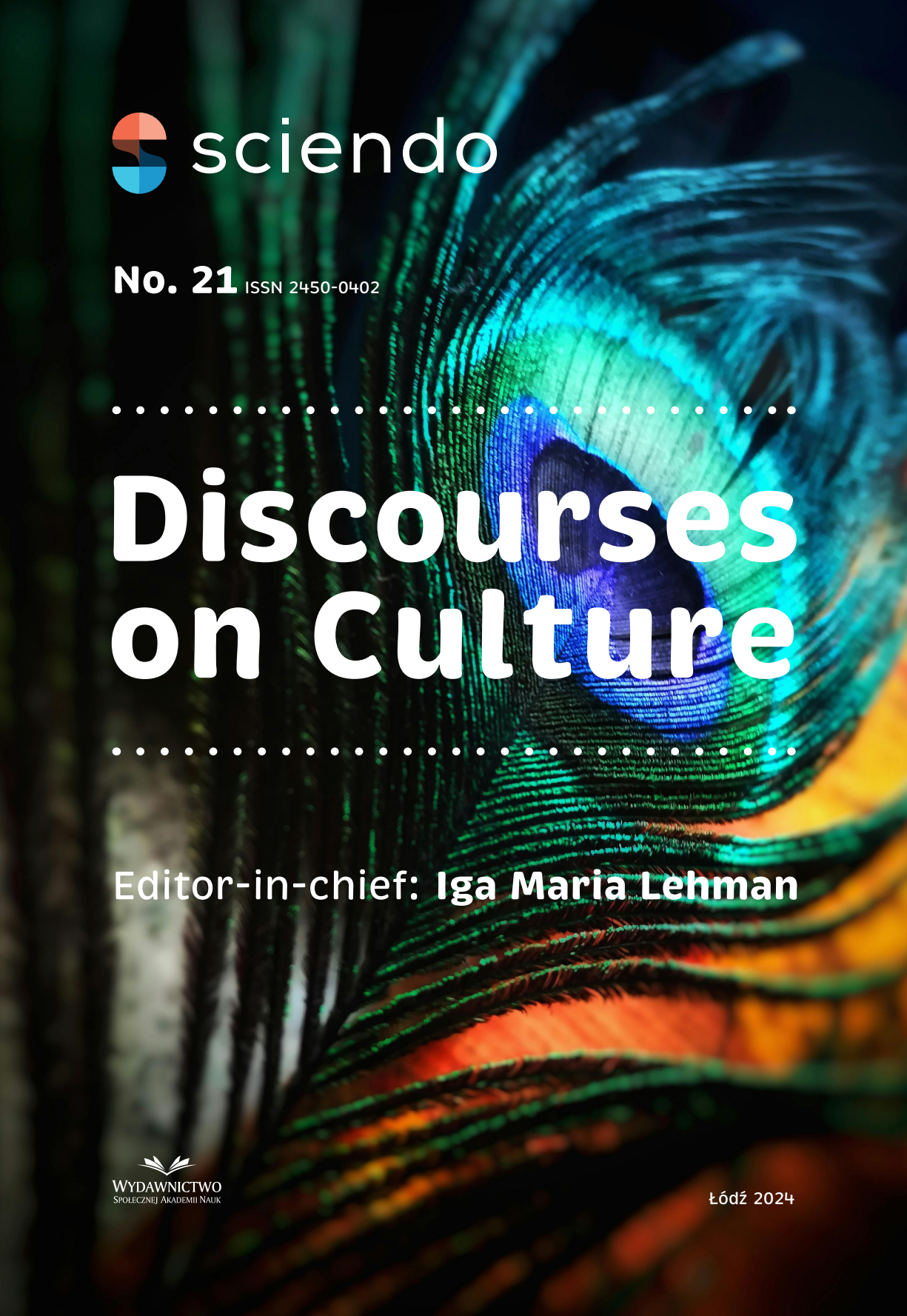


sciendo

No. 21 ISSN 2450-0402

Discourses on Culture

Editor-in-chief: **Iga Maria Lehman**

Wydawnictwo Społecznej Akademii Nauk

Łódź 2024

sciendo

No. 21 ISSN 2450-0402

Discourses on Culture

Editor-in-chief: **Iga Maria Lehman**

Łódź 2024

Wydawnictwo
Społecznej Akademii Nauk

The electronic version is the primary version of the journal

http://dyskursy.san.edu.pl

All the articles published in the journal are subject to reviews.

Editor-in-chief: **Iga Maria Lehman**

Adjustment: Agnieszka Śliz

Text design and typesetting: Studio Grafpa, www.grafpa.pl

Cover design: Studio Grafpa, www.grafpa.pl

ISSN 2450-0402

University of Social Sciences Publishing House

Sienkiewicza 9, 90-113 Łódź

phone: 42 664 66 41

e-mail: discourses@san.edu.pl

Table of Contents

7 **Iga Maria Lehman, Suresh Canagarajah** | Preface: Scholarly Writing as a Spiritual and Reflexive Practice

21 **Articles**

23 **Mary Shepard Wong** | Scholars as Spiritual Beings: Five Trajectories of Scholarship and Spirituality

43 **Samuel Kwesi Nkansah, Emmanuel Mensah Bonsu** | Indigenous Place Names: A Literary Toponomastics Study of Suburb Names in Cape Coast

73 **Juan Pablo Yepes Tobón, Phoebe Godfrey** | Unleashing a Student's River of Being: A Dialogic Exploration of Expanding Possibilities

101 **Book Reviews**

103 **Rosalie Metro** | Book Review of *Spirituality and English Language Teaching: Religious Explorations of Teacher Identity, Pedagogy and Context* by Mary Shepard Wong & Ahmar Mahboob. Staple Hill, Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2022

109 **Shalini Abayasekara** | Book Review of *Language Incompetence: Learning to Communicate through Cancer, Disability, and Anomalous Embodiment* by Suresh Canagarajah. London: Routledge, 2022

115 **New releases**

sciendo

DOI 10.2478/doc-2024-0001

Preface

Scholarly Writing as a Spiritual and Reflexive Practice

Received **04 June 2024**

Available online **24 June 2024**

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 framing[1] (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).

[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, 2011, 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.

Iga Maria Lehman
University of Social Sciences in Warsaw
ilehman@san.edu.pl
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2092-8119

Suresh Canagarajah
Pennsylvania State University
asc16@psu.edu
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1292-2366

Warsaw, June 2024

References

Bazerman, C. (1988). *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Biehl, J., & Locke, P. (Eds.) (2017). *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*. Durham: Duke UP.

Canagarajah, S. (2002). *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Canagarajah, S. (2018). Foreword: Complexifying our Understanding of Spirituality. In S. M. Wong, & A. Mahboob, *Spirituality and English Language Teaching* (pp. ix-xiii). Bristol: Multilingual Matter.

Canagarajah, S. (2022). *Language Incompetence: Learning to Communicate through Cancer, Disability, and Anomalous Embodiment*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Deumert, A. (2022). The sound of absent-presence: Towards formulating a sociolinguistics of the spectre. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 45(2), 135-153. DOI: 10.1075/aral.21039.deu.

Duszak, A. (1997a). Analyzing digressiveness in Polish academic texts. In A. Duszak (Ed.), *Culture and Styles of Academic Discourse* (pp. 323-341). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Duszak, A. (1997b). Cross-cultural academic communication: a discourse--community view. In A. Duszak (Ed.), *Culture and Styles of Academic Discourse* (pp. 11-39). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Ellis, C. (1995). Emotional and ethical quagmires in returning to the field. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 24(1), 68-98.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Longman: London.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and Power*. London: Longman.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2nd edition). London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as Social Semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1989). *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective* (2nd edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ibarra-Colado, E. (2006). Organization studies and epistemic coloniality in Latin America: Thinking Otherness from the margins. *Organization*, *13*(4), 463-488.

Lee, A. S. (1991). Integrating positivist and interpretive approaches to organizational research. *Organization Science*, 342-365.

Lehman, I. M., & Tienari, J. (2024). What do you mean? Linguistic sensitivity and relational reflexivity in scholarly writing. *Organization*, *0*(0).

Lehman, I. M., Tienari, J., Hyland, K., & Alejandro, A. (2024). Forum: The Case for Reflexive Writing Practices in Management Communication and Organization Studies. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *0*(0). DOI: 10.1177/08933189241227943.

Lillis, T., & Curry, M. J. (2010). *Academic Writing in a Global Context: The Politics and Practices of Publishing in English*. 1st edition. Routledge.

Luhrmann, T. M. (2023). Anthropology as spiritual discipline. *American Ethnologist*, 1-4.

Pal, M., Kim, H., Harris, K. L., Long, Z., Linabary, J., Wilhoit Larson, E., ... & Dempsey, S. E. (2022). Decolonizing organizational communication. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *36*(3), 547-577.

Peterson, B. L., & McNamee, L. G. (2020). Reclaiming the "native" in organizational communication research. *Ohio Communication Journal*, *58*, 120-131.

Richardson, L. (1990). *Writing Strategies*: *Reaching Diverse Audiences.* Sage.

Sinclair, A., & Grey, C. (2006). Writing differently. *Organization*, *13*(3), 443-453.

Tracy, S. J., Eger, E. K., Huffman, T. P., Malvini Redden, S. M., & Scarduzio, J. A. (2014). Narrating the backstage of qualitative research in organizational communication: A synthesis. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *28*(3), 422-431.

Articles

sciendo

DOI 10.2478/doc-2024-0002

Mary Shepard Wong

Sociology, TESOL, & Modern Languages, Azusa Pacific University, United States

mwong@apu.edu

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9444-4523

Scholars as Spiritual Beings: Five Trajectories of Scholarship and Spirituality

Article history:

Received	**02 February 2024**
Revised	**15 March 2024**
Accepted	**06 May 2024**
Available online	**24 June 2024**

Abstract: This article reflects on the bi-directional, reflexive work of scholarship and spirituality. It begins with the author's positionality as a Christian language educator who has researched spiritually in her field of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL). A brief introduction

of seminal works in faith and scholarship is provided, followed by a discussion of how scholarship within one faith tradition might be applied to others. The concept of scholars as spiritual beings is raised with a reflection on the limits of categorizing acts as either sacred or secular, and how this polarity hinders deeper, more meaningful ways to engage in scholarship when even the mundane is seen as spiritual and so called 'spiritual' acts are reconsidered as potentially empty ritual. Five trajectories of spiritual scholarship are described with examples for each trajectory from the author's work: 1. Vertical: enlarging our understanding of God; 2. Outward: revealing an understanding of nature and the universe; 3. Horizontal: improving our spiritual service to others; 4. Inward: deepening our spiritual identity; 5. Multidimensional: providing a spiritual understanding through difficult life events and finding meaning and interconnectedness to God, self & others. Reflection on the legitimacy of scholarship and spirituality concludes the article.

Keywords: spirituality, religion, TESOL, scholarship, faith integration

Introduction

Post-positivism compels us to examine our positionality in our scholarship, to question the possibility of a value-free objective research stance, and to acknowledge that what we study does not happen in a vacuum. Who we are, our ethnic, gendered, social, geographic, racial identities, histories, and spiritual affinities inform both researchers and participants, including what we see and how we interpret our observations. In post-positivist qualitative research and scholarship, we seek to offset the Anglophone Eurocentric center, to find other ways of knowing and understanding. We also seek to be open to how our research impacts our identity including our spirituality, and the bi-directional (spirituality impacting scholarship and scholarship impacting spirituality) reflexive work of the scholar as a spiritual being.

My Journey, Identity and Positionality

In the field of language education, in which I will speak from, the contextualized critical approach of post-positivism has allowed for an exploration of teachers' spiritual identities and a consideration of the role of religion in language learning and teaching. For me, this exploration resulted in three co-edited volumes spanning ten years. The first, Wong & Canagarajah (2009) brought together 30 contributors, half of whom were Christian and the other half claiming other spiritual identities or that of atheist. We set up chapters in a dialogue format, with authors reading and writing to one another, raising and responding to ethical dilemmas such dealing with the imposition of teachers' religious beliefs on students, and the other extreme, the ethics of a total ban of all spiritual discussions in the classroom. The next volume, Wong, Kristjánsson, & Dörnyei (2013) focused on empirical studies of Christianity and English Language Teaching (ELT), with many chapters focusing on the significant role that faith has on motivation in language learning and teaching. The final volume, Wong & Mahboob (2018) brought together authors from multiple faith traditions, Buddhist, Hindi, Muslim, Christian, and others, to learn from one another of how one's spirituality shapes identity and pedagogy, and how it is informed by the context in which we teach.

These three edited volumes are a discipline specific exploration of three aspects of faith and teaching: controversies and dilemmas of Christian faith and ELT (Wong & Canagarajah, 2009); selected research of Christian faith and ELT (Wong et al., 2013); and insights from teachers from different religious faiths on the role of spirituality and ELT (Wong & Mahboob, 2018). There are thousands of other discipline specific publications on the ways spirituality (especially Christianity) impacts various fields of study[1] including health care, literature, art, music, as well as publications that take an interdisciplinary

[1] For example, over 9,000 articles dealing with faith and learning were found in Christian peer-reviewed journals since 1970 in a study conducted at Calvin College as cited in Bleistein et al. (2013).

approach, such as the focus of how spirituality impacts scholarship (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2004)[2].

Here I will acknowledge my positionality as it impacts my scholarship. In Wong & Canagarajah (2009) we asked all contributors in the volume to provide a spiritual identity statement. My statement was the following:

> I believe that one cannot teach people language without touching the spiritual, as humans are spiritual beings, and the ability to create languages is a marvelous gift of God to be explored, enjoyed, and valued. Although I believe that God is truth, I realize that my perception of truth is tainted by my human condition and sin, and so I am open to learning how my understanding of God is incomplete or incorrect. I acknowledge and am deeply saddened by the way institutional religion has used its power to oppress those whom God created and for whom Christ died. I claim both titles, Christian and critical English language educator, and find it hard to be the former without the latter (Wong & Canagarajah, 2009, p. xvi).

This still rings true for me now 15 years later. Since that time, I have published on religion and ELT with not only Christian scholars, but also with scholars from other faith backgrounds. I have seen how insights on faith and practice from the point of view of one religion can extend and apply to other religions, deepening and extending our understandings as we learn from one another. To my surprise, I have been invited to give the keynote at Muslim Universities on faith integration and review dissertations on Islam and ELT. The learning has been mutual (my learning from them and their learning from me) and bi-directional (impacting my scholarship *and* my faith journey). This process of people of deep faith (i.e., those whose spiritual identities are vital to them and their practice) being able to learn from one another and being impacted spiritually by their scholarship, is somewhat remarkable given the conflicts that historically and in present times have been fueled by religious differences

---

[2] See Bleistein et al. (2013) for a working bibliography of works on religious faith and several subtopics.

as well as the tendency in many fields to not regard spirituality as a bona fide focus of academic research.

The Literature on Spirituality and Scholarship

Some seminal works within Christian discussions of faith and scholarship are Marsden's (1997) *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, Noll's (1994) *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* and *Christ and the Life of the Mind* (2011), Wolterstorff's (1999) *Can Scholarship and Christian Beliefs mix?* and *Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning* (2002). There are also publications that consider the bi-directional, reflexive nature of spirituality and scholarship, that is, how our scholarship informs our spiritual identities and faith (see, for example, *I Still Believe* Byron & Lohr, 2015).

What was harder to find were abundant works on the ways religions other than Christianity impact scholarship, especially those published in English. When I was invited to speak at the conference at an Islamic university in Indonesia on faith and teaching, I could not find as many works on Islam and teaching as I did on Christianity and teaching[3]. While I found it a worthwhile experience to consider how the literature on Christianity and scholarship could be applied to a Muslim audience, I lamented the scarcity of works I could find on spirituality and scholarship from other faith traditions. I do not believe that the image of God resides only in fellow Christian believers. Much can be learned from those of different faiths, especially as that is the very place to find new perspectives and fresh insights that one may be missing.

We have learned much in the past two decades with an opening of the academy to a plurality of voices, acknowledging and welcoming situated and particular perspectives (black history, feminist perspectives, queer theory, etc.). We have dismissed the possibility of a "generic" perspective, which assumes we can be stripped of our uniqueness, our identities and biases when

---

3 I hope readers will let me know of works I missed that may only be available in Arabic.

we pass under the archway of academic halls, as if entering as a naked human being from nowhere, cloaked in a magical white coat of science that grants total objectivity. This "generic" human, that of the dominant European white male, served as the norm for 300 years; however, we now acknowledge that we come to learning having a particular perspective, which is just one among many. Our discussion of faith and scholarship needs that same openness and plurality, acknowledging the dominance of one faith perspective in the literature (i.e., Christianity) on this topic, and the benefit all will have when we learn with and from others.

As an example of extrapolating from the literature on Christianity and Scholarship to other religions, let me take a quote from Wolterstorff (1999) and ask readers from faith traditions other than Christianity how they would respond to this. The original quote is this:

> The general goal of the Christian in the practice of science and in the conversation of learning is not difference but fidelity: not scholarship different from all non-Christians, but scholarship faithful to Scripture, to God and Jesus Christ, to her fellow human beings and to the earth (p. 48).

How might scholars with faith traditions other than Christianity respond to the following reworded version of Wolterstorff's statement?

> The general goal of people of faith in the practice of science and in the conversation of learning is not difference, but fidelity: not scholarship different from all non-believers of one's faith, but scholarship faithful to the sacred texts, to the object of worship, to fellow human beings and to the earth (changes in italics).

It might have a bigger impact when specific terms are inserted to replace the generic, ie., replace "our faith" with "Islam" and replace "object of our worship" with "Allah" etc. This allows us to learn from one another, while staying true to our own faith beliefs.

Something to keep in mind in this discussion is that while we seek to learn how faith informs our scholarship, we also should consider a more intentional, reflexive account of how our research impacts our spirituality. The former asks: How does my spirituality impact my scholarship? While the focus on the impact of scholarship on spirituality asks, In what ways does my scholarship enlarge my understanding of the object of my faith (God, Allah, etc.), give me insights into the sacred texts I read, and advance my spiritual formation and service to others?

Scholars as Spiritual Beings

Smith (2008) argues that when educators view learners as spiritual beings, the whole process of teaching changes. He contends that the boundaries we create between the sacred and secular, or the spiritual and mundane, do more to constrain us than help us. Spirituality, like the 2022 movie title says, is *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Inserting "sacred" activities into teaching, such as devotional readings at the beginning of class and a prayer at the end of class, can be superficial and leave some students feeling like consumers of religion and teachers feeling like they are shoehorning religion into a class where it may not fit. Contrast the daily classroom prayer to seemingly secular acts, such as interactions with students, which could take on a spiritual dimension when students are viewed and treated as spiritual beings in the image of God. Viewing students as spiritual beings erases the line between what is sacred (prayer, Bible reading) from secular (taking attendance, answering students' questions) and seeks to find the spiritual in everything, even the mundane. It turns this on its head, viewing "secular" acts as having the potential for being sacred, and "sacred" performances as having the potential for being empty rituals.

The act of selecting class materials, for example, if viewed in a way that treats students as spiritual beings, would reveal the null curriculum (i.e., what is not being taught, and excluded) in our textbooks and curriculum. Smith contends that educators are lulled into viewing students in reductive ways, as consumers, and that textbooks facilitate this. Smith (2008) states:

> By and large, the people depicted do not suffer, do not die, do not face difficult moral choices, do not mourn or lament, do not experience or protest injustice, do not pray or worship, do not believe anything particularly significant, do not sacrifice, do not hope or doubt. They represent a consumer culture to which we have become all too inured, and from which many central human experiences have been quietly marginalized in such a way that to introduce, say, the language of prayer feels awkward and clumsy, like bringing in a character who does not fit the genre of the story one is telling, like having Little Red Riding Hood suddenly appear on the bridge of the Starship Enterprise (p. 39).

Smith (2008) provides ways that he has addressed this by including additional materials and activities, such as stories about the lives of real people who have suffered and sought to find meaning in their lives, with photos of these people and class discussions of applications to the students' lives. He uses language lessons as ways to give students tools to engage with these deep and transformative topics. Smith (2008) states viewing students as spiritual beings "means combining the processes of language learning with matters such as ethics, hospitality, failure, the nature of the good life, questions of value and the source of hope, responses to human need, cross-generational interaction" (p. 46).

Just as Smith (2008) asks "How would I teach differently if I believed that my students were spiritual beings?" (p. 41), as scholars we can ask, how would I engage in research/scholarship differently by intentionally viewing my participants/readers/those who might benefit from my scholarship as spiritual beings?

In a previous article (Wong, 2014), I asked, what would qualify research as faith-informed? Research is defined as systematic inquiry which aims to enhance the understanding of that which is being studied and includes the identification of a question, the collection and analysis of data, and the dissemination of the findings. Research for scholars who view others as spiritual beings could be distinctive in the following ways: in the identification of a question (faith informs the 'what', the topic or subject under inquiry even when it is not about

faith), the collection and analysis of data (faith affects the 'how', the way we research, including ethical precautions, the lenses that are used in analysis, and the integrity of data collection, recording, and reporting), the dissemination of the findings (faith informs the 'who', in terms of the consideration of who the study benefits and who has access), and the wider implications and purposes of the research (faith informs the 'so what', the practical implications the research may have). I am not implying that religious researchers have a corner on ethical practices by any means, only that one's faith identity, if salient, could have a potential impact on ethical decisions.

Research from a religious/spiritual perspective could be defined as research in which the majority of the decisions are made with the intentional application of one's understanding of sacred texts and the object of one's worship (God's/ Allah's/Buddha's/ Cosmos) and the calling on one's life. While the researcher may not have been mindful or intentional in aligning every research decision with their spiritual beliefs, the strength of the connection at each phase of the research process, is an indicator of the extent scholars view themselves as spiritual beings and their research as spiritual in nature (adapted from Wong, 2014, pp.11-12).

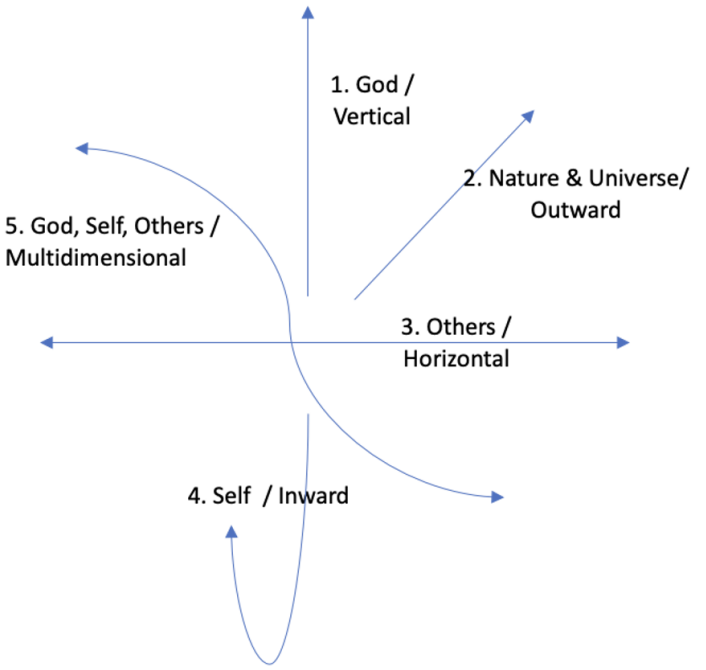
Five Trajectories of Spirituality and Scholarship

In reflecting on the themes in the call for proposals for this special topic issue, I see (at least) five foci/trajectories that spirituality and scholarship can take. Scholarship and spiritual practice can interact by trajectories that are:

1) Vertical: enlarging our understanding of God
2) Outward: revealing an understanding of nature and the cosmos/universe
3) Horizontal: improving our spiritual service to others
4) Inward: deepening our spiritual identity
5) Multidimensional: providing a spiritual understanding through difficult life events and finding meaning and interconnectedness with God, self & others.

This is represented below in Figure 1. Five Foci/Trajectories of the Intersections of Spirituality and Scholarship. I will discuss each trajectory with some examples of research with that focus, and conclude with some suggestions for further exploration and research. Note that these categories often overlap, and studies often have multiple trajectories or two or more of the five foci, but overall studies tend to have a predominant focus and direction.

Figure 1. Five Foci/Trajectories of the Intersections of Spirituality and Scholarship



Scholarly Enquiry on and as Spiritual Practice (focus: God; trajectory: vertical)

This type of scholarly enquiry focuses on God and spiritual practices. Spiritual practices can include among other things, prayer, meditation, mindfulness, pilgrimage/hajj, fasting, singing/chanting, reading/studying/memorizing sacred texts, almsgiving, corporate worship/fellowship, yoga, bowing/kneeling/prostrating, dancing/twirling, evangelism/missions, and sacrificial

service to others. The field of theology specializes in the study of God, religious beliefs and spiritual practices, but scholars in many fields have researched this trajectory, for example, the impact of prayer on patients' wellbeing and healing in nursing.

In the field of ELT, an example from my students is a study in an Action Research course conducted during the Covid lockdown. Students conducted a study of the spiritual practices they and others used to cope with the isolation and depression they were experiencing and the perceived impact their spiritual practices had on their faith formation and relationship with God during this time[4]. They surveyed each other and read about spiritual practices Christians use when faced with isolation and depression, and reflected and wrote about the impact these practices had on themselves. While this might also be classified as Self/inward (number 4 in Figure 1), the focus on specific spiritual practices and on one's understanding of God in times of crisis places this along the vertical trajectory.

Scholarly Enquiry to understand the Natural world (focus: natural world; trajectory: outward)

Studies that focus on spirituality and the natural world are found in the sciences, for example, studies that seek to understand how the universe started and the evolution of homo sapiens, and the apparent evidence of a creator based on the complexity of nature. A plethora of studies, books, and societies on faith and science can be found with just a cursory search. One can also find scholarship on spirituality and the natural world in my field of language education that dates back to the 17-century scholar, John Amos Comenius (1728) in his work *Orbis Pictus*.

Questions about language, the natural world, and religion arise from the fields of Literature, Theology, and Sociolinguists. These questions might include: How do creation stories in different religions describe the use of language (God spoke

4 This Action Research was not published beyond the class presentations in the course.

the world into existence, for example)? How do sacred texts refer to languages, their purpose, and how one communicates with God? How is language diversity a blessing or a curse, and what does it teach us about who we are and our place in the cosmos? In the afterlife of various religions, what languages do we imagine will be spoken and heard? Perhaps not just the 7,000 that we have today, but the millions that have existed and will be created throughout all of time. Will we all be able to understand them or even speak them?

These questions cannot be researched on this side of heaven, or Valhalla, or whatever one calls one's afterlife, but imagining them helps us comprehend the complexity of the human condition and one's spirituality, and the ability to create and use languages. In my Sociolinguistics course, we watch clips from the 2016 film Arrival, in which a linguist communicates with alien lifeforms to consider the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and ponder how language can impact not only our conception of our physical and social reality, but also time itself. I am not aware of studies that have explored these aspects of spirituality, nature, and language, but science fiction allows us to imagine them.

Scholarly Enquiry as Spiritual Service (focus: others; trajectory: horizontal)

The horizontal trajectory of scholarly enquiry as spiritual service is not difficult to find and describe, especially in the fields of education and health. Those serving in schools and hospitals as missionaries speak of their spiritual calling to go and live in other countries as an act of service to others to live out their faith (Wong, 2016). In "Called to Teach: The Impact of Faith on Professional Identity Formation of Three Western English Teachers in China" (Wong, 2013) I researched how faith informed the pedagogy and professional identity formation of three Christian English teachers in a longitudinal study that spanned ten years. Findings demonstrated that faith informed the teachers' reasons to enter the field as expressed in their "calling to teach"; their commitment to teach well and what they focused on in teaching; and how they responded to critical incidents. For these teachers, the construct of religious identity (in this case their Christian identity) and the construct of pedagogy were interrelated.

There are many other studies and examples of how faith impacts service to others. Through interdisciplinary conferences on faith and the academy I have been involved in, I was amazed at how those in many disciplines regard their scholarship and practice as service unto God. Examples include artists' beautiful visual expressions of the spiritual, musicians' original scores that transports us to God, historians, who bring to light the untold stories of the oppressed and their faith journeys, coaches whose faith motivates teams to glorify God, counselors who draw upon sacred texts and spiritual practices to heal those who encountered trauma, and the list goes on.

Scholarly Enquiry as Identity Quest (focus: self; trajectory: inward)

Scholarly inquiry into one's own spiritual identity, takes an inward trajectory by definition, as it is intentionally bi-directional, seeking to understand the process of spiritual formation with the goal of deepening one's spiritual connection to God.

A personal example is a chapter by Wu & Wong (2013) called "Forever changed": Emerging TESOL educators' global Learning and spiritual formation on a study abroad trip in Myanmar. In this chapter, my co-author and I examined student journal entries and found overlap in gains of intercultural sensitivity and growth in spiritual formation. Examples in education of exploring one's inner life of spirituality are Parker Palmer's influential works, *The Courage to Teach* (1997) and *An Active Life* (1999), among many others. These are written from a Quaker's perspective, yet in a way that is welcoming to those of all faiths, free of faith--specific jargon, which make them applicable to those in all disciplines. Other examples in education are the numerous studies of the use of mindfulness and meditation, which is considered a Buddhist spiritual practice. See for example, *A Buddhist in the Classroom* by Sid Brown (2008).

Scholarly Enquiry as the Search for Meaning of Life Events (Focus: God, Self & Others: trajectory multidimensional)

The last trajectory, which I call multidimensional, has a large literature base as thousands of authors have written about their personal traumatic life

experiences and how their faith has helped them make sense of and come to terms with these events. This trajectory typically includes deep reflection upon impactful life events, and seeks an understanding of how the events impact their relationships to others, self, and God. Analysis of reflective accounts such as diaries and books written during war, captivity, and other tragic events include the many works from and about the holocaust. Analysis of The Hiding Place by Corrie Ten Boom (2006), is an example. Although this scholarship is often personal, with the authors reflecting on their own lives, other scholars can also follow this trajectory to research databases of others.

This includes databases of missionaries, who were often meticulous about writing about and reflecting on their work in letters and reports which were often kept by their sending agencies and loved ones. In some cases, these documents were later made available by archivists in special collections of universities. This makes them available for analysis by scholars, seeking insights into how missionaries came to terms with their spirituality and traumatic life experiences. For example, I had the opportunity to examine the personal correspondence of a missionary educator in China, Luella Miner. I read boxes of letters spanning almost five decades found in the archines of special collections at Harvard and Yale. I wrote a summary of my findings in the article, *The Legacy of Luella Miner* (Wong, 2016), documenting how Luella made sense of political and social events that shaped and changed China while she was there from 1887 to 1935. This type of archival research provides a wealth of opportunities to research the impact of faith in understanding key events in history.

For examples of research and spiritual research paradigms from Confucian, Daoist, Hindu and other perspectives that focus on this and other trajectories, see Lin, Oxford, and Culham's edited volume (2016).

Final Thoughts on the Legitimacy of Spirituality and Scholarship

Scholarship in each of these five trajectories can be transformational and valuable, but needs to be rigorous and follow the standards of academic research

to be accepted in the academy. This call to rigor was noted from scholars in an edited volume on English Language Teaching (ELT) research and Christianity. The invited scholars who wrote response chapters in the Wong, Kristjánsson, and Dörnyei (2013) volume offered suggestions for those doing research on faith and English teaching. Kubanyiova (2013) encouraged researchers of faith and teaching to maintain the same level of rigor expected of research in any area, namely to construct rich portraits of teachers, generate thick descriptions of practice, and include examinations of power and bias. Smith (2013) urged researchers to engage in a deeper exploration of the relationship of faith and teaching, one that is more complex, rich, and expanded. Smith also suggested the application of coordinated attention to beliefs, practices, institutional dynamics, and divergent interpretations in various contexts. Ushioda (2013) recommended researchers use qualitative and exploratory research approaches for this type of inquiry but also acknowledge the researchers' voice in the co--constructed context and co-text of the interview data in analysis.

The introduction of this article mentioned the desire to offset the Anglophone Eurocentric center, to find other ways of knowing and understanding. Making space for scholarship that focuses on the spiritual is one way to do this. As I have stated elsewhere, "one might make the claim that we are in fact imposing our Western views by *not* allowing space for discussions of spirituality in scholarship" (Wong, 2009, p. 94). Or as it is more deftly stated by Newbigin (1989) "The sharp line which modern Western culture has drawn between religious affairs and secular affairs is itself one of the most significant peculiarities of our culture and would be incomprehensible to the vast majority of people who have not been brought into contact with this culture" (p. 133). Thus, we may be promoting the Western dichotomy of secular and sacred by ignoring the spiritual dimensions of ourselves and our scholarship and the spiritual practices embedded in all cultures. Since culture is shaped in profound ways by religious beliefs and practices, it seems odd that discussion of spiritual aspects of our lives and our teaching is not more prevalent in scholarship.

For some, the consideration of spirituality in scholarship may seem odd or feel uncomfortable at first, given the past few centuries of Anglo-centric epistemological perspective of positivism. However, religion and the academy actually have a long

history, as many if not most academic institutions were founded with strong ties to religion, be they Monastic schools in Burma founded by Buddhist Monks, the first colleges in China started by Christian missionaries, Ivy league colleges in the US with Christian foundations, and Islamic Madrasas and universities in the middle east. Many have argued that these strong religious ties to colleges and universities carry the potential to impede scholarly inquiry by reinforcing dogmatic views, or restricting academic freedom such as in the case of Galileo who was sentenced to formal imprisonment by the church in Rome for stating the earth moves around the sun. Yet arguments can also be made that the human desire to search for a force or being who created and sustains our life, world and universe has also been one of the strongest motivators for scholarly inquiry, and that the view of trying to secularize education is actually a world-view of its own (Taylor, 2007).

So why, then, has spirituality and scholarship been kept apart? Canagarajah (2018) states the following:

> Though spiritual beliefs and experiences have always influenced teaching and scholarship, the modern educational system had not given us a space to talk about them. Education as it was conceived in the western European enlightenment tradition assumed that religion constituted a form of harmful bias, blind adherence to tradition, and unexamined knowledge that needed to be kept out of teaching and scholarship. However, recent philosophical changes suggest the significance of religion and spirituality in education (p. xvii).

The significance of spiritual beliefs in education, and in society as a whole, is important to note, with great potential for research, examining how religion and spirituality impact our identities, knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and practices.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the discussion of the five trajectories of scholarship and spirituality and the related studies discussed here will inspire future research

and scholarship in these areas. Readers are encouraged to consider the many ways in which scholarly enquiry relates to spirituality be it as: 1. spiritual practice (God/vertical); 2. understanding of the universe (the natural World/outward); 3. spiritual service (others/horizontal); 4. identity quest (self/inward); 5. a search for meaning of life events (God, Self & Others: Multidimensional). These five forms of spiritual scholarship have their own focus (on God, Nature, Others, Self, the Cosmos,) and trajectory (vertical, outward, horizontal, inward, and interconnected). It is argued that bi-directional reflexive work of scholars reflecting on the spiritual aspects of themselves and their work has the potential to be transformative, impacting both research and the researcher.

References

Bleistein, T., Wong, M. S., & Smith, D. (2013). A working bibliography: Christian faith and language teaching and learning. In M. S. Wong, C. Kristjánsson, & Z. Dörnyei (Eds.), *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning: Research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT* (pp. 235-266). New York: Routledge.

Boom, C. T., Sherrill, E., & Sherrill, J. (2006). *The hiding place*. Ada, MI: Choosen Books.

Brown, S. (2008). *A Buddhist in the classroom*. Albany: SUNY.

Byron, J., & Lohr, J. N. (2015). *I (still) believe*: *Leading Bible scholars share their stories of faith and scholarship*. Zondervan.

Comenius, J. A. (1728). *Orbis sensualium pictus/Visible world* (C. Hoole, trans.). London: John and Benjamin Sprint (Original work published 1658).

Canagarajah, S. (2018). Forward: Complexifying our understanding of spirituality. In M. S. Wong, & A. Mahboob (Eds.), *Spirituality & English language*

teaching: Religious explorations of teacher identity, pedagogy, and context (pp. xvii-xix). Multilingual Matters.

Jacobsen, D., & Jacobsen, R. (2004). *Scholarship and Christian faith: Enlarging the conversation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Kubanyiova, M. (2013). Towards understanding the role of faith in the development of language teachers' identities: A modest proposal for extending the research agenda. In M. S. Wong, C. Kristjánsson, & Z. Dörnyei (Eds.), *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning: Research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT* (pp. 85-91). New York: Routledge.

Lin, J., Oxford, R., & Culham, T. (Eds.) (2016). *Toward a spiritual research paradigm: Exploring new ways of knowing, researching, and being*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Marsden, G. M. (1997). *The outrageous idea of Christian scholarship*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Newbigin, L. (1989). *The gospel in a pluralistic society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Noll, M. A. (1994). *The scandal of the evangelical mind*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Palmer, P. (1999). *The active life: A spirituality of work, creativity, and caring*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Palmer, P. (1997). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teachers' life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Smith, D. I. (2013). Frameworks for investigating faith and ESL: A response to Snow, Lessard-Clouston, and Baurain. In M. S. Wong, C. Kristjánsson, & Z. Dörnyei (Eds.), *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning: Research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT* (pp. 154-164). New York, NY: Routledge.

Smith, D. I. (2008). On viewing learners as spiritual beings: Implications for language educators. *Journal of Christianity and Foreign Languages*, *9*, 34-48.

Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*. Harvard University Press.

Ushioda, U. (2013). Christian faith, motivation, and L2 learning: Personal, social, and research perspectives. In M. S. Wong, C. Kristjánsson, & Z. Dörnyei (Eds.), *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning: Research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT* (pp. 223-229). New York, NY: Routledge.

Wolterstorff, N. (1999). Can scholarship and Christian conviction mix? A New Look at the Integration of Knowledge. *The International Journal of Christianity & Education*, *3*(1), 35-50.

Wolterstorff, N. (2002). *Educating for life: Reflections on Christian teaching and learning*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Wong, M. S. (2013). Called to teach: The impact of faith on professional identity construction of western English teachers in China. In M. S. Wong, C. Kristjánsson, & Z. Dörnyei (Eds.), *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning: Research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT* (pp. 11-30). New York: Routledge.

Wong, M. S. (2009). Deconstructing / reconstructing the missionary English teacher identity. In M. S. Wong, & A. S. Canagarajah (Eds.), *Christian and critical English language educators in dialogue: Pedagogical and ethical dilemmas* (pp. 91-105). New York: Routledge.

Wong, M. S. (2014). The history, nature and future of faith-informed research in English language teaching. *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching*, *1*(1), 6-23. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/ijc-elt/vol1/iss1/3/.

Wong, M. S. (July, 2016). The legacy of Luella Miner. *The International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Retrieved from https://www.growkudos.com/publications/10.1177%25252F2396939316649186/reader. DOI: 10.1177/2396939316649186.

Wong, M. S., & Canagarajah, A. S. (Eds.) (2009). *Christian and critical English language educators in dialogue: Pedagogical and ethical dilemmas*. Routledge.

Wong, M. S., Kristjánsson, C., & Dörnyei, Z. (Eds.) (2013). *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning: Research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT*. New York: Routledge.

Wong, M. S., & Mahboob, A. (Eds.) (2018). *Spirituality & English language teaching: Religious explorations of teacher identity, pedagogy, and context*. Multilingual Matters.

Wu, S. F., & Wong, M. S. (2013). "Forever changed": Emerging TESOL educators' global learning and spiritual formation on a study abroad trip in Myanmar. In M. S. Wong, C. Kristjánsson, & Z. Dörnyei (Eds.), *Christian faith and English language teaching and learning: Research on the interrelationship of religion and ELT* (pp. 47-65). Routledge.

sciendo

DOI 10.2478/doc-2024-0003

Samuel Kwesi Nkansah

Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Ghana

snkansah@ucc.edu.gh

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0181-4589

Emmanuel Mensah Bonsu

Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Ghana

ebonsu@stu.ucc.edu.gh

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7867-8204

Indigenous Place Names: A Literary Toponomastics Study of Suburb Names in Cape Coast

Article history:

Received: **25 November 2024**

Revised: **03 March 2024**

Accepted: **03 March 2024**

Available online **24 June 2024**

Abstract: Most toponomastics research has ignored the importance of indigenous places as sites for identity and other cultural and social significance. Using Cape Coast as a historical site of the transatlantic slave trade, this study explores the origin, meanings and relevance of indigenous place names in the suburbs of Cape Coast, Ghana. Through an interdisciplinary approach that synergizes an interview with a chief, who is a prosopographer, historical documents, and literary sources, this study traces the city's evolution from its ancestral hunting origins. The findings revealed that Cape Coast's identity is encapsulated in the indigenous names, which point out the complex dynamics of culture, geography, identity and power. The names reference landmarks, events, environment and communities, transforming the city itself into a living archive with historical relevance. The literary interpretations uncovered metaphorical meanings encoded in some toponyms. Tracing connections across people, events, geography and time, these names reveal an interconnection often obscured by colonial ruptures. Based on these findings, there is a need to preserve the indigenous place names to foster intergenerational connections to the city's storied landscape. The study contributes to Critical Toponymy theory and empirical insights into using indigenous toponyms to decolonize urban heritage.

Keywords: Cape Coast, indigenous names, literary, metaphor, toponomastics

Introduction

From time immemorial, humanity has been driven by a profound impulse to make sense of our experiences and existence through stories, symbols, and

meaning-making practices. As Ivanič (1998) states, scholarship always represents a delicate negotiation "between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other" (p. 86). Behind the methodical veneer of academic research lies a fundamentally human yearning for purpose, understanding, and continuity in the face of life's flux. Nowhere is this delicate dance between the personal and disciplinary more evident than in practices of place naming. Toponyms, whether conferred through oral traditions or institutionalized nomenclature, reveal the complex interplay between official conventions and vernacular creativity in inscribing meaning onto local landscapes. Azaryahu (1996) argues that the commemorative naming of the cityscape is intended to shape group consciousness through cultural ideals, civic virtues, and historical memories. However, dominant historical narratives intertwine with folk stories and community perspectives (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009). Rose-Redwood et al. (2010) propose the value of critical toponymic research in elucidating the contested politics of place naming across different social groups and periods of history. This study's literary analysis of indigenous Mfantse place names in Cape Coast represents one such quest to trace personal and ancestral attempts to consecrate meaning amid rapid change. This research aims to address this gap through a literary toponomastics study of indigenous Mfantse (Anglicized as Fante) place names in the suburbs of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Cape Coast, originally named *Cabo Corso* by the Portuguese in the 15th century, has a long and complex history of colonialism and transatlantic slave trade. Toponyms in Cape Coast today reveal layers of Mfantse, colonial Portuguese, Dutch, Danish and British influences. The outskirts of Cape Coast are home to many towns and villages, likely retaining indigenous Mfantse heritage through their place names. The Mfantse people are part of the Akan ethnolinguistic group, speaking the Mfantse dialect of Twi (Allman, 1990). Under successive Portuguese, Dutch, Danish and British colonial rule from the 15th century onwards, the original Mfantse presence and perspective in Cape Coast was increasingly suppressed and erased (Anquandah, 1982). More broadly, affirming indigenous Mfantse place names recognizes and honors Mfantse perspectives within Cape Coast's complex multicultural heritage. In the face of extensive cultural destruction under colonialism, preserving and celebrating Mfantse toponyms becomes an act of cultural reclamation and

empowerment. Scholars have called for greater attention to Akan place names as windows into folklore, history and culture (Anquandah, 1982).

In this study, we conduct a literary toponomastics analysis of indigenous place names in primary indigenous suburbs of Cape Coast. Through literary toponomastics, we examine indigenous place names through the lens of oral narratives, supported by literary interpretations, moving beyond literal meanings to explore imaginative and symbolic connotations (Tent & Blair, 2011). We aim to identify and analyze Mfantse toponyms, associated stories and meanings. The study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, including oral history, literary studies and qualitative ethnographic methods. The study contributes to decolonizing African toponymy and demonstrates the value of literary toponomastics for illuminating cultural meanings within indigenous place names. Against this backdrop, the study is guided by two research questions:

1) What is the origin and literary relevance of the indigenous names of prime suburbs in Cape Coast?
2) How do the indigenous place names of the prime suburbs contribute to the identity and sense of place in Cape Coast?

Literature Review

Previous Studies on Toponomastics

Studies on toponomastics have explored a variety of issues, including the relationship between place names and language attitudes, the impact of language contact on place names, and the role of place names in identity construction and maintenance. For instance, Ryder (2011) analyzed place names in the American West, finding that descriptive names like Long Valley or incidents like Battle Creek were common. Surnames like Washington and Jefferson became widespread in cities as against the countryside. Ryder (2011) argues that place names thus encode cultural history. Meanwhile, Guyot (2017) examined the indigenous origins of place names, such as Mississippi, which derives from the Anishinaabe language. He reported that

the meaning is "Great River" or "gathering of waters". The name, Misi-ziibi, was then changed to Mississippi following the French colonialist settlements (Guyot, 2017). Toponomastics interacts significantly with linguistics in analyzing the phonology, morphology, semantics, and grammar of place names. De Felice (2012) examined the phonological adaptation of place names spread through migration, colonialism, and globalization. Sung (2013) explored the morphology of toponyms, finding suffixes like "-ville" productive in creating new names. On semantics, place names may refer to people, geography, events, activities, or qualities (Berezkina, 2016).

Scholars have applied diverse theories and methodologies to study place naming. Drawing on social identity theory, Guyot and Seethal (2007) argue that renamings of places reflect identity shifts at personal, community, and national levels. Azaryahu (1996) uses critical toponymy to expose how place names transmit dominant historical narratives and ideologies. Similarly, Erikha (2021) adopted the critical toponmies theory to investigate the renamings between Javanese and Sundanese. Guided by the aim of examining the connections between naming, place-making, and power, she found that renamed cities and localities were opposed by several people despite the positive intentions of the government. Meanwhile, Berg and Vuolteenaho (2009) critique quantitative computational approaches and call for richer qualitative, interpretive methods focusing on meanings and contexts.

A major area of critical toponym research is examining how place naming intersects with power and politics. Light and Young (2015) argue place naming is an act of textual authority; naming or renaming places is an instrument for social control. Algeo and Algeo (2012) investigated how place names in the southern U.S. reflected the power of White supremacy through segregatory toponyms. Meanwhile, Rose-Redwood and Alderman (2011) studied processes of decolonization through the widespread renaming of places across Africa. Current developments in toponomastics include studying changes under globalization, digitization, and the growth of unofficial place names. Azaryahu (2018) proposes studying toponymic conflict and interaction at globalized borders. Gao et al. (2017) map how internet technology and crowdsourcing are generating unofficial place names like hashtags. As well, some scholars argue for greater interdisciplinarity, connecting place name research more firmly with geography, GIS, ecology, and public policy (Boucher & Bonn, 1995).

The ongoing review highlights four key areas that are addressed in the present study. First, much of the current research is in Anglo-American and Asian contexts and other major urban centres (Boucher & Bonn, 1995; Gao et al., 2017; Wu & Young, 2022). Less attention has been paid to intermediate cities and smaller settlements. This study focuses on the suburbs of Cape Coast, a mid-sized coastal area. This adds to how place naming in suburbs differs from major cities and urban areas. Second, there appears to be no study that has investigated the literary dimensions embedded in place names. Most studies have focused on socio--political and linguistic perspectives (Azaryahu, 1996; De Felice, 2012; Light & Young, 2015; Sung, 2013). In this study, we explore the issues of identity, relevance of names, and sense of place within the socio-cultural geography of Cape Coast. We argue that the indigenous place names carry rich metaphorical and symbolic meanings that can be uncovered through literary analysis. Third, this study addresses gaps in examining the interconnected nature of place identities and meanings. Existing research often examines place identity and sense of place separately (Rose-Redwood, 2008). This study provides a more holistic perspective on how naming practices shape cultural imagination and belonging. Cape Coast's unique history enhances this place identity dynamics as both a European colonial hub and centre of the transatlantic slave trade (Potter, 2019). This study's focus on indigenous place names reveals African cultural resilience despite colonialism's disruptions (Mahoney, 2009). Finally, echoing Ingold's (1993) concept of landscape "tempos", Cape Coast's place names embody a community's dwelling within their ecosystem through seasonal mobility, economic adaptations, and the imprint of lives, deaths and dreams along ancestral paths (De Certeau, 1988). This intergenerational fusion of nature, culture and memory contradicts assumptions of rigid borders between societies and environments.

Critical Toponymy: Exploring Indigenous Place Names

Toponomastics, the study of place names and their origins, is a fascinating interdisciplinary field that straddles linguistics, geography, history, anthropology, and other areas. The naming of places and geographic features is a universal human phenomenon that provides insight into language, culture, landscape, and identity.

According to Stewart (1975), place names generally originate from descriptions of the physical environment, incidents that occurred there, the names of individuals, or pre-existing names used by indigenous inhabitants. Critical toponomy is a pluralistic theory that is open to new ideas and experiments (Rose-Redwood et al., 2017). Critical toponymy adds value to the diverse naming practices of different languages, cultures, and social groups as part of the complex pluralistic meanings embedded in the names. It fits into the larger field of toponomastics.

Critical toponymy examines the intersection between place naming, power and ideologies that shape naming practices (Erikha, 2021; Rose-Redwood et al., 2017). Although this theory is still in its emergence, it offers a critical perspective to explore indigenous place names in Cape Coast, Ghana. Place names reflect social constructions rather than neutral labels. Rose-Redwood (2011) explains that places and their names do not have inherent meaning; however, they acquire meanings through complex social processes and power relations. In the context of the present research, names become a viable site where cultural meanings and social hierarchies are produced and negotiated. Hence, the names reflect the values and worldviews of the people who named the place (Rose-Redwood, 2011). This connects to the issues of power and colonization in Cape Coast. The issue of power in critical toponymy presents an effort to decolonize the place name systems associated with Eurocentric notions of space (Carter, 2004). The theory aims to centre indigenous naming practices in an urban space, recognizing the names as important sites of communal identity and belonging (Vuolteenaho & Berg, 2009).

Scholarship on critical toponymy has analyzed how the naming of places is interconnected with politics, power, and spatial meanings (Alderman, 2000, 2003; Hui, 2019; Marin, 2012). As argued by Berg and Kearns (1996), the process of naming places plays a role in how places are socially constructed and contested. Place naming is part of how the symbolic and material order is produced and reproduced, serving as a way of normalizing or legitimating dominant power relations. According to Rose-Redwood et al. (2018), the act of naming places constitutes a performative expression of authority over how spaces are organized and understood. Within the complex pluralism of the theory, place names reflect and reproduce power structures and social hierarchies (Berg &

Kearns, 1996). More importantly, critical toponymy facilitates the adoption of an ethnographic, community-based approach that engages local knowledge and perspectives to understand place naming holistically. This grounds the analysis of lived realities and the naming traditions of indigenous communities. In practice, we adopt this theory to examine the etymologies, semantics, and contributions of the indigenous place names in Cape Coast, tracing history, language, and identity from a literary perspective. Second, through this theory, we aim to unravel how certain names became dominant through colonial processes and indigenous interactions. Finally, it offers a robust perspective for rediscovering and foregrounding Cape Coast's diverse indigenous place names and heritage.

Materials and Methods

Design and Approach

Meanings emerge from the unknown depths of life, before fading away again into mystery. The study of place names represents an ongoing effort to capture those fleeting moments of insight and local meaning before they disappear. This quest is especially evident in the literary analysis of place names. Based on this assertion, this study adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative design to explore indigenous place names in the suburbs of Cape Coast, Ghana. Situated in the interpretivist paradigm, this study endeavors to provide the meaning of the indigenous place names. As noted by Creswell and Creswell (2017), the qualitative research design targets narratives, texts, and lived experiences for interpretation and meaning. Rather than just asserting political views or tracing population changes, critically examining place names tries to uncover the imagination, symbols, and essential awareness of communities that get embedded into Cape Coast's history, which is linked to several parts of the world. Berg and Vuolteenaho (2009) argue that qualitative interpretive methods are better able to grasp the subtle shades of meaning and background that quantitative computational approaches miss. Beyond numbers and charts, literary place name analysis seeks to crystallize the profound yet elusive ways communities perceive existence and infuse

the places they inhabit with layers of significance. As such, the study aims to determine the meanings and significance of the names in a specific cultural setting rather than quantify their occurrence. Within the qualitative design, the study dwells on the case study approach, focused on Cape Coast, Ghana, as a case. The case study allows for a rich localized interpretation of the indigenous place names (Yin, 2009).

The case study of Cape Coast is fitting given its unique history with the transatlantic slave trade and the complex colonial influences on toponyms. The case study allows for other investigations in other contexts that share similarities with Cape Coast. The study has an exploratory purpose to reveal the cultural and historical relevance of the indigenous place names. This aligns with the purpose of Critical Toponymies theory, which reveals perspectives from the names (Rose-Redwood, 2011). Based on the case study approach, the study synergizes cultural geography, literary studies, and ethnography (interview). This provides a holistic lens on place names (Boucher & Bonn, 1995). The study's literary toponomastics connects the indigenous place names to oral narratives and symbolic interpretations, moving beyond literal meanings (Gardiner, 2012). In this regard, the qualitative exploratory case study facilitates cultural analysis of indigenous place names of prime suburbs in Cape Coast, serving the goals of Critical Toponymies research.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The nature of the study was subjective, which required careful data collection and analysis procedures. For a start, the primary data source was an in-depth interview with a chief who is knowledgeable about the city's history and place name origins. The chief's role as *Tufohene* (a term in Akan culture that means advisor of the chief) in the Oguaa traditional area makes him the custodian of oral traditions and histories, providing insightful perspectives. He symbolizes self--assurance, and confidence, and is the overseer of the Asafo (warriors) company in the traditional area. He maintains peace, unity, and development. The interview with the chief provides a rich context for interpreting the indigenous place names. However, to achieve data triangulation and enhance the trustworthiness of

the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we compared the interview data with histories crafted in literary texts and other historical documents and publications (such as *Cape Coast Castle* by Opoku-Agyemang and *The Healers* by Armah). Using multiple sources validates the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview focused on uncovering the meanings and significance behind prime suburb names. The literary analysis, based on the texts and documents, helped situate the names in a cultural and historical context. The suburb names were compiled into a table (see Table 1).

We conducted a thematic analysis guided by a constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2017) in coding the data to reveal patterns for discussion. We undertook a thematic analysis because it is a standard technique for qualitative studies to discern patterns and critical themes (Nowell et al., 2017). Paying close attention to the interview data, we iteratively examined the data, in tandem with the other sources, to construct the themes. The themes were grouped under the research questions formulated in the introduction. The literary perspective of the analysis unearths allusions, metaphors, indirections, and symbols to uncover hidden historico-cultural ideologies in the names. Concerning ethical considerations, the chief was fully informed about the nature and purpose of the study and he expressed his enthusiasm for the research. After the analysis, we did a member-checking with the chief to verify the findings. His responses in the interview and the checking were impersonal as well.

Table 1. Indigenous place names and commentaries

Indigenous Names	Commentaries
Oguaa	A name derived from the first settler.
Amamoma	The name evolved from the indigenous name of the rubber plant because there was a rubber plantation there.
Amanfu	Amanfu means 'new settlement'. It evolved as a result of increasing economic activities.
Anaafo	Anaafo means 'south of Amanfu'. It was created by some young men of Bentsir Asafo Company.

Brofo ye Dur	The name translates as 'English is heavy'. The name is from incessant sayings that the whiteman's language is heavy to the ear.
Tromu	Tromu means 'garden'. Currently, it is the place where the Methodist Mission is located opposite NIB Bank in Cape Coast.
Abeadze	This means 'palm plantation'. It was close to Tromu.
Kawanopaado	The name translates as 'close your mouth'. This follows a call to urge the natives to keep quiet and not disturb the Europeans.
Bakaano/ Bakatsir	These mean 'the mouth of a lagoon'/ 'the end of a lagoon'. This was a busy battleground in Cape Coast as that marked the entry point for people to enter Cape Coast.
Victoria Park	It has been renamed to 'Jubilee Park'. It was named after one of the British monarchs. Her bust is erected here.
Coronation Street	It evolved out of the coronation of late Queen Elizabeth II.
Lighthouse	It is a hill overlooking the sea from Coronation Street.
Jerusalem Street	It is a place with leafy canopy falling from lighthouse.
Ntsen	Literally, it means 'linear barrier'. It was a settlement for Ntsen Asafo (warriors).
Bentsir	The name means 'behind the boundary'. The name emanates from the fact that it is beyond the barrier of the Ntsens.
Kente Ekyir	This literally means 'after weaving kente'. The place had its name from the activities of the people who rushed to the place to gather the remnants of the weaving to make fire.
Krutown	It is located opposite the Ntsen stretch; on the top of the hill. It was a forest.
Asante Road	This is the prime suburb of the Asantes who migrated to Oguaa because of the booming commercial activities.
Gyegyemu/ Gyegyeano	These names mean 'within the stretch' and 'the tip of the stretch'. It was believed to be a calm serene space for reflection.
Kotokoraba	This name is a corrupt version of 'Kotoworaba' which means 'a swamp with crabs'.
Siwdo	It means 'on top of the hill'. This is inhabited by another set of migrants from the northern part of Ghana.

Ewim	This means 'the skies'. It got its name from its geographical features.
Mfantsepim/ Kwabotwe	This means spirit of thousands of Mfantses. It reflects a deity that inhabited the hill on which the school is situated.
Aboom Wells	Literally, it means 'well in stones'. This is an offshoot of Bakaano; between Siwdo and Abeadze.
London Bridge	The place was a stream that drew its source of water from the Kotoworaba, Krutown Hills and Jerusalem Hills.

Source: Interview data (2023).

The names in Table 1 are the prime suburbs of Cape Coast that can link to its emergence and rise to fame. After these, there were other novel settlements such as Abura, Esikafo Ambatsem, Apewosika, Ankaful, Akotokyer, Adisadel Estate, Ayifua and so on. Though these are also part of Cape Coast, they did not have a direct bearing on the emergence and rise to fame of Cape Coast. The next section discusses the indigenous names under the two objectives guiding the research.

Discussion

This study is motivated by the rich tapestry of linguistic and cultural diversity embedded in the names of places. Focusing on the toponymic suburb landscape of Cape Coast, this study discusses the literary dimensions of indigenous place names to reveal the profound significance they hold in shaping the cultural identity and historical tapestry of this coastal city. We discuss the origin and literary relevance of the names of the suburbs in the first part of the discussion.

Origin and Literary Relevance of the Names of Suburbs

The names of suburbs, often taken for granted, are far from arbitrary; they are the product of historical, cultural, and linguistic factors that reveal implicit

meanings to the places they represent. We examine the origin and literary relevance of the names based on the evolution and growth of Cape Coast, the significance of the names, and the literary and cultural relevance. These subthemes are intertwined.

Evolution and Growth of Cape Coast

Cape Coast, a name heavily linked to the transatlantic slave trade, transformed from a small indigenous hunting settlement into a thriving commercial centre and strategic British colonial port city. At first glance, the suburb names of any city may seem like innocuous administrative demarcations without greater meaning. However, a careful analysis reveals that these names offer vital insights into the historical identity of a place and its people. The interview unpacks how Cape Coast's suburbs encapsulate different eras and facets of the city's maturation. From the interview data, Cape Coast is traced to the arrival of Egya Oguaa and the small community of *Amamoma*. This early place name, evoking local figures and landmarks, represents the city's ancestral origins as a modest hunting village before the fishing activities. The interview thus grounds Cape Coast's foundational identity in these early settlements predating European contact. The interviewee highlighted that:

> His [Egya Oguaa] hunting expeditions landed him at the place where the Methodist Cathedral is (now) situated and he erected a hut and settled there. Others from where he traded his games followed him and established themselves there. The community gained its name from the first settler. However, prior to the arrival of Egya Oguaa, a community called Amamoma (a community swallowed by the University of Cape Coast) was in existence where workers in the nearby mining site lived. The name Amamoma evolved from the indigenous name of the rubber plant because there was a rubber plantation there (Interview data, 8th October, 2023).

A critical look at the name of the originator of Cape Coast, *Egya Oguaa*, points to the traditional name of Cape Coast, *Oguaa*. The name is derived from *gua*,

which means market (uncorrupted). His settlement led to the establishment of small markets that predated the arrival of Europeans and British colonial power. However, contact with the Europeans recategorized the name as the slave trade (market). The other suburb names, such as *Amamoma*, *Amanfu*, and *Anaafo*, then act as a map charting Cape Coast's rapid growth and transformation into a thriving port city following the arrival of European traders, missionaries and colonists. The names compress centuries of lived experiences into linguistic markers dotting the cityscape. They bear witness to Cape Coast's complex history and identity. The discussion shows how Cape Coast expanded from a small hunting village to a major commercial centre and seat of British colonial power on the Gold Coast, as reflected in names like *Victoria Park* and *Coronation Street*. We discuss the significance of the names in the next section.

Significance of the Names

As stated earlier, Cape Coast's suburb names are more than just administrative labels; they form a living archive of the city's richly layered history and identity. In this section, we reveal how these suburb names encapsulate complex dynamics of language, culture, geography and power within the urban space. Rose-Redwood et al. (2017) argued that street names are enmeshed in the social and individual dynamics of place-making through signification. The interview highlights names like *Brofo Ye Dur* that linguistically capture the friction between English and local Mfantse dialect during the colonial rule. This nature of language politics is etched into the fabric of the city. The interviewee commented that:

> ...As part of the colonial territory, information from the castle were sent to them in English and their difficulty in comprehending it made them exclaim "Borofo ye Dur"; hence the name (Interview data, 8th October, 2023).

Similarly, names like *Bakaano* and *London Bridge* stand as poignant reminders of Cape Coast's pivotal role in the exploitative transatlantic slave trade centred on Britain. The brutal shadow of colonial capitalism manifests in these innocuous indigenous names. For instance, *Bakaano* was a busy battleground

on Cape Coast, as that marked the entry point for rival people to enter Cape Coast to trade with Europeans. This place plays a major mythological role in Armah's novel, *The Healers*.

Meanwhile, names like *Kente Ekyir* and *Siwdo* point to the imprint of the local Mfantse industry and migrant communities on Cape Coast's evolving character. For instance, *Siwdo* embodies the presence of migrant groups like Frafras, Mossis, Dagombas and Dargartis from the northern part of Ghana who contributed their skills and culture to Cape Coast's cosmopolitan activities. The name encapsulates how the assimilated identities of newcomers reshaped the city. Other names offer glimpses into specific neighborhoods flavour and character: *Aboom Wells* as an elite locality, *Kotokoraba* as a bustling migrant market hub, and *Brofo Ye Dur* as a site of local-colonial linguistic tensions. Over time, streets like *Anaafo*, *Tromu*, and *Coronation Street* became imbued with memories of events, families, trades and lives that took root there.

Each suburb name tells the story of a particular epoch, community, or socio--cultural dynamic that left its imprint on Cape Coast. This reiterates the fact that place-making practices, memory, and lived experiences surround street names in a specific socio-cultural geography (Azaryahu, 2011). Together, these multi-layered names reveal the complex symphony of people, occupations, traditions, power relations and moments gone by that have been woven into the fabric of the city throughout its eventful history. In the next section, we explore the literary and cultural relevance of the indigenous place names.

Literary and Cultural Relevance

In this section, we discuss that the suburb names are not simply labels for identifying the various places (Gardiner, 2012). The suburb names render space into a dense memorial landscape through literary, cultural, and historical remembrances (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008). Interestingly, most of the names have been woven into the literary works of Ghanaian writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo and Ayi Kwei Armah. Considering place names as an aspect of traditional knowledge, the names of the suburbs hold crucial literary and cultural relevance that give meaning and structure to Cape Coast.

From the analyzed interview transcript, the suburb names of Cape Coast act as vivid repositories of history and cultural memory rooted in locality and space. These names elucidate the profound interweaving of lived experiences within the urban landscape. *Jerusalem Street*, *London Bridge*, and *Kente Ekyir* are among the names that have literary and cultural relevance. For instance, the name *Jerusalem Street* invokes biblical connotations as a holy site, suggesting divinity and sanctuary. Referencing Jerusalem creates a metaphor for the suburb as a sacred, protected space for its inhabitants, especially during the upheavals of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. The name asserts a sense of dignity and spirituality even when facing brutal external forces (Mazrui & Wondji, 2010).

London Bridge also carries profound literary relevance in marking the suburbs as a liminal space, a point of transition and separation. In Cape Coast, this name denoted where slaves were ritually bathed before being imprisoned, signifying their transition into commodified human cargo heading into the horrors of the Middle Passage (Lawrance et al., 2022). The name signifies the loss of identity, the death of a previous life, and rebirth into bondage under British imperial power. *London Bridge* potently invokes this spatial passing over, while asserting persistent connections between Cape Coast and Britain. Finally, *Kente Ekyir* powerfully condenses cultural philosophies into their proverbial meaning – "after weaving the illustrious Kente cloth, little is left". This metaphor asserts the ephemeral nature of material creations and achievements in life and their ultimate irrelevance after death. The name evokes the vibrant local kente weaving traditions while mapping them onto society's existential struggles for purpose and legacy (Asante, 2022). The sobering message woven into the suburb's name conveys both cultural pride and philosophical reflections on life's fleeting nature.

In essence, the suburb-scape doubles as a living archive inscribed with traces of the past. The names reveal how streets soaked up countless lived experiences that cumulatively shaped the suburb's character. Cape Coast's suburbs resound with echoes of the lives, communities and events that have transpired within them. The names render the suburb-scape into a rich historical, socio-cultural and literary text. They reflect how people and place intertwine to forge communal heritage and identity.

Identity and Sense of Place through Suburb Names

As has been consistently stated, suburb names are not mere labels but serve as powerful expressions of a community's identity and sense of place. We seek to unveil the influence the suburb names exert in shaping the identity and deep--rooted sense of place within these neighbourhoods. We discuss the intricate interplay between names and community, revealing how these toponymic symbols ascribe meaning to Cape Coast.

Local and Historical Landmarks

Several suburb names in Cape Coast directly invoke local historical landmarks that link the city's contemporary identity to its roots. These indigenous names serve as time portals connecting modern neighbourhoods back to their ancestral antecedents and origins anchored in the local landscape. For instance, as we previously discussed, the name *Amamoma* reaches back to an old settlement that predated the arrival of European colonists. It immortalizes a rubber plantation that once defined the area's rural beginnings as a Mfantse hunting village before growing into the port city of Cape Coast. More importantly, another indigenous suburb name is *Bentsir*, which signifies a barrier beyond the *Ntsens*. "*Bentsir* hosted one of the earliest and most famous slave markets in Oguaa, called *Anaafo Market*" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). The need to create space for the development of infrastructure (GCB Bank, Atta Mills Memorial Library, Cape Coast Castle, the Court Complex, Ministries and SSNIT Office Complex) saw the Bentsirs relocate to *OLA* (Our Lady of Apostles), a location between the Atlantic Ocean and the University of Cape Coast.

Similarly, *Aboom Wells* references a unique landmark of marble-like stone wells that became a notable community fixture in a neighbourhood that emerged in the late 1800s. The name etches this local water source into the city's living memory. The interview mentioned that "it is a place where marble-like stones are giving pure crystal water. "It happened to be the street of the affluent/elite community of Oguaa" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). Another example is

London Bridge. More broadly, this name signifies the neighbourhood's role as a passage for the transatlantic slave trade. The name links modernity to traumatic history. The interviewee revealed that the bridge was over a stream that "happened to be the last place of ritual bath for the slaves before their final arrival at the Cape Coast Castle and onward journey to the Americas" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). *London Bridge* is significant in connecting Oguaa (now Cape Coast) to London and the slave trade. More significantly, in connection to the transatlantic slave trade, *London Bridge* is discussed as the point of the final ritual bathing for the slaves after the *Assin Manso* spiritual bathing. Just like the Ohio River in the Americas where slaves who could swim used the Ohio River as a route of escape from slavery, the London Bridge provided choices for the slaves. The London Bridge events provided meaning in both spiritual and physical contexts. During the ritual, those who knew how to swim and were 'smart', swam off the stream into freedom. Such escaped slaves became the inhabitants of Amanfo. Those who could not escape were washed ashore and exported to the Americas as slaves. The stream which is the aggregate of all streams in Cape Coast was symbolic in either baptizing the slaves into slavery or self-emancipated freedom.

Cape Coast's suburb names tangibly tie the present-day cityscape back to its historic building blocks. Places, streets and identities shape each other over time. The names act as imagined maps, tracing the geographic and socio-cultural contours of the city across time. They transform Cape Coast's neighbourhoods into an open living museum imprinted with traces of the past awaiting discovery.

Migration

Migration, whether driven by economic, social, or political factors, has been a transformative force in shaping urban landscapes and their nomenclature. According to Klugah (2013), migration narratives constitute a symbolic historical genre that can be mapped to place names. Cape Coast evolved into a tapestry of diverse cultures as different migrant groups arrived from across Africa and beyond to stake their claims. Many suburb names in Cape Coast directly encapsulate these migrant experiences and imprints on the urban space. For example, the suburb names reflect the spatial organization of a group or region

in response to migration, such as Krutown. Per the oral account, "*Krutown* is a location opposite the *Ntsen* stretch, on the top of the hill. During the expansion of *Oguaa*, migrants from the West African sub-region, such as Liberia, travelled to *Oguaa* to seek greener pastures. A group of Liberians, known as Kru, settled on top of the hill (now the Social Welfare Centre). "This group helped with the construction of Cape Coast" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). They were the workforce used by the British to build Cape Coast castles and other settlements. Similarly, there is *Amanfu* (which means a new settlement). This suburb's name emerged after *Amamoma* in the east of the Cape Coast Castle as a result of the migration of people to *Oguaa* due to the booming commercial activities following the arrival of the Europeans.

Also, the settlement of migrants in suburbs can have a profound impact on the social and economic dynamics of an area. The indigenous suburb names reinforce inter-ethnic activities that were facilitated through trade, such as *Asante Road*, signifying migrant communities from the inland Gold Coast. *Asante Road* is a community of Asantes who migrated to Oguaa because of the booming commercial activities spearheaded by the Europeans. *Asante Road* is at the north end of Krutown Hill. This is where most of the feud between Asantes and Mfantses ignited. Similarly, *Kotokoraba* signifies the area inhabited by Hausa, Fulani and other migrants from northern and sub-Saharan Africa. The migrants settled there and they are still there at the heart of Oguaa. They controlled the commercial activities of Oguaa. The name immortalizes this community's lasting economic and cultural influence on Cape Coast. Interestingly, the place is now a major socio-economic centre in Cape Coast, Central Region.

Together, these names point out the presence of new cultures within the geography of Cape Coast. Such indigenous suburb names enable migrant groups to inscribe their identities and contributions into the social fabric of their adopted city. The names weave diversity into Cape Coast's story and signal the assimilated belongings of these communities. The migrants and their descendants planted firm roots and helped shape Cape Coast's cosmopolitan outlook. The suburb names on the city map testify to their participation in the making of a dynamic trading hub enriched by its myriad of origins. Cape Coast upholds its identity as an amalgam of cultures rather than the product of

any single group. The names collectively narrate a story of adaptation, fusion and multiculturalism – a reminder that diversity strengthens society.

Evocation of the Environment

Place names have a remarkable ability to evoke the aesthetics of their environment, allowing individuals to conjure mental images and emotional connections to specific locales. Certain suburb names in Cape Coast provide vivid descriptive snapshots of the city's distinctive environment. Names like "Tromu" (garden), "Abeadze" (palm plantation) and "Ewim" (skies) linguistically capture floral abundance, avian melodies, aquatic rhythms and celestial vistas unique to this coastal geography. More than just labels, these linguistically evocative names distil the ambience, landscape and 'spirit of place', of different locales into poetic toponyms. For instance, *Tromu*, meaning 'garden', perfectly captures the greenery and fertile nature of a riverside suburban grove that became a verdant community garden. This name employs metaphor to evoke the aesthetics of the environment. The name highlights its leafy essence. Historically, "the place was very fertile, so there were a lot of trees. The European settlers converted it into a garden of many exotic flowers and it became a European settlement" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). To complement *Tromu*, there is *Abeadze* (palm plantation). This is a community close to *Tromu*. The place was full of palm trees that added to the greenery of the "tromu". "It fell off *Tromu* because of its unique vegetation (palm trees)" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023).

Furthermore, *Ewim*, meaning 'the skies', crystallizes the lofty, celestial vistas overlooking Cape Coast from the highest point on the surrounding hills. *Ewim* is on the highest hill in Oguaa, and when one stands on the hill, one sees every part of Oguaa. It used to be one big hill, but due to "the construction of the road between Kotokoraba and Tantri, it became two parts" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). These suburb names reveal the geographic features, such as rivers, mountains, or valleys, that immediately bring to mind the physical characteristics of the environment. Other suburb names reveal the essence of hills and lagoons. For instance, there is *Siwdo* (which means on top of the hill), which also highlights the geographic features of the place. The place provided space for farming and

the rearing of livestock. The interviewee stated that "there is a well at Siwdo where the chiefs are ritually bathed during the celebration of the annual Oguaa Fetu Afahye" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). Concerning the names that signify lagoons, *Bakaano* translates literally to 'mouth of the lagoon' and *Bakakyir* as 'end of the lagoon', conjuring images of a serene coastal suburb located along a lagoon's estuary. The name echoes both the landscape and aquatic rhythms of the area.

Finally, there *is Lighthouse*, a hill overlooking the sea from Coronation Street and opposite St. Francis De Sales' Cathedral. "It served a navigation purpose, though it added to the European presence in Oguaa. *Lighthouse* was (and still is) very vegetative, and its trees provided a canopy for the places beneath the hill" (Interview data, 8th October, 2023). One such place is called *Jerusalem Street*, as the canopy of the hill metaphorically protects the people as mountains protect Israel. Through such descriptively imagistic names, Cape Coast's suburbs come alive with personality and regional flavour. The names render tangible places in the realm of the literary imagination. Echoing the famous line by author Thomas Hardy (2021), "If a way to the better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst", these names compel us to envision the full-lived experience of Cape Coast's distinctive communities. These names paint poetic portraits, capturing the essence of locations.

Commemoration of Personalities and Circumstances

Suburb names often serve as poignant commemorations of personalities and circumstances. They reflect historical figures, events or the unique characteristics of a place. Cape Coast's suburb names form a living memorial to personalities, events and institutions that have shaped the city's collective memory and identity. Through commemoration in toponyms, the city etches selective history into its mapped landscape. From the data gathered, three important names were attributed to this subtheme: *Mfantsipim*, *Victoria Park* and *Coronation Street*. Evocatively, *Victoria Park* and *Coronation Street* immortalize cultural ties with Britain and the monarchy that once ruled Cape Coast and Gold Coast. The names function as linguistic monuments linked to the British colonial era. The interviewee distinguished between these names:

> Victoria Park (now Jubilee Park) is named after one of the British monarchs. It is adjacent to the major European settlements and a reminder of the imperial presence in Oguaa (Interview data, 8th October, 2023).

> Coronation Street is named so because history has it that when Elizabeth came to Cape Coast to erect the bust of Queen Victoria, Elizabeth was driven through the present-day Coronation Street. She was coroneted not long after her return to England, hence the name Coronation Street (Interview data, 8th October, 2023).

While *Coronation Street* commemorates a significant historical event, *Victoria Park* is named after prominent historical figures and their imperial presence that contributed to Cape Coast's development. This historical continuity connects the present community with its past. However, *Mfantsipim* enshrines an esteemed school, almost assuming the chorus of Alma Mater from its halls. Its name signifies the value Cape Coast places on education and its pioneering role in Ghana's school system, carrying this as its motto "Dwen Hwe Kan" (Think ahead). Through commemoration in suburb names, locales transform into sanctuaries of collective memory. Layers of meaning accrue, such that places become repositories of the shared past. The city finds continuity and relevance in what and who it honours across its storied landscape.

Conclusion and Implications

This study set out to conduct a literary toponomastic analysis of indigenous place names in Cape Coast, Ghana. Guided by two questions and drawing on critical toponymy theory, we analyzed indigenous place names collected through an interview and oral narratives. The findings reveal the critical role of indigenous place names in shaping communal identity, evoking history, commemorating figures and events, and capturing the essence of local environments. Relating to previous scholarship, this study supports arguments by scholars like Rose-Redwood (2011) that place names are social constructions reflecting the values

of their namers rather than neutral labels. The analysis shows how Cape Coast's indigenous suburb names encapsulate diverse lived experiences, power dynamics, communities, and moments that have collectively shaped the city's identity. The study also aligns with Azaryahu's (2011) view that place names are enmeshed with memory and place-making. Cape Coast's indigenous toponyms transform the city into an open archive inscribed with traces of the past. These names map constellations of significance across Cape Coast's suburbs that bind spatial sites with cultural identity. Likewise, through trade networks, migration trails and colonial encroachment, waves of Asante, Fante, Danish and British cultures have collided and coalesced, successively inscribing their worldviews into Cape Coast's soil. Each place name signals the assimilated belonging of newcomers, from "Asante Road" to "Kotokoraba" (Hausa) to "Amanfu" ("new settlement"). These interwoven diversities strengthen communal resilience (Azaryahu, 2011; Berg et al., 1996). At root, the city's prime suburb names highlight an ongoing journey toward interconnection and understanding that bind the land, people and past across generations.

Concerning the practical implications, these findings underline the need to preserve and promote indigenous place names as vital cultural heritage reflecting local histories, languages, and identities. A constellation of intimate connections binds all aspects of existence into an intricate cosmic web, though the strands often elude perception. As Eco (1989) explains poetically, "The universe is a sphere whose exact center is any given point. The circumference nowhere" (p. 41). In few domains is this elusive interconnectivity more evident than in exegesis of place and its names, such as Cape Coast. Indigenous suburb names in Cape Coast offer sites where strands of communal experience crystallize, momentarily tangible as "places make memories cohere in space" (Azaryahu & Foote, 2008, p. 183). Hence, the study recommends participatory naming policies that democratize toponymy by engaging local communities. Cape Coast's municipality could collaborate with residents, especially elders and chiefs, to officially recognize the longstanding indigenous names alongside colonial era names. This can be achieved through heritage signage, oral histories, and educational initiatives that nurture intergenerational connections to the place.

For future research, a holistic research could explore more suburbs in the Central Region as a whole to develop a comprehensive indigenous place name inventory. Studies could also examine toponymic shifts over time through spatial mapping and longitudinal analysis. Toponomastic research could be extended to other coastal towns to understand regional place naming practices. For the limitation of the research, we relied on a single interview with a chief, who is a prosopographer. Further studies could complement this approach with archival data, such as documents or newspapers. Nonetheless, as a learned custodian of tradition, his inputs enriched the perspectives on the significance of indigenous place names in encoding cultural meanings.

Acknowledgement

The authors are grateful to the chief, Nana Kwame Edu VI, Tufuhene of Oguaa Traditional Council, for providing extensive information and resources to make this research possible.

Data Availability Statement

The data for the research is available upon request from the corresponding author.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding

The authors received no funding for this research.

References

Alderman, D. (2000). A street fit for a king: Naming places and commemoration in the American South. *The Professional Geographer*, *52*(4), 672-684. DOI: 10.1111/0033-0124.00256.

Alderman, D. H. (2003). Street names as memorial arenas: The reputational politics of commemorating Martin Luther King Jr. in a Georgia county. *Historical Geography*, *31*, 120-137.

Algeo, J., & Algeo, K. (2012). The toponymy of Jim Crow: Reflections on the racial landscape of the American South under segregation. *Names*, *60*(4), 214-224.

Allman, J. M. (1990). Fante factions: The politics of a merchant diaspora, 1650-1980. *African Studies Review*, *33*(3), 23-41.

Anquandah, J. (1982). *Rediscovering Ghana's past*. London: Longman.

Asante, K. W. (2021). Aesthetic, African. In V. Y. Mudimbe, & K. Kavwahirehi (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of African religions and philosophy* (pp. 5-7). Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-94-024-2068-5_5.

Azaryahu, M. (2011). The critical turn and beyond: The case of commemorative street naming. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, *10*(1), 28-33.

Azaryahu, M. (2018). The critical turn and beyond: The case of commemorative street naming. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, *17*(1), 28-33.

Azaryahu, M. (1996). The power of commemorative street names. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *14*(3), 311-330.

Azaryahu, M., & Foote, K. E. (2008). Historical space as narrative medium: on the configuration of spatial narratives of time at historical sites. *GeoJournal*, *73*(3), 179-194.

Berezkina, M. (2016). Semantics of English toponyms. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *236*, 209-214.

Berg, L. D., & Kearns, R. A. (1996). Naming as norming: 'Race', gender and the identity politics of naming places in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *14*(1), 99-122.

Berg, L. D., & Vuolteenaho, J. (2009). Towards critical toponymies. In L. D. Berg, & J. Vuolteenaho (Eds.), *Critical toponymies: The contested politics of place naming* (pp. 1-18). Ashgate.

Boucher, C., & Bonn, F. (1995). From toponyms to topology: Toponymic fields as a geographical information resource. *The Canadian Geographer*, *39*(3), 269-282.

Carter, P. (2004). *Material thinking: The theory and practice of creative research*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing.

Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2006). Linguistic landscape and minority languages. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *3*(1), 67-80.

Charmaz, K. (2017). Constructivist grounded theory. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *12*(3), 299-300.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. London: Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. London: Sage.

De Certeau, M. (1988). *The writing of history*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

De Felice, E. (2012). Place names and linguistic adoption/adaptation. *Names*, *60*(4), 207-214.

Dwyer, O. J., & Alderman, D. H. (2008). Memorial landscapes: Analytic questions and metaphors. *GeoJournal*, *73*(3), 165-178.

Eco, U. (1989). *Foucault's pendulum*. Trans. W. Weaver. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Erikha, F. (2021). Application of the concept of critical toponymies to street name changes in Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya. *Paradigma, Jurnal Kajian Budaya*, *11*(1), 25-41.

Gao, S., Janowicz, K., & Couclelis, H. (2017). Extracting urban functional regions from points of interest and human activities on location-based social networks. *Transactions in GIS*, *21*(3), 446-467.

Gardiner, M. (2012). Oral tradition, landscape and the social life of place--names. In R. C. L. Jones, & S. Semple (Eds.), *Sense of place in Anglo-Saxon England* (pp. 16-30). Donington: Shaun Tyas.

Guyot, S. (2017). Replication and innovation of place names in Australia. *Names*, *65*(2), 67-76.

Guyot, S., & Seethal, C. (2007). Identity of place, places of identities: Change of place names in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *South African Geographical Journal*, *89*(1), 55-63.

Hardy, R. (2021). 'If a way to the better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst': Pearl Buck's American search after 1934. In R. Hardy (Ed.), *Pearl*

S. Buck's novels of China and America: The battle of life (pp. 95-121). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hui, D. L. H. (2019). Geopolitics of toponymic inscription in Taiwan: Toponymic hegemony, politicking and resistance. *Geopolitics*, *24*(4), 916-943. DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2017.1413644.

Ingold, T. (1993). The temporality of the landscape. *World Archaeology*, *25*(2), 152-174.

Ivanič, R. (1998). *Writing and identity: The discoursal construction of identity in academic writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Klugah, A. M. (2013). Recounting history through linguistics: A toponymic analysis of Asogli migration narratives. *African Journal of History and Culture*, 5(8), 151-159.

Light, D., & Young, C. (2015). Toponymy as commodity: Exploring the economic dimensions of urban place names. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *39*(3), 435-450.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London: Sage.

Mahoney, M. (2009). *The persistence of their traditional culture: The Gullah/Geechee of coastal South Carolina*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Antioch University New England.

Marin, A. (2012). Bordering time in the cityscape. Toponymic changes as temporal boundary-making: Street renaming in Leningrad/St. Petersburg. *Geopolitics*, *17*(1), 192-216. DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2011.574652.

Mazrui, A. A., & Wondji, C. (2010). *História Geral da África VIII: África desde 1935*. Brasília: UNESCO.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*, 1-13.

Potter, R. (2019). *Urbanisation in the colonial world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose-Redwood, R. (2008). From number to name: Symbolic capital, places of memory and the politics of street renaming in New York City. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *9*(4), 431-452. DOI: 10.1080/14649360802032702.

Rose-Redwood, R. (2011). Rethinking the agenda of political toponymy. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, *10*(1), 34-41.

Rose-Redwood, R., & Alderman, D. (2011). Critical interventions in political toponymy. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, *10*(1), 1-6.

Rose-Redwood, R., Alderman, D., & Azaryahu, M. (2010). Geographies of toponymic inscription: New directions in critical place-name studies. *Progress in Human Geography*, *34*(4), 453-470.

Rose-Redwood, R., Alderman, D., & Azaryahu, M. (2018). *The political life of urban streetscapes. Naming, politics, and place*. London: Routledge.

Ryder, M. (2011). Rhetorics of naming, or, what's in a toponym? *Western American Literature*, *46*(2), 123-135.

Stewart, G. R. (1975). A classification of place names. *Names*, *23*(4), 257-272.

Sung, J. S. (2013). The morphology of Chinese toponyms. *Names*, *61*(3), 159-169.

Tent, J., & Blair, D. (2011). Motivations for naming: The development of a toponomastic typology for Australian placenames. *Names*, *59*(2), 67-89.

Vuolteenaho, J., & Berg, L. D. (2009). Towards critical toponymies. In L. D. Berg, & J. Vuolteenaho (Eds.), *Critical toponymies: The contested politics of place naming* (pp. 1-18). Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.

Wu, C., & Young, C. (2022). Critical toponymies beyond the power-resistance nexus: Multiple toponymies and everyday life in the (re-) naming of South China Sea Islands. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *24*(4), 1-20.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

sciendo

DOI 10.2478/doc-2024-0004

Juan Pablo Yepes Tobón

Department of Sociology (Undergraduate Student), University of Connecticut, United States

jpseptember17@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0009-0001-1307-5023

Phoebe Godfrey

Department of Sociology, University of Connecticut, United States

phoebe.godfrey@uconn.edu

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0720-8720

Unleashing a Student's River of Being: A Dialogic Exploration of Expanding Possibilities

Article history:

Received **14 May 2024**

Revised **27 May 2024**

Accepted **29 May 2024**

Available online **24 June 2024**

Abstract: Sociology professor Phoebe Godfrey and her former student Juan Pablo Yepes Tobón, engage in boundary-crossing explorations of the relationship between the academy and spirituality – recognizing dialogue as intimate and animate, reflecting the character of spirituality. The purpose of education is posed as the cultivation of the students' inner life. This entails nurturing intrinsic curiosity; encouraging cross-disciplinary, spiritual/ontological consideration; holding space for students to explore their "authentic Self"; and thusly helping the students to discover their "gifts", which arise innately from this spiritual cultivation and flourishing.

This stands in stark opposition to the realities of the modern academy, which has predominantly assumed the patterns of the capitalist context within which it is embedded. The modern academy serves to produce a workforce and echoes positivist notions of "objective knowing". Accordingly, a hierarchical model is assumed, along with an orientation toward grinding intrinsic curiosity out of students from a young age and into higher education. This at once supplants tendencies for "disruption" with an inclination to please authority figures, while predisposing students to forgo autonomous and experiential exploration in exchange for "handed-down" knowledge. Yet there is hope, as our dialogue illustrates, when students' inner lives and spiritual autonomies are prioritized.

Keywords: autonomy, dialogue, academia, Spirituality, pluriverse

Introduction

> Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer (Rainer Maria Rilke, 1929).

The authors of this article were, at one point, professor and student. The former, Phoebe Godfrey, a White, US-born, Europe-raised, woman-identifying lesbian female ("although not very female, but that's fine") – a sociology professor off the tenure track, a community creator, an artist, among other things. The latter, Juan Pablo Yepes Tobón, a Colombian-American, man-identifying male, raised in both countries – an eco-anarchist, a facilitator, an artist, among other things. Yet both were seekers, even before meeting – spiritual seekers, seekers of life and all its connectivity. Both also recognized that the modern classroom, as it exists, holds no space for seeking in this manner. In Phoebe's holding of space through years of tutelage and mentorship, the flourishing of Juan Pablo's spiritual autonomy was nurtured – as was the spiritual autonomy of countless other students that had been ready for such spiritual journeys. As Rilke says, we each must live into our own answers.

Our seeking has brought us together into multiple dialogues, through which we intended to mesh our understandings of spirituality's relationship to academia, under the context of modern capitalist institutions – as well as weave our understandings of where lie the possibilities for spiritual flourishing. In short, we seek to explore the possibilities for the growth and development of the Self (which we understand as our spiritual beings, as opposed to our socialized, socially constructed selves) within today's academy and in so doing we explore deeper questions as to the meaning and purpose of education – as in the overlapping processes of teaching, learning and knowledge making.

These dialogues responding to such questions were the seeds from which this article was grown. Understanding dialogue as a communal weaving of knowledge, our explorations shed the constraints of mathematical argumentation and instead reflect an illustrative form, like a tapestry. We forgo isolated and abstracted conclusions, and instead present the fruit of our

knowledge-making process as this painterly illustration of understanding and experience.

Why a Dialogue?

Our choice of dialogue reflects our understanding of reality as *socially constructed*, as propounded by social theorists such as Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann who in the seminal book The Social Construction of Reality recognize that in its essence social reality is created through conversation. They state:

> The most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation. One may view the individual's everyday life in terms of the working away of a conversational apparatus that ongoingly maintains, modifies and reconstructs his subjective reality... It is important to stress, however, that the greater part of reality – maintenance in conversation is implicit, not explicit.
>
> ...
>
> We have seen how language objectifies the world, transforming the panta rhei ["everything flows" – added] of experience into a cohesive order. In the establishment of this order language realizes a world, in the double sense of apprehending and producing it. Conversation is the actualizing of this realizing efficacy of language in the face-to-face situations of individual existence (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 173).

Given this fluidity of reality construction we additionally recognize the *plurality* of reality. In this article, this takes a central role in how we situate spirituality in academia; namely, via emphasis upon *spiritual autonomy* – practiced through direct, autonomous, and experiential exploration of the world by the experiencer. We align ourselves with the notion of the "pluriverse" – as defined by Latin American post-development theorists rooted in Indigenous thought. Arturo Escobar intuits that the cultural intentions of the "capitalist hetero patriarchal modernity" (2019, p. 121) have invented the notion of

objectivity in order to imbue its own epistemologies with absolute authority, while invalidating those plural ways of constructing reality developed outside of this hegemony. The editors of "Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary" – Escobar included – elaborate: "Whereas the West managed to sell its own idea of One World – known only by modern science and ruled by its own cosmovision – the alter-globalization movements propose pluriversality as a shared project based on the multiplicity of 'ways of worlding'" (Acosta et al., 2019, p. xxxiv.).

Thus we value dialogue as a medium for the constructive intersection of co-existing, impermanent and continually emerging realities. From here, we shall argue for the spiritual empowerment of the student body toward autonomous and communal construction of realities, in opposition to the trend of "One--World" impositions under modern academic institutions.

Glimpses of what we seek for today's young people can be witnessed in the recent Pro-Palestinian, ceasefire, and military-divestment encampments (as in students are asking their universities to divest from the for-profit military industrial complex), which have been supporting multi-racial, religious and political collectivist perspectives, even while remaining focused on these larger transnational and highly complex goals (Abu El-Haj, 2024). What these students seek are dialogues, across political, religious and institutional divides, in opposition to the hegemonic imposition of a singular narrative, so that their views can be collectively heard and their visions collectively woven into reality.

Building on Berger and Luckman's work, we also recognize the insights of Aboriginal scholar Tyson Yunkaporta who describes how the dialogue ritual of Aboriginal epistemology honors this plurality, through the ritual of what he refers to as "yarning".

> ...[Yarning is] a ritual that incorporates elements such as story, humour, gesture and mimicry for consensus-building, meaning-making and innovation. It references places and relationships and is highly contextualised in the local worldviews of those yarning. It has protocols of active listening, mutual respect and building on what others have said rather than openly contradicting them or debating their ideas (2019, "Advanced and Fair" section).

Additionally, Standing Rock Sioux author and activist Vine Deloria Jr. illustrates a similar practice of communal knowledge-weaving in Native American epistemologies:

> In most tribal traditions, no data are discarded as unimportant or irrelevant. Indians consider their own individual experiences, the accumulated wisdom of the community that has been gathered by previous generations, their dreams, visions, and prophecies, and any information received from birds, animals, and plants as data that must be arranged, evaluated, and understood as a unified body of knowledge. This mixture of data from sources that the Western scientific world regards as highly unreliable and suspect produces a consistent perspective on the natural world. It is seen by tribal peoples as having wide application... (Deloria et al., 1999, pp. 66-67)

Reflected across these vantage-points is the fathoming of reality as synonymous with both *experience* and *relationship*. In fact, we assert here that both reality and knowledge are created through relationships; relationships that must be continually co-nurtured and thus co-constructed.

Quantum physics has come to understand that observation is intrinsically interactive, that the very act of perceiving unavoidably influences reality. "At the subatomic level, we cannot observe something without changing it. There is no such thing as the independent observer who can stand on the sidelines watching nature run its course without influencing it", says Gary Zukav, author and teacher, who, in his book *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, explores the overlap between quantum physics and Eastern spiritual understandings (1984, p. 112). The known can never truly be objectified, and the knower can never truly isolate themselves – both are instead always dynamic participants in reciprocal relationship, collectively manifesting reality.

We argue that spirituality is not only intrinsic to, but to some degree synonymous with, knowledge-making. Spirituality, too, is woven from relationships; it is cultivated through direct experience – the intuitive act of touching-as-knowing – of the world's myriad beings. Thus, we claim education should be as participatory and experiential as spirituality is, and as this relationship-reality encourages and even demands.

Dialogue, we understand as the medium which reflects how existence and epistemology are inextricably patterned by relationship, and honors this participatory, experiential animacy of knowledge-making.

Methods

We engaged in multiple recorded dialogues using an online virtual platform to aid both in transcription, but also interestingly enough, heightened intimacy from our cameras' foci on our faces. These dialogues are the basis from which the text for this article is drawn. Through the punctuation and more informal expressions preserved through this medium, the recorded dialogues reflect the emotions and lively engagement that we shared when we had them.

The pattern of our unedited dialogues naturally assumed a spiral pattern of topics – "A-B-C-A-B-C-A-B-C". The richness of our dialogue arose from this animate freedom to 'bounce around'. Writing this article involved resequencing and linearizing this pattern – "AAA-BBB-CCC" – for the sake of accessibility. The body of this article is divided into three sections, reflecting this resequencing. That said, this does not erase the value gleaned from the dialogic process.

Additionally, we have used our dialogues both as our data, and to experience from a meta-cognitive perspective how we individually and collectively understand the embodiment of our own spirituality, as well as human spirituality in general.

Given our transition from quoted dialogue to distanced analysis, at some points we speak in the first person, at other points in the third person. This is done to mimic the scale of intimacy in which we experience our spirituality – as in, sometimes, we are "it" and sometimes we are out of "it", reflecting upon "it".

The dialogue between authors will be presented in the format of:

JP: ...

P: ...

We are the living, amorphous data; thus, our methodology is straightforward, and not.

Spirituality: One's Place in the Self, One's Place in the World

We endeavor to coax and paint a loose and vivid illustration of a possible understanding of spirituality, rejecting the notion of a 'one, true' spirituality. Spirituality is a living plurality of the myriad spiritual experiences of beings across place and history, rooted in specific lived experiences and thus sprouting unique inroads into what many Native Americans refer to as the "Great Mystery" of existence and being. That which we present here is the emergent notion of spirituality co-weaved from the intersection of our spiritual explorations, as detailed above.

"Seeking Life"

Education – to learn – is discerning, coming to know and getting to know the patterns of our world. It is a deeply intimate experience – especially when recognizing the continuity and animacy of the world. Education is intrinsically linked to the spiritual process of exploring the world, exploring existence, exploring the plural and continuous beings of existence. At the heart of spiritual development is education. And at the heart of education, lies spirituality.

The cultivation of the inner life represents this same educational expedition, but directed inwards – a familiarization with the Self, to situate oneself within the Self.

Understanding the ways in which one's Self is embedded in the world/cosmos is a dimension of the spiritual journey. Education should ideally become a process of situating oneself within patterns of being – reconciling one's own *beinghood* with those of the beings that one is in relationship with. Cajete reflects this understanding in the introduction of "Native Science" – explaining how Native Science recognizes and practices the interconnectedness of knowledge--ways:

> In Native languages there is no word for "science", nor for "philosophy", "psychology", or any other foundational way of coming to know and understand the nature of life and our relationships therein. Not having, or more accurately, not needing, words for science, art, or psychology did not diminish their importance in Native life. For Native people, seeking life was the all-encompassing task. While there were tribal specialists with particular knowledge of technologies and ritual, each member of the tribe in his or her own capacity was a scientist, an artist, a storyteller, and a participant in the great web of life (1999, p. 2).

In this sense, education is, or rather should be, deeply and innately ontological as well. By ontology, what we refer to are the stories which the human being comes to hold, regarding the nature of humankind, the nature of the Universe, and *the ways in which humankind should interact with the Universe*. Education intrinsically entails learning how to be in the world. Learning how the Self, the community, and the human being, should participate with Nature, with what *is*. In our case, living upon Mother Earth, this implies learning to settle into *reciprocal co-living* with the many non-human communities within which we are embedded.

Here lies "seeking life", in this ontological wrestling with the "Great Mystery", with the fundamental questions of how the human being should interact with the cosmos.

The Experiential Exploration of Beings

We would assert that one's spirituality can be developed, grown, through a direct experiential touching of beings (as in, "the light in me sees the light in you").

> JP: On the one hand, this can be about – if it's me practicing the touching--knowing of other beings, it can entail a profound recognition, a fathoming, of the other's beinghood, the quality of their animacy and spirit. Diametrically opposed to othering, or alienating them. On the other hand, this spiritual exploration of other beings can be about "knowing" them through experience, as one comes to know a relative, as one's familiarity with them gestates the more space and time you share.

In this we see Juan Pablo taking a panpsychic stance on spirituality, asserting the animacy of all matter, and the illusory nature of the boundaries between all beings; the Universe framed as a continuity of being. Similarly, together we understand *othering* as not solely an act of social estrangement, but an attempt at existential estrangement – the imposition of illusory boundaries between beings. We would assert that a shared character across the plurality of authentic spiritual experiences is a gradual approximation toward the realization of the continuity, animacy, and divinity of all things in the cosmos.

Thus, we assert that spiritual exploration can be directed into the Self, toward other beings with whom we share the animate cosmos, or even toward the living continuity of all beings.

Some of these insights have emerged during a class of Phoebe's, from our collective reading of "Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence" by Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete. He refers to Native American epistemology as one of innumerable spiritual expressions that emphasizes the experiential dimension of spiritual exploration, "rooting the entire tree of knowledge in the soil of direct physical and perceptual experience of the earth" (1999, pp. 23-24). From these insights, we too have, as already, argued above based on our own experiences that authentic spiritual exploration is indeed woven from relationship, including the one we have co-created.

JP: While conceptualization is a tool in the knowledge-making process, concepts are illusory, and often deceptively used by the powers-that-be to control the narrative, to impose a singular reality.

Versus, autonomous spirituality, a personal – yet often and I would say preferably communal – engagement, with one's direct experience of reality, and the community's interwoven direct experiences of reality.

Juan Pablo's exploration here reflects a well known Zen saying; "To point to the moon a finger is used, but do not mistake the finger for the moon". Similarly phrased as, "to not mistake the map for the territory", these both evoke a more subtle implication: conceptualization – which seeks to hold and objectify

the world – will always amount to a cerebral imitation, and cannot discern the dimension of truth gleaned through direct experience of the world.

Autonomy and the Self

Along with this broader conceptualization of spirituality, we explored in our dialogue the particular focus of one's "knowing" of the Self – whether this be cultivation of the peace and fulfillment fruited from one's inner life; a grounded sense of continuity with the world/cosmos; or coming to embody one's intrinsic, authentic "dance", one's pattern, one's way of being.

P: It's like the Zen saying that I love. "Show me your Original Face, the face you had before your parents were born".

This exploration of the authentic Self, an intrinsic and autonomous exploration in itself, often fills the explorer with a fitting sense of freedom. It reflects and reinforces autonomy back into one's way of being. Phoebe continues.

P: That's part of the package, right? That spirituality should give you that feeling of freedom – autonomy? I think freedom and autonomy are two sides of the same experience, or sense of identity. Identity as in the Self, and not just our socially ascribed identities as in being male or female, white or black, etc.

I'm a very autonomous person, and I feel very free because I allow myself to explore new ideas and insights in almost any given moment, regardless of the social norms that constrain people's thoughts. When I was younger, that was more challenging. Now that I'm older, it's easier, as I see it as part of my spiritual – and I would add creative – practice, and so I'm more used to it.

The very cultivation of the inner life – as Phoebe shares – previously framed as a "compass-to-wellbeing", can come to imbue the cultivator with the fathomings and energy to further circumvent the pressures of the dominant

culture and the coercions of institutions, for the sake of further reaching toward that which nurtures the soul, further cultivating the inner life.

Spiritual Autonomy vs. Coercive Doctrine

There is an important distinction to be made, between what we have thus far elaborated upon – the authentic and autonomous exploration of spirituality – as opposed to the traditions of "spirituality" often enforced by the dominant culture (which we would assert to be a "dominator" culture) and its institutions.

JP: I've often distinguished institutional (and often patriarchal) religions, and their handling of spirituality, from autonomous spirituality. I think this dichotomy is very vivid – though often not clear-cut. The former embodies doctrine, and the culture of allowing spiritual authority to be imbued in, say, a hierarchy of priests, often for the sake of coercion and social control. The patriarchal – or often-patriarchal – religions' way of approaching spirituality is like Paulo Friere's "banking" model of education, where students are posed as receptacles for swallowing and regurgitating the objectified knowledge given to them by authority figures (Friere, 1972). It's a handing-down sort of model.

When I was 12 or so, I got into a heated argument with an authority figure in my life. I said that my little sister shouldn't be told that "Catholic doctrines are law, whether you like it or not" – that she should be given options, and the freedom to choose for herself. I'll qualify now, Catholicism, Christianity, they can be grounds for authentic spirituality – when they're autonomous, when they're fed by spiritual experience.

I was scolded. "If you try to do that, I will stop you. You know how I was raised? The people like you, the doubters, we're supposed to snuff you out".

Both religious doctrine and this banking model of education are about accepting what you've been fed – what you've been told is important, valuable, real – regardless of your own actual experiences.

Thus, as we further discussed, our dominant culture and its spiritual institutions have a coercive tendency to encourage others to accept and digest the doctrine, the "handed down" conceptualizations of the dominant culture – as opposed to gleaning the truth of the world through direct experience, then digesting and weaving their own stories of the world (preferably in community). The latter is a grassroots, pluriversal way of knowledge-making, threatening to the dominant culture, which of course includes us and our own emergings.

The Modern Academy

> To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best night and day to make you like everyone else is to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting (E.E. Cummings, 1965).

This section will spotlight first-person dialogue with very little emphasis on secondary sources and analysis. The intent is to explicitly oppose the positivistic and linear thinking of the modern Western academy, which insists upon an on--going stream of literature and analysis, usually representing the accepted perceptions of social reality – the current hegemonic intellectual paradigm – in order to justify its validity. We instead choose to allow our dialogue to speak for itself, in a manner that is raw, vibrant, and animate, thus from our understanding deeply spiritual.

We posed to ourselves the simple, yet deeply complex question, "What is the relationship between spirituality and the academy?". Here, we address modern educational institutions in particular, understood to largely be expressions of the aforementioned "capitalist hetero patriarchal modernity" – a control-oriented, "dominator" culture.

P: I like to look at the history of the Academy.

I like to remember that the academy came out of the religious emphasis on study and withdrawal from society, the monastery. And so now, here we are hundreds of years later, where we've got a piece of that – the expectation that students will be completely immersed in the text, and have time to read and reflect and critically think. But we've also got the contradiction that they have all these courses to take and all these credits to accumulate and all these topics that they are not interested in. And many of them have to work, many of them are just struggling to survive.

That tension is really playing out more and more in the modern world, as more students who are low income are coming to the University, along with more students who previously had been legally banned from the University – either because of race, or gender, or sexuality, or religion.

JP: Yeah. I would phrase it as, that original university, with its focus on inner life, has been stripped down – in the same way that capitalism strips the value from anything within its reach for the sake of productivity, like meat from the bone. That's just sort of its nature, exploitation for the sake of exponential growth, right?

P: And alienation, I think we have to add a nod to Marx's estranged labor: the alienation of the learner from their learning.

JP: I would go further; I think that, from the universities as they exist under capitalism, there is very little genuine focus on spiritual cultivation, on the genuine and internalized knowing of transformative learning – Paolo Friere's concept (1972). And I think that this is very much intentional.

I would say the culture purposefully orients the university against the intrinsic dimension of genuine spirituality. Instead, education is extrinsically motivated, structured around conditioning and meeting the demands of a hierarchy, and that's for the purpose of getting the student accustomed to servicing the capitalist engine, dissuading the student from exploring reality and their own spiritual life autonomously. Getting the student to instead...

P: To become a worker.

JP: To become a worker. It is for breaking spirits! To predispose them to coercion, to get them to be as willing to submit to the whims and demands of capitalism as possible.

The culture does not only vaciate – I take "vaciate" from the Spanish vaciar, which means to empty, but to me it connotes a more active, violent voiding – these institutions don't just vaciate education because "that's what capitalism does". This phenomenon is not only a microcosm of capitalism's broader tendency to exploit, to plunder the fullness and value in the world. It is useful and strategic, to vaciate the student body, the citizenry. It is disempowering.

Here, Juan Pablo crosses lingual barriers, a pluriversal act, to weave and expand possible meanings, and to reclaim some epistemic autonomy.

The described emptying of education serves to socialize the student body into a workforce adjusted to capitalist society's hierarchical structuring – as the neglect, repression, and erosion of spiritual and *creative* autonomy is essential to dispossessing the human being of that threatening ability for ontological self-determination.

As Henry A. Giroux, Marxist educational theorist, argues, higher education is molded by "corporate culture [which refers] to an ensemble of ideological and institutional forces that functions politically and pedagogically to both govern organizational life through senior managerial control and to produce compliant workers, depoliticized consumers, and passive citizens" (Giroux, 2013, p. 104). We continued.

JP: Most students under modern academies – again, intentionally – have been kept away from that which might show us the value of the cultivation of our inner lives. We've been pushed away from calibrating that existential compass-to-wellbeing; wellbeing can only be consistently and heartily achieved through autonomy.

And so, the students stay domesticated, sacrificing their own mental, emotional and physical wellbeing for the sake of performing those tasks that they don't care about, as efficiently as possible.

P: I want to also bring us to questions around the mental health crisis. Because one of the things I'm noticing is that no one is saying it's a spiritual crisis. It's a crisis of meaning. And it's a crisis created by the very institution that claims that it's going to solve it by providing students with more mental health support, or by handing out flowers on campus, or whatever else they're coming up with. Rather than putting the whole institution under examination. What is it about the classroom? Or the average classroom; there is something that is making students feel so spiritually numb.

JP: It's a pattern that is reflected throughout capitalism. All that's offered are symptomatic solutions, without a preventative lens, without looking at the underlying structural flows that are pushing people towards these outcomes. It's what Daniel Quinn calls "sticks in a river" (Quinn, 1999).

P: Yes, in this metaphor, the river is capitalism, which is inherently oriented against spiritual development. And yet we are having this dialogue, and these dissident ideas and so there is resistance, there are ways that we can, not stop the flow of the river, but to use another Quinn quote, to "walk away from the pyramid" (Quinn, 1999). And for me that is the solution.

There is the education under capitalist institutions which reflect the dominator culture, and there is the emancipatory education we seek to manifest, oriented toward empowerment of the student and care for the student. We recognize the former as comparable to Friere's "banking" model of education, and the latter as being rooted in spiritual and creative autonomy. To even use the term "education" to describe both of these is questionable, given how qualitatively different their processes are, and how diametrically opposed their goals are.

Moving towards what we claim to be "the purpose of education" necessarily involves shedding the hierarchical model dominant through our modernity. That

said, we understand the purpose of education to be a complex and dynamic plurality. In the coming section, we'll paint out our fathoming of the purpose of education, our inroads into this plurality.

For the Flourishing of the Student

P: This, for me, really challenges my questioning of, what is the purpose? What am I, as an instructor supposed to be doing for myself, and thus for my students? And the answer I've come up with is – to go back to the spiritual., go back to the creative, or as Marx put it our "species-being", as I have written about previously (Godfrey, 2017). To go back to feeding their souls and letting the capitalist part be insignificant – to the best that I can do. Deadlines, the best I can do, grades, the best I can do; and it seems to be working.

We continue to honor, emulate, and recognize the unpredictability of the flow of spirituality by preserving dialogue as a space for capturing the emergent inherently creative alchemy of two people.

Here we dig deeper into the relationship between spirituality, creativity and the academy – past the context of a deprived academic regime, into explorations of nurturing, flourishing, and possibilities.

A sociology classroom, an Inroad, a Space for Emergence

JP: I was fortunate enough to not only come across your – very non--traditional, feminist, creative and mindful – sociology classes, but also, external to the University, go through my own educational journey towards spiritual development.

I got to a point where, at the University, I had it as a goal to be as intrinsically motivated as possible, and to actively go against those impulsive, socialized narratives that replay in your head from years of being subjected to the school system. And I did it for the sake of... of being happy! And for the sake of making something of value out of my own education.

P: Yeah. I think that there is the possibility that anybody can see through the production model. And sociology, as we've discussed, gives you tools. For me that's the power of sociology is to see through the illusion of our social story. Right?

And students who take sociology, I think often go through this kind of crisis where they realize that the things that they've been told are important, when put in comparison to your own inner life, pale.

But if you don't have that inner life to compare them to, it's like grasping for gold because inside is a desert! Because nobody's ever told you, that's where the real happiness and the real fulfillment and the real feeling of freedom can be found.

We the authors, as teacher and student, have had our journeys grounded within the context of sociology, the realm of academia which we navigated. Sociology, with its vantage-point and the tools it provided, was central to our experiences bridging, mending, spirituality and education. Given the modern academic hegemony, in objectifying and deanimating the world and knowledge of the world, spirituality and education have been torn apart. This is what Marx and Engles identify as having happened under capitalism, where all professions have lost their halos (Marx & Engles, 1848).

That being said, sociology holds no primacy as a knowledge-way in serving as a guide toward the inner life. That is to say, there are a pluriverse of possible inroads to spiritual education. The mess of socializations and institutional pressures can be navigated and untangled via innumerable entryways.

A plurality of attempts at alternative classrooms, including Phoebe's, have the teacher holding space – that is to say, establishing and maintaining a constructive setting – in the classroom for educational *emergence*, like waves cresting from the ocean of the students' inner lives. Space for a harmony of constructive interference between these waves to emerge; creativity from chaos – again reflecting Native Science, in its recognition of the creative impulse inherent to the chaotic patterning of the Universe (Cajete, 1999, p. 16). This is realized by releasing one's stranglehold and allowing the animate education to breathe and present itself via the students, encouraged by the beckoning of their explorations.

JP: I've been engaging with my own existence and with be-ing, and with other beings, for as long as I've had those curiosities. The question, the great question, "The Great Mystery" or whatever you might call it.

Your classroom naturally uprooted the radical questioning of the assumptions of the doctrine that the dominant culture hands down to us, naturally your class uproots the ontology of civilization.

That allowed me the space for developing my own ideas about ontology, about living in the world; and the space for even considering spirituality as a way of knowing.

P: If I can add in, I think more than all of that, when we're given autonomy, freedom, and a certain amount of stimulation, it gives us a space to figure out who we are.

JP: Yeah, it was the autonomy you gave us to explore.

P: And to me that's the ultimate goal of learning is, the ultimate spiritual experience – to keep inviting students to question, "Who are you, what are you thinking? Why do you think that way? How could you think it differently? How could you feel differently? What would it mean if you felt differently?"

> But I do think, no matter what subject you're teaching, there can always be space for the inner life. You're teaching chemical engineering; ask the kids, "For what? For whom? For what kind of world?" You could always invite students into that inner space to ask the more philosophical questions about meaning and values and identity and… really struggle with, "How do we solve the crisis that we have created?" 'We' being Western culture.

Nurturing the "Metaphoric Mind"

Phoebe's approach to teaching rejects the hegemonic tendency of the dominating cultural river, that perpetuation of the "banking method of teaching" which seeks to atrophy the autonomy of students. She recognizes that despite many educational institutions' excessive emphasis upon positivist thought-ways like linearity, rationality, and atomization; that students – especially children – often hold divergent, creative, intuitive thought-ways in equal, if not greater degrees. These nascent seeds of spirituality and creativity within all children/students are in fact what Cajete refers to as the "metaphoric mind" (1999). He states,

> In Native science, the metaphoric mind is the facilitator of the creative process; it invents, integrates, and applies the deep levels of human perception and intuition to the task of living. Connected to the creative center of nature, the metaphoric mind has none of the limiting conditioning of the cultural order. Its processing is natural and instinctive… It is inclusive and expansive in its processing of experience and knowledge (1999, pp. 29-30).

A well-realized metaphoric mind – one which practices holistic and intuitive knowing of the world, one which weaves dynamic, transformative, animate knowledge – such a mind is capable of fathoming, accepting, and holding space for the autonomous spiritual explorations of others; such a mind can embrace ontological plurality. Thus, it is 'dangerous' to the required monoculture of hegemony. Like spiritual autonomy, the metaphoric mind is not passively repressed for efficiency in the classroom, but actively repressed for its potential

to threaten the hegemonic culture and its ideological grip on what it claims to be 'the truth', as Juan Pablo explores here.

JP: I'm reminded of another sort of space held in your classroom, oriented towards spirituality, creativity. One dedicated to creating arts, so as to understand sociology and ontology. Creating a stage play about wolves questioning the "civilizational human" – the value lying in the fun of creation and play, and in weaving and communicating understanding through metaphor and poetry. Not for the sake of creating a product – though that was important, because we were trying to touch people – but also just intrinsically, for the sake of cultivation, for the sake of artistic expression.

P: Yeah, and for the experience. And the growth that comes from taking ideas and turning them into experiences right. The art show that I'm doing right now is called "From Ideas to Art".

Artistic avenues are deeply saturated with the potential for story-telling – by which we broadly refer to the divergent communication pertaining to the realm of the metaphoric mind. To circumvent objective conceptualizations, and instead, through communicative freedom of movement, to capture and express the intuited, and essentially unlimited patterns of the world.

Such an intimate internalization of meaning is essential to transformative education; with this digestion comes the ability to rearticulate, reconfigure and/or create new meaning. The aforementioned free exercise of theater and poetry embodies this creation of meaning – using the arts to pierce through the superficial, through the realm of conceptualizations and abstractions, and to intimately interact with one's interlocutor, to stimulate transformation, as was done to the student.

Becoming the Teacher, Unleashing the Self, Discovering One's Gifts

Through the creation of art – and more broadly, through the student expressing their transformed and unleashed inner Self – the student takes steps along

their journey to becoming their own teacher. This is evident in the ways Juan Pablo here is not beholden to Phoebe but rather teaches himself, her and others from who he has *become*, more than from what he knows. We assert that this level of ontological transformation is, or rather should be seen as, the deepest purposes of education.

American education activist Parker Palmer elaborates on how the realization, the "self-knowledge", of the teacher themself must come before they are able to teach.

> ...Knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject – not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth (1997).

This paints but a piece of the cyclical process which we assert education should embody. Here lies the goal of the student, the goal of education, of Self--exploration to become their own teacher. As Chinese Buddhist monk Linji Yixuan once said, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him"; among its plural meanings, this reflects how the guide must not be idealized, but instead supplanted – anything less cannot promote the level of spiritual and creative autonomy we seek.

"Becoming the teacher" needn't mean assuming that formal role. In fact, to phrase it as "becoming the teacher" limits the breadth of this endeavor which we situate at the center of education. Whether or not one explicitly becomes a guide, the self-realized student lives upon the weavings of their understanding, embodies the meaning they have autonomously created, resonates their dance of being into the world. The student's authentic Self – unfettered from the suppressive and control-oriented socializations of the dominant culture, and cultivated through attentive care – unabashedly manifests, daring to make itself

visible through the unshackled creativity and vivacious expression. Education must be oriented towards the realization of the student themselves. This is what it means to "become a teacher".

Potawatomi scholar and botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer articulates this intuition about the purpose of education – and again it becomes saturated with, linked inextricably to, ontology.

> ...Were we to act ethically, don't we have to somehow compensate the plants for what we received?... I love listening to them consider such a question... The students ramble and laugh as we work and weave, but come up with a long list of suggestions... The gifts they might return to cattails are as diverse as those the cattails gave them. This is our work, to discover what we can give. Isn't this the purpose of education, to learn the nature of your own gifts and how to use them for good in the world? (2013, p. 239)

Thus, the realization of the student is grounded in the ontological endeavor – to situate the Self, the community, and humankind within existence, to learn how to live, and how to co-exist with the other beings of this living universe in which we are embedded. The realization of the student, the cultivation of their inner life, their journey to the Self-discovery of their "original face", thusly is not realized only for its own sake; but because the unshackling of this resonance inextricably implies the unshackling of a generous abundance of being.

"Sol Rivering"

> JP: In my own lived experience of my spiritual autonomy, I came to embody a term that I called "Sol Rivering" – Sol, Spanish for sun, and referring to one's inner life, one's fire, one's spirit, one's energy, one's way of being, one's dance, one's pattern, one's verb, the "whirlpool in the stream"; and the "Rivering" being a verb-form of "river", representing a sort of out-flowing that isn't consolidated into a noun, that's allowed to live, that is dynamic, emulating Kimmerer's Grammar of Animacy (2013, p. 48).

While we have thus far used "river" to refer to the cultural flow which manifests society and socializes the people therein, we assert the versatility of the term "river" in repurposing its dynamism here to describe the expressive, emanating, outward flow of one's Self. To distinguish our uses of the term river, for Sol Rivering we are using capitals.

JP: Unshackling this Sol Rivering, I feel, is the purpose of education. Because the Sol Rivering, in being this expressing of one's intrinsic life, the shining of one's sun, the outflowing of one's energy, one's animate, creative energy – is about giving. It's about gifts, as the birds give their gift of song and the trees give their gift of fruit and medicine.

We humans, I believe, are the same as all other beings in nature – all the other beings of existence – in that we are oriented towards giving.

And so I want to give to others what I've been gifted. This spiritual autonomy, this knowing-what-my-gifts-are, or at least beginning to know what my gifts are and continuously exploring this. And, I think this is done through giving attention.

P: Yeah, I like that.

JP: I think, "What you pay attention to grows" (brown, 2021, p. 18). It's a quote from adrienne marie brown, the activist who wrote Holding Change.[1]

"Paying attention" as nurturing, and as caring. Giving attention to the inner lives of others so that they may discover their own spiritual autonomy, their own Sol Rivering. And so that they may discover their own gifts.

P: Yeah, I like that. And... I think your gifts are also yourself, right?

[1] Pleasure activist adrienne marie brown advocates for self-determining her spelling; brown's name is customarily spelled with lowercase.

JP: Absolutely. We are the gifts – the sunlight is inseparable from the sun. And I think it relates to "being the change you want to see in the world". Because once you embody that genuineness, just by existing, just by doing the dance that is your way of being, you are enacting change, you are giving gifts.

P: If you can find the face you had before you were born, then that is your gift, right? Your gift is inseparable from that face. That original Self, or soul, or spirit.

I think it's about enabling students to see that a career is not the same as your gift. We don't allow everybody to fulfill their gifts as a way of getting supported by society or getting rewarded enough to live, but it doesn't mean... You could stock shelves and still develop your gifts, your inner life, right?

And people who find that, people who embody their authentic spiritual Self, become gifts. When you think of the people we admire, if we take the Dalai Lama, or Robin Wall Kimmerer, or Greg Cajete – these are people who have become themselves. And out of them flows that authenticity. It doesn't have to be written. It could be just their presence. It could be their song, it could be their art, it could be their sport!

A saying that I love, mentioned by Jack Kornfield, a Buddhist scholar, he says, "The purpose of Buddhism is not to become a Buddhist. ...It's to become a Buddha. To find that unshakable part of a Buddha, and that spacious awareness within yourself" (Kornfield, 2019). And the purpose of education should not be to become a sociologist or a biologist or a tax writer or accountant – it's to become yourself.

Conclusion

> For the mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for the truth (Plutarch).

For our conclusion we decided that the greatest proof of our collective claims were to be found in Juan Pablo's own "Sol Rivering" – a term he created from his own "species-being" – and thereby Phoebe hands the conclusion over to him. What more could she say – what is called for here is to listen and be taught.

I, the student, now speak alone.

Within me, the fire has been lit. Through my experience submerged in freedom, through space held and attention paid, my spirituality has flourished. Ever more, I learn to foster my intrinsic curiosities. Ever more, I root myself in an animate universe. Ever more, I express the outflows of my authentic Self, ever more I transform the world into art with the resonance of my being, ever more I come to know the gifts I have to offer.

My own experience has proven to me that the oppressive socializations of the academy, and of the broader cultural hegemony, can be shed; that there are possibilities for an experience of education where the student's exploration and empowerment of their Self is prioritized – especially when the teacher steps forward to hold space for such an endeavor.

I hope to do the same, as has been done for me. I hope the sun within me can spread its flame to others. I hope to nurture in others that smothered inner strength, that curiosity for the world, that birthright to spiritual autonomy. I hope to welcome others back to this shared home in the Great Mystery; and I hope to spur others to contribute their "real" to the rich diversity of the pluriverse.

I am certain that I will, as I already have. Yet I shall always be a student; my *student-hood* I shall never shed. I am eager for this flame within to keep burning with awe and wonder at the sublimity of the Mystery, to compel me to keep exploring my ever-transforming Self, for many years to come.

References

Abu El-Haj, T. R. (2024, May 2). *Pro-Palestinian Student Protesters Are Enacting the Highest Ideals of Education*. Truthout. Retrieved from https://truthout.org/articles/pro-palestinian-student-protesters-are-enacting-the-highest-ideals--of-education/.

Acosta, A., Demaria, F., Escobar, A., Kothari, A., & Salleh, A. (Eds.) (2019). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books.

brown, a. m. (2021). *Holding Change: The Way of Emergent Strategy Facilitation and Mediation*. A.K. Press.

Cajete, G. (1999). *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: Clear Light Publishers.

Cummings, E. E. (1965). *A Miscellany Revised*. New York: October House.

Deloria, B., Foehner, K., & Scinta, S. (Eds.) (1999). *Spirit & Reason: The Vine Deloria, Jr. Reader*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing.

Escobar, A. (2019). Civilizational Transitions. In A. Acosta, F. Demaria, A. Escobar, A. Kothari, & A. Salleh (Eds.), *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (pp. 121-124). New Delhi, India: Tulika Books.

Friere, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin Education.

Godfrey, P. (2017). Radical pedagogical homesteading: Returning the 'species' to our 'being'. In K. Haltinner, & L. Hormel (Eds.), *Teaching economic inequality*

and capitalism in contemporary America (pp. 91-103). New York, NY: Springer Press.

Jacob, D. T. (2013). *Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education*. New York: Peter Lang Inc.

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions.

Kornfield, J. (2019, August 16). *The point isn't to become a Buddhist – spare your friends and family – but to become a Buddha*. [Post]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/jkornfield/posts/the-point-isnt-to-become-a-buddhist--spare-your-friends-and-family-but-to-become-/2391163414301336/.

Marx, K., & Engles, F. (1848). *Communist Manifesto*. Chapter 1. Retrieved from https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm.

Palmer, P. (1997). *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Rilke, R. M. (1929). *Letters to a Young Poet*. Penguin Random House.

Quinn, D. (1999). *Beyond Civilization*. New York: Harmony Books.

Yunkaporta, T. (2019). *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking can Save the World*. The Text Publishing Company.

Zukav, G. (1984). *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*. Bantam Books.

Book Reviews

DOI 10.2478/doc-2024-0005

Rosalie Metro

Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum, University of Missouri-Columbia, United States

metror@missouri.edu

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7001-6276

Book Review of *Spirituality and English Language Teaching: Religious Explorations of Teacher Identity, Pedagogy and Context* by Mary Shepard Wong & Ahmar Mahboob. Staple Hill, Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2022

Received **13 November 2023**

Accepted **24 February 2024**

Available online **24 June 2024**

This edited volume tackles what has been a salient but underexplored topic in TESOL literature: how religious belief influences EFL and ESL teachers, students, and classrooms. The book contains fascinating fuel for conversation, but certainly no consensus about whether these influences are primarily positive or negative. Yet the exploration is valuable precisely because, as Suresh A. Canagarajah points out in the foreword, this complex topic is often ignored; avoiding the issues leaves teachers unprepared to address them. He concludes his foreword with an expression of spiritual striving: "I pray that this book will motivate us to reflect on more effective ways to draw from our religious beliefs for meaningful education, while probing our beliefs in the light of our professional experiences to deepen our spirituality" (p. xix).

In my case, at least, Canagarajah's prayer was fulfilled – I could not help but consider how my own (Buddhist and Quaker) spiritual practices influenced my teaching, and vice versa. Yet that exploration did not lead me to a comfortable resting place. Some of the data in the book is unsettling, as it reveals curricular biases and teacher practices that are likely to negatively affect students' experiences. Co-editors Mary Shepard Wong and Ahmar Mahboob point out as much in their introduction, which addresses both overarching concerns and concrete examples – for instance, they highlight from Bal Krishna Sharma's chapter a British textbook used in Nepal that asks students to discuss whether they prefer ham or steak, which are religiously contraindicated for many students.

The book is divided into three sections that connect religious faith to teacher identity, pedagogical practice, and the language learning context. Each section is followed by a response from another scholar. Wong leads off the section on teacher identity by facing head-on the double-edged nature of religion in the classroom, calling her chapter "The Dangers and Delights of Teacher Spiritual Identity". She notes that English teaching has been a vehicle for Christian proselytization, and acknowledges the "menace of the overzealous oblivious teacher" (p. 25) of any religion. To balance these dangers, she notes that spiritual

beliefs may make teaching more personally meaningful, and that those beliefs can be a source of strength when facing classroom challenges. She poses scenarios for discussion and questions that teachers might reflect on, including, "How can you get feedback on students' perceptions of the ways in which faith and spirituality are excluded or included in a particular course?" (p. 27). Questions like this hint that there may be teaching contexts in which *excluding* discussions of religion from the classroom may be considered as inappropriate as including them would be elsewhere; we can't necessarily stay 'safe' by making religion 'off-limits' if it is important to students or central to institutional mission.

Continuing this section, Mary Ann Christison shares the relevance of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path to her professional decisions. Readers of any belief system might be inspired by her penchant for truthfulness, as in her frank demurral from requests for institutional service: "I have to be honest with you; I don't really want to chair this committee" (p. 37).

In the section's final chapter, Joel Heng Hartse (a Christian) and Saeed Nazari (a Muslim) write a "duo-ethnography" in the form of an interfaith dialogue. As Nazari points out, "from a Bourdieuian perspective, being religious simply means being born in a context and acquiring the thought systems imposed by the field" (pp. 55-56). In contrast, Hartse writes, "because I experience the Christian faith as the anchor of my identity in a world I often view as hostile to a Christian vision of human flourishing, I do weird things like pray for my students before class (sometimes), and I do find the source of many of my values as a teacher in my faith" (p. 54). The contrast between these quotes is striking, as this is not so much a dialogue between faiths as it is between secular-scientific and faith-based approaches to religion. Hartse's sincerity makes clear that many teachers grounded in religion cannot exclude the faithful part of themselves from their teaching lives. But, as Hartse suggests in the way he qualifies his prayers ("weird" and "sometimes"), these influences are not always welcomed: do students *want* to be prayed for by their teacher, and does it matter if they don't?

As Ryuko Kubota explains in her response to this section, neither liberal pluralism nor post-structuralism fully overcomes the problem of teachers imposing their views on students. She concludes that the best we can do is reflect honestly, and I am inclined to agree.

Yet despite attempts at honest reflection, teachers may overlook the double-edged nature of how their religion affects students. This insight is illustrated by Sid Brown's chapter on how her Buddhist beliefs shape her pedagogy. As she explains it, "My students reach outside themselves for solutions all too often. Some of them buy things to be cool. Some go to parties to numb their neurocortexes so they can go to bed with one another. Some students take anti-anxiety drugs and antidepressants or take medicine for their attention deficit disorder" (pp. 80-81). I imagine that many of her students would find her pronouncements condescending and hurtful, especially her presumption that medicines they have been prescribed represent their inability to solve their problems through spiritual reflection. Not only does she seem to hold these deficit views of her students, but she also gives them assignments designed to change their behavior and presumably make it more like hers as a Buddhist, such as asking them to buy nothing for a week.

I am particularly sensitive to the dangers of Brown's line of thinking because I share her Theravada Buddhist beliefs. I admit having had similar thoughts about my students. But reading them in an academic context made clear to me why they are problematic.

The other chapters in the pedagogical practice section are methodologically diverse. While Brown's chapter is a personal reflection, Sharma undertakes a historical investigation to argue that ideas considered "Western" or "modern", such as student-centered, practice-based methods are present in ancient Hindu educational traditions alongside teacher-centered, memorization-based pedagogies. Stephanie Vandrick emails an unknown number of TESOL scholar / educator acquaintances and reproduces quotes from their responses to her questions about religious influences on their teaching. In his response to these three chapters, David I. Smith observes challenges to the construct of the Christian West and non-Christian non-West, noting that the two Western authors are Buddhist or non-religious. That brought up a larger question for me of how much the authors in this volume represent most English teachers from the societies they describe. The book contains plenty of anecdotal evidence, but not many empirical studies that would offer wider insight.

In the third section on how religion influences language-learning contexts, Kassim Shaaban provides a fascinating history of language education in Lebanon that hardly mentions the teaching of English (French are Arabic are dominant). In contrast, the chapter by Deena Boraie, Atta Gebril, and Raafat Gabriel provides what readers may have expected when choosing the volume. Their clear argument, based on interviews with eight English teachers in Egypt, elucidates the stakes of language education in that context: "While the four Muslim teachers indicated that [the spread of English] is a serious threat to both the Arabic language and the national identity, three of the four Christian teachers did not believe so" (p. 169).

In the book's final chapter, Carolyn Kristjánsson writes about church--sponsored ESL programs in Canada, exploring the tension between churches that offer English classes to gain converts versus to fulfill needs expressed by immigrant communities. Some programs use the Bible to teach English, while others focus on providing the language students would need to assimilate to Canadian culture in their daily lives; but none challenge the idea of "Canadian culture" dominated by white Christian English-speakers.

The underlying tensions among these chapters rise to the surface in Brian Morgan's response to this section, when he claims that Kristjánsson inappropriately positions Christian ESL programs as a "corrective to the spiritual void of mainstream ESL programming" (p. 201) while maintaining a "deficit orientation" toward students (p. 202). To me, the line between her participants' views and her own is not entirely clear; she is conscious of the danger of exploitative religious indoctrination, but seems not to acknowledge when her participants engage in such behavior.

I would guess that assembling this edited volume was a difficult task, due to the methodological and ideological heterogeneity of the authors. Yet Wong and Mahboob have done a service by surfacing discussions of religion and offering space for debate. When Mahboob and Eve Courtney confirm in the conclusion that "spiritual and religious beliefs can and do influence ELT practices" (pp. 214-215), and that these influences should be explored more fully, it would be hard to disagree with them. The disagreement would come in how those influences are evaluated.

sciendo

DOI 10.2478/doc-2024-0006

Shalini Abayasekara

The Ohio State University, United States

abayasekara.1@osu.edu

ORCID ID: 0009-0001-9667-8953

Book Review of *Language Incompetence: Learning to Communicate through Cancer, Disability, and Anomalous Embodiment* by Suresh Canagarajah. London: Routledge, 2022

Received **28 April 2024**

Accepted **17 May 2024**

Available online **24 June 2024**

Suresh Canagarajah's (2022) book *Language Incompetence* explores the intersections of disability and language, especially as they relate to areas like religion, race, and geopolitics. While Canagarajah's own experiences with disability springing from cancer run as a throughline in the book, providing insights into the various topics covered, his central focus is not this cancer journey. The work is an "academic cancer memoir" (p. 85), which allows him not just to reflect but to theorize. The book combines multiple genres as well, including academic theory, autoethnography, and other scholars' published journal entries and blog posts.

One of Canagarajah's main theorizations occurs in relation to disability and religion. Canagarajah introduces the topic by discussing five tropes that Thomas Couser (2001) maps regarding disability – triumph over adversity, rhetoric of horror, spiritual compensation, rhetoric of nostalgia, and rhetoric of emancipation. Briefly put, triumph over adversity involves the temptation to present oneself as heroically triumphing over hardship, for instance by demonstrating how the disabled condition has brought about other capabilities. Rhetoric of horror dramatizes the pain that accompanies disability, perhaps to receive sympathy or admiration. In the spiritual compensation view, one spiritually advances despite, or through, discomfort, so they can overlook their impairment. One might have a narrative of sublimation or transcendence. There can also be new states of existence like mindfulness and fresh appreciation for nature. Rhetoric of nostalgia prompts one to reflect on their past before the disability's onset and despair over what has been lost due to the disability. Here too, desire for sympathy and admiration might occur. Notably, for Couser, these first four tropes are all ableist because they all in some way uphold ability as the preferred norm; but the fifth trope works against an ableist ideology. It represents an acceptance and even embracing of disability, with the condition regarded as part of life and as providing fresh insights.

While Canagarajah thoughtfully observes that though Couser distinguishes between the first four tropes and the fifth, the line between trope one and trope five is very thin (emancipatory rhetoric can carry sentiments of triumph over adversity), Canagarajah's discussion about the third trope – spiritual compensation – carries special relevance for this review. As noted, the spiritual compensation view holds that a person describes themselves as having spiritually advanced

despite or through discomfort in a way that enables them to overlook their impairment. And in a chapter on "Anomalous Embodiment and Religious Disability Rhetoric", Canagarajah delves into this argument with regard to Christianity. He starts by considering how religion has been viewed in disability scholarship so far, and notes that some DS histories list the "moral model" as one of the earliest discourses on disability. In this model, conversations regarding religion and morality are used to explain disability as divine punishment for one's immorality. Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson (2001), for example, examine the connection made in some Christian settings between disability and sin. They state that "[t]he Christian rhetorical tradition demonizes the disabled… casting disability as corporeal testimony of sin and punishment" (as cited in Canagarajah, 2022, p. 93).

Canagarajah, however, complicates these connections made between disability and faith. He comments that his own spirituality did not begin after his cancer diagnosis as "compensation" or "solace" but was always a part of his life, though it certainly took a new turn following the diagnosis. He describes how faith relates to disability differently for different people, and how even spiritual compensation can shape the upheld rhetoric of emancipation by helping one embrace disability. He also describes his own Christian practices springing from his Sri Lankan upbringing, to illustrate the varying relationships to religion different disabled individuals have. He notes that this upbringing was rooted in social justice, environmental stewardship, relational ethics, and loving through sacrificial doing – tenets that are in fact discussed in DS scholarship as well. He elaborates on how, for instance, a radical relational ethic informs the Christian worldview. The motive behind Christ's crucifixion was not self-glorification but giving oneself to others. Similarly, Christian history is filled with examples of people embracing persecution or mortality because of love for others or resistance towards injustice. Furthermore, Christian conceptions of sociality involve collaborative effort, as do many disability frameworks. The Trinity, for example, involves a working together as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The church itself is required to function like the human body, with different parts uniting for the whole. As Canagarajah illustrates, disability and faith are then hardly inconsistent.

Such mapping of the connections between disability and faith also involves examining different versions of Christianity. Canagarajah observes that while

northern hemispheric Christian preachings might emphasize a view of disability in relation to sin, scriptural evidence says otherwise. He points out, for example, that though Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson (2001) cite the Book of Job where Job treats his personal affliction as divine punishment, this interpretation is Job's *friends'*. God himself rejects such an understanding, instead calling Job and his friends to embrace uncertainty and vulnerability as part of their faith. Canagarajah also extends these examples to Christ's own life on earth, filled with suffering, spent in a "social and material environment… [with] conditions of extreme powerlessness" (p. 94). While this argument runs the risk of relegating disability to a pitiable state, Canagarajah is careful to note that Christ's pain was also productive. It brought about salvation for humankind. Moreover, the view that disability is a part of life normalizes the experience, including its aspects of limit and vulnerability. Coming back to his Sri Lankan upbringing, Canagarajah also notes how being socialized in a multi-religious community, growing up in situations of war and poverty, and being mindful of a history of colonization, have all helped him embrace a Christianity that treats imperfection, pain, and giving of self as generative. Canagarajah thus demonstrates meeting points, instead of oft-quoted oppositions, between disability frameworks and Christian thought.

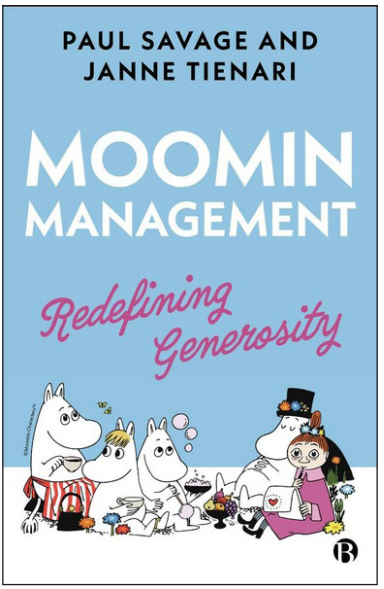
In illustrating how Christianity reflects some of DS' key tenets, Canagarajah gives an example from the Global North as well, through the life of his colleague and friend John Roe. Sadly, by the time Canagarajah writes, Roe has passed on from cancer. But Roe's life and work exemplify the kind of approach Canagarajah describes Christianity as making possible: an approach which embodies both disability and religious orientations. Roe's (2017) thoughts as he contemplates hospice care, for example, represent "not 'giving up'… not 'the end is nigh'… not 'just let nature take its course'… [but] living your best life now" (as cited in Canagarajah, 2022, p. 98). It is a faith that courageously embraces disability and mortality. Moreover, Roe displays this courage by openly discussing his faith, and the discomfort that comes with such a discussion, on an academic platform – one that does not often encourage conversations around religion. Roe's writings also engage potentially challenging topics like faith and environmental stewardship, and faith and sexuality. They lend key insights into scripture on diversity and non-normativity in a way that welcomes the anomalous in life. Through these approaches, Roe's

work reinforces convergences between disability and the Christian faith, providing a powerful conclusion to Canagarajah's chapter on religious disability rhetoric. While one might still wonder how these reflections relate to religions besides Christianity, the chapter contributes immensely to disability scholarship in its expert exploration of disability in relation to the Christian faith.

Linguistic Incompetence covers many areas regarding disability besides religion as well. The book's early chapters grapple with different models of disability apart from the previously mentioned moral model – such as the medical, social, embodiment, and geopolitical models. Canagarajah investigates the complex relationship between disability and his area of professional specialization: language (evinced through his tongue-in-cheek term: "language incompetence"). He observes that just as people with disabilities have been seen as less than due to certain "bodymind" (Price, 2011) characteristics, some linguistic practices have historically been considered less than, and continue to be viewed so in various settings. He also depicts ways these non-normative language users navigate their environments (just as disabled individuals do), through a case study of one migrant STEM scholar. He theorizes about intersectionality too. Noting his intersecting identities as a patient and a person of color in the US, he describes his experiences in a cancer ward filled mostly with White people, highlighting intersectionality's layers for both care recipients and caregivers.

The book's concluding chapter draws together arguments about disability and language "incompetence" to emphasize the power of vulnerability. Canagarajah recounts the vulnerability he felt as a humanities researcher going in to observe STEM scholars at work, and the fear he felt when remembering that a detection of cancer metastasis could halt his plans for future work. But, without romanticizing these precarities, he conveys the insights they could bring. He comments, for example, that his outsider status at these STEM meetings might have helped the scholars keep using their regular communication strategies uninhibited, which was key for his observations. He explains what cancer helps him realize about living in the moment. Thus, throughout, he demonstrates a keen sensitivity to disability's many possibilities, including the spiritual, offering an appreciation of the myriad forms life can take.

New releases



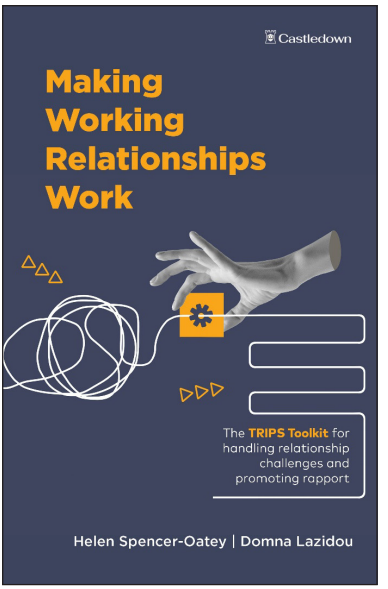
https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/moomin-management

Moomins, beloved troll creatures of Moominvalley, have captivated hearts worldwide since the 1940s.

This book unveils the Moomin business management journey, from Tove Jansson's creations to a global art-based brand and a growing ecosystem of companies. Emphasising generosity as a key management principle, it champions caring for people as vital for a thriving organisation.

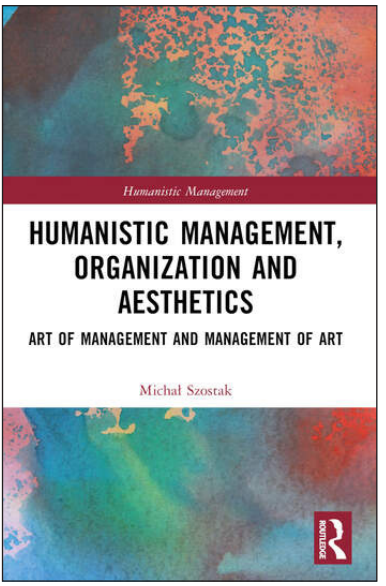
Generosity, rooted in love, courage and belief in equality, shapes the Moomin ethos, underpinning not just the brand, but also strategic partnerships, engagement with technologies and the virtual world.

Offering rare insights from the Moomin inner circle, this management guide advocates sustainable practices. It unveils the keys to a business devoted to comforting people and fostering good, inspiring a blueprint for lasting success.



https://castledown.online/reference/9780648184461/

This book provides a powerful set of tools and concepts for leaders, managers, and employees of all levels to deal with relationship challenges at work with greater success. It does not offer simplistic tips or easy fixes. Rather, it helps people address the challenges for themselves – to 'read' the context so that they can identify the factors giving rise to the people problems or risks they are facing. Then they will be able to select the most suitable strategies for overcoming the challenges.



https://www.routledge.com/Humanistic-Management-Organization-and-Aesthetics-Art-of-Management-and-Management-of-Art/Szostak/p/book/9781032599854

The book is the first worldwide publication of a complex theory of management aesthetics in humanistic management based on the aesthetics and arts approach allowing for a complete and systemic understanding of the management art and art management phenomena. The methodology is based on the critical literature review and empirical research applying qualitative, quantitative, and autoethnographic approaches. The main goal of this monograph is to create a holistic model that organises the issues of management aesthetics and shows the interdependence of the components of this model. The role of this model should be to perform a central function for a complete and systemic understanding of the phenomenon of management aesthetics, as well as to perform the function of a field based on which analysis of individual issues in the area of management aesthetics is conducted. The critical component of this holistic model is Maria Gołaszewska's theory of the aesthetic situation. Two theses of the book are the following: (1) the theory of aesthetics and artistic practice have the potential to enrich the theory and practice of management with qualitative components through deep immersion in the world of values and (2) management theory and practice have the potential to enrich the theory of aesthetics and artistic practice with efficiency components.