



Knowledge Cultures 10(3), 2022
pp. 150–176, ISSN 2327-5731, eISSN 2375-6527

De/Colonisation and the Un/Doing of Critical Theory

Elba Ramirez

elba.ramirez@aut.ac.nz

Auckland University of Technology

Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand

And Pasley

a.pasley@auckland.ac.nz

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato/University of Waikato

Kirikiriāroa/Hamilton, Aotearoa/New Zealand

ABSTRACT. This paper explores the colonialities of trans/gender and the Canary Islands to interrogate the in/adequacy of critical theory as a tool applied to Global South issues. In both cases, critical theory is found to be lacking due to its compulsion to predetermine and essentialise relations, which undermines its capacity to engage with the multiplicitous im/possibilities of trans/gender and post/coloniality. In lieu of a critical approach, the authors each engage with relational ontologies that offer a more capacious relationship with their respective colonialities. In the case of trans/gender, agential realism offers Pasley a means to trace the entanglements, potentiating more response-able becomings. For Ramirez, te Ao Māori allows her to imagine a future reconfigured to account for the multiple tensions that co-constitute Canary Island relationships with colonisation. While trans/gender and the Canary Islands are perhaps not an obvious pairing, the im/possibilities offered by each are deeply entangled in colonisation and the ongoing reconfiguration of colonialities in the pursuit of more just worlds.

Keywords: trans/gender; Canary Islands; guanched; coloniality; agential realism; te Ao Māori; critical theory

How to cite: Ramirez, E., & Pasley, A. (2022). De/colonisation and the un/doing of critical theory. *Knowledge Cultures*, 10(3), 150–176. <https://doi.org/10.22381/kc10320229>

Received 04 July 2022 • Received in revised form 10 November 2022

Accepted 16 November 2022 • Available online 01 December 2022

Responding to Critical Theory in the Global South

In responding to the question at the centre of this special issue, this paper explores the state of critical theory as a means of inquiring into two seemingly disparate

topics: trans/gender politics and the post/coloniality of the Canary Islands. What unfolds is a tracing of the colonial histories that inform each of these becomings. The inheritances that emerge are no simple matter. Throughout, we employ the ‘/’ to signify the multiple ways in which concepts are operating, such as ‘un/becoming,’ signifying the multiple meanings of becoming and unbecoming that operate simultaneously (see Pasley, 2022 for a detailed account of these conventions). Pasley begins by outlining the issue of transnormativities that striate trans communities, acknowledging the historical situatedness and racialisation of trans becomings. This is unpacked further through Lugones’ (2007) colonialities of gender, which recognise the ways in which trans/gender is a colonial inheritance. We offer a critical reading of these dynamics, yet the cracks in critical theory quickly start to show. Pasley’s section illustrates how critical theory’s principles of resistance undermine its effectiveness insofar as they essentialise the relationships that re/produce in/justice. In its place, agential realism offers a means of attending to gender as an inheritance.

Dividing the main sections, we address the contention of employing theory from the Global North in the Global South. We suggest that the ethics of theoretical deployment stem from what theory does, rather than where it is from. While it would be valid to critique agential realism or any other theory if it were used in place of Indigenous approaches in Indigenous contexts, we contend that reducing Indigenous ethics to their origin condescends to the genuine ethical work they do. Penultimately, we emphasise the importance of recognising the contingency of power dynamics, which blur the lines between Global North and South. We query where this contingency leaves those who have not inherited the ‘appropriate’ onto-epistemologies to reconfigure their worlds. Finally, we point out that the insistence on employing local theory perpetuates injustice in contexts where Indigenous worlds have been erased, such as in the Canary Islands.

Ramirez’s section addresses how coming from the Canary Islands means inheriting a void- of possibilities that can never be in the wake of Spanish colonisation because of the erasure of the Indigenous peoples, known as *guanche*. To begin, Ramirez unpacks the Spanish colonisation of the Canary Islands – one of the first manoeuvres of the modern/colonial project – detailing the essentialisation, manipulation, enslavement and genocide. Following this, she differentiates the colonisation of the Canary Islands from other forms of Spanish colonisation, given that the colonisers never left, and the islands became a Spanish entity. Where extant Indigenous peoples decolonise the worlds that they have inherited by reifying their ways of being in the world (Smith, 2012), an assimilated Canarian population can only develop a critical consciousness of the histories that produced them and the people on whose backs their presents were built. While assimilation appears complete, Ramirez attends to how language, stories, DNA, mundane practices, like the consumption of *gofio* (flour made from roasted/toasted grains), and the persistence of the land itself, illustrate how colonial imaginaries did not and could never achieve complete erasure.

While she does not claim expertise or authority in te Ao Māori (the Māori world), Ramirez acknowledges the ways in which her encounters with ‘whakapapa’ (genealogy), ‘whanaungatanga’ (kin relationships) and ‘whānau’ (family) potentiated critical awareness of her heritage, connecting with what remains, and a sense that the *guanche* never truly disappeared. Simultaneously, the complex subjectivities that the post/colonial space of the Canary Islands demand reveal the inadequacy of critical theory because of the way it essentialises colonial relations. In its place, Ramirez offers a sense of the way Canarian decolonisation requires re/turning to the relations that constitute present Canarian im/possibilities. While the void colonisation created might be read as nothingness, Ramirez attends to the way this void bears the marks that colonisation’s attempted erasure left behind (Barad, 2018), as well as the possibility of something new emerging. By attending to these im/possibilities, she cultivates the potential of un/becoming *guanche*.

Despite the seemingly disparate nature of trans/gender and the Indigenous histories of the Canary Islands, what we understand is that both issues speak to the inheritance of coloniality. These inheritances require analyses that reflect their complex and multiple becomings. We argue that a Critical Theoretical analysis is inadequate in both cases because it reduces relations to binaries and essentialises power dynamics, which we use this article to unpack. In its place, we discuss the relational ontologies that have provided a more capacious engagement with post/colonial issues.

A Critical Disclaimer

Before we continue, an important distinction should be made between critique and critical theory. Critical theory should not be confused with the criticality derived from Derridean deconstruction, whereby the relations that inform a sense of knowing and/in being are carefully traced, recognising onto-epistemological difference (Latour, 2004), rather than treating knowing and being as given. In fact, while the Frankfurt school contested positivist science, they were largely dismissive of the fluid understanding of subjectivity that underpinned poststructural approaches to inequality,¹ as they remained invested in stable, rational modernist subjectivity, demarcated by structural inequalities (Agger, 1991). Critical theory’s response to injustice is predicated on a normative system of inequality and the capacity to produce practical responses to these injustices (Horkheimer, 1972), neither of which can be achieved when a stable, rational modernist subjectivity is rejected. The following sections will unpack some of the specific onto-epistemological assumptions that underlie critical theory approaches and, by acknowledging different onto-epistemological possibilities, how their assumptions can undermine critical theory’s emancipatory goal.

We do not seek to create a straw person argument out of the various ideas that emerged from the Frankfurt School because we recognise that others, including Critical Race Theorists and feminist scholars, have adapted these approaches in

ways that have made pertinent contributions. For example, Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality, while reliant on structural distinctions along gendered and racial lines, affords a sense of the fundamentally different forms of inequality experienced by black and white women. Where appropriate, we have cited authors whose work we are indebted to, even if it does not serve our present needs. For example, many Māori scholars have adapted critical theory, incorporating relational ontological principles from te Ao Māori in ways that have provided important critiques of post/coloniality (Smith, 2012). However, as with all theory, critical theory's principles also define the limits of its capacity to respond appropriately to theoretical issues, and it is this that we delineate. When reality exceeds the ontological matrix of a theory, those excesses are either forced to contort themselves to fit the theory or are excluded from conceptions of reality (Warren, 2017). In critical theory's place, we offer agential realist and decolonising alternatives that provide more expansive im/possibilities that speak to the worlds that each of us has inherited.

Inheriting Gender and Un/Becoming Trans (Pasley)

Transnormativities

Transnormativities entail the ways in which particular expressions of trans/gender are privileged over others, which simultaneously puts pressure on trans people to seek out hegemonic (binary, heterosexual, able-bodied, commodifiable) expressions of gender, while limiting social and institutional access to those who cannot or will not embody these expressions (Pasley, Hamilton, & Veale, 2022; Vipond, 2015; Puar, 2015). By no accident, these pressures reflect the hierarchies that determine normative expressions of cisgender masculinities and femininities. McIntyre (2018) discusses how dominant representations of trans people perpetuate gender binaries and trans pathologisation, constraining trans narratives. Gill-Peterson (2018) discusses how this often means construing 'successful' transition as becoming undetectable, perceptibly cisgender. In a similar vein, Roen (2001) warns that what is typically framed as 'trans liberation,' such as access to gender-affirming care, often comes with the risk of racial marginalisation because queer meanings often re/centre whiteness. In part, Stryker (1994) accounts for this in the way the whiteness of transsexuality is a historically situated phenomenon that has emerged from the medicalisation of (trans) gender/sex. While it is true that this figuration of trans possibilities is a product of medical normalising apparatuses (cf. Foucault, 1977), it is necessary to go beyond narratives that construe 'trans' as 'new' because this traps the possibility of trans justice in a sense of futurity (Gill-Peterson, 2018; Pasley, 2022). That is, it erases extensive histories of people who have not conformed to cisnormative understandings of gender and treats gender justice as if it is always on the horizon but ensures it never arrives.

Colonialities of Gender

Maria Lugones (2007) illustrates how the very notion of binary sexual difference, based on biological essentialism, was a colonial invention that complemented racialised colonialities of power (Quijano, 2000). What became known as the heterosexual matrix (sex = gender = sexuality [Butler, 1990]) emerged from a model of human citizenship that actively excluded black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) from membership by framing them as animalistic and, therefore, genderless and universally fit for enslavement (Lugones, 2007). Notably, the genesis of these fictions took place during the same period that the Spanish were colonising the Canary Islands, as the modern/colonial project took shape (Lugones, 2007; Quijano, 2000). White women were largely persuaded to invest in patriarchal hegemony by equating white gender roles with civilisation, which meant that resisting patriarchy would cost them the privileges that white supremacy afforded them. Simultaneously, BIPOC ‘men’ who took advantage of colonisers’ sexism unwittingly helped destabilise BIPOC social systems by being complicit in undermining the authority of those without penises. Gender/sex emerges from the valorisation of white imaginaries of sexual difference, which tie investments in these social organisation principles to modernist ontologies. For BIPOC women, claiming womanhood came at the price of ontological erasure (Lugones, 2007), as this requires acceding to civilising paradigms. This has also resulted in resistance to (white) feminisms, as ‘correct’ gender performativities are implicitly white, which renders black womanhood unintelligible. Moreover, violence towards BIPOC women is often justified through stereotypes that depict them as blameworthy for not conforming to white female archetypes (Rahimi & Liston, 2011). Therein, becoming similes of white women does not grant them the same privileges (Oyěwùmí, 1997). These delineations are not limited to cisgender people, as Stryker’s (1994) recognition of the whiteness of transsexuality embodies the way in which gender and race are a co-production. Moreover, ‘trans’ is only intelligible in relation to the colonialities of gender, relative to cis gender – a colonial inheritance (Kerekere, 2017).

Un/Packing Critical (Gender) Theory

Perhaps there is some poetic justice in the possibility of critical theory, imported from the Global North, taking accountability for the injustices of the Euro-pean/-centric society from which both emerged. It is tempting to repeat Marcuse’s (1969) ‘great refusal’ in response to gender norms or perhaps even the colonialities of gender, writ large: to simply do away with the conditions of sexism (Ahmed, 2015) or those that legitimise racialised sexual violence (Rahimi & Liston, 2011). It is certainly possible to understand this as part of Horkheimer’s (1972, p. 246) ‘human emancipation’ from hegemonic systems of gender. Certainly, Lugones (2007) provides evidence that there have been/are societies whose social orders were/are not regulated by gender and many more whose gender systems do not abide by the

heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) that binds gender, sex and sexuality to binary biological essentialism.

Despite these aspirations for emancipation, critical theory's understanding of how that justice might be achieved betrays some problematic assumptions. At its core, critical theory is necessarily explanatory, practical and normative in its resistance to positivist conceptions of knowledge (Horkheimer, 1972). However, it remains representationalist insofar as its resistance is epistemological. Critical consciousness is a matter of perspective but assumes the nature of existence is universal. This is particularly notable in the rational, modernist subject that critical theory assumes (Habermas, 1987), which constrains critical consciousness within the humanist ontology that underpins the modern/colonial project (Lugones, 2007; Warren, 2017), centring an individualist European hu(man)ity. To play on Audre Lorde's (1984) expression, one cannot dismantle the master's epistemology with the master's ontology. In particular, such a strategy traps critical conceptions of gender within humanism, dealing in established binaries and reductionist paradigms that seek to delineate 'Truth.' This is evident in the way non-Western peoples continue to have their societies read through the heterosexual matrix, even though they do not necessarily understand what we think of as gender, sex or sexuality in those ways (binaohan, 2014). Likewise, similar dynamics operate when queer communities are coerced into homonormativities (Duggan, 2002) or when cisgenderism manifests in trans communities (Howell & Allen, 2021). Moreover, it excludes more-than-human ontological possibilities (Pasley, 2021, 2022), which foreclose many non-western conceptions of gender, such as Māori understandings that gender is inherited through wairua (spirit) that is shared via whakapapa (genealogy; Kerekere, 2017). The colonialities of gender are an ongoing inheritance.

Gender is hauntological, co-constituted by spectres of pasts, futures, and ghosts of futures passed (Pasley, 2022), which means that it is always already multiple as these spectres negotiate ongoing im/possibilities. Moreover, this recognises that inheritance is a dis/continuous becoming rather than a linear, arboreal endowment (Barad, 2014). This multiplicity exceeds the limits of critical theory, which reduces gender in/equality down to the practical undoing of normative systems that have a preconceived dynamic of oppressor and oppressed. These colonialities have closed off Indigenous worlds (Kerekere, 2017; Lugones, 2007), yet their ongoing spectral presence continues to co-constitute ongoing possibilities, including but in no way limited to trans parenthood (Pearce & White, 2019), reclaiming Indigenous ways of being (e.g., binaohan, 2014; Kerekere, 2017; Zemke & Mackley-Crump, 2019), more-than-human genderings and an openness to im/materialisation of gender in ways that exceed human intelligibility (Pasley, 2021, 2022). Moreover, these dualities seek to divide gender into 'good' and 'bad' performativities: phallogocentrism or patriarchy or normativities as the enemy. By virtue of these dualities, critical theory derives the 'in/correct' way to enact (in this case) gender. For example, 'correct gendering' might entail uplifting femininity in the face of

patriarchal norms that valorise men, providing a clear sense of the structure of inequality and a practical means to subvert that norm, even if it reinforces the gender binary. Linstead and Pullen (2006) describe this reductionism as *Multiplicities of the Same*, whereby established binaries are expected to account for all the variation and context that can emerge, producing an ethics that predetermines the valence of particular ways of being in the world. These feminist strategies have historically pitted ‘virtuous women’ against ‘vicious men,’ erasing the variation in what it might mean to perform gender and forcing gendered power dynamics into a zero-sum game. The *Multiplicities of the Same* produce dynamics like trans-exclusionary radical feminism, whereby (like misogyny) gender is reduced to biological essentialism (Williams, 2016), as well as trans necropolitics, whereby black trans deaths are exploited to buttress (normative) white trans lives without accountability to the striation of trans vulnerabilities (Puar, 2015). Notably, Williams (2016) demonstrates that the harmful consequences of these epistemologies are not inevitable, as radical feminism has also produced trans-inclusive variations; however, these reductionistic constructions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are a product of critical theory’s (explanatory) conceptualisation, (practical) operationalisation and (normative) generalisation of relationships, rather than being accountable to how gendered relations are open to ongoing reconfiguration. We cannot know the content and value of those relations in advance of their materialisation (Manning, 2016). Subsequently, critical theory constrains relationships, such as between bodies and genders or transness and vulnerability, rather than being open to the possibility of difference.

An Agential Realist Reading of Gender

By comparison, agential realism (Barad, 2007) understands reality as an iterative renegotiation of relations, which contingently (or as Barad [2007] expresses, *intra-actively* or *diffractively*) produces reality. That is, the nature of what emerges in the world cannot precede relations, so we cannot assume anything in advance. This offers the possibility of radical difference, wherein reality can emerge in ways that were impossible or incomprehensible to previous configurations of existence. However, iterations leave their marks, which is to say that previous im/possibilities continue to participate in the re/production of reality. The present is never simply here-now; it is haunted by pasts that were (not), ghosts of futures past and futures that might (not) be (Barad, 2018). In this way, colonialities of gender can be understood as colonisation re/defining the boundaries of possibility, and, while this social organising principle has been continually reconfigured (for better or worse), this tool of colonial control continues to affect the limits of (gendered) possibility. Where critical theory entails explanation, practicality and normalisation of responses to injustice, agential realism understands that what it means to enact justice is contingent on the specific relations that constitute each iteration of becoming; therefore, what is just cannot be known in advance of relations. Borrowing from Levinas’s (1985) ethics of responsibility, agential realism

understands that it is necessary to trace entanglements – the spectres of pasts and futures that haunt the present im/possibilities – to understand what it means to respond ethically (Barad, 2007). Hoskins (2010) surmises that responsibility (or *response-ability* [Barad, 2018]) requires recognising the potential for other configurations of reality (or perhaps gender, in this case): understanding them on their own terms, recognising that they co-constitute present configurations (even if just through their exclusion), and being open to being affected by their difference.

Such an approach is vital in the Global South because neither colonisation nor colonialities of gender can be erased (Barad, 2018), but nor are they stable phenomena with unchanging power dynamics. By recognising that enacting gender justice is an ongoing, contingent renegotiation of the relations that we have inherited, it becomes feasible to conceive of and respond to the multiplicitous im/possibilities that emerge. For example, one of Roen's (2001) participants, Don, discusses how the western biomedical system (that seeks to pathologise and medicalise their gender) cannot make sense of what it means for them to be fa'afafine. Simultaneously, another of Roen's (2001) participants, Tania, pursues gender confirmation procedures to meet the government's demands for her to be recognised as a woman:

On principle, she disagrees with the suggestion that she must have sex reassignment surgery to attain the legal rights of a woman, arguing that this reduces 'woman' to a vagina. In practice, she has decided to opt for sex reassignment surgery, a decision which she describes as relating partly to the current legal situation of non-operative transpeople in Aotearoa/New Zealand. (p. 259)

These relations demand a different sort of justice because the impacts of colonisation diffract multipliciously with everything and everyone that it comes into relation with. There is no normative response to colonialities, and Tania is not less enlightened for responding to the constraints of the world she inhabited in the most just way she could. In my doctoral thesis (Pasley, 2022), I call this enactment of partial justice *concessional perfectionism*, which acknowledges the tension that often exists between aspirations and immediate possibilities. It is interesting to note that, just over a decade later, the New Zealand government removed the requirement of gender-confirming procedures in the process of gender recognition (Department of Internal Affairs, 2012). At the turn of the millennium, Tania's response is simultaneously co-constituted by both the impossibility of just legislation at that time, the legislative changes coming to fruition in 2012, as well as the spectre of colonisation's original imposition of the gender binary in Aotearoa New Zealand. Today's justice is not yesterday's justice, and neither is Don's Tania's. Agential realism recognises that response-ability entails tracing the entanglements that produce these differences to understand the contingent nature of what it means to enact justice.

Another important aspect of Tania's womanhood arises from her being Māori and the ways in which Māori understandings of identity are tied into whānau (family) and whakapapa (genealogy); gender is never simply an individual issue (Roen, 2001). Kerekere (2017) unpacks the ways in which gender (and sex and sexuality) are inherited through whakapapa, so takatāpui (gender, sex and sexually diverse Māori) have not traditionally been excluded because the wairua (spirit) that connects whānau cannot be undone; therefore, takatāpui are always already 'part of the whānau.' Because critical theory's framing of subjectivity is humanist, it struggles to capture this more-than-human constitution of gender, particularly when accounting for the ways Māori are not simply from the whenua (land); they are the whenua – there is no distinction. Māori philosophy can more than account for itself (Stewart, 2020), and the suggestion here is not to supplant te Ao Māori (the Māori world) with agential realism. However, the way in which Western dualisms have separated and treated the human as exceptional means that those who have only inherited humanist thinking do not have a language for articulating more-than-human relationships that might be fundamental to them. Agential realism enacts a literacy to account for and discuss these relationships. In my doctoral research, which explored how (Pākehā) trans secondary students matter in Aotearoa (Pasley, 2022), I found that participants' genders were likewise not simply a manifestation of individualist human intentionality but were co-productions of school routes and weather patterns and doctor's offices and more. Their genderings could literally not have materialised, let alone be understood, independent of these more-than-human phenomena, which suggests that having a means of engaging with these dynamics is integral.

Gender is an inheritance, and the work of inheritance is no simple matter (Barad, 2010). The hauntological nature of inheritance means that these relations cannot be predetermined, essentialised or reduced to human intentionality. By tracing the entanglements that have iteratively reconstituted the colonialities of gender, agential realism accounts for the ongoing im/possibilities gendered relations offer, their more-than-human constitution, and the contingent nature of what it means to enact response-ability and affect gender justice.

A Bridge between North and South

As a theory originating in the Global North, critical theory's imposition on the Global South can understandably be read as a form of recolonisation. This is a form of epistemological hegemony or violence (Spivak, 1988), wherein Indigenous and other Global South ways of knowing are cast as inferior and in need of (critical) enlightenment. This critique of critical theory's recolonising effects would feasibly be extended to the deployment of agential realism in Global South contexts, such as in this paper. That is, these imported theories reopen the wound of colonisation as their use in place of Global South approaches might suggest that Global South approaches are not enough to account for themselves.

However, this translation risks reducing Global North/South theories to a false dualism, assuming an inherent (positivist) ethics, whereby imported theory is somehow inherently unethical, rather than attending to the work that theory does in situ. Simultaneously, if Indigenous/Global South theory is treated as inherently virtuous, this reduces its integrity to a product of place rather than recognising the serious work that it does (de la Cadena, 2010). Instead, we contend that critical theory's problematics emerge from its erasure of ontological difference (see also Jaramillo-Aristizabal, this issue; Warren, 2017; de la Cadena, 2010), rather than where it is from. By comparison, agential realism's capacity to attend to the onto-epistemological difference that constitutes im/possibilities affords it the capacity to recognise its debts to Indigenous/Global South ways of being and knowing, rather than seeking to supplant or erase them.

We acknowledge that it is important to uphold the political potential of Global South onto-epistemes (Lugones, 2010) and the worlds that they constitute (e.g., Kaupapa Māori; Smith, 2012). Simultaneously, this raises important questions, such as where this leaves peoples whose histories have been erased, like those of the Canary Islands. In Aotearoa New Zealand, how are tauiwi (non-Māori) expected to unsettle the injustices they are entangled with when they do not necessarily have a theoretical paradigm that matches their place of origin? Without appropriating knowledges or re-establishing hierarchies against which knowledge is measured, this paper suggests that building coalitions across paradigms – what Hoskins (2010) calls practising responsibility to other worlds or what de la Cadena (2010) calls upholding pluriversal ontological politics – is fundamental to reconfiguring relationships with colonialities.

Finally, this highlights the contingency of what it means to occupy the Global North/South. For example, while 'trans' may occupy a subjugated position in cisnormative Western societies, its co-constitution with the colonialities of gender means that 'trans liberation' is potentially complicit in the recolonisation of Indigenous genders (Roen, 2001). The hegemonies of trans/gender are by no means inherent. Likewise, Ramirez (below) engages with the complex subjectivities that emerge from simultaneously inhabiting both/neither roles of coloniser and colonised. How do the descendants of both coloniser and colonised resolve their inheritance in the context of the Canary Islands? None of these relationships can be essentialised.

Inheriting the Void and Un/Becoming guanche (Ramirez)

This section is an account of a personal journey of (self-)discovery and engagement with me in relation to the histories of the Canary Islands. The structure of this section invites the reader to walk with me through the histories of the Indigenous Canarians (*guanche* peoples), their (ongoing) attempted erasure by colonial forces, and how I started to engage with my identity in relation with their histories. This section is not an attempt to present a historical/anthropological overview of the colonial period of the Canary Islands but of the historical events that have been

informing my relation to the islands and, particularly, their Indigenous histories. These relations remain open to be reconfigured as I un/learn more about the histories of the Canary Islands. What follows situates the reader and contextualises my relational un/becoming, the ways in which critical theory did not have the capacity to engage with these relations, and how te Ao Māori facilitated my process of un/becoming *guancho*. In line with Pasley's play on Audre Lorde's (1984) expression, one cannot dismantle the coloniser's epistemology with the coloniser's ontology. As a Canary Islander, I inherited a void haunted by both colonial histories and ongoing colonialities, which are simultaneously present and erased by virtue of their hauntological nature. This void needs to be understood through an agential realist lens (Barad, 2018), whereby colonisation excludes a multitude of worlds that might have otherwise been; however, this void also bears the possibility of futures reconfigured in more response-able ways. These haunted becomings require an understanding of inheriting the Canary Islands as multiple and heterogeneous.

Colonisation, Erasure and Colonialities

The Canary Islands is an archipelago composed of eight islands, about 100 kilometres off the coast of West Africa and about 1000 kilometres from the Iberian Peninsula. From West to East, the islands are *El Hierro, La Palma, La Gomera, Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura and Lanzarote (plus La Graciosa, in the Chinijo Archipelago, with the islets Montaña Clara, Isla de Lobos, Roque del Este, Roque del Oeste and Alegranza)*. Harvey (2002, para. 3) stated that '[t]o the ancient Greeks this is where the maps ran out, and the world came to an end. Classical writers linked the Canaries with the Garden of the Hesperides, the Elysian Fields and even the lost continent of Atlantis.' The Canary Islands stopped being considered *Finis Terrae* (the end of the Earth) from the 13th century, after the first European explorations, which drew attention to the islands as a potential location for European Kingdoms' expansion strategies (Galán Cuartero & Fernández Rodríguez, 2007). Their location provided the inhabitants of the islands with diverse interactions with other cultures.

Between the 14th and 15th centuries, the Canary Islands operated as a borderland and battlefield between Portugal and Castilla in their quest to occupy Atlantic insular territories and nearby African coasts (Galán Cuartero & Fernández Rodríguez, 2007). The Canary Islands became a strategic colonial location after Christopher Columbus's accidental encounter with the Americas in 1492, which positioned the Canary Islands as 'puertas del Atlántico [the doors of the Atlantic]' (Galán Cuartero & Fernández Rodríguez, 2007, p. 12) for resupplying the European navies. Adhikari (2017) recognises that the colonisation of the Canary Islands

served as strategic bases for further European exploration and were, in a real sense, testing grounds for Iberian colonialism in the New World. Not only were ideas and methods developed in the Canaries applied in the

Americas, but the plunder of natural resources, development of plantation economies, widespread use of slave labour, unrestrained violence towards the Indigenous population and the devastating impact of disease also foreshadowed the holocaust that was to engulf the New World. (p. 2)

There were different tribes in each of the islands, which were divided into several social strata and territories with their own customs and ways of life: *guanches* (Tenerife), *canarii* or *canarios* (Gran Canaria), *gomeritas* (Gomera), *mahoreros* or *maxos* (Fuerteventura and also Lanzarote), *bimbaches* or *bimpapes* (El Hierro) and *benahoritas* or *awaritas* (La Palma). The archipelago was multicultural and multilingual, which contributed to the ‘mystery’ and complexity of the historical, cultural and anthropological legacy of the islands. Different terms have been used to collectively refer to the Indigenous inhabitants of the islands: *guanche*, aboriginal, Indigenous, ancient Canarians, prehispanic or precolonial populations, which equally refer to those who inhabited the Canary Islands before the first contact with other cultures and societies, such as the Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Romans. The term *guanche* has been widely used since the 16th century (approximately); however, some consider *guanche* has a French etymology, whereas others believe it is an Indigenous word, used for all the Indigenous peoples of the Canary Islands (see, for example, Ballester, 2019; Alonso de la Fuente, 2007; Pérez Carballo, 2001; Trapero & Santana, 2018; Trapero & Pombo, 1998). It is widely accepted that, despite being the name of the peoples of Tenerife, the Spanish named the entire population of Indigenous Canarians ‘*guanche*.’ Naming all the islanders *guanche* was one of the ways identities were initially erased because ‘essentialising’ cultures and peoples, reducing them into intelligible categories and ‘Othering’ them, has been a widely deployed colonial practice to erase Indigenous peoples and their identities and ensure the survival of the colonisers’ ‘imported’ and imposed heritage.

This resembles the creation of the term Māori to refer to the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, who were heterogeneously organised by their *iwi* (kin groups or ‘tribes’) prior to European contact, each with their own *tikanga* (customs and ethics). Stewart (2020) explains that ‘Māori ethnicity is a pan-tribal identity that coalesced in response to colonisation. So, the Māori identity is a “placeholder” or generic form of the multiple “tangata whenua” [Indigenous peoples born of the *whenua* (land)] cultural identities that reside among the *iwi*’ (p. 39). This stimulated the first stages of my ‘critical consciousness’ regarding my own identity as a Canary Islander and my connection (or lack thereof) with the *guanche* peoples. Having to decide whether I should use ‘*guanche*’ or ‘*Indigenous Canarian peoples*’ was a struggle throughout the writing of this paper as I felt *guanche* was a reductive term. I feared that taking up the colonial generalisation would be a form of recolonisation. Eventually, I had to accept that ‘*guanche*’ is how the *Indigenous peoples* of the Canary Islands have been and continue to be named and how they are known by the present Canary Islands populations; however, I remain open to un/learning.

Some of the *guanche* tribes were often at war, which facilitated the colonisers' maxim of divide and conquer, 'enlist[ing] the support of one or more clans in their battles against the others' (Harvey, 2002, para. 23). This is evident in how *gomero* warriors helped the colonisers to conquer Gran Canaria and Tenerife (Pérez García, 2013). An important realisation that emerged from my research is that the *guanche* peoples' experience fits the United Nation's definition of 'genocide' (Adhikari, 2017; United Nations, n.d.), as the brutal physical assaults, enslavement, deportation and consequent replacement by Europeans was conducted with a clear intent to annihilate Indigenous Canarian societies. Reviewing learning material by the Canary Islands Government (Gobierno de Canarias, n.d.), it appears that present Canary Islanders learn that there were 'Indigenous people who lived in the islands first' and who eventually 'adapted' (rather than were forced to assimilate). There does not seem to be space for Canary Islanders to engage with the *guanche* peoples as their 'ancestors,' being part of the land, or the way these histories are entangled with their own. How can present Canary Islanders understand themselves in relation to and part of these histories, rather than seeing themselves as outside of and disconnected from what they have inherited?

There have been different theories about the origin of the *guanche* peoples, which have always been a source of speculation because they must have arrived on the islands in boats and yet they had no boats, shipbuilding, or navigation skills. Interestingly, Pérez-Camacho (2019, p. 24) reports on Andrés Bernáldez's chronicles of how, in 1495, he asked the elders of Gran Canaria about their origin, and they said: 'Our ancestors told us that God put us here and forgot us; and He told us that through such a place an eye or light would enlighten us.' The *guanche* peoples are believed to be descendants of the Berbers, arriving in the Canary Islands in several waves from tribes in Northern and North-western Africa from the 5th century BC (Adhikari, 2017; García Conde & Roldán Delgado, 2011; Sosa Martín, 2019). The different migratory waves were evident in the cultural differences among the islands. While they may have initially been more homogeneous, the isolation on different islands produced more cultural and linguistic variation among the *guanche* (Pérez-Camacho, 2019). Their Berber heritage has been recognised in the remains of the Indigenous language (*Libyco-Berber*) of the variety of Spanish, cultural practices, DNA and cosmology (Adhikari, 2017). The first Europeans reported that the inhabitants of the islands were typically tall, vigorous, blue-eyed, fair-haired, fair-skinned and appeared 'primitive' (Harvey, 2002). When they first encountered the *guanche* peoples, they were shocked because they looked like a 'primitive version' of the Southern Mediterranean white populations (García-Talavera Casañas, 2016). The *guanche* peoples' 'white passing' facilitated the Spanish process of erasing the *guanche* heritage. Over time, many of the men were killed or enslaved and extracted from the islands, while Spanish men married *guanche* women (García-Talavera Casañas, 2016), which rendered the population 'Spanish.'

García-Talavera Casañas (2016) describes that, apart from sporadic commercial interactions with Phoenicians and Romans, among others, and more recently through the slave trade, the *guanche* were mainly isolated until their colonisation by the Spanish Kingdom of Castilla (1402–1492). Their isolation might have protected them from the Black Death, which had impacted the population of the European continent. This was evident in the notably higher population density than their European counterparts, particularly in Gran Canaria and Tenerife (Pérez-Camacho, 2019). Adhikari (2017) explains that the *guanche* peoples had been enduring raids and slavery organised by pirates, merchants, aristocrats and monarchs since the 14th century before the Spanish conquest started. It was recorded that there were already *guanche* slaves in Mallorca, Spain in the early 1340s, ‘and captives were subsequently sold in Iberian, Italian and North African slave markets. Canarian slaves were also sought after on other eastern Atlantic islands and, with the onset of conquest, were used to build the colonial economies of the Canaries themselves’ (Adhikari, 2017, p. 7). Likewise, *guanche* slaves were the first ones to be used in Madeira as part of the Portuguese slave trade and, ‘[b]y the 1480s, an extensive sugar industry was being established in the Canaries, which fuelled intensified demand for slaves’ (Adhikari, 2017, p. 7).

The histories of the *guanche* peoples have been erased from the Spanish collective consciousness as part of the ongoing naturalisation of a homogeneous and ‘united’ Spain. Current inhabitants remain oblivious to the full extent of the atrocities committed on their land, their entanglement in these histories, or that their world has been built on the blood, bodies and suffering of the *guanche* peoples. So, how can critical theory help me deal with the historical void of the *guanche* peoples, the history of the islands and my relation to them? The work of Carter (2006) on archival silences and the power in silence resonates with the attempted erasure of the *guanche* histories. A way for individuals to learn the stories of their ancestors and predecessors is through those who can tell those stories, and/or by visiting archives. But what happens to those histories and stories that were not ‘recorded’ or were re/written by those in/with power? Carter (2006) explains that ‘[i]f records are destroyed, manipulated, or excluded, the narrative of the groups cannot be transmitted across time. Their stories ... may ultimately disappear from history’ (p. 217). This is exactly what I encountered when trying to re/connect with my *guanche* ancestry.

The Im/Possibilities of Erasure

Different varieties of *Tamazight insular*, an extinct language from Berber, were spoken on the islands, and their alphabet was *tifinagh*, which appears to have a Punic origin (Sosa Martín, 2019). The cultural oral tradition of the language used by the *guanche* peoples resulted in few ‘written’ records of the languages: *Libyco-Berber* and *Libyco-Canarian* (in Lanzarote and Fuerteventura). Interestingly, ‘[d]ue to the isolation of the islands and the Guanches being ignorant of the art of navigation, these languages could only be understood by inhabitants of

neighbouring islands' (García Conde & Roldán Delgado, 2010, p. 1311). However, at times, '[t]he people of one island could not understand another's dialect, despite a common linguistic heritage [and] the Spaniards used these differences to divide and conquer each island, sometimes employing natives from one island against those of another' (Stevens-Arroyo, 1993, p. 525). It is not possible to determine exactly when the '*guanche* language' disappeared, but it seems to have been progressively disappearing during the start and mid-15th century (conquest of Lanzarote, Hierro and Fuerteventura), in the late-15th century (conquest of Gran Canaria, La Palma and Tenerife, and occupation of La Gomera), and, finally, during the 16th century, when it appears to have stopped being used entirely (Sosa Martín, 2019). While the '*guanche* language' (and its insular varieties) was rendered effectively extinct after the conquest and assimilation into Spanish territory, the Canary Islands' *corpus toponymicum*, comprised of 40,000 words, around 4,000 words have *guanche* origin (Trapero & Santana Martel, n.d.; Trapero & Santana Martel, 2018).

There is still a surviving language, the *Silbo Gomero* (whistling), which is part of the *guanche* heritage. This language, used to communicate at large distances, from mountain to mountain, still survives in La Gomera, but was previously also used in Tenerife, El Hierro and Gran Canaria. In 2009, it was recognised as a World's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO (Pérez-Camacho, 2019; García Conde & Roldán Delgado, 2010). Fortunately, the *Silbo Gomero* is still taught in La Gomera, and is compulsory for school children. Morrisby (1987) explained that La Gomera was not only a departure site for Christopher Columbus before he encountered the Americas, but also where his lover resided. Beatriz de Bobadilla was the widow of Hernan Peraza, the son of the Lord of Gomera and a well-known tyrant, who was murdered by Iballa's father, a *mencey* (king). The story/legend says that Iballa, Hernan's *guanche* mistress, heard his father's men's whistled message and warned Peraza, but it was too late. This story (and other versions of it) have survived in the oral history of the island for more than five centuries. As Trapero (1994) claims, it could be due to the atrocities caused by the Spanish, to make the *guanche* peoples pay for the murder and to stop rebellion, which resulted in the depopulation of the *Indigenous peoples* in La Gomera. Perhaps this oral story has functioned as a cautionary tale for those who might want to rebel against the Spanish. Is it possible that this is still embedded in the minds of the current Canary Islanders? This story is one of many in the islands that recount, as Trapero (1994) explained, episodes between the Indigenous peoples of the islands with the Spanish, and that include heroic *guanche* men who fought the colonisers (e.g., *Atahen* in Lanzarote and *Bentejuí*, *Artemy* and *Tazarte* in Gran Canaria) and romances between *guanche* women and Spanish colonisers (e.g., *Tautiagua* and Guillén Peraza in La Palma and *Adarga* and a soldier in El Hierro). All these stories originate from historical episodes that transformed into living legends on each island and which have subsequently been developed into literature (Trapero, 1994).

The *guanche* elders were the ones who possessed the most knowledge and memories of the origins of their cultural practices; however, they avoided sharing this knowledge and memories because they worried disclosure would undermine their peoples (Pérez-Camacho, 2019). Ultimately, the *guanche* histories were forgotten. What remains are the chronicles written by the first explorers who visited and the Europeans who colonised the Canary Islands. Nothing was done nor can be done to recover what was erased. To foster accountability for this erasure, it is necessary to decolonise and disseminate these insights amongst the current inhabitants of the Canary Islands, recognising the *guanche* histories of the islands and their attempted (and ongoing) erasure by the Spanish. What needs to be unlearned is the widely held belief that ‘there is no one left’ – no trace of *guanche* cultural-linguistic and genetic heritage – because ‘[i]n the archive, ... oblivion ... is the opposite of memory and truth ... [resulting] in societal memory being compromised ... Despite the best efforts of the powerful ... traces can still be found’ (Carter, 2006, pp. 220–222), including genetic and cultural heritage that resisted erasure. It is my intention, as a future ancestor, to ensure the transmission of our *guanche* histories and a sense of our entanglement in them. This process of transmission offers the possibility of un/becoming *guanche*, through which we re-establish relations with the histories of the islands and the links that remain among the present inhabitants. While colonisation cannot be erased, cultivating relations with these histories reconfigures the im/possibilities that these colonialities offer.

To trace these possibilities to un/become *guanche*, it is necessary to account for the processes of attempted erasure. García-Talavera Casañas (2016) explains that the *guanche peoples* who survived the colonial wars continued to suffer repression, transculturation, and forced assimilation. The erased histories of the *guanche peoples* are the result of various processes that started with Jean de Bethencourt’s (an aristocratic Norman explorer) arrival in Lanzarote in 1402 and during the conquest of the archipelago by the Spanish colonisers. These processes can be summarised as geographical disadvantage, stealing of and eviction from land, ‘white passing,’ brutal murders, being sold into slavery, acculturation, baptism (assimilation through Christianity), and intermarriage (Adhikari, 2017; García-Talavera Casañas, 2016). Unlike some of the Indigenous peoples in the Americas, the landscape of the Canary Islands presented a geographical disadvantage as it allowed faster and more efficient processes of linguistic and cultural erasure in the islands by the Spanish. Moreover, migrating or escaping was not possible (and/or easy). It is important to note that some *guanche peoples* never rebelled against the coloniser and were ‘rewarded/compensated’ for this with freedom, land, and/or water and social status and privileges (though this was largely reserved for the *menceys* or *guanartemes* (kings and ‘nobles’). Those who rebelled were either captured or forced to retreat into the mountains and continued to be persecuted by the Spanish. Only after decades did they succumb and were ‘integrated’ into society (Pérez-Camacho, 2019). Moreover, European settlers were continuously pushing (stealing) *guanche peoples* from their lands, murdering or selling them as

slaves. Notably, the practice of establishing what locals call *colonias* (colonies) in the islands is a practice that remains today, such as the British and German tourists, among others, who established settlements (complete with imported amenities). Acculturation was key to brutally repressing and erasing any Indigenous cultural identities (e.g., languages, practices, customs, beliefs, etc.), by imposing those of the colonisers. As Stevens-Arroyo (1993) explains,

For nearly a century and a half, Europeans sporadically landed on the Canary Islands, either to take slaves or make converts. The Guanches resisted the slave traders and occasionally killed the missionaries, but by 1488, when the final Spanish drive began, some natives had returned to Guanche society with knowledge of European language and culture. In a sense, just as the Spaniards had time to adapt and modify their colonisation of the Canaries, the natives also had opportunity to accommodate themselves to the Europeans. (p. 527)

It is important to recognise that there was collusion among some *guanche mencey* (king, Tenerife) or *guanarteme* (king, Gran Canaria) with the colonisers, as conversion to Christianity was rewarded with better treatment by the Spanish (Stevens-Arroyo, 1993). This led to other forms of epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988), such as the boys of those converted receiving an ‘education’ from Franciscan monks. While much of colonisation’s impact was through force, bribery was also an effective strategy, leading to more widespread, strategic, if not willing, assimilation. As the invention of race was taking shape during this period (Quijano, 2000), it is conceivable that some *guanche* peoples might have benefited from their ‘physical resemblance’ to their colonisers.

Through baptism, the *guanche* peoples were assigned family names from, among others, their masters (if they were slaves), their ‘Godfather,’ or the priest who baptised them. Despite this, fortunately, García-Talavera Casañas (2016) identified the seven most common family names with *guanche* roots that are still ‘alive’ today: *Baute*, *Bencomo*, *Chinea*, *Guanche*, *Oramas*, *Tacoronte* and *Tarife*. Interestingly, the close ties with the Americas have resulted in these family names being widely used in American nations, such as Venezuela, Cuba, Uruguay and the Dominican Republic. Despite the attempted erasure of the *guanche peoples*, these traces of indigeneity survived. It was thanks to the shepherds, who were predominantly isolated in the mountains, that some of the *guanche* vocabulary and customs survived (Pérez-Camacho, 2019). Likewise, the Indigenous heritage lives through the *Salto del Pastor* (pole-vaulting to move around *riscos*, cliffs and rough terrain), *Lucha Canaria* (Canarian Wrestling) and *gofio* (flour made from roasted/toasted grain, which continues to be an essential aspect of the diet in the Canary Islands, and some areas of the Americas).

Failed Erasure

Despite the significant decline in the *guanche* population during (and after) the Spanish conquest, due to the wars, slave trade and diseases, the *guanche peoples*, not including the *guanche*-Spanish *mestizos*, still accounted for the majority of the inhabitants of the islands (García-Talavera Casañas, 2016). It is important to note here that ‘*mestizos*’ in the Canary Islands was simply a categorisation of the offspring between *guanche peoples* and Spanish (or other Europeans), unrelated to the political project of the *mestizaje* in Colombia (see Jaramillo-Aristizabal, this issue). However, the current inhabitants of the Canary Islands should still not be thought of as *mestizos*, as understood in the Americas, because the Canary Islands assimilated into the Spanish national territory. Not being a colony (in a geo-political sense) resulted in the imposition, assimilation and naturalisation of Spanish institutions, laws and other infrastructures. The colonialities in the Canary Islands are different because the coloniser never left, and the islands remain Spanish territory.

One potential origin for the widely held belief that ‘there is no one left’ is unpacked by Fregel, Ordóñez and Serrano (2021). They discuss how the *guanche* population, prior to colonisation, was approximately 95,000–137,000, which was reduced to 7,000 by 1504. However, this latter figure was based on a census that only considered families that were composed of only *guanche* members, failing to account for mixed couples (mainly, *guanche* women and European men). Moreover, the authors also suggest that discrimination may have played a role in *guanche* non-disclosure, as they may have been avoiding making themselves more vulnerable. Pérez-Camacho’s (2019, p. 94) account reveals that, ‘[t]o have opportunities in the new society there was one prerequisite: to renounce your native past. Hence the new Guanches renounced their Indigenous surnames – surnames that distinguished them from the settlers – and changed them for others.’ Similarly, de la Cadena (2010) illustrates the way participation in ‘civilised’ politics requires the relinquishment of ‘uncivilised’ Indigenous beliefs/‘superstitions’ in favour of rational modernist subjectivity. Notably, it is uncertain whether the *guanche* would have been able to perform these survival strategies if it were not for their ‘white passing.’ Furthermore, to access higher education, candidates had to demonstrate that they were not descendants of Canarian (*guanche*), Jewish or Moorish heritage, which contributed to non-disclosure and the invention of family trees (Millares Torres, 1977, as cited in Pérez-Camacho, 2019). This encouraged *guanche* to participate in their own erasure.

Most of the European settlers in the Canary Islands were: (1) Spanish farm owners and/or workers, (2) Portuguese, Genovese and Flemish in the sugar plantations, which was the first profitable ‘business’ of the archipelagic economy, with significance in international markets, (3) Moors and black slaves, and, finally, (4) English and Irish for wine production (from the mid-16th century), which substituted the profitable sugar business (Pérez García, 2013). This multi-ethnic profile of the Canary Islands is evident in, for example, Gaspar Frutuoso’s account

when '[w]riting at the end of the sixteenth century, [he] noted that the population of La Palma was composed of Castilian, Portuguese and Indigenous people' (Harvey, 2002, para. 29). Consequently, recent genetic studies have found that 'current Canarians are a mixture of European, North African and sub-Saharan African lineages, with a reduced Amerindian input' (Fregel, Ordóñez, & Serrano, 2021, p. R68).

Notably, the rapid Christianisation and acculturation processes did not erase the prehispanic genetic origins of Canary Islanders, which remain in the current population of the islands. The *guanche* women ensured that the *guanche* genetic ancestry remained, still found in the current Canary Islanders, through the U6b1a haplotype (maternal mitochondrial inheritance), 'which is hypothesised to be endemic to and a founder lineage of the Canary Islands' (Rodríguez-Varela et al., 2017, p. 3397). Although there was a great migration of Europeans to the islands after the conquest and migration to the Americas by Canary Islanders, Wölfel (1930, as cited in García-Talavera Casañas, 2016) stated that between 2/3 and 3/5 of the native population in the islands carried 'Indigenous blood' and the rest 'European blood.' It has been estimated that the current inhabitants of the island of Gran Canaria carry between 16–31% Indigenous ancestry (Rodríguez-Varela et al., 2017, p. 3396). Fortunately, '[s]urvivors ... left behind a genetic as well as cultural imprint on today's population' (Rodríguez-Varela et al., 2017, p. 3399). This is one of the ways it is possible to recognise these traces of the *guanche* peoples, which tell a story of a failed attempt at colonial erasure.

Colonialities in the Canary Islands

While some *guanche* peoples lived in 'modern' houses, had gardens and were perceived as more 'civilised' (Pérez-Camacho, 2019), the *guanche* peoples were largely considered primitive by European colonisers because they predominantly lived in caves, wore goatskins (although others were naked), had goats, sheep and dogs, and rudimentary agriculture of barley and wheat, with which they made *gofio* (still produced and consumed by present Canary Islanders, and some areas of the Americas). The respect and care some *guanche* peoples showed for their dead, involving mummification, has caused historians and anthropologists to draw connections with practices in ancient Egypt. In Tenerife, the pyramids of *Güímar* resemble those found in Mesoamerica and Mesopotamia. It is notable that, 'facing the Atlantic and with Mount Teide as their backdrop, the structures are precisely aligned according to the sunset on the summer solstice' (Harvey, 2002, para. 28). Similarly, most tribes were arranged in *menceyatos* (kingdoms), ruled by a *mencey* (king in Tenerife and *guanarteme* in Gran Canaria) and a council of elders, there were cast-like social divisions and hereditary chiefdoms (mainly in Tenerife and Gran Canaria), and they had a reputation for having great warriors, despite not having metal weapons (Adhikari, 2017). Moreover, it took the Kingdom of Castilla almost 100 years to colonise the Canary Islands, which served as a practice arena

to tackle the colonisation of the Americas, replicating war strategies learnt from and used against the *guanche* peoples (García de Gabiola, 2019).

While the Spanish colonisers have cast themselves as the civilised/civilising heroes, in truth, the Spanish sense of superiority prevented them from recognising a different social order. Unfortunately, my experience of migrating from the Canary Islands to mainland Spain suggests that the myth of Canarian inferiority has been cemented in the collective Spanish imagination. Víctor Ramírez (2004, p. 17) explains that there is a big difference between learning and saying that the Canary Islands is a ‘province,’ a ‘region,’ an ‘autonomous community,’ a ‘part’ of Spain, and an ‘ultraperipheral European entity,’ compared to learning and manifesting that it is, actually, a ‘subjugated nation’ by a ‘foreign power,’ a *patria* (homeland) submitted at gunpoint and corruption; merely an ‘overseas’ economic possession, a north-west-African archipelagic territory utterly colonised. The former is a clear example of the naturalised treatment and adoption of the ‘coloniser’s discourse,’ that lives and thrives in the collective imagination of both Canary Islanders and mainland Spaniards. This paper asks how present Canary Islanders can appreciate themselves as entangled with and know themselves in relation to these histories.

Establishing Relations through te Ao Māori

Having moved to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2014, to do my doctorate, it was through my engagement with te Ao Māori (*the Māori world*) that I have come to know myself in relation to ‘*guanche*’ because it allowed me to reflect on ‘belonging’ in terms of ‘whakapapa’ (genealogy), ‘whanaungatanga’ (kin relationships) and ‘whānau’ (family). Before having the privilege of engaging with these worlds, I had no reference point for how I might understand myself in relation to where and who I am from. It is only by engaging with and understanding these concepts through a te Ao Māori lens, moving beyond the limitations of potential English-language ‘equivalents,’ that my knowing of myself in relation to *guanche* has been possible. The process of having to re/connect with my whakapapa presented more challenges than expected. Tracing back my tīpuna (ancestors) was an arduous process after three generations. Surprisingly, this process uncovered my connections to Lanzarote, as well as Gran Canaria. Stewart (2020) states that ‘[w]hen we express our identity, we do so in relation to a concept of the world in which we live’ (p. 56). But what happens when ‘my world’ is a product of near-complete erasure and lost memories of the histories of the Indigenous peoples of my islands? Reflecting on this made me realise, for the first time, that my relation to the whenua (land, the Canary Islands) also included the *guanche* peoples. My argument is that Canary Islanders’ tīpuna are both *guanche* and European, even if only through inhabiting the same land; however, it is the Indigenous (Global South) heritage that has been suppressed for the sake of Spanish (Global North) identities. Although *guanche* peoples have disappeared into a Global North paradigm, their wairua (spirit) remains in the whenua, whanau,

whanaungatanga, the languages spoken in the islands and various cultural practices.

Critical theory facilitated the development of my understanding of myself in relation to the *guanche* peoples and histories of the Canary Islands, as it seemed to explain present dynamics, provide practical means of decolonising, and a normalisation of these inequalities (cf. Horkheimer, 1972). However, critical theory's identity politics demanded an essentialist understanding of what constitutes Canarian indigeneity and post/colonial Spanish identity. The erasure of Canarian indigeneity (both through genocide and assimilation) renders this an impossibility. Instead, I needed a way to understand myself in relation to what 'remains,' which cannot be reduced to the stable categories that critical theory demands. Te Ao Māori facilitated my connection to my ancestors and the histories of the Canary Islands, allowing a process of re/configuring connections with these histories. In particular, in a te Ao Māori understanding of time, 'past events do not lose their significance, and ancestors can collapse the space-time continuum to be co-present with their descendants' (Stewart, 2020, p. 3). This allows me to share space-time with my tīpuna and teaches me that the *guanche* never disappeared; they inhabit my world in multiplicitous, though often hidden, ways. Te Ao Māori helped me understand that it is not simply about DNA but about being in relation with my tīpuna, the whenua, and everything that binds us.

My engagement with the relationality of te Ao Māori was the missing link I needed to understand my ancestry, origins, and the colonialities of/in the Canary Islands. Although I remain uprooted, I imagine new possibilities for what 'Canarian indigeneity' may mean now: a metamorphosis of un/becoming *guanche*. Reading my *guanche* whakapapa through te Ao Māori is liberating and decolonising because it does not force me to take a stable subject position. It recognises the way that I 'live in two worlds' (Stewart, 2021, p. 51): the Eurocentric world and the world that colonisation attempted to erase. I am indebted to te Ao Māori for opening new possibilities for understanding my whakapapa, and how I might un/become *guanche*, inspiring the possibility of a *guanche* future.

Un/Becoming Guanche

My journey to un/become *guanche* has some resonances with critical theory, such as the development of my critical consciousness around my relationships with the *guanche* peoples, the histories of the Canary Islands, and the ways in which colonisation has created a systematic disconnect. However, I feel that it does not have the capacity to move beyond its dependence on stable (modernist) subjectivities, which hinders my capacity to re/create those connections. Requiring a stable (modernist) *guanche* subjectivity is not possible nor desirable; it does not address what remains, nor facilitate a 'change' in the way we might relate to these histories. Inheriting the histories of the Canary Islands is a matter of inheriting a void: while so much has been erased, traces remain, and they offer the possibility of something new. In this way, what it means to un/become *guanche* is haunted by

both colonial and colonised histories. By renegotiating our relationship with these histories, multiplicitous possibilities emerge.

Critical theory struggles to engage with this void of im/possibilities because it traps the relations in categories of oppressor and oppressed (coloniser and colonised); a false dualism that does not apply in the Canary Islands. The *guanche* peoples that existed are not here anymore. The Spanish colonisers are long dead; they are impossible to hold accountable. The histories and context of the Canary Islands present a paradox insofar as the islands went through colonisation and the *guanche* peoples were nearly annihilated and forced to assimilate. Eventually, the islands stopped functioning as a dominion, becoming a region of Spain – though perhaps this distinction is tokenistic. However, the *guanche* peoples continued to be enslaved and displaced. Thus, it is paradoxical that the Canary Islands were geopolitically the coloniser, as part of the Spanish Empire, and yet still colonised.

In line with Tallbear's (2013) critique of Western notions of bloodlines, quantum and inheritance, what remains in the Canary Islands is more complex than the DNA some Canary Islanders have inherited. To do the work of reconfiguring relations with colonialities in the Canary Islands, it is necessary for current inhabitants to understand themselves as entangled with the histories of the islands, the attempted erasure of Canarian indigeneity, and the traces that remain. Mercier (2020) states that '[d]ecolonisation is many things. It is untangling and stripping away. It is rediscovery, recovery and affirmation of a non-colonial identity. It starts in the mind but requires action. It is taking power back. It is liberation' (p. 73). Decolonisation in the context of the Canary Islands requires an unbecoming of colonial subjectivity and reconfiguring relations to reimagine what it means to be a Canary Islander. Acknowledging these relations may be unbecoming, but they are integral. Importantly, this invitation is not limited to only those who inhabit the islands, but also those who were displaced by colonisation, such as those who were victims of the slave trade. This also applies to anyone who becomes a Canary Islander, because it has to do with coming into relation with (the histories of) the whenua. These multiplicitous relations cannot be explained or acted upon in any uniform, normalising fashion, which is why critical theory cannot account for what it means to un/become *guanche*.

Canary Islanders cannot exist without the *guanche* peoples – we are constituted by their absence and can be reconstituted by coming into relation with the histories of the islands. As Mercier (2020, p. 43) asks, '[i]f you don't know what your own house looked like, how can you recognise what's different about the colonial house?' While a critical consciousness of the histories of the islands is necessary, critical theory cannot address what we have become and what we might become. To enact these potential becomings, present Canary Islanders need to understand ourselves as part of those histories. This piece is an invitation to return to relation with the whenua, which remains and bears the histories of those who came before us. This relation to the whenua will help us understand what it means to 'decolonise' by reconnecting. It was the relationality of te Ao Māori that connected

me to my ancestors and histories of the Canary Islands and offered means of reconfiguring relationships with coloniality from which new possibilities for un/becoming *guanche* emerged, to remember and decolonise Canary Islanders' relationships with the histories of the islands. Un/becoming *guanche* is a process of decolonisation.

Critical Un/Learnings

While we acknowledge critical theory's well-intended pursuit of 'human emancipation,' this paper has demonstrated how this approach cannot achieve justice in response to the inheritance of trans/gender or the void of Canary Island histories. Critical theory's imposition of a modern/colonial (humanist) ontology, insistence on essentialist subjectivity, and predetermined oppressor/enlightened binaries impede its capacity to address the haunted, multiplicitous and more-than-human un/becomings that are common to both authors' inheritances. In lieu of mere critique, Pasley's section offers agential realism as a more expansive lens to read trans/gender, while Ramirez's illustrates the challenging process of coming to terms with the colonialities and the void that she inherited, tracing her process of un/learning where she comes from, through te Ao Māori, and what it means to un/become *guanche*.



And Pasley, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0772-7889>

Elba Ramirez, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1428-852X>

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy and the integrity of the data analysis.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

NOTE

1. Poststructural approaches have also been the subject of criticism (see Barad, 2007; Pasley, 2022), but there is neither room to unpack these critiques here nor are they a source of ramification in this work.

REFERENCES

- Adhikari, M. (2017). Europe's first settler-colonial incursion into Africa: The genocide of aboriginal Canary Islanders. *African Historical Review*, 49(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17532523.2017.1336863>
- Agger, B. (1991). Critical theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism: Their sociological relevance. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17(1), 105–131. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.17.080191.000541>
- Ahmed, S. (2015). Introduction: Sexism: A problem with a name. *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, 86(1), 5–13. <https://doi.org/10.3898/nEWF.86.Introduction.2015>
- Alonso de la Fuente, J. A. (2007). Notas sobre la etimología de los numerales bereberes. *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes*, 18, 41–63. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/>
- Ballester, X. (2019). Review of *Lo que queda del guanche: Introducción a un diccionario de topónimos prehispánicos de Canarias*, by M. Traperó and E. Santana Martel. *eHumanista*, 42, 328–335. <https://www.ehumanista.ucsb.edu>
- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.
- Barad, K. (2014). Diffracting diffraction: Cutting together-apart. *Parallax*, 20(3), 168–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2014.927623>
- Barad, K. (2018). Troubling time/s and ecologies of nothingness: Re-turning, re-membling and facing the incalculable. *New Formations*, 92, 56–86. <https://doi.org/10.3898/NEWF:92.05.2017>
- binaohan, b. (2014). *Decolonising trans/gender 101*. Biyuti.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Carter, R. G. (2006). Of things said and unsaid: Power, archival silences and power in silence. *Archivaria*, 61, 215–233. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12541>
- De la Cadena, M. (2010). Indigenous cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual reflections beyond 'politics.' *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(2), 334–370. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01061.x>
- Department of Internal Affairs. (2012). *Information for transgender applicants*. https://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Services-BDM-Information-for-Transgender-Applicants?OpenDocument
- Duggan, L. (2002). The new homonormativity: The sexual politics of neoliberalism. In R. Castronovo & D. D. Nelson (Eds), *Materialising democracy: Toward a revitalised cultural politics* (pp. 175–194). Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv125jgrq>
- Foucault, M. (1989). *The birth of the clinic: An archaeology of medical perception*. Routledge.
- Galán Cuartero, M., & Fernández Rodríguez, J. M. (2007). *Las puertas atlánticas: Piratas y corsarios en canarias (siglos XV–XIX)*. Gobierno de Canarias, Consejería de Educación, Universidades, Cultura y Deportes.
- Fregel, R., Ordóñez A. C., & Serrano, J. G. (2021). The demography of the Canary Islands from a genetic perspective. *Human Molecular Genetics*, 30(2), R64–R71. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hmg/ddaa262>
- García Conde, M. & Roldán Delgado, H. (2010). The last of the Atlanteans. *Child's Nervous System*, 26, 1131–1134. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00381-010-1188-9>

- García de Gabiola, J. (2019). La conquista de las Canarias: Un ensayo bélico para América (1402–1501) [The conquest of the Canary Islands: A warfare essay for America (1402–1501)]. *Medievalia*, 51, 155–179. <https://revistas-filologicas.unam.mx/medievalia/>
- García-Talavera Casañas, F. (2016). *Guanches ayer, hoy canarios. Apuntes de la historia e identidad de un Pueblo Macronesio*. Idea.
- Gill-Peterson, J. (2018). *Histories of the transgender child*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Gobierno de Canarias [Canary Islands Government]. (n.d.). *Historia de Canarias*. <https://www.gobiernodecanarias.org/educacion>
- Harvey, S. (2002). Isles of eternal spring: Overlooked mysteries of the Canary Islands. *World & I*, 17(4), 178–187.
- Horkheimer, M. (1972). *Critical theory: Selected essays* (vol. 1). A&C Black.
- Hoskins, T. K. (2010). *Māori and Levinas: Kanohi ki te kanohi for an ethical politics* [PhD thesis]. Waipapa Taumata Rau/University of Auckland. <http://hdl.handle.net/2292/6089>
- Howell, T., & Allen, L. (2020). ‘Good morning, boys’: Fa’afāfine and fakaleiti experiences of cisgenderism at an all-boys secondary school. *Sex Education*, 21(4), 417–431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2020.1813701>
- Kerekere, E. (2017). Part of the whānau: The emergence of takatāpui identity: He whāriki takatāpui [PhD thesis]. Te Herenga Waka/Victoria University of Wellington. <http://hdl.handle.net/10063/6369>
- Levinas, E. (1985). *Ethics and infinity*. Duquesne University Press.
- Linstead, S., & Pullen, A. (2006). Gender as multiplicity: Desire, displacement, difference and dispersion. *Human Relations*, 59(9), 1287–1310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726706069772>
- Lorde, A. (1984). The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. In *Sister, outsider: Essays and speeches* (p. 110). Crossing Press.
- Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system. *Hypatia*, 22(1), 186–219. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb01156.x>
- Manning, E. (2016). *The minor gesture*. Duke University Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1969). *An essay on liberation*. Beacon Press.
- McIntyre, J. (2018). ‘They’re so normal I can’t stand it’: I am jazz, I am Cait, transnormativity, and trans feminism. In C. Dale & R. Overell (Eds), *Orienting feminism* (pp. 9–24). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70660-3_2
- Mercier, O. R. (2020). What is decolonisation? In B. Elkington, M. Jackson, R. Kiddle, O. R. Mercier, M. Ross, J. Smeaton, & A. Thomas (Eds), *Imagining decolonisation* (pp. 40–82). Bridget Williams.
- Morrisby, E. (1987). The Guanches. *Quadrant*, 31(9), 44–48.
- Oyèwùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Pasley, A. (2021). The effects of agential realism on gender research and education. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1555>
- Pasley, A. (2022). *Spacetimegenderings: How trans secondary students matter in Aotearoa New Zealand* [PhD thesis]. Waipapa Taumata Rau/University of Auckland. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.26563.48165>
- Pasley, A., Hamilton, T., & Veale, J. F. (2022). Transnormativities: Reterritorialising perceptions and practice. In L. Johnston & P. Doan (Eds.), *Rethinking transgender identities* (pp. 124–147). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315613703-8>

- Pérez-Camacho, J. (2019). *Guanches: Legend and reality: The mysterious people of the Canary Islands* (5th ed.). Weston.
- Pérez Carballo, M. (2001). *Anaga (Tenerife): Excursiones a pie*. Ayuntamiento de Santa Cruz de Tenerife.
- Pérez García, A. (2013). *Síntesis de historia canaria*. Gobierno de Canarias. Consejería de Educación, Universidades, Cultura y Deportes.
- Puar, J. K. (2015). Bodies with new organs becoming trans, becoming disabled. *Social Text*, 33(3), 45–73. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-3125698>
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>
- Rahimi, R., & Liston, D. (2011). Race, class, and emerging sexuality: Teacher perceptions and sexual harassment in schools. *Gender & Education*, 23(7), 799–810. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2010.536143>
- Ramirez, V. (2004). *Palabras libertarias para una conciencia canaria universalista*. Academia Canaria de la Lengua.
- Rodríguez-Varela, R., Günther, T., Krzewińska, M., & Jak, M. (2017). Genomic analyses of pre-European conquest human remains from the Canary Islands reveal close affinity to modern North Africans. *Current Biology*, 27(21), 3396–3402. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2017.09.059>
- Roen, K. (2001). Transgender theory and embodiment: The risk of racial marginalisation. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 10(3), 253–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589230120086467>
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonising methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Bloomsbury.
- Sosa Martín, R. (2019). La sustitución lingüística del guanche en las Islas Canarias, un caso excepcional en la historia del mundo Bereber. *Espacio Tiempo Y Forma. Serie IV, Historia Moderna*, 32, 289–302. <https://doi.org/10.5944/etfv.32.2019.22357>
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 21–78). University of Illinois Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/morr14384>
- Stevens-Arroyo, A. (1993). The inter-Atlantic paradigm: The failure of Spanish medieval colonisation of the Canary and Caribbean Islands. *Comparative Studies in Society & History*, 35(3), 515–543. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500018569>
- Stewart, G. T. (2020). *Māori philosophy: Indigenous thinking from Aotearoa*. Bloomsbury.
- Stryker, S. (1994). My words to Victor Frankenstein above the village of Chamounix: Performing transgender rage. *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 1(3), 237–254. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-3-237>
- Trapero, M., & Pombo, E. Ll. (1998). Es guanche la palabra guanche? Revisión histórica, filológica y antropológica de un tópico. *Anuario de Estudios Atlánticos*, 44, 99–196. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/>
- Trapero, M. (1994). *Encuentro de escritores Canarios: La Gomera, 1992*. Vice-consejería de Cultura y Deportes.
- Trapero, M. & Santana Martel, E. (n.d.). *La toponimia de las Islas Canarias*. <https://toponimiacanarias.ulpgc.es>
- Trapero, M. & Santana Martel, E. (2018). *Lo que queda del guanche: Introducción a un diccionario de topónimos prehispánicos de Canarias*. Idea.
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Genocide*. Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>

- Vipond, E. (2015). Resisting transnormativity: Challenging the medicalisation and regulation of trans bodies. *Theory in Action*, 8(2), 21–44. <https://doi.org/10.3798/tia.1937-0237.15008>
- Warren, C. (2017). Onticide: Afro-pessimism, gay nigger# 1, and surplus violence. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies*, 23(3), 391–418. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-3818465>
- Williams, C. (2016). Radical inclusion: Recounting the trans-inclusive history of radical feminism. *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 3(1–2), 254–258. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3334463>