

Confronting Climate Coloniality

Decolonizing Pathways for Climate Justice

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Introduction

Climate change and its governed responses are imbued with colonialism all the way through. Colonial rationality and practices not only contribute to the historical production of the climate crisis (Davis & Todd 2017; Lewis & Maslin 2015), but they also continue to shape and influence climate vulnerability and actions (Sultana 2022b; Whyte 2017, 2016; Wildcat 2009). As geographer Farhana Sultana states, “[c]limate change lays bare the colonialism of not only the past but an ongoing coloniality that governs and structures our lives which are co-constitutive of processes of capitalism, imperialism and international development” (Sultana 2022b, p. 3).

The *ongoing* colonialism that is inextricably articulated with climate change, and shapes vulnerability and responses to the multifaceted crisis, has incited a growing field of study on *climate coloniality* (Sultana 2022b). Drawing upon the theory of coloniality (Quijano 2007; Wynter 2003), climate coloniality requires moving beyond static notions of colonialism proper – located to a past and project temporality – to reconceptualize colonialism as a *continuous* constellation of uneven relations. Rooted in rationalities that crystalized with the onset of sixteenth century colonization, coloniality continues to imbue all aspects of life: from relationships with nature, to one another, to wider systems of work, to ways of knowing and being (Sultana 2022b).

It is the intention of this edited volume to empirically investigate and more deeply theorize how the climate crisis and colonialism are deeply intertwined, and thereby *confront* the coloniality of power that continues to structure climate discourses and projects, while simultaneously attending to decolonial possibilities. Contributing to these aims, this chapter offers a critical ethnographic analysis of the coloniality of global climate governance from within the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Paying specific attention to the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP), I trace recent institutional attempts that strive for more fair and just relations between nation-states and Indigenous nations. Methodologically, this work is neither an ethnography of the state (or statist institution), nor an ethnography of so-called place-based and local communities. Instead, I consider this work an ethnography of relations, and specifically an investigation

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of the relations between Indigenous nations and nation-states within the context of inclusive and “post”-colonial climate governance.

Seeking insights into the mechanisms of the coloniality of power within the context of contemporary climate governance, this chapter investigates *how coloniality is enacting, and enacted through, global climate governance, by what tactics and with what effects?* And moreover, *to what extent decoloniality might be actively at work in the global, political arena?* I followed this line of inquiry ethnographically over four nonconsecutive years of engagement within the UNFCCC process (from November 2018 to June 2023), beginning with attendance to the twenty-fourth Conference of the Parties (COP) in Katowice, Poland, and subsequent attendance to three Facilitative Work Group (FWG) meetings of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform: FWG4 – Madrid (2020), FWG6 – Glasgow (2021), and FWG9 – Bonn (2023).

LCIPP, or the “Indigenous Platform”, was operationalized in 2018 and has been called a “critical case of institutional change”, representing a new institutional model for Indigenous participation and knowledge politics within global climate decision-making (López-Rivera 2023, p. 1). The higher order aspiration of LCIPP (or, at minimum, the representatives of Indigenous Peoples) is not simply that of adding technical inputs to the process, but rather strives for a re-working, a de-settling, of the colonial relations between states and Indigenous Peoples. While the Indigenous Platform under the UNFCCC is indeed novel, my attention here remains critically focused on matters of relationality between Indigenous-championed discourses and desires, and the dominant discourses and practices that circulate throughout the UNFCCC process. I pay specific attention to the ways in which the *coloniality of power* informs and structures Indigenous and state relations in global climate governance, even when through institutions that signal a new, more inclusive governance paradigm, such as the LCIPP. Insights gained throughout this ethnographic engagement suggest that both the production of space and knowledge are critically important domains in which the struggle for de/coloniality at the global level is being forged.

A Note on Methodology

As Anthropologist Naveeda Khan states, the UNFCCC is a “mammoth” process: no single ethnographer could cover all its legal agreements, functions, meetings, workstreams, activities, and happenings in its entirety (Khan 2023, p. 3). Therefore, like Khan, whose recent ethnography on the UNFCCC illuminates the voices and perspectives of a particular position – the Global South – I too have similarly chosen a strategic vantage point from which to observe and participate within the UNFCCC arena to the exclusion of other locations. This has been a matter of method and practicality, but also a subjective (personal-political) decision of where and how to observe and participate. I engaged most closely with LCIPP, which is the only constituted body within the UNFCCC with equal party (nation-state) and Indigenous representation.

As a non-Indigenous woman of color, I am not always granted access to Indigenous-only spaces, and while conducting this work as a mother, as a graduate student, and as an assistant professor in the US, I negotiated both privileges and barriers associated with my intersectional and shifting positionality in order to show-up in the UNFCCC process. While identity and access issues are throughout this work, I have been able to ethnographically engage in LCIPP spaces and stand in political alliance with the transnational Indigenous movement that also undergirds the work of the Platform. Permission and consent to engage as a researcher in these spaces was obtained multiple times and throughout the life of the research, attending to Indigenous, UN and academic protocols. Observation from this situated location has allowed for deep understanding and insights into the relationship between the worlds' sovereigns (Indigenous nations) and nation-states that is unique to any other location within the UNFCCC.

Theorizing Coloniality in the Age of Climate Change

Amidst a growing body of scholarship at the intersection of climate change and colonialism, I draw upon *coloniality* and *settler-colonialism* as two analytical frames that enable foregrounding the relational dimensions of the contemporary climate colonial condition. Nelson Maldonado-Torres makes clear that “[c]oloniality is different from colonialism” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 243). Coloniality is most often attributed to the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2007) and Jamaican cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter (Wynter 2003), and has come to refer to “long-standing power relations that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of the colonial administration” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 243). The central feature of coloniality “is the *categorization and hierarchical classification of differences*, leading to suppression, devaluing, subordination or even destruction of forms of knowledge and being that do not conform to the dominate form of modernity” (Escobar 2018, p. 94). In this way, coloniality can be understood as not so much different, but *divergent*, from colonialism proper. While it is historically rooted in colonial rationalities and practices, coloniality is that which exceeds first wave colonialism and manifests colonial reason in contemporary settler-colonial and postcolonial worldmaking.

The notion of excess and continuity that coloniality evokes dovetails with definitions of settler-colonialism – specifically, Wolfe’s notion that the colonial invasion is a “structure rather than an event” (Wolfe 2006, p. 390). Accordingly, settler-colonialism is inherently an eliminatory process that displaces to replace, and is performed through acts of killing, containment, romanticizing, assimilating, breeding white, educating, and otherwise eliminating the native population. Wolfe (2006) complicates purely genocidal understandings of settler-colonialism and highlights the ways in which settler-colonialism *remains an ongoing and unfinished project*, and thus ruptures static notions of colonialism as an event tied to quintessential temporal and spatial boundaries.

When understood as a structure rather than an event, we can then take settler-colonialism and coloniality as a “matrix of power” that functions as an ongoing and organizing principle of contemporary society, rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence of colonial contact (back then). Instead of fixing colonialism to a linear past as static and separate from today, settler-colonialism, postcolonialism and coloniality theories bring to the fore the ways in which colonialism is structural, ongoing, and atmospheric (DeBoom 2022). As Arturo Escobar puts it, “there is no modernity anywhere without coloniality” (2018, p. 94); and likewise, Nelson Maldonado-Torres asserts that “as modern subjects we breath[e] coloniality all the time and everyday” (2007, p. 243). These atmospheric sentiments are captured in Sultana’s (2022b) reference to the “heaviness” of climate coloniality and are echoed across earlier decolonial writings.

Problematizing the co-constitution of modernity/coloniality draws into question so-called modern projects, policies, discourses and institutions as complicit and active in colonial worldmaking today. Ojibwe scholar Megan Bang points out that while colonialism and concomitant hierarchical orderings of human life have shifted from the age of conquest and discovery, “settled expectations based in whiteness remain deeply embedded in the multidimensional structure of our society. Moreover, they are embedded in ways that make them seem natural and objective rather than socially or ideologically constructed” (Bang *et al.* 2012, p. 303).

For scholars of colonialism and coloniality it is a central premise that “[m]odernity as a discourse and as a practice would not be possible without coloniality, and coloniality continues to be an inevitable outcome of modern discourses” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 244). Critical scholars have already begun identifying and challenging the continuity of colonial rationalities and effects within climate change discourses and practices, including within: urban green development (Anguelovski *et al.* 2022; Safransky 2014); climate resilient infrastructure (Gray 2023; Shokry *et al.* 2023); carbon offsets, sinks and markets (Bumpus & Liverman 2011; Lövbrand & Strippel 2006; Lyons & Westoby 2014); renewable energy (Awāsis 2021); nature-based solutions (Reed *et al.* 2022, 2024); inclusive and participatory governance (Haverkamp 2021; Lindroth & Sinevaara–Niskanen 2014); knowledge integration and co-production (David-Chavez & Gavin 2018); post-disaster recovery and development (Bonilla 2020; Rivera 2022; Sheller 2020); capacity building (Nautiyal & Klinsky 2022; West 2016); and mobility (Boas *et al.* 2023; Farbotko 2022; Whyte *et al.* 2019). In response to this rapidly growing body of literature on climate colonialism and climate coloniality, it becomes imperative to not only confront the historical colonial production of present climate devastation, but also the ongoing colonial rationalities and knowledges that continue to shape climate governance and solutions.

On Decoloniality

De-settling and *de-linking* from the settled expectations of colonialism and hierarchical orderings of life that underpin modern discourses, policies, and institutions is the task of *decoloniality*. As promises of modernity legitimize coloniality,

decoloniality can be understood as the response from people who refuse and resist the continuation of oppression, exploitation, and dispossession (Mignolo & Walsh 2018). Walter Mignolo and Katherine Walsh describe decoloniality as “first and foremost a liberation of knowledge, [...] of understanding and affirming subjectivities that have been devalued by narratives of modernity that are constitutive of the colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, p. 146). The decoloniality of knowledge is a direct response to breaking from the hegemony of Eurocentric onto-epistemic rationalities that continue to discursively structure modernity/coloniality.

Yet, while decoloniality may begin as an epistemic project of recognition, knowledge politics, and restor(y)ing, it must also go beyond the liberation of knowledge to the liberation of life and land. Drawing settler-colonial studies back into conversation with decoloniality, decolonization requires the material return of land back to Indigenous Peoples (Tuck & Yang 2012). In non-Indigenous contexts, where modernity/coloniality continues to the oppression of “othered” peoples, decoloniality similarly requires not only a paradigmatic shift (of the mind), but a life affirming (material) reparative project (Bhambra & Newell 2023; Táíwò 2022). Consistently found across articulations of decoloniality is a call to de-settle and de-link from the rationalities, discourses, narratives, promises, and projects of modernity/coloniality – and a call to re-exist *otherwise*.

In resistance to the coloniality of climate change, scholars argue that the creation of just and livable futures will require nothing less than a radical and relational course change away from the extractive, colonial, and violent ways of knowing and being that both produce, and are produced by, capitalist modernity and empire (Bang *et al.* 2022; Marion Suiseeya *et al.* 2022; Ojeda *et al.* 2022; Sultana 2022a, 2022b). Through the lens of de/coloniality, it is clear that the struggle to stop dangerous climate change is not merely a technical problem of adjustment or incremental policy reform, nor is it about more perfect science or technological mastery over nature. Rather, it is a paradigmatic and relational struggle for alternative ways of knowing and being that de-link from (settler-)colonial worlding.

This study is informed by important assertions from theories of settler-colonialism and de/coloniality. First, that coloniality is an organizing principle of modern society that imbues modern cultures, discourses, and governance; and second, that decoloniality is a demand for changing the terms of this colonial matrix of power, to re-existing otherwise in nonhierarchical, life affirming relations. Bringing these arguments to bear on the issue of contemporary climate change necessitates confronting the ways in which coloniality continues to shape climate discourses, knowledges, and governance from the local to the global, and far beyond the specific temporalities and geographies most associated with colonization (e.g., the reservation, colony, plantation). They also require attending to the ways in which decolonial possibilities and movements are concurrently present, viable, and active despite the domination of modernity/coloniality. This is the intervention that this chapter aims to make – to confront the ways in which coloniality imbues modern global climate governance and discourses, while simultaneously attending to the decolonial visions and projects within the UNFCCC.

The UNFCCC: A Global Climate Governance Arena

The UNFCCC is the organizing international body responsible for global climate policy and multilateral treaties across the world's nation-states. This international body is perhaps best known for the landmark agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, as well as the annual climate negotiations, referred to as the Conference of Parties, or COPs.

The global climate negotiations have become the high spectacle of international climate governance and decision-making – a space composed of tens of thousands of people pouring into hosting destinations where constructed pop-up infrastructure and hospitality labor strive to support the influx of international COP attendees for just a few weeks of time. To date, there have been 28 of these boom-and-bust COPs, beginning in 1995, when 198 parties (nation-states) sent their heads of state and delegations to negotiate the terms of global climate action. Since then, nation-state participation has remained remarkably stable despite changes in country-level leadership, a global pandemic (COVID-19), and international wars. Even within turbulent international relations, the world's nation-states, with near universality, have remained committed members to the UNFCCC process.

The UNFCCC, regardless of its effectiveness in realizing climate goals, remains an important political arena in which the stakes of climate change futures are being negotiated and determined by powerful actors. The UNFCCC appeals to liberalism's justice imaginary – engaging discourses of rights and individual freedom – and yet, as a political and socially constructed process, the UNFCCC is historically produced, incomplete in knowledges and actors, and full of contradictions, narratives, and power-asymmetries. Critical scholars assert that the UNFCCC and related processes are state-centric, techno-bureaucratic, and hegemonic (Fine *et al.* 2023; Lindroth & Sinevaara–Niskanen 2014), however, they also call attention to the political possibility that still exists there (Khan 2023; Sultana 2022b).

Sultana has commented that COP “can be seen as one of the theaters of climate colonialism (led mainly by corporations, powerful governments, and elites), yet simultaneously as a site of decolonial, anti-colonial, anti-racist, and feminist politics (led primarily by youth, Indigenous groups, academics, unions)” (Sultana 2022b, p. 2). Escobar also claims that, despite the exclusionary knowledge politics and power-imbalances that shape the global arena of the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (a sister convention to the UNFCCC), “it is not necessarily hegemonic”, rather this arena remains malleable – “countersimplifications and alternative discourses produced by subaltern actors also circulate actively in the network with important effects” (1998, p. 56).

Storying De/Coloniality in Global Climate Governance

This understanding of the UNFCCC, as a space in which both the coloniality of power continues to shape modern institutions and discourse *and* decolonial possibilities persist, is reinforced through my ethnographic observations. I first encountered this de/coloniality struggle as a graduate student while attending

COP24, in Katowice, Poland. Here, I found myself overwhelmed by the obtuse displays of wealth, power, and prestige from big NGOs, powerful state actors, and international banks who were often asserting various kinds of green neoliberalism to save the planet, and shifting discourses of responsibility to a homogenous “all”, despite highly differentiated country-level contributions to the climate crisis. While dominant discourses at COP seemed to be fixed on powerful state-centric interests, techno-scientific expertise, and the flow of green capital, there also appeared to be a moment of rupture in the seemingly hegemonic form of the UNFCCC process when these same state parties elected to operationalize the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform. Mobilizing text from within the Paris Agreement and the Paris Decision text, LCIPP went into force with agreement on the Platforms’ functions and purpose, and the creation of the first facilitative working group (FWG), at COP24. Both Indigenous Peoples and states celebrated this as an unprecedented partnership between the world’s nation-states and Indigenous nations, and claimed it to be an important “victory for Indigenous peoples” (Carmen 2019), who had no other means to a legitimate voice or recognition in global climate negotiations beyond that of civil society.

This move for Indigenous recognition within the UNFCCC importantly resulted in the establishment of LCIPP, as well as the FWG – a constituted body tasked with operationalizing the functions of the Indigenous Platform. Comprised of seven Indigenous representatives and seven party representatives (nation-states), the FWG is unprecedented in three ways: (1) as the first body consisting of *Indigenous-appointed* Indigenous representatives; (2) holding equal party to non-party representation; and (3) as the largest non-party constituted body under the UNFCCC (Interview #1, FWG9, 3 June 2023). Just by the representative design of the Platform, LCIPP already disrupts the coloniality of a state-centric process and offers a model of what nation-to-nation relations might look like in a post-Westphalian, decolonized world, where Indigenous nationhood and self-determination are legitimized.

November 2020: Two years after the working group to LCIPP was established COVID-19 had fully gripped the world, moving the in-person FWG meetings of LCIPP online. Attending FWG4 in 2020, I watched as Youssef Nassef, the UNFCCC Adaptation Director, took the virtual floor and addressed the members of LCIPP, parties, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies joining in from around the world. Addressing the eclectic group in grid-cells across the screen, Mr. Nassef declared that:

We are reaching the process towards a different era, a different paradigm – one where we have enhanced participation of Indigenous Peoples, but not just enhanced participation but joint leadership, [...] this is something we have never had before.

(Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG4, 14 December 2020)

The Adaptation Director’s remarks were optimistic and hopeful of the work that the Indigenous Platform could achieve with regards to the inclusion of Indigenous

knowledges, values, worldviews and rights. Speaking as part of the UNFCCC Secretariat's senior staff, Nassef's remarks signaled a broader institutional desire for a new and more just paradigm for climate governance that breaks from a long-standing UN tradition (read: colonial relations) between Indigenous nations and nation-states. This desire for a new, just paradigm in international governance is also expressed across other UN efforts, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007. However, I wondered to what extent the newly established Indigenous Platform might actually rupture the coloniality of power within the UN apparatus, where historically, only nation-states and not Indigenous nations had access to full participation, representation, legitimacy, and leadership in the global climate governance arena.

One year later, at LCIPP's sixth FWG meeting preceding COP26 in Glasgow, I heard an Indigenous response to my question emerge. Standing at microphone 3, Alison, a Māori youth of Aotearoa/New Zealand, made her intervention to the FWG members:

How do I translate this to my aunties and uncles and grandmothers – this very technical and bureaucratic and culturally specific space? How do I bring this work back to my community? We have so many pressing needs [...] but where is the Indigenous priority here around mitigation emissions? Where is the Indigenous priority in adaptation? It is fantastic to see the priority on participation, but I am worried. [Participation] is a drain and a detriment on our communities. I find this space intimidating and colonized space.

(Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG6, 28 October 2021)

Alison's Indigenous critique calls attention to the very "bureaucratic", "technical", and "culturally specific space" of the UNFCCC as a direct reference to the coloniality of power that persists within global climate governance. Her critique draws into sharp relief both the *coloniality of space* that is intimidating and exhaustive; as well as the *coloniality of knowledge* articulated as a state-serving, unidirectional process of knowledge accumulation that does not translate back to "aunties and uncles and grandmothers" of Indigenous communities.

The Coloniality of Space

Listening to, and learning from, Alison's critique, I ask: *What does it mean to be colonized space ... What is colonized space? And how might we interpret this within the context of the UNFCCC?*

According to Métis scholar, Zoe Todd, colonized spaces may be considered as *de facto* "white public spaces" in which the discourses and responses to the Anthropocene are being generated, and the rules of when and how Indigenous/black/people of color are allowed to enter and occupy these spaces reinscribes whiteness and white privilege (Todd 2015). Todd, drawing on Sara Ahmed, suggests that these are spaces in which those without white categorical coding are "dislodged" from residence, but are also spaces in which "Indigenous ideas and

experiences are appropriated, or obscured, by non-Indigenous practitioners” (Todd 2015, p. 243).

The UNFCCC is a gathering of the world’s nation-states, and thus, while it might be difficult to see a color-line here, it’s not difficult to see that the nation-state – a colonial artifact – still works to the exclusion and erasure of the worlds’ sovereigns. Enshrined in the UN convention is a fundamental understanding that “post”-colonial and settler-colonial statehood is the objective arbiter of sovereign rights (Lightfoot 2016). This framing, known as “methodological nationalism”, affords the nation-state a right to rule while simultaneously foreclosing on Indigenous nationhood and sovereignty. The continuity of this colonial logic becomes re-enacted within the UNFCCC in myriad ways, perhaps most notably in the imposed imperial geographies of the “seven socio-cultural regions” of which Indigenous members of LCIPP must identify with and represent, as well as in the allocation of badging access and voting rights within the climate negotiations (Belfer *et al.* 2019).

Despite the novelty of LCIPP, the seven Indigenous FWG members – identified by their seven “socio-cultural regions”, rather than Indigenous nations – are given no voting rights or direct access to participate in climate negotiations. To be clear, a vote and seat at the global climate decision-making table consistently remains the privilege of the victors and benefactors of European colonization – the right of nation-states, not Indigenous nations. This dislodging of Indigenous sovereignty stands in antithetical tension with the need/demand for Indigenous participation and Indigenous knowledges within “inclusive” global climate governance.

Belfer and colleagues (2019, p. 23) argue that this state-privileging power imbalance puts parties (states) in the position of deciding unilaterally which issues and agenda items are “relevant” for Indigenous participation. Indigenous nations are therefore *not* included in the UNFCCC process in ways that honor Indigenous modes of governance, jurisdiction, protocols, customs, or self-determination. Rather, the rules of when and how Indigenous Peoples are allowed to enter and occupy spaces of authority (i.e., climate negotiations) reinscribe whiteness and logics of racial-colonial spatialization between those colonized and the colonizers. The operationalization of the Indigenous Platform and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, and experiences in global climate policy, is therefore arguably determined as a function of “interest convergence” (Bell 1980) and party gate-keeping – whereby the rules of inclusion of LCIPP’s participation in negotiating spaces may open, but only when it aligns with the interests (not necessarily altruistic) of, and invitation by, state parties.

The Coloniality of Knowledge

LCIPP did not simply manifest instantaneously at COP24, rather there was a building and intersecting of efforts that came together in the creation of the Platform. The historical production of LCIPP is located in both the transnational Indigenous movement’s call for the recognition of Indigenous rights in climate governance, as well as in states’ desire for Indigenous knowledge (IK). The leveraged text for

the creation of LCIPP is found within the Paris Agreement and the decision text (2016), wherein paragraph 135 states that the UNFCCC:

Recognizes the need to strengthen knowledge, technologies, practices and efforts of local communities and indigenous peoples related to addressing and responding to climate change, and *establishes* a platform for the exchange of experiences and sharing of best practices on mitigation and adaptation in a holistic and integrated manner.

Operationalizing the Paris Agreement text led to a *state-driven* process for the establishment of LCIPP and its concomitant core functions. Within the functions ascribed to LCIPP the desire for Indigenous knowledge is overtly clear, including: (1) *the knowledge function* for the “application, strengthening, protecting, and preserving” of IK systems; (2) *the engagement function* which “builds the capacity of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to enable their engagement within the UNFCCC process”; and (3) *the policy function* which strives for the “integration” of IK into international and national climate policy (UNFCCC 2020a).

The need for Indigenous knowledge is unequivocally at the center of LCIPP’s creation and mandated roles. The remarks of the former Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, Patricia Espinosa, once posted to the LCIPP website, reminded us that:

Indigenous Peoples must be part of the solution to climate change. This is because you have the traditional knowledge of your ancestors. The important value of that knowledge simply cannot – and must not – be understated.

(UNFCCC 2020b)

This knowledge refrain came again at the opening remarks to LCIPP’s 9th FWG meeting in Bonn, when the new Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, Simon Stiell, *re-stated* that the work of LCIPP is to be the “conduit of this [Indigenous] knowledge” (Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG9, 31 May 2023).

The incredible diversity of Indigenous knowledges, often referred to across the UNFCCC homogenously as “traditional” and “local” knowledge, are now ambitiously sought after in the politics of climate adaptation and transformation. This knowledge need/demand is not necessarily unique to LCIPP alone, but is consistent with similar efforts throughout the UN, including within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and within the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) (Chandler & Reid 2019; Lindroth & Sinevaara-Niskanen 2019). Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen (2019) point out that states’ need/demand for Indigenous knowledge within international environmental governance emerged with the 1987 Brundtland Report and now centers in state-centric resilience imaginaries that position IK as synonymous with resilience.

Indigenous knowledge and wisdom holds tremendous value in the realm of environmental decision-making (as well as far beyond); and “TEK”, as a discursive

strategy has opened-up spaces for greater Indigenous representation, participation, and self-determination in local-to-global environmental politics. Yet, insights from these ethnographic engagements also caution against a state-centric process that aims to protect, preserve, and utilize Indigenous knowledges while simultaneously continuing to disavow Indigenous rights of territorial sovereignty and self-determination. My concern here rests on the longstanding colonial need/demand for Indigenous knowledge, customs, art, and culture. Paying attention to the long arc of European colonization, I suggest that this state-centric desire for IK is nothing new and does not signal a decolonial turn within the UNFCCC. Contact, conquest, and the extended settler-stay thereafter have all depended upon the appropriation and accumulation of local and Indigenous knowledge. As Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, recounts of the colonial invasion, “knowledge and culture were as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength. Knowledge was also there to be *discovered, extracted, appropriated, and distributed*. Processes for enabling the things to occur became organized and systematic” (Smith 2012 [1999], p. 61). This organizing, institutionalizing, and systematizing of the taking of Indigenous knowledge is a practice that has not gone away, but rather remains a practice of “deep colonizing” that is embedded in research, policy, and planning – and even within “institutions that are meant to reverse processes of colonization” (Rose 1996, p. 6).

The integration of Indigenous knowledge and requests for Indigenous participation are increasing across the UNFCCC process, from collaboration with the Technology Executive Committee (TEC) and the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (WIM ExCom), to feeding inputs to the Global Stocktake process (GST) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and still more. Yet, during LCIPP’s ninth FWG meeting, Indigenous participants and representatives alike voiced ongoing concerns about the *extractive* nature of participation within the UNFCCC (Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG9, May–June 2023).

Recommendations to “share” Indigenous knowledge and technologies with high adaptation potential and mitigation co-benefits are put to LCIPP from various state- and expert-led bodies within the UNFCCC (Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG9, May–June 2023). As a non-Indigenous representative of the TEC impressed upon the Indigenous Platform at FWG9:

there is no doubt that Indigenous and local knowledge systems represent a range of cultural practices, wisdoms, traditions and ways of understanding and knowing the world that provide accurate, useful, climate change information, observation, and solutions. [...] We see significant opportunities both to harness Indigenous technology and knowledge for climate action and also to strengthen Indigenous participation and agency in climate technology, policy and planning.
(Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG9, 2 June 2023)

The aspiration to “harness Indigenous technology and knowledge” impresses little faith that new encounters between states and Indigenous nations will be unlike previous colonial encounters – in which knowledge making and knowledge taking

were key to territorial colonization (Archibald *et al.* 2019; Santos 2016; Smith [1999] 2012). Concerns regarding the ongoing coloniality of knowledge are not only theoretical, but grounded in the eruption of Indigenous-voiced concerns that broke after the intervention from the TEC representative:

It's great to have collaboration but it's an ongoing concern that there is no ethical protocol. [...] It's no good ... if there's no process to ensure that they don't use it for some other purpose or just "harness" that information and use it any way that they wish. That is a concern ... And, he said they want to "harness" Indigenous technologies.

(Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG9, 2 June 2023)

Indigenous participants to the LCIPP meetings have also called attention to the ways in which the arrangements of knowledge production are "a detriment on our communities" (Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG6, 28 October 2021), reminding the FWG members that:

we are concerned with the level of reporting ... we do not have the capacity to keep feeding into the UNFCCC's reporting structure – we are a small Indigenous community and this is a burden on us.

(Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG9, 1 June 2023)

The ongoing requests for Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, and technologies in ways that advance state-centric political agendas and exhaust Indigenous participants is hardly a move away from extractive participation to collaboration in any decolonial, anticolonial or equitable way. Rather, these "novel" requests for Indigenous knowledge and inclusion that usher in new opportunities for Indigenous participation within global climate governance are reminiscent and re-enactments of colonial ways of governing, relating, and being.

Given these power-imbalances and colonial conditions, some knowledge holders exercise a politics of refusal (Simpson 2017), thereby fully rejecting participation within the UNFCCC process. As Audra Simpson describes elsewhere, this political stance is tied to deep questioning of the liberal state's notions of justice and a "refusal to acquiesce to state legitimacy and power" (Simpson 2017, p. 5). The occurrence of Indigenous refusal troubles the core functions of LCIPP, and especially Activity 1 – the Annual Global Gathering of Knowledge Holders. For LCIPP members tasked with operationalizing Activity 1, the pressing issue has thus become a matter of creating safe spaces for knowledge holders and knowledge sharing – a matter of decolonizing the UNFCCC's knowledge sharing spaces. As one member of the FWG pressed:

how do we create a space for our knowledge holders in a space that is not ours? ... how do we make sure that when we enter these relations with TEC [or others] we are entering into shared spaces with understanding?

(Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG9, 3 June 2023)

The extent to which safe and decolonial possibilities exist within the UNFCCC remains in question, yet LCIPP's FWG members and the broader transnational Indigenous movement continue to push through the dominant structure in strategic ways towards realizing a vision of climate decoloniality and Indigenous futurity.

Decolonizing Global Climate Governance

When this Platform was established and the FWG provided the leadership, the larger aspiration was to transform the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and different actors – the state, development actors.

(Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG9, 2 June 2023)

Despite being a technical body under the UNFCCC, LCIPP must be understood in relation to the broader transnational Indigenous political movement – the “subtle revolution” (Lightfoot 2016) – of which many (if not all) of the Platform's Indigenous members are a part. Anishinaabe scholar, Sheryl Lightfoot, argues that the global Indigenous political movement is simultaneously a destabilizing and transformative force in global politics: it unabashedly reveals and confronts colonial structures in the current world order. This subtle revolution, therefore, not only de-settles dominant colonial structures, but importantly offers a transformative vision for alternative global political relations grounded in what Lightfoot calls, “transnational Indigenous ways of being” (Lightfoot 2016, p. 88).

Within this broader context, LCIPP is not only serving the functions that the UNFCCC crafted, but it is also de-settling the dominant colonial order, creating new spaces in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies organize, “hold the line”, and prevent “backsliding” on the centuries of Indigenous rights advancements that have already been hard fought and won (Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG9, May–June 2023). Indigenous remarks made at UNFCCC events that “we are on enemy grounds” and “we need policy warriors” speak directly to the subtle revolution for radical change that is at play within the UNFCCC (Fieldnotes, LCIPP FWG9, 1 June 2023). As an Indigenous participant at the FWG9 meeting put it, “[w]e are often not invited to be part of the solution making, but we are here to ensure the climate fixes don't further harm our communities ... and to protect lands and waters” (Interview #5, FWG9, June 2023).

Like Sultana (2022b) and Escobar (1998) state elsewhere, concurrent within the elite UN network are also subaltern movements. In this climate frontier space, members and activists among the Platform, and the allied transnational Indigenous movement, are tied up in the experiment for an otherwise, creating spaces for climate decoloniality where Indigenous nationhood, knowledges, spirituality, ethics, protocols, and worldviews may enter with affect/effect in the governance of climate futures.

As decolonial theory suggests, “the action, labor, struggle, and toil of decolonizing [...] continues *within* the cracks, margins, and borders of the dominant order” (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, p. 100). Decolonial labor is “the continuous work to

plant and grow an otherwise” despite modern/colonial/capitalist/heteropatriarchal dominance (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, p. 101). In this way, I suggest that LCIPP is enrolled in not only actively resisting the colonality of power within the global dominant order, but is also forging decolonial possibilities and ethical global political relations otherwise.

Conclusion

While the academy has many theories of colonization and colonialism(s), this chapter strives to ground abstract notions of “coloniality” in Indigenous critique and experiences within a particular time and space–place. This place-*ing* of coloniality within the site of the UNFCCC’s Local Communities and Indigenous People’s Platform allows for more deeply understanding and confronting the enactments and effects of climate coloniality beyond the local and land-based territories of which it is most often associated. As this ethnographic analysis illustrates, the relational production of space and knowledge emerge as two critical arenas in which the colonality of power is currently enacted, and simultaneously productive arenas for decolonial possibilities within global climate governance.

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