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Sarina Chugani Molina

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***I'm From Foreign: Transnational Identity Construction in the Journey of Being and
Becoming an ESOL Educator***

Sarina Chugani Molina

How unjust to themselves are those who turn their backs to the sun, and see naught except the shadows of their physical selves upon the earth! – Kahlil Gibran (1982, p. 882)

Introduction

As a third-culture, perhaps even fourth-culture individual, “Where I’m from” has been and continues to be a question often posed to me. McCaig (1994) defines third-culture kids (Useem & Useem, 1967), as people that have grown up in a host culture, but identify with neither their home nor the host culture, often creating a culture that is uniquely their own (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). This is characterized by the notion of “transculturality,” which views culture as fluid and evolving, rather than static and self-contained (Pahor, 2018). In my experience as an Indian national, born and raised in Japan and having attended an American international school there, I identified with none and all of the cultures at the same time.

My teachers spoke a variety of Englishes including American English, British English, Irish English, Russian English, Filipino English, Indian English amongst others, and my schoolmates hailed from different countries around the world (Molina, 2014a). With the rise of movements to embrace Global Englishes as vernaculars in their own right, researchers such as McKay (2002) urged the field to challenge long-held assumptions around the native/non-native binary, ownership of English, and linguistic and cultural identities as English language users; however, at my school, I was keenly aware of the inherent power differentials within these accents with American and British English maintaining status as the “standard language” and

“accent.” Rajendran (2019) asserts that these social constructs are inherited from English raciolinguistic supremacist structures, where marked racialized varieties such as those spoken by the rest of us were considered comparatively deficient.

In my professional experience as a transnational language teacher and teacher educator, defining my membership became important as my students wanted to place me in some speech- or cultural-community. Like Zacharias (2019), I, too, wondered how I was going to present myself to my students and how much I needed to divulge to establish my legitimacy and viable professional identity as their teacher. A perspective that I found missing is the growing number of English-speaking individuals raised in transnational and transcultural contexts, who fit into their own unique category as English speakers. As such, it became important for me to engage in critical research that provided perspective on what constitutes a transnational English speaker and teacher.

Canagarajah (2018) defines “transnational” as a space that transcends nation states, where our “relationships, experiences, and affiliations are not bound by them” (p. 42). Canagarajah’s (2013, 2018) work gave me permission to live within this “third space” (Bhabha, 1994) where my homeland is not my frame of reference and in a sense, this experience is different from the diaspora experience that impacted my parents. This transnational positioning, is indeed a lonesome space, where I continue to long for belonging. There is a voice within me that has been silenced in a way because it is too hard to explain where I am from - as I truly belong nowhere. As Selvi (2018) affirms, “Today we live in a world of essentializations...A Naisbittian world in which we are drowning in information, generalizations, and stereotypes, but starved for knowledge, synthesis, and appreciation of individuals’ negotiations of personal and professional identities” (p. v). Makris (2018) likewise purports the need to push beyond “compartmentalized

identity qualifiers” to one that has multiple layers of identity, which she defines as “an accommodation of the complexity of interacting, shifting, and overlapping characteristics and the ways they morph according to circumstance” (p. 1). This tendency to compartmentalize identities is a mechanism to make sense of the world, but my space cannot be neatly labeled, and I believe with more and more people living within these unique transnational and transcultural spaces, we must come to value the “superdiversity and individual’s contextualized accounts of being and becoming” (Selvi, 2018, p. v.).

In this chapter, I trace my history and critical incidents or what Daloz Parks (1999, 2000) terms “shipwreck-moments,” where I confront and reflect on my understanding of my transnational identity (ethno) as a transnational language teacher and ESOL educator through a systematic analysis (graphy) of my personal experiences (auto) (Ellis et al., 2011).

Methods

Autoethnography was selected for this study particularly because it provides the opportunity to deepen cultural understandings of self and others and has the “potential to transform self and others toward cross-cultural coalition building” (Chang, 2007, p. 213). As such, using Chang’s (2007) approach to autoethnography, this chapter is “ethnographical in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretative orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (p. 208). In autoethnographies, fieldwork is conceptualized differently in that the “field” is not a physical, external field, but instead the researchers’ own introspective recollection and reflection. I purposefully selected those vivid experiences as cues that evoked a strong sense of emotion of ‘othering’ or desire for ‘belonging’ through my childhood, as a graduate student, a language teacher, a teacher educator, and scholar. Chang (2008), however, cautions against relying solely on personal memories, and suggests the use of *external data* to

triangulate these recollections of experiences. As such, I included 1) an interview with my father about his post-war diaspora experience, 2) photographs of my childhood and as a teacher in a variety of contexts, and 3) documents such as course syllabi, lesson plans, and scholarly publications to understand shifts and changes in my being and becoming a language teacher and teacher educator over time.

Phenomenological interview. In facilitating my recollection for this autoethnography, I utilized an interview with my father about his experiences and family stories with the partition in India that served as a backdrop to understanding my experience situated in a historical, political, and cultural context. I conducted this interview in 2007 as part of a phenomenological study on my father's lived experience during the partition of post-war India.

Review of photographs. I selected a series of pictures that depicted my childhood images from the preschool and my American international school that sparked memories of my experiences as an Indian in Japan. In addition, I curated a total of 38 pictures of myself teaching language in a variety of contexts in Japan, Hawai'i, San Diego, and as a teacher educator in China, Thailand, Singapore, and India. In reviewing this collection of photographs, I attempted to overlay my current understanding of transnational identity as a scholar today on what I perceived as my developing identity at that time.

Document analysis. In my document analysis of course syllabi, lesson plans and scholarly publications, I specifically coded changes and developments in my thinking around my transnational identity and how these changes and developments manifested into these documents as readings, session topics, and assignments. As an example, I noted my anchoring of teaching a special topics course and publications within the framework of teaching English as an International Language, before I was exposed to critical perspectives around language and power

(Crookes, 2013; Lippi-Green, 1997; Motha, 2014), transnationalism and translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2013; Castles, 2004) that informed my later instructional materials and research.

In the following sections, I delve into themes that emerged from the analysis of these data sets through ‘shipwreck-moments’ or experiences of cognitive and emotional dissonance as I negotiated my historical, personal, and professional transnational identity in being and becoming an ESOL educator. It begins with an analysis of my conceptualization of home followed by experiences of ‘othering’ and longing for ‘belonging,’ linguistic aspirations and loss, and concludes with the construction of my personal and professional identities as a language teacher and teacher educator.

Where is Home?

I am from the land of Sindh, a province in the northwest region of pre-partition British India. My father was born to Sindhi parents in Saigon, but moved to India when he was one with his mother and brothers. His father stayed behind to run the family business. My parents were Sindhi Hindus, who boarded boxcars of trains to flee from their own homeland amidst robberies, fires, rapes, and murders to southern regions of India when Pakistan, a Muslim state, separated from India in 1947. They were eight and eleven years of age respectively. They became refugees, in essence, in their own land. My father’s family managed to flee to Mumbai, and then to Lonavala, where English was the medium of instruction, and my mother’s family moved to a southern region of India, where Tamil was the regional language. My father only knew how to read and write in Sindhi, his mother tongue, and was put in what he called, “ABCD baby class” to learn the English language, the language of the British school run by Catholic brothers. After the partition, my mother moved to Indonesia for eight years, where her father had a business. Like my father, my mother spoke Sindhi, but also learned Indonesian, Tamil, Hindi, and English.

At the age of sixteen, my father left India to join his brother in Hong Kong. When he was of marriageable age, his parents arranged for him to marry a Sindhi girl. Soon after their wedding, my father moved back to Hong Kong to work and my mother remained in India for four years until my father was ready to have my mother and my oldest sister join him. The Hong Kong market was saturated with Indians in the textile business, so when my father heard of opportunities in Japan, he decided to set up our family there instead. After a few years, he called my mother to come to settle in Japan. When my mother arrived with my sister, who was four years old at the time, she was so afraid of this new country and its people, that she pulled down all the shutters in the house for three full days and did not step out. My middle sister and I were born in this small village in Japan.

My father worked in an import and export textile company and learned Japanese through bilingual phrase books, television, and through daily conducting of business exchanges. He travelled for three months at a time on business trips to secure orders from international markets for textiles to be manufactured in Japan. He would export textiles in containers to international markets all over the world and the language he used to communicate with most of his clients was English.

This was the cultural, linguistic, and social context into which I was born as an Indian girl in Japan. Within our home, my parents spoke Sindhi and I, along with my siblings spoke English, the language medium of our American international school. We spoke Japanese in the Japanese community and both Sindhi and English when interacting within the Sindhi community.

Though I had a physical 'home' in Japan, what 'home' truly meant to me became a very complex notion. For my parents, India was still 'home,' but for me, Japan was my 'home,' until

this was challenged through experiences I encountered. As I moved across the world and was asked where ‘home’ was for me, I would say “Japan,” but when puzzling looks would arise as I did not look Japanese, I would have to qualify Japan as home with “but, I’m Indian.” Then, I would often be told, “...but you speak English well,” to which I would respond, “I went to an American international school,” which would generally put my interlocutors at ease, though I continued to sense some lingering confusion as they may not have familiarity with people with transnational histories.

In the next section, I narrate those lived experiences chronologically of ‘othering’ and desire for ‘belonging’ that caused me to challenge what I thought I knew to be my identity and reflect on experiential cues that caused dissonance as well as a longing for belonging. Then, I describe the ways in which these experiences informed my transnational identity in my scholarship, pedagogy, and practice.

Experiences of ‘Othering’ and Desire for ‘Belonging’

Experiencing ‘othering’ as a student. When I was four, I attended a Japanese pre-school in the neighborhood and learned Japanese through my interactions with the children and teachers as well as from the television. I remember at this school, I could follow a different curriculum or elect to do something different as a foreign student. For example, I could choose to paint when other children were learning about the weather and putting stickers in their weather notebooks. I could also choose to stay in during recess when the other students were expected to go outside to play. Though as a 外人(gaijin) or foreign person, this was in a certain way, a privilege, in retrospect, I also realize that I was not held to the same standards and expectations set for the Japanese children. One incidence comes to mind, where for the first time, I realized I was different. During recess, a Japanese boy began to chase me and point at me chanting, “外

人、外人” (gaijin, gaijin), which translates as “outside person.” He taunted me every day, and then I remember turning around one day and running after him calling him “ninjin, ninjin” to which all the children laughed. Actually, the correct word for Japanese is “nihonjin,” (a person from Nihon or Japan). “Ninjin” translated to “carrot,” and hence, the outburst of laughter. While on the surface, this could appear to be an inconsequential—perhaps even humorous— childhood incident, in retrospect, this incident was the first of many that weighed heavily on me. As I look at a photograph of me from this preschool sitting between two Japanese children in front of a Japanese girl’s day showcase, I can see now how they saw me then. Despite the impact of this incident and others like it, I pushed it to the back of my consciousness so that I could function through life as though all was well with the world and I belonged. Now that I recount this experience, I wonder if this may have also been my first attempt at standing up for myself and my sense of belonging at that preschool.

When I turned five, my parents enrolled me in an American international school 45 minutes away by bus and train. Two incidents of ‘othering’ stand out in my memory. The first was in elementary school when I was returning with a group of Korean and Japanese friends on the train. We were playing around on the train when suddenly one annoyed man marched towards us and towered over our heads. We hid behind each other in great fear of what he might do. He pushed all of my friends aside, singled me out, and then spit on my head. I could not shake the feeling of “Why me?” after this incident and for the first time recognized my high visibility as a foreigner amongst my Japanese and Korean friends.

Another experience of ‘othering’ occurred when I was in high school returning from a dance late at night with some of my schoolmates by train. A drunk Japanese man with his necktie around his head was resting on his friend or colleague’s lap. As we were communicating in

English, granted somewhat loudly, he rose unsteadily and suddenly shouted at us, screaming “国へかえれ！” (Kuni e kaere!) or “Go back to your home country!” While my friends from other countries could envision what that was, I, on the other hand, being born and raised in Japan, did not quite understand the implications of this as this was the only ‘home’ I knew.

Negotiating ‘belonging’ as a student. As I attended my American international school in Japan, I interacted with students from many countries around the world. I learned very quickly that in my school, stratifications were in place, with Americans and Europeans at the top and Indians and other Asians towards the bottom. America was also glorified in my school, and in Japan with the increasing influence of Hollywood, I am not proud to say, I did try to replace my Indian identity with what I understood as American identity. I observed how Americans were privileged in Japanese society and through narratives expressed on Japanese television. I also began to notice how Indians ranked lower in the hierarchical ranking of foreigners in Japan in my observations of interactions between Japanese and Indians. I realized I wanted to approximate the language and culture of those in positions of power. I watched American television shows and lightened my hair. I listened to American music, joined the cheerleading squad, and played the drums in band, activities I was told I could not do as a good, Indian girl by women elders in my community. Perhaps this was just a form of adolescent rebellion, but it influenced how I began to understand the world and my ranking within it.

Negotiating ‘belonging’ as a college student in Hawai’i. In college in Hawai’i, I majored in East Asian Languages and Literature with an emphasis on Japanese and a minor in Comparative Religions informed by my childhood exposure to various spiritual traditions. I tutored several Japanese American students there. I also served as a Teaching Assistant for a course on the Japanese American experience. In retrospect, I realize that I was seeking

membership somewhere, but the Japanese American experience and my experience as an Indian born and raised in Japan was entirely different, though some values remained the same. In Hawai'i, you are either a local, *kama'aina*, or you are not. On many occasions, when I met local Japanese Americans, Filipino Americans, Portuguese Americans, and Hawaiians at college parties, I would notice a stark change in behavior from when they thought I was a local to when I first spoke and they recognized that I was not one of them. I learned that Hawaiian pidgin was the language of membership. I initially thought that my upbringing in Japan and familiarity with the language and culture would be the capital I could use to bridge my membership into the Japanese American community. Though this sparked some interest, I came to realize that the second, third, and fourth generation Japanese Americans born in the US did not identify with the Japanese culture or language, and it did not hold the currency I expected. I did find belonging with other non-locals in Hawai'i who happened to be from the mainland US.

Negotiating 'belonging' as an Indian in San Diego. In San Diego, I sought to connect with Indian women whom I have come to learn have very different experiences of being Indian from mine. Most of them were either born in the United States or moved here at an early age from India. Through our engagement in book club discussions, I have found that there are moments where we share a collective identity as Indians, but other moments, where I feel completely isolated from some of the shared experiences. The color of their skin ostracized many of them in their schools where one of them shared that on her first day of school, during lunch, as she walked by, one by one, the children put something on the chair next to them to indicate that seat was taken and not for her. While I did not experience this in the international school I attended in Japan, it occurred to me through her narration, that the idea of being "of color" suddenly became part of my perceived identity here in the mainland United States. I understood

how important it was for this community of American-born Indians to rise up the socio-economic ladder and approximate the nondistinctive variety of English that has come to be associated with whiteness. This aligns with what Rosa (2018) terms “raciolinguistic enregisterment,” where they rather approximate the language of power than maintain the distinctive Indian-English variety spoken by their parents or adopt other racialized varieties such as African American English or Chicano English (Lo & Reyes, 2009).

While the ability to approximate the language of power both in terms of race and language was not seen as possible for me in Japan, in the United States, it could be possible within certain contexts such as at the university, amongst other people of color, or those with transnational backgrounds. Outside this context, however, in San Diego, I am often mistaken as a Latina because of the way I look and my last name. The first exposure to the stratification of cultures here was when we rented our first apartment and were told that we better not fill it up with all of our relatives. I experienced the prejudice against Mexicans in this country, not only in this experience, but in many more of my experiences here as I interacted with Mexicans and other races. I began to understand that this would become part of my perceived identity here in the United States.

Language ‘Aspirations’ and Language ‘Loss’

In this section, I specifically focus on the linguistic dimensions that informed my transnational identity as a multilingual user of English. I first consider opportunities I was afforded in building a multi-linguistic repertoire, but lost due to the struggles against dominant raciolinguistic ideologies. These experiences confirm Rajendran’s (2019) notion of raciolinguistic supremacy, where languages of the once colonized people are discounted or

perceived as inferior or deficient continues to impact discourses surrounding native language and the language of power.

Language aspirations. Teachers at the American international school in Japan, where I was enrolled from age five to age 18, spoke a variety of Englishes including American English, British English, Irish English, Russian English, Korean English, Chinese English, Japanese English, Filipino English and Indian English. And within each of these varieties of Englishes, there was a full spectrum of accents. For example, I learned early on that there was no standard American accent because I had teachers from New York, New Jersey, California, Texas, Georgia, and Mississippi. Through these experiences, I was able to tune my ears to focus on meaning and understand messages in English regardless of accent. Likewise, I had classmates who were from around the world and English was our primary mode of communication. When I would go over to their homes, I would hear French and my name said in a French accent, which I found funny at first, but came to love. When I would attend birthday parties, I would hear a variety of different languages, even Indian languages that I did not understand, but my ears tuned into these sounds and I began to be able to recognize these different languages. These experiences informed my identity as a language user where I could tune my ears to hear other varieties of English, but also be able to approximate varieties to negotiate meeting with English-speaking interlocutors from a variety of linguistic backgrounds and accents.

Language loss. In school, I picked up proficiency in “academic” English, through my years of schooling and casual conversational skills through interactions with friends and the slow, but steady emergence of American television, often shown at two or three in the morning. Although our schools provided rich experiences for learning English and understanding the different varieties of Englishes spoken around the world, it was often to the detriment of

maintaining my home language, Japanese, and learning some of the other languages spoken by my peers. At home, my parents also emphasized the importance of speaking English and discouraged me from speaking my native tongue, Sindhi, as my father said, my Sindhi was “not so good.” This key moment made me believe that my native tongue was less important and that I had to focus on the more important language, English. My parents truly believed English was the language of power, which would allow me to pursue higher education and have better opportunities in life. I am afraid to admit that as I reflect on this time I, myself, began to look down on my native language and refused to speak it or pretend not to understand it. This may have also stemmed from generational damage incurred by our colonial legacy.

In the Japanese community, every time I spoke Japanese, the Japanese people in their well-meaning ways would often praise me for how well I spoke Japanese. However, I know now, my repertoire of the Japanese language remained within the realm of informal, conversational language, but not the realm of the formalized, polite forms of the language that provided access to upper levels of this hierarchical society (Chie, 1972), which put a ceiling on potential work opportunities. What I began to understand was that they did not expect me to speak Japanese perfectly, nor would they ever see me as Japanese. There were many such experiences, but one vivid memory, in particular, comes to mind with this revelation. I was once returning home from visiting a friend and did not remember which train to take home. When I arrived at the station platform and passengers exited the train, I asked one man in Japanese if this is the train I would take to Sannomiya station. He got flustered and put his arms up crossed across his face and said, “No English! No English!” I learned that for him, he could not recognize my words as his language as the way I looked spoke much louder to him. In other words, I would never come to look like his language or sound like his race (Rosa, 2018). What compounded this problem was

that in my international school, the English-only policy sent us to detention if Japanese or any of our home languages were spoken. This “English-only” monolingual discourse somehow made us feel “less than” both in our sense of cultural and linguistic identity.

The complexity of these experiences often led to a form of identity crisis, with no space or place, to which I belonged. These experiences and discourses in and out of school served as obstacles for me as I tried to construct an imagined identity, which I wished for myself. I believe I attempted to enact an authentic transcultural and translingual identity, but each piece of my imagined reality was slowly negated and subtracted in my attempts to develop my unique voice anchored within my transnational experience.

Constructing my Language Teacher Identity in My Pedagogy & Practice

Yazan (2018) defines language teacher identity as “teachers’ dynamic self-conception and imagination of themselves as language teachers, which shifts as they participate in varying communities, interact with other individuals, and position themselves (and are positioned by others) in social contexts” (p. 21). In this section, I describe my iterative attempts to reconstruct my language teacher identity as a transnational language teacher and the ways in which this influenced my instructional practice and my relationships with my students.

Exploring the construction of my identity as a Japanese language teacher. During my graduate program, I was given the opportunity to teach introductory Japanese to undergraduate students at a university. I recall always having to begin my courses justifying my linguistic qualifications (Zuniga, et al., 2019) as a Japanese language teacher. I also taught Japanese language and culture at a local elementary school, where many of the children were Japanese American. I find it odd perusing old photos of me looking like me, teaching Japanese to American children who were of Japanese descent. Internally, when I was teaching these children,

I felt that I was doing what I was always supposed to be doing, but now, looking at it through the lens of a camera, I see what others see, a non-Japanese teaching Japanese. I became painfully aware that I became a spectacle for my students, parents, and teachers. I had to work hard to disclose my experience and expertise in the area (Zacharias, 2019) as a Japanese language teacher, which I continued to do as an English teacher, and later, teacher educator.

Exploring the construction of my identity as an English language teacher. In San Diego, I got a position teaching beginning-level English in a noncredit program at a community college, and slowly gained experience teaching a variety of levels. I then moved into credit bearing English classes that focused on specific macro-skill areas such as reading, writing, listening and speaking. I also worked at a language academy associated with a university with international students from a variety of countries. Through our conversations where they would often openly ask me about my unplaceable background and uncategorizable accent. They would ask, “Teacher, where do you come from?” and “Teacher are you speaking American English or British English?” These were complex questions to respond to as there was not one place or one variety that comprised my cultural, ethnic and linguistic identity. Over time however, as I openly shared the complexity of my identity as their language teacher, I noticed that they began to value their own variety of English, but still had the desire and longing to speak in the American or British accent. When teaching my immigrant and migrant students (Molina, 2015a), without fail, because of the way I looked and my last name, they would always ask on the first day of class, “Teacher, you speak Spanish?” to which when I would respond sadly, “No, sorry!” their faces exuded obvious disappointed. Here, I was and continue to be mistaken as a Latina. I worked to connect with my students in other ways and learned a few Spanish words and phrases. I stumbled and laughed at myself as I made mistakes speaking in Spanish with them as they learned to speak

English with me and each other. My students were primarily Mexican in some of these settings and they essentially became my teachers of Mexican culture and the Spanish language. I realized the importance of positioning myself as a transnational language teacher by sharing my history with them in my initial introduction based on common questions about my identity I had heard over the years (Zacharias, 2019). Likewise, my openness to leveraging their linguistic repertoire in my attempts at translingual practice influenced my relationship with them as we mutually negotiated linguistic and cultural understandings. Given their colonial and political histories, I wondered if they let their guards down with me because I looked like them and did not represent the identity of the “native” English-speaker or person in a position of power.

Exploring the construction of my identity as a TESOL teacher educator in the US context. I continued to teach English in three to four community college sectors to help support my doctoral program tuition. As I taught during the days in these various settings, I began to teach teacher candidates in a master’s degree program in the evenings. After securing my position as a full-time faculty member and director of the TESOL program at my university, I explored the field of teaching English as an International language as for me English was not a second or foreign language. As was shared earlier in my experience with language loss, the imposition of the Western education system on the culture and heritage of its people (Crookes, 2013) around the world has alerted us to how history can shape individuals’ attitudes toward learning the English language. It was the language used between non-native speakers in the multilingual contexts in which I found myself. I experienced firsthand, the denationalization of English (Smith, 1983), and the renationalization (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2013) of the language within the three contexts in which I was embedded: The Indian community, the International American School, and the wider-Japanese community. English was used to express my

developing identity both locally within the school and community and transnationally as I traveled to other international English-speaking communities. I would venture to say, that this post-colonial Indianized British variety that my parents learned was renationalized as it moved into a Sindh-Japanese English variety, which then was influenced by the multiple Englishes I was exposed to throughout my international American school and college experience. I questioned my own 'nativeness' and challenged the traditional native/non-native binary. I questioned the notion of 'accentedness' and what that means in my case as well-meaning people from a variety of countries often ask me where my accent is from. I realized that in my emerging transnational identity as an English language user, I could not satisfy the needs of others to binarize or categorize, and I had to learn to seek comfort in the discomfort this caused for others. I wanted to construct my own identity as a transnational language user, rather than have the social constructs of "nativespeakerism" and "accentedness" define and position me.

I began looking for ways to provide my teachers with thought-provoking experiences where we could critically examine the history, ownership and the positioning of the English language. For example, we worked with a non-profit organization in Kenya with a mission to help homeless youth escape poverty through the provision of professional development opportunities. Through the process of developing an online Business English program and engaging in this transnational context, our teacher candidates became more cognizant of the conceptual understanding of the historical, political, economic and social influences impacting the process of language teaching and learning within this context. Preparing English teachers to teach in this transnational context allowed for critical conversations around power (Motha, 2014), language hierarchies, ownership of English, and post-methods and post-structural perspectives on language teaching (Molina, 2015b; Molina, 2016). It also provided a space for

our teacher candidates to continually examine and negotiate their positionality as English teachers within this transnational context. My knowledge of British English by way of my parents helped to support our work in providing feedback, where we were able to acknowledge and recognize the varieties spoken and the translingual practice (Canagarajah, 2013) that may be influencing the variety of Englishes used by the Kenyan youth we were serving. While I felt vulnerable not knowing the unique English linguistic variety our Kenyan youth speak, I slowly began to feel empowered by my linguistic repertoire informed by my transnational experience, and I was able to leverage my knowledge of the British English variety from my parents to inform my pedagogical practice with my teacher candidates.

Exploring the construction of my identity as a teacher educator in international contexts. A couple of years ago, I took a group of graduate students to Japan, which was my first trip back to Japan after about seventeen years. I no longer had a physical home in Japan after my mother's passing and I hesitated to take on this course, though I knew it would be important for me to return at some point. Through a comparative educational lens with a focus on cognition and learning, I taught our graduate students about the different educational practices in Japan along with some introduction to the culture and common phrases. Because I gave up my foreign residency card in Japan, I had to apply for a visa to enter Japan, the land of my birth. The experience of returning to Japan that summer after so many years, filled me with a sense of emotional and cognitive dissonance as I was questioning again my sense of belonging. It pained me to know that though this felt and smelt like 'home' in the ways in which there were surges of warmth that filled my heart with the physical and emotional familiarity of this place, it was never going to truly be my 'home.' Based on the way I looked and the insulated nature of Japanese

sense of identity, I would always be on the other side of the binary – Japanese vs. non-Japanese, inside person vs. outside person, Japanese citizen vs. foreign national.

For several years, I traveled to Mexico and worked closely with Mexican English teachers who were earning their TESOL certificate and I envied their strong sense of place, belonging, and identity. They were proud to be Mexican. I was not proud to be Indian for a very long time. They were proud to be bilinguals. I lost my native tongue. They loved their country. I did not know to which country I belonged. They did not put the US on a pedestal. Once, as I was lecturing, I inadvertently stated, “In America, we...” to which they were quick to respond, “But, teacher, **we** are America.” I realized the America-centrism that I also unconsciously picked up as a non-American, and became very aware and cognizant of this, particularly in my global teacher education work.

In China (Molina, 2017) and Thailand, I surveyed over 150 teachers and interviewed several stakeholders on the role of English in their country and challenges the teachers faced, particularly their English language teacher identity, with which I deeply resonated as I, too, was and continue to be categorized as a “non-native” English speaking teacher. I, too, did not understand idioms and colloquialisms shared by English-speakers in English speaking communities and had to learn these over many years. I, too, had been passed up on teaching opportunities by less-qualified “native” English speakers, who fit the globally recognized physical appearance of what constitutes an English teacher.

I was commissioned to develop an English textbook for Thai children after researching their culture and needs and in consultation with stakeholders who were familiar with the Thai language and culture (Molina, 2014b). I had illustrations of Thai children in the book so that the children can see themselves as English speakers, something I wished I saw in textbooks growing

up. English provided educational and economic opportunities in these countries, and for me, it was the only language through which I navigated the world and my space in it.

In Singapore, I met with the language education representative from the Ministry of Education who shared with me the ways in which home languages are honored and taught in their country, which was contrary to the ways in which my home language and other languages were treated in my family, community, and schooling in Japan. People in Singapore had their own English variety and were proud of their diverse languages, heritage and country.

Through my desire to connect with India, I engaged in a variety of school projects and created videos for rural schools in India to learn Indian English through values stories of Gandhi and the alphabet song. For these children, English could provide social mobility. The English language, indeed, provided opportunities for social mobility for me at the loss of my own native language, but today, “native” and heritage languages are being more honored in schools in India, where English is an additional language. My transnational identity encompasses being Indian not necessarily through my “native” tongue, but through spiritual stories and tales that informed my spiritual and cultural being as an Indian. I yearned to leverage this portion of my identity to connect with the Indian children’s funds of knowledge, as I considered ways to best approach language teaching within this context.

Exploring the construction of my identity as a researcher. The synergy between my research and teaching began to focus on marginalized communities, which I aligned with most through the experiences of displacement of my parents. I worked on developing fieldwork experiences in the community where our students can develop curriculum based on the needs of their students. In the Fall of 2016, we developed a community-based English language program in a neighborhood middle school to serve the community surrounding our school. This

community is a vibrant community with over 25 languages spoken and also considered one of the most distressed neighborhoods in San Diego (Molina, 2019a; Molina, 2019b). More recently, I began to work with the International Rescue Commission serving refugee-background students in the San Diego area where our teacher candidates have the opportunity to tutor these students while deepening their understanding of their unique academic and linguistic needs from an asset-based perspective. As a daughter of refugees, this work with refugees has provided meaning and a sense of healing as I began to own this as part of my identity. In selecting grants, I have also begun to look for opportunities that align with my identity and bridge meaning into my work as an English language teacher and teacher educator. Most recently, I applied for a grant to bring 50 Pakistani teachers to the United States to train them on innovative teaching methods in our field. I find that more and more post-colonial generations are making movements back to the healing of past histories. Through this experience, I hope to see myself in them and use this opportunity as a peace-building effort through personal, interactive experiences they will gain with us here in the United States.

Exploring the construction of identity in my professional service. In my service work, I have also slowly begun to support in building private, residential schools in India that provide access to free lodging, boarding, and food, and education for children, particularly girls from rural communities, who would often end up as child brides just as both my grandmothers were in their time. These opportunities I believe serve to inform my professional identity, particularly as a woman, where my inner sense of responsibility pushes me to seek opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the land from which endearing stories, traditions, and spirituality were carried across the world seeping into my identity of who I am today.

Building a Translinguistic Repertoire as a Transnational Language Teacher and Teacher Educator

As Makris (2018) argues, we do take cues from our experiences and transform “them into effective tools for connecting with students,” (p. 72), I, too, believe that these experiences have directly informed my pedagogy and practice. I know now that it is from my experiences of ‘othering,’ I work especially hard to create an inclusive space, what Makris (2018) terms “proactive inclusiveness” (p. 71). I learned to develop a kind of “multidialectal competence” (Canagarajah 2006, p. 233) or “meta-cultural competence” (Sharifian 2009), which are essential strategies used by English speakers in transnational contexts to negotiate meaning (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2013). Because of my exposure to a multitude of varieties of English, I honored my students’ varieties of English. A simple example included accepting and honoring my Spanish-speaking students’ variety of English where they would often say or write “I make my homework” rather than “I do my homework.” With my Kenyan students, it included British English terminology such as “flat,” “lorry,” and “lift,” as well as sequencing of the dates (month, date, year), and formality in addressing recipients of letters (Molina, 2015b; Molina 2016). With my Indian English speakers, use of prepositions in phrases such as “*on* the lights,” has evoked stimulating discussions.

I found that in my teaching I would often engage students in discussions around what would normally seem mutually understood concepts such as “family” and “relationship.” When I would open up these notions during class discussions and elicit from students their cultural conceptualizations of these concepts, they would inevitably light up as they often shared very different, and at times, overlapping conceptualizations of the same concept. While we were analyzing text one day, the chapter featured the concept of “yard sale.” Though my domestic

graduate students understood this as a normal event, my international students from Saudi Arabia, Japan, Korea, and China could not understand how people could display old, used items in their front yard for the world to see. The discussions that ensued were enriching for all students, where cultural norms and practices, such as dating, etiquette, gender roles were questioned.

Now, I reflect on my transnational identity as an English language teacher, and find that through my exposure to a variety of Englishes, I was able to negotiate meaning with my students from a transnational rather than a binary perspective. By this I mean, I would acknowledge English varieties and historical influences on language use rather than categorically assessing their utterance as correct or incorrect. I would encourage students to share their voice in their varieties and was relieved to read of other teachers (Jain, 2014), who used their knowledge from an asset based perspective, while also inviting them to access the culture of power (Delpit, 1988) and use the dominant rhetorical forms of higher education in the US. Canagarajah's (2007) statement about the redefinition of language acquisition appears to apply not only to my relationship with the English language and identity as an English language user, but also to the ways in which I approach my instructional practice where "previously dominant constructs such as form, cognition, and the individual are not ignored; they get redefined as hybrid, fluid, and situated in a more socially embedded, ecologically sensitive, and interactionally open model" (p. 923). In our consideration of academic practices, I invited students into discussions on the culture and language of "power" within Western academic writing and participation practices, while empowering my students to recognize the wisdom behind practices that were part of their local or international cultures.

As a language teacher and teacher educator, I hope to continue to leverage my transnational identity in my scholarship, pedagogy, and practice where all students can feel valued, accommodated, and connected (Makris, 2018), what I wished so very much for myself as a child, student, teacher, and teacher educator.

Conclusion

In Japan, I was a *gaijin* (外人), an outside or foreign person. Even by birth, I was still a foreigner. In India, I have come from overseas, from foreign. Even as an Indian citizen, I am still a foreigner. In Hawai'i, I am not *kama'aina* or a local person, but from the outside as I do not speak Pidgin fluently. In San Diego, gender has been added to my foreignness where I am now labelled as a 'woman of color,' but not sharing in the same political, cultural, and social histories as my peers who have roots in the United States going back several generations. I continue to remain a resident alien, unable to give up my Indian citizenship, the only artifact that connects me to the land of my ancestors, yet feeling most at home here in the United States with my father, husband and children.

Writing this auto-ethnographic account of my transnational identity was indeed, a cathartic experience, but it provided a space for authentic and honest reflection on my understanding of myself as a transnational person, language teacher, teacher educator, and researcher. I am reminded of Kahlil Gibran's (1982) quote cited at the beginning of this chapter, "How unjust to themselves are those who turn their backs to the sun, and see naught except the shadows of their physical selves upon the earth! (p. 882). Instead of living in the shadows by simply dismissing my transnational identity with the phrase, "I'm from foreign," I confronted my tendency to leave all of me outside the classroom. It was not until recently that I felt empowered to share my background as I uncovered more literature and work such as this book that in a way,

permitted me to tell my story and be accepting of who I am as is – bereft of a traditional ‘home,’ but considering my transnational liminal space as an asset, rather than a liability. Because I was trying so hard to fit in within the field, revealing only those parts of my identity that others may recognize, I failed to allow my students to be their whole selves because I, myself, was not willing to shed the frame and expose my vulnerability. As a teacher educator, I realize that it is imperative that I first explicitly engage in the process of deconstructing and reconstructing my identity and history as I consider my transcultural experience, which Motha et al. (2012) consider a “rich and fertile soil for knowledge generation within language teaching” (p. 25) before I can attend to my charge as a teacher educator to draw forth and connect with my teacher candidates’ identity, positionality, and lived experiences as future language teachers and teacher educators.

Now, in my pedagogical practice and research, I am finding that deconstructing the various intersections of my identity and seeing these pieces for what they are, as painful as some of it has been, actually allowed this process to serve as both a healing and empowering experience. I now begin each class session with a question about “Where I am from?” which engages students in challenging their own assumptions and recognizing their own sense of place and identity. When I expose my stories of vulnerability to my language learners and my teacher candidates, particularly those who perceive themselves as “non-native” speakers, from an authentic space. This is a space where perceived barriers between myself and my students are lowered for our mutual sharing of our lived experiences, and through this process, I find that they breathe and feel less hesitant to expose their own vulnerabilities as they navigate their identity as language learners and as future language teachers in this increasingly transnational world.

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