



Editors' introduction to the journal: A forum for intercultural discourse

Dr. Stevie Bell, York University

Brian Hotson, Dalhousie University

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We, *SKRIB: Critical Studies in Writing Programs and Pedagogy* co-editors, and the editorial board are pleased to provide a space for multilingual, international writing scholars and practitioners. As we wrote on the founding of the journal, our hope for *SKRIB* is to facilitate “intercultural dialogue around the development of writing programmes, writing centres, and writing pedagogy in post-secondary institutions of higher learning around the world.” As a forum for intercultural discourse, *SKRIB* draws attention to the ways in which the writing at the core of our work is not neutral, but rather deeply personal, and it resides in an inherently politicized space. Our work is always necessarily caught up in globalization processes and global contestations of power between nation states, ideologies, cultures, communities, and languages. *SKRIB* invites scholars to centre this conception of writing as inherently political in the ways they critically reflect on their writing programs, pedagogies, and initiatives, and, especially, in how they contribute to the development of writing studies; decolonization, equity, inclusion, and diversity are fundamental responsibilities of writing teachers, scholars, and administrators.

SKRIB calls upon scholars at the centre of the colonial matrix of power to practice a form of radical self-awareness given the limitations of their positioning, which Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gomez (2021) describes as the “hubris of the zero point.” This hubris stems from the prevalence of an enlightenment narrative that “nature must be liberated from all pre-scientific opinion” with scientific minds transcending subjectivity in the achievement of “an objective and totalizing view of its object of study” (p. 18). The hubris here is not simply one of better than, but rather as knower of, master of, and namer of all things; the Other becomes defined by and exists on the terms of the “enlightened” society. As Mignolo (2007) explains, European modernity and rationality proclaimed itself “as the ‘center’ of a World History that it inaugurate[d]” (p. 454), created and

positioned the Other on its periphery in a simultaneously “engulfing” and “defensive and exclusionary” relationship (p. 451). At the zero point, this hubris is an “imperial consciousness” (Mignolo, 2007, p. 451) that is largely opaque—a dangerous situation given that the zero point has epistemic privilege and control over the production of knowledge.

This context is not abstract for writing teachers or scholars in any part of the world. We see its material impacts in the global flow of writing programs and pedagogies outward from the U.S. and US institutions of higher education, as well as the concentration of power in US-dominated institutions like the International Writing Centers Association and its publications. The direction of this flow maps onto the internationalization of higher education as well as the use of American English as a globalized lingua franca (Batista, 2020; Canagarajah, 2006, 2007; Demeter, et al., 2022). US-influenced writing programs abound outside of the U.S., though their networks tend to be stymied or remain under- or undeveloped. Writing centres outside of the U.S. are also often still run by U.S. nationals, American ex-pats, or as branch-campuses of American institutions. Much of this work is connected (through government programs or grants) to U.S. public diplomacy efforts aimed at fostering affinity for the values, ideologies, cultures, and languages in the zero point. Institutions of higher education, in the U.S. as elsewhere, are agents of colonization and participants in these flows of power and influence.

SKRIB calls writing scholars to attend to the reality that all space is political. It’s never neutral or empty of political activity or influence, and the political systems within a space are necessarily “uneven and unjust” (Soja, 2009, p. 2). Recognition of this should cause us to realize that the “ontological idea of ourselves as ‘subjects who know, do, and make against a neutral, objective background’” (Ricketts, 2013, p. 41) is “untenable and difficult to reconcile” (Bell & Hotson, 2022, p. 14). The space for our field is occupied by the internal politics and culture of the U.S. Through *SKRIB*, our action is to de-link, re-occupy, and rebuild international writing centre and writing studies’ spaces from political and cultural dominance in ways that move towards decolonized approaches to social justice.

As an international community, how do we reconcile English as the lingua franca in the face of its historic and continuing U.S. colonizing and hegemony in our writing centres? (For example, see Uhler, n.d.; Cons & Martinez, 2021; Martinez & Graf, 2021; Reis, et al, 2022; Deans, 2021.) Rambiritch (2018) reports that in a South African writing centre, only “23% of students indicate English as their first or home language” (p. 57). In Brazil, English is supplanting Portugues (also a colonizer language) (Batista, 2022; Rajagopalan, 2005) in science publishing nationally to an alarming rate. According to the Organization of Ibero-American States,

Only 13% of scientists in Spain presented their work in Spanish, followed by 12% of those in Mexico, 16% in Chile, and around 20% in Argentina, Colombia and Peru... As for the Portuguese language, 3% of researchers

from Portugal used their own language in their published work, compared with 12% of Brazilian scientists. All others publish in English. (Bonilla, 2022)

In Demeter, et al's call-to-action, *Rethinking English as a lingua franca in scientific-academic contexts: A position statement* (2022), they provide principles "to foster discussion about how and why we, as research communities in different fields and regions, should use multiple languages and varieties to promote transnational dialogue in scientific-academic contexts" (p. 3). These include recognizing that "[l]anguages/varieties function as powerful resources for knowledge making; [c]hoosing a language for publishing or presenting is a sociolinguistic right; and [c]hoosing a language to publish or present in is a political act (pp. 3-6). *SKRIB*, it's our hope, will become a collective action, imbued in values that include publishing without reproducing colonialist tendencies, habits, methodologies, or ideologies.

In its work, *SKRIB* recognizes that isolationism does not work in the favour of those Canagarajah calls "periphery scholars" (2021),

While periphery scholars blithely conduct their scholarly lives according to their local norms and restrict their domain of influence to the periphery, center scholars continue to dominate the global scene of knowledge construction. This domination will be especially successful if no challenges are faced from periphery scholars. (p. 269)

The colonization of Global South's epistemological and ontological views, and its replacement through a knowledge genocide caused an erasure of local epistemological processes for knowledge creation and dissemination, including language and pedagogies. Ndlovu-Gatsheni posits this, in *The cognitive empire, politics of knowledge and African intellectual productions: Reflections on struggles for epistemic freedom and resurgence of decolonisation in the twenty-first century* (2023),

Under Euro-American-centric modernity, epistemology was instrumentally and strategically deployed in accordance with the coloniser's model of the world, whereby Europe and North America were put at the centre. The worlds of indigenous people of Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Caribbean and other places became subjected to 'discovery' paradigm and colonisation. Epistemology became highly political in the service of the cognitive empire... Science became a tool of imperialism, which enabled capitalist extractivism. Economic, ontological and epistemological extractivism coalesced. (p. 884)

Colonization continues using soft power through programs of public diplomacy. Engaging in the centre is critical for periphery scholars, while de-linking (Amin, 1990; Mignolo, 2007) from neocolonial, white male dominated thinking. Following these, we want to provide a space for "[l]iberating [as in the African context] knowledge from dominant white minority male elite intellectuals and opening it up to knowledge from African intellectuals, peasants, workers, and women" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023,

p. 884). This is because “the politics of knowledge cannot be discussed separately from the understanding of the empire and imperialism” (p. 885). For us, white scholars in a Canadian context, our privilege allows us to appear and position ourselves in the scholarly centre. We live and work in the Global North unimpeded, as our whiteness allows us to not only to cross borders without discrimination, but to also be viewed as part of, in Marxist terms, members of the privileged class. We not only occupy that space, but we bring that space with us, merging it with the cultural privilege of the local space wherever we go, something that we’ve experienced over and over. This is hubris of the zero-point that requires radical self-awareness.

Reflections on the journal’s name

“SKRIB” resists meaning in American English and beyond. Inspired by the verb “to write” in Esperanto perhaps with some idealism from that project. It is not an acronym of the journal’s subtitle in any language and can be a common meeting point for all. With SKRIB, we are all publishing in the same “space” though we may come to the space differently positioned. We hope this can be a testament to the journal’s commitment to multilingual and multicultural publishing led by a group of international editors.

This is our starting point. We are interested in centering those voices that are not present in US writing centre and composition journals published in American English as well as a forum for authors situated in the zero point to develop a responsible radical self-awareness. Our vision for *SKRIB* is to provide counter-narratives, as well as for conversations from the breadth of our field. We call for examinations of:

- In-country development and operation of writing programs and pedagogy.
- Writing programs & pedagogy as cultural artifacts.
- English as the lingua franca of global academic knowledge production (Demeter, et al, 2022).
- Cultural framings & histories of writing, rhetoric, and their teaching.
- The past, present, and future of Western (especially US) linguistic, epistemic, institutional hegemonic forces.
- Englishes as commodities and colonizing forces.

These examinations necessitate a critical approach to scholarship, foregrounding issues of internationalization, colonialism, globalism, capitalism, neoliberalism, and racism, as well as issues relating to patriarchy and gender inequality. We call for scholars and academics to act to challenge these divisive and harmful forces. Using a framework for engaging in transregional writing centre initiatives with integrity, it is possible to critique, delink (Amin, 1990; Mignolo, 2007), tear down, and (re)construct leading with social justice, ally-ship, and equality.

Rambiritch and space and safety

Avasha Rambiritch, keynote speaker at the 2022 CWCA/ACCR conference, brings these to bare in her keynote published here, *Reimagining Space and Safety in the South African Writing Centre: Keynote address from the 2022 CWCA/ACCR conference*. A scholar of spatial justice (Rambiritch, 2018), she applies the concepts of ubuntu and ubuntu pedagogy, which “draws from the ubuntu philosophical values of compassion, care, cooperation, respect, and dignity to provide a learning environment that, as a lens, brings together students from diverse cultural backgrounds to value cultures, opinions, ideas, and learn to cooperate and to co-exist.” Rambiritch drop down into morass of this struggle, challenging us to create “braver” spaces in writing centres by foregrounding “discussions and actions related to language, language injustice, and identity.”

As a descendant of indentured Indian labourers who came to South Africa with aspirations a better life, Rambiritch writes that the cost of their dreams was their home language, their “mother tongue.” The struggle to maintain their language was brutally challenged linguistically, first by Afrikaan and then by British English. This continues today in South Africa. Rambiritch imagines a writing centre as global village that seeks linguistic justice, a “multilingual writing centres” where “[s]tudents are encouraged to exploit their multilingual repertoire.”

Condon’s Counterstory

Our second piece, *Counterstory as Research Method and Genre: Bean and the Epic Workshop Fail*, is by Frankie Condon. Condon employs *counterstory*, which is “simultaneously a research method and genre developed by Black, Indigenous, and Scholars of Colour, as they analyze, interrogate, and critique white supremacy, racism, and settler colonialism in writing and writing centre studies,” a concept Condon takes from Aja Martinez’s book, *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* (2020). Condon applies these concepts onto and through a fictional student, Bean,

a composite of who says and does things in and outside of class that embody in distilled form performances of whiteness, toxic masculinity, racism, and white supremacy that can and do seethe beneath the surface of classrooms in which I and other colleagues have taught not only in the United States but also in Canada.

Bean, together with a fictional writing instructor composite, both of whom are not “very likeable (frequently are absolutely despicable),” Condon uses a kind of scenario-dialectic to “theorize racialized experience” of ‘symbiosis, color-blind racism-interest-convergence, racial formation, intersectionality, or hegemonic whiteness’” (Condon, quoting Martinez, 2020 p. 17). The realness of the scenario she presents is a confounding theatre of absurd of Bean’s white-supremist narcissism, Trumpian gaslighting, and the hand-wringing moralizing “whiteness” of a martyred writing instructor. It’s a piece that pulls no punches.

We hope that you find in SKRIB’s publications writing that resonates with you both personally as well as with your scholarship.

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