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# Anti-colonial orientations to place: Unsettling encounters with South African educational landscapes


## Abstract

The authors bring together decolonial, place attuned and critical posthumanist orientations to analyze an event during a residential workshop organized as part of a state-funded research project on decolonizing early childhood discourses in South Africa. An invitation during the workshop to grapple with what might be unsettling by attending to the agency of the more-than-human world *and* its entanglement with unequal human geographies of place, generated a diffractive photographic image and unsettling stories as a group of early childhood teachers and educational researchers kept re-turning to the data. Working with Barad's methodology of temporal diffraction as apparatus, we discursively and visually trace entanglements that emerged from this data. We conclude on the mattering of this work for engaging with the potentials and tensions of attending to the more-than-human within highly asymmetrical human relations in the settler colonial context of South African education.


## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to engage with the potentials and tensions of attending to the more-than-human within highly asymmetrical human relations in the colonial context of South Africa. Our specific focus is on what emerged when a group of early childhood teachers and educational researchers engaged in a workshop on decolonial orientations to land. The workshop was part of a 3-day residential that took place in the Western Cape, South Africa, as part of a state-funded research project on decolonizing early childhood discourses. The theoretical framing of the workshop brought together perspectives from Indigenous relational

ontologies (Le Grange, 2012; Mbiti, 1969; Todd, 2016; Tallbear, 2015), critical posthumanism (Barad, 2018; Braidotti, 2018; Murris, 2016), and critical feminist geographies (Latty et al, 2016; Jackson, 2015; Yusoff, 2018) to foreground the ways in which the more-than-human, is always already entangled in emplaced racialized and colonial human inequities. Brought to the context of decolonizing education, these critical perspectives were engaged as a provocation to consider the ways in which education requires ongoing efforts to interrupt simplifications, erasures and omissions of place (Nxumalo, 2016; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015).

The workshop was constructed as an invitation to participants to grapple with what might be unsettled by attending to the agency of more-than-human worlds *and* their entanglements with unequal human geographies of place. More specifically, the workshop was intended to open up considerations of what it might mean and look like pedagogically, to decentre the human by recognizing the agency of the more-than-human, while simultaneously interrogating ongoing settler colonialism, and its ongoing processes of dehumanization and dispossession in particular places and spaces (Nxumalo, 2016; Nxumalo et al., 2020; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017; Rowan, 2016). Participants were invited to walk the land surrounding the workshop venue, take a photographic image and then use that image as a writing inspiration alongside specific questions intended to provoke thought towards the intents of the workshop.

In this paper we focus on two of the questions that participants engaged with: *What and whose presences are made visible in this place? What might decolonial, situated, and non-human centered engagements with place look like?* We discuss the particular significance of one affective and affecting story that resonated with these propositions and highlight the

complexities of decentering the human within educational places haunted by pastpresent settler colonialism and its accompanying racisms.

**The workshop: 'Decolonial orientations to writing place'**

The workshop that generated the data for this paper was part of an event organized by the Decolonizing Early Childhood: Critical Posthumanism in Higher Education Project (DECD).[1] Its transdisciplinary research helps identify and expose age-discrimination and is interested in making visible possibilities for disrupting institutional policies and practices that reproduce power relations connected to children and childhood based on historical privilege, colonialism and apartheid[2].

One of the DECD project activities in 2018 was a three-day residential at a popular conference center near Stellenbosch in the Western Cape, not far from the University of Cape Town. It was the third time we had used this venue for the project, but it was the first time, *the venue itself* (the place) became the subject of our collaborative enquiries about decolonizing education.

One of the co-authors, Fikile, has been invited as the residential visiting scholar that year. She facilitates a writing workshop entitled 'Decolonial orientations to writing place'. Fikile suggests we take a walk nearby and search for evidence of Indigenous, settler and immigrant presences. The questions she asks as provocations to the participants to attend critically to place include: *"How are marginalized (Indigenous) presences made visible in this place? What might decolonial, non-human centred place-attuned writing look like?"*. Some possibilities are mentioned: signs, sculptures, artwork, monuments, buildings, waterways, a tree, an animal. In other words, she stresses to attend not only to the human, but also the

more-than-human storying of places. The task is presented as follows:

> Select one subject/site (for example one that connects to Indigenous presences).
> Take a photo if you can and then practice writing a responsive, creative, detailed and descriptive piece about this site paying attention to the writing propositions we discussed, noting why you selected a particular site. While you may not know the specific past-present histories of the site you have chosen, your writing can pose questions/wonderings/imaginings about and (re)story the site.
> Experiment with non-anthropocentric modes of writing that also do not erase or universalize the human (adapted from Rowan, 2016).

Some of the thirteen project members split up into smaller groups of two or three, while others walk on their own. After thirty minutes we return with our photographic images to our meeting room for us to do the experimental writing. Fikile proposes the following "writing propositions" to guide our writing:

- De-romanticizing 'nature' by attending to anthropogenically (human-caused) 'damaged places'
- Paying attention to the ways in which the more-than-human world actively 'stories' places
- Restorying places; paying attention to, presencing marginalized (such as Indigenous, Immigrant) place stories.
- Paying attention to uneven/inequitable human geographies of place
- Paying attention to the affects/embodied emotions evoked by a place

- Making connections with childhood education – possibilities for relating to places with young students in ways that decenter the image of the individual, developing child that is separate from nature

**Re-calling the event I.**

Several weeks after the workshop, two co-authors, Sumaya and Sieraaj re-turn to what Fikile's workshop provoked for them; paying attention to "intensities, reverberations, passion, fragments and impressions" (Otterstad & Waterhouse, 2016, p. 740). Without assuming that memory gives access to a past (that never was) (Barad, 2007, 2017), Sumaya and Sieraaj meet up on-line and 'compost' the event (Haraway, 2016). Like "an earthworm" making compost, they turn "the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunnelling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it" (Barad, 2014, p.168). Below is the writing that emerged, as they re-called the event.

Taking up Fikile's suggestion, Sumaya and Sieraaj trickle out of the conference room with the other members of the project. They make a stop at the restrooms. The restrooms are at the bottom of a circular staircase in the basement of the building, positioned directly below the main conference room. It is a large space with a snooker table, extra pieces of (dusty) furniture and a wine cellar. There is also silence. Stillness. Musty smells. And dust particles that glitter in the streaks of afternoon sunlight.

Numerous yellowing and faded photographs hang along the circular walls. Dated and captioned, the photographs tell stories of dignitaries who have attended conferences, workshops and research seminars in this venue for many years. Individual photos re-cord the

successes of powerful and prominent (white, male) South African business leaders and politicians. The photographs capture the handshakes, moments of friendly bantering, and the physicality of seating arrangements amongst unexpected (political) leaders. The 'mood' is bright and chirpy.

But the captions of the photographs also convey the his-tories of the apartheid era in South Africa, a time of intense violence against people of color. Erasures of people of color are strongly evident in the photographs. With the exception of domestic employment, people of color were rarely permitted access, ownership or exploration of the land shown in the photographs; the setting of the workshop, now known as Mont Fleur. For Sieraaj, the beauty of the Mont Fleur Stellenbosch landscape, including the surrounding winelands, is in stark juxtaposition with the infertile lands that were purposefully allocated to people of color; lands that could not adequately sustain plant, animal or human life.

Staring at the smiling faces of the people in the photos, Sieraaj re-members the workshop activity. Re-membering the workshop becomes sedimented by the photographs, mustiness of the basement, the solitude of the space, and the unused furniture. This re-membering is entangled with power inequalities pertaining to land accessibility, and poverty. The materials of the here and now bleed into past, intertwining with the pastpresentfuture traumas. The materiality of basement-human bodymind entanglements generates affective responses. The affect is overpowering. There are no words spoken except an inaudible "Look" by Sumaya, gesturing to the photographs. This place is not neutral, and the material-discursive stories that are told through the photographic lens are not innocent.

Sieraaj sees the wine cellar in the basement. The cellar is a large indentation in the wall and is locked by an iron gate. Sieraaj and Sumaya joke about the irony of two Muslim members of the group finding the hiding place for the 'dop' (alcohol and spirits). Sieraaj's thoughts turn to the ongoing colonial injustices of the 'dop system' in the winelands of the Western Cape which dispenses alcohol to those who labor on the wine farms. The materiality of the basement, the photographs and wine cellar haunts. It tells of colonial markings on the land, markings which are inescapable.

**Diffracting through the 'dop system'**

Diffraction as methodology was suggested by Donna Haraway (1997) as an alternative to reflection and reflexivity and then taken forward by Karen Barad (2007). Barad (2007) refers to diffraction as a *physical phenomenon* which is part of wave behavior - whether it is light, water, or sound waves (Barad, 2007, p. 28). In combining, waves can be amplified by being superimposed upon one another. Barad uses this physical process of diffraction as a methodology which engages affirmatively with difference by reading the social sciences and natural sciences through one another. In this example, diffracting the materiality of Mont Fleur winelands through the dop system is an effort to bring attention to the material injustices of education in the Western Cape. This makes visible educational exclusions that might remain otherwise hidden, including the entanglements of these exclusions with the land.

As previously described, the conference venue, Mont Fleur (https://www.montfleur.co.za) is set in a valley of mountains surrounded by vineyards and wine farms in Stellenbosch. The dop system, known as *die dopstelsel* in Afrikaans, started with the arrival of Dutch colonialists in the 1600s in Cape Town who used slaves on their farms; extracting labor

through multiple violences, including the dop system. The earliest indication of the institutionalization of the *die dopstelsel* in the Western Cape came from a journal entry of Jan van Riebeeck, the first Dutch settler in the Cape, who had arrived in the Cape with slaves from Angola which read: "*To animate their lessons and to make them really hear Christian prayers, each slave should be given a glass of brandy and two inches of tobacco"* (van der Merwe, 2010, cited in Hoosain, 2014). Lasting for over 200 years, the dop system was incorporated into the wine farm working conditions of multiple generations following the abolition of slavery. While it was made illegal in 1960, the practice still continues at many Western Cape wine farms (Hodal, 2018). The resulting institutionalization and normalization of alcohol consumption as part of daily life has resulted in high levels of alcohol abuse and addiction such that the Western Cape currently has the highest levels of fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) in the world (info@FASfacts; Olivier, Curfs & Viljoen, 2016). The dop system remains a largely unacknowledged consequence of settler colonialism and slavery in South Africa and continues to impact children and families, including early childhood education experiences (Viljoen, et al., 2016).

**Recalling the Event II.**

Sieraaj and Sumaya try to open the cellar gate, but find it locked with the wine locked 'behind bars', like the holding cells that once housed their ancestors. Sieraaj asks a person who works at the conference center to open the cellar for them and to lend him a cigarette in order to pose for a photo that Sumaya takes (see center of Figure 1). Sieraaj would later explain to the workshop group the ancestral injustices he felt in that moment behind bars; injustices that seemed to traverse his bodymind, as if his ancestors' spirits behind the bars of the cellar recognized their fellow prisoner and called out to him.

Sieraaj and Sumaya refocus on the question Fikile posed as part of the workshop: *How are marginalized Indigenous presences made visible in this place?* They choose to respond to this question by attuning to human/more-than-human relations that generate stories of erasures, marginalization and colonial presences on the land. They do so by creating the image below, diffracting a previously taken photo of the Mont Fleur workshop site with the photo taken of Sieraaj in the wine cellar (Figure 1).

<<Insert Figure 1 here>>

Figure 1. Colonial erasures

Sieraaj and Sumaya never made it outside the building as proposed in the workshop prompts. Apartheid geopolitics permeates and expresses itself in, and through, porous human and more-than-human bodies, including buildings.

Methodologically speaking, rather than regarding this moving story as solely a description of the event from the perspective of the subjective experiences of two human subjects, Sieraaj and Sumaya - as is common in qualitative research (Le Grange, 2018) - we also acknowledge the role of the more-than-human (such as the camera, land, stairs, photos on the wall, the cellar 'prison-like' bars) with/in the event and the difference they make in terms of knowledge production and who and what is included below. Cognizant of the importance of disrupting damage-centered narratives (Tuck, 2009), we (Sieraaj, Sumaya, and the co-author fellow participants in the workshop event) think-with the visual assemblage generated in Figure 1 to help engage with two key questions posed in the workshop: *What and whose presences are made visible in this place? What might decolonial, situated, and non-anthropocentric engagements with place look like?* We also want to engage with the question

of why it matters for education to grapple with such questions.

One entry point into these questions, is through the diffractive (composting) methodology that we put to work in this paper. The use of verbs above such as 'remembering', 'recalling', 'reminding' might give an impression of a travelling back in time by the authors through the reflective analysis of 'the event'. Instead, we adopt a diffractive '*re*-turning' as our methodology by drawing on Barad's agential realism, which we now turn to.

Although poststructuralists, postmodernists, phenomenologists and others have also acknowledged the performative role of the knowing subject and language in descriptions of reality, critical posthuman scholars move beyond the human as source of knowledge construction (St Pierre, 2013). For posthumanist and quantum physicist Karen Barad (2017, pp. 23, 34), the image in Figure 1 is a configuration of *multiple temporalities* – a disruption of the idea that history unfolds causally and unilinearly between events that are located in homogenous, empty time. Hence, memory does not give unique access to the past by a knowing subject.

The theoretical framing of our paper invites a reconfiguration of who and what the human is, as well as their relationship to the world. Sieraaj, Sumaya and other humans are understood as not able to take a transcendental, detached point of view – a view from 'nowhere' in particular (Haraway, 1988, pp 575-599). But posthumanism does not only trouble a human-centric perspective of perception, it also moves away from human exceptionalism – the idea that only humans have intelligence. Drawing on Deleuze, Braidotti (2018, p.21) offers an alternative posthuman definition of the human or 'people' by including the more-than-human:

> non-human agents, technologically-mediated elements, earth-others (land, waters, plants, animals) and non-human inorganic agents (plastic, wires, information highways, algorithms etc.). A posthuman ethical praxis involves the formation of a new alliance, a new people.

The inclusion of the material, including the land, space and place, opens up rich pedagogical potential and also profound tensions. It makes it possible to pay attention to the more-than-human in ways that unsettle individualized human agency. Here it is important that we pause to attend to the question of why we are working with a posthumanist methodology in this context.

**Critical posthumanist perspectives, Indigenous knowledges, and Black feminist geographies**

Critical posthumanist perspectives, Indigenous knowledges, and Black feminist geographies, while all acting to disrupt colonial and racist nature/culture binaries, do so in different ways. These perspectives also diverge from each other. For example, several Black feminist scholars have pointed to how movements beyond the human in posthumanist scholarship can act to universalize and flatten the human; leaving unexamined the ways in which the category of the human continues to be shaped by anti-Blackness (King, 2017; Jackson, 2013, 2020). Similarly, Indigenous scholars point out that posthumanisms can enact erasures of the ways in which Indigenous ontologies have long recognized the agency of the more-than-human world and its inherent relationality with humans (Todd, 2016). In this paper we attempt to work with these perspectives together while staying with these tensions. For example, Fikile's workshop was framed by all of these perspectives which in turn was generative in how Sumaya and Sieraaj engaged with the question of land, place, Indigenous presences, and

the ways in which the Mont Fleur lands evoked for Sieraaj, pastpresent memories of dehumanization on these lands. We also work with a critical posthumanist tool of analysis (temporal diffraction) to help us stay with the question of how attention to the more-than-human in a particular place might also attend to the differentiation of the human.

In resonance with multiply situated Indigenous ontologies, critical posthumanism foregrounds the ways in which what it means to be human is always already entangled with the more-than-human (Tuck, 2015; Tallbear, 2015). The human of whatever age is not just social, but also material – what Haraway (2016, p. 58) calls an unbounded *sympoietic* system: complex, dynamic, responsive, situated and historical. Sympoiesis, Haraway (2016, p.58) explains "is a simple word; it means 'making-with'", a 'thinking-with' and implies that human and nonhuman bodies do not move between *points* in space and time, but are always 'on the move', dispersed and diffracted through time and being. The material-discursive entanglements of agencies and processes are already at work classifying what Braidotti (2018) calls the "missing people" of humanism. The missing people is an emerging category of people who are empirically missing from the official cartographies in the humanities: Indigenous peoples, "feminists, queers, otherwise enabled, non-humans or technologically-mediated existences" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 21). Braidotti's 'missing people' could and should also include children and post-age notions of the subject (Murris, 2016, 2018).

Critical posthuman perspectives, Black feminist geographies and Indigenous ontologies disrupt the representational logic that accompanies the binary separation of nature from culture. This logic assumes that there is a primary, original reality (nature) that can be discovered/uncovered and described accurately through language (culture). Together, these perspectives disrupt colonizing relationships with land by bringing attention to the injustices of colonialism, slavery and apartheid which perpetuate the nature/culture binary. The ontological separation between nature and culture is implicated in other oppressive binaries, including white/black (racism), boy/girl (sexism), adult/child (ageism), rich/poor (classism) and abled/disabled (ableism), which all continue to do damaging work in early childhood

education (Giorza, 2018; Murris, 2016, 2018; Nxumalo, 2016; Nxumalo and Cedillo, 2017; Rowan, 2016).

**Re-turning to the image and tracing multiple temporalities**

A key element in Barad's posthuman theory of agential realism is the concept *intra-action* (2007, 2013). Intra-action expresses mutual relationality: the idea that 'nature' and 'culture' are never 'pure', are never unaffected by each other, but are always in relation (Barad, 2007, p.152). This is resonant with multiply situated Indigenous ontologies of radical relationality with the more-than-human world (Kimmerer, 2002; Mbiti, 1969; Tallbear, 2015). Barad contrasts intra-action with 'interaction' where discrete entities pre-exist relationships and come together in relationships. Agential realism is anti-Cartesian. The latter assumes that the world consists of autonomous, intentional and rational human actors against the backdrop of the natural environment. For an agential realist, it is impossible to separate objects, events, beings, doings and becomings from their intra-actions with each other across space and time as phenomena. Individuals and entities cannot be separated through neat boundaries, as they do not exist ontologically as substances (Murris & Bozalek, 2019). Bodies (including human and more-than-human bodies) are unbounded quantum entanglements constituted by concepts *and* material forces, where the social, the political, the biological, and technological (e.g. Skype calls, camera) are interwoven and entwined. Intra-actions do not as such change from moment to moment, but "space, time and matter do not exist prior to the interactions that constitute entanglements" (Barad, 2007, p.33). The implications for the subjectivity of the researcher in re-counting their experiences is that

> There is no 'I' that exists outside of the diffraction pattern, observing it, telling its story. In an important sense, this story in its ongoing (re)patterning is (re)(con)figuring me. 'I' am neither outside nor inside; 'I' am *of* the diffraction pattern. Or rather, this 'I' that is not 'me' alone and never was, that is always already multiply dispersed and diffracted throughout spacetime (mattering)...in its ongoing being-becoming is *of* the diffraction pattern. (Barad, 2014, pp. 181,182)

Re-turning to the event and the image does not change 'the event', because it was never simply present to begin with, that is, no description can be a *representation* of what *really* happened. When 're-turning' or 're-membering' as researchers we are reflecting on the past, when '*re*-turning' we are diffracting, although as Barad points out: "...the mere mark of a hyphen [in re-turning], is an important reminder that reflection…and diffraction are not opposites", but overlapping optical intra-actions in practice (Barad, 2014, p.185 ftn2). The diffractive methodology is not only discursive, because the material *and* discursive are always entangled in intra-action as part of a relational ontology. In other words, there is a reality, but never 'out there' independent from intra-action. Posthuman research is diffractive, not reflective, as reflection reinforces the nature/culture binary. Barad summarises the problem the metaphor of the mirror poses:

> [R]epresentationalism – the belief that words, concepts, ideas, and the like accurately reflect or mirror the things to which they refer – makes a finely polished surface of this whole affair. And it has encouraged the belief that it is possible to turn the mirror back on oneself, as it were, thus spawning various candidates for "reflexive methodologies". (Barad, 2007, p.86)

In our example, the materiality of the basement, the cold bars of the cellar, the staircase going down, the photographs of the White men, the cigarette, the grapes, the wine, the land, skin color and more, as well as the *absence* and *invisibility* of women and Black men are part of the meaning produced material-discursively. The intra-action brought into existence re-memberings of unequal educational experiences, a lineage of erasures and oppression for Sumaya and Sieraaj who are descendants and members of South African Indian and Coloured (this term was coined during apartheid to describe multi-racial people, including descendants of the Khoikhoi and San Indigenous peoples and is in common current use in South Africa) communities and also others in the group. The marks on their bodyminds render them response-able to the injustices of apartheid education that continues to haunt the present day unequal two-tier education system in South Africa, particularly for children of color.

We trace some of the multiple temporalities with/in the image (Figure 1), in order to generate a thick understanding of how image, threaded through spacetimemattering, re-works possibilities for producing new knowledges. The tracing is attentive to small differences that matter, for example, the complexities of apartheid education which continue to haunt the past, present and future. However, the aim is not to analyze the image with/in a linear timeline (past-present-future) that might enact narratives that nostalgically fix the apartheid past into the present (Dlamini, 2009). Nostalgic narratives also run the risk of embedding discursive histories of victims and victors that do not engage with the complexities of ongoing post-apartheid injustices, including material dispossession from lands and waters (Chisholm, 2012; Putuma, 2017; Walker, 2010).

**Troubling time(s)**

For Barad (2007, 2014, 2017, 2018), time and issues of justice can indeed not be separated out. However, present attempts to undo injustices of the past assume that time is a unilinear

concept that progresses from past, present and future as we have seen above. Reading Quantum Field Theory (QFT) diffractively through social justice theories, Barad provides empirical evidence that time is not unilinear and is always already entangled with space and matter (her neologism 'intra-action'). Every moment in time is threaded through every bit of matter and every location in space (Barad, 2018). There is no matter in space at specific times as in a set of fixed points, or co-ordinates on a grid. There are no discrete entities of space, time and matter, hence Barad's oft used notion of 'spacetimemattering' (Barad, 2007). Space, time and matter are not ontologically discrete as per Newtonian physics and land is not a container wherein events are encased within co-ordinates of time as empty, quantifiable and measurable (as in clock time). There *is* never a past as a 'here' or a 'there', according to QFT (Barad, 2018).

So, what are the implications of spacetimemattering when re-turning to the image in Figure 1? Barad (2018) suggests troubling time itself. Past, present and future are "bleeding through one another" in order to open up radical possibilities for a "justice-to-come" (Barad, 2018). Inspired by Jacques Derrida, Barad proposes that justice is the impossible task of allowing the response of the 'between' we should gesture toward. Barad (2012: 81) explains:

> (Doing justice is a profound yearning, a crucially important if inevitably unachievable activity, an always already inadequate attempt to respond to the ethical cry of the world.) Or, rather, perhaps I can put it this way: It is the very question of justice-to-come, not the search for a final answer or final solution to that question, that motivates me. The point is to live the questions and to help them flourish. (Barad, 2012: 81)

This move is therefore not about *truths about a just future* as perceived by the educator to be

taught (transmitted) to the student (Fikile in our example), but to continue to ask the awkward questions (including what it means to decolonize in this context). Barad suggests that we should re-turn to the past that honors patterns of inheritance. Honoring inheritances means being accountable by tracing entanglements and reconfiguring the past without discarding histories or memories. Re-turning involves the art of noticing the material and discursive that is always already present (Tsing, 2015). Sumaya's and Sieraaj's memories are sedimentations of the ongoing intra-activity that is folded with/in the world. So, temporal diffraction does not undo their past, or discard their memories but rather re-works the possibilities that multiple temporalities and spacetimemattering bring about. These diffraction patterns are infinite and not always evident, but the task is to make the patterns visible that might otherwise go unnoticed. This requires drawing on transdisciplinary knowledge that includes, but also transverses the social sciences (Barad, 2007). Paying attention to the more-than-human and materiality of the space and land makes visible what is present and not present at the same time.

**Whose prisoner am I?**

What and whose presences are made visible in this place?

The workshop and the activity deeply affected us. Relations with land are highly contested with/in education in South Africa (Chisholm, 2012). The political-economic-social injustices of the colonial 1948-1994 policies of apartheid in South Africa (Kallaway, 2012) regulated the bodily, spatial and temporal boundaries in which education took place (Chisholm, 2012, Kallaway, 2012). In the Western Cape where we are located, lands hold pastpresent histories of/with forced removal, inaccessibility, and educational marginalization. For Sumaya and

Sieraaj, entangled with/in the image (Figure 1) is also a recognition that the land on which the conference center has been built does not belong to the white people who own it and that the land-as-commodity remains entangled in colonial relations through the racialized and inequitable labor relations (Tuck & Mckenzie, 2015).

After the workshop, Sieraaj traces discursively and visually (Figure 2) the geopolitical locations involved in his educational journeys.

<<insert figure 2 here>>

Figure 2. Sieraaj's material-discursive tracing of the geopolitical locations involved in his educational journeys

Rewind back to 1988. Sieraaj is born in apartheid South Africa, to a colored family, in a colored neighborhood, Strandfontein, 35 km away from where Fikile's workshop is taking place in 2018. His memories of his early childhood schooling involve long drives that move him from one neighborhood to the next where the 'good' schools are, but where his mind was never welcomed. He recalls being treated differently by doctors, strangers and teachers; there are certain things that a Black, Coloured child's body is not supposed to have, not supposed to do. At the age of 3, sitting in the doctor's waiting room, Sieraaj reminds his mom that it is 3 o'clock and his brother needs to be picked up from school. Realizing that this 3 year-old has just read an analogue clock, the doctor says Sieraaj is remarkable and needs to be looked at to see if he is gifted. Sieraaj was then referred to a child psychologist and after playing

with the dinosaurs and teaching the psychologist all the names of the different species she had, the psychologist concludes that he indeed is special but lacks the maturity to enter the mainstream education system. So, he should wait. At age 4, Sieraaj begins to learn how to read with his brother who is now old enough to learn at school. Sieraaj returns to nursery school in Mowbray, 25 km away from home, which was racially segregated. What do you do with a child who wants to read during nap time? Sieraaj can tell you. You beat him and when he cries, you drag him up the stairs to "where the babies are" so that he knows where to go if he wants to act like one. After graduating from nursery school, Sieraaj went to a Muslim primary school in Wynberg. Sieraaj remembers one of his bigger beatings there in the first grade. This beating was for forgetting his circle stencil at home and drawing his circles freehand. Sieraaj becomes an angry student, having to sit in lessons that he has already learnt and being beaten for making mistakes. In 1994, apartheid ends and shortly after, Sieraaj's parents, along with some of his uncles and aunts move to Parow, into one home in a previously white neighbourhood (still mostly white). Sieraaj now makes a daily drive from Parow to the Muslim school in Wynberg, which are 30 km apart, so that he is still connected to his culture and religion. After a year of challenging traveling, Sieraaj moves to a previously all-white school in Kraaifontein in grade 4, as it is closer to Parow. Here, he struggles to adjust to this new culture of a Christian previously all-white school, although he is happy that his educators recognize his intelligence. They were amazed when on a field trip to Simonstown, Sieraaj could tell them all the stories about the submarines and how they got the

names. “He reads a lot”, they said in amazement. After two years there, the living situation with so many families in one house doesn’t work. So, all the families moved out of the house, and Sieraaj’s family moves to Bellville. As a result, he has to move schools again as he previously used to be driven to school by an aunt. At his new school, no one really values his intelligence. There were very few teachers attending to academics and bored, Sieraaj gets up to mischief. Sieraaj graduates from primary school and is excited about moving to high school, expecting that he may find different forms of stimulation there. Instead, on his first day of school he was sent home because he had ‘a step’ in his hair and needed to get a haircut. Only his Mathematics teacher notices his abilities. In the rest of his classes, he is just another Coloured kid, with a Coloured accent, who needs to learn how to say “Ma’am”, instead of “Miss”, who needs to learn to tuck his shirt in and who needs to learn to tame his facial hair because it started to develop on a different timeline than was permitted at the school. He becomes angry. More time was spent teaching his body to become close to the school’s image of what it should look like, and less time actually learning. In grade 9, Sieraaj attains 90-something for Mathematics, but almost fails the year by nearly failing English, his home language. Sieraaj endured a nightmare at this high school; a school named in reverence to the settler colonialist project in South Africa. In the tenth grade, Sieraaj leaves home to go to a boarding school in Constantia. This was a school in its first year of operation, built in the skeleton of an old white boys’ reformatory school. This school was designated as a special school for gifted learners and here Sieraaj began to flourish. Although, still

angry at being locked up in a jail-like hostel from 6pm to 6 am every night, in this space Sieraaj's mind is acknowledged while his body is imprisoned. It was this imprisonment in Constantia, a Cape wineland, which lead Sieraaj to take the photo behind bars in Stellenbosch, another wineland, where the labor of Coloured people is exploited to produce world renowned wines. The bars remind Sieraaj of the construction of his body as prison. The prison of childhood. The constructed prison of his Coloured body. The real prison at the old reformatory school, which was constructed to keep girls safe from our teenage male bodies. After high school, Sieraaj was accepted to an Ivy League university where he found all sorts of new freedoms but felt imprisoned by poverty and isolation. This is because he lacked the cultural capital to succeed in this new environment, and even though he received a full scholarship, the money was enough for tuition, books, accommodation and a meal plan. Therefore, like the Constantia boarding school, it was very difficult if you were hungry outside of mealtimes. It was also very difficult to afford to participate in various activities with his peers. Sieraaj's schooling has been a construction of various prisons which all shifted based on place and in 2018 at Mont Fleur, he is reminded of the similarities between the multiple prisons in his life and the shackles of his ancestors on the colonial slave ships that travelled to what is now South Africa.

Prisoners with no crimes.

Whose prisoner am I?

Through the embodied connection with his ancestors in this workshop, Sieraaj is not only re-minded of their lives as prisoners, but the journeys that they were forced to take on slave ships. Taken from their lands and brought to new lands as slaves, where their histories were intentionally erased. Not only were his ancestors not entitled to a home, but all memories of home were erased, particularly in future generations. Sieraaj is forced to think about how his Cape Malay ancestors ever acquired his surname, which is Francis, and the erasures of home and identity that came with this naming. Sieraaj feels like a prisoner to a name and a historically homeless being.

Where is home? What can this land teach him of being home, of belong, of being free? Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes, "He who knows all the languages of this world but not their mother tongue, will always be a slave. But he who knows their mother tongue and all the other languages are empowered" (2017). What does it mean to not even know what your mother tongue was, or your motherland, or your mother (ancestors) for that matter?

Whose slave am I?

**Re-membering of childhood and ownership**

Sieraaj's re-membering of childhood and schooling are not a going-back-in-time as in time travel. As we have seen above, for Barad (2007, 2014, 2017), past, present and future are not sequenced like beads on a string, but are always intra-actively threaded through one another. This is why posthumanism is not 'post', leaving humanism behind, but a philosophy that is

nonanthropocentric. The ontological inclusion of the material and the materiality of human and more-than-human bodies requires a natureculture ontology that disrupts colonialism and colonizing notions of relationships. The inclusion of the material world in what matters, ontologically, epistemically and ethically problematizes the idea that learning takes place 'in' the human and that intellect is reserved for humans only. In Sieraaj's case, his travelling of long distances to and from school, sitting in the car, moving house, moving schools were all entangled in his academic achievements and sense of belonging. Tracing these entanglements involves the geopolitical situatedness of living in the Cape Flats, an inequitable educational system (which is largely still in place, two decades post-apartheid) and the material-discursive reality of how his Coloured body affected school reports and how he was listened to by his teachers and mainly white peers.

Sieraaj re-membered childhood events - a childhood not left behind, but part of the present and future(s). Childhood conceptualized as the period at the start of a person's life presupposes a quantitative, chronological concept of time, thereby imposing an adult form of temporality: unilinear and irreversible time. However, childhood is not just a period in a human life, but also a particular relationship with, and experience of, time; an intense experience of being-in-time-and-space. Childhood is not something adults leave behind: the ageless subject is always in process, always "on-the-way" (Kennedy, 2006, p. 10).

Sieraaj's re-mememberings is an embodied engagement with the question posed in the workshop; what might decolonial, situated, and non-anthropocentric engagements with place look like? Temporal diffraction acknowledges that we as researchers and co-authors are part of the phenomena that we seek to understand and cannot be separated out from the event. Writing and thinking with the data are not unidirectional, but mutually co-constituted. Sieraaj

and Sumaya are not the only constituents response-able for the diffractive patterns that emerge through the images in Figure 1 and 2. Rather, the patterns are a spacetimemattering that emerged from entangled conversations with various human and more-than-human others. These include the tables and chairs, the delicious food, the sauna, the mountains, the fynbos, the grass, the conversations, the log fires, the hospitable atmosphere – all entangled in the conference center that caters for a very small elite of South Africans and visiting scholars. This complex tension between the coloniality of the conference center and its affordances provoked multiple affective intensities and diffraction patterns. The first diffraction is entangled with locked wine cellar, the image in Figure 1 created by Sieraaj and Sumaya, and the paradoxical beauty of the Mont Fleur winelands landscape.

**Paying attention to asymmetrical human and more-than-human relations in early childhood education.**

One of the aims of the workshop was to teach about environmental education differently through an experiential *doing*. Early childhood educators and other researchers were invited to make multimodal responses to the experience of being in the colonized landscape while considering the visible and invisible presences they could sense. Such an approach disrupts the idea that environmental education is about bringing children closer to nature through outdoor activities on the one hand, or about filling in worksheets about nature on the other.

Pervasive discourses of 'pure nature' continue to normalize coloniality in complex and at times contradictory ways. For example, historically marginalized people continue to be positioned as "closer to nature", as ungeographic beings who are out-of-place in 'nature', or as people whose relations to place are predominantly understood through urban spaces that are constructed as empty of or separate from 'nature' (McKittrick, 2011). As Collard and

colleagues (2014) state “Nature is steeped in colonial patterns of power and knowledge. Nature...must be confronted as an artifact of empire” (p.326). What emerged through the workshop was the entanglement between nature (the vineyards), apartheid, the dop system and childhood (education). By not only focusing on the symbolic and what the cellar image (Figure 1) represented, power-producing racist binaries were made visible and disrupted. Methodologically this was made possible by focusing on the situated space: space and time as not mere background, but by showing how, for example, schooling can function as modes of imprisonment, dehumanization and unbelonging for children from marginalized communities in South Africa (Figure 2). By engaging inter-disciplinary perspectives, our inquiry made visible that in the Western Cape, children’s educational future(s) are marked by extremely unequal inheritances of apartheid such as the outlawed, but still practiced, dop system. These land-based inequalities trouble discourses of idyllic childhood-nature relationships. Instead, they underline the urgent necessity of environmental and place-based education for young children and beyond early childhood, that is situated within the actual, places in which all children’s everyday lives are situated (Nxumalo, 2018).

Our choice of Sieraaj’s and Sumaya’s stories was not accidental. It is a deliberate act of presencing (Simpson, 2011) marginalized place stories. Attention to issues of land-based justice and equity is particularly urgent in current times of ecological precarity and requires ongoing efforts to interrupt the simplifications, erasures and omissions in pedagogical encounters with and conceptualizations of place and time. A critical posthuman methodology of diffraction has made a nonchronological experience of time and space possible. In turn this helps us enter into the workshop questions ‘*What and whose presences are made visible in this place?’* and *‘What might decolonial, situated, and non-anthropocentric engagements with place look like?’.* A temporal diffraction analysis of the event emphasizes entanglements of bodies, lands, texts, materials, and more, provides generative possibilities to rework

spacetimematterings in ways that are accountable to inheritances and response-able practices. The temporal and spatial diffraction of this event produces new ways for thinking about anti-colonial early childhood education discourses, particularly for the political context in South Africa. Alongside pastpresent apartheid injustices, racism, land dispossession, and access to education are all threaded through multiple temporalities.

Temporal diffraction opens up possibilities for reconfiguring the past in ways that pay attention to differentially situated and implicated inheritances. While Sumaya and Sieraaj shared the stories of their communities and past, some of the white people in our group shared their responsibilities as kin of people who had implemented the oppressive apartheid regime. The white men in the photos on the stairs at Mont Fleur are the products of particular privileged childhoods and becomings, entangled with the settler colonial project and the extractive exploitation of people and lands. Our embodied and land-based story-telling and diffractive analytics are an illustration of how engagement with critical posthumanist perspectives in education might simultaneously decenter the human while also attending to the ways in which the privileging of certain humans over the more-than-human is also racialized and colonial. Diffraction helps us to attend to the complexities of human/more-than-human entanglements (Murris & Bozalek, 2019). It helps us to foreground the ways in which land in this particular place is always already entangled in racialized and colonial inequities.

Notes

1. This three-year long research project was funded by the National Research Foundation of South Africa between 2016-2018 and is still ongoing (see www.decolonizingchildhood.org). The broad overall aim of the DECD project is to

investigate what it means to decolonize teacher education, higher education, and in particular early childhood education (0-8). Its location in the South is salient, while at the same time of critical importance to the wider, global debate of how to educate through more-than-human inquiry-based learning for an ecologically sustainable future that includes animals, matter and children as political agents.

2. The term ‘apartheid’ can be traced back to settler colonialism and imperialism dating back to the first Dutch settlement in South Africa in 1652, although the policy of apartheid dates back to 1940. Apartheid, which literally means ‘apart-hood’ or ‘apartness’, actively promoted privileges for white people and in particular the Afrikaans settlers, while implementing racial segregation, land dispossession, educational disparity and numerous other racially discriminatory economic and social conditions for people of color, particularly for Black South Africans. The legacies of apartheid oppressions remain in South African society, including through persistent educational and economic inequality.

3. The injustices of apartheid education are still present. In 1953, the discriminatory policies of apartheid were extended to education. Although Black children were always educated separately from White children, The Bantu Act of 1953 solidified the racially segregated policies of education. South African education was streamed into different curricula for White, Indian, Coloured and Black people. Each stream was governed by separate departments of education and staff, policies and unequal funding. These departments, controlled by the state, were required to implement curricula that would enforce the systemic oppression of people of color (Chisholm, 2012; Kallaway, 2002). Schools designated for Black students focused on preparing children for particular menial tasks. Of significance for this paper is the deliberate exclusion of Black children

from learning experiences with land. Not only were Black children subjected to inferior education, they were also systematically deprived from learning with the land through the Bantu Education Act. In this way education mirrored the dispossession of Black people from their lands.

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