



## Becoming Indigenous: the 'speculative turn' in anthropology and the (re)colonisation of indigeneity

David Chandler & Julian Reid

To cite this article: David Chandler & Julian Reid (2020) Becoming Indigenous: the 'speculative turn' in anthropology and the (re)colonisation of indigeneity, *Postcolonial Studies*, 23:4, 485-504, DOI: [10.1080/13688790.2020.1745993](https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1745993)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1745993>



Published online: 30 Mar 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 579



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)



## Becoming Indigenous: the ‘speculative turn’ in anthropology and the (re)colonisation of indigeneity

David Chandler <sup>a</sup> and Julian Reid<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>International Relations, University of Westminster, London, UK; <sup>b</sup>International Relations, University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland

### ABSTRACT

The Indigenous have become central to contemporary critical and governmental imaginaries as the West tries to cope with planetary crises imbricated in the legacies of modernity and settler colonialism. As such, Indigenous methods and practices are increasingly constructed as offering futural possibilities for ‘becoming’ rather than belonging to the archives of an underdeveloped past. Central to this transformation has been the speculative or ontological turn in anthropological discourse, which we argue has opened up new possibilities for a Western and colonial appropriation of indigeneity. This turn is the subject of this article and is critically engaged with to pursue a number of avenues which problematise this form of ‘ontopolitical anthropology’. The reduction of Indigenous lives to the speculative ‘other’ of Western modernity inherently tends to reify or ‘exoticise’ Indigenous thought and practices or, as we state, to ‘ontologize indigeneity’. This, we argue, is particularly problematic in the context where critical imaginaries of precarious ‘life in the ruins’ tend to affirm contemporary governmental approaches rather than challenge them. Ironically, rather than opening up alternative possibilities, these approaches reduce the reality of Indigenous struggles and sufferings to a mere foil for the speculative imaginaries of a privileged white Eurocentric academic elite.

### KEYWORDS

Indigeneity; anthropology; ontopolitics; speculative turn

### Introduction

In this article, we seek to highlight the transformation of Western discourses of indigeneity as discourses of ‘becoming’. Increasingly, today, indigeneity is constructed as futural rather than a mere legacy or product of the past. Just as Bruno Latour argues ‘We Have Never Been Modern’,<sup>1</sup> so we are told by what we will analyse as ‘ontopolitical anthropology’ that the Indigenous ‘were never pre-modern’. As Elizabeth Povinelli argues, the reduction of Indigenous analytics to a form of cultural belief was a crucial fiction of ‘setter late liberalism’.<sup>2</sup> Indigenous knowledge as it is contemporarily constructed in the Western academy is then not pre-modern but necessarily post-modern, or after modernity. Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen state, in their well-cited book, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*, the turn to ontology in the discipline of

anthropology reverses the position of the Indigenous subject, from being an object of anthropological study to enabling a new approach of speculative analytics, placing Indigenous thought and practices as the 'analytical starting point' for the discipline itself.<sup>3</sup> As Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro argue, in relation to Amerindian collectives:

... their relatively simple technologies that are nonetheless open to high- intensity syncretic assemblages, are a 'figuration of the future', *not a remnant of the past*. Masters of technopri-mitivist bricolage and politico- metaphysical metamorphosis, they are one of the possible chances, in fact, of a *subsistence of the future*.<sup>4</sup>

How Indigenous knowledge could be transvalued in terms of 'becoming': constructed into forms that become futural and post- rather than pre-modern, is the subject of this article. We seek to question the ease with which this process of transformation or transvaluation has occurred and highlight some problems with what we see as a new form of colonisation of indigeneity for Western consumption, both in terms of the understanding of indigeneity and the stakes for critical theorising itself. In doing so, we draw upon leading theorists such as Philippe Descola, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Elisabeth Povinelli, Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway and Isabelle Stengers, who have each been key to popularising these anthropological insights.

The article is organised into four sections. The first engages with the development of what we are calling 'ontopolitical anthropology', the anthropological production of a certain understanding of indigeneity, which rather than challenging the view of separate and distinct 'cultures' seeks to draw out from the ethnographic experience an alternative methodology able to reveal the speculative possibility of 'different worlds'. The second section focuses on how discourses which seek to transform the temporality of Indigenous analytics, articulate them as necessary for constructing alternative speculative futures. The following section engages more closely with debates within anthropology over Indigenous analytics, which seek to establish Indigenous knowledge in a 'symmetrical' framing, of equal standing to the modernist episteme.<sup>5</sup> The final section raises some problems with the approach of ontopolitical anthropology, in particular, the ways that it can be seen to reify or 'exoticise' Indigenous thought and practices or, as we state, 'ontologize indigeneity' and suggest the possibility of doing anthropology differently.

## Ontopolitical anthropology

Anthropology has a long and chequered history as a 'science' of human societal differences and has struggled to get away from its racial and colonial heritage.<sup>6</sup> Modern anthropology developed in distinct national 'schools', drawing on different social and philosophical traditions and was divided between more universalist structural or functionalist approaches and more relativist approaches, stressing the distinctiveness of separate cultures. The former often operated through analogy with Western forms of organisational life, projecting a Western interpretation on to non-modern societies, problematically understood to be more 'primitive' or 'savage' versions of the West. These approaches were increasingly understood to be reductionist, always understanding other cultures on the basis of a single method of explanation<sup>7</sup> whether through rational choice, the use of behaviouralism or some other approach to natural or contextual constraints. The latter approaches, stressing

cultural difference, which were often informed by post-structuralist positions, were also seen to be problematic, accused of relativising and ‘exoticising’ non-modern societies: seeking to understand them on their own terms, reducing cultural understandings to processes of language and cognition.<sup>8</sup>

One response to this dilemma, of universalising cultural understandings or relativising them, was the ‘hybridization’ position: emphasising the porousness or adaptability of cultural boundaries. Culture was not a dead or static aspect but always in a state of interactive development and change. Paying attention to the realities of Indigenous communities meant seeing that they were entangled with many pressures, forces and demands of the world. Indigenous communities, like any others, were immersed in relations, which they were influenced by and also influenced, as Marshall Sahlins noted (back in 1999) when he talked about ‘the indigenization of modernity’:<sup>9</sup>

The struggle of non-Western peoples to create their own cultural versions of modernity undoes the received Western opposition of tradition vs. change, custom vs. rationality—and most notably its twentieth century version of tradition vs. development.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note that ‘Indigenous peoples’ are a relatively recent construction, emerging from struggles for rights and recognition in the 1970s, primarily led by the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood.<sup>11</sup> Indigenous struggles in the 1980s became more overtly political as Indigenous movements were able to gain national and even international political support for increased rights and recognition and for opposition to ongoing resource extraction, dispossession and displacement.<sup>12</sup> Political theorists were therefore drawn to particularly focus on Indigenous resistance to the nation-state.<sup>13</sup> As Indigenous peoples became feted as important political actors in their own right, critical appropriations of these struggles moved beyond the classist peasant studies of the 1960s–1980s to embrace more culturalist approaches that appreciated the distinctive epistemological and cosmological dimensions of Indigenous political resistance. Nevertheless, this attention to cultures rejected the idea that cultures were somehow fixed or pristine or exotic:

Cultures are ... densely interdependent in their formation and identity. They exist in complex historical processes of interaction with other cultures ... Cultural diversity is not a phenomenon of exotic and incommensurable others in distant lands and at different stages of development ... interaction and interdependency of cultures is not a recent phenomenon; the cultures of the world have been shaped and formed by interaction for a millennium.<sup>14</sup>

As political theorist James Tully’s work exemplifies, in the 1990s, Western critical academics attempted to highlight the importance of cultural distinctions as a pluralising and disruptive force, keeping open the foundational assumptions of modernist liberal constitutionalism.<sup>15</sup> The struggles of Indigenous groups and communities for rights and recognition in the 1980s and 1990s led not to the idea of an alternative speculative analytics of ‘becoming’ but to the idea of a plural and globalised world where cultures were living, changing and entangled sets of practices and experiences.<sup>16</sup> Thus Sahlins’ view of the ‘indigenization of modernity’ sought to critique the binaries and hierarchies, which informed the anthropological gaze and to problematise the attempt to construct fixed differences and distinctions which categorised and essentialised Indigenous societies. Critical anthropology thus highlighted the essentialising of Indigenous cultures and practices under

regimes of settler-colonialism<sup>17</sup> and problematised the continued reification of Indigenous culture through ecological and New Age cultural practices.<sup>18</sup>

Until the late 1990s the marginal position of Indigenous peoples meant that for most theorists, Indigenous communities and Indigenous thought were constrained by settler-colonialism. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith stated (in 1999) 'Our colonial experience traps us in the project of modernity. There can be no 'postmodern' for us until we have settled some business of the modern.'<sup>19</sup> This is a far cry from contemporary interpretations and translations of the power and potential of Indigenous knowledge. In the 2000s and 2010s an alternative response to the post-structuralist or relativist position emerged, one that was informed by debates in continental philosophy and focused on moving beyond deconstruction based upon interpretive framings of meaning through symbolic interaction and language as representation. While for culturalist approaches the emphasis was upon how the abstraction of language removed the reality of the world, as signs lost their signification and meaning, the 'ontological' or 'ontopolitical' turn in anthropology sought to ground the discipline in the use of ethnographic materials for the production of alternative realities. It is here, in making this 'turn', that Indigenous knowledge as a futural method became central. In anthropology, this focus managed to evade the discipline's difficulties with reducing the 'other' through either a universalist or relativist approach: the other was to be no longer the object of knowledge but the subject of a new metaphysics of knowing.

This shift of subject positions was enabled through the dismissal of the modernist divide between plural and subjective 'culture' and universal and objective 'nature'. Contemporary theorists claim that Indigenous approaches enable them to solve the problems of anthropological methods and to move beyond cultural frameworks of analysis in order to take alterity seriously. Literally, the demand of the ontopolitical turn in anthropology is to 'become Indigenous': to take the appearance of the world as the starting point for alternative speculative futures. Indigenous knowledge then becomes the practice and method of anthropology, deriving from the ontopolitics of interpreting what the world itself, in its fluid multiplicity or the 'liveliness of life', might be enabling, as opposed to how it is constructed by the subject. Here, 'becoming Indigenous', as a set of analytics, has as its goal not the understanding of Indigenous groups or communities as 'cultures' but the application of Indigenous ways of knowing to speculative knowledge-production *per se*. In this respect, ontopolitical anthropology puts Indigenous knowledge on the same level as Western or modern ways of generating meaning (as we shall analyse later) as a symmetrically similar process but with different outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

To put our argument upfront, ontopolitical anthropology makes two essentialising moves. Firstly, analytically there is the construction of a strict epistemological and ontological division between the 'Indigenous' and the 'modern', or the Indigenous and the colonial. This binary is one that very much resembles Bruno Latour's division between the 'Human' and the 'Earthbound'.<sup>21</sup> This is ontopolitical as there is an implicit connection between the epistemological distinctions, i.e. the ways of knowing (a process of speculation based upon embodied experience versus an abstract process of causal rationalisation) and the ontological underpinnings, i.e. what is to be known (a multiverse of speculative possibilities). Here the struggle is clear. If anything, it is a little reminiscent of the Cold War articulation of a clear divide – geographic, political and ideological – between the 'capitalist West' and the 'communist East'. Except this time the divide is

between the modernist/colonial West and allegedly non-modern colonised/‘Indigenous communities’. This level of crudity in the spatial, ethnographic and epistemic mapping of the world is rarely overtly argued in the anthropological literature, and merely smuggled in through the exclusive focus on selected Indigenous groups and, even then, only certain peripheral aspects, such as shamanic practices, held to hold the key to Indigenous being, for their critical anthropological interlocutors.<sup>22</sup>

The second move is the extraction of an analytic that can be generalised. The analytic is not exactly the same in every case but it can generally be directly mapped on to contemporary continental theorising, often claiming authority from dubiously reductive readings of the work of Deleuze and Guattari, phenomenology and semiotics, or indirectly via post-humanism, actor-network theory, new materialism and object-oriented ontology. Ontopolitical anthropology is distinct as a practice in that its concern is the generation of an alternative analytics rather than an understanding of Indigenous life and practices per se. The fact that some academics engaged in ontopolitical anthropology (or using the work derived from this) have long-standing commitments to Indigenous struggles and see this work as enabling these claims does not detract from what we see as both the problematic nature of the underlying political philosophy and the risk of exoticising or ontologising indigeneity itself.

We claim that the Indigenous play a vital role for contemporary theorists, not so much as objects of study in their own right (old fashioned anthropology) nor as a focus of political solidarity (old fashioned politics) but rather as a vicarious stage army for critical scholars meeting the fashionable demand to develop non-modern approaches to knowledge production. For many critical theorists, feminists, posthumanists, new materialists, actor-network theorists and object-oriented ontologists, Indigenous thought (as produced through the lens of ontopolitical anthropology) plays a fundamental role in supplementing and legitimating their experiments in ‘provincializing’ the foundations of Western epistemology in the culture/nature divide. This role is one that is largely accidental, based on a particular reading and engagement, which constructs Indigenous thought as non-Western or non-modern, in so far as it allocates agency to non-human actors. We suggest that the demand for ontopolitical anthropology is enhanced by the construction of indigeneity such that it coincides with the desire of critical theorists to give additional legitimacy to their speculative projects. The irony is that too often these theorists end up adopting and strengthening tropes which merely mimic the most dominant and disempowering cultural and political forms of our times, instead of doing what critique ought to and provide, at the very least, some critical distance from and insight into them.<sup>23</sup>

## Anthropology and the Anthropocene

The apparent failure of modernity – allegedly played out in the global warming, climate change, species extinction and the ocean acidification of our contemporary world – has driven the ‘ontological turn in anthropology as much as, if not more than, the discipline’s internal limitations. While modernity was constructed as successful the question posed by anthropologists was why Indigenous cultures got things ‘wrong’. As Descola notes:

In ethnographic enquiries, the dualism of nature and culture that the observer carries with him thus effectively compels him to approach the system of objectification of reality which

he studies as a more or less impoverished variant of that which is familiar to us, the local system ultimately proving to be incapable of completely objectifying our own reality.<sup>24</sup>

By the 2000s, this approach increasingly became displaced through a shift away from cultural frameworks of understanding. Now Indigenous knowledge was used to show how earlier assumptions of Western anthropology got things ‘wrong’. Through ontopolitical anthropology, Indigenous knowledge became translated into Western self-knowledge. This translation is the ground upon which the injunction to ‘become Indigenous’ is enabled and conditioned.<sup>25</sup> The error of Western anthropology was not understood to be at the level of epistemology per se, how to know or understand Indigenous practices, but at the level of ontology: the deeper underlying assumption of Western researchers, that nature was objective or universal and that culture was subjective and multiple. Thus, for many authors, thinking beyond modernity’s limits means ‘becoming Indigenous’ through overcoming Western ‘anthropocentrism’. If ‘Humans’ (with a capital ‘H’) led to the global environmental catastrophe of the Anthropocene then ‘the Human’ is the problem that Indigenous knowledge is to be mobilised against.<sup>26</sup>

Viveiros de Castro and Danowski argue that the struggle against ‘the Human’ enrolls Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, Donna Haraway and Elizabeth Povinelli,<sup>27</sup> thereby highlighting that the construction of this modern/Indigenous binary involves elite figures of the white Western academy (well beyond the discipline of anthropology itself) as key interpreters of indigeneity as an analytical method. This capacity for critical theorists to speak on behalf of the Indigenous would not be possible without anthropology’s ontopolitical turn, transforming Indigenous knowledge into a method or set of analytics available to all. Armed with the understanding of indigeneity as method, these anthropologically informed theorists can then anoint themselves as the intellectual gurus, leading the struggles of the Indigenous and of others, constructed as a collective resistance to the Anthropocene:

The world ‘without Man’ of this Anthropocene lived in a mode of resistance would thus converge with the world ‘made of people’ of Amerindian cosmologies: Gaia’s definitive transcendence becomes indistinguishable from the originary anthropogeomorphic immanence postulated by the ‘people of Pachamama’.<sup>28</sup>

The conceptualisations of ‘Gaia’ of Latour and Stengers and Donna Haraway’s imaginary of the ‘Chuthulucene’ stand in as representations, ‘indistinguishable’ from the speculative analytics culled from ontopolitical anthropology. These radical critics, who seek to reign back innovation and technological development, are unlikely to be read as conservative or reactionary if they can succeed in foregrounding the need for an ‘Indigenous’ alternative on the basis that the left’s view of progress and freedom forgets the limits of the environment and its sustainability.<sup>29</sup> It also helps their cause if they are able to enrol their constructed Indigenous stage army against those who still harbour illusions in the ‘Human’, with its dreams of ‘progress’.

This is the key trope of ‘becoming Indigenous’: indigeneity as the imaginary of a speculative future after modernity. It is important to emphasise that the Anthropocene plays a fundamentally important role in ‘becoming Indigenous’ because these speculative analytics depend upon a speculative engagement with the present. If we still lived in modernity, then the real struggles of real and differentiated Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples would have to take centre stage, rather than the speculative analytics so beloved

of critical theorists in the West. However, in the Anthropocene, the dice are loaded in favour of the Western academy's critical theorists and their Indigenous imaginary because, or so we are informed, the 'Humans' 'have already lost the war; *their world is already over*.'<sup>30</sup>

But all is not lost; there is a 'second chance'. While the modernist world of the Human may be over, 'there are many worlds in the World', and the Western academic interpreters of the Indigenous, who have extrapolated their method and their analytics, will guide us to these other worlds 'to come', because 'we have a lot to learn from these minor peoples who resist in an impoverished world which is not even their own any more'.<sup>31</sup> 'Becoming Indigenous' is the slogan less of a resistance to modernity and the destruction it is seen to be wreaking upon the world, than of an imaginary future that is always immanent in its becoming:

How can someone *desire backwardness* as their *future*? Maybe the scandal has a reason for being: maybe it is impossible historically to go back to being indigenous. But it is perfectly possible – more than that, this is actually taking place – to experience a *becoming-Indigenous*, local and global, particular as well as general; a *ceaseless rebecoming-Indigenous* ...<sup>32</sup>

While Danowski and Viveiros de Castro refer to popular movements in Brazil, they also hint at the global struggles against the occupation of the Moderns 'in Africa, Australasia, Mongolia, in the backstreets and basements of Fortress Europe'.<sup>33</sup> But, of course, in the Anthropocene, the war against the colonisation of the world by Moderns and Humans, is not a matter of ethnic essentialism but of a political and ethical way of being, held to keep future possibilities open. Once indigeneity is a matter of methodology or analytical framing, we are all inculcated in the struggle and are required to take sides. The future lies with those who are aware that the modernist world is already over. As noted at the start of this article, indigeneity is '*not a remnant of the past*':<sup>34</sup> 'Masters of technoprimitivist bricolage and politico-metaphysical metamorphosis, they are one of the possible chances, in fact, of a *subsistence of the future*.'<sup>35</sup>

## Indigenous analytics

Indigenous analytics are held to expand our world, not by adding one more cultural perspective, another way of seeing, but by providing a different world after 'the end of the world'.<sup>36</sup> Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, already cited extensively above, is widely seen as the 'father of anthropology's ontological turn'<sup>37</sup> and his influential book *Cannibal Metaphysics*<sup>38</sup> has been described as 'the first attempt by a 'real' anthropologist at doing speculative philosophy on the basis of ethnographic materials'.<sup>39</sup> It should be emphasised that Viveiros de Castro is not setting out an ontology, and to this extent there is often misunderstanding of the meaning of 'the ontological turn'. His is a speculative philosophy, which can much more usefully be understood as sharing the approach of speculative realism. The speculative realist position is well set out by Quentin Meillassoux, who argues that since Immanuel Kant's division of the world between the noumenal world (the world 'in itself', which is independent of us) and the phenomenal world (which is the world as we experience and perceive it) the modernist episteme has focused upon knowledge as always a product of our relation to the world, as a correlation between the thinking subject and the world as it is apprehended by that subject, as it is given to thought.



Meillassoux calls this ‘correlationism’: the fact that ‘we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other’.<sup>40</sup>

‘Correlationism’, as a modernist episteme, is held to separate the subject from the world, making the world inaccessible. Man is in the world but trapped in consciousness and language ‘as in a transparent cage’, where ‘Everything is outside, yet it is impossible to get out.’<sup>41</sup> For Meillassoux, speculative thought enables an escape from this modernist cage, enabling critical theorists to take the world more seriously again, rather than merely focusing on the intersubjective construction of meanings. Taking the world more seriously means speculating on a reality that is independent of human thought and thereby opening up to ‘a great outdoors’.<sup>42</sup> This speculative framing posits being as the key to thought, rather than prioritising thought. As Elizabeth Povinelli argues, this inverts the modernist conception which always prioritises thought, the subject and life and denies agency to ‘Nonlife’.<sup>43</sup> For Ray Brassier, along with Meillassoux, one of the most influential speculative realists, speculative realism would allow being to dethrone the power of thought; instead, thought’s limits would ‘index the autonomy of the object in its capacity to turn thought into a thing’.<sup>44</sup>

It is Viveiros de Castro who has brought Amerindian ‘perspectivism’ and ‘multi-naturalism’ to the centre of anthropological thinking on indigeneity as a performative example of the application of a speculative method. In Amerindian cosmology, different beings have fundamentally different perspectives on the world, but share the same forms of ‘soul’ or cognition. All types of being see themselves as humans and see other types of being according to their own affordances and ways of being, normally related to their relational status as predator or prey.<sup>45</sup> The practice of shamanism foregrounds this ‘perspectivism’ as the shaman can cross the barrier between species and become an interlocutor able to take on the perspective or point of view of other beings to understand their intentions or will.<sup>46</sup> It is this framing that enables Viveiros de Castro to translate Amerindian culture into the terminology of Deleuzian or vital materialist speculative philosophy. But, more importantly, this highlights that for ontopolitical anthropology, perspectivism is a method or set of analytics that seeks to go beyond ‘correlationism’. Rather than being imprisoned in a ‘transparent cage’, ‘perspectivism’ enables the world to be grasped through speculative shifts of perspective to those of other beings, with other embodied ways of knowing.

Whereas in the modern ontology, scientific knowledge seeks to reduce objects or occurrences to objective outcomes of causal chains of interconnection, ‘Amerindian epistemological convention follows the inverse principle, which is that an object is an insufficiently interpreted subject.’<sup>47</sup> Objects, to be known, have to become subjects, replete with individual intentionality and wills. The sphere of ‘nature’ as brute facts or mechanical causation is drastically reduced and the sphere of ‘culture’ or of subjectivity and agency becomes much greater. This increase in ‘perspectives’ should not be confused with epistemological relativism; Viveiros de Castro argues that this is an ontological perspectivism as perspectives are correct or true for different forms of being.<sup>48</sup>

It is the distinctions between ontological forms of being that make this form of perspectivism ‘multinatural’: ‘different kinds of being see the same things differently’.<sup>49</sup> The difference is not in different forms of representation as the perspective is a product of the affordances of the body not of the mind. There is one way of knowing – or one

culture – but each form of life knows its world differently. There is no thing ‘in-itself’ somehow outside these multiple perspectives.<sup>50</sup> ‘Every point of view is ‘total’, and no point of view knows its like or equivalent.’<sup>51</sup> Every ‘thing’ is thereby many things at once, in superposition, thus: ‘The indigenous theory of perspectivism emerges from an implicit comparison between the ways the different modes of corporeality ‘naturally’ experience the world as affective multiplicity.’<sup>52</sup>

Viveiros de Castro presents a speculative method of using Indigenous ethnographic materials to inverse the modernist episteme, thus bringing Indigenous thought to the same level as modernist thought. But, of course, this framing is not merely derived from the Indigenous themselves; the point is to extract speculative philosophy from them:

The philosophy of Deleuze ... is where I found the most appropriate machine for retransmitting the sonar frequency that I had picked up from Amerindian thought. Perspectivism and multinaturalism, which are, again, objects that have been resynthesized by anthropological discourse (Indigenous theories, I dare say, do not present themselves in such conveniently pre-packaged fashion!), are the result of the encounter between a certain becoming- Deleuzian of Amerindian ethnology and a certain becoming-Indian of Deleuze and Guattari’s thought – a becoming-Indian that decisively passes ... through the chapter concerning becomings in *A Thousand Plateaus*.<sup>53</sup>

The key point for ontopolitical anthropology is that Indigenous analytics opens up the speculative potential of the world. As Viveiros de Castro argues, this shares much with the ‘symmetric’ epistemology of Bruno Latour: ‘in which knowing is no longer a way of representing the unknown but of interacting with it, i.e. a way of creating rather than contemplating, reflecting, or communicating’.<sup>54</sup> This is not ‘an interpretation’ of Amerindian thought, but rather an ‘experimentation’ with it, beginning by ‘affirming the equivalence, in principle, of anthropological and indigenous discourse’.<sup>55</sup> This is creative for Viveiros de Castro, leaning on Latour, as ‘The task of knowledge is no longer to unify diversity through representation but, as Latour again puts it, of ‘multiplying the agents and agencies populating our world’.’<sup>56</sup>

This approach, of ‘symmetrical anthropology’,<sup>57</sup> argues that Indigenous knowledge speculatively brings new agents and actants into being in ways which could be understood as no different from the natural sciences: ‘it locates Moderns and non-Moderns on the same plane and proposes to consider identically all the collectives within which the repartitions between beings and properties are at work’.<sup>58</sup> Latour argues that there should be no distinction between the two methods and that both are equally valid.<sup>59</sup> ‘All nature-cultures are similar in that they simultaneously construct humans, divinities and nonhumans.’<sup>60</sup> As Descola puts it:

In denying to modern dualism the structuring function that it had hitherto been granted, in emphasizing that, everywhere and always, humans enlist crowds of nonhumans in the fabric of communal life, symmetrical anthropology places on an equal footing Amazonian tribes and biological laboratories, pilgrimages to Our Lady and synchrotrons.<sup>61</sup>

While the position of treating Indigenous knowledge as method can enable equating it with modernist knowledge it has also been used to provincialise modernist approaches further, particularly in the context of the Anthropocene. For these approaches, most notably, that of Descola, the modern episteme becomes just one of four ways of understanding the relationship between culture and nature.<sup>62</sup> Or, even more directly, for

Viveiros de Castro: ‘If real philosophy abounds in imaginary savages, anthropological geophilosophy makes imaginary philosophy with real savages’.<sup>63</sup> While the speculative nature of the philosophy is fairly straight forward, the idea of ‘real savages’ (no matter how ‘playfully’ it may be articulated) as the claimed basis for a particular brand of metaphysics is problematic. As Bassire and Bond state, despite the claims of Viveiros de Castro, Latour and Descola to evading metaphysical or ontological claims about the nature of reality, essentialising regularly slips in with the association of certain ways of thinking with ethnic groups and communities.<sup>64</sup> This problem is highlighted by Brazilian anthropologist Alcida Rita Ramos, who argues that the crude binaries at work in perspectivist approaches, inspired by de Castro’s work, are ‘essentialist’ and ‘exoticizing’, diminishing the intellectual value of Indigenous thinking by making it a foil for projecting Western thought:<sup>65</sup>

... abdicating the central role of ethnographic research as a means to arrive at a deeper understanding of and respect for indigenous peoples ... as a theory, perspectivism is, at best, indifferent to the historical and political predicament of indigenous life in the modern world. It may be fair to say that the more extensive and deeper ethnographic knowledge is, the less arrogant we become and the more clearly we perceive the folly of projecting our theoretical ambitions on indigenous peoples.<sup>66</sup>

### Ontologising indigeneity

The role of the speculative analytics of the ‘Indigenous’ in much contemporary critical theory is to lend substance to the critical and speculative desire to ‘challenge the coloniality of knowledge’ itself,<sup>67</sup> which is a substantially different focus than the coloniality of real inequalities and injustices in the world. Indigenous knowledge is, in these framings, not about a method of struggle or about justifications for land rights and resources but very specifically about knowledge-production itself, or as Viveiros de Castro writes, ‘conceptual self-determination’. It is a generalisable analytic or practice of knowledge production, specifically for the use of non-Indigenous theorists.<sup>68</sup> Yet, for some, the price is too high to pay in terms of what we are calling the ‘ontologisation’ of indigeneity itself. As Descola himself notes, in relation to Tim Ingold’s approach to the Indigenous as illustrating an ‘ontology of dwelling’:

While such a position is entirely legitimate as a philosophical profession of faith, it is hardly so on the anthropological plane which Ingold aims to occupy. It simply inverts the common ethnocentric prejudice: it is no longer the animism of archaic peoples that appears as an incomplete version or clumsy prefiguration of the true objectification of reality as Moderns establish it, but it is rather this very objectification that appears as a monstrous outgrowth dissimulating the truth of the primordial experience of the world, of which the hunter-gatherers assisted by phenomenology, give us a better account.<sup>69</sup>

The critical injunction to ‘become Indigenous’ should be understood as an injunction to take up a particular way of being in the world: to have a particular ethic of being, a particular form of critical stance. At the close of (critical anthropologists) Martin Holbraad and Morten Pedersen’s recent book *The Ontological Turn*<sup>70</sup> this is articulated well. Becoming Indigenous can thus be understood to be an open-ended critical project, where the world itself becomes the critical subject or agency and the critical theorist or activist is not attempting to impose themselves upon the world but rather to become a facilitator or enabler in speculatively letting the world speak back to power, hegemony and limits.

The task of critique then is ‘not unlike an artist probing and sensing her way through the bundle of forces that the affordance of her materials enable or even compels her to release’.<sup>71</sup> The task of critical anthropology is to ‘intensely abstract conceptual scaling or ‘sculpting’ that works by eliciting certain dynamics and potentials present ‘within things’ into intensified versions of these things themselves’.<sup>72</sup> The task of critique is to make the world more ‘alive’, more real and intense.<sup>73</sup>

Indigenous knowledge as method or as analytic becomes a tool to be universalised for a new ‘post-critical’ ethic of care. As Holbraad and Pedersen accurately observe, becoming Indigenous thus becomes an alternative to earlier ethics of critique. It is a far cry from the old left doctrinaires who proclaimed that they had divined a single and absolute truth of the world that they would disseminate and implement through the party. It is also very different to the post-Marxist left’s critique through deconstruction, attempting to reveal the hegemonic forces behind truth claims and to remove the grounds of certainty.<sup>74</sup> The construction of Indigenous knowledge as critique seeks to articulate constructive or positive alternatives through drawing them out from the world itself. The problem, of course, is that these self-aggrandising claims of critical theorists and activists ‘representing’ or ‘giving voice’ to the world, the environment, or mountains and rivers can easily sound like the height of white or colonial hubris.

The construction of Indigenous knowledge as an analytic available for export to Western critical activists and theorists therefore becomes vital for the viability of these (otherwise deeply problematic) claims. We call the production of Indigenous knowledge in these terms ‘ontopolitical’ as it grounds a new ethic of politics, not in the needs and desires of the political subject but allegedly in the world itself or rather in its speculative affordances. In alleging that ‘post-critique’ works on the basis of the ‘conceptual affordances present in a body of ethnographic materials’, Holbraad and Pedersen argue that Indigenous analytics ‘imply a peculiarly non- or anti-normative stance’.<sup>75</sup> Rather than ‘a means to externally defined political ends’ they claim that this approach is ‘a political end in its own right’.<sup>76</sup> This is because Indigenous analytics of bringing the world to life on its own terms and intensifying these is ‘oriented towards the production of difference, or ‘alterity’, as such’.<sup>77</sup> Here the critical anthropological imaginary takes on nearly God-like features:

Regardless ... of the political goals to which it may lend itself, anthropology is *ontologically political* inasmuch as its operation presupposes, and is an attempt experimentally to ‘do’, difference as such: the politics of indefinitely sustaining the possible, the ‘could be’. It is an anthropology, then, that is analytically anti-authoritarian, making it its business to generate vantages from which established forms of thinking are put under relentless pressure by alterity itself, and perhaps changed.<sup>78</sup>

The critical politics of anthropology armed with Indigenous analytics is that of enabling the critical but latent power of ‘alterity itself’. Here we see the full hubris of ontopolitical anthropological thought in its pretence to write the subject out of critique and replace it with life itself, understood as the ceaseless differentiating power of ‘alterity’. Western anthropologists have replaced the hubris of the modernist ‘God’s eye view from nowhere’<sup>79</sup> with the no-less hubristic God’s eye view from everywhere, from life itself.<sup>80</sup> This is a transformation in the form of knowing while maintaining its hierarchical content, through (once again) erasing the positionality of the anthropologist as

knowing subject. It is achieved through the engagement with and transvaluation of Indigenous knowledge.

One problem we have with taking at face value the articulation of Indigenous knowledge as method is that it effaces the reality of being Indigenous. Indigeneity is transformed into a fictive way of being and knowing that has nothing to do with the rich plurality of the lived life of Indigenous groups, and everything to do with the imagination of its white Western author. This exoticisation of Indigenous knowledge is widely prevalent in critical theory.

A good example of how the reality of Indigenous being is effaced in the white, predominantly Western fantasy of 'becoming Indigenous', can be encountered in the work of Donna Haraway, one of the most well known and widely cited critical scholars of the present. Haraway's recent book, *Staying with the Trouble*, reveals a lot about the problems with the expropriation of Indigenous knowledge as method.<sup>81</sup> The final chapter ends with a story she made up at a speculative narration workshop,<sup>82</sup> of a migratory people she names, the Children of Compost. The Children of Compost, like many other peoples of the future, as she tells her readers, 'felt moved to migrate to ruined places and work with human and nonhuman partners to heal these places, building networks, pathways, nodes, and webs of and for a newly habitable world.'<sup>83</sup> A community that migrates in order to heal, the Children of Compost, vaguely but not exclusively Indigenous, understood its task of learning to live on a damaged planet to involve reducing 'radically the burdens of human numbers across the earth'.<sup>84</sup> They understood that human biological reproduction is to be discouraged; 'New children must be rare and precious.'<sup>85</sup>

This imaginary migrant community of healers embody the imperative Haraway ends her book with, 'Make Kin Not Babies'.<sup>86</sup> While biological reproduction is 'discouraged' by the Children of Compost, when it does happen there is an obligation of the person carrying the pregnancy 'to choose an animal symbiont for the new child'.<sup>87</sup> Every newborn comes into being as a symbiont with an animal belonging to another 'actively threatened species'.<sup>88</sup> The animal symbionts themselves are also 'generally members of migratory species'<sup>89</sup> and the education of the children centers on 'learning how to live in symbiosis so as to nurture the animal symbiont'.<sup>90</sup> Because the animals in question are migratory so that education entails teaching the child how to live in the nodes, pathways and corridors where migrations happen.<sup>91</sup> Haraway narrates the five-generational story of Camille, one of the Children of Compost, whose people 'allied themselves with struggling multispecies communities in the rugged mountains and valleys' of the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia.<sup>92</sup> Camille's parent chose the Monarch butterfly to be her animal symbiont, so that she 'would grow in knowledge' of how to sustain the life of this particularly threatened species, which in turn meant learning how to sustain the practices of migration by which the Monarch lives, as her contribution to the life of her people, in their work to make multispecies partnerships flourish and build 'a habitable earth in sustained troubled times'.<sup>93</sup>

Haraway's speculative analytic asks us to imagine a people of the future, a people that she, as the critical theorist, would wish to exist. This is a people attuned to the history of Indigenous struggles, unable to imagine that it could inhabit or move to 'empty land', because it is already well versed in the 'destructive fictions of settler colonialism'.<sup>94</sup> Her story is a dedicated attempt to put into practice what she calls a 'proindigenous' and 'non-settler' approach to 'disabling the pretensions of human exceptionalism'.<sup>95</sup> The speculative embodiment of this pro-Indigenous and non-settler approach to life and being, the young

child Camille, dedicates herself to giving the migrations of the butterflies ‘a chance to have a future in a time of mass extinction’.<sup>96</sup> The migrations of the non-human life in question are the actual objects of Camille’s life of dedicated work and care, we are to suppose. Her life’s work happens ‘almost entirely along the corridors and in the towns, fields, mines, woods, coasts, mountains, deserts, and cities of the great eastern and western monarch migrations’ and she sojourns with the insects ‘in the winter homes of the western migration of the monarchs’.<sup>97</sup> She studies with ‘Native American, First Nation, and Métis teachers’ so as to do her work in support of the migrations.<sup>98</sup> She is ‘well read in decolonial and postcolonial literatures’ and yet still struggling with the consequences of her own people’s inheritance of practices of conservation from settler colonialism.<sup>99</sup>

Camille’s way of shedding that inheritance is to embrace the practices of the Indigenous peoples from who she learns. Indeed the ethos of ‘becoming Indigenous’ is at the heart of the story of Camille. Her people use medical science to transfer genetic materials from animal to human, enabling a shamanic sensitivity to the world that remaining merely human could not. Supplemented with their genetic material, Camille was able to understand ‘the biological, cultural, historical worlds of these clusters of [M]onarch [butterflies]’.<sup>100</sup> Crucially this human-non-human symbiosis required the skill set of Indigenous knowledge:

Of course, as an important component of [Camille]’s education and working alliances as both child and adult, Camille 1 had studied with Native American, First Nation, and Metis teachers, who explained and performed diverse practices and knowledges for conjoined human and other-than-human becoming and exchange.<sup>101</sup>

Here the posthuman Camille needs the assistance of the Indigenous skills in order to let go ‘of colonialist notions of religion and secularism’ and ‘begin to appreciate the sheer semiotic materiality’ of the world.<sup>102</sup> In fact, the further down the line of future posthuman generations Camille goes, the more Indigenous knowledge as method is necessary as an enabling factor. Camille 5, the last in the narrative time-span is trained in Susan Harding’s ‘experimental animism’<sup>103</sup> and in Viveiros de Castro’s multinaturalism and perspectivism.<sup>104</sup> The Camille Stories are literally the white liberal fantasy tale of becoming post-humanly attuned to nature through ‘becoming Indigenous’.

We are not the first to raise the problem of ‘exoticism’. As Bessire and Bond state: ‘the apparent fusion of nature and culture attributed to Indigenous peoples is itself a long-standing conceit whose genealogy can be traced to colonial property regimes in which the commons was assigned to Indians while private property was reserved for Spaniards’.<sup>105</sup> However, the problem of exoticism is often misunderstood as somehow giving Indigenous groups a special insight into non-modern ontologies and epistemologies. This is not really the case. In fact, it could be argued that the reality is worse. One problem that the advocates of Indigenous knowledge as method face is why the arguments and frameworks that they derive from their ‘ethnographic experiences on the ground’ always ends up being very similar to what white European theorists have been arguing for decades. Therefore the anthropological promise that Indigenous analytics can enable the infinite variety of life’s alterity to emerge, in a challenge to West’s colonial hegemony, seems rather disingenuous. These decolonial and postcolonial anthropologists might just as well have stayed at home and attended workshops on speculative narration.

A typical example occurs in the work of Marisol de la Cadena, at the University of California, Davis, who states that she is taking her cue from Isabelle Stengers<sup>106</sup> in developing a ‘multinatural’ cosmopolitics, centred on the alternative ontology of indigeneity. Here’s a sense of how these ‘cosmopolitical’ sensitivities work out on the ground, as she describes two of her interlocutors:

Graciano Mandura (Major of Ocongate, bilingual in Quechua and Spanish, holding a university degree) and Nazario Turpo (pampamisayoq in Ocongate, monolingual Quechua speaker, and not knowing how to read or write) participate in indigeneity from two different positions—one more capable through literacy, the other *better able to interact with other-than-human beings*—but both connected to the worlds that their lives make less than two.<sup>107</sup>

The ease with which the differentiation between different Indigenous perspectives is understood in the most essentialising terms – literacy equals modernist ontology separating nature and culture/ illiteracy equals non-modern ontology ‘better able to interact with other-than-human beings’ – would be shocking if it was not written in good coin by a well respected ontopolitical anthropologist. Once again repeating all the hoary colonial prejudices already rehearsed in Haraway and Stenger’s speculative fiction workshop.

Holbraad and Pedersen, to their credit, take up the challenge, asking: ‘Should we take the similarities between ontological turn-style analyses as an indication that the ethnographic situations that precipitate them are not, after all, as different from each other as we might imagine?’<sup>108</sup> The idea that all across the world the anthropological experience might be the same clearly doesn’t say much for the discipline’s investigative powers or ability to uncover new ways of thinking and doing! If this latter view, that anthropological investigation itself was the source of this similarity, were to be true, then they argue: ‘This would be dismal, since it would effectively amount to the ontological turn admitting that its prime task, that of creating the conditions for ethnographic differences to make a difference, had effectively failed.’<sup>109</sup>

The ‘convergence’ of Western critical thinking, informed through the ‘ontopolitical turn’ in anthropology thus celebrates Indigenous knowledge at the same time as denying an Indigenous voice independent of this ‘methodological’ framing. As Bessire and Bond argue, this is:

... what makes the implications of ontological anthropology so problematic. The paradox is this: Although it poses as a mechanism to promote the ‘ontological self-determination of peoples’ by ‘giving the ontological back to the people’, multinaturalist ontology cannot be taken as a general description of actually existing Indigenous being without becoming ensnared in empirical contradictions. The only way it can often be sustained is by a targeted erasure of ethnographic evidence and an artificial standardization of alterity itself.<sup>110</sup>

They continue:

Is there anything more banally modern than that orthodox dialectic of Otherness wherein Indigenous ontological legitimacy is restricted to the terms of an alterity grounded in myth with which many do not agree and from which many are always already excluded? ... To unsettle one modern binary, he or she must presume the validity of another: the incommensurability of the modern and the nonmodern.<sup>111</sup>

The problem of exoticism is precisely that critical anthropologists, so keen to distil Indigenous knowledge as method or analytics, reduce their field studies to an homogenous whole: one which seems very much based on their readings of contemporary US and

European writers engaged with ontological and epistemological problems with dubious relevance to the struggles of Indigenous communities. Rather than facilitating and enabling any plural or differential power of life to inform their critical perspectives, the project of extracting Indigenous knowledge as a fungible method or analytic for Western critical theorists reduces Indigenous societies and practices to mere props or backstops for the story of how the anthropologists themselves operate to 'do difference differently'.

Critical anthropological work can, of course, engage with indigeneity in other, more self-reflexive, ways. Were these anthropologists to engage with the actual politics of Indigenous struggles for security in the world they would have to encounter the limits and contradictions of their own truth claims. Take, for example, the Inuit of Nunavut, Canada, who are currently engaged in a dispute with the colonial State of Canada over what to do about migratory polar bears. The Inuit claim that there are too many polar bears in Nunavut and that they pose a risk to human wellbeing. In the summer of last year, 2018, this Indigenous claim was borne out when one Inuit, Aaron Gibbons was killed defending his children from a bear.<sup>112</sup> The Inuit claim that because there are too many polar bears in Nunavut so it is their right to cull them.<sup>113</sup> This is in contrast to the claims of colonial scientists that bear populations are in decline and threatened with extinction. There is a significant clash taking place in Nunavut between real Inuit knowledge, which indicates that bear populations are increasing and that climate change poses no threat to the bears' well being, and that of Western biological knowledge which argues that the opposite is true. The Inuit of Nunavut have no interest in fostering one of Haraway's 'multispecies partnerships' with polar bears, nor with receiving its genetic material. By contrast they want to hunt and slaughter the bears in defence of their own human security.

## Conclusion

Rather than merely 'exoticising' Indigenous practices, we argue that critical or ontopolitical anthropology goes further to 'objectify' its subject matter. In treating Indigenous knowledge as method or analytics the theorists analysed above, in fact, reduce Indigenous peoples to the level of any other object or appearance in the world that catches their attention and then becomes used to enable their own creative critical capacities. When Holbraad and Pedersen, for example, argue that they also want to treat things in the same way as they treat Indigenous practices this 'objectification' becomes clearer. The anthropological respect for the 'conceptual self-determination' of Indigenous people is thus no different from their 'respect' for any other object. Thereby, Indigenous knowledge as analytics does not make practices or things more 'exotic' but rather 'objectifies' the world to being merely a set of transmutable effects available for the speculative anthropological imagination.<sup>114</sup> In effect, Indigenous analytics empties the world of things of all meaningful content, reducing the world to a mere foil for speculative thought.

We find the conflation of a very white, very Western, very Eurocentric concern with the crisis of the modern episteme with the real political and life struggles of Indigenous groups and communities for security and freedom from colonialism to be dishonest and, indeed, parasitical. This conflation happens through a specific form of 'translation', through which radical Western conceptual critique becomes reconstructed through the injunction to



'become Indigenous'. This process of 'becoming Indigenous' is not the fantasy of literally pretending to be Indigenous, nor is it a political act of solidarity with Indigenous struggles for rights, land or resources. The indigeneity at stake in anthropology's desire to 'become Indigenous' is the imaginary product of a white liberal and colonial fantasy. From being forms of culture and knowledge that once demanded respect from a distance, indigeneity is hereby reduced to a 'transferable skill set' that white people can learn from and adopt for themselves. This is the reality of colonialism today.

## Notes

1. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
2. Elizabeth Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, p 33.
3. Martin Holbraad and Morton Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp 6–7.
4. Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, Cambridge: Polity, 2017, p 123.
5. Such as Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013; Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2013; Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2014; Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*.
6. Tess Lea, 'Contemporary Anthropologies of Indigenous Australia', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41, 2012, pp 187–202.
7. Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, p 16.
8. See Arun Agrawal, 'Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge: Some Critical Comments', *IK Monitor* 3(3), 1995, pp 3–6.
9. Marshall Sahlins, 'What is Anthropological Enlightenment? Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28, 1999, p x.
10. Sahlins, 'What is Anthropological Enlightenment?', p xi.
11. Linda Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, London: Zed Books, 2012, p 7.
12. Marjo Lindroth and Heidi Sinevaara-Niskanen, *Global Politics and its Violent Care for Indigeneity*, Cham: Palgrave, 2018, pp 1–25.
13. See, for example, James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
14. Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*, p 11.
15. Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*.
16. See also Marie Battiste (ed.) *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000; Jeffrey Sissons, *First Peoples: Indigenous Cultures and Their Futures*, London: Reaktion Books, 2005; Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014; Chris Andersen, *Métis: Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014.
17. See, for example, Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Events*, London: Cassell, 1999; 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4), 2006, pp 387–409.
18. For example, Andrew Lattas, 'Nationalism, Aesthetic Redemption and Aboriginality', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 2(3), 1991, pp 307–324; 'Aborigines and Contemporary Australian Nationalism: Primordiality and the Cultural Politics of Otherness', *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* 27, 1990, pp 50–69; 'Primitivism, Nationalism and Individualism in Australian Popular Culture', *Journal of Australian Studies* 16(35), 1992, pp 45–58.

19. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, p 35.
20. Bruno Latour, 'Perspectivism: "Type" or "Bomb"', *Anthropology Today* 25(2), 2009, pp 1–2; *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010; Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*; Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*.
21. Latour, *Facing Gaia, Six Lectures on the Political Theology of Nature: Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion, Edinburgh, 18th–28th of February 2013* (draft version 1-3-13), 2013.
22. As Luca Bessire and David Bond state:
 

... the resulting awe of alterity holds up only so long as the ground of ontology is kept clean. Coca-Cola cans, shotguns, soccer balls, evangelical icons, petrochemical pollution, trinkets for tourists, and T-shirts from Grand Rapids—to name a few of the things we have encountered in far-flung Indigenous villages—are brushed aside, as the dreams of dogs and chants of elders come to stand in for the most pressing form of material becoming. This rarified multinaturalism is only strengthened as the figure of ontology shifts attention from domestic or working relationships with the natural world to priestly assertions of it. Thus, many in the ontological turn attempt to convince fellow anthropologists that shamanic visions of vibrant actuality are the only version that really counts. ('Ontological Anthropology and the Deferral of Critique', *American Ethnologist* 41(3), 2014, p 447).
23. Melinda Hinkson, 'Locating a Zeitgeist: Displacement, Becoming, and the End of Alterity', *Critique of Anthropology* (first published online 11 June 2019).
24. Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, p 57.
25. As Latour notes ('Perspectivism: "Type" or "Bomb"', p 2), Amerindian perspectivism is 'a bomb with the potential to explode the whole implicit philosophy so dominant in most ethnographers' interpretations of their material'.
26. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, pp 95–96.
27. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, p 111.
28. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, p 112.
29. As discussed in Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*; Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, Paris: Open Humanities Press, 2015; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Anthropocene and the Convergence of Histories', in C. Hamilton, C. Bonneuil and F. Gemenne (eds), *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2015, pp 44–56; Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, pp 116–117.
30. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, p 119.
31. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, p 120.
32. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, p 122.
33. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*.
34. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, p 123.
35. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*.
36. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
37. Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*, p 157.
38. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*.
39. Peter Skafish, 'Introduction', in Viveiros de Castro (ed), *Cannibal Metaphysics*, Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2014, p 10.
40. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, London: Continuum, 2008, p 5.
41. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p 6.
42. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p 50.
43. 'Life is not the miracle – the dynamic opposed to the inert of rocky substance. Nonlife is what holds, or should hold for us, the more radical potential. For Nonlife created what it is

- radically not ... Life is merely a moment in the greater dynamic unfolding of Nonlife' (Povinnelli, *Geontologies*, p 176).
44. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p 229.
  45. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p 57.
  46. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, pp 60–61; p 152.
  47. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p 62.
  48. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p 70. As Eduardo Kohn describes his response to being challenged with the question of whether or not he was still just talking about a cultural system: 'My response was, "Oh, you think that how people see a jaguar seeing the world is a cultural product? Well, go out in the forest. When you're out in the forest, you have to get how the jaguar sees the world right, or else ..."' (Kohn, 'Leaving the Forest', in A.-S. Springer and E. Turpin (eds), *The Word for World is Still Forest*, Berlin: K. Verlag & Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2017, pp 163–164).
  49. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p 71.
  50. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p 73.
  51. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, pp 157–158.
  52. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p 87.
  53. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, pp 92–93.
  54. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p 105.
  55. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, pp 188–189.
  56. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p 105.
  57. Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, p 69.
  58. Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, p 71.
  59. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*; Latour, 'Not the Question', *Anthropology Newsletter* 37 (3), 1996, pp 1–6.
  60. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p 106.
  61. Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, p 71.
  62. Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*.
  63. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p 192.
  64. Bassire and Bond, 'Ontological Anthropology and the Deferral of Critique'.
  65. Alcida Rita Ramos, 'The Politics of Perspectivism', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41, 2012, pp 481–494.
  66. Ramos, 'The Politics of Perspectivism', p 489.
  67. Doerthe Rosenow, *Un-making Environmental Activism: Beyond Modern/Colonial Binaries in the GMO Controversy*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, p 9.
  68. This is why Indigenous knowledge as an analytic is a distinctive part of what is often called the 'ontological turn' to material ways of being in the world. As Holbraad and Pedersen write, in the early 1990s, the focus in anthropology was upon phenomenology, alternative ways of being in and thereby perceiving the world, held to be prior to language and conceptualisation (this was thereby another way of interpreting or understanding Indigenous cultural distinctions). The difference in the shift to Indigenous knowledge is that this is seen as a specific method for theorising and conceptualising from reality itself (Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*, p 284).
  69. Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, p 66.
  70. Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*.
  71. Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*, p 292.
  72. Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*.
  73. See also Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
  74. See Pol Bargañés-Pedreny, 'From Critique to Affirmation in International Relations', *Global Society* 33(1), 2019, pp 1–11.
  75. Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*, p 294.
  76. Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*, p 295.

77. Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*, p 296.
78. Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*, pp 296–297.
79. Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies* 14(3), 1988, pp 575–599.
80. As Claire Colebrook (*Death of the Posthuman: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, pp 163–164) states:
 

Humanism posits an elevated or exceptional ‘man’ to grant sense to existence, then when ‘man’ is negated or removed what is left is the human all too human tendency to see the world as one giant anthropomorphic self-organizing living body ... When man is destroyed to yield a posthuman world it is the same world minus humans, a world of meaning, sociality and readability yet without any sense of the disjunction, gap or limits of the human.
81. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
82. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p xii.
83. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 137.
84. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 139.
85. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 138.
86. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 137.
87. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 139.
88. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.
89. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 140
90. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.
91. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.
92. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 141.
93. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, pp 142–143.
94. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 138.
95. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 216.
96. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 148.
97. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, pp 152–153.
98. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 153.
99. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, pp 154–155.
100. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 153.
101. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.
102. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 157.
103. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 164.
104. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 165.
105. Bessire and Bond, ‘Ontological Anthropology and the Deferral of Critique’, p 444.
106. Marisol de la Cadena, ‘Indigenous Cosmopolitics in The Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond “Politics”’, *Cultural Anthropology* 25(2), 2010, p 336; p 346.
107. de la Cadena, ‘Indigenous Cosmopolitics’, p 348; emphasis added.
108. Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*, p 279, n.11.
109. Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*.
110. Bessire and Bond, ‘Ontological Anthropology and the Deferral of Critique’, p 443.
111. Bessire and Bond, ‘Ontological Anthropology’, p 444.
112. CBC News, ‘Man killed by polar bear “died a hero”, cousin says’, 4 July 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/polar-bear-attack-arviat-1.4733550>.
113. B. Weber, ‘Draft plan says Nunavut has too many polar bears and climate change isn’t affecting them’, 12 November 1 2018. <https://globalnews.ca/news/4655426/nunavut-polar-bear-population-climate-change/>.
114. See also Mark Jackson, ‘Composing Postcolonial Geographies: Postconstructivism, Ecology and Overcoming Ontologies of Critique’, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35(1), 2014, p 76.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

*David Chandler* is Professor of International Relations at the University of Westminster and edits *Anthropocenes: Human, Inhuman, Posthuman*. His recent books include *Becoming Indigenous: Governing Imaginaries in the Anthropocene* (with Julian Reid) (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), *Ontopolitics in the Anthropocene: An Introduction to Mapping, Sensing and Hacking* (Routledge, 2018), *The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience, Adaptation and Vulnerability* (with Julian Reid) (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) and *Resilience: The Governance of Complexity* (Routledge, 2014).

*Julian Reid* is Chair and Professor of International Relations at the University of Lapland in Finland. He is currently Principal Investigator in the Finnish Academy funded research project, *Indigeneity in Waiting*. His books include *Becoming Indigenous* (coauthored with David Chandler); *Biopolitics of the War on Terror*; *Resilient Life* (coauthored with Brad Evans); *The Liberal Way of War* (coauthored with Michael Dillon); *The Neoliberal Subject* (coauthored with David Chandler); *Biopolitics of Development* (co-edited with Sandro Mezzadra and Ranabir Samaddar); *Deleuze and Fascism* (co-edited with Brad Evans). In 2014 he held the Benjamin Meaker Visiting Professorship at the University of Bristol, UK.

## ORCID

*David Chandler*  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2766-7169>