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Reconstructing Local Knowledge

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PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

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It is when a discourse forgets that it is placed that it tries to speak for everybody else.
(Stuart Hall, 1997, p. 36)

The term "local knowledge" has been with us for some time, its more conspicuous example being the title of Geertz's (1983) book. But it has acquired its critical edge only in the last decade or so, with the scholarship of movements such as cultural studies and postcolonialism. Though I will problematize this term in the following discussion to grapple with its complexity, it is good to start with some familiar assumptions. The term has acquired different currency in diverse domains of discourse:

• In the anthropological sense, it refers to the beliefs and orientations emerging from the social practices of a community through its history (see Geertz, 1983). These beliefs have their own rationale and validity, though they may differ from the knowledge forms valued at the global level.

• In the social sense, it contrasts with the official knowledge informing the policies and procedures of various institutions (legal, fiscal, political). People generally develop extra-institutional (or "vernacular") discourses in their everyday life about how to negotiate these relations in their own terms (see Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

• In the academic sense, it refers to knowledge that diverges from what is established or legitimized in the disciplines (see Foucault, 1972). The beliefs that do not fall within the established paradigms continue to circulate unofficially at the local level among smaller groups.

• In the professional sense, practitioners develop a knowledge of accomplishing their work in ways that are not acknowledged or recommended by the authorities/experts. Perhaps this is how we in language teaching know this term best. The knowledge generated in our daily contexts of work about effective strategies of

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language learning and teaching may not enjoy professional or scholarly recognition (see, for example, Canagarajah, 1993; Pennycook, 1989).

In all these domains, there are certain common assumptions that characterize the term. Local knowledge is context bound, community specific, and nonsystematic because it is generated ground up through social practice in everyday life.

A STORY OF DENIGRATION

Despite recent efforts to perceive local knowledge in nonpejorative terms, in many circles it is still treated as received wisdom and unexamined beliefs that are parochial, irrational, or backward. Even the sometimes romanticized orientations to local knowledge—such as magic, folklore, and/or myth—show a subtle inequality with scientific knowledge. What has led to this low estimation?

Perhaps there is something fundamental in processes of knowledge construction that explains this bias. Generalization, systematization, and model building involve a certain amount of abstraction that filters out the variability of experience in diverse contexts. The more we move beyond the surface level contingencies of performance, the closer we are supposed to be in defining the invariable deep structures of competence (as we know well in our own field of linguistics). Eventually, the phenomenon we are describing is removed from its locality, the structure is reduced of its social and cultural "thickness," and the particularity of experience informing the model is suppressed as unruly or insignificant. Furthermore, such activities of knowledge formation are not innocent, nonpartisan, or value-free. There is the question as to whose perspectives shape interpretation and analysis. The establishment of operative knowledge in any society always involves contestation. What is left out is the local knowledge that constitutes the perspectives and practices of the disempowered. At any rate, the orthodoxy will itself generate opposition and deviation at the local level through the sheer process of subjects attempting to define their independence. Thus we find pockets of local knowledge that characterize the beliefs and practices of minority communities in different historical periods. In precolonial Asia, for example, we can identify the hidden oppositional discourses of the untouchables against the upper castes, the lay against the priestly circles, and the vassals against the landowners (see Adas, 1992; Khare, 1984; Scott, 1990). These are just a few manifestations of the interconnection between knowledge and power in human history.

But the most systematic and concerted campaign to denigrate local knowledge at the global level begins with the movement of modernism. Inspired by the values of enlightenment and resulting in empirical science, this movement has led to the suppression of diversity. The values that were important for this movement were universality, standardization, and systematicity, all for the end of predictability, ef-

ficiency, and, eventually, progress (see Dussel, 1998). From this perspective, variability, contingency, and difference were a problem. As modernism establishes geopolitical networks and a world economy that foster its vision of life, all communities are pressed into a uniform march to attain progress. Those who stubbornly insist on maintaining their own vision of "progress" or "reason" face the danger of being isolated, impoverished, and discriminated against. Some read in this history a process of time conquering place (see Bhabha, 1994, pp. 212–235; Kaplan, 1996; Mignolo, 2000). Constructs such as worldview, reason, and culture are measured according to their "maturity" in time. The distinction between being civilized and primitive is based on time. Localities are ranked hierarchically according to the phases they have to pass through to reach the advanced stage representing modernity. All that a community has to do is jettison the idiosyncrasies associated with its locale—the vestiges of one's stubborn backwardness—and adopt the values that define progress.

The parallel movement of colonialism may be considered to have spread the values of modernism beyond Europe in a more direct and invasive fashion. The local knowledge of colonized communities began to be suppressed with missionary zeal in the name of civilization. In spreading the enlightenment values, European powers set up their institutions of governance, jurisprudence, health, and education, which systematically suppressed local knowledge in diverse domains. In what has come to be labeled "a denial of coevalness," European nations refused to acknowledge that the divergent cultural practices of other communities could have a parallel life of equal validity (see Mignolo, 2000). There are recorded instances of public debates between British educators and local Hindu pundits in my hometown of Sri Lanka, where the former attempted to prove the error in local knowledge in fields such as astronomy, geography, and medicine (see Chelliah, 1922). There was no effort made to understand that the local Ayurvedic medical tradition, for example, was based on different values and principles, and that there was no common point of reference to compare it with the Western allopathic system. By default, the comparison was done in the terms of the powerful, and local knowledge was made to appear silly.

It should be clear at this point that the science of modernism is not a value-free, culture-neutral, pure rationality that is of universal relevance. This orientation to knowledge in objective and impersonal terms draws from certain specific cultural traditions (i.e., Judeo-Christian, Renaissance; see Huff, 1993; Merton, 1970). The reason why this form of science developed in Europe at this time can also be accounted for in terms of 17th-century sociohistoric conditions (see Hessen, 1971; Jacob, 1976). Modernist knowledge is therefore a form of local knowledge—local to communities in Europe. It is not hard to understand this paradox of a global knowledge that is in fact local to a specific community. If we acknowledge that *all* knowledge-producing activities are context bound and collaborative, scientific knowledge also had to have a shaping influence from its locality of production. But

enlightenment is one of the most ambitious attempts of a local knowledge to ex-
tend its dominion in global proportions. Its modus operandi was to absorb other
forms of knowledge on its way as it presented itself as valid for everyone (see Hall,
1997). To the extent that this strategy of hegemony is successful, we fail to recog-
nize its local, contextualized character. We accept it as ours. It may sound surpris-
ing, then, that the challenge for local knowledge is not from global knowledge, uni-
versal knowledge, or transcendental knowledge. It is simply from another form of
local knowledge, that is, that which belongs to the more powerful communities. It
is precisely for this reason that the inequality between intellectual traditions has to
be interrogated without presumptions about the universal validity or legitimacy of
any single form of knowledge. There is something unethical about one tradition of
local knowledge lording it over other forms of local knowledge.

THE RISE OF THE LOCAL?

Has all this changed in the postmodern conditions of present time? After all, is not
postmodernism essentially anti-enlightenment in values? Do not celebrated con-
temporary notions such as hybridity, pluralism, and multiculturalism provide a
space for the local from diverse backgrounds?

It is an interesting irony that the success of modernism in integrating all commu-
nities into the global whole has created greater visibility for the local. Technological
advances have brought the world closer, developing a keener awareness of previ-
ously remote communities. The advances of media have channeled the voices and
images from localities far and wide into one's very home. Internet and other modali-
ties of communication fuse diverse codes and discourses from different localities.
The industrial work space has been decentered to include a network of communities
that provide labor, expertise, and resources for production. The need for expanded
business opportunities has sent multinationals scurrying to previously unknown lo-
calities to market their products with sophisticated cultural understanding. Even the
nation-building agendas and border-drawing activities undertaken during colonial-
ism to suit Eurocentric norms and interests have led to uprooting many communities
(some of which were already transplanted for reasons of labor, trade, and slavery),
leading to diasporas, which pluralize life everywhere. We live in a world where lan-
guages and cultures jostle against each other and mix fluidly, irrespective of which
locality they come from. Can we then say that space is gaining over time—in a rever-
sal of the dialectic unleashed by modernism?

But we have to be careful not to exaggerate these changes. We have to treat
postmodern globalism as not representing a revolutionary shift from earlier condi-
tions, but rather a revised continuation of the modernist project of globalization.
Whether its origins are 30 years ago (Harvey, 1990) or 300 years ago (Giddens,
1990), or even from pre-Modern times (Robertson, 1992), globalization has

worked to the disadvantage of local knowledge. The contemporary postmodernist movement simply adopts a different strategy to carry out the interests of the status quo. If modernist globalization tried to eradicate local knowledge, postmodern globalization incorporates it in its own terms. If modernism suppressed difference, postmodern globalization works through localities by appropriating difference. This strategy of accommodating local knowledge is necessitated partly because of the consequences of modernity—which, as we saw earlier, did create a space for the local. In addition, the resistance generated against modernism by different localities has to be managed strategically with a different modus operandi if the status quo is to be maintained. Therefore, what we now see are more complex relationships between time and space. We see interesting paradoxes where some parts of the East appear to be practicing the modernist vision of technological progress more successfully than the West.

However, power is still not shared equally in the new dispensation. The nations and institutions that orchestrate local resources are still merely a handful, not very different from the powers of the colonial period (see Amsden, 2002). Despite the myriad symbols that pluralize contemporary cultural and communicative life, economy still shows sharp disparities between the rich and the poor (see Jameson, 1998; Miyoshi, 1998). Therefore, the local finds representation only according to the purposes and forms permitted by the powerful.

Consider, for example, the way fashionable postmodernist discourses of pluralism work these days. Although the notion of hybridity gives life to the local with one hand, it takes away its radical potential by hyphenating it with other Western or global cultural constructs. The specificity and particularity of the local is lost in being fused or recycled with other elements from Western society. Furthermore, postmodern discourses such as multiple subject positions (in describing identity), heteroglossia (in describing codes), and multiculturalism (in describing community) complicate and muddle differences, defining these social constructs in less materially grounded terms. Scholars from non-Western communities point to the irony that just when they gain hope that there is going to be an appreciation of their identity and values, they feel cheated to find that the currently popular discourses reduce the significance of their particularity (see Moya, 1997). In fact, even current forms of postcolonialism in the West are treated by many periphery scholars as blunting the critical edge of local knowledge (see Bahri, 1997). Postcolonial cultural and literary products that are celebrated in academic and popular discourses are picked according to the interests of the dominant communities in a way that does not disturb their hegemony.

This is not to say that we don't enjoy greater opportunities today for the celebration of the local. The fact that we can have a special topic of this nature in this journal is due to the heightened awareness of the local in contemporary academic discourses. However, we cannot be complacent that postmodern globalization truly liberates the local by virtue of the cultural and technological changes we see

around us. In a recent issue of *TESOL Quarterly,* which explores the implications of globalization for language teaching, some of the authors consider the Internet and computer-mediated communication as validating periphery Englishes, empowering non-native students, and democratizing social relations (see Murray, 2000; Warschauer, 2000). Though these scholars do make some obligatory qualifications, they are largely enthusiastic about the possibilities of revolutionary learning and communication. But we have to critically engage with postmodern conditions to make a space for local knowledge in terms of disempowered communities. There is work to be done in developing transformative pedagogies that would help construct more egalitarian relationships in education and society.

REDISCOVERING THE LOCAL

Despite the designs of the global in the past centuries, we can take heart in the fact that local knowledge has not been totally eradicated. The local has negotiated, modified, and absorbed the global in a unique way. As Appadurai (1996) pointed out, the local realizations of the global have not always followed the expectations of the metropole. Dominant discourses have been taken over selectively and, sometimes, superficially to facilitate a convenient coexistence with local cultures. I have described elsewhere how successive orthodoxies in our field, such as communicative approaches and task-oriented pedagogies, have been translated by local teachers and students in Sri Lankan classrooms to suit the styles of teacher-fronted instruction practiced from precolonial times (see Canagarajah, 1999). English language teaching (ELT) professional discourse in local communities represents a fascinating mix of the center and periphery, the new and the old.

This realization presents both good news and bad news for our project of recovering the local. Although local knowledge has not completely died, it is also not pure. Local knowledge has not been waiting undistorted and whole for scholars to come and discover it. It has been going through many locally initiated and globally enforced changes all this time. For example, the local has been changing its positionality in relation to the changing practices of the global. It has done so partly to resist the global, partly for its own survival. Furthermore, after the long history of globalization, almost no community can claim today that it is not integrated into the global network of communication, travel, or trade, and transformed in the process. It is but realistic to adopt the position that the local is a relational and fluid construct. We have to identify the many changes the local has been going through if we are to develop a suitable project to reconstruct it for our purposes.

Paralleling the appropriation of the global by the local, the global has absorbed local knowledge and resources for its own purposes. If the former is a mixing initiated from the ground up, the latter works top-down. Consider the claim by Ra'ad (2001) that the first Greek and then Latin civilizations absorbed the linguistic re-

sources of Etruscan and Canaanite communities, eventually leaving no trace of the latter cultures. The provocative thesis by Bernal (1987) regarding the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical culture points to another example of how the local has been taken over by the more powerful without proper acknowledgment. In fact, the residue left after the looting by the global is increasingly hard to recover. Rather than proceeding further into local communities to recover local knowledge, paradoxically, we have to sometimes burrow deeper into the global to extricate recycled bits of the local.

More problematic is the possibility that the very geographical ground of the local has been shifting during globalization. With communities uprooted for many reasons, or willingly crossing their traditional borders, their shared culture and history have become transnational. Diaspora communities do not have a consolidated physical locality on which to build their local knowledge. In the case of quintessential diasporas—such as the Kurdish or Sikh communities, which do not have an autonomous traditional homeland (see Cohen, 1997)—their locality is paradoxically translocal. The local knowledge of these communities is at best a shared intersubjective reality, constituted by commonly cherished discourses and practices. More recent exiles—such as my own Sri Lankan Tamil community, with more members living in cities such as Toronto and London than in their homeland of Jaffna, for which a separatist struggle is being waged—are also constructing new, expanded, mediated forms of locality through literature, news media, and the arts. As Appadurai (1996) put it, "The many displaced, deterritorialized, and transient populations that constitute today's ethnoscapes are engaged in the construction of locality, as a structure of feeling, often in the face of the erosion, dispersal, and implosion of neighborhoods as coherent social formations" (p. 199).

If we can grant the possibility that the local is still being "constructed" (as Appadurai puts it)—that it is not something of the past, preexisting and rooted in a specific geographical domain—we can also consider the local knowledge constructed by many virtual or invisible communities in the cyberspace and other media of contemporary communication. In fact, many exile communities such as the Tibetans and Tamils enjoy a stronger sense of identity and richer knowledge base through the Internet. Consider also other subcultural groups and special interest circles (of alternative lifestyle or eccentric social causes) who are developing their "virtual neighborhoods" and shared knowledge in cyberspace.

In such novel domains of postmodern communication, we will readily acknowledge that locality is a discourse. But even for other more geographically rooted traditional communities, the local is largely discursive. Both insiders and outsiders to the community have formed notions, values, and attitudes about the "local," which now become part of local knowledge. The sediments of texts, talk, poetry, art, memory, desire, dreams, and many unstated assumptions that people have developed through history about their community define the local. I marvel at the different apologetic traditions local scholars in my Tamil community have developed from time to time to

resist the thrusts of modernism. They have argued that local intellectual traditions are a precursor to the values of enlightenment thinking and anticipate it, that they transcend modernism and have the answers for the problems created in the West, and that they operate on a totally different rationale and do not relate to modernism in any way (see Canagarajah, 2002). Such theorizations show how the discourse on local knowledge is relational—defined in relation to global knowledge, perhaps based on what is strategic for local interests at different periods. How do we work through these periodic layers of interpretation in history to understand local knowledge? Is there any possibility of ever reaching an "authentic" indigenous knowledge as we work through these interpretations of an interpretation? We must not think of local knowledge as transparent or grounded, which can be unproblematically recovered without interpretive effort from a foundational source.

Moreover, as the global holds sway among all communities in the world, we have lost any neutral or objective position from which to perceive the local. We are increasingly interpreting the local through global theoretical lenses. This is inescapable if we grant the epistemological dominance Western intellectual paradigms have held for centuries. As we conduct knowledge worldwide largely in terms of enlightenment values, even local scholars (often trained in Western academic institutions) have to use the dominant tools in their field for celebrating the local. The local can be defined, once again, only in relation to global knowledge, as the apologists of earlier times did. We can understand the superhuman interpretive effort it would take to work against the dominant paradigms that cast local knowledge in a negative light. One has to break the available hermeneutic molds in order to empower local knowledge.

An additional challenge in reconstructing local knowledge for contemporary purposes is that it has remained for centuries in an undertheorized state, in the form of unreflected assumptions or everyday practices. In fact, since many traditional communities are largely oral (even when they have had a written tradition like my Tamil community), valuable stocks of local knowledge are lost even for the local people. Getting passed on from mouth to mouth through successive generations places constraints on the extent to which local knowledge can be developed in a sustained and critical manner. Remember, also, that these marginalized communities have not always enjoyed the material resources to develop or even preserve their knowledge in formal terms.

Given the fluid and relational character of local knowledge as articulated previously, it should be easy to understand that it is not a unitary or homogenous construct. The local is as diverse as global knowledge (as evident from the modernist and postmodernist versions described earlier). There are diverse practices, discourses, and ideological tendencies that constitute local knowledge. Even in precolonial education, for example, the Tamil community has featured different pedagogical traditions (Jeyasuriya, n.d.). Yes, we did have a product-oriented guru-shishya method, which featured some of the rigid forms of teacher-fronted

education. But we also had the nonformal apprentice system of education that now resonates well with such fashionable pedagogies as the legitimate peripheral participation of Lave and Wenger (1991). This diversity is similar to the gurukkal and pathsala traditions in the Hindu Indian culture and the madrasseh and makkab traditions of the Islamic world.

It is not surprising, then, that the local can contain chauvinistic tendencies. In fact, the onslaught of the global has been forcing the local to retreat further into more stubborn and unreasonable positions in a desperate attempt to maintain its independence. The educational enterprises of fundamentalist circles in the Islamic world today of developing controlled forms of religious schooling in their madrassehs, result in suppressing secular and critical thinking. Understandably, this is done in order to safeguard traditional values and protect students from encounters with other threatening intellectual traditions. Unfortunately, this strategy leads to an extreme form of localism. Celebrating local knowledge, therefore, does not mean holding up a mythical form of classical knowledge as possessing the answers to all contemporary questions or representing resources that are always progressive and radical. Local knowledge has to be veritably reconstructed—through an ongoing process of critical reinterpretation, counter-discursive negotiation, and imaginative application.

TOWARD A PRACTICE OF LOCALIZING KNOWLEDGE

It should be clear from the previous characterization that what we mean by local knowledge is not a philosophical paradigm or a body of ideas (these are not unproblematically available for us now). Celebrating local knowledge refers to adopting a practice. We treat our location (in all its relevant senses: geographical, social, geopolitical) as the ground on which to begin our thinking. Local knowledge is not a *product* constituted by the beliefs and practices of the past. Local knowledge is a *process*—a process of negotiating dominant discourses and engaging in an ongoing construction of relevant knowledge in the context of our history and social practice. What is important is the *angle* from which we conduct this practice—that is, from the locality that shapes our social and intellectual practice. This is nothing new. As we discussed above, all knowledge is local. We can interpret other knowledge constructs and social formations only from our local positionality. This is our hermeneutic bias. The difference is that while we previously adopted a positionality based on Western or modernist paradigms that were imposed on everybody, we are now going to think from the alternate position of our own locality, which is more relevant for our community life and speaks to our interests. Ideally, this epistemological practice envisions not just changing the *content* of knowledge, but the *terms* of knowledge construction. Rather than merely replacing one set of constructs with another, this practice aims to relentlessly critique and democratize knowledge construction.

In some ways, what I (and the other authors in this issue) have developed is an amplification of what has already been put forward by minority scholars in regard to oppositional discourse practices. Remember the *politics of location* articulated by feminist scholars, borrowing a metaphor from Adrienne Rich (1986). Being sensitive to the situatednesss of one's own subjectivity compels one to sympathetically understand the struggles experienced by others in other contexts, while also appreciating the differences (see Kaplan, 1998). Standpoint epistemology is another articulation in feminist circles of the importance of knowledge making from one's locality (Hartsock, 1990). The power of location is widely appreciated by minority ethnic scholars as well. bell hooks's (1989) imploration to "talk back" to dominant discourses with an awareness of one's roots is one such articulation. In more recent scholarship, especially in heavy-duty philosophical discourse, postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha (1994) and Walter Mignolo (2000) speak of the *locus of enunciation*. To exemplify the difference location will spell for scholarly discourse, we might say that although postmodernism is a critique of enlightenment from a Eurocentric positionality (and may have its own usefulness), a more radical critique informed by colonialism, race, and geopolitics (as articulated in this article) can be expected to arise from the standpoint of colonized communities.

This practice of localized knowledge construction involves several important components. I will describe them as forming a deconstructive and reconstructive project. These two projects inform each other. They constitute an ongoing engagement with knowledge that must deal reflexively with the new questions raised by their own activity. Such a practice involves the following:

• Deconstructing dominant or established knowledge to understand its local shaping. Our own local positionality provides a demystifying perspective from which to conduct this critique. This activity involves much more than showing that the dominant constructs are biased toward the culture and history of Western communities. Appreciating the rationale and validity of dominant constructs in their contexts of origins, we are able to translate the features that are useful for other localities with greater insight. Thus, this involves a *reconstructive* activity as well. We must interpret established knowledge for local needs and interests. Although this process of appropriation has occurred somewhat unconsciously in the past, we will now undertake this enterprise more reflectively.

• Reconstructing local knowledge for contemporary needs. Any knowledge construct has to be constantly reinterpreted to speak to changing conditions. As new questions emerge in the social and geopolitical domains, we have to consider how local knowledge would answer them. Similarly, this reconstructive process can creatively redefine the disciplinary paradigms of the mainstream. We should not underestimate local knowledge to be of relevance only for local needs. However, this reinterpretation is effective when it is accompanied by a *deconstructive* project as well. We have to critique traditional knowledge to unravel the limiting

influences from feudal, caste, religious, and other chauvinistic contexts of production. Of course, the ways in which colonialism has distorted its character also needs to be critically addressed.

We must note that this reflexive practice is well served by the "double vision" or "in-betweenness" that postcolonial people are gifted with (Bhabha, 1994). Compelled to become aware of nonlocal discourses from the history of colonization, while also enjoying a local subjectivity, we have a dual consciousness that provides a critical vantage point for this intercultural engagement. This consciousness also enables us to move beyond the myopic entrapment of the local. Celebrating local knowledge should not lead to ghettoizing minority communities or forcing them into an ostrich-like intellectual existence. A clear grounding in our location gives us the confidence to engage with knowledge from other locations as we deconstruct and reconstruct them for our purposes. This engagement should extend to a sympathetic understanding of suppressed knowledge traditions from other colonized communities as well. In a sense, such an epistemological practice would lead us beyond the global and local dichotomy. We cannot indulge in an easy reversal of former hierarchies to posit one tradition of local knowledge as superior to others. Though we start from an awareness of geopolitical inequalities (which are historically real), our intellectual practice leads to translocal engagement of wider relevance.

Before I illustrate this project from the articles published in this issue, I must point out that scholars from different postcolonial regions are theorizing such localized epistemological practices under different labels and metaphors these days. Ioan Davies (1998), working from the African context, uses the metaphor of *fetishization*: "an alternate reading of fetish is not that of fake, but of a double meaning. … By living in the slippage between the dominance and the subordination of the surface, a mutation is being created with new languages and new possibilities" (pp. 140–141). This description may serve as a rough gloss for what Bhabha calls "in-betweenness" as he works from the Indian context. Hannerz's (1997) notion of *creolization*, borrowed from the linguistic process whereby colonial languages are transformed in the shape of the vernacular, is employed by Caribbean scholars to describe local appropriations of dominant knowledge (see Glissant, 1997). Moreiras (1998), theorizing from the Hispanic context, uses the label "Second Latin Americanism" (to distinguish it from previous colonial discourses on the region) for "a kind of contingent epistemic performativity … an epistemic social practice of solidarity, with singular claims originating within whatever in Latin American societies still remains in a position of vestigial or residual exteriority, that is, whatever actively refuses to interiorize its sub-alternatization with respect to the global system" (p. 97). We can discern in Moreiras's prose the struggle to capture the local that eludes the all-embracing grasp of the global. Mignolo (2000) comes up with a huge collection of neolo-

gisms to capture localized epistemic practices by reviewing a range of postcolonial scholars: that is, border thinking, double critique, transculturation, pluritopic thinking, new mestiza consciousness, and even barbarian theorizing.

ACADEMIC PUBLISHING AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Though there is a burgeoning interest in local knowledge in diverse academic circles in the West, publishing practices present a major barrier to its representation. As we know well, academic publishing is a gatekeeping activity that legitimizes what passes for established knowledge. Due to a variety of material and discursive reasons, academic journals end up representing the knowledge of a narrow circle of Western scholars. The prestigious journals in almost every discipline are published in the English language and from Western locations (see Canagarajah, 2002, for a range of recent statistics). Needless to say, editorial committees, reviewers, and authors come predominantly from Euro-American scholarly centers. In such a situation, there are insurmountable problems facing periphery scholars in representing their knowledge in scholarly fora. They do not enjoy the resources (time, funds, writing or printing facilities), support networks (seasoned peer reviewers, collaborators, and mentors), and access (information about suitable journals and their publishing conventions, news about recent publications or research) to compete for space in mainstream journals. If those are some of the nondiscursive problems facing them, they also find the accepted discourse conventions of center-based journals alien to and ideologically uncongenial for their purposes. Despite new writing styles being increasingly represented in mainstream journals, the discourse is still overwhelmingly transparent, rationalistic, and detached, following enlightenment values of knowledge construction. All this leads to the local knowledge of the West gaining established status in many disciplines. At best, knowledge from other locations may find representation according to the perspectives and purposes of Western scholars. Publishing is thus an important mechanism by which the intellectual hegemony of the West is maintained in a global scale today.

As we provide space for local knowledge in this issue, we realize that tackling the nondiscursive (or infrastructural) bases of publishing inequality is a more difficult, long-term project. Published in the United States, and drawing heavily from the expertise of scholars in Western academic institutions, this journal is itself caught in the nexus of intellectual geopolitics. Despite widely publicizing our Call for Papers, we have not been able to reach many far-flung communities that have limited access to the Internet, telecommunication, and foreign publications. In fact, as we go to print, I continue to receive inquiries from scholars who have just seen our Call in their locations. The best we have been able to do is to attract the attention of local scholars with relatively better access to mainstream publishing and academic networks. Thus we bring knowledge and practices from western Brazil, Iran, China, Hong Kong, and Ja-

pan, in addition to the Dominican Republic and Louisiana. This issue can only demonstrate how local knowledge can productively complicate a few representative fields in our discipline—that is, literacy practices (de Souza), sociolinguistics and language death studies (Ryon), English-language teaching (Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, and Riazi), and bilingual education (Pita and Utakis).

Attracting local scholars and scholarship is only half the problem. To negotiate the established conventions of research writing, our contributors have had to adopt creative modes of presentation. Theorizing the new imperatives in teaching English globally from the personal knowledge of their learning experience in their communities, Lin and her collaborators adopt a narrative mode of presentation. Their discourse is also reflexive as they consider how their multiple subjectivities (constructed through English and their local languages, at home and in the West) inform their theorizing. Ryon has to tap local knowledge on Cajun French from stories, songs, and poems, as dominant publishing media do not represent the aspirations of this community. Mary Curran, in her review of books that resist "linguistic genocide," talks about the unconventional forms of writing adopted by Skuttnab-Kangas, Khubchandani, and Krishnaswamy and Burde to disturb the complacency of academic discourse. de Souza would have liked to include colorful pictures from Kashinawá writers, as befitting their multimodal literacy, but considering the constraints in production and space in our graphocentric media, he has desisted from doing so.

The studies in this issue display that locality is indeed relational, as each author adopts a stance relevant to her or his own context. Though de Souza's article displays local knowledge in its classic anthropological sense, as he considers the literacy practices and interpretive strategies developed from precolonial times by the Kashinawá people, he is conscious of this knowledge being marginalized by different domains of globalization—that is, the Brazilian state and its educational practices, the graphocentric tradition from modernity, and academic theorizations of literacy. For Lin and her colleagues, local knowledge translates as their personal learning experience in the context of pedagogical practices at home in East and West Asia. But this is already a *glocal* knowledge (an increasingly popular term to refer to the local manifestations of the global), because the language in question is English, and the pedagogical practices display a mix of traditions. Ryon's articulation of local knowledge may seem odd as it comes from a community within the recesses of the geopolitical center. But the Cajun community experiences its own challenges from the hegemony of English and globalization, perhaps more intensely than communities that are geographically distant from the United States. Finally, the most paradoxical form of local knowledge is articulated by Pita and Utakis, as their locality is that of the translocal Dominican community. But, as I argued earlier, diasporic and migrant communities today are constructing virtual localities that are of increasing significance. We have to take seriously their aspirations for a transnational community and identity as we construct suitable policies of bilingual education.

As these scholars negotiate the global and local, adopting the interests of marginalized communities, we see how they gain critical insights into the limitations of dominant knowledge. de Souza critiques long-established literacy assumptions of the West to reveal their word-based bias; Ryon reveals the ideological slant in language death studies that ignore community resistance and enforce assimilation; Lin and her coauthors question the dichotomized, hierarchical constructs that categorize speakers and communities unequally in ELT; and Pita and Utakis expose the bias toward monolingual competence in the terms of the host community in the prevalent models of bilingual education.

The damages from using these limited constructs are very clear. When graphocentric literacies are enforced by modern schooling on the Kashinawá, they not only lose their literacy practices but also the ways of representing themselves and their worldview embodied by their texts. Positivistic sociolinguistic scholarship not only fails to deploy its resources to foster the community aspiration of maintaining Cajun French, but may in fact exacerbate the reproduction of homogeneity in a case of self-fulfilling prophecy. "Native speaker" norms of identity and proficiency disempower learners with a sense of inadequacy, preventing local communities from developing their pedagogical and linguistic resources in their own terms. Biased models of bilingual schooling make Dominican students unfit for education at both home and abroad, while constructing identities that are unsuitable for their transnational life. Such ramifications should serve to convince us that there are serious social motivations behind localizing our disciplinary constructs. Celebrating local knowledge is not for the purpose of adopting an intellectual affirmative action or joining the academic bandwagon of multiculturalism.

As these scholars strive to make a space for their chosen communities in our discipline, we see how this intellectual practice paradoxically transcends its location to address pressing concerns elsewhere. The multimodal literacy of the Kashinawá provides interpretive models to understand the fashionable multiliteracies emergent in postmodern communication (fusing texts, graphics, and sound in the Internet, for example). Ryon's exploration goes to the heart of research in sociolinguistics, showing the importance of addressing issues of power and representation in our studies as we struggle to revitalize marginalized languages everywhere. Pita and Utakis go beyond New York City schools to speak to educational concerns of multilingual communities in Asia and Africa, who are still struggling to develop more egalitarian policies of literacy. Lin and her coauthors develop more complex definitions of identity and competence for the new mission of teaching English as a global language. Thus the practice of localizing knowledge moves beyond the deconstructive project of exposing the biases and limitations of disciplinary constructs to reconstruct paradigms that are meaningful for global as well as local life.

CONCLUSION

If even the few studies represented in this issue succeed in showing the critical and transformative power of local knowledge, this should convince us of the value of providing space for other localities in academic knowledge construction. We hope that the issue serves to prove the importance of maintaining an ongoing conversation with forms of local knowledge—if not to respect the aspirations and independence of marginalized communities, then at least for our common academic pursuit of developing valid knowledge constructs. The local will always have a questioning effect on established paradigms, deriving from the nonsystematized, unorthodox, and simply messy features of its existential practice. Already, situated scholarship has exposed how fields central to our interest have had a questionable formation: The orientation to language and teaching as a value-free, instrumental, pragmatic activity in ELT is rooted in the history of teaching English to colonized communities (see Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992); the narrow literary canons now being questioned were formed for the purpose of teaching English in colonies such as India and forming a docile citizenry (see Viswanathan, 1989). Similar imperialistic motivations have been uncovered in fields such as anthropology (see Asad, 1973) and area studies (Moreiras, 1998). As many disciplines are redefining their orientation these days, especially under the changes initiated by postmodern globalization (see Appadurai, 2000, for anthropology; Jay, 2001, for literary studies; and Robertson, 1997, for sociology), it is important to consider how knowledge from diverse localities can inform new epistemological practices. Ironically, the benefits of this negotiation are clearer for the "hard" sciences. Research agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (Stolberg, 2001), Centers for Disease Control (Hitt, 2001), and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (Rosenthal, 2001) are now experimenting with folk medical practices from other cultures to tap their resources for purposes in the West.

Paradoxically, local knowledge can motivate conversations between different localities, answering questions that transcend one's own borders. It is when we acknowledge the localness of our own knowledge that we have the proper humility to engage productively with other knowledge traditions. The assumption that one's knowledge is of sole universal relevance does not encourage conversation. It is possible to develop a pluralistic mode of thinking through which we celebrate different cultures and identities, and yet engage in projects common to our shared humanity. Breaking away from the history of constructing a globalized totality with uniform knowledge and hierarchical community, we should envision building networks of multiple centers that develop diversity as a universal project and encourage an actively negotiated epistemological tradition.

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