An increasing number of educational policies, academic studies, and university courses today propagate ‘interculturality’ as a method for approaching ‘the Other’ and reconciling universal values and cultural specificities. Based on a thorough discussion of Europe’s colonial past and the hierarchies of knowledge that colonialism established, Impossible Interculturality? interrogates the definitions of intercultural knowledge put forth by EU policy discourse, academic textbooks on interculturality, and students who have completed a university course on the subject. Taking a decolonial approach that makes its central concern the ways in which differences are formed and sustained through references to cultural identities, Robert Aman shows that interculturality, as defined in these texts, runs the risk of affirming a singular European outlook on the world, and of elevating this outlook into a universal law. Contrary to its self-proclaimed goal of learning from the Other, interculturality may in fact contribute to the repression of the Other by silencing those who are already muted.

Impossible Interculturality? suggests an alternative definition of interculturality, which is not framed in terms of cultural differences but in terms of colonial difference. This argument is substantiated by an analysis of the Latin American concept of interculturalidad, which derives from the struggles for public and political recognition among indigenous social movements in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru. By bringing interculturalidad into the picture, with its roots in the particular and with strong reverberations of the historical experience of colonialism, this study explores the possibility of decentring the discourse of interculturality and its Eurocentric outlook. In this way, Impossible Interculturality? argues that an emancipation from colonial legacies requires that we start seeing interculturality as inter-epistemic rather than simply inter-cultural.

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