

Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

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Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: The Context of Being, Interculturality and New Knowledge Systems

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Dedication

We would like to dedicate this book to our respective families for their continued support and encouragement

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Dr Jacques Boulet has studied, worked and lived in five continents. Originally from Belgium, he obtained his Social Work Degree in 1965 and worked for three

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Foreword

Skilfully edited and guided by two highly experienced and deeply expert scholars, Dr Margaret Kumar and Dr Thushari Welikala, this is a book that, to put it colloquially, really ‘hangs together’, that is to say a book that is cohesive and coherent in its content and the spirit of its message. Essentially what Kumar and Welikala have managed to do so well here is to perform what they proclaim, to be what they do. Knowledge, and the systems into which knowledge is organised, are notions that have long been central to the social sciences and humanities, in education and in various other academic disciplines. Being, however, or asking questions about what it means ‘to be’, has by contrast been subsumed and sometimes smuggled into our sense what it is to know and what it means to interact across cultures. The focus of this book goes to the heart of ideas related to Being, which have been half-posed and part-tackled for decades.

How can something so wide-ranging in its ambition and dealing with three concepts of great complexity, written by diverse authors from different perspectives, actually cohere? Principally because of a coherent conception, expert guidance provided to the contributors and expert editing. The editors, like the contributors, are perfectly selected for their roles. Dr Kumar is attached to Centurion University of Technology and Management at Odisha in India and Senior Fellow (Hon) at The University of Melbourne. She has not only observed and studied the critical themes of this book, but has lived them, taught them and reflected on them, deeply and for an extended time. As an academic, a research supervisor, lecturer, prolific author and reflective scholar, Dr Kumar brings a wealth of cultural and educational experience with Indigenous societies and diverse knowledge systems to bear on the complex issues raised in contemporary higher education. For Dr Kumar facilitating communication within and among different educational, cultural and individual groups, not only requires performativity in negotiation and awareness of difference, but also reflection on systems of difference and the problems of teaching, learning and mediation in the contemporary world.

I have had the pleasure of working with Dr Kumar for many years and I am constantly impressed by the scope of her vision for transforming how we teach and how people learn to generate a fairer and more effective educational practice. This reforming mission for higher education is for an envisaged world, which we can only imagine and aspire to achieve at present. But we must prepare for this imagined world in which epistemological principles are more democratic, negotiated and complete compared to current inequalities.

Dr Thushari Welikala is Senior Lecturer in higher education at the Institute of Medical and Biomedical Education at St George's University of London. Her profound suitability for the challenge contained in the chapters of this book comes from her roles as Director of Continuing Educational Development at the Centre for Innovation and Development in Education at St George's. Here she contributes to improving professionalism and generally to make teaching and learning more effective. In all this she imagines and creates practices of education that are, as this book proclaims and delivers, responsive to the potential multicultural, multilingual and multisemiotic, superdiverse societies we inhabit today. Whether it is life sciences, medicine, or language, Dr Thushari, clearly understands, from practice, praxis and theory, from writing and teaching, that internationalisation and interculturalism in learning and teaching, mean profound changes to how we conceive of knowledge itself. It also means changes to concepts of who learners and teachers are, and how their engagement in processes of teaching and learning change and affect all participants. Dr Thushari is also able to inform her reflections with an acute sensitivity to comparative education research, so that how 'difference' is conceived in different places is itself an issue for interrogation and reflection, comparison and study.

The inevitably interdisciplinary character of this book is already present in the academic and professional trajectories of its editorial partnership. In today's higher education, more than ever before, old and new 'Beings' enter and are given life in educational settings where intercultural encounter is normal. However, the specific elements, such as the combination of languages, literacies, semiotic practices, desires and assumptions, that combine in higher education today are not ones for which history can offer much guidance. Too much is new and uncharted in what we do that unique interactions arise in contemporary global education and so new knowledges need to be generated. These new knowledges are organised into New Knowledge Systems which reflect the different geographic and disciplinary backgrounds of learners and teachers, and so provide a multitude of trajectories into and from teaching, learning and research.

This brave book looks to deepen these everyday encounters in higher education by looking squarely into its deepest corners: the conceptualisation of Being, Interculturality and New Knowledge Systems. Because these concepts are interrogated from a variety of personal experiences the collective impact of the chapters forces the reader to see not just an abstract and philosophical idea of the concept of 'Being' or 'to be', and not just concepts of the capitalised Intercultural or New Knowledge Systems. Instead, the reader is forced to confront definitions and extrapolations of these important concepts in the concrete lived experience, and even the psychological personalities, of individuals. Being, at its centre, and perhaps the least discussed concept in recent history, is therefore instantiated in a range of communities and personal dispositions, cultures and professional activities. There are many ways to be, and many ways to think about how to be, and these are never far from how we forge and form other educationally relevant concepts which we define and discuss much more often.

I have the impression that today 'culture' does a lot of work in a range of fields. The culture concept, or a concept of culture, is recruited to explain failures

to communicate and failures to understand. I can recall police departments, hospitals and other institutions apologising for 'cultural problems' in their interactions with the public, often with the new publics of minority populations who are asserting their rights not to be ignored, assimilated and overlooked. But culture as an adjective describing how any human system works collectively, and what its values and symbols predispose it to do, is employed even more widely. Perhaps it is true to say that today the culture concept suffers from too much exposure and diffusion; that it does too much work.

The same cannot be said of Being, which is far too little discussed and far too little reflected upon. Too much about what it means 'to be' is taken for granted or totally ignored. At least in educational institutions of superdiverse societies any kind of human interacting across differences must come up across different notions of Being and its many cultural manifestations. Yet the Being concept is hardly noticed and rarely poked at conceptually. Much less commonly than 'culture' is the concept of Being and the multiple ways 'to be' a human subject, teased out and talked about. Redressing this paucity of attention is what this book aims to achieve. Foregrounding Being in cultural discussion moves towards an active representation of culture, whereas it is often defined as closed and homogenous within interculturality. Often the limitations injected into the way culture informs policy and practice in education end up raising barriers, foregrounding separation and even fostering segregation behind superficial 'difference', when in fact most human interactions are in some sense deeply cross-cultural. The dynamic and non-essentialist conception of Being that pervades the chapters of this book allow us to see to new horizons and to review what we might have overworked in the past in a richer light.

The narratives that form the bulk of the book discuss radically different processes of interaction, but they are based on a shared critical realist view of knowledge and how it is constructed. The authors look with a critical eye at relevant academic writing and theories, and at real world problems, to explore different knowledge systems in interaction. Some knowledge systems they address are emergent, others are dominant, some are oppressed and repudiated, while others are arrogant and wield the power of hegemonic prevailing. All people, as individuals, and all Peoples, as groups, have knowledge. Individual items of knowledge are drawn from and carry residues or traces of the 'systems' from which cognition is drawn. This is the essential message of the compelling writing in this book and it is for all of us in higher education who teach and research immersed in the encounters of migration, indigeneity, mobility and knowledge creation.

We are being asked to look in and at ourselves, at what we know, how we know what we know, what we don't know that others know, and whether we know that we don't know. These kinds of searching processes can help us to know more deeply, more democratically, and more productively, to see our learners as participants with us in shared discovery. The aim is to help guide our stressed societies to a more collaboratively interacting, and just, deliberation of our increasingly shared life. To help us to teach more effectively, to research more productively in collaborations, and to produce the professionals who deliver services to society more attuned to living in a world of expanding and deepening acceptance.

I think this book succeeds very well in its generous invitation to us to critically engage with stories that problematise the familiar and familiarise the strange. At the very least the book asks us to acknowledge the legitimate and already present existence of the different, to not judge it strange, and to do all this without recourse to exotica or hierarchy.

Because the three main concepts recur throughout the writing, they help the book to ‘hang together’. While the book is about education, and specifically higher education, and therefore about teaching and learning, the pedagogical and disciplinary scope of its central concepts of Being, Interculturality and New Knowledge Systems, percolate much more widely. They reach into global health (in the era of COVID no less), into psychology and subjectivity, into linguistic and multiple language ecologies, into settings of postcolonial accommodation and also within the centres from various colonisation processes originated.

For all these reasons the book will appeal across academia, in university disciplines as much as college and professional curriculums, to researchers and practitioners from multiple scholarly backgrounds. I can see people in academic support activities and also medical practitioners of diverse kinds benefitting. For immigrant, tribal, Indigenous and First Nations people engaged in taking up new openings to teach better, to teach more democratically, or to reclaim space taken from them, and who want to design and deliver more effective and more just education, the book is a rich repository of ideas, perspectives and reflections.

At its base, the book and all authors want to improve education and enrich knowledge through new and sometimes challenging perspectives. In a more active stance the book’s contributors, if I can generalise across their differences, want to inject into education a message of the significance of the three concepts and link this to an ambition of repairing injury, past damage and collective limitation. In effect the book opens a civilisational dialogue about human mentalities in higher education.

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Introduction: Unravelling

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The inception of our book resulted from various discussions on the ‘nature’ of the world and how best to describe it. Our discussion revolved around issues of agency; colonial encounters resulting in colonialism, decoloniality and postcoloniality; culturality and the link to pluricultural societies; dimensions of teaching and learning; identification, inclusivity versus exclusivity; internationalisation; ‘new’ and alternative knowledge systems, protocols of Indigenous research and knowing, our sense of who we are leading to our ‘becoming’, ‘unbecoming’ and ‘to be’.

Overarching this was our multifaceted positioning which indicated the various trajectories that brought us to the ‘here and now’. Our backgrounds as determined by history introduced us to the multilevels of our cultural and scholarly backgrounds. These comprised migration to another country: for Thushari, this was the UK and for Margaret this was Australia. Journeying across geopolitical borders informed our hybrid cultures, or the cultural interfaces we occupy, our educative and postcolonial reflections as well as our multilayered attributes. An enlightening focus of this journey was the emphasis on the educational as acquired through our relationality on how best to facilitate the learning journeys of students from diverse cultures, in varied cultural and educational environments.

In this respect, we have been involved in the field of higher education collectively for 35 years. Our experiential journey has made us acutely aware of the many areas of knowing, Being and doing in the diverse cultural and educational backgrounds of our students. It also made us aware of, to what depth these backgrounds had been glossed over or had not been tapped into. This concern brought us to the threshold of what we saw as a new trajectory of looking at teaching and learning in higher education as envisaged from our reflexivity of the following.

Students’ writings have identified several blank spaces in how to relate to the teaching and learning delivered to them. For some students, their life worlds are different from what is being taught in the university. In these cases, there is an incongruence between their historicity and culture and the monoculturalism that they are expected to relate to. There is a vacuum in glocal literacies that hinders expression in a globalised world community. Further, there has been no or very little acknowledgement of new and alternative

knowledge systems that are Indigenous, culturally diverse, environmentally sustaining or interculturally and transnationally diverse, yet globally one.

In particular, facilitating learning of diverse groups of students, over the years, have always made us wonder what do we mean by knowing. What is the correct way of coming to know? Whose knowledge is valid? And why? Increasingly, equitable global distribution of ownership of culturally determined research studies have been brought to question. New technologies especially in the wake of COVID-19 have indicated the gaps we face in how we provide productive teaching to our higher education students.

This led us to our motivation for writing this book.

In this introductory chapter, we unravel the conceptual framework of the book through our critical engagement with literature related to the three main concepts of the book: *Being*, *Interculturality*, and *New Knowledge Systems*.

Being

According to Dillon (2000, pp. 57–71), an overview of the concept of Being reveals several conceptualisations of the term. In the context of Greek thought, the term ‘Being’ denotes a single, permanent, unchanging, fundamental reality, to which is habitually opposed the inconstant flux and variety of visible things. Of significant interest is that the word Being is classified as a substratum. This substratum may evolve a multiplicity of appearances. Through this, Being can take on other features which may take on opposing qualities. Dillon discusses that these could be one of the following: absolute unity or infinite multiplicity; eternity leading to timelessness, incorporeality, rationality, or conversely blind necessity. Moreover, Dillon advocates that the term Being becomes the repository of what can be termed ‘becoming’.

A further insight offered by Gilson (1952, pp. 6–7) is that to understand the nature of reality is to understand that everything is interconnected. He emphasises that each and every one of the innumerable things which make up the universe is ... identical in nature. Gilson discusses that there are two trajectories to the word Being. The first is that Being subjectifies the substance, nature, and essence of anything existent. The second is that it signifies something that ‘is’, that is, the very act whereby any given reality actually is, or exists. He calls this the act of: ‘to be’, in contradistinction to what is commonly called ‘a being’. In departing from the philosophical to the etymological meaning of the word, Heidegger (2000) in his focus on the substantive (noun) form of the word Being, questions the essence of language. He argues that essences provide directions and differences in direction in the possible meanings of the word ... within a discursive structure. Heidegger stipulates that whether the primordial form of the word is a noun (substantive) that is: Being, or the verb that is: ‘to be’, it coincides with the question of speech and speaking and into the origin and purpose of language. In turn, this question entails the origin of language.

Cascading from this in terms of deconstructing the use of the noun form, ‘Being’ and its verbal counterpart, ‘to be’ and their affiliation to Indigenous Knowledge Systems, we turn to Kahn (1966) who explains that the verb ‘to be’

is greatly diversified in languages and does not suggest a universal situation. Therefore, 'this verb is not univocal and draws on a plurality of meaning when it is linked with Being' (p. 259). In backgrounding these definitions, this chapter extends the salient points of [Dillon's \(2000\)](#) discussion of Being as a substratum through which may evolve a multiplicity of appearances; [Gilson's \(1952\)](#) two trajectories of Being as firstly subjectifying the substance, nature, and essence of anything existent and secondly that it signifies something that 'is'; Heidegger's focus on the word Being and the essence of language and Kahn's discussion of the plurality of the verb 'to be' when it is linked to the word Being, in Indigenous Knowledge Systems bring out further conceptualisations and how they relate to Aboriginal societies. This is further detailed below under New Knowledge Systems and within particular chapters.

Being is also a transient notion, especially given the supercomplexity and unpredictability of the current world. The being of the student and the teacher in higher education is the way they are in the world. The relational nature of Being in the world means, the idea of Being as well as the Being that keeps fluctuating. It is 'enduring and fragile at once' ([Barnett, 2007](#), p. 29). As [Heidegger \(1998\)](#) observes Being cannot function or find their own way in isolation. They engage in the process of becoming in the company of others. Hence, within the context of higher education, Being and becoming a student or a teacher is a process which is never finished. The chapters in this book address these dynamics of Being, becoming and unbecoming and their impact on learning and teaching journeys in this fragile world.

Interculturality

Given the relational and the transient nature of Being in this locally–globally interconnected as well as disconnected (in many aspects) world, extending the existing debates on interculturality in higher education is a timely project. In this book, we explore the meaning and the operationalisation of interculturality against the background of hidden global cultural politics and their impact on the process of opening up or barricading effective interaction among people. Employing [Santos' \(2007, 2018\)](#) idea of the *sociology of absence*, it will critically engage with the 'benign' construction of the term interculturality and interrogate its current meaning and practices to examine how interculturality has resulted in the construction of a particular imagination of 'culture', 'other' and 'interaction' between diverse people, societies and cultures. It will consider how under the guise of *cultural difference* certain cultural narratives and ways of interaction have come to be insignificant, non-scientific, unworthy, irrelevant or non-existent due to the continuing hegemony of the western individualistic, dualistic and neo-liberal perceptions of *being in the world*. This book unfolds the historical, political backdrop of this hegemony, inviting the readers to imagine how interculturality contributes to creating cultural comfort zones for a particular group of people while constructing *zones of absence* for some other groups. The effort here is to critically engage with the ideologies, theories and praxis of interculturality within the context of higher education. It aims to interrupt the uncontested assumptions

held about interculturality and its benefits and challenges for communities across geopolitical borders. In particular, the book intends to intervene and dispute the subtle ways in which interculturality silences the alternative voices and epistemologies by neglecting and creating an *absence* of certain forms of being and knowing, identifying them as radically inferior, dangerous or discardable. In this book, we aim to open up a vibrant dialogue to explore the means to rigorously engage with the sociological and epistemic absence of alternative ways of being and engaging with each other as human beings.

Interaction between cultures is not at all a new phenomenon. People have always crossed boundaries for a multitude of reasons—be it trading exotic items, arranging marriages between different communities or spreading religious beliefs. Boundary crossing and cultural exchange have always been key features of the world history (Nemet-Nejat, 1998) and have taken place between communities long before the era of western modernity (McNeill & McNeill, 2003). People have also moved across boundaries for the purpose of knowledge exchange over centuries. Motsa (2017, citing James, 2009) examines that Egyptian universities have attracted students from Europe and other parts of the world, contributing to the creation of a global knowledge system, ‘long before the Euro-American era of knowledge economy’ (Motsa, 2017, p. 29). There had been well-established cross-cultural knowledge building in Asia as early as the fifth century CE. Nalanda, a Buddhist monastery of higher learning situated in Bihar, India, that was founded in the fifth century CE, had operated for nearly 800 years, occupying students from all over Asia (Pinkney, 2015).

This background helps us consider interculturality as a process, a quality, with which people have always lived rather than an outcome of modernity, new forms of globalisation or neoliberalism. Interaction between cultures has continued to inform learning and teaching in higher education, under the guise of a range of processes such as multiculturalism, transnationalism, cross-cultural learning, internationalisation or globalisation (Dervin, 2016). The question, then, is what is the relevance of talking about interculturality within the context of current higher education? What is the purpose of focussing on interculturality in relation to Being and New knowledge systems?

The idea of interculturality has become ubiquitous in the field of higher education. In the wake of the increasing focus on neoliberalism and commercialisation, interculturality has achieved an aura of sacredness within higher education. The widening discourse associated with the interactions among cultures and its influence on learning, teaching and researching reflect the multifarious roles and expectations of interculturality. Widely used as an adjective, the concept of ‘intercultural’ captures a range of functions including intercultural competency (Deardorff, 2020), intercultural capability (Trahar, 2011), intercultural communication (Naidu, 2020) and intercultural religious sensitivity (Kusuma & Susilo, 2020). Intercultural is also entwined with a number of disciplines from intercultural psychology to intercultural medicine and intercultural philosophy to intercultural education. The extension of the functions of the term to embed inclusion, internationalisation, sustainability and social justice has further intensified the instability of the meaning of the term. Moreover, ‘culture’

which is the root word of ‘intercultural’, itself has not been critically explored and agreed upon.

This multiheadedness and the ambiguity associated with the idea of ‘intercultural’ make it difficult to understand what the concept entails. To critically explore and reflect on this cumbersome nature of the term and its entwined relationship with Being and knowledge systems, we opted to use the term ‘interculturality’. The concept of interculturality in this book is considered a process, a transformative quality which enables effective reciprocity within human encounters. In this sense, interculturality is neither liquid nor static. It can be simultaneously context-bound or situated and transient. Therefore, interculturality cannot ignore historicity and the politics embedded in human and other encounters.

Interculturality and Culturality of the Other

The idea of interculturality cannot be effectively reflected upon without examining the notion of culture which is the root word of interculturality. The idea of interculturality and associated practices in higher education are informed by the neoliberal agenda and commercialisation. This influences how the idea of culture is being interpreted in relation to interculturality. Despite the discourses around the evolving and temporal nature of cultures, interculturality continues to hold onto culture as a phenomenon which is pure, untouched and homogeneous (Holliday & Amadasi, 2020). Informed by the Cartesian duality, the idea of diversity, interaction and difference between cultures continue to be analysed using a classificatory approach, mainly based on ethno-cultural groups (Meer & Modood, 2012). Here, one can argue that such ethno-national perceptions of culture were the characteristics of multiculturalism and, hence, belong to the past. It is widely accepted that over the years, the change of the prefix ‘multi’ in multiculturalism into ‘inter’ in the term interculturality has significantly transformed the nature of the engagement with cultures – be it in the area of education, international relations or social policy-making (Aman, 2015). Thus, interculturality, unlike multiculturalism, is believed to acknowledge the dynamic nature of culture and focus on the interaction between people rather than the differences between cultures. In this sense, interculturality can be seen as a pathway towards creating a more peaceful and genuinely interconnected future, both locally and globally.

In the meantime, some scholars have already shared their suspicion about the heightened significance given to interculturality in higher education and its practical ramifications on developing graduates who are able to effectively manage the contradictions and plurality of perspectives in this postmodern world (Coulby, 2006; Piller, 2011). Reflecting on the intensified importance offered to interculturality, Piller (2011) notes that ‘the popularity of intercultural communication should be more a cause for concern ... than a cause for self-congratulation’ (p. 173). His views can be justified by looking at the ways in which interculturality is interpreted and operationalised in higher education contexts. A vast majority of the definitions of interculturality is centred around the idea of cultural difference (Welikala, 2013), thus constructing a fear of difference while implying that the difference between cultural perspectives restrict human interactions. Fantini and

Tirmizi (2006) interpret interculturality as an uncontested ‘good’ that enhances learning and life experiences of both the learners and the teachers. They hold that intercultural competence should enable people to effectively and appropriately interact with others who are linguistically and culturally different from one’s own self. Maintaining a similar view, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2013) claims that ‘acquiring intercultural competences is a thrilling challenge, since no one is, naturally, called upon to understand the values of others’ (p. 5). We often adhere to such superficial, dichotomous portrayals of interculturality and unknowingly or knowingly, contribute to the continuation of the existing power relations and cultural politics associated with our engagement with interculturality.

A Manufactured Difference

The overemphasis on cultural *difference* needs a critical rethinking in an age of global connectivity. Simplistic and static views about culture are almost impossible due to the evolving and moving nature of the process of culture. The idea of cultural *difference* is manufactured and ideologically constructed by particular centres (Holliday, 2011) in the world, based on a fabricated, polarised *self* and *other*. The polarised positioning of (cultured) self and cultural other and the overemphasis of the difference which is the core of almost every definition of interculturality have seldom been critically reflected upon (Aman, 2015). Why is the difference between the self and the other always been highlighted in interculturality? Different in whose point of view? Whose cultural ways of Being is the accepted norm that differentiates the cultural other from the self? The answers to these questions are not very ambiguous. One may find that the binary construction of self and other reflects a particular reconstruction of the alignment of colonial subjects – self/other and White/Black (Bhabha, 1994, p. 40) – through the agenda of interculturality. Binary oppositions signal the power relations between the two elements involved: ‘one is the Norm, the other element is the power-less Other’ (Woodward, 1997, p. 36). Given that the idea of interculturality is being promoted and led by the western higher education contexts, the norm is believed to be reflected through the individuals who mainly represent rationale, scientifically informed western world views and ways of Being. The Other belongs to the category of people who are foreign and non-western or Southern, who hold on to non-scientific, irrational ways of Being. Relating to otherness has therefore never been apolitical.

UNESCO (2013) holds that interculturality enables those cultures and knowledge systems which are not recognised in the world to be heard and recognised. This implies the fact that only certain cultures are recognised in human interactions. Interculturality, therefore, is engaged in the service of supporting those whose cultures are not valued by the powerful centres. Such claims, on the surface level, show the willingness of institutions and powerful centres to help those who do not have a voice in the global cultural arena. However, they should be critically analysed in relation to the ongoing ascribed power of the west to help the rest of the world and their cultures (Holliday & Amadasi, 2020). Again, how

certain cultures, languages and knowledge systems have become silent or made silent has not been adequately questioned, except for a few exceptions (Kumar & Pattanayak, 2018). The intricate and almost invisible power relations embedded in interculturality offers an example of an exercise of imperialistic power at the global level.

While interculturality is associated with a range of discourses, the most commonly used term is intercultural communication (Byram, 1997). Effective intercultural communication is considered as critical for establishing a favourable interaction between culturally different groups. The communication between culturally different people is constructed in the majority of literature as arduous, taxing, and almost impossible (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988). Such understandings, which are informed by the dualistic world view that language captures the meaning of the world ignores the tacit, culturally embedded nature of human communication. They further lead to the operationalisation of linguistic hegemony within the context of interculturality. As Ingold (2018) examines language gathers meaning through their 'enrolment in the shared experience of joint activity' (Ingold, 2018, p. 5). Therefore, similarities or differences between people – be it cultural, linguistic or social – is not the only source that will lead to either disrupt or stimulate effective interaction. It is also the tacit knowledge of *being human* that will generate willingness to engage with the other who may share similar and different world views.

Moreover, understanding a different viewpoint does not necessarily lead to agreement. Just because we think we are able to understand others and their cultures, there is no guarantee that our understanding is right or acceptable. Real life engagement with difference involves disagreement and critical engagement with a range of beliefs and ways of knowing. Meaningful interactions between people will often be provisional and never final.

Effective Engagement with Alterity

The literature, over the years, has contributed to reconstructing the same narrative about interculturality, enabling and refuelling the historical power issues and inequalities associated with cross-cultural interactions. The assumption that cultures are pure and that they always differ from each other constructed the myth that cross-cultural encounters will necessarily result in conflict. Gadamer (1996) believing that the encounter of culturally different people will inevitably result in conflict and frustration, illustrates how the contradictions between different viewpoints can be resolved through dialogue. He establishes that the conflicting systems of convictions of culturally different individuals can be integrated in a 'fusion of horizons' which will lead to the reconciliation of opposing views (Gadamer, 1996, pp. 302–307). Such views can support superficial, unrealistic perceptions about human encounters, highlighting that intercultural interactions should necessarily lead to mutual understanding. As Bakhtin (1986) suggests, conflict and disagreements are inevitable in communication between people. Moreover, meaning making is a process of interpretation which, as Ricoeur (1970) observes, involve both hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of faith.

Thus, human encounters cannot ignore the double possibility: the possibility to interpret ... with suspicion or doubt as well as the possibility to interpret the same with faith on the other. Therefore, the efforts taken to resolve possible conflicts between cultures by trying to understand the cultural other, within intercultural encounters seem less constructive. What is necessary is to explore and identify how to make human encounters meaningful and useful for all, by recognising silenced ways of Being and knowing so that the ontological alterity can authentically lead to epistemic justice.

Opening up rigorous dialogue aimed at critically analysing the ways in which neoliberalism, neo-colonialism and multiple hegemonies maintained by various global centres – both strategically and unknowingly – have silenced alternative ways of Being is crucial. In this project, the role of interculturality seems ambiguous. In particular, the ‘inter’ in interculturality needs to be further analysed, since culture itself has already always been hybrid. Culture never stops becoming. So do the people. People have always been shuttling between multiple cultures, connecting and disconnecting with a wide range of knowledges, reconstructing their Being in the world. Given this context, the effective engagement with another human being, their ways of knowing and thinking should not be hugely problematic.

This book has made an effort to critically engage with the ideologies, theories and praxis of interculturality within the context of higher education. It aims to interrupt the uncontested assumptions held about interculturality and its benefits and challenges for communities across geopolitical borders. In particular, the book intends to intervene and dispute the subtle ways in which interculturality silences the alternative voices and epistemologies by neglecting or creating an *absence* of certain forms of being, knowing and being together.

New Knowledge Systems

This section is approached with a focus on Indigenous Knowledge Systems with a lead into alternative knowledge systems. We borrow from [Silitoe \(1998, p. 23\)](#) when we say that we use ‘Indigenous Knowledge in the widest currency in contemporary discourse. It is difficult to draw lines between Indigenous, local, popular and folk knowledge’. Also, a question often asked is: how does one classify ‘Indigenous’. The term Indigenous as codified by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2014) is referred to as a generic term encompassing more than 370 million Indigenous People spread across 70 countries worldwide from the Arctic to the Americas, the circumpolar region, northern Europe to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia and the Maori of New Zealand. Subsequent to this, the term ‘Indigenous peoples’ has extended in derivational meaning to include tribes, ethnic groups, adivasi, janajati, nomads, peasants and hill people ([Kumar & Pattanayak, 2018](#)).

An insight offered by [Corntassel \(2003, p. 75\)](#) has led to a dilemma over: who is indigenous. Hence, there is a lot of confusion regarding its use and usage. This led The United Nation Working group for Indigenous Peoples in 1983 as cited in [Sandberg McGuinne \(2014\)](#) to provide the following definition of ‘Indigenous’: