



Yes, We Speak, Si Tenemos Voz: On Refusing Epistemological Terra- Nullius

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EDITORIAL

ABSTRACT

To claim that we do not have languages and tongues of our own and that we are forever rendered the misrepresented and disavowed Other by Speech is a claim that is intelligible only within the onto-epistemological terms and containments of (non)being and (un)knowing of Whiteness. We are not, therefore, in the collective co-weaving of this special edition and beyond tethered to deconstruction as critique which whilst demonstrates how we are rendered Other, nevertheless reinforces our muteness. Instead, we read, (t)race and (w)rite any deconstruction not from the abstract coloniality of an (un)knowing-(non)being Subject of modern/colonial (un)reason but from the presence/present of survivance and dignity in relation. Thus, our answer to our originary question out of which this special issue emerged is a resounding Yes. From this presence/present of survivance and dignity become legible and intelligible a different set of questions foregrounded within the reality of political-epistemological difference (against and beyond Whiteness) in the plural.

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In this time of turning, where Hannukkah and Summer/Winter Solstice and Christmas meet, we call to presence the ancestors of the lineages that thread through the project of this special issue and beyond. We ask that they offer us safe passage in the coming to word and text of our languages as worldmaking (m)otherwise. We give offerings of grace and gratitude for the wisdoms gifted and the responsibilities expected as we traverse the territories of the flesh; of body and Country/Madre Tierra, that have been relegated to exile and epistemological terra nullius and out of which we co-weave our serpents' tongues, new-ancient onto-epistemological intimacies and pluridiverse existential landscapes of collective liberation.

To claim that we do not have languages and tongues of our own and that we are forever rendered the misrepresented and disavowed Other by Speech is a claim that is intelligible only within the onto-epistemological terms and containments of (non)being and (un)knowing of Whiteness. We are not, therefore, in the collective co-weaving of this special edition and beyond tethered to deconstruction as critique which whilst demonstrates how we are rendered Other nevertheless reinforces our muteness. Instead, we read, (t)race and (w)rite any deconstruction not from the abstract coloniality of an (un)knowing-(non)being Subject of modern/colonial (un)reason but from the presence/present of survivance and dignity in relation (Motta, 2018; Simpson, 2017; Anzaldúa, 1987). This does not imply we propose pristine, unchanging onto-epistemologies of presence otherwise, nor does it render (re)invisibilised the systematic and systemic violations committed upon the territories as land and flesh of the racialised and feminised (m)other (Women's Health Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2016; Motta, 2021) as the underside condition of (re)production of the current matrix of hetero-patriarchal modern/colonial power.

Rather, our answer to our originary question out of which this special issue emerged is a resounding Yes. From this presence/present of survivance and dignity become legible and intelligible a different set of questions foregrounded within the reality of political-epistemological difference (against and beyond Whiteness) in the plural. These include how to bring to thought and text plural modes of speech and language and the onto-epistemological subjecthood and social relations that such modes of speech herald, enflesh and tend to? How to attend carefully to creating the conditions of possibility so that such speech/language/text/worldmaking might emerge without author(s) (re)experiencing the denial or elision of their dignity and well-being in the process? How to write/right/rite these languages, our voices, our worldmaking(m) otherwise in and as/freedom and not require that our authors and ourselves as authors must translate into the languages, logics and (i)rationalities of enslavement or face the violences of the onto-epistemological frontier in reviewing, editing and invitation? How to ensure the safety of homeplace in the weave of lifemaking that we are/were midwifing? How to hold the space of tension for different political/epistemological trajectories, loyalties and threads within (feminist) decoloniality within a project in which we set the intention to foster a space of and for the racialised and feminised other to speak in the plural and on their/our own terms and in their/our languages and tongues?

These questions and their collective answerings emerge in our encounters and shared praxis of meaning making and liberatory healing. It is not simple nor linear such finding of individual and collective voice when our (non)being in the world is shaped and contoured by the modern/colonial frontiers of Reason, Right, and Subjectivity which are premised upon our silencing and can invade the intimacies of our everyday lives and subjectivities. The disciplining and silencing logics and (i)rationalities of voice as (non)knowing-being can be deep and enduring, result in the (rational) fear of talking/speaking, being misunderstood, problematised and pathologized, and of facing backlash. As an anticipated response, we can attempt to avoid the pain of receiving Power's violent reactions as a means to survive. The complex ways and tender forms through which we find our voice(s) are political and pluridiverse. They enflesh the co-creating of our own space/times in which to come to recognise our voice, turn inwards to ancient-new territories and (re)root ourselves in the right to languages as world-making of our own making, on our own terms.

In our ongoing collective in relation embrace and journeying with these questions during and beyond the emergence in the 'public' view of this special issue, we have been reminded how placedness matters. In particular it becomes essential to render present for ourselves (which is not necessarily to make visible to the public gaze) from where we speak and in relation to who we speak. With Spivak (1988) we foreground how abstract (re)presentations within

post-colonial discourse of the poor brown woman's absence as subject with speech shape the contours of hegemonic reason, agency, and subjectivity. Here our author Anupriya Biswas in her piece (this issue) 'Countering Hegemonic Knowledge in Cross-Cultural Research' does similar work to expose the epistemic imperialism within particular forms of social science paradigms of research, knowing and intervention in organisational psychology; forms of epistemic imperialism that she demonstrates can empower White middle class woman to support and enact controls over the 'poor' brown woman's body and reproductive autonomy and ultimately justify military interventionism.

However, we move beyond Spivak, as all our authors do, by also making visible, nurturing and enfleshing speaking in the plural from the exteriority and margins of such (post)colonial/modernity and with a focus on knowledges from the South (Mignolo, 2011; de Sousa, 2015) and (feminist) decoloniality (Motta, 2018; Anzaldúa, 1987; Lugones, 2010). We commit to this as Shilpi Pandey (2023) in her piece 'Brown women saving brown women' does as a means to carve out the pathways and roots/routes of our emancipation on our own terms and in our own registers of reason, and we do so with an accent on the prefigurative affirmative futurities (Motta, 2022a) that are emergent when we take our presence as the starting point of such collective enquiry.

In this journey we have been reminded, again and again, that our (her)stories and presents and their complex intertwining and sometimes painful entanglements of displacement, desire, exile, intimacies and (non)belongings (Hartman, 2008; Motta 2022b) can shape in liberatory ways the possibilities, pedagogies, and relationalities out of which we can co-weave our coming to autonomous voice, decolonising registers of speech, and Indigenising/abolitionist languages of life and liberation (Lean, 2021).

As the contributors to this special issue embody and express, our (her)stories are epistemological medicine and offer healing balms to the experiences of silencing and violent elision at the hands of claims of epistemological terra nullius. In re-telling these (her)stories they bring to presence both ancient-new philosophies and memory-making as liberatory praxis. In the re-turn and re-membling of these fragments that sometimes lay buried within layers of passing in Whiteness as survival, (Ahmed, 1999, 2007) or exiled in (her)stories of displacement (Anzaldúa, 1987; Motta 2022b), or languishing within layers of pathologized desire there are threads and roots of belonging. None of our authors who work with such re-membling, and piecing together imagine or breathe into be-ing roots in an essentialised timeless sense; all are complex, mestizaje subjects whose re-turn and re-membling foretell and embody courage, strength, wisdom and re-connection to ancestors and relationalities which move beyond and sometimes against renditions of humanness within the bounds of Whiteness.

Zuleika Shrek (2023) through and as her contribution 'Limnagraphy: Lessons in life-affirming research practices for collective liberation', brings such reconnection through her text as breath and her words as weaving worlds otherwise. In particular, she develops 'Limnagraphy...that centres onto-epistemological re-existence through decolonizing the self and coming into harmony, that is deep relation with all life, that of each other, the earth and all her beings'. As she continues 'it is cultivated from the joy of being together, long walks in nature, deep conversations, shared meals, holding space and healing laughter. It is an approach in/from the margins, where resistance is rife in the pursuit of liberating knowledge from colonial logics'. Such relationality is the weave through which other languages (as worldmaking forms of social reproduction and life of the (political), registers of speech and subjects of reason that move against and beyond representational logics of modern/colonial reason(speech) and writing emerge.

They call to presence in text as onto-epistemological language making in which racialised and feminised subjects who are subjected to logics that seek to reduce them/us to abjection are exposed and refused (Motta, de Carvalho, Alencar and da Sliva. 2023). Here is a speech /voice which does not re-produce our muteness. Such speech which neither conforms to modern/colonial traditions of theory-making, theory or formal speech instead, enfleshes dignified resistance and practices of a politics of life-making in which racialised and feminised subjects come into being-knowing-creating otherwise. Here theory and language as world-making is of and in the flesh and weaved through ceremony, dance, poetry, music, body-magic (Mattingly and Wakpa, 2021).

In our special edition it is voice as (oral) story, metaphor and poetry that comes to the fore as such enfleshment of speech as onto-epistemological political difference. We are held by the foremothers and ancestors of such lineages such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Chicana Feminisms (Keating/Anzaldúa, 2015), Audre Lorde (Lorde, 1984) and Black feminisms (Cruz, 2001; Hartman, 2008), and Vivir a Palavra and heritages of popular education of Paulo Freire (2000). Claudiana Alencar (2023), Zuleika Shrek (2023) and here Sara C Motta in this introduction call to presence otherwise through the poem, and the figure of the racialised and feminised poet/storyteller, always in relation never standing on their own or speaking in a solipsistic individualising voice other stories to be told and co-emergent voice-language-speech as world-making praxis.

As Claudiana Alencar (2023) in her piece “Everyone’s love, seed-words to change the world: grammars of resistance by cultural collectives from the Brazilian racialized periphery’ discusses from her activist-scholar work with Vivir a Palavra cultural collective that are from and work in the racialised peripheries of Fortaleza, they co-weave a cultural grammar of resistance. Such a cultural grammar of resistances is a cry of refusal against the racialised extermination of afro-Brazilian youth of the peripheries. Alencar (t)races seed-words which are threads of being-knowing that articulate the desire for life and the onto-epistemological proximities in which language is a form of life or life making (Alencar, 2021a; 2021b). Seed-words are loaded (not as heaviness but as freedom) as signs/sites of pain, struggle and dignity. As she demonstrates they become an enunciation otherwise and a new form of proximity and existential territory.

This place from which we speak, understood in the plural and multiple sense of complex relations and relationalities across time, space, territories and (her)stories, asks of us to walk-talk in responsible relation (Rose, 2002; Plumwood, 2001, 2008). The ancestors ask of us that we stop refusing to bring to presence the precarious conditions through which we (w)rite and the (im)possibilities we must navigate and survive so that we might appear at all as editors and authors (of this special edition). They remind us that we have nothing to hide; that the shame is not for our shoulders to carry anymore; that we are not indebted to registers of reason, speech and text which reproduce our monstrosity and unintelligibility. That we are NOT to blame for our own oppression and enslavement, and we can remove the skins of passing (Ahmed, 1999) that were never ours and that always impossibly rendered us assimilated and left us with internal rajaduras (Anzaldúa, 1987) and soul wounds (Duran et al., 2008) of the modern/colonial border slicing us down the middle.

*Veins of Abya Yala,¹ pulsating
 coursing memories
 refusal
 to be laid to rest*

*they shake me from the delirium
 In which the mirage of their hatred
 Is mistaken
 for the real*

*they sing to me
 soothe my pain
 wash away the shame
 honour rage in ceremony*

*they stroke my feet
 I look down
 feel the soil
 the roots of my soul*

¹ Abya Yala is a notion coined by the cunas in Panama “to refer to the territory and the indigenous nations of the Americas”. The use of this name seeks to “confront the colonial weight present in ‘Latin America’ understood as a cultural project of westernization” (Walsh 2007, 236).

*they implore me to take tea
manzanilla, ortiga, milenrama
allow the poderes to nourish my skin
replenish our wholeness*

*make medicine
with the oceanic pain
imprint the possibilities to remain
despite their dread*

*they hold my tears
overflowing sacred containers
alchemical grief
ancient release*

*they remind me
We have a right to life
to weave the thread of our recovery
have home, and hearth and kin*

*I am innocent
We have always been innocent of their crimes
We are not guilty
I AM NOT TO BLAME*

*their logics of dispossession
and despair, are not mine
let them go now mijita
allow them to fall*

*from shoulders and thighs
fly like the eagle, connect with our dead
love, live, breathe in
the majesty of our flesh²*

Instead, they beckon and guide towards a descent into the territories of County/Land and body/ the enfleshed as the site of the dark wisdoms of which Patricia Hill Collins (1990) talks (see also Keating/Anzaldúa, 2015; Motta, 2018). Our authors undertake such descent and re-emergence through praxis such as decolonising autoethnography (Barthwal-Datta), decolonising to refuse epistemic imperialism of both mainstream social science (Biswass) and liberal White feminism's refusal to see that yes we as brown, black and Indigenous women can indeed and have always spoken (Pandey, 2023) border-crossing pedagogy (Oliveira, Finardi, and Basilio, in this issue), cartographies and word-seeds of participatory action research (Alencar, 2023), and liminagraphy methodology (Shrek, 2023).

Such praxis as our authors express and en flesh is premised on knowledges and knowledge systems as worldmaking praxis of the South- the South, understood as a relationality as exteriority to Power as opposed to the empire making coordinates of the maps of nation states (Mohanty, 2003; Goeman, 2013). They embrace the power and onto-epistemic possibility of vulnerability not as victimhood but as courage and opening to registers of voice and visibility which rupture the dominant coordinates and (mis)representations of the public, the scholar, the 'poor' brown woman. As Monika Barthwal-Datta echoes and (t)races in her piece (in this issue) 'On In/visibility' 'I aim to show some of the myriad and complex ways in which processes

2 Fragment of the poem Return to Innocence, Sara C. Motta, 13 October 2021, published in full in Motta, 2022b.

of visibility and invisibly, silence/ silencing and speaking out, are stitched up with operations of power, vulnerability, and resistance in spaces of whiteness’.

Monika is the author who explores and brings to visibility the epistemic frontiers and their violations and possibilities of resistance, refusal and dignity making by the racialized other within the territories of the University. Here vulnerability is her coming to voice despite and against the taken for granted of passing in/as Whiteness which were premised on expectation of her passive silence and (in)visibility (García Peña, 2022). When speaking on her own terms and articulating violations, elisions and silencing, the response of (un)belonging that she received made viscerally visible the violences and self-denials entangled into the (im)possibility of her passing (Motta, 2019, 2022c). This bringing to text the onto-epistemological frontiers of the sacred grove of the Lettered City supports us as editors in our bringing to (in)visibility on our own terms the conditions and relationalities of (im)possibility that birthed this special issue.

Our embrace of vulnerability-precarity as strength read from within the epistemic coordinates of racialised and feminised non-being informe(d)s our commitment to ensure ethical-epistemological feminist decolonial congruence between invitation, practices of editing, politics of knowledge of reviewing, and timing and nature of publication. We refuse(d) to leave anyone behind and we give political-epistemic meaning to the pedagogies of care and pluridiverse inclusion which constitute a decolonising politics of recognition that does not reproduce the violence of the original colonial encounter, but rather foregrounds the gift of mutual recognition (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2021; Brown, 2021; Gonzalez, Motta and Seppälä, 2023). We recognise(d), value(d) and honour(ed) the complex differential precarities that were/are deepened in differential ways for us and our authors, the journal’s editors and all our complex relations through the pandemic and this not-post-pandemic moment. We acknowledge and centre this process of mutual recognition as a practise of (un/re)learning and mutual fragilization (Motta, 2018; Ettinger 2009) and here in our (w)riting visibilise the ongoing, state logics of abandonment and university systems of careless cruelty and accounting in which our lives as racialized and feminised scholar-activists and communities are deemed less valuable (Harney and Moten, 2013), and our caring labours for kin and community strategically invisibilised (Motta and Amsler, 2019) and elided and yet maliciously subject to onto-epistemological dispossession and extraction (Motta, 2022c; Rodríguez, 2018).

This is not to re-victimise us as ‘poor’ Brown, Black, Indigenous women, and feminised and racialised peoples. Rather it implice(s)d for us shifting our temporalities to the tempos of those of us who are most vulnerable in recognition of the epistemic wisdoms and medicines that their/our words, tongues and re-writing the languages of the political and of reason bring to this (ongoing) project of healing liberations (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2021; Vázquez, 2009). We honoured the plural temporalities which enable the production of text that moves beyond the oft-times hurricane winds of surviving/ance and we enfolded the need for nurturing safety in the way we held the space for such justice-making (w)riting. We have learnt through our collective experience of coming to voice, visibility and speech on our own terms of the gentle and tender dwelling in deep rhythms of the earth and temporalities of the ancestors that we need to re-find and nurture our multiple serpents’ tongues (Motta and Bermudez, 2019).

The time in which we speak and co-create the spaces and conditions where we might come to speak freely are always co-existing as the underside of the space/times of coloniality/modernity. For us as editors this meant the rush during semester teaching times, and the times we carved out to read each piece of this issue care-fully. Yet the entire timescape of its conception, gestation and birth was characterised by uncertainty, illness, and precarisation for us both. The vulnerability implied in the precarious work and particularly the temporal-visa-holder status for one of us made our experiences in everyday work-life a constant effort to deal with anxiety and (re)create ourselves. Such recreation is not just about work, even though the oppressive continuity of unpaid work registered in the academia is relentless (i.e. publishing texts and marking essays with meaningful comments, which takes longer than what is paid).

It was/is also characterised by everyday social experiences, speaking of solidarity, sharing stories with lived concepts of connecting the past, present and future and caring for each other that give us strength and happiness and moments of joy. Hence, as racialised immigrants, mothers and women working in academia, we experience precarity with the responsibility of creating spaces for sharing and learning, being-in relation and being witnessed and listening to each

other (Gonzalez, Motta and Sepalla, 2023). One example of our collective praxis is this special issue where we can share our stories and learn from each other, particularly from each 'other' as other in her own terms. As Pandey (2023) tells us when talking about #PasToucheAMonHijab or #Handsoffmyhijab, in taking control of our narratives and telling our stories, Muslim women change the narrative of the 'other', breaking the stereotypes of the oppressed other and deciding 'the course of my/our emancipation'. In bringing to the present/presence their stories, these women are re-(w)riting the past and forging other futures. Similarly, the text 'Disordering epistemological terra Brasilis Or yes – the indigenous fisherpeople in Piúma-Brazil' by Oliveira, Finardi, and Basilio (in this issue) reminds us that by foregrounding indigenous 'existing experiences and knowledge into visibility', we break the narrative of modernity/coloniality that places the knowledge of the colonised as primitive and/or non-existent. Rather our stories reveal our knowledges and make possible theories and theorising otherwise.

We thus committed to hold the line for each other as *comadre* editors, our kin and community and in responsible relation with our authors. We caste a circle of protective and nurturing fire around us all to minimise the potential harm of misrecognition in reviews and by reviewers in the normalised demands of academic Whiteness for us to translate, contort and rebrand our work so that it fits into the containments of coloniality and speaks in the Language of the Master's Tongue (Gonzalez, Motta and Sepalla, 2023; Motta, 2022a). We specifically reached out and invited reviewers from our webs of care and mutual aid networks who were respected as walking their talk in responsible relating and relationship making. We did this to honour and embrace critical intimacy (Motta, 2016) as opposed to critical distance and a no-place gaze of approbation and value. Our intention was that they/us like this would break the fiction of neutrality and objectivity in accounting and being made to account as authors-knowers and instead would also gently hold space for the authors appearance/emergence/coming into being in their texts. When we did receive a review of non/misrecognition we foregrounded how we saw this to the author and the elements of wilful 'innocence' in the review and reassured them that they could ignore such a monological talking past and at, and over.

Our learnings from this process are pointed: one, that we need to be explicit in our ethical-epistemological commitments and what it is that we are expecting from each other and from reviewers as opposed to assuming implicitly we are 'all on the same page'; secondly, that there is nothing more than tending to relationships and relationality otherwise in creating the kind of meeting-place of pluriversity in emergence, process and text that we desired (Motta and Manning, forthcoming). We cannot assume from abstract relating through concepts such as decoloniality, or knowledges from the South, or publications that talk of decolonising that we are all indeed on the same page, or that the way we articulate these concepts in our praxis will enable a space/place/relationality of mutual recognition and vulnerability as epistemic possibility; and finally, there is a lot we leave unthought in relation to how to co-create plurally across difference within the South and as the South which is to the detriment of our struggle for pluriverse healing liberations (Brown, 2021; Motta, 2018). To ensure such braiding across plurality does not reproduce the dehumanising entanglements and violent erasures of Whiteness', we cannot remain in any presumed sameness of comfortable niceness. We must bring to thought and text as worldmaking relationalities, however unsettling facing and (t) racing such tensions and dissonances are for the hope of nurturing relationalities of consent and accountability and ensuring our ability to protect and enfold the flourishing-in-relation of our lifeworlds (m)otherwise (Women's Health Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2016; Piepza-Samarasinha, 2021; Brown, 2021; Gonzalez, Motta and Seppälä, 2023).

There are tensions and dissonances in the politics (of knowledge) of voice making and/or world-making within the (feminist) decolonial project of knowledges from/of the South in the plural. These tensions manifest themselves in this collection also. These lie across the frontiers and thematics of recognition and navigating in, against and beyond the entanglements with Institutions and Institutionality and their logics of coloniality and the (im)possibilities of decoloniality (Motta, 2019; Boggs et. Al., 2019; Meyerhoff, 2019). They manifest in terms of voice as recognition/deconstruction within and beyond or voice as mutual recognition against and beyond as abolition (Fanon, 2008). They raise the enfleshed question of the routes and roots of our liberation.

They emerge also around the question and embodiment of the role of the scholar and the politics of knowledge of racialised and feminised voice making. Does the figure of the scholar-knower need to be decolonised too, and does this involve Brown, Black and Indigenous Southern bodies as knowers and/or decolonising the subjectivity of the knower in relation to the entanglements of place, geography, class, gender and racialisation? (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Motta, 2016, 2018, 2022a, 2022c). What is the place and nature of feminist decolonial theory and what indeed is reason within this? Can we add to the current conversation new-ancient knowledges and come to sit at the table of speech and humanness as already constituted or must we burn that table down and create our own weaves of knowing-being-becoming in the mangrove swamps of collective liberation? (Hartman, 2008; Watego, 2021; Motta, 2022b). These tensions in relation also manifest in our (as editors) different placements and relations with the collective asking and answerings to these questions.

We have compassion for these complex entanglements and the need for ongoing contextual and collective question-making and answer creating. We also acknowledge how there are so many more and nuanced questions than those we have systematised here. However, when we are faced (as many of us live daily) with the frontiers and border-guards enacting their violations in visceral apocalyptic ways in the intimacies of our survivance, we ask where is it you (will) stand at moments such as these? (Indigenous Action, 2020).

We end on joy – they fucking hate our joy and the laughter that is untameable and the desire that cannot be bordered. We belly laugh a lot at Power and its fictions and their inability to break us and our languages (M)otherwise. None of this, then – our (w)riting, reading, (t)racing, relating – has been about reproducing our victimhood, our non-being or renditions of ‘us’ as merely the walking woundings of the complex traumas we are subject to. This entire project as our life-making in relation has instead foregrounded survivance in the flesh and the conditions and practices that midwife the flourishing of our pluridiverse voices. This does not negate the pain and grief of silencing and elision, but it reads them through the roots and rhythms of our enfleshed presence, dignity and desire.

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