

Conceptual and Idea/ Logical Colonization: Ideational Practices in the World of Journal Editing

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We begin by engaging in collective critical reflection towards expanding the kind of dialogue that journal editors create by thinking about the question *What makes a global conversation?* I have the privilege of launching this reflection, with some consideration of the ideas, and the practices around those ideas, with which we exert a species of power we might conceptualize as akin to colonial authority. I hope my thoughts and those of my colleagues will provoke a bit of controversy and reaction and open up a space for considering some of the taken-for-grantedness of how we influence what gets said, how it gets said, and perhaps also what has to this point been inadvertently silenced.

The Nature of Colonization

Whether we think of it in the biological, military, or political sense, “colonization” is a term that describes what happens when any species populates a territory. In the human interactional sense, we think of colonialism as the establishment and maintenance of a territory by people from another territory. In this kind of social interaction, the metropole claims sovereignty over the social structure, governance, and economics, with the colonizers permanently changing those they have colonized within a fabric of unequal relationships.

What fascinates scholars about these phenomena is the way in which ideas and practices become taken for granted and dominant norms exert tremendous influence over a wide spectrum of human experiences and interactions, even long after the material colonization may have concluded. Thus, cultures and populations take in and absorb a set of ideas with respect to such issues as who holds power, who ought to hold power, what risks and privileges accompany authority, and what ideas and opinions should and should not enter the public domain. And this thoughtful examination of what happens as a result of colonialism becomes the postcolonial lens that can be usefully applied to understand-

ing issues of unequal relations across so many of the contexts of concern to our profession.

Nursing's Relationship to Colonial Practices

Nurses certainly share an experiential understanding of the way in which ideas about medical superiority have shaped the practice of nursing in our health-care institutions. The bedrooms, convalescent homes, and hospital wards that were the natural site of nursing practice were gradually transformed for a century after Florence Nightingale's time by medical ideas of what constitutes an effective and appropriate health-care system. So we became great at serving the high-acuity, high-technology, medically intensive conditions. At the same time, we started to lose our grip on ensuring appropriate systems for primary prevention, home care, residential care, palliative care, and community services. And we do understand how nursing often becomes part of the predicament in failing to recognize that there is a serious problem with that balance of resources and attention. The greatest challenge facing all of our health-care systems today is working out how to shift our focus from the extreme investments in high-acuity care towards a more balanced model of health care across the spectrum. And although the smart people who put their minds to these things can deal relatively easily with the structural adjustments that might help us get there, the barrier to change always lies in the resistance of health-care providers and their allies to giving up our comfortable way of doing business — even if our disciplinary knowledge repeatedly and stridently reminds us that it isn't right.

So nursing has an intimate understanding of how ideas become the arena within which colonial practices persist, and many nurse scholars have contributed greatly to our understanding of ourselves through deconstructions of apparent reality using a critical postcolonial theoretical lens. This perspective has opened up new ways of thinking about and working with issues embedded in the context of our ongoing discourses around diversity, health inequities, social determinants of health, and social justice. And so it is through that postcolonial lens that I think we can learn much about how we in the nursing editorial community serve to maintain and sustain a particular kind of ideational power that becomes a barrier to the kind of full and robust dialogue that will include a wider international audience.

In his article "Whiteness and Difference in Nursing," David Allen (2006) tackles the manner in which the language and ideation of nursing curricula have reproduced racialized relationships in the process of educating nurses and consequently have compromised the project of positive engagement with cultural difference. He traces the problem to the core

metaphor of the factory as a way of thinking about curricular processes and products, alluding to an apparently neutral machinery that, from his perspective, is thoroughly white and class-based in origin. Other lively discourses in the nursing education literature apply a similar lens to rethinking our educational practices from the perspective of, for example, international or Indigenous learners. It is well recognized by educators that attention to the internal colonization of the “other” and displacement of the colonizer are fundamental to the processes that allow nursing students to learn and develop consciousness within the kind of global citizenship ethos that underscores multicultural and international excellence.

Nursing Editors as Gatekeepers

Allen’s (2006) manufacturing image made me wonder what core metaphor may exist for those of us in the publishing industry with respect to the social injustices we too may be unwittingly reproducing. The International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE) has recognized that, despite good intentions, it may have become an organization that primarily serves the interests of a particular dominant group within the theoretical universe of nursing scholarly writing. In order to better understand why the organization reaches out to scholars from different regions of the world differently, the conference planners have chosen to create some provocative dialogue, to invite us to disrupt our assumptive base, to challenge ourselves to deconstruct our practices and processes for the purpose of seeing if there are any insights we might obtain about ourselves that may be contributing to an organizational climate that feels more chilly for some of us than for others.

The elephant in the room is, of course, the matter of language. There is no question that, despite the multiplicity of languages within which nurses develop and share their ideas, the English-language press is a dominant force in driving the development of nursing scholarship. An organization such as INANE exists within the much larger context of an increasingly global English-language dominance. This is a subject of tremendous complexity that requires conversations well beyond the confines of a community such as ours. But even as it poses a problem we cannot hope to resolve, it remains an elephant we must always keep an eye on.

In this era in our collective history, beyond the obvious issue of language dominance, what other ideas and assumptions underpin our role in the business of deciding whose scholarly products will and will not be publicly shared? We in the editorial community set the rules by which authors shape their ideational pieces. We set the criteria upon which

reviewers cast their judgements on the quality of ideas and interpret the calibre of their expression. And we create editorial processes through which some of the hopeful submissions that come our way are successful and some are not. So we editors control the processes of production within which some ideas are privileged and some are obscured or even rendered silent. We are a community with significant power over discourses.

We justify our role in these practices on the basis of a conviction that what we are producing is scholarship. Each of our journals delineates its own territory of scholarship through defining its scope and naming the particular kind of audience it expects to please. And we establish and make explicit the criteria by which our particular domain of scholarship will be assessed as well as the standards it must meet in order for ideas to find their way into our particular conversations.

Although I am quite confident that none of us takes a malevolent approach to the work of being a nursing journal editor, deconstruction of our discourses and practices can usefully illuminate some of the complexities that we may gloss over in the course of our everyday production priorities. And that critical self-reflection that we consider to be a hallmark of nursing practice excellence can guide us in examining the sometimes unseemly underbelly of editorial practices in a similar manner. To begin, I propose a few of the ideational practices we may want to reflect on as a way of deconstructing the unintended consequences of the ways in which we collectively assert power over the knowledge that will be available to the next generation in our profession.

Ethical Mandate

The first is our commitment to what we see as an ethical mandate. Despite the range of scholarship models in our collective repertoire, publishing decisions all rely on concepts of meritocracy that reinforce existing hierarchies. We accept that they require rationality and must be theoretically sound. And we also understand that this core value lies in tension with another direction that co-exists within society and also presumably deserves to flourish. This direction is the spark of creativity and innovation that pushes our thinking beyond its comfort level. And it exists within the realm of exploration of unpopular ideas. We can see its value when we look back historically on the progression of our ideas. And yet we tend not to know how to welcome it in the present, even as we theoretically value its role for our future.

Baruch Brody (1990), in his consideration of the “quality of scholarship in bioethics,” recognizes an essential challenge in the nature of different forms of scholarship in the field of ethics. To resolve this problem,

he proposes a “reflective equilibrium” that aligns the kind of mid-level principles of ethics to the criteria for evaluating scholarly merit. His proposal made me wonder what kinds of ethical principles we might draw upon to locate and conceptualize the challenge we face in being the colonizers of ideas within our domains of interest. Do we accept half-baked theoretical solidity if it meets some standard of disrupting equilibrium? Or do we hold creativity and innovation to a different level of credibility? And how do we recognize that which is potentially creative or usefully disruptive within the volume of manuscript submissions that we all sort through?

Stylistic Sameness

As James Baldwin (1955) writes in *The Harlem Ghetto*, “The American ideal, after all, is that everyone should be as much alike as possible” (p. 65). According to Lippi-Green (1997), just as language functions to perpetuate inequitable social structures, discrimination based on accent permeates our interpretations of what constitutes intelligence and credibility. We take comfort in a manuscript that looks as it should, has followed our rules of formatting, begins at the beginning and follows logically towards a definable end, and conforms to the unspoken conventions of length, form, structure, and language use. Our minds, and the minds of the reviewers upon whom journals rely, react differently to difference from how they react to sameness. Difference prompts a valuation motivation whereby we seek to categorize it as good difference or bad difference. We love to be delighted by a brilliant argument that we were not expecting, and that kind of difference favourably disposes us to a positive assessment regardless of any flaws that may coexist in the written product. However, we do not appreciate being irritated by an awkward turn of phrase or a linkage that is not self-evident to our logic. Too many of those will almost inevitably shape our attitudes in the direction of a negative opinion.

Locational Familiarity

We like to be familiar with the conversation within which an author is positioning ideas. We often believe that there is a fixed set of authorities that are properly trotted out in support of certain claims and platforms. However, we typically do not realize that we inhabit a particular “nationhood” of thinking that may or may not represent all of what is out there. I had a remarkable experience once when asked to review an introductory text on qualitative methods written for an English-speaking audience by an author writing and publishing in Germany. I considered myself well versed in the qualitative-methods literature but was

astounded to find that, on the other side of the pond, a completely parallel universe had unfolded in which very similar kinds of ideas were being attributed to an entirely different set of authors. This was an eye-opener to me. It shattered my uncritically held assumption that I “knew the literature.” Obviously, I knew one conversation in that field but had been completely oblivious to a rich and evolving alternative discourse from which I might have benefitted. I further realized that the parallel conversation had in fact taken place in English, somewhere outside of my spectrum of awareness. I also realized that, because we in the qualitative research world so freely reference the methodological masters of the Frankfurt school, reproducing their German-language concepts in our current thinking, we had actually misled ourselves into thinking that was all there was. In this manner, we recreate our preference for location by inflicting upon our authors the opinions of reviewers (and ourselves) as to which are the appropriate authorities within which to position our thinking.

Regional Preference

Anssi Paasi (2005), a Finnish geographer writing in the field of globalization of knowledge production, believes that publishing practices have been dominated by hegemonic Anglo-American discourses as to what “international” entails. In his view, the publishing industry operates in a market-like manner, leading to homogenization even in those fields that are reliant on being heterogeneous and context-dependent. Surely nursing must be one of those fields.

His analysis challenges us to consider the geographic regions of the world from which we choose to hear when we seek to expand our internationalization. I feel sure that analysis of manuscript-selection patterns across nursing journals would reveal a great deal about the intersectional confluence of values and power dynamics that is shaping who we hear from and who we do not. While we may reassure ourselves that fewer publications from a region is merely a matter of fewer high-quality submissions, there are other stark realities that we do not often choose to confront — other elephants in the room.

Like many journal editors, I notice patterns in the responses of invited reviewers. Most editors are particularly attuned to those occasions when we receive an unusually high rate of “decline” or “unavailable” responses from qualified and generally available reviewers. In this context, I sometimes wonder what would happen were we to change the geographical location implied in the submission’s title or abstract. To illustrate, I recently encountered considerable difficulty securing an appropriate set of reviewers for a submission whose title signalled its focus on “burnout

among Chinese nurses.” I began to wonder if I might have had more success had the population of burned-out nurses been Portuguese, Australian, or American. And although I have not figured out an ethical way in which to test my theory, I strongly suspect that certain geographical locations will be consistently less readily accepted by reviewers. I fully appreciate that a North American reviewer may feel he or she knows nothing about that other national/geographic context and might therefore be less qualified than some other reviewer. However, that ostensibly charitable attitude may be furthering the conditions under which a fair and just review becomes almost impossible — widening, if you like, that great global citizenship divide (Stasiulis & Bakan, 2005). I suspect most journal editors have had similar experiences. And so I wonder how we ought to be thinking about this. What is our ultimate responsibility in relation to the processes and practices we use to solicit, interpret, and judge the knowledge products of those who seek to find a place within the scholarly dialogues we so enthusiastically promote?

Concluding Comments

The dialogue we begin today creates an opportunity for individual reflection on ways in which we may unwittingly be perpetuating post-colonial practices in our powerful capacity as journal editors. It invites us to unpack our assumptions, to critically consider the decisions and details that make up the work we do to bring ideas to light. It creates an opportunity to step aside from the everyday realities of our editorial work and to consider how we might look at our practices in order to maximize our global citizenship and create as inclusive an intellectual dialogue as we can — to welcome the “other” into the dominant discourse. In so doing, we look inward at ourselves as a community of editors, with the collective strength to perpetuate our current practices or to strive towards an ideal of a broader dialogue that encompasses a more inclusive world. We take up the opportunity to strive towards the ideals of the *Nursing Manifesto* that has captured the attention of our profession — to advance thinking through the core values of global-ecological diversity and inclusivity, participatory engagement, and audacious optimism (Kagan, Smith, Cowling, & Chinn, 2009).

The point of this exercise is not critique, finger-pointing, or blame, but, rather, a journey of collective discovery and learning. I suggest that we have a moral obligation to have this kind of difficult conversation from time to time. After all, we are the gatekeepers, the rule-makers, the holders of power in relation to the ideas of the discipline. We need to disrupt our ways of thinking in order to better understand our complicity in creating a knowledge world within nursing in which certain ideas

stand a better chance than others of finding their way into print. In the words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (cited in Turale, 2006, p. 71), “The mind of the scholar, if he would leave it large and liberal, should come in contact with other minds.”

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