

Critical Storytelling: writing outside your skin

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Abstract

I was born into language, the stories that my grandmother and othermothers passed on to me filled my life. They were accounts that defined the world around me... the stars the oceans the earth... I lived through times when these histories were broken others replaced them, supplanting them and obscuring them. As time went by I began to disremember them, neglecting to acknowledge their meaning, then there were times when I held on to them as if my life depended on my stories. I was born to be a storyteller, and with this conviction, this principle, comes the responsibility to ask: How can we remember and write? How can we arrange words on a page that still carry the echoes the hums of our tongues, the echoes of our bodies? What are the ethical considerations of story telling, and how can stories be told?

Keywords: Identity, Critical Storytelling, History, Goa, Representation

As I stand here before you today, I am not alone. Behind me stand a long line of women who crossed the Indian Ocean, the *Kala Pani* and became indentured workers in many places in Africa. My grandmother used to say 'You don't enter someone's house, without paying your respects', so I will start by acknowledging the people of Zanzibar, who have made us welcome here and are hosting this conference.

My name is Audrey Fernandes-Satar and I am a researcher from Murdoch University, in Perth Western Australia. I was born in Pune, India. My grandmother baptized me Audrey, she believed that with an English name I could pass as an English woman and that this would enable me to get a better job. My surname is Fernandes-Satar. Satar is the family name I share with Arif my partner, Fernandes is the name my family acquired after the colonisation of Goa by the Portuguese. My traditional family name is Gaspar, taken after the land we inhabited, we are named after the land. I keep Fernandes as a reminder of my history, not to become complacent, never to forget ... One day I will return to my name...

Once Upon a time...Writing outside your skin

In this paper I explore the notion of Critical Storytelling, a concept that moves away from traditional ethnographic perspectives of talking, writing and observing the 'other'. Emerging from a social justice platform, critical storytelling acknowledges the social realities and histories that give meanings to 'the story', it encourages us not only to read between the lines, but also to consider our own subject position. Most importantly, Critical Standpoint reconfigures the discourse of storytelling by considering the position from which the story is told and written.

I was born to be a storyteller, and with this conviction, this principle comes the responsibility to ask: How can we remember and write? How can we arrange words on a page that still carry the echoes the hums of the tongues that have spoken them? What are the ethical considerations of story telling? Who can tell our stories? To discuss these points, you need to hear my voice, listen to my accent... know how my tongue speaks and breaks and sings. So I have included sound in this paper, interwoven with images and text.

I was born into language, the stories that my grandmother and other mothers passed on to me filled my life. They were accounts that defined the world around me... the stars the oceans the earth... I lived through times when these histories were broken others replaced them, supplanting them and obscuring them. Knowledge...



Image One - *“The King of Cochin riding an elephant and accompanied by his squires, known as nairs.”* (Huygen van Linschoten. 1595, p. 37)

[CLICK HERE to listen to Spoken word 1](#)



Image Two - Vasco da Gama (1558-1564)

[CLICK HERE to listen to Spoken word 2](#)

What is History?

If one does not know the names, one's knowledge of things is useless. This is attributed to Isidorus, and I do not know if this is the Greek Isidorus or the other Isidorus, the Archbishop of Seville; but why not put it another way: To have knowledge of things one must first give them a name. This, in any case seems to me to have been Christopher Columbus's principle, for he named and he named; he

named places, he named people, he named things. This world he saw before him had a blankness to it, the blankness of the newly made, the newly born. It had no before. I could say it had no history, but I would have to begin again, I would have to ask the question again: What is history?
(Kincaid, 2000 p.115).



Image Three - *“Indian peasant or farmer, known as canarim”; “Indian children wearing only small linen cloths to cover their private parts, according to the customs of the country”; “ Indian soldier, known as lascarim”: Indian prostitute, earning her living from dancing and singing”*(Huygen van Linschoten. 1595, p. 97)

[CLICK HERE to listen to Spoken Word 3](#)

What to call the thing that happened to me and all who look like me?

Should I call it history?

If so, what should history mean to someone like me?

Should it be an idea, should it be an open wound with each breath I take in and expel healing and opening the wound again and again, over and over, and is this healing and opening a moment that began in 1492 and has yet to come to an end? Is it a collection of facts, all true and precise details, what should I do, how should I feel, where should I place myself?
(Kincaid, 2000 p.114).

[CLICK HERE to listen to Spoken Word 4](#)

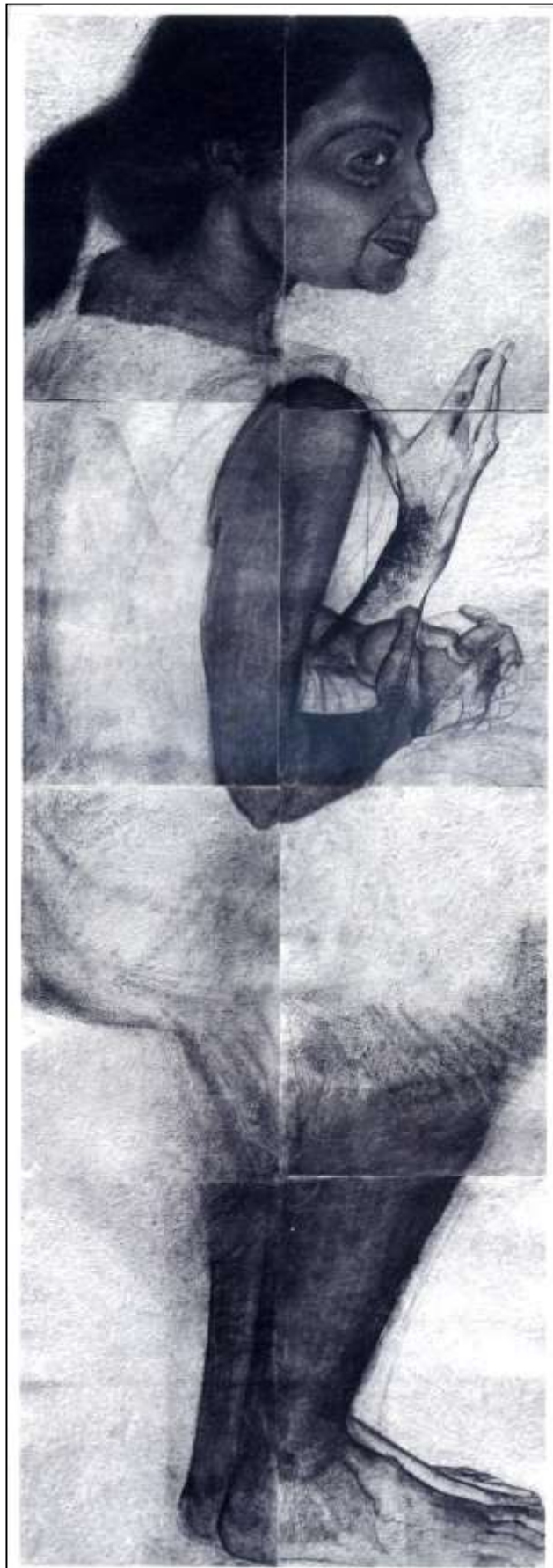


Image Four - Self Portrait (Fernandes-Satar , A. 2014)

[CLICK HERE to listen to Spoken Word 5](#)

We should not choose between critical theory and ethnography. Instead, we see that researchers are cutting new paths to reinscribing critique in ethnography.
(Noblit et al. 2004, p.4)

[CLICK HERE to listen to Spoken Word 6](#)

Ethnographic writings can properly be called fictions in the sense of “something made or fashioned”, the principal burden of the word’s Latin root, *fingere*. But also of making up, of inventing things not actually real. (*Fingere*, in some of its uses, implied a degree of falsehood.)
(Clifford, 1986 p.6).

[CLICK HERE to listen to Spoken Word 7](#)

Critical Standpoint Storytelling emerges as a concept that moves away from traditional ethnographic perspectives of talking, writing and observing the ‘other’. But what do I mean as ‘Critical’

Narratology as Critical Theory

For a theory to be critical it must account for the permanent interaction between social and individual processes. The opposition between the two is problematized, indeed resolved, by critical theory. This presupposition implies some specific methodological requirements. To establish itself, criticism needs *tools*
(Bal, 1991,p.27).

Critical Standpoint Storytelling, a concept cuts into traditional ethnographic perspectives of talking, writing and observing the ‘other’. Emerging from a social justice platform, critical storytelling acknowledges the social realities and histories that give meanings to ‘the story’, it encourages us not only to read between the lines, but also to consider our own subject position. Most importantly, Critical Standpoint reconfigures the discourse of storytelling by considering the position from which the story is told and written.

[CLICK HERE to listen to Spoken Word 8](#)

Methodology/ Tools

- Framing of a specific sphere of experience as historical
- Extending historical possibilities - conceptually and pedagogically
- Considering the space of stories as cultural and symbolic
- Positioning the ‘Others’ as active participants.
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Beyond right and wrong, there is a field. I will meet you there.

- Rumi

[CLICK HERE to listen to Spoken Word 9](#)

[CLICK HERE to watch Video Clip: After The Last Ship](#)



Image 5 - Still from After the Last Ship video clip (Fernandes-Satar, A. 2014)

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