Slide one

Thank you for the opportunity to present my research. The issue at stake in my research is does a cosmopolitan ethic give us an opportunity to rethink how we think about social and political questions? In order to give you a flavour of the spirit of my research let me read this story:

In a ‘developing’ country, a Western academic enters the office of a government official. Armed with a moral certainty gained through intellectual effort and the canon of Western political thought she tells the official the story of Cosmopolitanism. She tells of how the Greeks had a vision of looking beyond one’s own horizon; of how we are all citizens of the world. She tells of how in this world of interconnected concerns we should grasp the spirit of Cosmopolitanism. The government official has listened. She sits backs, laughs and says, “My friend, when your people first came to my land you brought us civilisation as we were not civilised living in a world of myths and religion, and you raped the lands of its riches. Then you fought your ‘cold war’ but it was my children who died in order for you to maintain the myths of your people. Then you told us that we needed to be democratic, so you brought your stories of democracy based on your religion and myths and my children died. You tell us that the world needs free trade but it is I and my husband that must look into our children’s eyes as they starve. You have placed our bodies in bondage, our minds in shackles and stilled our voices. You now tell me that we are sisters. Tell me my sister, during all your learning did it not occur to you that after many thousands of years my people may have had thoughts of their own? During your education, was your curiosity not raised as to whether we have asked questions such as what is a human being, of how to live a good life, on justice, or of how to live with our neighbours? Have you ever thought that the barbarism of my people’s tongue may also capture some scent of the adventure of being human? Now, as the world once more shifts, you bring me a new myth, a myth that you hope to make real in the world. You now tell me that we are sisters. Will you do something for me, my sister? Be still and see what light my people can bring to humanity’s house, before more of my children die.”

Slide two

Cosmopolitanism claims to provide the intellectual and experiential space to solve the problem of the 21st century; the problem of self, other and the world. However, the irony of this problem is that most of the world’s population having been living with the consequences of this problem for the past 500 years. In terms of internal critique it seems to be myopic to the distress that is experienced on a daily basis by citizens in ‘developed’ nations. Cosmopolitanism can be grouped under four perspectives – moral, political, cultural, and, lastly, as a social science which is the focus of this research project.

My research conceptualises cosmopolitanism through drawing on insights from other disciplines and philosophical practices to refashion our use of self for supra-individual purposes. That is to provide a space through which to explore the theoretical and experiential possibilities of the cosmopolitan imagination and therefore of the normative and analytical options that are available to researchers and practitioners.

Slide three

Like in a boxing match the opponents are squared up against each other. Delanty and Beck for instance argue that a cosmopolitan approach to the social sciences would represent not only a non-Western centric social science but also one that emphasized the critical and transformational dimensions of the cosmopolitan imagination. This research agenda is predicated on the idea of individuation and the global promotion of human rights and democracy. It is rooted in a philosophical abstraction of the ‘Self’ and an understanding of the progress of history, modernity and completeness. Buoyed by the success of liberalism over communism, this self projects itself into the world. Societies seen to be lacking in terms of the cosmopolitan critique are considered incomplete and therefore in need of cosmopolising. Whereas the self of European thought was focused on ‘if I do this in my encounter with the world’ the world will improve it now says ‘we have been victorious’ and you will change.

In the other corner, and drawing from the work of Emmanuel Levinas, are thinkers such as Walter Mignolo and Enrique Dussel, who tell us that only the ‘other’ should provide the basis for philosophical and ethical reflection. They argue that in privileging the self of European thought we ignore the adverse consequences of ‘modernity’ (Dussel, 1993), the exclusion of other forms of knowledge (Mignolo, 2000) and the non-reflective use of categories within the practice of social and political thought that were established during the period of European colonialism (Bhambra, 2010). In terms of conceptual construction the historian Tully goes as far as to state that our ideas of democracy, law, international relations, the stock and trade that we use in our everyday work as researchers owe much of their shape to the legacy of empire and colonialism. I would take this further and state that much of what we describe as social and political thought is riddled at a fundamental level with onto-theological assumptions generated from the protestant reformation and can be found in some of the most important conceptual tools at hand to the researcher.

Levinas and Mignolo are suggesting that rather than rely on MY ACTIONS AS SELF through which to evaluate my life it is through EXPERIENCING THE OTHER that we become human beings. In doing so they make an appeal to the other, the oppressed, from which to think about the social and political world. Levinas does so in the context of the Nazi genocide through an examination of European philosophical thought. Dussel together with Mignolo takes Levinas's Other and decolonises it, attempting to strip it of its Europeaness.

And who cannot be moved by such appeals? Who cannot acknowledge that a social science or philosophical position needs to recognise the suffering of the world’s marginalised in order to ground any claims of validity. However, despite all the differences between thinkers such as Levinas, Delanty, Beck, Dussel and Mignolo they all hold one common assumption- the assumption of a human being as a distinct, absolute agent. Whilst this is an issue for Levinas who was decidedly anti multi-cultural, in terms of Mignolo and Dussel this limits the use of border thinking or the inclusion of other paradigms in the production of knowledge.

What actually happens in the work of Levinas, Dussel and Mignolo is a reversal of the power of representation-the other, the oppressed, becomes the voice of rationality. This rationality was experienced in the killing fields of Cambodia were the Khmer Rouge inspired by the Other of Satre and by The wretched of the Earth of Franz Fanon killed millions. The oppressed have every opportunity to oppress. In both cases Mignolo or Delanty they still, despite their protestations of de-eurocentricing, rely on the nativism of the European experience. In doing so both cosmopolitan projects limit possibilities rather than provide a space to create them.

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My research starts with the question: WHO ARE WE? Who is this fragile little creature that has happened to find itself on this piece of rock?

My research argues that rather than presuppose a specific idea of SELF through which to conceptualise cosmopolitanism we should take the opportunity to be cosmopolitan; to draw on the resources that are available to us through the multi-cultural encounter and through our increasing scientific knowledge rather than be constrained by the legacy of Europe and the matter in motion of Galileo. This will require the development of (1) a methodology that can welcome and not assimilate other understandings of SELF and (2) develop a framework through which to carry out this process.

My research is concerned in how we can explore social and Political thought. How do we ground social and political thought through Cosmopolitanism to allow us to engage in the social-scientific appreciation of the human condition in a way that may illuminate our own situation? As I stated the approach of Delanty (the dialectical approach that relies on the idea of self to explore the social and political world) is critiqued through the work of Levinas, Mignolo (the analectic route, from the position of the other). However, despite its appeal the approach from the Other merely shifts perspective and despite the claims of moving away from a euro-centric view of the world still maintain fundamental European assumptions on the nature of humanity that are an indelible part of European consciousness.

By drawing on insights from neuroscience and anthropology as well from other paradigms of philosophical practice provides an understanding of social cognition which at a fundamental level culture, cognition, body and social interaction are functionally intertwined and experienced. Such an approach is already beginning to ‘change the game’ in terms of the theoretical approach and the re-evaluation of assumptions in disciplines such as economics, psychology, and sociology. This suggests that rather than being absolute, either as self or other, from the first breathe of a child the face to face is never as experienced subject-object but in a recursive nature and, amongst other things, raises the question of “I am other.”

In stressing the potentiality of the ‘in-betweenness’ (aidagara 間柄), of individuality and relationality, provides a framework for cosmopolitanism to explore other conceptual frameworks of being and therefore as a means of framing new forms of experience and sociability. Our concept of inbetweeness, situated as it is through our 'new' understanding of the relationship between self and other creates space for three things-

Knowledge of ourselves; what are the limits that this inbetweeness places on my existence,

It creates space within cosmopolitanism for difference,

And creates space between self and other for politics and dissent.

Rather than isolating questions of culture from those of politics and economics, and masks inequalities, and relations of power and dominance, the idea of in-betweeness, highlights these concerns.

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This approach is designed to take account of this systematic ambiguity: vertically in the context of a philosophical system within a continuing tradition, and horizontally in the context of life practices. To isolate either part in societal analysis misrepresents both the intentional affect of the practices or scholarship as well as the epistemological and methodological structures into which it these are located. Furthermore, a critical cosmopolitan theory must be relevant to the features of the political, historical and social situation. It must be realistic in the sense that from the perspective of the lived experiences of a community what it describes must be imaginable. Therefore, this method does not rely solely on the text. To rely solely on the text is to engage in debate with other books. Whilst this is undoubtedly important this bypasses the inarticulate and unsaid. One of the benefits of this methodology, as opposed to a mono-aspect model is that it allows access to the intellect, the somatic as well as the emotional mechanisms (controls) of a society and how they have the capacity to affect the agency of society members.

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Whilst this research is designed to address the Eurocentric tendencies of the cosmopolitan debate it is designed to also have utility and impact. There is potential here for the development of further theoretical work and its application. An example would be that such a methodological approach suggests that by localising reasoning and through stressing the potentiality of the aidagara of individuality and relationality, and not as an abstract idea, rather than adopting rational choice and institutionalism in the development of policies or interventions, greater space could be provided for pluralist citizenship, popular participation, and dialogic policy-making.