

I and Other: Thought to Address

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It is of ever more pertinence to address the striated homogeneity, be it through race, sex, or socioeconomic background, that divides the boarding school community. Upon closer observance, it would not be a stretch to conclude that such phenomena in schools is directly representative of the striations that exist in American society today. Andreas Wimmer directly hits at this in his study, "Beyond and Below Racial Homophily: ERG Models of a Friendship Network Documented on Facebook." He states that such homogeneity, or better phrased, homophily, a principle that states that "birds of a feather flock together," "might be produced by micro mechanisms other than the psychological preference for same-race alters, including and most importantly the segregation of everyday lives into different domains, which reduces opportunities to meet individuals" (Wimmer 3).

When the system of cultural, social, political, and economic segregation is an innate aspect of the culture that forms the basis for the institutions that we are members of, and thus enables us to inadvertently become agents of this heinous systems of irrationalities, it is ever more important to become vigilant and actively swerve against the tide of this unjust system. In her work, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, Seyla Benhabib delineates between the factors that outline the political controversies over the multicultural ethics of Culture and Civilization. She states that Culture refers to

forms of expression through which the "spirit" of one people, as distinct from others, is voiced...an individual's acquisition of culture involves a soul's immersion and shaping through education in the values of the collective...a process of intellectual-spiritual formation. (2)

Conversely, Civilization

refers to material values and practices that are shared with other peoples and that do not reflect individuality...associated with the concept...namely superficiality, homogeneity, reproducibility, lack of durability, and lack of originality...it is not educative or transformative; it does not shape the soul or express the spirit or collective genius of a people (2-3)

It is apparent that under the vise of Civilization at boarding schools, meaning the homogeneity and tedium of reproducing and stagnating patterns of mass being, Cultures have each been distinctly recognised, so that they have been able to create affinity platforms and segregated pools of likely colored and thinking people. What have resulted are cesspools of homogenised

groups in which cross-Cultural interactions have become limited only to arenas that are forced by dominant groups such as the Institution of education.

As a remedy for such phenomena not only present in interactions at school, but in broader American society itself, Benhabib presents a dialogical system for human interaction as the creating of “stipulated norms of *universal respect* and *egalitarian reciprocity*” (11). In the light of Civilization eventually becoming the arbiter for the integration and cooperation of Cultures, be it of race, sex, or socioeconomic background, this article works to dismantle this obvious state of segregation that subtly havocs the boarding school community and furthermore present a comprehensive solution.

It is firstly important to situate oneself upon the continuum that is man and to be able to see the absolute minuteness and thus necessity for the proposal of reconciliation with other men. Immanuel Kant, a foremost thinker in the Western philosophical tradition, posed the essential question, *What is Man?* Through such questioning he was able to generate the idea of human autonomy. Through such an idea he argued that this was the result of “nature” or rather the “sensory states caused by physical objects and events outside of the mind” paired with the “mind’s activity in organizing these data under concepts...” (“Kant’s Theory of Human Nature” 2014). With reason, he argues, man is led to conglomerate his perceptual experience, which is reason, to answer his fundamental question of *What is Man*. Thus, he equates reason with man. With Kant’s insight, one can come to the conclusion that man’s state and resultantly his actions, such as the willingness to homogenize and perpetuate divide within a community, comes out of his “natural” experience, such as the climate of racial divide in America, and the innate tendency to rationalize it. One can therefore recognise that they are blindly submitting to such innate unjust systems and to actualize their “self,” it is important to use their reason to transcend it.

In response to Kant’s question, Martin Buber, in his effort to understand human relations in *I and Thou*, argues that “man is the being who faces an “other,” and a human home is built from relations of mutual confirmation” (“Martin Buber”). He creates a distinction between two pairs of words that illustrate this human delineation: I-Thou and I-It. An I-Thou relation is dialogical in which the “I” is a whole and single person and the “Thou” is a polar entity that is not to be reduced to a set of simple classifications but rather one that is just as whole, complex, and singular as the “I”. An I-It relation is monological in which the “I” is a self-enclosed organism and the “It” is categorised either into the segregated pool of “same” or “different” that is detached, submitted to the throttles of space and time, and thus an “other”. This monological format of the I-It relationship results in a “monologue [that] is not just a turning away from the other but also a turning back on oneself (*Rückbiegung*)” (“Buber”). One can see I-Thou relationships in primordial states, such as that of an infant and its mother. Buber argues that a primordial distance exists between all I’s, Thou’s, and It’s, but that it is the role of one’s human autonomy to shorten or elongate such a gap by entering into an I-Thou or I-It presentation of the Self. In his “Three spheres of dialogue” of an I-Thou relationship, he states that Eternal Thou, which is when one realizes that the “Thou” is a such a relation that is of “eternal value,” one is

able to “transcend our present state of being” and “intensive[ly] engage with another thinker’s works” (“Buber”). In his anthropological dig in the light of “What is man in periods of social and cosmic homelessness,” he bids for the transcendence of primordial solitude and through that the recognition of our existence in relation to “other selves” or rather “Thou” (“Buber”). Conclusively, in recognizing that you are a thread in the continuum of a larger reality of multiplicitous and multitudinous selves, it makes it easier to view the necessity of social reconciliation between striated groups in the boarding school community.

The Greek myth of Sisyphus works to illustrate our current condition: the constant fight against the maniacal wrath of the dominant hand: race, gender, and class struggle. Sisyphus, one of the wisest men on earth, becomes condemned by Zeus to Tartarus. There, he is resorted to the singular task of infinitely rolling a rock up a hill just to have it roll back down. Albert Camus, in his essay “The Myth of Sisyphus,” argues firstly that “whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy” and secondly that through the endless task of Sisyphus, the immortality of his punishment, Sisyphus becomes immortal himself. Through Sisyphus’ human autonomy to constantly roll the rock up the hill despite its inevitable fall and thus the reducing of his efforts as null, Camus writes that Sisyphus becomes immortal through his punishment in that he overcomes the Absurd; which is defined as the absolute meaninglessness in existence or rather the impossibility to answer the basal metaphysical question of *What is the Meaning of Life?* In this proposal, he raises the formative notion of the Camusian Revolt, which is essentially the overcoming of the despair of the Absurd which in the case of revolution is the “existing and oppressive authority” (“Camus”). He states the three steps of such revolt: Acknowledgement, acceptance, and accomplishment. Acknowledgement is the full recognition of the status quo in which the “otherness” and unpleasantness of it is rid of. Camus states that one must “grasp that Sisyphus is the absurd hero” (119). Acceptance is the work of the Inside in which one’s “attitude towards an issue” matures (“Albert Camus”). Thus Sisyphus accepts the absurdity of his situation and in doing so prepares himself to overcome it. In the state of accomplishment, one becomes stronger than their absurd fate. Sisyphus, who has acknowledged and accepted his state, comes to understand his condition. Camus thus states that “It is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory” (121).

In the end, we are not much different from Sisyphus. We live in the void of the Absurd in which the endless task of Sisyphus that is at present to create human harmony and interactions of cross-Cultural discourse under the platform of the Civilization of the boarding school community, seemingly a gargantuan and impressively impossible notion as to evade deeply rooted institutions of injustice. Camus argues that all men are immortal in the way of Sisyphus until the moment of death in that death is absurd in its impossibility of being an experience in reality as it is “a substitute, an illusion, and it never quite convinces us” (15). This absurdity naturally instigates fear. When also recognizing the infinite minuteness of our existences even relative to our universal observances, fear is instigated. The earth has a radius of 6,378 km. The solar system that carries it has an estimated radius of two light-years. The earth carries about 0.0003% of its mass. The Milky Way that contains our solar system has a radius of 100,000 light years.

The Virgo Supercluster, which is 110 million light-years across, contains not only the Milky Way that contains us, but 100 galaxy clusters like our Local Group. The Supercluster complex that carries this Supercluster spans 1.37 billion light-years across. And the observable universe, that is ever expanding, stands as 93 billion light-years across. The Observable Universe thus about 1.9×10^{23} times larger than earth. Camus concludes that when “overcome by faith in the self,” such as the self’s ability to perpetuate social change, this “strong individual [can] create a strong community and...change the world” (“Albert Camus”). When ‘the absurd man’ masters his faith to be an arbiter of the means of self, the revolution of the “inner self against the absurd” is completed.

When addressing the relationships that form in boarding school communities, it is easy to first recognize the blatant racial, gendered, and socio-economic divides that take place. To actively participate in a dialogue that firstly normalizes *universal respect* and *egalitarian reciprocity*, to present oneself and approach others in an I-Thou format, and to transcend the Absurdity of existence and thus participate in a revolution of one’s means is the final view to create reconciliation is the prescribed way. It is of ever more importance to bridge the gaps between groups in our schools. When one observes the political and social climate of America, one can see the blaring cry of inequality and suffering is only amplifying.