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# Decolonization is a metaphor towards a different ethic. The case from psychedelic studies<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Indigenous psychedelic uses have long been imbricated with colonialism and its afterlives. Amidst tensions from accelerating investor interest in psychedelics and calls to decolonize research and practices, we argue that the study of psychedelics is troubled by dualisms used in both colonial and decolonial thought: subject and object, self and other, culture and nature, synthetic and natural, the colonizer and the indigenous, the literal and the metaphorical. Feminist and decolonial theory as well as a discussion of metaphor support our argument that the study of psychedelics often lacks critical engagement with these dualisms. A narrow understanding of colonality hinders far-reaching critiques of contemporary capitalism, including progressive colonization of the life-world and commodification of psychedelic experiences. Fears that decolonization is becoming just a 'metaphor' implicitly reaffirm the conceptual power dynamics of colonization. In research on psychedelics, decolonization as a critical metaphor enables reassessing problematic distinctions that shape thinking, material realities, experiences.

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## Introduction

This article begins at the generative nexus of decolonial thought and the study of psychedelics in Latin America. Growing interest in the role of psychedelics in health and medicine has accelerated clinical, political, financial, and cultural investments in the potential healing effects of ayahuasca, *Salvia divinorum*, and psychoactive mushrooms.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ayahuasca and psychoactive mushrooms are prominent in both historical and current discourses on psychedelics, particularly in Mexico and Latin America. They are not synthetic. *Salvia divinorum* and psychoactive mushrooms can be consumed directly from the field, whereas ayahuasca is a preparation of plant ingredients, that is known under different names and can be brewed using different plant species and recipes.

This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

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Psychedelic substances link places such as the Amazonian rainforest and the Mexican Highlands with laboratories and clinical trials in the US and the UK. All are connected with practices of violence, such as the US-led 'War on Drugs' in Latin America and other histories of criminalization of psychedelic substances, as well as epistemological tropes in Western thought which reinvoke dualisms between knower and known, natural and synthetic, subject and object, self and other.

Through an analysis of past and present examples of extraction practices and uses of psychedelics in Mexico, we argue that the study of psychedelics can contribute to debates in decoloniality because it illustrates how dualist logics of colonization (Plumwood 1993, 4) are continually re-invoked, despite attempts to reject them. At the same time, the study of psychedelics can be useful for illustrating how an *ethic* of decoloniality could be advanced that eschews such dualisms. Our purpose is to outline an ethical approach away from the logic of dualisms to achieve structural changes for less violent social organizations that recognize continuity and plurality.

Debates on decolonization are inherently normative and political because they are concerned with the righting of a wrong that affects relations and identities. Decolonization claims normative and political force, standing as the conceptual banner to rally movements that oppose the persistence of colonial power. Gandhi (1998) argues that the rise of postcolonial concern sprang from the disquieting observation that *colonialism* could not be defined as a bygone political force, but one that lingers into contemporary politics. Its ramifications are still felt, and the modalities of colonial power are still active and wider ranging than previously thought: from the use of overt military power, colonial modes of economic exploitation and extraction, through to cultural eradication and epistemicide (Sousa de Santos 2014). In this article, we draw on Gandhi's (1998) and Sousa de Santos' (2014) work, but without proposing a general methodology for decolonization. Instead, we wish to situate the argument we develop within wider decolonial discourses concerning psychedelics specifically.

Decolonizing debates often engage with one or more of the following concerns:

- moral culpability and compensation for injustices and exploitation committed in the past;
- inequalities that continue into the present and are of social, material, and political consequence (e.g. marked subject and identity positions);
- the identification and prevention of new practices of domination, appropriation, and exploitation.

All of these come to bear on the study of psychedelics, which is broadly understood here to include psychoactive drugs and the knowledge and practices surrounding them, as well as the exceptional experiences associated with them. Indigenous people have suffered multiple consequences of imposed colonial regimes of knowledge, policing, and extractivism across the world. In this article, we examine these concerns with regard to the reverberations of the brutal colonization of the lands and resources in what is now the Mexican Republic.

Most of the people who live in present-day Mexico are descendants of indigenous peoples who were exploited and subjected to indentured servitude. Indigenous beliefs and practices have been historically delegitimized, belittled, and tightly controlled.

Holding 10% of the world's total biodiversity, Mexico has a wealth and extensive history of uses of psychedelic plants and substances, recorded back two millennia (Hernández Santiago et al. 2016). Plants and preparations with psychedelic properties have shaped cultural rituals and informed indigenous science and knowledge practices (Schultes and Hofmann 1992). In ongoing territorial struggles, both literal and metaphorical, the appropriation of indigenous skills and knowledges serves the needs of consumer markets, whether for goods, psychological cures, or for religious and transformative experiences (Liffman 2011).

Colonization also takes the form of a systematic, concerted effort in psychiatric research to subject indigenous ways of knowing and doing to the instrumental logic of Western science in the form of clinical trials and highly-regimented biomedical research (Noorani 2020; Sanabria 2021; Schwarz-Plaschg 2022). The so-called 'psychedelic renaissance' advances this new frontier of colonization, where the methods of clinical medical science are applied to absorb private refuges of unreason, pleasures, and communal experiences into the marketized systems of control and behaviour management (Hauskeller 2022).

This article takes a critical approach towards the discourse and research practices in contemporary psychedelic studies. The problem we address is both conceptual and methodological. We argue that decolonizing psychedelics requires a different ethic for disarming past and present power structures. To do that we draw on Frankfurt School Critical Theory (Fraser and Honneth 2003), the Coloniality of Power (Quijano and Ennis 2000), and Feminist philosophy, in particular the work of Val Plumwood. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood (1993) systematically differentiates binary from dualist distinctions and identifies the latter as an epistemic instrument of colonization. She argues that Western thought conceives of dualistic human/nature relations. Oppressive power structures operate through conceptualizing the world in hierarchical dualisms. These dualisms entail relations of *mastery*: a self (the colonizer) is separated from and given rights over an inferior, and hence subordinate, other (the colonized). Plumwood's analysis provides a critical instrument to examine the 'interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms' (42) in psychedelic studies. Critical Theory and the recent 'recognitive turn', initiated by the works of Honneth (1996) and Nancy Fraser (1995; Fraser and Honneth 2003), serve as a theoretical framework for this analysis. Intersubjective recognition matters for the self-relation and ultimate wellbeing of the subject. Given the important role of recognition in present social conflicts, recognition practices ought to be part of decolonial scholarship. McArthur argues that Critical Theory has not done enough to articulate its valuable concepts to advance decolonial thought and ethics (2021). When applied to the study of psychedelics, the critical method equips us with the normative language of recognition and redistribution to apprehend colonial abuses without reaffirming the very logics that underwrite them, such as wielding colonial ideas of sovereignty as a corrective against historical abuse.

The history of psychedelics continues to grapple with legacies of largely white, male scholars located in the West who travelled to distant locations to explain native, or 'traditional,' ways of life. As decolonial theorists have argued, one result of this history has been the persistence of dualisms that reinstate colonial practices and exert power – between the researcher and the researched, between subject and object, between nature and culture, between natural and synthetic. In the second half of the twentieth

century, Latin American Marxist scholarship began to systematically deconstruct such colonial dualisms informing our understanding of social class, land property, and racial identity (cf. Stavenhagen 1965; Quijano 1965). Aníbal Quijano's concept of *Coloniality of Power* (2000) crystallizes this academic tradition criticizing the Eurocentric project of rationality, modernity, and colonial domination that has historically rendered the European researcher as the 'subject' capable of knowing, and all others as the 'object' of knowledge.

Decoloniality scholarship makes central the question of how knowledge is produced, arguing that knowledge production is an epistemological, political, and methodological matter infused with power. Indigenous, Latinx, and scholars of colour have illustrated that the specific and highly value-laden dualisms of nature/culture, subject/object were never universal, but rather part of a specific project of modernity that worked to erase other relational forms of knowing and being in the world (Todd 2016; Kovach 2009). The problem of misrepresentation and appropriation of indigenous knowledges and practices (Tuhiwai Smith 1999), and similar problematics in biomedicine (cf. Haraway 1988; Keller 1985), has bearing on present-day experimentation with psychedelics. The study of psychedelics presents discourses where these dualisms have been and are being deployed. We will concentrate on dualisms as well as some of the paradoxes they bring forth, especially regarding sovereign enclosures and patents, notions of identity, culture, as well as continuity for restorative justice projects and processes of purification, and their strategic use.

### **Part one: colonization and the first psychedelic boom: María Sabina and Gordon Wasson**

The systematic research of Blas Pablo Reko (1877–1953) and Richard Evans Schultes (1915–2001) laid the groundwork for research in the field of psychedelic plants and fungi in the West. Both Reko and Schultes gathered and classified hundreds of species and shaped some hypotheses about the ritual uses of sacred mushrooms. However, neither scholar had the opportunity to be present at, or experience ceremonies with, psychedelic mushrooms because they were kept secret. One result of this secrecy was that discussions of ritual healing ceremonies using psychoactive mushrooms did not appear in academic journals and publications. Thus, the Mazatec *veladas* ceremonies were believed to no longer exist. It was not until 1939, when Schultes published an article in which he reported that the mysterious sacrament described in pre-Columbian codices, *teonanacatl* – 'flesh of the gods' in Nahuatl – was a psychoactive mushroom (Schultes 1939), that the mushroom and discussions thereof began to re-enter the Global North (Bassett Johnson 1939). This attracted little interest until 1952, when Robert Gordon Wasson received a letter about Schultes' article on the subject from the poet and scholar Robert Graves (Sheldrake 2020).

R. G. Wasson had previously travelled to Oaxaca and other villages, as well as to Huautla asking about the ancient rituals of sacred mushrooms. In 1955, R. G. Wasson met with María Sabina, who was well known within her community as a powerful healer. Their encounter became an important focal point in the developing Western understanding of the sacred mushrooms' ritual and therapeutic uses. R. G. Wasson boasted afterwards: 'There is no indication that any white man had ever attended a

session of the kind that we are going to describe, nor that white man had ever partaken of the sacred mushrooms under any circumstances' (Wasson 1980, 10). This is incorrect. 500 years prior to his arrival in the Mazatec Sierra, various Spanish missionaries had mentioned rituals involving sacred plants and mushrooms in their chronicles (Motolinia 1969; Durán 1867). Nonetheless, R. G. Wasson's claim reinforced the trope and strategic narrative of *Terra Nullius*, so common among self-acclaimed pioneers or explorers. Such framings of intercultural encounters as a primal experience of the knowledge, materials, or lands of indigenous or native 'others' have historically served to legitimize claims of discovery and novelty in colonization agendas. A telling legacy of this is the continued references in the psychedelic literature of Wasson as the 'discoverer' of magic mushrooms (cf. Plotkin 2021).

The encounter between María Sabina and R. G. Wasson was asymmetric, marked by profound imbalances of power. He was not only an amateur mycologist but a former banker and Vice President of J. P. Morgan Bank, with considerable resources to finance his ethnographic research trips to Mexico and the Mazatec Sierra. María Sabina was a highly recognized sage in her village, but this did not carry monetary value – she did not, for instance, charge a fixed amount of money when she performed her 'healing ceremonies' with sacred mushrooms. The municipal trustee of Huautla had pressured her to agree to meet R. G. Wasson. In an interview with Alberto Ongaro in 1971, R. G. Wasson acknowledged that she had not met him on her own accord (Wasson 1980). María Sabina confirmed that she was pressured in an interview she gave to the Mazatec writer Álvaro Estrada in 1976:

It is true that before Wasson, no one spoke so freely about the holy children [sacred mushrooms]. None of our people revealed what they knew about this matter. But I obeyed the municipal trustee. However, if the foreigners had arrived without any recommendation, I would also have shown them my wisdom because there is nothing wrong. (Estrada 2005, 42)

R. G. Wasson reported the encounter in *Time* magazine. It was read by millions and is credited with encouraging a wide array of scientific research into psychedelics and indigenous rituals. Reflecting on the popularity psychedelics gained through this publication, Wasson lamented later about the 'activity of the riff-raff of our population that no longer follows, or are even aware of the deep spiritual significance of the consumption of "magic mushrooms" for the Mazatecs' (Wasson 1980, 17). He was aware that his publications constituted a betrayal of the secrecy and mysticism shrouding the *niños santos* (magic mushrooms) in Mazatec culture. However, he concluded that it was his duty to share this knowledge with the world, before it disappeared in the wake of the relentless advance of modern civilization (Wasson 1980, 17–19). His encounter was an opportunity to learn about the wisdom of indigenous peoples. Yet, how the meeting came about and how it was later reported provoked critical reflection on the ethics of the encounter as well as the consequences of the narration and publication. Looking back at Wasson's meeting with María Sabina, we can see how it was shaped by an extractivist appropriation of indigenous knowledge into Western scientific and public discourses.

Gruber (1970) uses the term 'salvage ethnographies' for studies that promise to save vanishing indigenous peoples and knowledge, criticizing them as part of neo-colonial strategies of extraction, engaging in biopiracy, and cultural appropriation. Gerber notes regarding Wasson's paper that

[w]ithin two years of the story's publishing, psilocin and psilocybin, the main active compounds in the mushrooms, were isolated, characterized, synthesized, and named by Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann at the Sandoz pharmaceutical company. Sandoz quickly patented the extraction procedure and a method for 'therapeutic tranquilization' marketing pills under the trade name Indocybin. (Gerber et al. 2021, 573–577)

Choosing a feminist and decolonial approach to the encounter of R. G. Wasson and María Sabina illustrates the marginalization of women in psychedelic discourses. The expertise of two women was critical for his public success. Wasson's wife, Valentina Pavlovna Wasson, was a paediatrician and ethnomycologist with a PhD. She wrote an article in the magazine *This Week* in 1957, where she succinctly noted that only her husband had met with a shaman and that her main objective was to research the mushroom experience in a non-ceremonial context. Due to Valentina Wasson's early death in 1958, the two women never met (Bartlett and Williams 2021). While R. G. Wasson won recognition, fame, and worldwide prestige for 'discovering' the sacred mushroom ceremony, María Sabina lived with the stigma of a 'Malinche' (Cortés' indigenous lover) of psychedelic knowledge – shamed for 'disclosing' indigenous wisdom and secrets to a foreigner. She was not acknowledged or recognized for her expertise and knowledge of the *niños santos*, and she subsequently became the victim of violence. Intense anger about her betrayal was directed towards her in Huautla: unknown people burned down her house, and a drunken man shot her with a gun and murdered her son. In 1985 she died in impoverished conditions.

In the public and scholarly discourse Valentina Wasson and María Sabina were treated as mere appendages to R. G. Wasson's 'discovery' and their crucial knowledge contribution was overlooked, just as the work of hundreds of other women. Historical research has sought to change this (cf. Papaspyrou 2019; Dyck 2021; Mangini 2021; González Romero 2022). The women here were treated as an extension of nature that could be appropriated and exploited as R. G. Wasson saw fit. However, it is insufficient to merely restore these two women and others to their rightful place in the story. Instead we suggest a broader refusal of attempts to apportion ownership of the psychedelic experience inherent in both R. G. Wasson's own self-aggrandizing reportage and more sober revisionist accounts.

One suggestion, then, is to disrupt the dualist power structures which favour masculine approaches to, and forms of, knowledge. Research on the therapeutic properties of psychoactive mushrooms, and the development of related pharmaceuticals, carries a 'colonial shadow' (Negrín 2021). Recognizing this is a first step in the reflection on persistent exploitation which is part of the history of the 'psychedelic renaissance.' Confronting historical legacies is a first step to undoing the unjust effects of discrimination, cultural appropriation, and unequal exchanges between the Global South and North. However, it is not only a question of being aware of past wrongdoings and acknowledging them, but about creating a decolonial future and alternative politics of psychedelic knowledges. We outline the philosophical framework we draw on in the next section.

## **Part two: decolonization and the power of dualisms**

A decolonizing approach attends to issues of colonial and postcolonial power formations, both material and social. We build our analysis of how one might proceed in

decolonizing research into psychedelics by addressing the logical structure of colonial thought. A seminal text for this line of critique is Val Plumwood's analysis of hierarchized dualisms as the powerful logic driving and justifying colonization in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993). Plumwood provides a list of features that are characteristic of the colonization of nature and women (43) which is useful for discussing how the colonizing logic of dualisms shapes psychedelic research. We add to this analysis a further dualism, namely that between synthetic and natural. In psychedelic research, substances such as ayahuasca are categorized as natural, indigenous produce. Little acknowledgement is given for the botanical expertise, plant cultivation techniques, preparation practices of making the ayahuasca brew, and conducting ceremonies successfully. Before the synthetic/natural distinction, which we will draw out further throughout this article, we discuss several of the dualist strategies outlined by Plumwood, namely backgrounding, hyperseparation, incorporation, objectification, and homogenization. With this, we show how important it is for decolonizing discourses to be critical of the dualist structure of colonizing epistemologies.

**Backgrounding:** Following Hegel's concept of dialectic (inter-)dependency, unfolded in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), Plumwood emphasizes how 'the real role of the other is obscured in culture and the economic relation is denied' (1993, 49). The other and the other's perspective are rendered inessential for the self, as a way of coping with the inescapable dependency on the other that must be denied, even if it is the colonized who makes the colonizer. R. G. Wasson's fame and recognition achieved through denial of the expertise of both María Sabina and his mycologically-proficient wife exemplify such backgrounding. A similar dualistic take is observable in the discourse of the current advancement of psychedelics in clinical psychiatry. Extracting knowledge and expertise from others, in this case indigenous and sub-cultural others with long traditions of psychedelic plants and substance use, is the basis for clinical trial design. Yet, these sources and the dependency on them is obscured in clinical trial reporting. Resourcing material for science from indigenous people or non-scientists is conceptually equated to taking directly from nature – and settler colonialists conceive of themselves as entitled to do both. Plotkin (2021) articulates such backgrounding with the following comparison:

[e]thnomycologists know that when you want to find out the secrets, you have to go to the indigenous peoples. When you want to find out where things are you go to the back of the book, to the table of contents, to find what page to turn to. Indigenous people can be seen as the table of contents and the index of nature. (minutes 30–31)

The psychedelic treatments and substances are presented as the products of Western laboratories and research work. There is little, if any, recognition for the continued one-sided dependency on indigenized others.

**Radical exclusion or hyperseparation:** The other has to be not only different, but has to belong to a different and inferior order, constructed through labelling features and differences that are social or behavioural as natural or metaphysical facts (Memmi 1965; Quijano and Ennis 2000). This hyperseparation (Plumwood 1993, 49) is necessary to uphold the colonizer's identity. The hierarchy of power must be maintained through iterative reassurance of his superiority. In psychedelic research, this feature of dualism takes several forms. One aspect is the dualism of synthetic versus natural, categorizing



the Western use and modes of production as radically different from any other modes of producing psychedelic substances. In terms of treatment and usage, the biomedical approach is presented as safer and more focused on cure (therefore better, superior, 'cleaner') while the indigenous way is presented through notions of animism and rituals which are not scientific unless incorporated and systematized within the colonist epistemologies of subject and object, culture and nature. The dualism of synthetic versus natural overlaps with the dualist distinction of reason and nature, deeply entrenched in the interrelated logics of Enlightenment and colonization.

**Relational incorporation:** Here the other is defined predominantly in terms of the needs and desires of the colonizer, as a lack or absence, and accordingly recognized only in relation to the self (Plumwood 1993, 51). In the study of psychedelics (and especially in psychiatry), this form of dualism is apparent in the way the psychedelic experience is enclosed and evaluated with the instruments of psychiatric diagnosis, standardization, classification, and assessment (Hauskeller 2022). Cures for depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders are needed and justify the labour of transforming otherwise irrelevant psychedelics so that the benefits can be extracted. Non-clinical transformative aspects of psychedelic experiences are largely ignored. Indigenous knowledges and practices are appropriated to serve psychiatry. At the same time, uses that do not fit with this model such as relaxation, seeking self-transformation, or ecstasy are othered and excluded, framed as often problematic touristic or recreational activity. Although such uses are not given full legitimacy, they are nonetheless recognized business opportunities (Fotiou 2019; Taylor 2003).

**Instrumentalization or objectification:** In this dualist relationship the other is the means to the self's ends. Often this relation is realized by presenting the relation between colonizer and colonized as mutually beneficial. In this conception, both benefit: colonizers get what they need and the colonized gain access to culture, religion, science, etc. The colonized and their epistemological and ontological frameworks are only acknowledged as far as they advance the colonizers' end without due reciprocity (Plumwood 1993, 53). Western society and the medical pharmaceutical complex use what they can find to bring new treatments to market.

**Homogenization or stereotyping:** The colonized must appear homogenous to conform to their presumed nature. Categories such as 'women' or 'indigenous' are generic, erasing differences and highlighting only one common trait – they are not what is recognized as male or dominant, i.e. 'the rest' (Plumwood 1993, 54). 'Indigenous' is a generic, and homogenizing category, born from the colonial encounter of the sixteenth century that amalgamated different peoples and indigenous nations (e.g. Taínos, Aztecs, Chibchas, Mapuche) into one category ('Indians'). The constitution of racial taxa produced both the legitimation for specific forms of labour (such as serfdom for 'Indians,' or slavery for 'Blacks') crucial for global capitalist accumulation, and a new 'modern' perspective of knowledge 'within which non-Europe was the past, and because of that inferior, if not always primitive' (Quijano and Ennis 2000, 552). Furthermore, the multitude of ways in which psychedelics are used by indigenous Mexican people is often presented as similar across those groups, when there is huge variety and a complex history. From the colonizer's perspective, the peoples and practices are dualistically othered and identified as 'traditional' or 'indigenous,' almost as an extension of the land itself.

The features of dualist thought are interrelated and create a web, or a puzzle as Plumwood suggests, of overlapping distinctions. Scholars of psychedelics in psychiatry, anthropology, and philosophy should be aware that such dualisms are of social, material, and political consequence. They obscure the oppression, biopiracy, and epistemicide that accompany appropriation and the erasure of difference.

Decolonizing the study of psychedelics requires actively challenging and avoiding the trap of such dualist logics of colonization. Therefore, researchers need to move beyond narrow understandings of decolonization strictly in terms of repatriation and material compensation, and also attend to the ‘identity-forming functions of colonisation’ (Plumwood 1993, 61) as well as the tendency of colonial logics to force relationships so that they conform to hierarchical dualisms. Promoting a concept of non-hierarchical differences, as suggested by Plumwood, is one way to advance different approaches. Examining what has been backgrounded, affirming continuity rather than exclusion, and reviewing the identity patterns enacted by both the colonized and the colonizers are the first steps to avoiding colonizing logics. This is not just a descriptive epistemic endeavour but one that engages with power structures. A philosophy that decolonizes knowledge formations is inevitably also an ethical quest. It entails recognizing the needs of others and acknowledging the complexity and diversity of colonizing situations, histories, legacies, and methods.

The situatedness of our discussion of psychedelic research and the history of psychedelic research in Mexico suggests that in order to eschew colonizing dualisms, we must aim to be specific, historically and geographically situated, and seek to avoid general and vague propositions. The decolonization approach is radical. It implies different and diverse social, cultural, and scientific paradigms, as well as a complete substitution of frameworks and methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Colonization undermines cognitive liberty and causes social harms, including violent conflict, murders, disappearances, imprisonment, racism, and discrimination. A decolonial approach entails the application of a micro-level analysis of a specific situation and its genealogy, and at the same time a critical perspective to examine the social contradictions attached to the politics of exclusion, punishment, and accompanying environmental damage (Negrín 2021).

### ***Decolonization as metaphor?***

In their impactful article *Decolonization is not a metaphor*, Tuck and Yang (2012) aim to recentre the focus of decolonization away from what they criticize as a mere ‘metaphorical’ use of the term and towards the repatriation of land. After reflecting upon the distinction between *internal* and *external* modes of colonialism, they contend that ‘neither ... adequately describes the form of colonialism which operates in the United States or other nation-states in which the colonizer comes to stay’ (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). With the nature of colonial power in the US representing their focus, they observe that *settler colonialism* stands as distinct in operating ‘through internal/external colonial modes simultaneously’ (Tuck and Yang 2012, p. 5) and thus requiring its own descriptive exercise. Primary themes of the nature of US colonialism, such as the settler-native-slave triad and the primacy of material abuses of colonial power, are central to this account. They therefore advocate for a narrow use of the term, as efforts to deploy decolonization in settings beyond a strict set of material relations and repatriation not only represent

moves to innocence on behalf of the settler, but ‘turns decolonization into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation’ (Tuck and Yang 2012, p. 7). They argue that this weakens the force of restorative demands and advocates a narrow use of the term in order to uphold the material and specific goals of decolonization in the interest of indigenous people.

Concerns have been raised over the particular descriptive account of *settler colonialism* in Tuck and Yang, relating to their focus on the US. We want to focus instead on their advocacy of a narrow use of ‘decolonization’ that rejects other uses as merely *metaphorical* and to be avoided. The notion of metaphorical use as derivative implies that other than the literal use of the term ‘decolonization,’ all alternative uses are distortions. For Tuck and Yang, the deployment of decolonization is made with reference to the European colonization of North America. The moment European colonizers made landfall in the Americas is calcified as the epoch from which the theoretical nature of decolonization springs. The claim that ‘decolonization is not a metaphor’ has been criticized recently regarding this US focus and how the argument reduces slavery to forced labour and the settler-native-slave triad to a settler-native dyad (Garba and Sorrentino 2020). From the conceptual basis we take, accepting dualist epistemic strategies as a colonial instrument, the notion that there is one right and narrow use of the concept and that others are only ‘metaphorical,’ becomes questionable. The cloistering of alternative definitions and contexts of decolonization, and the implicit normativity that arises, therefore appears as a reiteration of the logic of dualisms and the colonialist frame itself. The particular focus of binding decolonization to the strictures of the settler-slave-native triadic form of ‘the United States, as a settler colonial nation-state’ (Tuck and Yang 2012, 7), and ascribing alternative uses as metaphorical, undermines the political applicability, the strategic force, and the theoretical potency of decolonization as a politico-linguistic term.

Gandhi (1998) observes that the diverse methods of colonial power yield a complex, often contradictory web of postcolonial theorists advocating diametrically opposed paths to liberation. Yet *decolonization* stands apart from this. Just as *colonization* serves as an abstract term to capture a deeply varied set of abuses, oppressions, and relations, *decolonization* aims to undermine residual colonial power structures. Echoing Tuck and Yang’s statement that ‘decolonization is not an “and[”, it] is an elsewhere’ (Tuck and Yang 2012, 36), Sium, Desai, and Ritskes (2012) connote it as a movement towards the ‘tangible unknown’ (12). It does not represent a clear, defined policy-set, but instead remains adaptable in holding two central aims: to take action against residual colonial power, and to recentre indigeneity. While Tuck and Yang share this conception, Sium et al. argue that this requires avoiding a fencing in of decolonization – that we ‘must recognize that theory is created on a daily basis in our communities, at the kitchen tables of our houses, in the forests, and on the fields of the land’ (11). The focus for theory should be on the ‘everyday acts of Indigenous resurgence’ (Sium, Desai, and Ritskes 2012) ranging from the praxis of the indigenous academic to the mother in an indigenous community, as all are restorative moments against colonial power. *Decolonization* can abide no narrow definition when faced with a multifarious *colonialism*. Transgressing the colonial influences that run as deep as our foundational epistemologies, setting a boundary around decolonization bounds the *elsewhere* itself.

Ascribing *metaphor* to the deployment of ‘decolonization’ beyond the particularized concept that Tuck and Yang yield from their analysis therefore hinders, rather than fortifies, decolonial efforts. Colonizations, oppressions, and abuses of victimized populations across political history and geography are, if not sequestered, forced to awkwardly adapt to uneasy binaries erected from this moment as *the* paradigmatic event. ‘The indigenous’ appears as a flat concept to capture all natives, set against ‘the settler’; both categories are already contentious in a modern US context, and deeply problematic when applied in other postcolonial settings. Traditional objects of concern, such as the autonomy and rights of the settler and *the indigenous*, find themselves side-lined as a matter of conceptual necessity, rather than normative justification. The relationship between this ‘decolonization’ and other decolonial acts becomes unclear – symbolized in Tuck and Yang’s reification of the traditionally colonial concept of sovereignty (Tuck and Yang 2012, 13). Finally, an almost Manichaean binary is erected around history and the present, with the moment of European landfall representing the fall from an idealized, and authentic, past; side-stepping distinct normative justification for *this* set of restorative demands against other irredentist claims. In attaching too much of the concrete to the abstract form of decolonization, all flexibility and applicability beyond the particularized setting of the US are lost.

An overinvestment in an authenticity that is defined in terms of a category of indigeneity in a single US-centric moment of colonial encounter and the ensuing redistribution of ‘land’ as the primary medium of repair – while not unprecedented (cf. Fanon 1963) – risks hamstringing global decolonization efforts by inhibiting the ability of the normative force of the demand to transcend US context. Our efforts lose sight of the unknown to be discovered by analysing colonial influence in the spheres of identity, social organization, and culture. In reflecting upon the diverse, ongoing studies of psychedelics in psychiatry, neuroscience, cultural anthropology, sociology, and philosophy, colonization has left an indelible mark. This speaks to the necessity of developing more decolonizing approaches to this topic, a conversation which we open below.

### **Part three: bioprospection, medicalization, and commodification**

The work of bioprospecting plants and animals is a fraught enterprise both in terms of financial, moral, and political risks, and even more so when it comes to the distribution or ‘sharing’ of benefits. Mexican history is full of examples that exhibit the ambivalent and complex relationships that have to be negotiated in order to find potentially-profitable plants to develop medicines and therapies (Hayden 2003). But it is also part of more recent controversies surrounding maize or ‘Mexican’ DNA. The development of medicines and ‘cures’ by the Western medical-industrial-complex is one example of ongoing biocoloniality (Schwartz-Marin and Restrepo 2013; Hilberg 2021).

Current sovereign enclosures, patent laws, and intellectual property rights represent the next iteration in the ongoing process of Western domination over non-Western bodies and ontologies. Disrupting such a process involves unsettling underlying notions of power, knowledge, and ownership which permeate the Western judicial system, as well as uncovering the binaries by which such concepts operate. Feminist philosophers including Haraway (1988) and Plumwood (1993) have argued that patents serve to reinforce the dualisms of nature/culture, and public/private. In the context of

psychedelics and their historic rejection and criminalization, the dualism of legitimate/illegitimate becomes particularly relevant too. These dualisms embed the colonizing logical structure into how an issue is conceived and addressed. They function as a naturalizing force which develops against the backdrop of a particular socio-historical context. From many possible examples to illustrate this, we choose the patenting of ayahuasca.

The colonization of plant-derived psychedelics can be seen through the dualism of legitimate versus illegitimate. The legitimization of certain knowledge frameworks and the delegitimization of others have historically formed a key element of the biopiracy of plant-derived psychedelics (Schwartz-Marin and Fiske 2022). Processes of legitimization and delegitimization are deeply entrenched in notions of power and domination.

The ‘doctrine of discovery’ from which modern intellectual property rights take their cue, was first formulated by the Catholic Church in the 1450s. The Doctrine declared that any land which had not yet been colonized was open to ‘discovery’ (Miller 2019). Such land was considered vacant, and colonizers made use of the term *Terra Nullius* (literally empty earth or empty land) to describe it. Contrast this to how indigenous peoples such as the Nahua in central Mexico consider the land to be alive: ‘The people say that the soil is the earth’s flesh, the stones its bones, and the water its blood’ (Sandstrom 1991, 238).

*Terra Nullius* became a significant element of the International Judicial System in 1493 when it was used in Spain and Portugal, where ‘the Catholic Church possessed the authority to grant Christian kings a form of title and sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and their lands’ (Miller 2011, 17). Legitimized through the Catholic Church whose interest in Christianization was helped by European colonial powers such as Portugal and Britain, it granted these states the power to ‘discover’ lands not in Christian hands. *Terra Nullius* remains a significant element of the dualisms present in contemporary patent law. While originally construed to justify the domination of indigenous lands and persons, the ‘doctrine of discovery’ is at work in the patenting of plant-derived psychedelics. This can be seen in the case of the ayahuasca patent. Within the current neoliberal judicial system, the patent serves to remove the plant from the *public* domain, making it available only to the capital-driven *private* market. In the case of the ayahuasca patent, the vine is transformed from a living plant into a biochemical where it acquires value as a pharmaceutical commodity, used in the treatment of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The existence of the judicial system, and more specifically, patent law, is a manifestation of a particular form of control in which the institutions of capitalist production (such as the pharmaceutical industry) mediate power and the norms which govern it. This is apparent in the bioprospecting of psychedelic plants and traditional knowledge thereof from indigenous people. The bioprospecting of ayahuasca, for example, involved generating the claim that the particular variety of the vine was novel in virtue of the flower shape and patterns. The notion of novelty is particularly significant in patent law as individuals wishing to claim ownership of a particular entity must show that it does not exist within the public domain at the time that the patent is issued. Ayahuasca was known to indigenous populations of the Upper Amazon for hundreds of years prior to its ‘discovery’ and subsequent patenting by Loren Miller in 1986. Indigenous people considered the vine a teacher and used it as a means to gain knowledge about themselves and the worlds they inhabit (Luna 1986). However, because many indigenous peoples

who made use of ayahuasca in warfare and spiritual rituals operated under an oral and social-constructionist framework of knowledge dissemination, there was no written knowledge of ayahuasca and its uses. Thus, when it came to filing the patent, the claim for novelty could be met based on the flower shape and the lack of prior art existing within the United States archives at that time. Yet, the lack of *published* indigenous knowledge does not imply a lack of any indigenous knowledge, but rather suggests that distinct epistemologies and cosmologies are at work (Schwartz-Marin and Fiske 2022). The TRIPS agreement and current patent system at work in the United States favour colonizing methods of knowledge dissemination premised on the idea that knowledge can be abstracted from the context in which it arises and is the ‘property’ of a single individual. Ideas are entities which can be ‘owned.’ Psychedelic capitalism has combined the concept of *terra nullius* and the doctrine of discovery with the (misogynist) idea of a ‘virgin market’ for psychedelic medicines/commodities. The system of patents is the legal way to apply this framework in the lifeworld grounded in the ideology of private property.

A feminist account of patent law questions the manner in which judicial systems favour particular forms of production. Examining the binaries through which the patenting of psychedelics operates, we analyse the public/private domain and its significance to the current framework. One well-established criticism of patent law is that the privatization of knowledge, and the technologies used to produce such knowledge, have limited the availability of research and prevented individuals from sharing its results (Boyle 2008; Rai and Eisenberg 2003; Reichman and Uhler 2003; Dreyfuss 2004). Publications in the field of patent law and intellectual property rights have suggested ‘a system of open science where results are shared, criticised and, ultimately, utilized to push forward the frontiers of knowledge’ (Dreyfuss 2004, 34) in order to bring scientific knowledge production back into the public domain. With respect to patents, scholars have suggested reducing the number of patents issued in order to encourage a shift from the private to the public. Such a viewpoint is, however, deeply problematic in its assumptions about knowledge and ownership. Specifically, the notion of an open domain does not address the binaries of legitimization and delegitimization of knowledge, nor the nature/culture dualism. Whilst limiting or doing away with patents may increase instances of collaborative research and knowledge-sharing it is important to be wary of equating openness with equity, fairness, ‘better’ results, or other claims. Historically in the case of psychedelics, the dissemination of knowledge has resulted in the exploitation of indigenous individuals. This can be seen in John Daly’s patenting of epibatidine, ‘an alkaloid with enormous potential as an analgesic’ (Angerer 2011, 2), derived from the bioprospecting of the Ecuadorian Poison Dart Frog, and in the patenting of ayahuasca. Such exploitation occurs because the patent system is itself structured and mediated by specific forms of power and knowledge. When knowledge is taken to be disconnected from the particular context in which it arises, and associated with masculine forms of production, it produces a particular form of legitimization which is almost exclusively associated with Eurocentric, Enlightenment notions of reason and rationality. One example of this can be seen in the notion of sole authorship which is a pervasive element of patent laws.

Drawing together the arguments from sections II and III, the epistemology that governs patent laws appears inherently masculine and colonizing. The doctrines

governing knowledge-practices (such as patents and Intellectual Property Rights) arise out of a methodology which stresses detached masculine forms of knowledge and rationality and marginalize other forms of knowledge production such as oral traditions of knowledge dissemination, and intellectual exchange or communicative discourse. The masculine/feminine dualism underlying the notion of knowledge utilized in legalized institutional forms thus requires reconceptualization. The pharmaceutical, psychiatric, touristic, and other such frameworks are unable to acknowledge the ways in which knowledge and its objects are already caught up in binaries of gender, race, and power that determine what constitutes knowledge, the ways in which it manifests, and who holds authority over that knowledge. Feminist and decolonial theorists have developed such alternative ontologies and epistemologies. For psychedelic studies, this critical work is only beginning (Noorani 2020; Sanabria 2021; González Romero 2022; Hauskeller 2022; Schwarz-Plaschg 2022).

### **Conclusion: ethics and decolonizing psychedelics**

We hold that the decolonial effort is the pursuit of right in the face of the multifarious aspects of still persistent colonial and colonizing powers. To that end, we must contemplate a range of forms of colonization and construct a decolonial framework that can meet these challenges. Contemporary epistemological, normative, and historical understandings of research, science, and nature are still entangled with power strategies used to colonize. One aim of a decolonial ethic is to avoid unknowingly reifying insidious colonial logics in efforts to overcome that very power in the study of psychedelic practices, such as in places like Mexico or the Amazon. Also, a decolonial ethics would be capable of creating new forms of relationality grounded in a different social ontology.

### ***Beyond the settler-slave-native triad***

The first European colonists who encountered psychedelics were terrified by their use, thinking their effects were the work of the Devil who deceived the natives with impious beliefs (Glockner 2016). The use of psychedelic substances was subsequently suppressed. In their ‘rediscovery’ by white scientists and cultural figures in the 1950s, they again provoked fear as well as new fantasies of escape and control. Subsequent initiatives have tried to appropriate the land, resources, and labour of the colonized others in a variety of ways, through drug tourism, bioprospecting, biopiracy, and plantation labour regimes. Yet these manifestations of colonial logics have often challenged the coherence of the settler-native-slave triad in profound ways. This is clearer the more the focus shifts away from the US context, with its strict, reified regime of racial categories.

### ***Right of refusal***

A substantial body of work has argued that community collaboration and control over research is a prerequisite to decolonizing work. This has included identifying *participatory action research methods* through which communities determine what materials, data, or knowledges are collected, and how this will be used. Indigenous and non-indigenous researchers have argued that community collaboration and control over research

is a prerequisite to working towards scholarship that does not replicate colonial hierarchies and violence (Zavala 2013; Benjamin 2016). A central tenet of community ownership in research is the right of refusal (Tuck and Yang 2013; Zahara 2016). As we have illustrated in the case of psychedelics, such as the historical appropriations of knowledge and violations of individual and community trust, a decolonial ethic also implies refusals to share knowledge, property, and practices. Rather than insisting that local, or ‘traditional’ practices demonstrate their equivalence with bioscience in psychedelic clinical trials, a decolonial ethic makes space for knowledge, practice, and science with psychedelics within and outside of official domains of knowledge production.

### ***Beyond binaries and individuation***

The urge to possess and control psychedelics that has gripped parts of the scientific, cultural, and philanthropic establishments in recent years has made great strides in extracting a commodifiable essence from practices found among historic and contemporary indigenous peoples and marketing it as a solution to a range of pressing problems. Yet perhaps like it was for Wasson, the psychedelic experience often proves too multifarious to pin down.

Indigenous psychedelic practices have been shaped by histories of colonial appropriation of indigenous resources and knowledge. In the midst of the current psychedelic renaissance, there is growing concern that the extraction of indigenous knowledge and plants for psychedelic use, the appropriation of indigenous practices, and their commodification as Western medicine continue colonial patterns (Sanabria 2021). Coloniality should, however, be understood as a more complex phenomenon than colonialism, one that extends to the present, operating through civilizing power structures with both ontological and epistemological dimensions, bringing forth different kinds of Eurocentrism (Mignolo 2002). Understanding decolonization as metaphorical opens conversations to address colonial issues of epistemicide, biopiracy, marginalization, and abuse. We make this case with reference to current studies of psychedelics.

These themes offer a future orientation for decolonial efforts in the study of psychedelics. We argue for the development of a future-oriented, restorative approach to decolonization that avoids reaffirming colonial logics of domination, and embraces a normativity informed by our studies in Critical Theory, cultural anthropology, sociology, history, and philosophy. Psychedelic discourses are a contemporary battleground over which issues of marginalization, exploitation, extraction, and appropriation are fought. Examining the psychedelic space recentres what ‘indigenous’ and ‘natural’ mean, showing a path towards enhancing our understanding of decolonization and of psychedelics.

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