Who is my neighbour? Unleashing our postcolonial consciousness

Christine Fox

chris.fox6@gmail.com

It is all too easy to be discouraged, indeed, outraged, by the continuing state of socio-economic inequality and the fragility of 'the neighbourhood' (our world) in a deteriorating, conflict-ridden environment. As educators, we struggle with the perceived lack of educational quality, relevance, and ethics of policy and practice. Education systems tend to reflect the political ideologies of the day, many of which are socially and economically divisive and hostile to equitable change. It is crucial to condemn, in the strongest manner, current racist, separatist, and discriminatory views that tend to permeate our social media space, affecting public attitudes.

Comparative and international education theorists and practitioners can play a crucial role in critiquing, through the lens of critical postcolonial awareness, such socio-political constructions of society and education. The observations made in this article refer in particular to comparativists in Oceania, a region containing both large economies such as Australia, and small Pacific island states. This paper sets out an argument for 'unleashing our global postcolonial consciousnesses' to effect change, acting with non-violence and empathy in an intercultural, ethical, and actionable space (Ermine, 2007; Sharma-Brymer, 2008).

Keywords: postcolonial comparative and international education, postcoloniality, postcolonial consciousness, intercultural communication, ethics, justice

INTRODUCTION

My call for unleashing our postcolonial consciousness is a call to each of us to "go beyond the politics of society into the politics of individual consciousness" (Thaman, 2003, p.1) to help create a more realistic and liveable world of the future. The call stems from several decades of studying, teaching and trying to practise authentic, ethical, intercultural communication in the

face of seemingly implacable divisive worldviews based on racism, religious intolerance, and a spectrum of fear and ignorance of otherness. The call comes as we are still, in the 21st Century, experiencing a continuing state of socio-economic inequality and fragility inherited from the century just passed. Through neglect and lack of reasonable remedial action, we are simultaneously experiencing a deteriorating, sometimes poisoned environment. The planet is reeling from the destructive forces of neglect, misuse, and misappropriation.

Education systems tend to reflect the political ideologies of the day, many of which are socially and economically divisive and hostile to equitable social change. The emphasis in schools is often on school-based, national, and international testing and ranking, merciless daily assessment practices, and a neglect of social education. Fortunately this tendency has many exceptions in Oceania with increased emphasis on teacher quality, language diversity, quality of learning, and indigenous research methodologies (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Maebuta, 2011; Puamau, 2001). The pressure on smaller states in Oceania to conform to larger regional island states and international ranking systems weighs heavily, however. The question asked is how can Oceanic educators actively research and engage in a dialogue that will draw upon the strengths of current innovation, the strengths of increased access to global communication, and the strengths of scholarly theoretical deliberation?

Following this introduction, Section Two of the article explores the concepts implied by the question raised in the title of this paper: Who is my neighbour? Within this section, I take the stance that whether we come from dominant majority countries or from the colonised smaller states, we are all affected by the historical exploitation of the resources of colonised neighbourhoods, and, at the same time, to the exploitation of peoples who came under the rule of the powerful dominant colonisers. I comment in particular on the dilemmas of legislating a language of instruction with reference to the politics of language in pre- and post-colonial contexts.

Section Three investigates the impact of applying a postcolonial lens to global issues and personal values. The section starts with a detailed discussion of the 'politics of indignation' (Mayo, 2012) and the role of social media in creating or reflecting change. While it is heartening to see so many calls for action through social media, and the subsequent strength of public opinion that leads to positive change, it is also outrageous and saddening to see alongside

the thoughtful voice of the concerned, a seam of racist, separatist, and discriminatory views that permeate that social media space. Such views can only exacerbate the cruel treatment of perceived 'outsiders' such as refugees and asylum seekers, the marginalised minorities within nations, and the many groups who might be dismissively located in the colonial mind as the 'other' and 'not us'. The growth and impact of postcolonial consciousness to repudiate such binary concepts concludes this section.

Section Four sets out ways of 'unleashing our global postcolonial consciousness' in the field of education to effect change, acting with non-violence and empathy in an intercultural (Fox, 2014), ethical (Ermine, 2007) and actionable space (Sharma-Brymer, 2008). This section continues the themes of neighbours, neighbourhoods, and the personal and political constructions of space: borders, border crossings, and personal boundaries. Robertson, a key theorist on globalisation, spatial politics and education, has emphasised that "we need to focus on bordering processes as they have worked on, through, and are constitutive of, new social and political relations and identities, including society-state relations and claims and enactments of citizenship" (Robertson, 2011, p.282).

Section Five, by way of summary and conclusion, reiterates the need for a dialogue that will draw upon the strengths of current innovation, the strengths of increased access to global communication, and the strengths of scholarly theoretical deliberation*?* I re-emphasise the potential impact of the public intellectual in engaging in public discourse in the 21ˢᵗ Century.

RE-IMAGINING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Who is my neighbour? Is it the person living next door? Yes, of course. Is it one who for me and my family is an empathetic person*?* Yes, even at a distance, I would call them my friend and my neighbour. Is *any* fellow human being my neighbour, in the biblical sense of 'love thy neighbour as thyself'*?* Yes, it applies to those who profess to follow both Christianity and Judaism. A spiritual connection with our fellow human being is the base of most religions, including Islam. Buddhist wisdom is similar. Is my neighbour also my enemy? My personal undoing? Or perhaps one whom I feel comfortable about subjugating, or torturing, exploiting*?* My rival*?* Yes, they may be neighbours, but we would hardly describe our behavior and attitudes in such cases as 'neighbourly'. Given such disparities of approach, it is assumed in

this article that the neighbourhood can be re-imagined as one where relationships are considered from an ethical standpoint, where social and interpersonal networks can co-exist peacefully. As Epeli Hau'ofa (1993) stated in his well-known paper, *Our Sea of Islands*, he saw Oceania as "a world of social networks that criss-cross the ocean" (p.147). He envisaged a future that is respectful of our relationships with our regional neighbours.

Who is my neighbour*?* How do we communicate?

In the region of Oceania, several groups of islands tend to be grouped together as Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia, together with the larger islands to the south of New Zealand and Australia. New Zealand is also a Polynesian country. Demographically, the populations of the Pacific Islands have vast ocean distances to cross inside their own national boundaries (e.g. Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Cook Islands) or from one island nation to another. Most have one or more indigenous languages with the Melanesian countries of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu being per capita the most linguistically diverse in the world. With one or two exceptions the countries of Oceania have been colonised at some point in their history. Most Pacific Islands have since gained their independence, the first being Western Samoa (now Samoa) in 1962 with others following through the 1970s and 1980s. A few are still under French rule (for example, New Caledonia), or are in a legal relationship with the USA (for example, American Samoa and Guam).

Given that all have a common border of the ocean, the concept of a regional neighbourhood is easy to comprehend. Distance, together with language, however, can make for very distant cousins: neighbours in the minds of some; strangers in the minds of many. With the colonisation of much of the Pacific, and the introduction of European-style schools, so the introduction of non-indigenous languages had the eventual impact of colonising the mind, creating a dissonance between the 'superior' introduced language and the assumed 'second-class' mother tongues. However, indigenous ways of knowing still inform life in many Pacific countries, and from early childhood to higher education, indigenous ways of knowing are encouraged in programmes and classes, research and practice. Although there existed the potential for Eurocentric knowledge to swamp indigenous ways of knowing, skewing the culture of communication, and changing the ways in which the 'neighbourhood' interacted, the

groundswell of indignation over such a skewed way of knowing is evident in the following recent observation by Tongan author, Manu'atu:

> *Tongan cultural practices through stories, arts, performance, poetry, and*
> *songs are not only specific to the Tongans but are similar to those of other*
> *indigenous peoples….The task for Kakai Tonga Tu'a is to draw from our*
> *own Tongan language and cultural practices, and from other indigenous*
> *peoples' knowledge and ways to promote and advance our voices, rights,*
> *and visions. (Manu'atu, 2016 Facebook)*

Oceania and language of instruction

The choice of language of instruction is a crucial and emotional issue where states and regions comprise multi-ethnic, multi-lingual populations, as it is the case in Oceania. Language as much as any aspect of social history is a key postcolonial lens through which to survey social change.

Language defines what stories we hear, what stories we remember, and how our neighbours perceive each other. Adichie (2009) a Nigerian public intellectual and acclaimed international author, spoke at a TED talk about 'the single story' and how constant, simplified, stereotyped stories of 'the other' tend to define what we believe." She says: "Stories matter…stories can be used to empower and to humanise. Stories (about the other) can break the dignity of a people, but stories also repair that broken dignity" (TED talk, TED Global, July). Adichie's award winning fiction work has strong themes of social justice, cultural inequality, racism, and gender equity (Adichie, 2007, 2013).

The language of the colonists was introduced into the subjugated lands. Schools were built replicating traditional European models. Children were dressed in 'uniforms', and the curricula of the missionary schools and those set up by colonial administrations were steeped in the ways of knowing and religions of the colonising countries. With independence in the mid to late twentieth century, the movement to reconcile the traditional, local ways of knowing with the now common European knowledge accelerated, with newly installed and elected local leaders extolling new ways of viewing their countries, new ways of relating to the world.

In Samoa, the first Pacific Island country to gain independence in 1962, both Samoan language and English were continued as languages of instruction. The pattern was repeated in other countries, although in multi-lingual countries such as Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu (the latter having Francophone as well as Anglophone schools) the debates over the use of local languages as classroom languages and how to provide sufficient resources continue.

In newly independent African countries such as Tanzania (1961) and Kenya (1963), the language of instruction moved away from the colonial English towards Ki-Swahili. A Kenyan 'public intellectual', Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose name became a symbol for postcolonial language theory, published what became a classic work, *Decolonising the Mind* (Ngugi, 1986). It was a thesis of the tyranny of colonial languages that colonised the mind, which turned away from the wisdom of local knowledge. Ngugi, now nearly 80 years old, remains a literary and social activist whose work shaped the early structure for studies of postcolonialism which linked decolonisation and language use. The recent quote from a Samoan writer shows how this linkage is kept alive:

> *Legends and stories connect me to the past, to my ancestors. They are the thread that transcends time and space and I'm trying to pass that sense on to my own children by doing the same, telling them stories and teaching them songs. Our rule is to speak as much Samoan at home as possible as language is such a critical aspect of transmitting knowledge (*Figiel, *Rethinking Pacific Island Research, 3 May, 2016).*

Beyond the everyday use of the mother tongue, the growth of Pacific Studies in the higher education sector has been a significant journey, influenced to a great extent by a number of influential scholars from Pacific Island nations, including Wendt (from Samoa) and Thaman (from Tonga). Professor Thaman, a UNESCO Chair of Teacher Education and Culture, observed:

> *For me, decolonising Pacific studies is important because (1) it is about acknowledging and recognising the dominance of western philosophy, content and pedagogy in the lives and the education of Pacific peoples; (2) it is about valuing alternative ways of thinking about our world, particularly those rooted in the indigenous cultures of Oceanic peoples; and (3) it is*

about developing a new philosophy of education that is culturally inclusive
and gender sensitive (Thaman, 2008, p. 3).

In spite of this wide movement away from the colonial languages, English remained the language of use among the elite and the aspiring elite, and is still the focus for 'modern' education of the majority in secondary schools and on the path to higher education and employment in the business sectors. Moreover, Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific is increasingly under threat. The struggle for relevant postcolonial indigenous studies continues. Lameta wrote a decade ago:

Developmentally, such issues have provided the triggers that bring us to
language determination, a reappraisal of our linguistic, socio-political, and
economic environment (Lameta 2005, p.50).

The debate continues today, as was made clear during the *Language in Education* symposium in Vanuatu in October 2015, in conjunction with the OCIES conference. From the presentations made at the symposium from various countries in Oceania, it is evident English is again becoming of prime importance in both primary and secondary levels of education, not least because of the ongoing pull of participating in international language and mathematics testing protocols.

A productive movement that has been developing for decades is the impetus to develop bilingual studies (Pacific Studies Research Center, 2010; Burnett, 2008, 2013). Bilingualism or trilingualism has been encouraged particularly where there are multiple local languages and dialects, for example in Papua New Guinea. Nevertheless, there have been some criticisms of how a bilingual program may be implemented in schools without having the resources to train quality teachers who proficiently speak both a local language and English (McLaughlin, 2011, p.90).

Oceania and comparative and international education

When an elder dies, a library is burned, and throughout the world, libraries
are ablaze (Lindsey 2016 May 3, Facebook post).

The opportunities to develop a more specific Oceanic field of comparative and international education have been both symbolically and practically enhanced by the decision to change the name of the *Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society* (ANZCIES) to the *Oceania Comparative and International Society* (OCIES). The change of name points to a recognition that Australian and New Zealand comparativists dwell in and are part of the neighbourhood of Oceania, drinking from the same water so to speak. The decision brings a level of dialogue with educationists from Pacific countries which previously has not been easy to establish or maintain. Only a small percentage of scholars from the Pacific islands are represented in the journals of education in Australia, for instance, let alone in the USA or Europe. Tuhiwai-Smith, a scholar from New Zealand who has been instrumental in bringing an awareness of Maori research to the New Zealand context, has been a long-time advocate of research undertaken by scholars from the Pacific:

> *When Indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, and people participate on different terms (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p.193)*

This is not to say that scholars from the Pacific should be consigned to speak only on behalf of themselves and their neighbours. As a reminder, Wesley-Smith, who was a guest editor for a special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific* (Wesley-Smith, 2016) on Pacific Studies, explains the changes over recent decades, changes from studying Pacific Islands peoples as laboratory objects of study toward a greater emphasis on issues of "positionality, research ethics and the politics of knowledge" (p. 153).

Together with other Pacific partners, comparative and international education researchers are key players in the conceptualisation of globalisation, regionalisation, regionalism and local concerns (Lee, Napier & Manzon, 2014). To place my argument in the context of international and comparative education, the stance of the *World Council of Comparative Education Societies* (WCCES), regarding its roles in promoting equity and representation among its constituent societies and activities, is in keeping with the concept of a new regionalism and a new global configuration. As OCIES is one of some 40 comparative education societies in the WCCES, there is a need to embrace not only a 'Western' international focus, but to embrace

ways of knowing that are equally international from the perspective of the Oceanic region. Unfortunately, marketization of education by the dominant 'West', "competes with values of cultural integrity and the local construction of knowledge…. Competing cultural values and the threat of exclusion for marginalised groups are often the driving forces behind resistance" (Fox, 2008, p.19).

As well as emphasising the urgent need for critical postcolonial awareness among educators everywhere, this article maintains that educational reform and constructive change within the wide boundaries of Oceania requires ethical and relevant research-based action, that for the comparative educationist researcher in the Pacific, the research approach itself is crucial:

> *We must design research strategies that are grounded in Indigenous and*
> *Native epistemologies… Outsiders have ignored or made light of the idea*
> *that Pacific Islands cultures have philosophies in part because our*
> *knowledge was oral rather than written until very lately – yet philosophy*
> *predates literacy (Gegeo, 2001, pp.503-4).*

The newly formed *Oceania Comparative and International Education Society* is a welcome impetus for creating the spaces for additional and emerging collaborative scholarly activity.

THE POSTCOLONIAL LENS

This section begins with the story of an internationally acclaimed singer-songwriter from Australia, Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, a member of the Gumatj clan on Elcho Island, Yolngu country, off the central northern Australian coast (Hillman, 2013). He epitomises one of the best-known examples of the intersection of indigenous music and Western influence. I first heard his music, sung in Gälpu, one of the languages of the Yolngu country, on the radio in 2008. This was Gurrumul's voice and song before he was 'claimed' and 'changed' by the intervention of the Western musical industry. The sheer beauty and spirituality of voice and sound made an enormous emotional impact on me. This blind musician, composer, guitar player, singer of what is sacred, has now been lauded nationally and internationally. His message is of identity, spirit and connection, coming from deep within. And yet, something has changed

In Western circles Gurrumul has now been named "an enigma", a "unique celebrity". Since his fame has spread far beyond Elcho Island, he has 'adapted' some of his singing to a more easily recognisable Western folk style over the past few years, even though his voice still mesmerises. One reviewer has noted that:

> *Gurrumul has changed the way people listen to and experience his Yolŋu*
> *cultural world through* an accessible Western music style *(my emphasis)*
> *(skinnyfishmusic.com.au).*

It seems that unless the representative of the 'other' somehow adapts, she/he cannot be considered 'accessible'. His biographer Hillman states that Gurrumul is blind, but the thing that singles Gurrumul out, "is not his blindness but innate musical savvy, his hunger to make melodies to fill the air with what he can imagine" (Hillman, 2013, p.12) Somehow 'filling the air with melodies' does not feel sufficient as a way to describe such a spiritually gifted person. There seems a naivety in another comment by the same biographer:

> *Gurrumul performs in English on occasion, but the full vigour of his voice is*
> *only revealed when he sings in his mother tongue. Maybe he feels a greater*
> *confidence in the meaning of words shaped in Gälpu, but I think it's also to*
> *do with the sheer love of the language he's used since infancy (Hillman,*
> *2013, p. xix)*

Here there is a disruption of meaning: the vigour of his voice is not about confidence but about meaning that cannot be easily translated. It is clear that the words of a piece of music cannot easily be translated into another tongue, or that words can be found that adequately fulfil the spiritual intention of the composer (and see Niranjana, 1992, where she discusses translation as disruption in a postcolonial context). It is through this example of Gurrumul's music, his representation of culture and meaning, that postcolonial theory can be understand at a personal level.

The impact of postcolonial theory

Without spending too much time on the historical development of postcolonial theory, which has been well described elsewhere over the last few decades (as has globalisation), postcolonialism is a useful way to describe the impact on societies of movements of people to

and from former colonies, and to analyse the consequences in a global context of power and domination, economic privilege, political resistance and the emergence of the subaltern voice (Spivak, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Hickling-Hudson et al, 2004; Fox, 2012). Postcolonial theory problematizes individual experience of otherness, disrupts the preconceptions of what a hegemonic society may construe as development, growth, or what is equitable trade and aid in the globalised world.

The postcolonial condition applies beyond the historical post-independence literature, to a theoretical exploration of contexts where interculturality can be problematized or celebrated. In an article on postcolonialism and education, Rizvi et al. (2006) say that "critical education practice is a postcolonial aspiration" (p. 260). The article, though written only ten years ago, seems still to be missing the point of where the postcolonial gaze lies: the authors are looking at postcolonial issues as drawn along a one-way colonial path from centre to periphery. As the 21st Century progresses, such a linear view of borders and bordering is increasingly being conceptualised along different spatial trajectories (Robertson, 2011, p.284).

Today, the exploitation of, or discrimination against, the 'other' comes from both within and beyond national borders. We have un-bordered the world through global financial transactions; we have re-bordered the world into spheres of wealth and poverty. We have un-bordered the world through social media; we have separated and re-bordered the world through war and conflict, through religious extremism and political mayhem. From an Australian point of view, for example, the postcolonial critique applies to a nation of indigenous peoples, former colonists and the 'nation of immigrants' from all parts of the world who have settled in the country. Thus it is appropriate to talk about education in postcolonial terms and disrupt the discourse of 'otherness' (Fox, 2008b, p.13).

In the Pacific Islands arena, where the majority of citizens are indigenous to their countries, postcolonial theory is a useful way to analyse the political, ethical and moral considerations of the interplay between the larger Western countries and the small island states (Thaman, 2009). Critical postcolonial theory allows researchers to explore the interplay of unequal power and different knowledges in context; it provides a stage for those who look beyond the claims of those in power.

The politics of indignation

Waves of indignation are increasingly felt by those who have been marginalised in society by ethnicity, language, culture, gender, disability, poverty, or indeed in the politics of power. Today such expression takes many forms, particularly through social media, including mass movements and public demonstrations of indignation as witnessed in the last decade (for example, throughout the "Arab Spring", when governments were toppled). Mayo, a postcolonial theorist based in Malta, has given an extensive review of the "politics of indignation" in his insightful monograph of the same name: *The politics of indignation: imperialism, postcolonial disruptions and social change* (Mayo, 2012). His outspoken views on the political basis of education, his searching questions on race, migration, the dynamics of political control, and other matters make him a key writer of the 21st Century on the state of the world as it appears to descend into chaos, conflict and conservative backlash.

Mayo critiques neoliberalism and the state, as many have done, noting the perils of an ideology of the market place. He explains how imperialism has not disappeared with the gaining of independence of former colonies. He describes how postcolonial theory and practice operates to disrupt the colonial agenda, and how social change is possible. His examples range from the 1959 revolution in Cuba, to the African wars of independence of the 1960s, and to Chile in the early 1970s. There are lessons to be learned from these movements that brought so much promise. Mayo also places Brazilian educator Freire in the category of disruptors of hegemonic power; Freire's well known thesis on conscientization of the oppressed to obtain freedom is a predecessor of postcolonial theory in education (Freire, 1970).

The expression of outrage and indignation tends to erupt where there is a tipping point of public opinion leading to mass demonstrations, uprisings and violence. Mayo says, in the cases of the uprisings of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in 2010-2011: "In all cases the tipping point for what would become a mass broad-based revolution was the circulation of a compelling story of the humiliation, abuse and flagrant flouting of rights of a fellow citizen" (Mayo, 2012, p. 79). He invokes the argument of Antonio Gramsci (1971), who wrote about the difference between spontaneity and 'conscious direction'.

The trajectory of uprisings is, however, less predictable. As Mayo says, "there are no guarantees in this politics of popular indignation and mobilisation…of who is giving

'conscious direction'" (ibid p. 44)*.* This is where researchers, teachers and other intellectuals have roles to play in critiquing, supplying well researched information, and in listening to the voices of those who have no ready access to the public.

A key observation from Mayo is that the role of students in disrupting the forces of imperialism and dictatorships should never be underestimated. He says that:

> *…students have played a significant role in furnishing countries with a stream of public intellectuals…. Education institutional entities provide the opportunity for academics and students to join forces as public intellectuals and not only denounce university neoliberal reform, but also turn what is already a public issue (education as a public good) into a broader all-encompassing public concern (ibid. p. 52).*

Throughout his book, Mayo is exploring the politics of indignation, and the role of public intellectuals, students, and the public in bringing about social justice and change. There is a case to be made that the tools of the new social media have of themselves revolutionised the way we as individuals interact. And when a message 'goes viral', youth uprisings can seem to be spontaneous.

The postcolonial lens is a powerful tool through which both the powerful and the marginalised can view the globalised structures of borderless social and economic interactions and the dynamics of political control. Indignation by those who are not beneficiaries of globalisation, those who are disempowered, spills over and creates unrest, uprisings, demonstrations that create change. Beyond indignation, there is an urgency to undergo a shift in consciousness, as described in the next section.

UNLEASHING OUR GLOBAL POSTCOLONIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The language of postcolonialism, with its deep interpretations of societies in flux, has facilitated a necessary shift of consciousness. A combination of wisdom, knowledge and experience in postcolonial relationships is unleashing a new global wave of (nonviolent) struggle against injustice and neocolonialism which are once again raising their ugly heads.

Determination to strive for human rights and freedoms underlies a commitment to social justice, a commitment that, under certain circumstances, arouses passion, even fury.

It is time for public intellectuals to raise their voices and provide scholarly, passionate discussion about the chaos that is emerging from the disruptions in the Middle East, the millions of asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Europe from Syria and other countries. It is time for speaking out from a moral and ethical perspective, by individuals reaching a heightened degree of consciousness of the failure of governments and military powers to deal humanely with the current diaspora. It is time to become conscious of the continuing poverty and societal breakdown of communities within nations, conditions that have been maintained through lack of authentic communication between the dominant and the powerless. Giroux has been espousing for decades the need for a critical transformational ethical arm of intercultural discourse; it is, he says, the principal role of the public intellectual (Giroux 2005, p.158). Two important areas of postcolonial consciousness are described below: the concept of Ethical Space, and of Actionable Space.

Intercultural Ethical space: a postcolonial perspective

Ermine (2007), ethicist and researcher with the Indigenous Peoples Health Research Centre in Canada, is a Cree from north central Saskatchewan. He has developed the conceptual notion of 'ethical space', a theoretical space between cultures and worldviews. The ethical space of engagement is a space to develop a framework for dialogue between human communities. Ermine defines ethics as "the capacity to know what harms or enhances the well-being of sentient creatures" (p.195). He claims that "with our ethical standards in mind, we necessarily have to think about the transgression of those standards by others and how our actions may also infringe or violate the spaces of others" (ibid). He talks about our basic personal boundaries, our moral thresholds, and the "sacred space of the ethical" (p.196). While his work concentrates on the positioning of Indigenous peoples and Western society, the 'space between' applies in other contexts, such as between asylum seekers and members of a Western established society who live in fear of their society being 'flooded' by unwelcome outsiders with different religious or other worldviews. In such circumstances, it would be well to explore Ermine's "sacred space of the ethical".

Ermine rightly points out that despite international agreements, treaties, or conventions regarding human rights, which should provide a measure of guidance, of legal obligations and so forth, the desired effective and peaceful communicative resolution of differences does not necessarily occur. In relation to the Canadian discourses around Indigenous and Western society, he notes that:

> *...what the legal instruments [in Canada] recognize is that Indigenous peoples are not the enemies of Canadian civilization, but are, and have always been, essential to its very possibility. The compelling legal task is to enable processes so that rights are justly named, described and understood (Ermine 2007, p.201).*

Although Ermine has stated that no framework has existed up until now to enable discussion and dialogue to happen between Indigenous-West relations, there are many points of theoretical connection between his desired communicative resolution, the ethical space of engagement, and the contribution of Habermas' Communicative Action Theory (Habermas 1984). While Habermas has moved on from his publications of the 1980s to acknowledge the shifts in knowledge production and knowledge dissemination globally, the essence of his theory remains significant.

Habermas posited a hypothetical 'as if' Ideal Speech Situation (ISS), coercion-free, in which interlocutors can develop a mutual understanding through a rational dialogic process (Fox 2007, 2012). In an Ideal Speech Situation, a counter factual context, interlocutors strive to meet a mutual understanding, not necessarily an agreement of action, but an understanding of meanings. Habermas maintained that, for *authentic* communication to take place, certain validity claims must be satisfied (Habermas 1984, p.99). In summary, Habermas' validity claims are that what the speaker is saying must be: true, as far as that person knows; truthful, or sincere; normatively appropriate, in terms of that person's understanding of cultural norms, and comprehensible to the other person.

These conditions need some clarification in an intercultural context. What is normatively appropriate for one interlocutor may be quite inappropriate for the other, regardless of whether they position themselves in the same culture or another. Therefore, some agreement must be forthcoming about what is appropriate in any specific communicative situation. Similarly,

comprehensibility is a loaded concept. Does this mean something greater than communicative competence if one party is not speaking their native language*?* Presumably so. Moreover, the definition of truth and truthfulness is within each person and interpreted through certain cultural modes of reasoning.

It follows that *claims* to authenticity are context bound even though they may be based on universal principles. Authentic communication and the ethical space of engagement, imply the opening of oneself to the full power of what the 'other' is saying. It is this potential which researchers in intercultural situations can celebrate. The unleashing of postcolonial consciousness requires researchers, writers, public intellectuals to find that ethical space and engage.

Actionable Space

The exploration of the idea of 'actionable space' evolved from an intensive research study by Sharma-Brymer (2007) on "being an educated woman". From her research with girls and women in India, Sharma-Brymer found that their experience of 'being educated' entailed different experiences between their internal and external space. In other words, differences between how they saw themselves from within (that is, their identity, their sense of wellbeing and agency), and how they saw themselves in the public sphere, for example as professional women, or mothers or community participants.

The women felt confident about being educated but their experiences revealed that the expression of that confidence varied in different contexts. The girls said they were better off educated in terms of being informed, and being more participative; however, there were tensions in their experience regarding inclusion, equality, rights, participation and capabilities. Sharmer-Brymer concluded that actual and metaphorical space in a woman's life entails an expression of agency in everyday lived experience, the assumed and the actual characteristic of an educated woman's life and how she could act in those spaces. She coined the term "Actionable Space", the ability to take action within a conflicting set of constraints.

Drawing upon this integrated meaning, the term Actionable Space provides a ground for the description of a space in which educated women are in a condition, a position, where they are capable of producing a desirable effect to alter their condition. They have power to act towards a change in their private and public domains of life. It is a space available to women for their

concerted action to renegotiate the boundaries of their lived world (Sharma-Brymer et al., 2008). Their 'being an educated woman' is the key with which they can effect a powerful renegotiation for a change as they desire. Thus, it is a conceptual space that has its value in an ideal [counterfactual] condition as well as an actual concrete space relating to an everyday expression of educated women's agency.

Their external experiences are located in the public systems of political, economic, social, cultural, religious environments. At the same time, they are negotiating the power relations and control by means of their inner strength, the space situated in the internal locations of their awareness of their self and identity and their social and cultural obligations.

The construct of actionable space resonates strongly with other ways of unleashing our postcolonial consciousness. It ties in with Ermine's ethical space. It contains a strong message for how the personal and the political can be intertwined not only in everyday life, but in what can be shared on social media and generally in the public sphere.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have tried to present a viable way to re-imagine our neighbourhood and explore ways of re-negotiating intercultural exchanges that are not based on exploitation or domination. I have called for unleashing our postcolonial consciousness so that as educators we feel free to speak out publicly, in addition to our working within the academic genres in which we find comfort. In answering the question, 'Who are our neighbours?' I propose that educators from around the globe who share concerns of human rights, of the inclusiveness of postcolonial society, are our neighbours.

A pivotal concern in this paper has been to explore how educators and public intellectuals communicate, particularly in Oceania, in this 'sea of islands'. Eurocentric and traditional knowledges and ways of knowing are not necessarily binary opposites. Furthermore, that research led by those who are part of that research, rather than being researched by others (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), is a key to intellectual collaboration. It is important that within Oceania, in schools and other contexts for educating the young, the languages used are carefully and deliberately selected to be inclusive.

From a postcolonial lens, to the impact of postcolonial theory, to the politics of indignation, the paper has tried to make connections and build a framework for individual educationists, public intellectuals, to unleash their global postcolonial consciousness. As this article goes to press, the world is reeling from the diaspora of refugees and from the calls for social justice by those who are marginalised in their own societies. Comparative and international education theorists and practitioners can play a crucial role in critiquing, through the lens of critical postcolonial awareness, such socio-political constructions of society and education. There is today a move from critiquing to raising a storm of awareness, to unleashing a force for social change based on a firm consciousness of postcolonial ways of knowing.

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