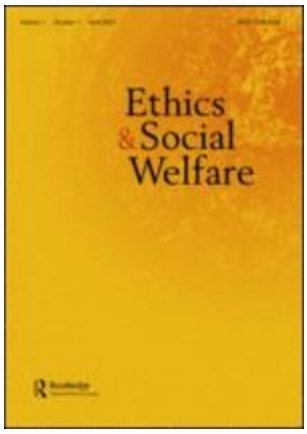

Coloniality of power and international students experience: What are the ethical responsibilities of social work and human service educators?

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Abstract

This article explores theoretical responses to the living structures of dominance and subordination within modern postcolonial societies, highlighting racialised international students' experiences within Australian universities. Drawing on coloniality of power and border thinking, it seeks to address ethical responsibilities for social work and human service educators from the author's positioning as a non-Western immigrant 'Other,' and experience of belonging as an educator of future social work and human service practitioners in Australia. Utilising autoethnographic and qualitative study, the article offers great insight into the systemic nature of discrimination in Australian tertiary education institutions. It suggests a need for critical, self-reflexive awareness about the legacies of colonialism and hegemonic whiteness to permeate social work and human service profession and education. This article, thus, enables decolonising minds, securing informed understanding, and initiating a shift in the way non-white (and non-Western) racialised international social work students are seen, constructed, and understood in contemporary Australian (Western) societies.

Keywords: Autoethnography, coloniality of power, border thinking, international students, racialisation, social work and human services ethics

Introduction

The number of international students worldwide is increasing, with the majority originating from non-English speaking backgrounds. Various scholars use the push–pull theoretical framework to explain factors influencing decisions to study abroad (Bista &Dagley, 2015; Mazzarol &Soutar, 2002). Some students are pushed by unfavourable conditions (such as political instability, lack of educational and employment opportunities) in their home countries. Others are pulled by better opportunities (such as quality education, scholarships, economic and career opportunities) in host countries. For many students, who have either been pushed or pulled to study abroad, their destination/host countries are lands of opportunity, where hard

work, in the long run, can bring a better life (Udah, 2019) and enhance social status after graduation (Bista &Dagley, 2015). While the majority gain international experience and a degree abroad, it is important to emphasise that many non-white (and non-Western) racialised international students in contemporary Western societies such as Australia are still problematised as in academic deficit (Lomer & Anthony-Okeke, 2019), and live under coloniality.

By coloniality, I refer to long standing ways of thinking, knowing, feeling, being and power in contemporary societies associated with five hundred years of European colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Adams, Estrada-Villalta and Ordóñez (2017, p. 14) describe coloniality as "the dark side of modernity,"arguing that any proper understanding of global modernity[1], the contemporary world, requires recognition and acknowledgment of coloniality. As a process of domination and exploitation, coloniality always manifests in "particular local forms and conditions as well as personal histories and experiences" (Tlostanova et al., 2016, p. 215). It defines people, culture, labour, intersubjectivity, relations, and knowledge production (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). It is maintained alive in various aspects and levels of our everyday modern human experience—media, books, movies, criteria for academic performance, cultural patterns, people's self-image and aspirations (Quijano, 2000). As Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 243) argues, "modern subjects breathe coloniality all the time and every day."

While coloniality has roots in colonial history, it survives colonialism and continues to operate at the heart of the macro-structures of modern capitalist world-system (Quijano, 2000). In the Australian context, colonial past continues to influence some social work and human service educators' interpersonal interactions with, and habituated responses to, international students with racialised ethnicities, leading to their domination, oppression, and

[1] Dirlik (2003) uses the concept of 'global modernity' to refer to the contemporary condition of modernity or to describe the contemporary world. Global modernity is intended as a concept to overcome a teleological bias in the term globalisation, which suggests progress toward global unity and homogeneity (Dirlik, 2003).

marginalisation, and impacting learning outcomes. In this article, therefore, I explore theoretical responses to the living structures of dominance and subordination within modern Australian (Western) society. Utilising autoethnographic and qualitative study, the article contributes to broader debates on global coloniality and the experiences of non-Western (racialised) international students. It focuses on their specific constructions, and examines their experiences, in the context of living and studying in Australia to discuss how coloniality of power works. In addition, the article engages with questions of rethinking social work and human service ethics from the borderlands. Writing from my position as a non-Western immigrant Other and the ethical responsibilities that flow from my positioning and experiences of belonging as a non-white educator of future social work and human service practitioners, the article, critically, reflects and analyses global modern world-system with the purpose of using that knowledge to (a) tell stories not only from inside Australia but from its borders, (b) understand contemporary racialisation and provide insights on how coloniality of power of Australia shapes social encounters, engagement, uneven relations and creates conditions that exploit and dominate, (c) dispel foggy assumptions about international students with racialised ethnicities, (d) give a voice to these international students, including racially and ethnically diverse migrants, refugees and forcefully displaced people, restoring their right to be different but equal, and (e) suggest credible ethical ways to practice within anti-oppressive, and structural (social justice and human rights) approaches.

Border Thinking

Border thinking can be defined as "dwelling in the borderlands, metaphorically as well as in concrete material terms, to create new cultural and political imaginaries from a position of being-in-between" (Schulz, 2017, pp. 132-133). It is a process of epistemic delinking, respectfully challenging the status quo, and moving beyond hegemonic dominance of Western

epistemological frame and paradigms that silence, inferiorise and subalternise non-Western voices, knowledges, and languages (Mignolo, 2013). In other words, border thinking is the necessary condition for practicing epistemic disobedience, critiquing and questioning Western imperial epistemological discourses, thinking decolonially and retaining a more global and multicultural viewpoint (Mignolo, 2013). As Mignolo (2013), Grosfoguel (2007) and Schulz (2017) explain, border thinking is necessary for directing attention toward the ideological, geo-political, and body-political location of the people that speak from both the internal and external borders of modern (colonial) world-system. Hence, simultaneously engaging in border thinking, delinking and epistemic disobedience is a great way of knowing, doing and being decolonially (Mignolo, 2013) and critically reflective (Fook, 2015).

In the context of persistent coloniality, it is crucial to delink, reframe the narration and stereotypical conceptualisations of non-white (and non-Western) racialised international students. Thus, through border thinking, this article addresses coloniality, challenges the never-ending imperial colonial discourses that create the modern structures of domination and subordination, and looks for ethically responsible ways to treat and work with a wide range of international students from diverse backgrounds in Australia. Indeed, border thinking is an important tool for addressing what the Peruvian Sociologist, Aníbal Quijano, calls the 'coloniality of power.'

Coloniality of power

The concept, coloniality of power, describes "the way social power relations today continue to be organised, constituted, and conditioned" by centuries of European colonialism (Grosfoguel, 2004, p. 319). First coined and developed by Quijano (2000), the concept is used as a response to the living legacies of European colonialism within modern global capitalist system of power. Quijano's notion of coloniality of power emphasises not only how the structures of power,

control and hegemony in contemporary culture and politics have emerged (Dados & Connell, 2012), but also identifies and addresses the experience of race, class and gender that still exists in modern contexts (Martinot, 2004; Mignolo, 2013; Quijano, 2000). According to Quijano (2000), the early system of social categorisation and structures of dominance and subordination survived after the end of colonialism, and continue to shape all social, economic and political structures in the modern world. In Quijano's (2007) view, colonialism created new identities, and hierachies built around the social category of 'race' that still pervade contemporary life, particularly the global racial/ethnic hierrachy. Quijano (2000) argues that race is a key element in the emergence of global coloniality of power because the idea of race and social construction of racial classification legitimised colonial relations and structures of power.

With the idea of race, the colonisers and the colonised were differentiated and placed in a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior. Due to their different phenotypes, skin colours and culture, the colonisers (whites, Europeans/ Westerners) were categorised and defined as superior while the colonised (blacks, Indians) were redefined as inferior (Quijano, 2000). Quijano (2000) and many postcolonial scholars (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2013) contend that this categorisation into different social groups resulted in the asymmetry of power relations and unequal conditions of existence that still persist (in varied forms of exploitation, discrimination and social domination) to this day in contemporary postcolonial societies. This explains why people from the Global South[2] (determined along racial, political and cultural lines) continue to be disenfranchised, exploited and dominated in the modern postcolonial world-system (Grosfoguel, 2007), and why oppression and

[2] The phrase, Global South, refers broadly to the regions of, or people from, Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. It is one of a family of terms, including "Third World" and "Periphery," that denote regions or people outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalised. It marks a shift from a focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical power relations (Dados & Connell, 2012, p. 12). As Dados and Connell (2012, p. 13) explain, the term Global South, "references an entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change" through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained.

disadvantage (structural systems), and persistent discriminatory discourses expressed through racist dehumanisation, objectification and inferiorisation of non-Westerners (Harms Smith, 2019; Udah, 2019) continue to be reflected in white dominated contemporary Western societies.

Today, coloniality of power is enacted, according to Castro-Klaren (2008 as cited in Carranza, 2018, p. 342) through the following stages: (1) classification and reclassification of people who are not colonisers (i.e. Europeans and North Americans); (2) creation of institutions to control and manage colonised populations (e.g. national institutions, international organisations and courts of law); (3) definition of spaces in which regional (developmental) goals are applied (e.g. Latin America); and (4) use of an epistemological perspective that legitimises this form of power and control by the centre of power.

Several scholars, who have expanded on Quijano's coloniality of power , agree that existing colonial matrix of power affects all dimensions of social existence, ranging from hegemony over economy; authority; politics, gender and sexuality; language; to control over subjectivity (being), power and knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2007; Harms Smith, 2019; Martinot, 2004). Indeed, Quijano's coloniality of power is important for the study of race and ethnic relations, and identity formation in contemporary postcolonial societies (Grosfoguel, 2004). Moreover, it offers a theoretical framework to understand the continuities of varied forms of social discrimination and hierarchical relationships of domination that have roots in colonial history and practices.

The concept of coloniality of power, therefore, can help us understand, in this article, the construction and experiences of racialised international students in the Australian context. Using the concept of coloniality of power, the article focuses beyond the persistence of a colour hierarchy to understanding the interface between racist cultures and social structural power relations with a long colonial history in the modern colonial world-system (Grosfoguel, 2004).

Thus, coloniality of power allows, in this article, to explore, discuss and understand how international students with racialised ethnicities are constructed and stereotyped, addressing contemporary racialisation, social positioning and performance of racialised groups in the coloniality of power of Australia.

Method

In 2016, I conducted a qualitative study in South East Queensland to understand the everyday lived experiences of African immigrants to Australia. In particular, I wanted to examine how African immigrants as visible immigrants define their identity, personal and socioeconomic wellbeing in white majority Australia, focusing on the role (mediating effects) of race and skin colour on their experiences and overall outcomes in Australia. The qualitative research allowed me to examine in detail and capture a richer depth of information from the participants' lived racialised experiences (Udah, 2016). The study offered additional information to examine and reflect on my own experience as a former international student and the experiences of other racialised international students who participated in the research, that is our racialised experiences of belonging and not belonging in contexts where the power of coloniality continues to classify, disfranchise and exclude us.

Autoethnography is utilised together with an empirical section in this article as a way to connect "the personal to the cultural" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 24) and present the experiences of research participants (other migrants/international students) from the qualitative study (Udah, 2016). As a research method, autoethnography draws upon personal experience (auto) of the author/researcher to describe, analyse and interpret (graphy) cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (ethno) (Adams et al., 2017; Méndez, 2013). It offers a way of "giving voice" to personal experience (Wall, 2008, p. 39) and interpreting subtle and hidden nuances about a researcher's feelings and motivations. Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 739) define

autoethnography as "an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural"—connecting personal story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. In autoethnography, the researcher calls on personal experiences as the source from which to investigate a particular phenomenon. An important advantage of autoethnography is its potential to contribute to readers' lives by making them reflect on and empathise with the researcher's narratives presented (Méndez, 2013).

The qualitative section in this article utilises empirical data generated via in-depth semi-structured interviews with twoparticipants (Natalie and Morris) from my 2016 qualitative study in South East Queensland. Natalie and Morris' experiences are considered important in terms of shedding light on the experiences of racialised international students in Australia. This article, therefore, explores and discusses my personal experience of studying, living, and working in Australia, and the experiences of other racialised international students in Australia to give them voice and suggest ethical ways to support and respond to their needs.

Social positioning and experiences of racialisation

Born and raised in Nigeria, I moved to Australia specifically to study. Following completion of my PhD in 2016, I have been instructing tertiary students at different Australian universities and colleges. In the time I have studied, lived, and worked in Australia, I have met amazing friends and colleagues, and have also learned a lot from my experiences as an immigrant Other. I understand, too, as a former international student the complexity of racialised international students' experiences and how coloniality of power dominates them. In addition, border thinking allows me as an epistemic subject to delink (Mignolo, 2013) and look at the world from my origins, marginality and lived experiences of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000). My Otherness consciousness is based on being at border of Australia, being

at crossroads—belonging and not belonging—in the Australian society. Thus, my lived experiences of being racialised, and treated differently in classrooms, and wider Australian society are walls I cannot walk through nor escape from, shaping the way I see, think, write, and speak. Everything about me seems to be subjected and surrounded by coloniality (Martinot, 2004). Often, implicit in the language of some lecturers whom I have studied under; some peers I have learned with; some students I have taught; some colleagues I have worked with; and some members of the general community I have met are foggy assumptions about my English proficiency, academic competence, knowledge, skills, ability, identity, viewpoints, and cultural communication styles, which heavily reflect the living legacies of colonialism and hegemonic whiteness.

Though my personal experiences and the experiences of other racially and ethnically diverse students in Australia may differ, I acknowledge that the coloniality of power of contemporary Australia continues to turn many non-Western and non-white international students into the Other—forever lagging, lacking in something, and needing extra help (Lomer &Anthony-Okeke, 2019). Having been an international student myself, I have experienced multiple otherisations and felt marginalised, unsupported, and dominated. For example, two of my lecturers, whom I will call Gwen and Viola, treated international students differently. They not only ignored and looked down on me, but also were patronising, and sometimes racist and discriminatory, in their attitudes and behaviours.

Gwen did not recognise my academic strengths nor considered my class contributions seriously. Despite her sacrifices in printing out and bringing some scholarly articles for students to read and review in the classroom, there were times, I felt she saw me, through her patronising behaviours, as incapable of reading, reviewing, and comprehending some articles. On one occasion, she hesitated in giving me an article to review. When I enquired about her hesitation, she said “it was because of the high English level of the article.” While the hesitation might

have been made in good faith without any intentions to harm, it would help to give me (and other international students) some benefits of the doubt to review articles with high English levels. The incident did not happen once but every time we had reading activities in class.

While nothing might be wrong with Gwen's patronising actions, the constancy made me, and other international students from India, Nepal and Venezuela feel inadequate and hurt. Also, her patronising actions had ripple effects: First, for many of us—international students, her actions robbed us of courage and self-confidence. To an extent, her actions made some of us to question our capacities to complete our studies because we felt our English is not good enough. Second, her actions could have made some casual observers, domestic students, in the classroom to look down on international students as incompetent and as needing extra support. In addition, her actions resulted to many of us, international students, bound together by our shared status, to form cliques to succeed, by working only among ourselves, when it comes to group assessments and presentations. In fact, her actions did not lend to ensuring that all students benefit from studying in an internationalised university, where students from diverse backgrounds and cultures, with different abilities and needs can collaborate and improve their learning experience.

On the other hand, Viola doubted my capacity to practice as a social worker in Australia. She otherised me because of my different culture, accent, and foreignness. While some lecturers gave me (and other international students) plentiful support, Viola othered, underrated, and underestimated me as less competent. In fact, both Gwen and Viola emphasised international students' deficiencies and often, gave us low (marks) scores in assessments. Many of us felt Gwen and Viola never assessed us fairly because of negative assumptions about our English language competence and foreignness.

I know my academic strengths, and I always work hard, hoping to excel academically. While I got High Distinction (HD) in subjects taught by other lecturers, no matter how much I

tried to excel in subjects taught and coordinated by Gwen and Viola, I got always Pass or Credit, and sometimes Fail, which significantly affected my overall GPA. For example, in one assignment I submitted for grading, I discovered to my dismay that my final score was changed from HD to Fail by Viola for reasons best known to her. Back then, there was no electronic submission of assignments nor originality checking digital tools such as Turnitin or SafeAssign to check and identify plagiarism. On the day I received the marked assignment, I did not bother to check my grade. Even though I worked hard and had expected a HD, a Credit would have been better than a Fail. However, I checked my grades when I saw other students rejoicing about their grades. What I saw instantly changed my demeanour. I became frozen, which was noticeable in my facial appearance. I could not believe what I saw and did not know the best way to communicate my disappointment. When one international student, who was a friend, asked me if I am ok, I gave her my assessment paper for her to view. Upon looking at my assessment scores, she noticed some changes in the scores for each of the marking criteria and brought it to my attention. I notified Viola about the discovery but her feedback and reasons for changing the scores were not convincing. She told me that she re-marked my assignment because the person that marked it overscored me. I reported to the head of school and appealed for grade change and my assignment was remarked.

The above experience is not unique to me. Some international students in my class had similar experiences. For example, one of student, whom I will identify as Ananya from India, constantly got low grades from Gwen. According to Ananya, “I was told it is because of my English language.” Ananya did not accept the feedback. Before coming to Australia, Ananya had done some studies in English, and was a high school teacher. She enrolled into Social Work degree to develop skills needed, to help, support, and work with people—individuals, families, and communities—and, to address social issues and problems, improve wellbeing and create better living conditions. Even though Ananya spoke fluent English, her experience was marked

by otherness and could not be detached from prejudice and her racialisation as a non-Western and non-white student. By racialisation, I mean the set of historical, cultural, and institutional practices that reflect and help to create structures of domination and subordination and maintain race-based outcomes in society, including universities (Udah, 2020). Ananya's grades improved the moment she reported her experience to the head of school.

Like Ananya, many of us—racialised international students—found it crucial to delink and challenge the persistent coloniality we were experiencing as people with English as a second language. As non-white (and non-Western) international students, we felt racialised, discriminated and problematised as in academic deficit (Lomer & Anthony-Okeke, 2019), and lived under coloniality (Quijano, 2000). In hindsight, I can say now that the head of school helped to reframe the narration and stereotypical conceptualisations of international students and engaged Gwen and Viola into reflection and change of behaviour. Both became friendly, supportive, and empowering towards the end of our studies.

Also, as a researcher studying the experiences of African immigrants to Australia, I have interviewed participants whose experiences are quite like my experiences as an international student. During my doctoral research project, one of the participants, Natalie, said she experienced discrimination during her studies. Natalie, a mental health worker, migrated to Australia in 1999 for further studies. Recalling her experiences as an international student, Natalie stated:

> When I was a student at University A and no matter how much I worked hard…I worked hard, comfortable with my ability to do well. I did so much work and I was never able to get anything above 52% in this other subject… No matter how much I try… Never! I was always *getting just enough to pass* [italicised for emphasis].

There is an indication from the quote above that Natalie was experiencing discrimination. First, Natalie comes from the Global South, and was born and educated in

Botswana, a Third World country. Second, the markers of her visible and cultural difference—skin colour, physical and facial features, accent, dress, or religion—together with other random characteristics and discriminatory factors can contribute to a considerable level of prejudice and disadvantage (Udah & Singh 2019). While she had no trouble speaking and writing English, it is more likely that Natalie was racialised as a student coming from the Global South.

Rather than getting just enough to pass a course, Natalie took proactive action to find out what she was not doing well. She took initiative and got support. As Frese and Fay (2001, p. 134) explain, initiative is a "behaviour characterised by its self-starting nature, its proactive approach, and by being persistent in overcoming difficulties that arise in pursuit of a goal." Despite receiving support from other lecturers and incorporating different academic strategies to improve her assignments, she kept getting *just enough to pass*. In her own words:

> One day, I thought am *gonna* test this lecturer because I do not know what is going on... So, I went to another lecturer and said, this is the topic that I am doing. I am interested to hear your views and this lecturer had done some work in that area. I said, once I finalise my draft, I will give it to you, and I want you to give me honest feedback and let me know where I can improve. So, this time, I really planned my assignment…He gave me good feedback. I wrote down some of the things he wanted me to do and added the things needed. So, by the time I submitted my assignment, it was at the best possible, you know, it was really to that standard that I thought I could not have done any more. And the marks came again, it was just 51%... Just enough to cross over.

As little feedback was always given to her, Natalie did not understand where she needed to improve. First, she had taken the initiative to meet with another lecturer, engaged in meaningful conversation and turned in her assignment complete and on time, which are essential characteristics of successful students, yet she still got *just enough to pass*. Amid her

confusion and despair, she raised and appealed for her assignment to be remarked, which led to a panel reviewing her assignment, overriding, and changing her grade. According to Natalie:

> There was never enough feedback for why I got those marks … never enough feedback, perhaps two or three lines at the back… never enough for me to improve. So, I never really understood where I was going wrong. So, I demanded to get my assignment remarked. So, it was taken to the panel that reviewed it, to a panel of three others who reviewed it and out of those three, they gave an overall mark and I ended up getting, I think it was about eighty plus, eighty something percent in that assignment. And then I had to obviously see my lecturer who had marked my assignment being confronted with the fact that she had not been fair to what I have been putting across.

There are few points to be highlighted from this data extract. First, Natalie suggested that she never received clear feedback, and therefore, did not understand what to do to improve her grades and enhance the learning process. This indicates that racialised international students are more likely to be disenfranchised, exploited, and dominated, which could not be detached from their construction as Third World people. Second, by demanding to get her assignment remarked, Natalie believed she was unfairly treated by the lecturer. For Natalie, being different was an obstacle to her academic success. As she stated:

> You get that challenge of being a black African where people do not know and doubt who you are and what you are about.

Natalie's experience comes as no surprise because some lecturers still assume that being different means being deficient (Hanassab, 2006; Heng, 2016) and that somehow international students are lacking in something—struggle to communicate effectively in English, participate in class, or complete assignments adequately (Lomer & Anthony-Okeke,

2019). In having certain biases, and assumptions about international students, some university lecturers fail to see their agency, skills, and ability to thrive academically (Welikala, 2015).

Another participant, Morris from Sudan, in my 2016 study demonstrated how some lecturers made assumptions about racialised students. According to Morris:

> I can tell you this more; here in my university the lecturer asked me why I chose the course? I told her because I want to help people. She said which people? I replied everybody. She said, it is going to be difficult for you to work with Australians. I asked her why? She said, it is because of where you come from, the culture, the way you speak, and I do not think you can work with them. Do you know what I said to her? I said look I have not actually finished my degree to work with the white people who do not want me. I want to work with the refugees and people who come to Australia. She now said, I can understand, you are right. You can do it. How is that? She did not think I could help other people. Her mind was only focused on one thing, working with white Australians, full stop.

As you can see from the above excerpt, the moment one is identified as a student with a racialised ethnicity, there is a list of some preconceived misleading and counterproductive assumptions made about the person. Morris was considered as one lacking English proficiency, local knowledge, and ways working with white Australians. Morris came to Australia in 2004 as a refugee. By the time of this interview, he was pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work degree. He was aware of black qua inferior assumptions which exist not only on an individual level but also on a systemic level (Udah, 2020). Also, he knew that he was categorised based on his national origin, which is characteristic of a deficit and stereotypical conceptualisation of students (Jones, 2017). Indeed, judging students without knowing their goals, motivations, and intentions can be counterproductive for good learning outcomes.

Morris found it hard at university because of treatment he received. According to Morris, "*it is like they* [some lecturers] *want you to really leave here because of the way they are treating you*." He felt some lecturers did not provide him with a nurturing and supportive learning environment. He suggested that some of his questions in class were not answered in-depth. As Morris explained:

> When you asked a question… they just say yes or no. Actually, I am finding it hard. For example, I was sitting in the class, my friend is a white person sitting beside me. I did ask a question, the lecturer responded to me yes and in another question, no. But when my white friend asked the same question, he got more than one-word explanation. He got more details about the idea. I said to him, are you happy with the explanation and he said yes, I am. But the response I was given was one word 'yes'. How can I learn? I do not know if yes is true or not.

From the above quote, one may ask, why did Morris receive always one-word explanation—yes or no—from the lecturer? Was Morris positioned as the 'Other' to the Australian 'Self' in the space of objectified Otherness? Or was he problematised—seen as a problem to teach? As Hanassab (2006) explain, some lecturers somehow may see non-white (and non-Western) racialised international students as problematic, incompetent, deficient, passive, and needy. While these assumptions may be incorrect, they ring true and normalise standards expected of some international students. Indeed, deficit imagery and contradicting stereotyping of international students from the Global South with racialised ethnicities, inadvertently, can reinforce racist, biased, and negative perceptions among other students, academics, or members of the wider university community (Heng, 2017; Jones, 2017), inducing them to discriminate, alienate, marginalise, and exclude these students who may possess agency (Heng, 2017), and can thrive academically (Bista &Dagley, 2015).

Social work and human service ethics from the borderlands

Today, Australia is one of the top study destinations for international students in the English-speaking world. These students in the higher education sector—over 404,515 as of August 2020 and representing 50 per cent of the total population of all student visa holders (Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), 2020)—see Australia as a place to achieve their study abroad dreams and aspirations. While Australian universities have been successful in attracting these students, more needs to be done to establish a nurturing and supportive environment that ensures students are critically engaged in learning that is high quality, meaningful, genuinely relevant, and potentially transformative. It is an ethical matter (Lomer, and Anthony-Okeke 2019) and besides, a more humane, supportive, inclusive, and respectful enagement from the university staff is vital.

Thereforethe accounts of international students reported in this article offer great insights into the experiences of racialised students in Australian tertiary education institutions. Their accounts indicate that there are challenges related to racialisation and otherisations, suggesting that imperial and colonial legacies still shape and inform attitudes and representations of racialised students (Lomer Anthony-Okeke, 2019). Despite an increasing number of international students in Australia, some students with racialised ethnicities live under colonilaity and continue to experience disadvantage. As evident in the accounts reported in this article, non-white (and non-Western) racialised international students are affected by colonial discourses. They confront discrimination even by some social work and human service educators, who by their profession should be self-reflective and clear about their biases.

Instead of using perspectives that recognise the agency, knowledge and skills of international students as equal participants in the learning process, their deficiences seem to be emphasised (Heng, 2016; Jones, 2017; Lomer & Anthony-Okeke, 2019; Welikala, 2015). Often at work in the classrooms is neo-imperialism and coloniality, the colonial ideologies of

race, power and domination that articulate social relations and racialisation of people from the Global South, leading not only to the material vulnerabilities of international students with racialised ethnicities but also cultural justification for why they are unjustly treated. It is, indeed, important to understand how existing neo-imperial deficit narratives and colonial discourses continue to heavily influence some lecturers' expectations and assumptions about racialised students. It is important, also, to understand what the social work profession and social work education can and/or should do to decolonise imperial ideologies about the Other that underpin colonial relations of rule, especially, in terms of its racialised privileging of 'whiteness' and eurocentric system—knowledge, learning, values and culture that have become embedded as 'common-sense' or 'truth'" (Maitra & Guo, 2019, p. 10)..

In modern Australia, race and power relations are still organised and constructed through structures, institutions, and cultural criteria (Udah, 2020) that divide people into zones of being and not-being human (Harms Smith, 2019; Maldonado-Torres, 2016), privileging white Europeans over non-European populations. As a white settler nation and being an outpost of the British Empire and influenced by the 19th century ideas on race, many Australian nationalists believed in the hierarchy between races (the superiority of the British [white] people and their institutions) and objected to the presence of immigrants of colour to maintain a racial unity and a white Australia (Udah, 2018). Despite the abolition of the 'white Australia' policy in 1973, the inherited categorisation of people from the beginning of European colonisation—constitutive of power relations—is still used to navigate human relationships, identities, and sense of belonging, as well as perceptions about where individuals belong (Carranza, 2018). Furthermore, racialisation remains central to the ways immigrants of colour are received, constructed, judged, defined, scrutinised, and controlled as individuals and as communities, maintaining past dominant images of the alien Other in early Australian nationalists' discourses (Udah, 2018). In the Foucauldian and Quijanoian ways of thinking, I,

thus, argue that there is a need for rethinking social work and human service ethics from the borderlands using decolonial theoretical tools to reflect on one's practices, biases, and intentions, and challenge and transform the assumptions about students with racialised ethnicities, and in the long-run, bridge oppressive practices.

The social work and human service profession is committed to three core values—Respect for persons, social justice and professional integrity—which give rise to general and specific ethical responsibilities (Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) 2020). Professional and accountable social work and human service practice is transformative and empowering. It is all about people, all about building people's capacity and understanding where people are and doing everything in their best interests. It is, then, important for social work and human service educators and practitioners to work with integrity and respond with empathy, care and compassion to students with racialised ethnicities. The over emphasis on what international students lack, rather than what they possess, can subtly reinforce disempowering education and practice.

The experiences of international students reported in this article, therefore, indicate the importance of reframing counterproductive narratives and rejecting deficit discourses that shape the ways international students are constructed, understood and analysed. Overcoming the pattern of construction and racialisation of international students in the context of social work and human service education requires not only being responsive to unequal power distribution, but also being critically reflective, listening, and championing the voices of students. Equally required is the consideration to be given by social work and human service educators and practitioners to what decolonising ideologies means and how it relates to everyday teaching and practice realities. Often, it is in power relations and dominance that international students are constructed and racialised. Thus, there is a need for for university

educators to be self-reflective, to decolonise racist ideologies and pedagogies, to facilitate recognition of systemic discrimination, and to problematise routine abuses of power.

Critical reflection is the first step towards acting ethically, understanding and unearthing dominant assumptions about race and power, including challenging stereotypes about international students with racialised ethnicities. The experiences reported in this article make clear the need for all educators and practitioners in the field to engage in deep critical reflection and reflexivity and be clear about what they do and what are their biases and intents, investigating how colonial discourses permeate their teaching, practice, imaginaries and relationships (Carranza, 2018). As Fook (2015) explains, being 'critical' with reflection involves unearth[ing], examin[ing] and chang[ing] deeply held or fundamental assumptions about people or things.

As social work and human service educators and practitioners, this critical approach allows to challenge dominant assumptions about race and power, act ethically and accept responsibility for others. It explicitly links race and power in making informed, effective and relevant responses to international students. Thus, I argue that if teaching and practice are to remain meaningful, relevant, respectful and potentially transformative to all, it is, then, vital for social work and human service educators and practitioners to be self-reflective, clear about what they do and what are their biases, and to explore alternative ways of responding to the social, political, historical and cultural conditions that continue to reinforce negative stereotyping and prejudicial tendencies or racist discriminatory behaviours towards racialised students. This can be done, also, with a commitment to shifting consciousness, and ultimately promoting human rights, and social justice, including structural and socio-cultural changes.

To counteract stereotypical conceptualisations of international students, and to reframe the narration today entail recognising and problematising systemic discrimination, and championing the voices of racialised international students. As a non-Western Other, educator

and former international student, I am, and have been, in many ways—through academic activities such as research, articles, conferences and group discussions—working on and against the racist and deficit discourses of racialised Others, including international students in Australia in order to transform the logic from within. As social work educators, we have a duty of care to protect racialised students from colonial, and stereotypical ways of seeing, thinking, and talking by people who represent, uphold and ratify the power of coloniality in our universities and wider society. Thus, there is need to critically rethink social work and human services ethics not only from our belonging as educators, but also from our experiences of marginality in relation to hegemonic dominance.

Whatever the academic issue or problem is, it is often productive to humanise students than patronise them. It is important to put their humanity first. Humanising students can change how they are seen or how their problems are conceptualised. Although, we teach and practice differently and our experiences shape how we interact with students, nevertheless, seeing racialised (and non-racialised) international students' humanity and valuing them as individuals with experiences, knowledge, and skills regardless of their particular shortcomings can be a profound and powerful way of working with them (Lomer & Anthony-Okeke, 2019). It can change how we support, teach, practice and respond as well as open up for them a world of hope and possibilities. When students are valued, listened to, taken seriously and shown that they matter, they will be more prepared to negotiate their difficulties and thrive academically (Welikala, 2015).

Similarly, respecting cultural differences in learning is important. As Welikala (2015) argues, "over emphasis as well as complete ignorance about different cultures of learning can both be harmful." This suggests that there is a need to decolonise pedagogies and curricula. A more profound way to decolonise is for educators to know more about alternative ways of learning and the great diversity of approaches—both Western and non-Western—to education

across the globe. Decolonising social work and human service education and practice means interrogating various forms of hegemonic dominance produced and perpetuated through colonial and neocolonial cultures, curricula and structures (Grosfoguel, 2007; Martinot, 2004), and recognising alternative non-Western knowledge systems and epistemic diversity, and pedagogic cultures as legitimate (Maitra & Guo, 2019; Tlostanova et al., 2016; Welikala, 2015). As Quijano (2000) has shown with his coloniality of power perspective, many non-white and non-Western Others still confront discrimination and experience domination through structural systems and control over knowledge and learning in the modern colonial world. Often, their racailised and ethnic identities and knowledge are marked by colonial and race relations. Therefore, as advocates for anti-oppressive and transformative practice, it is important to break away from the narrow ways of thinking about colonial relations, and become key players in questioning, recognising and problematising postcolonial and racial forms of colonialism that inform knowledge and practice, and contribute or uphold sytemic discrimination, unequal social relations and access to resources (AASW, 2020) and exchange of knowledge among cultures (Maitra & Guo, 2019).

The first step in decolonisation is to decolonise our minds—decolonise the white 'imperial' minds. Without decolonising our minds, internalised colonialism would not allow us to "challenge the passivity, colonisation, and marginalisation" of international students both in our classrooms and workplaces (Maitra & Guo, 2019, p. 15). Adopting a decolonising stance demands an openness and willingness to map out coloniality and to dialogue with marginalised and non-Western ways of knowing, doing, and being in a praxis of solidarity and social justice (Saraceno, 2012). Thus, we need to consciously engage in deconstructing colonial theories, standpoints, structures, and values that shape and influence our ways of knowing, speaking, doing, teaching, and being in professional practice. Achieving this would also require both dialogue and engagement with, and taking seriously the epistemic, pedagogic, and cultural

insights of non-Western ethnic/racial people, students, and critical thinkers from the Global South.

Conclusion

This article has illustrated scenarios of the systemic nature of discrimination experienced by international students, indicating that some experiences of racialised students can be understood from the coloniality of power of Australia. Also, it has argued that making assumptions about international students can be counterproductive and impact on learning, suggesting a need for critical, self-reflexive awareness about the legacies of colonialism and hegemonic whiteness to permeate social work and human service profession and education. As this article indicated, critical border thinking, a decolonial perspective that envisages a transmodern world, can enable educators including policy makers, and practitioners to examine assumptions, promote anti-oppressive, social justice and human rights approaches, retain a more global viewpoint, and move beyond racialisation, and hegemonic dominance of Western epistemology, interventions, pedagogies, and paradigms—the Eurocentric project of modernity.

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