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# We are invited to imagine: using a literary text to encourage cross-cultural dialogue about citizenship

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## ABSTRACT

Using William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* as a stimulus, researchers from Norway, Pakistan and the United Kingdom explored the potential of a literary text to encourage intercultural dialogue. The innovative research method used was to combine Literature Circles and Google Documents to provide a platform for asynchronous online exchange between three cohorts of students in higher education. The authors' analysis of the data suggested differences between those students who regarded the text as a living document speaking directly to their personal experiences of citizenship issues and those for whom the novel remained a historical document, removed from their lived experience. The authors contend that this research can contribute original and significant insights to the literature on teaching citizenship through literary texts such as the relationship between text choice and context, models of international collaboration at the higher education level and contrasting approaches towards citizenship and reading.

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## KEYWORDS

Teaching citizenship through literature; intercultural collaboration in Higher Education; Literature Circles; online discussion

## 1. Introduction

The international collaboration between researchers from Norway, Pakistan and the United Kingdom consisted of a joint project involving students in higher education with the aim of encouraging intercultural dialogue. Students in higher education in three different countries discussed the same literary text first with their peers in their classroom setting in the structured model of Literature Circles. Subsequently, the students were regrouped to include students from all three countries asynchronously in an online exchange to enter into dialogue about the text. The three participating institutions offer English as part of their degree. The students in Pakistan major in English literature, the students in the United Kingdom are taking a Young Adult Literature course as part of their undergraduate studies in Education, and in Norway, the students have English Language and Literature as an integral part of their pre-service teacher training.

The literary classic text *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, because we were able to find a common text in all three contexts' syllabi;

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secondly, the text needed to address questions regarding democracy and citizenship as well as individuality and group thinking since the idea was that the text would create discussions across nations. The choice of text was guided by three factors: in Pakistan, syllabus and reading lists are decided by the Board of Studies at the participating university and are relatively inflexible; in Norway the university syllabus focuses on the theme of democracy and civics, and *Lord of the Flies* frequently serves as a go-to text for such discussions; and in the United Kingdom the novel serves as an examination text in secondary schools. On one, utilitarian, level, the choice of text might appear unproblematic. On a deeper, ethical, level, of course, it is anything but. This issue is explored in more detail in the next section of the paper.

In the online exchange the students were asked to respond to questions about their classroom discussions in Literature Circles; about the connections the group made between the novel and their own experiences; and finally about whether they could see any relevance of the novel to their own lives. Our overarching research question for the project was: How do students in different contexts connect, respond to and discuss *Lord of the Flies* through an online exchange? A rich amount of data was collected and coded. As the participants talked about a variety of themes, we have chosen to discuss only part of the data in this paper. Three major coding categories regarding participants' views on social, political and historical aspects of the novel were selected for discussion here. As these three themes were discussed from a broad citizenship perspective, we have chosen to discuss them together. Other data, such as the extent and manner of the participating students' interaction with each other, or their views regarding the moral themes presented in the novel, will be discussed in subsequent papers, where factors, such as gender distribution and socio-economic background, may also be addressed.

Since the focus of this paper is on participants' discussion of social, political and historical elements in relation to the novel, the literature review covers aspects related to citizenship as that helps the three themes cohere. The literature reviewed presents citizenship studies in general and citizenship specifically for the three countries involved as a bridge to cosmopolitanism which foregrounds the concept of 'conversation'. Furthermore, the literature review discusses some of the tensions involved in choosing to explore citizenship issues through the medium of a literary text. These issues are then considered within the specific context of *Lord of the Flies*.

We employed Google Documents to engage the participants in exchanging ideas and to embark on negotiating perceived understanding of the text. Little has been written about how literature circles impact understanding of a literary text in disparate settings attempting to create space for conversation through negotiation and appreciation for other cultures through literature. We believe that this study will help enhance understanding of how students interact and explore a literary text in a virtual, intercultural space.

This study is part of an on-going research project between the team of researchers from the three national contexts and is the third round of data collection where different versions of a similar design have been employed. The collaboration started as a transnational project between Norway and the UK with the objective of encouraging intercultural dialogue through reading young-adult literature, which was then extended to Pakistan in order to broaden its scope. In this phase, only one literary text was included and the students were provided with prompts for the online discussions.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Defining citizenship

Definitions of citizenship and citizenship education are much contested. Brett defines education for citizenship as ‘equipping students with a set of tools which will enable them to participate effectively, actively and responsibly within their adult life’ (2005, p. 9). Osler and Starkey state that ‘citizenship is a status, conferred by Nation States, which carries rights and responsibilities’ (2002, p. 144). Some definitions are more widely known: ‘Citizenship is a status, bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed’ (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992, p. 18). Cogan (1998) developed a model of citizenship consisting of five general attributes that he claimed to be the constituents of citizenship. The attributes are identity, rights, duties, involvement in public affairs and acceptance of societal values. Essentially, Cogan’s model of citizenship is based on political and social aspects of a citizen’s life. Tilly (1995) considers social history to be an essential part of citizenship. He argues that social history helps develop a nation and its citizens’ sense of identity over time. These different models are helpful for understanding the concept of citizenship. However, for the purposes of this paper, and for the reasons given in the introduction, we have focused on social, political and historical elements of citizenship.

In order to understand the civic context in which the students involved in this international study are located, it is necessary to provide some background information about the ways in which those social, political and historical elements of citizenship described by Cogan and Tilly are articulated within the three participating countries. In the Pakistani context, citizenship is not taught as a separate subject at school level; the closest alternative is Social Studies. However, there is much debate in Pakistan regarding the unsuitability of the content of Social Studies textbooks owing to their Islamised and partial content that could, some argue, be said to hinder the growth of critical thinking amongst learners (Dean, 2005). Lall (2012a, 2012b, 2014) conducted studies to gauge the awareness of Pakistani citizens in terms of social, political and historical aspects of their citizenship. She argues that identity is still an issue 65 years after the creation of Pakistan and that the biggest divide is not among different ethnic groups, religions or between civilians and the army, but rather between the common citizens and the state. Lall (2014) argues that despite young people’s enthusiasm for the first democratic transition of government in the history of Pakistan, they are not properly prepared for political participation – they have little awareness of their rights and duties as citizens. Pasha (2015) conducted a study with teachers and students from Pakistan and concluded that even though global citizenship education is part of the curriculum in Pakistani institutes at the undergraduate level, students and teachers are not familiar with the concept.

The context of citizenship education in England is in some ways very different and in others similar to that of Pakistan. The major difference is that citizenship education in England (other parts of the United Kingdom have their own arrangements) has undergone several manifestations over the past 60 years, moving from ‘civics’ (1960s) via ‘political literacy’ (1970s) and ‘global education’ (1980s) to the Crick Report (DfEE, 1998) with its communitarian emphasis upon social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy. Its status enhanced – like that of global citizenship

education in Pakistan – by accommodation within the National Curriculum from 2002 onwards, citizenship education at that time offered state-educated students in England the opportunity to engage with *key concepts* (rights and responsibilities; democracy and justice; identities and diversity) and *key processes* (critical thinking, advocacy and representation; informed and responsible participation) (Davies, 2018). Neoliberal government policies over the past decade have seen a diminution in commitment to Crick's broad vision for citizenship education. In its stead has come a somewhat problematic emphasis upon so-called 'British values' and character training.

Rather than being afforded national curriculum status as it was in England in 2002, citizenship is valued implicitly in the school curriculum of Norway. Citizenship concepts are taught through subjects such as Social Studies, Norwegian, Religion and Ethics (Hayward, Selboe, & Plew, 2015). The 1998 Education Act in Norwegian Educational Law traditionally promoted democracy and citizenship as important values to be fostered in all citizens through education. However, as Stray argues, the recent changes in educational policy 'suggested that it is now more important to focus on diversity and not on unity' (2013, p. 166) which might affect the teaching of citizenship and democracy depending on how teachers and students understand and enact the new changes. Despite the changes in educational policy, Norwegian students have one of the highest rates of civic participation in the world (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010). Plew's research (2014) concluded that effective citizenship teaching in Norwegian schools is predicated on strong support from society and parents and a commitment to democratic values on the part of teachers.

We wanted to see if our three groups of participating students, located as they are within three very different civic contexts, might be willing and able to engage in *conversation* with each other. We borrowed our interpretation of this noun from Appiah, who uses 'the word "conversation" not only for literal talk, but also as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and ideas of others' (2006, p. 85). Given the aims of our project, we were attracted, too, by Hannerz's conception of *cosmopolitanism* as a particular stance towards difference, 'an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other' (1990, p. 239). As practitioners committed to the teaching of literature, we shared Nussbaum's belief that literary texts are central in cultivating the 'cosmopolitan imagination and to developing "moral feelings for others"' (Von Mossner, 2015, p. 4), and that engagement with literature might 'wrest from our frequently obtuse and blunted imagination an acknowledgement of those who are other than ourselves, both in concrete circumstances and even in thought and emotion' (Nussbaum 1997, pp. 111–112). It is Nussbaum's reference to thought and emotion' which inclined our approach towards a cosmopolitan rather than a globalisation paradigm. As Beck and Sznaider argue, while 'globalization is something taking place "out there", cosmopolitanization [sic] happens "from within"' (2006, p. 9). Imaginative engagement with literature might be likened to cosmopolitanisation in that, for both, *the habitus and the act of culture in which it is engaged are inwardly transformed through a series of critically reflexive encounters with difference* (McGuinn & Naylor, 2018, p. 71). These encounters, instead of *othering*, aspire to *articulate and sustain conflicting interpretations* (Arnason, 2003, p. 151).

Using *Lord of the Flies* as a possible site of cosmopolitanisation further complicates the text choice for the project. Deconstructive and politically informed critical procedures have encouraged readers to interrogate texts in terms of their overt – or more often

covert – ideological agendas. Knowing it is freighted with such ideological baggage, why choose to work with a text like *Lord of the Flies* at all? Do utilitarian, syllabus driven considerations trump ethical concerns? While recognising the issue at hand, given that *Lord of the Flies* is a ‘shared text’ across the curricula of the three national contexts, our approach is to consider a way forward as to how we can enter into conversation with and about such texts without reiterating the role of literature in what Spivak calls ‘the imperialist project’ (1985, p. 243).

The post-colonial feminist scholar Rosemary M. George suggests that we can still ‘engage with literary texts and literary criticism produced elsewhere’, as long as we do so ‘with a clear understanding of the pitfalls of apprehending the world with the aid of the old imperial analytical tools supplied by our common history of colonialism’ (2006, p. 229). Suzanne Choogoes further in arguing a case for literature as a medium for the promotion of intercultural dialogue. Detecting nothing less than a late twentieth-century ‘ethical turn’, Choo attributes this paradigm shift to a growing dissatisfaction with the ‘disruption of stable meanings’ associated with poststructuralist critical procedures. She notes, too, a need to address the societal pressures exacerbated by the ‘intensification of global interconnect-edness’. The new challenge facing teachers of literature is, Choo argues, to embrace a ‘cosmopolitan ethical criticism’ which, through the medium of shared texts, might help human beings ‘to share an existential concern about what it means to live in the word’ (2017, p. 336, 342). Liam Gearon, in response to Choo’s line of argument, warns against the dangers of such a ‘narrowing of literature to a political, pedagogical agenda’ and the ‘risks of a ready-made interpretation ahead of any reading’ (2019, pp. 392, 401). The *conversation* thus needs to be extended to the literary text itself. Gearon’s reservations were reinforced by our own research findings. We return to this point in our conclusion and in a subsequent paper.

## 2.2. Towards an ethical cosmopolitanism?

The ethical turn that Choo points at reinvigorates the age-old argument about the role of literature in encouraging empathy towards others and their experiences. Empathy is achieved in fiction by showing how the ‘universal’ is played out in the ‘particular’ ‘life narrative’ (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 220) of an individual character. ‘All art,’ Fleming argues, ‘no matter how differently it manifests itself in different cultures, can be said to draw attention to a concept of a universal and transcendent common humanity but, crucially, it always depends upon the particular and the concrete’ (2006, p. 140). Healey illustrates the point with an example from William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. The ‘abandonment of civic restraint over the course of the novel’ (2013, p. 93), she argues, is personified by the character of Roger, who moves from tentatively throwing pebbles at the younger boys in Chapter 4 to murdering Piggy with a rock in the penultimate chapter. As Nussbaum puts it:

A tragedy does not display the dilemmas of its characters as pre-articulated; it shows them searching for the morally salient, and it forces us, as interpreters, to be similarly active. (2001, p. 14)

But ‘active’ in what way? Like a number of researchers interested in the learning potential afforded by literature circles (for example: Burns, 1998; Lawson, 2008), Sanacore turns to

Rosenblatt's (1995) binary distinction between *effere*nt and *aesthetic* readings as a means of summarising the issues:

'In the *effere*nt stance, the reader appears to be focused on information; however, in the *aesthetic* stance, the reader seems to be engaged in a lived-through experience with a greater interest in broader facets of the text (2013, p. 117).'

An *effere*nt reading of *Lord of the Flies* 'focused on information' runs the risk of treating the novel as if it were some kind of moral puzzle in which the reader's task is to identify the concepts represented by each character: Jack *stands for* dictatorship, Ralph for democracy and so on (Olsen, 2000, pp. 169–170). The problem with this approach, Gribble warns, is that it might 'tear the thought out of the delicate organic structure of a work of literature' and thus destroy it (1983, p. 158). To opt for the other extreme, however – an *aesthetic* reading which encourages engagement with the novel as a 'lived-through experience' – is equally problematic. A main reason why 'narrative fiction is an important potential resource in teaching citizenship', Fleming argues, is because 'at its best, it engages us emotionally and confronts life in all its moral complexity' (2006, p. 140). Readers committed to the lived-through experience approach may fail to appreciate moral complexity through a lack of what Fleming calls 'disinterestedness': the ability 'to perceive without being duly influenced by one's own distracting, practical concerns' (2006, p. 142). Disinterestedness, Eagleton writes, brings with it the capacity to 'decide that, in a specific situation somebody else's interests should be promoted over yours' (2003, p. 134). A *disinterested* reading of *Lord of the Flies*, for example, might acknowledge that 'somebody else's interests' could include the flora and fauna of the island, so horrifically thrashed in the course of the power struggle between Ralph and Jack. It is this tension between *effere*nt and *aesthetic* readings which Sanacore, for example, seeks to accommodate in his work on Literature Circles:

Both types of responses complement each other because they foster a sense of community, support analytical discussions, and encourage sophisticated and higher levels of thinking. (2013, p. 117)

### 2.3. Textual appropriation? Critical engagement with *Lord of the Flies*

The critical urge to decipher *Lord of the Flies* within comprehensive ethical or social frameworks has often itself resulted in *effere*nt readings of the text. Reading the novel as an allegorical battle between good versus evil, Apollonian versus Dionysian, and civilisation versus savagery, however, runs the risk of imposing dichotomies onto the text, whether religious, classicist or philosophical. McCullen identifies Margaret Walters' 1961 article as the landmark in shifting the discourse from allegory to fable and establishing Golding as a fabulist (1978, p. 208). While recognising the allegorical affinities of the fable, Walters clearly demarcates the two, emphasising that in allegory 'the cross-reference between literal narrative and a body of abstractions is usually specific, sustained at length, and rather arbitrary', whereas 'the fabulist always tries to make his dramatic situation serve as an *analogy* of the world at large' (in McCullen, 1978, pp. 18–19), thus fable is based on the logic of metaphor. The importance of metaphor is twofold: the literary qualities of the text cannot be ignored, and the text cannot be reduced to one specific meaning when the interpretation moves from the concrete to the more abstract.

Fabulistic readings of the novel move in the direction of breaking down the dichotomies that have led to oversimplifying interpretations of the complex moral issues that the text presents.

The three most typical such dichotomies, as mentioned earlier, are good versus evil, Apollonian versus Dionysian, and civilisation versus savagery. For all the religious resonance to *Lord of the Flies*, it would be a mistake to narrow the notion of evil or the figure of Beelzebub to a strictly Christian reading. As Carlevale points out, Golding himself referred to ‘original evil’ instead of ‘original sin’ in relation to the novel, in essence rejecting the ‘possibility that “sin” might be somehow redeemed or repaired by supernatural intercession’ (2006, p. 368). This emphasis on ‘evil’ rather than ‘sin’ also broadens the religious and theological dimensions of the novel to a more general, or rather universal, moral understanding, which is reflected in the criticism on the novel: ‘While most critics grant the novel a religious dimension, all find it deeply moral’ (McCullen, 1978, p. 226). This broadened sense of evil complicates the notion of good as well, while simultaneously making it futile to try pinning the notion of good or evil to a specific character.

In the aesthetic trend of ‘*Bacchae* interpretation’ of *Lord of the Flies* (Carlevale, 2006, p. 367), Ralph represents the Apollonian pole – light, reason, law and order – while Jack, in opposition to him, symbolises the Dionysian realm – ecstasy, excess, the irrational and the instinctual. However, as Carlevale argues, the ‘beast-god . . . Dionysus is new only in the sense that he is “ever new”, a necessary atavism that abides in the human condition, ready to reappear should he be forgotten’ (2006, p. 368). The Apollonian depends on the Dionysian, as these two drives together manifest the constitution of both human subjectivity and civilisation. Dionysian regression, as Singh argues, is simultaneously a maturation: ‘To become savage is to regress to the anthropological infancy of mankind, but to recognize one’s essential savagery is to be psychologically mature’ (1997, p. 212). Ralph and Jack, therefore, are essential elements of the same process. As Libschutz observes, Jack is not there ‘to *destroy* the liberal peace but to make it *possible*, even if the island must be destroyed in order to save it’ (2009, p. 266). Jack does not oppose civilisation, but ‘draws on culture, history and socialisation’ to reveal its essence: ‘As savages, the boys are not primordial; they are British all the way down’ (2009, p. 266).

### 3. Research methods

#### 3.1. Context

This is a qualitative study and data collected is made up of comments, questions and statements on *Lord of the Flies* from students in three national contexts in higher education participating in asynchronous online exchange. The research question is: How do students in different contexts connect, respond to and discuss *Lord of the Flies* through an online exchange?

The participants in this study were selected using convenience sampling, as they were all enrolled in the researchers’ respective literature courses. The participants constitute three cohorts of students, predominantly in their early twenties, from the three countries: 19 Norwegian students in their second year of Teacher Training studies; 12 Pakistani students in their fourth year of English studies, many of whom study towards becoming



teachers; and 8 students from the United Kingdom in their second year of Education studies. The Norwegian and the Pakistani cohorts had a roughly equal gender distribution, while the UK group consisted mainly of female students. The participants in all three contexts participated in the literature circles and were subsequently offered enrolment in the online discussion, which provided the data for the study. All who volunteered to participate were included in the project, hence the somewhat unequal number of students. The contexts of the participatory students are different. The Norwegian context primarily represents a socio-economically homogeneous participatory group, whereas the students in Pakistan have a more diverse socio-economic background in that they come from rural districts as well as the city. Both the Norwegian students and the students from Pakistan have English as a second language. The United Kingdom students are also socio-economically less diverse than the Pakistani students; however, there are a number of international students in the United Kingdom cohort, and therefore some of the United Kingdom students have English as their second language. The socio-economic background of the participants was not measured and is included here only to provide a clearer understanding of the context and composition of the three cohorts of participants.

### 3.2. Research design

The research design involved two steps. First the students were engaged in face-to-face, oral discussions in class with peers, utilising pre-set roles in Literature Circles (Daniels, 2002) before engaging in online written discussions. Google Documents were used for the online exchange, hereafter referred to as Google Circles. The data which is reported on here is based on the written data, which was collected over a three-week period.

Literature Circles are learner-centred discussion groups with pre-assigned roles for each participant. The following roles were used in our study: *discussion director* (prepares higher level questions and facilitates the discussion); *literary luminary* (selects passages for discussion); *scene setter* (studies the setting); *researcher* (provides background information to the text); and *connector* (identifies text to text, text to self and text to world connections). The purpose of the Literature Circles as part of the research design was to have the participants prepared prior to the online discussions. The Literature Circles method stems from reader response theory and psycholinguistics, and, in theory, promotes authentic discussion based upon the active and personal involvement of students. According to Daniels (2002) the participants in Literature Circles are supposed to choose which book to read and discuss from a wide range of possible texts. However, for the purposes of controlled research design, and for the reasons outlined in the introduction, in this particular case the text was selected by the researchers.

As preparation for the discussions in class the students were provided with the opportunity to read five examples of critical commentary which they could draw on in their discussions in class as well as in the Google Circles discussions. The five examples were selected to reflect a range of interpretative approaches and time periods, from a 1965 study of classical allusions in the novel (Gordon, 1965) to a 2015 exploration of the intertextual resonances between Golding's text and Martin's *A Game of Thrones* (May & Upton, 2015). The groups and roles were set randomly by the researcher in each context, for both Literature Circles and Google Circles. The students received and prepared the

Literature Circles roles for the in-class discussion. Since Literature Circles are student-driven, the instructors did not interfere with the students' discussions in any way, except for setting a time limit to them. The discussion lasted approximately 60 minutes in the three local settings.

For the online exchange, students from all cohorts were represented in all Google Circles groups. Due to timetabling constraints, the Norwegian students made the first entry, then the Pakistani students and finally the United Kingdom students. This cycle was repeated once. The online exchange was guided by the three prompts listed in the introduction to help stimulate their online discussions and allowed for a minimum of two entries per student in the course of two cycles during class-time. This framing was designed to enable the students to best use the affordances of asynchronous online exchange. While it may be harder to get, initiate and sustain the dialogue in an asynchronous discussion (Hrastinski, 2008; Stahl, Koschmann, & Suthers, 2006), the format also has its benefits, as students in such discussions may spend more time preparing their posts, which in turn allows for a more reflective involvement and the possibility of addressing more complex issues (Hrastinski, 2008; Putman, Ford, & Tancock, 2012).

### **3.3. Data collection and analysis**

The data reported on here is the written data from the Google Circles online exchanges of the participants' responses to the *Lord of the Flies*. In the data analysis phase, the researchers conducted three stages of coding as part of a conventional content analysis, involving an inductive search to categorise the material (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For the first stage of the analysis, each member of the team individually read the whole data set as an immersive experience, as one would a novel, to achieve a sense of the whole shape of the data (Tesch, 1990). This initial impression was discussed as a team to compare the group's first reactions to the data. The second phase of the conventional content analysis entailed the team, again individually, reading word by word to derive codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Punch, 2009). Again, after this process the team shared their thoughts about coding to encourage 'reflexive dialogue' and 'investigator triangulation' (Denscombe, 2007, p. 82). We found a high level of agreement in our interpretation of the data.

For the final stage of the data analysis, we worked physically together as a team. In this phase, we collectively agreed and defined the highest level of codes, following further discussion of the labelling and interpretation of the data. The iterative discussion at the different stages of the data analysis were crucial for us to achieve 'inter-observer' reliability (Denscombe, 2007, p. 209) and also provided us the opportunity to provide additional information regarding our respective contexts. Six main, overarching codes were identified in the data: moral; political; historical; personal; social; and the experience of the Literature Circles. As noted in the introduction, for the purposes of maintaining a focus for this article we have decided to report only on the responses to the historical, political and social aspects of the data. For coding purposes, each of the 39 participating students was allocated a number and letters (*N*, *P* or *UK*) to indicate the national context.

### 3.4. Ethics

Research adhered to the ethical standards of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. All names of participants were anonymised and use of data adhered to agreements regarding the use of data. Before the data collection process the students were asked to sign an informed consent form, which stated that the participants were allowed to withdraw from the study if they so wished. None withdrew from the project once they signed up.

Quotations from the participants are reproduced as they were written.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Responses to the historical aspects of the data

Historical elements were mentioned 29 times by different participants in all six groups. Students considered the Second World War to be a major historical reference. Four of the six groups discussed the Second World War, mentioning it 20 times. Specifically, they wrote about Golding's experience of the war; the novel as a reflection of the war; the resemblance of Jack to Hitler; and Germany's national experience. While discussing the Second World War, students talked about how the novel was a reflection of that war. As S13 N observed:

The historical significance with WW2 was also an important talking point, especially considering how the boys ended up on the island and how their actions reflected the brutality of war.

They connected the character of Jack with Hitler and talked about the German national experience as a traumatic history. For instance, S18 UK commented:

We are invited to imagine what pathologies will arise, in the same way as we are invited to consider the fate of nations who went through the trauma of the second world war, a conflict which clearly informed this story.

A sub-code within the participants' discussion of the Second World War was the influence of the war on Golding as reflected in the novel. As S37 P said:

We have taken the overlook on the life and background of William Golding in which we discussed that the author showed his own experience of world war – II.

Talking about the Second World War was common among all students from the three institutions. However, the way they interacted with the text was a bit different for the European students compared with the Pakistanis. The Pakistani students tended to state the occurrences of the novel as fact whereas the others seemed to think of the text as a piece of fiction that had encouraged them into discussion.

A second sub-code under historical elements was Political History. Students talked about the divide between capitalism and communism in history and connected the events of the story with the political divide of the Cold War. S11 UK noted:

We believe that Jack and Ralph could represent the two block fighting between the communist and capitalist ideologies during the cold war, and that each block is fighting for an ideological hegemony over the group, and each group is driven by fear of the unknown and the other side.

Three participants also talked about international political history. They referred to Spanish colonies in Latin America, the situation of Palestine, and the Soviet Union. They made connections here with the situation of democracy presented in the novel. One of the Pakistani students (S3 P) made a connection with the local politics of Pakistan, giving examples of the military coup in the 1990s which overthrew a democratic government.

#### 4.2. Responses to the political aspects of the data

All six groups discussed at some point the political resonances of the novel. The data within this theme was subdivided into the codes of *students' responses to politics on a local, national and international level; discussions of the nature of power and democracy* and *responses to symbolism in the text* that prompted specifically political comments. In the code for politics, 23 extracts were coded. Within this code, one group in particular drew many parallels between the novel and their perceptions of national politics with regard to the use of power, political infighting and corruption in Pakistan. The issue of the selection of a leader who is attractive, in the way that Ralph was perceived to have been selected for being attractive, was seen as flawed and related to Pakistani politics. S3P commented:

The first thing we saw the selection of the leader related to us. They select Ralph as leader only by looking at his appearance and we also in our life prefer the person who is good in appearance but we forget that all that glitters is not gold. In our province Sindh we always elect PPP because of their slogans like Bhutto is Alive and now a days see the example of our society when we select our leader without knowing any background information about it. Same situation was in the novel of Golding.

Corruption was commented on by two groups in relations to the wielding and distribution of power by Pakistani politicians. S2 P noted:

This story is very much related to our country on every aspect, as we know that our country is in under developing state so it has many flaws than the one who are developed.

The data coded under *international politics* were responses to the portrayal of Jack's leadership qualities and his use of fear to dominate the boys on the island in relation to the way that states or leaders operate. There were 11 data extracts from Groups One and Two where the students discussed these points. Here student S1 N sums up her opinions:

We can draw parallels to Trump and his regime in the US. Where he, like Jack, played on fear and the necessity for a strong military force. ... Jack also has a military force, and sees the importance in hunting. Plays on the children fear of the 'beast'. Trump plays on the populations fear of Islam, and points to mexicans for stealing their jobs. And calls himself the savior.

There was a clear difference in the political references in that the Pakistani participants mostly referred to their local, or national, context, while in the case of the Norwegian and the United Kingdom participants such references were more detached from their own contexts. Out of the 23 extracts coded for *politics* in total, 12 out of the 14 written by Pakistani students referred to their experiences in their own society. As opposed to that, out of the nine remaining extracts, which were written by UK and Norwegian students, only one mentioned an event from their own country (Brexit). Three mentions of the

immigrant/refugee crisis in the subset addressed the question on a more general level (in the European or global context).

Six extracts were coded where students discussed specifically the nature of democracy and power. Three groups commented on the potentially fragile nature of democracy, and two groups on power being allied with strength and money regardless of virtue. S33 P related the symbolism of the conch in the novel enabling someone to speak with the way that in his view money had the same function in his country: without money some citizens have no voice. He commented: ‘Also in our society money is the power take an example of tribal areas in our society where poor people are not allowed to talk before the feudals.’

Ten data extracts were coded under *symbolic resonances*, where characters or symbols in the novel were read politically by the students. The struggles between Jack and Ralph, consistently read as *dictator* and *democrat*, were related to fights between politicians for leadership and to disunity between people. Piggy was seen as representative of so-called weaker people in society and the conch being replaced by money as ‘a symbol of power’ (S2 P) and Simon as representative of suffering innocence.

#### **4.3. Responses to the social aspects of the data**

A total of 42 extracts were coded for social elements. The students frequently commented on social roles between individuals and between individuals and society. Furthermore, the students often commented on the power relations between individuals and people in power and societies’ rules and laws, which is particularly true of the Pakistani setting.

Many students (eight extracts from four groups) commented that the novel emphasises the need to ‘face one’s fears’. Some commented on the characters in the novel and their fears. Others generalised and commented on how fear is necessary as a coping mechanism in life and connects the novel to real life. They stated that fear will strengthen one’s character and they highlighted how fear can provide ‘valuable lessons, where you do not get anywhere unless you face your fear’ (S1 N). Others connected fear to their own lives and made connections to their own lived experiences. S39 P made an analogy to real-life events and the impact on people’s everyday lives, and comments on the power relations in society:

In novel we have seen the factor of fear in weak Piggy and relates this with our present that many people who are weak physically and mentally fears from the strong one and can not show their own desires and opinions. We have analysed the power of civilization that how it resists the evil in the society. This book have a very powerful message that as far as we have democracy and civilization in our society we have order in our lives.

S4 UK expressed the importance of facing one’s fears on the societal level, observing that ‘it is their [the boys in *Lord of the Flies*] great fear that makes them panic and lose control.’

A second sub-code under the overarching theme of social elements was the need for *being responsible for one’s own destiny* – mentioned by 10 students in 5 of the groups. The students commented on the individual’s role in society, especially in relation to the selection of leaders and in relation to rules and laws in society. As S13 N noted:

We need rules to function in a society, and this book gives the reader an understanding of what will happen once the rules disappear.

A number of students in all three cohorts comment on how humans relate to each other, but also how human nature and minds develop in disparate circumstances as a way of ‘controlling negative emotional responses’ (11 extracts in 5 groups). S29 N commented that:

The book gives an impression of how humanity consists of both good and evil. I can in a way relate to the book because as a human I sometimes feel conflicted about how to act, feel and think. We know that civilization, rules, democracy and all of this is necessary to remain control, but sometimes, especially under difficult circumstances, we let ‘the beast’ out.

Students in all three cohorts comment on the relation between the individual and society and the power relations between those in power and those without power. S3 P observed:

I think this story has more relevance to our country than the others because this story visualises many defects of society as the defects of democracy, discipline, jealousy, politics, leadership and much more. Most of the European countries are developed and they do not suffer from these kind of problems but Pakistan is still under development process therefore we have all these issues.

A recurring theme with many students was the power relations demonstrated in the book, which they relate to real life. For example in relation to power, some will feel jealousy. Thus, jealousy and ambition for power may be at the root of the problem on the island and in society. S9 P commented:

We also discussed the outer things of society how much our people are jealous with one another. Just because for getting power. Everyone is greedy of power.

Another example of how the students connected to ‘real world’ issues is demonstrated by S10 UK, who was reminded of children’s use of social media and made connections to mob mentality related to cyber-bullying. S10 UK compared the Internet to the boys’ desert island experience:

I think the novel reflects modern society and in particular, children’s use of social media. The peer-pressure and mob-mentality developed throughout the novel could be compared to cyber-bullying and trolling and the power groups often have to single out individuals to torment.

## 5. Discussion of different themes in the data

### 5.1. Historical

One of the five exemplar critical texts which seems to have chimed particularly with the students’ response is Al-Saidi’s study from 2012, which opens by foregrounding Golding’s wartime experiences as a source of inspiration for the novel. Whether they took their cue from a reading of Al-Saidi or whether they felt that the Second World War was a historical event of such global significance that students from each of the three participating countries could recognise and relate to it, all six discussion groups made explicit references to the Second World War – something which the text of *Lord of the Flies* does not do. As S37 P’s comment about ‘the life and background of William Golding’ implies, when it came to

using the novel as a means of initiating Appiah's 'conversation' across international and cultural boundaries, biographical information concerning the author's wartime experiences seems to have served substantially to define the parameters of that conversation.

By linking their response to *Lord of the Flies* so closely with autobiographical and global events, which took place almost 80 years ago, the students chose to position the novel as a historical text. Perhaps this is hardly surprising, given that *Lord of the Flies* was published almost half a century before any of the participants in the discussion groups were born – and perhaps this is a point which should be kept in mind by compilers of school-based literature curricula intended for readers who will live well into the twenty-first century. To confine the potency of Golding's novel to the past could be to place its invitations and imperatives at one remove, as it were, and to establish what might seem to be a safe space between reader and text.

S11 UK's choice of the verb 'represent' in the context of a discussion about Ralph and Jack (see Section 4.1) is interesting in that it gestures towards concerns raised by the *allegory/fable* discussion explored in the literature review. By opting for what Sanacore described as an efferent reading approach 'focused on information', the participating students have – whether consciously or not – aligned their interpretative strategy with that espoused by another of the critical commentaries they were invited to read: Li and Wu's 2009 study of the 'symbolic significance' of the characters in *Lord of the Flies*. Following Olson's example, Li and Wu take the binary approach encouraged by an allegorical reading of the text:

Ralph stands for civilization and democracy; Piggy represents intellect and rationalism; Jack signifies savagery and dictatorship; Simon is the incarnation of goodness and saintliness. (2009, p. 119)

S11 UK even uses one of the same verbs as Li and Wu, though her inclusion of the modifier 'could' adds a welcome note of hesitancy missing from the latter's assertions. To argue that Ralph, Jack and the rest 'represent' formidable abstract concepts risks closing down rather than opening up readings which are attuned to the rich metaphorical resonances afforded by fiction in general and the fable in particular. To construct an allegorical reading predicated on a series of crude binary divisions is to miss Fleming's point about bedding the universal within the human particular. Far easier to say, as S11 UK does, that Jack and Ralph 'represent . . . two-block fighting' than to engage with the painfully personal implications of Libschutz's suggestion that they are in fact essential elements of the same process. Eagleton may argue for the merits of 'disinterestedness', but if too much distance is placed between text and reader, disinterestedness may become indifference.

## 5.2. Political

While historical references may have been picked up from the readings shared by the instructors before the Literature Circles, contemporary political references and parallels came either from the Literature Circles, as specified by the participants of the online discussions, or emerged in the online discussions themselves. The political reflections added a new layer to the problematics of disinterestedness and indifference that emerged in the historical reflections, which resonates with our initial differentiation between

globalisation and cosmopolitanism. As the findings showed, the online discussion revealed a division between the European (both United Kingdom and Norwegian) and the Pakistani participants, in terms of their political reflections. While the European students almost exclusively referred to historical and political events that were at a temporal or geographical distance from them, the Pakistani students directly connected the reading and the discussion to their own lives, emphasising the text's relevance, if not authority, in relation to their country, society and life ('this story is very much related to our daily country in every aspect', 'in our society we can find many Jacks' [S2 P]; '[t]his novel is very much related to our daily life and our daily doings' [S3 P]).

The political discussions unveiled two clearly distinct reading traditions. One, as demonstrated by the European students, in which detachment from their own context further distances the literary text as a historical document; and another which relates – if not translates – the literary text to the readers' sociopolitical experiences, almost treating it as a blueprint for the workings of contemporary politics. This discrepancy between these two ways of reading *Lord of the Flies* opened up the online discussions towards a cosmopolitan 'conversation', where several follow-up questions were posed, especially by the Norwegian students, to clarify what their Pakistani partners meant, such as references to political parties, tribal areas or the role of government. This exchange detached the European students from their distancing, or *othering*, tendencies, and they became actively engaged with notions and experiences they had not been familiar with (Appiah), while many of the Pakistani students used the discussion to give free expression to their frustrations, taking the reading personally, as something that 'visualizes', 'relates to' and 'shows' the issues in their society, life and actual experiences. In a way, the two parties enacted Sanacore's complementary stances of efferent and aesthetic reading in the online discussions.

### 5.3. Social

As the substantial number of references to 'social elements' in the students' exchanges suggest, when it came to issues related specifically to citizenship, *Lord of the Flies* certainly served as a medium for Appiah's 'engagement with the experience and ideas of others'. By tracking these references against various taxonomies of citizenship – Davies' account of 'concepts' and 'processes', for example – it was possible to identify certain patterns of response.

There seemed to be broad agreement across all three cohorts about the importance of the 'process' of 'informed and responsible participation' (13 coded references). References to 'democracy and justice' also featured in the responses of each cohort, with a general consensus that they formed an (albeit fragile) defence against what S29 N, taking her cue from *Lord of the Flies*, described as 'the beast'. The concept of identity evoked different responses from the Pakistani students and their European counterparts. The comments of the former reflected Lall's observations about divisions between citizens and state in that, as noted earlier in the *discussions* section, they used their exchanges about *Lord of the Flies* as an opportunity to express dissatisfaction with the current political situation pertaining in their country – even in one instance to the extent of comparing Pakistan negatively with 'developed' European countries. Interestingly, none of the Norwegian or United Kingdom students made any comparable national



connection. While students from all cohorts demonstrated either implicit or, in the case of S29 N, explicit recognition of Carlevale's and Singh's point about 'the beast' being inside all human beings, nobody made reference to the nationalistic resonances of the novel as expressed in Libschutz's equally powerful assertion that 'the boys ... are British all the way down.'

Beck and Sznajder's assertion that globalisation is something taking place 'out there' seemed to accord with the Pakistani students' account of civic participation as a public, popular struggle against perceived forces of repression. As one Pakistani student put it tellingly: 'We discussed the outer things of society.' The European students, on the other hand, seemed to incline more to Beck and Sznajder's description of cosmopolitanisation as happening 'from within'. Compare, for example, the responses of S39 P and S1 N to a discussion about 'fear' (see [Section 4.3](#)). S39 P grounds her initial response within the parameters of the novel ('we have seen the factor of fear in weak Piggy') before widening the terms of reference to include societal struggle ('relates this with our present that many people who are weak physically and mentally fears from the strong one'). Although S1 N uses the pronoun 'your' in contrast to S39 P's 'our', her response is orientated inwards: the novel has taught her 'valuable lessons, where you do not get anywhere unless you face your fear'. S29 N's response is even more striking in its self-reflection: 'I can in a way relate to the book because as a human I sometimes feel conflicted about how to act, feel and think.'

## 6. Conclusion

The Literature Circles and Google Group discussions stimulated 'conversation' (Appiah) among students within their national context and helped them engage with students in other contexts, but our analysis of those 'conversations' would suggest that critical thinking does not just happen. The complexities – whether civic, moral or textual – in the novel were met with a simplifying attitude from each cohort of students. This highlights the importance of the teachers' role in framing such discussions and possibly tailoring the roles in the Literature Circles so that students might be invited to take more responsibility for specific tasks or for assuming particular perspectives. For example, individual or groups of students might be tasked with encouraging their fellow members to make explicit reference to citizenship curricula or to critical approaches. The key terms of transactional reading theory, namely efferent and aesthetic reading, became problematic as analytical tools for our study. Two different traditions of reading were revealed by the online discussion, which on the one hand presented 'conflicting interpretations of the world' (Arnason, 2003, p. 151), while on the other unveiled complexities that further complicate the notions of efferent and aesthetic. A final question prompted by Gearon (see Literature Review) and reinforced by our study asks: Where was the literary text in these encounters? Left to their own devices without teacher guidance, the participating students made little reference in their discussions to the text as a novel – a literary work of art with its own textual trajectory through aesthetic and critical discourse space.

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