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Manoomin is not Wild Rice: An Anishinaabeg Treaty

Abstract

In this article I consider the Anishinaabeg tradition of harvesting manoomin as it is conceived within the language used by Anishinaabeg political actors. I attempt to show that manoomin is not identical to wild rice and that these distinct concepts and their concomitant epistemic and ontological projects are obscured in the act of using these terms interchangeably. I emphasize that these words signify different projects and I introduce a third, which I call Anishinaabe-manoomin following many local designations, as a means of contributing to a decolonial articulation of these projects by highlighting the humanist dimension of the term Anishinaabe.

Résumé

À travers cet article, j'examine la tradition Anishinaabeg de récolter manoomin tel qu'elle est véhiculé par le langage des acteurs politiques Anishinaabeg. Je cherche à montrer que manoomin et le riz sauvage ne sont pas identiques et que le fait d'utiliser ces termes de manière indifférenciée obscurcit la différence entre leurs conceptions et leurs projets épistémiques et ontologiques concomitantes. J'accentue sur le fait que ces termes représentent des projets divers et introduis un troisième que j'appelle Anishinaabeg – manoomin en faisant référence à de nombreuses dénominations locales, dans le but de contribuer à une articulation décolonisée de ces projets, tout en insistant sur la dimension humaniste du terme Anishinaabeg.

Introduction

Translation appears as a means by which communication across cultures is facilitated. However, the linguistic direction in which this act flows is not neutral. Despite this, the languages in which dominant epistemologies are codified appear as neutral media the more hegemonic they become extending their form to whatever object falls within their purview. But the question of this hegemony is based on a great epistemic violence that, in part, perpetuates itself every time we assume the neutrality of translation. In this article I consider the Anishinaabeg tradition of har-

vesting manoomin¹ as it is conceived within the language used by Anishinaabeg political actors. I attempt to show that manoomin is not identical to wild rice and that these distinct concepts and their concomitant epistemic and ontological commitments are obscured in the act of using these terms interchangeably. I therefore suggest that these words signify different projects and I introduce a third, which I call Anishinaabe-manoomin following many local designations, as a means of contributing to a decolonial articulation of these projects by highlighting the humanist dimension of the term Anishinaabe. To this end, I elaborate my argument by drawing on concepts developed by various Latin American thinkers, specifically those affiliated with the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality Group (MCD).² My appeal to Latin American thinkers is based on a twofold rationale. On the one hand, their analyses examine the consequences of the so-called discovery of the New World, which extend well beyond the borders of modern nation-states whether South or North American; on the other hand, and primarily because of this transnational historical reading, their theories take into consideration certain generative processes of modernity intimately linked to colonialism, which equally mark the Canadian context as they do the southern part of the hemisphere. Their contributions therefore help identify certain aspects of colonial relations that do not find a thorough articulation under the theoretical lens of settler colonialism, which strikes me as the predominant discourse in Canada at the moment, particularly with regards to the epistemological violence of colonialism. Furthermore, the historical narrative that forms the basis of the MCD project foregrounds a more complex logic of domination, the extent of which remains underdeveloped through an analysis of Indigenous-settler relations that postulates the nation-state as a point of departure. In thinking with these ideas, I hope to draw attention to the epistemological problems engendered by colonialism and think through the challenges of a politics based on a project of epistemic diversity. Moreover, I am driven by the hope and possibility of revitalizing the practice of harvesting manoomin within my own community. The reflections presented here are thus part of an effort to give greater meaning to this motive by arguing for the epistemic and political sense of such a project in our contemporary circumstances, especially pertaining to cases where it is a question of restoring certain traditions that have been negated and identifying the conditions that enable these traditions to be shared across colonially constructed identities and borders.

1 Manoomin is commonly referred to as wild rice in English. For a brief but insightful introduction to this tradition see the short video by Ryan Finn *Manoomin: Food that Grows on the Water*, narrated by Fred Ackley Jr. of Mole Lake Reservation, Wisconsin available at <http://theways.org/story/manoomin>.

2 For a good overview of the MCD group see Mabel Maraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (2008).

'Anishinaabe' as humanist³ tradition

The meaning of Anishinaabe⁴ has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Whether understood as “the good beings,” “the spontaneous beings,” or “from whence lowered the male of the species,” all have denoted some notion of the human being (Child, xvii). Today, it is well known that the word in Anishinaabemowin (the language of the Anishinaabe) often refers to “indigenous peoples,” not exclusively those who self-identify as Anishinaabe or Algonquin, for instance, but all Indigenous peoples across what is now the Americas. What is not often emphasized is that prior to contact all peoples were signified by the term, not in the sense of cultural homogeneity, but as a means of recognizing the humanity of others. Anishinaabeg spiritual teacher Edward Benton-Benai reminds us of this in his narration of the Creation story, whereby all Indigenous peoples originate from Original Man.⁵ It is only with the advent of colonialism and the establishment of settler populations that Anishinaabe came to refer exclusively to Indigenous peoples and more commonly to Anishinaabe as a specific cultural group. What seems crucial today is precisely the need to recover the underlying tradition of this name as a concept and practice of philosophical reflection on humanity;⁶ that is, a reflection on what it means to be human as opposed to the mere affirmation and exclusive use of Anishinaabe as a designation for a category of people born within a context of colonial relations and knowledge practice.

This is how I understand Nishnaabekwe scholar Leanne Simpson when she states with reference to Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred:

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- 3 I am using this term in the sense used by Nelson Maldonado-Torres in his discussion of Frantz Fanon where he argues that Fanon’s brand of humanism is not “the abstract humanism that interferes with the activity of humanization,” but a suspension of this false universal for the purpose of striving for a higher expression of the human that transcends colonial and racist social systems (Maldonado-Torres, 158). This is corroborated by Lewis Gordon’s observation that “[f]or people whose humanity has long been denied, the value of philosophical anthropology became their *philosophia prima*” (2016, 69). I will speak more about this below.
 - 4 The meaning of Anishinaabe has great personal import for me and has inspired some of the reflections in this paper. My Anishinaabeg names, given to me by my Elders at Opwaaganisining (Lake Helen, Ontario), are Gaa gabaa wiji’iwaad Anishinaaben and Gaa gabaa wiji’iwaad kina wiya, which translate respectively as “one who helps the people” and “one who helps all living beings.” Attempting to live these two names responsibly has led me to think about the greater meaning of Anishinaabe beyond colonial determinations.
 - 5 “All tribes came from this Original Man. The Ojibway [Anishinaabe] are a tribe because of the way they speak. We believe that we are nee-kon’-nis-ug’ (brothers) with all tribes; we are separated only by our tongue or languages” (Benton-Banai, 4).
 - 6 I will discuss this in more detail below in relation to the Anishinaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy.

[We] need to reclaim the “radical” and “revolutionary” parts of Nishnaabeg⁷ Knowledge, the parts that encourage what Alfred calls “free philosophical thinking,” and encourage self-reflection [...] I believe that the fundamentalism that is sometimes seen in Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous communities is a facet of colonialism, and comes from a misunderstanding of Nishnaabemwin and Nishnaabeg philosophy. (2008, 212)

It is no accident that Simpson refers here to the risk of fundamentalism in conjunction with the project of reclaiming and empowering Indigenous epistemic traditions, and her intuition about its colonial origin is not trivial, but critical. The source of this misunderstanding is intrinsically connected to and arises primarily from the notion and function of colonialism one assumes to be at work in society. Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel provides an insightful distinction that sheds light on the nature of this problem:

It is important here to distinguish the “epistemic location” from the “social location.” The fact that one is socially located on the oppressed side of power relations does not automatically mean that he/she is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location. The success of the modern/colonial world-system consists precisely in making subjects that are socially located on the oppressed side of the colonial difference think epistemically like ones in dominant positions. (Grosfoguel 2011, 5)

In other words, the fact of being oppressed does not imply an epistemic position autonomous from the system of domination nor one that is by definition different from the epistemology that reproduces it. To assume so is to postulate an absolute exteriority, understood in ontological terms, and neglect the epistemological dimension of colonial domination. Moreover, due to this neglect of relationality, an understanding based on the conflation of social location and subaltern epistemic practice risks being self-characterized as the negation of its opposite (the epistemology and norms of the colonizer) within the binary of colonial relations, without challenging the very logic that produces and justifies epistemic hierarchy. As such, it presupposes a dehistoricized and monotopic epistemology that merely extends a dogmatic privilege to the location of the subaltern understood as the absolute Other of the system. This gives rise to a position, consequently, which is highly conducive to fundamentalism. Here the relevance of Simpson’s discussion, following the teachings of Anishinaabeg Elder Gdigaa Migizi, of the Anishinaabeg notion of Aanjigone is paramount. Simpson defines it as

7 Nishnaabeg is another spelling of Anishinaabe according to particular dialects of Anishinaabemowin spoken by Anishinaabe peoples in different geographical regions.

the idea that one needs to be very, very careful with making judgments and with the act of criticism. Aanjigone is a concept that promotes the framing of Nishnaabeg values and ethics *in the positive*. It means that if we criticize something our spiritual being may take on the very things we are criticizing. (2011, 54; emphasis J.C.)

While Simpson suggests that Aanjigone is an attitude grounded in the spiritual knowledge of the “implicate order,” in the context of the current discussion, I interpret this as the cautionary attitude that resists proceeding without reflection on the logic of the terms born within colonial relations, an act which signals the danger of reinforcing a dogmatism grounded in the oppressed as a privileged form of subjectivity without heeding the distinction introduced by Grosfoguel. As such, Aanjigone marks a general attitude and epistemic resource for the framework of my argument and the project of decolonization I propose here. It gives expression to an indispensable step in confronting the epistemological problem of philosophical mobility.⁸ However, this argument requires further elucidation of its sources, especially if one is to resist the collapse of a humanist interpretation of Anishinaabe into this logic. Although I can only provide a general summary, which certainly does not capture the complexity of the MCD project, I hope to at least highlight some key concepts that are important for my argument.

MCD Project: Some Concepts

Grosfoguel’s distinction belongs to a genealogy of thought based on a specific reading of history, one developed by a number of Latin American thinkers,⁹ including Argentine semiotician Walter Mignolo who defines the concept of the “modern/colonial world-system” referred to above as

an epistemic standpoint or locus of enunciation that emerged and evolved in Latin American scholarship and during the Cold War period that looked at modernity from the perspective of coloniality, that is, from the perspective of the Creolo/mestizo/European immigrant consciousness whose history unfolded at the receiving end of the colonial experience [...] It is, first and foremost, an epistemic standpoint on world history whose key concept is the “coloniality of power”. (Mignolo 2003, 436-437)

8 See John Borrows (2016) for a discussion of Indigenous physical and intellectual mobility as primary challenges to decolonization and the good life.

9 For a thorough look at this genealogy see Mabel Marañá, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (2008).

Before discussing this latter concept, it is crucial here to note that Mignolo emphasizes the character of the colonial/modern world-system as both a theoretical object and a locus of enunciation, thus bringing to the fore “the geopolitics of knowledge” (Mignolo 2008, 229). By relocating the place of theoretical production to the local histories of modern colonialism, this epistemic act reveals a drastically different interpretation of world history from hegemonic readings that presume the inherent validity of modernity as their over-arching narrative.¹⁰ With its foundations in the conquest of America, the modern/colonial world-system identifies coloniality as constitutive of modernity against Eurocentric interpretations that relegate it to the status of an accidental and, thus reconcilable, derivative (Grosfoguel 2011, 11).¹¹ By tracing the various permutations of coloniality across *modern* history, including the “post-colonial” era of various geohistorical locations, the modern/colonial world-system indicates a logic that survives the period of official colonial administrations to become entrenched as a principle of contemporary global social organization, hence the designation “global coloniality” often used to describe its current modality (Grosfoguel 2011, 13).

The “coloniality of power,”¹² mentioned in the above quote, is thus central to understanding the modern/colonial world-system. While this notion is comprehensive, Grosfoguel suggests further that “[w]hat is new in the ‘coloniality of power’ perspective is how the idea of race and racism becomes the organizing principle that structures all of the multiple hierarchies of the world-system” (2011, 10). Although the coloniality of power is a complex logic that operates across the social field in all its diversity, I am primarily concerned in this article with its operation in the sphere of knowledge and subjectivity, which, as Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gomez has pointed out, “cannot be reduced to economic, political, and military domination of the world by Europe, [but] involves also and *primarily* the epistemic foundations that supported the hegemony of European models of production of knowledge in modernity” (280, emphasis J.C.). Thus within this theoretical framework, race, as a category of social classification, is understood as an essential mediation in the consolidation of Western epistemological hegemony. Crucial to the development and management of this epistemic dominance, according to Mignolo, is the subordination of other forms of knowledge and culture, historically articulated through “colonial difference” as the condition of possibility of the coloniality of power and a strategy that provides “the legitimacy for the subalternization of

10 While Mignolo states that this concept was developed from the experience and consciousness of “Creolo/mestizo/European immigrant[s],” I interpret the concepts developed by the MCD project as gifts that can help Indigenous thought and movements articulate decolonial projects.

11 Grosfoguel actually argues that there is a crucial prehistory to this system that begins with the Spanish “Reconquista” of the Iberian Peninsula and the genocide of women deemed witches in medieval Europe. See Grosfoguel (2013).

12 The concept “coloniality of power” was introduced in the late 1980s by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano. See his “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America” (2000).

knowledges and the subjugation of people" (2012, 16). He defines colonial difference as "the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, an energy and machinery to transform differences into values" (2012, 13). The "line of colonial differences," he argues elsewhere, "traced the separation between 'humanitas' and 'anthropos,' and therefore was the necessary condition for inventing the epistemic and ontological differences and then making the lines appear neutral and objective" (2011, 90). Accordingly, it is through the historical production of colonial difference that the hegemony of Western epistemology naturalizes itself as *the* locus of enunciation, which grounds a territorial epistemology that is monotopic and monological, displacing the focus of epistemic labour to the domain of the enunciated (the known) away from the enunciation (the knowing subject) and thereby effacing its location in the process.¹³ Mignolo elaborates on the logic of this operation in the following manner:

The simultaneous logic of disavowal and dependency of all possible loci of enunciation (from religious to economic, from legal to political, from ethical to erotic) is the hidden logic of modernity, the logic that justifies its place as guiding light and point of arrival, on the one hand, and of disavowal and dependency on the other. This logic is the logic of coloniality put in place, for the modern/colonial world, during the European Renaissance. (2003, 442)

Other scholars have referred to this process as "epistemicide."¹⁴

Furthermore, by delineating the notion of the human¹⁵ through colonial discourses in their various forms across time, whether "as Christian conversion, civilizing mission, development, and market democracy" (Mignolo 2011, 441), the modern/colonial world-system constitutes its "interiority" (realm of *humanitas*) through the invention of its "exteriority" (location of the *anthropos*). However, these metaphors should not be understood in ontological terms, a point that Colombian-American anthropologist Arturo Escobar is quick to point out: "[i]n no way should this exteriority be thought of as a pure ontological outside, untouched by the modern. Exteriority refers to an outside that is precisely constituted as difference by a hegemonic discourse" (168-69). Thus, what is at stake in this conceptualization is not "the ontology of the world," but the possibility of identifying loci of enunciation, or,

13 For a thorough discussion of this development see Grosfoguel (2012).

14 See for instance Grosfoguel (2013).

15 The distinction between ontological and epistemic difference is useful for understanding the production of colonial difference. By attributing ontological "equality" to the "barbarian" or "primitive," subordination becomes justified on the basis of epistemic deficiencies that, in turn, correspond to some form of ontological inferiority. Granting formal 'human' status legitimizes a form of didactic violence. See Mignolo's discussion of De Vitoria's strategy of defending the rights of Amerindians (Mignolo 2011, 279).

rather, the conditions of their possibility and potential, negated in the process of determining “legitimate” knowledge (Mignolo 2012, 338). This is why Mignolo suggests that decolonial reason be conceived as the rationality of different loci of enunciation (Mignolo 2012, 116). Colonial difference becomes the epistemic standpoint from which the possibility of developing this rationality emerges. In its diverse enactments throughout the modern/colonial world-system, colonial difference opens up (a) space(s), as locus of enunciation, from which to think beyond the logic of coloniality and the modern/colonial world-system precisely by foregrounding the essence of this exteriority as constitutive of the world-system and the epistemic potential of its “borders” in which many subaltern people(s) dwell existentially. Accordingly, it is crucial that this site be understood as a starting point from which to think decolonially, and not merely instrumentalized as a way of suggesting that certain subaltern positions can be thought independently of the logic of coloniality. Colonial difference introduces a radical notion of relationality or at least the possibility of relationality as epistemic diversity beyond the logic of coloniality. It is within this framework that Mignolo characterizes decolonization as

the type of deconstruction operation [...] [that involves] maintaining and undoing the colonial difference from the colonial difference itself – that is to say, maintaining the *difference* under the assumption that ‘we are all human’ although undoing the *coloniality of power* that converted differences into values and hierarchies. (Mignolo 2002, 239)

In this sense, decolonization cannot be reduced to an anti-colonial ideology, but a project guided by a logic of decoloniality “understood as the multiple and varied forms of recreating the matrix of power, knowledge, and being, as well as of culture and structure, beyond the Manichean divisions that inhere at the center of modernity/coloniality” (Maldonado-Torres 2012, 3). Hence, the emergence within this overall framework of the triad modernity/coloniality/decoloniality as inseparable elements of a concept and project that seeks to stimulate a plurality of responses to coloniality. In this vein, Mignolo has developed the notion of “border thinking” to characterize a form of epistemology that emerges from colonial difference as locus of enunciation and decolonial project; a notion that I will address in more detail below.

Lastly, it is important to emphasize with regards to Simpson’s observation above that all forms of identity produced within the modern/colonial world-system become suspect when considered ontologically. As Mignolo suggests, “[t]hese [identities] are precisely the forms of identification that contribute to the reproduction of the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system and the coloniality of power and knowledge implicit in the geopolitical articulation of the world” (2012, 171). Questioning these identities, and recognizing the logic of coloniality that underlies them, therefore, is crucial for the recovery of the ‘radical’ and ‘revolutionary’ parts of Anishinaabeg knowledge. Fundamentalism, conversely, affirms oppressed identities

constituted within the formation of the global system without heeding this logic at the heart of their formation. In this sense, the modern/colonial world-system may be understood as an epistemic and geopolitical category that enables us, through the enactment of Aanjigone, to orient ourselves on a macro scale. With this conceptual apparatus in mind, we can begin to address the problem alluded to above by Grosfoguel of thinking from a “subaltern epistemic location” within the modern/colonial world-system. I turn now to a discussion of this possibility with regards to the Anishinaabeg tradition of harvesting “manoomin,” which I attempt to articulate as an epistemic standpoint from colonial difference.

Manoomin is not wild rice

“To call manoomin a plant is to demean it in the eyes of many Anishinaabeg.”
Kathi Avery Kinew

The Anishinaabeg tradition of harvesting wild rice is, following Kathi Avery Kinew, first and foremost a system of governance (1995). As such it belongs to a complex process involving political, economic and spiritual relations and responsibilities. For the reader unfamiliar with this tradition, I offer a description of this practice, albeit brief. According to Brenda Child, the process begins long before the harvest with the selection of a committee whose responsibility is to observe the ecological conditions affecting the rice during the growing season. In certain regions, at least historically, women were the central agents of the harvest and binding ricing beds into sheaves in order to mark the territories where they had legal entitlements to the rice (Child, 24, 25). During Manoominikegiizis, the ricing moon, which is the Anishinaabeg designation for the time corresponding roughly to September, the rice is harvested by canoe with cedar knockers. The stalks are gently tapped allowing the rice to fall into the canoe while some drops to the bottom of the lake for regeneration. The canoe is propelled by a second person using a long pole. Prayers, songs and stories accompany the harvest. Afterwards the rice is parched, winnowed, and hulled through a variety of methods, many of which have changed over time. The entire process, which involves many different community members, is a “model of intergenerational cooperation and learning” (Child, 25). It concludes with a community feast and thanksgiving. As a gift from the Creator, manoomin is a sacred food that signifies a spiritual relationship between Anishinaabeg people and the Creator, which, as such, forms the basis of a fundamental responsibility and a core element of some Anishinaabeg systems of governance (Kinew, 87).

On the other hand, modern taxonomy classifies wild rice under the designation “*Zizania aquatica*,”¹⁶ a categorization that belongs to a system based on a European

16 “*Zizania*” derives from the Greek ‘zizanon’ meaning “a wild weedy grain that typically grew among wheat crops,” <http://www.calflora.net/botanicalnames/pageZ.html>.

tradition rooted in the work of Carl Linnaeus (Vennum, Jr., 13). This practice and discourse constructs a horizon in which “nature” is objectified and understood as a distinct ontological category. Subsequently, “manoomin” is considered interchangeable with “wild rice;” that is, they become identical by reference to the same “object” in “nature.” American-Ecuadorian scholar Catherine Walsh describes the historical context in which this equivalence becomes a function of coloniality:

The natural/scientific explorations first led by Charles Marie de Condamine, Carl Linnaeus, and Alexander von Humboldt, and locally carried out by “New World” *criollo* elite such as José Celestino Mutis and Francisco José de Caldas in Nueva Granada, objectified and naturalized nature. By exploring, explaining, classifying, and ordering the natural world, these men – whether intentionally or not – imposed a cultural order and control, constitutive of what Mary Louise Pratt has referred to as a “European planetary consciousness.” That is “an orientation toward interior exploration and the construction of global-scale meaning through the descriptive apparatus of natural history [...] a basic element constructing modern Eurocentrism” (Walsh 2015, 104).

In other words, this scheme of classification comes to designate “Zizania” as the ontological foundation of which ‘manoomin’ can be understood as a culturally articulated *derivative*, thus furtively placing them within a binary determined by hierarchy. This trick consists in constructing one cultural interpretation as the “ground” of the other, establishing a privileged place from which “knowledge” is produced, according to the geopolitics of Eurocentrism,¹⁷ while relegating the Anishinaabeg understanding to the field of “cultural” production or non-knowledge. It is a “New World” logic which implies that “Zizania” has always been *there* waiting to be discovered and, which conceives of “manoomin” as a contingent form based on inaccurate knowledge. It is established by what Castro-Gómez calls “the hubris of zero degrees,” a key factor in the construction of colonial difference, which he describes as the “gaze that attempts to articulate itself independent of its ethnic and cultural center of observation [...] [so as to] generate a “universal point of view” (278). With this act the power relations that structure the difference between manoomin and wild rice and consolidate cultural dominance are thus concealed. As such, a basic cultural condition for the capitalist model of nature is established that gives rise to what Escobar calls “cultural distribution conflicts,” which “arise from the difference in effective power associated with particular cultural meanings and practices” (14). The logic of coloniality places these determinations in an asymmetrical relation while the hubris of zero degrees, moreover, provides the basis from which to justify the

17 Although I do not focus in this article on the function of colonial difference in the dispossession of Indigenous lands, it is the primary subtext of what I am currently discussing.

dispensability of traditions such as manoomin and its concomitant subjectivities, producing arguments that are well-documented and prevalent across colonial discourses in which colonial difference is enacted.¹⁸

Although Anishinaabe mobilizations around manoomin challenge this ontology, the tendency to assume the neutrality of translation indicates just how deeply ingrained coloniality is in the domain of knowledge/subjectivity as well as in the formation of what is understood by nature. While people may claim that translation is acceptable for the sake of practicality, I am suggesting that there is more at stake. If we accept manoomin and wild rice as interchangeable, we overlook this translation as a seemingly neutral and harmless act and unwittingly accept a discursive construction that legitimizes itself on the basis of colonial difference. Schiwy and Mignolo have argued that

translation [has] contributed to the construction of hierarchical dichotomies that have imposed certain rules and directionalities of transculturation. Translation helped build the colonial difference between Western European languages (languages of the sciences, knowledge, the locus of enunciation) and the rest of the languages on the planet (languages of culture and religion and the locus of the enunciated). (2003, 4)

The failure to see the power differential between these concepts and the acceptance of the proposed neutrality of language in which knowledge is articulated, leads one to affirm, albeit tacitly, the universal epistemic subject of Western Eurocentric knowledge, an epistemology that grounds an “ontology of essences [according to which] there is only one reality, and the epistemic struggle is for truth of that mono-topic and homogeneous world” (Mignolo 2012, xvii). This corresponds to a “territorial epistemology” [and] “an epistemology of war [...] against competitive ideologies, as well as with decolonial ideologies that do not intend to compete but to delink” (Mignolo, xvii). Evidently, this is a disavowal of the possibility of producing knowledge from an Anishinaabeg locus of enunciation. In other words, by using these words interchangeably, we remain within a vicious epistemic circle predicated upon the *a priori* illegitimacy of manoomin as a knowledge practice. As I will argue shortly, a reflection on manoomin, as referred to by *Anishinaabe political actors*, cannot be reduced to the assumption of its equivalence with wild rice, although the

18 For instance, Frances Densmore’s 1929 report to the Bureau of American Ethnology notes that U.S. Department of Agriculture agronomist Charles E. Chambliss “was in charge of rice investigations for the USDA and favored a scientific approach to wild rice cultivation by non-Indians [...] Chambliss regarded Indigenous methods of tending and harvesting wild rice as ‘simple,’ saying that the Ojibwe harvested ‘the grain in a very primitive way’ (Child 211). See also the myth created by early missionaries referred to by Kathi Avery Kinew as the “they reap but do not sow” myth (1995, 68).

language used to clarify these movements, both internal and external to them, does not necessarily call attention to this dimension.

On the other hand, a contextualization of this translation within the coloniality of power framework foregrounds its strategic dimension, which institutionalizes colonial difference and relegates manoomin to the realm of “culture” within a dominant modernist ontology. It thereby delegitimizes all Anishinaabeg accounts pertaining to manoomin as “myth” or “legend” with no epistemic value. While attention to colonial difference enables us to identify the collapse of manoomin into wild rice and its simultaneous erasure as a form of knowledge, it is crucial to stress that what follows from this inquiry is not an effort to affirm a cultural relativism devoid of ethical and political imperatives. Escobar suggests that cultural distribution conflicts “do not emerge out of cultural difference per se, but out of the difference that this difference makes in the definition of social life: whose norms and meaning-making practices define the terms and values that regulate social life” (14). The (re)introduction of the cultural/ontological sphere, understood geohistorically and thus contingently, in reflections on colonial difference, therefore, “shifts the study of cultural difference from the modernist concern with multiculturalism to the distributive effects of cultural dominance (coloniality) and struggles around it” (14). Mignolo reinforces this point by suggesting that

[t]he idea of “cultural difference” is indeed an invention of modern imperial discourses that function by hiding the power differential; the “difference” is indeed ‘colonial’ rather than cultural. That is, it is a difference that justifies exploitation, control, and domination of one sector of the population over another [...] “Cultural difference” calls for relativism, while “colonial difference” calls for liberation from epistemic imperial powers (2003, 439-440).

Thus, the analytic of colonial difference functions as a means of restoring the “cultural” to the level of politics. By calling attention to the ontological differences at the heart of these power relations, it exposes the logic of coloniality as a means by which the political is negated through the domestication of culture as an object of management according to larger systemic imperatives (themselves cultural). This is why Escobar suggests that conflicts of the sort I am discussing, understood through colonial difference, imply a “political ontology” (15). The deep relationality introduced by thinking from colonial difference opens up the possibility of a universal project not in terms of abstract universals but as pluriversity in the sense of many worlds or relational ontologies (Grosfoguel 2011). Thus, a movement towards pluriversity departs from the exteriority of the modern/colonial world-system by challenging the logic of which this exteriority is a function. It is through colonial

difference, as loci of enunciation¹⁹ that marginalized and suppressed ontologies regain their political force by becoming explicitly relational through a consciousness of their entanglement in the logic of coloniality. This epistemic act calls for the suspension of identities constituted by the classification of the modern/colonial world-system for the purpose of its management. Furthermore, it has led many movements engaged in such struggles to conceptualize their goals in terms of interculturality understood as a project concerned with “bringing about effective dialogue [between] cultures in contexts of power” (Escobar, 14). As a decolonial project, interculturality presupposes the rationality of constructing loci of enunciation (epistemic diversity) as a basic condition of its possibility and, equally, for the appearance of the political.²⁰ In the next section I look at the meaning of manoomin in the context of Anishinaabeg political claims in order to grasp its sense beyond an identity with wild rice and its inferiorization through translation as a function of colonial difference.

From Manoomin to Anishinaabe-manoomin

In 2011, a group of Anishinaabeg activists from various bands across the Minnesota region founded ‘Protect Our Manoomin,’ an unincorporated organization formed to defend manoomin against the threat of contamination linked to the mining industry.²¹ The following is an excerpt from the ‘Mission Statement and Declaration’ published on their website:

Article 1: Inherent Rights of Manoomin²²

1. As a living being, manoomin has the following inherent rights;
 - a) the right to life and to exist;
 - b) the right to be respected;
 - c) the right to regenerate its bio-capacity and to continue its vital cycles and processes free from human disruptions;
 - d) the right to maintain its identity and integrity as a distinct, self-regulating and interrelated being.

19 For the purpose of clarity, it helps to repeatedly highlight the dual nature of colonial difference as both an object of theory and an epistemic standpoint that opens up other epistemic possibilities and projects.

20 See Lewis R. Gordon 2011 for a discussion on the conditions of the political and politics as a condition of appearance.

21 “Protect Our Manoomin”, <http://protectourmanoomin.weebly.com/who-we-are.html>.

22 “Protect Our Manoomin”, <http://protectourmanoomin.weebly.com/protect-our-manoomin--mission-statement--declaration.html>.

It is clear from the language that “Manoomin” is not simply conceived as an object to be appropriated, whether as commodity or sustenance, but as a subject.²³ But what does it mean for Manoomin to have rights? Evidently, these are claims made by someone, namely a group of Anishinaabe, for whom Manoomin is valuable and for whom that value is under threat, hence the exigency of the declaration as a political act. But value as a concept implies some measure of instrumentality while rights conventionally imply a subject to whom the category of dignity can be extended. A similar understanding is echoed in a recent article published in *Anishina-bek News* reporting on a panel discussion in Peterborough, Ontario entitled “The Challenges of Reconciliation: Manoomin”:

In any case, *the wild rice is speaking* and people are listening. The message is clear: it is up to all of us to stop the possession of Indigenous lands, rights, languages, foods, medicines, bodies, and cultures and to encourage and to teach our children to develop a deep love for the land and the waters. *This is what Manoomin is teaching us.* (Kapyrka 2015; emphasis J.C.)

Here, again, we notice that Manoomin is spoken about as a subject. It is Manoomin that is speaking and teaching us.

What is at stake, then, in the struggles to protect Manoomin, are the conditions that make Manoomin possible, or, put another way, the social relations that enable people to have a relationship with manoomin as ‘Manoomin’ not wild rice. While Manoomin is manifested through certain social relations, its recognition as subject is simultaneously the condition of regulating those relations according to certain social ideals. In other words, to speak about the dignity of Manoomin is to argue simultaneously for the dignity of a social-subject that makes such a relation possible. Manoomin, unlike wild rice, is a set of intersubjective relations, not an “object.”²⁴ This characterization, however, implies a general epistemological shift from a denotative to an enactive epistemology (Mignolo 2012, 26). This critical move, which is *facilitated by the identification of colonial difference as historically constitutive of cultural difference within the modern/colonial world-system*, enables us to grasp Manoomin as a performative function and begin a reflection on it as an ethico-political praxis and epistemic standpoint beyond its subordination as a mere “cultural practice.” Thus I am trying to identify an epistemic location that resists the reduction of “Indigenous knowledge” to a form of technical or environmentalist rationality. It is under the hegemony of modern epistemology that “Indigenous knowledge” has

23 I, therefore, retain the capital “M” when referring to it in this sense to emphasize the use of a proper name.

24 Although it could be argued that wild rice also refers to a set of intersubjective relations I am trying to foreground and contrast an ontology that does not place nature “outside” the context of social relations.

been granted some concessions in the name of conflict mitigation, or, as Escobar suggests, due to the power differential, has been “refunctionalized at the service of” dominant ontologies without challenging “foundational modern assumptions, such as the divide between nature and culture” (15). Characterized in this way, Indigenous knowledge remains non-essential, politically speaking, and contributes to the perception of Indigenous peoples as one “interest group” among others while reproducing the imaginary of the colonial/modern world-system predicated on the denial of Manoomin as a locus of enunciation; as such, it forecloses the decolonial imperative of epistemic diversity.

Returning to the examples above, it appears at first glance that we encounter a paradox: the essence of Manoomin, as a gift from the Creator²⁵ grounded within Anishinaabeg cosmology, is contingent upon political circumstances. But this is only paradoxical if we dismiss colonial difference as a condition of our contemporary social reality *and* as a locus of enunciation. Provided colonial difference remains invisible, the attribution of rights to Manoomin appears to be a senseless fetishism of nature born of a “primitive” epistemology. Although the analytic of colonial difference suggests the futility of attempting to reconstitute isolated or pure ontological orders, it signals a challenge to the logic of coloniality from the exteriority of the modern/colonial world-system’s borders, which allows us to think the nature of human difference beyond a logic of hierarchical order and deal with it both politically and ethically. Therefore, against an epistemicide that forges primitive culture, Manoomin should be understood as an ontological horizon that belongs to the historical complexity of contemporary social and political reality. This conceptualization, however, requires what Mignolo has called “border thinking.” Drawing on the work of Moroccan philosopher Abdelhebir Khatibi, he suggests that border thinking, as a form of thinking from colonial difference, is predicated upon a “double critique,” which he characterizes as a “criticism of [...] imperial discourses [...] as well as of national discourses asserting identity and differences articulated in and by imperial discourses” (2012, 69). Thus border thinking, as an epistemic location, requires a simultaneous critique of both Western and Indigenous fundamentalisms as dogmatic affirmations of difference that presuppose coloniality not as locus of enunciation, but as condition of possibility. It implies thinking “from both traditions, and, at the same time, from neither of them” (69), a type of “thinking from dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies” (85). With this approach, the paradox above becomes meaningless because it shifts the task of asserting and maintaining the absolute truth of a particular world order to a project of dealing with difference in its historicity and against the logic of coloniality and its mythology of linear temporality.

Subjectively, this also implies a double operation, one that Nelson Maldonado-Torres refers to as the “teleological suspension of identity and universality” (155).

25 This is a common Anishinaabeg expression of manoomin. See for instance Kathy Kinew 1995.

This act, which presupposes an awareness of colonial difference, is simultaneously directed at both the modern subject and subaltern identities constituted within the modern/colonial world-system. Maldonado-Torres characterizes it in his discussion of Frantz Fanon as follows:

Confronting a reality where imperial politics violates the ordinariness of the extraordinary [ethical praxis that characterizes normative human relations], Fanon defended an ethico-political praxis of liberation. This praxis entails a sort of teleological suspension of identity and of universality in the interest of the humanization of the world." (155)

Here we find a complement to the Anishinaabeg notion of Aanjigone as a critical attitude that opens up the intellectual space for this suspension. Consequently, this act provides the conditions for the double critique mentioned above and situates us within a border epistemology by opening up the possibilities of dialogue and imagination beyond the pseudo-absolutist identities and social relations forged through the coloniality of power. In the context of Anishinaabeg struggles to uphold the sacred relationship with the Creator that Manoomin embodies, we could designate Anishinaabe-manoomin as a form of consciousness and project in which the performance of this double movement takes place in contrast and against an assertion of Manoomin understood metaphysically and without regard for colonial difference. As such, it signals a thinking and doing which has nothing to do with a pre-modern/colonial practice, but is precisely a locus of enunciation that emerges *historically* from colonial difference as a decolonial response to the logic of coloniality. It thereby enables the recovery of Anishinaabe as a tradition of humanist reflection by locating Manoomin as an epistemic practice with a *claim* to universality.

In order to situate this notion of Anishinaabe-manoomin as a form of humanism more precisely, I appeal once again to Nelson Maldonado-Torres and his discussion of Fanon's notion of the "damned" or racialized and colonized subjects. Drawing on a linguistic analysis that illustrates the etymological relation between "damné" (French for "damned") and "donner" (French for "to give"), Maldonado-Torres suggests that

if we follow this interpretation, [the damned] is the one who cannot give precisely because things are taken from him. The colonized is the "damné" in the sense that the colonial condition takes away from her, or at least radically restricts, the possibilities of giving. (2008, 142)

In this sense, I interpret "giving" as the ability of colonized peoples and cultures to share the dignity in which their epistemic traditions are understood as resources for a collective human project. The false universal of colonial relations is precisely the reduction of humanity to a system in which the colonizer has a complete monopoly on the capacity to give, to make both practical and epistemic contributions to the

human community (2008, 143). Afro-Jewish philosopher Lewis Gordon corroborates this notion when he claims that

[d]emonstrating this falseness expands the normative universe, or, better, pluriverse. It also brings together terms that the system attempted to keep apart. This fusion is a creolization at the level of knowledge that acknowledges the underlying reality of culture and practiced values. (2015, 128)

Gordon, thus, argues that theorists engaged in decolonial thought and politics

are actually reaching for more *universalizing* practices. Although not *the* universal, because of the fundamental incompleteness at the heart of being human, the paradox of reaching beyond particularity is the simultaneous humility of understanding the expanse and possibility of reality and human potential. (2015, 130)

Thus what is being expressed here is not an abstract universality in which the form of humanity is predetermined by a particular culture, but a concrete universal that constructs itself from the vantage point of the oppressed as the effort to continually transcend the conditions that reproduce their situation. To repeat Maldonado-Torres above, it is in the interests of humanization that this form of humanism is conceived and deployed in modern contexts determined by the logic of coloniality.

This project of humanization, which includes both colonized and colonizer, has an intellectual predecessor in the Anishinaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy,²⁶ particularly the prophecy of the Seventh Fire and its possibility of an Eighth Fire. The Seven Fires Prophecy narrative recounts that

[i]n a time of peace and flourishing, seven prophets came to the Nishinaabeg people and made seven predictions for the future. The seven prophets also outlined an epic journey from the east coast of Turtle Island [North America] to the western shores of the Great Lakes; they encouraged our people to make that journey as a protection against the coming colonizers. (Simpson 2011, 65)

For the purposes of my argument I do not focus here on the complexity of this prophecy in its entirety, but will simply mention that the first six prophecies announced the arrival of a new people (white European settler-colonizers) that would cause great suffering for the Anishinaabe, but also the foreknowledge of resistance

26 See Benton-Banai (1988) for a comprehensive narrative of the Anishinaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy.

and survival that make the Seventh and Eights Fires possible. The Seventh Fire is the time of revitalization, whereby knowledge and traditions protected and cared for by the Ancestors are rethought and taken up again with fresh insight and passion, which gives rise to a new people: the Oshkimaadiziig (the New People) (Simpson 2008, 14). This is the time in which we now live (14). According to Simpson, “[t]he foremost responsibility of the ‘new people’ is to pick up those things previous generations have left behind by nurturing relationships with Elders [...] the work of the Oshkimaadiziig determines the outcome of the Eighth Fire, an eternal fire to be lit by all humans” (14). In other words, it is a moment that contains the potential of transcending the racial-colonial relations of the current system, a transcendence that is embodied in the human relations realized in the age of the Eighth Fire. For this reason, Simpson claims that the Seven Fires Prophecy is “[p]erhaps the most epic narrative in Nishinaabeg thought concerning processes of mobilization [...] in relation to colonialism, decolonization and resurgence” (2011, 65).

Contrary to an interpretation founded on colonial difference that would place this prophecy in a category of some timeless and depoliticized “legend,” I suggest, following Simpson, that its meaning is based on a profound historical consciousness in order to relate it to the foregoing discussion on humanism. Simpson states that “[f]or Nishnaabeg people, our prophecy is the foundation of our resistance and of our resurgence” (2008, 14). As such, the prophecy becomes a normative horizon in which the project of decolonization orients itself and finds meaning. In this sense, Oshkimaadiziig may be understood as a mode of Anishinaabe conceived relationally, that is, through the historical context of relations defined by the logic of coloniality within the modern/colonial world-system. As such, Oshkimaadiziig becomes a concrete precondition for the possibility of realizing Anishinaabe understood as the normative horizon of ethical human relations that transcend the historical system of domination. In other words, we can conceive of it as a mode of being that develops from a consciousness of colonial difference and positions itself from colonial difference as an epistemic standpoint. This is why Simpson argues that “[r]esurgence is our original instruction” (Simpson 2011, 66). To speak of original instruction in this context is already to acknowledge the anticipatory realization of Anishinaabe. If we recall the Creation story in which Anishinaabe is understood as the original human, we can interpret Oshkimaadiziig as those who do not attempt to recreate the world at the time of Creation, but who attempt to transcend dehumanizing relations with a memory of that original unity. The translation of Anishinaabe as Oshkimaadiziig in the time of the Seventh Fire suggests a profound understanding of the historicity of differences and the imperative to transcend dehumanizing relations. It is this transformation based on circumstance, of Anishinaabe into Oshkimaadiziig, which defines the humanistic core at centre of the concept of Anishinaabe and rejects the closure of an ethnocentric and totalizing ontology.

Moreover, to ground humanism in the Seven Fires Prophecy is to acknowledge the critical role of Ancestors in the humanist project. It is on the basis of the respon-

sibility of the Ancestors that this humanism is made possible due to the fact that the fulfillment of these responsibilities opens up the possibility of resurgence, which in turn is a historical condition for humanization. While the present duty of acknowledging the fulfillment of Ancestral responsibility directs us to the past, it simultaneously acquires its sense as an act of humanization opened up by the foundational horizon of Anishinaabe in the Creation Story and is thus directed to the future. Characterized in this way, it does not articulate a temporal linearity of dogmatic progress, but a relentless attempt to locate the past in the future in the name of humanization. As such, cosmology, against modern epistemicide, becomes historically indispensable to a politics of decolonization. Coloniality attempts to transfix epistemic resources such as the Seven Fires Prophecy into ahistorical dogma, which, subsequently, can only have an ethnocentric value. In contrast, this interpretation defines an epistemic position that resists the reduction of thought to the non-relational thinking of modern/colonial epistemology grounded upon a philosophy of essence. Provided we maintain consciousness of Oshkimaadiziig as a mode of Anishinaabe, we do not collapse into a dogmatism grounded in ahistorical mythology. The fact that this mode of being is already anticipated in the prophecy of the Seventh Fire indicates the presence of a critical epistemic resource within Anishinaabeg thought for social-historical transformation. It also suggests a consciousness of the intrinsic incompleteness of human being in the very notion of Anishinaabe in the sense of Gordon's analysis. Simpson echoes this when she states that "[i]f we are going to make it to that Eighth fire, then we all have the responsibility for picking up those Gifts – for honouring them and *making them relevant* in our lives and in our nations, *without rigidity and without exclusion*" (2008, 210; emphasis J.C.). We could designate this interpretation as a form of Eighth Fire humanism.

Thus, to emphasize, suggesting that Anishinaabe is a humanist tradition is not indicative of a disembodied form of universal thought predicated upon ontological closure. Rather, it belongs to the construction of a pluriversal order in which the possibility of thinking belongs to all peoples with dignity beyond the "natural" entitlements of Western civilization and its dehumanizing project. The humanism advocated here is not founded on a hegemonic subject, but is developed by a plurality of subjects and cultural contributions. Anishinaabe should be understood as a unique and crucial contribution to it. Recall that I am grounding my argument on the historicity of difference and its colonial mediation. Therefore, the imperative to reconceive the logic of these relations is not mandated by the dialectical unfolding of a transcendental subject otherwise known as humanity (or Anishinaabe), but by the constellation of projects in their efforts to realize epistemic diversity in the unrelenting struggle against the logic of colonial difference. In this way, the positivity of this humanization project may be conceived as the surprising discoveries of collaboration and difference, never known beforehand, born of the perpetual negation of intolerable social relations conveyed as universals.

The teleological suspension of identity and universality, and its fundamental attitude, *Aanjigone*, moreover, opens up the possibility of a deeper form of relationality between Manoomin and Anishinaabe, as a particular form of human reality, beyond its classification by the coloniality of power and the identities forged therein. It thereby facilitates an understanding of Anishinaabe as a form of subjectivity, that is, as an agency with the ability to give thus enabling relationships that “the system attempted to keep apart” and the construction of a collective human project. This is the sense in which I attribute Anishinaabe to a reflection on Manoomin in the notion of Anishinaabe-manoomin.

However, it should be emphasized that this teleological suspension is historically contingent. Its temporality is contextual and therefore not permanent. The “openness” won through the suspension of identity and universality is always mediated strategically. For instance, Indigenous nationalism will continue to assert itself provided that cognitive justice remains outside the terms of “reconciliation” in countries like Canada. In contrast to Nandita Sharma who claims that “the making of new social bodies is not an epistemological problem but an ontological one” (80), decoloniality is precisely the articulation of projects that recognize epistemicide as constitutional of the status quo. Thus the imperative of constructing loci of enunciation may require strong assertions of identity in times when epistemicide is presupposed rather than addressed by political agendas. It is worth recalling here the distinction between social and epistemic location. While coloniality, as a locus of enunciation, opens up the possibility of this distinction, it does not simply dismiss oppressed social locations as negative moments within a dialectic, which would simply be an affirmation of the dominant totality as universal; rather, it conceptualizes social location as a crucial vantage point from which the false universal of the modern/colonial world-system is experienced corporeally²⁷ and theorized. The recognition of epistemicide is the result of a radical historicization from the social location of oppressed and racialized peoples, which recognizes the complicity of knowledge in the reproduction of colonial relations while identifying an exteriority that is both intrinsic to the operation of the logic of coloniality and the location of decolonial possibilities. The epistemic location, in other words, is rendered possible by the exteriority identified through the experience and reflection from the social location. Sharma, conversely, presupposes the closed totality of the modern world-system (in which colonialism is derivative, not constitutive as coloniality teaches), as a point of departure and therefore calls for “decolonizing decolonization” as the wholesale liquidation of Indigenous nationalism, which appears as the totalization of a particular social position against the social totality. Although Sharma calls on us

27 See Walter Mignolo 2011 for a discussion of the “body-politics of knowledge,” particularly when he states, “[t]hus body-politics is the decolonial response to state-managed biopolitics: body-politics describes decolonial technologies ratified by bodies who realized, first, that they were considered less human, and second, that the very act of describing them as less human was a radical un-human consideration” (140).

to adopt a properly historical attitude and heed the irrevocable changes wrought in the wake of 1492, she pays little attention to the depth of coloniality in the formation of those identities and social relations at the epistemological level. Although she mentions the role of representation in the classification of peoples within “a single field of power,” there is no indication in her argument of how the cohesion of this system is created and maintained. As such, representation appears to be conceived as a neutral medium with the aim of a proper correspondence with reality; in other words, she presupposes the monotopic and monologic epistemology of Western modernity whose sole concern is the nature of the enunciated having concealed the geopolitics of knowledge through domination and epistemicide: a thoroughly dehistoricized epistemic standpoint. Race, understood through the coloniality of power, is a mediation whereby identities are not only invented to justify exploitation, segregation or exclusion, but identities born through the negation of epistemic alterity in the very production of a hegemonic epistemology as a condition of managing the system. Racialization as a central axis in the construction of the modern Subject simultaneously marks the site of vestiges/potential of non-modern loci of enunciation. The analysis of how racialization functions must extend beyond the discrimination of groups vis-à-vis the common good to include a theory of it as the constitution of manageable entities through epistemicide understood in the widest sense to include the inferiorization and negation of language, knowledge, culture, spirituality, etc. Therefore, epistemicide and cognitive justice, to repeat, cannot be skirted in the formation of “new forms of subjectivity and conspecificity” (Sharma 176). While I am in agreement that an ideology of autochthony can lead to a vicious dogmatism, Sharma does not foreground the conditions from which Indigenous nationalism emerges and justifies itself (never in absolutist terms, of course, and not simply as a result of epistemicide). Her position relies too heavily upon ethics with insufficient attention to the social conditions for such relations.

Herein lies the challenge of thinking through a politics that does not abandon ethics and vice versa. After all, decoloniality presupposes ethics in its condemnation of coloniality and its efforts to articulate a thinking and doing beyond the relationality of its logic. However, ethical projects may easily become blind to historical circumstances. Lewis Gordon has formulated this problematic in the following manner:

For politics to exist, there must be discursive opposition. Such activity involves communicative possibilities that rely on the suspension of violent or repressive forces. In effect, that makes politics also a condition of appearance. To be political is to emerge, to appear, to exist. Colonization involves the elimination of discursive opposition between the dominant group and the subordinated group [...] Since the ethical life requires others, a challenge is here raised against models of decolonial practice that center ethics [...] The additional challenge, then, is to cultivate the

options necessary for both political and ethical life [...] It is not that ethics must be rejected. It simply faces its teleological suspension, especially where, if maintained, it presupposes instead of challenges colonial relations (Gordon 2011, 100).

It is a consciousness of this tension between the affirmation of identity and its suspension, as well as that between ethics and politics, that is necessary to maintain in order to articulate "Indigenous nationhood," for example, as a decolonial project. In other words, it requires a rigorous critique of the sources from which it builds its movement, and to know strategically when to engage in a teleological suspension and when to affirm an identity resolutely. This is also the space where a dialogue between settler colonialism and coloniality may be fruitfully developed. The locus of enunciation opened up by the analytic of settler colonialism, predicated on the suspension of the "universality" of the state as "settler state," announces the refusal of the identities constituted therein and deploys a strategy for creating the conditions of appearance in Gordon's sense by the rupture of settler normality. Coloniality, as locus of enunciation, draws colonial difference to the foreground in the construction of this exteriority and challenges its logic in order to engage in decolonization as pluriversal project and not simply anti- (settler) colonialism. Neither project is reducible to the other; rather, both presuppose each other and should be developed together as project(s) of decoloniality. Thus Indigenous nationalism, at a given historical moment, may very well be in order strategically speaking, both ethically and politically. I am suggesting that Anishinaabe-manoomin is one form of consciousness in which the tension between the teleological suspension of identity and universality and the affirmation of Anishinaabeg identity may be internalized consciously as a basis for action.

In the political sphere this double movement can be understood as the basis for a project of interculturality in which a dialectical relation between the cultural (understood as the ontological) and the political becomes the crux of a decolonial form of relationality and a larger project of pluriversality. This marks decoloniality not as a war between absolute ontologies, but an operation that internalizes this irreducible tension between culture and politics as constitutive of the political. Therefore, contrary to the rhetoric of modernity,²⁸ the cultural horizon in which the ontology of Manoomin is articulated is not a politically irrelevant structure, but a fundamental dimension of thinking through difference decolonially within a social structure defined by the logic of coloniality. As such, it has nothing to do with reification, nor an ahistorical ontological order, but belongs to what Escobar refers to as a "theory of difference that is historically specific and contingent [...] a response to the present moment that builds on intellectual and political developments in many places" (18).

28 See Walter D. Mignolo 2007 for a discussion about modernity as a rhetoric of salvation that presupposes coloniality.

Anishinaabe-manoomin is thus a particular means of conceiving a politics that struggles to bring about new social relations through a project of interculturality while honouring the Anishinaabeg treaty with Manoomin, a treaty that I will refer to in the following section.

Perhaps we can make a distinction for the purpose of clarity between the interpretations I have given of wild rice, Manoomin and Anishinaabe-manoomin and their corresponding projects:

- 1- 'Wild rice' is related to the universalization of the projects of taxonomy and commodification. It is Eurocentric and totalizing.
- 2- 'Manoomin' is a nationalist response to the first project and seeks to secure political and economic control over a resource that is culturally valuable.
- 3- 'Anishinaabe-manoomin' belongs to a project of interculturality and pluriversality, which is based on a critique of the logic of coloniality from the subaltern side of colonial difference. While it is critical of the first two projects, it only becomes politically viable when it operates in tandem with the second project as a historical condition of its possibility. By internalizing the third project, the second project is able to orient itself as a decolonial project.

A Dialogue with Manoomin

So far I have chiefly written *descriptively* about Manoomin. A decolonial epistemic act implies a shift in the geography of reason, which I have only performed partially up to this point. In order to grasp Manoomin as a locus of enunciation, we need to *think from* it as a source of epistemic creativity emerging from colonial difference.²⁹ The issue at hand, to reiterate, is not only the challenge of looking to this tradition for epistemic resources, but the fact that this knowledge has been subalternized through colonial difference and its geopolitics of knowledge, which marks Anishinaabe as the object of knowledge as opposed to the site of knowledge production. The construction of this object, subsequently, has given birth to a discourse of authenticity regarding the nature of Anishinaabeg identity whereby legitimate membership is judged on the basis of non-relational terms, whose main criterion is the conformity to essence. Admittedly, one who has a relationship with Manoomin is Anishinaabe. But if we fail to introduce the relationality of thinking from colonial difference, we risk affirming the criteria of an inert cultural construction conceived for the purpose of domination. Therefore, in order to avoid essentializing a particularistic identity as the ground of Manoomin and recognize its dynamism we must shift the location from which we think by fully accepting the language of Manoomin as the identification of a subject.

29 This is crucial for "[i]f postcoloniality is not able to break away from modern epistemology, it would become just another version of it with a different subject matter. It would be, in other words, a theory about a new subject matter but not the constitution of a new epistemological subject that thinks from and about the borders" (Mignolo 2012, 110).

In order to make this epistemic shift, I appeal to Anishinaabekwe scholar Jana-Rae Yerxa who recounts: "I did not realize it then but through these interactions my great grandfather was introducing and familiarizing me with the responsibilities I inherently carry as an Anishinaabe person – responsibilities that are embedded in our treaty with manoomin" (3). Again we encounter Manoomin as a subject only now with whom a concrete relationship is determined through the form of a treaty. A "treaty" is always with *someone* not something. To enter into a treaty with someone, furthermore, implies that one can engage in a dialogue. Thus the form of how this other is conceived determines the nature of the relationship. In this case, the recognition of Manoomin as a subject implies an ethical relationship, which the treaty institutionalizes. Here it is important to acknowledge that manoomin in Anishinaabemowin means "the *good* seed that grows in water" (Child, 24; emphasis J.C.). This reference to 'good,' as belonging to the essence of Manoomin within Anishinaabeg thought, places us squarely within an ethical tradition and praxis of humanization. Therefore, if Manoomin is understood as a treaty partner, then we can enter into dialogue with Manoomin to discover who Manoomin is or can be and what the basis of upholding such a treaty might entail beyond identities constructed through the logic of coloniality. By proceeding from colonial difference we could ask Manoomin the following:

"Manoomin, are you racist? Are you sexist? Are you capitalist? Are you Truth? Nationalist? Reconciled? Are you homophobic? Hetero-normative? Is your blood pure? Are you a quarter? An eighth? Are you Bear Clan? Loon Clan? A member of the Conservative party of Canada? Do you have "Indian Status"? Are you Midewiwin? Traditional? Modern? Are you primitive? Progressive? On-reserve? Urban? Are you secular? Religious? Treaty 3? Robinson-Superior? 1835? Ontarian? Are you private property? Do you "own" the land? Are you Marxist-Leninist? Are you a commodity? Are you transgendered? Male? Female? Are you Christian? Canadian? American? Are you monolingual? Are you Neoliberal? Fundamentalist? Are you imperial? Colonial? Are you Indigenous?"

While this list of questions might appear tedious and irrelevant, my point is to place in question the closure of identity that may appear inevitable in the struggle to maintain one's dignity in the face of powerful forces of negation. The range of identities I have mentioned also includes those that have come to be taken for granted as essential characteristics of Indigenous people. My intent is to call for their constant scrutiny as a project and continual effort to locate the dynamism of our traditions. While it is not up to me to provide definitive answers to these questions (nor is it possible), a decolonial critique suggests that these questions will not be settled by simply affirming identities constructed through colonial difference, but by restoring the epistemic grounds from which these questions can be asked. Although particular historical moments will certainly generate positive answers to

some of them, they all, *in principle*, can be answered negatively.³⁰ Recovering Manoomin as an epistemic standpoint requires us to think of Anishinaabe in its plurality, that is, as a cultural horizon where multiple subjectivities can converge and develop together. To recognize Manoomin as Anishinaabe means, moreover, that Manoomin exceeds the determinations by which it is circumscribed within the modern/colonial world-system, while also functioning as an aspiration for more dignified social relations; in other words, Manoomin is marked by an intrinsic incompleteness and a humanistic ethics. The question of who Manoomin is (Anishinaabe) is simultaneously the question of who can be recognized by Manoomin, that is, following Yerxa, who can enter into a treaty with Manoomin. She states,

to restore the traditional harvesting practices of manoomin [...] is to strengthen and deepen one's understanding of what it means to be Anishinaabe because we learn about who we are from the land and each other [...] Our learning, our ways of governing, and who we are is alive [...] within manoomin and in our relationships with one another. [...] Our treaty relationship with manoomin is based on respect, care, reciprocity, and interdependence. (Yerxa, 164, 163)

This treaty, therefore, is a crucial form of relationality through which the dignity of Anishinaabe is explored, developed and expressed. As a treaty, its conditions for renewal are based on an ongoing dialogue with Manoomin, which, as I suggested above, implies a continuous reflection on the nature of Anishinaabe understood as human being. The essence of Manoomin, as Anishinaabe, therefore, can be understood as an ideal by which the teleological suspension of identity may be oriented in order to expand the relations that constitute Manoomin. In this sense, Anishinaabe-manoomin can be interpreted as the critical consciousness and practice of reflecting upon the diversity of Anishinaabeg subjectivity from colonial difference. By doing so, we can shift the focus away from authenticity based on colonial definitions to a question of upholding the treaty through responsibility and interculturality.

To illustrate this notion I appeal to Yerxa's call for a "Manoomin Movement" (164) as a means of asserting Anishinaabeg self-determination, which, in the face of contemporary social reality, demands a political postulate of nationhood to orient its goals. Anishinaabe-manoomin, as a locus of enunciation, may help in the formation of the political subject that mobilizes this force. After all, in the Anishinaabeg

30 Here I am thinking of Anishinaabeg legal scholar John Borrows when he states that "[i]ndigeneity does not *necessarily* reside in any particular blood, language, land, culture, clan, family grouping, spiritual practice, economic activity, story, teaching, song, relationship, etc. – though these criteria are very important components of belonging in particular contexts. It is misleading to claim that Indigenous societies possess an unalterable central essence or core" (2016, 1). I am even suggesting "Indigeneity" be subject to this scrutiny.

prophecy of the Third Fire “the place where food grows on water”³¹ has its origins in migration, that is, a crossing of “borders.” Perhaps we can begin to think of this notion not only in a geographical sense or as a circumscribed territory, but also, as a concept of Anishinaabeg political power, a space where Anishinaabeg political subjectivity is constructed and the treaty with Manoomin upheld. In her 2012 book *Fractured Homeland*, Mi’kmaw scholar Bonita Lawrence recounts the episode of the “Rice War,” a conflict which took place in the late 1970s when the Ontario provincial government issued a license to a commercial operation interested in harvesting wild rice at Mud Lake, a place where Manoomin had been cared for undisturbed by the Algonquin³² people for nearly a century until then. This clash would turn into “a development that galvanized the small informal community into taking a stand to protect it and ultimately created the modern community of Ardoch Algonquin First Nation” (Lawrence, 141). As such, it was the Anishinaabeg treaty with Manoomin which lay at the source of this political agency, a treaty which, incidentally, also extended through Manoomin to the Mississauga Nishnaabeg across borders and languages.³³ It was this treaty that consolidated the Algonquin as a people regardless of their unrecognized status within the Canadian state. Moreover, to uphold the treaty during the Rice War,

a formal alliance was established between Algonquins of Ardoch, other local Aboriginal communities, and the settlers of the Ardoch area. Called IMSet (Indian, Metis and Settlers Wild Rice Association), it enabled the people to focus more proactively on how to protect the wild rice for the future. It became obvious that they needed to consult with academic professionals, to prove legal and moral rights, and to build community awareness programs to maintain connections that had been built during the struggle (Lawrence, 142).

Thus, “the place where food grows on water” was materialized through a multiplicity of agents across borders, all with different relations to Manoomin, but all crucial in their way to the renewal of the treaty under such precarious circumstanc-

31 According to the Third Fire of the Anishinaabe Seven Fires prophecy, after a long migration to the West, the people would arrive at the place where food grows on water, which would mark the place of their chosen ground (Benton-Banai, 89).

32 Some Algonquin or Omàmiwinini people also use the designation Anishinaabe to refer to themselves, a clear indication that this word does not simply denote a particular people but suggests a much more profound concept that extends beyond the borders of colonial divisions. I use this “Algonquin” example here precisely to call attention to this point.

33 See Leanne Simpson’s foreword to Paula Sherman’s *Dishonour of the Crown: The Ontario Resource Regime in the Valley of the Kiji Sibi*, where she discusses the diplomacy between the two nations that ensured the survival of Manoomin when construction of the Trent-Severn Waterway was built. Mississauga Elders gave Manoomin to Omàmiwinini Elders in the late 19th century, the same Manoomin that would eventually become embroiled in the Rice War.

es. More than mere resistance, the diversity of peoples that constituted this political power gave rise to a pedagogical opportunity: a place from which to think from Manoomin as a locus of enunciation. I have been suggesting that it is a dialogue with Manoomin, or what I have called Anishinaabe-manoomin, which opens a space for this type of collective subject. This is conception echoes Lewis Gordon when he interprets Frantz Fanon's critique of liberation movements in the following way: "Legitimacy doesn't emerge from the proof of cultural heritage or racial authenticity; it emerges [...] from the active engagement in struggles for social transformation and building institutions and ideas that nourish and liberate the formerly colonized" (2015, 126). Although the alliance during the Rice War was temporary and not without its internal tensions, it is interesting to consider the possibility of a 'Manoomin Movement' that would seek to sustain and institutionalize the pedagogical value of these intersections in the effort to democratize epistemology across society and help renew the Anishinaabeg treaty with Manoomin in perpetuity. By orienting action and alliances by this treaty and the dialogue that sustains it, a 'Manoomin Movement' could gather the force necessary to transform social relations forged by the logic of coloniality and restore Manoomin as an epistemic standpoint in its own right and dignity.

Conclusion

In closing I feel it is important to explicitly state that I am not attempting to determine how the Anishinaabeg treaty with Manoomin should be upheld nor who is entitled to participate in it. To do so would be to dismiss the history of Indigenous-settler relations and the great mistrust this violent relationship has engendered. Rather, I have attempted to indicate a way of conceiving of this practice as a dignified epistemic tradition by reflecting on colonial difference as a structural constituent of our contemporary social reality. The lesson of coloniality signals the formative dimension of epistemicide in the creation of subjectivities on both sides of colonial difference; hence, the dangerous tendency to assume the neutrality of language and epistemological categories in the development of decolonial theory and praxis. The inadvertent appropriation of modern epistemological discourse for understanding decolonial struggles runs into the difficulty of attempting to legitimize them within a horizon that is already structured on their inferiorization. Conversely, thinking from and with Indigenous traditions and movements as sites of knowledge production allows us to counteract a reductionism of politics to the totality of a single ontological horizon and discover the source of a political ontology that is attentive to colonial legacies. Escobar argues that "[t]he articulation of struggles across differences may lead to the deepening of democracy – indeed, to questioning the very principles of liberal democracy, if conceived from the colonial difference" (15). It is from this point of departure that we realize Manoomin is not wild rice and the imperative of epistemic diversity and/or the democratization of epis-

temology is foregrounded as an imperative of decolonization. Coloniality enables us to work from and against colonial difference in the construction of our politics and social projects through the identification of cognitive justice as integral to the decolonization of social relations. Anishinaabe-manoomin responds to this imperative as a means of articulating a particular practice as an ongoing dialectical epistemic struggle, which does not harbour an abstract universal as its essence or goal, but a dignified tradition entangled in the logic of coloniality. Thus, we are forced to look beyond the closure of identities in a world regulated by dehumanization and “recognize that the struggle for humanization does not leave cultures untouched” (Maldonado-Torres, 153). Manoomin already knows this; it remains a question of relating to this knowledge and practice.

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