

REVIEW ARTICLE

Academic writing and global inequality: Resistance, betrayal and responsibility in scholarship

A. SURESH CANAGARAJAH, *A geopolitics of academic writing*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002. Pp. x, 332. Pb. \$27.95.

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Although Suresh Canagarajah's book under review is situated within the specific field of academic writing, the author explicitly undertakes to address what he recognizes to be a very large subject: the democratization of knowledge and knowledge production across global academia. The subject itself is one that many thoughtful scholars across the world are acutely aware of and concerned about. However, it is by no means evident what responses the task it defines might require. At least partly because of its fundamentally value-laden nature, it encourages a wide range of possible responses from among which there would be no principled basis to choose, even though some of them could, in practical terms, be ineffective or even undesirable. Many of these, reflecting mainly sensibility rather than rationality, might not just conceal the true nature of the issues involved, but might even, unconsciously, incorporate or enshrine positions that are subversive of the task.

The book under consideration, by virtue of its declared concerns, invites a direct engagement with the problem just outlined. The discussion of it below will, therefore, provide a means of seeking out, at least implicitly, certain fundamental considerations of a metatheoretical kind which might be taken to define an essential basis for the effective pursuit of the task. Such considerations will also be relevant to the formulation of the "evaluation procedure," if it might be called that, that seems to be needed in order to make choices among competing responses. The following very general matters will constitute the background against which these considerations may properly be understood.

The general matters just mentioned centrally involve the massive changes that have taken place across the globe in every conceivable sphere of life and activity during the past century or so. These changes have inevitably run parallel with profound developments in the epistemological realm that is home ground to the scholarly endeavor. In interacting with the changes, scholarship has increasingly come to recognize the crucial role of language (and the discourses it helps construct) as a major site of the operation of the various epistemological and related ideological forces involved. Curiously, linguistics per se has remained considerably more conservative in this respect than have many other disciplines,

showing a certain scholarly fastidiousness over engaging too directly or wide-rangingly with these epistemological issues, particularly their ideological dimensions. Among the more notable exceptions in the field are the subdisciplines of pragmatics, discourse analysis, and writing.

The study of writing (especially academic writing), the field to which the book under review belongs, has begun to venture increasingly beyond concerns of an immediate, service-oriented pedagogical kind to direct engagement with underlying epistemological and ideological issues, specifically those relating to inequality, domination, and resistance. Considered on a geopolitical scale, as they are in the book, these seem to involve the workings within the global changes mentioned earlier of what might be seen as two opposite sets of internally highly variegated forces. One of these includes the well known phenomena of modernism and globalization, both closely associated with the restructuring and reconstitution of the world over the past few centuries by global capitalism, often riding on empire. Simultaneously, the world has seen a very different set of forces in operation, involving the increasing democratization of societies, and movements of emancipation, liberation, decolonization, nationalism, and so on, which have worked in a contrary direction, often in opposition to discriminatory or hegemonic workings which seem to be built into the first set of forces. Indeed, much of the violence of the 20th century might be accounted for by the simultaneous operations of these opposite sets of forces, which have increasingly become far more complex. The realities of the integrating and integrated global order created by global capitalism and empire have made exclusive contestation and resistance a non-option for people – ironically, especially for those who are most disadvantaged by its inequalities. These realities make participation in the global order a necessary goal in the interests of survival itself – which, in turn, places a significant premium on interactive processes of negotiation, mediation, bargaining, arbitration, collaboration, and so on.

Since the distribution of power and influence within the global order nevertheless remains unequal, so that the sought-after participation never seems to be on terms of parity, these negotiations, collaborations, and the like necessarily demand to be combined with processes of contestation and resistance. But these in turn have become far less straightforward than a superficial view might suggest, for hegemonic forces have begun to develop far more sophisticated methods of control, allowing domination by consensus rather than by force, in ways brought to light by Gramscian thinking. Industry, for instance, has seen the emergence of post-Fordism (Fairclough 1990), and administration, managerialist rationality (Yeatman 1990); both of these comparatively new phenomena are purportedly more democratic, in their openness to merit rather than to mere predetermined rank, and in their encouragement of negotiation over coercion, than what prevailed earlier. Correspondingly, the discourses of such hegemonic forces have made themselves more accessible to ordinary people, not least by using more everyday spoken language. Consider, also, the phenomenon of easification

(the valorization of information and skills over ideas and abstract thinking, the fetishization of credentials over what they are intended to testify to, the preference for short-winded summaries in bullet-point form over reflective explorations that use as many words as the ideas require, and so on) that has emerged within education along with its increasing appropriation by global capitalism, particularly after World War II. It is possible to go beyond mere surmise to actual demonstration – facilitated, it might be noted, by abstract thinking – of how the phenomenon will serve the workings of the dominant global order by helping fit people into the little niches determined for them. To complicate matters even further, all of the “purr” words of civilized, humane discourse (“equality,” “democracy,” “freedom,” “liberation,” “reason,” “tolerance,” “rights,” etc.) have been maneuvered into equally ready service on all sides of the contestatory spectrum, making it difficult to be certain of what one is being persuaded to accept.

The consequence of such very general developments, together with various specific matters which will surface as this article proceeds, is that the entire issue of global epistemological parity has become extremely complicated and fraught. Lines of distinction between liberation and domination get blurred, while seemingly progressive initiatives often work to subvert the very causes they are purportedly serving. Thus, any attempt of the kind made in the book under review to address the issue demands a significant degree of discernment, sensitivity, sophistication, and self-reflexivity, a firm eschewal of naïve or easy responses in the face of immense complexities, and a strong sense of scholarly responsibility. The absence of such qualities is likely to leave the situation worse than it was at the beginning. It is against the background outlined above that this review article is written.

One does not have to accept the book’s almost-invitation to play Third World (TW) astrologer in global academia to predict that it could possibly become a kind of a landmark in various fields of language study in the First World (FW), particularly among self-perceived radicals. Leaving aside the enthusiastic comments of established FW scholars in the blurbs on its cover, there are other considerations that will permit the prediction to be made in a more circumspect scholarly way. In doing so, these might also help reveal, in a way totally unintended by the book, certain grievous shortcomings of the global world of language scholarship (at least the relevant kinds), and, particularly, of its “radical” wings.

The book emerges out of the author’s frustrations at the rejections and/or requests for revision of his papers on TW language situations by established journals in the Euro-American (FW) academic “Center.” On that basis, he builds a case for the democratization of global academic communication and knowledge production, currently center-dominated and unequal. This would be accomplished by a reconstitution of global academic publication to accommodate what appear to be considered unsatisfactory textual practices and modes of literacy of the “Periphery,” and this would allow scholars in the TW to “get published” in

the center. This notion of getting published in the center saturates the book to the extent that it may be termed its presiding desire.

Two substantial prefatory sections (“The problem” and “The project”) set the background for the development of the book’s argument. The first announces the theme of the inequality of global academic practice through an accusation that center scholars appropriate the knowledge of the periphery for their own advantage. The second calls attention to certain material, “non-discursive constraints” that make it difficult for TW scholars to do research in the ways expected by the center. These are illustrated through a graphic, narrative-type description of the terrible conditions of disruption and deprivation under which scholars had to work at the author’s former institution, the University of Jaffna (UJ) in a then war-torn region of Sri Lanka.

The book develops its theme in eight chapters, written in a mixed style, much of it formal and academic, but pronouncedly interspersed throughout with a personal narrative style. The latter, devoted largely to “telling the story” of the UJ experience, plays a conspicuous role in obliging readers to see global academic writing and knowledge production and dissemination under the unrelenting glare of TW deprivations that do not allow its scholars to perform as expected. Through every single chapter, it helps make the points that TW scholars are consigned to a secondary status that parallels their geopolitical roles (chaps. 1 and 2); that they are condemned to unequal and dependent participation in knowledge production (chaps. 3 and 6); that unable, for material and other reasons, to produce work that conforms to the expectations of center scholarship, they come out with work that looks shoddy, sloppy, incompetent, and unprofessional, which in turn affects their chances of being published in center journals (chaps. 4 and 5); and that they cannot prevent center scholars from wresting credit from them for the insightful work they themselves have done (chap. 7). These various matters lead in the concluding chapter (8) to a series of prescriptions for solving the problems of global scholarly inequality.

The points just mentioned are developed on the basis of certain substantive scholarly notions and constructs which are organized and discussed in the eight chapters in a familiar formal academic manner. Chap. 1 (“Contextualising academic writing”) highlights the central role played in knowledge construction by research articles in refereed journals. Chap. 2 (“Communities of knowledge construction”) explains how the process of knowledge construction involves the emergence of disciplinary discourse communities defined by shared linguistic practices and conventions. Chap. 3 (“Conventions in knowledge construction”) makes the point that the conventions and practices involved are not just matters of form but in fact shape the representation in partisan ways determined by patterns of social relations.

Chaps. 4 (“Textual conventions in conflict”) and 5 (“Publishing requirements and material constraints”) scrutinize TW scholarly practices and approaches in the light of, respectively, well-known center schemas dealing with conven-

tions of text construction on the one hand, and publication procedures and requirements on the other, and find them falling short of the expectations these generate. Chap. 6 (“Literacy practices and academic culture”) gives one set of reasons for this, namely those relating to the academic culture out of which TW scholarly practices emerge. It is, the chapter claims, primarily an oral-type culture, which consequently assigns low priority to knowledge construction through writing. Chap. 7 (“Poverty and power in knowledge production”) elaborates the other main set of reasons, relating to the material deprivation of scholars and other associated lacks. The prescriptions that follow from all this in Chap. 8 require the center to exercise more accepting attitudes toward what it might see as unsatisfactory TW work and practices, and to provide TW scholars with more material aid in the way of scholarships, subsidies, and so on. These presumptions concurrently put on the periphery the onus of taking a whole set of steps that will enable it to construct multivocal and hybrid texts which reconcile the current disjuncture between oral and literary modalities.

Almost all of the scholarly notions, constructs, analytical apparatus, perspectives, and even information relating to other TW contexts that are utilized in these basic non-narrative parts of the chapters are drawn from well-established literature and could be expected to be quite familiar to readers of the book; so could the issues of the global inequalities in knowledge production and dissemination, extending far beyond simple publication in the center. The question raised by the prediction made above, then, is this: Why is it exactly the treatment of these familiar matters in THIS book that is likely to earn these issues sustained, serious attention of a kind that they have not received earlier?

The answer that the rest of this article will propose is as follows. Using a mode of argumentation that diverts attention from underlying issues and causes to symptoms, the book packages the entire problem of the global inequality of knowledge in precisely the ways that will leave intact or even strengthen the grounds on which such inequality rests. As might be expected, this will be quite reassuring to a FW scholarship that has helped create that inequality and continues to benefit from it. It will also be very welcome to the global scholarly publishing industry, ever alive to the possibilities of profit from its activities. It is relevant to note in passing that it is books such as these, rather than the research articles that are the focus of the work’s attention, that play a major role in making both reputations for scholars and profits for publishers.

Consider first one of the lesser problems with the argumentation. This relates to the generalizability of the UJ experience to the entire TW. War situations of the kind the UJ found itself in are always “abnormal” and, therefore, resist being generalized to more “normal” situations. This is compounded by the inadequacy of the personal narrative style, whose value for “capturing” experience ethnographers and postmodernists have indeed recognized, to project the whole TW experience (or even just that of the UJ) with immediacy. Any particular situation can generate myriads of personal narratives, each using linguistic symbols to

uniquely “re-present” the presumed “reality” through the filtering concerns of the narrator. This alone raises serious questions about the validity of the generalization sought in this case. In any event, it can hardly be presumed that the view of knowledge and its democratization projected by the particular narrative in the book, driven as this narrative is by its presiding desire, can capture how the TW as a whole might want to look at it.

The point is that the desire to “get published” in the center is only one small facet of the far larger issue – due participation in global knowledge production and dissemination – that the democratization of knowledge raises. As mentioned earlier, this is a hugely complex matter, and one that requires a far more discerning effort than the author is able to make. Such participation entails membership in the global academic community, and, as the book itself recognizes, membership in a community is contingent on a shared commitment to its defining discourses. The discourses are constituted of certain characteristic principles, conventions, practices, and so on (these will collectively be referred to as “conventions” below) that enable a community to achieve its shared, collective goals, on the basis of satisfying the norms and standards that these conventions determine. The problem for TW countries is that, within current global realities, the conventions of global academia are vested with the epistemologies and ideologies of the dominant center – which leads the book to the Foucaultian position (chaps. 3 and 4) that all instances of the workings of the conventions in global academia will necessarily serve to impose the hegemony of the center on the TW.

This confronts TW countries with a major paradox. The urgent tasks of post-colonial reconstruction they are engaged in make it inescapable for them to participate in global academia, but to enter the global academic community is, equally inescapably, to be vulnerable to the hegemonic workings of its conventions. Unfortunately, driven as it is by its presiding desire, the book evades any satisfactory encounter with the challenges of this paradox. There certainly are many instances of editorial requests for revisions or rejections which are clearly driven by ideological or epistemological motivations, and more than just TW scholars can cite ample instances of this. The book, however, provides no evidence of such instances, as, for instance, is provided in Kandiah 2001. The examples provided of the author’s own experiences seem to involve perfectly acceptable judgments on the basis of the “standards of excellence” (p. 272) which the book itself explicitly invokes elsewhere – without acknowledgment, it might be noted, of where these standards would need to come from.

To complicate matters further, all of the book’s own characterization of much UJ practice in fact presents it not as representing genuine epistemological alternatives in any useful sense of the term, but as plain bad scholarship by any standards, let alone those defined by FW conventions. To let the book speak for itself, it is not only that, as mentioned earlier, TW work looks shoddy, sloppy, incompetent, and unprofessional (163, 165). In addition, it is marked by a host of other features such as the following (chaps.4–6, particularly): it shows a lack

of concern with active and creative knowledge generation as such; it is “un-focused”; it displays a “sense of diffidence and incompetence”; it has little understanding of “the expanding horizons” of disciplinary discourses; and it is “dependent” on the center, even to the extent of adopting “outdated” center paradigms; instead of showing “sustained” attention to ideas, it is satisfied with “bits and pieces” of information; it operates in terms of “limited,” “functional” purposes; it lacks “conscious critical engagement”; worse, it shows susceptibility to rank hierarchies, scholarly rivalry, cliquism, struggles for power and reputation, influence, and lobbying, bureaucratic decision making, politicking, and displays of power.

This is a devastating account of TW scholarship. At the same time, for the purpose of its argument, the book HAS to project that scholarship positively, as actually representing an “alternative discourse” (108), which gives expression to its own very different epistemology/ies (152) and its own “different logic” (112) and which, moreover, is “refreshingly oppositional” (55). The many unsatisfactory features from which it had been noted to suffer and which would make it difficult to accept such claims about it are, to a considerable extent, argued away by using the notion of “non-discursive constraints” mentioned earlier; the constraints are the result of material conditions of deprivation in the TW context, and, therefore, presumably excusable.

This volte-face is accomplished by means of a set of mere declarations, entirely contradictory of the negative features listed earlier, to the effect that the UJ culture is hybrid, democratic, egalitarian, multivocal, pluralistic, and interdisciplinary, mindful of its civic responsibilities, pleasant, and relaxed (chaps. 6 and p. 141). None of these declarations, highly romanticizing in their effect, is subjected to the kind of critical scrutiny that is strenuously advocated elsewhere in the book, with damaging consequences. An example of such consequences is provided by an examination of the claims relating to the multivocality and plurality of the culture. These are based partly on the claim that there exist in the culture both tradition and modernity, in mutual tension. While modernism is criticized along currently fashionable lines for its post-Enlightenment “empiricism,” “positivism” and “scientism,” tradition receives much more gingerly treatment. The discrepancy here is possibly because, although both modernity and tradition need to be kept intact for the purposes of the argument for multivocality and plurality, modernity has a taken-for-granted status within current realities which might make it less vulnerable to criticism than tradition, which, therefore, needs to be protected from interrogation and maintained as some kind of totalizing, essentialist “given.”

Thus, no effort is made to draw out the strengths and resources that tradition might and actually does contribute to the current epistemologies that are claimed to be in contestation with the hegemonic center epistemologies. Moreover, in order to maintain tradition intact for the purpose of the argument, the actual opportunistic exploitation of it in bitter *Realpolitik* battles among rival power groups

within the MODERN polity is ignored, even though this in fact militates against the articulation of the epistemologies demanded by contemporary realities. Worse, even tradition's negative features (its dependence on the unchallengeability of the ancients and ancient canonical texts [51], and its use of rhetorical strategies to cause people to "suppress" their "questions and arguments" [184–85]) are nonchalantly or approvingly accepted, even celebrated. From here it is but a short step to the kind of relativism that legitimizes just about anything, including such things, which tradition is too often used to justify across the TW, as caste, chauvinism, child brides, *sati*, foot binding, female circumcision, cannibalism, astrology, or Hare Krishna-type cultism. Surely, the epistemological democratization with which the TW is concerned cannot be based on assent to such things?

What seems in the book's view to sanction its exemption of this romanticized view of UJ culture from critical interrogation is its claim, which is basic to its argument, that this is primarily an oral-type culture. The claim is preposterous enough. The Tamil-using inhabitants of the Jaffna region have a literary history which goes back many centuries. They have long- and well-established systems of schooling, both traditional and modern, with modern education being both compulsory and free since the 1940s. The island of Sri Lanka, within which the region lies, has a literacy rate around 90%, and a strong print culture. As in many acknowledgedly literate communities, some pockets exist that nurse oral cultural modes of communication, and, as everywhere, spoken communication far exceeds written communication. But any understanding of the fundamental, very widely accepted classification of cultures into oral and literate on the basis of the historical evolution of civilizations would make completely untenable such a characterization of not just the UJ community but also of many other contemporary TW communities.

Nevertheless, the book NEEDS to make the claim that the UJ culture is an oral-type rather than a literate-type culture. This is for the purpose, crucial to its argument, of re-presenting in positive terms the characteristics of the culture that had earlier been presented so negatively, as in fact reflecting an alternative epistemology. The underlying assumption here is borrowed from superurbanized scholars of the center, as well as of the TW, who are enamored of primitive exotica. It is that the communications of oral cultures, and the "everyday knowledge" associated with them, being more immediate and spontaneous and more equally available to all "ordinary" people than are the abstract, knowledge-oriented communications of literacy-based cultures, are inherently more to be valued than are the latter. There is also the trace of a suggestion that for these reasons they can even be trusted more, being more innocent and, perhaps, neutral. The merest glance at oral and written acts of communication in the real world will give the lie to this sentimentalizing assumption. Both speech and writing may be epistemologically and ideologically vested in favor of one group or person, and both have resources that may be used either to persuade, mislead, and mystify people, or, on the other hand, to enable them to resist such work-

ings. In any event, as we are reminded by the ancient Indian grammatical tradition, which existed before writing had arrived, the equation of abstract thinking and literacy in this sense is not inevitable.

All of this combines with the very negative account of TW scholarship presented earlier to ensure that the TW epistemologies that are celebrated by fiat hardly emerge as possible robust alternatives to the center epistemologies with which they are presented as being in contestation, but instead as attenuated phenomena, lacking quality, intellectual muscle, and depth. In any event, the book does not itself seem to believe its own romanticized account of TW culture. This is evident from certain Freudian slips, very revealing of its real viewpoint, which the book makes about the culture at certain unguarded moments. For instance, it repeatedly describes TW scholars and communities as “local.” More interestingly, it unwittingly declares that a failure of the culture to expose itself to center thinking and to get published in the center may leave that culture in “a blissful state of ignorance and isolation” (29) or “a state resembling one of happy idiocy” (269)!

This is entirely consistent with the main polemical strategy that the book, driven by its presiding desire, depends on to support the case for the global democratization of knowledge. Ultimately, it is a strategy based on an appeal to the global academic community’s feelings of sympathy for the terrible plight of UJ scholars, an appeal which does not allow their culture to be presented as anything but woeful. Their plight is relentlessly exhibited throughout the book in the many narrative sections which are tactically woven into it whenever an abstractly articulated point needs to be clinched, through graphic descriptions of the sufferings and ordeals of the UJ community. Such descriptions exalt not strength and resilience but weakness, and they seem to work very much like the unabashed displays of open sores by mendicants in TW slums.

And that, indeed, is what the whole argument of the book on behalf of TW scholarship finally reduces to: an extended act of mendicancy, designed, at least in part, to subject privileged FW scholarship to a trial of conscience. The plight of the UJ scholars, features of which are indeed shared by some other TW scholars, is by no means undeserving of sympathy. But its use in the book to evade the challenge to compellingly establish credentials for the acceptance of TW scholarship as an equal partner in global academia, and instead to throw that scholarship on the mercy of FW scholarship, can only strengthen the latter’s privileges by creating a scenario where the strength of the already strong is made even more perfect in the weakness of the weak. Worse, while a TW quarter (occupying far more than just a quarter of the world) might possibly be set up through the charity of remorseful FW scholars, it will only stand out as loudly representing not an alternative epistemology, as the book would have it, but everything that scholarship, as exemplified by the FW, is not, and ought not to be.

It does not help, either, that this TW scholarship will be short not only on quality but also on ethics. Some of the “coping strategies” which TW scholars are

claimed to adopt in compensating for the disadvantages which FW conventions impose on them, and which the book approves of as a sign of their willingness and ability to resist the scholarly hegemony of the FW, are in fact mere instances of sharp practice. Among such coping strategies are the use of citations for the “name recognition” value of the texts involved (130), “unattributed textual borrowing” (131), and vague gestures of acquiescence toward the expected conventions purely for “credentialling purposes” (136) or merely “in order to see the paper into print” (149). Acts of mendicancy are known, of course, not to place too high a premium on an ethics they cannot afford. This is an unhappy reality that has been confirmed by scholarly TW studies of the phenomenon, and also by Bertolt Brecht’s brilliant treatment of it in *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mother Courage* – all the more brilliant for the way in which it never allows us to forget the systemic sources of that reality. But to use that reality to support an argument on behalf of a TW scholarship in search of recognition is hardly acceptable.

The success of acts of mendicancy depends, of course, on concealment of whatever real strengths the mendicants might possess. The book achieves this in the case of TW scholarship by a series of significant suppressions of certain actualities of that scholarship which help shore up the damaging account of it on which the strategy depends. One set of these involves the contemporary indigenous language traditions of scholarship that have been developed across many TW regions of the world. A further set involves the exciting work done across, for instance, the entire South Asian region, and very richly in India, in a variety of languages and in a range of fields – including the structural/theoretical linguistic field which the book denigrates so, reproducing the clichés of some of the more parochial linguistic and other wars of the center. Some of the work belonging to these two sets occasionally receives a bare mention, but less for what it has to say for itself than to bolster the argument of the book.

However, the most strategic suppression is that of the entire context of the Sri Lankan nation of which the Jaffna region is a part. There simply is no way in which a meaningful account of the region’s scholarship can be provided in total disregard of the larger national context within which it inextricably belongs (Kandiah 2003). But the book chooses to set aside nonchalantly all of extensive scholarship and publication that has gone on in this context in a wide range of fields and in all kinds of fora during the past five decades or more, and not only in the indigenous languages. There is no need to idealize this scholarship. As in all scholarly communities across the world, a lot of it is mediocre, at times even pernicious, not least because it is sometimes so uncritically imitative of center thinking. At the same time, a great deal of the work done is quite relevant to the issues of knowledge, ideology, and so on that the book undertakes to address through its study of academic writing. The portions of this work that are most immediately salient to it are, clearly, those that deal with discourse and language.

These have sought to engage fully, and without shrinking from its complexities, with the paradox with which membership in the global academic community

has confronted TW countries. They have done so by seeking to enter that community, a community outside which their global realities do not allow them to set themselves without stultifying themselves, and by taking as complete and commanding control of its conventions as possible. The thinking behind the attempt is as follows. Owing to the normalizing aspect of the conventions, adopting them clearly raises the danger of assimilation to the ideologies and epistemologies with which the conventions are vested. At the same time, in the battles of resistance that these ideological and epistemological loadings make necessary, it is these conventions themselves that are the best and most powerful weapons that can be used. It makes little sense to try to enter the community with alternative conventions that might be seen as shabby and incompetent, that belong in no discernible way within the community, and whose illegitimacy in defining membership already ensures their marginalization in the context and renders them irrelevant, powerless, and ineffective within it. This would amount to an attempt to engage in battle with grossly unequal weapons – catapults versus fighter jets.

In any event, the conventions of a community define the currency in which any negotiations and exchanges may viably take place within that community. It is necessary, therefore, to take firm control of the conventions, to appropriate them. But once this is done, or even as it is being done, they can be liberated from the contingent constraints which have, up to now, not allowed their full potential to be drawn out. Such liberation is characteristic of all language use. It is illustrated by the way in which, for instance, all languages continually develop new resources and change, even while remaining “the same.” Further instances are provided by creative uses of language – and not just in literature – which free it from the limits of the rules that govern the shared system these uses must draw on. Part of this act of liberation could well involve adjustments to or reworkings of the conventions that help extend their semiotic range, and also their ideological and epistemological range, while still allowing them to remain the shared basis of the now extended community held together by them. This enables conventions to serve in the projection of distinct TW messages and voices which nobody can pretend any longer not to hear, because it is done through an essentially shared medium which defines the more inclusive global community.

All of this has the potential to enable the emergence of an interactive, mutually PARTICIPATORY community of scholarship across the globe. In the process, it helps reverse the current one-way and, therefore, dependency-ensuring directionality of the flow of ideas from center to periphery. It does this not least through opening insights, in a shared but non-monotonic idiom, into academic and other problems which center academia has often found recalcitrant. This thinking finds various expression in Parakrama 1995, Kandiah 1995, and, with apologies, in a further series of papers by me that deal specifically with many of the very issues and complexities that this book raises (references are available on request to interested readers).

The work that expresses this strand of TW thinking is published both nationally and internationally and is easily accessible to scholars, especially to scholars purporting to emanate from the Sri Lankan context. In spite of this, and in spite of its immediate relevance both to the issues the book is concerned with and to the language-related field of study to which it belongs, the book chooses to erase it even more completely than center scholarship, including its “radical” wing, has already found it convenient or useful to do. This allows it to launch the fiction that “the hegemony of the center goes unchallenged” (286) in the periphery because the “failure” of its scholars “to find their unique sense of mission and philosophy” (286) has made it “hard to find published sources” within their milieu (132) that address the issue.

This erasure saves the book from an encounter with some of the more complex dimensions of thinking that the democratization of knowledge and knowledge production involves. In doing so, it allows it to sustain the picture of the weakness of TW scholarship that is crucial to its mendicant strategy. But it also does much more. By expelling radical TW scholarship from the space that it has already created for itself, it allows control of that space to be unsolicitedly handed over to center scholars (explicitly named, as it happens) on whose work, in spite of its undeniable virtues, TW scholarship has not always found it useful to draw. This was the case either because TM scholars had already begun to move in other directions from those represented by its thinking, or because that thinking was in any event not quite adequate for the complex demands of the project of resistant reconstruction that that scholarship had launched. Thus, the book asserts, even the act of “resistance to the West” and the critique of its “linguistic imperialism” have to “be first articulated in the West before (they) can become an acceptable project” in the periphery. For it is center scholars who “provide the texts to understand” such resisting work (236–37). It is interesting in this respect that the book provides a place within this now-sanitized space for center-based emigrant scholars (for example, Braj B. Kachru) whose thinking had been demonstrated by the erased TW scholarship to be unsatisfactory for the purposes at hand (258). Revealingly, the center scholars named have been glad to embrace the work of such emigrant scholars.

By these means, the book firmly secures the dependence of TW scholarship on the FW thinking it claims it is seeking to resist, something very important to the mendicant mode of argumentation it has adopted. Moreover, it does this in ways that are very reassuring to FW scholarship, for it removes from the scene all possible threat of “local” rivals to that scholarship. After all, nothing is so intimidating or destabilizing to those who want to maintain control of things as “outsiders” who show themselves able to use the resources that secured this control at least as well as the controllers can. The often-remarked discomfort that is generated in so-called “native speakers” of English who believe in their own exclusive proprietary right to the language when they encounter so-called “non-native” speakers who use it “too well” is a case in point.

If the observations made above have any validity, then it is likely that what this book will do is consolidate and strengthen the current dominance of FW scholarship within global academia, even while the author projects himself as striving toward the democratization of knowledge and knowledge production. Moreover, it will do so in a manner that will be very palatable to that scholarship, particularly to its radical wing. The latter will now find it far easier to live with their awareness of the privileges they have shown little evidence of being willing to let go.

Supporting the facilitation of this “achievement” are two further features of argumentation in the book which I have not mentioned until now. One set involves the frequent announcements of awareness or recognition of complexity in the matters dealt with, of their “multi-vocality” or “hybridity” and so on. The discussion above has already indicated that what we in fact see are reductive oversimplifications which consistently evade engagement with complexities – for instance, in the insufficiently informed use of the notions of narrativity, orality, and tradition. Indeed, for the success of the mendicant strategy, it is important that the epistemological contest must be presented not in the complex way that the erased scholarship mentioned has attempted, but rather as a fairly straightforward opposition between two effectively dichotomous, totalized and totalizing singularities. The explicit announcements of recognition must, therefore, be present simply for ritual purposes, to reassure readers that everything is being taken care of.

What might just about enable these strategies to work is the book’s prolific use, largely in a taken-for-granted, “emblematic” way (that is to say, simply for their assumed “magical,” symbolic power), of the avant-gardiste vocabulary of postmodernist critical theory and its textual hermeneutic discourse. Terms like *scientism*, *positivism*, *empiricism*, *orality*, *multi-vocal*, *narrative*, *hybrid*, *contingent*, *disjunction*, *resistance*, *conflict*, *hegemony*, *critical awareness*, and a host of others, pepper the writing. Without doubt, this vocabulary and the thinking associated with it have gone a long way toward opening up the closed structures into which knowledge and its expressions and institutions, and indeed thinking itself, had ossified over their history. At the same time, in their fashionable consumerist-type use in these hyper-real, commercialized times, they have also begun to acquire a certain narcotic power over minds, often evacuating them of exactly the critical awareness that the terms themselves seem to entail.

In the process, they facilitate an escape from addressing exactly the matters that need attention: the determinate material realities of the global order within which the causes of the entire unequal situation are embedded (Ahmad 1992). These realities – economic, political, and so on – reflect certain characteristic hierarchized distributions and patterns of social control, social relations, and social functions and roles (including those involving the FW as distinct from the TW). The distributions and patterns have been fashioned over the centuries by the structuring operations of global capitalism, working, in response to the re-

quirements of its modes of production, in tandem with empire. In the process, they also “objectively determine” and connect all the various kinds of productions and processes that take place throughout the world, including cultural productions and processes such as scholarship and academic publication (Ahmad 1992). The problems of poverty and inequality with which the book deals in the realm of scholarship are, then, but a reflex of the more encompassing phenomena of poverty and inequality which these operations have created and in which vast numbers of the ordinary people of the TW are far more desperately enmeshed than are scholars, who anywhere tend to be among the privileged. It is, in fact, exactly such considerations that assign significance to the treatment of the problems of inequality and poverty in the epistemological realm, in the form of a quest for the kind of understanding of them that is a crucial prerequisite for the praxis that an unequal world seems to need so badly.

But it is exactly such matters that the fashionable rhetoric allows to pass unrecognized. It does so by depositing the entire problematic of discursive communal-ity within a Foucaultian state of eternal conflict (chap. 2), characterized by the self-sufficient and all-enmeshing principles of power, control, and order, operating independently of agency and in their own irresistible right. In its gratifyingly exotic “unhousedness,” all of this can yield immense exhilaration to comparatively well-provided scholars whose positions are ensured. However, the vast numbers of TW people – the “subalterns” who have to live with the poverty, deprivation, and so on created by the material realities of a global order outside which they have no option to place themselves – cannot afford any of this. The epistemologies and ideologies of global academia that will serve their interests within the global order will need to operate in ways that, in full cognizance of the workings of that order and the impossibility of simply setting either it or its methods completely aside, will in some way make it a little more possible that their voices might, just might, be heard. True, given Spivak’s insight that the subalterns might not be able to speak for themselves, their voices cannot but be mediated in the epistemological realm by those who have the necessary equipment for the purpose – in this case, the scholars, including people like the writer of this review article. But that puts a huge onus of responsibility on the mediators, to try at least to recognize their own limitations (of class, affluence, privilege, etc.) in this respect. These always make them vulnerable to the danger of misrepresenting the narratives of the subalterns or of exploiting the great afflictions of an unequal global order for their own purposes.

The argument has led us to a further recognition that is important to the whole endeavor of the book. This is that in academic fields of the kind it belongs to – those that occupy the realm of (to use Chomsky’s notion) Orwell’s problem rather than Plato’s problem – the epistemological endeavor runs inevitably into the ethical. Some of the ways in which it does so are suggested by Habermas 1979 in his cogitations on the emergence of “moral-practical knowledge/

insight/consciousness” out of “communicative action.” But, as the argument of this article has sought to indicate, if the underlying ethical issues that arise in this realm are to be effectively addressed at all by scholars, it is important for those scholars not to forget their responsibility to the human subjects who, in the last account, lie at the very heart of their endeavors. Evidence of the book’s failure to recognize the import of any of these various underlying dimensions of the problem it undertakes to deal with are to be found in its ready endorsement, in the final chapter, of pronouncements made by the World Bank. The TW has generally tended to be cautious of such pronouncements and the accompanying prescriptions, precisely because of their advocacy of such matters as “direct investment and technology transfer” (291), which are often seen also to involve dimensions that reinforce capitalist hegemony. Further evidence of the failure is to be found in the naïve hope the book expresses that rights which are important to the TW will be “honored” by multinational corporations, often seen in the TW as the main, totally conscienceless agents of their economic exploitation. Finally, note its ingenuous expression of “sad(ness)” that “marketing considerations” and “economic motivations” should “stand in the way of democratising knowledge production” (271)! The last two matters mentioned represent in the hard-headed, and generally hard-hearted, realm of global economic operations the equivalent of the mendicant strategy, the only response which the approach of the book has left open to itself.

All of this is likely to make it less than easy for TW scholars to accept the book’s offer to “educate” (13) them and “motivate them to do systematic research” (21), or to want to learn from its “demonstrat[ion of] ways they can negotiate the dominant conventions in their favour” (31), or to endorse its “claim to represent” (11) and “present the case for” them (18) on the grounds that “it is migrant scholars like me who can create an understanding between [the] separate academic worlds” involved (28).

Nevertheless, to return to my prediction a few pages ago, there is indeed a good chance that this book will earn itself the desired pot of gold at a rainbow’s end located somewhere in the center; but only in a manner that, while further strengthening the hegemony of center scholarship, will militate strongly against all the true interests of TW scholarship. The ultimate losers will be the vast numbers of dispossessed human subjects who need that scholarship to give them a voice within a material global reality that has for too long withheld it from them. The last word cannot but belong to “A.J.,” the brilliant and perceptive Jaffna mind who figures so prominently in the numerous narrative sections of the book, at least as some kind of inadequate compensation for the gross way in which he has throughout been misused by the book’s arguments to bolster a case that he cannot possibly agree with: “This way radical scholars and critics in the West can salve their consciences while business goes on as usual” (27).

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