Buddhism as a resource for reconciliation pedagogies
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In the Symposium: With and against critical pedagogy: knowledge, power and the 'Buddhist imaginary'

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ABSTRACT

In ‘unsettling times’, reconciliation processes have the potential to strengthen the fragile network of relationships that holds Australian society together. Reconciliation is understood here to be a psycho-social and pedagogical intervention that aims to heal the effects of traumatic events that produce guilt, anxiety, resentment and injustice that persist and distort individual and national well-being. Unfortunately, neither the pedagogical potential of reconciliation processes has yet to be adequately elaborated, nor have we really begun to draw on ‘reconciliation’ as a resource for developing pedagogical approaches. Such an examination needs to elucidate habits of mind that foster reconciliation, a vocabulary for reconciliation, an understanding of the dynamics of reconciling practices, and a map of the socio-cultural geography of reconciliation spaces. In this paper I will be proposing that Buddhism offers a range of conceptual resources and practices that might be useful in the development of reconciliation pedagogies. The paper will especially focus on socially-engaged Buddhism, understood as a new social movement evolving out of the translation of Buddhism into the ‘West’ under the conditions of globalisation.

Alternatives to revenge in unsettling times?

‘Unsettling times’

We are living in ‘unsettling times’– times in which economic, political and cultural factors are aggregating in new ways as cause and consequence of major shifts in global realities and sensibilities. The post-industrial nation state is now faced with ‘ungovernability’ pressures from both within and outside its borders. Inside, there are pressures to heal the effects of colonisation with indigenous/First Nations peoples; to deal with the effects of living according to the conditions of a globalising post-industrial economy; and to recognise the social, cultural and religious diversities that constitute complex multicultural societies. The nation-state’s recognition of ethnic, racial and religious difference, however, seems to have stalled in recent years and mistrust of it intensified.

Economically, under conditions of globalisation, the nation-state struggles with the aspirations of its citizens for the ‘good life’ in conjunction with the emergence of the ‘new poor’ living in the margins of every large city. Simultaneously, economic globalisation and ‘western’ models of development continue to exacerbate the contrast between first world affluence and third world poverty. New information and communication technologies have contributed to changes in civil society, politics, and cultural practices, and the media now challenge families and schools as the most significant sites of social and identity formation. They have also arguably contributed to a loosening of the connection between identity and place, an ‘unsettling’ mirrored in human terms by diasporic, expatriate and itinerant communities swelled by global flows of asylum seekers and refugees, and the emergence of global terrorist and state surveillance networks.

There is a lot at stake at this time. This new constellation has the potential to intensify divisiveness in our societies and hence damage the fragile network of relationships that holds them together. We need research that pursues ways of strengthening or making this network more durable and hence builds trust, reciprocity, civic participation, solidarity and integrity. In this context, reconciliation projects are being tried in many countries as a form of cultural politics and nation building. Unfortunately, the pedagogical potential of reconciliation processes has yet to be adequately elaborated. Nor have we really begun to draw on ‘reconciliation’ as a resource for developing pedagogical approaches. Such an examination needs to elucidate habits of mind that foster reconciliation while formulating a vocabulary for reconciliation, an understanding of the dynamics of reconciling practices, and a map of the socio-cultural geography of reconciliation spaces.
Reconciliation

The term ‘reconciliation’ is often used to describe processes that address the effects of colonisation with indigenous/First Nations peoples in post-settler societies such as in Australia and South Africa. But read against the vaster horizon of ‘unsettling times’ the term must also include all those reconciliations necessary to foster inter-cultural, inter-religious harmony, such as in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland, China/Tibet and East Timor to name but a few. Reconciliation is understood here to be a psycho-social and pedagogical intervention that aims to heal the effects of traumatic events; the spiralling guilt, anxiety, resentment and sense of injustice that distort individual, national and global well-being. Reconciliation might also be understood to be an alternative to revenge that seems to be the habitual reaction to harm. But then, it is difficult to know who ‘started it’ in many contemporary struggles: we have so many examples of an ongoing cycle of revenge, blood-feuds without end. Examples of national reconciliation projects include South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Australia’s Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. In these sites, reconciliation is understood as a healing practice and as a third space in which ‘new’ cross-cultural discourses can be elaborated. Reconciliation confronts what is unspeakable or irreparable and struggles with the complex difficulties of ‘narrating trauma’ and witnessing those narratives. With speaking and hearing also come a ‘politics of memory’ and a power struggle around claims to knowledge and truth. Reconciliation can also be understood in terms of a politics of recognition and a re-imagining of community. In this sense reconciliation involves an exploration of the relation between memory and identity and, more specifically, memory and national identity. As such the healing process has to take place at the level of the wider community. Large scale reconciliation projects, however, can experience difficulties moving from the personal to the social and back again.

Pedagogy

‘Unsettling times’ also provides a frame for reconsidering the question: what is ‘good’ pedagogy. This question is one that is pertinent for not only those who are teachers in the formal sense but for all cultural workers involved in political-pedagogical work. This paper takes up this issue within/against ‘critical pedagogy’ which is understood as a significant educational movement that is neither homogenous nor coherent, and one that is open to ongoing reflexivity. ‘Critical pedagogy’ provides an ‘emancipatory’ social vision for pedagogical work that rejects views of pedagogy that are ahistorical, depoliticized, and positivist. The critical pedagogue focuses on the way that power relations exert an effect on how knowledge is (re)produced, and exchanged in any pedagogical act. Against critical pedagogy, there is still much to do to properly elaborate how we might learn to live together in societies of ever increasing cultural complexity. It is easy enough to say ‘yes to emancipation’ but difficult to put it into practice. For example, recent work on antiracist education casts doubts on the effectiveness of contemporary pedagogical interventions. Allied to this, racism continues to manifest itself in new ways that demand new educational responses. In unsettling times, the debate about what constitutes ‘good pedagogy’ is being dominated by an ideology of ‘backlash politics’. Backlash politics is an assault on thought, fears diversity, suffers amnesia, blames victims, and enshrines the status quo. Backlash pedagogies appear to be contributing to an intensification of divisiveness rather than providing the resources for living with differences that foster understanding, social justice and co-existence. As an alternative to pedagogies of resentment, the present crises bring into sharp focus the need for pedagogies of ‘awful thoughts’ (Britzman and Dippo 2000) and for pedagogies that develop capacities for doubt, and that work with suffering, love, hope and despair.

If the potential of reconciliation is to be harnessed then we need much more research that is able to elaborate the pedagogical dynamics of these processes that is sensitive to the limitations and possibilities. We also need research that enables theories of reconciliation to be translated into practice for cultural workers in a range of
fields. There are numerous sites that could be examined for insights into reconciliation apart from the ones already mentioned above.

**Socially-engaged Buddhism as a resource for reconciliation/pedagogy**

In this paper I want to suggest that socially engaged Buddhism could be investigated as a resource for reconciliation/pedagogy. In one of the strands of my research (Hattam 2004) I am attempting to map out in broad terms, an emerging Buddhist critical social theory, or socially-critical Buddhism, that is being shaped in a dialogic space between both ‘traditions’. I think about both critical theory and Buddhism as dynamic, rejuvenating traditions—very much alive, and involved in translation in an increasingly East-West globalising culture. In my work, ‘critical theory now’ is understood in terms of what Agger (1998) refers as a ‘theory cluster’ (p. 4). This metaphor attempts to represent the state of critical theory today. Critical theory is no longer defined in terms of its relationship to Marx, even though I do have some sympathy for that sentiment. Now critical theory is also feminist (Fraser 1989; Benhabib 1992; Benhabib, Butler et al. 1995), postcolonial (Said 1978; Spivak 1987; Sprinker 1992), queer, antiracist, postmodern (Kellner 1988; Flax 1990; Best and Kellner 1991), poststructuralist (Poster 1989), indigenist (Rigney 2000), ecological (Gottlieb 1996), and theological (Freire 1972; Schipani 1988; Kovel 1991). Critical theorists work in every traditional discipline of the social sciences as well as having developed interdisciplinary spaces around such studies as new social movements, labour, women, diaspora, culture and Aborigines.

In terms of Buddhism, I’m especially interested in the Tibetan schools and in particular the Gelugpa school, but I have an interest in all of the various strains and draw on all of these. I am especially interested in what I understand to be an emerging social movement that goes by the name of socially-engaged Buddhism [Eppsteiner, 1988 #12][Kotler, 1996 #59][Queen, 1996 #60]. One important edge of this movement is found in the comparative philosophy [Loy, 1992 #135;Loy, 1993 #132;Loy, 1996a #108;Loy, 1996b #255;Loy, 1997 #134] of those scholars who are willing to both use modern thought to understand ancient thinkers from different cultures and use ancient thought to understand our (post)modern world. The claim for socially-engaged Buddhism as a site for developing reconciliation/pedagogy is substantially based on the proposition that by definition, Buddhist wisdom-knowledge provides resources for fostering co-existence rather than promoting fear, anger and revenge. This paper will sketch out some aspects of this socially-engaged Buddhist movement.

**What is socially-engaged Buddhism?**

The term ‘engaged Buddhism’, according to Batchelor appears to have entered the discourse in the 1930s during the ‘monks’ war’ against the French occupation of Vietnam. But then the idea of a socially-engaged Buddhism predates the actual use of the term. Being socially-engaged and Buddhist begins with Shakyamuni Buddha’s life and teachings and might best be characterised by his work in developing a community of practitioners referred to as the Sangha. His discourses had a revolutionary effect on the society of his time and his teaching dealt with this-worldly topics such as politics, good government, poverty, war, and peace (Rahula 1985). The Buddhist Sangha provides a model of community and community development based on a lifestyle that is ‘minimalist, nonacquisitive and noncompetitive’ (Swearer 1996: 215). The Buddha’s teachings on social, economic and political life are not well known but are scattered throughout ancient Buddhist texts. Rahula draws our attention to some examples. For instance, the Cakkavattisihanada-sutta of the Digha-nikaya, clearly states ‘that poverty is the cause of immorality and crimes such as theft, falsehood, violence, hatred, cruelty etc’ (p. 104). The Kutadanta-sutta provides other examples including the futility of suppressing such crimes through punishment. Instead, ‘the economic condition of the people should be improved, and ‘adequate wages should be paid to those who are employed’ (p. 104–5).

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1 There are four schools of Tibetan Buddhism: Nyingma, Kagya, Sakya and Gelukpa. For discussion of the history of these see the Introduction in [Thurman, 1995 #121].
In the present situation, in which Buddhism is being translated from the ‘East’ to the ‘West’, it is not possible to define one socially-engaged Buddhism but for the sake of initiating the conversation I will outline a working definition. Kraft (1999) defines socially-engaged Buddhism in these terms:

Engaged Buddhism entails both inner and outer work. We must change the world, we must change ourselves, and we must change ourselves in order to change the world. Awareness and compassionate action reinforce each other. (p. 10)

Socially-engaged Buddhism might also be understood in terms of a practical spirituality in which ‘spiritual development and dedication to the pursuit of a more humane world necessarily go hand in hand’ (Swearer 1996: 212). The socially-engaged Buddhist rejects the idea that Buddhism is world-rejecting, ‘world-denying, passive or socially inept’ (Kraft 1992: 3).

The argument for a contemporary socially-engaged Buddhism has been neatly summarised by Jones (1989) whose logic I will paraphrase here. Under (post)modern conditions we now live in ‘socio-historical conditions which institutionalise alienation, ill will, aggressiveness, defensiveness, and acquisitiveness’ (p. 194). ‘In turn, those societal conditions are kammically inherited by each new generation, whose delusive personal struggle for identity and meaning is socialized and super-charged by previously mentioned norms and institutions’ (p. 194).

Greed, Anger, and Delusion—known as the ‘three poisons’ in Buddhism—need to be uprooted in personal lives, but they have to be dealt with as social and political realities. Throughout the world today, large-scale systems cause suffering as surely as psychological factors cause suffering. Traditional Buddhism focused on the latter; engaged Buddhism focuses on both. (Kraft 1999: 10)

Our own delusion and its institutionalisation are now so interpermeated that these two—contemplation and activism—need to go hand in hand. But without some form of mind transformative practice such as meditation that enables us to begin to heal our own alienation/delusion, we won’t develop the necessary insight and our efforts to effect social change can only be undermined.

Engaged Buddhism is not new

Attempting to define a socially-engaged version of Buddhism suggests that there is an un-engaged version but that would contradict some of the basic principles of Buddhism. On this point the Dalai Lama argues that a world-rejecting, or world-denying Buddhism would be contradictory. Such a view would certainly be an anathema to the Bodhisattva sensibility, a point that I will elaborate on later. On this same point, Thich Nhat Hanh (1987b) argues that even meditation is not an ‘escape from society’ (p. 45). Rather than thinking that meditation is an escape from society, Thich Nhat Hanh argues that meditation is in fact a process that ‘equips oneself with the capacity to reintegrate into society’ (p. 48). Society is difficult to live in but our suffering only increases if we succumb to its alienating effects. And if our alienation becomes too extreme then ‘we can not

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2 Under the conditions of ‘globality’ (Robertson, R. (1992) Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture. London: Sage, Robertson, R. (1992) Globality, global culture, and images of world order. In H. Haferkamp and N. J. Smelser. Social Change and Modernity. Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press.) ‘East’ and ‘West’ are increasingly interpermeated. Hence what form or forms Western Buddhism will take is very much an open question. In addition, those already existing ‘Eastern’ forms of Buddhism are also under revision as the process of globality evolves. As an example: what does it now mean to be a Tibetan Buddhist? Given the cultural diversity of people who either claim the status of Tibetan Buddhist or have even taken ordination in this tradition, this term ‘Tibetan Buddhist’ must now infer a radical cultural hybridisation. Those ‘Tibetans’ who are a part of the translation of Tibetan Buddhism into the ‘West’—and that must include those living in exile in the monasteries in India—are also part of a cross cultural hybridisation process.
help change society to make it more liveable’ (p. 49). Meditation then, is not world-denying but is a way of dealing with our psycho-social alienation which enables us to stay in society.

To provide a little more specificity to my argument, Jones (1989) provides a model of three types of practice that can be considered as socially-engaged. He argues that socially-engaged Buddhist practice can involve the following:

1. alternative societal models, for example monastic or quasi monastic communities;
2. social helping, service and welfare, both in employment and voluntarily; and,
3. radical activism, which is ‘directed to fundamental institutional and social changes, culminating in societal metamorphosis’. (p. 216)

Of course, in many instances, the social engagement involves all three of these. As an example, the Tibetan Government-in-exile, in collaboration with a range of other institutions, is involved in rebuilding the great monasteries of Tibet in India (Drepung, Ganden and Sera), and also establishing a range of other monastic or quasi-monastic communities. The Tibetan Government-in-exile also has in place programs to assist exiled Tibetans with health and other welfare services, especially for those of the Tibetan diaspora living in exile in India. The Dalai Lama engages in a non-violent struggle with the Chinese government over reclaiming some version of Tibetan independence. It’s the third version that is most interest to me in this paper.

An alternative way of representing socially-engaged Buddhism, and the one I want try in this paper, involves contemplating the sensibility of the socially-engaged Buddhist practitioner. Contemplating such a sensibility involves going after what makes someone both Buddhist and activist. How does a Buddhist (re)think their practice in terms of social struggle? Thich Nhat Hanh, as a Zen practitioner living in Vietnam during the early 1960s, frames such a question in this way: ‘When a village is being bombed and children and adults are suffering from wounds and death, can a Buddhist sit still in his unbombed temple?’ (Thich Nhat Hanh 1987a: 35). This quote can be reworded to make it less context specific—how can I sit in the meditation hall when there is ‘war’ on outside? This question has relevance to our present situation: given that we are part of an alliance that is waging a ‘war on terror’. This question is suggestive of the way in which socially-engaged Buddhists are ‘working the hyphen’ (Fine 1994) between personal and social transformation and hence resisting the idea that Buddhism should be understood entirely in terms of a mystical quietism.

Most of this chapter is organised around the question—Where can we go for conceptual resources, inspiration, and advice about what it means to be socially engaged and Buddhist? The are a number of options including investigating the mode of being of the Bodhisattva (Hattam 2000), drawing on scriptural sources (Nagarjuna 1975; Thurman 1985a), examining the socially engaged Buddhist sensibility of a few ‘Eastern’ Buddhist scholar-practitioners, or reviewing some of the emerging scholarship on socially-engaged Buddhism by Western interpreters.

The ‘engaged’ perspective has always been at the very heart of Buddhist theory and practice but at various times has been less evident in the community of Buddhist practitioners. Its recent manifestation might be seen as a strengthening of what has always been extant in the tradition, but has come to the fore in light of contemporary social conditions. It may be that what we refer to as socially-engaged Buddhism is an artifact of the recent movement of Buddhism into Western culture, a process that has involved a ‘fresh’ examination into what it means to be a Buddhist practitioner. This examination into what Buddhism means theoretically and practically, may have concentrated our gaze on the engaged aspect. Perhaps what is ‘new’ is the emergence of an international movement. In this sense, engaged Buddhism, as a new social movement is an expression of globalisation. Perhaps ironically, the most significant contributions to this ‘fresh’ examination into what it means
to be Buddhist have been developed by Buddhist scholar-activists from 'Asia'. I have chosen to focus on the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa. Before I begin though, I need to emphasise that all three are scholar-practitioners and whose lives are lived as experiments in ethical life, of how to live a life under extreme circumstances and hence provide some insights into both theory and practice. Their lives are sites for investigation not only their writing.

The Dalai Lama and universal responsibility

The Dalai Lama’s writing on socially-engaged Buddhism is extensive and I do not intend reviewing that corpus here. I have a more modest task that aims to outline briefly his argument for Buddhist social engagement. The Dalai Lama is most renowned for his work as the leader of the Tibetan Government-in-exile and his struggle for the independence of Tibet. He is a Nobel Peace Prize recipient and travels the world as an ambassador, not only for his own people but also as a lightening rod for peace in general.

His theory of social engagement is informed by his own Gelugpa education and might be understood to revolve around the idea of universal responsibility, which is a term that he uses to name the Bodhisattva motivation, or bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is a term that is not well known in the ‘West’ and refers to the ‘the good heart’ (Lobsang Gyatso 1997: 10) or the awakening heart. Of course, the metaphor of the heart as the site of our love and compassion hides more than it illuminates. For Buddhists, love and compassion, or concern for the welfare of others, are not feelings but types of awareness (Lati Rinpoche 1980: 99). Love and compassion arise and abide in our minds. Love is understood as a ‘quality of mind’: ‘wanting others to be happy’ (McDonald 1984: 94). Compassion, being the other side of love, is also a type of mind: the wish that others are free from their suffering. In thinking about bodhicitta, the metaphor of mind/heart might be more appropriate.

There are extensive descriptions of how we might develop bodhicitta in foundational Buddhist texts and in the Dalai Lama’s own writing. The idea is usually presented in terms of the wish to go for enlightenment as a means of alleviating the suffering of others. At a certain point in one’s spiritual work there is a choice: to strive for enlightenment for oneself alone, or else, to practice out of compassion for the suffering of others. Geshe Rabten (1984) describes this choice in these terms: ‘It is as if we and our elderly mother were in prison, and we took a chance to escape alone, just leaving our mother inside’ (p. 139). To actually get at what this means requires studying some preliminary ideas that I haven’t got time to elaborate here. Alternatively it’s possible to explain bodhicitta in terms of what Chögyam Trungpa’s (1984) refers to as ‘connecting with your heart’ (p. 42). Awakening your heart involves living with the ‘tremendous sadness’ when ‘we open our eyes to the rest of the world’ (p. 45). It is living with your ‘heart completely exposed’ (p. 45). Bodhicitta is a heart/mind that


4 Within the context of Deng Xiaoping's statement to Gyalo Thondup in 1979, that everything, except the question of complete independence, could be discussed, the Dalai Lama put forward the notion of association rather than separation. The Dalai Lama proposed a Five-Point Peace Plan: (1) Transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace; (2) Abandonment of China's population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people; (3) Respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms; (4) Restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste; (5) Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.
spontaneously experiences love and compassion for all beings without exception. It’s the mind/heart that is required if we are to get beyond the notion of insiders and outsiders. The critical tradition has a lot to say about the distorting effects of Othering but has yet to even imagine the mind that is post-deconstructive (Critchley 1996)—‘the subject after deconstruction, a determination that succeeds the duty of deconstruction without lapsing back into the pre-deconstructive or classical conceptions of the subject …’ (p. 39)—that is beyond experiencing duality or binaries. As well the critical tradition has little to say about how we might cultivate such a mind. Bodhicitta is the mind that is beyond discriminations of friends, enemies or those we hold as neutral. Bodhicitta is the mind that spontaneously experiences loving-kindness, not only to our dear ones but also to those that harm us. The expansive form of loving kindness implied here is often defined in terms of the bodhisattva vow:

For as long as space endures
And as long as living beings remain
Until then may I too, abide
To dispel the misery of the world.

In another famous text on this topic, Thought Transformation in Eight Stanzas, it is asserted that we should even treat our enemies with loving-kindness: of holding those of wicked nature as a ‘dear one so hard to find as though discovering a precious treasure’. A beginner to this sort of Buddhist logic, Liberman (1986) suggests ‘is likely to wonder if there is a misprint’ (p. 116).

The Bodhisattva path is traditionally described in terms of a personal practice, or what Thurman (1985a) calls ‘individualist transcendentalism’ (p. 121). However, as I argue, such a view is not world-denying but can be understood in terms of compassionate action. In the Dalai Lama’s (1992a) own words, ‘when you practice you do not isolate yourself from the rest of society’ (p. 91). What is significant in the Dalai Lama’s recent writings has been his elaboration on the nature of compassionate action and his reworking of the idea of universal responsibility in the light of our increased interconnectedness.

*Compassionate action in postmodern conditions*

The Dalai Lama’s argument has followed a traditional view that argues for the cultivation of concern for others’ well-being on an individual level. In part, this argument is based on the view that until we have actually stabilised some level of love and compassion we are under the influence of the afflictive emotions and hence can be of only limited benefit to others.

In the beginning of Buddhist practice, our ability to serve others is limited. The emphasis is on healing ourselves, transforming our mind and heart. But as we continue, we become stronger and increasingly able to serve others. But until that time, we may get overwhelmed by the suffering and difficulties of other people. We may become exhausted and not able to serve others effectively, not to mention ourselves. So we must begin simply by doing as well as we can, trying to improve ourselves, and, at the same time, trying as much as we can to serve other people. It is natural to feel some limitation with both, and we just have to accept that. (Dalai Lama 1992a: 94)

The aim is to develop an active form of compassion that goes beyond overcoming ‘the distortions and afflictions of your own mind, that is, in terms of calming and eventually dispelling anger and so forth’ (Dalai Lama 1992a: 96).

When there is something that needs to be done in the world to rectify the wrongs with a motivation of compassion, if one is really concerned with benefit it is not enough simply to be compassionate. There is no direct benefit in that. With compassion, one needs to be engaged, involved. (Dalai Lama 1992a: 96)
Such a view of compassionate action can only make sense if we are responding to the issues of our social context. Understanding the nature of contemporary society is essential for compassionate action. The Dalai Lama (1999b) acknowledges that ‘[t]oday’s [social] reality is so complex and, on the material level at least, so clearly interconnected’ (p. 161) that conceiving of ethical practice, only in terms of the need for individual transformation, is no longer adequate. He cites the examples of the globalisation of economics—that a stock-market crash on one side of the globe can have a direct effect on the economics of countries on the other side—and the impact of technology on the environment. But what does it mean to cultivate universal responsibility in post(modern) conditions? From the perspective of universal responsibility he outlines some general directions and identifies some significant struggles that require urgent attention.

In outlining these general directions he begins by reaffirming that universal responsibility infers a reorientation of our heart and mind away from self towards all others without partiality. The aim to cultivate and practise universal responsibility involves taking personal responsibility for the well-being of all others. The practice of universal responsibility then must be by definition counter-hegemonic in the sense of countering those aspects of culture that harm others. Against the greed, envy and aggressive competitiveness encouraged by ‘a culture of excessive materialism’ (p. 165) the Dalai Lama recommends the cultivation of contentment. He argues that we need to counter the ‘culture of perpetual economic growth’ that fosters discontent, contributes to the growing economic inequality that is emerging everywhere, and also seems to be the source of damage to our natural environment’ (p. 166). Universal responsibility also demands a commitment to honesty which helps reduce the level of misunderstanding, doubt, and fear throughout society’ (p. 168). Honesty also involves not being blind to the various injustices that distort societies, and the commitment to speak out against these. A sense of universal responsibility means countering the urge to ignore the diseased and the marginalised, and to ‘ensure that the sick and afflicted person never feels helpless, rejected, or unprotected’ (p. 169).

Central to the Dalai Lama’s view of universal responsibility is the practice of compassion, but in a postmodern context, compassion must be extended to both the individual and society. In that sense, ‘compassion belongs in the political arena too’ (p. 173) and will require that we engage in a number of significant social arenas. The Dalai Lama mentions especially education, the media, our natural environment, politics and economics, peace and disarmament and inter-religious harmony. Each of these arenas requires our engagement because the stakes are so high if we do not act. Whilst the Dalai Lama does not provide any specific advice about how these arenas might be reformed, his argument constantly shuttles along a dialectic of personal and social transformation, such as the need to ‘disarm ourselves internally’ which then creates the conditions for ‘dismantling military establishments’ (p.207).

Whilst he is from a different Buddhist tradition Thich Nhat Hanh’s justification for socially-engaged Buddhism has many features similar to that of the Dalai Lama.

**Thich Nhat Hanh and the Tiep Hien Order**

Thich Nhat Hanh is one of the most prominent socially-engaged Buddhist scholar-practitioners. He became a monk in the Zen tradition and played a significant role in ending the Vietnam War in the 1960s. His peace work was acknowledged by Martin Luther King, who nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1967). His peace work involved mindfulness practices and gatha (short verses) and koan. See Thich Nhat Hanh's biography in *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. New York: Hill and Wang. for his own account of the Vietnam War.

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5 Nhat Hanh was born Nguyen Xuan Bao in 1926. His Zen master, Thich Chan That, taught from the Lin-Chi, Rinzai Zen school and the Lieu Quan School, which is a form of indigenous Vietnamese Buddhism that draws on both Theravada and Zen Mahayana and which emphasises the practices of mindfulness, gatha (short verses) and koan. See Thich Nhat Hanh Thich Nhat Hanh (1967) *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. New York: Hill and Wang. for his own account of the Vietnam War.
He founded the Tiep Hien Order which aimed to respond to ‘the burgeoning hatred, intolerance and suffering’ that ‘were forged in the crucible of war and devastation that was the daily experience’ (Thich Nhat Hanh 1987a: 5) of Vietnamese people. Their struggle for peace involved maintaining the strictest neutrality, which meant not taking sides with either the non-communists or the communists. For Nhat Hanh, neither of the warring parties actually spoke for the people of Vietnam and that was part of the problem. The Vietnamese people felt that they had been ‘effectively excluded from participation in the determination of their own country’s future’ (Thich Nhat Hanh 1993a: 50). Taking inspiration from Gandhi, this group developed a range of non-violent forms of struggle, including fasting and using literature and the arts as weapons to challenge oppression. This commitment to non-violence was paramount and was based on the realisation that ‘the means and the ends are one’ (Thich Nhat Hanh 1993a: 43).

For the Tiep Hien Order, the struggle to actually be heard amongst the killing, was the most significant issue and this anguish eventually led many Buddhists to self-immolate. Rather than being seen as suicide, these immolations are understood as acts of courage by people who loved life to the point that they were prepared to suffer extreme pain to waken others to the suffering of war. This form of non-violent struggle was also predicated on the view that our ‘enemies’ are not human beings but the intolerance, fanaticism, oppression, greed, hatred, and discrimination that lay within the hearts of men and women’ (p. 45).

The practice of non-violence for Nhat Hanh was not a matter of prefabricated technique. The point was to have ‘the substance of nonviolence and compassion in yourself. Then everything you do will be in the direction of nonviolence’ (p. 45). ‘To practice ahimsa [nonviolence], first of all we have to practise it within ourselves’ (p. 65). To work for peace means to quell the violence inside us first. The practice of killing arises out of our minds. For Nhat Hanh, a violent mind arises in dependence upon ‘dividing reality into two camps … and standing in one camp while attacking the other’ (p. 65). To undermine our own violence, then we need to abandon dismissing some people as our enemies, even those who act violently. ‘If we work for peace out of anger then we will never succeed. Peace is not an end. It can never come about through non-peaceful means’ (p. 66). To undermine violence, Nhat Hanh recommends understanding our co-responsibility in that violence. Such a practice, of course, has to contend with our own anger and frustration and our tendency to blame those we see as the perpetrators. To go beyond violence, he argues we need to understand that the weapons that harm us are our ‘own prejudices, fears, and ignorance’ (p. 75). To go beyond violence demands that we go beyond the idea of the enemy and replace it with the ‘notion of someone suffering a great deal who needs our compassion’ (p. 77).

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6 The Tiep Hien Order, or the Order of Interbeing was founded by Thich Nhat Hanh during the Vietnam War Thich Nhat Hanh (1967) Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire. New York: Hill and Wang, Thich Nhat Hanh (1993a) Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change. Berkeley, California: Parallax. The Order was based on four principles—non-attachment to views, direct practice-realisation, appropriateness-conformity to basic tenets of Buddhism, and skilful means Thich Nhat Hanh (1987a) Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts. Berkeley, California: Parallax Press. Thich Nhat Hanh argued that the Order of Interbeing was not a new order but a new branch of the tradition of Lin-Chi Zen that aimed to bridge the lay and monastic communities and was an important instrument for responding to difficulties and anguish in the world. Those who took the precepts of the Order of Interbeing experimented with living an ethico-political life based on a Buddhist version of liberation theology. After the end of the Vietnam War, Thich Nhat Hanh was forced to live in exile and re-established the Order of Interbeing in France. This organisation has grown and now involves hundreds of practice groups in many countries including Western and Eastern Europe, Russia, Australia, Israel, China, and Japan. Two presses have been established, La Boi Press in Vietnamese and Parallax in English, and there is a journal, the Mindfulness Bell.

7 It’s interesting to consider Gandhi’s idea of non-violent struggle. Of course Gandhi was a serious student of the Bhagavad Gita but his ideas on non-violence are often tracked back to the writing of Tolstoy, whose work was very much influenced by Christianity.

idea of practising compassion ‘within ourselves’ is further elaborated when we consider the meaning of Tiep Hien.

### Going beyond violence

Tiep means ‘to be in touch with’ and ‘to continue’. Hien means ‘to realise’ and ‘to make it here and now’. To be in touch with, infers being in touch with ‘the reality of the mind as well as the reality of the world’ (p. 12). For Nhat Hanh, to be in touch with the reality of the mind means not only to ‘be aware of the processes of our inner life, i.e. feelings, perceptions mental formations etc., but also to rediscover our true mind’ (p. 22). ‘True mind’ is enlightened mind, undefiled by negativity, free from suffering and the causes of suffering, free from delusions such as hatred, attachment and especially from the ignorance of self grasping. To be in touch with the reality of our minds is also to become aware of the reality of the world and hence to realise the unity of mind and world: ‘these are not two separate worlds; they belong to the same reality’ (p. 12). To be in touch with our mind we simultaneously get in touch with the reality of the world. Invariably our minds are encountering all manner of phenomena, some wonderful and others dreadful. Nhat Hanh often talks about this process in terms of seeing deeply into minds and simultaneously seeing deeply into the world. The term ‘tiep’ also means ‘to continue’ which connotes perpetuating the way of enlightenment of the Bodhisattva.

Hien translates as ‘to realize’ and ‘to make it here and now’. To realise directs us towards a process of transforming our understanding and compassion into real life. Realisation is the process in which understanding and compassion become lived. In this way we avoid being trapped in doctrines and ideas. ‘Understanding and compassion must not become ideas about understanding and compassion. They must be real existing entities within life itself which can be seen, touched and experimented with’ (p 13). For instance, to share joy we must have joy within us. To transmit serenity we need to realise this state in our mind-streams. In this sense we need to do more that just talk about peace, or compassion for others. It is not enough to have the idea about these states, we must have a peaceful and compassionate mind ‘otherwise one’s actions could only cause more trouble and destruction in the world’ (p. 14). And ‘to make it here now’ reminds us that ‘only the present is real’ (p. 14).

To practice Buddhism does not mean to endure hard things now for the sake of peace and liberation in the future. The purpose of Buddhist practice is not to be reborn in paradise or a Buddha land after death. The purpose of the practice is to have peace, for ourselves and others, right now while we’re breathing. Means and ends cannot be different. (p. 14)

It is important to understand that this means that every activity is an occasion for practice. We cannot wait until our lives are more conducive to practice, but must use our everyday lives as grist for transformation. For a Buddhist, there is nothing in life that is outside that transformative process. Nhat Hanh has also been experimenting with developing a form of Buddhist praxis that embodies that ideal.

### Peace work and the malaise in Western society

Nhat Hanh’s Buddhist activism has been redefined as a consequence of living in exile since the signing of the Paris peace accords in 1973. So his socially-engaged Buddhism has developed more expansive aims than just

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9 In the words of Pema Chödrön Pema Chodron (1994) *Start Where you are: A Guide to Compassionate Living*. Boston: Shambala., ‘start where you are’. This point is especially potent in the Tibetan Buddhist thought transformation teachings. These teachings are based on inverting our usual attitude to obstacles. ‘Rather than seeing the unwanted aspects of our lives as obstacles [they] become the raw material necessary for the awakening genuine uncontrived compassion: we can start where we are’ (p. x). The Tibetan thought transformation teachings describe in detail how we might ‘transform problems into happiness’ Lama Zopa (1993) *Transforming Problems into Happiness*. Boston: Wisdom. by using our suffering and happiness as occasions to practise.
peace in Vietnam. His trips to Paris during the peace negotiations had already alerted him to more profound problems or suffering arising from of 'the deep malaise in [western] society' (Thich Nhat Hanh 1993c: 7).

When we put a young person in this society without trying to protect him, he receives violence, hatred, fear, and insecurity everyday, and eventually he gets sick. Our conversations, TV programs, advertisements, newspapers, and magazines all water the seeds of suffering in young people, and in not-so-young people as well. We feel a kind of vacuum in ourselves, and we try to fill it by eating, reading, talking, smoking, drinking, watching TV, going to the movies, or even overworking. Taking refuge these days in these things only makes us feel hungrier and less satisfied and we want to ingest more. (p. 7)

From Plum Village in France, Nhat Hanh now engages in an international community development project based on ‘right livelihood’ as a context for both personal and social transformation. Right livelihood he defines in terms of the ‘art of living’ (Thich Nhat Hanh 1994b: 242) which he understands to have ‘ceased to be a purely personal matter’ but instead must be understood as a ‘collective matter. The livelihood of each person affects us all, and vice versa’ (p. 245). His project can be understood to one of ‘developing and maintaining communities of resistance’ (Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh 1975: 117). The very idea of communities of resistance arises out of the insight that we are engaged in a ‘long term struggle in which [people need to] stand up more visibly and perhaps with more risk’ (p. 121), and that ‘a moral, individual action [is] no longer enough; there must be unity of effort which [is] more and more highly political’ (p 121). His living in exile and learning about Western society has meant that he has had to expand his idea of struggling for peace.

It is a resistance against all kinds of things that are like war. Because of living in modern society, one feels that s/he cannot easily retain integrity, wholeness. One is robbed permanently of humanness, the capacity of being oneself. … So perhaps, first of all, resistance means opposition to being invaded, occupied, assaulted, and destroyed by the system. The purpose of resistance, here, is to seek the healing of yourself in order to be able to see clearly. (Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh 1975: 122)

Nhat Hanh, along with a range of others (Thich Nhat Hanh 1993c), has proposed a Buddhist theory or theology of resistance, which involves a rethinking of *sila*, or the practice of ethics. Such a theory is framed by a rethinking of the Buddhist lay precepts. These precepts traditionally define ethical practice in terms of what an individual should abandon. Simply put: no killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct and intoxicants. But when these precepts are understood in terms of right livelihood in (post)modern conditions, ethical practice demands actively resisting the social conditions that give rise to these negative actions. Rather than view the precepts as negativities to avoid, Nhat Hanh has developed a rewording of each of them that adds also the practice of their antithesis. For instance, to avoid killing, we practise reverence for life and hence develop compassion for others. To avoid stealing, we practise generosity and develop loving kindness. To avoid the suffering of sexual misconduct, we practise responsibility in our relationships with others. To avoid lying, we practice deep listening and loving speech. And to avoid intoxicants, we practise keeping our bodies and mind healthy which means being mindful of what we consume both materially and culturally.

Of course, each of these practices are interrelated. To practise one of them well involves practising all five. The practice of ethics as experiments in the art of living in a postmodern society, as Aitken (1993) understands, is a

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10 For an extensive discussion from a socially-engaged Buddhist perspective on ‘right livelihood’ see Whitmyer, C., (Ed. (1994) Mindfulness and Meaningful Work: Explorations in Right Livelihood. Berkeley, Ca.: Parallax..

path, ‘uncharted by the old teachers’ but one in which the ‘unholy alliance of greed, state ego, racism, androcentrism, and technology has made an imperative’ (p. 105). But Batchelor reminds us that the practice of precepts has always involved a tension ‘between those who emphasize the literal meaning of the precepts and those who emphasize the values that underlie them’ (p. 139). The underlying problem is the impossibility of solving our ethical dilemmas, especially with those uniquely complex situations, with any form of precepts. The practice of ethics demands that we ‘look deeply at the situation and then choose, with wisdom, what to do’ (p. 139) and the wisdom that is required here is ‘beyond the wording of the precepts’ (p. 139). Beyond the wording is a commitment to a set of values, which Batchelor defines as ‘clarity, stillness and freedom of mindfulness’ (p. 140). With that in mind, Nhat Hanh’s rethinking of the precepts, goes a long way in identifying what these values might be, thus providing a practical and useful map for cultivating an ethico-political practice in an unjust world.

Sulak Sivaraksa too provides a socially-engaged re-interpretation of living an ethico-political life that resonates strongly with the previous two sections, and also provides insights and inspirations for a post-colonial Buddhist theology/theory.

**Sulak Sivaraksa and a Buddhist vision for renewing society**

Sulak Sivaraksa is one of Thailand’s most prominent social critics and activists (Swearer 1996; Sulak Sivaraksa 1998b). He is renowned in the West for his work in the International Network of Engaged Buddhism. He is a valued participant in the World Council of Churches, the Peace Brigade International, in the Gandhi Peace Foundation and was recently recognised for his work, winning the Swedish Government’s alternative to the Nobel Prize, the Right Livelihood Award. His work encapsulates both a critical and Buddhist sensibility and his work is characterised by a Buddhist dialectical approach which he applies to all manner of binaries including local/global, theory/practice and self/society. A theme that marks his writing and his activism is his commitment to rethinking what it means to be Buddhist. His work is ecumenical and catholic and he is especially committed to defending a socially-engaged form of Buddhism.

**Struggling for social justice in Thailand demands a global outlook**

The focus of much of his work has been in response to the process of ‘development’ in Thailand, which he understands in terms of a crisis. Against those advocates of Western-style economic globalisation, Sulak sees a degradation of the everyday life of the Thai people. His critique of contemporary Thai society is based on a view that ‘Thailand is in the midst of an identity crisis that began during the reign of Rama VI (King Vajiravudh – 1919–32)’ (Swearer 1996: 209). Since that time, Thai political elites have engaged in a wholesale appropriation of a Western lifestyle with the concomitant erosion of traditional cultural, religious and social values. With a few exceptions, these elites have turned to a Western ‘development’ model to transform Thailand.

Such a framework presupposes the concepts of capital markets, nation state structures, the ‘free individual’ (i.e. consumer), and the linear and unlimited procession of growth. These are foundations of a world view for the vast majority of the West, large segments of Japan, and increasing numbers of southern elites who study abroad. However, for the large percentage of the human race, these concepts are still alien. (Sulak Sivaraksa 1998a: 1)

Unfortunately, whilst offering great promise, this top-down model of ‘development’ has meant that the existing feudal elites have been able to use the modern nation-state to consolidate their power over their ‘clients’ (the

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Thai citizenry). Instead of the ideal of material prosperity, democratic government and individual social mobility, the reality of contemporary Thailand is distorted:

Material prosperity exists for a small group of patron elite in government and business circles; feudal cronyism is disguised as representative democracy; and a mass of disempowered citizens are increasingly cut off from their historical and cultural identities. These identities are replaced with a modern consumer identities which they have few personal or communal resources for coming to grips with. (Sulak Sivaraksa 1998a: 2)

The implementation of a paradigm of modern ‘development’ is characterised by Sulak as the degradation of a village lifestyle, that was self-sufficient and involved naturally cooperative institutions, to the emergence of urban slums that require government services to provide support.

Farmlands are usurped by monoculture agribusiness and those formally outside the money economy have no way to earn even enough to eat. The young people go to the city to find work, and they end up working in sweatshops, as prostitutes, as drug runners, or living on the streets not finding work at all. These non-elite are not choosing to be poor, homeless, or violent. They have been placed in the situation by the ['development' model]. (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992a: 24)

Meantime, feudalistic leaders embezzle large amounts of development aid for their personal business interests which ‘has had a cascading effect’ on all sectors of society, ‘especially government officials who seek to get their own slice of the pie at the expense of public welfare’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 1998a: 2). In traditional Thai culture, people are taught that personal growth is related to social well-being. People are ‘taught to respect other living beings’ and ‘personal achievement at the expense of others is frowned upon’ (p. 5). ‘Exploitation, confrontation, and competition are to be avoided, while unity, communality, and harmony are encouraged’ (p. 5-6). The break down of traditional cultural values and their replacement by an unbounded consumerism has resulted in intolerable environments from industrial waste and consumer pollution and an explosion of HIV/AIIDS from the booming sex industries. ‘The department stores have become our shrines’ and ‘have replaced the Buddhist temples as centers of social life’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992a: 4). Also, crime and religious fundamentalism have emerged as people attempt to respond to the ensuing alienation of ‘development’. Being forced into the world market and global consumerism by the structural adjustment packages on the World Bank and the IMF are rationalised by the rhetoric of self-determination, but in reality, involve a process in which indigenous cultural systems are overwhelmed by the power of foreign transnational corporations. The traditional values of Thai society have been unable ‘to resist the pressures of consumerism’ (p. 8).

Sulak (1992a: 24) provides a unique Buddhist critique of this ‘think-big’ strategy for development in Thailand, that has been called economic rationalism in the ‘West’ (Saul 1997). From his Buddhist perspective, this model is a materialist development theory that ‘measures development in terms of physical results, such as increased income, more factories, schools hospitals, or food, or a larger labour force’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992a: 35). But this theory assumes wrongly that development can be understood only in material terms. What is missing is any sense of the development of human potentiality. Through quantifying development, the theory has ignored the ‘quality of humanity’ (p. 35). A materialist theory of development has no way of thinking about what it means to live fully and assumes these issues are ‘metaphysical or religious’ (p. 26). These issues are existential, not economic and they are ‘related to our needs for leisure, contemplation, love, community, and self-realization’ (p. 37). A development theory that is sensitive to the existential requires ‘a multi-disciplinary approach’ that involves ecologists, sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, philosophers and others’ (p. 37). Under the think-big strategy for development people are perceived only as a ‘labour force’ and as ‘consumers’. Whether they are
exploited, their environment is degraded, or the quality of their lives deteriorates, is irrelevant. As an example, Sulak (1992a) draws special attention to the construction of a ‘modern’ factory in a ‘developing’ country.

The sole function of a factory like this is to accumulate money for foreign investors, and for those few local investors who are willing to oppress their own countrymen [and women] and obstruct them from exercising economic and political power at or near their own level. … The producer's motive is to invest money in the way that will bring him the greatest financial return. He cannot be concerned with the disappearance of natural resources. He may be producing luxury goods of little utility, while the majority of the people struggle for the basic necessities of life. (p. 38)

This model of development, is for Sulak, an expression of the logic of capitalism which privileges ‘catering to the physical pleasures of the wealthy … rather than the welfare of the general public’ (p. 39-40). Such logic has little resistance in Thailand. Unlike the reality of the developed countries, which have labour unions with some power, government officials are fairly honest, and consumers have their own organisations, the ‘developing’ countries have to tolerate rampant dishonesty and exploitation. Sulak argues that the adoption of this model of development places Thailand in a ‘vicious cycle’ (p. 42). The critique of this development model is treated with contempt and has little or no voice. The model is obviously unsustainable even in the short to medium term. The solution is not a matter of continuing with the idea of ‘more production is better, as long as there is a just distribution (p. 42). Under the conditions of ‘fast capitalism’ (Agger 1989) ‘new problems are appearing faster than … can be solved’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992a: 42). The addiction to economic growth, along with little concern for the consequences, ultimately means an unsustainable exploitation of natural resources which cannot go on forever. Sulak traces this problem back to the lifestyle of those living in the richest nations. ‘Unless the citizens of the richest nations seriously change their lifestyles, and do its soon, there is little hope’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992c: 134).

For those of us living in the richer nations, Sulak’s demand can only be realised if we can get beyond thinking of ourselves as separate and self-existing. We need to think about how we are ‘co-responsible’ (Thich Nhat Hanh 1993a: 84). If we reject the illusion of separateness then we are implicated in everything that happens, the good and the evil. We cannot then blame another but must see ourselves as involved. ‘We are all victims of violence, anger, misunderstanding, and the lack of respect for our human dignity’ (p. 84) but we are also the perpetrators. Beyond the duality of our own separateness we cannot take sides with victims against the perpetrators. ‘Taking sides is too easy’ (p. 107) but we can take sides with those who are suffering the most, and that will mean transforming our own lifestyle.

*Theorised activism*

Sulak also has important things to say about the pragmatics of a more dialectical approach to dharma practice. As a preliminary to his advice though, he affirms the faults of being preoccupied with changing the system without any commitment to personal transformation. To be preoccupied with the social is to ignore that negativity actually operates within us psychologically. From a socially-engaged Buddhist perspective, the ‘radical transformation of society requires personal and spiritual change first or at least simultaneously’ (p. 61).

If we are attempting to combine both practices of awakening and struggle then there are some dangers. There ‘it is a great danger that those who are socially engaged lack spiritual depth, inner calm and peace’ (p. 4). If social activists do not have adequate time to meditate—and he recommends retreat for several weeks a year—then there is a possibility that they will either burn-out or else be without the sort of joy and peace we need to sustain skilful means.
Buddhism for the contemporary world

A parallel theme for Sulak’s critique has been his interests in the relationship between the Buddhist community and the state. For Sulak, this relationship needs to be always in tension and the religious traditions need to nurture a prophetic aspect ‘that calls for a more just and peaceful society on Earth, here and now, and stop postponing justice for some future existence’ (p. 57). Unfortunately in Thailand, segments of the Sangha became dependent on state patronage. The growth of monastic wealth was accompanied by the integration of the Sangha into society; often the priestly class became another sector of the elite, with its own social power, cultural influence, and selfish interests. ‘The institutionalization of the Sangha was typically linked to state control, so that instead of holding the state to the ethics of nonviolence, the Sangha was increasingly called upon to rationalize violence and injustice’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992c: 128). Rather than being the spiritual advisors of the nation’s leaders, the Sangha now perform ceremonies which have little or no relevance to the society. ‘The ‘new’ spiritual advisors are from the Harvard Business School, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and the London School of Economics’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992a: 4).

In this context of a perverted form of Buddhism, Sulak attempts to rethink what it means to be a Buddhist practitioner. He is very clear that traditional Buddhist approaches need to be rethought in order to make sense of life in contemporary societies, but ‘without compromising the essentials’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 1994: 2). He is especially sensitive to avoid thinking about Buddhism as a form of escapism and rebukes Buddhist thinking that considers dharma only in terms of the personal. In a clear exposition of his position in the context of thinking about world peace he says that a ‘Buddhist approach … demands self-awareness and social awareness in equal measure’. ‘This requires not just a counter-psychology, but also a counter-culture, a counter-economy, and counter-politics’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992c: 127).

His Buddhist perspective is not about the shunning of the material aspects of life, such as food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Instead, these are understood as the means to building a mental and spiritual ecology and not as the ends to be accumulated. His writing is replete with examples of projects in which communities are mobilized as both ‘a political force and protest movement’ and also as ‘a creative new venture of self-reliance and sustainability. Both streams being committed to incorporating spiritual practice and a goal of contentment rather than material wealth’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 2001: 2).13 There is a Buddhist alternative to the ‘think-big’ version of development. Development must aim at the reduction of fostering greed and hatred and increasing power. ‘It is the reduction of desires that constitutes development. This is the opposite of the materialist notion that dominates our conventional thinking’ (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992a: 44). So for Sulak, this process of reducing selfishness involves two realizations: ‘an inner realization concerning greed, hatred and delusion, and an outer realization concerning the impact these tendencies have on society and the planet’ (p. 47).

Buddhism as a resource for reconciliation/pedagogy

By way of conclusion I’d like to make a few suggestions for critical educators. Socially engaged Buddhism offers a range of possibilities for both curriculum and pedagogy.

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13 In the example he provided in his paper given at the Adelaide Festival of Ideas, Sulak Sivaraksa (2001) Culture and reconciliation. *Paper given at the Festival of Ideas, Adelaide 12-15 July.* described the work of the community near the Pak Moon dam. This work involved a traditional healthcare centre, community businesses, a youth environmental group and a preschool.
Buddhism offers ‘new’ cultural resources to critical pedagogy, and to counter-cultural and counter-hegemonic movements in general, and might be considered as a ‘resistance narrative’ (Moore 1993: 6) that enables us to rethink ethico-political practice. I agree with Clarke (1997) who argues that ideas and practices coming ‘East of Said’ (Fox, 1992) have ‘for three centuries assumed a counter-cultural, counter-hegemonic role, and become in various ways a gadfly plaguing all kinds of orthodoxies, and an energiser of radical protest’ (Clarke 1997: 27).

In terms of curriculum it would be possible to study socially-engaged Buddhism as a ‘resistance narrative’, choosing any of the Buddhist inspired political struggles in many Asian countries with large Buddhist populations, such as: Burma (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991; Aung San Suu Kyi 1997; Aung San Suu Kyi 1997), Tibet (Kelly, Bastian et al. 1991; Adhe Tapontsang 1997; Dawa Norbu 1997; Dalai Lama 1997; Palden Gyatso 1997), Thailand (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992; Watts, Senauke et al. 1997; Sulak Sivaraksa 1998), Sri Lanka (Macy 1983) and Vietnam (Thich Nhat Hanh 1967; Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh 1975; Chân Không 1993), to name the most famous ones. In each of the stated countries, significant political struggle is, or has been conducted by Buddhist practitioners committed to working a dialectic between inner and outer work. These Buddhist activists have also been inspirational at a time in which Buddhism is being translated into the ‘West’ (Batchelor 1994). As a consequence a Buddhist-inspired radical activism is also developing momentum in concert with other social movements, such a feminism (Murcott 1991; Gross 1993; Dresser 1996; Gross 1998), environmentalism (Spretnak and Capra 1984; Jones 1993; Kelly 1994), anti-nuclear activism (Macy 1983; Macy 1991), peace activism (Kraft 1992) and those interested in critiques of global capitalism (Sulak Sivaraksa 1992; Payutto 1994; Whitmyer 1994; Loy 1997; Watts, Senauke et al. 1997; Sulak Sivaraksa 1999; Sulak Sivaraksa 1999).

Socially engaged Buddhism also offers a few suggestions for reconsiderations of critical pedagogy. From the socially-engaged Buddhist tradition we might begin to think in terms of pedagogies for universal responsibility. Taking from the Dalai Lama, this means cultivating concern for others as a basis for compassionate action. Pedagogies for universal responsibility would enable young people to develop their understanding of connectedness as a basis for thinking through ethics. The reality of our connectedness, or our interdependence, means that we have no choice but to take personal responsibility for the well-being of others. Thinking through connectedness also leads to the cultivation of contentment: that we are in this together, can only mean that personal greed and acquisitiveness leads to harming others. Thich Nhat Hanh’s work pushes the idea of interconnectedness still further. That we inter-are, means that we need to understand our co-responsibility for the present state of violence. Pedagogies of connectedness, reject the illusion of our separateness and demand that we think through how implicated we are in everything that happens. For Nhat Hanh, struggling for peace involves both inner and outer work and that the inner work needs to proceed the outer. And from Sulak Sivarka, a pedagogy of universal responsibility would pursue forms of knowing/knowledge that build self and social awareness in equal measure. Such a pedagogy would provide opportunities to imagine ways of living that are non-exploitative, democratic, non-violent and hence also opposed to forms of materialism that are obviously unsustainable and toxic to the environment, societies and the psyche.

This is a big call but then do we have any other choice?

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of ‘double bind,’ which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures.

The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to
promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries (Foucault 1982c: 216).

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