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A. Suresh Canagarajah. *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002. 332p.

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A. Suresh Canagarajah's *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing* is a welcome intervention in such fields as English studies, rhetoric, linguistics, postcolonial theory, and political economy. Canagarajah's work provides a rigorous and sustained critique of western knowledge construction in general, and the publishing practices of academia in particular. Drawing on the discourses of political economy, world systems theory, and rhetorical analysis all at once, he clearly and forcefully lays out the inherent inequalities that exist between "center" and "periphery" scholars in terms of access to knowledge-production and knowledge-dissemination, and connects such inequalities to the larger politico-economic inequalities inherent in the systems of capitalism and imperialism.

Much of the impetus for Canagarajah's study comes from his own experience as a Third World scholar attempting to read, write, and publish from Sri Lanka in the midst of poverty and civil unrest. He taught English in Sri Lanka for ten years before he moved to the U.S. in 1994 to teach at the City University of New York. Canagarajah begins by pointing out the contradictions that result from his own relative privilege as a Third World scholar now working and publishing in the First World. He writes: "It is because I moved to the center that I am able to publish about the scholarly deprivation and exclusion I suffered while teaching at UJ [University of Jaffna], but in the process of moving my status has changed, calling into question my ability to represent my periphery scholars" (11). Yet he insists, convincingly, that the book's intervention is still much needed and that "it is a necessary evil that periphery scholars should use center publications even to resist their domination" (12). Canagarajah then outlines his general project thus:

academic writing holds a central place in the process of constructing, disseminating, and legitimizing knowledge; however, for discursive and material reasons, Third World scholars experience exclusion from academic publishing and communication; therefore the knowledge of Third World communities is marginalized or appropriated by the West, while the knowledge of Western communities is legitimated and reproduced; and as a part of this process, academic writing/publishing plays a role in the material and ideological hegemony of the West. (6)

With this overarching argument in mind, Canagarajah divides the book into eight chapters: 1) Contextualizing Academic Writing; 2) Communities of Knowledge Construction; 3) Conventions in Knowledge Construction; 4) Textual Conven-

tions in Conflict; 5) Publishing Requirements and Material Constraints; 6) Literacy Practices and Academic Culture; 7) Poverty and Power in Knowledge Production; and 8) Reform, Resistance, Reconstruction.

In chapter one, Canagarajah provides a social and disciplinary context for his study in terms of “geopolitical relationships” (37). Focusing specifically on the research article because, in his words, “refereed journals are the gatekeepers of knowledge in each discipline” (33), Canagarajah draws connections between the academic publishing world and the capitalist system itself. He posits that the capitalist countries maintain their position of power at least partly through the production of knowledge in academia or through what he calls “educational imperialism” (40). Canagarajah argues for a historical-materialist analysis of “discourse communities” (60) in chapter two, comparing First World and Third World contexts. He argues that “the most powerful notion that motivates this book [is] *knowledge as interested* and, therefore, ideological” (57, author’s italics). In order to make his point, Canagarajah explains that in the First World, despite some conflicts in academic disciplines, discourse communities maintain their hegemony based on “their interest in material resources and influence” (66). In other words, First World academic communities stand united for the sake of profit and power.

Canagarajah expands his discussion of knowledge construction in chapter three, particularly in terms of academic conventions enforced by the center. He posits that even academic conventions must be understood in politico-economic terms. Canagarajah continues his analysis of conventions in chapter four, pointing to material disparities between center and periphery contexts as crucial in understanding differences in writing practices rather than “culturalist and linguistic explanations” (107). He also challenges the western concepts of neutrality and detachment in writing, insisting that “there are profound ideological implications in adopting a rhetoric that is detached, neutral, and uninvolved” (153).

In chapter five, Canagarajah critiques western publishing conventions that are blind to the location of scholars from the periphery. Drawing from personal experience, for instance, he writes: “When I then went to the post office to mail my bulky package to the editor, I realized that one also has to be rich to publish academically. It is not often realized that submitting a manuscript for consideration is an expensive affair for periphery scholars” (169). He takes up what he calls the “political economy of literacy” (211) in chapter six, making the point that periphery scholars “are not totally excluded from literate activity” but are “allowed to participate selectively” (211). This is the case, he suggests, because “[t]his way the center maintains a market for its literate products but does not let its monopoly get challenged by new written products from the periphery” (211). Here

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Canagarajah's formulation is heavily informed by a Marxist theoretical insight: he discerns that profit and maintenance of power are the strongest motivating forces behind the western academic publishing world and, on a larger scale, capitalism.

Chapter seven takes up the issue of unequal production-relations and power-relations in academia, paying attention to poverty in particular. For instance, Canagarajah writes: "Consider also the irony behind the fact that the knowledge of periphery scholars *on their own communities* is marginalized, while that of center scholars enjoys repute. While the work of scholars like Phillipson, Holliday, and Pennycook on linguistic imperialism in the periphery earns universal recognition, the work of periphery scholars like A.J. on a similar subject is unknown" (236). And the few writers from the periphery who do get published, he argues, are carefully chosen by the west. His critique of postcolonialism is apt here: "By selectively publishing periphery writers and writing, the center has also formed a postcolonial discourse that is tamed of its radicalism, even while it is promoted as oppositional" (248). Finally, in his last chapter, Canagarajah calls for concrete changes to be made to the academic publishing world. For instance, he proposes that mainstream journals should "democratize participation" (276), particularly if the journal claims to be of international scope. He also calls on periphery scholars to continue interrogating knowledge produced by the center.

Overall, this book raises issues that will certainly be crucial to the academic publishing world in the twenty-first century. Canagarajah's tireless reading of the connections between the interlocking systems of exploitation and oppression such as capitalism and imperialism and academia is commendable, although he could have more rigorously taken up the issue of racism. Also, his use of the tools of political economy to understand unequal production-relations and power-relations between First World and Third World academic sites is not only refreshing but also extremely useful. I highly recommend this book to academics in all disciplines, but particularly those who are interested in further studying the political economy of knowledge production in a world devastated by capitalism and western imperialism. ✱