

Dilemmas in providing hospitality to others in the classroom: stories about one Christian religious education teacher

Barbara Kameniar

The University of Melbourne, Australia

Introduction: hospitality and the teacher

'Teacher', as a subject position, is highly complex. The teacher, like the zombie, the hymen, the *pharmakon* or *différance* is an undecidable who/that marks the limits of order. The teacher is like the *maitre d'* who has oversight over a public/private space which is never her/his own. The *maitre d'* simultaneously exerts conditional *and* discretionary control over that space but especially over the waiters who must perform the demands placed upon them without autonomy or with an autonomy that is circumscribed. Acting as a host they must welcome whomever arrives and extend hospitality on behalf of another (*a Host, the Host*), while remaining vigilant in upholding the rules and norms of that Host. The teacher, like the *maitre d'*, must also manage contradictory demands. The teacher must negotiate a pathway between the responsibility they have to those who enter the classroom, those before them (the students, the Others about whom they teach) and those for whom they are agents (a multitude of others with often conflicting demands). Like the *maitre d'* teachers embody 'undecidability'. They are an in-between subjectivity, marked by ambivalence. In terms of the argument in this paper, teachers who teach about another culture or religion are both 'hosts' to a 'foreign' Other and 'agents of the Host/s'¹. By 'agents of the Host/s' I mean they represent hegemonic national culture, hegemonic national religious culture and the religious culture of the school, which, in the context of this paper are White Australia, White Christianity and, in terms of the religious tradition of the school, a White Christian variant.

In this paper I use 'White' to refer to a location of institutional privilege, power, and domination that goes beyond the physicality of 'race' as it is often understood (differences in skin pigmentation, eye colour etc.) to include the acquisition of 'cultural capital' and a 'state of psychological entitlement' (Brodkin 1999, 8). I draw on the work of Whiteness scholars (see for example Frankenburg 1993; Kincheloe & Steinberg 2000; Ware and Back 2002) who see 'White' and Whiteness as relational concepts involving diverse sets of practices that are established and reinforced through what Brodkin calls an 'invidious contrast with an invented blackness' (1999, 8-9). That is, 'White' is a racialised and privileged identity produced through contrast with what it is not. When discussing Christianity in this paper I am referring most particularly to Anglo and European Christianity because it is these forms that represent the religion of Australian whiteness. Coptic, Asian and Eastern forms of Christianity exist as Other to Anglo-Celtic and Western European forms within the Australian context and will therefore not be included in the conceptualisations of 'Australian' identity, 'Australian Christian' identity and 'White Christian' identity engaged in this paper. It is also vital to note that there is no singular 'Anglo' or 'Western European' or 'Australian' or 'White' form of Christianity. Each of these categories is marked by difference and manifests in multiple

¹ Teachers are also always 'hosts' to the students in the class. However, this paper does not address this element. See Ibrahim (2005) for a discussion of teacher as a 'host' of students.



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forms. However, insofar as religion is linked to culture, and Christianity (in a multiplicity of forms) is the religious tradition of White, hegemonic culture(s) within the Australian context, Christianity's relationship to White Australian national identity (both consciously and unconsciously) is assumed. It is in a context of hegemonic White Christianity that teachers are summoned forth as 'host' and 'agent of the Host/s'.

As 'host', teachers are called not only to fulfil their obligations to laws of hospitality that have been determined through cultural histories and practices but also to the (im)possibility² of offering unconditional hospitality and therefore responding to a 'law without law' (Derrida 2000). In this position, teachers risk also becoming 'hostages' to the multitude of others they host, just as they risk becoming hostages to the Host/s for which they are agents.

Foreigners and hosts

In *Of Hospitality* Derrida (2000) discusses relationships that may be possible between a 'host' and a guest, a 'host' and a foreigner, a self and (an)other. These relationships are determined by an understanding of 'host' as one who has certain rights as well as certain obligations. The 'host' is one who is able to imagine themselves as centred, as present, as having originary presence, as having rights of ownership, rights to speak first *and* to be heard, as the one who belongs in *this* place, *here, now*. The guest or the foreigner is one who is imagined as having originary absence, as one who comes to this place from *there*, from *over there, beyond*, one who is *unknown*, who lacks rights of ownership to *this* place, who must wait to be asked to speak and who must hope to be heard and to be given a 'fair hearing'.

What establishes one as host and the other as guest or foreigner, however, is dependent upon the *relationship* that must exist *between* them. For there can be no host without a guest, or without a foreigner to whom hospitality can/must be shown. And there can be no guest or foreigner without one who has the power to invite or exclude, as well as one who has the power to refuse to enter into a relationship on singular or unilateral terms. This relationship that exists between host and guest/host and foreigner is subject to certain 'laws of hospitality' (Derrida 2000) that emerge from and are embedded in culture.

However, this relationship is also subject to '*the law*' (Derrida 2000) of hospitality. That is, *the law* as the categorical imperative of unlimited hospitality, that which is above all laws and precedes and gives meaning to the laws. For as Derrida tells us, *the law* of unlimited hospitality (that is, the imperative to give the new arrival all of one's home and oneself, to give her or him one's own, our own, without asking a name, or compensation, or the fulfilment of even the smallest condition, to be radically open to what is unforeseeable), exists with and relies upon (while simultaneously being in conflict with and contradictory to the laws [in the plural]), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional.

Derrida (2000) argues that what distinguishes the foreigner (or she/he who is 'other') from the barbarian (she/he who is an 'absolute other' or wholly 'other') is whether they come with a name or not. And not just any name, but a 'proper name', because a 'proper name is never purely individual' (Derrida 2000, 23), rather it is relational and carries with it both a past and the possibility of a future. For Derrida 'the name' or the 'proper name' provides familiarity and elicits obligation, elicits responsibility. He notes:

... this right to hospitality offered to a foreigner 'as a family', represented and protected by his or her family name, is at once what makes hospitality possible, or the hospitable relationship to the foreigner possible, but by the same token what limits and prohibits it. Because hospitality, in this situation, is not offered to an anonymous new arrival and

² Drawing on Derrida's deconstructive work, I understand 'that the impossible does not refer to what is *not* possible but to that which cannot be foreseen as a possibility' (Miedema & Biesta 2004, 24-25).

someone who has neither name, nor patronym, nor family, nor social status, and who is therefore treated not as a foreigner but as another barbarian. (Derrida 2000, 23-25)

Christian variants may sometimes *appear* to be irreducibly different but the laws of hospitality, so embedded in western modes of thinking (Derrida 2000, 155), require, indeed oblige, hospitality be shown to those who come with the proper name 'Christian' regardless of their status as 'foreigner' or 'other'. The hospitality that is shown by one Christian to another is not absolute hospitality but conditional hospitality in the ordinary sense. That is, hospitality as a duty or as reciprocity – hospitality as a pact. One can expect to some extent that the expression of hospitality, the act of being hospitable, will be returned.

However, the religious tradition that comes with a name that is unknown or unfamiliar, that has no history of automatic and mutual obligation, of reciprocity, is wholly other and therefore immediately recognisable as dangerous. The kind of hospitality to be shown to the 'absolute, unknown, anonymous other' (Derrida 2000) is the kind of hospitality that breaks with conventional western laws of hospitality and has the potential to destabilise the sovereignty of the 'host', to make of them a hostage. Derrida argues that conditional hospitality, or hospitality in the ordinary sense, is a hospitality of 'invitation' where the 'host' exerts the power to *invite*. However, unconditional hospitality is a hospitality of 'visitation' (Derrida 2003, 129). It is an openness to a non-identifiable and unforeseeable Other and as such 'it exposes the host to the maximum risk, as it does not allow for any systematic defense or immunity against the other' (Borradori 2003, 162-163).

Other religious traditions, or the religious traditions of Others, are always invited into the classroom on terms that are conditional. However, these traditions, like the tradition of the school, always already come with a 'remainder', with an excess, to that which is called upon to enter. It is this 'remainder', unknown, unknowable and uninvited, that may/will 'visit' unannounced and unexpectedly. It is this remainder that is always greater, and perceived as less difficult to control and contain when it 'visits' or comes from an Other who does not have a name familiar to the 'host'. Derrida notes, '[t]he visit might actually be very dangerous, and we must not ignore this fact, but what would... hospitality [be] without risk' (Derrida 2003, 129).

This conundrum, produced through the invitation/visitation of a cultural and religious Other in the classroom, positions teachers in an ethico-political space that challenges them to negotiate between 'two contradictory and equally justified imperatives' (Derrida 2001, xii) – that of providing hospitality to the Other tradition about which they teach and that of honouring the tradition for which they are agents - and burdens them with the requirement that they may have to break with established laws of hospitality, established rules of relationship, established obligations. As such, the teaching of a culture or religious tradition other than the dominant tradition of the school might be seen as 'antinomic' (Derrida 2000) and therefore dangerous.

Dangerous visitations

In a religious education classroom religious traditions other than the dominant tradition of the school are always located as Other to the 'Host' tradition. This otherness is not differentiated laterally but hierarchically, and the hierarchy is structured through the Others' proximity to the 'family' of the 'Host'. In the Christian religious education classroom this proximity is never static but determined through shifting cultural, political and economic histories and practices. This results in differential treatment of different religions in different places and at different times. The examples drawn on in this discussion come from a multi-sited micro-ethnographic study that examined how the subjects of religious education are racialised

through discursive classroom practices³. The study was conducted almost ten years ago. It was a time before ‘the event’ in New York in 2001⁴. It was a time when ‘Asian’ immigration was considered the greatest ‘threat’ to White Australia and people of South East Asian descent, along with Indigenous Australians, were the dominant racial, cultural and religious Other in Australian and, most particularly South Australian social relations (see Hanson 1996; Hage 1998; Stratton 1998). It was largely in response to the perceived othering of Australians of South East Asian descent and those who lived in South East Asia that I commenced this study.

Since that time global relations have moved restlessly in many different directions. At the time of writing this paper there has been a shift in the perception of who is the most feared racial, cultural and religious Other in Australia. Today it is Muslims, in what has been constructed as the global threat of militant Middle Eastern Islam, who have come to occupy the unenviable position. The reasons for this are complex and a full discussion of them is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it needs to be noted that although the group that is currently occupying the position of the dominant Other has shifted since the fieldwork, Australia remains a White nation in which the racialisation of the subjects of religious education and the invisibility of whiteness in religious education, remains. The issue of how to respond to the racial/religious/cultural Other in the religious education classroom also remains, as does the moral imperative to ‘host’ those who come as foreigners to our classrooms and our shores.

In the next section of this paper I illustrate some of the ways one of the teachers who taught a unit of work on Buddhism in Adelaide, South Australia, managed the competing obligations that being both ‘host’ and ‘agent of the Host/s’ demanded. The particular components of the teacher’s representations of herself, Christianity and Buddhism I focus on here are drawn from observations within the classroom as well as responses to interview questions. The teacher’s representation of herself, Christianity and Buddhism in these different contexts illustrate attitudes and beliefs about religious, cultural and racial identities that go ‘well beyond that of the individual and her beliefs or attitudes’ (Frankenburg 1993, 44) to the discourses available for teachers to ‘take-up’ in their teaching. That is, this teacher’s representations illuminate the discourses that circulate within religious education and the broader community that both constrain and make possible the ways in which the dominant religious tradition in the school and other religious traditions *can* or *might* be represented, *can* or *might* be shown hospitality.

I close by considering how this teacher’s representational practices suggest that regardless of what discursive choices she makes, regardless of her location to the ‘Host/s’ and her understanding of what it means to be ‘host’ to another tradition, and in spite of many of her representations remaining loyal to the logic of white European Christianity, she cannot escape the ‘difficulty in choosing’ that being simultaneously positioned as both ‘host’ and ‘agent of the Host/s’ demands. Indeed these two positions/locations must be ‘restlessly negotiated’ (Derrida 2001, xii).

³ Research for the study took place during 1998. It involved ethnographic fieldwork in four different religious education classes. Each class was at a different school. The amount of observational time spent in classrooms varied as follows: 14 weeks, 10 weeks, 10 weeks and 4 weeks. The time spent at each site was dependent on the length of time each teacher chose to teach a unit of work on Buddhism. The teacher referred to in this study undertook a 10 week unit of work.

⁴ For Derrida’s discussion of the difficulty in naming what happened in New York City on September 11, 2001, see his interview with Giovanna Borradori in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*.

Restless negotiations

‘Caroline’ was one of four teachers who took part in the study. She taught in a co-educational Year 12 class in a religiously affiliated school. The School was located in an area with a high migrant population where the average weekly income of individuals and households was amongst the lowest in the State. However, there were also a small number of households in the area with very high incomes. Unemployment rates in the local area at the time of the research were well above the State and National average.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 Census data, approximately forty percent of the people in the local area were born outside of Australia. About a quarter of all people living in the area came from South East Asia, East Asia and South Asia with the majority coming from South East Asia. This distribution was also evident in the school. Almost half of the households in the area spoke a language other than English and a large number of students in the school spoke English as a second, and sometimes third, language. A number of the students I interviewed spoke English as a second language. Like many other children of non-English speaking migrant backgrounds, this class was distinctive not only because of a ‘catalogue of cultural differences’ but because of the class position they came ‘to occupy in Australian capitalism’ (Rizvi 1991, 188).

Religion Education was a compulsory part of the curriculum across the school and across all year levels. The students in the study were taking part in a public curriculum as part of their SACE⁵. The curriculum statement required students to learn about two different religious traditions and the school had elected to undertake a study of Buddhism as one of those traditions because of ‘cultural relevance’ of the tradition to people in the area. A small number of students in the school were Buddhist.

I have chosen to represent Caroline’s negotiations because it seemed to me that she most clearly represented a teacher for whom the imperative to undertake negotiations between conflicting obligations was most immediately apparent. She also represented a teacher who remained committed to an openness to what was unforeseeable in her negotiations. While Caroline is but one teacher, the discussion of her negotiations highlights some of the complexities of what individual teachers bring to the ‘moment’ of teaching about (an)Other and the ‘difficulties in choosing’ they face.

Caroline was a highly experienced teacher who held a position of responsibility in the school in which she taught. She was a convert to the Christian variant of the school. Her identity as a ‘convert’ was highly significant to her identity as a Christian and her identity as a religious education teacher. It also had implications for how she understood her obligations as an agent of the school (one of the Hosts for which she was agent) and her obligations as a ‘host’ to Others. Caroline referred to her conversion during a number of different conversations with me, speaking about it in a way that positioned her as being in a state of ‘between-ness’, neither entirely ‘this’ nor ‘that’, both inside and outside the Christian tradition to which she now adheres.

When I first started doing a Grad. Dip. in RE you know, I think I’d been quite challenged by ideas that were different, because I’d actually, you know, converted from being [Christian variant] to being [a different Christian variant] and so I knew I wasn’t [the different Christian variant] like other people were in terms of being that since birth... Yeah! So like I knew that I didn’t even understand and even though I really valued the history and that was part of the thing that really fascinated me about [the Christian variant to which I now belong] was the whole history of it, and the richness of the history, because there’s so much difference in history.

⁵ South Australian Certificate of Education, a two year program of study.



As a convert, Caroline may be understood in terms of what Derrida (1991) calls the *metis* or ‘cultural half-breed’⁶. According to Derrida, the *metis* as a subject within culture is characterised equally ‘by a hybrid origin and by the myth of a single origin – by difference and by the discourse of a unitary nondifference’ (quoted in Spurr 1999, 196). Spurr (1999, 196-197) argues that when a cultural subject is cognisant of this ‘difference-within-themselves’, as Caroline was, they are able to negotiate border regions and other spaces, because they have abandoned notions of cultural or religious purity and are no longer threatened from the outside. Of course some converts attempt to erase their hybrid origins and seek only to assert a myth of a single origin. For those converts, difference remains outside themselves and, as such, all threats are also seen to come from without. However, in the case of Caroline she appeared to operate from the former standpoint. She recognised that her state of ‘between-ness’ existed because of her prior ‘outsider-ness’ and appeared to not only acknowledge her ‘between-ness’ but to assert it as a possible standpoint for students to take up as well. She suggested to the students: ‘Let’s get out of our religious background’.

As a convert Caroline’s position was always slightly unstable and undecidable. Indeed, it might be argued that it positioned her to negotiate the (im)possible position of being both ‘host’ and ‘agent of the Host/s’ in a creative way. As a convert Caroline was herself a ‘foreigner’ to the tradition she spoke for, was agent of. Her relationship to the ‘Host/s’ was not entirely seamless ‘like other people... in terms of being that since birth’, for she had ‘joined’ and had ‘been joined’ to the religious tradition of the school. By articulating a lack of ‘birthright’ (Derrida 2000, 21) Caroline expressed the seeming stability and naturalness of a connection between (and a union of) birth, culture, race, gender, sexuality, history, and religion, and called this connection (this union), into question by her own decision to convert. Her relationship with non-Christian religions reflected a very deep sense of a decentred self and an understanding of her own alterity (Ashcroft *et al* 1997) or hybridity (Bhabha 1990).

In terms of her teaching, Caroline utilised her undecidability to create a space ‘in-between’, or a ‘third space’ (Bhabha 1990) into which the Other might be invited or might find a ‘place’. This place was a space for the articulation of a form of hospitality that attempted to negotiate between *the* law of unconditional hospitality and the laws of conditional hospitality, and between her obligations as ‘host’ and as ‘agent of the Host/s’. In part, this was the result of the kinds of *investments/requirements* made *by/of* her as an *outsider/insider* on the *inside/outside*. That is, as one who was herself simultaneously ‘host’ and ‘guest’, and yet never fully either, she had to continuously negotiate a space for ‘outsider-ness’, ‘insider-ness’ and ‘between-ness’ (her own and that of the students in the class) when there was no such necessity for the other teachers who participated in this study to do so. For each of the other teachers were not converts to the Christian variant they represented in the classroom and nor were their classrooms as culturally diverse as the one in which Caroline taught. More recently Awad Ibrahim has discussed the ways being ‘an immigrant Black body that is assumed to be Muslim in a post-9/11 United States’ (2005, 149) has positioned him as ‘host’ and ‘foreigner’, as ‘foreigner host’ in the classroom context. For Ibrahim the classroom is always a place that opens up the possibility of hospitality. What becomes apparent from both Caroline’s and Ibrahim’s understanding of themselves as Other to the Hosts for whom they are agents is the ways in which that otherness encourages engagement with the modulations of the dominant culture’s and the student’s *own* otherness (Britzman 1997, 37).

Caroline did not see her location as a convert as a disadvantage. Rather, she expressed her conversion as advantageous to her practice as a religious education teacher. Caroline said she felt having a different religious origin had taught her to value difference.

⁶ Derrida describes himself as a *metis*. See Spurr (1999) for a brief discussion of this.

I reckon a lot of it came out of being a ... being challenged to value difference. Not just accept it, but actually value it. And there's a big difference.

Caroline distinguished between seeing and accepting difference and 'actually valu[ing] it'. She saw a distinction between 'acceptance' and 'value' with one's capacity to 'value' difference (that is, to give it positive worth), a more moral and just response. It is this valuing of difference that signals Caroline's striving towards an unconditional hospitality. It signals the depth of her commitment to negotiation, learning, exchange and the humility of an unconditional welcome.

Caroline's notion of difference was highly complex. Her relationship with non-Christian religions and her high regard for them appeared to be located somewhere between a fascination with the exotic or entirely Other, which was primarily evident in the language she used to describe her interest in Others and other-ness, and a resistance to objectification which was most evident in the ways in which she negotiated representational issues and her relationships with students. The form of hospitality shown to a reified, exotic Other can only ever be a circumscribed and formulaic hospitality that is little more than a performance of culturally determined laws. Indeed, there is no obligation to provide any form of hospitality beyond that which is required by a self-imposed form of social politeness. However, when one resists objectification of the Other, one opens oneself to unconditional hospitality. Caroline would often query the language students used in their responses to her questions as a means of challenging them to think carefully about the ways in which they engaged with the Other:

Caroline: What does this teach you about the value of meditation in Buddhism?

Student: He escapes!

Caroline: That's an interesting word. What is meant by it in Buddhist terms?

In this way she takes up her position as an agent of the tradition she is hosting and invites the student to enter into a relationship with Buddhism that moves beyond learning about 'the Other' to an openness to understanding the Other on their terms. Caroline described her approach to teaching religion in general and Buddhism in particular as being primarily concerned with difference and diversity:

The wonder of it all is that... the diversity thing, so... I try... I operate out of 'isn't this interesting 'cause it's different?' and so you can learn something because it's different, you know. You get something there about life or whatever because it's different... so... um... yeah. So I think I took to heart this... that thing was 'well let's start valuing each other by being different'.

For this school, an excursion to a Buddhist 'temple'⁷ came late in the program. Caroline felt students needed a considerable amount of information about Buddhism before they participated in an excursion. Part of the information provided to students prior to the visit had included work on mandalas. Caroline had shown the students a film about a group of Tibetan monks who spent a lengthy period of time constructing a mandala out of coloured sands. Once the mandala had been constructed, the monks destroyed it. The act of destruction was a

⁷ Quotation marks have been placed around 'temple' to signal the problematic nature of this term. The term implies a building used for the worship of a deity, or a building in which a deity resides, and is therefore inappropriate in the Buddhist context. These buildings are best described as centres of religious ritual and learning. However, as 'temple' remains the dominant English language term used by schools and Buddhist communities in Australia to name these centres I have used the term within the paper.

reminder of *anicca* (impermanence). The students had found the destruction of the mandala to be disturbing and had become quite fascinated by the production and use of mandalas as well as the notion of *anicca*. This fascination had spilled over into the excursion where the students had decided to ask the Chinese Buddhist person who spoke to them at the temple ('Susan') about the construction and use of mandalas.

During lessons, no distinction had been made between the beliefs and practices of the Tibetan Buddhists in the film and the beliefs and practices of Chinese Buddhists in Adelaide. Instead, Chinese Buddhists, like Tibetan Buddhists and Vietnamese Buddhists, were all conflated under the category Mahayana⁸. Caroline said that at first she (like the students) had expected Susan to know all about mandalas and had been quite surprised when Susan didn't appear to know what she was being asked:

... when we got over to the temple the kids couldn't... the... the... the lady couldn't... couldn't answer the questions... she... knew nothing, and they were so stunned when she knew nothing about a mandala... We... so we said it three or four different ways, with different inflections and pronunciations, and she still didn't... have a clue what we were talking about...

The attempts by Caroline and the students to say 'mandala... three or four different ways' signals something of the confidence and investment students and teachers often have in their own capacity to 'know' about Others. It suggests that part of the intention of the excursion was to affirm and confirm the students and Caroline as knowing subjects. According to Said (1995) and others (see for example hooks, 1992, 1994, 1995; Razack, 2001; Freire, 1985), it is always the subordinate or colonised Other who possesses characteristics or practices that can be studied and 'known', and it is those at the centre, or dominant groups who 'know'. Through their knowledge of the known object, the knowing subject confirms their authority, power and privilege. When Susan was unable to answer the question she not only called into question her own position as 'native informant' but also inadvertently destabilised the 'mainstream positionality' (hooks 1992, 24) of the students and most particularly Caroline, who, as the White religious education teacher, is positioned as an all-knowing subject (in spite of her own ruminations to the contrary). However, while Caroline was initially destabilised by the response she engaged in a self-reflexive analysis of what had occurred:

I found that quite fascinating and I was trying to... well, I was trying to make a... a connection in my head. I was trying to say 'well, I suppose it's like asking...' you know, it is like asking a Pentecostal what Mass is like, you know?... 'What do you do for Mass?' I suppose.

This analysis provided an explanation for why Susan didn't 'know' about the mandalas while also confirming the status of Caroline and the students as knowing subjects. However, Caroline's explanation also signals a recognition of her place as a 'visitor', a 'foreigner', to the temple, which is, a foreign space within the national space. It signals the ways in which host/guest relations must always involve negotiations and require an 'openness' to what is unforeseeable, or as Meidema and Biesta (2004, 24) have written, the 'unforeseeable incoming of the other'. It is about understanding that there is always 'remainder'. Teaching about (an)Other religious tradition must always involve 'the expectation of something

⁸ The categories 'Chinese Buddhists', 'Vietnamese Buddhists' and 'Tibetan Buddhists' are also heterogeneous but tend to function as homogenizing categories themselves. Buddhist scholars no longer separate different traditions of Buddhism into Mahayana and Theravada. Recent scholarship separates the different traditions into three Vinaya traditions: Theravada, Dharmaguptaka and Mulasarvastivada.

unrepresentable, running up against the unforeseeable'. As a teacher who was both 'host' and 'agent of the Host/s' Caroline attempted again and again to open students to that which could not be foreseen, could not be known and defied representation, even as she attempted to teach them to 'see', to 'know' and to represent. She returned to the students with her reflections on their shared misunderstanding and used the incident as a moment to recognise the tendency of those who occupy a position close to the centre to presume they 'know'. She also used the incident as a space in which to differentiate difference (their own and Others) in multiple ways.

Caroline's capacity for reflexivity was quite extraordinary. In an attempt to *explain* what happened in the classroom for herself, the students, and their understanding of Others, she resisted closure in her analyses of her own and other religious education teachers' practice, preferring instead to dialogue with difficulties and successes which arose. However, Caroline's personal engagement with the material she taught and her willingness to be reflexive in a way that entailed sharing her doubts and reflections with the students in the class made her vulnerable. By sharing doubts she broke with strict obligations placed upon many teachers in religious education classrooms to act as 'agents of the Host/s' who are generally called upon to assert an unproblematic and seamless 'vision' or representation of a coherent, united and unified universe in which White Christianity is central⁹. Caroline accepted and performed this vulnerability as a pedagogical and political technique which destabilized the privilege inherent in her own position as a White Christian teacher who embodies the right to speak and to name the 'real' within the White Australian national space. In so doing, she also destabilized the privilege of White Christianity. Caroline replaced a 'myth of a single origin' with a fluid and hybridised representation of Christianity that defied attempts by some of the students to construct it as an absolute and definitive identity. Caroline also attempted to construct fluid and hybridised representations of Buddhism but, as shown above, she found this more difficult.

Conclusion

All the teachers who participated in the original study engaged in representational practices that both enabled and limited the ways in which Buddhism could be understood. Each of the teachers engaged forms of essentialism at different times. However, teachers like Caroline who were cognisant of difference, or what Frankenburg (1993) calls 'race cognisant' were less likely to do so repeatedly. They were also more likely to *see* they were faced with representational choices in the classroom and that those choices carried with them the burden of addressing unequal power relations. They were also more likely to be those who entered into negotiations with the conflicting obligation being positioned as 'host' and 'agent of the Host/s' demanded.

On the other hand, when teachers engaged in essentialist discourses they were more likely to privilege their obligations as 'agent of the Host/s' over their obligations as 'host', more likely to engage in 'small acts of cunning' (Foucault 1991, 139) that subordinated Buddhism and Buddhists to White Christianity, and were less likely to see the possibility for choice or the violence embedded in representation.

This paper illustrates some of the possibilities available for teachers within religious schools if they come to understand their location as both 'agents of the Host/s' and as 'hosts'. These positions/locations must be understood as expressing 'two contradictory and equally justified imperatives' (Derrida 2001, xii). As 'agents of the Host/s' teachers are subject to 'laws of hospitality' (Derrida 2000) that are multiple, complex, culturally determined and

⁹ Something teachers are currently asked to do in their teaching of Australian History and global politics. To do otherwise is to risk censure from a White nation as hegemonic Host.

made normative through cultural practices. As 'host' to the wholly other they are not only subject to 'laws of hospitality' but also to *the* law of hospitality - that is, *the* law which is above the laws and obligates the 'host' to provide unconditional hospitality to a new arrival (Derrida 2000). These two positions/locations must be 'restlessly negotiated' (Derrida 2001, xii). When teachers develop an understanding that they are immersed within a network of power relations and that many of their discursive practices are anchored in colonial tropes that circulate throughout White Australian society as commonsensical statements of fact that are anything but hospitable, then they might be able to actively engage with those power relations and discursive practices to produce creative ways of representing difference. Power relations are both product and producer of discourse and yet teachers seldom see their place within various discourses and, at a structural level, are not provided with the tools to develop an understanding of the ways in which they are located within, produced by and reproduce, hegemonic discourses of difference and unequal power relations. As teachers within religious schools they are also positioned within changing but also persisting colonial discourses that both limit and enable the ways in which they can 'talk religion'. How a teacher of religions represents their own tradition and that of Others can reproduce, disturb or subvert hegemonic and colonial understandings of themselves and Others. This paper has been an attempt to think through the (im)possible task of representation in a way that might allow teachers to understand their location in a system that structures them as undecidable, always located in-between with conflicting obligations that, I would argue, are best served through dialogue and restless negotiations rather than fixed allegiance to dominant worldviews. Like the teacher above, all teachers of religious education must negotiate and re-negotiate their relationship to the 'foreigner' and the Host/s. Teachers must resist unreflected practices that lead to the subordination of Others.

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Author

Barbara Kameniar is a Lecturer in Curriculum Studies in the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. Email: b.kameniar@unimelb.edu.au

