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Preface

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Scholarly Writing as a Spiritual and Reflexive Practice

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When Suresh started publishing research articles from Sri Lanka in the early 1990s, he was socialized into the scholarly conventions of the local academic community. In his autoethnographic book, *Geopolitics of Academic Writing* (Canagarajah, 2002), he has narrated how the local academic community functions. There the separation between the experts and the lay, academy and community, and the intellectual and the everyday is very thin. Both domains mesh and mediate all teaching and scholarly activities. Not surprisingly, values from ethics and spirituality from local intellectual traditions also influence their academic work. After all, Sri Lanka is the home of four great religions, i.e., Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity.

Suresh's early publications on local communicative and pedagogical concerns were motivated by the need for social relevance, accommodating diversity, and promoting justice in a country emerging from European colonization. He wrote about the harm from "native speaker norms" in the teaching and use of English in the local community, arguing for the place of local varieties of English, communicative practices, and pedagogical traditions. Though the themes were not too controversial for editors and reviewers of academic journals in the United States or United Kingdom (as their own scholars were motivated by postcolonial and cultural studies orientations to write about these concerns), they had problems with the discourse Suresh adopted in his articles. Many of his submissions were summarily rejected. Reviewers observed that his articles were framed inappropriately, unclear as to the main themes, or failed to highlight the new disciplinary contribution. It was gradually that Suresh understood their expectations. His typical compositional strategy was to start his article based on some burning problems faced in the local community or classrooms as the rationale for his inquiry. Adopting a narrative style to marshal data from his observations and interviews, he would then conclude with alternatives based on ethical considerations. In using this style, he was motivated by his local spiritual and cultural traditions which evaluated intellectual work by the good it did to human life and the honesty the scholar invested in their argument. However, his editors and reviewers were motivated by a different expectation. They wanted Suresh to frame his articles according to the current research literature. They expected him to demonstrate how his article addressed a gap in the existing scholarly conversations in order to contribute new knowledge to the discipline. They were also put off by his narrative style, personal voice, and ethical values, which they considered as not conducive to dispassionate reasoning and inquiry.

Iga can also testify to limitations on her possibilities to participate in the global disciplinary discussions and to the consequent trade-off in her authorial representations. With this compromise came changes to how she constructed her unique writer identity and her relationship with the reader. Specifically, she had to abandon inductive ways of reasoning, typical to Polish scholarly discourse, and the assumed intellectual investment on the part of the reader. Traditionally, the assumption that the reader will make an intellectual

effort to process the text has led to knowledge claims being made in a digressive manner with a large amount of surrounding information, contributing to textual nonlinearity. As digressions constitute "material that is somewhat additional, peripheral, or supplementary, and thus also of lower relevance to the argument in progress" (Duszak, 1997a, p. 326), from the perspective of an Anglophone reader, they are usually considered as an impediment to the successful processing of the text. However, as Duszak (1997b) points out, for Polish audiences, this branching style of text argumentation is traditionally appreciated and seen as evidence of the author's inquiring and learned mind.

As evidenced in our personal accounts, doing and reporting research in global academia, located in the Anglophone 'centre', often excludes considerations of the role of diversity and spirituality in scholarship. Based on the epistemological perspective of positivism, the dominant approach attributed to modern science (in particular in hard and social sciences) holds that reality is separate from the individual who observes it and that scientific explanations need to be expressed in formal propositions that apply the rules of formal and deductive logic (see Lee, 1991). These propositions may be able to represent a world of ideal relations, artificially generated by the scholar, but they are sadly lacking in the potential to describe the reality the researcher is actually observing. Other ways of reporting, which may involve aspects of intuition, subjectivity and introspection, are rejected as being inappropriate for such a genre. What follows from this is that to have our work published, we, as scholarly writers, are expected to learn and perfect these highly formulaic routines.

In contrast to the positivist view of reality, and the subsequent methodologies, methods and writing style employed to report scholarly work, interpretivists believe that individuals shape society and so meanings are products of social interactions (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995; Halliday, 1978, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1989). This implies that the same phenomenon may have multiple interpretations in different contexts and between different participants. We, the two authors of this preface, also challenge this dominant detached, objective and value-free way of writing about research (Canagarajah, 2018). We call for spirituality in scholarship to be recognized as a crucial part of the knowledge-making process. We understand spirituality not as a one-way application of religious beliefs in our professional life

(Canagarajah, 2018, pp. xviii-xix), but as a mental resource we draw upon to develop and reflect valuable traits, such as tolerance, openness and self-reflection in our communications with readers, research subjects and our collaborators. We agree with Luhrmann that a spiritual approach to scholarship offers us "a vantage point from which to see their lives as if from without, and an invitation to imagine how they could be otherwise" (2023, p. 3) which prevents us from falling into the trap of "intellectual apartheid" (2023, p. 1). Consequently, we refrain from striving to imitate, but attempt to see the world as it is, dynamic and diverse, and replete with differences that create a unique kaleidoscopic composition.

Undoubtedly, allowing spirituality-related issues to become part of the knowledge-making process requires a more profound engagement with difference and diversity. This is in contrast to the privileged forms of scholarly writing that promote individualistic values of Anglo-American culture and the image of writer as 'conquering hero' (Pal et al., 2022). With reference to organization studies in Latin America, Ibarra-Colado lamented how "to be allowed in you must deny your own identity: to belong in 'the international community', you must speak the Centre's language, use its concepts, discuss its agendas" (2006, p. 471). A consequential outcome of this situation is the disproportionally high number of papers from scholars working in Anglophone universities, a reality which can be evidenced by a perusal of articles from any leading scholarly journal. This is a reflection of the linguistic inequality present in academia today and the subsequent under-representation of voices from non-Anglophone scholars in global disciplinary discussions (Lillis & Curry, 2010). The stifling of different voices also leads to the absence of other ways of presenting knowledge and the dissemination of new or contentious knowledge claims.

Recognizing, accepting and including difference when doing and reporting science is particularly important in the case of ethnographic work. Luhrmann calls ethnography a spiritual practice, arguing that doing and reading ethnography enables us to imagine "what it is to be another, and to see the possibility of difference a potent seed of hope" (Luhrmann, 2023, p. 3). The understanding of the spiritual dimension of scholarship has compelling parallels with the desire of many researchers to be more authentic in writing about their fieldwork (see Lehman et al., 2024). Authenticity in ethnographic practice involves, as Ellis puts

it, "being more consciously open to ambiguity, complexity, and relatedness of experience (Berger, 1988)" and "more likely to call on the ethics of care, empathy, personal relationships, community, and personal accountability to access […] knowledge claims" (1995, p. 94). These qualities echo Peterson and McNamee's call for the need of 'engaged scholars' in order for us to be "distinctly valuable to the study and practice of organizational communication" (2020, p. 120). Such scholars, they argue, possess three linked qualities: intimacy, partnership and commitment, and empathy (Peterson & McNamee, 2020).

Empathy is the quality linking all of these approaches and yet little is written about how we can recognize and manifest it in scholarly writing. Richardson asks, "How do we write (explain, describe, index) the social?" (1990, p. 15) which will allow us to not perpetuate behavioristic assumptions about writers, readers, subjects, and knowledge itself rooted in a positivist conception of the world where participants are given "exactly the role they have in a behavioristic universe" (Bazerman, 1988, p. 126). Tracy et al. echo Richardson's concerns, pointing out that although research journals "increasingly welcome qualitative research, "most journal articles continue to be written in a deductive style that camouflages the messy, inductive processes by which most qualitative research unfolds" (2014, p. 423). Indeed, the dominant academic rhetorical requirement is to present knowledge as "focused, problem (i.e., hypothesis) centered, linear, straightforward" (Richardson, 1990, p. 21). Consequently, anything considered extraneous and even qualitative is sidelined or excluded which also implies that inductive research is reported deductively (see also Richardson, 1990). There is no space for empathy or spirituality as scholars are pressured to "write in a dispassionate and quasi-realist tone" (Ellis et al., 2014, p. 425).

Some anthropologists and social scientists are now taking modernity's empiricism to its logical conclusion and asking that if empiricism is about privileging sense experience, why is it that certain sensory experiences such as affect, emotions, ethical values, and spirituality are not addressed. Adopting empiricism to privilege only physical sensations (i.e., the five senses of touch, smell, sound, taste, and sight) is very reductive. South African sociolinguist Anna Deumert (2022) argues that it is time to address the senses that are beyond these five, especially those that are nonrepresentational. Nonrepresentational

resources and knowledge are those that may not have a physical body to "see" or represent them. Such senses include ethics, ideologies, spirituality and affect. Deumert (2022, p. 9) challenges us as researchers to broaden our understanding of what it means to collect data, and what counts as data: "If empiricism is about sense experience, then how can we capture the complexity of what we sense?". Deumert urges us to capture the "manyness" (p. 9) of worlds of sense and experience.

Similarly, some progressive anthropologists from the Global South, who are familiar with knowledge traditions that differ from modernist positivism, question why anthropology should limit itself to experiences that are familiar and acceptable. If anthropology is open to the otherness and diversity of experiences and cultures, why should experiences of mystery be excluded? The mysterious in life has always been part of diverse communities and cultures. Suppressing them as illegitimate or invalid, or treating them with condescension, are forms of intellectual colonialism. This practice not only continues the foundational scholarly assumptions of European modernity based on reason, but also marginalizes non-European people and communities who value spirituality. In a bold theorization of "an anthropology of becoming" (in their book of that title), Biehl and Locke (2017) propose:

> Through its relentless empiricism and radical analytical openness, anthropology creates the conditions of possibility for moments of surprise and the sustained, open-ended engagements that wonder, itself always historically and locally situated, precipitates. Whether through the classic anthropological realization that other systems and ideas organize life elsewhere, or the recognition that our own presuppositions often prove inadequate in describing the complex realities of the lives of others, fieldwork moves us away from entrenched categories and expands the perspectives – on other cultures, space-times, and species – from which we can perceive and understand the world (if only always partially) (pp. 6-7).

Thus, they articulate how the empiricism that is valued by scholars can actually open them to the diversity of experiences. The authors go on to propose that scholars who remain open to the complexity of life and experience can actually counter the reductive effort of other disciplines to colonize knowledge in terms of modernist values:

> At stake is finding creative ways of not letting the ethnographic die in our accounts of the contemporary. Ethnography is not just protophilosophy, but a way of staying connected to open-ended, even mysterious, social processes – a way of counterbalancing the generation of certainties and foreclosures by other disciplines (Biehl & Locke, 2017, p. 10).

The above considerations throw light on the ethical issue of "writing 'right' but doing wrong" (see Ellis, 1995, p. 69) to our colleagues, research subjects and to readers. We suggest that the spiritual dimension of academic text can only be achieved when we, as writers, engage with our evoked readers and their intellectual and affective needs by creating space in the text for dialogical communication. This approach requires the activation of the scholar's reflexivity, defined by Sinclair and Grey as "recognizing and making explicit the relationship between the writer and what, how why they write" (2006, p. 447), and extended by Iga to include 'who we write for' (see Lehman et al., 2024; Lehman & Tienari, 2024). As Iga argues elsewhere (Lehman et al., 2024) reflexivity emerges from the writer's desire to project a convincing persona and a reader-sensitive authorial voice. When writing with this goal in mind, we, as scholarly writers, need to develop sensitivity to our audience's needs, expectations, doubts and fears which enables us to create a relationship with the reader based on equality and commonality underlined by the concept of tenderness (Lehman et al., 2024). According to Iga,

> In this relationship, the author and the reader play equivalent roles, the former by creating and reality framing1 (Fairhurst, 2011), the latter by making interpretations which are confirmed, challenged or resisted during the reading process. When interpreting, we rely on familiar contexts for reconciling new input. However, where new input is especially alien or may be startling or resisted, there is an increased role for a special kind of tenderness, one which emphasizes "the bonds that connect us, the similarities and sameness between us" (Tokarczuk, 2019, p. 24) (Lehman et al., 2024).

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[1]   Framing is a term coined by Fairhurst and at its most basic level, framing reality means describing "the situation here and now" in ways that connect with others" (Fairhurst, 2 0 1 1, p. 3).

We conclude with recent developments in the story we started in the opening. Suresh's search for ways to bring his spirituality and scholarship together has been long and slow. However, recent scholarly developments, as reviewed above, have emboldened him to address his ethical and spiritual concerns more explicitly in his academic work. In his most recent book, titled *Language Incompetence: Learning to Communicate through Cancer, Disability, and Anomalous Embodiment* (2022), Suresh adopts a narrative and personal voice to discuss his diagnosis of cancer and what he learned about teaching and research during his medical treatment and resulting debilities. He argues for a place for vulnerability in scholarship. That is, while the Enlightenment tradition promoted mastery, cultivating an ethos of rational control and dispassionate inquiry in order to find objective answers, there has been a suppression of experiences such as suffering, pain, difficulties, and limitations in human inquiry. However, those who embrace these vulnerable conditions as positive and creative appreciate the role of interdependency, collaboration, and negotiation in knowledge-making activities. While Suresh develops these themes, drawing from disability studies, he also adopts a personal voice and narrative style to engage the readers in collaborating with him in interpreting his arguments.

A key component of the book is an analysis of cancer diaries and life writing (such as those by Susan Sontag, Audre Lorde, and other ordinary people who write in social media as they go through cancer). The book analyzes the value of such life writing as cancer survivors develop clarity into their condition, community with others who support them, and knowledge about boldly living with impairments. Many of them also discuss the role of spirituality in giving them hope and strength. The book analyzes how spirituality is rendered not as a form of escape from pain or life for these cancer survivors but how it infuses their lives with meaning and knowledge to the social and intellectual activities possible to them due to their medical condition. However, in a two-way relationship, these writers also gain new insights into spirituality based on their embodied experiences, reinterpreting religious interpretations which treat disability as a punishment or offering transcendence and consolation. The writers develop more resistant, socially grounded, and empowering interpretations of spirituality

which allows them to embrace their disability and vulnerability as part of life for productive social and intellectual outcomes.

Hopefully, recent publications and theorizations like this will inspire scholars to treat spirituality as part of the complexity of life, and religious identities as part of intersectional identities, as they engage with them in their academic publications. It has always seemed to both of us intriguing that while ideologies and values are treated as informing scholarship in recent philosophical orientations, spirituality is still excluded from academic conversations. And while diversity and intersectional identities are promoted in academic work, spiritual and religious identities are taboo. It is time to engage with them for a more socially relevant, culturally inclusive, and intellectually complex scholarship.

The above concerns have been addressed in the respective contributions to this thematic issue.

In her article 'Scholars as Spiritual Beings: Five Trajectories of Scholarship and Spirituality' Mary Shepard Wong investigates the complex relationship between spirituality and scholarship and the role reflexivity plays in reconciling the potential dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. She argues that through the process of reflexivity scholars are enabled to examine their position considering their positionality, their degree of objectivity in their research and issues around ethnicity, gender, society, race and biography, all of which inform and affect scholars in their research. Matching the description of her own journey with respect to the desire to link the spiritual with the scholarly, she provides further examples of scholars who have undertaken similar journeys. This is done within her framework of Five trajectories of spiritual scholarship: Vertical, Outward, Horizontal, Inward and Multidimensional. The paper makes a strong case for viewing the relationship between scholarship and spirituality as having a significant impact on our identities, knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and practices benefiting education in general and research in particular.

In their paper, Samuel Kwesi Nkansah and Emanuel Mensah Bonsu explore the interconnections across people, events, geography and time in the Cape Coast of Ghana as manifested in place names. Their study differs from previous

studies in four key areas: it focuses on smaller geographical areas, it examines the literary dimensions of place names and it considers issues of identity, and socio-cultural aspects. The study consists of in-depth interviews with a local chief whose explanations of the origins of the city's history and place names was then compared and collated along with histories from literary texts and other historical documents and publications. In this way, the study reinforces previous studies which highlighted how place names are social constructions reflecting the values of the people who gave these places their names. They are a manifestation of the inter-generational interconnectedness which binds these places.

Juan Pablo Yepes Tobón and Phoebe Godfrey's paper adopts an interesting format of transcriptions of their conversations and a distanced analysis of their discussion in order to investigate the relationship between the academy and spirituality. In doing so, the Authors provide an innovative critique on the theme of 'the purpose of education'. Their discussion, as one might expect, ranges wide and pulls in references and exemplifications from Marx to quantum physics. The dialogue between tutor and ex-student allows them to explore the efficacy of a pedagogic approach which focuses on cultivating the student's inner life, encouraging and nurturing their intrinsic curiosity and creating a space where students can discover and explore their 'authentic self' and in doing so, recognize and develop their unique 'gifts'.

Roselie Metro's review of Wong and Mahboob's (editors) volume, 'Spirituality and English Language Teaching: Religions Explorations of Teacher Identity, Pedagogy, and Context' is precise and useful as it catches the main themes from a series of wide-ranging chapters dealing with religious belief and its potential influences on EFL and ESL teachers, their students, and classrooms. However, Metro rightly focuses on the inconclusively of many of the papers, a point which is not lost on the editors, while recognizing that the volume is important as it brings issues to light which might otherwise not have had the attention they deserve. The three chapters deal with teacher identity, pedagogical practice, and the language learning context. Metro makes salient points from the contributions emphasizing what she calls the 'double--edged sword' and inter-connectedness in almost all of the aspects of this topic.

For example, with regards to teacher identity she points out that teachers who are 'grounded' in a specific religion need to not only look inwards to see what it means to them as teachers but also to look at 'how their religion affects students'. While recognizing the difficulty in assembling such a myriad of views, Metro concludes that Wong and Mahboob have done a service by giving space to such issues and inviting further debate.

Shalini Abayasekara's review of Suresh Canagarajah's book *Language Incompetence: Learning to Communicate through Cancer, Disability, and Anomalous Embodiment* highlights the intersections of disability and language as they relate to areas like religion, race, and geopolitics and shows how Canagarajah reflects and theorizes on these issues through his own experience with cancer. Abayasekara discusses how he does so by combining multiple genres, such as academic theory and autoethnography, and referencing other scholars and works. The connection between disability and faith is investigated with specific reference to Christianity which through in-depth and convincing argument are shown to have many points of connectedness rather than opposition. Canagarajah likens body/mind disability to some linguistic usages which have historically been considered less than what is considered 'normal'. Abayasekara draws attention to how these two main sections are finally brought together in his thoughts on disability and language as interpreted through his own personal and professional experiences as a cancer survivor.

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