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## Articulating Identities: Communities, Histories, Migrations

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This paper offers a critical discussion of how identities get articulated in relation to migrations, spaces and histories. Specifically, it addresses historical and material conditions under which community and ethnic identities are named in certain ways. We argue that the one-to-one relationship between national and ethnic identities that we sometimes ascribe to our students in TESOL is problematic, since issues of identities are integrally tied to complex relational issues of histories, movements, and spaces. Amid a great deal of current discussion about fluid identities and the problems of essentialism, we need to come to an understanding of several key issues relating to identities: First, there may be very good reasons to present unified identity formations in order to gain a voice in a particular time and place. Second, a particular mode of assembling oneself occurs when experience is collectively enunciated in very specific ways. Third, so much of what we regard as identity emerges from identification with carefully constructed assemblages and their associated rhetoric. Fourth, particular interpretations of history are legitimised to produce very specific knowledges and enunciations with which we identify. Fifth, the identities that are handed down to us by history demand alienation and dissolution. Our points about identities while drawing on a range of data and contexts focus specifically on the lives of Anglo-Indians, and our present dual engagement to contest the national identities handed down to each of us, what we call translocal postcolonialism, permits us to speak of ethnicities and nationalities differently.

### Articulating identities

When we raise questions about identity, place and movement, we need to consider several important issues. In this disparate world, with its inequitable economic and political relations, its immigration policies that render some people 'illegal', its definitions of citizens, indigenous peoples and new arrivals, who can afford to take on mixed identities? After all, some people are still struggling for the right to have an identity, or at least to have their identity recognised. So, amid both the fixity of identity with which our field of TESOL and applied linguistics often becomes entrenched (assigning static identities along lines of gender, race and ethnicity) and the easy talk of hybridity that has flowed, particularly from cultural studies (we all have fluid, multiple, hybrid identities), how do we locate a sense of identity in relation to material conditions, location, language, migrations and histories?

Much has been written recently about the possibility of fluid identities in conditions of globalisation and increased human movement (the ethnoscares of rural/urban migration, refugees, economic and political migration, travel, tourism, conferences) as well as increased interconnectivity through new communication networks (mediascapes, linguascapes, mobile networks, blogs, MySpace). Yet people move or connect to different communities under very different conditions: economic, social, political. So before continuing, at the very least, we may need to distinguish between various ways of thinking about this. We can think in terms of translocality (e.g. Clifford, 1997), where different local relations are interconnected; so that, for example, immigrants from one place of origin, say, Sri Lanka or Lebanon, who are now settled in very different places, say Canada, France or Australia, stay interconnected and retain certain local practices within a global space. This is not new: Cornish miners, who moved to Moonta (South Australia), 'little Cornwall' as it became known, in the late 1800s maintained their Cornish connections, practices and language across time and space. They stayed in touch for generations through letters, newspapers, marriages and migrations to the Cornish homeland, while constantly reiterating the status of Moonta as the 'spiritual home' of 'Australia's Cornish identity' (Payton, 2007, p.219).

From a different point of view, we can also think in terms of what Maher (2005) calls *metroethnicity*: "a reconstruction of

ethnicity: a hybridised 'street' ethnicity deployed by a cross-section of people with ethnic or mainstream backgrounds who are oriented towards cultural hybridity, cultural/ethnic tolerance and a multicultural lifestyle in friendships, music, the arts, eating and dress" (p.83). Looking particularly at Japan, Maher points to the ways in which both Japanese and people with minority backgrounds 'play' with ethnicity (not necessarily their own). The possibility of trying on new identities has become 'cool'. Of course, metroethnicity is an emergent possibility only for those living within certain conditions of globalisation, in contexts where there is easy access to forms of multicultural life, where levels of affluence make travel and cultural style easily available, and where class, cultural, racial, religious or ethnic conflict are not a daily threat. Metroethnicity, which is akin in some ways to Rampton's (1995) observations of how urban school children played with different language varieties, or Otsuji's (2008) description of how people performed different identities in multilingual workplaces, has also, it might be argued, become one of those features of the affluent end of the TESOL world, where students travel and learn English as part of a new set of metroethnic performances.

However, amid all of this, we also need to acknowledge that in many other contexts identities, either ascribed by others or taken on in self-affirmation, become the very mobilisations around which conflict occurs. We only have to think of recent events in Kenya or Kosovo to see how the ascriptions of identities, or the taking up of particular identities, play a very different role. In this paper, we shall look at certain conditions under which identities are articulated in quite distinct ways. Drawing on research into ways in which people of English background understood and created different forms of Anglo-Indian identity, we will try in this paper to show how what we call *translocal postcolonialism* – with its particular focus on micro-histories and movement – can help us see how identities are made. This has particular importance for the world of TESOL since it sheds light on the ways in which identities are not the pre-given entities we sometimes ascribe to our students, but rather are far more complex, historical, transitional, relational ways of being.

### Collective identities

The point about assuming distinct identities takes on particular overtones in relation to collective identities, especially in cases of reductive (essentialised) presentations. Our first example

regarding this is quite brief, and has to do with the Dalits in India. The 'lowest' caste group, and historically marginalised in most every space, 'Dalit' literally means 'trod underfoot'—a phrase they chose to remind 'upper-caste' people of their oppressed status. A most diverse group of people with issues of class, gender, sub-castes, sexualities cutting through them, the Dalits, in order to gain recognition in the public space, such as seats in colleges or jobs, have over several decades worked very hard to assemble a unified front. They have had to cultivate a distinct mode of self-presentation; to counter certain historical truths so that their experiences and wounds of injustice and marginalisation can be heard. This is our first point about identities (and self-presentations). While this kind of unified assemblage erases differences, it does so to enable voices to be heard, to counter dominant tropes, to assume the authority to present people in particular ways instead of staying in corners (see Prasad, 2007; Thiagaraj, 2007 for detailed discussion about Dalit modes of self-presentation).

The second example is more immediate and has to do with some of Ramanathan's (2006) ongoing work with various vernacular-and-English-medium teachers in Ahmedabad, the city she grew up in, where she has, for the last 10 years or so, been actively engaged with issues of teacher education, civic change, and curricular reform in both formal and non-formal contexts. Self-presentation in this case is not one that finds articulation in the kind of force of the Dalit movement, but one that operates quietly, determinedly. In 2002, the city of Ahmedabad broke out in the worst riots in recent years. Media reports stated that 58 Hindus were returning home from a religious pilgrimage chanting Hindu prayers, when the train made a scheduled stop at Godhra, about 20 miles outside Ahmedabad. There was a scuffle with a Muslim tea-vendor at the station outside the booth carrying these pilgrims and with insults being traded between the Hindu pilgrims and Muslim vendors the scene erupted to a point at which the booth was doused with gasoline and the pilgrims were burnt to death. The rampage that many Hindus went on in the days that followed that event in the city was horrific. Muslim homes, shops and business were looted and burned, women were raped and killed, children were maimed, people were tortured. As if this were not enough, the following year an earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale devastated Ahmedabad. As is generally the case, though, the people who needed the most help, poorer, 'low-caste' or Muslim families, obtained help last, if at all.

So what does this have to do with distinctive self-presentations? There were several activist groups in the city which sprang into action after both events. In the workshops that followed in succeeding summers, the primary theme that was continually underscored was that civic education and communal healing in the city had to begin in non-formal educational contexts by harnessing the 'vernacular'; namely, the local, immediate, native (Gujarati in this case) resources: figuring out the kinds of houses that people in villages wanted built, finding ways of mobilising vernacular-medium students to work in communal kitchens and shelters in poorer parts of the city, organising student groups to find vernacular-medium Muslim students whose houses and college materials had been burned and who were thinking of leaving both their education and the city.

The notion of the 'vernacular' here refers to the complex intersections that make up the local, including cosmopolitanism, and does not have associations of parochialism with which it is often linked. Indeed, the 'vernacular', like English, has never been distinct. Like English, 'the vernacular' shifts forms, assuming particular articulations in specific moments and places, articulations that get 'storied' by researchers and the media that run the risk of giving it distinct 'auras'. Gujarati ways of living, being, thinking, operating - indeed, the very sentiments that the English-medium press and people in the city have for a long time decried as rabid - became a powerful way to bring about civic awareness in non-formal educational domains, as well as speaking to local citizenship. This relates to the second point about distinctive identities and self-presentations. A particular mode of assembling oneself sometimes occurs when experience is collectively enunciated in very specific ways and when that enunciation gets strategically called on as a resource by which to counter regimes that suffocate expression. We live in a world where unspeakable crimes are perpetrated systematically on peoples, and there has to be a way for people to speak of their pain and for us to listen and attend, regardless of how defensive those articulations make us, or of how divergent our ideological positions might be.

So identities do indeed assume very different articulations, and the terms by which we speak of them, such as essentialism, need judicious wording. Meanings of experiences: what comes through them, how they get 'storied' and presented, how they get spoken about in different spaces (in English, as opposed to a vernacular



language in India) call for careful dis-assembling. So, perhaps we should think not just in terms of all essentialisms being about the particular politics of self- and other presentations that have emerged from specific enunciations of collective experiences, but of us, teachers, researchers, scholars, becoming critical readers, alert to uncovering the politics around them all: who is the essentialised, distinctive self being presented to and why? What justifications are being drawn on to do so? What dominant historical tropes are being countered?

### Identity and locality

Considering place and identity, of the different relations we the authors have as academics, through families, in history, to India, England, Australia and the USA, foregrounds three important themes. First, it matters not only what place we talk about but where we talk about place. When we talk about different ways of thinking about place and identity at conferences in India, as we have done in the last few years, it is a very different issue from when we talk about these issues in Alice Springs. This is always to keep place in mind. Second, these connections to India, England and Australia can never be distanced too far from the histories of colonialism that made these movements possible. This is to keep history, and power, in mind. Third, we need to ask for whom identities are flexible. This is to keep locality in an uneven world in mind.

It is also clear that, at least for some people, there are various identity choices available, and we can opt for a diversity of identities, which can also include, amongst the options, what we might have assumed to have been our 'home' practices. At the same time, many academic and popular discourses tend to celebrate the notion of diversity, that identities are multiple, fragmented, performed, and to critique notions of essentialism, the idea that nation, location, culture and birth are indelibly linked and even determine how we behave. This critique of essentialism has taken place for very good reason. Thirty years of postcolonial and cultural studies have helped us move away from a vision, and particularly an imposed vision, of cultural behaviour and belonging, whereby the Japanese have certain characteristics, the French others, and so on. This has been a particular problem in applied linguistics and TESOL, where a long-standing tendency to ascribe particular identities to particular people has led to limitations in both research and teaching practice (Kubota, 2004).

We not only need to see how identity may be used strategically, but we also need to learn how to read identity enunciations in more critical ways. A parallel point to the one about the Dalit in India can be made about indigenous Australians, though we make such comparisons with great caution. A continent of diversity, of languages, peoples and cultures has been collapsed into one 'Aboriginal' identity by European invaders, and has also by necessity been taken up by indigenous Australians as a means for political solidarity. Yet, as indigenous hip hop artist MC Wire puts it, performing and speaking in Sydney, for example, is for him an international event:

"Right now, I'm international, I'm in another man's land, the nation of Gadagul, I come from the nation of Gombangi. I also try to bring that awareness through hip hop, there are so many different shades of Aboriginal. One of the biggest personal achievements for me has been going to communities and performing. From somewhere like the Block to somewhere like Noombuwa<sup>1</sup>, where it's very different but still the same." (personal communication, 31 March, 2006)

Another way of thinking about identities can also be in terms of the duality of origins. Indigenous Australian Wire MC explains his phrase *abo-digital*, by pointing to the ambiguous meaning created by the word digital.

"I'm abo-digital because I'm a Twenty-first century Aboriginal, I'm down with laptops and mobile phones and home entertainment. But digital also means your hands and your fingers, so I'm still putting my fingers in the dirt; I'm still using my hands to create things. So that's the ambiguity" (Wire MC, personal communication, 31 March, 2006).

This image is important for several reasons: It pulls a sense of the indigenous away from an indelible link to traditional ways of doing things. This is a twenty-first century Aboriginal performer at home in a digital, global era. Yet at the same time, he has dirty hands, fingers that create from the land to which Aboriginal

<sup>1</sup> The comparison here is between the poor and predominantly indigenous inner-city area of Redfern in Sydney known as the Block, and small rural indigenous communities such as Noombuwa. The interview data are drawn from a project on globalisation and hip hop (see Pennycook, 2007).

Australians have been so deeply connected for thousands of years. Wire MC links the traditional and modern in another way, through his notion of hip hop as 'the modern day corroboree'. Hip hop brings people together in new ways, to tell stories, to sing and dance but "it's still the same corroboree, still singing and dancing and telling the same stories about the immediate environment" (Wire MC, personal communication, 31 March, 2006).

When Wire MC suggests that hip hop is part of Aboriginal culture and always has been, this is not of course to suggest that hip hop as a global cultural formation was invented by indigenous Australians. Rather, it is to argue that what now counts as Aboriginal hip hop is the product of a dynamic set of identifications, with African American music, style and struggle, and a dynamic set of re-identifications, with indigenous music, style and struggle. This suggests that in the process of appropriation of language and culture, it is not just that we can make things our own, but that the origins become intertwined (Pennycook and Mitchell, 2009).

### Constructing identities

Moving now into addressing how identities get constructed by history, indeed, by very particular accounts of history, while also speaking about how 'origins' are always mixed and complex, we turn towards addressing Alastair Pennycook's familial connections to a space faraway from England, where he was born and raised. His mother was born in India and his grandparents spent 35 years in Kerala. His own visit back to the family house opens up the possibility of thinking about 'origins' in alternate ways. A question we would like to consider is: if so much of his familial background was in India, then how 'English' could he be, and how much of India is in him?

In order to understand, we need to go back in time to understand how the term 'origins' came to be understood in light of the British presence in India. There were the discourses of Empire, the Raj, as it was called, that over centuries cultivated a very distinct kind of self-presentation, a particular Englishness by, among other things, keeping the Indian 'natives' at a distance to preserve a sense of their 'purity', and 'whiteness' (McClintock, 1995, ). This rhetoric in confluence with the discourses of working for 'God, King and Country' worked to create a strong and specific orientation to 'heritage' and 'origins'. Schools and colleges were set up to prepare

the English for coming out to India, with handbooks on everything from finding appropriate ingredients for English cooking to raising children with Indian maids (ayahs as they are called), to dealing with the Indian heat, to how to give orders to servants. Englishness, in all its facets, was to be maintained at all costs; being tainted by acquiring an Indian accent, by having mixed-race children, or by picking up Indian habits was seriously disallowed. A sense of preserving one's Englishness and English origins, foods, habits, lifestyles, language, then, in the South Asian context at least, was bound up with the Raj (Beutner, 2004; Flemming, 2004; Brenden, 2005; Foss, 2006). As Young (2008) points out, much of this reductive identity was established in terms of preserving linguistic and racial difference and distance.

Such serious cultivation of English 'origins' though, as much recent writing has pointed out, came at the cost of tremendous pain to individual families. Children of upper class English homes (Beutner, 2006; Flemming, 2004; Brenden, 2005) were sent away to England for schooling to acquire English ways of being and living, and sometimes families did not meet each other for years. Coping with physical and emotional hardships would help give them the character, it was believed. "If they survived the rigours of their childhood, lonely, young exiles of Empire would stand to gain from Britain's increase of power and wealth during the years when she became mistress of the seas and the workshop of the world" (Brenden, 2005, p.40). Such enforced separations, though, and the general justifications given for them, meant that many families reared their children through letters. In the case of Alastair's family history, his mother was sent away to England and she and her sister were raised by their grandparents through letters, which in those days took weeks to arrive. The relational identities of the writers emerged gradually, through letters, time and the evolving relationship between them.

Alastair's grandparents, particularly his grandmother, somehow needed to achieve several things through their letters to their daughters in England. They needed to communicate, to stay in touch, to keep informed, to obtain and relay news. They also needed to parent, to scold, to praise, to sympathise, to encourage, to admonish; to work on particular identities, on producing English girls. While this was in some ways a greater concern for parents whose children were educated in India, because there was the

always the worry that too much of the local might rub off, these concerns were mitigated by the children's proximity.

Leaving her two daughters in England in 1938, Dorothy wrote to them on her way back to India: "I didn't like leaving you two darling little sprats at all – But I know you are both very sensible, and will be perfectly happy and well cared for till I see you again"<sup>2</sup>. That would not be until 1946. From 1938, with both daughters back in England, and travel back to Europe impossible because of the war, she wrote constantly.

"Sorry to hear you fell over on your skates, and cut your knee so badly. I expect the dressing hurt you, and made you feel a little faint – That's why you feel so queer, but I'm glad you are O.K. again, - and please be more careful on those skates, or I shall have to take them away again". At this point, there was still every expectation that they would see each other again before long, so Dorothy's threat to take away the skates again remains a possibility.

Later she would have to write to her sister, Nell, who looked after the two girls in the holidays, to manage such parental actions.

Writing letters was the only means of contact, and letter-writing itself became a subject of communication, admonition and concern. Back in Kumbazha on Oct 31, 1938 Dorothy wrote: "It seems awfully queer to have no children in the bungalow, and I find myself just counting the days till your letters come. Please write both sides of your sheets, to save weight."

The complex set of experiences around long distance child rearing that this entailed: the waiting for letters, the ways in which the letters were read and interpreted, the images each formed of the other through these texts, are poignant. The layers here, of being raised through letters and of Alistair Pennycook's writing of them years later, laminates other relations between identities and historical wounds. This is the third point about identities, this time in relation to histories. So much of what we regard as identity, whether communal or personal, emerges from identification with carefully

<sup>2</sup> This and subsequent quotations are taken from a private collection of letters written between the early 1930s to the 1940s. Precise dates for each letter are provided where they were available.

constructed 'assemblages' sometimes larger than life, such as the Empire, and the rhetoric associated with the maintenance of those 'assemblages'. The British Empire was one such construct and its discourses rendered invisible the anguish and messiness behind prolonged familial separations. Our present temporal positionings, several generations later, make us now look at them askance to interrogate not just how they came into being, but whose voices were silenced, the micro-histories that escaped historical representation and are now being told (Beuttner, 2004; Flemming, 2004; Brenden, 2005; Foss, 2006).

To assume, however, that the English in India identified easily and automatically with some notion of the Raj is to overlook many further layers of identification. Joan Densham and Jane Bigg, two women who went to school with Vaidehi Ramanathan's mother in India, and who were interviewed in Oxford in 2007, were born and raised in India, having never seen England until they migrated as young adults. Indeed, Joan Densham is fifth generation Indian on her father's side. Here is what she has to say:

We had absolutely no English background as I am the 5th generation on my father's side to be born in India (second on my mother's side). Our view of England was gleaned from stories told of friends from India who visited England, from the Women's magazines and books we read. These views were obviously biased and we regarded England as a distant country (never 'home'). I did feel that the English were better educated, spoke with a better accent (our Anglo-Indian accent was noticeable), wore more fashionable clothes and lived in better houses. When I came to England (aged 21) I found that all these ideas were wrong! ... I never felt English - in fact I felt somewhat ill at ease with them. My family never called England home and commented (unkindly) on people who we knew grew up in India and said they were "Going home for the holidays". We always regarded Bombay as our home - and I still do (Personal communication, June 26, 2007)

These views about India being home are also picked up by Jane Bigg in her narrative:

Growing up in India was what we did! We knew nothing else, and Bombay was home – all the talk of home by many expatriates, meaning the United Kingdom, meant nothing to us, and we never



called it that, although my mother may have done; after all, it was legitimate for her (personal communication, June 26, 2007).

For both Joan Densham and Jane Bigg, India was home. Indeed, Joan Densham's parents never left India. This takes us back to the question raised earlier: How English could they have been?

In the letters from Alastair Pennycook's grandmother to his mother, the war became over time a quiet rumble in the background. "I hope you are all making a very special effort towards general orderliness, and implicit obedience, just now. That will be one of your best contributions to the war" (personal communication, 11 June, 1940). 'It's beginning to get very hot here, now, and I have to carry a tin of talcum in my knitting bag, to prevent myself sticking to the knitting. I'm making sea-boot stockings, and what queer things they look! But they should help to keep some poor sailors warm" (personal communication, 5 February, 1941). There is also occasional commentary on events in the war: "I expect you are all disappointed that poor little Greece has fallen after her very gallant fight. It does seem sad, but it is only temporary, for we shall conquer that rotten, nasty bully, Hitler, somehow, - and let's hope we shall not take too long to do it" (personal communication, 8 May, 1941). By March 1942, however, the threat of a Japanese invasion of India meant that they too were making preparations for war.

This background of the war offers still more insights into the experiences of cultivating very particular kinds of English identities. The need to contribute to the war effort by modifying one's behaviour, through, among other things, 'implicit obedience', a phrase frequently heard in the south Asian context at that time to remind both Indians and English about their abiding commitment to God, King and Country, becomes tied in interesting ways to Britain's role in the war and being English. The war does far more than merely enforce family separation and common activities such as knitting. It also puts into circulation a range of discourses on identity, on Englishness, on countries under threat of invasion, on a divided Europe, on the Japanese threat to the Empire in Asia.

### Signifying identities

But beyond this, what is becoming evident is that experiences and the self- and other- presentations that emerge from

them are a result of very particular modes of articulation that lead to the cultivation of historical truths, which in turn create other 'experiential effects', and it is crucial that we bring this into our discussion about identities. What were the experiential effects of such long distance parenting? A distinct kind of Englishness emerged through the Empire's discourses of distance and difference. This is where our fourth point about identities, histories and experiences comes in. Our respective histories have been recounted in specific ways to produce a very specific kind of knowledge, one which we embrace, carry and identify with. Both authors are implicated in our pasts because of particular renditions of historical truths. Speaking openly about how discourses of Empire and identifications with them positioned Alastair Pennycook's mother allows the wounds of her story to emerge.

If Empire discourses set in motion particular truths, then those of Nation, when India became independent over 60 years ago in 1947, did the same. Discourses of difference and distance lay at the collective unconscious of the Nation, sowing fertile grounds for a heterogeneous duplication. If the Empire created a very distinct kind of Englishness, then the Nation created a very particular Indian-ness. Nation building narratives and the historical truths emanating from the south Asian postcolonial space engaged in similar kinds of reductive self-presentations. An Indian self and sense of nationality had to be deliberately constructed; assembled through, among other things, ritualised acts of anthems and pledges and nationalistic songs. Historians writing at the time (e.g. Chakrabarty, 2007) scripted the nation's history in very particular ways. Key interpretations of tragic and momentous experiences such as the Indian Sepoy Mutiny, the Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre, the Simon Commission, the divide and rule policies, the appropriations of land, the demeaning images of Indians and the internalisation of those images, accompanied by the nationalistic rhetoric of Gandhi, Tagore, Andrews and other freedom fighters, created a particular Indian-ness, and it is to this we now turn.

While Alastair Pennycook's mother and aunt were in England, his grandparents were building a life for themselves in Kerala. They lived there for 35 years, were engaged with local issues in the community, and his grandfather, Frank Hawkings, could speak Malayalam. Later, in England, asked to give a talk to a Women's Institute meeting, he chose to talk about elephants, showing how his life had been deeply involved with these animals.

"Logging is the work on which elephants are mostly employed in Travancore. In the old days they did many jobs which are now done by tractors or bulldozers, but they still do logging in the forests, and I myself often employed a half a dozen of them for this purpose; and was in fact doing so just before I left India 3 years ago. This is how it is done. It is usually the teak trees and maybe the rosewood trees that you want to get out of the forest or from an area that you have felled out for planting".

There are elephant anecdotes too:

"I was riding slowly on my motorbike just before sundown along a narrow winding path through a dense patch of elephant grass growing 6 to 8 feet high. Suddenly I turned a corner and crashed into the front leg of an elephant standing on the path. Bike and self fell in a heap and the elephant trumpeted into my ear".

After the war, the estate managers were faced by several dilemmas. On one hand, of course, they could finally travel to England again; reunite with family they had not seen for many years. On the other, India was moving towards independence, raising many questions about their futures in the country. Clearly the possibility of becoming Indian citizens was a major point of debate at the time. Frank spoke of his frustration at how their community was perceived, particularly at that time of postcolonial upheaval:

"A great deal has been written and said in recent years in various parts of the world, notably in the U.K. and the U.S., to the detriment of the British connection with India. Most of it has been unfair and much of it downright falsehood. We are a community of administrators and business men, and we do not have within our ranks that leisured class of lecturers or writers who could speak for us. As a result our case has gone largely by default, and lying propaganda has dubbed us exploiters and enslavers. Ladies and Gentlemen, you will know what our forefathers did for India, and what even we have been able to contribute. We shall give to India a legacy of two centuries of peace, with a high standard of administration, law and order, irrigation, health and sanitation; and above all of education which has taught our Indian brothers the meaning of the liberty for which they now cry".

Perhaps this idealistic young man who had survived the horrors of the WWI trenches, who had been wounded at the Somme, who had left for a better life in India and made himself a

comfortable and happy life in the spacious bungalow at Kumbazha, had become too steeped in the colonial discourses that made up so much of European communication in India. Perhaps it was time to leave.

Increasingly, the local population thought so. By the 1950s, things had become difficult on the estates. India had gained its independence. Kerala had elected a communist government. There was a strike on Kumbazha Estate in 1951 arising, it seems, from an assault on a Union worker not employed by the estate. As tensions rose and Nair, the President of the Union, went on hunger strike, groups of students came to the estate, and when the full strike started "a gang of 400 students arrived at the factory compound demonstrating". The disputes lingered on from November into January and February of 1952. On Feb 29<sup>th</sup>, Frank stated that he had received warning that he was to be molested on his way to the office. And soon after, they left for England, never to return.

We need to make clear here that to bring out 'different sides of the story' we are not trying to lessen the significance of the struggle around land ownership in a postcolonial era (Alastair Pennycook's grandfather, though not a landowner himself, represented forms of inequitable land distribution). Rather, we are interested in micro-histories that have yet to be voiced. Our aim with our joined endeavour of *translocal postcolonialism* is to bring strands of thought into current historical interpretations that otherwise, for a number of political and strategic reasons, have not had an adequate hearing. Our point with this is simple: our current temporal positionings, 61 years since the Raj, permit more nuanced readings and renders less binary the meta-narratives that position us both in different camps, with different histories. Our emphasis on identities and spaces in this paper allows us to speak of connections and overlaps in our backgrounds.

There are several issues in Frank Hawkings' story that need careful consideration, given our earlier comments about English-ness and Indian-ness, and some of these can be read from a normative postcolonial orientation. Like a lot of English administrators at the time, Frank had taught himself the local language. As scholars such as Cohn (1996) have pointed out, English administrators needed to do this in order to run businesses. We know from Frank Hawkings' account that there had been an assault on one of the workers who was a member of a Union, and that the Union was agitating on his



behalf, and was holding strikes and demonstrations. Clearly, there was class-related resentment here, and it was being articulated at a time when co-relations between the Raj and property were being seriously undermined. As much postcolonial scholarship has pointed out, Empires across the world were partially sustained by 'taking over' land, businesses, properties and assuming collective rights to run them in organised, systematic ways (see Moses, 2008; Cooper, 2005 for detailed discussion). These were, after all, tumultuous, nationalistic times. Gandhi's Non-Violence and Non-Cooperation movements for Swaraj had been dominant ideologies for at least three decades. English ethnicity with its accompanying associations of power was generally viewed as being in opposition to Indian-ness (see Dalrymple (2004) for detailed discussion). Is it possible that Frank Hawkings' leaving, while prompted by a workers' strike, may have also have been a result of growing nationalist sentiments? His lines about things that had been written to the detriment of the British connection with India speak of a disillusionment that stemmed from this growing agitation against the English. His lamentation that as "a community of administrators and business men" they did not have within their ranks "that leisured class of lecturers or writers who could speak for us" points to a different level of antagonism: He clearly saw himself as part of a hard-working group of middle managers whose voices had no space in these momentous struggles. While his claim to have given "to India a legacy of two centuries of peace...[an] education which has taught our Indian brothers the meaning of the liberty for which they now cry....we have a record of which any man can be proud" can be seen as condescending, it also emerges from a palpable sense of rejection.

The situation is more complicated than an English estate manager being forced to leave India as part of a postcolonial class struggle. There are nuances in the 'surround' of this account that have not had much airing (indeed, like this one, they have remained in dusty attic boxes gathering mold), yet they have direct bearing on the present discussion about identities. Frank's life was taken up with very local concerns around mahouts and elephants and tree logging. Given what we have said about citizenship in the Gujarat context being about local vernacular engagement, his participation in the Kerala communities was similar in a number of ways. While particular Empire-and Nation discourses frame him in certain ways, if we pull back and critically recognise the multifarious strands that go into their truth-building—the deliberately constructed discourses

of difference and distance on both sides echoing each other—we are able to see both their manufactured nature as well as the experiential effects of these truths. If we shed colonial and nation building discourses for just one second, Frank emerges as similar to many of us who have gone overseas to build a life elsewhere, been civically engaged, and contributed to the community

Nevertheless, when pushed to leave against his will, his particular class and colonial location point to the ways in which the possibilities of relocation are unequally distributed. After all, they could just go back to England, an option denied to many who are obliged to move. While being forced out may always be hard, it matters very much where and under what conditions you can go. Today, one factor deeply bound up with the movement and migration of people is the English language, one of those things that Alastair's grandfather, in a sense, left behind in India. For those of us involved in TESOL, we are all involved with these legacies, of colonialism, of movement, of identity.

### Translocal Postcolonialism

So where does all this leave us? Let us return to our earlier points about identities, experiences and spaces, and their contexts of emergence and articulation. Much of the uncovering of micro histories happens through the voicing of experiences (although alternate textual forms such as photos and letters are crucial evidence as well). Permanent, completely dual-edged, experiences, especially those voiced collectively, threaten to draw and harden borders, becoming truths in some instances, excluding and silencing in others. At other times, it is in the hearing of experiences, of wounds, whether in the Gujarat context or of Alastair's grandmother and mother, that truths and borders get challenged. Also, experiences emerge through very distinct articulations, in particular ways, at certain times, for specific audiences and it remains up to us as teachers, researchers, scholars to read the politics of their enunciations. While the moment of voicing painful experiences/wounds that contest historical truths is in itself critical, it is, as Derrida (1992) points out, simultaneously pre-critical, since its very articulation threatens to render the wound a truth. Our wounds become truths and our truths cloak wounds. It is only when we, in joint fashion, start to un-fix these historical truths, as we are both trying to do, that sedimented narratives, that have run deep into the ground, start to detach.

Such a dual, joint engagement, what we are calling *translocal postcolonialism*, is different from *vernacular postcolonialism*, where the focus is on localised voices and interpretations countering colonial/Empire tropes. While crucial and still extremely relevant, we do always need to hear and text the collective painful experiences that move people to counter dominance. Translocal postcolonialism dares to go a step further. It draws on vernacular postcolonialism to counter the Empire while also countering its own neocolonial truths, and it dares to do this by extending a hand to the 'other side' not so much to forget the pain of its own past, but to engage the other in speaking back with vernacular postcolonialism. We are aware that such a shift may be open to criticism. It entails a sharp move away from the dominant looms of Empire and Nation (Spivak, 2004) and provides for the possibility of a more encompassing vision of history. This is where our fifth and final point about experiences, identities and histories comes in: The identities that are handed down to us by history demand alienation and dissolution, but in order for reformulations to occur, we need first to identify the discourses at play. It is when we do this that the air seems less stale, interpretations less worn, and our truth-making less trite.

History, preoccupied as it is with political events and momentous upheavals, and intent as it is on scripting truths, takes little account of ordinary experiences and points of connections. Connections and inter-relations are all we have. Dominant looms get taken down and lines blur, disclosing lives ordinarily lived, shops burnt down and rebuilt after the riots, college students and teachers finding their way back to alternate educational spaces after rape and torture, pain undergone as the ship moved on and the familiar shoreline receded, Alastair finding his way back to his grandparents' house in Kerala and seeing his ancestry in a space, distant from England where he grew up.

We hear and tell these stories to counter tropes, but even as we do, we strive to un-fix them as well, since stories and truths like our lives and histories need forever to be unglued and set free, lest binds set in.

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