my conclusion the day before and was beyond myself with nervous excitement. I asked her to sign my copy of the book next to where my first name appears (pictured above). When I pointed out that my name is Kevin and noted that it is the same as the Islamic extremist group in the novel, she said,

"Oh my gosh, I'm sorry. I am so sorry."

Conclusion

At the moment that I am writing this,[8] Greece has just carried out a controversial referendum with voters electing to reject the conditions and austerity measures set by the "troikas," thereby compromising their position in the EU; several thousand Haitian immigrants and descendants in the Dominican Republic have faced deportation, culminating in a massive diaspora across the Haitian border; the United States is still recovering from the effects of racial violence, amplified by the recent terrorist shooting of nine people, all African-American, who were killed at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Church in Charleston, South Carolina; and the President of Tunisa has recently declared a state of emergency within the country, noting that its borders are unsafe from the horrifying persistence of repeated terrorist attacks--last month marking the second mass shooting in a three-month period. It is fitting, given this climate, to consider the ways in which positions or feelings of being welcomed (or un-welcomed) into a national space tend to vary, and for us to realize the vulnerability of acceptance and belonging, especially when groups lack the mobility to comfortably associate within certain organized units.

Let us take a closer look at that word *belonging* and all of its different uses, especially in light of these events. The Oxford English dictionary denotes 'belong' as a verb to mean both "to be property of", and "to be a member of,' and to "be rightly placed in a specified position". It also notes another familiar meaning: to have "an affinity for a specified place or situation". Finally, one definition which I find most interesting, 'to belong' is to "have the *right personal or social qualities to be a member of a particular group*". These several meanings should be utterly familiar in our everyday language. When we say we belong somewhere--to a place, to an organization, to a nation--we mean, essentially, that we associate with that place; that, we have not only a *right* to be there, in some official sense, but also a *responsibility* to that place or nation. There is also the sense of belonging, which, as cliche as it sounds, refers to a *state of mind*. When I *belong* somewhere, I feel, or imagine, that it is where I am meant to be, and feel as though I have been welcomed. Furthermore, there is the third sense: we talk about our possessions, as those things which belong to *us,* our *belongings*, for which we are responsible. Indeed, we are certainly familiar with how these meanings overlap. We often say, for example, usually in an amiable way, “these are my people”; it is the sense that we feel connected to them--we feel responsible to them and they are a part of us--but it also conveys some ownership over how they are *treated,* as well as their actions.

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[8] July 8th, 2015

Throughout this thesis, I have been interested, especially in light of migrancy and displacement, how these different meanings of belonging come into conflict, especially in a national or nationalistic context. Feeling like you *belong* to a ‘nation’ without being a part of its ‘imagined community,’ for example. Yet, what is built into the idea of belonging is the assumption that there is a *transaction* or *exchange* involved. Where I was born, for example, is (officially) where I belong. An item that I paid for (legally) belongs to me. But, why are some exchanges valued *differently* than others? Why do some things belong to our ethical responsibility more than others? Why are some subject-positions given a high social or political value, while some are not valued at all? What context can lead Citizen "I" in *Ulysses* to assert that the Irish nation "belongs to [him] by right" (Joyce 12.1470)?

Throughout much of the experiences we have encountered in literary texts, characters are torn between the *subjective* or internal state of belonging, and the *objective*, or external state of belonging--and, throughout these texts, these states have come into conflict in a number of interesting ways. Consider Millat Iqbal, for example, who is born in London, but feels that London and its people have turned their back on his traditions and his religion. Magid Iqbal, by contrast, despite being born in the exact same situation as Millat, feels less of a betrayal from London, but actually an affinity toward the national values, aims, and customs of the English. We can remember Changez, too, whose attitudes toward America dramatically shift, once he sees the political climate turning against him; but, he also realizes his complicity in the growth and investment of America’s wealth--wondering incessantly where he belongs and whose ideals he upholds. Finally, Marina and Ifemelu come to mind as characters who struggle for belonging, in the sense of trying to gain "the *right personal or social qualities to be a member of a particular group*". Yet, their background, heritage, accents, hair style, and skin color restrict their achievement of these "right personal and social qualities," thus restricting their membership into their desired "group"--whether it's English aristocracy, for Marina, or the American intellectual elite, for Ifemelu.

What is crucial to grasp, though, is the relative states of belonging, and how the transactions involved determine how an individual is treated from the outside, and, indeed, what an individual's attitudes are from the inside. This aspect is especially problematic when we consider the asymmetry in transactions and exchanges; the asymmetries in legal, economic, political, and cultural representation and recognition. We can think of the several Haitian immigrants being uprooted from their homes, lives, jobs, and neighbors, being told they no longer *belong* in the Dominican Republic. This population was forced out following a 2013 ruling by the Dominican Republic's Constitutional Tribunal that strips the "citizenship of children born to Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic as far back as 1929" (Ahmad). Residents were given a two-year deadline to re-apply for their residency status; but, given "the difficulties faced by many in producing documents and satisfying bureaucratic requirements," (Ahmad) several of them are being arrested, contained, and sent back to Haiti. This constitutes, as Jonathan DiMaio points out, a massive "human rights crisis" (DiMaio). Considering this in terms of the ethics of belonging, the Dominican Republic has determined that only one *position* or *state* of belonging is authorized, while other subject-positions are dispensed from their responsibility and care. They have restricted the boundaries of their ethical consideration to only the official and legal sense of belonging (i.e. birthright), and disregard the several years of labor and other contributions these immigrants have given to the culture, industry, and history over the past century. These exchanges and contributions, apparently, do not matter; family origins and citizenship are, instead, the only authorized basis for belonging to the Dominican

Republic national space.

The case of Greece and its relationship to its creditors provides an interesting discussion here. Debt encumbrance is always built with asymmetry, especially when inflation is the aggregate for an entire country's capital; and, as David Graeber points out, with the financial policies instituted by debt enforcers (i.e. the IMF), democratic regions "have no control over their country's policies," (Graeber 3) given their obligation to refinance and pay back loans on the terms set by the creditors. Through this system of "debt peonage," Greece was beholden to the interest of their creditors (the European Commission and the European Central Bank), and effectively became their property as they were still obliged to repay their loans at extremely high interest. In other words, before the referendum, Greece's state of belonging was a state of enslaved ownership--they *belonged to* the IMF and their creditors; the IMF took ownership over their actions, austerity, pensions, and economic revenue, and took virtually *no* responsibility or ethical care for the collective needs of the Greek people. Their economy belonged *to* the "troikas", but they, as people, were not granted acceptance or belonging *among* the executive decisions of the institutions. Rather, the asymmetry was manufactured to tilt the economy to the differential advantage of banks, without recognizing the dignity and needs of the people. The vote in the referendum, therefore, fostered a partial revolution. The economic hardships are going to cause a profound struggle within Greece; yet, the country is no longer the *belonging of* the ECB and the IMF (notwithstanding the punitive restrictions on international trade they are likely to impose once they exit the EU). Nevertheless, the basis for how the people are treated and who controls the standard of living within Greece are the Greek people themselves, as well as the officials they democratically elected and affirmed, thereby re-calibrating the ethical horizon. Without this vote, the ethical asymmetry and undervalued lives within Greece would have remained as such, leaving an imbalance of power and a lack of ethical concern.

Being displaced and forced out of one's own home; the asymmetry of debt, and the ownership of creditors; the fear of being attacked based on skin color; the terror of living with persistent violence in one's own home--all of these aspects lead us to consider a world in which someone is able to suddenly decide *where* we belong, and see how our feelings or sense of belonging can be dramatically undermined. The issue is, though, that the coordinates that determine where we belong--spatially, temporally, or subjectively--are also used to inform the basis of ethical responsibility. Moreover, it does not always create mutual feelings of responsibility (for example, I belong within a nation, but do I necessarily feel ethically responsible for that nation's wealth?). How this disconnect occurs between two sides of the ethical exchange is what interests me. How can one person imagine that she belongs to a group, without that group validating her association with it? The assumptions that govern our ethics of belonging are, I think, due for re-evaluation. For, after all, the concept of 'belonging,' and all of its different meanings, is *itself* an ethics, governed by a set of values and strategies that determine who *belongs* where; it is a set of principles that set up the boundaries of where we are welcomed, whom we associate with, and how much we "fit in"-- in short, where we belong, and with whom or to whom we belong. But, perhaps, we ought to consider whether this category for existence is even a relevant one or, indeed, an ethical one. Rather, maybe our ethics and social relations ought to expand beyond the official, legal, or, even, imaginary lines of belonging to which we have so accustomed ourselves. Perhaps, instead, recognition and representation should expand the ethical horizon to include those who do not fall under otherwise artificial categories of recognition.

Here is where, I feel, literature has a capacity to produce an ethical openness that is not confined to nation, association, wealth, or history. Through imaginative narratives, plays, or poems, we recognize a world beyond the narrow confines and the particularity of our own existence. For the texts discussed in this thesis, readers participate in a dialogic relation with characters whose lives we would otherwise not encounter; we see the world of migrancy in all of its struggles and uncertainties, but also in its humor and liveliness. Chinua Achebe locates in fiction the "self-encounter," which he considers the "potency and success of imaginative fictions," and defines this encounter as "imaginative identification": "Things are not merely happening *before* us; they are happening, by the power and force of imaginative identification, *to* us. We not only see; we suffer alongside the hero" (Achebe 144). If we "suffer alongside the hero" (or, even, the enemy, in some cases), then we grow to empathize with them; we recognize suffering that is not our own, and learn, in turn, to reflect upon the nature of our own existence. "Art," says William Deresiewicz, "instills the fundamental moral lesson: That you aren't the center of the universe. That others weren't created for your benefit. That they are just as real as you, with equal claims to dignity and understanding" (Deresiewicz 163). In this sense, the "imaginative identification" with characters presents us the moral lesson that others' *suffering* is just as real as our own, despite living in separate places and distant times. We become them as we start to embody their existence.

This capacity to embody the Other is not to be confused with "reducing" the Other's "alterity," as Levinas chided against; nor does it involve representing through language of "predication" or "arborescence" as Derrida and Deleuze say. Finally, it also does not forge a representation-by-portrait (*Darstellung*) registered as a dis-embodied re-staging of economic exchange and translation. Rather, this capacity is an ability to "recognize" the other, while also empowering ourselves through, as Spivak would say, a "training of the imagination for epistemological performance" *(Aesthetic Education* 345). We can re-inform the epistemic horizon that anchors our ethical capacity; we can build a better system for recognition and representation that does not rely on resemblances, similarities, essences, axioms, universalism, and totality. Rather, we read and imagine characters in a way that is beyond the assumptions and invented categories that govern our daily discourse and the structure of social life.

Returning to Achebe, he notes that it is not necessarily imagination *as such* that is most valuable to human life. He says, rather, that there are "beneficent fictions" and "malignant fictions," both of which are susceptible to imaginary justifications:

> Belief in superior and inferior races; belief that some people who live across our frontiers or speak a different language from ourselves are the cause of all the trouble in the world, or that our own particular group or class or caste has a right to certain things which are denied to others; the belief that men are superior to women, and so on--are all fictions generated by the imagination (Achebe 147).

We are meant to extract from here the lesson that imagination can be forged just as easily into a more malignant attitude. Yet, as Achebe notes, "what distinguishes beneficent fiction from such malignant cousins as racism is that the first never forgets that it is fiction and the second never knows that it is" (Achebe 148). We assume, as readers, when we encounter a literary text, through the inventiveness of its singularity, as Attridge would say, that we are reading fiction, and that the lives we are reading are "within the bounds of imagination" (Achebe 149). This ability to bring us within the bounds of fiction allows to view the internal and singular existence of someone other than ourselves. As Achebe says, to believe that "self-centredness is smart" is an "indication that we lack enough imagination to recreate in ourselves the thoughts that must go on in the lives of others, *especially* those we dispossess. A person who is insensitive to the suffering of his fellows is that way because he lacks the imaginative power to get under the skin of another human being and see the world through eyes other than his own"(Achebe 149). This idea resonates well with the novels we analyzed in this text, as well as the current upheavals happening in our global society. Being unable to imagine how someone feels, such as someone who exists in migrancy or in "subalternity" is a by-product of a deficient imagination. Restricting our attention, responsibility, and consideration to only those who resemble us, or only toward people who *belong* within our group, race, tribe, gender, class, species, or nation takes little imaginative effort since we can so easily conceive someone whose life is just like our own; but, the difficulty and, indeed, the challenge is to "get under the skin of another human [or non-human] being," seeing the world "through eyes" other than mine.

To conclude, I would like to return again to the nature of *belonging.* I argue that it is time for us to re-conceptualize and re-consider the ethics of such a concept. As I already stated above, belonging or 'to belong' entails an assumed transaction or exchange involved that grants the individual the *right* to a *belonging,* or the privilege to rightfully *belong* (to a place, nation, or organization). But, for some individuals, the achievement of a reliable currency of exchange or of sufficient value for transactions is considerably more difficult under conditions of migrancy and displacement. Without having a high contributing value toward the interests of an organized community or unit, the individual is forced to the margins; in other words, without the correct "personal or social qualities to be considered part of a group," the person is deprived of the right to belong and given little consideration or recognition. Yet, much like the "malignant fictions" of racism and discrimination, I would like to argue that these symbolic systems that underlie belonging are also "malignant fictions"--imaginary boundaries and hierarchies produced by an asymmetrical system of power relations and subjugation. Instead, our time in history has brought us to a point where we ought to look beyond the confines and boundaries of belonging, and expand our ethical horizon to those who do not necessarily supply these symbolic and fictional qualities that profit our organization or nation. For, the singularity of existence is not necessarily repeatable, exchangeable, translatable, or negotiable, especially for the subaltern subject. So, we should recognize this ethical value system of belonging for exactly what it is: purely imaginary.

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