While English literature once occupied a central position in national curricula, enrollment in the subject has undergone a continuing decline in English-speaking countries such as the United States and United Kingdom. Its marginal position may also be observed in formerly colonized countries such as Singapore, where the subject was introduced, appropriated, and reconstructed. My aim, in this paper, is to propose a reenvisioning of literature education premised on the principles of ethical cosmopolitanism. In the first part of the paper, I describe ethical cosmopolitanism by distinguishing it from strategic cosmopolitanism, which has more recently emerged in response to the pressures of economic globalization, leading to the economization of education. In the second part of the paper, I show how the principles of strategic cosmopolitanism have directed the national literature curriculum in Singapore through my analysis of the national syllabus and high-stakes examination papers from 1990 to the present. This leads to the third part of the paper, in which I use a case study of four literature teachers in Singapore secondary schools to characterize the ethical cosmopolitan pedagogies they employ to circumvent nation-centric, economic pressures of strategic cosmopolitanism operating at the national level. More importantly, I discuss how such pedagogies have the potential to foster a hospitable imagination, which constitutes the strongest defense one can give to literature education in the context of an increasingly culturally complex, connected, and contested global sphere.

In the early fifteenth century, the Chinese admiral Zheng He commanded over three hundred ships setting sail from China toward major trading sites along India’s southwest coast. Years later, Italian explorer Christopher Columbus would discover the New World in the Americas, and Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama would make the voyage from Lisbon to establish the first sea route from Europe to the East. These men, among others, were catalysts in facilitating a global exchange of knowledge, goods, and culture along with the colonization of people. Today, the sense of transnational connectedness, encapsulated in the term globalization, has intensified more than in any other century in history. Yet, as the world becomes closer, it is also pulled apart by rising instances of global terrorism, xenophobia,
inequality among rich and poor nations, and modern-day slavery. Increasingly, countries are turning into “world risk societies” (Beck, 2007), given the permeation of global risks in everyday local experiences, risks that can no longer be resolved by the nation-state alone. It is this fragility of our world that provides the opportune moment to reenvision the teaching of English literature.

The need for a reenvisioning comes at a time when the value of English literature education appears to be in question. While it once occupied a central position in national curricula, enrollment in the subject has undergone a continuing decline in countries such as the United States and United Kingdom.¹ Not surprisingly, vocal defenses of English literature have largely come from these “native English-speaking countries” since the subject once played a vital role in fashioning their sense of national identity (Applebee, 1974; Eagleton, 1996). At the same time, those who claim that only the Westerner can write about any history or defense of English literature appeal to a myth of authenticity, the myth of a pure Anglophone race that can speak on behalf of English culture and cultural texts. The history of English literature and its defenses are incomplete without the participation of voices belonging to countries, such as Singapore, that were formerly colonized by Western powers and in which English literature was introduced, appropriated, and reconstructed.

This paper aims to contribute to the debate about the value of English literature education, henceforth termed literature education, from the perspective of a postcolonial and cosmopolitan country such as Singapore. It is not too far-fetched to claim that literature education has now reached a crisis point in Singapore. While the English language remains a compulsory first-language subject in all schools, literature education is marginalized. Enrollment in the subject at the upper secondary level (equivalent to grades 9 and 10) has fallen sharply over the last two decades. While 48% of the secondary school graduating cohort enrolled in the 1992 high-stakes national literature examination, that number declined to 22% in 2001, and subsequently to 9% (or about 3,000 students) in 2012 (Heng, 2013).² A common excuse is that the introduction of new subjects such as computing and economics reduced the number of students choosing to study literature. The Minister of Education described how, to promote the subject, his ministry had organized regular sharing sessions and biennial seminars for teachers (Heng, 2013). Yet, these efforts pale in comparison to the government’s investments in the subjects of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics as observed in various initiatives, such as a S$2.8 million grant to boost robotics and coding in schools; a science research mentorship program conducted in collaboration with universities and external organizations; and the establishment of two schools specializing in science, mathematics, and technology.

Both statistical evidence of literature education’s demise and the lack of any government push to redress it point to the subject’s perceived irrelevance to society. My aim, in this paper, is to propose a reenvisioning of literature education premised on the principles of ethical cosmopolitanism. In the first part of the paper, I describe ethical cosmopolitanism by distinguishing it from strategic
cosmopolitanism, which has more recently emerged in response to the economization of education brought about by the pressures of economic globalization. In the second part of the paper, I show how the principles of strategic cosmopolitanism have directed the national literature curriculum in Singapore through my analysis of the national syllabus and high-stakes examination papers from 1990 to the present. This leads to the third part of the paper, in which I analyze case studies of four literature teachers in Singapore secondary schools to characterize the ethical cosmopolitan pedagogies they employ to circumvent nation-centric, economic pressures of strategic cosmopolitanism operating at the national level. More importantly, I discuss how such pedagogies potentially foster a hospitable imagination, which constitutes the strongest defense one can give to literature education in the context of an increasingly culturally complex, connected, and contested global sphere.

Distinguishing between Strategic and Ethical Cosmopolitanism

The concept of cosmopolitanism is commonly said to have originated in ancient Greece when the Cynic philosopher Diogenes (404–323 BCE) rejected material comfort by setting up his home in the marketplace, declaring, “I am a citizen of the world [kosmopolites].” Since the late twentieth century, there has been renewed interest in the idea of cosmopolitanism, given that its worldly vision resonates well in our globally interconnected age, in which nations can no longer afford to remain insulated and their prosperity is increasingly dependent on a neoliberal climate conducive to economic and political cooperation with others. Thus, it is not surprising that the term has been co-opted by governments to support various economic imperatives for the benefit of their nations. Yet, a distinction needs to be made between cosmopolitanism as a means for economic development and cosmopolitanism as an end grounded on an ethical orientation to humanity. The key differences are that the former, termed strategic cosmopolitanism, is premised on economic rationality and is nation-centric in its aims, whereas the latter, termed ethical cosmopolitanism, is grounded on ethical rationality and is other-centric in its intentions. In what follows, I elaborate on these distinctions before explicating the significance of ethical cosmopolitanism for literature education.

Strategic cosmopolitanism emerged following the Second World War, with the global expansion of the world economy supported by the dominance of liberal democracy as the principal form of rule (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). While liberal democracy catalyzed a climate favorable to international exchanges, beginning in the 1960s the formation of transnational organizations (such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD) established various international agreements that facilitated the removal of trade barriers and promoted a climate of cosmopolitan openness. At the same time, this openness to the world has been justified primarily on economic rather than political or cultural grounds, given its conduciveness to the development of industrialized “post-Fordist” nations that privilege market flexibility, competition, and innovation (Brown & Lauder, 1996). In this sense, strategic cosmopolitanism
is selective in nature, and the phrase has been used interchangeably with terms such as *selective globalization* and *tactical globalization* to describe how governments seek to globalize countries such as Singapore by encouraging economic liberalization in order to woo foreign investors, while curtailing other forms of openness, namely sociopolitical liberties (Chong, 2006; Koh, 2007). In education, strategic cosmopolitanism is observed when economic reasoning is used to support neoliberal practices emphasizing global competitiveness, market choice, and training a globally oriented entrepreneurial class (Mitchell, 2003).

Conversely, ethical cosmopolitanism is grounded on a transnational commitment to the fraternity of human beings that finds its intellectual lineage stretching from Greek philosophers such as Socrates and Stoic philosophers to Eastern philosophers such as Confucius and ancient Hindu spiritualists (Hansen, 2011). While morality is tied to right conduct, ethics involves reflective reasoning (Noddings, 2003) about what, according to Socrates, it means to live the “good life,” or a life lived in engaged and responsible relation to others, as nicely encapsulated in his remark that “the good life, the beautiful life, and the just life are the same” (Plato, Crito). In the late eighteenth century, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1785/1995) proposed that one’s actions must be governed by the ethical imperative to treat the other “always as an end and never as a means only” (§429, p. 46). In his political writings, Kant (1795/1963) emphasized hospitable treatment of the other as a core aspect of world citizenship by arguing that the earth belongs to human beings and therefore planetary fraternity transcends nation-state citizenship.

A second distinction between strategic and ethical cosmopolitanism is that the former is paradoxically nation-centric, whereas the latter is essentially other-centric. As an ideological tool, strategic cosmopolitanism conceptualizes the world through the disciplinary lens of human capital theory and contemporary mainstream economics that perceives education as an investment that ultimately increases the productive value of the individual and the economy (Becker, 1962; Robeyns, 2006). The rising popularity of global education, international exchange, and overseas community service programs promotes a form of cosmopolitan learning, but often its justification—to equip students to be more globally aware—is made in the service of national interest. Schools increasingly function as platforms to acculturate students with twenty-first century global workplace skills and marginalize other curricular emphases such as education for social justice or for participatory citizenship (Spring, 2015). Further, such programs may promote a sense of national superiority when the identities of students from economically privileged countries are reinforced by negating disadvantaged groups from less developed countries that become sites of intervention (McCarthy & Dimitriadis, 2000).

Alternatively, the humanistic impulse of ethical cosmopolitanism is grounded on an other-centric ethos that recognizes humans as innately relational and called to move beyond themselves (Choo, 2013). Various philosophers of the late twentieth century have demonstrated how this other-centric orientation reverses nation-centric strategic cosmopolitanism by proposing that the essence of ethics is each person’s fundamental responsibility for the other (Levinas, 1998); that society
must be continually renewed through dialogic encounters with the other in order to counter dominant culture’s tendency to objectify marginalized others (Buber, 2002); and that language’s strategic impulse, centered on achieving one’s goals and getting one’s ideas across to the other, can be disrupted by its communicative, other-oriented impulse, which is aimed at reaching understanding (Habermas, 1984).

Ethical cosmopolitanism’s rallying call for deeper engagements with others, particularly the marginalized and oppressed, may be seen as a normative response to the injustices that have arisen due to the intensification of global mobility, whether it occurs physically as different communities come into contact with one another or imaginatively as concerns of different groups are transmitted via social media. As global risks such as terrorism and climate change permeate everyday local imaginaries and experiences (Beck, 2002), the question is how ethical cosmopolitanism can be enacted in everyday reality. In relation to English, various scholars have focused on the everyday practices of English speakers. In opposition to deterministic and situated approaches to literacy, Suresh Canagarajah (2013) argues that literacy is performative and describes how readers and writers enact “negotiated literacy” involving various interactional strategies to engage with others from different communities and cultures to co-construct meaning. Other scholars describe how immigrant students, at-risk students, and students facing various forms of discrimination utilize code-meshing, linguistic, and multimodal resources to develop intercultural awareness (De Costa, 2014; Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010; Vasudevan, 2014). The marginalized student is no longer one who is compelled to assimilate into a fixed system of language, but rather one who learns to utilize language to fashion himself or herself as a “cosmopolitan intellectual” with agency to construct his or her own sense of identity through dialogic encounters with others (Campano & Ghiso, 2011).

Perhaps the most powerful way in which ethical cosmopolitanism is enacted in everyday reality is via the imagination. While the imagination is deeply personal, occurring in the internal consciousness of the individual, it is also social, as it is constructed by external textual realities such as the media. Thus, the imagination can either reinforce or disrupt stereotypes of the other represented in public discourse. The development of ethical cosmopolitanism is therefore closely dependent on the cultivation of a hospitable imagination, as Jacques Derrida (2001) asserts: “ethics is hospitality; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality” (p. 17). Derrida’s argument is that ethical responsibility to others entails a hospitable openness to others without conditions, particularly those from communities that are distant and discriminated against. Yet, such openness begins in the imagination before it is translated into action, since the mind’s imposition of identity labels related to race, gender, or class may hinder any subsequent engagement.

In this paper, I seek to characterize ethical cosmopolitan pedagogies that, as highlighted previously, are grounded on ethical rationality and are other-centric in their aims. More importantly, since the study of literature as imaginative writing is also the study of projections and visions of others and other realities, I show how such pedagogies powerfully facilitate the development of the hospitable imagina-
The interdependencies of our world propel the need to tap into literature’s cosmopolitan potential to develop what Martha Nussbaum (1997) describes as the “narrative imagination” that enables one to perceive reality through the lens of others. When cultivated, a narrative imagination leads to habits of empathy and an expansion of sympathies, leading to a concern for the fate of others in the world. Likewise, Maxine Greene (1995) argues that the imagination fosters “wide-awakeness” (p. 120), as it has the power to break through disciplinary and institutional structures that project a singular version of reality in order to convey a vision of complex, multiple, and intersecting realities in the world. As opposed to a consciousness of nation or singular territory, Greene (1995) conceives of a hospitable imagination as an “embodied consciousness” (p. 59) that encompasses “awareness of what it means to be in the world” (p. 35), that envisions a “common world that may be in the making” (p. 43), and that reaches for “a social vision of a more humane, more fully pluralist, more just, and more joyful community” (p. 61). It is literature education’s capacity to develop hospitable ways of imaginatively encountering and vicariously experiencing other lived realities that provides the compelling reason why it must be recognized as a vital subject in our global age.

**Tensions between Strategic and Ethical Cosmopolitanism: The Case of Singapore**

In reality, strategic and ethical cosmopolitanism are not enacted in compartmentalized ways, but may overlap—inevitably creating tensions. This is apparent in Singapore, where the strategic cosmopolitanism that governs state-directed education, which caters to the production of human capital needed to generate the economy, may be resisted by teachers who seek to foster ethical cosmopolitan sensibilities in the classroom. To uncover these tensions, this paper adopts a multilevel vertical case study analysis (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006), which differs from more traditional case study analysis. Here, macro-level analysis of the national curriculum is connected to micro-level analysis of cases at local school sites. The benefit of this approach is in contextualizing local school practices within pressures occurring at the national levels, as these are in turn influenced by global forces. Thus, instead of studying local sites as bounded cases informed by school-level policies, the vertical case study method recognizes the confluence of the school, the nation, and even the world, resulting in a “cosmopolitan dialectic” (Beck, 2010).

The research aims to address two questions:

1. In what ways is the national literature curriculum directed by strategic cosmopolitanism, and what are its resultant effects?
2. What characterizes ethical cosmopolitan pedagogies that literature teachers employ to circumvent the pressures of strategic cosmopolitanism in order to develop a hospitable imagination in students?

To address the first research question, the study examines the national literature curriculum, paying attention to the aims, objectives, and skills assessed. Data col-
lected and analyzed include national literature syllabuses first published by the Ministry of Education in 1989, followed by those published in 1999, 2007, and 2013, as well as national examination papers from 1990 to 2013, titled “GCE Ordinary level” and offered to graduating secondary school students (equivalent to grade 10). A total of 1,593 questions from these examination papers were coded separately by two researchers in two phases according to question types and question intentions. In the first phase, question types were coded based on the examination format—without the imposition of the research’s theoretical lens—focusing on five areas of study stipulated by the Ministry of Education: plot, character, setting and atmosphere, style, and theme. This provides insights into which specific area of study (and its corresponding knowledge and skills) was emphasized. Since question types in these five areas may differ according to intentionality, they were coded at three levels in the second phase: whether they were intended to assess students’ understanding of the text (interpretation); students’ capacity to analyze the aesthetics of the text (aesthetic analysis); or students’ capacity to evaluate the text’s stylistic representation of others and the ideological values it contains, as well as their capacity to connect the text to the real world in order to engage with its ethical concerns (ethical evaluation and engagement). While questions at the first two levels focus on students’ engagement with the text, questions at the third level capture ethical cosmopolitanism’s other-oriented ethos by attending to students’ capacity to de-objectify, understand, and engage the other. Agreement among the researchers in the initial coding process was 96%; both researchers subsequently discussed and reached consensus on the 64 questions that had been coded differently.

To address the second research question, the study seeks to characterize ethical cosmopolitan pedagogies employed by literature teachers that have the potential to cultivate a hospitable imagination. Four literature teachers from two local schools were observed from 2011 to 2014 (see Table 1 for an overview of the teachers involved).

Data collected include six to eight classroom observations of a unit stretching over a period of about six months and one-hour pre- and post-observation interviews. From the transcripts, researchers identified and described pedagogical approaches that contribute to an understanding of how the hospitable imagination can be developed. The schools were chosen via theoretical sampling, as they were

Table 1. Profile of Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Classes Observed</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shanti</td>
<td>Grade 9, language arts</td>
<td>Durham High School, mixed gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaishi</td>
<td>Grade 10, language arts</td>
<td>Durham High School, mixed gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>Grade 7, language arts</td>
<td>Howard High School, all boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>Grade 10, literature</td>
<td>Howard High School, all boys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
part of the Ministry of Education’s initiative of encouraging integrated program schools in which students do not need to take the high-stakes secondary-level national examination. Admittedly, both schools are high-performing and accept the top 20% of students in Singapore, based on the results of a high-stakes national examination taken at the end of primary school (or grade 6). However, teachers in these schools have greater autonomy to design more holistic curricula, unlike those in mainstream schools, who tend to focus on preparing students for the high-stakes examinations. Thus, it is hoped that the pedagogies described may provide other schools with a glimpse of the possibilities of fostering ethical cosmopolitan sensibilities when teachers are given more autonomy to teach beyond the test.

Strategic Cosmopolitanism Directing Literature Education at the National Level

At the national level, the literature curriculum is directed by the operations of strategic cosmopolitanism, as observed in the connection between literature education and cultural capital, an association initiated during the colonial period and that became more entrenched from the post-independence period onward.

In the years following the founding of modern Singapore by the British in 1819, literature education was introduced to schools to expand locals’ cultural knowledge by exposing them to works of Western literature. At the time, there was very little interest in English as Singapore was essentially a multilingual disparate society largely composed of immigrants from China, India, and Malaya. Toward the early twentieth century, however, the colonial government began actively establishing English-medium schools in the country, and literature education was a core part of an English education utilized to fashion a class of “natives” who would be “English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Macaulay, 1835, para. 34). Literature education became tied to a narrow form of cosmopolitan cultural education that encouraged the embracing of Western culture. It also provided a form of cultural capital, since fluency in English and knowledge of British canonical texts were necessary for the attainment of prestigious scholarships sponsored by the colonial government and opened opportunities for good jobs in the civil service (Dhaliwal, 1961).

Following Singapore’s independence in 1965, the goals of literature education were subsumed under the broader goals of nation building that focused on developing Singapore as a global city. Given that it was a small country lacking natural resources and a large domestic market, the government’s strategy was to focus externally and market Singapore as “the most open and cosmopolitan city in Asia” (Economic Review Committee, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore, 2003, p. 5). English education was to play a vital role in the country’s globalizing ambitions, as the government viewed it as a language of business deemed essential to Singapore’s success as a global financial hub. However, English education’s affinity with colonial culture was problematic, given that the government wanted to forge a stronger sense of national belonging among the locals. The solution was to distinguish English language education from literature education (the two were
not taught separately during the colonial period). The study of English language was prioritized, and by the 1980s, it was a compulsory first-language subject in all schools, while mother tongues could be studied as either a first- or second-language subject. English language education was accorded an instrumental focus emphasizing effective communication and language proficiency, since this was part of the government’s broader aim to train a skilled labor force that was conversant in English and could engage with businesses, particularly those from the West. Meanwhile, literature education was marginalized, since the government argued that mother tongues were the best conduit for teaching cultural values (Choo, 2014).

Beginning in the late twentieth century, some attempts have been made to increase literature education’s perceived value to the economy by strengthening its association with cultural capital. Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, John Guillory (1993) draws attention to how education systems ascribe cultural capital to literature education by assigning aesthetic and symbolic value to literary study. In terms of aesthetic value, literature education is perceived to equip students to discern and interpret creative uses of language. While this “textual power” (Scholes, 1985) sensitizes students to language, in Singapore, its importance is justified not on ethical grounds (such as the ways creative language can promote social-ethical causes), but on economic grounds. This became more apparent following Singapore’s first major recession in the 1980s, when the government stressed the importance of developing aesthetic sensitivity among Singapore’s populace. A government-initiated Economic Review Committee argued that Singapore was becoming less competitive in comparison with other newly industrialized countries and that one area where it had fallen short was aesthetic education (Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore, 1986). A report by the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (1989) discussed how the “encouragement of a keen aesthetic sense among Singaporeans and the improvement in the standard of arts will benefit [society] because culture and the arts . . . contribute to the tourist and entertainment sectors” and that “arts can enhance [Singapore’s] reputation and generate a higher perceived value for [its] products and services world-wide” (pp. 11–23). Later, the Economic Review Committee (2003) proposed allowing arts and literature to constitute up to 5% to 10% of the core curriculum in primary and secondary schools, as this would nurture Singapore’s creative workforce, eventually giving far better returns than the petrochemical and banking industries. The following year, the Acting Minister for Education explained the need to invest in arts education, stating that the creative industries were among the fastest-growing in the new economy and, as Singapore’s creative industries grew, this would “have an indirect impact on the rest of the economy, by influencing the style, aesthetics and appeal that can differentiate [Singapore’s] products and services from others” (Shanmugaratnam, 2004, para. 6).

The industrializing of creativity based on economic rationality (Lee, 2007) has led the national literature syllabus to become overly focused on developing students’ sensitivity to creative, aesthetic uses of language rather than ethical engagement. For example, while the 1989 syllabus guidelines stress a broader range of teaching
principles, including tapping into students’ background experiences in reading and connecting with their interests, these are reduced to three principles in the 1999 syllabus—active response to literature, development of literary appreciation skills, and exposure to literary genres. All three principles essentially center on aesthetic appreciation, which remains the core emphasis in the 2007 and 2013 syllabuses. From 1999 on, the literature syllabus revolves around five areas of study focusing on plot, character, setting and atmosphere, style, and theme. Of the five areas, question types in the national examination increasingly focus on the style of the writer, from 4.3% of questions in 1990 to 16.2% in 2000 to 91.1% in 2013. In terms of the three levels of question intentions—interpretation, aesthetic analysis, and ethical evaluation and engagement—the majority of questions assess aesthetic analysis (comprising 87.5% of questions in 2013) rather than ethical evaluation and engagement (comprising only 12.5% in 2013).

Attention to literature education’s connection to cultural capital involves capitalizing not only on its aesthetic value but its symbolic value or the perceived value of having a more cultured populace. In practice, literature education then revolves around the study of a narrow body of texts recognized for their aesthetic originality and power, which makes text selection a necessarily elitist act (Bloom, 1994). An obvious consequence of elitism is the lack of adequate cultural representation resulting in a large part of the world being left out including texts by authors from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Presumably, the inclusion of such literature would require the use of translated literatures in English, which would be perceived as a compromise to the aesthetic “authenticity” of the texts. The fact that translated texts are excluded in Singapore’s secondary-level national literature curriculum points to a superficial form of cosmopolitanism that perpetuates the reading of similar cultures, since the texts studied are predominantly set in, and written by authors originating from, English-speaking, economically advanced countries. For example, in the prescribed list of texts (excluding anthologies) included in the literature examination from 1990 to 2013, 65% are written by authors who originated from Ireland, England, and United States, while 14% and 10% are written by authors originating from Africa and Singapore, respectively. The most frequently included author is William Shakespeare—who is also the only one to be included at least once in each year of the examination—followed by Arthur Miller. More importantly, the national curriculum emphasizes extreme close reading of these texts. For example, at the upper secondary level (grades 9 and 10), students study one to two literary texts in close detail over two years. Passage-based questions in the high-stakes examination require students to become well versed in every aspect of the text. Symbolic value is attached to the close study of predominantly Western canonical texts, since familiarity with these texts is a social indicator of taste and refinement. However, such extreme close study of singular texts discounts the fact that texts are constructed from the perspective of the author and must be compared with other cultural perspectives.

Strategic cosmopolitanism’s role in directing the national literature curriculum, as evidenced in its close connection to cultural capital attained from the aesthetic
value of literary appreciation and the symbolic value of close canonical literary study, has led to a de-emphasis of the humanistic impulse of ethical cosmopolitanism. One consequence has been the gradual disappearance of questions related to ethics and values. For example, the 1989 national syllabus includes a goal related to critical engagement of sociopolitical and ethical issues: “During Literature lessons, a wide range of inter-related social topics can be discussed. Indeed, Literature provides a concrete forum for discussion of morals and values” (Curriculum Planning Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore, 1989, p. 5). This goal is absent from subsequent syllabuses. As highlighted previously, the majority of questions now emphasize style, and rather than evaluating the politics or ethics of stylistic representation, the majority of questions are aimed at aesthetic analysis of style—with such questions typically framed as follows: “How does Shakespeare make Mercutio a dramatically compelling character?” (Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board, 2013, p. 8). While such questions draw attention to the writer’s craft, they result in classroom pedagogy that is fixated on aesthetic analysis and confined to the lifeworld of the author’s fictional imagination, leaving little room for the critical evaluation of the text’s politics or for engagement with its ethical concerns.

Characterizing Ethical Cosmopolitan Pedagogies at the School Level

How do teachers circumvent the pressures of strategic cosmopolitanism at the national level, particularly the expectation of developing aesthetic appreciation skills and close study of canonical works? The four teachers in this study work in schools that do not require students to take the secondary-level national examinations. Yet, it is clear that their pedagogical emphases continue to be influenced by these examinations, since their students eventually have to sit for another high-stakes examination two years later at the precollege level (equivalent to grade 12). Hence, they are cognizant of the fact that they still have to prepare students with fundamental skills assessed at the secondary-level high-stakes examination so that they will be equipped to do well in the precollege examination. Thus, all four teachers continue to emphasize aesthetic appreciation of literary texts and the teaching of discrete literary analysis skills. The teachers also utilize texts that are included in the high-stakes national examinations, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Macbeth*, *Animal Farm*, and *Frankenstein*. At the same time, I highlight some of the pedagogies they employ that are other-oriented and grounded on the recognition of literature’s role in fostering greater consciousness and understanding of others in the world. Here, I focus specifically on characterizing the ways such ethical cosmopolitan pedagogies promote the development of the hospitable imagination.

Developing the Hospitable Imagination through Connections to Global Issues

In most mainstream schools in Singapore, the pressure to prepare students for high-stakes examinations and equip them with literary analysis skills has disconnected literature education from everyday reality. One pedagogical strategy that
fosters the hospitable imagination is to intentionally pair canonical texts with contemporary texts to help students make real-world connections. In Tanya’s grade 7 language arts class, the central curriculum, which revolves around the study of *Animal Farm*, is taught alongside a supplementary curriculum focusing on a more contemporary text—*Shooting Kabul* by N. H. Senzai—which describes a family’s attempt to gain asylum in the United States as they escape Afghanistan and the Taliban while facing all kinds of discrimination in a post-9/11 climate. Tanya’s view is that the literature curriculum should equip students with core skills of literary analysis and allow them to make connections to the world. She explains that she chose the text after realizing her students were discussing politics through *Animal Farm* in a detached way. Students saw little relation between the literary texts they were studying and current political issues reported via the mass media, particularly in relation to terrorism. Tanya observed that her students were less able to associate *Animal Farm*’s satirical comments on the terrorizing effects of communism with political realities due to its allegorical style. Further, the news articles students were reading regularly made references to 9/11, an event they had little memory of since most of them were born in 2001. “I thought that in *Shooting Kabul* we had the opportunity to move towards something that was more human, more personal,” she says. “Because with *Animal Farm*, this [the instances of power and corruption being commented on] happened in the past. But these things can still happen and do happen. So I thought it was a good opportunity to discuss the world around them [through *Shooting Kabul*].”

In Tanya’s class, there is a clear contrast between the core and supplementary curriculum. The core curriculum is centered on an in-depth analysis of a canonical literary text, and she describes how, in the final examination, her students are tested on analysis of characters and stylistic devices in *Animal Farm* through passage-based and essay-type questions—a format similar to the national examination. Conversely, the supplementary curriculum allows her to introduce more contemporary and lesser-known young adult literary texts. Students are not formally assessed on these texts in tests or examinations. Instead, they are given opportunities to respond to the text through various projects involving creative writing, photography, and use of social media.

Essentially, the core curriculum is grounded on New Criticism’s adherence to an isolationist approach to literary engagement, in which students remain in the lifeworld of the plot, character, and language of the fictional text, while the supplementary curriculum positions the literary text as an entry point to global engagement. For example, in one discussion, Tanya leads students to consider how migrant communities construct culture in a foreign location. When asked what culture means, one student suggests that it is “a set of ideas, beliefs, social practices that a certain group of people believes in.” Other students talk about culture in terms of accent, language, everyday practices such as greeting another person, and values that are honored, such as duty to family. As the discussion continues, Tanya leads students to connect culture with the issue of discrimination. When she asks students to consider similarities between *Animal Farm* and *Shooting Kabul*,...
Kabul, she observes that “no one had brought up the idea of discrimination and bias in Animal Farm before. It took reading Shooting Kabul for students to draw that link.” Whereas students have tended to focus on themes concerning power and oppression in discussions of Animal Farm, they can now highlight instances of bias toward certain groups and their effects, which then concretizes the ways in which power affects the lives of individuals and communities.

Students’ exploration of real-world instances of discrimination as a result of global mobility culminates in a creative project. Here, students are required to work individually or in groups and have to select one of ten assignments given to them. In one assignment, students are asked to conduct research on 9/11, particularly eyewitness accounts, and then to write a story from the point of view of someone living in the United States after the attacks who is either Muslim or South Asian and who may be facing similar forms of prejudice as the protagonist in Shooting Kabul. In another assignment, students are asked to examine a particular refugee population, such as those in Syria, and consider what prompts them to flee their country, where they go eventually, and the challenges they face in a foreign environment.

Tanya’s pedagogical approach highlights the possibility of fostering cosmopolitan sensitivity by placing contemporary, less familiar young adult texts in conversation with canonical, well-established texts. The point is to help students connect abstract concepts in the latter with contemporary concerns in the former. Her approach points to the possibility of developing a global issues-based literature curriculum in which what anchors literary study is not the text itself (along with an appreciation of its construction) but empathy toward marginalized others through engagement with real-world issues such as terrorism, climate change, modern-day slavery, and human trafficking. More often, such concerns are left to social studies classes, perpetuating the perception that literature has little relevance to the world. However, a literature curriculum grounded on the principles of ethical cosmopolitanism would seek to foster a hospitable imagination by connecting our understanding of the other through literature to complex realities and injustices in the world. This is the kind of “new, dirty cosmopolitanism” (Robbins, 2012, p. 44) that is premised on ethical responsibility to the other.

Developing the Hospitable Imagination through Transnational Explorations

Another pedagogical strategy with the potential to develop the hospitable imagination involves deliberate attentiveness to the other—not only those from less economically advanced countries but also those who are caught between cultures: immigrants struggling to assimilate, refugees, those in exile, and the persecuted seeking asylum. As observed in Kaishi’s grade 10 language arts class, this approach raises consciousness of cosmopolitan cultural complexities by disrupting bounded notions of culture via literary texts that explore themes of transnationalism and cosmopolitan styles, highlighting forms of cultural disorientations and mix-ups (Walkowitz, 2006). Kaishi explains that for this to occur, interdisciplinarity and intertextuality must be valued: “[Students] are very sheltered and very closed, so we try to make them understand that there are deeper social issues even within
Singapore, and even if you don’t realize it, your identity is in a kind of conflict because you do negotiate what we call a cross-cultural identity.”

Indeed, his curriculum centers on the theme of cross-cultural identity, and students study a range of texts including Ang Lee’s film *Eat Drink Man Woman*, Jamaica Kincaid’s *On Seeing England for the First Time*, Kyoko Mori’s *The Dream of Water*, and Amy Tan’s *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*. Common in all these texts are the notions of cultural displacement, clashes, and mixing, whether they occur through colonization or migration. In one assignment, students answer questions such as “Examine how Lee explores the idea of cross-cultural identity through his craft” and “Compare and contrast two extracts you studied this year (Tan, Kincaid, or Mori) for how they explore the issue of cross-cultural identity.” Some questions push students to relate these texts to their own experiences: “Use one of the text extracts you studied this year (Tan, Kincaid, or Mori) to talk about your own sense of cross-cultural identity.” Students’ writings demonstrate their own explorations into cultural dislocations:

**Student A:** Similar to the character Ruth in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, I am a Chinese who is not born in China. Being a Singaporean, I face a cross-cultural crisis in a sense that I am Chinese but I do not fully understand Chinese culture, and sometimes, I understand the Western culture more than the Chinese culture.

**Student B:** I am not sure if I have a cross-cultural identity and I cannot say that I am more qualified than other people to speak on this matter simply based on the fact that I am mixed race. I have never felt any conflict with the Indian side of my heritage due to the lack of one, as I was mainly exposed to Chinese culture and not Indian culture. . . . I cannot say I have much of a cross-cultural identity. It does not even have distinguishable parts, unlike the identity Kyoko Mori possesses, which, like her life, is divided into two separate parts. I suppose my identity is what people would call “cultural assimilation.” I grew up in a mainly Chinese culture and thus lost my Indian identity.

**Student C:** I have embraced two different cultures that are not really my own, but at the same time all I have. I do not hate them, in fact I do appreciate their beauty, and how they factor in my life. However, I dislike the way I am made to learn them in such an artificial manner, just because I am conveniently situated in the middle. I dislike the way learning the culture and language seems to be divorced from emotions or love for the country. Like Kincaid, I was brought up “knowing” a country, but not really understanding it.

These examples illustrate how a text dealing with transnational themes provides the platform for complicating notions of cultural purity in students’ own lives, as evidenced in the way Student A shares feelings of disconnection and cultural rootlessness with a character in Amy Tan’s novel. Yet, connections to culture cannot simplistically be linked to place, race, or ethnicity, as Student B observes, nor
can one passively absorb or learn culture without participating in the process of its continual construction, as reflected in Student C’s response.

Kaishi’s pedagogical approach provides a glimpse of the possibility of valorizing what James Clifford (1992) terms “traveling cultures,” or cultures characterized not by fixity or stasis but by porosity and fluidity. At present, the most common themes in the literature examination text list are related to African American race relations, postcolonialism, and apartheid. While these continue to be relevant, the boundaries of hospitality can be expanded when students complicate bounded notions of culture and explore how cultures travel as well as remain tied to communities, how groups negotiate insider and outsider positions, and how one group’s core culture may be another group’s peripheral culture.

The use of transnational literatures provides a starting point to develop an imagination hospitable to complex cultural formations in our world. Another pedagogical approach is to draw attention to two dominant features of contemporary globalization: mobility and mutability. Both these concepts are essentially tied to place and the ways it has become contingent in defining the individual’s sense of identity (Livingston, 2001). There is, then, a need to problematize the notions of cultural authenticity, ancestry, and the fixation of identity to a particular place in time. In one unit on the theme of identity, Shanti has her grade 9 language arts class discuss identity and change in physical spaces. She begins by juxtaposing images of old Singapore, such as the National Stadium, public housing, and playgrounds, with images of modern Singapore. “In the course of rapid development, urbanization, modernization,” she asks the class, “is there something that we are leaving behind, forgetting?” To explore this question, students work in groups to examine various artifacts, from critical articles lamenting the commercialization of Chinatown to articles about the state’s attempts to preserve culture to poems by writers reflecting on Singapore’s changing landscape. Both literary and nonliterary texts serve to broaden students’ perspective on the issue, with the former providing a more philosophically reflective response and the latter providing historical and informed arguments. Shanti then facilitates a discussion on the effects of mutability on the sense of identity and belonging. For example, when one student discusses how the constantly changing landscape in Singapore results in the dilution of a distinctively Singaporean culture, another student points out that such romanticizing of history is an attempt to return to an essentialized past which is itself a myth. Shanti then pushes the class to consider the inevitability of change and how identity can instead be thought of as imagined, constructed, always in the process of being constituted and transformed.

Essentially, both Kaishi’s use of transnational texts to provoke intertextual conversations and Shanti’s use of literary and nonliterary texts to problematize fossilizations of identity and place have the potential to cultivate an imagination hospitable to cultural complexity. Such pedagogies push the imagination into “a kind of exile—from the comfort of local truths, from the warm nestling feeling of loyalties” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 11). Postcolonial scholar Edward Said (2002) echoes a similar view in his argument that “seeing the entire world as a foreign
land makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions’ (p. 148). Far from promoting cultural relativism, such pedagogies aim to facilitate an exilic imagination that recognizes the importance of developing rooted cosmopolitans (Appiah, 2006) who retain their connections to their communities while recognizing their affinity with multiple others as part of a larger human fraternity.

Developing the Hospitable Imagination through Disruption of Stereotypical Representations

A literature curriculum grounded on the principles of ethical cosmopolitanism should aim to cultivate in students an imagination hospitable toward foreign others who have different histories, values, and beliefs. One pedagogical approach is to consider ways in which the curriculum can explicitly disrupt one-dimensional, stereotypical depictions of the other, as observed in Pamela’s grade 10 literature class. The central text in the unit is *Frankenstein*. In the previous year, she had predominantly focused on a close analysis of the text. Yet, she wanted to get students to move beyond “SparkNotes kind of responses” and how they were “so used to seeing *Frankenstein* in relation to just a few themes or ideas.” In the year she participated in this study, she had to teach the text again, and this time wanted to explicitly draw attention to the complexities of “othering” and make them more real to students. She explains that students understand that the monster in *Frankenstein* represents those who are othered, but his foreignness as a creature makes him less relatable to students. Her strategy, then, is to frame the lesson around the concept of representation and ways of seeing. This occurs in two ways.

First, following the typical analysis of main ideas and character motivations in *Frankenstein*, she has students work in groups to research a contemporary global issue and discuss how it shapes their understanding of *Frankenstein* and vice versa. Various projects touch on how issues related to the environment, discrimination against gay and lesbian communities, and terrorism connect to the novel. One group examines how rumors of other countries’ involvement in nuclear research provide the motivation for superpower countries to invest in nuclear power, in the same way that Victor Frankenstein’s perception of other scientists’ promising scientific breakthroughs spurs him to create life in order to get ahead. Another group discusses the Arab-Israeli conflict, in particular how attention to Palestine is often focused on its terror organizations rather than the territory or its people, which is similar to the way the creature in *Frankenstein* is judged by his appearance rather than his personality.

Next, Pamela guides students to think about the ways in which the perception of marginalized individuals is constructed, through the introduction of a short story, “The Moon above His Head” by Yann Martel, which describes the sense of alienation faced by a Somali-Canadian named Hashi, who gains asylum but loses his family. Pamela provides a series of guiding questions that center on how each character is interpreted by others. At one point in the discussion, students discuss...
how Hashi is portrayed in the local newspapers when a particular accident occurs and why the reporter has to mention that he is a Somali-Canadian.

**Student D:** [His nationality is mentioned] because the most distinguishable thing about a person is skin color, just like how Chinese people differentiate others by shades of color.

**Student E:** But the point is that the media bothered to highlight the nationality so specifically. Why Somali-Canadian? It’s not relevant to the story but they bothered to highlight this.

**Student F:** The identity of the person has to be part of the story. It’s part of how they want to introduce the person.

**Student G:** But automatically you have immediate negative connotations when you hear [that he’s] Somali-Canadian. You think of refugees and all that.

**Student H:** I think mentioning that is meant to emphasize differences to show he is not a true-blue Canadian. He’s a naturalized citizen. It seems to me there’s segregation because even though they are Canadians, they are Somali-Canadians.

In the discussion above, some students wrestle with whether media representation of the marginalized figure is part of the norm of objective reportage, while others question the ethical implications of such a norm itself and whether public acceptance of such reporting implicitly naturalizes xenophobia. As Pamela reflects in an interview, this is one of the more uncomfortable moments in the discussion because of the struggle involved in thinking about how particular stereotypes of the marginalized other become socially accepted through apparently “factual” techniques of representation. The discussion transitions to students thinking about the framing of the story itself and how the author utilizes the narrator, himself a writer, to guide readers on how Hashi, as a representative of the asylum seeker–cum–alienated foreigner, should be perceived. Several students point out how both author and narrator continue to objectify Hashi as his life is utilized by those in privileged positions to educate readers, even as they claim to empathize with him. Their insights echo Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) argument in her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” on the question of who can adequately speak on behalf of those who do not possess the linguistic, economic, or other resources to represent themselves and whether even sympathetic acts of representing the other as victimized reinscribe their subordinate position.

Toward the end of the unit, Pamela challenges students to think about what they have come to expect in representations of the other in public discourse. She tells them, “Just because it is the norm [to write about the other in ways we have come to expect], is it ethical? Is there a better way to frame an issue? Here we are questioning how the [news] article chose to represent the incident and how the narrator chose to represent to us his interpretation or reading of the article, and at the same time, we also question ourselves as readers of stories. I’m asking you to look at perspectives and question your perspectives and how they are actually
formed.” Students then return to *Frankenstein* and examine pairs of characters in the text, looking at how one character sees another, how the reader’s perception of both is shaped, and whether there are gaps in the interpretation of the other.

In Pamela’s unit, a shift occurs as students examine how the other is constructed by those who control the power of discourse, utilizing subtle techniques that reinforce essentialized depictions to influence how the other is read by those in more privileged positions, including the students themselves. Consequently, students’ imagined interpretations of the other take on a critical reflexive dimension that Gerard Delanty (2006) argues is activated whenever new relations among self, other, and the world emerge in moments of openness. As Spivak (2012) argues, aesthetic education should fundamentally provide “the training of an imagination for epistemological performance” (p. 101), which involves more intentional interrogations of the way knowledge of self, others, and the world is constructed, performed, and interpreted and the varying power positions of the multiple actors involved in representing and being represented. Given that the imagination may fuel nationalism, she explains that part of this training must involve testing the limits of the imagination’s attempts to know and perceive otherness. Ultimately, the point is to aim at what Spivak (2003) terms “planetarity,” which occurs when we begin to imagine ourselves as a collective species in the universe, which paradoxically involves recognizing the existence of different belief systems, even primordial ones, that are built upon such existential questions as why we exist, how we come to exist, and what or whom we exist for. Ethical cosmopolitan literature pedagogies, such as those employed by Pamela, seek to foster three-dimensional ways of seeing the foreign other that go beyond the superficial, consumptive style of tourist-like seeing. This involves developing a disposition of multireferential curiosity that occurs through the continual destabilizing of fixed interpretations of the other based on identity markers, which then fuels a deeper desire to understand the other as a human being caught up in evolving, complex, and intersecting histories.

**Prioritization of the Hospitable Imagination in a Globalizing Singapore**

In this paper, I have argued that literature education in Singapore is directed by strategic cosmopolitanism, which has assigned aesthetic and symbolic value to the appreciation and close study of canonical literary texts. At the same time, I have characterized ethical cosmopolitan pedagogies that teachers have employed to develop the hospitable imagination by making connections to global issues, encouraging transnational explorations, and disrupting stereotypes of the other. What I am proposing in this paper is a reenvisioning of literature education grounded on the principles of ethical cosmopolitanism and centered, in practice, on the development of the hospitable imagination. Indeed, the concept of hospitality is premised on the recognition that globalization has resulted in a time-space compression of the world (Bauman, 1998) involving greater transnational consciousness and planetary awareness. The crisis of literature education in Singapore and around the world provides an opportune moment for a repositioning of its goals, no longer centered
on a bounded notion of culture or an exclusionary emphasis on aesthetic taste. Literature education should now be conceived of as a significant global positioning site to grapple with the many cosmopolitan aporias facing the world today as borders that demarcate cultures and nations are constantly challenged, resulting in rising xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and fundamentalism. As countries such as Singapore strive to fashion themselves as influential global cities that manage and coordinate the flows of capital and business networks around the world, they must also cultivate dispositions of hospitality among citizens. More than any subject in the curriculum, literature education powerfully mediates encounters with foreign, exiled, and alienated others through narratives that provide a glimpse of particular lived realities and that propel an appreciation of collective humanity.

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NOTES

1. In the United States, enrollment in literature and the humanities has declined, prompting several government reports and scholarly books on the subject (see Kernan, 1990; National Endowment for the Arts, 2004). In the United Kingdom, the number of undergraduate literature courses offered has declined. A more serious issue concerns the dilution of standards in precollege-level literature examinations (Bluett, Cockcroft, Harris, Hodgson, & Snapper, 2006; Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation, 2011).

2. The 9% figure refers to students who took literature as a full subject. There was another 9% who took the subject as an elective subject, for which the content assessed is reduced by half.

3. The quote is taken from Thomas Macaulay’s (1835) infamous presentation to the British government, “Minute on Indian Education,” in which he argues that the teaching of local literature in India should be replaced with the teaching of English literature because the latter is aesthetically superior.

4. Pseudonyms are used in place of actual names of teachers and schools.

REFERENCES


Suzanne S. Choo is assistant professor at the English Language and Literature Academic Group, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

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