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Not All That Post, Not All That New: The Disruption of Challenging Coloniality

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Abstract
What happens when, as scholars who have habitually been working with posthumanism and the new materialisms, we find ourselves summoned by thinkers who critique the covert coloniality present in these approaches? This work is the result of a year-long project where we set up the task of feeling our way through these critiques, exploring how they change our work and ourselves; and attempting to find a way of relating to the challenge of decoloniality. We use collaborative writing as an approach to delve into our encounters with readings, our own histories, and our ways of relating to the academy and each other. In this work, we start from our differing histories and positionalities—a Chilean woman and a British man; now colleagues and with a history of being a PhD supervisee-supervisor. Then, we grapple with how posthumanism/new materialism has neglected to think about how coloniality is entangled in who the “humans” it speaks to are and how it is further reproducing colonial dynamics of ethnocentric erasure that effectively do not allow it to go beyond the “human.” After considering possibilities of integration, reparation, survival, and refusal, we conclude it is crucial to reflexively acknowledge and work with our concrete positionalities and interests, thereby making our conceptualizations necessarily provincial, limited, and in some ways problematic. Otherwise, we run the risk of engulfing decolonial, postcolonial, anticolonial, and indigenous theories without any fundamental change, thus furthering coloniality.

Keywords
posthumanism, new materialism, decolonial, postcolonial, reflexivity

What happens when, as scholars who have habitually been working with posthumanism and the new materialisms, we find ourselves in conversation with—summoned by—thinkers who critique the implicit coloniality1 in these approaches? What happens when we bring such thinkers and writers into our work and lives? What are the implications for our ways of thinking, ways of writing, ways of teaching, ways of relating, even ways of living? Increasingly, in our academic roles within an ancient Western institution, our theorizing-as-usual, teaching-as-usual, and writing-as-usual have been interrupted by voices that hail us, inviting us to look at our participation in colonizing practices. In this article, we explore how the two of us have been responding to this call; how we have, together, brought our (differing) ways of working with posthumanism and the new materialisms into relationship with post- and decolonial approaches and the challenges the latter offer to the former bodies of theory and practice.

Anzaldúa, who started publishing early in the 1980s, practiced a collaborative way of writing that she called “writing comadres” (Anzaldúa, 2015; Keating, 2015). A “comadre” could be translated as a woman you can trust, an ally, a partner, a collaborator, someone with whom you mother or nurture a child or a creative venture. “Writing comadres” are a group of women who give generous, challenging feedback to each other and write. In what follows, we offer accounts of our reading, talking, and writing together, during 2022 and 2023. We position this text as collaborative writing inspired by Anzaldúa and collaborative writing as inquiry, following the pioneering work of, among others, Bronwyn Davies, Susanne Gannon, and Jane Speedy and colleagues in the Collaborative Artful Narrative Inquiry Network. Wyatt et al. (2017, p. 738) see (and experience) collaborative writing both as “potentially radical, political, disruptive, and creative.” Moreira and Diversi (2014, p. 301), two authors coming from differing social positions in Brazil, think of writing together as a decolonizing practice offering the hope

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of change. Collaborative writing might hold the possibility of disturbing academic, social, and cultural spaces (Speedy, 2012) and challenging the assumption of the neo-liberal individual scholarly subject (Wyatt & Gale, 2014). For us, and in resonance with Speedy et al. (2010), Douglas and Carless (2014) and others, collaborative writing also includes tensions, power dynamics, and conflicting feelings; it is not a smooth process, and we hope to make this visible. Speaking from a “we” is not straightforward. Just writing this paragraph, Jonathan’s deeper alignment with the promise of collaborative writing and Karen’s questioning of the extent to which collaborative writing can be decolonial and disruptive (and for whom) each makes their presence felt.

Our writing together, Karen and Jonathan, a confluence of moments and trajectories, began as a shared interest in how we might bring thinkers who challenge coloniality to our habitual academic conversations, the familiar ways of relating with our favorite (Western, Global North) scholar, academic, literary lovers—with Karen having a much more ambivalent and conflicted but still love relationship with them. Karen invited Jonathan to write with her into this shared interest, to push at what might happen to our familiar theoretical “homes” when post- and decolonial thinkers made their presence felt. Where would such an engagement take us?

We began by setting aside a Friday morning in August 2022. Karen proposed readings we would each read beforehand. We met in a café; we talked, shared perceptions, responses, and puzzles; we returned to Karen’s office and wrote, then read aloud to each other what we had written and wrote in response in each other’s writing. We saved our texts into a shared folder in the cloud.

This became our pattern, our way of relating in those early weeks: each of us suggesting texts, then each of us reading before meeting every few weeks on Fridays to talk, write, read aloud, write, repeat, echoing the call and response collaborative writing practices of Jane Speedy and colleagues (e.g., Speedy et al., 2010). Our collaborative writing dynamic shifted by late 2022 as we began crafting this article: we still met on Fridays but focused only on writing (read aloud, repeat). Our earlier reading remained with us, in us, writing us, writing this; and we, especially Karen, continued reading further scholars whose work offers a decolonial challenge to posthumanism, reading that also found its way into our writing process. From early 2023, our collaborative writing practices changed again: the Friday rhythm remained, meeting in the same space, Karen’s shared office, but we would re-connect with the writing-in-progress—reading and talking—before each of us, a few feet apart, wrote into the same document. We could see each other’s cursor blinking, could sense each other thinking/writing. Mazzei and Jackson (2012) write about their similar collaborative writing practice, writing together in a shared document (albeit, for them, asynchronously and with each of them in different geographical places and time zones). During this time, there was no reading aloud, just writing, for the remaining weeks and months until we felt close to finishing, when we read the paper aloud with/to each other from beginning to end, then returned to writing.

**Beginnings: Our Different Histories**

This is how we began writing: writing together in Karen’s office. Karen shares her office, it faces north, does not catch the sun, and overlooks a cobbled street onto the back of a lecture theater. Jonathan’s is the office right next door. He does not share. His office is west-facing, floods with afternoon sun, and has views across the Meadows south to the Pentland Hills.

This is how we began: some years back, as student and supervisor (one of two), meeting once a month for 3 years (and a few months) as a PhD thesis was created, raised, and released into the wild.

Or this: teaching our favorite research course, with all its theoretical, conceptual, and methodological energy. Discussing and changing which authors we read and starting to challenge the predominance of Western approaches. Teaching over a hundred students, working with their fears and hopes, their confusions and excitements. Teaching together.

Or this: This is also how we began: in a café on a Friday morning in summer, readings in front of us, in us, in our bodies, talking, thinking, feeling our way across new territories, allowing those readings to do their work in us.

Or this: we began with different histories, different stories.

**Karen**

Coming to do a PhD in Europe, thanks to a scholarship from the university, from Chile, a formerly colonized country, and later becoming a lecturer in the same “world-class” university, inevitably suggests a narrative of progress and development. When packing my bags for the United Kingdom, I assumed that studying here would be harder, but I was surprised to find that my education in Chilean universities had given me more than I needed to engage, challenge, and go further with what I was offered in a university more than a hundred positions ahead in the QS University Ranking (2022). It soon became evident to me how, in addition to the problematic power dynamics present in establishing any such ranking, it was not so much about the quality of the education provided but about the possibilities that become available here, possibilities born of a contagious sense of entitlement to produce knowledge in lands that have long held the power to do so.

In my undergraduate years, I was a tutor for a course in “Latin American Identity” run by Jorge Gissi. Gissi (2002) introduces the concept of *alienated ethnocentrism*. He
diagnoses how Latin American people—and Chileans in particular—are ethnocentric in an alienated manner. The culture and aesthetics we most value are not ours; they are European and gringa (North American). The more European or gringos we appear to be, the more valuable we feel, which leaves us in an alienated state because we are not European, we are not gringos; we are Latin American. As Latin Americans, we are in great majority descendants of mestizos (people who have mixed Indigenous and European roots). Gissi emphasizes the need to embrace our being Latin American and the social and economic forces that make it hard to do so. Ribeiro (1971, in Gissi, 2002, p. 42) coins “mestizo visible” which could be roughly translated as having visibly mixed European and Indigenous ancestry, that is, people who look mestizos. Some Chileans are not “mestizo visible” but “blanco visible” (i.e., look White) and are generally economically and socially privileged. This connection between Whiteness and privilege is part of the aftermath of colonialism. To me, the concept of “mestizo visible” is helpful because it makes it apparent how there can be mestizos whose roots are not visible. Many people who are “blanca visible” (I included) have mestizo and European ancestry (thus the mestizo—let alone the indigenous—visibility and roots can get diluted).

In Chile, being “blanca visible,” having these European surnames, and so on, has granted me social advantages while weakening the need to embrace my mixedness, the mestiza in me. However, living in the United Kingdom and being routinely asked where I come from, being asked to classify myself in the ethnicity options regularly included in surveys, and not being a citizen here and coming from the Global South, have pushed me to embrace my mixedness. Latin Americans have “inside” ourselves, to different extents, both the colonized and the colonizer.

Using performative meta-reflexivity (Serra Undurraga, 2022, 2023a, 2023b), I ask myself: How am I relating to myself and what is that producing? Am I relating to myself by labeling my experience and producing myself as a fixed identity? “A blanca visible with Mestizo and few European roots, a Latin American—Chilean -academic woman in the UK.” I know better than reifying myself in categories. I am well aware these categories are made and not essential. For example, Quijano (2000) speaks about how the notion of race as a way of categorizing people emerged from the conquest of America, helping to justify European domination. The very fact of naming the land I come from as ‘Latin America’—honoring Americo Vespucio and not using the indigenous name Abya Yala—evidences colonialist forces that produce categories and identities. However, the fact that categories are produced does not mean they are not constantly used and producing (un)helpful effects in the world. The labels I am using for myself here point to the socio-political dynamics that affect the ways in which my experience takes shape. What is this way of relating to myself—that is, acknowledging and working with these identity categories—producing? It is making these dynamics visible. For example, being Chilean means; further questions at the airport counters; filling out forms that scan whether I could be a threat to the United Kingdom; more paperwork required by the UKVI from the institution that hired me; finding hardly any Latin American authors (let alone Chileans) who are substantially used in university courses; and finding daily that no statues, building styles, or golden plaques belong to my side of the world. These and more experiences tell me loud and clear that I need to prove myself. What are the approval criteria and whom do they serve? I experience myself in conflicting ways: wanting to be approved; resenting being put through procedures of further testing; feeling like a European; and resenting “pure” Europeans, their privilege, and its hidden costs. Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa, 2015) helps me embrace this nepantla (not here, not there) space; not finding ready answers but paradoxes and contradictions; pulled to delve into the chaos, pain, and potential creativity of this space.

And now, here, I am writing with you, Jonathan, a “pure” European man. How do our histories and privilege markers show up in our ways of relating? In this article, we question posthumanism and new materialisms. You introduced me to Barad. You lent me Barad’s Meeting the Universe Halfway (2009), which I kept with me for years. Inviting you to this collaboration meant me introducing you to my new favorites, Anzaldúa and Ahmed among others. This collaboration is changing our ways of relating to each other. How does it further shape our sense of ourselves? What does our writing with Deleuze and Foucault, with Barad and Haraway, with Anzaldúa and Ahmed, do to our ways of relating, to our work, to our students, and to our readers?

Toole (2019) says we need concepts to make our problems visible and articulable. How do I need the critiques of coloniality? I need them to embrace the complexity, the mestizaje, that I come from, to refuse to be a secondhand White-European thinker. I think of my favorite South American singers and bands and how they have deliciously brought together and made something new, different, with our Indigenous, mestiza and European influences: thriving in the mixedness that we are. I need these critiques to articulate different ways of being a person, different ways of living, ways that do not blindly follow hegemonic criteria, ways that make me less dependent on the approval of the part of the world that has built itself by the oppression and devaluation of the South. How do you, Jonathan, need the critiques of coloniality? What do they serve for you?

Jonathan

It’s always a selective process of what stories to tell. It’s about this encounter, today, and what emerges; what is present; what feels possible to write; what feels urgent.
There is this, today, in response to your prompts: I have been looking for the new, needing to be challenged. I have been wanting to move, needing to learn. I have feared being, or becoming, stuck, repeating over and over what I’ve been writing for years. That fear, of becoming boring and predictable, is familiar.

Also this: I have been writing with Deleuze and Guattari (and with Deleuze with others) for almost 20 years. I first encountered them through my friend, my buddy, my brother, my co-conspirator, Ken Gale, on our doctoral program. Ken and I wrote with Deleuze and Guattari in our first collaborations, have written with them since, and continue to write with them. I have barely read half their work. I keep reading more when I can, and the barely half I have read I re-read because often it’s as if I’ve never read them. But when I’m talking and teaching, their words, their concepts, come to mind and body, like friends, like longing.

Also: I later found myself with the feminist new materialisms—Karen Barad, Alecia Jackson, Lisa Mazzei, Elizabeth St. Pierre, Jane Bennett, Kathleen Stewart, and others. Those authors and their writings, together with Deleuze and Guattari, became my scholarly home as I wrote, both alone and with others. Their work is rhythm. Their work is dance.

I could add: I am a White, cis, straight, older man. I could say: I am, in addition, temporarily enabled, middle-class. Comfortable. A full professor. A senior scholar. I could name these identifiers even as I challenge their conceptual fixity; that desire to challenge—that capacity to challenge—in turn a marker of privilege. I could say: I am privileged.

I would, of course, turn to those White, Western scholars, to those bodies of theory. There were other possibilities—there always are—but from where I was and where I am positioned, those sources were more readily available than others, more within reach, more within my onto-epistemological frames of reference. Deleuze, Guattari, postqualitative and posthumanist scholars were “my people” (Bhattacharya, 2021).

I could, then, also say: it is no longer sustainable—epistemologically, ontologically, affectively, intellectually, politically, environmentally, ethically—to stay only within the continuing demands and reassuring comforts of “my people.” I need the critiques to coloniality. Just as, as a man, I need feminist theory, as a White person I need critical race theory, and as a straight person I need queer theory. You ask how I need post and decolonial: I need them because, just as I am limited by sexism, racism and heterosexism, I too am limited by colonialism. Feminism, if I allow it, opens me to different ways of understanding and being a man. Critical race theory, if I am open, teaches me about the limitations of my Whiteness. Queer theory, if I make space for it, expands the possibilities of sexuality. There’s more and there’s how these all intersect: these are about more than these narrow categories of experience. I am limited by only attending to White western epistemologies. The critiques to coloniality open me to ways of understanding and being in the world that can challenge me and enrich me. It’s about wanting to learn, wanting to be open to what I don’t know.

Yet, whatever I may need is not the issue or not the only, or the main, issue: each of these—feminism, critical race, queer, and post and decolonial theories—is about justice. This, being here now, writing with you, this reading/writing/reading/writing, is a necessary encounter with change. A charge, a call. It cannot be any other way.

The critiques to coloniality are hailing me. They demand a response. It’s about keeping up, getting with the program. It’s about honoring colleagues, honoring our students and acknowledging the multiple histories and current practices of oppression. It’s about not colluding. It’s about doing what I can.

What Purposes Does It Serve to Engage With Critiques of Coloniality? A Statement of Intent

In those first Friday conversations—talking, reading, writing—we arrived at a statement of intent: to bring ourselves to literature that challenges coloniality and bring this literature in/to us, to be challenged. We did not have a particular aim in mind (to “decolonize” our teaching, our writing, ourselves). Encountering these challenges would, we trusted, generate change in and for us. The encounter itself would be transformative. Drawing on Ahmed (2006), the project is not about “diversity” and integrating new perspectives into what already exists; it’s about changing our basic tenets: “We can certainly consider that when queer bodies do ‘join’ the family table, then the table does not stay in place.” (p. 174). We wanted to risk what was our familiar ground. We wanted to risk being affected. We committed to our becoming different.

Karen: Writing now in my office in early 2023 as we work together on this article, I feel full of myself reading the previous paragraph. Blind. Unaware of how come we get to have both the desire and the possibility of doing this work. It happens to me that when I read some “posts” passages I get angry. I feel a sense of entitlement and self-indulgence that I want to point out. I feel suspicious of the good intentions with an air of edginess that we deploy in the previous paragraph. How come we get to be interested in these authors? I reflexively question (Serra Undurraga, 2022): how are we relating to these authors and what is that producing? Maybe there is something about our image and identity that we want to feed further, make more interesting, more cutting edge, cooler, by
engaging with authors who challenge coloniality. Perhaps we are reinscribing a new kind of colonialism, relating to post and de-colonial authors to serve our purposes. Reading about what our intention for this engagement is, I hear Ahmed’s (1998) voice criticizing Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of “becoming woman” in A Thousand Plateaus. She argues that this notion works as a stage through which the male philosopher goes through, thus serving him for his purposes. Even if “becoming woman” is conceptualized to dissolve categories, Ahmed argues that it ends up reinscribing problematic categories: the figure of the woman as passive and a means through which the man can go through a process; and the figure of the man as free to move, flow and be transformed. The challenge comes back stronger: we use this literature to feel better, we yearn for something, this becoming, this freeing, and these authors who defy coloniality help. When (formerly) colonized people have historically been utilized to help white people build empires, households, etc., it is troubling. It is troubling being “the help.”

Jonathan: I have been reading that opening paragraph of this section too. I’ve been editing it, re-drafting it. Before I started re-drafting, I called across to you to ask you whether you were happy for me to do so. That paragraph had been “your” writing. I was aware of what it might mean to change what you had written; I was aware of the micropolitics of that gesture. You told me you were fine with my doing so and I’ve been making changes. Feeling those words, phrases, sentences take different shape, I kept hesitating, checking with myself: is that how it was? Was, for example, that commitment to being open to change genuine? Was that commitment full? Can commitment be full when there is also, surely, an inevitable holding back, a continuing investment in the status quo, an aversion to and fear of change? Can commitment be full when a part of me is here because I feel I should be, a part of me here to be seen to be here? I too feel suspicious of good intentions (Serra Undurraga, 2022).

Harding (2016) points out that it is not about personal will. We tend to work for what benefits us. Something becomes a problem only when it affects our interests. The current war in Ukraine is recognized as a pressing crisis by European countries who make exceptions to, and adapt, their existing policies to accept Ukrainian refugees. These refugees are White Europeans being displaced (through war with Russia), so governments respond and mobilize, which has not been the case with similar political catastrophes other countries live through.6 Good intentions are partial and expedient. So, as we re-consider the opening paragraph of this section, a fuller, more honest statement of intent would be: to bring ourselves to literature that challenges coloniality and to bring this literature in/to us for us to be challenged, knowing we do so, even if unwittingly, for and from our own interests. As we accept this, the air of being edgy gives way to an uncomfortable sense of limitation and even inadequacy. We must embrace this, even as we keep confronting ourselves and as we encounter post and de-colonial challenges to posthumanism and the new materialisms.

With this more adequate statement of intent, we endeavor to explore some of the challenges that the critiques of coloniality have posed to posthumanist and new materialist scholarship to then think about possible ways of engaging with these challenges.

Which Knowledges and Which “Human” are Posts and New Theories Attending to?

Magnat (2022) argues that Indigenous scholars have been long speaking about a foundational interconnectedness of all forms of life, yet Western bodies of thought that trouble the boundaries of human and nonhuman name themselves as if they were new. This is the Columbus problem. Columbus is named as discovering America as if there was nothing before the European arrival, as if the colonizer’s perspective is the only perspective. Ravenscroft (Ravenscroft, 2018) further argues that

the act of refusing this indebtedness performs—makes—the very same Enlightenment discourses that new materialism insists must be transformed if the devastation wreaked on the West’s Others—“human” and “inhuman,” the “zoe” and the ‘geo’—is ever to cease. (p. 358)

However, it is not only about acknowledging indebtedness to Indigenous knowledges and leaving the (Western) theory as it is. It is about questioning the very assumptions on which posthumanist, new materialist and related theories are built. Who is the “human” in these theories? (Ravenscroft, 2018) points out the ‘human’—which is actually a situated, Western human—stands for all humans in these theories. Similarly, Z. I. Jackson (2020) points out that when posthumanist and new materialist authors speak about the “human” they refer to a kind of human who is at the top of the hierarchy of humanity and has not had their reality as a human plasticized. Koegler (2020) speaks about how the posthumanist call to trouble the boundaries between human and nonhuman is complex and affects differently people who are classified in particular races. She explores the consequences of this flexing of boundaries for different characters in Charlotte Brontë’s 1847 novel, Jane Eyre.
As such, the consequences of the three characters’ animalisation could not be any more different: Bertha is loathed, dreaded, abjected. When she dies she is not mourned. Jane and Rochester, by contrast, fuss over each other’s animalness as they also do over each other’s injuries. Under Jane’s fond care, Rochester quickly recovers: is quickly “rehumanised.” While all three share a sense of “posthumanness” and “humanality,” the radically different consequences of this are neatly organised along racial lines. (p.25)

Mignolo and Walsh (2018) challenges posthumanism to interrogate how the definition of human came to be, who was involved and the purposes it served, arguing it is clear its definition of human served for classifying and identifying certain humans as lesser humans. Furthermore, Mignolo continues, for whom are the issues that posthumanism articulates a problem? For example, the division of nature and culture that posthumanism so keenly troubles is a Western fabrication that made no sense in ancient civilizations in Mesoamerica and the Andes where these words could not have a translation:

Chakra, modern dictionaries will tell you, is a piece of land outside of the city where food is produced for city dwellers. Well, it is not what chakra means in ancient Andean cultures: chakra (also chacra) refers to vincularidad (interrelations) between Runas, sallqas, and huacas. Runa could not be translated as “human” because human in Western vocabulary was separated from nature, which is not the case in Indigenous philosophies. Sallqas are all living organisms, and huacas refers to the sacred, such as mountains or rivers that are also sallqas. (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p.161)

These challenges make evident how our situated embodied practices, our everyday problems and interests, have an imprint on both what we write about and how we write about it. Overall, these critiques pointedly evidence how posts and new theories are speaking to a human who does not have their status as a human plasticized as if they were the only human, and the only epistemic perspective that is attended to. Crucially, this critique partly extends to scholarship that does acknowledge race or indigenous people but, arguably, does not do the work required to fundamentally alter the reproduction of dominant White Western interests.

**What Issues Do Posts and New Approaches Attend to Carefully?**

The critiques of coloniality do not only challenge posthumanist and new materialist scholarship that does not take into account colonialism, racism, and indigenous knowledges. Instead, there is a broader critique of the way in which these issues are taken up by the posts and new. For example, Koegler (2020) points out that in posthumanist literature, race is generally mentioned as part of the alterity lists (e.g., gender, class, race) and not explored. It seems as if there is an awareness that race is important and needs acknowledgment, but there is not enough dedication to explore how race is part of what is being studied. Is it about ticking a checklist and assuring oneself that race has been acknowledged bypassing the need to actually work with it? Davis et al. (2019) point at how Haraway and collaborators, in their proposal and characterization of the term *platonization*, framed in a multispecies and flattened ontology where human labor is but one element in a broader assemblage, are obscuring and leaving largely unexamined the crucial role of racial politics: “Since the plantation was not a device of undifferentiated socioecological transformation, the lack of an analysis underscoring human embodiment and examining socioecological hierarchies as both causes and consequences of the plantation is a conspicuous absence” (p. 5)

Spivak (2013) drawing on the text “Intellectuals and power: a conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze” (Nelson & Grossberg, 1988, as cited in Spivak, 2013) criticizes Deleuze’s and Foucault’s thinking. She conceives their work as dangerous in developing a theory where it would seem like society’s Other can speak (that is, can have a voice and be heard) when what is happening is that they are being spoken for in the language of a certain hegemony (that is, the French intellectual poststructural way of making sense). She argues that the subaltern cannot speak; when certain colonized people do speak, they are usually privileged, and they can only speak because of using a language in line with some hegemony. A subaltern reading (that is, a reading based on Spivak’s approach) can also be applied to how some posthuman theories integrate “Indigenous” knowledges. Martin (2020) questions the homogenizing of both “Indigenous” and “Western” knowledges. He notes how it seems common-sense to simply endorse Indigenous ontologies as if they were one thing when only few examples of elite Indigenous people are being represented. Martin (2020) further argues that giving agency to the nonhuman is not necessarily a generative, ethical enterprise; for example, he points out how corporations are persons under the law in the United Kingdom and the United States. There seems to be a romanticization of indigenous perspectives with the agentic capabilities of mountains, rivers, and more that further feeds the image of academics’ posts in social media networks rather than a socio-political analysis that actually inquires into the social dynamics, complexities, and interests of indigenous communities.

Ahmed (2008) notes how new materialist authors seem to have established their approach through a critique of “constructivist” or “socio-constructionist” feminist scholarship, or what Barad (2003) names the linguistic/cultural/
This brings to mind how in one article, telling (Serra Undurraga, 2022) to authors/knowledges/traditions. kilometic turns, because that scholarship, those turns, do not take materiality into account. Ahmed calls attention to how the targets of these critiques are so broadly conceived that we do not get to know who or what specific texts are being critiqued; it seems to her that actually in-depth reading of feminist theories is not something that is prioritized. Ahmed urges us to think about what we read carefully and what we do not. She says that if we are going to make a defining judgment on certain work then a careful reading is the ethical thing to do. How we relate to the authors we use says much about the kind of theory we are producing. What are we actually doing with the authors and their concepts makes a difference in relation to how our propositions are sustained. What are we doing with our writing wittingly or unwittingly? It seems crucial to go beyond the explicit content we argue about to consider how we are relating (Serra Undurraga, 2022) to authors/knowledges/traditions.

Karen: This brings to mind how in one article, telling entitled “Betraying our best intentions” (Serra Undurraga, 2022), I have included Haraway’s (2016) opposition between sympoiesis (making-with) and autopoiesis (defined as self-organizing) without citing (Maturana & Varela, 1980, 1998) the Chilean thinkers and biologists who introduced the concept of autopoiesis back in 1972 (and whom Haraway also doesn’t cite). It is not that I was unfamiliar with Maturana and Varela—I read them, and they influenced my thinking. The first time I heard about what Haraway was doing in opposition to autopoiesis was at a conference in 2018. When I read the word, “autopoiesis” on the slides I was disconcerted that Maturana and Varela were not mentioned. I even questioned whether they were the ones who coined the concept. I knew the opposition autopoiesis/sympoiesis was a straw man, I knew autopoiesis has never meant self-sufficient nor “interacting units plus contexts/rules” (Haraway, 2016, p. 33), yet at that time it was enough for me that Haraway in one part of her 2016 text was making a more nuanced argument. She credited Margulis with using the term “autopoietic” for what Haraway would term “sympoietic” and then she writes: “As long as autopoiesis does not mean self-sufficient ‘self-making,’ autopoiesis and sympoiesis, foregrounding and backgrounding different aspects of systemic complexity, are in generative friction, or generative enfolding, rather than opposition” (p.61). After writing that 2022 paper, it dawned on me that Haraway conceptualizes autopoiesis without carefully reading (or should I say simply not reading) Maturana and Varela, whom Margulis is drawing on. There is a misreading of what self-organizing, self-producing and autonomous meant in Maturana and Varela’s conceptualization. In a text (Haraway, 2016) that uses the term autopoiesis considerably, we do not find a single reference to the coiners of the term. She mentions them in passing (no reference) in a different text (Haraway, 2008) as second-generation cybernetic thinkers and not the coiners of the term. By contrast, Wynter (1984; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015), who challenges the idea of the human from an anticolonial perspective, has fruitfully made crucial use of Maturana and Varela’s work. I do not intend here to point fingers but to bring to the foreground how easy it can be to not give enough depth of attention to Global South authors. Indeed, I betrayed my best intentions and further reproduced the misreading and erasure of my fellow citizens Maturana and Varela. Colonialist forces are indeed strong and all the more powerful in their invisibility.

Jonathan: Which brings us to here, this writing, and how writing here with each other is also not about pointing fingers, whether at ourselves or at others, but about opening ourselves to how these encounters open us, challenge us, make us aware of what we were not aware of before, in ourselves, in our own work and in the work of scholars we draw from.

After having briefly explored some of the critiques of the covert coloniality in posthumanism and new materialisms, we now explore the question of how we relate to these challenges. Authors associated with posthumanism have grappled with this question. For example, Rosiek and Adkins-Cartee (2023), from a diffractive perspective, interrogate what is enabled by citing (or not) Indigenous scholars in their resonances with a posthumanist framework. They resolve by taking responsibility for their decision of citing Indigenous scholars as a gesture of respect even if it risks appropriation. They highlight that they cannot assert this as the “right” decision but, in a diffractive fashion, can question the productions of this type of engagement for different people and movements. Below, we revise some ways of relating to the challenge of coloniality as we grapple with how these ways impact on us, considering their potential effects.

How Do We Relate to Perspectives That Challenge Coloniality? Integration, Reparation, Survival, or Refusal

Cherniak and Walker (2020, p. 435) write about their stance on working with postcolonial critiques: “We suggest that we can continuously position ourselves to disrupt the colonial practice of new/old binaries and to actively engage with non-modern philosophers as an act and practice of reparations” (emphasis in the original).
Karen: It feels too easy for me. I think they remain “good” in their identities and there is no staying with how uncomfortable it can be to be in the colonizer’s position. I feel the urge to denounce that. I think I feel the urge to denounce that in myself as well: my questioning of the “right” that I have or not to hold critical perspectives when materially I am engaged in practices that are not consistent with them. It is hard for me; I haven’t done it before. It feels like a painful acknowledgement of my limitations and how much I value being comfortable and secure. I said to you, Jonathan: if I put myself in the place of the South American colonized and I imagine the Spanish confessing their bad deeds and making a beautiful public statement about how they are doing things right now, I would feel pissed off.

Jonathan: . . . and I said that if I put myself in the position of the colonizer, I’d need to take the anger and stay there, accept that this is where I am and continue to be available.

Karen: I thought how this is like Winnicott’s (1969) psychoanalytic concept of “surviving,” that is, receiving the attack without retaliating or becoming unavailable. I felt that if that were the case, I would feel recognized. If what would happen is that in the presence of my anger, the colonizer gets angry and says, “Well then, fuck off,” I would think that it would reveal that what mattered to them was their image and I never was important in the first place.

Then, I rethought this. If the colonizer is the one who survives, he is still the good one, the one above. And I rebel. What is required to enable you/us to survive in the first place? Ahmed (2006) troubles how Husserl (1969 as cited in Ahmed, 2006), in his first volume of Ideas, writes in passing about the table in front of him as a ‘writing table’; however, what does not appear is what domestic work—typically performed by women—is needed to keep the desk clear, ready for his writing. The work required to make of that table a desk ready for him. What kind of privilege, grounding and security is assumed, but not scrutinized, to be able to “survive” the attack of another? And more, this whole thing has too neatly distinguished identities. In what identity category would I situate myself? Anzaldua (2015) speaks about double vision when we are in between places, not neatly categorized in any grouping, and then we can see from one perspective and then the other and more. And more, using performative meta-reflexivity, what ways of relating are implicit in “surviving” and what are they generating? It looks too unidirectional and hierarchical. Cherniak and Walker’s proposal of reparation is producing a good ex-colonizer, a good post-colonizer maybe, who is so good that they can repair the anger of the colonized. And let’s notice that anger can be associated with “savage.” It feels like it is rather reinscribing the problem. How could the person occupying the colonizer role be fundamentally changed by this encounter?

Jonathan: When Winnicott talks about survival he’s talking about the maternal (and the psychoanalyst’s) capacity to survive the infant’s (patient’s) fantasized destructive attacks and, through doing so, become able to thrive. As you suggest, that does not transpose to this dynamic. There is power that remains with the mother and analyst. They, as you say, are the “good” ones, the mature ones, the ones who “help” the other. Such a dynamic is a perpetuation of the colonizer/colonized relationship. It must be more than my taking the anger and staying there. It must demand more from me than that. It must involve, I sense, more humility, more action, more change. It’s not about “integration,” either, because that denies the politics; it can’t only be about reparation because that suggests reparation is both possible and restorative; and it requires more than Winnicott’s “survival” because surviving does not, in this case, require enough of the survivor. Like you suggest, perhaps the move is towards being open to being “re-made.”

Karen: The colonized has needed to endure the blindness, arrogance, greed, violence, and narrow-mindedness of the colonizer. The violence of colonization is having your lives destroyed, imposing a foreign way of doing things that situates you at the bottom, at best as a subject of Christian compassion. It becomes apparent to me that these dynamics of violence and erasure cannot be encompassed by the concept of “survival” with its grounding in the mother-child relationship.

Our intention has been, and remains, to stay with the complexities of this project, of this coming together. Bringing the critique of coloniality to posthumanism is disturbing our waters and there is no single appropriate response to this. It is not simply about acknowledging and repairing; it is not about aligning with one to the detriment of the other, nor is it about integration. It is maybe about an open conversation that challenges and transforms our thinking and practices but that is also complicated. To what extent do we tolerate being challenged, disturbed, being made uncomfortable, being questioned about our privileges, being affected, being changed—and making change—through our encounters with authors and concepts which challenge coloniality?
King (2017) contends that posthumanist literature will keep reproducing the same if it does not address its own colonialism. The possibility of going beyond identity, the subject, or the human rests on dismantling what has formed these structures, that is, the negation, destruction, and annihilation of (to use King’s terms) Natives and Blacks. “If there is no plan to enable Black and Indigenous life, then there is no transcending the violence of the human.” (p. 179).

King (2017), presses for a fundamental change and not simply acknowledging, integrating, or repairing. She advocates for a refusal to keep building theory over the shoulders of authors who unwittingly endorse the destruction of Natives and Black people. She is clear in how a Deleuzian brand of posthumanist thinking reproduces in their conceptualizations the annihilation of Natives. Drawing on Byrd’s (2011) work, she speaks about how Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in A Thousand Plateaus describe the West, the United States, as a rhizomatic place populated by Indians who do not have ancestry.

There are no existing people to which Deleuze and Guattari have to be accountable. Therefore, their own and others’ self-actualizing, free-form whiteness can proceed unimpeded. The rhizomatic West—terra nullius—is without a people, history, or a cosmology to navigate. (King, 2017, p. 171)

She emphasizes how, while not intending to colonize, Deleuze and Guattari further reproduce the violence of colonization. This is an example of how we betray our best intentions and the need to iteratively, reflexively, question ourselves and what we are helping to produce (Serra Undurraga, 2022). However, King (2017) is incredulous about the possibility of posthumanist theory doing this on its own. The movement she proposes is decolonial rather than what she calls postcolonial and requires material and epistemological change to the very foundations. “Further, if Native people were to be fully incorporated into the category of the human, then the United States would cease to exist” (p. 180). Clearly, this decolonial refusal to continue building on posthumanist theories would require a concrete risking of, or more, an abandoning of, privilege on the part of posthumanist authors; not because of goodwill but because the refusal of people affected by colonization would not allow otherwise.

Endings: A Way of Relating to the Challenge of the Covert Coloniality in Posthumanism and the New Materialisms

Karen: It is hard to “conclude” this paper. Things keep coming up. For example, I find it a funny scene to envisage both of us at a café in Edinburgh enacting the encounter between the colonized and the colonizer. Who am I to give voice to the Indigenous? As I write this, the Chilean singer-songwriter, Patricio Manns (1965), appears with his lyrics “¿Qué sabes de cordilleras si tú naciste tan lejos? Hay que conocer la piedra que corona al ventisquero” (What do you know about the mountain ranges if you were born so far? You need to know the stone that crowns the mountain glacier—my translation)

Likewise, many other corners of this article invite me to continue thinking, reading, and writing. However, there is something that I feel clear and strong about: the hailing of literature that challenges coloniality in posthumanist thinking begs for a foregrounding of positionality and reflexivity. As Z. I. Jackson (2020) says, “Perhaps the precipitous resurgence of the ‘beyond’ in recent years is precisely owed to its performative gesture and routinized deployments having become a beguiling habituation, a seductive doxa effectively eluding the imperative of renewed reflexivity” (p. 215). She continues to argue that posthumanist theories have not done enough work to situate themselves, the going beyond does not appear to be situated so it “returns us to a Eurocentric transcendentalism long challenged.” (p. 217).

Recognizing the location, interests, and purposes of our writing makes it necessarily provincial writing, provincial knowledge. I think that the most generative way for posthumanist literature to relate to the challenge of decolonial and postcolonial literature is to acknowledge its provincialism, to tolerate making itself smaller. Much posthumanist literature tries to capture, to engulf, postcolonial, decolonial, anticolonial, and indigenous literature and knowledges. Even the best intentions of integrating, acknowledging, and repairing can continue to reproduce a hierarchy with posthumanism at the top. I am the one acknowledging and repairing, the one integrating you in. This is my game. I believe it would be best to stay with the wound of finding that we/you were not that original after all, that what we/you say is not that relevant for all peoples, that what we/you say further reproduces colonizing practices we/you do not want to be associated with. In making posthumanism provincial, postcolonial, decolonial, and indigenous knowledges make space for themselves. No need for permission.

When as an author who has written with posthumanism, I want to write with postcolonial, decolonial, and indigenous literature, I do it out of the fruitfulness that these encounters allow me. However, this does not automatically allow me to say that I am “decolonizing.” Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us of the material, concrete fights that decolonizing
movements are making. Cusicanqui (2012) urges us to think about the economic-material flows in which academics working with decoloniality participate. It is necessary, even if painful and uncomfortable, to interrogate whether our academic work with decolonizing perspectives is furthering a privileging of the academia and/or bolstering our own career through publications that feed, also in economic terms, the Western academy.

**Jonathan:** I agree there is no “concluding” possible here, no neat wrapping up, no tidying of where we have got to. What we have been writing about is messy and open-ended. I write this, in late July 2023, as we are each on our respective summer vacations, both of us away from Edinburgh. I’m in southern France. The balcony doors are open. It’s mid-morning. The sun is out but the air is cool, much cooler than the past few days. Elsewhere, more than 3000 kilometers south-east from here, in southern Europe, there is exceptional, terrifying (becoming less exceptional, more terrifying) heat; wildfires are raging. Homes, villages, towns, forests are being destroyed; tourists and locals alike being evacuated. I find it is not possible to write without drawing attention to being a body-in-place here, safe, in relation to this example, so much in the news this week, of other human and more-than-human bodies-in-place at grave risk elsewhere.

Noticing and declaring is not enough but it is necessary, as you state: your call for positionality and reflexivity—the complex, nuanced reflexivity you write about in depth elsewhere (e.g., Serra Undurraga, 2022)—to be foregrounded is relevant and imperative, here, now. Privilege and its effects are ever-present.

As we draw this article to a close, I am also with how writing, how collaborative writing, writing together with you, leaves me with a sense of momentum. Writing feels so limited, so small, an undertaking, given the scale of the issues to be addressed, but it is, I guess, something. An act. An act of activism (Madison, 2010). Gloria Anzaldúa (2000, p. 183) claims how the hand, the writing hand, “does things.” It is the “symbol of activism accompanied by a deep awareness.” The continuing call is to keep doing, keep engaging, keep being open, and keep writing.

I notice how I have just cited Anzaldúa, which I have not done before. It could be I do so for, as you write, the act’s “fruitfulness.” You have introduced me to her work over the past year, I have engaged with it, it has drawn and affected me, and that engagement is being productive and enriching. Or it could be my citing her is performative: to be someone who cites Anzaldúa and be seen as someone who cites Anzaldúa. Or it could be a subtle move to claim her for myself, to be the one who is integrating her into my work. *This is my game.* Or it could be there are traces of each of these.

The act, the process, of colonizing can be subtle. It is present in the everyday, in what might appear to be mundane, ordinary engagements. I remember, for example, how about 18 months ago I kept not including your name in the list of presenters for a writing-in-progress event I organized for the Centre for Creative-Relational Inquiry (CCRI). There were five of us presenting, and I circulated the information with only four names. You pointed that out, I corrected it, and then did it again. We talked about this. I apologized; you accepted my apology. I wondered whether I was (secretly, unconsciously) finding it difficult your no longer being my PhD student and instead being a colleague; how I was still grieving the former and was threatened by the latter. As we write now, however, in ending this article, I’m thinking and feeling there was (also) the dynamic of a White, European man erasing a Chilean woman.

**Karen:** I find it crucial that we can have a conversation about this. As a PhD student, I felt so comfortable and free with you because of how much I could explore, criticize, and not feel that you were threatened. Feeling tutors threatened by me threatened me, as I feared they could attack me. Now we speak about how my being officially your colleague and no longer your PhD student, and us teaching the research course together, might also play into the “erasing” slips. You can also be threatened by me and that might lead to this erasing. It makes the relationship more real in its complexities. The two of us speaking about this makes it less threatening.

I note how the dynamics of you being a white European, British man, and me being a Latin American, Chilean woman and that leading to the erasing slips just appeared when I was no longer your PhD student. Is it that being your PhD student made me less threatening and thus easier to include, take in, recognize, but no longer being your student and now a colleague moved me to another place in your world where I could be unwittingly erased? This makes me think of how for posthumanist authors it might be easier to include postcolonial, decolonial and indigenous authors “under their wings” but struggle to see them as potential competition, as people they need to share space with, people who will make their room smaller.
We end, both of us, with some tentative final claims: The power dynamics permeated by colonialism act in subtle ways. Even between us, in a relationship where there is space for challenge and otherness, erasure happens. Engagement with the critiques of coloniality can be used to bolster ourselves: we may feel at ease including postcolonial, indigenous, decolonial approaches when we do not feel threatened; doing so may shore up our identity as posthuman authors. Engagement with the critiques of coloniality can be used to bolster economically and epistemically the Western institutions we are part of. We can be unwilling to let go of our privileges; we stay attached to them, to the order of the world in which we live. Finally, we have come, first, to understand the decolonizing call to risk changes in our familiar structures, foundations and orders, allowing what is dear to us to become challenged; and, second, to see the call not as something we can, or should, ever master but one that will change us in a way we cannot fully understand.

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**Notes**
1. Coloniality (Quijano, 2000) refers to the long-lasting social, political, epistemological, and economic power structures and dynamics initially imposed by colonialism but alive and kicking when countries have gained “independence.” In this article, we refer to the “critiques of coloniality” to encompass authors associated (though not necessarily identified) with the “decolonial,” “postcolonial,” and “anti-colonial” approaches. This is in itself complicated as the concept of coloniality emerged in the South American decolonial approach. These approaches (postcolonial, decolonial, and anticolonial) are defined in differing ways by different authors. In this article, we will not focus on settling these differences but will acknowledge the different angles taken by different critiques of coloniality. It is important to clarify that this article is not focused on indigenous knowledges and their integration into posthumanist/new materialist approaches as, for example, Ravenscroft (2018) and Rosiek and Adkins-Cartee (2023) do.
2. [https://cani-net.com/](https://cani-net.com/)
3. The University of Edinburgh.
4. Universidad Católica de Chile and Universidad de Chile.
5. United Kingdom Visas and Immigration.
7. Bertha is a character described in the novel as “Creole.”

**References**


**Author Biographies**

Jacqueline Karen Andrea Serra Undurraga is a lecturer in counseling and psychotherapy at the University of Edinburgh. Her last publications propose re-conceptualizations of reflexivity; namely, performative meta-reflexivity and diffractive reflexivity. She has also recently published on interrogating psychotherapy from a Foucauldian perspective. Karen is currently working with decolonial approaches and the alternative ways of living they open.

Jonathan Wyatt is professor of qualitative inquiry and co-director of the Center for Creative-Relational Inquiry at the University of Edinburgh. His latest book, co-edited with Keith Tudor and published by Routledge, is *Qualitative Research Approaches for Psychotherapy: Reflexivity, Methodology, and Criticality*. He is working (slowly) on a new book, *Writing, the Everyday, and Creative-Relational Inquiry*, also with Routledge.