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Article

What Could the White Body Do For Decolonising Psychology? 31 Questions

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With my White, sick bones-*cum*-ancestors, I analyse my pedagogical attempts at 'decolonising Psychology' to theorise whiteness and experiment with praxis. While White supremacy is seen and felt by Black, Indigenous and other People of Colour, it is unseen by White people, thereby triggering discomfort and fragility when brought to the surface. But what if White supremacy is both unseen and unfelt by White people, if White discomfort and fragility involve *White fusion* – a refusing and re-fusing of feeling that otherwise threatens our sense of innocence and mastery? Implicating coloniality, the flesh and the more-than-human, this 're/fusal' suggests that decolonising Psychology requires an embodied, inspirited praxis; letting go of innocence, mastery and re/fusal for an unfamiliar otherworld of response-ability, humility and imagination. These changes may revive the *psykhe* – breath – of Psychology within coloniality, helping us to *conspire* with those rising against this state of breathlessness. While this Abstract has reflected on content, I conclude with a 'Concrete' that reflects on form, before offering responses from a Māori and Pākehā scholar.

KEYWORDS
body, decoloniality, Fanon, sickness, whiteness

1 | CAN YOU HEAR ME?

O my body, make of me always a man who questions!

Fanon, 1952, 2008, p. 206

I wanted to start just by introducing– there's up in the bottom right-hand corner of the slide is what's called in Aotearoa New Zealand a 'whakatauākį', which is a proverb. It's an old Māori proverb and it's one that I was reminded of by a Kaupapa Māori scholar called Teah Carlson when I met them recently and they sent me through their work. And I bought it with us this evening because I've found it really useful in my own teaching, but also because I think it provides a really nice framework for thinking about our dialogue today. So 'Whakarongo! Whakarongo! Whakarongo!' means 'Listen! Listen! Listen!' and this is how Dr Carlson describes it:

> *It's an old whakatauākį. 'Whakarongo! Whakarongo! Whakarongo!' means listen with your upoko (your head), listen with your manawa (your heart) and listen with your puku (your stomach or gut). In Te Ao Māori it's understood that it takes more than ears to listen. We listen with our head or mind to make logical sense of what we hear and set this against our experiences and understanding of the world. We hear with our heart, which provides an emotional connection to what resonates with us. Lastly, we hear with our puku, listening to our intuition and foresight. If we provide environments and spaces where listening on all levels can take place, we can start building our knowledge capacities and our transformative endeavours* [1].

... So for this part in particular but also maybe for the rest of the dialogue we ask that everyone might have a go at following the whakatauki and listening with your head, your heart and your gut. One way that I recommend that students start to have a go at doing this in the classroom is maybe by lowering your eyes and just letting the words that we're about to read wash over you.

[13 minutes of reading]

Okay, we ask now that you sit in our words, we invite you to sit in our words, and see if you can start to reflect on what thoughts came into your head as Stephanie and I spoke. Some people find it easier to take notes, otherwise you can just sit and have a think. What did our words make you think about?

[30 second silence]

How did our words make you feel?

[30 second silence]

Is there anywhere in particular in your body where you feel these feelings? See if you can tune into it. What does your feeling feel like? What is your feeling saying, your body-part saying?

[30 second silence]

And as you listen to that part of your body, see if you can turn what it's saying into a series of questions rather than statements. What is that body-part asking you?

[1 minute silence]

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[1] See Carlson, Barnes & McCreanor (2017)

> *We'd like to hear these questions from your body. What we're going to ask everyone to do, what we're going to invite everyone to do – you can pass if you need to – is share one of these questions that your body is asking you with the group. And to do so just to say, "My such-and-such (my gut, my hand) is asking–" and then your question. And then we'll move onto the next person. If it's okay we'll start at the back and weave, like a snake? [Laughs]. Okay.*

This is a transcript of me addressing a room of approximately 150 people who had come to hear Dr Stephanie Davis and I give a public lecture in central London on a Monday evening during May 2019. Stephanie, a Black lecturer in Psychology, had been invited to give the Westminster Critical Pedagogies Group's Annual Lecture, which for this year was to be on 'decolonising pedagogy'. Instead, she had asked if I – as her White colleague and friend – would join her for a live conversation about how we 'conspire' together to do this work, and we decided to first undertake the activity above.

While in this case the accounts that we read were reflexive pieces that Stephanie and I had written about our experiences of being Black and White, respectively, usually it is just me giving a reading. Over the past three years I have facilitated this activity with close to 500 people in groups of between six and 150 in a classroom, seminar room, lecture theatre, community festival, marae[2], public hall and Zoom. While the content of the activity has differed in some ways across these spaces, what has been constant is the process of listening, writing and sharing. I think of this format as the spine of the activity – taking one from head to heart to gut[3].

It was inspired by the quote by Fanon with which I opened this section. This self-described 'final prayer' toward anticolonial [4] revolution is used to end his seminal text, *Black Skin, White Masks* – literally, it is the last line on the last page[5]. I created the activity in 2018 when asked to facilitate a 'decolonising Psychology' session with a group of clinical doctoral students outside of my own university. I thought it would be a simple and gentle way to experiment with Fanon's prayer; I had no idea what it would do or even, necessarily, what I wanted it to do. In turn, I was taken aback by the intensity of its effects. And, as I started to try it out with different people in different spaces, this intensity both continued and eluded me. The activity felt almost embarrassingly basic – so much so that I always hesitated before including it – yet it was clearly *doing something*. But, what?

There has been another pattern to the activity. While the people who have participated have had varying relationships to colonisation – some said they had ancestors who were enslaved, some colonised, some colonising, some all three, some two, some none – by the time we were facilitating in the setting above, I was starting to quietly notice that, when asked to share back, White people were more likely than Black or Brown people to either say they couldn't do the activity, give a statement about what it made them "think" about, offer a question from their "mind" (rather than a body-part) or ask on behalf of a body-part, "Are you there?", "Can you hear me?". This pattern was confirmed in the event described above when I was approached afterwards by a Black artist who, curious, had noted down people's responses and picked up on a similar pattern. At a glance, these responses could seem like instances where the activity has failed. However, it is toward these cracks that I want to turn in this essay. What is this activity doing with White bodies? *What is it telling us about how whiteness feels?* And, in turn, what might it suggest about the role of whiteness, bodies and form when decolonising Psychology?

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[2] An Indigenous meeting house in Aotearoa New Zealand

[3] Two modifications to the process have been made along the way. Firstly, in January 2019 I began using the Māori proverb described in the extract with which I open this essay. As mentioned that night (but excluded from this extract), I forefront this whakatauākī as I find it sophisticated, decolonising and – as someone who has descended from settlers – something that keeps my accountability to Indigenous people close-by: I don't believe I can host it with integrity unless I am actively making efforts toward decoloniality (Liebert, 2019). Secondly, at some point around this same time, I started to explicitly say when we were sharing back our questions that people could always opt to "pass". I did this after beginning to suspect that the activity could otherwise request an unjust degree of emotional labour from Black and Brown people, who seemed more likely to share a question about feeling pain or hurt if not to cry. After introducing this option, I have found that Black and Brown people often choose to participate (even if painful) but are much more likely to pass than White people.

[4] While academia has picked up the language of 'decolonial', movements to challenge colonisation and its legacies have long been described as 'anticolonial'. There is a nascent shift by current-day activists to return to this language, which is thought to better acknowledge that many of the institutions that we seek to decolonise (including universities, whiteness and Psychology) were colonial by design such that we need abolition and alternatives, not reform. Similarly, some Indigenous scholars are now using the language of 'counter-colonial' (e.g. Mika, 2020), thereby making space also for imaginative tactics that are less explicitly tethered to the colonial. I feel a strong resonance with these shifts, but for this piece have decided to stay with 'decolonial' given that I seek here to be in dialogue with institutional efforts to 'decolonise'.

[5] As a Black psychiatrist dedicated to documenting the coloniality of the psyche and the psychology of decoloniality, Fanon is undoubtedly a – if not the – founding figure of decolonising Psychology. While he is highly renowned and influential in critical race and decolonial studies worldwide, he very rarely makes it onto Psychology curriculi. His absence is testimony to the need to decolonise Psychology.

But first, a quick note on what follows. I use 'White supremacy' to refer to the current-day social structure of racial hierarchy that emerged out of colonisation; 'White' (with a capital 'W') to refer to a category of *being* that comes with more power, safety and well-being within White supremacy[6]; and 'whiteness' to refer to the *doing* of this category. While being White is more easily achieved by people with light skin, whiteness can be done by anyone. Typically, when people do whiteness they enact White supremacy. However, this dynamic also suggests the corollary: that doing whiteness differently may be one way to try and disrupt this social structure.

It is to this end – doing whiteness differently – that not just the content but also the form of this essay is ultimately committed. In literature on whiteness or anti-racism, sickness appears as a frequent yet relatively unquestioned trope for White supremacy or racism, both of which are not uncommonly depicted as an 'illness', 'disease' or 'pathology' (e.g., Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1987; Baldwin, 2018; Lorde, 1984; Matias, 2014; Trinh, 1989). This recurrence has particularly stood out to me after being diagnosed with a chronic sickness with physical symptoms that echo popular depictions of whiteness. Below, then, I enter my sickness as whiteness[7], listening down the spine of my own White, sick body, to see how whiteness feels. Taking myself, my pedagogy, our discipline and perhaps you through *discomfort*, *fragility* and *fusion*, I experiment with moving from a state of breathlessness to a praxis of breathing.

I begin with some context.

2 | HOW DOES THIS FEEL?

This essay is a response to the increasing visibility of White supremacy in the Global North. Following Césaire (1955), I see this White supremacy as evidence that colonisation is an 'ongoing, organising force' in the present (Rowe & Tuck, 2016), inextricable from (post)modernity (Sandoval, 2000). Like other scholars and activists, I use the language of 'coloniality' to convey this dynamic, and 'decoloniality' to convey ongoing, organising forces against it (Quijano, 2000). While liberation psychologies from the Global South were founded on challenging coloniality (Biko, 1998; Martín-Baro, 1994), the past five years have seen a rise in the number of Critical Psychologists from the Global North also committing to these struggles, with several Special Issues being published to this end[8].

On my mother's side, my

European ancestors are

missionaries & wives of

missionaries who arrived in the

nineteenth century to the shores

of the southern island of

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[6] 'White' as a category was developed in late seventeenth century US to draw poor English people into alliance with the English elite in order to bolster a structural supremacy when the latter were threatened by slave revolts. This category has morphed and expanded in different contexts to include a range of other ethnicities including Jewish, Irish, Italian, Eastern European, East Asian and Latinx. While its effects intersect with gender, class, nationality, disability and so forth, within a White supremacy being White brings privileges – including freedom from an omnipotent, racialised violence (Gibbons, 2018).

[7] See endnotes 15 and 18 for some consideration of the politics of this move.

[8] E.g., 2015 Journal of Social & Political Psychology, 3(1); 2017 South African Journal of Psychology, 47(4); 2018 American Journal of Community Psychol-

Such commitments have emerged within broader Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC)[9] movements. Of particular influence was RhodesMustFall (RMF) in South Africa – a 2015 student uprising against the ongoing role of universities in imperialism, symbolised by a statue of Cecil Rhodes (the British architect of apartheid) and high student fees (thereby also becoming known as FeesMustFall). This movement was met with both violent repressions nationally and solidarity expressions transnationally – in the UK this included at Oxford University. Itself encountering fierce backlash from conservative media and university benefactors, RhodesMustFallOxford (RMFO) bought the language of decolonial transformation to several years of ameliorative actions by students of colour, now demanding removal of statutes, acknowledging of past wrongs and "rewriting Whitewashed colonial history" (Henriques & Abushouk, 2018, p. 308).

Five years later and, from where I stand in London, these movements have become dominated by calls to 'decolonise the curriculum'. The same year that RMFO emerged, saw the launch of what was to become a leading campaign by students at University College London. Also committed to transnational solidarity and seeing universities as "monuments to imperialism", Why Is My Curriculum White? aimed to dismantle the "racist myth" across all disciplines, "that Europe is, and always had been, the intellectual and moral leader of the world" (Elliot-Cooper, 2018, p. 292)[10]. Come 2019, and the Open University identified decolonising the curriculum as one of the top trends likely to influence UK teaching over the next ten years (Ferguson et al., 2019), a report to the UK Office for Students asked if universities should "decolonise" curricula to include "non-Western and non-White forms of knowledge" (Stevenson et al., 2019, 44); and Meghan Markle, the then Duchess of Sussex and Patron of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, publicly supported university campaigns that challenge the dominance of thinkers who are "male, pale and stale".

Within Psychology, campaigns to decolonise the curriculum have the potential to oblige course content that speaks directly to our discipline's emergence from colonisation (see Richards, 2012) and continued complicity in coloniality (see Bhatia, 2017), and that lifts up psychological praxes that have been forgotten, marginalised or exiled – particularly those which have emerged out of BIPOC experiences (e.g. Anzaldúa, **?**; Biko, 1998; Braveheart & DeBruyn, 1998; DuBois, 1903; Fanon, 1952, 2008; Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Martín-Baro, 1994; Sandoval, 2000). Teaching reflexivity alongside non-European thinkers and contexts, such content could help to interrupt notions of objectivity and

Aotearoa – Ngāi Tahu land.
Having travelled from Ireland
through India, they played an
explicit role in the destruction of
Indigenous cosmologies,
preparing the ground for the
global spread of capitalism,
colonisation, White supremacy.

Writhing with good intentions,
my ancestors' saviour mission
whispers through psychologists
that I meet in the classroom or
staffroom.

Or mirror.

Feeling their contamination, I
have spent a large part of my life
as a Critical Psychologist trying

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ogy, 62(3-4); 2020 Feminism & Psychology, 30(3) – in 2020 even the British Psychological Society published a letter entitled, 'We must act to decolonise psychology' (see De Oliveira, 2020).

[9] BIPOC is currently the preferred acronym used by and for people within Black, Indigenous and other People of Colour movements to denote both the differences and the intersections of these struggles.

[10] While undertaken by student activists, these two campaigns were guided by Dr Nathaniel Tobias ~~Coleman~~ – a Black philosopher who had led on an earlier 2014 campaign, "Why Isn't My Professor Black?" (see ~~Coleman~~, 2020). ~~Coleman~~ was later refused a permanent academic position because of his decolonial activism.

universalism that otherwise characterise the colonial episteme. While such interruption is an existing commitment of Critical Psychology, situating this within decoloniality draws attention to the role of objectivity and universalism in the violent production of European-ness as the standard of reason, civilisation and humanity against which all else was and is compared and judged (Wynter, 2003). Together, objectivity and universalism allow this standard to be 'just the way it is' – innocent and masterful – both making and protecting a hierarchy of 'Knowing, Knower, Knowledge' that continues to structure coloniality (Liebert, 2019). Potentially interrupting academia's own 'KKK', decolonising the curriculum is transformative work for Psychology.

And yet, while the founders of both RMFO and Why Is My Curriculum White? explicitly positioned themselves against more reformist efforts (see Henriques & Abushouk, 2018, and Elliot-Cooper, 2018, respectively), the radicality appears to have progressively leaked out of these campaigns. For example, during my own involvement in university efforts to 'decolonise'[11], I have seen a shift to the language of 'diversity and inclusion' – told that this is "less threatening" for White colleagues and students. Such language betrays an ulterior shift in these campaigns: from ostensibly including non-whiteness to preferentially including whiteness. This shift both overlooks and reveals that universities are already White, and that whiteness is violent for not simply its exclusionary properties but also its assimilative ones. Sandoval (2000), for example, describes 'inoculation' as a central mechanism of White supremacy – treating difference as a controlled substance that can be injected homoeopathically, leading to tolerance while taming and domesticating anything that might otherwise be threatening – an experience well-documented by BIPOC. As a senior Māori academic recently asked about his own role in a university within Aotearoa New Zealand (itself an ex- British colony), "What happens if we all get assimilated; if we become anaesthetised? Whither decolonisation?" (Kidman, 2019, p. 9). To be included in a university is to be absorbed into White supremacy, despite – or especially (Ahmed, 2012) – when in the name of 'diversity'. In turn, the inclusion of decoloniality simply works as a kind of colonial enclosure, enacting settler appropriation (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Indeed, since moving to London four years ago I have found decolonising efforts within Psychology to be consistently blocked by whiteness; one that I keep hearing myself describe as particularly – and perhaps peculiarly – 'thick' (see also Wood & Patel, 2017). Campaigns to decolonise the curriculum require action from the people who write and deliver the curriculum; people who in the UK are largely White (Loke, 2019). Further, such curriculums need to be engaged within classrooms that are dominated by whiteness – for even if (like my own university) these classrooms are not comprised of mainly White students (although the majority in the UK are; Loke, 2019), the UK university is a

not to be my missionary ancestors. But my White female body simply does not allow me to be distant.

Indeed, to claim distance is to make a 'move to innocence'[1], reproducing a heteropatriarchal virtue that itself is both of & in coloniality. While BIPOC women were cast as sub-human during colonisation, White women were granted humanity & protection – but only in exchange for our submission to White men[2]. We were to be innocent, pure – our wombs available for the reproduction of the White race.

[1] Mawhinney (unpublished) as cited in Tuck & Yang (2012)
[2] Lugones (2010)

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[11] These efforts have not just been through what and how I teach but also through Departmental, School and University initiatives toward 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' and, most recently, setting up staff and student White anti-racist collectives.

White institution (Ahmed, 2012) and UK Psychology is a White discipline (Patel & Keval, 2018). This thickness evokes the ongoing 'metaphysical catastrophe' of colonialism, dividing people into zones of being human and zones of being non/subhuman – racialised in terms of whiteness and blackness, respectively – the latter forced to become the former, to effectively die to become 'human' (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). As Fanon (1952, 2008) depicts in even just the title of his seminal text, *Black Skin, White Masks*, whiteness is core to coloniality; to de-colonise, we need to de-whiten.

As a Black man, Fanon's (1952, 2008) own tactic for decolonisation was "digging into the flesh" (p. 3), or "going through race in order to undo it" (Leonardo & Porter, 2010, p. 148). Without also doing so as White people, Leonardo and Porter (2010) suggest we risk "an epiphenomenal, intellectualist interpretation of race" whereby at best White people feel "enlightened and enlivened by discussions that confront racism, vowing their commitment to the cause… [and] conceiv[ing] of race talks as intellectually stimulating – as in a discovery of another topic in which they can excel" (p. 150). The emphasis in decolonising the curriculum on including diverse content risks exactly this, becoming yet another colonial project of innocence and mastery. For Pete (2018) too – an Indigenous scholar "tired of the arguments over (light) inclusion and diversity vs (deep) decolonisation" (p. 175) – decoloniality is "White work" because colonialism "is – ultimately – their story" (p. 180). We need to also go through White bodies; not centring or circumventing them so much as doing a 'double turn' that is *both* toward *and* away from whiteness, recognising our role in *both* coloniality and decoloniality (Ahmed, 2004). That is, both our responsibility for current conditions and our ability to respond to them: our 'response-ability' (Liebert, 2019).

And so, simultaneously going through my own White body (see My Spine, right now), in what follows I put my experiences of decolonising the curriculum into dialogue with Fanonian literature to experiment with 'digging into the flesh' of whiteness. I come to move through better known notions of whiteness as *discomfort* and *fragility* to a lesser known notion of whiteness as *fusion*, drawing attention to the role of form alongside content when doing this work – itself a decolonising act (Mika, 2020; Pete, 2018).

Often my sessions include a screenshot taken of my laptop three years ago when I was first preparing for an experiential workshop on/for decolonising Psychology in the UK. Looking for something to help us discuss epistemology, I had typed 'globe head' into a Google Image search only to be presented with a telling collection of figures that have a globe where a head might otherwise be (see Figure 1). During that workshop and in the numerous ones I have facilitated since, I ask people to tell me what stands out to them about these figures. They typically name that the vast majority are in a suit, that they are male, that their 'head' is the Global North. Yet, even when a session explicitly about whiteness, people need to be pushed to say that three quarters – and arguably all – of the

Such submission was violently established through the 'witch-hunts' of the fifteenth century – executed first by the Church, then by the judiciary to eradicate women-led revolutionary movements that were threatening the land-owning elite[3].

The rollout of capital in Western Europe required this genocidal attack on women; the same capitalism that then demanded the colonial appropriation of land resources and bodies; the same colonisation that then demanded the categorisation & hierarchies of White supremacy.

Beaten into submission, since the end of the eighteenth century this

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[3] Federici (2014)

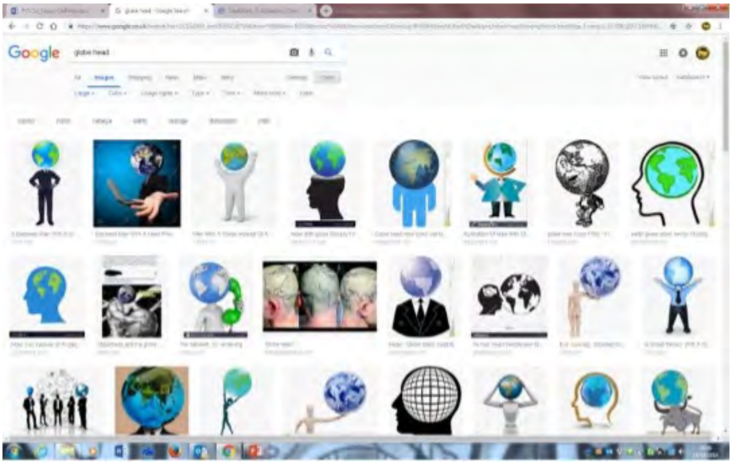

FIGURE 1 Screenshot of a Google image search for ‘globe head’, Jan. 2018

figures are White. I wait, deliberately leaving long pauses. Still, sometimes they don’t say it at all.

This exercise in itself opens a discussion on how within White supremacy we are taught to not see, or at least not speak of, whiteness when in White spaces. How even saying the word aloud makes us flinch, uneasy, for whiteness is supposed to be “the immovable mover, unmarked marker, and unspoken speaker” (Leonardo & Porter, 2010, p. 149). Returning to the image, we talk further about the abovementioned hierarchy of Knowing, Knower, Knowledge that emerged out of colonisation, connecting this to notions of objectivity and universalism, to a sense of innocence and mastery. And yet, these heads are also stuck in a globe – we think we see the world, but really we only see a world of our own making. Trapped in this colonial episteme, we’re unable to see what lies alongside, not even our own White bodies.

This is ‘White ignorance’ – an active ignoring of the past and present of White supremacy, enabling its continuation (Mills, 2007). For Gibbons (2018), White ignorance manifests as five ‘refusals’ of White supremacy – the humanity of the other, experience of the other, (present) past, spatiality of violence, and structural roots of racism. Protecting “the hollowness at its core”, these refusals are seen as the points where White ignorance is – must be – actively maintained (p. 723-33). A simple show of hands shows this refusal in action – invariably only one or two, if any, people schooled in the UK or in an (ex) British colony have been taught about the violence of colonisation. Myself included.

White ignorance is intertwined with ‘White privilege’. While McIntosh’s (1988) early work on the ‘invisible backpack’ is often cited and used to establish this concept, I turn to another image from my own life. Nearly ten years ago, I was sitting outside a café in a gentrified neighbourhood of New York City when a White male 20-something hipster went past on his bike. Fly-

new docile figure of the White

woman has been funnelled by

capitalist, colonialist, racist

interests – whether met with our

protest, tacit consent, permission.

Or help.

Including in the name of

feminism[4]*, we have become*

agents of the state that both killed

& created us.

It may be easy as White women

to move to innocence, but our

bodies are far from it; White

women and coloniality are

inextricably linked; interrupting

our innocence is central to the

‘hard, unsettling work’ of

decolonisation[5]*.*

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[4] Abu-Lughod (2002); Mohanty (1984)

[5] Tuck & Yang (2012)

ing fast and smooth down the centre of the road without pedalling or holding onto his handlebars, he was sitting back, talking excitedly on his cell-phone: “. . . I know I know I’ve only been there three weeks and I’ve already got a promotion?!...” From this moment on I’ve conceptualised privilege as being covered in lube, allowing White people to move more quickly, easily, pleasantly through the social structure of White supremacy. In turn, we are not aware of what blocks or squeezes or defines non-White bodies – stopping people getting through or forcing them into a more ‘acceptable’ shape (or a more ‘predictable’ one). It is as though the lube gets into our eyes – blocking our capacity to see, enabling our capacity to ignore.

Baldwin (2018) calls this ‘sleep-walking’. For him, to be White is “to be forced to digest a delusion called White supremacy” that metabolises as kind of a privileged stupor (p. 1). However, this ignorance cannot be confused with innocence; the word denotes an active ignoring – if not denying or concealing (see The Guardian, 2012) – of the evidence. As suggested by the Coyote in Pete (2018), it is perhaps better understood as an unwillingness than an inability; as Fanon (1952, 2008) writes, White people are “at once the perpetrator and the victim of a delusion” (p. 175). By looking through ignorance without seeing it, White supremacy protects itself, justifying a racist status quo, spiralling into deeper and deeper ignorance – and slowly killing BIPOC (Anzaldúa, 1987).

A third and final image I have found useful is the popular cliché, ‘fish don’t see water’. In her phenomenology of whiteness, Ahmed (2007) thinks through the ways that whiteness becomes background until it is at a kind of body-temperature for White people such that we are unaware of it, comfortable in it – “so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins” (p. 158). Being confronted with the workings of White supremacy effectively changes the temperature of the water. Less background, White people become aware of it and therefore of our own bodies. Forced to see things that we do not usually see, we become extremely uncomfortable. For one, particularly given that this learning comes from BIPOC, our place atop the colonial hierarchy of Knowing, Knower, Knowledge is threatened; that very same hierarchy that campaigns to decolonise the curriculum aim to challenge. The resulting *White discomfort* works to resist learning, recentre whiteness and sustain White supremacy (Matias, 2014).

“This class is oppressive [to White people]”, “You’re being racist [to White people]”, “You’re creating racism”, “You’re dividing us”, “We should focus on our similarities”, “This isn’t about me”, “It wasn’t my ancestors”, “My [White] ancestors were colonised too”, “I don’t identify as White”, “White people are indigenous here”, “It’s all about class”, “What about sexism?” What about heterosexism?” “It’s not fair to put the burden of colonisation on White people”, “It’s irresponsible to make [White] students uncomfortable”, “You need to be more inclusive [of White people]”, “You shouldn’t use the phrase ‘White supremacy’”, “You need to smile more”, “Don’t you think you’re a bit idealistic?”, “We needed

So, what might I learn about decolonising Psychology from turning toward, not away from, my complicit flesh?

In 2016, I was diagnosed with Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS) – an inflammatory disease that creates an increasing discomfort & fragility in all of my joints as well as the gradual fusion of my spine. The rheumatologist told me that AS is particularly common in people of my ethnicity as it is passed down through our British ancestry. Likewise, in te reo Māori the word for tribe – ‘iwi’ – comes from the word for bones.

Are, then, my bones my tribe? Are they missionaries complicit in cosmological violence? Do the to check if you're a crack-pot".

These are some of the comments that White female students and colleagues have made directly to me in response to my efforts to decolonise the curriculum in the UK[12] (my colleagues of colour experience far worse). Of late, such responses are becoming popularly known as *White fragility* – defined by DiAngelo (2011) as,

> *a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviours such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. (p. 57)*

Arising from an "entitlement to racial comfort" (p. 60), White fragility is intimately connected to White discomfort. Both are also said to emerge out of individualism (see Boler & Zembylas, 2003, and DiAngelo, 2011), with White people often feeling that discussions of White supremacy erase our individuality – particularly personal striving and personal suffering – leaving a sense of being unseen, unheard, unwitnessed. Ironically, this fragility is partly an inability to be treated the way that BIPOC are treated within White supremacy – an insistence to be seen as a 'person' rather than a 'category'. In contrast to BIPOC, this insistence is said to indicate White people's lack of 'racial literacy' (Leonardo & Porter, 2010) or 'racial stamina' (DiAngelo, 2011) from being embedded in a White supremacy that does not discuss or interrogate whiteness – what Fine (1997) calls our "protective pillows" (p. 57). White fragility, then, is "the price of the luxury of ignorance and a legacy of privilege" (Pete, 2018, p. 185).

Given these responses, much has been written on the need to engage White people in 'pedagogies of discomfort'. These pedagogies are founded on the idea that any "effective analysis" of White supremacy "requires not only rational inquiry and dialogue but also excavation of the emotional investments that underlie any ideological commitments" (Zembylas & Boler, 2002, p. 2) – an excavation that is necessarily uncomfortable. Leonardo and Porter (2010) extend this idea with their 'pedagogy of disruption'. They discuss how an attempt to maintain 'safety' when confronting White supremacy maintains White comfort zones that reproduce a racist status quo, such that genuinely confronting White supremacy needs to be not just uncomfortable but violent – putting all people in their "rightful place" by "shifting upward the standards of humanity" (p. 146). Drawing on Fanon (1962, 2001), Leonardo and Porter (2010) point out that (like the UK university mentioned above) a violent White supremacy is *already* present in the classroom and as such understand their pedagogy as 'violently anti-violence'.

While pedagogies of both discomfort and disruption originate from the

discomfort & fragility & fusion
that come with my bones speak
of their experiences? Of
colonisation? Of whiteness?

Can I hear them?

Discomfort: You need to shift.

Me: Why?

The muscles at the top of your
back, down the sides of your
spine, in your neck, are
screaming.

But I'm not sore?

They're not sore, they're
swollen & agitated.

What about?

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[12] My more public activism has been responded to in ways that are much more explicitly aggressive – from being sworn at to being told to kill myself.

work of Freire (1972), situating the work of liberation in awakening the minds of the oppressed and the oppressors, decolonial projects situate the work of liberation in dismantling colonial structures (Zembylas, 2018). For these pedagogies to be decolonising, then, Zembylas (2018) argues they need to also "force Whites to confront their complicity in coloniality, without sentimentalising the terms and conditions of doing so" (p. 97). This sentimentalising can happen when White discomfort is reduced to an individual experience requiring individual intervention. Indeed, the studies often referenced as founding the above pedagogies trace White discomfort to childhood experiences (e.g., Tatum, 1992) and traumatised psyches (e.g., Thandeka, 1999). This approach not only risks a construction of whiteness as biographical – seemingly devoid of ancestors, intergenerationality, history – thereby repeating its own individualism. It also risks a turn toward suffering and sympathy – toward innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012) – and away from unsettling transformation. Instead, for decolonising efforts, White discomfort and fragility are more effectively conceptualised as social and political affects entangled with and in coloniality (Matias, 2014; Zembylas, 2018).

But what if I dig deeper?

Isn't there something more happening in
my flesh, my sickness, my whiteness, than
this discomfort and fragility?

Coloniality's hierarchy of Knowing, Knower, Knowledge is predicated on a peculiar relationship to the flesh. Introduced by My Spine (right now) for their role in the making of the submissive White woman, the Western European witch-hunts of the fifteenth century persecuted people whose strength came from a fleshed interdependence with an animated cosmos. In order to dominate it, capitalism required that the world be disenchanted and the body's capacity to attune to its vitality – capacities embraced by witches – be exorcised (Federici, 2014). Separated and put into a hierarchy where the mind ruled, the new Cartesian body that had violently emerged by the eighteenth century was treated as brute matter disconnected from knowing, feeling, being the world. Alienated, it became intelligible and controllable, or what Federici (2014) describes as 'the first machine' of capitalism.

With Wynter (2003), we can trace how this domination of the flesh also travelled through colonisation. From the fifteenth century, the Church set out on its global evangelising mission with a worldview that organised the physical cosmos, world geography and populations with a similar binary to those of the witch-hunts: Spirit/Flesh. The Christian, European subject was coded as closer to Spirit and, therefore, God; earthly matter, the Americas and Africa and 'Indians' and 'Negroes' were coded as closer to Flesh and, therefore, outside of 'God's grace'. However, from the Renaissance, this evangelising mission of the Church began to give way to an imperial mission of the State and a new, more

Something's disturbing them.

What?

Something's wrong.

And shifting makes it better?

Shifting makes you not feel bad.

Isn't that a good thing?

You act shifty. It's hard to trust you.

But I haven't done anything wrong?

You're literally squirming in your seat as you ask that.

So you want me to sit still?

I want you to sit with me.

secular organising principle was required to justify the expropriation, extermination and enslavement required by capitalism. Instead of Spirit/Flesh, people were organised first by Reason/Sensuality then by Rational/Irrational. Taking on the function of God, Reason and Rationality were seen to rule over the flesh while Sensuality and Irrationality were an 'enslavement to one's passions' that threatened not only people's 'civility' and 'freedom' but also the 'common good' – that is, the imperial mission of the State.

Driven by Western intellectuals (including Psychology; see Richards, 2012), what followed was enabled by the construction of 'race'. By the end of the eighteenth century, White peoples were taken as the pinnacle of rationality, civility and freedom; Indigenous peoples were taken as irrational but able to be civilised and therefore freed from their flesh; Black peoples were also taken as irrational but unable to be civilised and therefore biologically destined to savagery and enslavement – to their flesh and to Whites. Through Darwinian philosophy, these organising categories became mapped onto how evolved people supposedly were as humans. This created the legitimated, racist ground for the coloniser-colonised relation as one of human-sub/nonhuman, justifying colonial violence, leading to today's above mentioned 'metaphysical catastrophe' (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

Wynter (2003) describes this shift from the evangelising to imperial mission as dependent on the 'de-supernaturalisation' of the Christian-*cum*-European-*cum*- White mode of being human from a religious subject of the Church to a political subject of the State. In doing so she calls attention to the supernaturalisation that underpinned the initial evangelising mission – that is, that the severing of Spirit from Flesh was itself dependent on a worldview that superior beings are supernaturalised: not just separate from but *above* 'nature'. As in the Western European witch-hunts above, the evangelising mission of colonisation displaced ideas of an interdependent, animated cosmos with a worldview of earthly matter as lifeless 'dregs' outside of God's grace. Within the imperial mission this hierarchy became subsumed by humanist ideas that the entire cosmos was made by God for humans' admiration and therefore came with universal laws that were entirely – wantonly – Knowable. But only to some: reasonable, rational 'Man' – severed from the flesh, severed from the cosmos.

For Wynter (2003), it is this shift from human to Man, from fleshed interdependence to objective body-machine, that underlies the present-day coloniality of being – a violence that is not just ontological, but cosmological. And it is this shift to which Fanon alludes when he attributes whiteness with machinic qualities:

> *The soul of the White man was corrupted, and as a friend who taught in the United States told me: "The Blacks represent a kind of insurance from humanity in the eyes of the Whites. When the Whites feel they have become too mechanized, they turn to the*

You're wanting me to feel bad?

I'm wanting you to do things differently.

Fragility: You need to protect yourself.

Why?

"You have the bones of an 80-year-old woman"

But I'm only eight?

"You have the bones of an 80-year-old woman"

But I'm only thirty-eight?

It makes you petrified.

What does?

> *Coloureds and request a little human sustenance". (p. 108, my emphasis)*

Fanon (1952, 2008) here is echoing his thesis of whiteness as an experience of 'affective ankylosis' whereby colonisers 'inject' their unwanted affect into the colonised (p. 101). Drawing on this thesis, Ali-Saji (2014) describes contemporary whiteness as likewise characterised by rigidity (being unable to process the past therefore just repeating it in the present, predetermining a future), immobility (being overtaken by a totalising sense of completeness or absorption therefore unable to become anything else) and numbing (being both unaware and unresponsive to self and other). Together these characteristics produce a 'recalcitrant invisibility', that "I cannot see or feel otherwise".

What if whiteness involves not only White discomfort and White fragility but also this kind of White fusion?

Within White supremacy do White bodies simultaneously refuse and re-fuse feeling, engaging in a spiralling mode of re/fusal that habituates bodies to a way of being White over and over again, becoming machinic, stiff (My Spine, right now)?

Dividing the world into 'the civilised' (those who have control over emotions) and 'the barbaric' (those who don't), affective ankylosis is thought to have produced a kind of 'affective imperialism', enabling the civilising mission of colonisation that continues today (Spivak, 1999). For example, following Wynter's (1972) thesis that mainstream education was colonialism's "chief agent of indoctrination" (p. 72), Rose (2019) suggests that the contemporary university works as a kind of 'neocolonial mind snatching' that enables White students to outperform BIPOC students, creating differences in attainment that can be used to affirm colonial hierarchies and therefore colonisation and coloniality.

This 'attainment gap' is prolific in UK universities and has arguably become the most commonly heard rationale for institutional commitments to decolonise the curriculum (e.g., Stevenson et al., 2019). While a significant source of this gap is institutional whiteness and racism, Powell-Pruitt (2004) also attributes such differences in student achievement to Black students feeling the feelings of their White peers – creating what she conceptualises as not a gap so much as a 'knot' that leaves the former affectively overburdened and the latter "more free to do the thinking" (p. 238). The 'attainment gap' may therefore attest to the university being affected by not only White discomfort and fragility but also White fusion[13].

Knowing.

Knowing what?

You've seen the x-rays. Your joints are literally going to dust. Dislocating is in your DNA.

Why am I teary?

You're afraid to face it.

Face what?

That your own body is threatening.

Why is that so scary?

You're not in control. You're unstable. Falling is inevitable.

Which will be painful?

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[13] Similarly, Borell (2021) analyses how an 'emotional rigidity' in whiteness contributes to institutional racism within Aotearoa New Zealand healthcare. Here,

But there is more to White fusion than this ‘freedom’ to think. Fanon (1952, 2008) first mentions affective ankylosis when describing, “a world – a White world – between you and us” (p. 101). This “White world” can be understood through his own teacher’s description of the White mind as operating like a filter that “lets through only what can nourish the thick skin of the bourgeois’ clear conscience” (Césaire, 1955, p. 52). As Césaire (1955) continues, such filtering creates a “forgetting machine” able to “take refuge in a hypocrisy” (p. 31) – that the violent acts of colonisation were and are acts of civilisation. The White mind thus creates a White world righteously absent of coloniality.

An example of this machinic process appears in a February 2019 episode of the BBC4 radio discussion programme, Moral Maze. Here, four British academics interrogate university campaigns to decolonise the curriculum with a recourse to ‘universal truth’, political ‘neutrality’, ‘intellectual merit’, ‘equal treatment’ and giving ethnic minorities a ‘proper’ education. Their argumentation echoed with the observation of Maldonado-Torres (2016) that the indifference, obfuscation, evasion and aggression commonly coming from White people when confronted with issues of colonisation and decolonisation often present in “the guise of neutral and rational assessments, post-racialism, and well-intentioned liberal values” (p. 8).

Indeed, the ‘re/fusal’ of White fusion evokes the ‘five *refusals*’ of White supremacy listed above from Gibbons (2018). For Gibbons, these refusals can be understood as “five key moments where the eyes must be shut and the ears closed to reality” and therefore offer a heuristic for dismantling the “global cognitive dysfunctions” of whiteness – aka White ignorance – through “both our personal relationships and intellectual endeavours” (p. 733). However, Fanon’s thesis suggests that such cognitive refusal has an affective ally. Indeed, what strikes me about the Moral Maze arguments, as well as the comments I listed above from my White female students and colleagues alongside the dialogue in My Spine (right now), is not what is happening on an intellectual register. They – we – are cold. A ‘freedom’ to think appears coupled with a re/fusal – of feeling.

Does the lube of White privilege not just get into our eyes but also into our pores, allowing White ignorance to get under the skin, thickening it?

Is Fanon’s ‘White world’ the globe-head fortified by a re/fusal of feeling, our thick skin?

Could feeling arouse not just the hypocrisy of Knowing, Knower, Knowledge, but its

Yes. But the scariness is because you won’t return.

Where will I be?

In a different life. In a different world.

Fusion: You need to stretch.

Why?

Two vertebrae in your neck are fused, more are fusing. The middle of your spine is fusing.

What does that look like?

You can’t look behind you. You can barely look around you.

What’s there?

---

stoical norms of self-control, personal autonomy and “the power of the mind over strong emotions” (p. 4) are thought to curb the expression of feeling within hospitals, making these White spaces unsafe for Māori and Pacifika peoples who value the collective sharing of emotions.

cracks, its instability?

Does White fusion solder cracks in the colonial episteme otherwise poked by campaigns to decolonise the curriculum, enabling us to ignore coloniality and, in turn, decoloniality?

White fusion suggests that White ignorance is not just in our intellectual endeavours[14] but in our bodies, under our skin, becoming irritated, enflamed when poked; an inflammation that can present as anger – listed above as a "defensive move" characteristic of White discomfort and fragility (DiAngelo, 2011). However, while fear and guilt are also listed above as defensive moves, My Spine (right now) suggests that these two feelings are core to yet avoided in discomfort and fragility. Here, guilt is an ask to not simply "feel bad" but to recognise that I could "do things differently", and fear is an ask to live in "a different world" where I am not "in control" – including of my own body.

While anger is plausibly a familiar feeling for privileged people (given its association with a sense of entitlement), guilt and fear ask me to leave a world – wrapped in ignorance – where I am innocent and masterful for one where I am response-able and humble. Unable to tolerate this unfamiliar otherworld, I attempt to shift into a comfortable position of innocence and protect a fragile position of mastery – defensive moves that enable me to re/fuse guilt and fear. Discomfort and fragility appear to be riddled with fusion.

Are White discomfort and fragility symptoms of White fusion?

Are they a problem in the university not because White people feel guilt and fear but because we re/fuse these feelings?

Obliging a sense of response-ability and humility, do guilt and fear threaten-cum-promise to crack our thick skin?

Taking us away from innocence and mastery, could feeling guilt and fear destabilise Knowing, Knower, Knowledge?

Is this why they make the globe-head shake?

The past.

So I'm always looking ahead?

Yes. And it's spreading.

Eventually you'll always be

looking down at the land.

Looking down on the land.

Never seeing the stars...

What's the "it"?

Your stiffness.

How does that feel?

Like you're always doing The

Robot.

But how does that feel?

Slow. Cold. Old. Reptilian.

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[14] The 'endeavour' of these "intellectual endeavours" evokes than name of the ship that Captain James Cook was sailing on his colonising voyages around the South Pacific: The Endeavour.

Somewhat similar to Césaire (1955) above, Watkins and Shulman (2008) argue that colonialism required a kind of "dissociation" in White people that, nowadays, prevents "the working through and mourning of the painful past, and mitigating engagement with the pressing issues of our time" (p. 75). For Watkins and Shulman (2008), this results in a "bystanding" that operates to mask privilege and history, normalise violence, defend the status quo and "anaethetise" individuals from painful knowledge. As they write, "It is as though there is a chronic illness of which one is unaware. To heal it, one must begin to experience it. Yet it is this very difficulty in experiencing it that is part of the illness" (p. 65)[15].

It is because of this paradox – that White people need to experience their "illness" in order to be able to experience it – that I have found a return to Fanon particularly resonant. Fanon (1962, 2001) describes the effects of affective ankylosis on the colonised in explicitly fleshy terms: "…the emotional sensitivity of the native is kept *on the surface of the skin* like an open sore which flinches from the caustic agent; and the psyche shrinks back, obliterates itself and finds outlet in muscular demonstrations" (p. 44; my emphasis). The feelings re/fused by White people are thrown into Black people such that, as Fanon (1952, 2008) describes elsewhere, a collection of "extremely toxic foreign bodies" come to "infect" the other with a sensitivity that is both emotional and embodied (p. 19). In turn, "forced to 'secrete' the White man's waste" (Oliver, 2005), the colonised do not internalise racism so much as, in Fanon's (1952, 2008) words, 'epidermalise' it.

While Fanonian literature in turn routinely examines this Black embodiment, the White body remains conspicuously absent in accounts of affective ankylosis. It is as though, re/fusing feeling, to be White is to be disembodied.

Is White fusion contingent on the severing
of the body?

Do White discomfort and fragility therefore
also depend on disembodiment?

Reptilian?

Spiny. Thick-skinned. Scaley.

So now I need moisturiser?

No. You're desperate to crack.

What's in-between?

No thing.

Why have I stopped breathing?

Thoughts are going round &

round & round in your head.

You're trying to Know.

---

[15] Watkins and Shulman (2008) are early contributors to a small yet recently growing and increasingly popular body of literature that conceptualises whiteness as a form of 'trauma'. Generated as a response to mental health issues, trauma discourses mark a paradigm shift in diagnostics – no longer asking "What is wrong with you? so much as "What happened to you?". In trauma literature, the phrase that's used to describe the trauma experienced by folks who have been perpetrators (not victims) of violence is 'moral injury', and a small handful of practitioners are starting to understand contemporary whiteness as a moral injury inherited from our ancestors (Menakem, 2021; Walker-Barnes, 2019). While I am drawn to how these understandings are increasingly implicating the body (see Menakem, 2021; van der Kolk, 2014), I am wary of the potential for their central question ("What happened to you?") to be co-opted by whiteness – namely, their potential to create and centre a kind of White victimhood within White supremacy. It's also of note that – despite burgeoning BIPOC praxes on the intergenerationality of BIPOC trauma (e.g. those building on Braveheart & DeBruyn, 1998) – mainstream psychological scholarship continues to locate White trauma only within an individual's lifespan (e.g. Brooker et al., 2021), reinscribing whiteness as some kind of ahistorical give-in (an exception here is literature on the Jewish holocaust, however this is with regard to people's experiences as victims rather than perpetrators of violence – see Hoffman, 2005). Given all these issues, I prefer in this essay to conceptualise whiteness as 'sickness' because this explicitly evokes the flesh, chronicity and inheritance without needing something to have "happened to me". Being less configured, more ambiguous than 'trauma' and therefore more open to being shaped anew with the assimilative properties of whiteness in mind, 'sickness' allows me to more easily shift the question of, "What was done *to* my ancestors? to one of, "What was done *by* them?".

Yet the globe-head is not alone. It is attached to a body – thick-skinned and mechanised, but still there, still breathing.

Could this White flesh offer, oblige
something for decolonising Psychology?

Can you hear me?

3 | ARE YOU STILL BREATHING?

> *Psyche: 1640s, "animating spirit," from Latin psyche, from Greek psykhē "the soul, mind, spirit; life, one's life, the invisible animating principle or entity which occupies and directs the physical body; understanding, the mind (as the seat of thought), faculty of reason" (personified as Psykhē, the beloved of Eros), also "ghost, spirit of a dead person;" probably akin to psykhe in "to blow, cool," from PIE root *bhes- "to blow, to breathe" (source also of Sanskrit bhas-). (etymonline.com)*

> *If coloniality refers to a logic, metaphysics, ontology, and a matrix of power that can continue existing after formal independence and desegregation, decoloniality refers to efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world. (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 10)*

> *I'm going to tell [the police] there's an* ***African American*** *man threatening my life. (Cooper, 2020)*

In contrast to institutionalised efforts to decolonise the curriculum, the above experiment suggests that coloniality cannot be simply ‘solved’ with knowledge. Digging into the flesh hints that there is more to whiteness than White discomfort and fragility – now somewhat routinely seen in both scholarly and popular descriptions of whiteness. Thickening the skin, less visible, is White fusion – a re/fusal of feeling that might otherwise make White ignorance, White privilege, White supremacy shake.

In turn we cannot just take off the globe-head, suddenly seeing, no longer sleep-walking, becoming ‘woke’ innocent masters of body and world whereby enlightened Man “individualistically emerges from the dark cave of ignorance into the light of critical consciousness” – as Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 20) describe Freirean pedagogical projects. By contrast, Tuck and Yang continue, black feminist thought “roots freedom in the darkness of the cave, in that well of feeling and wisdom from which all knowledge is recreated” (p. 20). Quoting an infamous line from Lorde (1984) – “The White fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us - the poet - whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free” – they urge a shift from ‘sight-centric’ to *felt* modes of liberation.

While a logical response to Lorde may be to call for ‘feeling feelings[16]’ , this quote is taken from her essay, ‘Poetry is Not a Luxury’ – her turn away from Cartesian philosophy and toward feeling is part of a broader argument that liberation requires a (re)turn away from (En)light(enment) and towards the dark. And for Mika (2020), the colonial emphasis on the seen, clarity and certainty is not only sight- but *human*-centric and as such needs to be counteracted with more-than-human modes of learning/teaching that embrace the unseen, obscurity and uncertainty[17]. Indeed Fanon (1952, 2008) responds to his own account of affective ankylosis with the more-than-human. He enters an unceasing capacity, necessity to inhale and exhale the cosmos; an engagement that, in its primordial form, manifests as *breathing*. Recognising its tendency to be fetishised, savagised, patronised in its blackness, Fanon leaves the revolutionary nature of this engagement imminent, hanging on an exhale. Elsewhere I have taken in this breath and suggested he is pointing toward an embodied, inspirited reciprocity that animates a world beside the colonial episteme and thus whispers an otherworld is not just possible but close-by (Liebert, 2019). This 'otherworldly correspondence' – what I think of as a kind of decolonising *imagination* – is threatened within a White supremacy built on the abovementioned shift from human to Man (Wynter, 2003) – severed from the flesh, severed from the cosmos.

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[16] Feeling feelings is a tactic well-known by feminists of colour (Matias, 2014) – Bell (2018) for example argues that feeling feelings in the classroom creates the ‘decolonial atmosphere’ necessary for individual and social transformation. While a logical response to White fusion may be to simply adopt this approach for White people too, the assimilative properties of whiteness call for caution. How to pursue felt modes of liberation in ways that do not simply feed our individualism with a self-centeredness, continuing coloniality?

And it is re/fused by a discipline beholden to seeing over feeling, enlightenment over mystery, human over more-than-human. Academics over poetics. White fusion obliges us to ask if White supremacy can be interrupted when theorised, researched and reported in ways that prioritise intellectual engagement. Or worse: do these endeavours reinforce it? While the etymology above suggests that Psychology is the study of *psykhe*, of spirit, of breath, our discipline was and is deeply implicated in the cosmological violence of coloniality, casting think-nets that smother reciprocal modes of being human, contributing to not just human but more-than-human genocide (see also Carlson, this issue and Lara, this issue). But: what if we read our etymological roots as pointing to not our object of inquiry so much as our mode? What if decolonising Psychology were a praxis of (not on) breathing? Experimenting with embodied, inspirited forms that welcome fresh air, that conspire against coloniality by trying to be something else?

The above experiment suggests that engaging White bodies may be one way to engage in this breathing praxis. Stretching our thick skin not only invites us to feel feelings, opening our pores to a White supremacy that exists, is violent and has to go. It hints that it *can* go. Decentring our selves and inviting otherworlds, when we engage our bodies do we animate, elevate and *enact* not just the flesh but the unseen, the obscure, the uncertain: the more-than-human? Are we then shown that another way of doing whiteness is possible? If so, opening up other 'forms of being' in the world, this stretching could perhaps be an example of an everyday 'counter-practice' listed above by Maldonado-Torres (2016) as moving toward decoloniality. Note: a *practice* – not a cure. Our bodies are our ancestors. White fusion suggests that as White people we have inherited not just privilege (Borell, Barnes & McCreanor, 2018), but also a poisoned state (Césaire, 1955). If we are chronically sick from whiteness, then we must commit to a life of tending and treating, of counteracting the intergenerational spread of White fusion through relentless efforts to stretch our bodies, to reconfigure whiteness[18].

Generating an intense atmosphere, the activity with which I opened this piece does not stand alone, it cannot be inserted into just any space and it will not endure without collective commitment and action – particularly within a colonial institution inhospitable to the otherworldly (see also Barnes et al., 2017). And I am certainly not suggesting that engaging White bodies is the route to decolonisation. Unwavering in his call to understand the psychological within the social and therefore to treat psychological problems with social action, Fanon (1952, 2008) differentiates between a Psychology that is content with description versus a Psychology that, after description, commits also to revolution. What creates the difference between the two, he suggests, is that the former is undertaken as only about the Other whereas the latter is seen to also concern the Self. Rejecting “the vileness of those who want to turn man into a machine” (p. 6), he thus calls for a Psychology that gives up its (White) pretence of objectivity and that seeks to create (rather than exhaust) possibilities. That is, a Psychology that gives up on Knowing the world and that seeks instead to transform it – whether in the classroom, the staffroom, the mirror.

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[17] In his own "counter-colonial" gesture, Mika (2020) also experiments with his form by creatively interrupting the certainty of his own claims.

[18] What are the politics of approaching whiteness as sickness given current moves within disability justice to reclaim 'sick' as a powerful identity for social transformation (e.g., Hedva, 2016) and to decolonise disability more broadly (e.g., Jaffee & John, 2018)? By approaching whiteness as sickness, this essay risks calling on pathologisation as a radical tactic, undermining decades of critique against pathologisation's violence and conservatism, including its coloniality (Liebert, 2019). At the same time, this essay explicitly uses sickness as a guide for decolonising praxis; the radical tactic that it gestures toward is not pathologisation so much as learning from sick activists and scholars about how being, tending to and treating a sick body can be a mode of political engagement (e.g., what if White people learned from disabled people's creation of networks of care about creating networks of accountability?). Indeed rather than threatening potential solidarity with disability justice activists and scholars, my hope is that this essay obliges it.

Or the street. Maldonado-Torres (2016) describes “breathlessness” as “a constant condition in the state of coloniality and perpetual war, but it increases in certain contexts” (p. 5). He is referring to the 2014 murder of Eric Garner – a Black man choked to death by police officers when selling cigarettes in New York City. Garner’s final words, “I can’t breathe”, became a rallying cry for Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists around the US, UK, Western Europe and South Africa; the same movements that ultimately catalysed UK campaigns to decolonise the curriculum in 2015; the same movements that needed to rise again in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd – a Black man choked to death by police officers when buying cigarettes in Minneapolis, his final words, “I can’t breathe”. A few days before Floyd’s murder, Amy Cooper – quoted above – is recorded telling a Black man what she is going to say to the police after he reminded her that her dog was supposed to be on a leash. A White woman, Cooper’s actions went viral as the latest example of a 500-year-old practice of weaponising the White female body against BIPOC, implicating all White women in Floyd’s murder. Cooper herself is a reminder that – swollen with rageful entitlement – the re/fusal involved in White discomfort and fragility is violent. Indeed, that White fusion does not just reinstate innocence and mastery, it reinstates White supremacy – whether in the classroom, the staffroom, the mirror or the street.

The repetition here is suffocating. With the state-sanctioned genocide of Black people in the air, breathing in BLM movements resists being ‘only’ a metaphor[19]. To revive the *psykhe* of Psychology is to commit to being a discipline that conspires – that breathes together – with those who know an otherworld is not just possible and close-by but also urgently needed. To inhale their teachings, exhale our learnings, inhale their teachings, exhale our learnings... Requiring a discipline that is itself able to let go of innocence, mastery and re/fusal for an unfamiliar otherworld of response-ability, humility and imagination, this praxis is a stretch. But it is not a question of possibility. What else might Critical Psychology need to revive the *psykhe*, our *psykhe* within coloniality, within a state of breathlessness?

Anything?

4 | CONCRETE

How to theorise and write in a way that enacts my decolonising commitments? I am a White female Critical Psychologist descended from settlers and trained and working in the Global North; if I present a ‘nice scholarly’ account – innocently objective and masterfully applied – then I risk reinscribing a kind of whiteness that is core to coloniality. My theorising and writing are therefore an experiment in and commitment to ‘decoloniality-as-praxis’ (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). I practice Fanon’s final prayer to theorise about practicing Fanon’s final prayer; I engage my White, sick flesh to theorise about engaging White, sick flesh. I have experimented with this spiralling mode of theorising elsewhere (Liebert, 2019). There, I suggested that a tactic of mystery, ritual and pausing is one way to make space within coloniality for imagination or ‘otherworldly correspondence’ – a kind of Fanonian breathing (Fanon, 1952, 2008). Here,

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[19] Affective ankylosis offers to break the Cartesian dualism of coloniality; a dualism also operating in moves to decolonise the curriculum that prioritise content over form, seeing over feeling, enlightenment over mystery, human over more-than-human, academics over poetics. However in the literature, including in those who name this breakage, Fanon’s references to the body seem to largely be taken as ‘only’ metaphorical (e.g., Oliver, 2005) – despite, for example, Fanon (1952, 2008) explicitly expressing an interest in a study to measure changes in the fluids of Black bodies when they enter France. As mentioned in the Introduction to this essay, while it is also not unusual for Indigenous analyses of coloniality and White supremacy to make references to whiteness as sickness, these too are often seen as ‘only’ metaphoric, if not indicative of ‘language issues’ or being ‘uneducated’ (e.g. Mitchell et al., 2019) – betraying a colonial episteme premised on not just the hierarchy of Knowing, Knower, Knowledge but also the shift from human to Man, from fleshed interdependence to objective body-machine, repeated in the well-known Western declaration that, ‘Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me’ (Elder, 2015).

I evoke this breathing praxis by both drawing on and departing from standard form, offering two-*cum*-one lines of inquiry-*cum*-imagery into how whiteness feels – a more academic, disjointed prose that reflexively puts my pedagogy in dialogue with literature on 'affective ankylosis' and a more poetic, stretched spine that reflexively puts my whiteness in dialogue with Ankylosing Spondylitis. The latter (written in the whiteness between the lines of the former) drives me to ask 31 questions that take the entire piece through discomfort, fragility *and* fusion – breaking a habit of White people and Psychology to refuse and re-fuse not simply feeling but imagination.

This otherworldly correspondence is not via any 'answers' so much as the questioning itself – a rhythmic, vulnerable practice that seeks to animate, elevate and enact the more-than-human. Specifically, I come to engage my White body *as my settler ancestors*, presenting an opportunity to tend to three symptoms of coloniality that respectively fester in and through my bones as discomfort, fragility and fusion: a sense of innocence, such that I think I do not have to do anything; an ignoring of a violent history, such that I think I am the natural master; the severing of my 'mind' from my flesh, such that I think I am separate from and above the cosmos. Tending to these symptoms required a response-ability, humility and imagination that sometimes stung, but that also became potential ways to prevent my sickness from spreading – at least in the moment. The form and content of this piece therefore conspire in their attempt to enter an unfamiliar otherworld, stretching both my whiteness and my critical psychological praxis within coloniality. Asking overall, *What could the White body do for decolonising Psychology?*, I nod to Spinozian trends in the affective turn to recognise the potential of the flesh (Deleuze, 1988), but – given the history of what White bodies have done – with caution.

5 | RESPONSES TO *WHAT A WHITE BODY COULD DO*

The following responses by Professors Carl Mika[20] and Tim McCreanor[21] were originally written as a peer-reviews of this article. They have been very slightly edited for publication.

5.1 | A Māori response by Carl Mika

This article calls into question the need for review – itself a colonial etching, most fundamentally because it assumes that I will respond to something (the article) in a rational way.

But given the colonised nature of my own mind and the lack of time available to respond irrationally, I will do so with western structures of argument at the forefront (unfortunately!).

This article stretches the boundaries by asserting vulnerability as a ~~method~~. I know the writer doesn't necessarily want it to be a method, but it can be thought of that way, as long as it, itself, is ok with eventually being undermined. I didn't sense any finality in the writer's argument, which was great.

So I am more drawn into the argument by the progression and structure of the writer's thinking rather than the content per se. With this sort of article, I think a review best takes place by assessing how one is impacted by its indefinability rather than its logical structure. The article progresses from one point to another with some confronting metaphors: from my (a Māori) perspective, this undoes the smooth nature of what is expected to be a great argument. However, this smoothness soon re-forms itself, and I think the writer is aware of that – and so the impression we get is that the writer is having a battle with western rationality. At least, that's how it strikes me – maybe because my own writing is increasingly more aware of minute problems with western expression through logic. The lube is definitely everywhere!

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This is a great article that will leave most readers with an unshakeable feeling that something has just taken place at a bodily level. In indigenous terms, we would probably say that it has actually occurred in metaphysical realms (we have words for that), and that it has simply mirrored itself in the body of the reader. I think this is the article's greatest success.

5.2 | A Pākehā response by Tim McCreanor

Through privilege unearned, so far spared any specific life-threatening condition in my late 60s, never-the-less gravity sits heavily upon my body. As my joints wear, muscles shrink and nerve-endings begin to fray, it matter-o-factly reminds me that though I still live, the earth awaits. While this does not necessarily translate into urgency or clarity, it does add to a dragging sense of 'so much to be done', so little momentum and the confusions these realisations work into the inertia of white supremacy. In your innovation, the fusions (my 4-year-old grandson recently described me to his mother as 'crooked and forgetty'!) and the many turns to innocence and ignorance that I manage through them, are very much fellow travellers with a generic white malaise that animates this coil.

Whakarongo, whakarongo, whakarongo.

It has been a moving and inspiring experience to read and respond to this work, helping me to feel out my own colonial entanglements of embodiment within a firmly intellectual professional life. To me, the structure, form and content work together here in rare, confronting and sometimes curiously comforting ways as I carry on my work in Māori research groups and communities, as well as Pākehā activist networks. The piece articulates with eloquence, beauty and inspiring honesty, fragments/fragmented dialogues that run in my head most days, grounding them in a decolonial theoretical matrix and weaving them together, into an open-ended coherence I can only hope to approach. What is so great from my perspective is that your questions mark territories within and beyond academia, that are currently under serious debate in this country, upon which Pākehā must tread if we hold any hope at all of a society constituted in just social relations.

I realise that this point is off-piste in relation to your paper, but I struggle to get a feel for how notions like Critical Psychology can contribute to decolonisation, so I wonder how useful is as a definitive identity marker in the face of its connotations with indigenous people? I know it is a weak joke but sometimes I refer to myself as a 'recovering psychologist', so I also acknowledge that having some insider knowledge enhances the salience of critical voices around Psychology and all that it represents, is hugely important. Critical Psychology is one of your domains of expertise, so it is excellent to hear your voice from that space, join the growing chorus from diverse knowledge spaces speaking decolonisation into being.

What you are saying about Psychology clearly applies also to Education and a slew of other disciplines (including my own Public Health orientation) that need to be transformed in order to contribute constructively to Tiriti-led[22] justice in Aotearoa. Are these cultural traditions from Western Europe, so deeply imbricated in historical and contemporary institutions and infrastructures of power and control, that they must always (eventually) cannibalise and destroy the diverse or transformational movements that they encounter?

The theorising of white supremacy as every-day and ubiquitous, rather than hidden in white robes or wearing red caps, though shocking to most, is really helpful for Pākehā whatever their standpoint. This pervasiveness creates the conditions in which hegemony is achieved and maintained through the discursive, affective and material processes of selection, construction, forgetting and oblation.

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[22] Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a contractual agreement first signed by the British Crown and Māori leadership in 1840, guaranteeing te tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty) to Māori. The New Zealand government which was devolved by the Crown from 1854 onwards, is legally obliged to uphold this promise, but it been repeatedly broken.

For me and the research trajectory I have been on these three decades past, discourse (a social practice) has been a key animus, reflexively outed as a shareable, able-to-be-changed determinant of racism and injustice. Working to critique naturalized discursive structures and particularly to make space for the voices of those who experience these forms of discrimination, has led me into working relationships with Māori and Māori women in particular, to attempt comprehensive, nuanced bicultural research projects. These have enabled diverse facets of oppressive and liberatory discourse, from both critical coloniser and indigenous decolonising voices to enter and inform the public domain.

The notions of pausing, making space, resonate very strongly for me, counter-intuitively perhaps bringing an excitement and lightness to the dreary carriage of contesting the existential threat of the status quo (to the ecosphere), as (relatively) unconstrained Māori enterprise blooms and effloresces. The research world here (far from contained within the academy) is increasingly brimming with a wealth of both brilliant and staunch Māori researchers, thinkers and writers, with repressed mātauranga paradigms and insights whose time has come and with guidelines that with whakarongo sustained, bring the transformative impetus to life.

Among these advances your work now speaks to Matike Mai, the indigenous blueprint for constitutional transformation, by asking the questions that Pākehā and the Crown must address to enact an honourable Kāwanatanga Sphere. This is vital to enable the just emergence of the Relational Sphere to pair and match with te tari Rangatiratanga. Your unpacking of refusal and re-fusal, is of high importance to Te Pūtahitanga, the soon to be launched framework for Māori science policy and very helpful for the research 'best practice' guide Rauika Māngai[23]. It is of high relevance also to international decolonial struggles as articulated by He Puapua, a report commissioned by Cabinet, under the leadership of Māori law professor Clare Charters, to guide the enactment of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in Aotearoa and other jurisdictions in which we have influence.

Closer to everyday experience I feel your piece can inform and contribute to potentially radical social change under way here in terms of how we will teach history within the national school curriculum. As Dame Anne Salmond has recently written, this is a rare and vital opportunity to move beyond division and injustice, to grow new generations of people who understand who they are, where they come from and how they are related to each other, as a foundation for more equitable futures. With colleagues I am embarked on a study of Pākehā reactions and responses to these curriculum changes and I can hardly wait to share your piece with them as an inspiration to encourage us on that journey.

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[23] http://www.rauikamangai.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Rauika-Māngai_A-Guide-to-Vision-Mātauranga_FINAL.pdf

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