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At the Intersection of Cosmopolitan Elitism and Oppression: A postcolonial analysis of transnational education systems

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Cosmopolitan Elitism and Oppression
a postcolonial analysis of transnational education systems

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Transnational education systems, globalisation, design education, postcolonial discourse, systemic design.

At the Intersection of Elitism and Oppression

Fig 1
Graphics posted on
storage shelves in
Graphics Studio 1,
Academy of Design,
March 2019.

At the heart of cosmopolitanism is a notion of world citizenship.

Go, 2013, p. 217

What is TNE?

TNE is an educational system where students live in a country different from their degree-awarding institutes. Higher education services, not students, cross national borders, creating a global flow of knowledge commodified for those who can afford it.

Fig 2

A view of the Colombo Innovation Tower from the entrance to AOD, Colombo, March 2019.

AOD x Northumbria

Even though we are independent, there is always the structure of things that were introduced by the British. We still go about with those structures; our parliamentary systems and the general systems in the country look up to it… Where would we be, right?

Senuri, AOD alumni focus group, Colombo, 2019.

Transnational Design Education

Fig 3
The contextual
Landscape of
Transnational Design
Education.

Globalisation

Design Education

Internationalisation

Transnational Education

**Transnational
Design Education**
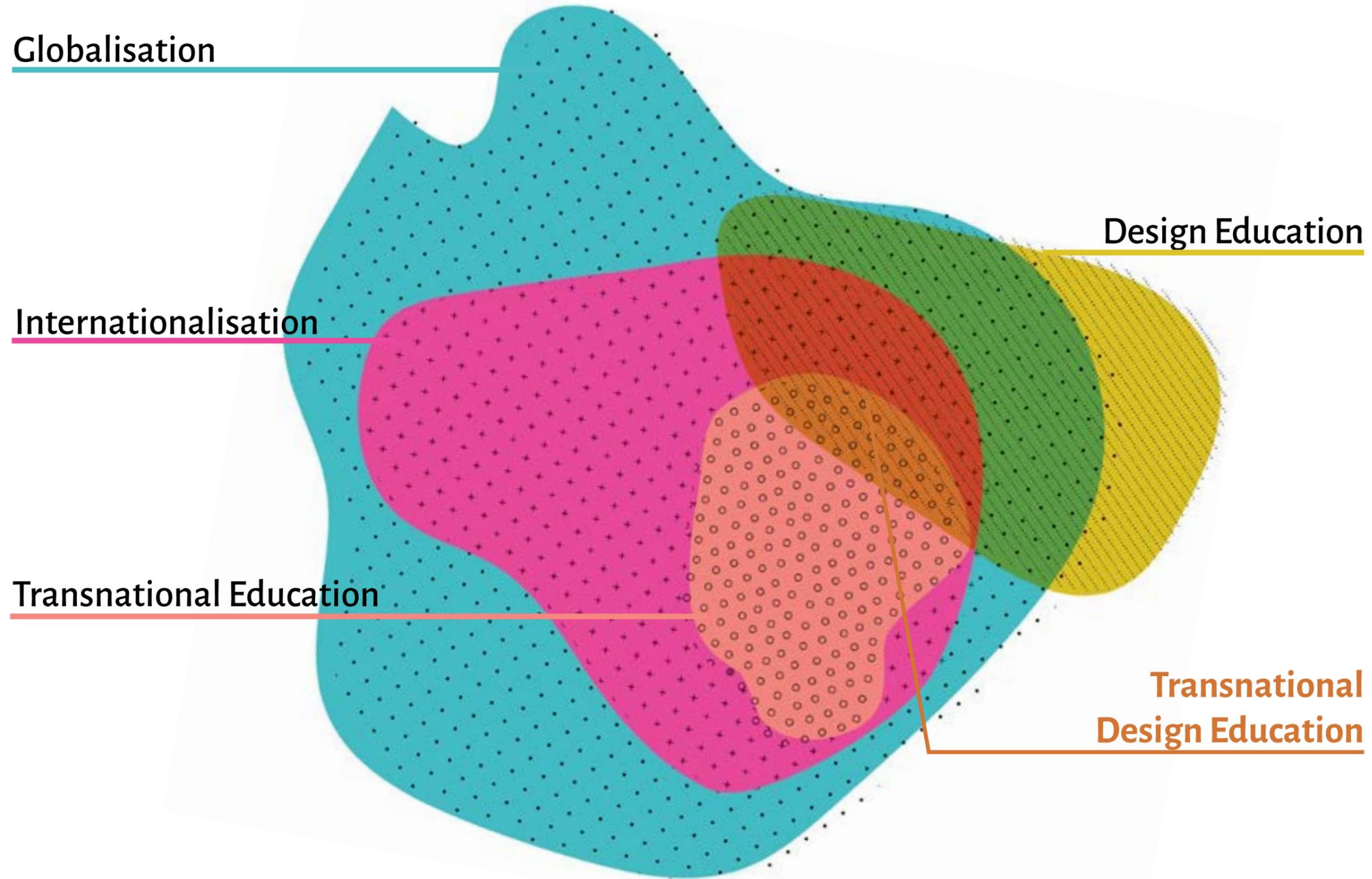
Postcolonial Partnerships

Postcolonialism is "a general condition or shift in the cultural, political, and economic arrangements that arise from the experiences of European colonialism in both formerly colonised and colonising countries" (Tikly, 1999, p.605).

Neo-colonialism is the term used to describe the new form of colonialism experienced in former colonies by their former colonisers or new superpowers. For instance, international monetary bodies such as the World Trade Organisation imposing their neoliberal ideals on nation- states (Ashcroft et al., 1998). This type of indirect control or imperialism experienced in former colonies is "more insidious and more difficult to detect and resist than older overt colonialism" (ibid., p. 163).

My dad was really against the whole design thing at first. So, the whole point of persuading him was like telling him that this degree comes from England and it is recognised (globally).

Janani, alumni focus group, Colombo, 2019

Franchising Design Education

The British Council defines a franchise programme as one where—

A **sending higher education institute** (HEI) authorises a **host HEI** to deliver its (sending HEI) programme, with **no curricular input by the host institution**. The qualification is awarded, and **quality assured by the sending institution**. The host HEI has primary responsibility for delivery of the programme, but the sending HEI may assist with delivery of the programme by providing flying teaching faculty. Recruitment of students and provision of facilities (library, classrooms, IT) is provided by the host HEI. Franchise programmes are typically 3+0 or 4+0 with all study taking place in the host country.

British Council and McNamara Economic Research, 2013, p. 15

Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism

Fig 4
AOD Design
Foundation student
prototypes of a
Passport to Design
Practice, February
2019.
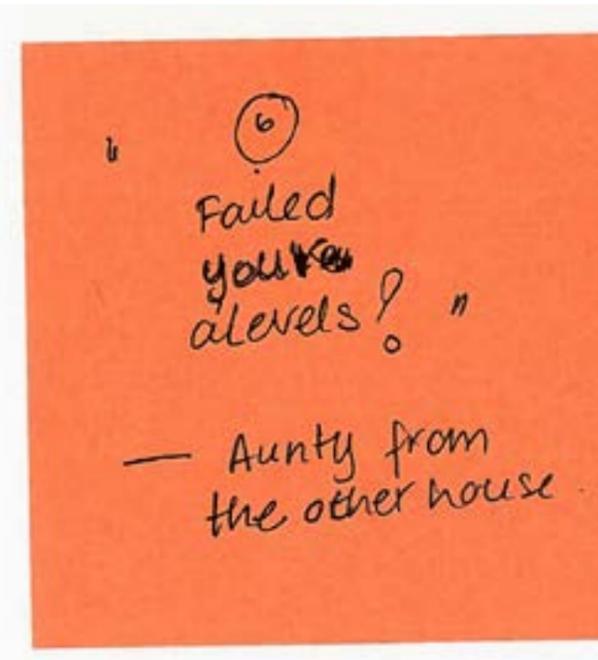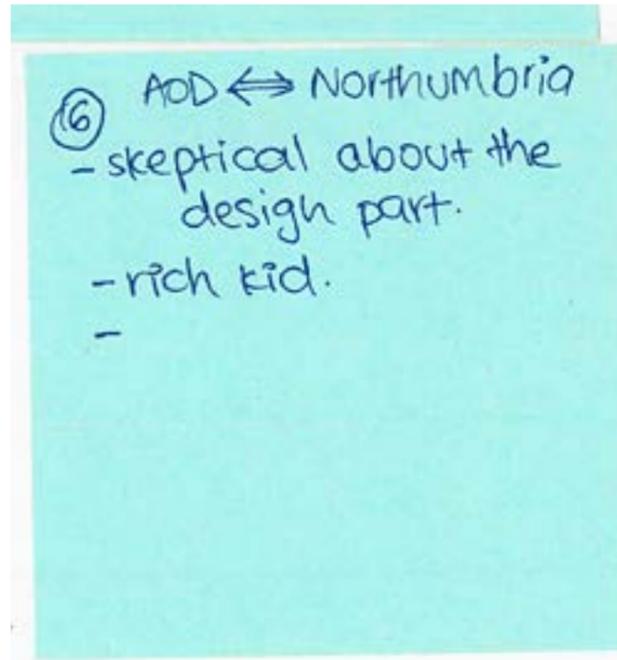
Fig 5
Workshop notes by
third year graphic
design students in
Colombo on the local
perception of AOD
and design education,
February 2019.

One thing you might have heard from anyone who is Sri Lankan, when it comes to British design education, because of being colonised people see it as being something superior… a British degree is the best thing you can afford for your child. When it comes to design education, culturally, we have a lot of interaction with arts and crafts and design, but there was never a formal introduction to the subject. For example, it's not part of the secondary education curriculum. So, when it comes to design education, they (the parents) buy into the superior partner that AOD is always selling.

Amanda, interview with academic staff, Colombo, 2019.

Oppressive Systems of Design Education

I think in shops where they have photocopying and printing, they have Graphic Design in a bold font right there, so people assume that is what graphic designers do; work at a small shop behind a computer.

AOD student workshop, Colombo, 2019

Design, in particular, exports very well, we have a high reputation about what UK design is. But we also have a high reputation about what UK design education is. So, we actually have a twin, bi-folded approach. People recognise that we have high-quality design, and then we also have high-quality design education. The two are hand in glove and work very well .

Toby, interview with Northumbria University Senior Management, Newcastle, 2019

We have to make sure that this degree will be of value to the local market. If this (British connection) is the only network that AOD has and they do not expand their local networks, they will not be able to give students more options to find jobs.

Chaturi, interview with AOD alumni, Colombo, 2019

Frictions Arising In the Margins of TNE Systems

In terms of the host institute not having curricular input, I think that's wrong. Most of the conversations I've had with AOD and other institutes is all about adapting what we've given them to fit their market. We're just used as sounding boards and getting the sign off formally for adapting what we've given them. So, it's got to be flexible; otherwise, it's never going to work. I honestly don't think that we can write a course and give it to somebody in another country without having in-depth knowledge of working there. I couldn't do that; I'd have to have input from the academic team working there.

George, interview with Northumbria University academic staff, Newcastle, 2019

How am I adapting? What are the parameters? How much of the brief can I change? Those things are not clear. It's a shot in the dark when I send material to Newcastle wondering if they will change things. But they never suggest change because we don't get feedback from them. They just say– go ahead with it.

Chaturi, interview with AOD academic staff, Colombo, 2019

The role of Agency, Ambivalence, and Translation in Systemic Design

Fig 6
Graphics Studio 1, AOD,
2019 (top).
Design Foundation
Studio, Northumbria
University, 2019
(bottom).

So, what you end up with is somebody with a programme, I guess this is what happened last time, someone comes out to Sri Lanka, and they're normally an executive member, or they have some kind of 'international' responsibility. They come out with the programme that we have given them, and we give them a bit of an overview, and they come out and say– what do you think? Do you think that's something you can do, or we can sell you? And then somebody else who is not a lecturer on the other side says yes, we'll do that. And then there are a lot of modifications which are done throughout that experience.

So, it's very different from what could happen in an ideal world, isn't it?

George, interview with Northumbria University academic staff, Newcastle, 2019

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