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Alienation in the Age of Global Citizenship: Diasporas, Borders, and Broken Belongings

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Abstract

In a time when the ideas of global citizenship and borderless identity are becoming more popular, the lives of diasporic people often tell a different story. This article looks at the paradox at the heart of cosmopolitanism: it says it is universal, open to everyone, and mobile, but it often hides deeper feelings of being alone, displaced, and estranged. This study looks at how people from different parts of the world deal with broken things, broken identities, and emotional dislocation, even though they are theoretically "at home in the world." It does this by looking at modern diasporic literature. Through close readings of key texts such as Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake,* Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, Ocean Vuong's *On Earth* We're Briefly Gorgeous, and Teju Cole's *Open City,* the article explores multiple dimensions of alienation—legal, spatial, linguistic, and affective—within the framework of migration and diasporic consciousness. It highlights how diasporic narratives resist the romanticism of rootlessness and cosmopolitan ease, instead offering a raw, nuanced portrayal of unhomeliness and deferred belonging.

The article criticizes the liberal optimism of global citizenship and suggests a more situated, ethical cosmopolitanism that takes into account the emotional costs of moving around and the politics of exclusion. It does this by using important ideas from Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Sara Ahmed. In the end, it shows how diasporic literature is a powerful record of alienation in the modern world, showing how the need to belong is still haunted by borders, both real and imagined.

Key Words: Alienation, Citizenship, Diaspora, Cosmopolitan, Border, Home, Identify

Introduction

The symbolic promise of a borderless world, where people's identities transcend their birthplaces and are no longer constrained by where they were born, is what people nowadays commonly refer to as global citizenship.

Cosmopolitanism, which envisions a world where people are united not by their nationality but by their concern for others, openness to other cultures, and shared humanity, is seen as a liberating philosophy in both popular culture and academic theory. The well-known definition of cosmopolitanism by Kwame Anthony Appiah, "universality plus difference," encapsulates this objective. In addition to promoting moral responsibility across national boundaries, this vision aims to acknowledge the distinctiveness of every culture (Appiah 151). According to cosmopolitanism, all people have the same moral rights and the world is one big community. However, this vision is often predicated on a tenuous premise: that mobility is always empowering, that migration is always welcome and an option, and that movement equates to agency. It disregards the past events and current situations that lead many people to cross borders, including those who do so under duress rather than privilege, out of necessity rather than choice, and who are still lost after crossing. The idea of global citizenship usually collapses when diasporic individuals and communities are torn between locations, memories, and identities. Open-minded, cosmopolitan cities do not make many people feel welcome; instead, they experience contested spaces, fractured identities, and protracted periods of emotional and legal isolation. Being able to move around does not make them less excluded; on the contrary, it usually makes their circumstances worse. They are usually enmeshed in webs of displacement rather than freedom. In his reflections on exile, Edward Said addresses this agonizing paradox. According to him, there is a "crushing disjunction between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" in addition to the physical separation from home (Said 173). Similar to this, Homi K. Bhabha's idea of "unhomeliness" adds to this comprehension by claiming that the migrant subject usually lives in the liminal spaces between cultures, failing to fully remember their native culture or integrate into the host society. As a result, the individual becomes a source of contradictory assertions, unresolved affiliations, and damaged self-perceptions, leading to hybridity as tension (Bhabha 13). This dissonance is powerfully and clearly captured in diasporic literature, especially that from postcolonial and transnational contexts. These stories show how estrangement endures, the emotional structure of not belonging, and the silent labor of bringing disparate cultural inheritances that often clash together into harmony, rather than validating utopian notions of seamless integration or global belonging. The upbeat tone of cosmopolitan optimism is in conflict with these texts. They show that access to international spaces alone does not equate to political or emotional belonging. Diasporic subjects feel as though they are from somewhere else—present and peripheral, seen and unseen—even when they are assimilated into the economies, languages, and institutions of the host society. In these situations, being misunderstood, having to speak a foreign language, being in a precarious legal situation, and experiencing emotional scars from exile all contribute to the structural experience of alienation that persists. Diasporic fiction explores what it means to live in the middle, not just physically but also morally and intellectually, rather than drawing a conclusion.

This article explores how the idea of belonging changes in diasporic fiction, where the realities of migration, memory, and emotional suffering often collide with the cosmopolitan ideal of a world without borders. It does not view the diaspora as a representation of global integration or mobility. Rather, it views them as a figure of contested identity, bearing the traces of endless histories and emotions that do not fit into narratives of assimilation or success. Through a series of broken negotiations influenced by the ghosts of inherited trauma, racialized visibility, and the constant quest for emotional and linguistic clarity, this article explores how diasporic characters navigate their identities rather than

telling a single story. Teju Cole's Open City, Ocean Vuong's On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous, Mohsin Hamid's Exit West, and Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake are all extensively read in order to achieve this. The psychological costs of moving and the fallacious idea of global inclusion are illustrated in these texts. They show how diasporic subjectivity is still influenced by spatial estrangement, affective dissonance, and legal disenfranchisement. This study, which is based on cosmopolitan critique, migration theory, and literary studies, contends that diasporic literature does more than just document movement; it deconstructs it. By showing that the right to relocate does not always entail the right to belong, it offers a fresh viewpoint on the problems pertaining to global citizenship. These tales challenge us to think of cosmopolitanism as a way of being that is firmly anchored in our bodies and necessitates addressing both pain and possibility, exclusion and access, and the fact that people constantly seek to feel at home, even in the absence of one.

Diasporic Subjectivity and the Myth of Belonging

To have a diasporic identity means to exist in the liminal space between memory and forgetting, origin and reinvention. It is to embody the dissonance of cultural inheritance without certainty of possession, as well as to navigate a world in which belonging is always conditional and questionable. Diasporic subjectivity does not operate within the confines of rootedness; it is a state of exile—not always geographical but affective—in which one is estranged from oneself, one's family history, and the sociocultural fabric into which one is expected to assimilate. The popular rhetoric of multicultural inclusion and global citizenship frequently romanticizes mobility and hybridity, but it fails to account for the psychological toll of displacement—how identity splinters under the pressure to belong everywhere while feeling completely at home nowhere.

Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake depicts this inner conflict in a profoundly sensitive manner through the life of Gogol Ganguli, the American-born son of Bengali immigrants. His life is a delicate balance between two worlds: the Bengali traditions his parents brought from Calcutta and the American landscape he was born into but struggles to fully claim. At the heart of Gogol's disorientation is his name, a seemingly insignificant detail that becomes emblematic of his fractured identity. Named after the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol in honor of a personal event in his father's life, the name defies cultural and familial legibility. It is neither American nor Indian, either chosen or inherited. Lahiri writes, "He despises that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it is not even a Bengali name, but Russian, that it is not even a first name, but a last name" (Lahiri 76). This disavowal of his name reveals an early rupture between language and self, an estrangement that will follow him into adulthood. Gogol Ganguli's life does not demonstrate defiance; rather, it depicts a slow, almost imperceptible loss of identity—a quiet unraveling marked more by doubt than certainty, by absence than presence. He is dealing with more than one crisis; he is dealing with a slew of competing expectations, inherited silences, and shifted longings. There is no traditional rebellion, no major break with family or culture. Instead, there is a slow-motion negotiation with selfhood in which identity is changed, renamed, and shaken up repeatedly. Gogol's two names are a perfect illustration of this fragmentation, which serves as a metaphor for cultural and psychological conflict. He goes by the name "Nikhil" both at school and in public. This name is more socially acceptable and less associated with historical oddities, but it doesn't seem to fit with his personality. At home, however, he remains "Gogol." This name came to him not from family or tradition, but from a story about how he survived when his father was nearly killed. The strange and foreign name indicates that he is the son of immigrants with stories that are not entirely his own. "At

school and at play, he is Nikhil, someone he has never met" (Lahiri 102). This seemingly mundane duality is at the root of his alienation; he must play two versions of himself, neither of which he fully inhabits. He must switch between identities to deal with the conflict between his public self, shaped by American culture, and his private self, shaped by his Bengali home's customs and emotional rules. However, the split does not restore balance; rather, it makes him feel even more alone. Switching names becomes an ongoing act of erasure rather than a synthesis. None of the identities provide comfort or sense. He loses touch with who he is and becomes trapped in an endless cycle of self-editing and self-criticism. His subjectivity is trapped in a sort of cultural purgatory, where he never quite fits in and every attempt to define himself feels incomplete, uncertain, or like a performance.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness is particularly relevant here. According to Bhabha, unhomeliness is more than just the absence of a home; it is also the strange feeling of being out of place in spaces that should be home—"the borders between the home and the world become confused" (Bhabha 13). Gogol doesn't just think about the confusion; he lives it. His house, which smells, speaks, and has Bengali rituals, does not bring him peace. Instead, he feels even more disconnected. He's both an insider and an outsider. People expect him to understand the customs of a place he has never visited, to feel nostalgia for a place he has never visited, and to love a country he has never called home. Even domestic rituals intended to affirm cultural continuity—birthdays, pujas, and planned visits to family friends—are fraught with emotional ambiguity. These moments make him feel separated rather than rooted. They do them because they have to, not because they believe in them, and they perform them more like reenactments than in real life. His parents' home country is fragmented: black-and-white photos of relatives he barely knows, phone calls that are mostly static and silent, and trips to Calcutta that leave him feeling more alone than connected. The so-called "return to origin" does not lead to recognition. India, like you, does not call America home. Gogol behaves as a guest in both settings: welcomed but not a member of the group, observed but never imitated, accepted but never fully comprehended.

America, despite its promises of belonging, is just as difficult to enter. Gogol is still remembered, even though he chose a socially acceptable name, excelled in school, and made friends within the American cultural framework. The very difference he tries to minimize is constantly brought to life by other people's mispronunciations, ignorant curiosity, and subtle exclusions. He is repeatedly told that assimilation and acceptance are distinct concepts. The space of belonging, which is so idealized in multicultural stories, turns out to be an illusion rather than a reality.

Lahiri captures with great subtlety the diasporic subject's struggle with both cultural codes and ontological insecurity. Gogol's broken identity stems not only from living in two cultures, but also from the terrifying realization that no cultural script can fully capture his experience. His life is more than just East and West; it's a palimpsest, filled with memories that aren't his, silences he can't articulate, and a desire with no clear object. His sense of isolation stems not only from his physical location, but also from how difficult it is to be fully understood anywhere. He is always being translated, never fully original or rendered. So his lack of a home is not a bad thing, but rather a normal part of life in the diaspora. According to Gogol, Lahiri dispels the romantic myths of hybridity in favor of celebrating the quiet dignity of being in between. His identity does not end with resolution; rather, it ends with an acknowledgement of the brokenness, fluidity, and haunting persistence of names and spaces that do not fit. Lahiri's story invites us to stay in that state of suspension, to witness the emotional work that takes place in the interim,

and to recognize that sometimes simply surviving is a form of homecoming.

The myth of belonging is further undermined by the emotional expectations placed on diasporic children—those who were born or raised in host countries but are often unconsciously linked to memories of their ancestors that they did not witness but are expected to preserve. These children inherit not only their parents' names and customs, but also emotional landscapes shaped by loss, dislocation, and longing. They frequently face two competing demands: continuing their parents' cultural traditions and fulfilling the promise of social mobility that the host country appears to offer, with its alluring myth of meritocracy. This impossible task does not result in synthesis; rather, it generates tension, which is an important part of Gogol Ganguli's life in The Namesake.

Sara Ahmed's concept of affective alienation is an effective way to think about this burden. She claims that emotions "stick" to some bodies, making some feel like they belong while others feel out of place (Ahmed 11). This is how Gogol's body, name, and presence are identified. He carries this emotional baggage not in acts of rebellion, but in small signs of discomfort, such as having to be polite at dinner parties where cultural rituals feel empty, having people mispronounce his name, and romantic relationships that fail to bridge the gap between his inherited memory and his constructed identity. These moments add up, leaving him with the persistent sense that he doesn't fully belong in either his American present or his Bengali past.

At first glance, his marriage to Moushumi, a second-generation Bengali-American, appears to be a cultural homecoming. But Lahiri changes the story. Their union is not a return to shared roots, but rather a clash of two distinct types of alienation. Both characters are haunted by familial, cultural, and emotional expectations that they cannot fully accept or reject. Moushumi's eventual cheating is not a plot point, but rather a sign of deeper unhappiness: a life built on unresolved compromises between selves. Their relationship is deteriorating not because they are incompatible, but because neither of them has dealt with the ghosts of their past—the things they must carry and the things they wish to let go of. It's amazing that Lahiri's story doesn't turn the identity crisis into a redemption story. Instead of closure, she proposes a slow, ambiguous, and emotional transition. When Gogol's father dies, his emotional life takes a dramatic turn. He starts thinking about the name he used to despise. He discovers that Gogol was "the first thing his father had ever given him," not as a cultural requirement, but as a symbol of love, survival, and memory (Lahiri 289). The name, which used to make people feel ashamed, is now a bridge—not between two countries, but between a father and his son, between isolation and understanding. Despite this acknowledgment, Lahiri avoids becoming overly sentimental. Gogol's acceptance of his name does not change his identity, but it does make him feel less isolated. It does not become a definitive answer; rather, it becomes a wound that he has learned to live with.

According to Edward Said's powerful thoughts on exile, "Exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (Said 174). For people like Gogol who live in the diaspora, the split is not only physical, but also existential—a split between an unchosen past and a present that one cannot fully inhabit. Going back to India does not alleviate his alienation, and living in America does not make it disappear. It remains, like his name, a reminder of a life spent between stories, borders, and selves. However, it is in this middle ground that Lahiri discovers a subtle code of survival. Gogol's identity is fragmented and fluid, and it does not neatly fit into the categories of East and West, tradition and modernity, or foreign and familiar. He hasn't figured everything out by the

end of the book, but he has progressed. He no longer wishes to be whole in the same ways he once did. Instead, he comes to realize that identity is inherently unstable. According to Lahiri, the issue may not be with the fragmented self, but with cultural messages that suggest that being together is the only way to be mentally healthy or socially acceptable.

In this way, The Namesake deconstructs the comforting concept of diaspora membership. It does not tell the reader a happy story about coming home or making amends. Instead, it provides a more valuable insight into what it means to live in the hyphenated space of diasporic subjectivity. Lahiri's story demonstrates that identity is not a straight path to integration, but rather a recursive and emotionally rich process full of contradictions, hesitations, and quiet endurance. Her characters are not examples of how different cultures can coexist, but rather individuals with complex emotions. They feel deeply, cry quietly, and stand up for what is right. So, being diasporic means not only being in a different place, but also being constantly redefined by memory, language, desire, and how others perceive you. In Lahiri's world, belonging isn't about where you are, but about having the courage to live without a place that truly represents you. It's in how we name and rename ourselves, how we partially recover but continue to lose, how we celebrate quietly and grieve silently. Lahiri appears to imply that in this never-ending process, there is no failure, but rather a different kind of dignity—a different type of home.

Borders of the Body and the Law: Citizenship, Legality, and Exclusion

Despite the wonderful sounding concept of global citizenship, the lives of migrants, exiles, and refugees are frequently still inextricably linked to the harsh, unforgiving edges of the law. The cosmopolitan ideal holds that all people are the same, regardless of where they live. However, the state retains significant power over who is included in the political system and who is excluded, rendered stateless, or placed in bureaucratic limbo. This disconnect is frequently highlighted in diasporic literature: how citizenship can devolve into a system of conditionality, discipline, and emotional exhaustion rather than ensuring belonging, and how laws designed to protect identity can actually make people feel unsafe. In these texts, the border is more than just a line on a map; it is a tangible, lived threshold that governs not only movement but also proximity, recognition, and even the ability to be oneself.

In Exit West, Mohsin Hamid employs the fantastical style of magical realism not to escape reality, but to make it more brutal. The book is a haunting allegory about the contradictions between migration, legality, and modern border regimes. The most intriguing new feature in the book is the mysterious black doors, which allow people to cross borders instantly. They serve as a sharp commentary on the difficulty of escaping state surveillance, bureaucratic indifference, and the uncertainty of displacement, rather than a means of escape. The book's main characters, Saeed and Nadia, are never identified with a specific country, religion, or language. They are intended to be universal symbols for people who have been forcibly displaced. But even this universal quality does not protect them. Their nameless homeland is ravaged by civil war, and when they exit through the magical doors, they only begin a longer journey into layered exile, where legality is fleeting, space is contested, and belonging remains a distant mirage. In each of the cities they visit, including Mykonos, London, and San Francisco, people tend to observe the characters rather than interact with them. Host governments see their presence as data to be managed, rather than lives to be integrated. The term "conditional hospitality" refers to permission without welcome and survival without settlement. Hamid meticulously creates a world in which the law is not always clear and is not consistently applied. White, Western subjects can move freely, and

their humanity is assumed. In contrast, the migrant must constantly prove that they are alive. Even in the novel's imaginary world, the "magic" of travel cannot alleviate border anxiety. Instead, it exacerbates the confusion. Hamid states, "When we move, we kill those we leave behind" (Hamid 94). Migration is more than just a logistical event; it is also an emotional severance, reconstituting the self in terms of absence, loss, and uncertainty.

Hamid's use of magical realism in this context is not a romantic or escapist gesture; rather, it demonstrates how even fantastical mobility cannot disrupt power structures. The black doors do not set people free or transform them. They do not alter the exclusionary rules; rather, they alter the appearance of the land. Outside the doors, there are familiar rules, such as border patrols, biometric data, surveillance drones, and anti-immigrant protests. Refugees are trapped in makeshift camps, separated from citizens, and referred to in crisis language as "swarms," "invasions," and "floods." Even the words we use to express compassion, such as "humanitarian aid" and "international protection," are inherently imbalanced. Migrants are viewed as things to be managed, rather than people to be welcomed. Hamid criticizes the current world order, in which citizenship is a privilege that some people enjoy while others do not. Furthermore, the book focuses on the psychological consequences of being stateless. Saeed and Nadia's dislocation is not only physical, but also existential. Without legal recognition, their relationship deteriorates, their values shift, and they lose their sense of identity. Saeed clings to the last vestiges of tradition—ritual, memory, and prayer—while Nadia strives restlessly for new ways of being free of the past. However, their differences are not viewed as failures; rather, they are viewed as evidence of how stressful it is to relocate: how the need to fit in, adapt, and survive in a new environment can make intimacy less real and home more of an idea than a location. As they drift apart, it becomes clear that migration does more than just relocate people; it also alters the very characteristics that define who we are, who we care about, and what community we belong to.

Exit West is very honest with its story by not providing a resolution. Hamid's novel differs from other refugee stories in that it does not conclude with the migrant settling in or winning. Instead, it demonstrates that the migrant's journey is frequently one of continuous arrival, with home never behind or ahead, but always delayed. In this way, Exit West quietly criticizes the concept of cosmopolitanism. It deconstructs the notion that movement itself is liberating, instead demonstrating how legal and emotional structures prevent displaced people from truly belonging. Even when crossing borders is as simple as walking through a door, migrants are still marked by loss, visibility, and systems that expect them to be strong while giving nothing back.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah is a courageous examination of borders that extends beyond immigration laws and visa requirements to migrants' racial, emotional, and private lives. Exit West by Mohsin Hamid employs magical realism and allegory to make displacement more relatable and abstract. However, Adichie's story is based on her own experience moving from the Global South to the Global North. Adichie uses the story of Ifemelu, a Nigerian student who moves to the United States for academic reasons, to demonstrate how legality, even when it allows for conditional entry, does not imply belonging. The novel depicts the many humiliations, racialized interactions, and economic compromises that characterize diasporic life. It emphasizes that, while legal documents can facilitate access, they cannot eliminate foreignness or provide protection against alienation.

Adichie is acutely aware of the material costs associated with being in law. Ifemelu

quickly realizes that the American immigration system is a source of anxiety and hardship rather than a fair means of obtaining justice. Although her legal status is technically secure due to her student visa, it actually makes her more vulnerable. The worst part is when Ifemelu, desperate to continue her education but unable to find work, is forced to have sex with a tennis coach for money. Adichie does not hide the mental breakdown that occurs after the violation when she writes, "She walked back to the dormitory feeling numb, her body stiff, and her mind floating" (Adichie 142). This is more than just a story; it is a real-life example of how immigration systems treat migrants' bodies in desperate ways, transforming legality into an emotional economy in which preserving one's dignity may be necessary to survive. In this case, the law considers sexual orientation, gender, and race in addition to simply following the rules. Americanah's boundaries are more than just national; they are inscribed on the body, governing not only mobility but also intimacy, desire, and self-perception. Even after her immigration status has been resolved, Ifemelu is acutely aware of her visibility as a Black African woman in predominantly white environments. "It is decided for you," she writes in one of her blog posts, "because you can't choose your race in America" (Adichie 220). Legal inclusion does not prevent racial exclusion; rather, it frequently exposes migrants to surveillance and cultural othering systems. Even though your passport verifies your legal status, your accent, skin tone, hairstyle, and posture all appear unusual. Adichie's perspective on immigration disproves the liberal illusion that being legal equates to equality or peace. Rather, she demonstrates how legality is frequently used to conceal more profound, implicit exclusions. Ifemelu's legal journey resembles conflicting emotional experiences such as condescending microaggressions in interracial relationships, awkward pauses during job interviews, and the gradual loss of identity due to unspoken cultural translation. Immigrants are expected to compromise their differences in order to fit in, and the American dream is about performance rather than opportunity. Even after receiving official documents, Ifemelu continues to experience affective statelessness; she yearns for a place where her body is not constantly perceived as out of place, for home, and for coherence.

Adichie highlights the importance of internalizing loneliness. Ifemelu's blog, The Non-American Black, serves as a platform for her resistance, as she discusses the inconsistencies between race and the law with incisive humor and direct criticism. Adichie uses phrases like "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby" to show how paperwork can alter someone's legal status but not their cultural identity (Adichie 220). These digital expressions resemble emotional maps of migration. They reveal what official forms and checkpoints do not: the exhaustion of switching languages, the violence of being perceived as different, and the quiet sadness of constantly feeling like you don't belong. So, in Americanah, citizenship is shown to be more than just filling out forms. It is an emotional, physical, and social process that cannot be solved solely by obeying the law. Adichie demonstrates that, while the law allows someone to be present, it rarely confirms their identity. She claims that crossing borders does not make you feel like you belong; instead, you must deal with the emotional turmoil and personal sacrifices that come with it. Ifemelu's return to Nigeria is more than just a homecoming; it is an opportunity for her to confront all of the changes that migration has brought about in herself and the world around her. The arc of her story doesn't end, which reminds readers that the journey to belong isn't always straight or certain, especially for people whose bodies are still bordered, even when their passports aren't.

Citizenship, Anxiety, and the Emotional Map of Belonging: Never-ending Boundaries

Exit West and Americanah deconstruct the romantic notion of global citizenship, revealing that it is a seductive delusion that conceals the persistent structural violence embedded in legal, cultural, and emotional geographies rather than a shared humanism. These books reveal a subtle yet timeless truth: the border is a condition ingrained in the daily lives of migrants, exiles, and racialized bodies, not just a line separating sovereign territories. Mohsin Hamid and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie both challenge cosmopolitan discourses that commonly celebrate transnational mobility as a sign of diversity and progress by emphasizing the long-term psychological costs of displacement. Although Saeed, Nadia, and Ifemelu are allowed to travel between countries, their emotional and cultural integration is still ongoing and incomplete. These texts show that citizenship is not a stable identity in this context. Though it rarely provides emotional stability, social cohesiveness, or a sense of belonging, it has the potential to make a body visible to law enforcement. The law, which is intended to protect migrants' social standing, frequently makes them feel even more isolated by establishing a hierarchy of worth. In both Exit West and Americanah, the state acts as a gatekeeper of legitimacy rather than an impartial arbiter of justice, labeling immigrants with restrictions, mistrust, and a sense of temporary status. Despite their ability to cross borders through magical doors, the government and local hostilities keep track of Saeed and Nadia's movements. As Hamid describes it, "they were camped... in a green belt... watched over by drones, separated from the natives" (Hamid 127). Their presence is acknowledged but never welcomed. Despite its subtlety, this division is comparable to the experience of modern refugees, in which legality emphasizes rather than eliminates differences. The refugee is reduced to a political category that is controlled, counted, and relocated, rather than a human being looking for a way to live and find meaning. Legal frameworks do not provide safety; rather, they frequently give the impression that people will never fit in. Adichie provides a similar critique with a different tone. Ifemelu's story of coming to the United States is told in Americanah, which includes racist encounters and bureaucratic issues that persist long after she receives immigration status. Her Blackness and non-American accent make her visible but culturally invisible in areas dominated by white people, even after she becomes a "legal" resident. Legally being present does not imply acceptance. "In America, lying has become necessary just to survive" (Adichie 146). This sentence demonstrates how migrants frequently have to conceal their differences in order to appear as if they belong. The law hides the truth rather than revealing it. It allows people to occupy a space without taking responsibility for its meaning.

Both texts challenge us to reconsider cosmopolitanism as a way of thinking that, despite its good intentions, frequently ignores the psychological and physical costs of displacement, rather than as a moral ideal. Global modernity flows, according to scholars like Arjun Appadurai, create "disjunctions" between the economy, culture, and politics—spaces where migrants must constantly reinterpret their identities and meanings (Appadurai 37). Even if Ifemelu obtains legal status and Saeed and Nadia travel across continents, none of them truly feel at home. The silent cost of translating across languages, landscapes, and people shapes their lives, not how easy it is to reach them. Citizenship serves as more of a sieve than a shelter in these circumstances. Legality is acceptable, but emotional stability, cultural validation, and epistemic acknowledgment are not. Hamid and Adichie do not want people to think that movement is always liberating. They paint a different, more somber picture: one in which, despite all its rhetoric about openness, global citizenship is still imposed through racial

hierarchies, bureaucratic violence, and selective empathy; one in which movement can mean escape but not arrival; and one in which legality can allow entry but not ease. In both novels, the border represents a sense of isolation as well as geopolitical exclusion. According to Sara Ahmed, these boundaries are "carried in the body," which means they adhere to specific identities and make them feel constantly uncomfortable (Ahmed 11). Even within their own countries, migrants are limited by laws, perceptions, language, and history. Together, these stories dispel the myth that obtaining citizenship solves the problem of belonging. Instead, they show how belonging is an uneven space that necessitates social resistance, moral negotiation, and emotional growth. The broken journey of Saeed and Nadia, as well as Ifemelu's return from cultural fatigue, evoke Edward Said's eerie statement, "Exile is not a matter of choice... it is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place" (Said 174). That division persists, manifesting not only in various locations but also in names, memories, and silence. In addition to criticizing cosmopolitanism, Exit West and Americanah offer a more realistic portrayal of what it means to be a migrant—not freedom, but the ability to cope with uncertainty.

Linguistic and Linguistic Alienation: Writing Absently and Speaking in Exile

Perhaps the most delicate and destructive factor that can upend an identity in the peaceful framework of diasporic life is language. Language is the most private space in which subjectivity is documented; it is not merely a neutral medium for meaning transmission. It affects people's thoughts, dreams, desires, and memories. Language is both a blessing and a burden to migrants. It makes them feel alone and carries the weight of memory. In addition to moving the body from one place to another, diaspora also modifies the tongue's natural rhythm, changing speech patterns and making words less evocative, which reduces the dependability of intimacy. In this sense, migration is a linguistic injury as well as a political act.

Jhumpa Lahiri's In Other Words is one of the best books about a quiet trauma that is often overlooked: how people move between languages. In Other Words is a nonfiction book written in Italian and then translated into English. This differs from her previous work, which explored the cultural and emotional tensions of being Bengali-American. It's a book about moving through words rather than physical space. It's a big deal that Lahiri is abandoning English, the language that made her famous as a writer, in favor of Italian, which she will learn as an adult rather than as a child. She refers to it as "a voluntary exile" (Lahiri 19), citing not only her native languages (Bengali and English), but also the comfort and skill it provides. She deliberately mutilates her voice in order to lose emotional truth in her search for a new linguistic self.

Lahiri embarks on a linguistic pilgrimage, but rather than succeeding, it ends in a break. Her journey is not about learning a new language, but about emotional dislocation. She chose to isolate herself from what she knows in order to find a more pure but vulnerable way to express herself. She says, "I feel like I have two selves: one who speaks English and one who struggles with Italian." "Lahiri 67" claims that they don't get along well. The duality she describes is similar to the larger diasporic condition: being stuck between different cultures, constantly having to translate, and never feeling completely at ease. Language is similar to her identity in that it changes frequently, is fragmented, and is constantly changing.

The eerie quality of Lahiri's story isn't due to her poor command of her adopted tongue. It's the profound emotional toll of being unable to communicate in her mother tongue. Writing in Italian is a means of grieving and expressing love. It's sorrow for the emotional intimacy lost in translation and love for a language that

breathes life. When writing in Italian, Lahiri claims, "I feel like I'm writing in silence" (Lahiri 121). The echo of unsaid sorrow—the sense that no language, no matter how well you know it, can replace the one that gave you your first metaphors for the world—is what this silence is, not a lack of sound. Lahiri sacrifices her command of language to highlight the weakness of diasporic expression: the need to be heard in one's own voice in addition to speaking. When discussing bilingualism or cosmopolitan fluency, people frequently romanticize this concept, but in this instance, it is depicted as a place where the mind disintegrates. It's not always better for the multilingual student; in fact, they're frequently isolated and trapped in a linguistic limbo. "Language is not just how we talk to each other; it is also how we live in worlds and make them livable," according to Sara Ahmed (Ahmed 92). Living in a world where a language may not understand them grammatically, culturally, or emotionally is a challenge for migrants, particularly those who write in multiple languages or communities. Therefore, even if it means erasing oneself, writing is a means of combating that erasure.

So, instead of celebrating multilingualism, read In Other Words as a sad poem about losing a language home. According to Lahiri, each language has its own cultural and psychic atmosphere. Changing languages is more than a mental shift; it is a break in existence. Italian not only expands her vocabulary, but it also creates a new self for her, one that is more fragile, unsure, and vulnerable to failure. In that failure, she discovers the truth. She writes, "I feel more liberated and less judged." I don't write with any expectations, means without context." (Lahiri 88). This freedom is what drew her in, but the dislocation makes her feel lost.

Lahiri's story has a larger meaning: it contradicts the cosmopolitan myth that being able to move around with language entails being able to move around with oneself. In Other Words, on the other hand, demonstrates that linguistic migration, like geographic migration, frequently carries a high emotional cost. The self doesn't switch languages easily; it stumbles, hesitates, and crumbles. There is no smooth integration. There is only the ongoing work of becoming—learning to live, speak, and write in a voice that is never quite your own but, strangely, feels more genuine than the one you left behind. As a result, Lahiri's experience with language is similar to that of many people who have moved away from their home country, where language can be both a source of comfort and a source of conflict. Her writing is raw and vulnerable, defying the polished performance of mastery. Instead, it embraces what Homi Bhabha might call the "unhomely" nature of language itself—the point at which the private becomes strange and the strange becomes a new home (Bhabha 13). In Other Words is about more than just learning Italian; it's about writing through silence, mourning what was left unsaid, and discovering your identity in the ruins of what can't be translated.

The City and the Non-place: Alienation in Space

The contemporary city is often hailed as a cultural melting pot, but it also hides a more sinister reality where anonymity and visibility clash violently. Urban space is a palimpsest of power, memory, and exclusion rather than a place where everyone is accepted and feels at home. The city's bustling streets and peaceful nooks are often where migrants feel most isolated. "Open City" by Teju Cole is a potent reflection on this paradox. The story follows Julius, a Nigerian-German psychiatry resident, as he roves the city like a flâneur in this post-9/11 New York City novel. However, Julius' wanderings are not for amusement but rather for existential reflection—a quest for self in a world that offers quiet exile but promises inclusion—unlike the Baudelairean or Benjaminian flâneur, who can observe aimlessly.

The streets of Manhattan are neither openly hostile nor friendly in Open City; they just don't give a damn. Cole portrays the city as a place where ghosts coexist rather than as a melting pot of cultures. History is buried beneath contemporary structures, and people pass one another with practiced indifference. In public spaces like slave cemeteries, locations of historical violence, and forgotten diaspora memories, Julius observes layers of trauma ingrained. He thinks that "all inconvenient histories are erased, and people forget things in New York" (Cole 61). This erasure is a feature of the system and is not an accident. Cole claims that by keeping its citizens silent, the multicultural city preserves its reputation as a world city. Although it boasts of its multiculturalism, it does not extend a warm welcome to those who do not fall into its tidy categories of inclusion. Open City turns public space into a "non-place," a term created by Marc Augé to characterize locations that have no historical or social significance, like city streets, malls, and airports. During his walks, Julius ignores the city's rhythms and landmarks, moving through it like a ghost. Despite the fact that he is officially "at home" in New York, his behavior suggests otherwise. People make him aware of his differences in small ways, ignore him in taxis, and notice him in stores. He states, "I felt as though I was in a place that someone else had left behind and I wasn't welcome" (Cole 89). He is hard to read because of his diasporic subjectivity, which is like a shadow that is familiar but unclaimed, belonging both everywhere and nowhere. Despite its size, the city cannot accommodate his presence.

The spatial dislocation is emphasized by Cole's elegant, spare prose. As though the cumulative effect of being out of place all the time has paralyzed his inner being, Julius' observations are exacting but emotionally detached. He stays away from making a name for himself in any community and forming lasting relationships. His nomadic lifestyle is a reflection of the existential architecture of the contemporary migrant, who is both psychologically and structurally disoriented. The result of continuously translating oneself in spaces that do not reflect or receive the migrant's interiority is a portrait of profound spiritual exhaustion as well as alienation. Importantly, Cole's portrayal of New York subverts the triumphalist thesis that the international metropolis is by its very nature inclusive. Rather, he characterizes it as an asymmetrical visibility geography where whiteness is the norm and other identities circulate as non-centered but tolerated marked bodies. Despite being a psychiatrist with a good education, fluency, and eloquence, Julius is not immune to the city's subdued xenophobia. He also passes racialized and class-based forms of belonging on his stroll through the city. The implication is unmistakable: citizenship grants you legal presence, but your spatial identity is determined by deeper cartographies such as race, history, and silence. Moreover, emotional distance alone cannot adequately describe Julius' psychological detachment. It is a prime example of what Homi Bhabha calls "unhomeliness"—a state in which the migrant views public and domestic spaces as battlefields rather than havens (Bhabha 13). Despite living in the city, Julius never feels totally comfortable there. He travels through museums, parks, and subway cars, all of which are haunted by the spectral presence of people who, like him, are invisible. His literary, musical, and artistic endeavors are also without sound foundations. Rather, they provide momentary respite from the emotional sterility of the city.

Lastly, there is no conclusion or end to Teju Cole's Open City. Neither integration nor realization are present. The book ends the same way it started: by strolling, observing, and silently observing. Even though he calls New York home, Julius never really lives there; he keeps floating through it. His alienation is gradual, steady, and uninteresting rather than dramatic. Cole thus conveys a subtle yet potent message about cosmopolitan space: even in the

most "global" cities on earth, people with awkward pasts, extra presence, and voices that don't fit the prevailing tone still don't feel like they belong.

Emotional and affective alienation: The agony of being in the middle, guilt, and nostalgia.

The soul's connection to a place is broken by emotional and affective alienation, just as the body's connection to a place is broken by moving around. Many people who have left their homeland feel not only geographically and legally isolated, but also emotionally alone, which impacts their memories, desires, and guilt. The inability to return, the confusion of hazy nostalgia, and the conflicting feelings of being at home in many places but never truly at peace in any of them are the causes. Ocean Vuong's On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous is a masterful examination of the emotional geography of migration, which is frequently indescribable, nuanced, and inward. The book explores the agony of cultural translation, the inheritance of trauma, and the need to make sense of a self divided between nations, languages, generations, and desires.

The book is a letter from the narrator, Little Dog, to his mother, who cannot read. She may never read it. The distance between the letters immediately establishes the text's emotional logic: a desire to connect that is haunted by the fact that it cannot be understood. This is more than just a language barrier; it's a divide between generations, cultures, and minds. Little Dog is a queer Vietnamese American born from wartime memories. His mother is a refugee who has been influenced by violence, silence, and a pragmatic approach to survival. Their worlds intersect but do not fully merge. "I am writing because they told me to never start a sentence with because." But I wasn't trying to make a sentence; I was trying to escape" (Vuong 3). In this line, Vuong combines grammar and existence. Diasporic alienation encompasses not only feeling out of place, but also the inability to express oneself. Language can serve as both a prison and a means of escape. It stores memory, but it can also disrupt how it is transmitted. Vuong depicts with great sensitivity how memory and emotion separate in the minds of people who have moved away from their home country. Nostalgia, which is frequently romanticized in popular culture, is depicted here as a haunted landscape filled with desire and distortion. Little Dog does not want Vietnam to be his home; instead, he learns about it through stories, traumas, photographs, and smells that he has never experienced firsthand. This secondhand nostalgia makes things even more perplexing. Vuong states, "Memory is a choice, but so is forgetting" (Vuong 97). The diasporic subject is in a state of suspended mourning, mourning not only what they have lost but also what was never truly theirs in the first place. The idealized homeland, seen from a distance, is as strange as the hostland, and neither space makes you feel better.

Vuong also inquires about how it feels to be foreign even in one's own home. Little Dog's queer identity makes him feel even more like an outsider. Even the most intimate spaces of love and family are fraught with tension and confusion. His desire is soft, but difficult to articulate. It happens in the dark, when he is vulnerable and has fleeting moments of grace. "I miss you more than I remember you," he says, capturing the emotional dissonance of a love that lacks a consistent memory or a shared language (Vuong 183). In this way, the novel demonstrates not only how moving to a new place can make you feel alone, but also how diasporic alienation is an emotional state caused by not fully knowing the people with whom you were born.

Sara Ahmed's concept of "affective alienation" is an extremely useful way to think about this condition. She claims that emotions are shaped by society rather than coming solely from within. "They stick to bodies," she says, identifying people as out of place even when they appear to be included (Ahmed 11). Little Dog is one of those things. His Americanness is

constantly questioned, his Asian identity is either fetishized or erased, and his queerness is either concealed or made to appear sick. He navigates American life with hyper-awareness, conscious of the micro-aggressions, silences, and denials that shape his emotional reality. His life is a performance of belonging that never feels entirely genuine, a balance between being seen and being vulnerable. In *On Earth* We're Briefly Gorgeous, Vuong tells a story that is both intensely personal and deeply political. The novel's ache is not only that of queer love or immigrant trauma, but also that of being caught in the gravitational pull of unresolved histories. The mother's trauma from the Vietnam War, the grandmother's madness, the father's absence, and the narrator's own aching desire for recognition all combine to create an emotional landscape that cannot be rationalized or controlled. Vuong rejects the resolution. He writes about rupture, beauty that flickers in pain, and language as an imperfect but necessary act of reaching out. "Sometimes being offered tenderness feels like proof that you've been ruined" (Vuong, 118). This sentence contains the essence of affective alienation: the fear that when love arrives, it feels unearned or impossible, not because it is false, but because the self has been too long conditioned to expect its absence.

Finally, the emotional alienation in Vuong's story is something that must be accepted rather than overcome. The book does not conclude with a victory or a return to wholeness. Instead, it emphasizes the dignity of being broken, the beauty of being partially connected, and the extreme vulnerability of sharing one's story, even if no one else fully understands it. By doing so, On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous transforms diasporic pain into art, demonstrating that emotional exile is both painful and creative. It is here that language becomes necessary, where remembering becomes a means of negotiating identity, and where belonging is sought as a fleeting gift rather than a permanent possession.

Reevaluating Cosmopolitanism: Moving Toward Situated and Ethical Belonging

What remains is not a rejection of cosmopolitan ideals but rather a call for their radical rethinking if the myth of global citizenship crumbles under the weight of legal exclusion, spatial estrangement, and emotional alienation—as expressed in the diasporic texts studied. The modern era encourages a change from a universalist, abstract, and frequently elite conception of global connectedness to one that is morally based, historically conscious, and emotionally sensitive, rather than completely rejecting cosmopolitanism. This new perspective, which Kwame Anthony Appiah refers to as "rooted cosmopolitanism," provides a middle ground by respecting the worth of regional ties while upholding an ethical duty to people everywhere. "No local loyalty can ever justify forgetting that each human being has a claim on us simply as a human being," according to Appiah in Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (Appiah 222). This kind of cosmopolitanism asks us to broaden our moral imagination without erasing the realities of difference, suffering, and historical violence instead of demanding that we erase our roots.

Seyla Benhabib's proposal for a "situated cosmopolitanism," which acknowledges that moral claims and identity are influenced by the contexts in which people live, further articulates Appiah's idea. Cosmopolitanism, according to Benhabib, cannot be de-territorialized or disembodied; rather, it must be "negotiated through democratic iterations" that acknowledge migrants as subjects with narrative agency rather than as problems that need to be controlled (Benhabib 175). As a result, the debate over belonging becomes more ethical and dialogic rather than legal or territorial. Being a part of a shared, albeit unequal, world where vulnerability is reciprocal and hospitality is a duty rather than an exception takes precedence over fitting into preexisting national structures. This ethical cosmopolitanism finds its most poignant expression in literature,

especially in diasporic narratives. Storytelling turns into a means of both restitution and survival. Diasporic texts that depict alienation, memory, desire, and displacement provide both critique and the outlines of a more situated and compassionate cosmopolitan imagination. These are not tales of contented assimilation or smooth integration. Often, they are tales of rupture, silence, and fracture. However, by identifying these injuries, the texts defy the erasure that is so frequently carried out by prevailing cosmopolitan narratives. They maintain that a sense of belonging needs to be accountable, accountable to place, history, affect, and the unique characteristics of cultural suffering.

For instance, Ocean Vuong's *On Earth* We're Briefly Gorgeous reclaims a queer, immigrant, Vietnamese-American voice that has long been marginalized in dominant discourses rather than attempting to affirm a universal human experience without context. Little Dog's writing, in which he addresses his illiterate mother, becomes an act of ethical cosmopolitanism—not through abstraction, but through intimacy. Even though the mother, the reader, will never be able to decipher the language, he suggests that "to be written is to be found." In a relationship that rejects linear resolution, the story itself turns into an act of love, healing, and rootedness (Vuong 109). Similar to this, Jhumpa Lahiri's cross-linguistic exploration in In Other Words serves as both a statement of artistic and emotional independence and a contemplation of the costs associated with pursuing a cosmopolitan ideal. She accepts linguistic exile as a necessary step toward a more authentic self, but instead of triumphantly embracing a new language, she wanders in its shadows (Lahiri 88). These stories push us to rethink cosmopolitanism as a challenging, essential practice of listening, storytelling, and ethical vulnerability rather than as a worldwide passport of privilege. In this updated definition, being cosmopolitan means entering into the realities of race, migration, and exile with humility and care rather than floating above them. It is to realize that all stories, regardless of language, geography, or history, are both an offering and a reckoning. These texts illustrate how the fractured self may become a site of radical empathy—a place from which to speak, listen, and belong differently—in a world that is becoming more and more divided by fear and fragmentation.

Therefore, rethinking cosmopolitanism does not mean giving up on its goals; rather, it means reestablishing them in the soil of lived experience, where memory, emotion, and cultural uniqueness are valued rather than erased. This subtlety is made possible by rooted cosmopolitanism. It creates room for incomplete stories, for partial connections, and for mourning. We learn that belonging is a dialogic process that is shaped by mutual recognition and the bravery to live in difference rather than a destination. Diasporic literature becomes a critique of global belonging and a roadmap for its more moral reimagining by paying close attention to the lives of the displaced.

Conclusion

The Ache Beneath the Promise: The realities that the contemporary discourse of global citizenship tends to obscure remain haunted by the language of freedom, mobility, and universal belonging. Although transnational inclusion and ethical openness are promised by cosmopolitan ideals, the actual experiences of diasporic people paint a much more nuanced picture. When faced with the obstinate persistence of racialized suspicion, emotional displacement, linguistic exile, and legal exclusion, the illusion of a borderless world crumbles. As this article has argued, these multi-layered and intersecting forms of alienation consistently erode the optimism of global citizenship. According to the prevailing conception, being a global citizen means belonging everywhere. However, for many

migrants and displaced people, it frequently means that they truly belong nowhere.

In this light, diasporic literature becomes an essential platform for testimony, resistance, and moral reflection. We come across deeply nuanced reflections on what it means to live in the spaces between cultures, languages, and histories in the writings of Jhumpa Lahiri, Ocean Vuong, Mohsin Hamid, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Teju Cole rather than triumphalist stories of mobility. Instead of just reflecting displacement, these narratives archive it as a continuous state rather than a singular occurrence. Their protagonists live in the challenging realm of affective nonarrival rather than merely traveling from one location to another. Vuong's statement, "Memory is a choice, but so is forgetting" (Vuong 97), encapsulates the diasporic weight of preserving what cannot be lost, even when it is difficult to recall. Furthermore, by reclaiming voice, space, and agency from within systems that have long marginalized them, these texts collectively execute what Seyla Benhabib refers to as a "democratic iteration" of cosmopolitanism (Benhabib 175). Their strength is in exposing the political and emotional realities that underlie our most ambitious global ideals, not in putting forth substitute utopias. By doing this, they point to the potential for a more moral and situated global community—one that is aware of vulnerability, asymmetry, and history—while simultaneously criticizing the structural shortcomings of cosmopolitan belonging. Kwame Anthony Appiah refers to this as "rooted cosmopolitanism"—an identity that demands empathy across difference rather than erasing it (Appiah 222).

It is even more critical that we pay attention to the voices of the diaspora as we move forward. In addition to voluntary migration, the twenty-first century has seen statelessness, digital diaspora, displacement brought on by climate change, and post-national identity. People who are rendered placeless by algorithmic invisibility, ethnic persecution, or rising sea levels are experiencing new types of estrangement. A rethinking of belonging that goes beyond the dichotomy of homeland and hostland is necessary in light of these realities. We need to focus on the unrecorded archives found in blogs, oral histories, and diasporic online communities, as well as the new literatures on forced migration. These are the voices that will influence the future cosmopolitan imagination, which will be based on mutual care and shared fragility rather than privilege. Accordingly, diasporic literature is a moral map of a fractured world rather than merely a subgenre of global fiction. It asks us how we coexist with others in addition to where we live. It challenges us to consider what it means to be included without assurances and whether storytelling could end up being the only real home in the face of ongoing displacement. Despite its fractures, the diasporic voice is still essential because it complicates the story of global citizenship in all the important ways, not because it completes it.

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