Defamiliarising Colonial Imaginaries Embedded in Interculturality: Self-Other Dichotomy and the Buddhist Concept of Non-self.

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This presentation focuses on:

how the meanings and the practices of 'Interculturality' in higher education reflect colonial imaginary, especially through the fabrication of:

a) polarised 'self' and 'other'

b) oneness between Being and culture

An ontological 'otherwise' is presented by drawing on the concept of **non-self** (*anathma*) and **transience** (Anika) in Buddhist philosophy.

My views in this presentation are informed by sociology of absence (Santos, 2018), autoethnographic reflexivity (Huang, 2015) and narratology (Onega & Landa, 2016)
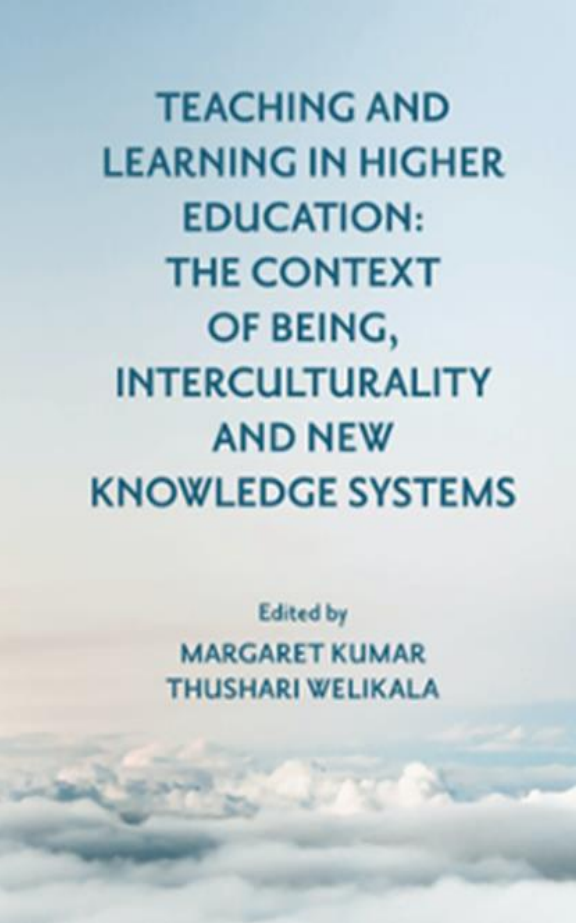
Sociology of absence: A transgressive sociology

Three moments to be considered:

1. rigorous critique of the selected knowledge area
2. move beyond Centred/Eurocentric criticality to explore alternative ways of knowing the world
3. identify and utilise heterogeneous knowledges.

The key arguments in this presentation are based on:

Welikala, T. (2021). Self, other and interculturality: An epistemic shift toward intersensoriality. In M. Kumar and T. Welikala (Eds.), *Teaching and learning in higher education: the context of Being, Interculturality and New Knowledge Systems.* Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.

TEACHING AND
LEARNING IN HIGHER
EDUCATION:
THE CONTEXT
OF BEING,
INTERCULTURALITY
AND NEW
KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

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Relevant key questions emerged

- What is the role and the purpose of interculturality within current socio-cultural and geo-political contexts?

- Can we justify the presence of 'inter' in interculturality?

- How can we interrogate intercultural practices that help maintain colonial legacies within higher education and in the society in general?

- How/why 'the white man's burden'; is enacted through intercultural practices?

- In which ways does the performance of interculturality miniaturise particular ways of Being, knowing and unknowing in the world?

Colonial imaginary in interculturality

a)Oneness between culture and Being

Imagined culture
Singular, untouched, coherent entity with distinctively different, permanent cultural features and values along the lines of nationality/ethnicity/faith etc.

Strong affinities of people with one particular culture

Ignores culture as a process of 'becoming'.

Maintains
Cultural comfort zones where significant, globally-relevant, rationale, civilised forms of scientific narratives about Being and knowing are created

Zones of absence where 'worthless', non-scientific local knowing is created

"While opposing 'segregation and fundamentalism' and supporting 'pluralism' and 'human rights', UNESCO (2010, p. 3) implies a confining and defining role of 'culture' as 'the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group' "

"Highlighting that 'cultures are themselves multiple', Deardorff (2020, p. 4) suggests a defining role where 'each culture is the sum of assumptions and practices shared by members of a group', distinguishing them from other groups" (Holliday, 2022, p.3) (author's emphasis).

b) Polarised 'self'/'other'

Informed and justified by
- Colonisation and coloniality
- Solipsism (self is all that can be known to exist)
- Cartesian duality
- Neoliberalism
- Individualism
- Capitalism
- Audit culture

'I think (others do not think, or do not think properly),

therefore I am. (others are-not, lack Being, should not exist or are dispensable)' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 252.)

WALTER D. MIGNOLO

THE DARKER SIDE
OF WESTERN MODERNITY

GLOBAL FUTURES, DECOLONIAL OPTIONS

'Self'/ 'other' dichotomy

- Initiated by Europeans?
- Unique within the global north?

→

Caste system, hierarchies within and across races, social stratification, disciplinary thinking and a range of social cultural norms and traditions

↓

Why is Eurocentric binary thinking more relevant in interculturality than other ways of dichotomous thinking?

←

- Contributes to strengthening and maintaining colonial design of divide and control
- Creates the illusion that there is a neat split between people/groups/contexts
- Informs and creates 'global' hierarchical value systems
- Utilises self/other bifurcation to analyse and to justify global geo-politics
- Makes us forget the temporality of coloniality through binary thinking

Beginning of coloniality: Formation of new imaginaries through classification

Coloniser created new identities & a classification of world population using the idea of **"race"**
European/White
- Indian
- Black
- Mestizo

(Quijano, 2000)

Manifested **difference**

Domination over Natives

Degree of humanity attributed to the racialised identities:
- The 'lighter' one's skin is, the closer to full humanity one is.

A biological & sociological myth

Social imaginary of 'whiteness'
A state of knowing and being.
An ongoing, unfinished history which orientates bodies in specific locations, shaping and controlling their ways of Being (Ahmad, 2007).
Whiteness exists **in the absence of the white bodies.**

Other
- Powerless
- Irrational
- Under-developed
- Requires empathy from the 'self'

- Strengthens the ongoing power structures
- Highlights 'difference'

SELF
- Authoritative Rationale
- Cultured
- Efficient
- Civilised

Colonial imaginary of 'self'/'other' in action

A CBS's foreign correspondent reporting from Kyiv, Ukraine on Friday (25 February):

Ukraine "isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan that has seen conflict raging for decades"... This is a relatively civilized, relatively European ...

NBC Reporter:
"These are not refugees from Syria, these are Christians, they are white, they are very similar to us."

A Prime Minister in a European country
"These people are intelligent, they are educated people.... This is not the refugee wave we have been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists."
(Herat, 2022).

Interrogating coloniality of Being

A Tempest is a revision of William Shakespeare's The Tempest, a textual intervention written within postcolonial Framework.

Caliban

Prospero, you are the master of illusion.
Lying is your trademark.
And you have lied so much to me
(lied about the world, lied about me)
that you have ended by imposing on me
an image of myself.
underdeveloped, you brand me, inferior,
That is the way you have forced me to see myself
I detest that image! What's more, it's a lie!
But now I know you, you old cancer,
and I know myself as well.

(Aime Cesaire, (1969:162)
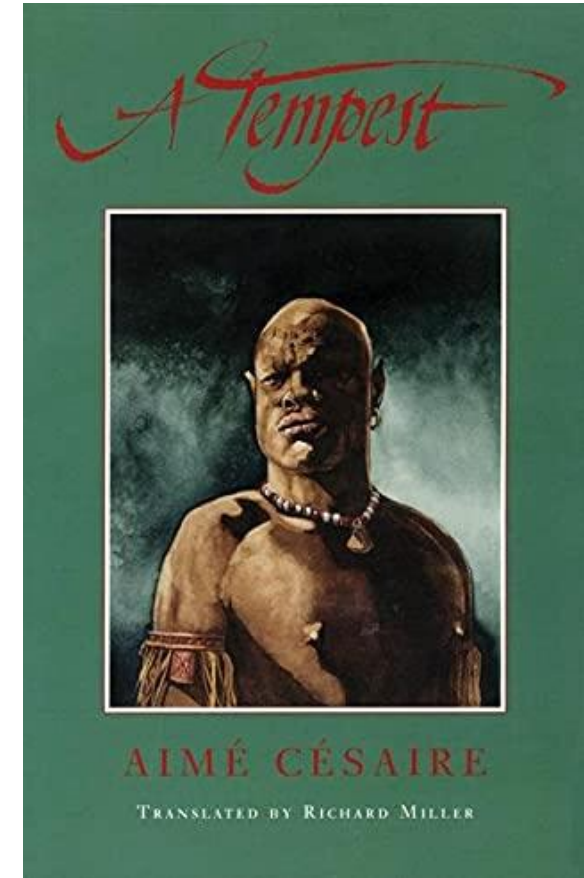
Impact of colonial imaginary on Interculturality

Assumptions about human encounters

Encounters between people from different cultures are inevitably difficult if not traumatic or impossible.

Frames 'intercultural' as an international phenomenon and ignores within culture differences

Prescribes action within human encounters

Make people believe that once the 'cultural differences' are understood, one can become intercultural.

Implies that human interactions are apolitical and neutral.

Engagement with cultures is superficial . No discussion about cultural ways/practices that can be harmful (Female genital mutilation, forced marriage etc)

Realities about human encounters

- People act and respond to contexts, situations and moments rather than cultures
- Meaningful interactions between people are provisional, never final
- Actual human interactions do/need not always lead to mutual understanding
- Conflict and disagreement are inevitable in communication between people (Bakhtin, 1986).
- Making effort to understand 'cultural other' in human encounters is less constructive.

Within this context we need radical philosophical and ontological shift to reconsider 'Self'/'Other' and the idea of 'culture' in the area of interculturality.

Alternative Perceptions of 'self'/'other' and 'culture'

1. Do you believe that you have a 'self'?

2. Can we spend about 2-3 minutes to explore/identify where your 'self' is?

The concept of non-self

- All living creatures live a series of **transient** experiences.

- No independent, coherent entity that can be identified as self.

- Only eternal existence in the universe is non-existence or the uncertainty (Evans & Dillinger, 2019).

"Things, perceptions, experiences, cultures, sensations and bodies arise, persist for a little while and disintegrate or cease to exist (Collins, 2020).

Body is a collection of elements come together for a short period of time…The realisation of the impermanence and the temporal discontinuity of experience help feel the state of non-self…and eliminates the myth that one is a self. Through critical reflection on the delusion of the notion of self, one can disestablish the self and may achieve transitory **transpersonal** status (Welikala, 2021, p.178-79).
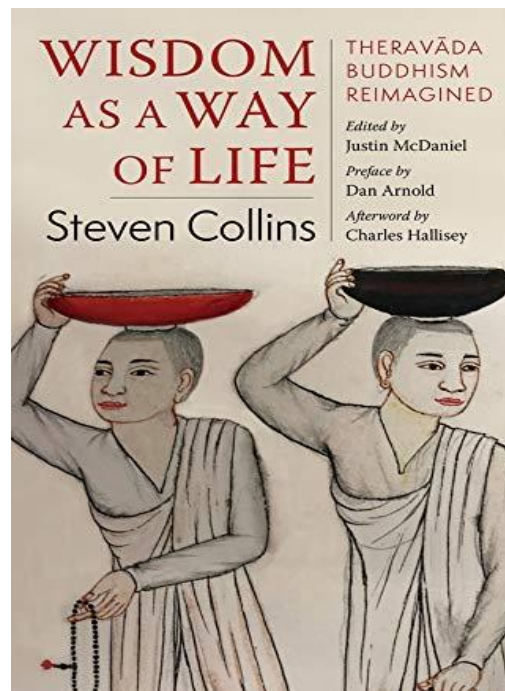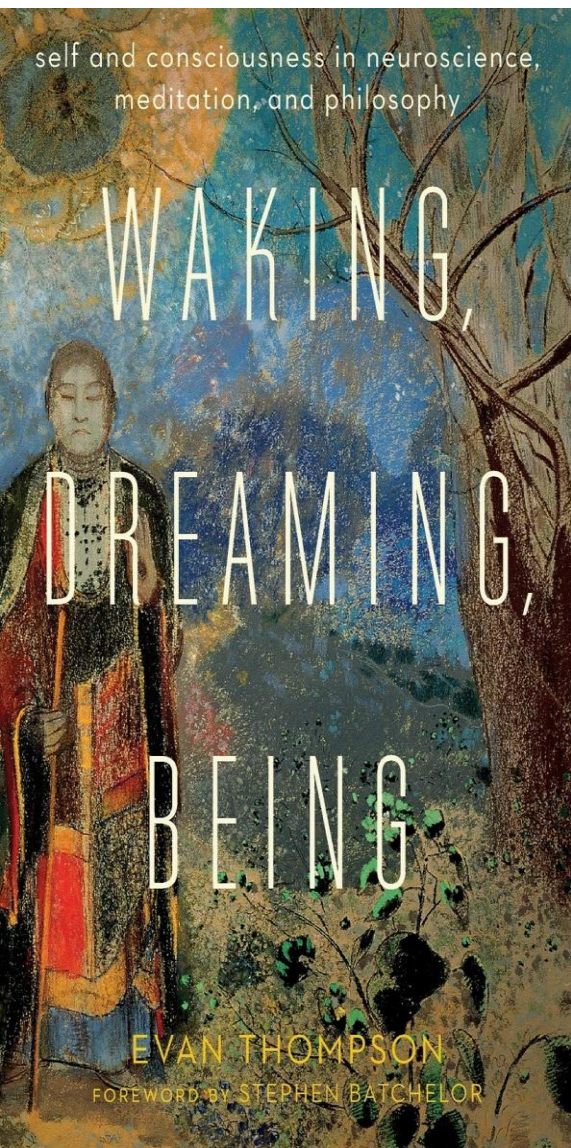
Our experience of the world around us and ourselves are kinds of controlled hallucinations.(Seth, 2021).
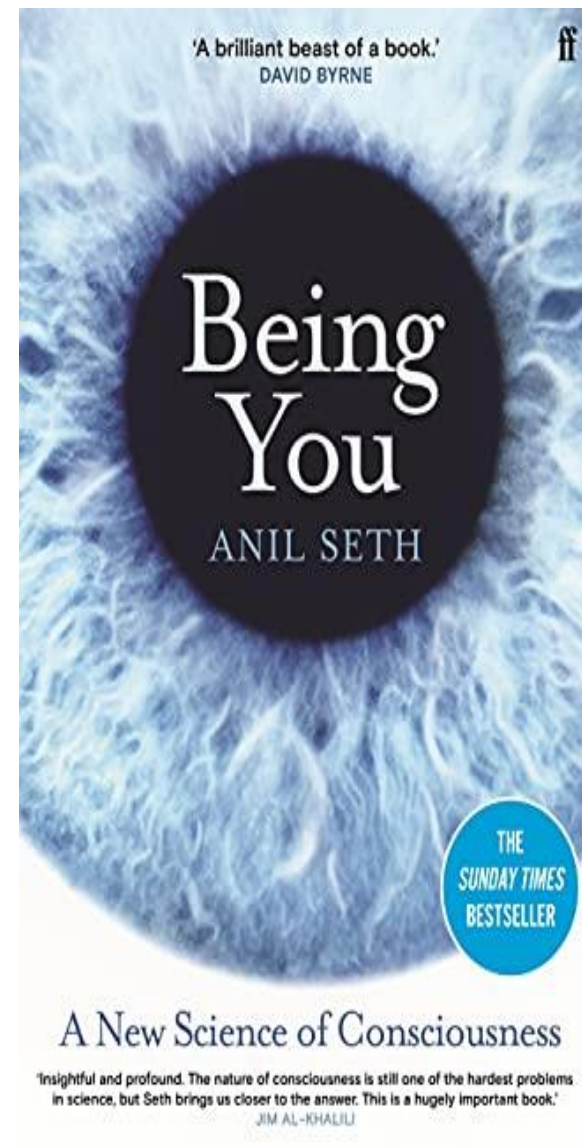
Addressing colonial imaginary in interculturality through the practice of non-self

- Differences or similarities among people can not always cause challenges since we all live transient series of experiences
- We only engage with the diverse perceptions and the experience of an encounter and not 'others', ethnicities or nationalities
- Transcendent self is capable of loving and caring as a **dividual** rather than an individual who may seek self indulgence
- Affection across lines of difference/different perceptions of people is not traumatic

Nonself concept:

problematises the construction of the polarised self/other, highlighting that every living being is equal and equally powerless as temporary dwellers in the universe

invites us to understand the **'dividual'** and their partibility and multiple identification (Mark, 2010), moving away from the individual and to re-consider the inauthentic nature of the discourses around 'belonging', 'agency' 'individual empowerment' and 'citizenship'

encourages dividuals to distance themselves from self-centred attachments, concentrating on all relevant living Beings (humans, animals and plants).

convinces that knowing involves critical thinking that is informed by tacit knowledge and sensory engagement.

leads to interconnections informed by compassionate love towards living beings, nature and animals (cosmic love).

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