

FRANCINE BRADSHAW

10. COCKA ROGIE'S SONG¹

Outsiders Within

THE POSITION: INSIDE/OUTSIDE

The room is large and airy. It is a room I like. I have spent many happy hours here, listening to lecturers, participating in stimulating counselling exercises, which sometimes left me in tears or furthered my understanding of my white colleagues' perspectives.

Today, however, my feelings are different. I feel very outside in this particular white group. I feel distanced, shut out. I see the group as homogeneous, the Insiders, sharing a common experience that seems to include them all but excludes me.

I look round the room. I do not see myself. This is a common occurrence for me, the only black face. I feel very visible. This high visibility accentuates my difference. What I see in the room initiates an internal process: the visible difference seems to be a marker for 'culturally different.' I am therefore not only different physically but now culturally as well. This separates me from the Insider group. I am different, I am the Outsider.

This sense of feeling 'outside' seems to heighten my awareness, and I now notice that whereas writers from as far as Australia and New Zealand are mentioned, Black writers are not. I notice the omission of names from places like southern Africa, the Arab world, the Caribbean, names like Maryse Conde, a well-known author from the French speaking Caribbean who spent a number of years working in Africa which is the setting of one her best known novels '*A Season in Rihata*' (Conde, 1981). I feel as if it is my job to contest this, to champion their writings. But I am unable to, feeling weighed down and now having huge doubts about my own writing, about my own abilities. I am becoming marginalised, squeezed into a position of constriction and rigidity. I am losing my voice. I become quiet.

I am reminded of an earlier instance, in the small group, when the subject of feeling 'outside' was raised. A response was that we all feel 'outside' at some time. I attempted to say that there is a difference between feeling 'outside' and being an Outsider. I knew I had not articulated my thoughts very well. I was frustrated with myself. Once again I had lost my voice. On reflection this incident may have been a trigger for my seeing the large groups as homogeneous (although it may not have been).

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Trying to make sense of my experience, I wonder about the ‘outsider,’ that feeling of being on the outside. Is it a common occurrence for certain groups or is it a personal emotion that has no political or social context? Psychological theories on attitude and prejudice attempt to explain marginalisation of groups or individuals. Examining attitudinal change, theories adopting an ‘inside’ perspective, refers to the personal or phenomenological experience, whereas an ‘outside’ view is the detached observer. Psychologists differ in their understanding of prejudice, arguing on the one hand that what produces the in-group or out-group may depend on structural factors whilst others, like Adorno who proposed ‘the authoritarian personality,’ suggest it is in the person’s character (Radford & Govier, 1987). However, these theories do not account for the personal emotion of feeling an Outsider. Is there a relationship between the intense personal emotion and the phenomenon termed Outsider? Does the one beget the other? Or were my own feelings to do with being black in a white dominated society? Is this a *motif* of the Black condition?

APPROACHING THE STUDY

My first grandchild is about to be born in the U.S.A. and I am planning a visit there. I realise that it would be an ideal time to observe the Outsider position. As a stranger, I would have no desire to acculturate and I could monitor my reactions to a different culture. I also decide to interview my daughter-in-law, Tracy Fisher, who is a professor in Anthropology, at the University of California. She is an excellent subject to comment on education and academia and is well placed to compare Britain with the United States as she carried out her field studies in London.

Our linkages constitute the basis of what is known as ‘autoethnography.’ As relatives, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, we are placed in both personal and professional roles, I as researcher and she as subject. But she is also a researcher, an anthropologist, and we stride parallel ground, for she has studied Black women and I am writing about Black women and education, a study that springs from my own specific educational happening. Like mirror images we are both Insiders and Outsiders: her ‘insider’ position is the African-American academic, mine the student in England. Our ‘outsider’ position relates to her, also a student, but in Britain; and mine as a visitor to her native place (and her home). Our professional inquiries, cross-cutting gender and race, not only play out in our academic/student lives but in our (personal) mother/daughter-in-law relationship.

Ruth Behar speaks of the delicate position of researcher and subject. She argues for the inclusion of the personal and a move away from the ‘observer’ stance (Behar, 1996). ‘Exposure of self,’ as she did in her study of Esperanza, a Mexican street peddler, is “essential to the argument ... not exposure for its own sake” (p. 14). Behar uses the terms ‘vulnerable’ to describe this type of ethnography.

I am placing myself in a ‘vulnerable’ position as I record my own feelings on going to the States, a very momentous occasion for me: becoming a grandmother. Because of this I decide to separate my autoethnographic study into two parts: one

it seems to me is the intellectual and cognitive activity (I am researching the assignment in the States), whilst the other is a record of my emotional and immediate reactions to the everyday events of my (new) social/physical environment. To emphasise these differences, I experiment with the writing on the page.

My identity is constituted of both researcher and mother/mother-in-law. As this is academic writing that was initiated from being in the 'academic role,' I decide to make that central. My personal experiences I therefore place on the margins. Not only is that my lived reality as the 'outsider' and as such is marginalised (almost as if that is its place), but as well I am not yet that 'vulnerable' to place my own personal life in the centre. I also accentuate the difference by writing the one in the present, personal tense and the other, in the past, academic style. By so doing, I aim to convey the in-the-moment experience contrasted with the once-removed mediated activity. The immediacy is also present in that I wrote it there, in the United States, as I experienced it (I carried a notebook for that express reason) and it has not been edited. On the other hand, some academic reading and references were obtained over there (thanks to Tracy) but the analysis and further reading was carried out over time and long after my visit to my family.

Placing my experience at the margins, it feels as if I am subjectively describing my marginalised position in the classroom. The text becomes the physical representation of myself in the classroom where academic theories and conceptualisation was the main focus. In academia there is no space for the emotional; we exist as 'rational, intellectual creatures, bringing in our ideas but leaving our feelings at the door. My experimentation with the text is an attempt to physically represent this dichotomised way of being.

Geertz's use of 'thick' description, as in Ryle's notion, is a kind of intellectual effort that observes an action, develops its meaning and adds an interpretation which takes it beyond the original action (Geertz, 1973). The recounting of my direct experience of being an Outsider adds thickness to the more routine interviewing and data collection. In addition my reflections and the personal experiences of my subject aid to enrich the study.

[I]

I exist on the margins. I know that is my place because I am a stranger, a visitor to this place. I do not belong here.

∞

I am noticing my attitude even before I leave England—I am refusing to take a United States carrier, despite their cheaper flights. It's a personal protest! They're not having my money! Even before I arrive there, I have a hardened prejudicial attitude -towards whom/what?

∞

On the flight I sit next to a young woman from the States. She's very chatty.

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As the 11-plus was the shared experience that initiated my feelings of being on the outside, I begin my exploration of Insider/Outsider within education but it is a journey, which like a river, flows into, and out of, different terrains.

Being in a foreign country means walking a tightrope high above the ground without the net afforded a person by the country where he has his family, colleagues and friends and where he can easily say what he has to say in a language he has known from childhood. (Kundera, 1984, p. 71)

[II]

I notice I am watchful, ready to pounce and declaim, quite what for I'm not sure. Instead she charms me and gains my sympathy: the British immigration gave her a hard time (she didn't have a visa) and put her back on a flight to Los Angeles.

Like me she's an outsider in England. Unlike me, she still speaks kindly of the place. She's able to separate the officious immigration officer from the rest of the 'nice' British.

I'm caught out. I find that difficult.

Hey she's white!

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The 11-plus was described by members of the group as a pivotal moment in their development, separating them, not just from their family and friends, but moved them into a different social class.

[III]

I notice that in my next encounter, with a black man, an African-American, I do not seem so wary. In fact I share a lot of information about myself. We discuss the National Assoc. for the Advancement of Coloured People. He's a member. We are in the airport shuttle bus and I notice I keep my voice low. I'm sure it's because of the white couple sitting in front. I think I'm still in Britain, where to talk about race issues so openly, might be considered rude/impolite (or so I feel).

But the couple are very friendly and warm towards him. Nor does he make a comment about them when they go.

I was very conscious of my experience hugely contrasting with theirs: at nine years old I sat, and passed an entrance exam for the best girls school in the island.

It was a privilege and an honour. Whereas my white colleagues were less happy with their success, mine was held up in my culture as an achievement. I was proud and pleased—they felt estranged. Their feelings, although personal, are also political, stemming from the class differences that are played out in the discourse on education. In Britain this discourse is part of a wider political debate that opposes state and private education on a superior-inferior scale. I can share some similarities with my white colleagues: I too was separated from the boys on the pasture with whom I played cricket. However a major difference is the attitude to that separation and the value each specific culture places on education. Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow (1977) note this in their research on sexual stratification in Barbados.

Notable for the “absence of marked sexual inequalities” (Schlegel, 1977, p. 293), the Caribbean was an obvious choice for such a study. Conducted between the fifties and the seventies, their research spans my educational experience in Barbados. Their findings help me to make sense of my outside feelings: “education is viewed as the prime means of acquiring social prestige” (ibid., p. 306). Although owning a house and land might be associated with personal autonomy, the parent’s social standing increases when their child gains a place at one of the ‘top’ schools in the island. The researchers remark on the struggle that parents have in order to pay for their children’s education but “they do not hesitate to express an equal pride in the educational attainments of their female and male children” (ibid., p. 306).

The majority culture’s discourse on education, markedly different from my own minority culture, positions me on the outside, and because there is no entry for my experiences, fortified in that place, I become silenced. My ‘success’ and social prestige cannot be vaunted in the dominant discourse of problematic and displaced educational experiences.

[IV]

In Britain, as two Black people, we might have said something, I believe, to show our solidarity—we the Insiders. His easy banter with them makes me feel an Outsider.

Ranks feel closed against me. He and I might share some ...?race/blackness? (unsure quite what) but he also shares ... a ?culture with them that I am outside of.

I do not know the rules here. In Britain Black and White do not generally have such amiable conversations and seem very comfortable with it, unless they know each other well.

Writing from a Black perspective, Patricia Hill Collins has theorised an ‘outsider-within’ concept. It is the framework of her theory on Black Feminist thought (Hill Collins, 1990).

[V]

The driver of the bus is Indonesian. Does he feel an Outsider?

He tells me his mother who lives in Indonesia wouldn't live in the States; his sister, who lived here all her adult life, is planning to go back home, but her children, born in the States, see it as their home. For himself, he won't return home till he makes his money. But he thinks he would not want to stay forever in the States.

I understand: my two sons live in different parts of the world, and I have a home in the Caribbean. Where is *home*?

We reach a tentative conclusion that *home* is where we began and as we get older we feel the greater urge to be there.

Feminist theory grounds its ontology in the social construction of gender. Arising from women's organising in the sixties, it issues a challenge to positivism to accept an individual's experience as valid data. Feminism demonstrated how women's views of the world had been omitted from academic research and feminist theory criticised the 'grand narratives' of empirical research. This stance promulgates the notion that science is 'situated' in a specific context. This gives a specific angle on reality. Objectivity therefore, as feminists argue, is not possible: science is value-laden (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The allowance of different voices and different realities offered a space for Black feminists to critique what they perceive as 'white feminism.' From this juncture Black women criticised white women for also being racist and oppressing Black women. The 'Sisterhood' as espoused by feminism was viewed by Black women as a white construct (Bradley, 1996).

Hill Collins (1990) focused on the experience of ordinary women. Analysing the lives of Black domestics, she perceived that their caring for and relationships with white families placed them 'inside' the family. But their exploited economic position, their ghettoisation in domestic work, coupled with the disadvantages of being Black in a predominantly white society, positioned them 'outside.' Collins names this the 'outsider-within' stance that produces a "peculiar marginality" (p. 11). She sees this 'curious' position as giving a "unique Black women's standpoint on self and society" (p. 11). The Black woman's reality offers "a distinct view of the contradictions between the dominant group's actions and ideologies" (p. 11). These Black women working in the homes of white women are perpetual outsiders because of their 'blackness' but their central position within the homes, as caregivers and pivotal to the efficient functioning of the household, gives them an 'insiders' knowledge of where the real power and authority lies.

[VI]

He drops me at the hospital and now I seem to struggle as I come into mainstream.

I don't understand the signs e.g. 'Urgent Care.'
 I ask someone (who looks like medical staff). They explain: "'Urgent Care,' exactly what it says!"
 "Does that mean 'emergency'?"
 "No," he explains, perhaps thinking what a dumb*** "emergency is 'Emergency,' this is 'Urgent Care'! ('Urgent Care' is maybe our equivalent to 'Outpatients.')

Was I playing a word game? It's a game that is often repeated in the next few weeks.

Language differences highlight my Outsider status.

Turning to academia, Collins argues that female Black academics are also in the position of 'outsider-within.' The oppression felt by Black women, coming from the macro structures of society, leads to the suppression of Black feminist intellectual tradition. As their ideas are excluded from mainstream academia Black women are the outsiders. Yet simultaneously, the economic, political and ideological conditions foster "the continuation of an afrocentric culture" (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 12) which then creates the 'outsider-within' stance so "essential to Black women's activism" (p. 12). Tracy, as a young budding academic in the States, has experiences of the 'outsider-within' as described by Collins.

In my own experiences in college I found there were not many black women professors. In my subject, political science, there were none. There weren't many black women in my class, in my governance class I was the only black female. There weren't many black professors, they were particularly, white and male.

Only until graduate school, I began to encounter more black women in academia, more black professors. For me when I decided to go to graduate school, to get involved in academia, it wasn't surprising particularly in anthropology where it was overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly male. On one level not surprising, and then on another maybe it was. It wasn't surprising because I did my graduate studies in New York. My programme centred on political economy. It tended to have more people of colour than in anthropology. At the same time there are more black women than men. The numbers are very low overall.

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As someone who is an academic now, particularly in women's studies which are overwhelmingly white- white liberal feminists- it's somewhat difficult because they see themselves as doing positive work. They see themselves as radical when in fact...*[Me: they are not radical enough]* exactly. It takes a while for them to even realise the position that they are in. They are in different positions of power really because you see more white women in academia.

[VII]

One of the first things I do when I arrive at my daughter-in-law's home is drive a car.

It's a very odd feeling, sitting in the car on the left/?right. (I never actually identify the left/right, it all seemed too confusing). Physically being in the car made me feel as if I had lost a limb; as if the car might tilt; a feeling of being on the edge and not centred. So although I was physically able to drive, I carried, for the most part, an existential feeling of division, of 'half a person.' It helped if there was a passenger to balance.

At the end of my stay (two weeks), I am still reaching across my passenger's neck for my seatbelt!

I ask Tracy about her experiences in Britain:

It was difficult for me going there. It was difficult for me to find a black woman to work with. I never did. It meant that the sort of conversations I could have had with black women here, I didn't have. There are more black women academics here than in the UK. There was just a lack of people I could have a discourse with. And I didn't in the end. In those terms it is outside.

If there are no Black women academics or a Black feminist intellectual discourse, where does a black women find support? Thinking of my own isolation in the classroom, I wondered how Tracy found support for her research whilst in London.

I did meet with some black women who were interested in similar academic ideas through a contact in Greenwich. She introduced me to a woman. We connected because she saw me as a black woman interested in race and I felt the same about her. Through her I met other black women. There was one (British) Black woman academic, Julia Sudbury, who was working in my area, Black Women Organising, but she was now in the States. When I phoned her up, she said "Where are you?" I said "England!"

It was just a handful of us meeting to discuss some of the readings we had to do ... on Sundays. It didn't last long although it did help, for a while, because I had dialogue with other people and young black women and because on a personal level I was coming in contact with black women and I could discuss things that I noticed in England ... yes like feedback. They helped me too. They encouraged me in terms of the work I was doing because no-one was doing that type of work.

[VIII]

I never really become oriented to where the house is. I make it home each time but it's a sort of visual map, rather than a knowing.

I wonder if *outside* stems from an inner emotion/a psychological root that structures and which systems then connect with!

Are left/right abstractions?
Not rooted in any reality?

Is this what postmodernists mean by language being a force that creates differences in the world?

Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe (I had to go to the USA to find her!) had similar experiences to my daughter-in-law. She attended the University of Bristol where she was researching Black youth's political consciousness but having difficulty in engaging with her subjects, she was drawn to those individuals "who lived life at the borderlands deemed marginal people" (Ifekwunigwe, 1999, p. 46). Ifekwunigwe describes her standpoint as one that stems from several ancestral and migratory reference points. By connecting with others who similarly lived the "half-life of the outsider" (p. 41), it gave her the courage to change her thesis. Those outsiders, for whom "home has particular layered textured and contradictory meanings" (p. 41), were like herself, metis(e). This term, originating from Diop, Ifekwunigwe adopted to identify individuals whose parentage is both black and white. The lives of these 'metisse' friends who supported her struggle in academia, then become the subjects of her thesis. She examines their insider/outsider experience from a critical feminist position (Ifekwunigwe 1999). Tracy and Ifekwunigwe found support outside the walls of academia. It was other, non-academic, Black women who encouraged them. As Hill Collins points out, it is the outside sustenance that produces the challenges to the inside. The research of both Tracy and Ifekwunigwe augment the Black Feminist intellectual tradition.

[VIV]

Language! The expressions they use strike me as dramatic e.g. “we’re not on the same page”; ‘Great Start,’ a name for neo-natal care.

At dinner four of us discuss these cultural differences: “in the States there seems an ethos of ‘we can do’; a progressive attitude, nothing cannot be overcome.”

“In Britain, people are timid, hesitant about jumping out of their box; they complain instead”

Cultural differences: I notice in the hospital that staff are smiling, seemingly upbeat. Their uniforms look like holiday shirts from Bali.

INSIDER/OUTSIDER POSITIONS: ENVIABLE/DANGEROUS?

Ifekwunigwe describes how she was forced to “step in and step out” (ibid., p. 44) of her British identity as her construct of herself was challenged both through the dialogues with her metisse friends and through the eyes of the white, and black, British public. Her stepping in and stepping out is a familiar feeling to outsiders. Like Hill Collins’ domestics, we are within, but still do not belong.

Yet the ‘outsider-within’ position is not an enviable place. On the one hand it is viewed as a privileged observational site where trust already exists, whilst on the other its position is invincible. But authenticity of the voice is hotly contested within feminism and postmodernism (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). For Black women it is problematic. Collins reported that some Black women found the insider position a burden as the felt they could not criticise other Black women’s work.

However Tracy thinks that white women do not fully grasp the Black context. Because of the unequal power relations they cannot fully immerse themselves in it. And their ‘left’ politics, she argues, means that they are really re-producing what people of colour have been saying for some time. Almost as if the ‘outsider-within’ position is piggy-backed on the intellectual tradition of white academics. Little wonder that Black women academics are fearful of criticising each other’s work. It topples another. Tracy believes that white women are not aware of the power dynamics and not conscious of what they are doing.

Prina Motzali-Haller in her paper ‘Writing Birthright’ conveys the problematic nature of the politics of representation. A Mizrahi Jew, she describes her ambivalence and tension about working within her own community. She speaks of feeling ‘noxious’ when invited to come and research the Falasha, black Jews from Ethiopia: “I resented the moment that was going to transform me from the subject of those professional researchers into a membership of the group who made their careers by writing about those ‘problematic’ Others” (1997, p. 211).

[X]

The 'personal' and 'private' becomes the site of major cultural differences.

Differences in our inter-pretations
of what is personal/
private varies hugely.

I'm conscious that I can't really say where mine come from. They talk
about me in England, but I have to correct them—I am not English! They
then become confused, and I, in turn, am confused too.

Are my ways Caribbean, Bajan or English?

In this home my ideas are definitely an outsider's.

These differences create tensions.

Motzafi-Haller experienced the position of outsider in Botswana where she carried out her fieldwork. There she was identified as the 'white woman,' despite her protestations of being the 'Black' person in her own country. Yet she could recognise the fluidity of her position, for at times in southern Africa she could be 'white,' using it to her advantage. Meanwhile she in turn observes the 'fixed' position of her black subjects. Ifekwunigwe too relates similarly of being mistaken as that 'red-skinned American gal, or that 'half-caste,' or whether from her accent, she was perceived as American or English.

Prina Motzali-Haller's reflections on her Insider/Outsider position, helps to clarify my own experience in the classroom. What occurs is that my high visibility (and my different cultural perspective) accentuates my difference and makes me feel an 'outsider.' As Outsider, I feel I am perceived as Insider, holding the 'trusted, authentic' voice. In fact this is burdensome, especially as there is no academic evidence of the Black intellectual thought. The 'only one,' like Tracy and Ifekwunigwe, I am unsupported.

Stuart Hall says of his state: "I have a funny relationship with the British working class movement. I'm in it but not actually of it" (cited in Morley & Chen, 1996, p. 493). Jamaica born, Hall was one of the very few Black male academics in the U.K. who is 'within' but clearly feels 'outside' at times. These shifting sands of identity, he analyses as arising out of the diasporic experience: "the experience of being inside and outside, the familiar stranger. We used to call that 'alienation' but nowadays it is come to be the archetypal late-modern condition ... it's what everybody's life is like" (ibid., p. 490). Diaspora, a term originally used to refer to the Jewish experience, in Hall's notion, began in the Caribbean, at the juncture of European and African collision.

Both Mutzafi-Hallen and Ifekwunigwe refer to this position as 'mestiza.' Hall uses the term hybridity, arguing for a 'shift' from the essential black subject. His

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deconstruction of their representation contests the marginal position they hold. There is a need to recognise the “extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category ‘black’” (ibid., p. 443). To reach this understanding is a personal journey but it is also political. Tracy makes the point that we may all be unaware of the political tensions, blinded to how it is played out in the personal. The individual is barricaded behind the personal experiences and emotions unaware of the structural and systemic weight behind the door.

Like Ifekwunigewe, using an autoethnographic approach opens up the seams where I can explore my feelings and articulate them academically. This is Behar’s vulnerable observer—how can we speak of something that affects us personally but which has much wider social and political implications. And Ellis, in the story of her husband’s death, demonstrates that personal relationships can produce valid sociological data (Ellis, 1995).

RE-POSITIONING

Hall’s conceptions of diaspora, like a lifeline, drag me from the morass of identity politics. People of the diaspora cannot be ‘cured’ by merging into a new national community (Clifford, 1997). This explains how I may always be on the outside. Diaspora has come to identify “immigrant, expatriate, refugee guest-worker, exile community” (Guibernau & Rex, 1997, p. 287) and although none of those identity tags may resonate with me, I certainly connect with the idea of a “domain of shared and discrepant meanings, adjacent maps and histories” (ibid., p. 287). (Travelling in a plane full of women from India and Sri Lanka going to the Gulf to work in 1991, evokes the memory of seeing my uncle board the ship in 1955 to go to England.)

[XI]

How to cross these boundaries: to strengthen relationships and get to know people?

Openness isn’t enough it seems.

∞

Language—it’s difficult! I’m struggling to understand what they mean.

I’m having to stop people in mid-flow and ask for definitions—not conducive to good conversation!

I am phased out by the television. The language seems inappropriate, colloquial. I can’t read expressions: they seem aggressive.

A woman is crying for her dead daughter. To me, she seems over-the-top; pretending. I can’t sympathise.

[XII]

I remember British physio-therapists saying that Asian people are too poetical about their pain.

I realise this must be how they feel: unconnected.

∞

'Different strokes for different people' becomes the refrain in the home.

It helps us to cope with the yawning gulf of meaning.

I can see how history /the legal system etc., all influence our behaviour, our thoughts to bind us to the Outsider position.

I am energised by Collins who believes that Black women can do more than just develop a Black feminist analysis “using standard epistemological criteria,” but can contest the “very definitions of intellectual discourse” (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 15). It is exactly what I need to do in the classroom. Challenge their educational experiences as the centrepiece of all educational thought. Open it up to other cultural forms. This would then enable them to see the cultural specificity of their experiences. And the political and systemic weight would be more evident. As centrepiece it remains an individualised experience. But the cultural discourse of the educational system remains hidden from view. Opening the centre instigates a flow from margin to centre, from outside to inside, and back again.

My outside position began as a negative effect on my self-esteem. However I can transform it into my motif. Kundera writes that a motif is a sort of code that we live by, as in music, that appears at the beginning and at the end, “guided by ... [a] ... sense of beauty the individual transforms a fortuitous occurrence into a motif which then assumes a permanent place in the composition of the individual's life” (Kundera, 1984, p. 49) The ‘outside’ position, as my ‘motif,’ could be my site, the position from which I challenge the Insiders. I could use it as a vehicle to bring writers on the outside into the light. It could be a place of discovery.

Carrying out this short autoethnographic study has enabled me to re-position myself, to be “a woman of the border: between places, between identities ... between cultures ... one foot in the academy and one foot out” (Behar, 1996, p. 162), to find my voice.

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[XII]

An encounter in a shop. We are buying flowers. Only one foot on the threshold and it bounces off us: “hey guys, how are you today?!”

It doesn’t cheer me up: am I supposed to seriously answer the question? I guess not because when I do—“we’re well, what about you?”—I draw blank looks.

I notice my reaction to her, with her upbeat, high-pitched voice. I’m thinking: she can’t be very bright! I explore my prejudice and see that I am expecting a different type of communication from a sales person).

As a woman of the diaspora, I am an outsider but I can secure the site and make it one of strength and courage, where I might “struggle for different ways to be—ways to stay and be different, to be British and something else” (Clifford, 1994, p. 308).

[XIV]

I expect her to be impressing on me her maturity and capability—not talking like a schoolgirl!

(My son tells me it sells goods)

It confirms what I know: *Communication is Cultural*.

But it also spotlights my own expectations and how they make me see someone.

This realisation draws me closer to understanding White British people.

I feel more empathetic with their difficulty in communication with minority ethnic groups.

NOTES

¹ Cocka Rogie’s song is a traditional in my family. It tells the tale of how Cocka Rogie was rejected by his mother, the Hen, but was the only one of his siblings left after the mongoose, by singing the song, lured them out of their nest and ate them:

Little Willy come here

Will’n’bow come here

Holl’n’daniel come here

But let Cocka Rogie stan deh

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