

# The 'Linguistic Aura of the Liminal' in Contemporary Exilic Discourse

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Exilic literature has a distinctive way of experiencing the trial of life in a new land, characterized by an exilic angst that exemplifies the predicament of personal displacement and cultural dispossession through the various stages of location, relocation and their subsequent transformation. This experience of the exiled informs and inspires specific strategies of artistic resistance, particularly in the linguistic domain, by using innovative strategies that will bring to the fore the 'exilic double bind'. Specific linguistic strategies that characterize exilic writing may include appropriation, abrogation, subversion etc., as hybrid poetic strategies to supplant the language of their homeland with an exilic discourse that adapts itself to the exiled space. This paper intends to analyse the linguistic aura that characterizes exilic literature with reference to select migrant writers in exile, by bringing out the salient features of exilic writing, and proposes a third space of enunciation – the liminal space – as the interstitial space between home and host, which characterizes the 'double binded' ambivalence of exilic discourse.

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The poetics of exile, which depicts an estrangement from the origin, records and reflects disjointedness, a decentralization, and marginality in its language use. New strains of social consciousness were also reflected in the language of these exilic writers.

To Salman Rushdie, "Indian writers in England include political exiles, first generation migrants, affluent expatriates whose residence here is frequently temporary, naturalized Britons, and people born here who may never have laid eyes on the subcontinent. Clearly, nothing that I say can apply across all these categories. But one of the interesting things about this diverse community is that, as far as Indo-British fiction is concerned, its existence changes the ball game" (*Imaginary Homelands* 12)

Commenting on the English language, Rushdie avers, "One of the changes has to do with attitudes towards the use of English. Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this language to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the view that we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. (*Imaginary Homelands* 17)

Delving further into this linguistic struggle as a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, Rushdie describes it as, "struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free" (*Imaginary Homelands* 18).

Highlighting the displacement and disruption that is characteristic of exilic literature, Alvin Rosenfeld in his masterful work on Exilic Literature titled, *The Writer Uprooted*, points out that,

From earliest times to today, the list of literary exiles—Isaiah, Ovid, Virgil, Petrarch, Dante, Voltaire, Heine, Shelley, Byron, Keats, Conrad, James, Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Auden, Yeats, Nabokov, Beckett, Ionescu, Kundera, Solzhenitsyn, Brodsky, Milosz, Rushdie, Ishiguro—is both long and distinguished. Some of those just named—and the above list could be increased substantially—were voluntary exiles; others were forced to leave their native cities or lands and lived abroad involuntarily. But whether they are thought of today as banished writers or émigrés, expatriates, or refugees, all have known and recorded the experiences of radical disruption and displacement that define the condition of exile and the challenges, both anguished and comic, of adjusting to the strangeness of life elsewhere (Introduction, x)

Language and culture play a pivotal role in conditioning the milieu, or the socio-literary context of an artist's literary output. Bill Ashcroft et al, commenting on this mutual relationship between language and culture, observe that, "Values are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history... Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world (*The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 266-7).

Often living in other linguistic environments, writers in exile think in their native language, but since they have to adapt to their nation of adoption, they have to adopt the tongue of the host nation; being rootless and in exile, they were forced to give form to their thought in the dimensions of a major language. To write in the tongue of the host nation, signified a great degree of intellectual independence for these writers; however, since the yoking was almost always a violent one, the writer in exile was not able to vent out the 'angst within' in a spontaneous manner with felicity and ease of expression. This prompted the need for a liminal tongue, that was at the same time – spontaneous, culturally grounded, portrayed the nostalgic angst of the writer and a voice of resistance against the dominant.

Exile literature distinguishes three diverse linguistic groups: monoglossic, diglossic and polyglossic. As Bill Ashcroft et al point out, "Monoglossic groups are those single-language societies using English as a native tongue, which correspond generally to settled colonies, although, despite the term, they are by no means uniform or standard in speech (*The Empire Writes Back* 38).

In a diglossic linguistic group, as David Crystal puts it, "... two markedly divergent varieties, each with its own set of social functions, coexist as standards throughout a community. One of these varieties is used (in many localized variant forms) in ordinary conversations; the

other variety is used for special purposes, primarily in formal speech and writing. It has become conventional in linguistics to refer to the former variety as ‘low’ (L), and the latter as ‘high’ (H) (Crystal 43). Speaking on Diglossic and polyglossic communities, Bill Ashcroft et al, opine that, “Diglossic societies are those in which a majority of people speak two or more languages, for example, in India, Africa, the South Pacific, for the Indigenous populations of settled colonies, and in Canada, where Quebecois culture has created an official bilingual society. In diglossic societies, English has generally been adopted as the language of government and commerce, and the literary use of english demonstrates some of the more pronounced forms of language variance. Polyglossic or ‘poly-dialectical’ communities occur principally in the Caribbean, where a multitude of dialects interweave to form a generally comprehensible linguistic continuum” (*The Empire Writes Back* 38-9).

The liminal space according to Homi K. Bhabha is a ‘hybrid’ site that witnesses the production - rather than just the reflection - of cultural meaning. By means of this hybrid space, or liminal space, which is otherwise called an ‘interrogatory, interstitial space,’ Bhabha expostulates the innate positive values of such a liminal space vis-a-vis the retrograde historicism that continues to dominate Western critical thinking, a ‘linear narrative of the nation,’ with its claims for the “holism of culture and community” and a ‘fixed horizontal nation-space.’ (*Location of Culture* 24)

Moreover, Liminality was quite simply a positive expression of cultural hybridity that entertains difference, without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. To Turner too, Liminality was a liberty, and had generative powers.

Although there is no certainty concerning the outcome as far as Liminality is concerned, the in-between space has its own spatial reality. Liminality thus refers to the ‘betwixt and between’ situation or object, an in-between place or moment, or a state of suspense. As Bjorn Thomassen rightly points out, ‘Liminality opens the door to a world of contingency where events and meanings – indeed ‘reality’ itself – can be moulded and carried in different directions. (8)

Hence, the liminal posits a challenge of uncertainty. Moreover, although Liminality has its connotations with marginality – the socially excluded and marginalized are also called liminal subjects – that need not necessarily be the case. Even though both concepts are boundary-oriented concepts, they are completely different in their denotations. The ‘interstitial space’ is neither marginal nor on the outside, but rather, something that is placed in an in-between position.

David Dabydeen, an Indian Caribbean writer, descendant of Indian indentured labourers, and a second generation exile, is a Guyanese poet, writer and novelist. In his poem “Two Cultures”, Dabydeen adopts a skilful linguistic cross-fertilisation that lies at the core of the native Caribbean experience. In his quest for an alternative authenticity – a third space of enunciation - Dabydeen also questions the notions of centrality in language and writes back to the centre with a reconstructed english, obviously not endorsed by the centre, and ‘re-placing’ it with a discourse that consolidates and characterises the local language – a ‘creolized’ language.

Commenting on the cultural models of creolization, John McLeod says: “... the notion of what it means to be ‘creole’ goes far beyond issues of language. It affects every aspect of

Caribbean life... The word ‘creole’ also means Caribbean-born, as opposed to aboriginal or European-born. It is not a racially specific term in the region but applies to people of all races whose place of origin is the Caribbean” (*The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* 97).

David Crystal, the famous linguist, while making out the difference between creole and standard language says that, “The standard language has the status which comes with social prestige, education, and wealth; the creole has no such status, its roots lying in a history of subservience and slavery” (Crystal 338).

David Dabydeen acknowledges and avers with this viewpoint and says, “If one has learnt and used Queen’s English for some years, the return to creole is painful, almost nauseous, for the language is uncomfortably raw. One has to shed one’s protective sheath of abstracts and let the tongue move freely in blood again” (*The State of the Language* 3, 4).

In this poem “Two Cultures” comprising twenty three lines, the poet vehemently attacks the native fascination for ‘BBC English’, where BBC English is seen as the yardstick for appropriation and other englishes are regarded as ‘subservient’ and abrogated at the expense of BBC (Imperial) English.

The opening lines of the poem are quite unconventional, and read thus:

‘Hear how a baai a taak

Like BBC!

Look how a baai a waak

Like white maan

Caak-hat pun he head, wrist-watch pun he haan!

(The Arnold Anthology 898)

Dabydeen laments that, it had become a Guyanese custom, for people who were privileged to have radio sets at home, to listen to the BBC World Service broadcasts, which, according to the poet, is an act of acknowledging the superiority of the white man and thereby vindicating the coloniser when it comes to reliability and accuracy of the news thus conveyed. Talking BBC English was considered elitist, and hence, anyone who spoke BBC English was considered highly cultured.

Dabydeen rants and raves in his own inimitable creolised way, against the white man and his culture in line 17:

Dem should a spit, vomit pun yu, beat yu rass wid whip!

Choke an rab, bruk-en-enta, tief dem people praparty!. (*The Arnold Anthology* 899)

Through the above lines, the poet resolves to counter the cultural onslaught with vituperative verbal assaults on the colonisers. In his essay “On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in

England Today”, Dabydeen acknowledges that, “the creole language is angry, crude and energetic. The canecutter chopping away at the crop bursts out in a spate of obscene words, a natural gush from the gut (The State of the Language 3), that reflects the suffering of its original users.

Dabydeen adds to say that, even though their country may be poor economically, they are very rich when it comes to indigenous culture and traditions, and above all, the locals are extremely proud about their indigenous values. The poem ends on a note of challenge, where he dares the coloniser to touch or to destroy their native culture, and face the consequences resulting therefrom.

Commenting on the extensive use of neologisms and code-switching, Bill Ashcroft et al argue that, “In all english variants the characteristic identity of the linguistic culture is continually being constructed by the invention of ‘neologisms’... Neologisms become an important sign of the coextensivity between language and cultural space, and are an important feature of the development of english variants. (*The Empire Writes Back* 70 – 1). Thus, David Dabydeen challenges colonial rule and effectively hybridises, through a spontaneously-crafted creolised language, the angst of the native against years of racial and political oppression thereby asserting cultural alterity in a ‘culturally distinct, culturally appropriate idiom’.

As Minoli Salgado points out,

Political exiles do not merely live on the borderline of history and language, but owe their ruptured lives to the simultaneous intransigence and transgression of its limits. As exiles, their lives are mediated by the experience of geographic and political expulsion, the intractability of different boundaries. For them then the ‘borderline’ alluded to by Bhabha is a site not merely for the potential translation of difference but, as significantly, for the exploration of the very translatability of difference, the (im)possibility of mediation across and between cultures and identities. (109)

Shyam Selvadurai, Sri Lankan Canadian writer, exiled during the politically crucial year of 1983, explores and enacts the socio-cultural discourses pertaining to race, ethnicity, class, language, gender and sexuality in Sri Lanka from his exiled residence in Canada. Selvadurai is a ‘realist’ writer who draw upon his own experience of socio-cultural relations to foreground the discrepancy between lived experience and social and political prescriptive, thus finding his new racial and sexual identity in exile, in Canada.

*Funny Boy* charts a clearly segregated terrain of permitted spaces and forbidden zones, and it is the negotiation, invasion and violation of these spaces that occupies much of the novel. Physical space is politicised, gendered, socially stratified (into the family residence and servant’s quarters), legitimated and policed.

Cross-dressing is Arjie’s first initiation into the cultural politics of transvestism, and the subsequent problematizing of gender roles. The narrator, in the first person recollects his first embarrassment in boyhood of how he became the laughing stock of the whole household for wearing a sari – everyone except his father was laughing. His father, having been brought up in a

heterosexist culture which enforces compulsory heterosexuality, (a term used by Adrienne Rich, among others), attributes the funniness of Arjie to the lenient ways of his wife – Arjie’s mother. Hence, he warns her saying that “If he turns out funny like that Rankotwera boy, if he turns out to be the laughing-stock of Colombo, it’ll be your fault” (12).

For Arjie, cross-dressing was a source of self-expression and entertainment, as he felt quite at ease, and longed for the opportunity every other day. By cross-dressing, Arjie was also overtly making a political statement against traditional gender roles. Boundary-crossing into the liminal space was considered anathema even in marriages between the exile and the host! Hence when Radha Aunty, a Tamil, falls in love with a Sinhalese boy, it was met with a volley of protests and the usual sarcasm in her family.

Thus we find that Radha Aunty, (one of the younger spinster sisters of Arjie’s mother) who falls in love with a Sinhalese boy, is not given the freedom of choice, to choose him as her bridegroom, simply because ‘the real world’ does not allow her that freedom. This ‘real world’ belief in the inborn inferiority of women is a form of what is called biological essentialism, as it is based on biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women.

Mala Aunty sighed. “It’ll never work.”

“But other Sinhalese and Tamil people get married.”

“I know,” Mala Aunty replied, “but they have their parents’ consent.”

“If two people love each other, the rest is unimportant.”

“No, it isn’t. Ultimately you have to live in the real world. And without your family you are nothing.” (78)

In the chapter titled “The Best School of All” Arjie is admitted in Queen Victoria’s Academy where his elder brother Diggy studied. Arjie has a rendezvous with the best companion of all, whom he meets by mere chance, at the Academy. “We looked at each other and there was, in our silent exchange, an acknowledgement of our newly found friendship. As I sat down next to him, I thought about my dream the night before, and caught myself studying him, the way his skin became lighter below the top button of his shirt, the way sweat had gathered in little spots on his chin and his upper lip, the way his hair was damp around the edges and clung to his temples in little curls” (243).

The feeling of being ‘the other’ is explored further, when the narrator takes us into a dialogue between Shehan and himself. “You’re feeling guilty,” he suddenly said. “You’re feeling guilty about what we did.” “Why should I feel guilty?” “Because you think it’s bad” (265).

Thus, in the final part of the novel, identity synthesis is achieved, when there is a blurring of boundaries, resulting in an emancipated interstitial space, when Arjie’s homosexual relationship with Shehan comes out in the open, and thereby marks the complete emergence of marginalized sexual identity, alongside Arjie’s self-separation from his family. The narrator



skillfully interweaves the identity crisis right from his childhood days, right into maturity, when, he finds his strange love, satiated through Shehan, who for him, represented an authentic trump card for ‘the essentialist other’ within him. Arjie is still not a liberated homosexual, as the normative constructions of gender seem to problematise his identity.

For Selvadurai, the queerness of Arjie as a ‘funny boy’ is therefore mediated through his status as an outsider, a migrant, a subject on ‘the brink of perpetual emergence’ from the borderlines of belonging. It is interesting to note that this has a structural correspondence with Selvadurai’s own experience of sexual emergence, which took place in exile in Canada and marked a radical break from a sense of originary identity, for ‘the pure sense of being Sri Lankan was based on rigid heterosexual and gender roles’. 56

In Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*, language becomes a symbolic site of contestation – occupying the third space of enunciation, and as an agent signifying cultural difference. The ‘Sinhala Only’ Language policy effectively segregates the education system in Sri Lanka into Tamil and Sinhala medium institutions. The fact that the writer chooses to write in a liminal lingua franca – English, seeks to draw attention to the implied cross-over between the dominant and subordinated – into a third space of liberation.

Sinhala is not only the language of power and the dominant identity and hence Arjie, in his final retributive performance – deliberately mangles with the structure of the English verse at the prize-giving ceremony, which symbolically signifies his dis-ease with the structure of dominance, and quest to break free into a liminal space of one’s own.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite, an Afro-West Indian writer, reflects his ambivalent double bind and resentment to both his African and West Indian heritage. His poetry articulates, with a profound seriousness, the experience of exiles and their experience of placeness in an alien environment. *The Arrivants*, is a poetry trilogy that seeks to portray the history and experience of African peoples in exile in the host nation. Here, Brathwaite explores the concept of fragmented sense of self that is created by geographical and cultural dislocation.

Exiled in the host nation, the migrants came to realize the fact that the dominant cultures saw their people as mere cheap labor. Hence, the first obstacle these emigrants faced was a crisis of identity. In “The Emigrants,” the second poem in “Islands and Exiles,” Brathwaite’s emigrants are no longer in the Caribbean but throughout Europe and the America,

So you have seen them  
 with their cardboard grips,  
 felt hats, raincloaks,  
 the women  
 with their plain  
 or purple tinted

coats hiding their fattened

hips.

*These are The Emigrants* (1973: 51)

This identity crisis and the double bind finds a solution in Brathwaite's *Rights of Passage*, in which he suggests that, process of reclaiming one's identity, is to keep moving, - a feeling that defined his own predicament as a traveller all through his life, - (transnational identity) as Tom makes the epic move from Africa, through the Middle Passage of slavery to the New World of America and the islands of the Caribbean and later, through his descendants, to Europe. Hence, to Brathwaite, a journey towards self-identity is transnational by nature.

In Part 2 of "The Journeys" Brathwaite explores the concept of identity formation through the image of the African in Paris, making his way through society, and taking the French cultural world by storm, and thereby making his presence felt in the use of skilful music and language. Brathwaite uses the folk art forms of the Negro (B lack) to describe the black man's attempt to maneuver into a subject position within a society that regards him as object.

Braithwaite thus emphasizes the importance of language as a strategy in the poetic construction of identity in the land of exile.

Moreover, Edward Kamau Brathwaite's "History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry" sets out, in the first place, the distinction between the concept of nation language and a dialect. To him, the concept of a nation language is a 'strategy', a 'forced poetics' which is instrumental in creating an authentic voice of one's own.

Voice, to Brathwaite, is authenticity, and as such, it is imperative for the Caribbean literary heritage to reflect "the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people" (Post-Colonial Literatures in English 551). This voice is heard in the notion of a 'nation language', a unique concept formulated by Brathwaite, to describe the Caribbean 'felt experience'.

Brathwaite contrast the term 'nation language' with a dialect. To him, the dialect is 'inferior English', and it is the language used when "you want to make fun of someone. Caricature speaks in dialect. Dialect has a long history coming from the plantation where people's dignity is distorted through their language and the descriptions which the dialect gave to them" (551). On the contrary, nation language, "is the submerged area of that dialect which is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean. It may be in English: but often it is in an English which is like a howl, or a shout or a machine-gun or the wind of a wave" (551).

The first and foremost characteristic feature of this nation language, is that, it 'ignores the pentameter'. According to Brathwaite, the iambic pentameter is the rhythm that is 'most prevalent in English poetry from Chaucer to the present day. Moreover, it carries with it a certain kind of experience, which is not the experience of the hurricane. The hurricane does not roar in pentameters'. In addition, the pentameter is linked to "metropolitan English speech and musical



forms, while Caribbean poetry needs to be connected to ‘native musical forms and the native language. That music is, in fact, the surest threshold to the language which comes out of it’ (550), which, together, form “a major part of the oral tradition which has sustained and developed a distinctive Caribbean culture” (Innes 107).

Hence, although, the ‘nation language’ may have similar lexical features, in its “contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English” (550).

The second feature of this nation language is that, it reflects the native voice – “the submerged area of that dialect which is much closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean” (551), a voice with its own legitimacy, that bears the burden of the native cultural experience. To Brathwaite, the submerged area of the dialect is important, because, it is most natural, fully complete and a very accessible means of verbal expression for the native subject.

Thirdly, Brathwaite compares the concept of nation language with the characteristics of oral literature. Nation language primarily evolved from an oral tradition. “The poetry, the culture itself, exists not in a dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word. It is based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning, and if you ignore the noise (or what you would think of as noise, shall I say) then you lose part of the meaning. When it is written, you lose part of the meaning. Which is, again, why I have to have a tape recorder for this presentation. I want you to get the sound of it, rather than the sight of it” (553).

Fourthly, Brathwaite dwells on the concept of ‘nation language’ by citing from famous ‘nation language’ writers. For example, to Edouard Glissant, nation language is a ‘strategy’ and a ‘forced poetics’. In his article titled ‘Free and Forced Poetics’, from the nation language journal *Alchringa* published by Boston University, Edouard says that, he considers ‘nation language’ as “the language of enslaved persons” (552). Hence, it is “a strategy” (552). The slave is forced to use a certain kind of language in order to disguise himself, to disguise his personality and to retain his culture. He also defines that language as a “forced poetics’ because it is a kind of prison language” (552). Bruce St. John is yet another nation language poet, who “has written some informal introductions to his own work which describe the nature of the experiments that he is conducting and the kind of rules that he begins to perceive in the way he uses his language” (552).

Fifthly, Brathwaite cites his article titled “Jazz and the West Indian Novel, which appeared in a Journal called *Bim* in the early 1960s, and emphasises that, the national language can be better understood if one were to study the connection that exists between native musical structures and the native language. “That music is, in fact, the surest threshold to the language which comes out of it” (552), he asserts. Brathwaite has an answer to the metropolitan ‘iambic pentameter’ in the form of the ‘calypso’, which does not employ the iambic pentameter. It rather employs dactyls. “It therefore mandates the use of the tongue in a certain way, the use of sound in a certain way” (553).

These national and regional peculiarities proceed to give the notion of a nation language its vitality and strength. This total expression, which is a part of the nation language, is the voice of the native, the voice of the people “in the open air”, the voice of “people who live in conditions

of poverty ('unhouselled'), because they come from a historical experience where they had to rely on their very breath rather than on paraphernalia like books and museums and machines" (553), because they had to "depend on immanence, the power within themselves, rather than the technology outside themselves". (553).

Slinger Francisco is yet another second generation calypsonian in exile. His 'Dan is the Man in the Van' is a representative poem of resistance, that abrogates the normative concept of 'standard' English, in order to bring out the 'imperial sway over the sugar isles' in the realm of education, and to interrogate the worth of a 'standardizing education' that smacks of an imperial agenda. Slinger Francisco seeks to construct an alternative discursive universe through the parodic approach, which is playfully and at the same time powerfully subversive, thereby celebrating marginality and alterity in the liminal space of enunciation.

Hence, to the exilic writer, "Language is an integral element of reconstructing "our personality on our own terms" (Gadsby 145). Moreover, the 'Caribbean demotic' or 'nation language' becomes a powerful tool for the writer to present authentic narratives that 'bear the burden of their own cultural experience'.

Calypso music, an indigenous folk music hailed as the rhythm of West Indian life, has always been a great medium of rebellion in the Caribbean islands. It is also the backbone of the West Indian Carnival. Historically, calypsos were platforms for social and political criticism to address social issues in Trinidad and Tobago, chiefly because it was able to communicate messages to the vast illiterate masses and provide perspectives on national identity. Chiefly because of this ability to communicate to the illiterate masses, the calypso earned the sobriquet – the poorman's newspaper. Calypso has also been referred to as a platform of meaningful resistance to the native Caribbean. Slaves used the calypso music as a convenient tool, and using a secret language, made fun of the white plantation owners and slave masters, who felt all along that they were being entertained by their slaves.

A Calypsonian, also called a chantwell, is a musician from the Anglophone Caribbean who sings songs called calypso. In Trinidad and Tobago, most Calypsonians use stage names or sobriquets to perform on stage. A few sobriquets of some well-known Calypsonians are: Aldwyn Roberts, who was known by his stage name 'Lord Kitchener', Slinger Francisco, known as 'The Mighty Sparrow', Winston Peters, known by his stage name 'Gypsy', Hollis Liverpool known as 'Chalkdust', Orthniel Bacchus, known by his popular stage name 'Tobago Crusoe', etc.

Satire is the primary genre of the Calypsonians, for venting out their stinging social and political commentary, and hence, Calypsos were witty and scholarly compositions which were meant to expose or attack some prominent issue of social interest within society. Since the Calypsonians were aware of the topic only when they appear on stage, calypsos were mostly extemporaneous performances. The singer hence composes the calypso on the spot during the actual performance.

'Stiff words frighten poor folks' goes the age-old dictum. Hence, the calypso has always been laced with humor as its forte. Commenting on Caribbean humor, African American scholar Mel Watkins observes that, it "1. Enables psychological release, 2. It allows for expression with

impunity, and 3. it is an exemplary subversive tool” (Vasquez 8). Humor here becomes a disruptive strategy that “allows the ‘unpalatable to be evoked and easily digested” (Vasquez 2). Moreover, humor also takes the role of a “subversive device that creates a space for questions about hegemonic relationships” (Vasquez 2) and also creates “a permissive platform that serves as a safe space for blacks to voice vituperative critique or dissatisfaction” (Vasquez 8).

Dr. Slinger Francisco, also known as the Birdie, and the Mighty Sparrow, and known for his social commentary calypsos, is a ‘Calypsonian par excellence’. He is considered to be Trinidad’s King of Calypso, and his contributions to calypso are so memorable and highly important that music critics have said that, “Francisco is to calypso what Bob Marley is to reggae” (Serafin Mendez et al 299). The calypso or the soca formed the main musical component of the Carnival. In 1956, Francisco established a record by winning the largest number of the competitions held during the annual Carnivals.

In this poem, Francisco takes the pre-text of Captain J.O.Cutteridge’s West Indian Readers as his starting point, since these ‘schoolbooks were widely used throughout the Caribbean for a number of decades’. Even though Captain Cutteridge supplied a long-felt want – viz., that of local text books specially prepared for West Indian schools, the colonialist educational legacy was still apparent. Hence, Cutteridge writes in his prefatory note that, “It has been my endeavour to include local names and terms whenever possible, as my experience has been that the pupils have great difficulty in spelling common words which they seldom if ever see in print” (Tiffin 46).

Francisco (Sparrow) ridicules and makes fun of the colonial education system that existed in a number of Caribbean territories during colonialism. He says that, although the aim of education is to make one grow up with true ambition and respect from one and all, he laments the fact that, the education he got in his school days has made him a ‘fool’, and a ‘block-headed mule’. The tales and the adventures of Robin Hood, King Alfred, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table have only given the Caribbeans empty words which have no meaning. Hence, the European framework of reference here becomes a departure point, and a vehicle for contesting the hegemonic authority of the European ‘normative’ master-narratives.

And now he resting and thing

Solomon Agundy was born on Monday

The Ass in the Lion skin

Winkin Blinkin and Nod

Sail off in a wooden shoe

How the Agouti lose he tail and Alligator trying to get

Monkey liver soup. (Arnold Anthology 544)

As Bill Ashcroft rightly points out, “Francisco thus demonstrates the resistances to the pressures of imperial education upon the colonies through the strategy of parody” (52).

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Moreover, various nonsense rhymes cited by Francisco throughout the poem “are taken to be the sign of infantilisation of the colonial population by colonial education” (Ashcroft 52).

According to Francisco,

The poems and the lessons they write and send from England

Impress me they were trying to cultivate comedians...

You know it was fictitious without pretence

J.O.Cutteridge wanted to keep us in ignorance (Arnold Anthology 544)

Francisco takes a jibe at the colonial education system that denied the colonial subject the aura of his culture, by ‘trapping them in a particular cultural discourse – a particular view of the world’ – that is completely alienated the native, and totally excluded the relevance of the local culture.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall

Humpty Dumpty did fall

Goosey Goosey Gander

Where shall I wander

Ding dong dell... Pussy in the well

RIKKI... TIKKI TAVI

Rikki Tikki Tavi. (544)

Thus by subverting the literary models of Britain, which have no use-value to the Caribbean education system, Francisco brings out the linguistic resistance through his calypso which not only celebrates the marginalized variety of the Caribbean English – the Creole, but also puts up a resistance to the centre – the Imperial English – wherein the marginalized/submerged variant emerges, and operates as a cultural vehicle in the liminal space that brings out the aura of the ‘nation language.’

While most of exilic writing brings out a sense of pining for the past, with nostalgic reminiscences of the home nation, yet there are others who have an ambivalent relationship with their home nation, which brings to their memory how the hybridized and hegemonised native dreads their own country people to be servile and obsequious to their past imperial masters. One such writing is, *Dreams From My Father* by former President of the US, Barack Obama, which is considered to be one of the most memorable memoirs by an African American. The epigraph to the book reads thus: “For we are strangers before them, and sojourners, as were all our fathers. 1 CHRONICLES 29:15.”

As an African American, he recollects the ‘white masks’ of the Blacks back home in Kenya, who put on white masks, and try to appropriate and imitate the culture of the colonizer. He describes one particular experience back home in Kenya, when Barack was busy studying the tourists, along with his sister Auma, they both decided to sit down for lunch in the outdoor of the New Stanley Hotel. Barack comments, “I felt them as an encroachment, somehow; I found their innocence vaguely insulting. It occurred to me that in their utter lack of self-consciousness, they were expressing a freedom that neither Auma nor I could ever experience, a bedrock confidence in their own parochialism, a confidence reserved for those born into imperial cultures” (*Dreams From My Father* 167).

His native sense of superiority and pride takes a beating, when he noticed an American family sit down a few tables away from them. Two of the African waiters immediately sprang into action, both of them smiling from one ear to the other. Since Auma and Barack hadn’t yet been served, he began to wave at the two waiters who remained standing by the kitchen, thinking they must have somehow failed to see them both waiting for a long time.

For some time they managed to avoid my glance, but eventually an older man with sleepy eyes relented and brought us over two menus. His manner was resentful, though, and after several more minutes he showed no signs of ever coming back. Auma’s face began to pinch with anger, and again I waved to our waiter, who continued in his silence as he wrote down our orders. At this point, the Americans had already received their food and we still had no place settings. I overheard a young girl with a blond ponytail complain that there wasn’t any ketchup. Auma stood up.

“Let’s go.”

She started heading for the exit, then suddenly turned and walked back to the waiter, who was watching us with an impassive stare.

“You should be ashamed of yourself,” Auma said to him, her voice shaking. “You should be ashamed.”

The waiter replied brusquely in Swahili.

“I don’t care how many mouths you have to feed, you cannot treat your own people like dogs. Here...” Auma snapped open her purse and took out a crumpled hundred-shilling note. “You see!” she shouted. “I can pay for my own damn food.” (168)

Barack, thus acknowledges in his memoir the “fissures of race that have characterized the American experience, as well as the fluid state of identity the leaps through time, the collision of cultures-that mark our modern life” (*Dreams From My Father* 1).

Salman Rushdie, offers a stereoscopic vision as an alternative liminal space for the angst of the exile. Quoting Richard Wright, says, “black and white descriptions of society are no longer compatible... how to build a new, ‘modern’ world out of an old, legend-haunted civilization, an old culture which we have brought into the heart of a newer one. But whatever technical solutions we may find, Indian writers in these islands, like others who have migrated into the north from the

south, are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of 'whole sight' (*Imaginary Homelands* 19).

Thus, the discourse of exile is reflected in the profound diversity in the linguistic realm, in its use of abrogation, appropriation, fragmentation and dismemberment as strategies that reflect the divided nature of the artist in the liminal space of liberation, devoid of dominance or marginalization, thus bringing out the double bind and the conflicted identities of the exilic writers of the second generation. Thus the liminal space is also a liberating space and a space of empowerment, as it resists the perceived binaries of the dominant discourse by which migrant writers saw themselves as writers in exile from a home nation, seeking solace and refuge in a host nation.

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