

The dynamics of togetherness

Introduction

We cannot exist totally separate and isolated from others. We are fundamentally connected, and we experience our connectedness as togetherness. But what is togetherness? How should we understand our experience of togetherness? It is important to consider these questions because everything we know about ourselves and how we behave follows from how we answer them.

The purpose of this learning unit is to:

- introduce the structure and dynamics of togetherness
- introduce the cultural dynamics of togetherness.

In the first part of this learning unit, and in line with the first purpose outlined above, we are introduced to the dynamics of togetherness as the interconnectedness of three components, namely:

- We
- You and
- I.

These components and their interconnections constitute the structure of togetherness. Changes in the interconnections reveal the dynamics of togetherness. This structure and its dynamics are the foundation of psychological intervention.

Learning Outcomes

After working through this learning unit, you should be able to:

- define the concept togetherness and its interconnected components
- evaluate the cultural dynamics of togetherness
- appraise the concept togetherness in the context of psychological intervention
- apply ethical decisions and behaviour in various contexts
- assess the ontological value of I and from a decolonial perspective

Key concepts

In the previous learning unit, which serves as an introduction to the module (PYC1513), we highlighted the importance of understanding key concepts. The following key concepts are introduced in this learning unit: togetherness; generic terminology; ontology; [We], [You] and [I] in the context of togetherness; horizontal and

vertical interconnections; decoloniality; individualism; and collectivism.

The generic terminology of togetherness

The notion of togetherness

We know we experience togetherness when we feel connected to others. Although this seems like a plausible explanation of togetherness, it does not tell us exactly what togetherness is. It relates the experience of togetherness to a feeling of connectedness, which means it links togetherness to connectedness, and it describes togetherness as an experience and connectedness as a feeling, but it does not tell us exactly what this experience and feeling resemble.

The statement that we experience togetherness when we feel connected to others is a description of togetherness, but it does not tell us what togetherness looks like. It offers no indication of the structure of togetherness apart from it being some form of connectedness. This is a difficult issue because it is about the fundamental reality of togetherness. A fundamental reality is called an ontology. Thus, the difficulty we are faced with here is to formulate the ontological structure of togetherness.

[We], [You] and [I] as generic terms in the concept of togetherness

We cannot think about the ontological structure of togetherness without proper terminology. In other words, we must choose our words carefully and be precise when we talk about togetherness. It helps to think generically. Thus, when we consider the statement that a person experiences togetherness when they feel connected to another, we must consider what this statement looks like in its most basic form. A statement that is expressed in its most basic form, is a generic statement.

Basically, the statement above suggests that when you and I feel interconnected we experience togetherness. This is a generic form of the statement of togetherness and we, you and I, are generic terms of this statement. However, when we intend these terms to be generic, we must use a particular notation to make sure they can be identified as such. Therefore, we write [We], [You] and [I] instead of we, you and I when we use them as generic terms. Thus, the generic form of the statement that a person experiences togetherness when they feel connected to another is that [We] experience togetherness when [You] and [I] feel interconnected.

The usefulness of generic terminology

The generic statement that [We] experience togetherness when [You] and [I] feel interconnected offers generic formulations of experiences of togetherness in various contexts by replacing the contextually appropriate terms with the generic terms of [We],

[You] and [I]. For example, in a work environment a work team ([We]) experiences togetherness when the team members ([You] and [I]) feel interconnected. Or a community ([We]) experiences togetherness when the members of the community ([You] and [I]) feel interconnected. In other words, generic terminology allows one to understand a phenomenon (like togetherness) regardless of the various contexts in which it occurs.

Generic terminology also allows one to describe situations in which one phenomenon is fundamental to another in various contexts. For example, the experience of togetherness may be fundamental to the cohesion of society, or a community or a work team. One may need different terminologies to describe cohesion in these different contexts, but if togetherness is fundamental to cohesion one can use the generic terminology of togetherness as a fundamental description of cohesion regardless of the various contexts in which it occurs. In other words, not only does generic terminology allow one to transfer one's understanding from one context to another, it also allows one to translate one's understanding from one phenomenon to another.

To explore this more closely, consider the phenomenon of psychological intervention. Psychological interventions differ depending on the contexts in which they occur. However, we can always describe a psychological intervention as an interaction between a consultant and a client. For example, in the context of a medical setting the consultant may be a medical doctor and the client a patient, or in a work environment the consultant may be an industrial and organisational psychologist and the client can be a work team. In a traditional setting, the consultant may be a traditional healer and the client may be an individual or a community seeking help. Thus, we use consultant and client as generic terms and indicate them as [Consultant] and [Client].

However, psychological interventions are based on experiences of togetherness, and the basic terminology of togetherness is [We], [You] and [I]. To understand psychological intervention in terms of togetherness we translate the generic terms of [Consultant] and [Client] to the generic terms of [We], [You] and [I]. This is a process of connecting generic terms. To reflect the consultant's point of view we relate [Consultant] to [I] and [Client] to [You]. [We] is the consultant-client system, but we do not have to consider [We] in the current discussion. What we do have to consider though is the relationship between [Consultant] and [I] and the relationship between [Client] and [You]. Because togetherness is the fundamental reality of psychological intervention, we can consider [I] as the fundamental reality of [Consultant] and [You] as the fundamental reality of [Client]. A fundamental reality is called an ontology. Therefore [I] is the

The ontological structure of togetherness

ontological term for [Consultant], and [You] is the ontological term for [Client]. In other words, in psychological intervention the relationship between [I] and [Consultant] is the relationship between [I] as an ontological generic term and [Consultant] as a generic term. The same holds for the relationship between [You] and [Client].

If we understand the generic terms, [We], [You and [I], of togetherness as the ontological terms of psychological intervention, we understand a lot about intervention regardless of the different kinds of interventions one may come across and the various contexts in which they may occur.

The structure and dynamics of togetherness

The generic terms [We], [You] and [I] are the names of three components of togetherness, namely a *we* component, a *you* component and an *I* component. These components are abstract. They embody *we-ness*, *you-ness* and *I-ness*. They become concrete when we think of them as physical bodies, which we call *we*, *you* and *I*. However, when we consider an abstract concept such as togetherness, we cannot use concrete terms. Hence, we resort to abstract components and use generic terms to identify them.

Togetherness is structured ontologically as three interconnected components called [We], [You] and [I]. The interconnections between [We] and [I], and [We] and [You] are vertical. The interconnection between [I] and [You] is horizontal. The ontological structure of togetherness is shown in Figure 1.

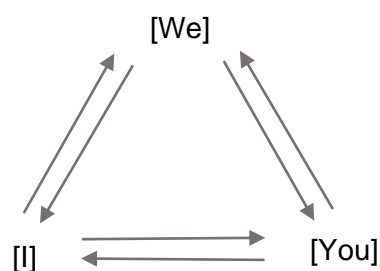


Figure 2.1: The ontological structure of togetherness

The diagram in figure 2.1 shows the three generic terms [We], [You] and [I] as well as arrows depicting the interconnections among them. The generic terms [We], [You] and [I] are the names of the three components that constitute the ontological

The ontological
dynamics of
togetherness

structure of togetherness. These components are connected to each other. For example, the arrow that points from [I] to [You] means [I] is connected to [You], and the arrow that points from [You] to [I] means [You] is connected to [I]. Together, the two connections form a unity called an interconnection. Interconnections are symmetrical or asymmetrical depending on whether the connections they consist of are supplementary or non-supplementary. Connections are supplementary when they work together to constitute an integrated and cohesive unity. For example, the connections between [I] and [You] are supplementary when both [I] and [You] present themselves and fully accommodate each other's presentations, creating an integrated and cohesive interconnection. Integrated and cohesive interconnections are symmetrical. Not presenting oneself or not accommodating the presentations offered by others means non-supplementary connections and consequently poorly integrated and low cohesive interconnections. These interconnections are asymmetrical.

We also distinguish between horizontal and vertical interconnections. An interconnection is horizontal when the interconnected components are at the same level, and vertical when the interconnected components are at different levels. For example, the interconnection between [I] and [You] is horizontal, whereas the interconnections between [We] and [I] and [We] and [You] are vertical.

The structure of togetherness depicted in figure 2.1 is a diagram showing what togetherness looks like. It shows togetherness as three interconnected components, called [We], [You] and [I]. However, a structural view is a static picture, like a still photo. It does not tell us how the components and interconnections in the image change. But in togetherness, neither the interconnections nor the components are rigid and unchanging. Any interaction that occurs between components changes their interconnection as well as the components themselves. For example, the interconnection between [I] and [You] changes every time an interaction occurs between them. Furthermore, being interconnected differently means both [I] and [You] are slightly different from what they were before. Changed interconnections mean changed components and changed components mean changed interconnections. The entire structure is dynamic. Everything in it changes.

This tells us something interesting about togetherness, namely that we can never describe and explain our togetherness in terms of a story that develops smoothly from when we first get together

until we finally part ways again because we can never predict how our togetherness would evolve. A story that runs smoothly from beginning to end is a linear story, but a story that changes in unexpected ways is nonlinear. Our togetherness is a nonlinear evolutionary process.

Self-assessment activity

Consider South African society in terms of togetherness and reflect on how the concept can be applied to us as a nation. Do you think we are together as a nation? Why/why not? What obstacles are there to togetherness and what can be done to promote togetherness in our country? Share your views on the discussion board and engage on these issues.

The ethics of togetherness

The ethics of togetherness require symmetrical interconnections

Ethics is a complex topic because part of it always escapes our attempt to understand it rationally, but this does not mean that we should give up on ethics. A togetherness that does not strive to be ethical is not worthwhile to pursue.

Togetherness is about interaction. It is about the act of presenting oneself and the act of accommodating the presentations of others. In other words, it is about the interconnection between [I] and [You] and in particular the symmetry of this interconnection. The connections between [I] and [You] should supplement each other. If the connections do not supplement each other, they do not constitute integrated and cohesive interconnections. Interconnections that are poorly integrated and incohesive may not be ethical, especially not if they are used as a norm and maintained over extended periods of time.

Symmetrical interconnections do not guarantee the ethics of togetherness

However, supplementary connections that constitute an integrated and cohesive interconnection are not necessarily ethical. In other words, the symmetry of the interconnection between [I] and [You] does not guarantee the ethics of the interconnection.

The only guarantee for ethical togetherness is the authenticity of [We]. [We] is authentic when it feels right, when it is congruent with who we are and what we want to be. This is where ethics slips beyond rational understanding. We can have a rational discussion about the symmetry of the interconnection between [I] and [You], but our understanding of the authenticity of [We] is a feeling that goes beyond rationality. We devise rational ethical rules to regulate the interconnection between [I] and [You], but these rules and regulations are always relative to the authenticity

of [We]. The ultimate test for ethical togetherness is whether our togetherness is congruent with what we see as authentic existence.

Togetherness and the culture of our existence

In the second part of this learning unit, we introduce three instances of the ontological dynamics of togetherness. Each instance reflects different interconnections among the components of We, You and I. These interconnections are characterised as ‘We are because I am’, ‘I am because we are’, and ‘I become you’. The dynamics of togetherness are associated with object, relational and trace ontologies and the values of individualism, collectivism and decoloniality.

The structure and dynamics of togetherness help us understand the culture of our existence

The ontological structure and dynamics of togetherness help us understand how we live our daily lives. It helps us to explore contemporary concerns such as colonisation, racism, sexism, heteronormativity, the information age society, and the 4th industrial revolution. These concerns are important to consider because they reflect our togetherness. They constitute the culture of our existence.

A person is a locus where different levels of culture intersect

We normally think of culture as the art, music, and literature of a society. However, culture is not only about society. It is also about the traditions and habits of communities, families, and individuals. A person is the locus where all these levels of culture intersect. A person’s styles of thinking, their ways of interacting, and their views of the world are functions of their cultural contexts, but also the source of culture.

We experience togetherness in different ways

A person’s style of thinking, ways of interacting and views of the world influence their togetherness with others. For some their culture suggests that ‘we are because I am’, whereas for others ‘I am because we are’. There are also those who embrace their togetherness as ‘I become you’. They are the ones who really know how to live their lives in the current era of 4th industrial decoloniality.

We are because I am

About object ontology and individualism

A period of socio-cultural revival known as the Renaissance began around the 15th century CE in Europe. The people of that time emerged from an era dominated by feudal systems, medieval thinking, and religious doctrine. Not surprisingly the Renaissance encouraged such values as humanism, individualism, and scepticism in reaction to the oppressions of former centuries. People looked at themselves as human beings, as individuals who

The ontological structure of togetherness when 'We are because I am'

had the right to question the world and to be sceptical about the social institutions that organised their existence. They rejected mysticism and put their trust in objective science. A new world view developed. The world was viewed as an objective reality. It was a world that consisted of objects, a world that included human beings as objects, and a world in which I was the most important object of all. The Western world adopted an object ontology with individualism as a core value.

Togetherness consists of three components, called [We], [You] and [I] and their interconnections. The statement "We are because I am" implies a particular kind of togetherness, which is characterised by a specific pattern of interconnections. This is shown in figure 2.2.

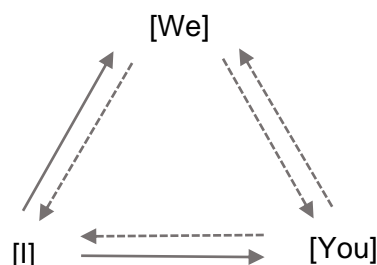


Figure 2.2: The ontological structure of togetherness when 'We are because I am'

Given an object ontology [We], [You] and [I] are viewed as objects that exist in their own right. But subscribing to the value of individualism means the [I] component is considered to be more prominent than the [We] and [You] components. Therefore, [I] has dominant connections with [We] and [You] (indicated by solid arrows), whereas the connections from [We] to [I] and from [You] to [I] are subordinate connections (indicated by dashed arrows). Thus, the connections between [I] and [We] are not supplementary and neither are those between [I] and [You]. Non-supplementary connections constitute interconnections that are poorly integrated and have low cohesion. Such interconnections are asymmetrical. However, unlike the asymmetrical interconnections between [I] and [We] and [I] and [You] the interconnection between [We] and [You] is symmetrical. It consists of two supplementary, yet subordinate, connections that work together to form an integrated and cohesive interconnection. The connections are subordinate due to both [We] and [You] being considered less important than [I], and they are supplementary because neither [I] nor [You] is considered more important than the other.

The togetherness of
an [Individualist]

We can use this ontological structure to describe the actions of the generic [Individualist] in creating and maintaining togetherness. The generic [Individualist] can be a person who subscribes to individualism, or it can be a group of people, or an organisation, a society or a nation that is deeply invested in individualism. Regardless of the nature of the [Individualist] (e.g., person, group or society), there are generic ways in which the [Individualist] interacts to create and maintain togetherness. The [Individualist] [I] presents themselves but is not willing to fully accommodate what others [You] have to offer. Similarly, the [Individualist] dominates the idea of who [We] are but is less likely to subscribe to who [We] are. Finally, the [Individualist] imagines the interconnection between [We] and [You] but is not interested in exploring it for real.

The person as an
individualist

We can express the general description of the actions of the generic [Individualist] at a personal level. To do so we put ourselves in the position of [I], consider others in the position of [You] and define [We] as the combination of [I] and [You]. Then we see that in an object individualist ontology I consider myself largely as the central character. Everything is viewed and done from my perspective. I dictate what it means for us to be together. In our togetherness, I maintain an asymmetrical relationship with you which means I present myself and my ideas to you, but I am less willing to learn about you and your ideas. I do not totally ignore you as a person in your own right, but I am only prepared to accept what you present as far as it can be accommodated within my own views. I also maintain an asymmetric relationship with the idea of us, dictating who we are but only willing to commit to a joint vision of us in so far as this vision fits my own vision of us. I can imagine how you relate to who we are, but I do not care to explore the interconnection between yourself and our joint identity.

The consultant as an
individualist

To consider togetherness in the context of psychological intervention, we place the consultant in the position of I and the client in the position of you. Then we see that in an object individualist ontology the consultant considers themselves largely as the central character. Everything is viewed and done from the consultant's perspective. The consultant dictates what it means for the consultant and the client to be together. In their togetherness, the consultant maintains an asymmetrical relationship with the client, which means the consultant presents themselves and their ideas to the client but is less willing to learn about the client and the client's ideas. The consultant does not totally ignore the client as a person in their own right but the consultant is only prepared to accept what the client presents as far as it can be accommodated within the consultant's own views. The consultant also maintains

	<p>an asymmetric relationship with the consultant-client union, dictating what the consultant-client union is but only willing to commit to a consultant-client union in so far as the union fits the consultant's own idea of what the union is. The consultant can imagine how the client relates to the consultant-client union but does not care to explore what this relationship is really like.</p>
We need a balanced approach to individualism	<p>Keep in mind that our descriptions of togetherness based on object ontology and a value of individualism are stereotypical portrayals of the impact of individualism on togetherness. They portray the [Individualist] as single-mindedly individualistic. However, this is not necessarily the case. We have moments in which we must act as individualists, and moments in which we don't. It is only when we overcommit to individualism and maintain our individualistic stances for prolonged periods of time that we become steeped in the philosophy that We are because I am. This happens when an individualistic stance is unduly endorsed by our personal and societal culture.</p>
Self-assessment activity	<p>What are the implications of the concept of Ubuntu have for psychological intervention in South Africa? Do you think a <i>We are because I am</i> orientation to psychological intervention is appropriate for a country such as South Africa? Why/Why not? Reflect on these questions and post your views on the discussion forum.</p> <p><i>I am because we are</i></p>
About relational ontology and collectivism	<p>Modern technological, economic, and socio-political systems owe much of their progress to object ontology. However, several developments in these fields in the 20th century brought awareness of a different kind of ontological perspective, namely relational ontology. Relational ontology complements object ontology by focussing on the interconnection between components rather than the components themselves. Relational ontology is regularly associated with traditional societies in which the group is considered more important than the individual and in which the value of collectivism outweighs the value of individualism. In threatening and demanding environments, it is easier to survive as a group than as an individual. However, it is not only environments that are physically threatening and demanding that prompt people to pull together to overcome difficulties. Environments can also be threatening and demanding in socio-economic and socio-political milieus. Therefore, the term traditional society refers to any society or social group that encounters demands that threaten their historical or current physical, socio-economic, or socio-political traditions. Relational ontology has philosophical roots in African, Eastern as well as Western cultures. It is also gaining traction in natural science such as physics that for many centuries used to rely</p>

The ontological structure of togetherness when 'I am because we are'

mainly on object ontology. Therefore, it is important to examine how relational ontology affects our understanding of togetherness, especially in light of the core value of collectivism.

We have a natural tendency to think of objects first before considering how they relate to each other. It is difficult for us to think of an interrelationship from which objects emerge. For example, when asked to think about the relationship between yourself and somebody else you tend to think of yourself and the other person before considering the relationship between the two of you. It is more difficult to think of the relationship first and to image the two of you emerging from this relationship. Yet this is the approach we must take when exploring relational ontology.

In object ontology, objects are considered primary to interconnections, but in relational ontology interconnections are fundamental to objects. The [We] component articulates this distinction. In object ontology [I] and [You] are combined to constitute [We]. In relational ontology, [We] is the interconnection from which [I] and [You] emerge. This is depicted in figure 2.3.

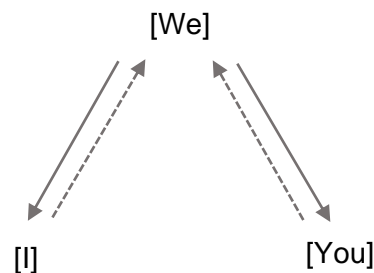


Figure2.3: The ontological structure of togetherness when 'I am because we are'

In relational ontology, the [We] component is an interconnection. If one acknowledges the value of collectivism in relational ontology, [We] is a collective interconnection. A collective interconnection is a single, uniform interconnection from which two or more components emerge. Thus, [We] is a single, uniform interconnection from which the [I] and [You] components emanate. Each emerging object has a unique interconnection within the collective interconnection. Therefore, the interconnection between [We] and [I] is not the same as the interconnection between [We] and [You]. Because in relational ontology the [We] component is primary to the [I] and [You] components, [We] has dominant connections with [I] and [You] (indicated by solid arrows), whereas the connections from [I] to [We] and from [You] to [We] are subordinate connections (indicated by dashed arrows). The connections between [We] and [I] are not supplementary and neither are those between [We] and [You], which means both [I] and [You] emerge from asymmetrical

The togetherness of
a [Collectivist]

interconnections. Note that in relational ontology there is no direct interconnection between [I] and [You] because [I] and [You] do not exist before the interconnection. They emerge from the interconnection.

We can use this ontological structure to describe the actions of the generic [Collectivist] in creating and maintaining togetherness. The generic [Collectivist] can be an individual who subscribes to collectivism, or it can be a group of people, or an organisation, a society or a nation that is deeply invested in collectivism. Regardless of the nature of the [Collectivist] (e.g., person, group or society) there are generic ways in which the [Collectivist] interacts to create and maintain togetherness. The [Collectivist] emerges from the collective interconnection [We]. Although the [Collectivist] presents themselves as a particular entity [I] the presentation is always subordinate to the dominant collective interconnection. As an entity, the [Collectivist] is determined by the collective interconnection rather than being an entity in its own right. The [Collectivist] does not present themselves directly to other entities [You] and does not directly accommodate what other entities have to offer, but instead imagines another entity [You] as another emergent from the collective interconnection [We]. As such, [You] presents itself as a particular entity but the presentation is subordinate to the dominant collective interconnection. The imagined entity [You] is determined by the collective interconnection rather than being an entity in its own right. The interaction between the [Collectivist] and the imagined entity [You] is not direct. It is mediated by the collective interconnection [We].

The person as a
collectivist

We can express the general description of the actions of the generic [Collectivist] at a personal level. To do so we put ourselves in the position of [I], consider others in the position of [You] and define [We] as the relationship between us. Then we see that in a relational collectivist ontology I define myself largely in terms of the relationship between you and me. Although I do not deny that I am a person in my own right, I consider this to be less important and the relationship to be more prominent in determining who and what I am. I have a similar perspective of you. In my view, you also consider yourself to be determined by the relationship rather than considering yourself to be a person in your own right. I do not obtain togetherness by presenting myself to you and by accommodating what you present of yourself. Our togetherness is mediated by the relationship that we both draw on to define ourselves. Both of us contribute to this relationship but our contributions are subordinate to what we obtain from the relationship. You are what I perceive you to be (how I imagine you) based on how I relate to the relationship between us, and similarly I am what you imagine me to be based on how you relate

The consultant as a
collectivist

to the relationship between us.

To consider togetherness in the context of psychological intervention, we place the consultant in the position of I and the client in the position of you. Then we see that in a relational collectivist ontology the consultant defines themselves largely in terms of the professional relationship between the client and themselves. Although the consultant does not deny that they are a person in their own right, they consider this to be less important and the professional relationship to be more prominent in determining who and what they are as a consultant. The consultant sees the client in the same way. In the consultant's view, the client also considers themselves to be determined by the professional relationship rather than considering themselves to be a person in their own right. The consultant does not obtain togetherness by presenting themselves to the client and by accommodating what the client presents of themselves. The togetherness of the consultant and the client is mediated by the professional relationship that they both draw on to define themselves. Both of them contribute to the professional relationship but their contributions are subordinate to what they obtain from the professional relationship. The client is what the consultant perceives the client to be (how the consultant imagines the client) based on how the consultant relates to the professional relationship between them, and similarly the consultant is what the client imagines the consultant to be based on how the client relates to the professional relationship between them.

We need a balanced
approach to
collectivism

Keep in mind that our descriptions of togetherness based on relational ontology and the value of collectivism are stereotypical portrayals of the impact of collectivism on togetherness. They portray the [Collectivist] as single-mindedly collectivistic. However, this is not necessarily the case. We have moments in which we must act as collectivists, and moments in which we don't. It is only when we overcommit to collectivism and maintain our collectivist stances for prolonged periods of time that we become steeped in the philosophy that I am because we are. This happens when a collectivist stance is unduly endorsed in our personal and societal culture.

Self-assessment
activity

Share your general view on the *I am because we are* psychological intervention on the discussion forum. What, in your view, are the limits of this orientation?

I become you

The second half of the 20th century is characterised by intellectual

and political movements of decolonisation. It was as if people from different spheres of society and from different societies came together in a major effort to undo the atrocities of World War II, as if they wanted to review and reset the pre-war world that permitted and facilitated this war. This post-war movement was not the beginning of political decolonisation (in the Americas decolonisation started already in the late 18th century) but it was a movement much broader and more fundamental than a struggle for political independence. It extended the notions of socio-political and economic colonisation to contexts supporting discrimination in terms of race, sex and gender, and it deepened our understanding of these matters by offering philosophical and theoretical considerations of people's real-life encounters with phenomena like colonialism, racism, sexism, genderism and heteronormativity. It became clear that all of these encounters share a particular phenomenon, namely that they are enabled, produced and perpetuated by power differentials. For example, colonialism is enabled, produced and perpetuated by the difference in powerfulness between the coloniser and the colonised, and racism is enabled, produced and perpetuated by differences in socio-economic power. But the most significant insight of all was that knowledge itself is enabled, produced and perpetuated by power differentials. We came to realise that what we know and how we know can be explored in terms of the power differentials in the political, socio-economic, and psychological spheres of our lives.

The realisation that knowledge is grounded in power differentials and not in absolute truth has a major impact on how we are together and how we understand our togetherness. The notion that we are because I am, clearly contains a power differential between 'we' and 'I'. In this statement 'We' and 'I' are not equally powerful. 'I' overpowers 'we', which allows the statement to express a particular truth, namely that we are because I am. The notion that I am because we are, contains a similar process. In this case, 'we' overpowers 'I' and the statement expresses the truth that I am because we are. These statements are opposites. We end up with two opposing truths. To embrace a particular truth, we have to select one of these statements and ignore the other. For example, we can express the truth of our togetherness as we are because I am and submit to an object ontology, placing a high value on individualism, or we can express the truth of our togetherness as I am because we are and accept a relational ontology with a high value on collectivism. However, selecting a particular truth and ignoring another, means we colonise the truth of togetherness as the truth we selected. This means we are instrumental in enabling, producing and perpetuating a particular truth of togetherness. We are colonisers of the truth.

The ontological structure of togetherness when 'I become you'

Is there a way out, or are we doomed to be colonisers of the truth? There is a way out, but it requires a different kind of ontology and a different value. If we want to avoid being perpetual colonisers of the truth, we must submit to trace ontology and we have to value decoloniality.

It is not as if we have a choice. Our world is changing fast and furiously, outdating our traditional ways of thinking. We are entering a 4th industrial revolution by creating a cyber-physical world in which people and machines are obtaining new capabilities leading to new technologies not only in the world surrounding us, but also embedded in our bodies. It means new ways of doing things, but more importantly it means new ways of perceiving ourselves and the world in which we find ourselves. We see ourselves reflected in machines that can think and we see our bodies becoming more machinelike as we increasingly encounter and accept sophisticated prostheses and implants. We are reflected in the physical world, and we see the physical world reflected in us, and without us really being aware of it, the notion of reflection is becoming the basic reality of how we exist in this world and how we relate to others.

We normally think of reflection as an image in the mirror, but when we consider reflection carefully, we see an interesting dynamic. Reflection is about continuation as well as differentiation. When somebody looks in the mirror, they see a reflection of themselves. The person who looks in the mirror continues to exist in the mirror image. Using the generic terminology of the ontology of togetherness, we can say [I] becomes [I] in the mirror image. However, the image is not an exact copy of the person in front of the mirror. The continuation is also a differentiation. To begin with, there is the obvious fact that the image looks back at the person in front of the mirror. If it was an exact copy the image would have looked in the same direction as the person in front of the mirror, and the person would have seen the backside of themselves. There is also the more intricate reality of the person in front of the mirror viewing the image from a personal perspective (as if looking from 'inside' themselves) obtaining an object perspective, an outside view of themselves. On both accounts, reflection is a differentiation. The [I] in the mirror differs from the [I] in front of the mirror. Therefore [I] becomes [You] in the mirror image. In other words, [You] is [I] continued but different from itself. This is the essence of trace ontology.

The rather complicated structure and dynamics of the trace ontology of togetherness is summarised in the diagram presented in figure 2.4.

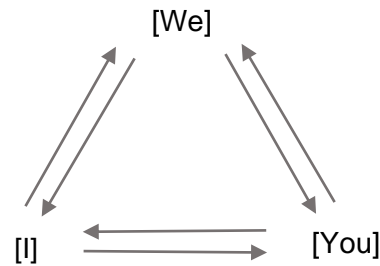


Figure 2.4: The ontological structure of togetherness when ‘I become you’

The diagram in figure 2.4 shows three interconnections, namely the interconnections between [I] and [You], [We] and [I] and [You]. There are no subordinate connections in these interconnections. All connections are equally dominant, and they are supplementary, which means the interconnections are symmetrical. However, this also means that the components [I], [You] and [We] are complex. Firstly, they are components that interconnect, but they are also components that emerge from their interconnections. In other words, each of the components have two states, a state of being and a state of emerging. Secondly, [I] and [You] are entangled due to the symmetry of the interconnection between them. This simply means that the states of these components cannot be considered independently from one another. They are entangled. Thirdly, the superposition of these states is contained in [We]. A superposition of states means all possible combinations of the states involved are contained at once. There are four possible combinations of the states of [I] and [You], namely [I] in a state of being combined with [You] in a state of being, [I] in a state of emerging combined with [You] in a state of emerging, [I] in a state of being combined with [You] in a state of emerging, and finally [I] in a state of emerging combined with [You] in a state of being. Superposition means that [We] contains these four interconnections between [I] and [You] all at once.

The togetherness of a [Decolonialist]

We can use this ontological structure to describe the actions of the generic [Decolonialist] in creating and maintaining togetherness. The generic [Decolonialist] can be an individual who subscribes to decoloniality, or it can be a group of people, or an organisation, a society or a nation that is steeply invested in decoloniality. Regardless of the nature of the [Decolonialist] (e.g., person, group or society) there are generic ways in which the [Decolonialist] interacts to create and maintain togetherness.

The [Decolonialist] is a complex entity. It is an entity [I] that exists as a superposition of two states. It is simultaneously in a state of being and in a state of emerging. Its interaction with others is about disentanglement. It is about the disentanglement of the superposition of its own states and the disentanglement of the

superposition of states it shares with others. Disentangling the superposition of its own states means the [Decolonialist] collapses the superposition of its states into a particular state. For example, the [Decolonialist] may collapse the superposition of its states of being and emerging into the state of being. This means the [Decolonialist] takes the position that it is an existing [I] and not an emerging [I]. However, the collapse of the superposition of the [Decolonialist]'s states causes the collapse of the superpositions of the combinations of states in [We]. The superposition of the four combinations of states collapses into a superposition of two combinations, namely [I] in a state of being combined with [You] in a state of being, and [I] in a state of being combined with [You] in a state of emerging. Therefore, when the [Decolonialist] takes up a particular position the relationship, [We], between [I] and [You], changes. In other words, the togetherness of [I] and [You] changes. However, the [Decolonialist]'s position does not force [You] into a particular state. [You] remains in a superposition of existing and emerging. We come to the same conclusion when we examine what happens when the [Decolonialist] takes the position of emerging entity as opposed to existing entity. The bottom line is that the [Decolonialist] takes up different positions in their interactions with others, but in doing so they do not force others to take up a particular position.

The person as a decolonialist

This is a general description of the actions of the generic [Decolonialist]. To see what this means at a personal level, we have to put ourselves in the position of [I], consider others in the position of [You] and define [We] as the relationship between us. Then we see that in a decolonial trace ontology I exist as a person in my own right, which means I can assert myself in my relationships with others. But I also exist as somebody who emerges from my relationships with others. The positions I adopt impact my togetherness with others, but I never use my position to force others into adopting a particular position.

The consultant as a decolonialist

In the context of psychological intervention, the consultant takes the position of I and the client the position of you. Then we see that in decolonial trace ontology the consultant positions themselves as an autonomous entity but at the same time as somebody who is defined by the relationship with the client. As such, the consultant asserts themselves in the intervention but also allows themselves to be guided in the interaction with the client. The consultant uses these positions to manage their togetherness with the client but never uses these positions to force the client to adopt a particular position.

We need a to learn how to embrace decolonialism

Keep in mind that our descriptions of togetherness based on trace ontology and the value of decoloniality are idealistic portrayals of the impact of decoloniality on togetherness. They portray the

interactions of the [Decolonialist] as if decoloniality has already saturated the ways we view ourselves and the world we live in. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Although we sometimes have to be individualists and collectivists, we still tend to cling too tightly to the philosophies that We are because I am, and that I am because we are. We still struggle to find the balance between acting as an individualist and acting as a collectivist. We are still too deeply invested in colonising the truth in the name of these philosophies. We are still too eager to colonise others by forcing them to adopt our own positions. We still do not understand that true togetherness means not to force my position on others. We still do not understand that togetherness means that I become you.

**Self-assessment
activity**

Assess the ontological value of 'I' and 'We' from a decolonial perspective. Please provide examples to support your answer.

Disclaimer: The material in this unit was adapted from learning material developed by Prof Vasi van Deventer.