KeywordS and CultureS: The Indian Challenge and Changing Paradigms[1]

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Abstract

In recent decades, a range of approaches in translation studies, cultural studies, anthropology, linguistic anthropology and ethnolinguistics have elaborated new approaches to cultural keywords arguing the need for a linguistically informed critique of universals. This is a challenge to both the Anglo World and to social sciences and to philosophy. Four approaches are taken into account, Anna Wierzbicka's Natural Semantics Metalanguage method, Barbara Cassin's *Untranslatables* dictionary, Jerzy Bartmiński's Lublin School of Ethnolinguistics and JOS Linguistics Worldviews for Europe project, as well as Underhill & Gianninoto's Migrating Meanings Project.

However, all four approaches are presented within the focus of two very different enlightened approaches to cultural keywords. On the one hand, it proves necessary to return to the source of the keywords traditions, Raymond Williams, who provides an engaged approach to social, cultural and political worldviews, what Underhill calls "cultural mindsets." On the other hand, the recent work being carried out beyond the boundaries of the Anglo World in India, and elsewhere makes it necessary to ask whether Western approaches can continue providing the prisms and frameworks to generate the keywords we need to help us express and explain the Global World in which we are no longer only world citizens, but more and more world netizens.

Nair & deSouza's *Key Words for India* offers 250 key words to help us understand urban spaces, class conflict, social stratification and aspirations in the online community and in the local and glocal contexts. Nair & deSouza's contribution to keywords will be evaluated to open up a discussion about how classical terms like *nirvana*, *yoga* and *karma* have become international resources with local meanings and cultural narratives, and the way gyms and beauty parlours function as parts of linguistic patterning of worldviews; political terms, cultural keywords and everyday activities are part of the sociolinguistic resources and repertoires of citizens and linguistic subjects living within their speech communities. This paper, therefore, asks how those resources are used to express the ideas and feelings of those netizen-citizens, and how their discourse helps reformulate the worldviews of their linguistic communities.

Ces dernières décennies, diverses approches en traductologie, études culturelles, anthropologie, anthropologie linguistique et ethnolinguistique ont développé de nouvelles perspectives sur les mots-clés culturels, soulignant la nécessité d'une critique linguistique des universaux. Cette critique représente un défi tant pour le monde anglophone que pour les sciences sociales et pour la philosophie. Quatre approches sont prises en compte : la méthode de sémantique naturelle (NSM) d'Anna Wierzbicka, le dictionnaire des intraduisibles de Barbara Cassin, l'école d'ethnolinguistique de Lublin de Jerzy Bartmiński et le projet « Visions du monde pour l'Europe » de JOS, ainsi que le projet « Migration des significations » (Migrating Meanings) d'Underhill et Gianninoto.

Cependant, il apparaît nécessaire de revenir à la source des traditions des mots-clés, Raymond Williams, qui propose une approche engagée des visions du monde sociales, culturelles et politiques. D'autre part, les travaux récents menés hors des frontières du monde anglo-saxon, en Inde et ailleurs, nous amènent à nous interroger sur la capacité des approches occidentales à continuer de fournir les prismes et les cadres nécessaires à la génération des mots-clés dont nous avons besoin pour exprimer et expliquer le monde globalisé dans lequel nous ne sommes plus seulement des citoyens du monde, mais de plus en plus des internautes du monde (*netizens*).

L'ouvrage « Key Words for India » de Nair et deSouza propose 250 mots-clés pour mieux comprendre les espaces urbains, les conflits de classes, la stratification sociale et les aspirations au sein de la communauté en ligne et dans les contextes locaux et « glocaux ». La contribution de « Keywords for India » sera analysée afin d'ouvrir le débat sur la manière dont des termes classiques tels que *Nirvana*, *Yoga* et *Dharma* sont devenus des ressources internationales, porteurs de significations locales et de récits culturels. Cet article s'interrogera sur la façon dont ces ressources sont utilisées pour exprimer les idées et les sentiments de ces internautes, et sur la manière dont leur discours contribue à reformuler les visions du monde de leurs communautés linguistiques.

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Keywords

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Fœticide féminin, tradition humboldtienne, anglais indien, mots-clés culturels, Mohalladar, perception du monde

Introduction

The Keywords Project of Raymond Williams reflects the prolific force and scope of Europe's influence as it has helped shape the global world over the past three hundred years and the implicit contradictions related to that influence. From the sociological and anthropological perspective Raymond Williams' *Keywords* was an urgent and, paradoxically, timeless reminder of the politics of language. It was a programme. It had tenets and objectives. We must think with words, but our words should not think for us. As human beings and as political animals, we need to define them and contextualize them within ongoing interacting cultural and ideological traditions. And we must situate ourselves and define ourselves within our own contexts, our historical, social, cultural and linguistic traditions. For Williams, words are parts of clusters of words, just as ideas are parts of worldviews and cultural narratives. Words and worldviews change over time. They not only change us, but are changed by our actions, our perspectives and our very understanding of those words and worldviews. How we grasp words, seize their multiple meanings, define them and trace the way they are changing and interacting in discourse strategies: these are the fundamental challenges that are envisaged in Williams' work.

From the perspective of ethnolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and translation studies, Williams' work on words and worldviews was welcome. But within the scope of a multilingual world, Williams' approach was inevitably going to be transformed. Research into words and worldviews today looks different. Indeed, we can observe a wide range of scholars who recognize the merits of Williams' contribution but interpret it very differently by highlighting one dimension at the expense of others. Researchers have tended to move on with their own agenda, developing their own version or approach to keywords. So, we find various projects with very different logics and objectives working within different linguistic contexts and traditions.

The objective of this article is to briefly refocus on those linguistic challenges to Williams' initial project within the scope of European ethnolinguistics before asking how his questions must be reformulated within a "global community." Nair and deSouza's *Keywords for India: A Conceptual Lexicon for the 21st Century,* published in London in 2020, has been selected as a prism for discussion because it constitutes one of the most profound challenges to Williams' approach. Nonetheless, like many keyword projects, Nair and deSouza reaffirm the vitality and urgency of Williams' contribution. And rather than turning their back on the politics of another period, *Keywords for India* tends to make it obvious that politics and ideology cannot be forgotten or marginalized in works on culture and language whatever the context, if keyword projects and anthologies are to have any meaning for readers. This, therefore, makes it worthwhile to return to William's *Keywords* and to ask why the questions his book raised still matter.

European Challenges or Adaptations of the Keywords Approach

Many of the European keyword approaches adhere to five of the fundamental principles of language study as they are defined by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) himself (Humboldt) and those who seek to perpetuate the scope, range and rigour of Humboldtian approaches in one form or another. Boas, Sapir (*Language*, *Selected*) and Whorf, Cowan, Brown, Trabant (*Traditionen*, *Humboldt*, *Weltansichten*, "The Jürgen Trabant"), Chabrolle-Cerretini, Underhill (*Humboldt*), Thouard, Pajević, Joseph, Głaz, and Drechsel explicitly or implicitly defend a Humboldtian approach to ethnolinguistics. Hymes (*Foundations*, *Now I Know*), Duranti, Levisen (*Cultural*, "Entretien," "Translating"), Levisen and Priestly, Enfield et al. and Sharifian (*Advances*, *Cultural*, *The Routledge Handbook*) perpetuate a linguistic anthropology that explores language and culture along the lines that are compatible with the programme Humboldt laid out for language study. Without wishing to deny the significant differences in their approaches and objectives, all of these "ethnolinguistic" approaches adhere more or less to the following five working principles which can be attributed to Humboldt:

1. Languages cannot be reduced to lists of words or collections of concepts.
2. Words are part of worldviews.
3. Human beings live within worldviews and learn to interact with the world as they learn their first language.
4. Languages are therefore human and cultural modes of representing and experiencing the world.
5. Translating words, speech and texts involves negotiating different worldviews.

It was clear that linguistic approaches were going to adapt the approach to language, culture and ideology as Williams envisaged it in the post-war English and European contexts, in order to focus more on distinct languages and cultures, and the challenge of translating from one context to another. The diversity of approaches should not be underestimated, but it is worth briefly highlighting four approaches to explain how they converge in celebrating the legacies of Humboldt and Williams while adapting their approaches to very different cultural, historical and linguistic contexts; namely the approaches of Wierzbicka, Cassin, Bartmiński and, finally, Underhill and Gianninoto.

Anna Wierzbicka's approach to cultural concepts gave rise to the Natural Semantics Metalanguage project that she has been developing since the 1970s. It is now based in Australia with an international network collaborators around the world: Wierzbicka (*Semantic*, *Understanding*, *Experience*, *Imprisoned*, "In Conversation–How English," "In Conversation–The Philosophical"), Goddard, Peeters ("Introducing," "Introduction," *Heart*), Levisen (*Cultural*, "Entretien," "Translating"), Levisen and Priestly, and Ye (*The Semantics*, "Ye Zhengdao"). Arguably, the most fundamental critique of Williams' approach, Wierzbicka and her colleagues tend to confirm that almost all of our words are cultural words and prove difficult to understand outside of the cultural and linguistic traditions that have produced and sustained them. *Heart*, *friend* and *friendship*, *sense*, *country*, *sibling* are not universals. Ultimately, they prove difficult to translate and they are hard to explain to cultures that do not have roughly analogous terms. The Greek and Latin traditions and the Hebrew influence on European languages, the constant translation between cultures and the prolific success of European languages as exported cultural paradigms all tend to obscure this fact. Ironically, Wierzbicka's team of researchers leads us to conclude that if we were to make a list of all the culturally specific words in any given language, it would include most of the words in the dictionary.

Barbara Cassin, the French scholar, born in 1947 and based in Paris, has produced another vibrant tradition of great significance for philosophy and translation studies: the

Untranslatables Project (*A Dictionary*, *Vocabulaire*), which champions the Humboldtian conception of language study (*A Dictionary* xix). The vast team of scholars she brings together in her *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* aims to explicate the complex strategies that must be adopted to translate many of the keywords of our European philosophic traditions. As Cassin and her colleagues demonstrate, key cultural concepts such as *Bilding* and *Kultur* in German, and *civilisation* in French do not coincide with *education*, *culture* and *civilisation* in English (Espagne). *Essence* – far from being a universal of philosophical understanding – proves to be a cultural concept with its own limits and is framed within an overarching narrative (Courtine). Likewise, we would be unwise to assume that we can easily translate from English such fundamental keywords as *people*, *race* and *nation* (Crépon et al.).
Wierzbicka and Cassin have set up international forums for debates on keywords and cultures, and the influence of their work makes it clear that we must move beyond the scope of an Anglocentric worldview if we are to understand the keywords of other cultures. And it is worth noting in passing that these two great scholars have resisted the chronic patriarchy of scholarship in ethnolinguistics and linguistic anthropology from Humboldt down to Hymes (which the bibliography of this very article testifies to). Their works and their translations, their academic engagements, workshops and conferences demonstrate that the discussion of words and worldviews, keywords and cultures, must be multilingual at both a local and a global level. Translations and translating, adaptation and interpretation are fundamental for both Cassin and Wierzbicka, just as they were for Humboldt when he developed his linguistic project at the beginning of the 19th century.
Two historical shifts had a profound impact on the Keywords Project. The breakdown of the Cold War and the polarized world, on the one hand, and the creation and enlargement of the European Union, on the other, encouraged the Lublin School of Ethnolinguistics led by Jerzy Bartmiński to develop a robust Keywords Project (see Bartmiński, *Aspects*, "Ethnolinguistics," *Language*; Abramowicz; Masłowska). The Lublin School continues to compare and contrast the various meanings of European values such as "home" and "homeland," with what came to be known as the *JOS Project* (Linguistic Worldview, lit. Linguistic Picture of the World). Uniting a vast range of scholars from Europe – in the widest sense of the term – the Lublin School has formed the headquarters for an international forum for discussing what it means to be European in terms of the keywords that Europeans think with and value. All three approaches, Wierzbicka's, Cassin's and Bartmiński's, are resolutely international in the way they understand Europe and European languages. Translations, diasporas and multilingual subjects are a part of the frameworks within which they explore keywords. The fourth project under discussion, the Keywords Project elaborated by Underhill and Gianninoto, explores the way we share keywords in a global world. For Underhill and Gianninoto, this involves understanding:

1. the influence of European cultural keywords like *citizen* and *citoyen* on Japanese and Chinese cultures;
2. the way migrating meanings become entangled in the tumultuous political upheavals in 20th-c. China (172–195);
3. the complexity of the Western traditions themselves and the way each culture makes use of keywords like *citizen* and *individual* within various competing and conflicting discourse strategies (145–172);
4. the distinct traditions of "citizens" within the Anglo world and the specific cultural and political contexts that generate, for example, a "Scottish sensibility" to citizens and citizenship (141–145).

The approach advocated by these authors avoids falling into schismatic East–West oppositions that continue to hamper Western investigations into Asian cultures and traditions. In the same way, it avoids setting up Communist-Capitalist oppositions between the East and the West, for

example, by including a discussion of Czech communist definitions of the "citizen" (*občan*) (157–159).

Underhill and Gianninoto's contribution to keywords lies in their conception of "migrating meanings." They explore how keywords ultimately take on new meanings and definitions when they are transposed to a new context. Keywords participate in the transformation of ideological worldviews and cultural mindsets. Keywords such as *individual*, *citizen* and *people* will, therefore, be reinterpreted and assimilated, and ultimately transformed, when they are integrated into the Chinese worldview. They grow new roots within the Chinese culture and end up producing very different plants. These new meanings belong to the Chinese culture, and, in time, they become, therefore, just as challenging to translate back into European languages as they were to transpose into Chinese in the first place (Underhill and Gianninoto 175, 261–262).

Why Williams Still Matters

The four approaches set up by Wierzbicka, Cassin, Bartmiński, and Underhill and Gianninoto vary widely in their scopes, the languages they deal with, and the teams of scholars they work with. But they all challenge the limits of Anglocentrism in academia and the implicit Anglocentrism of Williams' own approach. Sociology and Cultural Studies have generated a robust metalanguage and terminology, and Williams has played a role in this. But we cannot simply adopt Williams' 150 keywords and assume they can be used as universal concepts, instantly recognizable around the world as universal facets of reality. And this makes these four approaches instructive. They highlight the limits of ongoing debates on keywords.

Nonetheless, Williams' understanding of the complexities of keywords from the public to the private, from the political to the artistic, have engendered a cultural sensibility that has continued to give shape and meaning to Cultural Studies and has helped the Social Sciences to consolidate its fundamental principles. And the four linguistic reinterpretations of the Keywords Project under discussion have tended to explore new ways that our cultural sensibility can be extended and redefined.

Williams has become a major figure within the media in general, with exhibitions and tributes to him as a thinker and cultural critic. And he is quoted as an influence by North American, Asian and Australian academics as well as by a wide range of researchers working in Europe. Paradoxically, Williams' work had less impact on the very countries sympathetic to Marxist readings of history; in Russia and in its satellite states in the 1970s and 1980s, for example. Is this because in Eastern Europe and in the USSR it appeared obvious to everyone that the private was political? Or because, in the East, political systems felt entitled to intervene in what was held to be a separate sphere of existence – privacy – in the democratic West?

Things have changed, at any rate, and radically so. The Internet and social media may have transformed our lives and the ways we express and define ourselves within our linguistic communities; transformed the way we think, work, meet, and entertain ourselves – that is, if we define "entertainment" as the way we seek to escape our lives, our work, and ourselves. Nonetheless, our debates continue to centre around private life and public life, publishing and posting, democracy and access to information. Even when we express our regrets, in outbursts and recriminations, we tend to express ourselves along the lines, of "There's no more privacy!". Denunciations of invasive Big Brothers or vagrant voyeurs still presuppose the sacrosanct nature of private life. However much the boundaries between the private and the political have broken down, the demarcation between the two dimensions are asserted with a virulence that is equal to our sense of disorientation. And this is where Williams' critical thinking comes in, as relevant today as it ever was.

Raymond Williams was sceptical about affirmations of privacy and about aspirations to living

private lives separate from "society." For Williams, "privacy" is a political notion with a political past, and it was always something controversial. His *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, first published in 1976, caused something like a landslide in that the avalanche that it produced had long been building up. When it came, its subsequent influence can be attributed as much to the long gestation of the project and the mature elaboration in its scope as it can be attributed to Williams' erudition, his attention to detail and his capacity for synthetic thinking. Those qualities ensured the transformative impact the book had on the Social Sciences and Cultural Studies in English-speaking countries. And it determined Williams' impact within the ever-widening circle of bilingual English-speakers around the world and people using English in their work and in their day-to-day lives.

Keywords scholarship today still faces the same problems as it did back in the 1960s and 1970s, and it was Williams who stressed that we cannot simply list words and use them as neutral terms. Neither do keywords function like the pieces of a game of chess. They are not solid, but malleable. They permeate spheres of existence and, conversely, spheres of existence permeate them. Keywords themselves are sociopolitical, cultural and linguistic constructs. And they do not and cannot exist in isolation. They come in clusters – a concept that was to have a lasting influence on the approach adopted by Underhill and Gianninoto in their *Migrating Meanings*. For both Williams and the latter authors, conceptual clusters of keywords supporting and consolidating one another tend to converge.

Williams understood that in much academic discussion and public debate, political questions tended to be circumscribed and penned off into separate spheres, like work, or fun, or games. This kind of thinking was totally unacceptable and intellectually dishonest for Williams. As a Marxian scholar, born in Wales and living though the emergence of the Welfare State during a post-war Britain that was already undergoing deindustrialization, he reminded his British readers that *Everything is Political!* Long before the miners' strike of the early 1980s, Williams was explaining that concepts have to be fought over, keywords have to be appropriated and reinterpreted. Otherwise, the ruling class would assert its own ideology and enslave the lower orders of society to their words and values, their worldviews, and ultimately, their interests. In this sense, all keywords are ideological, embedded in cultural forms that emerge and are sustained or transformed within socio-historical circumstances which can never be anything but political. For Williams as a sociologist, a philologist and a specialist of literary studies, aesthetics and cultural studies, "apolitical postures" were impostures. An objective linguistics, scientific and separate from history and society, makes no sense and has no *raison d'être,* from this engaged perspective. That is all very well in theory, but what does it mean in practice? How does Williams set about selecting, ordering and defining his keywords?

If we want to understand what he meant by conceptual clusters, it may prove enlightening to playfully try to summarize a couple of letters to see how the keywords of each section fit together. *Capitalism* is linked to *class*, to *collectives* (by collusion or opposition). *Career*, *class*, *commercialism* and *communism* are related to workers. *Civilizations* are groups organized into *communities* with or without a *consensus*, and workers either share in or are deprived of *common land*.

Criticism, *culture* and *cultural criticism* are part of Williams' daily practice as a novelist, an academic, a lecturer and an activist. In Williams' eyes, countries are *civilizations* only inasmuch as they develop into *civilized cultures* and *communities* capable of reflecting creatively and capable of creating works of art and culture. So much for the Cs. But what about the As?

The list of As is much shorter: *Aesthetic*, *Alienation*, *Anarchism*, *Anthropology*, *Art*. Like most lexicographers, Williams begins his discussion of aesthetics with Baumgarten (1742–1786) and Kant (1724–1804), insisting on the Greek influence on the German tradition. But he crucially points out that aesthetics – the "abstract science of feeling" (Williams 31) – came into English when the word *anaesthesia* had already been in play since the late 18th century (31). This places

aesthetics within the scope of *feeling* (as opposed to *unfeeling*) and *sensibility*, a word borrowed from French, initially in competition with *sensitivity*, which was already perceived as an "English" concept by the time the aesthetics of 18th-century France began to make itself felt in Britain.

Alienation, derived from Latin *alienare* 'to estrange', is clearly linked to feeling. Feeling "a part of something" is the antithesis of being estranged from it (feeling "aloof" or "apart"). And although Williams traces the estrangement and breakdown of feeling conceived as a meaningful bond from man's alienation from God to his alienation from groups or from political authorities, he points out that by the 15th century, *alienation* was being used for the transfer of ownership of estates or monetary wealth. Alienation becomes deprival. It is a political process and a policy. The modern meaning of *alienation* has been heavily influenced by the Freudian, psychological meaning, but it was already being used in the 15th century in English by analogy to mean "the loss, withdrawal, or derangement of mental faculties, and thus insanity" (Williams 33). As a Marxian, Williams stresses that capitalism tends to engineer and consolidate "isolation," "estrangement" and "powerlessness"; estrangement from society's goals, and "meaninglessness." Are such keywords relevant to us today? Covid brought isolation and alienation to a culminating point with its "distancing regulations," but as the Western governments began to celebrate sharing and coming back together, they made it clear that political meetings and collective organizations that contested the power of the government would be met with disapproval and opposition. The very process of isolation that was enforced demonstrated the capacity of elites to "imprison" the people, and it should, therefore, quite logically, come as little surprise that those who enforced those measures like Boris Johnson and his Cabinet in Great Britain, saw no reason why they should themselves be deprived of their own personal freedom.

Isolation forms part of the classification of society that cordons off certain groups into certain sections and opens up spaces for freedom and innovation, opportunities and openings to others. If this is so today as it was yesteryear, Williams' conclusion remains true for us in Europe: succeeding in finding your place in society appears structurally difficult. Increasingly, European citizens are filled with the feeling that illegitimate means are required in order to reach the approved goals that society is setting for people. If this was true in Williams' time when the Welfare State was still robust and reassuring in Great Britain, is it any less true today after two generations of neoconservative politics have produced a political spectrum which has contracted to a choice between their champions on one side and the radical right on the other?

Anarchism, Williams situates in the mid-16th century as "a hostile unlawful licence on the part of the multitude" (Williams 37). But anarchism is not a solitary notion. As Williams points out, this definition of *anarchism* is very much in tune with derogatory uses of the term *democracy* (37). Anarchism is "anti-monarchy," and after the French revolution, anarchy will be associated with the French, and, therefore, considered pejorative among English-speaking nations according to the Anglocentric prejudice of the age. The relationship between anarchism and collectivist communism as it developed under the Soviet supervision was paradoxical. Despite the anarchists' hostility to "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and to "state socialism" (37), Williams reminds us that many anarchist ideas were "adopted in the later phases of Marxist and other revolutionary socialist thought" (37).

If *anarchism* is about transforming society, *anthropology* is about trying to understand other peoples and other societies. But Williams stresses that this phase begins in English with the Greek term, *Anthropologia,* being used in the late 16th century to refer to the "discourse and study of man," and in those times, this meant beginning with Aristotle, politics, ethics and aesthetics. For the late 18th century (for Herder in German, and even for Coleridge in 1810, see Williams 38-39) this meant celebrating and investigating the plurality of cultures and the diversity of mankind. But by the middle of the 19th century, with the rise of colonialism, Klemm,

in his *Allgemeine Kulturwissenschaft* (1854-1855), quoted by Williams (39), was already advocating a tripartite history of the stages of human development in terms of "savagery," "domestication" and "freedom." This is radically different from the kind of linguistic philosophy that was emerging in the *Goethezeit* in Germany at the end of the 18th century with Herder, Haman and Humboldt (see Underhill, *Humboldt*). By the mid-19th century, the European empires were engineering anarchy and disruption and imposing new forms of order and servitude in many parts of the world; and those were being relegated to the sphere of "savagery." Their peoples were increasingly considered to be "primitive peoples." In this way, transforming peoples into slaves and slaves into savages was supposed to perversely justify their "re-education" through "civilizing constraints."

In contradistinction to Herder's and Humboldt's enlightened 18thcentury anthropology and anthropological linguistics, history and human development was increasingly seen as "a unilinear process [leading] towards 'civilization'" (Williams 40). And ironically, Hegel and Marx, following him, both tended to fall into that linear kind of thinking, in contrast to Kant, to the Humboldt brothers, and to the thinker and poet, Goethe himself, who was a champion of the individual talent.

It will suffice to consult any dictionary or encyclopaedia to see to what extent the vast variety of the disparate entries under any letter bears no resemblance to the tight style and lucid insight that Williams brings to bear in selecting his keywords and organizing them by relating and opposing them to one another. Williams' mind organizes keywords into "clusters." And there is an efficiency in his organizing intelligence, a scope in his aesthetic sensibility and an elegance and economy in his style, stripped of pedantry and pettiness, that contrasts with most dictionaries of philosophy or sociology. Indeed, it is his deep and broad erudition, his sensibility, and the poignancy and perspicacity of his insights that have made Williams' legacy so lasting. This is what made his *Keywords* a classic. As a consequence, our four linguistic revisions to the Keywords Project show Williams' approach the respect it deserves and might be seen more as attempts to reframe and refine his approach than to challenge it.

Williams was interested in language and culture. The four linguistic approaches discussed were interested in *languages* and *cultures*. This is a crucial distinction. Nonetheless, these authors are, like Williams, concerned primarily with European languages. Their works are published primarily in English and in French (although the Lublin Ethnolinguistic School works in German, Russian, Czech, Ukrainian and in other Slavic languages). Does that make these linguistic challenges implicitly "Eurocentric"?

What happens when we move beyond Europe? How must the Keywords Project be reinvented in contexts influenced by English but entirely distinct from the English culture? How will an Indian approach reshape the Keywords Project? It seems highly likely that, beyond the frontiers of Europe, we will need an entirely different approach with an entirely different team of linguists to invent their own objectives and methodology if the Keywords Project is to have any meaning and significance for linguistic communities around the world.

New Indian Perspectives

In this context, Nair and deSouza's work comes as both a "breath of fresh air" and a bit of a slap in the teeth for European (or Eurocentric) scholars. The *West is Best* mantra will not survive as a social or economic, political or cultural model, when readers discover the richness of this project. *Keywords for India: A Conceptual Lexicon for the 21st Century* is a challenging work for keyword scholarship. Cultural Studies, Translation Studies, Ethnolinguistics and Linguistic Anthropology will be forced to revise their objectives and methodologies if they take this work seriously. Whether they will indeed respond to it, is uncertain. Despite the great advances in technology and access to information, concerted debate is becoming increasingly problematic.

Do fields of scholarship function as communities today? Can they respond to one another? Do we as global netizens believe in a shared destiny? And is the world community advancing together in unity? This is uncertain, and given the proliferation of publications and the specialization of fields of scholarship and research, few scholars can hope to master even the great diversity of books on keywords being published today. It is far from certain that this book will receive the attention it deserves. It may just as easily fall on deaf ears as it might come as a breakthrough in breaking down barriers. Whatever the case may be, it seems worthwhile to highlight at least ten strengths of this project which merit consideration, analysis and critical reappraisal, if we are to understand what it has to contribute to the Keywords Project.

1. Nair and deSouza's *Keywords for India* work is challenging because they provide an Insider-Outsider perspective. And this allows them to demonstrate that the Anglo world promotes "universals" as a cultural world, a linguistic worldview, and one in which other cultures are invited to enter into and accept. This has always generated tension and resistance around the world. Their work forces Anglophones to face up to their own conceptual and perceptual limits. Words and ideas that appeared "neutral" and "natural" to English-speakers are exposed as being historically and socially, politically and poetically situated. Paradoxically, it is only by standing outside the Anglo world with its global success that we can appreciate the limits to that great culture. The vast number of contributors that Nair and deSouza are working with perceive those limits all the more acutely as they are forced to negotiate them in their work and their daily lives in multilingual communities, and those authors enable us to stand back from our Anglo world and appreciate the cultural significance of:

a. Anglo keywords;
b. Non-Anglo Indian keywords specific to the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, Nair and deSouza's contributors understand how British culture borrowed Indian words, and how those "migrating meanings" were reconfigured in world English. Words like *pundit*, *nirvana*, *karma*, and *yoga* embark on new trajectories inventing new traditions in the US and in Europe. They have become fully integrated into Hollywood, YouTube, and Netflix and are now inseparable from the soft power of Western cultures and their own cultural influence.

2. As international academics and multilingual scholars living within a multilingual subcontinent, Nair and deSouza are highly sensitive to the dangers of their project. They realise the temptations of an "India-centric" project. And they have strategies for ensuring that their scope is complex and multiple. The Moghul traditions, the wars of Independence, and the Pakistan State are not annexed or denied as we might be inclined to expect in the context of a contemporary politics that champions one strand of India's incredibly rich tradition over another. Their balanced approach is clear when it comes to the way Nazima Parveen discusses the meaning of *Mohalla*, which designates an area of a town or village, but is also used to refer to a "residential community." In English, its meaning would coincide with "neighbourhood," "neighbours" and "neighbourly," because *mohalladar* refers to "neighbours" and *mohalladari* refers to "neighbourly feelings." The word *mohalla* comes from Arabic, but Parveen points out that this concept enters into the history of other cultures early on, and that it becomes vital for European cultures, among others, when it enters Spanish, Portuguese, English, Italian, German, French, Hebrew and Turkish. This is not the perspective of the monolingual Western mindset. This gives us insight into another dimension of the European tradition. It stresses that European languages were themselves receptive to migrating meanings and that they are a part of the global influence of keywords that have helped reshape Indian keywords. Paradoxically, Nair and deSouza's *Keywords for India* exposes Anglocentrism by highlighting what English owes to other languages. But the editors

are equally eager to guard against Hindu ethnocentrism by ensuring that the Arabic and Muslim influences are represented alongside their English counterparts. India-centrism is a constant danger that the editors are on the look-out for, even if they cannot hope to fully eradicate it.

3. Nair and deSouza's book is a work that is well adapted to the 21st century of global capitalism. Politics and ideology are central. This is the ruthless world of international capital, investment and international law, and in that world, human rights either apply or do not apply depending upon your economic and social status. In this world, *jobless growth* (147–149) will prove to be an interesting keyword to use in fighting the policies and proposals made by unscrupulous individual investors, lobbies, parties, factions and politicians. How can we conceive of *labour disputes* and *class conflict* without these terms? And how are we to speak of individuals in their daily lives in cities? Are workers *coolies* or *refugees* (172–174)? How are *public health* (169–171) and *pollution* (167–168) related to poverty, to casts and to social status? And what society today can do without a word for what is defined by Vipul Mudgal as *policy paralysis* (165–167)? Nair and deSouza's authors define what the *black economy* (125–126) means, and what *development* (135–136), *climate change* (127–129) and *green revolution* (138–140) mean for 1.4 billion people. These may be global questions, but the Indian perspective will transform the way we understand them.
4. Nair and deSouza embrace but critically reappraise the cultural heritage of English influence. This is not a contradiction. It is not a question of ambivalence. It is about facing up to complex unfolding stories in the Indian subcontinent. How has colonialism impacted India? But, conversely, how has India helped shape the British Empire, and with it, the modern world? How did India make Great Britain great? By embracing an empowered history of colonization that refuses to see indigenous populations as objects, victims incapable of action, Nair and deSouza question traditional narratives about English rule. Have colonials and post-colonialists alike not tended to exaggerate the impact of Europe on India? Ultimately, how much influence could be exerted by a couple of hundred thousand English-speakers struggling to adapt to the diet, the climate and the local diseases in a foreign region, while vast and vibrant Indian cultures were evolving and creatively responding to English and other European influences?
5. Nair and deSouza are well aware that, in the contemporary world, we are dealing with individuals who must be considered as both citizens and netizens, individuals forming parts of local, global and online communities. This is not a eulogy for new technologies. The editors are not turning their backs on local communities in the "here and now." They make it obvious that shops and communities and neighbourhoods are still vital for communal life and for language. But they listen to the words and the world around them, and they are acutely aware that the spaces we live in are permeated by online activity on social media. Our daily activities depend on our being connected, and the ways our institutions and companies function now assume we will all have access to the Internet. Similarly, the State and its organs and institutions assume that our actions and activities can be influenced or controlled, or at least subjected to surveillance, by and through the Internet. We have moved beyond "citizens," in the sense of urban, town and city dwellers, to become netizens, occupying multiple, coexisting, physical and intangible spaces.
6. Nair and deSouza's project is "post-modern" in the sense that these scholars reject hierarchies when they observe the way various systems of tastes and values coexist and interact. This is the case for the traditional concepts of Hindu philosophy, and what Nair in her Introduction calls "words of the upstart variety" that coexist alongside "superior and time-tested concepts like 'maya'" (5). *Maya* is a keyword derived from the

philosophical school of Vendata and it also plays a role in Buddhism. *Maya* refers to the concept of illusion that is crucial for the Indian tradition. It implies the need to liberate oneself from a deluded state that is often confused with everyday life. It is a powerful notion with a great conceptual force that has shaped the Indian imagination throughout history. But this concept does not exist above us in some transcendental sphere; it is part of our ongoing existence. So, Nair and deSouza do not hesitate to include alongside *maya* their "upstart words" such as *beauty parlour* (76–77) and *gym* (86–87). Why? Because these are keywords that have taken on a central role in social life, promising to enhance self-image and facilitate social climbing, and to ensure success and self-realization in contemporary society in India. Who meets in these places? Who interacts? Which classes or castes serve which classes and castes? And how are products and services rendered and consumed in these shared spaces? All of these questions are ascribed sociological and cultural significance by Nair and deSouza. Who are the Indians? Where do they come from? Who do they want to be? And how do they want to be seen? These are obviously crucial questions for any image-conscious modern nation, and social media and e-interaction are hardly likely to discourage that trend in India and in Brazil any more that they will in Italy or in California. So are these "upstart words" not keywords that will help other languages and regions to reinterpret their own vocabularies related to dieting, beauty, beauty parlours, gyms, fitness and wellness centres?

7. Nair and deSouza show great sensibility regarding the ways minorities exist within worldviews and the way they shape those worldviews through resistance or through their very existence. *Street children* (227–228) and *street vendors* (228–230) are part of Indian life and the life of its linguistic communities, whether or not those individuals and groups belong to the same linguistic community as the people they serve. This is the interaction that is fundamental to multilingual city life in contemporary Indian society: subcultures coexist. So, when *violence* (413–414) and *rape* (402–403) take place, they take place "in" society but also "across" cultures, or subcultures. These are the keywords that emerge out of the ways Indian communities are dealing with modern European conceptions of human rights, respect, and gender, although the perpetrators of that violence and those rapes may not, of course, make use of such keywords to describe their actions. The keywords that the editors include demonstrate how dominant elites are influencing and seeking to control and exploit minorities, but they also show how minorities adapt and respond in resisting the dynamics of domination, exclusion and exploitation.
8. This is a collective work, the collaboration of 200 authors. It is a "hybrid text," a text "both 'for' and 'from' India" (Nair 13). Rather than aiming to produce a definitive text, the authors are well aware that they are engaging in an "open-ended conversation" (13). They stress that "incoming information in ordinary talk" (13) keeps them alert to the fact that their perspective is always limited and situated. They speak of the "conceptual universes" of the Indians. But their tireless discussions across disciplines, both within and outside of the University, have enabled them to keep in focus crucial questions about keywords and culture, questions such as how "the contemporary moment" can be "recorded" (14). "How have our ideas of 'progress' changed?" (14) and "How does one locate the universal within the local and the specific?" (14).
9. Williams was a great writer, a thinker, and a cultural critic. But however great his insight, he took his stand alone as an individual thinker. Nair and deSouza make use of a vast range of specialists who master their fields of specialization and have the broad knowledge and deep experience that comes from working within their fields. This is the advantage of working with environmentalists, engineers, educationalists, economists,

doctors, historians, linguists, literary theorists, novelists, performers, politicians, anthropologists, political theorists, philosophers and psychologists. Academics and lexicographers alike will admire the efficiency of these specialists when they give not only a succinct and precise definition but a broad overview of each keyword and its relevance to Indian society.

10. Moving beyond the well-established violence of colonization and colonial rule, Nair and deSouza do not fall into complacency. They are critical of the post-colonial racism and national policies of India that promote the idea of one nation with one religion. They cherish India and the richness of its history and the diversity of the subcultures of the subcontinent. But they don't shy away from hard issues. Ravinder Kaur, for example, defines the keyword *female foeticide*. This keyword gained currency in the 1980s, when it became clear that technology and ultrasound machines were making it possible to practice "sex-selective abortions." This trend took on such proportions that the privileging of male births came to be called "gendercide," and critics began speaking of "missing women" and "missing daughters." Ultimately this will be perplexing for Westerners, since it involves entering the logic of a patriarchal system in which women "exert their rights" in choosing to eliminate potential daughters. Nair and deSouza are not inviting linguistic anthropologists to explain the "brutal rituals" of "backward communities" in villages in far-flung provinces. This is not about the past but about the present. And "female foeticide" is very different from "female infanticide" (Kaur 197): the former embraces science and the medical profession. This is, therefore, a political, sociological and geopolitical question, since determining gender in births has an impact on demography. In a country with 1.4 billion inhabitants, female foeticide may well have global consequences for demography and social equilibrium.

Nair and deSouza present us with a project of vast proportions. In today's world, it is unlikely that scholars will read this book in its entirety or get to know the inner logic and over-arching structure that organize these various dimensions of the Indian worldview. Arguably, the book is more exhausting than exhaustive, because it is endless by nature and in its very form. The number of Indian keywords that could have been included seems infinite. The linguistic diversity of the book is understandable – laudable – but it will prove perplexing for readers from the very outset as they begin to peruse the Contents. The introduction of dozens of words from Indian languages is truly welcome. However, readers unfamiliar with these languages – and that inevitably means many Indians themselves – will find it difficult to navigate through this challenging book's entries.

Nevertheless, the book does indeed invite readers around the globe into a very different culture and a very different world. And the "tourist" will find this fascinating, enchanting and challenging. Each keyword will remind Westerners that here they are entering into unfamiliar territory; the words will disorient European readers and force them to face up to the diversity of the world's worldviews and the limits of their own Eurocentrism. This is part of the linguistic challenge to the Social Sciences and Cultural Studies. Like Wierzbicka and Cassin, in their own ways, Nair and deSouza are leaving universals behind and entering the sphere of "untranslatables." Trying to grasp the meaning of those words may prove challenging, but it may well cultivate the desire to understand India and to question the ways we have tried to understand Indians and their words in the past. Values, perspectives, politics, gender, class and caste come into play as histories are woven out of multilingual pasts that project individuals into complex presents and offer up difficult choices. This is, indeed, another world and another worldview: the horizons of this subcontinent are carved out of practices, policies and perspectives that will seem as fabulous as they seem foreign to anyone unfamiliar with India.

This takes us beyond Williams' *Keywords* with its Anglocentric scope and its terms that may or may not appear relevant to the realities of other languages and cultures today. Nair and

deSouza write and think in English, but theirs is a variety of world English. And like any other, their Indian English is increasingly challenging the traditions of the established English of the US and of Great Britain. Williams still speaks to us today, but how will he be translated into the English of the 21st century? Nair and deSouza's work "displaces" us in time and space. Their emphasis on online communication and culture and their recognition that we are now not only world citizens, but netizens, force us to question the ways in which linguistic communities are constructed and maintained. This makes Nair and deSouza's contribution both crucial and central. And any attempt to dismiss it as marginal or peripheral within the English-speaking world, may, indeed, appear to be not only unfair, but "a bit 20th century," a little "antiquated," and perhaps somewhat "provincial."

Conclusion

Nair and deSouza take us back to politics and perspectives, to society, status and social stratification. In this respect, they are faithful to the project as it was laid out by Raymond Williams in the *Keywords* that he wrote towards the end of his career as a cultural critic back in the 1970s. Two generations of research have come and gone since then but the social and political pertinence of his project has not waned. And when his keywords are used as conceptual tools for investigating the fabric and the functioning of culture, they prove to be impressive, precise and incisive. This is what links Williams and Nair and deSouza. Keywords like *policy paralysis* and *jobless growth* remind us of the relevance of economic and political life, but keywords like *maya* and *beauty parlour* exist side by side and interact with these economic keywords. This demonstrates the complex aspirations and spiritual yearnings of today's Indians. If these clusters and contrasting concepts remind us that keywords must help us understand the private and the political and the way they are entwined, then Nair and deSouza will have served to remind ethnolinguistics of the fundamentally political nature of Williams' contribution. Keywords can still be conceived of today as sharp knives that help us cut away the fatty tissue of media clichés and academic dogma.

All approaches to ethnolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and translation studies (Berman; Venuti; Underhill, *Creating*, *Ethnolinguistics*, *Voice*; Underhill and Głaz) remind us of the diversity of languages, cultures and worldviews. Once this is understood, our whole understanding of language, communication and cultural exchanges is transformed. Humboldt and ethnolinguistics take us in another direction from Williams, leading us towards the linguistic diversity, which is an unavoidable historical truth and a self-evident reality for today's global community. The multilingual culture of a vast subcontinent such as India, therefore, serves as a crucible for melting and remoulding a Keywords Project that is sensitive to the realities of national cultures, linguistic communities, and individuals interacting as personal agents, citizens and netizens. And while each era and each political, cultural and linguistic community must create its own crucible, many of the key tenets of the Keywords Project continue to find inspiration in Williams' founding work. In that sense, the Keywords Project has been sustained and reinvigorated by the challenges that languages, history, culture and politics present it with.

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