

WHENCE MY CURRICULUM

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With narrative, the semantic innovation lies in the inventing of another work of synthesis—a plot. By means of the plot, goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action. It is this synthesis of the heterogeneous that brings narrative close to metaphor. In both cases, the new thing—the as yet unsaid, the unwritten—springs up in language. (Ricœur, 2010, p. ix)

The *azaan* is mouthed by a nine-year-old; the body taut as the lungs, throat, thighs compress and release in calling a sea of other boys to prayer. Facing the pinkish-red hue of the age-old bricks—the structure my nano tells me was donated by her grandfathers—the *muezzin* is left there to follow the path of his mother's ancestral tree. Roots of princes in an era where the progeny struggles to hold on to a specter of the azure jewels adorned by the ancestral portraits—the boy is to live a dream that trickles through his grandmother's fist—a reverie from a hometown yet miles apart—her association with it ambivalent, bittersweet, for the weight that bent her spine as she labored through her new-found poverty. The memories don't help when there are three children to raise and a husband who gambles. But for each new-born—and yes, especially male-born—there is the possibility that tomorrow shall be like the yesteryears.

My grandmother had in one hand 100 Pakistani Rupees and in the other 50 to give to the nurse. A nurse rushed past, as she asked the sex of the new-born. Girl, she said. She got 50. Another passed, and she reiterated her question. A boy, she said. She got the 100. Nano, ironically, was out the whole 150.

In this paper, I *fictionally* recreate aspects of my past and weave them with my journey as a curriculum scholar. Fiction and empirical research, writes McDermott (2015) are forced contrast sets—they are better thought of as shedding light on each other. The ancient literary concept of mimesis or representation adumbrates the relationship between the two genres (Ricœur, 2010). I am not as interested in *what happened*, rather what I should make of these disjointed memories in relation to my scholarship.

It makes good sense here to bring forth my privilege. To resist imposed categories, Desai (2012) asks us to examine our own subject positions, power, privilege, and supremacy, for the articulation of difference by sub-altern groups cannot remain beyond critique (p. 161). To start with the story of my grandmother is an attempt both of rematriation of my own biography (Tuck, 2011) and an acknowledgement of the primary person in my upbringing through whose stories I trace my roots.

And why go back to the nine-year old? Do you, Ali, have unfinished business with religion? But, aye, if knowledge, for me, is to be salvaged from the lives of my ancestors—peeled off from meanings imposed to meanings inherent—then, divinity I cannot ignore. For mysteries reside in interaction—everyday accounts of a pathway made for another; an elevator button pressed so another can pass through; children rocking their hands next to their ears, eyes fixed on their teacher, their hands miming the soundwave as they feel their eardrums. If the miracle of learning and teaching is to be described—then why not start with divinity. O, but do we want to start with that

much-maligned... Look deeper in your history. Can you fairly say you were born when you were?

To engage historicity, as recommended by Freire and Ramos (2009), Desai (2012), and Kanu and Glor (2006), I'd have to go to an earlier time. But since religion has always been a major part of organizing my own and my ancestor's worldviews, an autobiographical account of the curriculum that bends me into shape would have to critically engage it. Theology, argues Desai (2012), has had a fundamental role in the descriptive statement, in the organization of knowledge systems, and in classifications of irrationality and otherness. My primary research interest in social interaction analysis, a methodology based on the visual order, engages the same contradictions between people and their environments at the same time as it foregrounds embodied ways of knowing (Freire, 1998, as cited in Darder, 2017).

But there are stories nano told—some make me proud; others make for tales suppressed and whispered—of distances travelled, lives rebuilt under the scorching summer months, *daal* sifted and basking in the middays of spring, sanity and insanity, life and death, pride and humility. They flow like the stream of my unconscious pen, for how else can a story be told? Meandering through hushed silences, broken sighs, humor told in rhyme—the silent laughter that shakes the world as it did my nano's body. How old is a body—if someone asks me, says I, earnestly, 'tis made of mud, of earth—and to it shall it return—dare I say, little do I know.

What is the ethical import of this meandering? Whose lands am I traversing—and what languages and epistemologies tied to them do I need to honor? Which ones, indeed, am I invited to articulate and partake in?

I sit, unwell, troubled at a funeral in a village evergreen—never mind, why go there? Doesn't affect my analysis, my praxis, my quest for science. Be not morose—laugh, on your rocking chair as Rabelais did—Buvons! Humor gives one the space to relate differently to the political.

Monsieur Rabelais—aah, but we gather here today at an interesting gesture. You are your grandmother you say? Never mind that your hand, when thumped on a child's chest, relieves not the body from its fever. But here, you appropriate what you read? Aye—for much respite gives fantasy—lay here your research question in words three: *What be the ethical import of fantasy displaced?* Wading through the realms of materiality and spirituality, are we? Never mind; you'll be fine; thought is not yours nor is the scene yet unbuilt. It is a wounded spirit that aims to traverse thee. Ricœur (2010), in his rumination on time, calls for intentionally making alive the pain of the past—the *distentio animi* or the distended soul, as we anticipate the future.

A story: The ancestor walked out of a Mughal's court, broken—nay shattered, for the *firmaan* he there heard: the Sikh Guru's sons—of nine and twelve or the regimes thereof—were to be buried alive in walls. He walked out—yet the act was done. Before you cry out for the injustice, theft, and poverty that colonialism wreaked—remember that on violence, too, they have not the monopoly. But the point of the story? This is a reflection on history made present and unmade so a future there may be. Back to the story of the ancestor who walked out of the court. Eight generations passed, and blood-boiled in the land of the five rivers, not one town unfree from violence unspeakable. A border newly laid was made in history. Millions displaced and trains of heads decapitated made way—east to west—why linger here? Manto, the court jester, wrote thus of a Bishan Singh, a resident of a mental asylum, lying on the border looking for his hometown of

Toba Tek Singh. On the left of his body lay Pakistan, and on its right lay India—the little piece of earth he lay on, he thought unarmed—and thus, he called it Toba Tek Singh. Into all this hullabaloo, the land of the ancestor-walked-out, his state, eight-generations later, was filled with peace. No bodies marred, no feuds settled, a little dint of humanity. Love goes a long way. Love lives, breathes, and leaves its aroma on history.

Teaching, for Freire (2018, as quoted in Darder, 2017), is an act of love, which is “an act of courage, not fear, a commitment to others and the cause of liberation” (p. 80). But what would it mean for love to be rescued from world-making and reproducing agency into the transformative potential of world-changing agency (Berlant, 2008)? How can we incorporate feminist critiques of love as tied to maintenance of social hierarchies in favor of love as an imaginary for emancipatory ways of being? Like the ancestor who walked out of the Mughal’s court, it has to be tied to a deep sense of action guided by justice.

Where else shall we travel to? A little recent place—a twenty-eight year old has been gifted a book—a sentimental journey—by a professor he admires. The student, young in age and younger in wisdom sets himself the task of writing out the book, word-for-word—for words can live and breathe, embodied when spoken out loud or given material shape when transcribed on to paper. A more apt explanation: it is how his mother taught him first to write and to memorise. Write thrice—and pay attention to rounding the belly of the a’s and the b’s. Midway through, the letters on the page start to breathe. A slight wind—is it not the spirit Ariel—lifts the edge of the leaf. It is traced as it arrives at the nape of an even younger student sat nearby—and the man could see goosebumps slowly taking shape; the olfactory sense takes on its own temporality as a slight rain begins to pitter patter.

Freire asks us to rethink the dichotomy between the human being and the world. Through our engagement with texts, we are asked to be with consciousness, to live the words as beings alive, rather than merely things we need to possess (Freire & Ramos, 2009), to articulate a point where “knowledge at the level of the doxa is superseded by knowledge at the level of the logos” (p. 170).

The man shifts seats and studiously continues to copy out the words, making sure to retain the eighteenth-century spelling:

The bird in his cage pursued me into my room; I sat down close to my table and leaning my head upon my hand, I began to figure to myself the miseries of confinement. I was in a right frame for it, and so I gave full scope to my imagination. (Sterne, 1768/2005, p. 70)

Desai (2012) critiques the anthropocentrism of western knowledge systems (p. 155). I follow the words Sterne wrote to build a fragment of captivity for a bird. It is Paris, and a starling, his feet and beak tied, is carried down a path that heretofore bore the signs of a non-descript veterinary. But nay! There it rests in front of a congress of birds repeating the words: in Paris, we follow the law. A mirthless laughter. Head-bowed—the chest drooped. An elevator takes the bird to its scene of confinement. Reminiscent of a film where all the jailors are hawks and the captives are sparrows or hoopoes. There are six of these cages aligned—a gap and six more that await inhabitancy. There lies the anticipated residence of the flamingos. Water to keep the senses. No tears. You will look back, little bird, to this moment to see how you held up. And how could you be not-strong? Your

fellow traveller is a baby-parrot, barely out of years of suckling. His music soft and acquiescing. O cruel world! How do you come to terms with this underbelly of yours? Is it this way by design? What language paints it this way? For emancipation to occur, what are the possible futures awaiting us, and how can we imagine better ways of being and knowing that are not predicated on oppression and hierarchy (Kanu & Glor, 2006). Sentimentality is decried. But have emotions no place in social change, and whence is it subordinated to reason? Why is it that the oppressed are “treated as individual cases” and as “welfare recipients” to be pitied rather than as a cause to engender a transformation of the very structure that oppresses them (Freire & Ramos, 2009, p. 167)?

Bon—a pleasant time then? Much does this history gloss over. You have left us feeling heavy hearted. The nine-year old then dropped by the parents into a new home. A trunk—silver—has seven white *shalwar kameez*, six pairs of khaki shorts, six white short sleeve shirts, and four blue *shalwar kameez* to sleep in. The boy sits at the edge of a bed, the lower of the bunk. How to come to terms with this situation? At home you were the eldest with two younger sisters; here the boys, taller and broader, make you feel scared. A boy sits opposite. Don’t worry—says he. Make friends with me, for I am the gangster here. What a laugh. Thus starts 13 years of life in an all-boys school. Gangsterism and fear apart, the school was vast: primly kept grass, fireflies, football sized bats, and moths that sleep on the body at night, dew, fog, and a caressing sun—depending on the time of the year, but here we are keeping it happy—the thrice-repeating-in-writing drill of the mother allows the boy float through the lessons. Yes—he writes letters for friends and sends them to their homes:

I like it here very much. We wake up at seven, do our physical training, go to lessons, rest in the afternoon, do our homework, head to evening games, homework again, television, then sleep, repeat. Making lots of friends, write soon: Love, Omar.

Tears, fights, joys, moral conundrums, fears, happiness on the football field aside, levity does underline the schooling of the younger-adult version of this fictional character. These are but some of the fragments with which I paint my “*tabula rasa*” (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 114).

Things to unlearn: Gender and class privilege; the British modeled boarding school for the elite—dressed in blazers, ties, and turbans—uniformity. Things to keep and grow: social relations as contexts for learning.

However, as Kanu and Glor (2006) suggest, we are not born into our social roles; rather, my evolution as a curriculum scholar and an amateur intellectual depends on “contingent social circumstances and my free choice” (p. 104). Which of these parts of myself do I need to shed to engage in a necessary disequilibrium? Is it the canonical list of authors who have defined curriculum studies that I carry with and mark, that I have to shed, or is it my proposed research project of constructing the genesis of present-day interaction in schools through the times of Sterne and Rabelais? How do I model my dissertation so that it is not centered on Greco-Roman epistemologies, but so to give voice to my own history and those of othered and marginalised knowledges and worldviews?

To develop a critical consciousness that makes me reconnect my personal history with my dissertation project and agentive action (Kanu & Glor, 2006), if books are to be my teacher—to narrativize what I learn and juxtapose contrarian viewpoints, to infuse

them with life, and to avoid what Freire terms narration sickness and give life to the words that go in my dissertation and action (Freire & Ramos, 2009)—what is the canon of texts that I give pride of place to? My current stance is to take chance as my guiding method and passion in my journey and induce polyvocality within the curricular texts of social interaction in my quest to infuse the ordinary with the extraordinary (p. 117). However, here, I think not of chance as a throw of dice. Philosophers such as Derrida (2015) and Rancière (1991) describe it as a coincidence of encounters and context that is elementary to the project of intellectual emancipation. For Sterne (1768/2005), time and chance are intricately linked:

What a large volume of adventures may be grasped within this little span of life by him who interests his heart in everything ... what time and chance are perpetually holding out to him as he journeyeth on his way. (p. 28)

Pinar (2012) recommends *currere* for young scholars to study how their autobiographies play out in their academic pursuits “in the interest of self-understanding and social reconstruction” (p. 35). In this paper, my meandering has asked me to critically understand my privilege and the ethical import of my footsteps, to feel my way through this journey, understand the sentiments that arise, and articulate “the contradictions of past and present as well as anticipation of possible futures” (p. 36), indeed, to question what it means to inhabit time. Who do I author this present with—dead, alive, or imagined? The narrative brought in my ancestral stories, dead authors, spirits, friends, and guides. For I may be the author of this autobiography, but it is always crafted with others. Vinciane Despret (2017) in her work on how people keep those who have passed away alive in their lives recommends *following the signs*. But what is a sign? She writes:

A sign is always the product of a connection, of an active liaison between being and things ... a sign is a product of a conspiracy of events ... a sign is translated as an active vitality between the living and the dead. (p. 137)

And thus, sitting on a winter day in Toronto beside a skating ring, I follow the signs and pen the following multilingual poem on time and chance to describe the scenery. For me, it carries with it the past and germs of the future authored with others:

Time is the best Christmas. It is the to and fro of knees sliding—waving, the skates scratch, erase, wobble, *jouisse*, hop hop. Time is where the limiting idea, the hum drum of the machine breathing, panting, sonorising, blinking, raging—aah but the blading and the fall. Time is the ineluctable modality of the ol-facto-audio-*vide*. Hop hop *dharum*.

Time is the bleep bleep and the yellow warning jacket, no—time is the charred chair underneath—dead, cold, mahi mahi.

Le temps, c'est le delectable modalite of the servant, the brimming heart, and the Channukah ashplant. It is the little tree dropped straw on the *toobi* dropped rustleaf on the charred snow on the packet of cigarettes. *Le temps* is the deepening of experience whether it arrives from within or without. *C'est Petit Croix's* reclining *dos* on the moist dark brown on the sinking mud that welcomes her *cuissees* as they do your boots—but the warmed, swarmed, socked feel within. Time is the tragedy on the plaque, the sonorous Zachosculpture—the pump, pump, pump. Time is the

violated body, the encapsulated charm of her smile. It is the purse, the fire intermingling with her *zulf*. O Zulfi, Zulfi, *legenbehen*—what you can fairly lay your hands upon, what Jesus riding on his mule could safely lay his chest on. Time is the featly drawn churgeon.

क ख ग ग

ملق نوج چه اد دور من ن زب رس
مدق من ش تا رد ملا لى لى خ نوج
behead nimrod with your pen
step into the fire friend (Attar)

Interially, radially, sonorising, hierarchizing
In the beginning there was the Word
The *firaash –firaash -e- mustaqeem*
the *samaa*
Sabh-e-samaa

And below was the stream flowing with fruital spouses; and the snobbish *malaika*; *tasbeeh-rab-hamd-naat-subhaan*, the moonlight, we returned from and are humbly assorting our flesh. The sunlight caresses, ensnares, *baooda* or *fauqah*. Is this hierarchizing enough—head prostrate chanting, invoking, *pros notre theon—al malaikatu*. Hierarchy is in the nine *huroof*, in the resting of a foot perpendicular behind the burgundied shoed resting life. Hierarchising is the friend, the lover, the committed, the mother—*amor mundi*, *amor matris*. Time is the soft, warm *padre*. Has Aa-dam walked enough for today? *Kishmish*, *badaam*, *pista* ... kick, stabilize—*alors*, up, up and *quoi?*

Interially, radially, delecting the failure of measuring and the *reussi* of falling, falling for you.

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