Research Article

REIMAGINING WORLDS WITHOUT WHITENESS: A RESEARCH-TO-PODCAST JOURNEY THROUGH COUNTER-MODERNITY INQUIRY

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Whiteness is like an invasive weed. By "whiteness," we do not mean white people, but a harmful social construct invented to uphold power through division and justifying violence—harming all, regardless of race. Entangled with capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and colonial/modern-gender systems, whiteness fuels coloniality by taking root in thoughts, behaviors, relationships, communities, and institutions—including community psychology. Although the field positions itself as committed to social justice and liberation, its practices often remain entangled with unexamined operations of whiteness rooted in modernist ways of knowing and being that reproduce colonial hierarchies. This reflexive case study examines the Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness research-to-podcast project which engaged 26 multiracial participants as co-researchers from diverse disciplines across the U.S. and Europe and responds to community psychology's lack of frameworks for interrogating whiteness as a structural system. The project addresses the research gap by: (1) advancing theoretical contributions through counter-modernity inquiry that resists colonial logics; (2) developing methodological innovations that move beyond critique toward co-creation; and (3) producing practical decolonial tools that actively challenge and dismantle whiteness. These tools include: (a) an invasive species metaphor for whiteness; (b) a five-step emergent framework for naming whiteness, seeing it, uprooting its harmful thoughts and behaviors, composting its emotional residues, and planting new worlds without it (i.e., reimagining); and (c) a public podcast extending these tools beyond academia. Together, these outputs provide tangible strategies for engaging whiteness reflexively, collaboratively, and creatively, offering community psychology a pathway from critique toward transformative structural change within and beyond the field.

***Keywords**: whiteness, decolonial community psychology, counter-modernity inquiry, reimagining worlds without whiteness framework, co-illumination, podcast*

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1. Introduction: Beginning Otherwise

To reimagine worlds without whiteness, we must begin otherwise. Rather than grounding inquiry in theory or definition, I begin with encounter—approaching image, reflection, and story as ways of knowing rooted in Indigenous, ecological, and decolonial traditions.

In this spirit, I invite you to take a moment to look closely at Figure 1. What do you see? Pause. Write down a few words—your first impressions.



Figure 1. Beginning Otherwise
Note. Reprinted with permission from King County (2017a).

Now, consider this: there is also a *ghost in the frame* (Marino, 1998)—something that may remain invisible unless the eye has awareness to see it. Without the language or lens to recognize it, it can easily blend into the background. Do you see it?

This is not a thought experiment, but a gesture toward decolonial method: an invitation to sense what has been made invisible yet continues to shape what is seen. For some, Figure 1 may simply represent a lush green landscape. But the *ghost in the frame* is that the green groundcover is actually English ivy, a noxious, invasive weed in this context. The photo, taken by staff from Seattle's King County Noxious Weed Control Program in the U.S., is titled *Invasive ivy growing up a tree and covering the ground in Ravenna Park in Seattle, Washington* (King County, 2017a). At first glance, nothing may seem out of place—until you know what to look for.

I had seen English ivy countless times without recognizing it as invasive. That realization came during a rainy EarthCorps volunteer project in Seattle in the early 2000s. The park seemed lush

and green, but when a crew leader uprooted a vine, I learned that what I thought was ordinary groundcover was actually English ivy, an invasive species suffocating native plants and trees. My task was to trace and uproot its expansive entangled root system from the soil. Imagine my horror when I realized that nearly everything green that I saw was what we were there to remove. It felt like an impossible task and the work was grueling.

That encounter was a moment of rupture—making the invisible visible. English ivy was no longer simply decorative but a colonial import—introduced for aesthetics, sustained by capitalist systems, and enacting ecological violence through displacement and domination. As EarthCorps (2023) explains, many invasive species spread through colonization and globalization, threatening biodiversity by outcompeting native species and creating monocultures that endanger the long-term health of local ecosystems.

Invasive species thrive through invisibility and normalization. Learning to see them involves recognizing not only what is visible, but what their presence has erased. Figure 2 illustrates this: a lone trillium surrounded by ivy, evoking what has been displaced and what never had the chance to grow.



Figure 2. Invasive ivy surrounding one surviving native trillium. Who knows what other native wildflowers would be here if the ivy hadn't taken over.
Note. Reprinted with permission from King County (2017b).

Why speak of invasive species? Because they offer a powerful metaphor for understanding coloniality—the lingering structures of power and violence that extend from colonization into the present. Coloniality hides in abstraction, what Castro-Gómez (2021) calls *zero-point hubris:* a way of knowing that erases its origin and renders itself invisible. Similarly, Maldonado-Torres (2007)

describes coloniality as a process of making invisible, such that "as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). Coloniality has been described as an inherent "dark side" of the modern era (approximately 1450s to the present) and persists as "ways of thinking, feeling, and being associated with European global domination" (Adams, Estrada-Villalta, & Gomez, 2018, p. 3).

The invasive species metaphor functions as a decolonial analytic: it makes colonial logics visible, traces their roots from origin to present, exposes interconnections among entrenched systems of colonial hierarchies, and invites possibilities for uprooting and reimagining. In this study, the metaphor emerged as a key finding and is applied here to whiteness as a reflexive entry point.

English ivy, now invasive across North America, Australia, and New Zealand, parallels other species that reveal how coloniality takes root under the guise of beauty or progress—famine weed in Africa, mesquite in the UAE, *Lantana camara* in Asia, Monterey pine in South America, and the so-called "green cancer" or "purple plague" (*Miconia calvescens)* in the South Pacific. Across continents, these examples show how colonial introductions reshape ecosystems while appearing benign.

Another invasive legacy of coloniality is whiteness. In this study, whiteness is not defined as white people, but as a social construct invented to uphold power through racialized division and the justification of violence—producing harms that affect us all, regardless of racialization. Seen through the invasive species metaphor, whiteness can be traced to the mid-fifteenth century, when Portuguese slave traders commissioned what Kendi (2016) identifies as the first recorded formulations of anti-Black racist ideas—produced to legitimize colonization and the transatlantic slave trade. These early articulations of "Blackness" simultaneously generated its invisible binary of "whiteness," later embedded in the colonial ordering of humanity that positioned whiteness at the top—an ordering that continues to fuel the structures of modern life shaped by coloniality worldwide (Quijano, 2007; Wynter 1995; Wynter, 2003). From this initial seed, whiteness spread globally alongside European empires, entangled with capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and colonial/modern-gender systems that sustain inequality across societies (Federici, 2004; Lugones, 2007, 2010; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Like an invasive weed, whiteness fuels coloniality by taking root inside many of us as thoughts and behaviors. Through us, it roots into relational patterns, community structures, institutions, and systems. This rooting process echoes ecological systems theory models in community psychology, where change unfolds across nested, interdependent levels. Thriving in silence and invisibility, whiteness continues to shape the present structures that sustain coloniality. Unlike most plants, which become invasive only outside their native habitats, whiteness has no natural home: it is always harmful because it was invented as a tool of domination. Recognizing whiteness as a historical construct, rather than an inevitability, invites the question central to this study: *how might we move from worlds where whiteness is deeply rooted to glimmers of worlds without it?*

One way whiteness persists is through institutional forms, including education and community psychology, where modernist epistemologies often maintain the very structures the field seeks to dismantle. Although community psychology positions itself as committed to social justice and liberation, its practices remain entangled with unexamined operations of whiteness within

knowledge production and research norms. Dutta (2018) critiques how Eurocentric conceptualizations of "community" reproduce hierarchies of knowledge and power, calling for decolonial methodologies grounded in the epistemologies and struggles of marginalized groups. Complementing this, Coleman, Collins, and Bonam (2021) identify a gap in community psychology: the field lacks critical frameworks to interrogate whiteness as a structural system. This absence limits the liberatory potential.

The *Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness* research-to-podcast project responds to this gap by: (1) advancing theoretical contributions through counter-modernity inquiry that resists colonial logics; (2) developing methodological innovations that move beyond critique toward co-creation; and (3) producing practical decolonial tools that actively challenge and dismantle whiteness, including: (a) an invasive species metaphor for whiteness; (b) a five-step emergent framework for naming whiteness, seeing it, uprooting its harmful thoughts and behaviors, composting its emotional residues, and planting new worlds without it (i.e., reimagining); and (c) a public podcast extending these tools beyond academia.

Together, these outputs provide tangible strategies for engaging whiteness reflexively, collaboratively, and creatively, offering community psychology a pathway from critique toward transformative structural change within and beyond the field. This reflexive case study explores these contributions, their tensions, and their possibilities for decolonial praxis. See Appendix A for a glossary of key terms.

2. Counter-Modernity Inquiry: A Container for Collective Reimagining

> Co-creating alternatives *to* modernity requires a commitment to delink from colonial ideologies and practices that have been normalized by many institutions and venues.
>
> --Ciofalo & Watkins (2023, p. 3)

This project did not originate within an already established community or collectively defined inquiry—usually a hallmark of decolonial and participatory research. Instead, it began from my positionality as a graduate student engaging in a summer community praxis course within a decolonial depth psychology program, seeking to embody decolonial praxis beyond theory. Motivated by curiosity and a perceived need, I initiated the project knowing its origins lay within my own initiative rather than a community's call. This recognition required an explicit counter-modernity stance—to resist reproducing colonial logics in both process and outcome.

The research asked: *How might whiteness be collectively reimagined within a counter-modernity container—a space that frames reimagining not as reproducing whiteness but as imagining alternatives outside of it?* This project inhabits the tension of striving to be decolonial while situated in colonial contexts, particularly as a white settler scholar grappling with whiteness in academia. What started as a project evolved into a journey of counter-modern inquiry. What follows traces the roots of the inquiry.

2.1 Researcher Positionality

Ecosystems—both social and ecological—thrive through biodiversity, yet coloniality threatens this biodiversity through the imposition of a universal way of being, knowing, doing: the *one-world world* (Escobar, 2020). As a white U.S. American woman with European immigrant ancestry, I locate myself within the structures of whiteness and settler colonialism and take seriously the responsibility for critical self-reflexivity and accountability for historical and ongoing harms. I have witnessed how the one-world world has harmed people racialized as white, as well as those racialized as people of color, including Black and Indigenous individuals (BIPOC), in distinct ways. I use the term *racialized* to emphasize that race is socially and politically constructed rather than inherent, fixed, or uniform, highlighting the historical and structural forces that produce racial categories.

To counter this legacy, my work as an educator for social change focuses on preparing adults with skills for a pluriverse—a "world in which many worlds fit" (Escobar, 2020; Marcos, 1996). These skills involve unlearning universalist conditioning and creating space for diverse ways of being, knowing, and relating to take root again. Over the past two decades, I have pursued this unlearning personally and, for the past twelve years, facilitated aspects of it with multiracial adult groups. Through these experiences, I have observed the limits of anti-modernity approaches, including many anti-racism and diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings: they often help participants identify and reduce harmful behaviors—the "not this"—but rarely offer pathways for imagining and enacting alternatives or transforming systems. My interest in co-creating alternatives to modernity arises from this gap: moving beyond critique toward more liberatory reprogramming and the co-creation of pluriversal futures.

My approach integrates andragogy—adult-centered learning that values lived and embodied experience—alongside cultural humility, critical intercultural competencies, and what Dutta (2018) describes as the transformative potential of discomfort as pedagogy. As such, I strive to create brave spaces grounded in trust, accountability, and collective care, reflecting a decolonial ethic that exposes how whiteness sustains colonial universality, resists those logics in research, and centers pluriversality in both process and outcome—with a focus on not only unlearning but also imagining and enacting alternatives beyond whiteness and colonial structures. For more details on my positionality, see my website bio at https://www.reimaginingworldswithoutwhiteness.com.

2.2 A Counter-Modernity Framework

Seeking a decolonial research approach, I drew on counter-modernity (Rose, 2004), which recognizes modernity's inseparability from coloniality and challenges its core assumptions, such as universality and disembodiment. Counter-modernity resists reproducing Eurocentric logics and instead seeks alternative ways of being and knowing. It moves beyond critique toward *counter-moves*—creative practices that ask: *what else is possible?* Whereas traditional methods rely on individualism, extraction, and universality, counter-methods emphasize ethical relationality, situated responsibility, and pluriversality. This framework supported a reflexive, decolonial inquiry that not only critiques whiteness, but dares to imagine life and research outside of it.

2.3 Decolonial Lineages

To build a counter-modernity framework with counter-moves to traditional research, I drew from methodological allies committed to doing research otherwise. Decolonial research, as Dutta (2018) and Coleman et al. (2021) remind us, requires centering marginalized voices and interrogating how research reproduces power. As a white scholar, this meant stepping back to listen, seeking guidance and accountability from decolonial traditions including critical community, liberation, Indigenous, and ecological psychologies, as well as decolonial participatory action research (DPAR). DPAR provides an ethical, anticolonial approach to research that exposes hidden ethical problems in conventional social science, centers relational ethics over procedural IRB compliance, and emphasizes ethical considerations related to reflexivity, expertise, humility, dignity, action, relationality, and community-driven theories of change (Tuck & Guishard, 2013). It challenges racialized sciencism and seeks to dismantle the settler colonial structures that sustain White supremacy and heteropatriarchy in collaborative research.

2.3.1 Researcher as Co-Learner

To counter the colonial figure of the researcher as an objective expert, I adopted a co-learner stance informed by Indigenous and decolonial principles. DPAR values lived experience as legitimate knowledge and calls researchers to reflexivity, humility, mutual vulnerability, and understanding of power and domination (Tuck & Guishard, 2013). This approach foregrounded positionality, identity, and the researcher's responsibility to examine how social location and power shape co-learning with communities, knowledge production, and commitments to social change (Muhammad et al., 2015). Indigenous principles of self-location as anti-colonial, vulnerability as honorable, and humility as a means of unlearning false consciousness further shaped the framework (Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Contemplative justice practices related to stillness (centering, silence, meditation, spiritual practices), creativity (music, journaling), relationality (council circle, dialogue, deep listening, storytelling), and ritual (establishing a sacred space for research and writing) grounded the inquiry in both personal and collective reflection and created spaces for co-creation (Ahmed, 2021; Shahjahan, 2006). Embracing messiness and uncertainty allowed time to grapple with new ideas, make sense of emergent processes, and co-construct shared meaning with participants (Chancer & Ramírez, 2026; Goodnough, 2008). This co-learner stance provided an internal framework that guided how I showed up to the research—an inner posture.

2.3.2 Relational Ethics

To counter extractive notions of participants as data sources, I turned again to DPAR and Indigenous values of ethical relationality, reciprocity, and reflexivity. DPAR centers relationality as "an alchemy of trust, representation, and reciprocity" (Tuck & Guishard, 2013, p. 21) and emphasizes that researchers should "focus their efforts not on establishing trust but on being trustworthy" (p. 21), preserving dignity, building on community strengths, and respecting the distinction between public and sacred knowledge. Transparency in methods, goals, and deliverables, along with congruence between research commitments and practices, supports collective learning and challenges unfair practices. Indigenous approaches similarly emphasize knowing oneself, sustaining nourishing relationships, and co-creating knowledge rather than

extracting it (Johnston-Goodstar, Boucher, & Red Shirt-Shaw, 2022; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Relational ethics provided an interpersonal framework that guided how I engaged with participants and their communities, resisting separations between researcher and researched, self and other, and human and more-than-human worlds.

2.3.3 Pluriversal Knowledge-Making

To counter the reproduction of singular and oppressive epistemologies during the research process, this study draws on decolonial and liberation frameworks that emphasize epistemological pluralism and the ecologies of knowledge erased or suppressed by Eurocentric modernity (de Sousa Santos, 2018). These approaches center collective co-learning spaces, inviting participants to "know with" rather than "know about" one another and to stay open to new perspectives and connections. A nonrepresentational orientation further informed the design of these spaces. As James and Lorenz (2026) explain, nonrepresentational approaches understand researchers and participants as "provisionally mapping the world" through evolving relationships within living systems, moving with imperfect knowledge rather than from the certainty of a zero-point epistemology (James & Lorenz, 2026, p. 119). Within this orientation, uncertainty, missteps, iterative learning, and transformation are understood as generative dimensions of inquiry, while research attends to unfolding events and relationships rather than fixed regularities. Consistent with the decolonial commitment to epistemological pluralism, this orientation resists claims to universal, detached knowledge. Its purpose is not simply to capture the past but to "signal future possibilities" (p. 119), including "opening multiple new spaces for thinking, being, action, regeneration, and creativity, breaking open the systems shaped by colonialism" (p. 109).

Together, these commitments to pluriversal knowledge-making provided a structural framework that guided how I created containers for shared meaning-making with room for multiple perspectives and convened a community of participants as co-researchers committed to reimagining whiteness together.

2.3.4 Reimagining as Decolonial Act

> I often feel I am trapped inside someone else's imagination, and I must engage my own imagination in order to break free.
>
> --adrienne maree brown (2017, p. 18)

To counter the reproduction of colonial imaginings, this study centers reimagining as a decolonial act by drawing on decolonial scholarship. As brown (2017) notes, "We are in an imagination battle" (p. 18). Mendieta (2020) calls for a *decolonial imaginary* —a radical re-storying that wakes us up from the stories we've inherited through coloniality, and awakens futures silenced by coloniality. Anzaldúa (2015) similarly offers a decolonizing process through *conocimiento,* an embodied shift in consciousness that transforms perception and identity and heals colonial wounds: "Reimagining identity means seeing through inherited fictions and remaking ourselves and our cultures (pp. 81-93). Together, these thinkers remind us that reimagining must extend beyond personal and relational dimensions to structural ones, moving beyond dominant paradigms. Wynter's (1995) *root expansion of thought* captures this horizon--a

shift already underway for our current era; born from the *counterperspectives* of the anticolonial movements of the 1950s and 60s and carried by Black and Indigenous voices that challenge colonial systems. This inquiry stands within that lineage, answering Dutta's (2018) call for community psychology that centers the epistemologies and struggles of historically marginalized peoples. Reimagining as a decolonial act provided a framework to mitigate the reproduction of colonial imaginaries in both process and outcomes throughout the entire research design, from participant selection to interpretation of findings.

The following sections illustrate how these principles were enacted through iterative, co-creative counterpractices.

3. Enacting Counter-Modernity Inquiry: Counterpractices

> Fundamentally a rehumanizing project, decoloniality involves production of counter discourses, counterknowledges, and counterpractices that not only seek to dismantle coloniality but also open up manifold possibilities of being in the world.
>
> --Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016, as cited in Dutta, 2018, p. 273)

The *Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness* research-to-podcast project began as a summer praxis and evolved into a three-year qualitative inquiry grounded in an interdisciplinary counter-modernity framework. Twenty-six multiracial participants as "co-researchers" from diverse disciplines across the U.S. and Europe explored the question: *How might whiteness be collectively reimagined within a counter-modernity container?*

To explore this question, the inquiry unfolded through three interconnected phases: (1) sharing stories through interviews and story circles inspired by Indigenous Council practices; (2) identifying emergent themes through a semi-collaborative iterative analysis integrating content analysis with DPAR principles; and (3) co-creating a public podcast of 25+ episodes to extend the research beyond academia and invite ongoing reflection. Throughout these phases, the following counterpractices were enacted.

3.1 Researcher Reflexivity

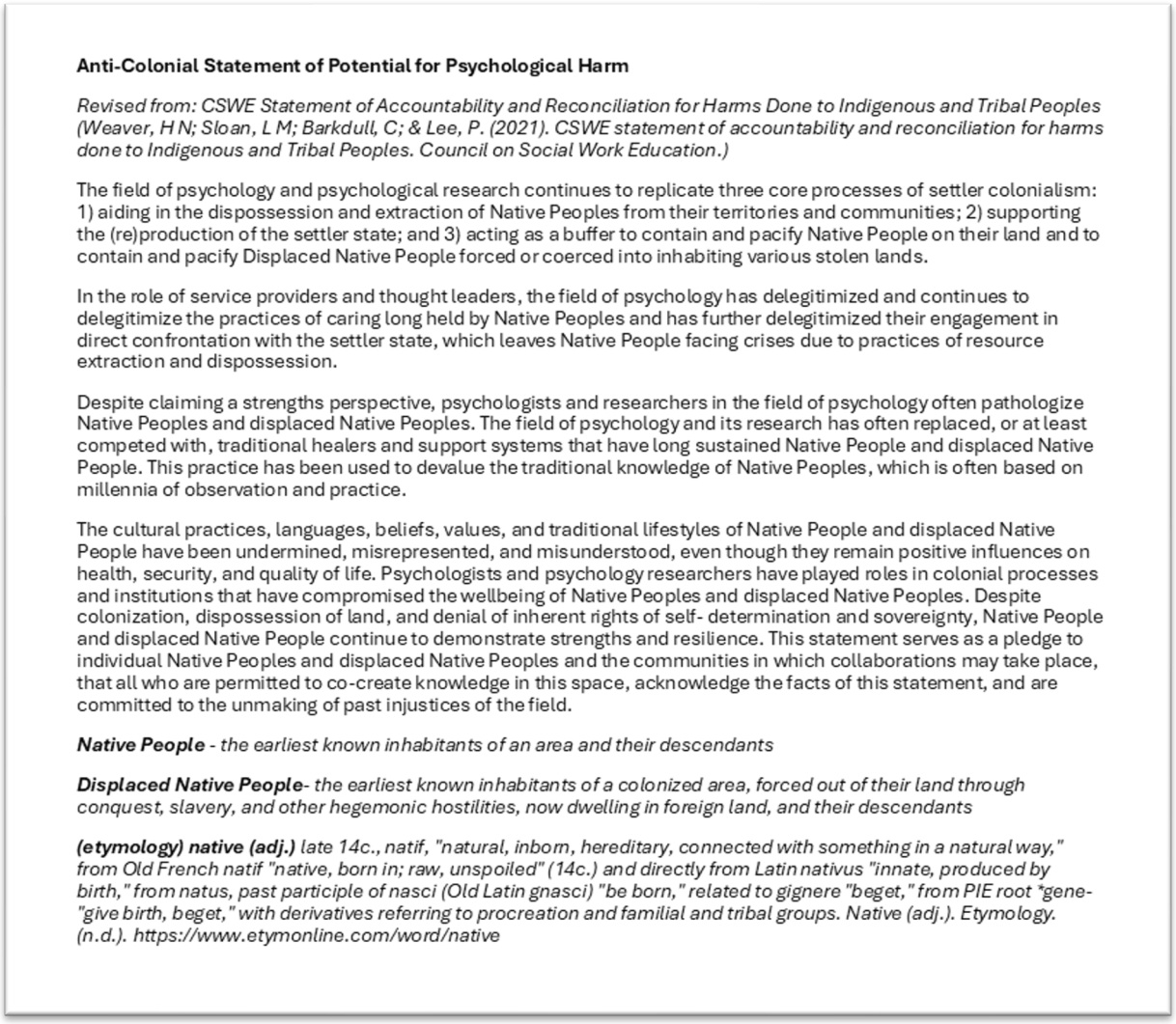
Reflexivity was embedded as an ongoing anti-colonial practice. At the outset, I located myself as researcher within the work and articulated a personal theory of social change (Appendix B) connecting the personal to relational, collective, and systemic levels of change, and clarifying commitments, positionality, and accountability. This reflexive practice was guided by questions including: *What is my goal for real social change*? (Muhammad et al., 2015); *What role do research and researchers play*? (Tuck & Guishard, 2013); and *How do contemplative practices shape my approach and integrate personal transformation with work for social transformation?* (Ahmed, 2021). Reflexivity was cyclical and nonlinear; reflexive journaling and contemplative practices supported alignment of head, heart, body, and spirit while continuously interrogating assumptions, biases, and blind spots.

3.2 Anti-Colonial Statement of Potential for Psychological Harm

As part of this study's commitment to relational ethics, decolonial praxis, and unmaking the colonial harms historically perpetuated by Western psychology, an *Anti-Colonial Statement of Potential for Psychological Harm* was included in the informed consent process (Figure 3). Developed by Dr. Ericka Mingo (personal communication, May 16, 2023) and reproduced with permission, the statement acknowledges psychology's complicity in colonial systems that have harmed Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized communities.

Grounded in Smith's (2013) call for research to be responsible, relevant, respectful, and non-oppressive, this statement served as an ethical foundation for this project. It functioned as a collective pledge—recognizing historical and ongoing psychological harms, affirming accountability, and committing to the unmaking of past and present injustices.

By explicitly naming these harms, the statement reframed informed consent as a decolonial ethical practice, inviting all participants into a shared responsibility to foster critical awareness, relational care, and to resist reproducing epistemic violence in the co-creation of knowledge.



Anti-Colonial Statement of Potential for Psychological Harm

Revised from: CSWE Statement of Accountability and Reconciliation for Harms Done to Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (Weaver, H N; Sloan, L M; Barkdull, C; & Lee, P. (2021). CSWE statement of accountability and reconciliation for harms done to Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Council on Social Work Education.)

The field of psychology and psychological research continues to replicate three core processes of settler colonialism: 1) aiding in the dispossession and extraction of Native Peoples from their territories and communities; 2) supporting the (re)production of the settler state; and 3) acting as a buffer to contain and pacify Native People on their land and to contain and pacify Displaced Native People forced or coerced into inhabiting various stolen lands.

In the role of service providers and thought leaders, the field of psychology has delegitimized and continues to delegitimize the practices of caring long held by Native Peoples and has further delegitimized their engagement in direct confrontation with the settler state, which leaves Native People facing crises due to practices of resource extraction and dispossession.

Despite claiming a strengths perspective, psychologists and researchers in the field of psychology often pathologize Native Peoples and displaced Native Peoples. The field of psychology and its research has often replaced, or at least competed with, traditional healers and support systems that have long sustained Native People and displaced Native People. This practice has been used to devalue the traditional knowledge of Native Peoples, which is often based on millennia of observation and practice.

The cultural practices, languages, beliefs, values, and traditional lifestyles of Native People and displaced Native People have been undermined, misrepresented, and misunderstood, even though they remain positive influences on health, security, and quality of life. Psychologists and psychology researchers have played roles in colonial processes and institutions that have compromised the wellbeing of Native Peoples and displaced Native Peoples. Despite colonization, dispossession of land, and denial of inherent rights of self- determination and sovereignty, Native People and displaced Native People continue to demonstrate strengths and resilience. This statement serves as a pledge to individual Native Peoples and displaced Native Peoples and the communities in which collaborations may take place, that all who are permitted to co-create knowledge in this space, acknowledge the facts of this statement, and are committed to the unmaking of past injustices of the field.

Native People *- the earliest known inhabitants of an area and their descendants*

Displaced Native People*- the earliest known inhabitants of a colonized area, forced out of their land through conquest, slavery, and other hegemonic hostilities, now dwelling in foreign land, and their descendants*

(etymology) native (adj.) *late 14c., natif, "natural, inborn, hereditary, connected with something in a natural way," from Old French natif "native, born in; raw, unspoiled" (14c.) and directly from Latin nativus "innate, produced by birth," from natus, past participle of nasci (Old Latin gnasci) "be born," related to gignere "beget," from PIE root *gene- "give birth, beget," with derivatives referring to procreation and familial and tribal groups. Native (adj.). Etymology. (n.d.). https://www.etymonline.com/word/native*

Figure 3. Anti-colonial statement of potential for psychological harm used in this study.

Note. Adapted and reprinted with permission from the research advisor Dr. Ericka Mingo, Adjunct Faculty, Community, Liberation, Indigenous, and Eco-Psychologies Program, Pacifica Graduate Institute. Minor formatting

changes (capitalization) were made for consistency. The statement was revised from the Council on Social Work Education's *CSWE Statement of Accountability and Reconciliation for Harms Done to Indigenous and Tribal Peoples* (Weaver et al., 2021).

3.3 Participants as Co-Researchers

Participants were intentionally convened as *co-researchers* rather than research subjects, a counterpractice rooted in relational ethics and a commitment to a "semi-collaborative iterative research design" (see 3.5 below). The project was necessarily collaborative rather than fully participatory, as co-researchers contributed at various stages but not across every phase of the research process. Engagement varied due to time, capacity, and life responsibilities; thus, collaboration unfolded in partial and adaptive ways. Although I honored community relationships, I also retained significant analytic control. My academic role afforded access to resources and as the project initiator I held considerable power in shaping its direction, timeline, and outputs. Mindful of these dynamics, I enacted the co-researcher approach to cultivate as much shared authority and collective meaning-making as possible within the project's constraints. Co-researchers were actively involved in the first phase of data collection, analysis, and findings through story circles (see 3.4 below). Insights generated in that cycle shaped both the second phase (i.e., interviews and cross-interview analysis conducted by me) and the third phase (i.e., podcast co-creation for public dissemination). Because their involvement did not extend into cross-interview analysis, co-researchers are not listed as co-authors of this article.

Co-researchers were recruited via purposive sampling, aligned with community psychology values. Selection emphasized prior engagement with critical racial dialogue, capacity for reflective discussion on whiteness and power, and pre-existing foundation of trust and rapport with me to support ethical, generative dialogue. Sixty-four individuals were invited from networks built over four decades; 26 participated (12 racialized as BIPOC, 14 racialized as white) across four countries (Denmark, North Macedonia, UK, US). Ages ranged from 21 to 70+, representing diverse identities including race, ethnicity, gender, biological sex, sexual orientation, disability, religion, parenting status, and professional sector. Participation was voluntary with the option to opt out at any time. All but two co-researchers were known to me. Story circles, interviews, and materials were conducted in English, with translation support for the Macedonian-speaking co-researcher. With consent, co-researcher names, photos, and bios are publicly available on the podcast website at https://www.reimaginingworldswithoutwhiteness.com. While relational recruitment enabled deeper engagement, it may have introduced selection or social desirability bias and limited the diversity of voices. Recruitment relied on English and/or Macedonian literacy, which may have excluded additional perspectives. The sample is not representative, and findings are not generalizable—a common trade-off in community psychology for depth, relevance, and relational engagement.

3.4 Story Circles: Council-Inspired Collective Inquiry

The first phase of data collection, analysis, and findings was collaborative and took place in a 3-hour virtual gathering called the *Reimagining Whiteness Community Lab.* Guided by Council practices adapted from the Center for Council and The Ojai Foundation (Center for Council & The

Ojai Foundation, n.d.) and rooted in Indigenous Council traditions worldwide, this session centered relationality, accountability, and collective meaning-making (Wilson, 2008).

I designed and facilitated the lab using contemplative practices to create a ceremonial research space—a non-hierarchical collective container to reimagine together. Nine of the co-researchers opted to participate (5 racialized as BIPOC, 4 racialized as white). The format included an opening ritual, co-created community guidelines, multiple rounds of storytelling, and closing reflections. Story circles were the primary storytelling method used, structured to ensure deep listening, talk equity, and co-creation. Throughout the process, deep listening was a core ethic: listening not to respond, but to understand. The practice is also supported by a shared set of community guidelines (see Table 1) and rooted in four core intentions from the Center for Council and The Ojai Foundation's Council method: speaking from the heart, listening from the heart, being spontaneous, and being lean of expression (Center for Council & The Ojai Foundation, n.d.). These intentions and guidelines helped create a brave space for deep dialogue, generative refusal (James & Lorenz, 2026), and creativity to emerge within a co-learning community of care.

Table 1. Creating the Container for the Reimagining Whiteness Community Lab

Community guidelines[a]	1. Engage in critically compassionate co-learning. 2. Be present, extending and presuming welcome. 3. Maintain confidentiality. 4. Speak your truth and speak only for yourself. 5. Practice deep listening and holding space. 6. Turn to wonder when someone else's truth challenges your own. 7. Allow for the difference between intention and impact. 8. Acknowledge uncomfortable responses. 9. Others?
Story circles	1. Storytelling Circle (Data Collection): Co-researchers responded to the question: *How do you reimagine whiteness?* Stories were shared in breakout groups with a virtual talking order format (in lieu of a talking piece), and volunteer timekeepers helped maintain equity in speaking time. 2. Emerging Themes Circle (Collaborative Analysis): Co-researchers reflected on what themes emerged from their stories. Volunteer note-takers captured insights without attempting consensus, honoring multiplicity and tension, while timekeepers again helped maintain equity in speaking time. 3. Podcast Co-Design (Creative Translation): Co-researchers translated their themes into podcast episode ideas. Discussion questions prompted reflection on purpose, representation, absences/gaps, soundscapes, participation, and next steps.

Note. [a]Adapted from the Coming to the Table Touchstones and Jesica S. Fernández's *Principles for Online Learning* (used in her classroom, adapted from https://www.chronicle.com/article/Nobody-Signed-Up-for/248298)

The community lab opened with a grounding ritual and somatic music exercise (e.g., "Unspoken Word" by The Soil) to support presence and "attune to each other" (Menakem, 2017). Design choices emphasized embodiment, trust-building, and intentional pacing—scaffolding activities from lower to higher risk. Reflection questions were shared in advance, along with community guidelines that were finalized collaboratively during the session. The structure of the community lab unfolded in three interconnected story circles (see Table 1), which took place in two racial-affinity breakout groups to support the creation of a container for honest, open, and brave dialogue. One breakout group included co-researchers racialized as BIPOC, and the other

included co-researchers racialized as white, reflecting the social and historical processes that shaped co-researchers' experiences. The BIPOC-affinity group was moderated by OhnSoon Kim, a co-researcher and experienced intercultural competence and diversity, equity, and inclusion practitioner, while I moderated the white-affinity group. The breakout groups included a storytelling circle (data collection), an emerging themes circle (collaborative data analysis), and a podcast co-design circle (collaborative creative translation of findings). The community lab then closed with a large group reflection of the process, outcomes, and next steps for collaborative episode(s), followed by a final circle for co-researchers to share one word or phrase takeaway. The findings (interview ideas, episode themes, generative refusals) were used in the second phase of the study (see 3.5 below). Informal feedback from co-researchers indicated the effectiveness of the model for surfacing diverse viewpoints, although more time would have been helpful. This story circle model affirmed that storytelling in circle is a sacred act, requiring relational accountability not only to each other but to the communities and wisdom traditions from which these practices emerge. It also offered a generative alternative to traditional focus groups, centering dignity, relationship, and imagination in the research process.

3.5 Semi-Collaborative Iterative Research Design

Phase two data collection, analysis, and findings unfolded through a semi-collaborative iterative design.

Table 2. Eight-step content analysis process used in this study with source attribution

Step	Source
1. Creating decolonial frame for data analysis • Reflexivity (DPAR asks 3 key questions and develops theory of social change) • Relationality (DPAR values trustworthy researchers)	 -Tuck & Guishard, 2013, p. 17-18; Muhammad et al., 2015; Ahmed, 2021 -Tuck & Guishard, 2013, pp. 21-22
2. Formulating research questions • Expertise (DPAR is respectful of and responsive to community knowledge and organic expertise)	-Hsieh & Shannon, 2005 -Tuck & Guishard, 2013, p. 18
3. Transcribing interviews and immersion in data • Reflexivity (contemplative practices, messiness, uncertainty)	-Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013 -Ahmed, 2021; Shahjahan, 2006; Goodnough, 2008
4. Defining categories and themes (manifest and latent content) • Action (DPAR values ongoing transparency)	-Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013 -Tuck & Guishard, pp. 20
5. Creating the codebook	-Hsieh & Shannon, 2005
6. Open, axial, and selective coding • Action (DPAR values ongoing transparency)	-Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013 -Tuck & Guishard, pp. 20
7. Determining trustworthiness	-Hsieh & Shannon, 2005

8. Analyzing and reporting	-Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013
◦ Humility (DPAR co-creates knowledge)	-Tuck & Guishard, 2013, p. 19
◦ Dignity (DPAR respects opacity and "theorizes back" by shifting the gaze of research onto the institutions and structures that maintain settler colonialism)	-Tuck (2009c, as cited in Tuck & Guishard, 2013, p. 20)
◦ Action (DPAR values collaborative deliverables)	-Tuck & Guishard, 2013, p. 20-21
◦ Relationality (DPAR values co-authorship)	-Tuck & Guishard, 2013, p. 21-22; Johnston-Goodstar et al., 2022

Note. Adapted from Kaid's (1989) classic seven-step framework (as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005); Elo & Kyngäs' (2008) model of preparation, organizing, and reporting (as cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013); ethical DPAR framework principles (Johnston-Goodstar et al., 2022; Tuck & Guishard, 2013) and DPAR-adjacent sources (Ahmed, 2021; Goodnough, 2008; Muhammad et al., 2015; Shahjahan, 2006).

Insights from phase one shaped phase two—informing interview questions, emerging themes, participant referrals, and collaborative roles such as co-moderation, co-interviewing, and design contributions. For example, one co-researcher referred a Nordic animist scholar later featured in a standalone podcast episode, while another served as a guest interviewer.

Phase two included semi-structured interviews with 23 co-researchers. Twenty responded to a shared, co-designed set of questions; three engaged with tailored questions on ancestral pilgrimage; and three declined. One interview was co-conducted by a co-researcher of a parallel study using a hybrid protocol. These variations reflect the project's relational commitments and respect for co-researcher positionality and agency.

I led the cross-interview analysis using an eight-step process that integrates conventional content analysis with DPAR principles of reflexivity, expertise, humility, dignity, action, and relationality (Table 2). In addition to the steps in Table 2, stories were engaged as relational offerings; reflective journaling and peer debriefing were maintained; and dignity was upheld through respecting generative refusal, using non-possessive language, and representing knowledge contextually (James & Lorenz, 2026; Muhammad et al., 2015; Tuck & Guishard, 2013).

The third phase—public dissemination—also followed a semi-collaborative iterative design (see step 8 in Table 2). Editorial authority for podcast and educational materials was shared through asynchronous member-checking: co-researchers reviewed episodes for three weeks, revising content, clarifying meaning, co-writing intros/outros, and shaping how their stories were represented. Interviews informing the findings appear in the *Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness* podcast (Truscott, 2025–present), with excerpts shared publicly with consent. Consistent with relational ethics, co-researchers also reviewed and approved all quoted material in this article.

Informal feedback highlighted appreciation for the integrity and care embedded in the process. This collaborative approach enacted ongoing relational ethics, supported shared meaning-making, and generated tools for public engagement beyond academia.

4. Findings: Decolonial Tools for Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness

The findings of this inquiry respond directly to the need within community psychology (and beyond) for critical whiteness praxis by producing a set of practical decolonial tools that make actively challenging and dismantling whiteness more accessible and tangible. These tools include: (a) an invasive species metaphor for whiteness that translates the abstraction of whiteness into embodied imagery; (b) a five-step emergent framework that serves as a guide for mapping worlds where whiteness is deeply rooted to glimmers of worlds without it; and (c) a public-facing podcast designed to extend these tools beyond academia, providing opportunities for listeners to engage in dialogue and reflection.

4.1 Finding 1: The Metaphor of Invasive Ivy—Making Whiteness Visible and Tangible

Returning to the metaphor of invasive ivy described in the introduction, what follows is a look at how the metaphor emerged as a decolonial tool—a way to articulate whiteness not as an abstract system but as a living invasive social construct that can be identified, traced, and uprooted, rendering it visible for those who may initially find the concept abstract. The metaphor emerged through a sequence of collaborative and reflexive encounters that revealed the limits of my own initial approach to discussing whiteness. During the story circles, co-researchers enacted generative refusal—resisting my invitation to jump from defining whiteness to reimagining it through a counter-modernity lens. Their discomfort and critique illuminated a gap between defining and reimagining. This refusal became a turning point, prompting me to seek a more accessible pedagogical bridge between the abstract and the tangible. In a subsequent interview, co-researcher Gilbert Salazar asked me, *"Is there an element in nature that really connects to this work of this project or reimagining whiteness?"*. The question lingered, surfacing later during meditation as the image of invasive ivy that I described in the intro. The metaphor became a mapping device. As I revisited the data through this metaphor, five recurring interconnected themes became visible—each corresponding to a stage in how co-researchers defined reimagining whiteness. Together, the five themes formed the groundwork for a broader decolonial framework to emerge, as follows.

4.2 Finding 2: An Emergent 5-Part Framework—From Worlds Where Whiteness is Rooted to Worlds Without it

Building on the invasive ivy metaphor, the data revealed an emergent five-part framework for engaging whiteness as a rooted system—from worlds where it is deeply rooted to worlds without it. Across co-researcher narratives, reimagining whiteness involved: (1) naming it; (2) seeing it; (3) uprooting its harmful thoughts and behaviors within us and through us across relationships, communities, institutions, and systems; (4) composting its emotional residues so that we become humble soil, porous enough for something other than whiteness to take root within us and our worlds; and (5) planting worlds without it (i.e., reimagining). These parts are nonlinear, cyclical, and ongoing, grounded in situated knowledges rather than abstract theory. They reflect how co-researchers collectively understand, confront, and transform whiteness as a system that has not always existed and need not endure. See Appendix C for the full Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness five-part framework, including how it emerged from the research, how it connects

back to the invasive species metaphor, and how each part can be enacted as part of a decolonial praxis rooted in decolonial theory.

Although I initially hoped to focus primarily on the "worlds being planted," the framework shows that reimagining whiteness currently requires both anti-modernity and counter-modernity as complementary orientations. *Anti-modernit*y pushes back against whiteness—naming, seeing, uprooting, and the initial stage of composting, where those formed within whiteness allow its logics and attachments to decompose. These "not this" acts are necessary, but as the saying goes, "whatever you are pushing against, you are stuck to." *Counter-modernity* moves beyond critique toward co-creation, asking *"what else is possible?"* The later stages—composting's generativity and planting through reimagining—embody this creative orientation.

Extending the metaphor, the framework invites us to view decolonial work as tending a shared garden. Where whiteness remains rooted, some people must do the anti-modernity work of weeding at all levels; others must plant and protect emerging alternatives as the seed keepers or guardians of counter-modernity work. Each role matters. Decolonial transformation, like cultivation, requires collective care: uprooting what harms, tending the soil, and nurturing new seeds and growth.

Co-researchers described planting across multiple terrains: self, relations, and communities/institutions. Self-reimagining involved reconnecting to ancestral, multiracial, or activist lineages as counter-moves to the erasures of whiteness. For instance, Rune Hjarnø Rasmussen revives Nordic animist roots as an anti-racist act aligned in solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty movements and ecological healing, reconstructing kinship and land-connectedness as a counter-image to whiteness for Euro-descendants. Relational reimagining included reflexive work with family, ancestors, and plantcestors. For example, three co-researchers independently traced how learning about the European and Salem witch hunts helped them reclaim pre-Christian, earth-based wisdom and confront inherited religious and patriarchal traumas. Drawing on Federici's (2004) *Caliban and the Witch*, they highlighted how "witch" knowledges, once suppressed through mechanisms that fueled capitalism and whiteness, open alternative ways of being and knowing to whiteness today. At the community and institutional level, co-researchers reimagined practices, such as Atiq Shomar, who reshapes therapy by training anti-oppression therapists attentive to how systemic inequities enter the therapy room and committed to practicing differently.

Across these narratives, the framework suggests that—regardless of race—awakening to whiteness and its operations across all levels of society is part of decoloniality: tracing entangled roots to uproot the causes of systemic oppression in worlds where whiteness remains deeply rooted.

4.3 Finding 3: From Research to Podcast—Translating Findings Beyond Academia

The final output translated the metaphor and framework into a 25+-episode podcast, *Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness* (Figure 4). Aligned with community psychology's commitment to accessible praxis, the research-to-podcast format was chosen from the outset to make the findings public and relational. Initially, I anticipated only three episodes would emerge from the story circles, but the depth of co-researcher stories expanded the project far beyond those expectations.



Figure 4. Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness Podcast Logo

The title evolved through dialogue with co-researchers. During the first story circle, co-researchers shared that the original title, *Reimagining Whiteness,* felt harmful because it risked implying reproduction of whiteness. I paused the study to listen and repair through 1:1 follow-up conversations. In a subsequent interview, another co-researcher, Desirée Gonzalez, named what would eventually evolve into the title: "that's my imagination when I think of […] imagining a world outside of whiteness." The plural *worlds* was later added to honor pluriversality and multiplicity. This renaming process became an ethical and reflexive turning point, embodying the study's commitment to relational ethics.

Table 3. Podcast Planning Checklist for Reflexive Knowledge Sharing

Phase and Focus	Key Tasks / Prompts
1. Visioning & Values Why this podcast?	• Clarify purpose: What story are you telling and why? • Identify your audience: Who are you in dialogue with? • Anchor in values: What principles guide your choices? (e.g., dignity, reflexivity, relationality) • Consider ethical questions: Who holds the knowledge? Who benefits?
2. Pre-Production Setup Laying the Groundwork	• Choose format: Narrative? Interview? Roundtable? • Plan equipment & software: recording equipment, editing & transcription software • Set up space: Quiet recording environment • Determine hosting platform and budget
3. Co-Creating Content Designing Episodes	• Co-create episode plan (story ideas, themes, language/s) • Book and prepare guests / co-researchers (ensure consent, protect intellectual property) • Record content and create transcripts (stories, interviews, soundscapes) • Co-create episode outlines and structure (analysis, hook, opening, closing, reflection prompts)

4. Editing & Assembly Shaping the Story	• Create episode audio file (edit for clarity, tone, and flow) • Layer music and transitions (ensure license compliance) • Write show notes and metadata • Invite feedback before release (member checking if relevant)
5. Launch & Distribution Going Public	• Build online presence (logo, cover art, website, social media, etc.) • Plan soft launch & promotional rollout • Distribute trailers and first episodes • Email newsletter, social posts, community partners
6. Sustaining the Practice Reflexive Growth	• Gather listener feedback • Update episode guide or educational materials • Consider long-term impact or monetization • Reflect on your own learning: What changed in you? In others?

The episodes emerged organically from co-researcher narratives through iterative coding and analysis. The first mini-series of episodes introduce the metaphor and framework as an accessible on-ramp for listeners to oftentimes complex concepts, followed by three additional mini-series exploring: (1) reimagining through ancestral roots, (2) in relationships, and (3) within institutions. Each episode integrates co-researcher interviews, semi-collaborative analysis, and reflective synthesis, offering call-to-action questions co-created with co-researchers. These embedded questions invite listeners into an ongoing process of reflecting, reckoning, and reimagining—making the podcast a living, reflective tool rather than a fixed representation of findings and extending the counter-modernity inquiry beyond publication.

Although the podcast has not yet been publicly released, a soft-launch event offered co-researchers an early preview of episode titles and themes. Informal feedback was affirming; one co-researcher described the work as "inspired," while co-researcher Michele Chang emphasized its value "to people like me, who are actively engaging in conversations about racial justice and how to create a transformative process." These reflections underscore the podcast's significance not only as an outcome but as an extension of the study's relational and ethical commitments.

The podcast offers two invitations. First, it invites listeners to use the *Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness* podcast as a tool for personal and collective transformation. Second, it encourages community researchers to consider podcasting as a decolonial method for their own work. To support this, a Podcast Planning Checklist (Table 3) outlines six key phases—from designing ethical collaborations to co-creating and launching episodes. The complete podcast series and accompanying materials are publicly available on the podcast website at https://www.reimaginingworldswithoutwhiteness.com. Ultimately, podcasting here is not just a communication method but a relational practice of inquiry—a living continuation of the study's reflexive, decolonial ethos.

5. Reimagining Community Psychology: From Critique to Co-Creation

The project generated three key outcomes: (1) advancing theory through counter-modernity inquiry that resists colonial logics; (2) developing methodological innovations that move beyond

critique toward co-creation; and (3) producing practical decolonial tools that challenge whiteness. The inquiry and counter-practices created space for co-researchers to explore alternatives, while their stories generated embodied metaphors and a five-part framework for moving from critique to reimagining worlds without whiteness—offering tangible guidance for cultivating spaces where alternative futures can take root.

Taken together, the inquiry, counterpractices, and findings (metaphor, framework, and public podcast) form a constellation of decolonial tools for engaging whiteness reflexively, collaboratively, and creatively. These contributions align with broader decolonial lineages that seek to "map the colonial and capitalist matrix of power…to make it visible and to understand its evolution over time" (Jiménez, Lee, Masud, & Mingo, 2022, p. 7) and to insist that empowerment within community psychology requires "questioning, digging, and embarking on new ways of knowing" (p. 7). This project therefore offers community psychology not only a critical whiteness framework but a pathway from critique toward transformative structural change within and beyond the field.

Although a formal evaluation will follow the public release of the podcast, early informal feedback underscores the project's resonance. Multiracial co-researchers and practitioners described the metaphor and framework as "marvelous" and "remarkable," highlighting capacity to spark dialogue and inspire collective reflection. Presentations at community dialogues and international decolonial conferences elicited strong interest from scholars and practitioners seeking accessible tools to communicate complex concepts of coloniality and decoloniality, affirming the project's potential contributions to broader decolonial praxis.

These early insights point toward future directions in research, education, and practice. The invasive species metaphor can be locally adapted using regionally specific species to analyze how coloniality and whiteness embed within local social and ecological ecosystems. The five-step framework offers a flexible guide for reflection and dialogue across classrooms, organizations, and community settings—supporting educators, organizers, and practitioners in identifying where whiteness operates (self, relationships, community, institutions, or systems) and envisioning relational, liberatory alternatives. The podcast extends this work publicly, inviting collective inquiry beyond academic spaces.

Together, these tools translate complexity into accessible practice and enact counter-modern ethics—collaborative, reflexive, ecological, and transformative. They position community psychology not only as a site for critiquing whiteness, but for dismantling and moving outside it. This project invites others to experiment with decolonial methodologies that shift from resistance to reimagining, cultivating the pluriversal worlds community psychology has long envisioned but not yet fully realized. The aim is not to become better modern subjects or worlds, but to become otherwise.

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and wisdom. With their consent, their names, photos, and bios are publicly available on the website at https://www.reimaginingworldswithoutwhiteness.com.

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APPENDIX A
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Anti-Modernity Inquiry. A process of critique and resistance that challenges the dominance of modernity and its shadow side of coloniality (Adams et al., 2018). In this study, anti-modernity inquiry includes the acts of naming whiteness, seeing it, uprooting its harmful thoughts and behaviors, and beginning to compost its emotional residues. It represents a necessary phase of refusal and confrontation but is not the endpoint.

Coloniality. An inherent "dark side" of the modern era and persists as "ways of thinking, feeling, and being associated with European global domination" (Adams et al., 2018, p. 3). It is the ongoing lingering impacts of colonization—systems of power, knowledge, and being that outlive formal colonialism and that continue to impact us to this day. As described by decolonial scholars, Lugones (2010), Maldonado-Torres (2007), and Quijano (2007), coloniality shapes how we relate, think, and live—through hierarchies of race, gender, and knowledge. In this study, whiteness is an invention with roots entangled with coloniality. Like an invasive weed, whiteness fuels coloniality by taking root inside many of us as thoughts and behaviors. Through us, it roots into relational patterns, community structures, institutions, and systems.

Composting Whiteness. The fourth part of the Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness framework. To invoke composting is not to suggest that whiteness itself can be recycled into something life-giving. Whiteness has no regenerative potential; it is a structural formation sustained through hierarchy, violence, and separation. Rather, composting names what happens after uprooting—not to whiteness, but to what occurs within people and relationships that survive it. Composting describes the emotional and existential decomposition that occurs when those formed within whiteness allow its logics—our attachments, identities, false securities/epistemologies—to die within us and our worlds. As they break down, emotional residues may arise that call for an alchemical process within us: transforming the emotions surfaced by naming, seeing, and uprooting whiteness—anger, anxiety, disgust, fear, fragility, guilt, hatred, pain, rage, shame, terror, etc.—that otherwise lead to paralysis or avoidance or suppression. Inspired by the work of co-researcher JJ Fiore and decolonial thinkers like Akómoláfé (2016), Anzaldúa (2015), brown (2020, 2017), Lorde (1997), and Machado de Oliveira (2021), composting involves sitting with difficult emotions, metabolizing them, and making space for new generative energies and meaningful action to emerge. Fiore distinguished *hot composting*—intense immediate emotional transformation—from *cold composting*—slow, lifelong processing. We are not composting whiteness; we are being composted by its death. It is to become humble soil, porous enough for something other than whiteness to take root within us and our worlds.

Counter-Modernity Inquiry. A reflexive, decolonial practice of imagining and enacting alternatives to Eurocentric modernity and its systems of oppression (Rose, 2004). Rather than only rejecting modernity (as in anti-modernity), counter-modernity invites creative action: seeding new or renewed worlds, values, and ways of being and knowing. It moves

beyond critique to creation and from resistance to reimagination. It asks: What else is possible? In this study, counter-modernity inquiry includes the end results of composting the emotional residues of whiteness, and the move into planting worlds without it (i.e. reimagining). It is not about reacting to whiteness—as the saying goes, "Whatever you are pushing against, you are stuck to." Rather, it is about co-creating alternative worlds and signaling future possibilities (James & Lorenz, 2026).

Naming Whiteness. The first part of the Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness framework. The process of making whiteness visible: recognizing it as a harmful social construct rooted in our lives, relationships, communities, and institutions over generations, rather than an invisible norm. It often involves rupture and a shift in consciousness.

Reimagining Whiteness. The fifth part of the Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness framework. A personal and collective process of envisioning life outside of whiteness and the colonial systems that uphold it. In this study, it is described as planting worlds without whiteness—the fertile soil of reimagining where renewed ways of being, relating, and organizing can take root. To counter reproduction of colonial imaginings, this study centers reimagining as a decolonial act. Inspired by Mendieta's (2020) concept of the decolonial imaginary, it is an act that resists inherited fictions and awakens futures silenced by coloniality by planting the seeds of ancestral, Indigenous, communal, and spiritual lifeways that whiteness tried to suppress. It is not planting the same seeds whiteness used. Following Anzaldúa's (2015) decolonizing process through *conocimiento,* it is an embodied shift in consciousness that transforms perception and identity and heals colonial wounds. Together, these thinkers remind us that reimagining must extend beyond personal and relational dimensions to structural ones, moving beyond dominant paradigms. Wynter's (1995) *root expansion of thought* captures this horizon—a shift already underway for our current era; born from the *counterperspectives* of the anticolonial movements of the 1950s and 60s and carried by Black and Indigenous voices that challenge colonial systems. Finally, echoing Glissant's (1997) *tout-monde,* reimagining whiteness is a pluriversal practice—personal, interconnected, relational, and co-created—moving us from critique to creativity, from rupture to rootedness.

Seeing Whiteness. The second part of the Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness framework. Seeing whiteness involves co-illumination—seeing together—because each person sees different aspects of whiteness depending on positionality, including what it has attempted to erase. It is a necessary precursor to uprooting and reimagining, requiring both personal insight and collective dialogue. Strangification (below) can also be used as a tool to see whiteness.

Strangification. A process of making the familiar strange. While historically strangification has reinforced coloniality by rendering non-Western ways of being "strange" (Wallner & Jandl, as cited in Ciofalo, 2019), here it was used to "make whiteness strange" (Dyer, 2002) instead. Co-researchers implicitly enacted this by problematizing whiteness—which in the Freirean sense means questioning uncritically held notions (Dutta, 2018, p. 274). In this study, strangification emerged as a tool that exposed whiteness as an imposed epistemology functioning like an invasive weed within a pluriversal ecosystem—one worldview among many. It enabled the problematization of whiteness without re-centering it, opening space

for diverse knowledges and resisting neoliberal reductions of racism to individual experience (Dutta, 2018).

Uprooting Whiteness. The third part of the Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness framework. The active and ongoing process of disrupting whiteness where it has taken root in our beliefs and behaviors, and through us within our relationships, communities, and institutions. Like pulling up invasive ivy, it requires effort, intention, and collective commitment to root out whiteness. Uprooting whiteness involves tracing internalized beliefs, interrupting behaviors, and actively unlearning patterns that reinforce dominance, disconnection, and violence. It also means changing how we relate to others, build community, and shape institutions. Uprooting becomes a decolonial act when it moves from individual behavioral change toward structural transformation. Decolonial scholars argue that coloniality is embedded not only within us and our relationships and communities but also within the very systems surrounding us (Lugones, 2010 Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2007). Uprooting therefore requires action across personal, relational, institutional, and structural levels.

Whiteness. Whiteness is not synonymous with white people. Rather, it is a harmful social construct designed to uphold power through division and justifying violence; and thus harms us all, regardless of race. It was invented alongside anti-Blackness nearly 600 years by European slave traders (Kendi, 2016). Since then, whiteness has spread globally alongside European empires, entangled with capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and colonial/modern-gender systems that sustain inequality across societies (Federici, 2004; Lugones, 2007, 2010; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Like an invasive weed, it spreads quietly and pervasively—taking root inside many of us as thoughts and behaviors. Through us it roots into relational patterns, community structures, institutions, and systems both locally and globally. It fuels coloniality through its invisibility, presenting itself as the default, the neutral, the “normal.” In this study, whiteness is understood as a world-making force that must be called out, seen, uprooted, composted, and ultimately left behind in the work of reimagining.

APPENDIX B
PERSONAL THEORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

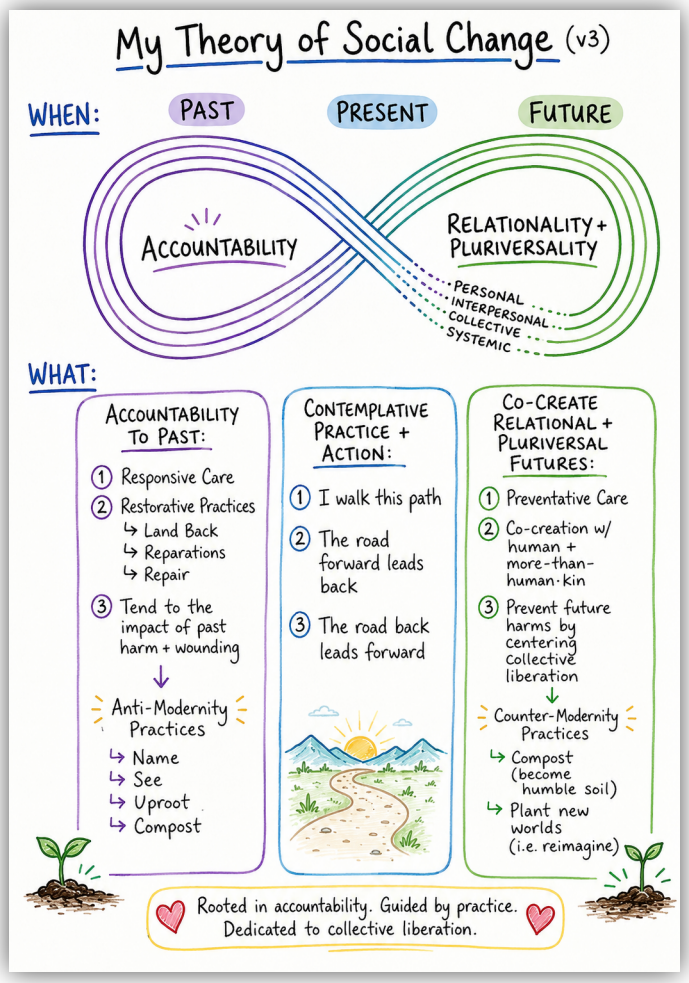


Figure S1. A Personal Theory of Social Change (from author's reflexive journal)

My emergent theory of social change (see Appendix B, Figure S1) is represented as an infinity loop linking past and future through the present moment. The left loop signifies accountability to the past—facing historical harms through responsive care such as land back for Indigenous communities, reparations for Black communities, and repair within white and other racialized communities of color. These pathways must be locally determined by the communities. In this study, it included the early stages of the five-step reimagining worlds without whiteness framework that emerged from the findings: naming whiteness, seeing it, uprooting it, and beginning to compost its emotional residues. The right loop embodies commitment to a relational future—preventing harm and nurturing pluriversal futures through dreaming, reimagining, and co-creating with human and more-than-human kin. These include the final

stages of the emergent five-step framework: composting the emotional residues of whiteness, thus becoming humble soil porous enough for something other than whiteness to take root, and the planting of worlds without it (i.e. reimagining).

At the center lies the present as a threshold for contemplative action—an invitation to pause, listen, and root into being. Here, contemplative practices such as meditation, ritual, and deep listening, as well as connection with head-heart-body-spirit and both human and more-than-human kin (plants, animals, ancestors, spirit, intuition), give rise to contemplative action.

How to do this work begins with the phrase, "I walk this path, the road forward leads back, and the road back leads forward." Social change, as this model suggests, is nonlinear and cyclical, unfolding across personal, interpersonal, collective, and systemic levels. It starts with individual transformation, but never ends there (Ahmed, 2021) in an ongoing cycle of accountability to the past while nurturing alternative futures.

APPENDIX C.
A FIVE-PART FRAMEWORK FOR REIMAGINING WORLDS WITHOUT WHITENESS

Building on the invasive ivy metaphor, an emergent five-part framework arose from the data that invites engaging whiteness as a rooted system—tracing whiteness from worlds where it is deeply rooted to worlds without it. The stages observed across co-researcher narratives of how they are reimagining whiteness include: (1) naming whiteness, (2) seeing it, (3) uprooting its harmful thoughts and behaviors, (4) composting its emotional residues, and (5) planting worlds without it (i.e., reimagining). What follows is the emergent *Five-Part Framework for Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness*, including how it emerged from the research, how it connects back to the invasive species metaphor, and how it is rooted in decolonial theory.

Co-researcher interviews informing the framework are featured in the *Reimagining Worlds Without Whiteness* podcast (Truscott, 2025–present), which publicly shares excerpts with co-researcher consent. Consistent with relational ethics, co-researchers reviewed and approved the inclusion of quoted material in this appendix, ensuring that their perspectives are represented with integrity and care.

Part 1: Naming Whiteness

Naming whiteness emerged as the first part in the framework. Across story circles and interviews, co-researchers shared how learning to name and define whiteness can transform understanding of it. As Desirée Gonzalez noted, "First you have to know there's a problem…. Naming becomes really important because it…opens critical consciousness." For others—racialized as white and BIPOC alike—this was the first time they had been asked to define whiteness, despite prior exposure to trainings related to race or bias. While unsettling for some, others welcomed the challenge. "One of my favorite things is to have someone share something that unsettles the way that I was looking at the world before." Naming also requires situating ourselves in relation to it, as noted by OhnSoon Kim. Though some co-researchers feared that discussing whiteness risks recentering it, from a decolonial lens, refusing to name it guarantees its continued dominance.

The invasive ivy metaphor illuminated this process, situating co-researchers' insights within a longer lineage of decolonial thought. Like invasive ivy, whiteness thrives in invisibility and spreads when left unchecked; naming it is therefore a decolonial act. As Maldonado-Torres (2007) noted, coloniality renders invisible, while decoloniality makes visible. Tracing whiteness to its colonial roots (Castro-Gómez, 2021; Wynter, 1995) reveals its pervasiveness and why it must be undone. Naming whiteness opens the door to deeper seeing, as one co-researcher observed: "If you don't know 'what,' how can you answer the 'how'?" Others shared moments of rupture that first made whiteness visible to them. Stevie further emphasized the impact of such rupture: "Making the invisible visible is not comfortable. It's discomfort. But that's where the wound healing happens."

Using the invasive ivy metaphor, the EarthCorps day of uprooting ivy exemplified this rupture: once seen, whiteness, like the invasive ivy, could no longer be unseen.

Part 2: Seeing Whiteness

Seeing whiteness emerged as the second part in the framework, with co-researcher Michele Chang introducing the concept in the first story circle:

> I don't know if I would call it a reimagination. It would be seeing it – seeing this frame in which your world is built and understanding what that language is, what that system is, through stories understanding your place and participation in that system so that you can make a decision towards dismantling of the system.

Through subsequent story circles and interviews, co-researchers connected the act of talking about and defining whiteness with new ways of perceiving it. Two tools for seeing whiteness emerged from the data: *co-illumination* (i.e., "seeing together") and *strangification* (i.e., "making whiteness strange").

The concept of *co-illumination* emerged from a co-researcher's reflection in the first story circle: "I'm light skinned…so I feel like I am in camouflage. I see a slightly different point of view that others can't see." Cross-interview analysis affirmed that each co-researcher perceived whiteness from a distinct positionality. Together, their stories co-illuminated a vast entangled root system of whiteness operating across generations and levels—from individuals and relationships to institutions and systems. Co-researchers racialized as both white and BIPOC described internalized whiteness. Co-researcher OhnSoon Kim noted that whiteness manifests in interconnected ways, from overt harm to everyday normalization and indifference, as illustrated in white supremacy pyramids. Their accounts highlighted not only how they *see* whiteness, but also the absences whiteness produces through erasure. Through co-illumination, co-researchers provided mirrors (shared experiences) and windows (different experiences) into the operations of whiteness (Bishop, 1990).

A second key process, *making whiteness strange,* aligned with the study's counter-modern approach. While historically strangification has reinforced coloniality by rendering non-Western ways of being "strange" (Wallner & Jandl, as cited in Ciofalo, 2019), here it was used to "make whiteness strange" (Dyer, 2002) instead. Co-researchers implicitly enacted this by problematizing whiteness—which in the Freirean sense means questioning uncritically held notions (Dutta, 2018, p. 274). One co-researcher, for instance, reflected on growing up in multicultural environments and how the advantages of lighter skin and pervasive colorism appeared increasingly absurd when critically examined. Another co-researcher, Sarah Kay Peters, described whiteness as "this giant monolith lumbering monster coming forward and grabbing all the things and sucking up all the things it can suck up in order to become larger to take and to crush whatever it comes across." Together, co-illumination and strangification exposed whiteness as an imposed epistemology functioning like an invasive weed within a pluriversal ecosystem—one worldview among many. These tools enabled the problematization of whiteness without re-centering it, opening space for diverse knowledges and resisting neoliberal reductions of racism to individual experience (Dutta, 2018).

Part 3: Uprooting [the Harmful Beliefs & Behaviors of] Whiteness

The third part in the framework is uprooting the harmful beliefs and behaviors at the root of whiteness. As co-researcher stories illustrated, recognition alone is not enough. The metaphor of invasive ivy makes this clear: simply recognizing ivy's harm does nothing to stop it. Like ivy,

whiteness must be removed from every place it has taken hold—tracing runners, loosening roots, confronting how it embeds itself in our ways of being, knowing, and doing, and through us into our relationships, communities, institutions, and systems. When invasive ivy is not fully uprooted within an ecosystem, it inevitably returns and spreads. Likewise, uprooting whiteness is not a one-time act, but an ongoing commitment to interrupt its return and prepare the soil for other worlds to take root. Because whiteness has spread through collective, often unconscious, efforts, uprooting it must also be collective. Everyone has a role to play.

Internally, uprooting involves interrupting internalized beliefs and behaviors, and asking, as Desirée Gonzalez put it in her interview, "What are you unbecoming?" Co-researchers described this as sustained, vulnerable work. Stevie's reflections offer two illustrative examples: "You actively choose to move forward and learn and be in a different way," and, "I'm nowhere near deprogrammed…even though I've been doing it since I was 18." It requires unlearning habits of perception, as Atiq Shomar noted: "White supremacy says we're trained to listen for certain things. We have to unlearn listening for those things." Similarly, Menakem (2017) shows how embodied somatic responses must be unlearned. As we do this inner work, we create the capacity to perceive and uproot whiteness beyond ourselves.

Uprooting also involves intentionally transforming how we relate, build community, and shape institutions. Relationally, co-researchers described addressing bias and interrupting microaggressions as everyday practices of uprooting, while community and institutional uprooting require sustained interrogation of the structural operations of whiteness. OhnSoon Kim reflected on this by asking, "What's in my locus of control that could combat this whiteness…structure?" She further emphasized the need to replace whiteness with "something that is about liberating us all," while Desirée Gonzalez added that this shift requires the "decentering of everything that's encompassed in whiteness—coloniality, capitalism, racism, patriarchy, hegemony."

Uprooting becomes a decolonial act when it moves from individual behavioral change toward structural transformation. Decolonial scholars argue that coloniality is embedded not only within us and our relationships and communities but also within the very systems surrounding us (Lugones, 2010, Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2007). Uprooting therefore requires action across personal, relational, institutional, and structural levels. This work can be difficult—and at times dangerous. Many current systems are designed to protect whiteness and punish those who challenge it. Like ivy choking a forest, whiteness can feel entrenched and overwhelming. Yet transformation remains possible when macro-level change is nurtured through everyday, embodied commitments. As Ahmed (2021) reminds us, grounding personal transformation in collective change affirms that micro- and meso-level actions can have macro-level impact (p. 87).

Part 4: Composting [the Emotional Residues of] Whiteness

The fourth part in the framework, emerging across story circles and interviews, is composting the emotional residues of whiteness. To invoke composting is not to suggest that whiteness itself can be recycled into something life-giving. Whiteness has no regenerative potential; it is a structural formation sustained through hierarchy, violence, and separation. Rather, composting names what happens after uprooting—not to whiteness, but to what occurs within people and relationships that survive it. Composting describes the emotional and existential decomposition

that occurs when those formed within whiteness allow its logics—our attachments, identities, false securities/epistemologies—to die within us and our worlds. As they break down, emotional residues may arise that require an alchemical transformation within us—it is to become humble soil, porous enough for something other than whiteness to take root within us and our worlds.

This metaphor emerged in dialogue with co-researcher JJ Fiore, whose parallel study on composting whiteness drew on the compost politics work of our professor and posthumanist philosopher, Báyò Akómoláfé (2016). Fiore described how the metaphor helped reframe emotions like shame, guilt, or paralysis that arise when confronting complicity in systems of oppression. She distinguished *hot composting*—intense immediate emotional transformation—from *cold composting*—slow, lifelong processing.

Across co-researcher stories, naming, seeing, and uprooting whiteness unearthed intense emotions—anger, anxiety, disgust, fear, fragility, guilt, grief, hatred, pain, rage, shame, and terror—that sometimes led to paralysis or suppression under societal pressures. Emotional healing grounded in accountability and responsibility, regardless of race, proved essential to sustain this work. Healing practices included slowing down to face overwhelming emotions and harms caused and/or endured, and working in community or with decolonial therapists. As co-researcher Jen Luecht reflected, learning to "sit with hard feelings and let them pass…[and] use that anger or energy towards coming with a solution" became a tool for reimagining new worlds. Whereas Desirée Gonzalez shared how reflection helped her move from forced suppression to full expression of her rage as a sacred emotion in response to injustice and harm endured, which in turn moved her from pain to empowerment.

These insights echo Black, Indigenous, and other scholars of color who have long framed emotional transmutation as central to liberation (Anzaldúa, 2015; brown, 2020; Lorde, 1997; Machado de Oliveira, 2021). As Lorde (1997) wrote, "Guilt and defensiveness are bricks in a wall against which we will all perish…. But anger expressed and translated into action… is a liberating and strengthening act" (pp. 278-280). Following decolonial thinkers such as Quijano (2007), Wynter (1995), and Maldonado-Torres (2007), whiteness is understood not as identity but as ontology—an extractive mode of being that must be dismantled and *hospiced* (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). Hospicing whiteness as one of modernity's primary architectures means tending to its dying—witnessing its violence, sitting in the emotions it leaves behind, and acknowledging the ways we have been shaped by it, and for some, how we have been complicit in maintaining it. It is about accompaniment: being present as something harmful loses its hold, rather than trying to fix or transcend it. We are not composting whiteness; we are being composted by its death.

Composting thus complements uprooting: while uprooting disrupts harmful internalized conditioning, composting invites an alchemical transformation of the emotions that remain. Together, they affirm Dutta's (2018) insight that "decolonization requires both intellectual and psychic/emotional work and cannot be divorced from larger struggles to decolonize society" (p. 280).

Part 5: Planting Worlds Without Whiteness [i.e., Reimagining Whiteness]

The final part of the framework is planting worlds without whiteness—the fertile soil of reimagining where renewed ways of being, relating, and organizing can take root. This metaphor

emerged in the first story circle, where co-researcher Michele Chang explained that "if we want to do a reimagining […] we have to start fresh. That is a real place to begin if you're serious about transformation." Across interviews, co-researchers emphasized that reimagining means refusing to replicate whiteness—we are not planting the same seeds whiteness used. Instead, it's about planting new seeds or seeds that have been suppressed by whiteness—Indigenous, ancestral, communal, spiritual, and land-connected practices. As Carrie Thomas shared, "Connecting to my roots, not even just ancestrally, but also my literal roots as a living organism – feels really generative." Elena Degel described reimagining as "a move towards humaneness: a humanizing state of being. And also, beyond human… A move to connection to spirit and the more-than-human world that we can both see and not see."

Co-researchers emphasized that reimagining is pluriversal. As Desirée Gonzalez reflected, "This is pluriversal possibility in action…. There are these different perspectives that are being brought. This is exactly what is needed, because I don't think reimagining whiteness looks like one thing." Another envisioned a global *mycelial network* of change—interconnected yet unseen. This resonates with decolonial philosopher Glissant's (1997) *tout-monde,* which frames the modern world as fundamentally relational, meaning everyone—including those racialized as white and BIPOC—is implicated in and responsible for the shared work of decolonization. At the same time, Glissant's principle of opacity protects marginalized communities from epistemic colonization by affirming that they need not be fully legible or transparent to dominant groups in order to remain in relation. *Tout-monde* thus names a planetary condition in which difference is neither erased nor reduced to fixed identities.

Co-researcher stories of planting on multiple terrains: self, relations, and communities/institutions illustrate pluriversal knowledge-making and decolonial imaginaries in practice, showing praxis rather than abstract theory across internal, relational, community, and structural dimensions. Reimagining is emergent, relational, and contextually grounded; the framework unfolds like a spiral rather than a set of linear steps. Ultimately, these practices return us to the core commitment of the framework and the inquiry: nurturing the soil and tending the seeds of transformation, collectively planting worlds without whiteness.