



# Indigenous Philosophies and the "Psychedelic Renaissance"

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## ABSTRACT

*The Western world is experiencing a resurgence of interest in the therapeutic potential of psychedelics, most of which are derived from plants or fungi with*

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*a history of Indigenous ceremonial use. Recent research has revealed that psychedelic compounds have the potential to address treatment-resistant depression and anxiety, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder and addictions. These findings have contributed to the decriminalization of psychedelics in some jurisdictions and their legalization in others. Despite psychedelics' opaque legal status, numerous companies and individuals are profiting from speculative investments with few, if any, benefits accruing to Indigenous Peoples. In this paper, we suggest that the aptly named "psychedelic renaissance," like the European Renaissance, is made possible by colonial extractivism. We further suggest that Indigenous philosophical traditions offer alternative approaches to reorient the "psychedelic renaissance" towards a more equitable future for Indigenous Peoples, psychedelic medicines, and all our relations.*

KEYWORDS: Indigenous philosophy, ontology, psychedelics, territory, relationality



The Western world is experiencing a resurgence of interest in the therapeutic potential of psychedelics, in part due to a loosening of legal restrictions on clinical research with these compounds (Sessa 2012). Researchers, spiritual seekers, wellness enthusiasts, and recreational users source psychedelics primarily from plants and fungi that have a history of Indigenous use (Dobkin de Rios 1972; La Barre 1989; Wasson 1980). This increased research attention has resulted in some significant findings related to the efficacy of psychedelics in addressing treatment-resistant depression and anxiety, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder and addictions (Lowe et al. 2021; Thomas et al. 2013). These developments, along with the increased numbers of Westerners participating in ayahuasca tourism (Fotiou 2016), and the non-fiction writings of journalist Michael Pollan (2019, 2021), whose works lend an air of middle-class respectability to what was previously a taboo subject, have all contributed to the mainstream popularization of psychedelics.

The legacy of R. Gordon Wasson, Wall Street banker and amateur ethnomycologist, casts a long shadow on the "psychedelic renaissance" narrative. Wasson "discovered" the sacramental use of psychoactive mushrooms in the genus *Psilocybe* in Huautla de Jiménez, an Indigenous Mazatec village in Mexico's Sierra Mazateca, in 1955 (Riedlinger 2005). An article based on Wasson's experience, published in LIFE magazine in 1957, captured the imagination of the West and led to waves of spiritual seekers, hedonists, scholars, and others descending on the small village of Huautla for decades since (Riedlinger 2005). The aforementioned "mushroom tourists" left an indelible mark on Huautla, the ceremonial activities associated with the sacred mushrooms, and Mazatec society more broadly (Feinberg 2003).

Wasson's primary respondent—Mazatec traditional healer Maria Sabina—specifically asked Wasson not to reveal her name or photographs of the *velada*, or sacred mushroom healing session, that she graciously invited him to attend. Wasson betrayed Sabina's confidence to his benefit and her detriment. Police harassed and jailed Maria Sabina, as well as burned her house down, and she later died in penury (Gerber et al. 2021; Lutkajtis 2020). Over half a century later, Indigenous Peoples remain, at best, a symbolic representation of the spiritual legitimacy of psychedelics and, at worst, casualties of Western colonial greed. Variations on the disruption caused by mushroom tourism in Huautla described here are also evident in the Amazon River basin regarding ayahuasca tourism and both peyote tourism and overharvesting in south Texas and northern Mexico (Fotiou 2016; Muneta 2020).

Numerous scholars and other writers have mobilized the term "renaissance" to describe the resurgence of mainstream interest in psychedelics (George et al. 2020; Kelly et al. 2019; Lu 2021; Sessa 2018; Witt 2018). A quick Google scholar search yielded 3,250 results for the search terms "psychedelic renaissance." While we appreciate the expansive connotations associated with this term—perhaps gesturing towards a flowering of learning across disciplines, much like the European Renaissance that the "psychedelic renaissance" invokes—we are concerned about the unexamined imperialist baggage that may accompany this particular endeavor. The European Renaissance did not simply coincide with the imperial expansionism associated with the Age of Exploration. In fact, the riches plundered from the so-called Third World and what are now the contemporary settler states of Canada, the United States, Mexico, New Zealand, and Australia fueled the creativity, learning, and economic growth associated with the European Renaissance (Mignolo 1992). By some estimates, the current market value of psilocybin alone is worth \$1.5 billion (Wooley 2020 in Gerber et al. 2021). According to Yakowicz (2021) in the magazine *Forbes*, psychedelic-assisted therapy to address treatment-resistant depression could yield an estimated \$10 billion in annual sales. At this point, the valuation of the psychedelics sector is contingent on legalization in many jurisdictions. Despite this, numerous companies and individuals are profiting from speculative investments with few, if any, benefits accruing to Indigenous Peoples. In this way, we see the "psychedelic renaissance" reproducing the imperialism that fueled its eponym, the European Renaissance. This paper presents our perspective on the "psychedelic renaissance," drawing on Indigenous philosophy, to offer an alternative approach to conceptualizing and equitably working with these sacred medicines and the Indigenous Peoples who have stewarded them for hundreds of years, if not millennia.



## THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN

The ontological turn is a retroactively applied term that scholars in the social sciences and humanities use to describe diverse, and often overlapping, philosophical critiques of the absolutism of Western conceptions of reality. The ontological turn has been productively taken up in various fields such as anthropology, archaeology, education, and science and technology studies (STS) (Daly et al. 2016; Zembylas 2017). Ethnographic work with Amazonian Indigenous Peoples in the 1980s and 1990s (Descola 1996; Viveiros de Castro 1998) recognized radical alterities at the ontological level among the Indigenous groups studied, which, bolstered by Deleuzian thought and Latour's Actor Network Theory, led to the rich theoretical proliferation associated with the ontological turn (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Latour 1993). Some noteworthy developments include the notion that forests think (Kohn 2013), that rivers are persons (Hutchinson 2014), and that plants are intelligent (Gagliano 2018; Kimmerer 2015; Marder 2013). Blaser (2014) identifies two primary manifestations of the ontological turn. He finds the first primarily in the geographic field and bases it on the profound implication of humans, non-humans, and "non-living" matter. Blaser finds the second manifestation emerged from ethnographic theory and he recognizes multiple ontologies, and therefore multiple realities, some of which feature a dynamic and animate world.

The ontological turn has revealed both overlaps and incompatibilities between Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and Western scientific knowledge (Ludwig & El-Hani 2020). For example, many biological identity categories are similar between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems (Berlin 1992). However, some biological identity categories are incompatible. For example, Western botanists recognize one species of ayahuasca vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi* (Griseb.) C.V. Morton) based on floral morphology, whereas Indigenous knowledge keepers recognize several kinds of ayahuasca vine, based on both plant morphology and the effects when people ingest the vine (Luna 2011). Some of the examples mentioned in the previous paragraph (e.g., thinking forests, rivers as people, and sentient plants) lie outside the scope of conventional Western science. Thinkers like Robin Wall Kimmerer, Eduardo Kohn, Monica Gagliano, and Michael Marder challenge the hegemony of the dominant Western paradigm that has limited our ability to perceive the multiple and diverse entanglements with the more-than-human.

In this paper, we apply the ontological turn to the so-called "psychedelic renaissance" from an Indigenous ontological perspective to trouble the myriad ways in which people and societies construct psychedelics according to the dominant Western paradigm. The acknowledgement of ontological

pluralism is not only a theoretical or speculative issue, but it also has several social consequences, especially regarding the implementation of legal pluralism, which encompasses sensitive issues such as Indigenous intellectual property rights and patents in the "psychedelic renaissance" (McGonigle 2016).

The main objective of legal pluralism is to guarantee the right to self-determination and dignity for individuals and communities. "Beyond the accumulation of wealth, the protection of Indigenous cultures through collective property rights has to be guided by similar criteria of the blossoming of peoples" (Wiessner 2011, 129). Indeed, collective notions of custodianship and the obligation to look after land are central features of First Peoples Law in Australia (Graham 1999). The unfolding of a global psychedelic marketplace directly violates such legal pluralism and thus the "blossoming of peoples" (Wiessner 2011, 129).

Since pre-colonial times, Indigenous peoples from Turtle Island to Abya Yala have considered sacred and visionary plants as living beings, with which it is possible to communicate through ritual and ceremonial languages, and according to Indigenous ontologies, these sacred plants are not isolated from the territory. In other words, it is necessary to take into account the sacred landscape and territory as a whole.

For example, based on the ontology of the Indigenous Peoples, mushrooms are not to be considered a drug or psychoactive substance but rather as sacred beings or entities with whom we can establish reciprocal relationships (Estrada 2005). It is also worth mentioning that mushrooms are not detached from the territory. They are an integral part of the sacred landscape. Finally, it is worth noting that psilocybin mushrooms allow communication with ancestors and other supernatural or more-than-human (MTH) beings such as the guardians of hills, caves, springs, or forests.



#### TERRITORY, THE FOUNDATION OF INDIGENOUS ONTOLOGIES

Osage scholar Robert Warrior (1999) provocatively identifies *topos* (territory or place) as foundational to Indigenous ways of knowing in contrast to *logos* (discourse or the word), which underpins Western philosophy. Bob Antone (2013) as well as Vine Deloria, Jr. and Daniel Wildcat (2001) further establish the importance of territory to Indigenous thought in identifying place as the fulcrum around which human, living, and non-living elements relate to each other. Deloria and Wildcat (2001, 23) summarize this understanding with the formula "power and place produce personality." We see this formula as intergenerational and epigenetic in that past, present, and future interactions with all our relations comprise the personalities associated with place.

Among the Western Apache, place anchors morally instructive traditional teachings (Basso 1996). Related to Keith Basso's work, linguist Andrew Cowell (2018) describes how the Northern Arapaho recognize and mobilize MTH power from sacred landscapes. Cowell's work among the Northern Arapaho led to the understanding that

*a person is sacred and powerful because that person literally has within them—or has access to—power derived either from the natural world or from ancestors—both of whom mediate the general MTH power of the creator, which is immanent in the world (9).*

In the Haudenosaunee world, MTH power manifests as *kasasten'sera* which translates as strength or power (Akwesasne Notes 2005). Oneida elder Bob Antone describes *kasasten'sera* as the power of the collective, and the strength that comes from thought and action unified with all of creation and the cycles of life (Antone 2013). Haudenosaunee traditional teachings maintain that children are formed from clay and that "we should walk gently upon the Earth, for we are treading on the faces of our own unborn generations" (Haudenosaunee Confederacy 2020, n.p.). Vine Deloria Jr. (1994) and Winona LaDuke (2002) both describe land as the ontological framework for understanding the interdependence and interbeing between animate and inanimate life. Glen Coulthard (2010, 81) sees "land-as-identity, as constitutive of who we are as a people; and land-as relationship." The centrality of territory to Indigenous thought is also emphasized by Sheridan and Longboat (2006) who specify that imagination is not an abstract concept but rather emerges from, and is inextricably connected to, place.

The place-based ontological immanence associated with Indigenous thought represents a profound challenge to the transcendence that seems to commonly frame the psychedelic experience in Western culture (Partridge 2018; Pollan 2019; Yaden & Newburgh 2014).

The right to land is one issue that requires special attention because of its cultural implications, including recognizing the "spiritual" relationship between Indigenous communities with the land (González Romero 2021, 134-138). However, Indigenous concepts of territory also recognize systems of land possession and ownership other than the prevailing hegemonic paradigm in consumer societies.



#### RELATIONALITY INHERENT IN A TERRITORIAL ONTOLOGY

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2017, 71) notes that, "relationality forms the conditions of possibility for coming to know and producing knowledge through

research in a given time, place, and land." Relationality is variously conceived of in ontological terms (Blaser 2009; Reddekop 2014), as an epistemology and methodology (Kovach 2010), and as an ethical approach to existence (Donald 2010, as cited in Todd 2015). A relational ontology views creation as consisting of a network of reciprocal relationships in which the human, non-human, and non-living play an important role in maintaining the cosmic balance (Blaser 2009). For Margaret Kovach (2010), Indigenous epistemologies are inherently based on "self in relation" (36) and "the interconnection between all entities" (37). Indigenous relational epistemologies inform the shape and content of Indigenous methodologies, particular to place (Kovach 2010). Dwayne Donald (2010, as cited in Todd 2015, 249) describes ethical relationality as an imperative to recognize our mutual entanglement, for example the fraught relationship between Indigenous Peoples and settlers on Turtle Island, and that we must "constantly think and act with reference to those relationships." Each of the above cited researchers elucidates an aspect of relationality, but all are limited by an apparent desire to translate Indigenous epistemes into the categories reified by modern Eurocentric philosophy, namely ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology (Langenbach et al. 1994) as well as subject-object, self-other, and human-nature.

Recognizing the sentience and agency of the non-human is central to Indigenous notions of relationality (Deloria & Wildcat 2001). The Haudenosaunee recognize the Three Sisters (corn, beans, and squash), otherwise known as our sustainers or *Tionhéhkwen* in Mohawk as agentic and as having personality, as revealed by a number of traditional stories in which one or more of the Three Sisters figure as animate persons (Williams & Brant 2021; Cornelius 1999). A number of Pacific Northwest Indigenous Peoples recognize plant and mushroom personhood. For example, the Ts'msyen depict Devil's-club (*Oplopanax horridus* (Sm.) Miq.) as a beautiful young woman who teaches an unlucky hunter how to improve his success by using devil's-club for purification purposes (Cove & MacDonald 1987). A personified polypore, most likely *Ganoderma applanatum* Pers. (Pat.), is central to the Haida teaching that describes the origin of women. According to the story, originally told by John Sky to anthropologist John Swanton, Raven sets out in a canoe to collect female genitalia—which just happened to be climbing all over each other on a certain reef. Raven invites Junco, Steller's Jay, and Tree Fungus Man to crew his boat. Of the four crew members, only Tree Fungus Man could withstand the overwhelming power of the genitalia, allowing the crew to collect the female genitalia, which were then carried back to land and stuck onto Raven's wife and sister, creating the first women (Turner 2014).

Luis Eduardo Luna (1984) relates several stories about "plant teachers" from Indigenous and Mestizo peoples of the Amazon River basin, such as

those plants used to make the ayahuasca beverage (*Banisteriopsis caapi* (Grisb.) C.V. Morton and *Psychotria viridis* Ruiz and Pav.), tobacco (*Nicotiana spp.*), several members of the Solanaceae and Apocynaceae, and many more. These plants teach the traditional healer how to diagnose and cure disease, how to use other medicinal plants, and how to perform specific divinatory and ceremonial activities.

In Mexico the nomenclature associated with psychoactive mushrooms in the genus *Psilocybe* suggests a recognition of their personhood. *Psilocybe aztecorum* Heim is known in Nahuatl as *apipiltzin*, which translates as "rain-water child" (Guzmán 1978). The Matlazincas refer to *Psilocybe muliericula* Singer & A.H. Sm. and *P. sanctorum* Guzmán as santitos in Spanish, or "little saints" (Guzmán 2008). The Nahua people of Necaxa in Puebla refer to *Psilocybe mexicana* Heim and *Psilocybe caerulescens* Murrill as teotlaquilnanacátl, which translates as "sacred mushroom that paints or describes" (Guzmán 2008, 409). Also, the land is called *tlalli* in Nahuatl language, and villagers consider it to be literally alive. The people say that the soil is the earth's flesh, the stones its bones, and the water its blood (Sandstrom 1991). Maria Sabina, the curandera who was R. Gordon Wasson's primary respondent, referred to the sacred mushrooms as *niños santos* or the saint children (Estrada 1989).

For the Wixárika (Huichol) of northern Mexico, hikuri, or the peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*) is one of a trinity of beings anchoring the ceremonial life and the material and spiritual well-being of the Wixárika. For the Wixárika, deer-maize-hikuri are one, and they are one with the Wixárika as well (Myerhoff 1970). This dynamic relational entanglement also involves Wirikuta—the sacred desert where since time immemorial, ceremonial pilgrims have harvested the cactus (Reyna 2017). Sacred places, such as Wirikuta where Wixárika harvest hikuri, are imbued with MTH power that pilgrims can access (MacLean 2012; Reyna 2017).

The place-based relational ontology implicit in these stories and names as well as traditional views of plant agency offer a radically alternative view of who counts as "persons" and reflects a sophisticated understanding of the profound interdependence, and in some cases an ontological indistinguishability, between the elements of our natural environment.



#### LANGUAGE AND LAND

Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (2000) explains that, in Indigenous thought, intelligence and creativity are not the exclusive domains of humankind, but rather these qualities are in plants, animals, microorganisms as well as entities that Western sciences considers "inanimate" such as mountains, rivers, and



other places. According to Cajete, "everything in nature has something to teach humans" (21) and that "relationships and renewable alliances take the place of fixed laws" (Peat 1994, as cited in Cajete 2000, 68). In the same text, Cajete discusses the use of hikuri (peyote, *Lophophora williamsii*) by the Wixárika (Huichol) people of northern Mexico to "re-establish primal connections and orientations that must be learned generation after generation" (80). These renewable alliances are with place, as well as with maize, deer, hikuri, and the ancestors (MacLean 2012). Betty Bastien, Blackfoot elder, shares that "all knowledge and wisdom comes through alliances with insects, animals and plants" (Bastien 2004, as cited in Cowell 2018, 10). Cowell (2018) extends this formulation, based on his work with the northern Arapaho, to include land and ceremony. Cowell further suggests that MTH power, derived from place and mediated by language, is the basis of all social relationships. Keith Basso's (1996) work among the western Apache offers illustrative examples of this land-language-relationality nexus. Basso describes how language index to place ("speaking with names") draws on place-based morally instructive stories and the spirits of "unseen Apache ancestors" (81) to support social cohesion.

Henry Munn (1973), in an underappreciated essay titled *The Mushrooms of Language*, describes how Mazatec traditional healers, known as men and women "of language" (88) mobilize MTH power as part of their practice. Munn quotes a curandera, or medicine woman, who refers to the sacred *Psilocybe* mushrooms as "the doctor that is here in our earth. The plant that grows in this place" (99). Munn draws on the words of another traditional healer who "names the towns of his mountainous environment, to call the landscape into being by language" (107). The profound relationship between the bemushroomed curandera or curandero and the land is suggested by the following invocation "I am he who speaks with the mountains, with the largest mountains. Speaks with the mountain, says. Speaks with the stones, says. Speaks with the atmosphere, says. Speaks with the spirit of the day" (111). Mazatec shamans consume psychoactive mushrooms as part of their healing rituals to access MTH power inherent in the landscape, particularly the mountains (Munn 1973).

This cultural feature extends its roots to Mesoamerican tradition; for example, it is possible to find iconographical evidence in some Aztec, Mixtec, and Mayan ancient manuscripts, or codices such as Boturini Codex (González Romero 2021). Furthermore, contemporary sacred narratives among the Nahua people state that the sacred entity who lives in the mountain is the one who teaches wise people (*tlatmatque*), but also can communicate with other mountains and human beings. The mountains were, and in some cases still are, considered as sources of wisdom.

Sheridan and Longboat (2006) describe land as both having mind and as being psychoactive. For the Haudenosaunee, our traditional territory "possesses sentience that is manifest in the consciousness of that territory, and that same consciousness is formalized in and as Haudenosaunee consciousness. Of course, other beings manifest that consciousness in their literature of tracks, chirrups, and loon calls" (Sheridan and Longboat 2006, 366). The Haudenosaunee achieve congruence between mind and territory by recognizing and honoring all our relations such as the medicine plants, the waters, the Three Sisters, and the land herself. In the same paper, Sheridan and Longboat draw on a Haudenosaunee prophecy to eloquently describe the existential risks associated with humanity's estrangement from territory:

*When the animistic possibilities of human thought exiled themselves within profligate farm acreages, the capacity to think with the aid of spiritual animal powers increasingly became dormant while the animals began to spend more time watching us than we did watching them. Among the Haudenosaunee especially this is a dark period for it marks an era that prophecy explains by warning that forgetting the animals leads to the animals forgetting about us. This is what it means to be unguided by, and disconnected from, this continent. The settler's condition. (377)*

While it is explicitly about animals and humans, we can extend this Haudenosaunee prophecy to all our relations, including sacred plant medicines. The only way to achieve an authentic continental citizenship here on Turtle Island—or anywhere else on Mother Earth—is by engaging with the personhood, through MTH power, of all our relations including sacred plant and fungal medicines.

One need not even actively imbibe psychedelic plants, compounds, or fungi to be aware of their MTH vibrancies and agential possibilities. The psychogenic trip, or more colloquially, the "contact high" (Shulgin and Shulgin 1991) goes a long way in explaining the immanence of plants interacting with human/animal nervous systems. New Materialist thought on vibrant materiality offers some ontological way in, in particular Bennett's notion about "the capacity of things, edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (2010, viii). The extraction of knowledge from transcendent realms accessed by vegetal chariot is beside the point, when far more holistic and respectful plant/human relations are possible.

■  
LAND BACK, PSYCHEDELICS, AND DECOLONIAL FUTURES

The Catholic Church's Doctrine of Discovery decreed that colonialists could take over any *terra nullius*, or land where no Christians lived, and subjugate its occupants (Reid 2010). The Doctrine of Discovery granted the Church comprehensive jurisdiction over Indigenous lands and lives and laid the foundation for centuries of genocide starting with Columbus' conquest of Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and then Mexico, followed by the rest of the Americas (Pieratos et al. 2021). Colonizers also used the discovery doctrine to justify the colonization of Australia and New Zealand and subjugation of its peoples (Watson 2011). In fact, it is not just a historical decree, as Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg cited it in 2005, against tribal sovereignty for the Oneida nation (Pieratos et al. 2021).

The Doctrine of Discovery also justified the forced removal of Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island. The most infamous of these removal campaigns resulted from the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which led to in the infamous Trail of Tears, or the forced relocation of 46,000 Indigenous Peoples from their homelands in the U.S. south to federal territory west of the Mississippi which yielded 25 million acres of land for settler occupation (Tuck and Yang 2012; Nelson 2017). Other harmful legislation predicated on the Doctrine of Discovery includes the Canadian Indian Act of 1876, which included provisions for the establishment of reserve lands (equivalent to United States reservation lands) for habitation and use by Indigenous peoples (Culhane 1998; McMillan 1995). In the United States, the Royal Proclamation of 1763, and the Non-intercourse Act of 1834 led to the development of the reservation system (Charlton 2019; Shoemaker 2020). The Indian Termination Act of 1953 sought to dismantle the Indigenous tribes and relocate all of the Indigenous people from tribal lands and immerse them completely in mainstream urban America, under the false pretense of increased economic security (Haider and Teodoro 2021; Tuck and Yang 2012).

Governmental jurisdiction over Indigenous lands has also led to numerous examples of colonial extraction—of hydroelectric energy, minerals, timber, and petrochemicals—that disregards Indigenous rights (Kidd 2020; Willow 2016). According to Willow (2016, 2), extraction is both a both a "political and environmental project" in that, "natural resources become vehicles for increasing personal wealth without regard for the potential cost to others." Liffman (2011) details the various extractive developments that have displaced the Wixárika (Huicholes) from their territories in northern Mexico since the colonial period including mining, agriculture, highway construction, and hydroelectric projects. The most recent threat is posed by a Canadian mining company, Vancouver-based First Majestic Silver Corporation. First Majestic

purchased the mineral rights to twenty-two mining concessions in the Real de Catorce desert (comprising 15,000 acres of land), seventy percent of which is in Wirikuta—the location of the Wixárika's annual sacred pilgrimage to harvest hikuri—including up to the edge of a sacred site Reu'unaxi (Hollander 2017; Liffman 2011;). Although grassroots activism has temporarily delayed silver mining in Wirikuta, the concessions are still owned by First Majestic and the threat to hikuri and to Wixárika spiritual sovereignty remains (Liffman 2017; Luce 2020).

Decolonizing psychedelics in Mexico implies a historical analysis of the paradoxes embedded in the contemporary "War on Drugs" and the "psychedelic renaissance." This analysis provides a better understanding of the implementation of the politics of punishment and the cultural phenomena associated with psychedelics and neocolonialism, such as biopiracy, cultural appropriation, and lack of recognition of Indigenous Knowledge.

Scholars such as Dev (2018), Fotiou (2020), and Falcon (2021a, 2021b) call for decolonizing psychedelics. For Fotiou (2020, 20), this means "allowing multiple perspectives to coexist and contribute equally to our efforts going forward." Falcon (2021a, 2021b) proposes that psychedelics can help to decolonize our consciousness to shift away from harmful and entrenched Western epistemes. Laura Dev (2018) recommends the use of Indigenous methodologies and multi-species ethnographic approaches in psychedelics research. While these ideas are all worthy of attention, we follow Tuck and Yang (2012) to advocate for a focus on the material dimensions of coloniality. Settlers and other allies in the psychedelic sphere must leverage their privilege to support the return of stolen Indigenous lands. As discussed earlier in this article, land is the source of Indigenous philosophy and identity (Sheridan and Longboat 2006). Non-Indigenous peoples' desire to decolonize their minds cannot happen here on Turtle Island or anywhere on Mother Earth unless they rectify the ongoing injustices against Indigenous Peoples and work as allies to restore Indigenous knowledge systems that have evolved in place. In short, efforts at decolonization and equitable engagement with Indigenous Peoples must first involve *giving the land back*.

Fortunately for all of us with an interest in psychedelics, there is an existing movement to help give the land back. The Indigenous-led Land Back movement can trace its genealogical roots back in time, arguably as far back as 1492 when the Taino caciques or chiefs organized to fight Columbus and his conquistadors (Beckles 1992). In Mexico, since 1994, the Maya communities in Chiapas gathered together in the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Zapatista Army) and fought successfully to recover a vast territory occupied by settlers since colonial times. Since then, they have organized self-government and autonomy in their territories.

Most recently, the Land Back movement was galvanized in the United States in 2020 at a protest against unfulfilled treaty obligations in South Dakota in which Indigenous activists demanded a return of the Black Hills to their original inhabitants. The Land Back discourse is also addressing the Keystone XL pipeline, the thirty-meter telescope at Mauna Kea, and the construction of former President Trump's border wall (Pieratos et al. 2021). As Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2017, 13) points out "reconciliation that rearranges political orders, reforms legalities and promotes economics is still colonial unless and until it centres our (Indigenous) relationship to the land."



## CONCLUSION

A refocusing on Indigenous ontologies as the register for engagement with radical alterity in the psychedelic sphere evades the problem associated with contemporary identity politics, which treats difference as merely cultural. As Mario Blaser (2014, 52) suggests, "when we treat difference as cultural, we are sneaking up and advancing a particular ontology, which does not do justice to the ontological difference that might be at stake." In this paper, we advocate for taking Indigenous philosophies and the aspirations and agency of Indigenous Peoples seriously. To that end, we offer the following suggestions to help those working with psychedelics to reorient their approach to include Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous Peoples.

- 1 Please slow down and take the time to consider our relationships with plant and fungi medicines deeply. Australian Indigenous knowledge keeper, Tyson Yunkaporta, and Murruwarri Elder, Doris Shillingsworth, suggest protocols for being relationally responsive. In an email to one of the authors on Wednesday June 23, 2021, Yunkaporta outlined a psychedelic protocol: "Before you trip, some information... There is a simple process for your practice that comes from Doris Shillingsworth... It's the order in which you do things properly. Respect, connect, reflect, direct. It's a protocol for how you come into relation with a place or any kind of relationship you want to form." The non-Indigenous mainstream needs to reorient its approach to sacred medicines. If the so-called "psychedelic renaissance" unfolds like everything else does in this neoliberal extractive capitalist environment, individuals, families, communities, and even the planet will miss opportunities for healing. We suggest that those involved in psychedelic work take time to consider and reorient our relationships with these beings, the sacred medicines that offer us so much. This reorientation could lead to more respectful and reciprocal relationships with each other and the

MTH, including place. The acknowledgment of the ontological turn could be helpful to achieve a better understanding of the interconnectedness between human beings and the rest of the natural world. The current trend towards legitimizing psychedelics could be a watershed moment for the mainstream's relationship with psychedelic plants and fungi and the MTH.

- 2 Engage Indigenous intellectuals and spiritual leaders regarding key issues in the psychedelic sphere. From our experience, each Indigenous nation or confederacy has land-based intellectuals and spiritual leaders. These people are not necessarily university academics, but Indigenous knowledge keepers and elders have educated them in Indigenous thought. Inviting Indigenous intellectuals and spiritual leaders to participate in an advisory capacity regarding current practice and the future of psychedelics will help governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to think through some of the pressing issues faced by the psychedelics community and society in general as psychedelics become more prevalent in mainstream Western culture.
- 3 Establish an Indigenous ethics watch organization. Multiple Indigenous ethics organizations exist already, such as the Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch based at Cape Breton University and the First Nations Information Governance Centre (Williams et al. 2020). These organizations deal primarily with government and university-based research that involves Indigenous Peoples or data. An Indigenous ethics watch organization for the psychedelic sphere—staffed by paid Indigenous specialists—could serve to ensure that plant medicines-related initiatives do not cause harm to Indigenous Peoples and that all aspects of any psychedelic plant project, from conception and implementation to project completion center Indigenous community needs and aspirations. From a philosophical approach, based on the ontological turn, Indigenous ethics enhance deeper connections and moral commitments between non-humans and humans to guide ethical forms of environmental decision-making and environmental science.
- 4 Establish a funding mechanism to support Indigenous aspirations, including Land Back and the facilitation of access to various opportunities afforded by legalization or decriminalization measures. Government and industry should use a percentage of revenue associated with the legalization of psychedelics to support Indigenous Peoples to address the systemic inequities associated with colonialism and to participate fully in the opportunities that legislation, such as Measure 109 in Oregon, which legalizes psilocybin (Tucker 2020), affords. As discussed in this article, land is foundational to Indigenous philosophy. Psychedelic organizations and individuals involved in psychedelics work can play a significant role in supporting the Land Back movement, which is the most direct, and some argue the

only, way to decolonize (Tuck and Yang 2012). This proposed fund could also support Indigenous participation in the "psychedelic renaissance," not as token symbols of ancient wisdom or construed as deficient peoples via damage-centered narratives (Suina 2017; Tuck 2009), but rather as crucial participants in a vital and dynamic revitalized psychedelic movement. Currently, some psychedelic enterprises have established foundations to support charities, which could include Indigenous organizations (Filament Health n.d.). While this is generous, it does not center Indigenous Knowledge or Indigenous Peoples in an equitable way. The Chacruna Institute of Psychedelic Plant Medicine established the Indigenous Reciprocity Initiative of the Americas (IRI) to support and promote Indigenous-led organizations by connecting donors with these organizations to support and promote their work (Chacruna n.d.). Chacruna's work in this regard is much closer to our recommendation here, but it is unclear the extent to which the IRI is Indigenous-run and Indigenous-governed. This proposed funding mechanism, like our suggestion for an Indigenous ethics organization dealing with sacred plant medicines, must be Indigenous run and must fairly compensate those administering the fund.

- 5 To avoid biocolonialism in the "psychedelic renaissance," it is necessary to reframe and discuss, from a cross-cultural approach, the international intellectual property rights (IPR) regarding Indigenous knowledge (IK) on psychedelic plants and fungi, recognizing the local expressions of property. For-profit pharmaceutical companies can also provide medical supplies for Indigenous Peoples, fund and support education programs for the communities, and share the profits of successful health treatments approved for commercial purposes (McGonigle 2016). Legal pluralism is crucial to achieving fair agreements that go beyond the Western legal conceptual framework. One example is the establishment of special courts that would consider Indigenous claims on their own terms. In order to be successful, recognizing Indigenous ontologies is the first step. For this reason, the goal of this paper is to disseminate Indigenous philosophy and ways of knowing to a larger audience.

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