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Narrating Literary Transnationalism in Zake Smith and Dave Eggers

Nelson Shake

NARRATING LITERARY TRANSNATIONALISM IN ZADIE SMITH AND DAVE
EGGERS

by

NELSON SHAKE

(Under the Direction of Dustin Anderson)

ABSTRACT

This work argues for a greater reception of transnationalism in literary studies. Though

the steady rise of transnationalism has already been studied in many areas of academia,

literary studies has only begun to pay attention to it, and scholars appear to remain largely

rooted in postcolonial or nationalistic thought. Refusing to read current texts through the

lens of transnationalism hinders the literary academy's relevancy since creative writers

today are addressing changes to the national structure in their fictive works. This study

suggests why a new theoretical construct is needed to understand those texts, and it uses

two representative examples: Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* and Dave Eggers'

novel *What Is the What*. Smith's work focuses intently upon the friction people

experience in the face of transnationalism when they refuse to let go of their colonial

mindset. Eggers' text centers on a Lost Boy from Sudan and, through an alternative form

of narration, examines how storytelling itself will have to change, since simple narratives

no longer exist in a transnational world and people no longer identify with one nation or

setting.

INDEX WORDS: transnationalism, literary transnationalism, nationalism, nation,
postcolonialism, colonialism, Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, Samad Iqbal, Dave Eggers, *What Is the What*, Achak Deng, necropolitics

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EGGERS

by

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DEDICATION

To Sally, for encouraging me when my reserves of confidence were depleted, for naming back into existence my abilities when I believed they had withered, for telling me when it was time to rest, for enduring my frazzled nerves, for listening patiently when I would get excited about an idea late at night and want to talk about it, for being the best sounding board as I tried to suss out my arguments when they were barely formed, and for sharing in this crazy ride that comes with being married to someone who loves a life of learning. You make this life glow, love.

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CHAPTER 1

LITERARY TRANSNATIONALISM: AN INTRODUCTION

With the advancements of technology and rise of global immigration in the last 30

years, globalization has gone from a phenomenon event to the everyday norm. What

continues to intrigue academia, though, is how globalization has created a world culture

of transnationalism made up of cosmopolitan individuals. As a large-scale concept,

transnationalism typically refers to a world where political and economic interactions

span national boundaries. Thus, national borders become porous or permeable, and the

nation loses some of its centrality as the demarcating point around which global

interactions are defined. Such changes ultimately affect individual citizens and their sense

of national belonging. Multiple academic disciplines have examined this evolution of

global society for some time. Historians, economists, cultural theorists, philosophers, and

anthropologists all have dissected and analyzed transnationalism. Literary studies,

though, has entered the discussion only briefly. Current literary discourse is still largely

rooted in the dialogues of nationalism and postcolonialism and continues to try to exist in

a world where cultures can be easily separated by nation. The opposite, though, is true of

some contemporary fiction writing. Many writers today delve into these cultural changes

while literary scholarship continues to describe literature with the language of

postcolonialism.

The hesitation of literary scholars, especially in the West, to read literature from a

transnational perspective is troublesome since they hold onto postcolonial studies too

tightly. Literary critics can quickly lose relevance when they continue to structure their

studies along exclusively nationalistic lines. The current predicament remains that literary studies has not paid enough attention to ongoing changes in national cultures, which creates a disconnect between the academic discipline and the authors it studies, authors who interact with a transnational landscape in their work. The literary academy must begin to rethink how literature functions in a rapidly changing world if it is to stay a relevant voice in academia and in the societies of which it is a part. This study seeks to establish new ways to view and a new language to discuss literature as transnationalism continues to grow.

This new way of articulating the study of contemporary literature is necessary given the differences between postcolonialism and transnationalism. The former is largely concerned with contact zones between the Empire and the Other and the identitarian struggle that ensues. While transnationalism focuses on issues of identity and belonging, too, it emphasizes complexities of identity that the Imperial dyadic structure cannot explore sufficiently. Indeed, transnationalism examines identity on a much larger scale by discussing the changes that are happening to the structure of the nation and how that affects people—a discussion that postcolonialism does not and cannot account for. Postcolonialism continues to view some literature improperly by applying the language of its imperial perspective, even though the imperial structure of governance has since gone away.

Literary studies is not alone in its hesitation to embrace the growth of transnationalism. The same apprehension has been seen in the structure of the nation at both political and societal levels. Understanding why transnationalism might bother a nation helps demystify the same discomfort that appears in the literary world, but that

does not make it any less troublesome. Paul Gilroy carefully catalogues why the nation bristles at the rise of transnationalism in *Postcolonial Melancholia*. In that study, he details the shriveled Western Empire's desire to keep its glorious nationalistic past alive in the psyche of its population even as it was aware that its imperialistic prowess was fading. *Postcolonial Melancholia* corresponds well to past and present studies from various academic disciplines that work towards crafting an understanding of the *nation*.

Gilroy's research synthesizes many of these early ideas, ideas that merit exploration before their application to literary studies. Comprehending Gilroy's perspective and its relevance to literature benefits first from an examination of how other academic disciplines have studied transnationalism. Determining the genesis of transnationalism and moving back to the present helps explain what a cogent definition of *literary transnationalism* might be as well as why the academy should begin reading literature through such a lens. Establishing literary transnationalism requires the synopsis of a preexisting tradition of research in history, cultural theory, philosophy, and political and social theory, as well as an explication of the few literary scholars who have tried to advocate for transnationalism's place in their discipline.

Put simply, because of both ages-old widespread immigration and recent technological advances, the idea of a "national culture" is changing drastically, and that will unavoidably affect the way stories are told. The evolution of national culture should lead us to ask how that change is revealing—or how that change *has* already revealed— itself in literature. This first chapter lays the groundwork to construct a lucid answer, followed by readings of Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* and Dave Eggers' novel *What Is the What* to illuminate that answer more fully. The intersection of literature and

transnationalism demands further study in order to understand how the art of fiction is changing. Comprehending this evolution necessitates the formation of a new lexicon to describe these changes more accurately. Rather than continually look backwards, there is a need to look forward. The goal in articulating new terms that grow organically out of literary transnationalism is to form a way to understand literature in the present and what we can expect from it in the future. Smith and Eggers exemplify the changes wrought by transnationalism in their fictive works.

Defining Transnationalism Historically

Scholars and theorists differ on where exactly to place the genesis of transnationalism. Literary scholars like Paul Jay date the beginnings of globalization and the changes it wrought to several hundred years in the past. Simultaneously, though, he privileges the cultural revolution of the U.S. in the 1960s as being of particular importance. Likewise, Laura Doyle in her essay "Towards a Philosophy of Transnationalism" prizes recent scholarship. She notes the growing amount of study on nationalism and suggests it deserves the credit for the current emphasis on transnationalism. Shelley Fisher Fishkin, noted scholar on American studies, lands more in the middle and places the growth of transnationalism at the point between the World Wars when the U.S. became a global superpower. World historian Patricia Clavin also looks to the global conflicts of the World Wars and identifies the formation of the League of Nations as a uniquely transnational moment that continues to affect us today. This study privileges Fishkin and Clavin's emphases on the rise of modernity and the World Wars. Though globalization has been, as Jay suggests, a centuries-long process, the border crossings, inter-national

alliances, and coordinated efforts of the belligerents in the World Wars created a heightened global interaction like never before. Nations continue to be glued to it in the present. However, placing the beginning of transnationalism there simultaneously simplifies and complicates these global changes. The World Wars were clearly anything but a simple conflict, yet the dialogue produced, especially from World War II, conjures up an image of clean-cut, straightforward nationalism.

Potentially more than any other conflict, World War II contained very clear ideas of who or what was *Good* and *Evil* in the world (Gilroy 88). Since Germany was intruding upon other countries' nationalistic sovereignty as well as ravaging the sovereignty of individuals' bodies with their concentration camps, determining who was Evil in this conflict presented no difficulty for the Allied powers. Any countries fighting against Germany were clearly on the Good side and were even fighting for their own sovereignty. Due to the Allies' eventual victory, England and the U.S. left the war with strong nationalistic pride. Good had prevailed, they were Good, and they were now stanchions of hope for other oppressed nations. These two national powerhouses needed to preserve themselves. Though it may seem a simplistic conclusion, one overriding implication which came out of World War II was that nationalism was on the Good side and a nation's sovereignty and solidarity were worth defending at all times from *all* sorts of invasion (Gilroy 89). World War II-era nationalism, then, became a potent signifier of identity for these Western nations. This is a straightforward idea, but it creates complications.

Nationalism carried great importance after World War II, but the World Wars fostered an interesting predicament: they simultaneously strengthened nationalism, but

also facilitated the growth of globalization. An inevitable collision takes place when this occurs. A nation faces great difficulty in maintaining its decades-old nationalistic identity when global pluralism intersects with its treasured wartime narrative. Indeed, this was a losing battle before the wars even started. Though transnational relations began to flourish out of the World Wars, historian James Field, Jr. argues that transnational relations have been ongoing for quite some time, even if awareness has developed only recently (5). The seeds of transnationalism had been sown long before, which further complicates any nation's attempt to maintain past nationalistic glory. Field states that nationalists always viewed their glass as half-full in the past, but he argues it would have been more accurate to call it "half-empty and leaking" since cultural pluralism is unavoidable as globalization grows (5). Indeed, he credits the growth of transnationalism to the conflation of a world market economy and rising global immigration over the last three hundred years (5-7). However, Field still argues that the World Wars play a key role in the growth of transnationalism, stating that the "multiplication of new sovereignties which followed both world wars only emphasized the limitations" of the national structure (20). For nations whose infrastructures were severely damaged by the World Wars, "transnational pressures" to participate in the growing world market economy "were irresistible" (20).

Paul Jay looks back even further than Field, summarizing the debate over when globalization technically began. He acknowledges that differing sides argue that the rise of transnationalism is either a contemporary phenomenon or has a long history rooted in the 16th century. Jay sides with the latter, arguing that the interconnectivity of "trade, exploration, conquest, colonization, decolonization, and postcolonialism" require

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consideration in order to fully understand how globalization has spawned the current

transnational world (33). Changes all throughout history have led to this moment, and it

has been a lengthy process. As one might expect, then, the term "transnationalism" itself

has changed as well.

Clavin, in her study on the contemporary rise of transnationalism, charts the

evolution of the word. "Transnationalism" was first used to describe America's migration

and identity in 1919; in the 1950s it signified supra-national interests and replaced the

dirty word that "multinational" had become; and in the 1980s it denoted dealings

involving more than three nations and *non*-national players, a description that remains

relevant today (433). Considering Jay's look to the past, Clavin's historical summary, and

Field's mention of the world market economy's magnetizing power, the roots of

transnationalism may appear economic due to globalization. Because of the border-

spanning nature of transnational relations, though, these economic interchanges carry

political baggage, quickly affecting nations and their influence. For example, Robert

Keohane and Joseph Nye, in their early 1970s study on transnationalism and world

politics, found that people identify more with corporations than nations (x). This is often

the trajectory of transnational studies. The question becomes: what happens to the nation

in terms of its sovereignty, its influence over its citizens, and its function as a political

player in a transnational world?

While nations do not disappear, they do begin to lose some of their central power.

Transnational groups themselves are often nongovernmental, and individuals can freely

choose to participate with one and then another, regardless of nationalistic ties. The

paradox of that changeover is that such transnational relations can simultaneously

strengthen and erode national borders—so much so that some world historians prefer to use the term *transnational network* instead of *nation* (Clavin 431, 436). The nation with its borders and stark lines of beginning and end become less rigid. Indeed, transnational relations often span state boundaries where they are free of governmental foreign policy (Keohane and Nye xi). If national borders and boundaries become less severe, they no longer stand as the defining line around which everything must orient itself. That eventually includes peoples' sense of belonging. Steven Vertovec, in a broad study of the myriad academic disciplines that transnationalism affects, determines that diasporas are no longer an anomaly. They are now the norm, comprising "transnational communities" (4, 7). These claims, when combined together, promise tremendous shifts for national cultures across the world. If fewer and fewer people identify with their nation, if political and economic relations take place as if national borders do not exist, and if more and more diasporas are being created, peoples' identities themselves will begin to change dramatically. National cultures across the world, then, also face a tremendous evolution.

The changes national culture has endured have had the attention of cultural theorists and anthropologists for some time. Transnationalism grew so much that it led to the creation of the acclaimed journal *Public Culture* in the late 1980s. Editors Carol Breckenridge and Arjun Appadurai saw the potential that transnationalism offered for performing more astute analyses of cultural flows. They believed neocolonialism no longer possessed the same potential due to its lack of "appropriate imagination" ("Editors' Comments" 2). Breckenridge and Appadurai are not implying that neo-, post-, or basic colonialism are bereft of significance; transnationalism would not have come about without them. Though they may relate to one another, separation between the two

ideas is needed since transnationalism takes a keener interest in nations. Keohane and Nye make sure to draw a distinction between postcolonialism and transnationalism. For them, determining whether or not some transnational relations are "imperialistic" or not does not interest them; instead, they advocate focusing on the "asymmetries" and "inequalities" of transnational relations rather than "employ older terms" that do not account for changes to national cultures (xxvi).

These changes to the national landscape, though, should not impart the idea that the nation is dying away or has become wholly insignificant. In fact, all of these critics, scholars, and historians are intent on emphasizing that the nation still matters. Cultural theorists do not discredit its influence (Clavin 436), and most transnational organizations still link to one specific national society (Keohane and Nye xv-xvi). Thus, in some ways nations are, ironically, the starting point for transnational groups that eventually transcend their borders. Eventually, then, nations may not be able to hold sway over transnationalism (Field 22). In fact, today many nations are actually *dependent* on transnational flows of money sent back home from diasporic " 'nationals' abroad" (Vertovec 7). That dependency goes both ways, though, since transnationalism still needs "the idea of the state" to exert its influence ("Editors' Comments" 2-3). The nation is very much still a major player in global economics and politics. The amount, however, of global interaction and relations that transcend the realm of the nation continues to grow.

While these scholars seem to want to avoid defining the undefinable, they all inevitably make an attempt to establish what exactly transnationalism is. For Clavin, it is akin to a honeycomb, which has a rigid and defined shape while still remaining porous to allow plenty of space for the transnational movement of nongovernmental groups (438-

39). Transnationalism also occurs when items "tangible or intangible" move across state boundaries in transactions that involve at least one nongovernmental participant (Keohane and Nye xii). Overall, it is made up of intense global interactions that occur in a "planet-spanning yet common . . . arena of activity" (Vertovec 1-2). Beneath the surface of simple definition the philosophical aspects of transnationalism have also been studied.

Cultural Implications of Transnationalism

Philosophers and theorists have charted how globalization grew to its current strength as well as what the repercussions of that growth are. Literary theorist Jean-François Lyotard describes in *The Postmodern Condition* how the changing dissemination of knowledge played a role in this shift. The main result became that a nation's singular presentation of itself to the world came under greater scrutiny from a nation's marginalized people. In *The Location of Culture*, literary scholar Homi Bhabha notes how these same changes affected not only the nation, but also colonialism. A greater scrutiny of the nation brings changes to it, which Benedict Anderson examines in his study *Imagined Communities*. Though the nation loses some of its influence, nationalism actually rises. What happens when nations try to maintain their former glory is the focus of anthropologist Arjan Appadurai. Though Lyotard and Bhabha both take an interest in literature throughout their research, their ideas intimate literary transnationalism without fully entering into it.

Lyotard examines how metanarratives of knowledge—political, religious, societal—comprised the older systems of power, but globalization created easy access to knowledge. The ensuing pluralism caused by this proliferation of other narratives challenged any single narrative that a government or nation could preserve.[1] Lyotard

argues that this makes the nation "obsolete" because it *has* to have such a narrative to keep its national storyline intact (5). Preserving it becomes complicated for a nation to perform effectively, though, since the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge is not the only thing that has changed. Language itself also evolved, shifting from being "regular, continuous, and unanimous" to "periodic, discontinuous, and conflictual," which then affected how knowledge was articulated (7). Bhabha charts how colonialism experienced some of the same challenges. He argues that the nation is, overall, a "narrative strategy" with opposing narratives competing, such as master versus slave (201, 206).

The problem for the nation, then, was that it could no longer homogenize culture since "difference" went from "outside" to "within" (Bhabha 214-15). Initially, with greater contact between the Empire and the Other, the stark, stiff binaries of colonialism began to crumble. The nation or power structure always tried to keep a central narrative and image of itself alive, one that consistently reverted to a more glorious past. However, the writing of the present narrative by the Other that exposed the Empire's atrocities came from the margins (or periphery) of society and infiltrated the center's narrative, thus moving the "difference" that Bhabha mentions further in. This challenge to the authority of the center narrative consistently destroyed the past by interrogating it. It erased any true or pure nationalism to which the nation could revert. Because of this shift in language and knowledge, Lyotard claims that the postmodern world challenges the *because I said so* context of legitimation used by the nation. That challenge to the main narrative leaves multiple language games intersecting like a maze of streets since true knowledge is impossible to apprehend (Lyotard 37-41).

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Still, though, the nation has not disappeared. In fact, Anderson argues just the opposite. He states that nationalism is at an all-time high even if a nation is nothing more than an "imagined political community" with "finite, if elastic, boundaries" (3, 6-7). This is because citizens continue to hold onto the nation as an idea, which helps them combat unnerving pluralism that challenges and questions the secure authority of their nation. Keeping the nation's strength intact in their minds is important since that gives them something "worth living and dying—or killing others—for" (7). This effort to maintain nationalism and its straightforward narrative can be dangerous, though, since "[o]ne man's imagined community is another man's political prison" (Appadurai 6). Appadurai echoes Anderson when he examines how maintaining a nationalistic mononarrative in a transnational world could create problems of oppression. He argues that the simplistic national storyline is outdated since the new global culture is a "complex, overlapping, disjunctive order," which "center-periphery models" cannot explain (Appadurai 6). A metanarrative-based national culture simply cannot speak for its pluralistic population. The concerns and fears of the nation, though, are understandable.

As Field has noted, immigration contributes to the current transnational culture for obvious reasons. The migration of people coming from the margins to live in the center affects the dominant metanarrative. There is no longer one definable national culture to point to anymore. Cultural theorist Greg Urban acknowledges this evolution, arguing that defining national cultures through people is now wholly problematic. In the past, one person could be a metonymic "vertical representation" of a culture based on nothing more than physical appearance, but now culture is laterally transmitted, spreading anywhere (221). If a black man is not automatically African, but rather, a born-

and-raised English citizen, then what does it mean to be English? If what formerly would have been labeled as "the marginal" is now the next-door neighbor, what has become of this "center"? Is it even a center anymore?

One conclusion scholars arrive at is that colonialism has basically disappeared from the world. While its effects are still felt, historian Arif Dirlik believes that "[m]arginalization, rather than any systematic colonial exploitation, better explains" what is going on today (611). Continued focus on the colonial takes attention away from the "appearance of global class structurations" that span the world (612). Dirlik asserts that these transnational flows have robbed nations and their economies of their sovereignty (612). The seeds of this eventual global interdependence were deeply sown in colonialism from the very beginning since the Empire's goals of colonization could not have taken place without the supporting existence of the Other (613). The colonizer could not survive or exist without the colonized, the very people they vilified, an interdependence located within Bhabha's Third Space. Cultural theorist Roger Rouse argues that an even greater interdependence must exist today in order for transnational endeavors like the Internet to succeed today. As the name would suggest, the World Wide Web must go beyond the national and "replace the rigidifying logics of the map and the clock" with something that transcends space and time (355). Inter-national and inter-cultural support and reliance will *have* to take place for such initiatives to succeed. Rouse suggests that these processes are not "multinational," but rather, fall along "transnational lines" (356-57). National borders are being circumvented politically, economically, and socially on a regular basis now.

A number of cultural theorists, such as Sheldon Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, come to similar conclusions. Together, they have studied how transnationalism eventually creates an inherently cosmopolitan atmosphere. Such a climate fosters a need for national cultures to accept the mutualities people share while acknowledging that they are predisposed to a high level of frequent change (580). Because of this, cosmopolitanism defies easy definition in order to avoid perpetuating harmful universals like nationalism and center/periphery models do. The authors argue that older colonial paradigms impose ill-fitting "practices and histories," which must be avoided lest they create detrimental mononarratives all over again (584). These scholars' summation, instead, is that national cultures may be best described now as having "centers . . . everywhere and circumferences nowhere" (587-88). The solidity of a nation's boundaries and borders is now less certain, and that is what separates transnationalism from the colonial period.

This loss of rigid definitions of how nations and societies function ultimately requires that governments adjust how they implement their power. A nation's exercise of authority has depended upon stark lines of identification with and separation from other nations. Governments are averse to the changes brought by pluralism because they challenge the sovereignty of their mononarrative. Philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault tracks how power structures respond to this cultural shift as being rooted in the move from biopower to biopolitics, but his focus pertains mostly to the individual. Postcolonial scholar and cultural theorist Achille Mbembe takes Foucault's ideas from the late 1970s and brings them into the present. While using biopower and biopolitics as his starting point, Mbembe then goes further to argue that the world is currently ruled by

necropolitics. This term coined by Mbembe signifies that governments have moved away from simple colonialism since non-national affiliated armies drive conflicts. Today, "war machines" replace the colonizer, natural resources replace territory and occupation, and the globalized money machine of transnationalism funds all of it, often through the buying power of wealthy Western nations (32-33). Similarly, in their book *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that war is the new "regime of biopower" where violence is no longer judged on a national basis (13, 29).

This type of conflict is a perfect recipe for creating diasporas (Mbembe 32-33), which further challenge the rigid definition of what a nation is since displaced peoples, as Breckenridge would put it, "rise with transnationalism, not against it" ("Editors' Comment" i). Therefore, national cultures are broken up as people become increasingly scattered and displaced. Naturally, the face of global culture is now "identifiable only as human," but is overall nondescript (Urban 221). Indeed, this is the natural movement of these studies—from large global implications down to the individual human being. While the health and future of the nation is an intriguing subject, it is still overwhelmingly a human issue. This is also a key topic that literary studies is specifically interested in— how these cultural shifts are affecting or have affected the individual.

The Individual and National Sovereignty

How an individual relates to her/his government or fits into the structure of the nation is an issue Foucault specifically targeted in lectures given towards the end of his life. He outlines how structures of power changed their strategy of governing. No longer were

they interested in taking care of specific individuals or families. Instead, the population

was now their focus—one mass, a faceless entity. This created a utilitarianism that

viewed a human being or family unit as nothing more than a "figure of the population"

(*Security* 73, 79, 104). Foucault notes how, in the past, the sovereignty of decision-

making and governmental rule rested with the king alone; at that time, the individual had

little power, and Foucault argues that this same dynamic continues in the structure of the

nation (*Security* 234-37). As a result, individuals are the most important aspect of the

nation, but not because they possess individual life; rather, the government views them as

a whole, so they simply possess life—life that is a mirror to the nation's overall health

and condition (*Security* 326-28). This, for Foucault, defines biopolitics—that the body is

viewed simultaneously as a mechanism and a species. Thus, the government realizes it

must regulate, maintain, and invest in the life of its population if the nation is to be

healthy itself (*Sexuality* 139). Biopolitical techniques—usually the economy—are then

implemented to control the people (*Sexuality* 140). By maintaining life like this, the

government obtains access to the body, and an individual's "politics place his existence

as a living being in question" (*Sexuality* 142-43). Though the nation is investing in the

lives of its people in Foucault's system, the actual concern is not for them.

Foucault notes that "discipline" becomes less of an interest to the government,

and "security" or management of the population is what drives its agenda instead.

Essentially, this amounts to the government creating an environment where the

population will need it to be there for them. If discipline were the focus, then the

government would seek to eradicate all aspects of society that were unfavorable to the

population. However, since security is the goal, the government now aims to regulate its

people. This means it will orchestrate "things that seem far removed from the population, but which, through calculation, analysis, and reflection, one knows can really have an effect on it" (*Security* 72). Regulating *individual* human life like this is impossible to do, though, because of all the widely disparate variables that would come into play with each unique person. Viewing the people as a faceless mass instead makes it much easier for the government to make blanket decisions. Not everyone will be satisfied, but that is no longer the goal. As long as the majority of the population is pleased, that is all that matters. Therefore, for example, the government will not eradicate crime completely and will only nurture the population with the basic necessities of life, but it will not give them too much (*Security* 322).

The reason behind all of these decisions is economic. In the structure of the nation, the game of economics takes precedence over human beings as the government seeks to keep the population from cutting itself off from it (*Biopolitics* 201-02). The government needs to be needed. The population can be managed by making systematic changes to the economic environment. Thus, a system is now in place where the government exercises sovereign power over the individual—not directly, but vicariously through economic agents (*Biopolitics* 282-83). The government will closely observe its population to understand how to implement these economic agents. It will encourage anything that lends to a healthier political economy, like marriages and families (*Biopolitics* 245). Indeed, in a capitalistic society, individuals and family units become encapsulations of human capital; they are an investment that the government monitors in order to maximize its returns (*Biopolitics* 228-30). However, when something like criminality enters this mechanism, for example, the government administers punishment

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in a very economic sense, measuring its success through the lens of supply and demand.
It does not try to eliminate crime, but simply keeps it in check, aiming to create negative
demand for criminals' efforts (*Biopolitics* 256). If all crime were gone, one of the
population's needs (protection, safety) would no longer have to be met by the
government. This is one example of how the government maintains its necessary status. It
would not be *as* needed by the people if all crime were to disappear, so the nation would
lose some of its primacy. But in a system where the government—and, thus, the nation—
exists because her people need her, some crime must still be allowed to exist. Ultimately,
in Foucault's system, individuals are only sovereign and possess agency in the sense that
the nation recognizes that they collectively possess life. Beyond that, there is little
uniqueness or individuality to a person in the nation's eyes. But even this system of how
the nation implements its power is more hopeful than what Mbembe describes.

In recent years, Mbembe has expanded upon Foucault's ideas in light of the
global present. He argues that sovereignty has changed from biopower to biopolitics to
necropolitics, which means that those who exercise control over life and death—not
solely over economics anymore—now possess sovereignty (12). This form of
governmental rule differs from colonialism because technologies of destruction leave the
individual with one choice—to die or not die (34). In order not to die, one must move or
run away, which increases the number of refugees on this planet. Another option is to
stay and participate with the non-national armies that drive conflicts, groups comprised of
"citizen soldiers, child soldiers, mercenaries, and privateers" (32). This is the difference
between colonialism and necropolitics: the desire of the power structure is no longer to
"inscribe" individuals into a pre-existing "civilizing" construct, but rather, to place them

into a massacre (34). Hardt and Negri, though, offer a different, more hopeful perspective than Mbembe.

For Hardt and Negri, the concept of Foucault's "population" has been replaced by a united "multitude," an irreducible assemblage of people that challenges the monolithic construct of sovereignty (100). They would disagree with Mbembe's theory that natural resources take precedence over human lives. Hardt and Negri acknowledge that nuclear power makes the sovereignty of a nation seem absolute because it gives them unlimited power to destroy; however, they argue that individual suicide still challenges the biopolitical control of the body, a control they claim is still the main focus of governments (332). They also maintain that the ruled multitude can always upset sovereignty by refusing servitude since, for them, the multitude is not "disposable" to global society (333, 335-36). Mbembe, however, convincingly argues that people *are* now horrifically dispensable, as seen in places like Sudan (34). Hardt and Negri advocate that true freedom for the multitude of individuals comes when "absolute democracy" triumphs over governments that use war to legitimize their rule (91).

Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude owes to philosopher Gilles Deleuze's notions of *becoming* and *multiplicity*. *Becoming* discards the Platonic concept of essence and replaces it with a pure movement of difference. As an entity encounters outside forces, they inevitably and irreversibly change it. Rather than a constant re-presentation of the same identity occurring over and over again within that entity, a new form of existence or being is generated. This entity can be a person or an assemblage, and since it is in a constant state of becoming, it never imitates something from the past. Thus, with becoming there is never a return to sameness; instead, it is a gateway to infinitude, with

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no starting point or endpoint. This correlates to the move from Foucault's faceless

population to Hardt and Negri's irreducible assemblage of individuals. There is no one

core identity or "population" or "people" to return to. Every moment is a coagulation of

forces that is not headed toward any specific outcome, so the act of becoming is a

creative "eternal return [that] is not the same but the different, not the similar but the

dissimilar, not the one but the many" (Deleuze 126). These "forces" could be other

people, governments, or cultures, so an individual is a constantly changing assemblage,

impacted by both the forces around him and this eternal return to difference. Becoming is

not in a particular time; it *is* its own time and a continual process. Free from this

preceding unity or essence, a *multiplicity* can grow. Since, for Deleuze, there is no

essence or immanent law of existence, multiplicities, which can include people, are the

elements and actors of the world out of which come continual change. Any situation is

made of multiplicities that never become a cohesive whole, and each multiplicity—

person, nation, government—is a patchwork itself and can be affected by encounters with

others. Because of this, existence possesses an unpredictable rhizomatic structure

(Deleuze 256-57). Just as Lyotard notes that pluralism challenges metanarratives and

leaves many language games intersecting like a maze of streets, multiplicities are ever-

expanding, ever-intersecting. There is no limit to how many new shoots and stems may

grow, collide with one another, and produce something unique. The possibilities are

limitless for Deleuze's multiplicity and, thereby, for Hardt and Negri's multitude as well.

Obviously complications arise if nations act as if none of this happens.

Nationalism vs. Transnationalism

When nations attempt to govern the way Foucault describes, but in the world that Lyotard, Deleuze, and Hardt and Negri detail, a major conflict between nationalism and transnationalism inevitably occurs. If a pluralistic assemblage of people no longer accepts its nation's metanarrative of knowledge, that nation's singular identity will be challenged. That is Paul Gilroy's focus in *Postcolonial Melancholia*—how a nation responds when its former identity rooted in strong nationalism is challenged. In this case, his focus is also the greatest colonial Empire, England. The nation will be weakened by the myriad cracks and fissures brought by globalized society, or as Deleuze would put it, a multiplicity that is perpetually in a state of becoming. The metanarrative is nationalism, trying its best to stand its ground against forces of pluralism. That pluralism brought by the multiplicity or multitude is transnationalism, which challenges the nation's unyielding metanarrative that proclaims X equals X, has always equaled X, and always will equal X. Transnationalism shows how nothing is that clean-cut anymore, but nationalism tries to disagree. In Gilroy's study, this all culminates in the nation's efforts to sustain its past power.

For Gilroy, the effort to uphold England's former nationalism and patriotism comes through the attempted preservation of the mononarrative of the glorious nationalistic past of World War II. It was a time when binaries were very stark and clearly defined, a time when England was undeniably on the side of Good—at least, in the minds of her people. His example of World War II aircraft, rather than technologically advanced modern war planes, flying over the Queen Mother's burial in 2002 tellingly exemplifies England's efforts to keep that "mythic moment" of their "finest hour" alive in their peoples' psyches (87).

Though England had already lost much of its imperial prowess by 1945, a reestablishment of World War II pride relates to England's past identity as an empire. Gilroy notes that England's colonial strength has waned so much that it has "mysteriously evacuat[ed]" from the present national memory (89). As an attempt to keep their imperial glory from being forgotten, Gilroy argues that those memories are being "collapsed into the overarching figuration of Britain at war with the Nazis, under attack, yet stalwart and ultimately triumphant" (89). He asserts:

> I think that there is something neurotic about Britain's continued citation of the anti-Nazi war. Making it a privileged point of entry into national identity and self-understanding reveals a desire to find a way back to the point where the national culture—operating on a more manageable scale of community and social life—was, irrespective of the suffering involved in the conflict, both comprehensible and habitable. That memory of the country at war against foes who are simply, tidily, and uncomplicatedly evil has recently acquired the status of an ethnic myth. It explains not only how the nation remade itself through war and victory but can also be understood as a rejection or deferral of its present problems. (89)

Though Gilroy focuses on England, his study is applicable to any former Western imperial powerhouse. The efforts he details above create the following pattern: the government generates nostalgia, citizens' nationalism rebounds, dualisms are then maintained anew, identity becomes reinforced, and once again the "uncivilized enemies"—in this case, immigrants—become evil in the population's eyes since they threaten this assumedly healthy nationalistic pride (88-89). Since immigration, one of the

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main "present problems," threatens former binaries and nationalism, nations try harder to force newcomers or the Other into a prescribed form of "us." What ends up happening, though, is immigrants eventually play the game of the nation better than her citizens do, which only draws greater ire from the nation (Gilroy 25).

Upholding nationalism is a conscious move against the "perceived dangers of pluralism" that immigration unavoidably brings against the national metanarrative (Gilroy 90). The very fact that the nation cannot sufficiently answer "What *is* difference?" and "*Where* is it?" skews the national landscape and frustrates the nation to no end (Gilroy 125). Any backlash against pluralism usually manifests itself in an increase of nationalistic racism aimed at tempering transnationalism (Gilroy 25, 88-89). Literary scholar Kandice Chuh charts this very occurrence in her study of the United States' response to Japanese immigrants during the time of World War II (96, 99, 103). There is a great irony here, though. Cultural theorist and legal anthropologist Sally Falk Moore sharply notes how these efforts end up being completely antithetical to their initial purpose. Any attempts to homogenize and depluralize a nation will only become frustrated since they inevitably create greater pluralization (30). Nationalism only grows weaker as it tries to act stronger, and the nation simply strengthens what it seeks to quash.

Foucault would agree with Moore and argue that the economic machine is an example of this irony. Nations cannot avoid moving towards a transnational existence as long as their devotion to capitalism continues. This is because, as the economic game becomes more and more global, the interactions and relations between people who are inextricably tied to the economic machine become more global, too. Within a global economy, then, many nations will become rolled into one. The nation wants its

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individuals tied to the economic game, though. So if an individual pursues her/his own

economic interests, the communal bonds of the nation will have to eventually have a

weaker hold on her/him. Economic bonds are simply more powerful than the bonds of

nationalism, and yet it is this very economic game that governments want their

population tied to. So, Foucault claims, national subordination is already at work from

within the nation's own economy. The same economic machine that is supposed to

maintain the nation's sovereignty simultaneously weakens it by conducting commerce

beyond its own borders. The problem for governments is how to regulate power when

this unavoidable paradox occurs; political thought is obsessed with solving this inevitable

challenge to national solidarity (*Biopolitics* 302-03).

Just as metanarratives of national cultures have been challenged by pluralism, the

established metanarrative of the literary world—essentially, the canon—faces scrutiny

from a multitude of different voices. Literature's entry into transnationalism in this way is

understandable. If nations are losing their primacy of influence as their metanarratives

fail to retain validity, if colonialism has been traded out for higher pluralism, if diasporas

are now the norm, and if the "population" has been replaced by a "multitude" of

individuals with an irreducible common denominator—how can literature not be affected

by these changes?

Literary Transnationalism

Few scholars seem to be assessing that question, though. As shown, transnationalism has

been thoroughly discussed throughout academia, but literary scholars seem hesitant to

enter the dialogue. In terms of nationalism, this hesitation makes sense. Education has

bristled, thus far, at including marginal voices in its curriculum.[2] At the level of higher

education, much of this could be due to literary studies' love affair with postcolonial

studies. For example, Marxist literary theorist Aijaz Ahmad's 1992 book *In Theory:*

Classes, Nations, Literatures was largely excoriated for questioning the legitimacy of

postcolonial literary theory and cataloguing its detrimental contributions. An "effort to

bury the book into silence and oblivion" followed (Ahmad 144). The stir caused by *In*

Theory prompted the editors of *Public Culture* to devote their entire fall 1993 issue to a

greater discussion of it. In their editorial note, Appadurai, Lauren Berlant, Breckenridge,

and Dilip Gaonkar acknowledge that Ahmad makes some troubling claims but agree that

theorists should interrogate the relationship between "the settings in which [they] gain

[their] livelihoods and the . . . opaque circumstances" of the political struggles with

which they align ("Editorial Comment" x). *Public Culture*'s editors recognize the tenuous

situation scholars face when "speaking for/as others," especially when they are "rewarded

professionally" for such work (x). While scholarship's metamorphosis into a business is

perhaps unavoidable, the editors still urge theorists to envision "a practice of theory

which responds equally to the need for global emancipation and the claims of the work,

the occasion, the location, the voice (xi). Appadurai and his peers realize this is not an

easy task, but they argue that it is a necessary one as long as the nation remains a

paradoxical space.

      Critical internal re-evaluation is happening, though. Historian and anthropologist

Ann Laura Stoler notes how scholars across disciplines are questioning if the application

of postcolonial studies only creates and fosters the same conditions it criticizes (127).

Obviously, that would only sustain binaries that culture and art challenge every day, and

Negri argues that this must not happen, since art today rises out of a sort of nowhere position that defies measurement (51-52). While placelessness is not something to celebrate, if literary studies is going to adequately understand contemporary writing and thus stay relevant, it should try to apprehend the changes transnationalism is bringing.

This presents exciting opportunities for literary studies. The possibilities created from the intersection of transnationalism and literature are vast. Fishkin gives an unparalleled list of sources that are already creating such transnational literature, but she also emphasizes the numerous areas in academia that still lack representation in the classroom. She claims this is the next big thing, since a wellspring of new ways to view literature is present when transnationalism enters. There is great need here "to correct the reductive visions of America"—"the West" could just as easily be substituted here—and for "research [to] cross borders as readily as consumer goods do" (20, 25). Thus far in America, the two primary literary scholars who have performed comprehensive studies of transnationalism and literature's junction are Jahan Ramazani and Paul Jay.[3] The former approaches the issue with an examination of poetry, and the latter explicates fiction.

Ramazani asserts that the intense compression of poetry lends itself well to displaying transnationalism because it can show us how "global modernity's cross-cultural vectors sometimes fuse" and highlight "the creolized texture of transnational experience" (4). He posits the Modern poets as the first ones to incorporate such transnationalism, and he uses contemporary poets to show how it has been continuing ever since. Literary scholar Celena Kusch questions if the modernists were successful in doing this, wondering if their move towards globalized cosmopolitanism only helped spawn further Orientalization of the Other (41). Ramazani addresses this throwback to

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the ideas of postcolonial theorist Edward Said, acknowledging that globalization can and has had homogenizing and totalizing aspects before. But he argues that, overall, the Modern poets successfully "transvalued and creolized . . . global forces" to express their "globalized locality" and that such successful rendering continues today (10, 96, 100). Ramazani also states that nationalism holds too much primacy in literary studies and preserves a mononational narrative that is harmfully exclusionary and narrow-minded (24, 28-29). Instead, a transnational poetics should emphasize "the dialogic intersections . . . of specific discourses, genres, techniques, and forms of diverse origins" (43). This would potentially change the reading of literature from modernism, through postcolonialism, and into today. For Ramazani literature speaks from a fractured voice that requires more open perspectives if it will be understood (158). Jay echoes much of the same when examining fiction.

Jay argues that the growth of transnationalism will have to impact our study of literature. Since homogeneous or pure national cultures do not exist, reading literature along nationalistic lines makes no sense; in fact, he believes greater agency comes from entering into the globalized culture, not by trying to suppress it (3). Nationalism is still important to Jay, though, because the national model continues to contribute to society; however, it needs to be "supplemented, complicated, and challenged by newer approaches" (73). Present-day national culture is not fixed on a rigid center/periphery model, since locations are created and shaped by how scholars choose to study a specific space (4, 74). In other words, all scholars, critics, or professors decide, to an extent, how White or non-White they make England out to be.

Jay notes that tension often mounts with these types of border studies and that one argument against the growth of transnational studies is that it will give rise to a "debilitating fragmentation" (4). He argues, though, that this fragmentation strengthens literary studies, since it has always searched for "promising new forms and expressions of coherence" (4). This happened in the 1960s when literary studies embraced deconstruction and post-structuralism, which welcomed the study of difference—not just sameness (17-19). With today's potential shift in study, though, Jay does not advocate eliminating the postcolonial; instead, he argues that scholars should view transnationalism as an extension of that dialogue (4, 34). Indeed, postcolonial thought began to challenge the idea of noble Western nations, which started to put nationalism to the test. That trend continues in transnational studies, which will end up "remapping" the locations examined in literature (8). Globalization does merit scrutiny, though, lest the university become "complicit with forces of global capital" and negate the work of social justice to which it seeks to contribute (7). For Jay, one way to avoid this is through a key process of transnationalism—mobility, which requires flexibility in literary studies to incorporate more voices from more regions. That mobility was seen in the academy in the 1950s and 60s when more minorities demanded access to higher education. With the vertical mobility of obtaining jobs in the academy, these minorities brought about Jay's notion of horizontal mobility by teaching authors and subjects that had never received time in classrooms before (12). There is now opportunity for a greater breadth of literary study than has ever occurred, should education embrace it.

These studies are thoughtfully drawn out but are just a starting point. There is still much attention that needs to be devoted to transnational literature. Given Fishkin,

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Ramazani, and Jay's enthusiasm for the new possibilities, this study aims to hypothesize and loosely define what literary transnationalism might look like. Establishing a firm definition would be impossible and, even if it were feasible, too limiting. Still, a formation of terms is necessary. For this study's purposes, the narration of literary transnationalism will emphasize an assemblage of consciousness, begin a dialogue on nationalism, interrogate individual sovereignty, and explore an interstitial authorial voice. Brief initial clarification of these terms will be beneficial.

First, characters in transnational literature will often be marked by an *assemblage of consciousness*. This means that individuals, whether diasporic or living in a pluralistic urban center, possess an identity that is more complex than postcolonial characters because the world they live in is more complicated. A single metanarrative neither satisfactorily describes the societies of which they are a part nor sufficiently acts as a signifier of those characters' identity. Even a binary is too simple to account for multifaceted identities. Du Bois' "double consciousness," for example, is too limited in its scope. His ideas fit for a time in history and for a select group of people, but culture and peoples' identities have moved beyond such simple binaries. Second, transnational literature will often include a *dialogue on nationalism*. This can include the examination of what it means to belong; what nationalities mean; the legitimacy of colonialism today; and whether or not nations matter. Third, per Foucault, Mbembe, and Hardt and Negri, *individual sovereignty* will figure heavily into transnational literature. This could encompass an individual's agency, the authority over her/his own body, or a sense of place within a political body as a refugee or second-generation diasporic individual. Lastly, transnational literature allows space for writers to create an *interstitial authorial*

voice. Traditional storylines that are linear and straightforward may be less capable of articulating an author's assemblage of consciousness. Thus, an author may need to employ a different type of narration to impart her/his multiple subjective experiences through writing. Within that new narration, there can be the creation of a Third Voice between the author and her/his memories. That simultaneous detachment from and unity with the fragmented Self mirrors the transnational shift away from a world of binaries and borders.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSNATIONAL HESITATION IN ZADIE SMITH'S *WHITE TEETH*

When Zadie Smith published her first novel *White Teeth*, the literary world's

enthusiastic response implied that nobody knew what to make of this new young phenom.

Surprisingly still, thirteen years later few scholars grasp what Smith accomplished with

her debut, as most continue to label her novel either postcolonial, multicultural, or simply

hybrid. For example, Sigrun Meinig calls the novel "an instrument of coping with the

traumas of post-coloniality" and that it "is true to the post-colonial condition it describes"

(257).[4] Focusing on multiculturalism, Nick Bentley claims that Smith addresses anxiety

over the changing meaning of Englishness and attempts to offer a "reframed model of

national identity" (485). He argues that multiculturalism replaces colonialism (499). This,

however, is incorrect, given how multiculturalism does not interrogate the issue of

nationalism like transnationalism does. Multiculturalism only acknowledges the fact that

many faces make up the world today, which is an argument that really isn't even an

argument anymore. It leaves no space for the political debate about the nation that

transnationalism inherently seeks to enter into, which *White Teeth* addresses.

Multiculturalism is too horizontal and on the ground level, whereas

transnationalism is more vertical, looming above like an airplane that can look down

from its observatory perch to commence a dialogue on nationalism.[5] Irene Pérez

Fernández comes close to performing an insightful reading, but stops short by focusing

on hybridity. She argues that the novel addresses "issues that go beyond the logic of post-

colonialism," but then claims that it celebrates human existence in Bhabha's Third Space

(143). The novel does move beyond postcolonialism, but Bhabha's Third Space is still too postcolonial of an idea. His theory does precede and lay the groundwork for transnational studies, but it does not move far enough into transnationalism to fully explicate Smith's novel.[6] These interpretations all ultimately make *White Teeth* out to be postcolonial, which it is not. Instead, it should be seen as an inherently transnational text and a pivotal novel in the development of transnational poetics since it challenges the relevance of a postcolonial perspective in the twenty-first century. Characters in *White Teeth* who still view transnational culture through the colonial paradigm become a laughingstock. Ironically, literary scholarship commits the same error by viewing the novel as a postcolonial piece, further proving the story's point: Western culture falters at acknowledging the move past colonialism.

Postcolonial aspects *do* appear in the novel, but they are always secondary to the greater transnationalism of the story, which characters like Samad Iqbal struggle against. He tries to limit the effect his transnational surroundings have on him, but he cannot. Samad's efforts do not make the novel postcolonial, though. Rather, the novel tracks a man who is frustrated by, powerless against, and ultimately beaten down by a transnational world in which he does not know how to function. Transnationalism first appears in the World War II vignettes of *White Teeth* and then becomes even more visible with transnational sites like O'Connell's Poolroom in London. In the midst of these surroundings, Samad continues to fight against his *assemblage of consciousness* by holding onto colonial binaries, and these attempts to keep the colonial construct alive become a joke. He, as a diasporic Bengali, struggles against these changes within himself as the urban culture around him evolves. English culture also bristles against

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transnationalism, wariness represented by former colonial soldier J. P. Hamilton. His place in the novel generates a *dialogue on nationalism* that undermines the validity of nationalistic fervor in transnational London.

Postcolonial readings of *White Teeth* are understandable in light of some of the novel's content, but the novel is wholly transnational. John Ball argues that there is very little in *White Teeth* that is definitive since there "can never be a neutral, final space" in its setting (243). Dave Gunning claims that the novel rejects simple constructs of identity by "refus[ing] any philosophy of cultural difference that anchors itself in a purely synchronic understanding of the world" (135). Essentially, *White Teeth* opposes the idea of pure Englishness as it scrutinizes past and present colonialism and nationalism. This novel very much functions as a marginal narrative against the center's metanarrative, as Lyotard would put it. Paul Jay notes that Englishness is threatened here as the novel "works to disrupt or deconstruct [the] central binary" of the core/periphery model (155). In order to perform such an examination, *White Teeth* "transcends (or synthesizes) the categories of 'British' or 'postcolonial' fiction" (Jay 156). It creates something entirely different than postcolonialism can account for, and Phyllis Lassner would agree, noting that in *White Teeth* "a new generation with new voices" will challenge "the legacies of World War II and British cultural identity and difference" (195). *White Teeth* exists in the London of Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia*. World War II is crucial in the novel since it causes characters from other nations to collide. It is a global war that "proclaims a declaration of independence" from "the very idea of belonging" (Lassner 193). Borders will be crossed, identity will never be the same after World War II, and nothing and will be as cleanly defined as it was during the time of colonialism.

This is not what appears at first glance in the novel, though. Archie and Samad's friendship borne out of the war might appear to preserve the colonial binary since one is English and the other Bengali. They could seem to exemplify the Empire and the Other, but they subvert these roles instead. When the other men in their tank are killed in Bulgaria, Samad feels a violent duty to avenge their deaths, even though they are not his fellow countrymen and "would not have acknowledged him in a civilian street" (80). Samad exudes a fervent sort of English loyalty, whereas Archie stares at him in amazement since "he could feel nothing comparable" (81). These are the beginnings of Samad's assemblage of consciousness. Throughout most of the novel, Samad is the stronger, bolder figure while Archie is apathetic at best, and the colonial construct does not appear in their interactions. Each character is not just playing against type in a postcolonial sense. Rather, they exemplify early on how colonial concepts of identity no longer hold true. Archie never tries to lord any of his Englishness over Samad, and Samad is free to tell Archie that just because Westerners do things a certain way "does not mean . . . that it is a good idea" (83). In addition to a nonexistent power play, their early friendship does not involve only them, the East and the West, but other parties as well.

Eventually a group of Russian soldiers comes through the Bulgarian village, and the transnationalism of World War II comes to the forefront. The Russians are searching for a French Nazi, Dr. Perret, who is a main figure of the German eugenics program, and the image constructed here is highly transnational—a Bengali and Englishman converse with a Russian about a Frenchman who is working for the Germans in Bulgaria (90). Further cultural collision ensues. Archie and Samad join the Russians in pursuit of Dr.

Perret as part of Samad's never-ending thirst for glory and efforts to live up to his great-grandfather's example of heroism. Joining them in their nighttime raid is the Bulgarian village's café owner and his drunken nephew. When they find Dr. Perret, six nationalities are accounted for. The Bulgarians dragged along on this raid begin to wonder why they are even there, but the World Wars bring everyone into this cross-cultural contact, whether they wanted it or not. That is not to say this vignette amounts to multiculturalism since multiple nations are represented. What follows is uniquely transnational because of these characters' interdependence. Samad *must* rely on these other individuals.

Samad augments his actual military rank and "began the march up the mountain in search of a war he could one day tell his grandchildren about" (92). His progress is impeded, though, by a war-torn hill, which is pockmarked with bomb craters that have ripped up trees—so much so that the roots block their way to Dr. Perret's house on the hill. The Russian bayonets end up having to be used to hack away the roots. These are small but significant details. If Samad succeeds on this raid, he will feel like he has re-enacted the past by repeating his great-grandfather's heroic legacy. Thus, triumph means a resuscitation of the past or a stronger bond with it. The irony, though, rests in the fact that Samad cannot achieve victory on his own. He must rely on soldiers from *other* nations and not himself to reach his goal. Ultimately, to succeed Samad needs them to cut away the roots—in other words, the past. Samad seeks to glory in the past example of his great-grandfather, but the point here is that roots are actually an impediment and not a boon of progress. If he will advance at all, it can only happen if someone cuts up the roots, the past. There is a transnational interdependence of this episode that, whether Samad realizes it or not, robs him of the ability to claim kinship to his great-grandfather's

individual heroics attached to a colonial mutiny centuries ago. If he does succeed and

move forward in life after the war, it is only because he had people from other nations

help him. This is a highly transnational moment. The war for these soldiers will only

end—and jumpstart the transnational future—if they work together to do it. These people

from different national cultures are not simply there occupying the same space; they are

dependent upon one another. Samad's "lone ranger" complex is rendered woefully

impotent.

Naturally, Samad becomes glum over this. He began the evening on a morphine

high, but it wears off, and in the gloom of withdrawal, "[h]e *longed* for the East . . .

longed for the man he once was" (94). He tries to re-enact the past, but fails. He also

wishes to go back to the past, but World War II has changed everything irrevocably.

Upon realizing this he asks Archie, "What am I going to do, after this war is over . . . Go

back to Bengal? Or to Delhi? Who would have such an Englishman there? To England?

Who would have such an Indian?" (95). Samad realizes he is simultaneously both and

neither, a nowhere man after participation in a global conflict like World War II. While

this may sound like hybridity, Samad's current status has also been affected and informed

by the other people surrounding him. While he may think his story is comprised of solely

English and Bengali timelines, but he is more of an assemblage than a binary. That is

because there is a deeper transnational interdependence that has taken place than he

acknowledges, and Dr. Perret completes that picture.

When they capture Dr. Perret, Samad wants to kill him since the man has

"affronted God" by working with eugenics. Archie tries to dissuade him, but in the

process he accidentally places the responsibility on himself, noting that if anyone has a

reason to kill Dr. Perret, it is an Englishman. His reasoning is that the war is being fought over "democracy and Sunday dinners, and . . . promenades and piers, and bangers and mash—and the things that are *ours*. Not *yours*" (100). Archie implies that this war was fought to preserve things of Englishness, but by this point the novel has stressed that Archie is less patriotic than Samad. Archie mistakenly does what Gilroy argues the West continues to do today: label a global conflict in nationalistic terms by describing what is being fought over as "ours" and not "yours." In such a war, though, "ours" and "yours" no longer exist, especially if Samad is now partly English. In the increasingly transnational environment of *White Teeth* there is no such separation. Archie eventually submits to Samad's command that he kill Dr. Perret, and Archie takes him off into a field where Samad hears several gunshots.

To the first-time reader and to Samad the deed is done, but Archie actually does not kill him. He keeps alive not a pair of East and West, but a transnational trio comprised of an Englishman, a Frenchman, and a Bengali. This decision to spare Dr. Perret's life makes Samad's view of Archie as he comes back from the "execution" even more significant. He sees Archie's "moon-shaped face lit up like a big baby, entering life head first" (102). By keeping Dr. Perret alive, Archie conjoins the three men, effectively starting this transnational relation that for Archie—and for all involved—is like a birth of a new self. They can never be the same after this, but Samad will try to live as if nothing is different, as if he does not have an assemblage of consciousness.

In a transnational setting like the London of Smith's novel, an assemblage of consciousness marks this new self, visible in almost every character. As urban centers face a greater influx of immigrants, pluralism rises and challenges nationalistic

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metanarratives, as Lyotard argues. Hardt and Negri's multitude has replaced Foucault's singular, faceless population, so clearly defined lines of identity and cultural belonging have been skewed. Likewise, the binary of East and West that Samad holds onto so fervently belongs to an earlier time. It no longer accurately describes the variety of narratives from various cultures that make up the transnational world. Samad, though, will not move along with these new cultural shifts and instead tries to hold onto the paradigm of colonialism and its binaries. Tradition, Islamic faithfulness, and being a dislocated Easterner in the West are the characteristics he touts with pride, even though they come from a bygone era. Samad faces challenges from around him and from himself. His family belittles his desire to hold onto past values, but he also must wrestle with internal desires, like his attraction to his sons' English music teacher, Poppy Burt-Jones. These different values and desires tear at Samad continually, deteriorating any singularity of thought he would try to preserve against his own growing assemblage of consciousness. He instead tries to sustain a sort of "double consciousness," a term that is now too limited in its scope. Du Bois' idea fit the slave/free binary for a select group of people, but it has no place in Smith's London, which is now home to the multitude. The urban center where Samad lives is transnational and pluralistic enough that trying to avoid becoming an assemblage is a losing battle.

Despite the challenges he faces, Samad attempts to relive the past, and this creates further complications. Jonathan Sell suggests that the novel rejects the "essentialist view[s] of identity" that Samad touts (28), and Pamela McCallum argues that sites of "interaction, or confrontation, with otherness cannot be avoided" in *White Teeth* (489). Though this is the environment Samad lives in, he pursues an essential identity

relentlessly, and change is the very thing he is leery of. He posits traditionalism as the remedy against transnationalism. However, there is not an older metanarrative anymore that holds a place of relevance in London where he now lives. This urban metropolis is not conducive to the retainment of traditionalism, but his blind devotion to the past emboldens him anyway, which is revealed partly through his love of war stories.

The war narrative, though, does not translate over to the current culture, and his family rolls their eyes and yells at Samad to stop when he begins to reminisce. The war does not hold the same meaning (or any meaning) for them like it does for Samad. As Gilroy notes, people try to make the war matter, and Samad seems to believe that having fought in the war has endowed him with a wisdom nobody else possesses. Jay insightfully explains why Samad does this, arguing that Samad's "war with *himself*" has replaced World War II and now centers on "abstract forces of purity and corruption" (161). This is the new conflict for Samad, separate from yet borne out of World War II, and he pursues it with just as much gusto as he did when storming the hill to capture Dr. Perret. While Archie views the cultural changes around him detachedly, Samad wages war on pluralism in himself and in his family. His goal is the preservation of his Eastern culture, heritage, and traditions in London, and his weapon will be the strength and energy derived from the colonial glory of his great-grandfather, Mangal Pande.

Pande's story is the most personal part of Samad since it contains the "stronge[st] evocation of the blood that ran through him" (84). He refuses to believe that Pande did not heroically start the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857 by firing the first shot at British colonizers. Though history clearly states otherwise, Samad chooses to believe Pande went down fighting and inspired those around him. He holds onto this fabrication of the

truth staunchly because "[w]hen a man has nothing but his blood to commend him . . . it must be jealously defended" (212). Samad views himself as a man without a nation since he is a Bengali living in London, so his blood is all he has. He looks to Pande for inspiration, pride, and hope, and it is crucially important to him that he leave behind a similar heroic legacy by preserving his Eastern heritage in London.[7]

But London in 1984 is much different than Pande's time of colonial aggression. By then, Samad's sons Magid and Millat are in the English school system. During a parent-teacher meeting at their school, Samad asks why they celebrate so many holidays. The transnational saturation of London in *White Teeth* is mirrored by a school that already recognizes "Christmas, Ramadan, Chinese New Year, Diwali, Yom Kippur, Hanukkah, the birthday of Haile Selassie, and the death of Martin Luther King" (108-09). They do not, however, recognize other Islamic holidays, which Samad does not understand. Humorously, the school already takes off thirty-seven days to accommodate all these holidays, so there is simply no room for more. The implication here is that the urban center is culturally crowded and too small for all this diversity. The dynamic is not West/East anymore. Deciding what to include and exclude is difficult, and complications arise when trying to preserve all of these ethnic and religious distinctions in such a small space. One can almost begin to sympathize with Samad's colonial lens; it makes everything so much easier and clean-cut. But this is the time of Hardt and Negri's multitude, so Samad's attempts to fit the past into the present simply do not work. He bristles at the cultural change around him and its spirit of inclusion and not separation. For example, he criticizes the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the unification of East and West Germany, calling it, "Foolishness. Massive immigration problem to follow"

(200). Samad values cultural solidarity and knows, just like James Field notes, that immigration will cause greater cultural pluralism. It is an inevitability that is exasperating for him—even more so when that pluralism comes from within his own family. His wife and sons do not support his desire to maintain his traditional Bengali values because today's culture, for them, is different.

Magid and Millat are second generation and more English than Bengali, but Samad cannot reconcile that they are being raised by a different culture than his own. Millat infuriates him because he "was neither one thing nor the other . . . he lived for the in between," and Samad wants things to be either-or like a colonial binary (291). This discrepancy is highlighted by Millat interpreting "jerky head and hand movements" from Samad incorrectly from across the room during music class. Samad's pantomime is supposed to bring to mind Indian dancing, but instead Millat reads it as a request to start belting out Michael Jackson's "Thriller," which he does with great enthusiasm, much to Samad's dismay (130). His Eastern culture does not live on in his boys who were born in the West and prefer the globalized society of London. The metanarratives, as Lyotard would put it, of tradition, religion, and Eastern values are not what Samad's sons identify with since their world is and always has been transnational.

Ironically, Samad cannot keep East and West cleanly separated in his own life, either, pursuing an affair with Poppy. But even then, Samad repeatedly invokes postcolonial binaries by contrasting English lust with the purity of Islamic faith. He constructs a typical Freudian prison of repetition and repression by continually trying to live in the colonial paradigm to avoid the possibility of becoming cosmopolitan. Ultimately, he fails to repress his desire and the inevitability of being affected by the

West, both of which are represented by his affair with Poppy. Christian Moraru agrees that repression plagues Samad, noting that his environment makes "selfhood impossible to locate as a discrete ontological and cultural unit," and any efforts to work against this will be nothing more than repression (134). Indeed, Samad's selfhood is difficult to keep singular because of his assemblage of consciousness, but he tries anyway. The affair causes a crisis for him since it means he is not being a good, pure Muslim. He fears how that example will keep his sons from being good Muslims and good Bengalis. Samad has to process this crisis with someone, and he and Archie very tellingly go to O'Connell's to discuss what he should do.

O'Connell's Poolroom is where they spend most of their time—an Irish pub in the middle of London, which the novel posits as an inherently transnational site.[8] Though it is referred to as an Irish pub, it is neither Irish nor a poolroom. This is akin to how England does not look so English anymore since, as Greg Urban notes, physical appearance is no longer an appropriate signifier of national identity. O'Connell's is a place of intimate transnational collision. On the walls are reproductions of pictures from the English painter George Stubbs, and there are fragments of an Eastern script. An Arab named Mickey, referred to as a "brown man," works behind the counter and owns this "Irish" pub, and inside there is an Irish flag and a map of the Arab Emirates—not side by side, but "knotted together" (153). There is also a life-size cutout of the West Indian cricketer, Viv Richards. These items from disparate nations and cultures share not only the same space of the walls, but they exist interwoven with one another. Just as there are no clean lines of nationalistic separation in transnationalism, these emblems of various cultures are not kept apart, but rather, bleed over into one another. In the end, though, there is still an

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image of wholeness: everything is bound up in a unity that is O'Connell's. The pub is its own assemblage. The clientele is also varied. Archie and Samad frequent the pub regularly, but so do two octogenarian Jamaicans. O'Connell's is "an Irish poolroom run by Arabs" (154), but there is more that makes it transnational.

For example, there is no room for nationalistic dialogue or even the colonial paradigm with its binaries. In a transnational world, such ideas do not fit into the social fabric anymore. They appear, instead, as a futile preservation of a worldview that no longer contains any relevancy. Mickey understands this while Samad does not. Samad has been nagging him for years to hang a picture of Pande in O'Connell's, but Mickey refuses since it creates "a *repetitive syndrome* that puts all these buggers off their *culinary experience*" (155). This echoes Freud again and pins the problem with a postcolonial perspective in a transnational world: to revert back to that older cultural model reeks of repetition and, ultimately, repression. It also harkens back to Lyotard's ideas. Pande's portrait represents a time of the colonial metanarrative, but a place like O'Connell's with its transnational array of accoutrements on its walls does not recognize such a narrative. Other people, like Mickey, understand this. O'Connell's, as a transnational site, is the last place a picture of Pande belongs. This does not mean that Mickey has purposefully fashioned O'Connell's in such a manner. The impression exists that this is just how the pub is. This sort of transnational creation has arisen organically. But for something from the colonial era, like Pande's portrait, to find its way into O'Connell's would require forceful tampering. Mickey simply is not willing to do that. He likes the way O'Connell's currently is and is convinced the other customers do, too. Samad stands alone in his discomfort.

The careful construction of O'Connell's augments the transnationalism of *White Teeth*, but hardly any scholars have done a deep reading of the pub, save for James Deys in his dissertation on English public houses in literature. Even though he correctly labels the pub as a "transnational space," he misses some of its greater significance. He contradicts himself when he calls it both an "ahistorical space" and "anything but a stable space" (127, 129). This implies that there simultaneously is and is not room for nationalism or colonialism in the pub. Deys also argues that O'Connell's is made into a hybrid location when Mickey, an Arab, takes over ownership (129). It is tempting to label O'Connell's like this since the existence of more than two cultures implies transnationalism. However, adding to Deys' reading with Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* illuminates the intrinsic transnationalism of O'Connell's. Kiberd's study expounds upon the transnational relationship Ireland has had with England. In light of this, simply by being an Irish pub in the middle of London, O'Connell's is already a transnational site before undergoing Arab proprietorship.

The English/Irish conflict might seem postcolonial, but Kiberd wants to go deeper than that. He argues that England created Ireland to be its Victorian dumping ground, its Unconscious (15). England took her nasty qualities, labeled them "Irish," and reviled her neighbors (20). Both countries knew this creation was not *really* Ireland, but something separate. Kiberd uses the term *hybridity* to describe this phenomenon, but this differs from Bhabha's hybridity. What Kiberd refers to, instead, is the creation of an entirely different entity, a separate Third Self—an Ireland that the real Irish knew had been manufactured and that the English tried to pretend did not exist since it revealed ugly truths about themselves. It was, literally, a new England. The Act of Union in 1800 was

England's attempt to hide this disparity by joining the countries together, but Daniel O'Connell, an Irish agitator in Parliament, spoke out against this. He gave the Irish a "corporate identity and a sense of their own massed power" for the first time, and that solidarity helped set the stage for later rebellions (Kiberd 21). The fact that the pub is named O'Connell's, then, is highly symbolic. It carries with it the reminder of a man who adamantly made sure to preserve the transnational construct between the English and Irish so everyone could see it. Thus, O'Connell's Poolroom is inherently transnational *before* Mickey ever takes ownership of it. Since O'Connell's is a transnational site, Archie and Samad's frequent meetings there suggest their inability to stay away from the growing transnationalism in a place like London. Their impromptu emergency meeting at the pub to discuss Samad's affair is significant. His adultery challenges his external claims of being a pure Bengali and a pure Muslim, and it points to his internal struggle against his own assemblage of consciousness. Something as alluringly cosmopolitan as a Bengali having an affair with an Englishwoman can only be talked about at O'Connell's, a place indicative of a Third Self or a new self borne out in transnationalism.

The possibility that his affair could damage his heritage brings a crisis of faith, identity, and guilt for Samad, and he worries about how that will affect his sons' maturation as good Bengalis. Ironically, Samad *refuses* the binary of a coin toss when asking for Archie's advice in O'Connell's. Archie begins to flip the coin to decide what Samad should do, but Samad slams the table in frustration, exclaiming, "[I]t is too late for that. Can't you see? What is done is done" (158). Interestingly, inside this transnational site of O'Connell's, binaries no longer assess situations sufficiently. The pub itself is an assemblage, and Samad's assemblage of consciousness is growing. He cannot define

himself so easily when he is in O'Connell's. Before long, though, he is "on about tradition again" as the remedy to counteract his affair (159). His guilt moves him to protect his sons and get them back to Bengali roots since "tradition was culture, and culture led to roots, and these were good, these were untainted principles. . . . Roots were what saved" (161). Exasperated by Samad's stubbornness, Archie asks Mickey's opinion, and Mickey says that Samad can either withdraw from this culture to protect his "pure" heritage for his sons or simply accept the change in the second generation—accept that this transnational culture and its effects are unavoidable (160). Mickey does not appear to have some keen insight into the culture of London that Samad does not; instead, what he does know is that Samad's staunch standpoint is woefully irrelevant to the way the world really is. Mickey never uses a word like transnationalism, but he does understand that Samad is not being realistic.

Unsurprisingly, Samad chooses to withdraw from London rather than choosing to accept the changing times, but he does not make this decision for himself. He leaves O'Connell's with a renewed vigor for maintaining his past and traditions as a means towards remaining "split people" (150), but nothing is that clean anymore. As metanarratives become challenged and pluralism rises, Hardt and Negri's multitude becomes the norm. This happens corporately, but also individually, and so individuals become assemblages affected by myriad national cultures. This creates the assemblage of consciousness, which rages in Samad, though he tries to suppress it. In his own life, he cannot keep his conflicting desires separate, and his sons are already the product of multiple cultures. But he still tries to protect them from *his* cultural waywardness, deciding to send them back to Bangladesh to inculcate tradition into them. However, he

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cannot afford the airfare for both, so he chooses to send only Magid—without telling

Alsana. In response to his deception, she refuses to give Samad definitive answers, and

she does so in a heavily symbolic way. One of the starkest binaries is yes/no, and Samad

loves precisely established lines. Instead, his wife replaces yes/no with, "Maybe, Samad

Miah, maybe not," which makes him livid (178). Samad's efforts to preserve past

traditional stability by sending Magid to Bangladesh remove the stark binary of yes/no in

his own home. Rather than regenerate the certainty of tradition, Samad's efforts have

only created ambiguity, which he deplores. Even sending Magid back to Bangladesh is a

failed experiment. Upon returning, he is *more* English than before and wants to become,

of all things, a lawyer. Samad is crushed. He has discovered what Sally Falk Moore has

argued—that efforts to strengthen tradition only weaken it.

Overall, Samad is awash in contradictions. He has an affair with a Brit while

claiming he wants to be a pure Muslim. He wants to be a pure Bengali, but spends most

of his free time at O'Connell's. He wants the world to be cleanly defined, but at the

school meeting he wants Islamic holidays included with all the rest or even to replace the

rest, which will only increase the pluralism of this transnational London. Despite these

contradictions, Samad claims, "I don't wish to be a modern man! I wish to live as I was

always meant to! I wish to return to the East!" (121). This cannot happen anymore.

Samad works against himself, and the culture around him obliterates that bygone binary.

It is impossible to return to. Late in the novel, Samad does begin to have an awakening,

though. In a moment of despair, he acknowledges to Irie, Archie's daughter, that he

realizes going back to the East is impossible and what is left is "you belong nowhere"

(336). Irie tries to reassure him by disagreeing even though she knows he is right, and this

prospect of belonging nowhere sounds wonderful to her. He continues to lament how

"you begin to give up the *very idea* of belonging" and come to believe "that everything is

an *accident*" (337). This, to him, is a prison, but Irie thinks it sounds "like *paradise . . .*

like freedom" (337). The separation between him and Irie's transnational generation is

gargantuan. He looks at her, hoping to find understanding in her eyes, but all she can do

is squeeze his hand, lie to him, and tell him what he wants to hear. Samad finally

understands the London culture he lives in, but he cannot bear the brunt of the truth he

has unearthed. Thus, Irie has to lie to him since she knows Samad is "neck-deep . . . in

the quagmire of the past" and drags "ancient history around like a ball and chain" (271).

Regardless of his epiphany that he belongs nowhere, this is still what defines Samad

when other people look at him.

The firm grip on colonialism does not work, which Samad exemplifies, but he is

not the only one who will not move on from the past. J. P. Hamilton, a character whose

English fervor removes him from reality, is staunchly nationalistic. He is not a standalone

figure, but represents England as a whole. Pilar Cuder-Domínguez argues that, with

characters like Hamilton, the "myths and prejudices" of white Englishness are on display

(185). He exists to show how World War II-era ethnocentrism borne out of nationalism is

very much still alive—values that will not go away easily (185-86). Though nationalism

persists, the novel belittles its legitimacy and uses Hamilton to enter a dialogue on

nationalism. As a colonial soldier who fought in the Congo, he is a symbol of Old

England, now resplendent in his signet ring, four medals, and Senior Service cigarette

package. At first, he assumes Magid, Millat, and Irie are at his door selling

encyclopedias, which he bristles at, saying, "[A]t my age it is not *more* information one

requires but *less*" (142). This echoes both Gilroy and Lyotard since a nation's mononarrative is so much simpler to digest, but the pluralism of a transnational world complicates it. For people like Hamilton, less is not just more—it is best. Therefore, the presentation of *more* information, in the hands of these three children of the transnational generation no less, is a frightening thing. Smith's London simply has more information today than Hamilton's war generation would like to handle.

Magid, Millat, and Irie—the second generation of immigrants formerly of the periphery and now planted in the center—occupy the same space as Hamilton. He refuses the treats they bring from school, saying, "I simply cannot eat anything unless it has been pulverized beforehand," (143). His teeth rotted while in the army, so his dentures would not be able to handle the foods they offer. Hamilton cannot digest or begin to stomach what the younger, transnational generation has to offer; it must be pulverized first. However, according to Hardt and Negri, today's culture of individuals constitutes an irreducible multitude. Therefore, what they represent and have to offer Hamilton cannot be broken down any further, so there is an impasse. He will remain unable to digest it, and yet *he*, the man with dentures, lectures the children on the importance of dental hygiene.

As he does, their conversation continues, and the two sides' differing views on nationalistic belonging appear. Hamilton mentions that, while in the Congo, one way he could tell the enemy apart from his fellow soldiers was through physiognomic difference. As if to create common ground, Millat mentions that his father "played for England" in the war, too, but Hamilton assures the boy he must be mistaken since "[t]here were certainly no wogs" fighting alongside him (144). The very idea that non-Whites would

fight for England is ludicrous to Hamilton, and "he grumbled, assessing the questions as if he were being given the opportunity to *rewrite history* here and now" (144, emphasis mine). Hamilton would like to set the record straight about what Englishness is, what patriotism means, and who gets to fight for what nation. The only problem for Hamilton—and what he does not seem to realize—is that history *is* written differently now, differently than he would prefer. Since Smith's London is distanced from the colonial project that Hamilton took part in, one can look back upon that point in history with greater scrutiny. As Paul Jay outlined, different stories are being listened to now since the demands for greater equality took place in the 1950s and 60s, and those efforts challenge the metanarrative Lyotard describes. But Hamilton wants to avoid "*more information.*"

He continues to lecture on dental hygiene, but his words seem to be better suited for his own ears when he concludes his admonitions with a discourse on wisdom teeth. He says the third molars are the most important, but problematic since "one is never sure whether one's mouth will be quite large enough to accommodate them" (145). A person "must grow into" them and be "big enough" for them; otherwise, they "grow crooked . . . or refuse to grow at all" (145). The impression here is that not all people can handle or grow into the wisdom—one could just as easily substitute *knowledge* here—that external forces, like the surrounding transnational culture, place upon them. Hamilton is actually describing himself, and his inability to recognize how Englishness is not pure and safe creates a suffocating atmosphere. The three children flee from his house to a "place where free breathing was possible" (145). Thompson argues that Hamilton is one massive paradox. He, within his staunch nationalism, tries to advocate for an essentialist

worldview. However, his perfectly white teeth were acquired through false dentures, which challenges any Anglo-Saxon "essentialist physiological notions of 'difference'." Thus, Hamilton actually embodies "the impermanence and uncertainty that characterise multicultural society" (125-26). Both Hamilton and Samad pursue different paradigms, one colonialism and one nationalism. Those desires become not so disparate, though, the longer they exist side by side since both men eventually long for the same thing: pure, essential identity. Hamilton, against the transnationalism and pluralism surrounding him, attempts to hold onto unreality, and the novel suggests that this is insanity.

Directly after this scene with Hamilton, *White Teeth* moves to a part of London where different mentally insane individuals roam the streets. They provide a contrast to Hamilton—not to make him look better, but rather, to show how insane *he* is and how normal *they* are. Since these people announce their madness and do not try to hide it, "they [are] better, less scary than Mr. J. P. Hamilton" and, therefore, they "[talk] sense when you least expect it" (146). Nationalism, then, is one of the worst forms of madness because of one's unawareness of it. All of these other urbanites "flaunted their insanity" externally (146). Stubborn nationalism, though, and the violent turns towards preservation that Benedict Anderson notes it can take are so deeply rooted internally that it conjures up a much more terrifying image.

This is the transnational world of *White Teeth*: World War II cross-cultural relationships; bygone colonial paradigms; transnational sites like O'Connell's that call to mind the creation of a separate and wholly new Third Self; stringent nationalism as a form of mental illness; and, to close, triads instead of a binaries. After all, the most visible binary of the novel, Archie and Samad, is not and never has been just a joining of

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two individuals across the poles of West and East. It is a much more complex cross-cultural conjoining, the likes of which is also evident in Dave Eggers' collaboration with Achak Deng in *What Is the What*. But even history does its best to focus on the binary while attempting to ignore the triad. The novel points to Crick and Watson's discovery of the structure of DNA as a commentary on the hesitation to embrace something other than a binary. Marcus Chalfen, the geneticist behind FutureMouse looks at a picture of those scientists and says, "1962, Wilkins won the Nobel in medicine with Crick and Watson. But no sign of Wilkins in the photos. . . . History likes lone geniuses or double acts. But it's got no time for threesomes" (279). Though Samad is not the focus of this statement, this scene reads as a severe commentary on people like him. Samad takes a "lone ranger" mentality from Pande and continually views the world through colonialism's dualities. To a large extent his life mirrors the West/East binary in his friendship with Archie, but in reality, just like Crick and Watson's invisible third partner, Archie and Samad are united forever by the third member of their group, Dr. Perret. Theirs is a sort of transnational union, the likes of which Samad knows nothing about since Archie hides it from him. Understandably, at the end of the novel when this deception is unveiled, Samad is outraged, and soon after that revelation the novel closes. Samad remains one of the novel's greatest focuses, largely overshadowing a character like Hamilton, as it should be since, as Dawson suggests, "[n]ationalist fears of penetration are . . . mild in comparison to the immigrant's fear of dissolution" (162). Samad is effectively a nowhere man with his mission in this transnational world, a world where even his closest friend has deceived him for more than forty years.

Never does *White Teeth* suggest how the reader should appraise this transnational environment. Some critics have argued that Smith herself is too optimistic about this growth of pluralism,[9] but she is actually quite reserved in terms of doling out universalized judgments. Any assessments of transnational culture exist in the novel's critiques of its own characters. Samad grips the past too tightly, and he becomes a laughingstock because of it. Other characters, especially Irie, try to live life free of the past, but their efforts are equally shown to be futile. If there is one thing that is clear from the presentation of Samad's character, it is that the postcolonial world has passed. It should still be given its due, its space, and respect, but *White Teeth* acknowledges that while the past does affect some aspects of peoples' identities today, that block of history no longer totalizes them.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSNATIONALISM AND NECROPOLITICS: THE INTERSTITIAL

AUTHORIAL VOICE AND PLACELESSNESS OF *WHAT IS THE WHAT*

With the publication of *What Is the What* in 2006, American author Dave Eggers

performed an incredible feat: despite being an American writing the story of an African,

he never faced accusations of racism, imperialism, ethnocentrism, or Orientalism.

Although his endeavor had great potential to be "morally fraught, if not illicit," as

Elizabeth Twitchell suggests, Eggers remained unscathed even though he entered

numerous "politically charged historical, social, and literary debates" (623).[10] One of the

ways he does this is by creating an *interstitial authorial voice* to tell Achak Deng's story.

This innovative narrative style, which can be referred to as a Third Voice, combines

Deng and Eggers' voices seamlessly into a separate narrator. Though Eggers is the writer

of the novel, he is telling the story of Deng's life and writing it as if Deng were the one

speaking. Indeed, since he and Eggers had countless conversations during the writing of

the book, it *is* Deng's voice and perspective throughout the novel. And yet, Eggers is the

one who writes it. The paradox of this combination is that both voices are simultaneously

present without sounding like two distinct speakers. Deng and Eggers' voices meet at the

interstices of their collaboration and create a wholly separate authorial voice, a Third

Voice that seeks to impart the true meaning of Deng's experiences.

The use of such a narrative style acknowledges Eggers' limitations in writing

about someone else's life. His choice to write the novel this way makes the narration

wholly transnational in its construction by bringing together disparate voices in unified

speech while keeping them distinct. It is a story, then, that transcends the borders of geography by charting Deng's movement from Sudan to the U.S. But it also moves beyond the boundaries of identity by cataloguing how Deng changes internally. This becomes even more evident when Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics is applied to *What Is the What*. Because of the necropolitical structure of Sudan, Deng's expression of *individual sovereignty* and consequent life as a refugee enables his own *assemblage of consciousness* to grow. Since he is a displaced individual with a fragmented identity, any retelling of his experiences necessitates a different type of narration to express what he has gone through. Through this transnational structure, Eggers is able to present Deng's story without being cocksure enough to imply he can fully apprehend the true experiences of a Lost Boy. In the process, *What Is the What* also challenges normal literary conventions.

Twitchell argues that Eggers articulates this Third Voice by embracing a "literary kenosis" by imagining "what cannot be known" since neither he nor the reader can fully inhabit Deng's experience (624, 635). Though Eggers' aim is to help readers understand Deng's situation, limited as that understanding can ever be, the novel's goal is not to present hard facts. Instead, it seeks to impart the truth of Deng's experiences, not the experiences themselves. Twitchell agrees, stating that what is important is "the knowledge that lies beyond one's limits," which Eggers seizes by opening "a space of uncertainty that revels in its own doubt" (640). Through this, both "knowledge and ignorance, fact and fiction" exist at the same time (640). Eggers is forthright in acknowledging his limitations, and that creates space for authorial experimentation. Since Deng cannot write his own story due to his lack of command over the English language

and since Eggers cannot fully render Deng's story since he has not lived it himself, the two will have to meet somewhere in the middle. They seek to share a story that readers cannot fully inhabit since, like Eggers, Deng's experience is foreign to them. And yet, there is still a story here that needs to be told. Fully closing that gap can never occur, but it can be narrowed. Eggers uses his skill with the English language to make Deng's story discernable to those who have not lived it. He cannot write as Deng because he is not Deng, but he still must write *for* Deng and keep it faithful to what Deng has experienced as a Sudanese refugee. The two will combine their talents and perspectives in a sort of transnational union through that style of narration. Twitchell also identifies Deng and Eggers' collaboration as a "third voice," and other critics come close to hinting at the same thing. Yost views the novel as a "cosmopolitan collaboration" that spreads its significance "beyond the constraints of any specific territorial or national boundary" (149-50). Since it moves beyond borders, Kevin Brooks argues that *What Is the What* is a work of translation (36). Brook's argument, should it be extended, would benefit from literary theorist and philosopher Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" to further explain Eggers' responsibility as translator of Deng's life.

Benjamin argues that literature's greatest aim is not to share just information, but to transmit "the unfathomable, the mysterious" (70). He also asserts that the translator's job is not to craft an exact likeness of the original because in the process of translation "the original undergoes a change" anyway (73). Here Benjamin begins to present a sort of Deleuzian idea that language is in a perpetual state of becoming. Translation, essentially, renews the original text since "[e]ven words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process" (73). The eventual goal is to attain what Benjamin calls "pure

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language"—the absolute truth and essence of meaning—and it can only be reached by collaborative efforts of more than one language (74). Each language brings its "individual elements" so that together they can "supplement one another in their intentions" (74). The translator's goal, ultimately, is to transmit the original text's "intended effect" into his own language (76). The ideal scenario would be to capture true meaning, but that cannot happen since one language is insufficient and will find the pure language to be "impenetrable" (77). Perhaps corporately it can be done, but never singularly since pure language "manifests itself in translations" (77). Simply translating word for word will not encapsulate true meaning, either, because words are standardized by their "emotional connotations," not their phonetics (78). What this means is that the translator must seek to give voice to the intention of the "original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself" (79). Benjamin concludes with the belief that apprehending true meaning is not an impossible task. Rather, he argues that "to some degree all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines" (82). Benjamin's ideas also argue for the existence of the interstitial authorial voice and show why Eggers must use it to translate Deng's life onto paper. Together they come closer to achieving the true meaning, the "pure language" of Deng's story. Though before his time, Benjamin's assertions intimate a transnational union between languages—that through their collaboration, through switching over between languages again and again, a literary work comes closer to embodying and expressing its truest meaning.

Twitchell notes that such collaboration occurs from the very beginning of *What Is the What*. In the second sentence, when Deng goes to answer the knock at his apartment door in Atlanta, he refers to the peephole as a "tiny round window to inspect visitors"

(Eggers 9). Twitchell argues that if Deng had been writing his own story, he most likely would have looked up the word for "peephole" to describe his apartment door. Eggers, even as the actual author, does not use the word, though he certainly would know "peephole" since English is his native tongue. This, for Twitchell, is the first encounter the reader has with "a third voice, which we assume bears some relation to Deng's speaking voice but does not reproduce or transcribe it" (638). What the reader hears is instead "a resolutely fictional construction and narrator of the novel" (638). The lack of the word "peephole" denotes how Deng is out of place or placeless because he does not know so commonplace a word, and Eggers implies Deng's discomfort without having to explicitly state it. Eggers' refusal of the word "peephole" embodies these necessary "emotional connotations," as Benjamin puts it. Because of this collaboration, the narrator cannot be identified resolutely. It is meant to *seem* like Deng, but Eggers is still the one writing. While this could create a problematic contradiction, the Third Voice is necessary. Deng's knowledge on his own is insufficient to tell his story, given the book's preface where he admits he does not know English well enough. With Eggers' help, it can be put down on paper more faithfully, so ultimately this is not Deng's story alone. The book as a material object stresses this interdependence with its appearance.

An artist's large rendering of Deng's face occupies the book's hard cover, but Deng's name is nowhere to be seen; only Eggers' name is at the bottom and on the spine. No mention of a Lost Boy is anywhere on the front. Only upon opening the book and turning a couple of pages would the reader encounter the both/and transnational construct of this story on the title page: *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, a Novel by Dave Eggers*. It is a contradictory notion for an autobiography to be a

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novel, but because of the narration these disparities become unified. The cover also makes more sense in light of the title. Deng's face covers the entire front of the book. He is impossible to miss. Eggers, though, retains the tools of authorship with his name on the front. This does not place precedence of one over the other. Eggers' name may be on the cover, but the story's contents clearly have nothing to do with him since another man's face, another man's life is the focus. This is one man's life written by someone else—a true story written in fictional form, yet also a tale with fictive parts written as if all of it were nonfiction. Indeed, the emphasis on nonfiction is highlighted on the back page's short bio on Eggers. It places larger emphasis on his journalistic experience and not his equally impressive work as a writer of fiction. Somehow this both/and construct of nonfiction/fiction and Deng/Eggers, though seemingly impossible, is coextensive in the novel.

In the case of literary transnationalism, this type of narration mirrors the multicultural and pluralized structure of a transnational world, much like Samad Iqbal does in *White Teeth*. Though scholars' have given some of their focus to *What Is the What*'s narrative style, none of them examine *why* it must exist the way it does. In light of the absence of attention given to literature and transnationalism's intersection, this omission is not surprising. However, such examinations must occur if a greater understanding of the cultural implications behind literary transnationalism is to take place. Eggers' use of an interstitial authorial voice makes greater sense by reading *What Is the What* through Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, which is more fully discussed in the introduction. Eggers' use of a Third Voice is the only way Deng's story *could* be shared given the events of his life in Sudan and in the United States.

First, *What Is the What* primarily exemplifies how the concept of individual

sovereignty has changed in a world of modern terror and violence. It is Mbembe's view

of sovereignty in a transnational world that predominates in Eggers' novel. In his article

"Necropolitics," Mbembe takes Foucault's notions of sovereignty and casts them aside.

Foucault had argued that a government's chief interest lay in maintaining the life of its

population since that drove the health of the nation (*Sexuality* 139-42). This was the

government's biopolitical exercise of sovereignty. Consequently, an individual's

expression of sovereignty lay in his or her choice to participate in or separate from the

societal construct provided by the government. For Mbembe, this picture of sovereignty

is from the colonial past—a government creating an environment where its people are

dependent upon it and subservient to it for life (34). He effectively argues that, in a

transnational world, the choice is no longer whether or not to participate in the game

presented by the nation. Instead, the nation no longer cares about her people, so an

individual can either choose to die or not die (34). Though Mbembe's focus is Africa, he

charts implications of this new world order that apply anywhere diasporas and refugees

are to be found. The scattering of people is the result of a necropolitical world where

exercising individual sovereignty offers the one choice between dying or not dying.

The reason this is an individual's only choice is because the war machine's focus

has shifted. Mbembe's *war machine* replaces Foucault's *state*, most likely because of his

belief that national borders are now so permeable they might as well not exist. The two

terms function similarly, though—both refer to groups that are arbiters of society and

dominators of authority. The health of the population is no longer of primary interest to

the war machine; instead, natural resources like oil, diamonds, and raw metals needed to

construct technological devices are the focus (32-33). Anything that stands in the way of the acquisition or sale of these natural resources will be eliminated with the weapons of modern terror the war machine possesses. This includes people. Therefore, this construction of society means the only possible expression of individual sovereignty is to survive by running to get out of the war machine's path or to die by staying behind and refusing to move.

For Mbembe, exercising sovereignty by choosing not to die will force someone to go on the run, which unavoidably affects the person's identity. In this world that is no longer colonial or postcolonial, identity will undergo alterations. In the well-known overview of postcolonial literature *The Empire Writes Back*, the authors stress the connection between place and identity. Rather than conceptualize identity as a solely psychological aspect of human existence, they emphasize the undeniable contribution environment makes (8-11). Where a person puts their roots affects who they are. Naturally, then, if a person becomes a refugee, this will alter his identity because he loses his rootedness to one place. While some of the history of his original roots will always be a part of him, his past environment will influence him less once he relocates. Upon resettling, his new locale will begin to affect his identity, joining aspects of his new culture to his old one. Therefore, his identity is now irrevocably fragmented. The more this process repeats itself, the more fragmented the refugee's identity becomes. There is no singularity or pure identity to be found anymore. An assemblage of consciousness now abounds within this diasporic individual. He is a composition of pieces gathered from all of the different places he has been. Deng can never be the same person as he was when rooted in Sudan. What he has seen and what he has experienced in every new

location alters who he is. His world is now bigger than his childhood village and always will be.

Given Deng's wandering from place to place in the necropolitical world of *What Is the What*, his identity is understandably fragmented. It is a composition of multiple places into a transnational unity. This identity is not unique to Deng, but rather, is part of the refugee lifestyle. He notes that it is something he and all the Lost Boys share together: "Each of us has a half-dozen identities: there are the nicknames, there are the catechism names, the names we adopted to survive or to leave Kakuma. Having many names has been necessary for many reasons that refugees know intimately" (237). This diasporic lifestyle creates not just a scattering of individuals, but also a scattering of identity within the individual, a fragmentation of being. Like a cracked and distorted mirror, the refugee is now made up of multiples, and each shard's reflection carries a new name out of this conflict. Each name and image is truly Deng and wholly composes him, and yet each one opens different doors of survival to him. He is a Deleuzian multiplicity.

Deng's (and the other Lost Boys') assemblage of consciousness is visible in these many names. They appear to maintain a sense of control since Deng says, "[W]e adopted" them (237). The boys seem to name themselves or at the very least assert some agency in the acquisition of these names since Deng implies they are the ones directing this regeneration of the Self. There is a caveat, though: no one pure, singular Self exists to return to because of all these names. Martyn Bone agrees by suggesting that Deng's experiences of trauma in multiple locations place him in an awkward position as an individual. Though location is not the only contributing factor to the construction of a person's identity, it is, as the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* argue, the most

important. Interestingly, then, Bone characterizes Deng as suffering from a Du Boisian "double consciousness" because he is "doubly dislocated," believing that he is caught between only two worlds (70). However, even a binary fragmentation is too simplistic to describe Deng's current identity. Just as Hardt and Negri's multitude is irreducible, Deng cannot choose just one name/identity—or even two—with which to describe himself. There is too much history attached to each name, and this fact comes to light in America. After a lengthy legal process, Deng changes his name "to a combination of my given appropriated names: Valentino Achak Deng" (236). Even within his chosen name, Deng's identity leaves more than one central story to tell—or narrative as Lyotard would choose to say—which causes complications.

Deng faces the complexity of his identity before leaving Africa. He has trouble writing his own story, a request made by the UN before any of the boys are sent to America. Deng says, "It was the first time I told my story, and it was very difficult to know what was relevant and what was not" (431). His first draft is only a page, a fact soon ridiculed by a friend who, though having just started writing his own account, is already at page five. Deng realizes he has left out so many experiences and then recognizes the impossibility of "put[ting] everything down on paper" (432). In this dialogic moment with the Self, blank paper in hand, Deng has no idea how to turn the life he now lives into a clean, linear, ordered story. Arranging the experiences of his life neatly onto a piece of paper is confounding. Perhaps if Deng had stayed his whole life in Sudan, it would be easier. His sense of place, sense of Self, and sense of belonging would all be very stable. However, now the challenge of taking his intangible existence and bringing it to life on the tangible paper in front of him in is impossible. The assemblage

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his life has become makes it much harder to render his life for others in a way that makes sense and does justice to what he has experienced. He tears up his first attempt, sets back to work, and finishes with nine pages, but is still dissatisfied with it in a passage that is very indicative of the interstitial authorial voice of the novel:

> When I turned it in, the UN took a passport picture of me to attach to my file. It was the first such picture of me I had ever seen. I had been in group pictures before, my head a blur in a crowd, but this new picture, of only me, staring straight ahead, was a revelation. I stared at this photo for hours and held the folder close for days, debating with myself whether or not this picture, these words, were truly me. (432)

Here, both Deng and Eggers shine through in a powerful and visible way, and yet their presence in the narration is so simultaneous that it becomes something separate from both of them. While these emotions undoubtedly belong to Deng and are akin to thoughts he may have had at some point during his journey, Eggers renders them in a presentation that is blatantly metafictional. Deng's frustration is understandable, but the construction of a man staring at his own photo for hours, assessing his identity as captured by images and stories, is a stark literary move. While Eggers' craft is visible here, he is using it to push Deng forward. While Deng's thoughts and emotions are the focus here, their expression brings Eggers into visibility. Combined, they symbiotically create this narrative voice to express Deng's frustration—the dissatisfaction that is unavoidable in a necropolitical world like Sudan.

Deng's frustration comes from realizing that his UN autobiography will require the excision of many details. Quite simply, one story cannot encapsulate him. This is

because Deng's choice to flee Sudan inevitably fragmented his formerly stable identity. In necropolitics and in transnationalism, both of the following are true: survival is predicated upon the growth of an assemblage of consciousness and vis-a-versa. That is to say, if Deng is going to survive he must enter a new lifestyle as a refugee, which will alter his identity by fragmenting it irrevocably. Likewise, for that assemblage to grow, it is dependent on Deng leaving Sudan. By choosing not to die, Deng *cannot* stay solely Sudanese. His decision to flee Sudan means he will necessarily move into a transnational world. After writing his story and looking at his photo, he is aware his identity is impossible to pin down. It is always in an act of becoming as Deleuze would put it.

When Deng looks at his photo, the implication is that any attempt to render one's true self for others will fail. The picture and story cannot fully capture who he is or what he has experienced. The larger implication of this metafictional moment is that *What Is the What* cannot truly capture him, either. A faithful rendering of experience is impossible, even by the individual who experienced it. If Deng and Eggers had attempted to make the intangible fully tangible, it would have been a failed endeavor from the beginning. Twitchell agrees, but notes that this "distinction is irrelevant" since the reader's trust in Deng's experience, rather than accuracy, is the goal here (641). If any singular representation of Deng will be insufficient—just like, for Benjamin, one translation cannot capture "pure language"—a different voice must try to tell it. A separate voice that is both insular and external to Deng will have to prevail if readers are to understand more of the truth of his experiences. Essentially, a fragmented story requires a fragmented voice.

The frustration Deng feels when writing his story is a clear indicator within the text of why Eggers is needed. As a transnational individual whose identity is an assemblage, Deng cannot turn himself into a singular, insular, linear text on his own—not successfully, anyway. When he attempts to do so for the UN, he wonders how he would ever be able to write everything down. So much is pertinent, but not every experience can be catalogued. A factual exposition is not the appropriate method, which Benjamin has noted. Thus, they never even try to do that. As noted, the very title of the work suggests this discarding of the usual conventions of storytelling. Indeed, literature will *have* to change if Deng's multitudinous story can be told.

Deng does not *need* Eggers to intercede for him. Realistically, he could grasp a better command of English one day and write his own story in the future. But even then, he will be doing exactly what he did for the UN back in Africa. Something different, then, must take place if Deng will ever tell his story and come close to imparting some truth of his experience. Brooks agrees, reading *What Is the What* as "building toward Deng asserting his existence" (38). Deng and Eggers' collaborative efforts would suggest that a person cannot do this on his own, and Brooks believes this is true from his own encounters: "None of my Sudanese friends has been able to relate their experiences as fully or as vividly as Eggers has been able to share Deng's life, and by this measure, nothing has been lost in translation, much has been gained" (37). Since a disaporic individual faces challenges to telling his own story, the interstitial authorial voice is indispensable to sharing transnational voices in literature. A story like this one that spans geographical territory accomplishes more through collaborative efforts. Deng's life is wholly transnational because of his nomadic life as a refugee. His multiple names point

to the myriad narratives that comprise him. *What Is the What*, then, functions as a unique literary text because it uses more than one voice to try and encapsulate as many of Deng's stories as possible. In the continual effort to establish true meaning—or, Benjamin's "pure language"—more than one voice and more than one language is necessary. Deng's complex experiences, multiple stories, and collaboration with Eggers all join to produce a novel whose only apt description is transnational.

Deng's nomadic life affects his identity but it ultimately affects the plot and progress of the novel, too. Therefore, classifying this text is problematic. On a broader scope, Deng's cosmopolitan connection with people—he is, in a very literal sense, a "citizen of the world"—affects how one might label *What Is the What* as a literary text. This is a fact not lost on Eggers, and he addresses these muddled lines of nationality and belonging by challenging a reader's expectations at the start. Eggers foregrounds Deng's transnational identity by choosing first to set the story of a Lost Boy in Atlanta, Georgia, rather than Sudan. Deng's presence in that city might not seem "normal," or at least not as normal as a place like New York City might. While Atlanta is a major urban centre, it is nowhere near as multicultural as New York City. Atlanta continues to be a prototypical Southern hub of the United States where the polarized racial lines of White and Black drive political and societal issues. Indeed, whites and blacks make up 92.4% of the population in Atlanta, whereas they only comprise 69.5% of New York City ("Atlanta QuickFacts"). Conversely, New York City has a greater number of American Indians, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and people who report two or more races than Atlanta does ("New York QuickFacts"). Though Deng is black, he is not the type of Black expected in Atlanta. Powder, when robbing Deng in his apartment, says they are

"brothers" but clearly views Deng as a lesser Black by dismissing him as a "fucking Nigerian" (Eggers 14). Deng clearly does not fit what is "normal" in Georgia's capital city.

But this is precisely one of the issues Deng and Eggers seem intent on addressing: what exactly *is* "normal" in this world, and how does one function in it? Eggers emphasizes that Deng's experience as a refugee places him in a position to view the world differently than other people can. The conflicts that surround him have enabled him to relate to others even though they cannot relate to him. Deng "converses" internally with each American in this story with great ease—Powder, Michael, Julian, his American sponsors, the health club members. The only problem is that these individuals do not possess the sense or desire to stop and converse with him. Since these people have not suffered like Deng has, they do not have the maturity required to listen. The suffering he has endured has also forced him to harden emotionally and grow up faster, so he can also understand human nature and adults in a way that they cannot understand him. By choosing not to die in Mbembe's necropolitical world, Deng must endure that suffering as a refugee.

Deng's suffering in this novel is key and is what joins disparate locations into a transnational unity. It enables him to understand and sympathize with all of humanity, whether that be fellow Lost Boys in Sudan or the people he encounters in the United States. As he lies on the floor of his Atlanta apartment, bleeding from a head wound doled out by Powder, the irony becomes that America and Sudan are not so different. Both promise violence for their inhabitants. The similarities appear when Deng says, "I came here, four thousand of us came here, contemplating and expecting quiet. Peace and

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college and safety. We expected a land without war, and I suppose, a land without

misery" (13). Later, he also says, "We did not want to start over here. We wanted the

next step, and quickly" (13). The problem with this expectation, though, is that there is no

difference between these worlds now—at least, not in the way he and Eggers detail it.

Suffering because of violence is the universal, inescapable. Since this is the case, there is

no "next step" because both places are essentially the same with their violence. Atlanta

offers little, if any, improvement. Sudan and Atlanta are connected and presented as

similar, and yet both Deng and Eggers problematize this relation as they simultaneously

create it.

They equate Sudan and Atlanta given the suffering found in each, but then Deng

exalts his experiences in Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia as preferable to Western urbanity.

The two settings' commonality becomes problematic when Deng says, "I am not sure

there was evil of this kind in the Kakuma refugee camp, and I want to return" (10).

Atlanta is now worse than Sudan. Regardless of the suffering he endured on the run as a

Lost Boy, he states, "[A]t this moment, as I am strewn across the couch and my hand is

wet with blood, I find myself missing all of Africa. I miss Sudan, I miss the howling grey

desert of northwest Kenya. I miss the yellow nothing of Ethiopia" (12). In light of the

present, Deng's former suffering is preferable, and this move to "look back" while in

Atlanta is commonplace throughout the novel.

Just as Deng and Eggers join together in a Third Voice and just as Atlanta and

Sudan are both the same and different, *What Is the What* joins past and future together to

address the present. Deng is never wholly present in the novel. For Deng as "narrator,"

everything is either past or future tense as he constantly wants to be in that moment

before the present or after it. In Atlanta, Deng always thinks back on his life and experiences in Sudan, but in those flashbacks Deng is only ever looking ahead of himself in hopes of leaving Sudan. This is another reason why the presence of Eggers is necessary. The juxtaposition of past and future are encapsulated by the space that he occupies. His authorial command binds everything in the present, which is the fascinating complication this novel offers. This multiplicity of voices points to how Deng is a Deleuzian multiplicity himself. The multivocal structure of the story, then, lends to the creation of a novel that is simultaneously in flux and stationary. This is because Deng's story is rooted in the present, but in doing that Eggers points to how he is in a perpetual state of becoming as he tries to survive in Atlanta. Deng's movement in the story represents the past, which drives the novel, but Eggers' authorship is the grounding force, pinning down Deng's tale. Such a paradox is indicative of a transnational text, for disparities in time and geography are unified. The setting is never beyond Eggers' world of composition, and yet it is also a world he has not inhabited since it is not his story. Even so, he writes the novel anyway. Since this paradox binds the entire novel, the book ultimately ignores borders and obstacles entirely—just like Deng's life and just like transnational culture does. While Zadie Smith focuses on the individual experience and that specific moment of living in *White Teeth*, Eggers is cumulative. His desire is to take the warring factions of past and future within Deng and bridge the substantial distance between the two to examine the transnational present. This unavoidably ties Atlanta and Sudan together in ways that otherwise might not make sense or seem feasible, but in Eggers' hands it works.

The result is that *What Is the What* defies classification. Deng's life physically transcends national boundaries. While the story is pinned down in Atlanta at the beginning, just as much of the novel takes place in Africa. Since his life crosses national borders, any retelling of his experiences will have to do the same. That same cultural crossover exists in the interstitial authorial voice. Both Deng and Eggers speak together as a separate voice to tell this story and come closer to nailing down Benjamin's "pure language." With this geographical melding and narrative innovation, *What Is the What* is not a Sudanese novel, and it is certainly not an American novel. Instead, Eggers' conjoins and crosses over the settings. This collation is what causes the ending of *What Is the What* to be so powerful. Deng breaks the fourth wall by pointedly addressing the reader:

> I speak to these people, and I speak to you because I cannot help it. It gives me strength, almost unbelievable strength, to know that you are there. I covet your eyes, your ears, the collapsible space between us. How blessed are we to have each other? I am alive and you are alive so we must fill the air with our words.
>
> (474-75)

As is typical with the interstitial authorial voice, "the collapsible space between us" is unmistakably the interjection of Eggers. Deng's pleading, though, is still present here, too. As they conclude together in that Third Voice, they pointedly capture much of what the novel has accomplished.

For Deng, "collapsible space" means he will no longer be repelled from humanity. Rather than feeling forced to share his story, people will desire to hear it. In his own life, he has already transcended so many gulfs and collapsed so many spaces in a geographical sense. The irony is that this has created many different identifies of his Self, causing him

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to become more fractured and fragmented than before. Though he can relate to humanity in a greater way, he finds himself isolated and left only to talk to other people in his mind. Even so, he continues to tell his story to his "listeners" that way. He cannot help it. His story is all he has. Telling it binds his identities back together and makes him whole again. His story *is* his identity. Eggers made a very astute move, then, by calling the book an "autobiography" even when it was simultaneously a novel. Fictitious additions aside, this is still largely who Deng is. Therefore, as long as he is alive, he "must fill the air with [his] words" because to be alive is to share his story. By reading this through Mbembe's necropolitics, choosing not to die in Sudan altered Deng's identity. Through that alteration, he acquired his incredible story. As a refugee stripped of everything except that story, he will doggedly share it. He has his story because he is alive, but inversely he is alive because he has his story, a story that began when he chose to run instead of die. The most successful way to collapse space with his story is to spread it with Eggers' help.

The "collapsible space" related to Eggers makes the novel a microcosm of transnationalism. Just as Deng has become a transnational individual because of his past and present situations, Eggers collapses the distances between West and East by foregrounding the setting of Atlanta to begin Deng's Sudanese story. The impression given is that everything is conjoined. There is no separation that needs to take place because these myriad episodes of Deng's life all bleed into one another—just as his name, Valentino Achak Deng, is a unified composition. This sort of "collapsible space" within the story has greater ramifications for *What Is the What* as a work of literature. Eggers has written something that is not American and not African. It is simply, yet

complicatedly, a transnational text, but such a complex and innovative literary work has not received its due attention.

What Eggers ultimately achieves in the novel merits recognition because of its brilliant conceptualization of one way to tell contemporary stories. In his article, Brooks is correct to say that whether or not Eggers' novel is a literary masterpiece is not the main point, and Robert Eaglestone would agree with him, arguing that it is primarily a didactic, humanitarian work (78). But this still leaves the literary accomplishments of the book unaddressed. The delicate and meticulous structure struck by Deng and Eggers' collaboration cannot be denied. A greater understanding of it should ultimately affect how one thinks of literature. This, however, happens rarely and continues to be the challenge at hand. Brooks' article is an example of this oversight. He aims to answer whether or not *What Is the What* should be considered world literature, but he curiously dismisses "get[ting] hung up on the question of authorship," even though he inevitably focuses on it himself (40). In other words, he stays so focused on classifying the novel that he fails to dig more deeply to understand what it is actually doing. Assessing and acknowledging such efforts in the twenty-first century is a necessary move by anyone who studies literature.

This interstitial authorial voice establishes not only how transnational literature can and will be written, but also signals a new way to view contemporary stories. What Deng and Eggers have created together is a work of art that defies placement within physical geographical boundaries. But it also underscores the individual phenomenon that Deng's life has become in this transnational world. The retelling of his story challenges notions of belonging, rigid definitions of identity, and traditional narrative structures. The

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decision to craft the novel apart from nationalistic lines stems from the placelessness experienced by Deng, whose Nowhere Man existence is becoming less abnormal in a transnational world. While the temptation to bracket literature within national borders is strong, Eggers destroys the notion that his novel can be called American or Sudanese. In a necropolitical environment like Sudan, Deng expresses his individual sovereignty by choosing to flee from Sudan. This movement inevitably alters his identity and creates his assemblage of consciousness. His multiple names and displacement as a refugee point to this, and successfully sharing his story in written form proves to be a challenge for him. If he is to render the truth of his experiences faithfully, a middle ground must be established to turn his fragmented identity into a composite story. Eggers provides the writing talent to perform such a feat, but a narration separate from both of them must provide that Third Voice. It is the use of this interstitial authorial voice that brings all of Deng's story into the transnational present—a window in time that obliterates geographical boundaries, acknowledges the impossibility of perfectly rendering experience, and identifies the cross-cultural act of becoming that Deng participates in. The old labels have to be discarded to describe literature like this. If "the collapsible space between" people from disparate regions is what Deng and Eggers desire, they have achieved it admirably. What readers are then left to face and respond to is what that removal of space and distance means for them.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: FURTHER EXPECTATIONS FOR LITERARY

TRANSNATIONALISM

Dave Eggers uses a unique form of narration to relate another man's experience in *What Is the What*. The impetus for this experimentation is his inability to share Achak Deng's true experience from his perspective. As the outsider American, such a task is impossible. This narrative structure, though, is not reserved only for collaborative efforts. The challenge Eggers faces would also be present if a person were to try and write about his own experiences from memory. This happens to Deng when he attempts to write his story for the UN, and it exposes the problems a person encounters when he tries to relate his own lived experience through writing. This challenge to the individual is something literary transnationalism can focus on in light of the innovation in Eggers' novel. Past experiences exist in the fluid setting of memory, which is an unstable construction. A person cannot relate his true experiences because, over time, his memory has inevitably reshaped what he went through. To render those experiences in the present as faithfully as they occurred in the past is impossible, and this is the problem with Deng's UN story: it does not successfully articulate who he is and cannot apprehend Benjamin's "pure language." Achieving true meaning presents a challenge since memories evolve.

Writing must alter experience in order to articulate the truth an individual has felt from his past experiences. Taking the past and grounding its visceral truth in the transnational present is a necessary narrative move of literary transnationalism, as seen in *What Is the What* and *White Teeth*. Eggers takes Deng's oscillation between past and

future and examines it against the backdrop of Atlanta in the present. Zadie Smith unveils the complications that arise when the past is lorded over and imposed upon the present in *White Teeth*. These plot lines in transnational literature make sense given the life-altering and identity-shaping changes that occur in the urban and rural cultures of these novels. Additionally, though, when a person's environment changes dramatically because of outside forces, he also changes within, so the very retelling of those experiences will need to be reshaped if the reader will fully comprehend what the author is trying to convey. Other past and current publications exemplify such narrative innovation.

In *The Things They Carried*, short stories about fighting in the Vietnam War, Tim O'Brien alters his storytelling style and does not report what actually occurred. He overexaggerates and fabricates some details—not to mislead readers, but rather, to "heat up the truth . . . so hot that you would feel exactly what he felt" ("Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" 89). O'Brien chooses what he calls "story-truth" over "happening-truth" to substitute a moving account for cold factuality ("Good Form" 179). He makes this choice based on his conclusion that "[w]hat stories can do . . . is make things present" for an audience who has not experienced what he has been through ("Good Form" 180). Eggers also seeks to ground Deng's past story in the present, and he gave a similar literary treatment to his own life with his memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. Though widely known as creative nonfiction, Eggers' memoir still aims to achieve the reader's trust in him to faithfully share what he felt when he became the main legal guardian for his eight-year-old brother. He creatively augments his own life to emphasize the emotional turmoil he goes through after his parents die and he is left alone with his

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brother. Creative renderings of the nonfictive past continue today with Salman Rushdie's recently published memoir *Joseph Anton*.

Readers can expect creative liberties with factuality in *Joseph Anton* since Rushdie is well known for performing artistic fireworks in his fiction. The memoir is ostensibly a retelling of his life in exile from the fatwa incurred by *The Satanic Verses* in 1989. The very title, however—names taken from Rushdie's favorite authors Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov—primes the reader for fiction, but it also signals both Rushdie's *assemblage of consciousness* and the need for the *interstitial authorial voice* in his memoir. Joseph Anton becomes the fake name Rushdie assumes in order to facilitate his hiding during the fatwa. Just like Deng, he must acquire different names in order to survive, giving rise to his existence as an irreducible assemblage. Any unifying reconstruction of who he is in *Joseph Anton* will necessitate a different type of narration as Rushdie in the present dialogues with Rushdie from the past.

Henry Giardina understands this alteration of identity in his review of the memoir. He correctly recognizes "a seemingly ulterior self that struggles violently, vaguely, to combine all the disparate voices of the self into one, consistent whole" in *Joseph Anton*, and this is the interstitial authorial voice. Rushdie's "more challenging focus" is how to accurately depict a Self that is "splintered" because of his new name, the adoption of which alters his "former identity." For Giardina, this move by Rushdie to "recreat[e] him[self] as author, narrator, and protagonist at once" helps establish "the truth of a character." Unlike Eggers in *What Is the What*, Rushdie chooses to write about Joseph Anton in third person as if to emphasize that this pseudonym is not him even though it refers to him. This helps preserve detachment, which underscores his "splintered"

identity. No matter how well he describes what he went through, Rushdie will continue to acknowledge the distance he feels because of his fractured identity. But even though Rushdie is detached, the writing of his memoir is still an attempt at unifying his assemblage of consciousness. Like Eggers in *What Is the What*, Rushdie is not afraid to identify his limitations while still working against them. Ultimately this could create contradictions, and that is unfortunately all Zoë Heller focuses on in her review of *Joseph Anton*.

Heller only notes the discrepancies between Rushdie's past voice and his present writing in the memoir—things he has said about Islam, his views on what fiction should or should not do, and his own opinions of himself. She takes snippets from past interviews, compares them against statements Rushdie makes in *Joseph Anton*, and overall concludes that the book is fraught with "exaggerated claim[s] to naiveté." Ironically, Heller argues that Rushdie does not employ *enough* "detachment to bear on his own bombast." By constantly comparing Rushdie's memoir to statements from his past interviews and essays, she exposes her mistaken expectations for *Joseph Anton*: that it should be complete nonfiction—factual, clinical, free of contradictions. In other words, she wants Rushdie to display a singular Self, one that was consistent throughout the duration of the fatwa. Heller leaves no room for an assemblage of consciousness to exist in Rushdie's memoir, and in doing that she can never allow space for as sensitive a reading as Giardina does. She does not concede that changes to one's identity inevitably occur in a transnational world, and because of that, she misses the point—a fictive rendering of Rushdie's past experiences is unavoidable.

Writing more than twenty years after the fatwa was declared, a factually accurate retelling of what he experienced is an impossible feat even for a writer of Rushdie's caliber. Both he and Eggers must use an interstitial authorial voice that combines past and present voices and identities if they will successfully articulate experience. Contradictions inevitably *will* ensue. Rushdie is writing in the present about the past; therefore, there *should* be contradictions between what *Joseph Anton* says today and what Salman Rushdie said in decades past. Heller wants a memoir that is so factually flawless it would cease to explore the complexity of human identity in this transnational world. However, literary transnationalism does not allow space for such simplicity and clean-cut linearity.

These changes to the Self are unavoidable in a world where national cultures are losing their primacy and where a fragmented identity is often necessary to survive. For the changes brought upon urban culture in the new millennium, Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* charts the move away from the colonial era and the complications such a turn brings. For the effects necropolitics has upon rural cultures like Sudan, Dave Eggers account of Achak Deng's life—and its very narrative structure—spotlights transnational changes brought upon identity, belonging, and how literature works now. These types of literary changes can be seen in the past with texts like *The Things They Carried* and *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, and they continue today with memoirs like *Joseph Anton*. As national cultures continue to move further and further away from the postcolonial, literary transnationalism will continue cataloguing how those changes affect both the world at large and the intimate image of the individual in the transnational present. The room for new perspectives, new creations, and new voices is vast, and the

literary world would be sorely remiss not to watch and study these different

developments.

NOTES

[1] This study privileges the term *nation* because of transnationalism's ongoing dialogue about the existence and health of nations. Though scholars referenced in this study employ various terms—*state*, *police state*, *nation-state*, etc.—their different usages all point to the same thing: the function of a nation. Therefore, for clarity's sake *nation* will receive preference here.

[2] Stephen Caesar explains a specific, current example of this in his articles on the education system in the state of Arizona.

[3] While other scholars have performed studies of literature and transnationalism, none of them are as comprehensive as Ramazani and Jay's critical undertakings since they examine how transnationalism applies to a small subset of literature. For narrower studies, see *Slavery, Colonialism, and Connoisseurship: Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literary Transnationalism* by Nandini Bhattacharya; *Transnationalism and American Literature: Literary Translation 1773-1892* by Coleen Glenney Boggs; *Between the Lines: Literary Transnationalism and African American Poetics* by Monique-Adelle Callahan; *Virtual Americas: Transnational Fictions and the Transatlantic Imaginary* by Paul Giles; *Nations of Nothing But Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Synthetic Vernacular Writing* by Matthew Hart; *Race, American Literature, and Transnational Modernisms* by Anita Patterson; and the collection of essays *Imagined Transnationalism: U.S. Latino/a Literature, Culture, and Identity*.

[4] The bulk of the novel's "trauma" comes from the fact that ideas of postcolonialism no longer fittingly describe the transnational world in Smith's story. For

other readings that erroneously place *White Teeth* along postcolonial tropes, see Gustar, Huggan, López, Murdoch, Nair, Ozvalda, Ramsey-Kurz, and Schäfer.

[5] For other interpretations of *White Teeth* that credit the novel for doing something new because of its multiculturalism, see Addante, Batra, Head, Jusdanis, Kayışçı, Lipovšek, Sell, and Thompson.

[6] For other explications that argue that Smith has created something uniquely hybrid, see Moss and Schaff.

[7] Ironically, though, Pande is neither Bengali nor Muslim. He was a Hindu originally from Uttar Pradesh. Thus, Pande is either 1) not Samad's great-grandfather, or 2) if he is somehow related to Samad, then Samad is not a pure Bengali or Muslim. Therefore, Samad's familial claims to Pande only further weaken his supposed singular identity.

[8] Many other sites or groups in *White Teeth* are highly transnational and also merit focus—KEVIN, FutureMouse, London itself, etc. This study privileges O'Connell's, though, because of its pointed allusion to Ireland's Third Self. For an excellent and thorough reading, though, of the eugenics and biotechnology behind FutureMouse, see Dawson 152-73.

[9] For criticisms that claim Smith is overly optimistic about the changing face of a city like London, see Challakere, Murdoch, and Schaff.

[10] Other scholars note Eggers' delicate handling of the subject matter. Brian Yost mentions his refusal to receive any financial compensation for the novel, refutation of U.S. superiority, and dismissal of the idea that the novel is metonymic of all of Sudan

(Yost 158-59). Katrina M. Powell points out that Eggers avoids "reify[ing] hierarchies of race, class, and gender" that would work against the aims of the story (308).

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