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IN SUCH BEGINNINGS ARE MY ENDS:
DIASPORA AND LITERARY CREATIVITY

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This chapter is an attempt to conceptualize literary creativity within a historical context. The introduction summarizes major diasporic experiences — for example, new visions, bicultural/bilingual experiences and their impact on class structure, sociocultural restructuring, and contributions to art, city planning, and architecture. These experiences are related to the spread of the English people and English as a language. The second part of the paper discusses the impact of diaspora on creativity in various types of social, cultural, and linguistic contexts. The chapter emphasizes a need for flexibility in theory and methodology of diaspora studies. In that sense, the chapter is interdisciplinary, with multi-cultural perspectives.

Introduction

When adopted widely by surrounding disciplines, labels have a way of permutating beyond the territory they were originally intended to cover. Politics and hybridity are examples. And diaspora, which according to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (vol. 6) is:

> the voluntary dispersion of the Jewish people as distinct from forced dispersion … As such, it confines itself to Jewish settlements outside Erez Israel during the periods of Jewish independence or compact settlements in their own land.

The *Judaica* goes on to say that

> As early as the Hellenistic period the Sibyl could sing of the Jewish nation 'Every land is full of you, and every sea,' and in reference to the first century B.C.E., the Greek geographer Strabo declared that it was difficult to find a place in the entire world to which the Jewish nation had not penetrated.

The spread of Jews from about the exilic age differs sharply from the phenomenon covered by the current use of diaspora. Judaism was faith and way of life, as

it is with strict people of the book. The Temple in Jerusalem remained the center of a turning world. So strong was the idea of Jewishness, that they retained their religious and, therefore, essential cultural identity despite ethnic mutation.

An example of an early diaspora, but one closer to the modern experience, would be instructive: Persian-Greek contact circa 330 BC. Xenophon (430-355 BC), the Greek historian, essayist, and early pupil of Socrates, and who led the 10,000 mercenaries to safety after the battle of Cunaxa in 401 BC described in his book *Anabass*, balanced his view of Persian weakness with an emerging ideal that included Greek elements. Here are quotes from Robin Lane Fox:

> By the 330s, this theme had gained a new depth in western Asia. Local rulers liked to patronize Greek technical skill. Like their own king, they kept Greek doctors. They had Greek prophets and soothsayers, poets, artists, soldiers, and physical trainers. They had some notorious Greek mistresses. In Caria, especially, Greek language and an outline of Greek political forms had been spread by recent urbanization. Elsewhere, Greek culture was relished for being fun … Bilingual Persians in the west were surely not uncommon. Bilingual Greeks were far rarer. (129-30)

As Fox says, the textual evidence for this situation is comparatively slight, but only when compared with the art, especially the bas-reliefs. They tell almost as much as the pharonic tombs have. So powerful, so continuous was the influence, that more than two thousand years later, the lama in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, was deeply, specially moved by the Buddha captured in the moment of apotheosis by Greek-influenced sculpture executed some five to six hundred years after Alexander. Kipling provides a careful build-up for this, the first cross-cultural contact in the novel. In so doing, he reminds us that the figures were done 'by forgotten workmen whose hands were feeling, and not unskillfully, for the mysteriously transmitted Grecian touch.' (Said 1987)

> The Lord! The Lord! It is Sakya Muni himself.' The lama half sobbed; and under his breath began the wonderful Buddhist invocation:
>
> To Him the Way, the Law, apart,
> Whom Maya held beneath her heart.
> Ananda's Lord, the Bodhisat.

What probably struck the lama, as it has generations past and generations to come, is proportion and realism, brought into a single moment of style and execution, one so potent that art ceases to compete with life by becoming part of it.

The dominant figure for my purposes at this point is Alexander. Unlike other Greeks including his teacher Aristotle who, incidentally, was born Macedonian, he did not think Persians barbarians. What he did, and what he got others to do, reveals the outline of his vision. Briefly, he sought to bring two cultures, Greek and Persian, together, through inter-marriage, the study of Greek, equal opportu-

nities to the extent politically and militarily expedient, amalgamation of customs, re-organization of the royal court and army, and much else. It meant basic re-orientations in key sites of power, some of which, such as the increasing admission of Persians to positions of authority, upset a section of his Macedonian and Greek followers.

> Like Achilles, Alexander had married a captive lady. But the marriage belonged with a wider theme in his politics. Sogdian nobles who had survived the reprisals were asked to leave their children in camp. At the same time orders went out for thirty thousand boys to be recruited from Iranian villages and brought up in a Greek style ... Alexander is already said to have arranged Greek lessons for the Persian queen mother and her family. He had long enjoyed the company of Barsine and Bagoas, and other bi-lingual Persians. In 328 BC, he was already looking to the next generation. (299)

This brief reference to history serves a number of purposes. History repeats itself where and when circumstances repeat themselves. So too the lessons drawn.

> *new vision — two cultures
> *long-term planning
> *top-down change
> *bi-cultural, bi-lingual program
> *revised socio-politico structure
> *class structure — creation of Greco-Persian upper-class
> *art, city planning, architecture

Here is the first planned hyphenated culture and society, a point to which I will return. These Alexanderian initiatives — the list is by no means complete — would have benefited from the tasks of educational linguistics that Braj Kachru proposed in 'The Speaking Tree: A Medium of Plural Canons', a fascinating, instructive paper he gave at the 1994 George Washington University Round Table. In his words, 'these include

> *cross-cultural discourse
> *the bilingual's creativity
> *language contact and convergence
> *language acquisition
> *intelligibility
> *lexicography
> *language, ideology, and power

There was no Kachru in his time to be guru, but Alexander may well have heard of Panini, who wrote his grammar in about the 5th century BC, and at a place close to where he had fought a battle and camped. His early death in 323 BC robbed his vision of any serious chance for success. Had it been held on course, the hyphenated society Alexander envisaged, Persian-Greek/Macedonian, Greek/Mace don-

ian-Persian, would have lost its hyphen in time with integration which does away with separations and seams. The *Peranakans* of Malaysia — Chinese who settled in the 17th century and adopted various Malay customs, and spoke a Malay-Hokkien patois while remaining essentially Chinese — are a classic example of such integration.

Given the situation and the needed response, these are the main elements involved in the dynamics, the calculus of diasporic consequences. But with a difference, namely between the spread of (i) the English as people and (ii) English as language. In the case of the first, there was identity-retention. A homogeneous group moved, lock, stock, and barrel. That diaspora was driven by voluntary exile on religious grounds, by white settlements which later turned into migration, and the founding of colonies that grew out of a desire for more trade and political and economic competition in Europe. In the first, people took their culture and operational institutions — of which language is chief — into their new environments, in America, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. England was still the center of their world, providing intellectual, political, cultural, and other sustenance. While less tight in guarding the borders of their identity, it was comparable to the Jewish experience. But in time and for a variety of reasons, links with England, which became Great Britain in the interim with the empowerment that came from her many colonies, loosened.

What concerns us now is the diasporic spread of languages, mine with English to the non-Anglo-Saxon parts of the world. That spread deepened its roots after colonies became independent and retained English because it was already there, firmly in place, and performed a number of functions, as a bridge between different language groups, a neutral and therefore 'safe' national language, education, administration, and as an instrument for rapid modernization. Its retention at times proved controversial, as it went against nationalist sentiment, which is generally most aggressive in the period immediately after independence. Yet English remained, actively cultivated as the instrument of modernization, and the keeping up with global developments. But whatever the specific politics, its continued use was a challenge. The response depended on a number of factors, some of which will be considered shortly. They are not there in the Anglo-Saxon diaspora which, given its identity-retention, felt no tension between language and user. There was no need for a hyphen: the people were English, the language was English. There IS a need for a hyphen in the case of (ii), where there IS cross-cultural contact.

Theory and practice

It is prudent in these theory-driven days to start with a modest statement of purpose. Theory presupposes practice; otherwise, it ought to be hypothesis, or at least inclining to one. Practice presupposes an object upon which to operate, to establish itself, to earn credentials. The object could be particles in physics or the diffusion of cultures: it does not matter. What does matter is whether, given the

object, the practice proves appropriate. It is a question of credibility, of whether the practice is able to explain the facts. These are large, far-reaching issues, made manageable by the reductive power of generalizations, a move that risks hoisting by our own petard. Generalizations are occasionally necessary, employable, provided their limitations are kept in view, even as we take what insight, what sap, they offer to nourish idea, line of inquiry.

Generally speaking, theory in the sciences (SCS) tends to look at the present and the future. Theory in the humanities and the social sciences (HSS) tends to look at the present and the past. They both deal with facts, though differently. In SCS, facts equal knowledge; in HSS facts have to be INTERPRETED into knowledge. In SCS, theories, if proven, become a law, which often hold for a considerable time, providing common understanding, until another theory, usually the replacement for the earlier theory in the field, gets proven. Not so in HSS, where fundamental concepts, paradigms and discourse change, shift and multiply almost unceasingly. And that should be the case. They are based on the INTERPRETATION of the facts as they arise in a particular time and place, say in India at the time of partition, or Kenya between 1950 and 1975, which included the Mau Mau movement, the 'neo-colonialism' and consequent failure of the government, all of which provided Ngugi wa Thion'go with themes for his fiction and insights for his critical essays. Or the degree to which Lloyd Fernando and K. S. Maniam share a pre-occupation with certain themes in *Green Is The Colour* and *In A Far Country* respectively, yet construct their significances so differently.

The facts of — and consequently, knowledge in — SCS are universal. They are universal mainly because the facts regarding objects arrange themselves. Breaking the molecule into atoms, electrons, and protons, into ever smaller particles, some with a life of one millionth of a second, implies a descending order that is an arrangement. You could reverse that order. But the sequence of which is next to which is pretty much fixed. The same cannot be said of the HSS. In some, religion is paramount, a matter for the state; in others it is not, leaving it a matter for the individual. Genes causing this or that disease do so consistently from Kokoda to Kalamazoo. But the social consequences of the same disease — mental disorders, for example — is often perceived differently. Consequently, in SCS, the substantial discourse is substantially denotative. The objects studied do not become metaphors. Hence the notion of scientific writing. A tree is a tree is a tree: it has certain basic characteristics, such as roots, a trunk, branches and leaves. In contrast, it is only within HSS that the tree turns image, enters metaphor, and becomes symbol. It provides opportunities for analogies: family tree, the tree of life. There is interpretation, a making of meaning. Kachru's 'Speaking Tree' paper provides a good example. It opens with references to that Tree, and goes on to say that

> The trunk of the English language — the Inner Circle — evokes mixed responses, as did that of the Speaking Tree, but the branches are bearing delectable fruit. The linguistic speaking tree is blooming,

for we believe it answers all questions. The questions relate to accessibility to knowledge, the questions of pragmatic functions, and those of creative functions. In short, we have a unique oracle with many faces (Kachru 1994:1).

The key word here is 'many'. For English goes to sleep and wakes up with a greater variety of peoples, climates, and histories than does any other language. Far more than all past and recent imperial languages such as Greek and Latin, Spanish and Portuguese, French, Italian, and German, put together. Here is the prime challenge of — and in — diasporic studies. What makes it international is its use by many nations for whom it is an official, main, or only language, and therefore a national language, with all that the label implies. As Kachru (1997:11) puts it:

the linguistic center of the language has already moved … from its former major linguistic epicenter, from its traditional center of creativity, of innovations … of authority of codification.

And now we — all of us — can use this key for crossing cultural and linguistic borders, but only if we make a distinction between English as a medium and English as a repertoire of pluralism, a repertoire of ideologies, of ways of life and living in distinctly different cultural contexts, and of thought patterns and creativities — and, indeed, of innovations which articulate various types of cross-overs: the African, the Asian, the South and North American, and the East European.

Kachru is referring to the role and the spread of English across his well known 'Three Concentric Circles of English'. The first diaspora was when English — or what became English — moved with the expansion of the English into Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. This was followed by the Anglo-Saxon diasporas that took English to America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. These constitute the norm dictating, code asserting, and canon defining INNER CIRCLE. Kachru lists examples of countries/nations in the OUTER CIRCLE and the EXPANDING CIRCLE. It is in the OUTER CIRCLE that the issues of diaspora are defined, that confrontation and adaptation between old and new users take place. The old users tend to think — and feel — that they are the permanent custodians of the language and everything linked to it. It is embedded in their culture and environment, both of which are in turn embedded in it. Languages have both diachronic and synchronic annotations. The first give it a history; the second, a contemporary flavor and relevance. English is inscribed by and with the DIACHRONIC ANNOTATIONS of her people's history, politics, sense of identity, the gifts of their temperament, genius, style, tone, tact, and the myriad elements of being and existence. It is this that gives language resonance, vitality, and connotation. There is room for origins and antecedents, for being aware of the distance evolution — linguistic, literary, scientific, and cultural, etc., — that has been traveled. So T. S. Eliot is able to relate 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and F. R. Leavis to proclaim 'The Great Tradition'.

There is the assumption that where the language goes, its critical tradition and practice follow. To a large extent these are the cumulative responses to the literature, from the late 16th century on. The sense of the contemporary can bring together interesting bed-fellows. Eliot felt closer to John Donne than to the Victorians as a whole. Even if there is an ideological itch that needs satisfying, the changes are likely to be radical rather than revolutionary. There is something monolithic, a comforting centrality holding individual and society together. Nonconformity is a variation, not a departure, or a betrayal. There is, instead, a certain protectiveness, a considerable measure of internally generated self-approval, one especially dismissive of externally generated alternatives. For they do not accord with DIACHRONIC ANNOTATIONS.

The countries/nations in the OUTER CIRCLE have their own distinctive diachronic annotations. They are there in their languages: Sanskrit, Sinhala, Gikuyu, Bahasa Melayu, Tamil, Chinese (including the other languages, the so-called 'dialects'),Yoruba, Illocano, Urdu, and Ewe, for example. It is enshrined in their word-games, capacity for pun, irony, and literary allusion; the traffic between metaphor and metaphor; court language. There is that creative sophistication demanded, for example, by the *kurruntokai*, whose very conventions either shackle or free, depending on whether the pressures of restrictiveness lead to inventiveness or tame conformity. Language has learnt to be lofty, far-reaching; sudden as thought; quick as feeling.

To be nativized, indegenized: that should be the fate of English in this Outer Circle, if it is to be a language in its new home in the various — and varied — parts of the world. What happens is that it first acquires synchronic annotations, through the pressures of daily use, in formal and informal occasions. It has to make its way among the other languages, each of which has been there, in occupation, for a considerable time. Their DIACHRONIC ANNOTATIONS, reflecting the history of the country/nation, have to be transferred to English if it is to have the same or comparable creative potential, if it is to function with the same creative power. This is a challenge that every writer using English in the Outer Circle has to face. The challenges vary from place to place, depending on the culture and the intellectual, linguistic and other environments, the earlier national history, the present economic strength, and the linguistic and other policies in force for national development. Below are some of the main situations, with broad indications of where there are examples.

    i)   Oral societies — Africa south of the Sahara; Pacific islands

    ii)   Islands —   a)   the West Indies

                               b)   Malta/Sri Lanka

                               c)   Pacific — e.g., West Samoa

                               d)   Singapore — artificial creation — 'three + one' major traditions: Malay-Islamic,

Indian, Chinese + Western

(Eurasian)

iii)	Bilingual Sites		Camaroons; Sri Lanka

iv)   Multilingual Sites
    a) Malaysia — indigenous population with Chinese and Indian immigrants; Singapore
    b) indigenous population + large/significant Anglo-Saxon/other white population — South Africa

    c) large/dominant Anglo-Saxon/other white population with significant/increasingly significant indigenous population
      — America
      — Australia
      — New Zealand
      — Canada
      — South Africa

v)   Sub-Groups
indigenous population are affected by arrivants.
    — Australia
    — New Zealand

iv)   India —
old civilization — has seen it all; has powerful religious/philosophical traditions, classical literatures, starting with Sanskrit

v)   Immigrants
    — Asian → American
    — Euro-Asian → Australia
    — Asian → Canada
    — Asian → Britain

Just to make life more interesting, what of (a) Indians and Chinese writing in all these sites? And (b) W. B. Yeats, Raja Rao, Octavia Paz and Carlos Fuentes, who are deeply immersed in their cultures, yet universalists? And (c) V. Nabakov and Muhammad Haji Salleh, who are bilingual?

Although far from complete, this listing should convince us of the necessity of adopting an approach flexible enough to recognize and give weight to variations in the literatures in English from these countries/nations. To see their national and other differences is to understand their very different needs and, therefore, their very different responses. For Derek Walcott (1972:17) and others in a similar situation:

> What would deliver him from servitude was the forging of a language
> that went beyond mimicry, a dialect which had the force of revelation
> as it invented names for things, one which finally settled on its own
> mode of inflection, and which began to create an oral culture of

chants, jokes, folk-songs and fables; this, not merely the debt of history was his proper claim to the New World.

There was no other point of reference than the life around them. English as language was a means which, together with black skin and blue eyes, would remain anomalies until they had to name, and so create. There was no other language, one whose DIACHRONIC ANNOTATIONS could be tapped, adapted and grafted. And the synchronic annotations have to be discovered and assembled. His English had to be forged, not fine-tuned in the way that Raja Rao did it in *The Serpent and the Rope* and *Kanthapura*. In his foreword to the latter, Rao says that:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up — like Sanskrit or Persian was before — but not of our emotional make-up ... After language the next problem is that of style. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs. (*Kanthapura*, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1994)

The third, and last, example is from Nigeria. Oral traditions have their diachronic annotations, but differ from literate traditions in that the annotations are not traceable through the centuries. They are embedded in the synchronic, in the ever-moving contemporary energies of the tradition. Gabriel Okara is among the writers who have discussed the indigenisation of English, its re-orientation to suit the content and dynamics of a particular society and culture.

> Why should I not use the poetic and beautiful, 'May we live to see ourselves tomorrow' or, 'May it dawn', instead of 'Goodnight'? If I were writing a dialogue between two friends, one about to leave after visiting the other at night, I would do it this way:
> 'Are you getting up now?' said Otutu as he saw his friend heaving himself up with his two hands gripping the arms of the chair he was sitting on.
> 'Yes I am about walking now. The night has gone far', Beni his friend said, for he was a very fat man.
> 'May we live to see ourselves tomorrow', Otutu said after seeing his friend to the door.
> 'May we live to see ourselves tomorrow', his friend also said and walked panting into the night.

What emerges from the examples I have given is that a writer can use the idioms of his own language in a way that is understandable in English. If he used their English equivalents, he would not be expressing African ideas and thoughts, but English ones.

'May it dawn for you'. Or 'May day break for you': Idiom and metaphor have their fact, in this case the point at which night yields to day. That is fact. It belongs to SCS. The meaning it is assigned by linguistic culture belongs to HSS.

Within HSS are occupations, pre-occupations, rather, which are deeply, obsessively connotative, to connote, which one dictionary, dryly defines as 'to signify secondarily'. That is the basis of difference. That is the basis of literary creativity. That is the basis of the 'Other', whose identity is often, and crucially, defined by the 'secondary'. It is the basis of what Okara rightly sees as primary. Speak that I may see thee. Large or small, gesture, idea and object in the HSS are defined, composed and maintained by the various institutions — and the values they represent — which characterize a society, a nation, giving it its identity. These are the particular versions of religion, ethics, folklore, myths, legends, history, philosophy, language, literature, the performing and visual arts, the principles and practice of politics, economics, manufacture, education, management within the social contract that prevails, and the very social contract itself. These are found in all societies. As nouns, their values are universal. All societies believe in faith and charity. They are universal. But noûns do not shape life and contacts. Only verbs do. Abstractions versus actuality. It is in the doing that values are revealed, made manifest, promoted, transmitted. They may overlap. But it is in the verbs of each society that their content and traditions are shaped uniquely to fit that society. As Okara says , 'For, from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and values of a people' (Okara, in Killam 1973:137).

This leads to the hyphen of cross-cultural contact. SCS is intrinsically value-free. It is neither good nor bad, but only usage makes it so. HSS, on the other hand, is value-loaded. SCS is HARD KNOWLEDGE. Its processes can be repeated. Its content has general acceptance. When that is replaced by new discoveries, the replacement receives the same general acceptance. Moreover, the language used to describe this content is stable, universally understood, and understood in the same way.

In contrast, HSS, whose facts need to be INTERPRETED before turning knowledge, is SOFT KNOWLEDGE. Nations want as much as they can get of SCS from any source; at the same time, they want to preserve their own HSS — content, institutions, ways and means, relying on their internal dynamics to shift and censor foreign influences, especially those thought radically undermining.

In such circumstances, the interpreter, who has an agenda shaped by his or her history as a member of a particular profession, society, and nation, all of which have vested, permanent interests, is of particular importance. Hence, the Mau Mau national movement or rebellion; the Indian Mutiny or national movement; these core, permanent interests must vary, and vary enormously at times, given the political, economic, technological, social, and other realities distinguishing nations. A few familiar labels do the work of reminding: First, Second, and Third Worlds; developed, developing, and under-developed nations; North/South. What is sauce

for the goose is NOT sauce for the gander. This must be stressed. For, as we have noted — all too briefly — there is a history behind the fact of nations using the same international language.

That history, if it is to be seen steadily and whole — if its impact on life, and therefore experience, on the material that shapes us, our outlook, etc., must be understood in specific terms of the country/nation AND the individual. As an historical phenomenon, diaspora deals with large movements, with generalizations — which I have myself resorted to — while the literature, in the final analysis, is the product of individuals. What can directly help advance the subject are studies of major and significant writers, and themes. The need for an essential flexibility, suggests that the spirit and methods of comparative literature should prove most rewarding, especially if it taps the insights of linguistic studies of the kind pioneered by Professor Kachru. It will help us discover hyphens, and help chart the content of each half, and how they relate, and the possible direction they are taking. Complexities and differences should be seen and understood for what they are, and not leveled by generalizations or the limits imposed by inadequate or inappropriate concepts and terminology. After all, we will be dealing with literatures using varieties of one language, each inhabiting and thriving in its own culture and environment, all adding to the challenge and richness of the coming millennium.

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