

Can academia be decolonized beyond the metaphor?

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Abstract

The paper evaluates the reach and viability of the call to “decolonize academia” and assesses what can be done in academic institutions by way of decolonizing practices. By distinguishing colonialism from colonality, it stresses the material and structural dimensions of the latter as an on-going reality, and thus argues for the impossibility of “decolonizing” the academy as we know it. From this stance, it identifies an array of expressions of colonality in the academy and presents a critique of metaphorical and/or allegedly performative approaches to decolonization. In doing this, the paper seeks to offer philosophical instruments for a thorough, self-critical reflection and intervention on academic institutions and teaching and research practices, in the understanding that these must be but a part of broader processes of social transformation.

Keywords: *decolonization, colonality, academia, knowledge, institutions*

In May 2021, on the holiest night of the holy month of Ramadan, the Israeli government redoubled its attack on the Palestinian peoples, initiating a new reinforcement of its long-standing genocidal interventions, which draw upon the most sophisticated biopolitical and necropolitical technologies of occupation,

subjugation and annihilation. In this context, Palestinian artist Fargo Nissim Tbakhi said:

Palestinians are reminding us that decolonization is not abstract. it is material. it is violent. it is not popular, it will be resisted and debated by the entire structures of the monstrous colonial world. and it is the only way forward, and it is the only path of life. (Nissim Tbakhi, 2021)

On the other side of the globe, as a part of the fierce repression of the National Strike taking place in Colombia, the indigenous *Minga*ⁱ was being attacked by military and paramilitary forces in different parts of the country, and the rates of death, torture and disappearances, which mainly affect the indigenous and Afro-Colombian sectors, continued to rise (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2021). Throughout the continent, indigenous populations face an increased vulnerability to COVID and its social, economic and sanitary consequences (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021); just as in Palestine, settlers have secured epidemiological policies that are withheld from natives (Amnesty International, 2021). Deaths from a virus that is born, circulates and kills due to the networks of global extractivist capitalism, heir to the extractivism that fuelled the invasion of the American continent by Western Europe in the 15th century. That is: to “colonialism” as we usually understand it. Still, these events point not so much to colonialism (“a mode of political-administrative domination entailing a number of institutions” that sustain the exploitation of the colonized by the colonizer), but rather to coloniality: a broader phenomenon that reaches our present “as a matrix of thought and framework for action that legitimizes differences” between the metropolis and its colonies, and more broadly “between societies, subjects and knowledges”, even after formal independence (Restrepo and Rojas, 2010, pp. 15–16). The colonial is not (was not) an event, it is a structure (Patrick Wolfe

1999 referred in (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 5)), and the situations just mentioned, as so many others we are witnessing these days, are clear proof of this.

In such a context, how can we talk about decolonization? Does it even make sense to do it? How *should* we talk about decolonization? How much can we stretch the metaphor of the colonial - and of decolonization - to bring it into our classrooms, our publications and our academic talk?

The title of this work takes up and seeks to honour the powerful interpellation brought by Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, who in a 2012 paper provokingly assert that “Decolonization is not a metaphor.” There, the authors lay bluntly the problem of -and the motivations for- the metaphorical drifts of decolonization. They argue that when we transform decolonization into a metaphor (decolonize your mind, decolonize your menu, decolonize the IMF...) we produce both domestication and exclusion. The term is domesticated, stripped of its political radicalness and the responsibility it implies; and we exclude not only certain interpretations of what decolonization might mean, but also the subjects who sustain the radical praxis of decolonization as concrete transformation.

Why do we slip again and again into metaphorical uses of decolonization? Tuck and Yang interpret this gesture as a symptom of settler anxiety, as settlers seek an escape route from the conflict opened up by coloniality and their (our) participation in it. Guilt stalks us, and we rush to leave it behind through different techniques that the authors, following Janet Mawhinney, call “settler moves to innocence” (2012, p. 9) (on self-representations of innocence, including those within academia, see also Ravecca and Dauphinee, 2022). Although it is not the focus of these authors, we could add “white fragility” to settler anxiety, as a mechanism perpetuated by white people to avoid

acknowledging the various forms of violence entailed by white supremacy and the benefits gained from it, all while maintaining intact both its structures of privilege and the moral self-perception of whites. However, it must be noted that an exclusive focus on whiteness as a site of privilege can overlook how people who are not white in a certain context can also participate in settler colonialism and/or benefit from it (Tuck and Yang, 2012); it also often fails to acknowledge that whiteness, and race more broadly, is not an organizing principle of inequality in many contemporary societies (Channa, in press).

Among the various “moves” Tuck and Yang analyse, three seem particularly relevant to the problems under discussion in this Issue. First, the representation of the colonized or native subject as “peoples at risk” or as “an asterisk”: the “A(s)t(e)risk peoples” (2012, pp. 22–23). The authors explain that these subjects are represented in social and human sciences research in two ways: as people always “on the verge of extinction”, involved in “self-destructive behaviours”, incapable of leading a dignified life; or as “asterisks”, additions or exceptions in analyses structured from a colonial viewpoint and designed with white subjects as parameter. All indigenous peoples are placed in the same asterisk, thereby assimilating them into a classification system that is alien to them and their realities. These are more than representations: they produce the subject they claim to represent – recall how Fanon said in *The Wretched of the Earth*: “It is the colonist who made and continues to make the colonized” (2002, p. 40).

A second point raised by Tuck and Yang is the illusion of equivalence of decolonization with social justice (2012, pp. 17–19). Even though there are undoubtedly connections between the various causes linked to social justice, not all of them prioritize the territories and sovereignty of indigenous nations, and many are alien or even contrary to the decolonizing project. Collapsing them all

under the term “decolonization” overlooks this fact and may convey the impression that the actual decolonizing work (referred to land and sovereignty) is being done and defended, while in fact it is not. This point is particularly important for -and seldom acknowledged by- those of us who are affected by other lines of structural oppression (such as sexism or ableism), but reap the rewards of settler colonialism.

Thirdly, we find a “move to innocence” that approaches decolonization as mere consciousness raising (Tuck and Yang, 2012, pp. 19–22), as expressed in slogans such as “decolonize the mind” or “free your mind and the rest will follow.” It is here, I believe, that the limits of decolonization as metaphor become most apparent. Although consciousness-raising is fundamental to decolonization (and in that respect academia does have an important role), decolonization cannot be reduced to consciousness-raising. I agree with the authors, and with a tradition of radical thinkers such as Cabral (2016) and Fanon (2002): decolonization is cultural, but it also entails a comprehensive and radical reordering of power relations, sovereignty over territories, and social and political organization.

What these different manoeuvres do, according to the authors, is to deactivate the potency of decolonization as a proposal, placating the anxiety that the real and concrete possibility of a decolonized future implies for settlers. In my view, it is as difficult as it is necessary to take the time to plunge fully into the uncomfortable problem of our metaphorical uses of language, when metaphors are used as a vehicle of political legitimacy. It is not my aim, of course, to criticize or censure metaphorical language – not only because our language is largely composed of metaphors, more or less crystallized depending on the case, but also because they allow us to move beyond what we know, into uncharted territories –. It does seem fundamental, however, to call attention to the political

uses we make of them, when we metaphorize agendas or concrete claims of certain collectives pretending we are thereby contributing to them, while in fact legitimising our own subject position. “When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future” (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 3).

Coloniality in academia

As a social, cultural and political matrix, coloniality undoubtedly permeates the academy in all its expressions. And this is precisely for the same reasons that decolonization cannot be reduced to a metaphor: because coloniality runs through absolutely all the institutions, practices, bodies and thoughts of our world system. The notion of “coloniality” is vital to understand the myriad ways in which the colonial matrix continues to shape our world (both in former colonies and the metropolis), and particularly its relations of domination, even after formal independence has been achieved (Vergès, 2019, p. 27). We need to continue identifying the colonial forms currently at play (which are our own, because there is no outside of coloniality, and even resistance rises within oppression), including those in the academy; we need to continue reflecting and intervening on them.

Coloniality plays a central role in the establishment and sustainment of “a politics of disposable lives, humans as waste” (Vergès, 2019, p. 28). Many contributions to this Special Issue identify and discuss various ways in which such politics runs through education, research, and our profession as academic workers. Even when our contexts vary enormously, coloniality accompanies us at all times, and in all the countries of our region. Like air: some have the privilege to breathe fairly pure air, others do not; still others have a personal or professional investment in the economies of loot and pollution. I would like to

recover some of these issues, to offer a philosophical perspective on them, in order to collaborate with the reflections shared here.

When addressing such question - and to go beyond any limited enumeration - we must remember that coloniality does not only refer to a geopolitical link between empire and dominated territories, to unequal North-South relations, or to racism and ethnonationalism. Coloniality has created specific parameters for body and mind: a heterosexual, (re)productive, able, competitive, power-seeking subject. It constitutes the very division between body and mind, and reinstates the notion that they are distinct, that they can be conceived - or even lived - separately from each other. And, simultaneously, it enshrines very precise ideas about how each of them should be and function (or rather: what a human body/mind is, and what is slightly less than human, or what is lacking in relation to that being). In the words of Pablo Mamani Ramírez (2015, p. 27), "The colonial is a body realized as a system, or somatized in the body to become the common sense of social life". This "common sense", as critical epistemologiesⁱⁱ have taught us well, is functional to the apparently objective exclusion of subjects for whom there was no place anyway: most notably, the bodies disabled by institutions through their spatial arrangements, allocation of resources, or requirements for admission and permanence; but also disabled by us, through our daily academic practices. That is why I wish to stress this beforehand: in what follows, at times it may seem that things have gone off topic, that coloniality and decolonization have ceased to be the focus of my argument. But I dare say that in those moments they are even more so, because part of the critical process on coloniality is precisely confronting its most capillary reaches, including those that find us as its well-meaning perpetrators.

With this in mind, we can now move on to considering some of the practices that produce and reproduce coloniality in academic settings. Perhaps the most

obvious form in which coloniality appears in the academy is epistemic violence. By this I mean a form of social relation characterized by the “historically and socially situated” denial “of the subjectivity, legitimacy or existence of another individual or community *qua* epistemic subjects” (Pérez, 2019, p. 83). In this Issue, Fabiana Parra from Argentina and Juan Pablo Bermúdez and Juan Ramos Martín from Colombia, address epistemic violence and even attempt some alternative paths for our work; while Natalia Duque identifies “cultural plundering” (see this Issue) as a central aspect of the history of violence in Abya Yala/Latin America. The operation of epistemic violence in the academy includes the legitimization of certain forms of knowledge over others; epistemic extractivism or the looting of “ideas as commodities, to colonize them by subsuming them under the parameters of the [dominant] culture and episteme” (Grosfoguel, 2016, p. 132)(see also Betasamosake Simpson, 2013); the instrumental use and objectification of marginalized subjects (Radi, 2019); among many other practices.

North/South relations of epistemic dependence are another of the points most often referred to in relation to this topic. This includes, among other things, Anglocentrism (centering English-speaking frameworks and using hegemonic English-speaking cultures and worldviews as a -superior- parameter to measure others), the citation policies required to be a “respectable” academic, the inequitable distribution of resources for research, the imposition of economic fees to access knowledge and the commercialisation of education to maintain unequal social structures, the intellectual endogamy among Northern academics, and the establishment from the centres of academic power of a research agenda that is irrelevant or contrary to the interests of the colonized territories and peoples.

We also must consider the use of concepts, images and metaphors that reproduce coloniality in all its different facets: from the image of “light” as superior to “dark”, to the globalization of categories of analysis such as “gender” that are alien to many cultural contexts (Channa, in press; Makoni, 2021). This forces marginalized researchers (those working outside of the Global North, and/or whose identities and social locations have historically been excluded from academia) to choose between speaking a language that is not their own (and that is useless when trying to make sense of their experiences), and being left out of the academic circuit. The use of such conceptual frameworks also limits our possibilities of identifying coloniality in its full scale, since by reproducing them, we naturalize ableist, cissexist, racist, Eurocentric orders, and fail to see ourselves as part of them.

But coloniality in academia goes well beyond the discursive order: it also involves the outright exclusion of certain subjects from academic opportunities at all levels. Consider the cost of studying, especially in English; the requirements of endurance and demand; the various tweaks of institutional design that make remaining impossible for the few who, without coming from a privileged background, still gain access to it; the daily reinforcement of their exclusion through microaggressions in the classroom or the professors’ lounge... Practices that remind us, over and over again, who has a place there and who does not. In relation to faculty, consider the demand for levels of work, conspicuously called “production”, at a pace that is incompatible with the care of life and that, as Macarena Marey (2020) has pointed out, can only be sustained by the illusion that care work is non-existent in the case of those of us who work in the academy. Indeed, Tuck and Yang argue that, from a colonial perspective, “civilization” itself is defined as “production in excess over the natural world” (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 6) – it is hardly surprising, then, that rankings of “academic development” be based on quantifiable production, while

the “natural world”, starting with life itself, is brushed off as irrelevant or a distraction. Here we meet in all its bluntness the core of what Fabiana Parra refers to in this same Issue of the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* (Volume 20, Issue 1, 2022) as “academic capitalism”.

The materiality of coloniality in the academy is perhaps most evident in the association of universities and research institutes with settler companies and industries that destroy occupied territories - mineral extractivism, agrobusiness, the eradication of biodiversity through monoculture for export, and other forms of capitalist ecocide (Pereira, 2018; Zibechi, 2015). Here again, academic capitalism faces us with the choice of gaining access to resources for research and innovation, at the price of destroying land and its inhabitants of all species.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the end, I fear that proposing a list of expressions of coloniality in academia may facilitate the concealment of other forms, first and foremost those that do not directly harm us, or that we are unable to perceive due to our own biases. Hence the importance of diversity as an epistemic value, even to study academia itself. Epistemic diversity opens us to the risk - hopefully to the certainty - of “epistemic friction” (Medina, 2013), which can lead us to revisit our belief systems in order to make them increasingly coherent with what we are seeking: collective emancipation.

The ever-incomplete task of decolonization

So, can academia be decolonized beyond a metaphorical use of the term? If, as Fanon has taught us, a decolonization that “intends to change the order of the world” is “a program of absolute disorder” (2002, p. 39), then certainly this program cannot be realized through the academy as we know it. “A process of decolonization,” says Mamani Ramírez (2015, p. 26),

is not the same as changing one object for another object (even if it is a different one). It is the transformation of one society into another society, which experiences the change of a value system factually and also in its being and making the world. It is a revolution of subjectivities [and] of social institutions.

It is not possible to decolonize academia beyond a metaphor unless academia, as a set of colonialist institutions, ceases to exist.

But that does not mean that nothing can be done. Precisely because the decolonization of academia as we know it is not possible, we have a duty and a responsibility to move one step further -or many- in that direction, crossing the boundaries of mere metaphor and the illusions of the performative to confront the discomfort and anxiety involved in a future in which our position will be very different.

It is difficult to identify our place within the decolonizing process, not only because it implies a certain peril for our situation if we are settlers, but also because it is absolutely counter-intuitive within a culture that has at its very core “the coloniality of being (or of modes of subjectivation), of knowing (or of modes of knowledge) and of power (or of modes of organization)”, if we follow Mignolo (Fraga, 2014, p. 204). Over time I have found that abolitionism, another absolutely counterintuitive proposal in the punitivist and individualistic society we live in, can provide numerous resources to understand our place within processes of radical transformation. I am not trying to suggest that decolonization and the abolition of systems of punishment are the same thing, although they are certainly related. What I wish to stress is that they are two projects that propose to completely change the world system as we know it. Abolition, in Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s words, “is deliberately about everything: it is about the totality of human-environmental relations” (Wilson Gilmore and

Kushner, 2019, p. n/p). Therefore, in the face of the bewilderment that decolonization as a political, social and cultural project and process brings about in us, abolitionism can guide us with some ideas. One of the guidelines it offers is, again according to Wilson Gilmore, to work with the fragments of the future that already exist in the present. It would be false, and in fact would reproduce colonial narratives of extinction (Pérez, 2022b), to maintain that decolonization is not germinating, that the territory and sovereignty of indigenous nations is not being fought for and sustained in different parts of the world and in numerous ways (see also Zibechi, 2015). Part of our task, then, is to identify those fragments of the future and to collaborate in their thriving, with the humility of one who knows that they are blending into something that has already begun, that is not theirs and that exceeds them.

Perhaps the first point for any project of decolonization on the part of those of us who work in academia is to acknowledge that we -and not only the institutions we work at- are part of the problem. Failing to do this might sustain our own moral self-perception as “innocent” and “pure”, but it most notably “serves as an obstacle to unpacking power relations (i.e., the practice of reflexivity)” and, of course, to redress them (Ravecca and Dauphinee, 2022, p. 39). We must admit therefore that although we can contribute to confront such injustices (for example, by accompanying processes of awareness on the place that each subject occupies in these unequal power structures, or by contributing to understand their functioning), we cannot be or provide the solution. The points raised earlier regarding the ways in which coloniality is expressed in academia can offer some initial guidelines as to what it would mean to walk towards decolonization from our place in the academy. We can learn to detect and reverse our own practices of epistemic violence and point them out to our colleagues; we can establish (or reinforce, where they already exist) South/South dialogues, relevant to our contexts and in our languages, in order to

diminish North/South epistemic dependence. Our use of concepts, images and metaphors can also be revised, when they reinscribe that "colonial body" mentioned above. Finally, we can educate ourselves on and denounce the economic alliances of the universities and institutes where we work, with companies and industries of colonialist extermination.

These and other initiatives, gestures and daily practices must be part of a series of broader transformations in our understanding of academia itself. In order to move towards decolonization from within academia, we must start by facing our own epistemic and affective resistances to self-critique. It is our responsibility to delve into our practices beyond good intentions (Pérez and Radi, 2020), beyond the metaphor and the fantasy that a commitment to decolonization is performative, in the sense that its mere enunciation would already produce the reality it names (Ahmed, 2004).^{iv} This entails nothing less than the exercise of taking the sophisticated critical tools we have developed to scrutinize an object "other," and applying them to our very work. It requires looking at factors such as whom we are speaking to, what the interests that move us to do so are, what our underlying assumptions are, and what beliefs that feed coloniality are seeping into our work. It is a task, in short, of "critical reflexivity": "reflexivity" as reflection, and as an action that returns to its agents and affects them in different ways. I am not referring here to the falsely performative acts of "self-reflexivity" that have become almost mandatory in disciplines understood as progressive (what Ahmed (2004) has named a "self-reflexive turn" in areas such as whiteness studies). Such approaches falsely assume that speech acts and institutional declarations uttered from a position of privilege have enough performative power to change reality; instead, they continue to perform the very exclusions they claim to overcome, while they succeed in raising the personal or institutional image of those who utter them. If we aspire to counter the social reproduction of coloniality in the spaces we inhabit, we need to engage in a

thorough, ongoing exercise of self-awareness capable of confronting us with “the ways in which [we] reproduce oppression and domination” (Jaime-Diaz and Méndez-Negrete, 2021, p. n/p) in these institutions. This includes “socially locating and positioning students and [our]selves within the structuration of society” (ibid.), while collectively developing alternative strategies to re-build those and other relationships in the academy.

Of course, critiques such as the ones I offer here are not new. They have often been presented by marginalized subjects or collectives (whether in the academy or not), that question the modes of knowledge production of someone external to their group, usually one considered representative of a hegemonic social setting. Many well-meaning scholars expect marginalized colleagues, research assistants or even students to help them understand their own malpractice. But academics cannot continue to place the critical task on the shoulders of the same people who have historically sustained other people’s privileges with their bodies and knowledge. Such demands most often result in unacknowledged, unrewarded and exhausting additional labour for marginalized groups within the academy, and a lustre of commitment and moral stature for privileged scholars, who rarely change their practices following such observations (Berenstain, 2016). Instead, the rigor with which as, for instance, female and/or Southern academics we evaluate -and rightly criticize- the androcentric practices that leave innumerable subjects outside the academy, or the colonialist practices of the North that ignore our existence and contributions as scholars from the South, must also be applied to evaluate what we are doing from our own locations to influence this scenario. We must look at our own work, and be as implacable with what we do as we are with others we perceive as more privileged.

In the Humanities, a commitment to decolonization must also include resisting, whenever possible, the call of the academic sirens that lure us into restricting the world to texts. Perhaps in a disingenuous misreading of the end-of-century maxim “there is no outside-text”, we seem to have lost track of the fact that the problems that affect the world we live in cannot be solved by merely cross-referencing (canonical) authors and their writings. Although we can certainly debate *about* it, decolonization is not a theoretical debate, but a transformation of the world. Argentine philosopher Samuel Schkolnik warned years ago that in the “paper culture” imposed by academia, our disciplines are reduced “entirely to metalanguage”: “one is recognized as a member of that community if one renounces to speak of the world, that is, of what extends beyond that territory” delimited by canonical bibliography (Schkolnik, 2012, p. 14). The author’s invitation is to regard as the terrain of our work not the texts, but the world, for which the texts can be a map, on certain occasions and according to the specificity of each territory. In this respect, we must be able to distinguish academia from academicism. In my view, there is great potential in an international and internationalist system of knowledge creation and sharing, even with the impossibility signalled before regarding a decolonized future where the academy as we know it has no place. We can be academics without being academicists although, needless to say, this comes at a cost; when material and professional survival is at stake, it may not be an option at all.

Recall that precisely because decolonization is not a metaphor, nor a state of consciousness, it entails a radical redistribution of the material conditions of existence for all subjects. The unequal distribution of life opportunities is one of the most evident forms of coloniality in the academy. Intervening on them is part of our work as scholars and educators, if we are committed to decolonization. This means actively participating in student rights and labour rights initiatives for educators and staff that effectively - again, beyond good

intentions - reorganize the structures of power and resources within the academy. Neither a merely performative declaration nor a profound theoretical interest (or knowledge) can stand in for concrete interventions on the life conditions of those who inhabit academia.

Looking ahead

We are faced with a collective task. Coloniality brings among its many values that of individualism, selfishness and competition. In the academy we know these mandates well, because the entire institution is built on them.

Decolonization, like the various causes we encompass under the idea of social justice, is not an individual endeavour, nor can it be achieved by mere introspection or personal heroism. In this line, Natalia Duque Cardona warns in this Issue of the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* (JCEPS Volume20, Issue 1, 2022) that “the exercise of resistance is not individual; it is a communitarian, collective exercise”.

I do not believe the academy can at once continue to exist and be decolonized in meaningful ways beyond the metaphorical level. This assertion, however, should not be the end of our praxis, but rather its beginning. There are things to be changed in the academy as we know it; and there is a world we do not know yet, which we can help build. In the words of Raúl Zibechi (2015, p. 119):

The only way out so that the colonized do not repeat, over and over again, the terrible history that places them in the place of the colonizer, is the creation of something new, of the new world. It is the way in which the dominated can stop referencing themselves in the masters, desire their wealth and power, pursue their place in the world. On that road they can overcome the inferiorization in which colonialism has situated them. They will not be able to overcome that place by fighting to share out what exists, which is the place of the master, but by (...) making that ‘other world’ with their own hands, putting into play their imagination

and their dreams; with different ways of doing, which are not an exact copy of the dominant society, but authentic creations, adequate to an ‘us’ always in movement.

The acknowledgement of an “‘us’ always in movement” entails that what concrete form these processes will take depends on the context, and cannot be defined once and for all, nor can it be found by mere theoretical study or speculative introspection. Our task, as workers in the academy, is not decolonization itself, but a humble contribution to a thread that makes sense within a much larger plot of radical transformation, which is collective, transnational, structural and long term. This entails putting our knowledge, skills and resources at the service of collective processes of decolonization that aim at the structural, and are therefore both internal and external to the academy.

Notes

ⁱ The *Minga* is a form of collective organization practised by indigenous peoples in the Andean region, and particularly notable in Colombia. It is an occasion for collective gathering, where all members of a community can build relationships, knowledge and action while strengthening their unity (CRIC, 2013). *Mingas* can gather for occasions such as collective festivities or harvesting; they can be convoked by the elders to build infrastructure needed by the community, or to discuss, learn and decide upon a certain issue (“*mingas de pensamiento*” [mingas of thought] (Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible, República de Colombia and Asociación de Cabildos y/o Autoridades Tradicionales del Nudo De Los Pastos “Shaquiñan,” s.f.)). “*Mingas de pensamiento*” “are the community spaces in which thought and knowledge are shared for cultural strengthening; in them, [the peoples] think how to act and the paths to follow are outlined according to [their] way of seeing the world” (Pueblo Inga, 2009, p. 4). Indigenous peoples in Colombia stress the importance of *Minga* as “the core of any planning based in [their] own identity and autonomy as ancestral peoples” (Pueblo Inga, 2009). In the massive mobilizations that began in Colombia in April 2021, the indigenous *Minga* played a central role as a grassroots movement, autonomous from the State and defending life and land (“territorio”) in all its forms. I thank Joice Barbosa for generously sharing her knowledge on this topic.

ⁱⁱ By “critical epistemologies” I refer to an array of theoretical approaches to knowledge, with particular emphasis on academic and scientific knowledge, which have examined and denounced the exclusions hidden behind Modern ideals of objectivity and neutrality. This includes feminist, decolonial and post-colonial epistemologies. For further detail see Perez, 2022^a).

ⁱⁱⁱ Mining companies have sought support by financing public institutions such as hospitals, schools and universities. In the case of the latter, this often results in conflicts of interest as universities are often called in as parties in permission-granting processes. For a case in Argentina, see (Machado et al., 2011, pp. 85-86 and 114-138).

^{iv} Note that these uses of the term “performativity” and “performative” are only possible through a profound misunderstanding of, or perhaps willful ignorance on, performativity as a complex and

sophisticated philosophical notion. Performativity, in its tradition opened by Austin and continued by the likes of Searle, Derrida, Butler and Stryker, does not indicate a voluntaristic capacity to change reality by mere enunciation.

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