

Between Appropriation & Assassination: Pedagogical Disobedience in an Era of Unfinished Decolonisation

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Structured Abstract

<i>Purpose of this paper</i>	Oriented to on-going student and university momentums for decolonial futures, I interrogate the role and status of mainstream International Development curricula and pedagogies by critiquing two absences in the sub-discipline's teaching formulae: appropriations and assassinations.
<i>Design/ methodology/ approach</i>	I draw from (1) a decade of research on oil extraction in Central Africa, including ethnographic work with two communities in Cameroon along the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline, (2) four years of research (interview-based and unofficial or grey materials) on the 1983 August Revolution in Burkina Faso and assassination of Thomas Sankara and (3) five years of experience teaching International Development in North America, Western Europe and North and Eastern Africa.
<i>Findings</i>	Through a critical synthesis of political and rhetorical practices that are often considered in isolation (i.e. political assassinations and corporate appropriation of Indigenous knowledges), I make the case for what I call pedagogical disobedience: an anticipatory decolonial development curricula and praxis that is attentive to the simultaneity of violence and misappropriation within colonial operations of power (i.e., 'coloniality of power' or 'coloniality').
<i>What is original/ value of paper</i>	This article contributes to debates within international development about the future of the discipline given its neo-colonial and colonial constitutions and functions with a grounded attention to how this opens up possibilities for teaching praxis and scholarship in action.

Keywords: Africa; assassination; coloniality; epistemicide; decolonial; development.

Absences in the curricula

'Building a pluriversal house means digging a new foundation'. (Kothari, Salleh, Escobar, Demaria, Acosta 2019, xxix).

As educators, we often prepare for teaching by gathering course material around a related set of themes and concepts. We cull determinedly from the reference lists of insightful journal articles and pour over abstracts, print-outs, book reviews, library shelves, TED Talks and more in search of comprehensive teaching materials that fit the pedagogical, curricula, creative and logistical needs of learners. For decolonial learners and educators in pursuit of

the transformation of Eurocentric knowledge through Freireian ‘pedagogies of possibility’ (1997) and decolonising the university by ‘teaching to transgress’ (hooks 1994), these moments of curricula preparation and structuring have richer significance. The creation of a critical decolonial syllabus necessitates a determined flexibility, a willingness to foster spaces of challenge in the classroom and a level of aptitude to coax learners through the discomforts of un-learning. It also requires a sensitivity to the reproduction of Eurocentric, colonial, patriarchal and ‘whitestream’ (Grande 2003, 329) epistemologies within even critical and radical works in the social sciences. Eurocentric ideas and works sometimes make their way onto the pages of syllabi in careless or unintentional ways; this might be because of disciplinary norms or ‘disciplinary decadence’ (Gordon 2006), or pressures to prioritise standardisation (Nyamnjoh 2019), or the academic search algorithms that reproduce white patriarchal hyper-visibility (Noble 2018) and make web searches for alternatives more difficult. Decolonial transformation requires systematic ‘de-silencing’ (Rutazibwa 2019) within an academy at the service of bureaucratic classes and ‘benevolent empire’ (Chatterjee and Maira 2011, 7). In my first years of university teaching, I often began each process of creating course syllabi by looking online for examples of readings, concepts and materials that had worked for learners in other universities. I quickly determined this to be not only an unhelpful convention, but an avenue of syllabus creation perpetually at risk of collusion with colonial economies of knowledge.

In January 2019, for example, I performed a random sampling of 28 English-language syllabi for Masters-level courses in International Development. I conducted an online search for ‘International Development Syllabus’—with a virtual private network (VPN) engaged—through the search engine DuckDuckGo, a platform that does not personalise a user’s search results. While this sampling was limited to syllabi in English and online availability, I was able to locate syllabi from universities in Canada, Germany, India, Namibia, South Africa, Sweden, Tanzania, the Netherlands, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the United States. I read and coded each syllabus using the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti.

My analysis revealed an inclination to examine poverty and wellbeing through particular frameworks. Capitalism appeared on four syllabi but the role of corporations was not addressed, as far as I could tell, in any. Colonialism appeared as a theme in 11 syllabi; neo-colonialism was taught as a stated theme in two. Decolonization was a theme for one course. Only in two syllabi did empire or imperialism feature; in each case these were topics addressed in course readings rather than as weekly or daily topics. Violence was a theme only via post-war settings, post-conflict societies and ‘push’ factors for migration. Forms of

structural violence and political violence were not specified. Neither decoloniality, nor decolonial options, nor assassination, nor race appeared at all (for an analysis of the latter, see Kothari 2006; Pailey 2019). Capacity building, sustainability, gender, resource availability, the environment and globalisation were the dominant framing devices.

This exercise was not designed to be exhaustive. Indeed, several arguments might be offered to justify the structural limitations of these syllabi. Perhaps the historical, political and economical dynamics informing and sustaining inequalities are addressed in other coursework as part of these Masters programmes. As any educator will quickly tell you, an analysis of syllabi cannot accurately capture nor reflect the complete content of a course. At the same time, it is possible that the syllabi for more critical courses are not posted openly online or are marginalised by search engine algorithms.

This cursory examination does, nonetheless, open up questions regarding the manner in which some conventional, international and postgraduate-level introductory courses in development studies are currently taught. While there is a need for further examination on the direction of the discipline (the way ‘globalisation’ stands in for capitalism and political economy, for example, or the preference for positivist examination), of interest to me here is the dearth of material on empire, imperialism and coloniality in directly stated form. In particular, in this article I am responding to a lack of attention in such pedagogical material to the functions and features of assassination and appropriation within imperialism or settler colonialism by international development studies instructors.

It is striking that at approximately the same time that I performed this syllabi analysis, reinvigorations of projects to ‘decolonise development’ and parallel movements to ‘decolonise the university’ maintained momentum and strength (Bhambra *et al.* 2018; Daley 2018; Murrey and Tesfahun 2018; Pailey 2019). Indeed, ‘decolonisation’ and ‘decolonising’ have emerged in the last three or four years as a standard organising theme for mainstream academic conferences in the social sciences, albeit not without considerable critique of the appropriative tendencies of the rhetorical moves—including ‘moves to innocence’ (Tuck and Yang 2012)—affected through such gatherings (Esson *et al.* 2017; Noxolo 2017; Bhambra *et al.* 2018, 4). In facing imperial collusions and seeking decolonised alternatives, Branwen Gruffydd Jones (2006) argues against wilful ignorance and other ‘moves to innocence’ (Tuck and Yang 2012) towards the kind of shame Edward Said identified for critical scholars working within hegemonic institutions: ‘an acute and embarrassed awareness of the all-pervasive, unavoidable imperial setting’ (Said 1995, 34). And perhaps some of these syllabi are already, as I write, being soundly decolonised and their ‘disturbing complacencies’

(Varadharajan 2019, 183) being rethought. Such moves are part of the collective project that Olivia U. Rutazibwa (2019: 173-4) calls ‘de-silencing’ the classroom, in particular an explicit ‘de-naturalizing [of the] ideas of Western superiority’ to shift the ‘location of the solutions and the problems in International Development Studies’.

This article seeks to contribute to these collective decolonial projects to ‘decolonise development’ (Icaza and de Jong 2019; Rutazibwa 2019) by asserting *pedagogical disobedience* in our curricula and teaching. This means embracing decolonial pluriversals that service a *will-to-life* rather than the colonial will-to-conquer or will-to-extract, what Suárez-Krabbe (2016) refers to as coloniality’s ‘death project’. My pedagogical reflection centres on two useful pedagogical tools and concepts—assassination and appropriation—which I have drawn from in a teaching practice that refuses to foster the ‘epistemological desire’ of development thinking (Sabaratnam 2017), including its ‘continued fantasies of superiority, homogeny and violent universality’ (Rutazibwa 2019, 175).

Outline of Arguments

In this piece, I offer reflections as an inadvertent educator within the shifting domains of ‘international development’ and critical development geographies. As an early career decolonial political geographer and scholar of Pan-Africanism who works on resistance, imperialism and extraction, I have regularly been categorised as someone conversant enough in this beast we term ‘international development’ to structure courses around it.

I have organised my courses—among them *Introduction to International Development* at Jimma University (Jimma, Ethiopia), *Beyond Tokenism: Indigenizing, Feminizing, Queering Development* at Clark University (Massachusetts, United States), *Development Theory* at the American University in Cairo (Cairo, Egypt)—around Pan-African and decolonial critiques of the development paradigm. Some of these efforts parallel features of sister movements of ‘decolonising development’. A commitment to decolonising how we teach development is a conversation to have broadly across the social sciences as we endeavour to move both beyond the critique of Eurocentrism (Amin 1972) and beyond Eurocentric frames.

Development studies curricula might also be valuably structured to address the real and present dangers of empire and imperialism. By this I do not merely mean the representations of Occidentalism, the Other and the colonial gaze (as per postcolonial thought), but we must also attend to the simultaneous material violence that structures neo-colonial state behaviour and structure: assassinations, economic ‘hits’ and the spectre of

political eliminations. In this move to holistic and critical ‘decolonisation’, we embrace the potential of the interdisciplinarity of the sub-discipline. Suárez-Krabbe (2016, vii)

importantly argues that decolonial work

cannot fall into the trap of pretending that the dominant frameworks of thinking and the practices that they authorize have been overcome. A careful attentiveness to the conceptual frameworks of *other* knowledges needs to happen in equilibrium with the criticism of coloniality and the death project.

By structuring sessions in the classroom around explicit attention to assassination and appropriation, learners attend to multi-layered global expressions of coloniality alongside the ‘global tapestry of alternatives’ (Kothari *et al.* 2019): decolonial modes of being and thinking seeking co-existence, wellbeing and dignity outside and beyond its bounds.

In this article I outline two contemporary instances of assassination and appropriation and their implications for international development, both of which I have drawn upon in my courses: the assassination of Thomas Sanakra in 1987 and the appropriation of certain Indigenous practices by social scientists contracted to work in southern Chad during the construction of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline. Teaching these histories highlights two mechanisms of post-colonial empire, which have significant implications for how students and future practitioners of development perceive ‘development in Africa’. While my arguments have theoretical meaning, my focus here is on articulating their practical significance for radical pedagogy and taking seriously student-led demands to ‘decolonise the university’ (Chantiluke, Kwoba and Nkopo 2018; Bhambra, Gebrial and Nisancioglu 2018) as well as to conduct anti-racist work in the ‘urgently racist times’ of unfinished decolonisation (Kamunge, Joseph-Salisbury and Johnson 2018, 2). I sketch some of the concrete frameworks through which I have been working, learning and teaching within the purview of development geographies. These are neither models to be replicated nor solutions to colonial logics or racialised capitalism and their combined expression in the classification of people as economically, politically or mentally ‘underdeveloped’. Rather, I offer something that is partially self-critique, partly reflection and tentative contribution to collective energies to move the discipline toward extinction, as to ‘decolonise’ development necessitates its abolition in pursuit of pluriversal will-to-life (Dussel 2013): ‘The challenge is to de-link solidarity and global justice from the bathwater of the ideas, institutions and practices of development’ (Rutazibwa 2019, 176). We might refer to this collective project as *pedagogical disobedience*.

Pedagogical disobedience and development studies

Powerful critiques of development as Euro-normative have occurred alongside the rising international visibility of the limitations of Euro-hegemonic approaches to development (e.g., Sabaratnam 2017; Hickel 2018; de Jong, Icaza and Rutazibwa's 2019; Kothari *et al.* 2019), including direct protests by dissatisfied people against development projects in their communities. Other responses have included quiet or slow dissent (Murrey 2016) or begrudged acquiescence (Li 2014). While there is no singular story of development, what we know of as 'international development' writ large has been criticised as being ideologically and epistemologically informed by Eurocentric norms, priorities, 'expert knowledge', 'fantasy' and 'seductive logics' (Escobar 1995; Hickel 2018; Kothari *et al.* 2019). Development has, with some degree of regular frequency, been pursued through colonial logics—including colonial racial hierarchies, hetero-normativity and patriarchal ideologies—rather than challenging them (Escobar 1995). Development agendas have often worked side-by-side with capitalist expansion, domination and coloniality (Ake 1996; Shivji 2006), although not without much ambiguity, friction and unexpected outcomes (Ferguson 1994; Tsing 2004; Li 2014).

Critical development and post-development scholars have worked hard to expose the varied complicities and complacencies of development logic (Escobar 1995; Shivji 2006). Sharad Chari (2017) explains that such moves require new forms of explanation. He writes, 'understanding historical geographies of racial capitalism today are inextricable from incomplete decolonization struggles of the twentieth century, including struggles to decolonize... *our habits of explanation*' (italics added Chari 2017, 5). In this project, educators have sought to give particular attention to elucidating alternative imaginaries of 'progress', 'empowerment', and 'development' for meaningful, livable futures that emphasise wellbeing, ecological balance, *Ubuntu*, *buen vivir* and more. *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, published in 2019 by Ashish Kothari and colleagues, is a rich resource for dissenting and alternative outlooks for 'an ecological wise and socially just world' (Kothari *et al.* 2019, xxi).

As a vocation-based area of study, 'decolonising' development entails a simultaneous critique of the practice and belief systems of development as constitutive of 'the colonial wound' in the present (Mignolo 2009, 161). This is a project that compels a decolonisation of our 'habits of explanation' (Chari 2017, 5) so that development is studied and considered as a possible *wound* rather than poultice. For which, pedagogical disobedience might be meaningful.

In my use of the term pedagogical disobedience, I draw from Walter Mignolo's 'epistemic disobedience', which calls for a delinking (*desprendimiento*) or 'spatial paradigmatic breaks of epistemic disobedience' from colonial logics and colonial epistemes (Mignolo 2011, 45). Pedagogical disobedience, like epistemic disobedience, entails a break or delinking. In this case, it entails working against the canon in our teaching and learning. In a 'colonial matrix of power', established canons function to border, enforce, police and contain knowledge. Ways of thinking and being are prioritised, ordered and catalogued; perspectives are privileged while others are suppressed or eliminated, what is known as 'epistemicide' or the killing of ideas (Nyamnjoh 2001), and authority is accumulated and guarded by 'experts' (Mitchell 2002).

Diane Gillespie (2000, 386) refers to pedagogical disobedience as a 'willingness to teach the wrong students at the wrong place', a usage of the term that further emphasises the importance of challenging authority and notions of expert knowledge within 'the Western university as a key site through which colonialism... is produced, consecrated, institutionalised and naturalised' (Bhambra, Gebrial and Nisancioglu 2018, 5; see also Chatterjee and Maira 2011). Pedagogical disobedience demands a refusal of 'certain academic conventions [because such] disciplinary, geographical and other... rubrics are largely insufficient to the task of thinking anew and addressing the global attacks' on marginalised communities (Sharpe 2018, xvi).

Gurminder K. Bhambra, Delia Gebrial and Kerem Nisancioglu (2018, 2) explain that decolonising

involves a multitude of definitions, interpretations, aims and strategies... it is a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study; it re-situates these phenomena as key shaping forces of the contemporary world, in a context where their role has been systematically effaced from view.

In a decolonial practice of pedagogical disobedience, development is looked at from its underside, its 'darker side' (Mignolo 2011). This is a transgressive act. Much like teaching the 'wrong' students (people situated as workers or peasants in colonial capitalism) or teaching 'at the wrong place' (outside the colonial institution or university) might be seen as *unsettling*. Teaching development through a curriculum that firmly roots the learners' awareness of the modern world in patterns of considerable environmental and structural violence and colonial power struggle is a *knowingly* transgressive undertaking. Christina Sharpe writes of the importance of beginning 'without illusion': 'We begin there, in the midst of brutality—quotidian, spectacular, cellular, organised and ongoing—against Black and

Blackened people everywhere in the world’ (Sharpe 2018, xv). To begin the discussion of development ‘without illusion’ of the ‘the black pits that hide [capitalist and colonial] rhetoric’ (Mignolo 2011, 46) is to refuse colonial ‘moves to innocence’ (Tuck and Yang 2012). Pedagogical disobedience builds upon important post-development and decolonial work, particularly in rooting learner’s understanding of global political economy and the *creation* of poverty. Such works include Walter Rodney’s historicisation of uneven and combined development in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; James Boyce and Leonce Ndikumana’s (2011) analysis of the manifold impacts of capital flight alongside ‘odious’ or unjust debt in *Africa’s Odious Debts: How Foreign Loans and Capital Flight Bled a Continent*; and Jason Hickel’s (2017) unmasking of post-independence ‘development’ as an imperial project originating in Harry Truman’s 20 January 1949 inaugural presidential address.

Assassinating anti-imperial development options

Killing ‘dangerous’ ideas

In my development studies courses, I have organised one week of readings and activities under the topic of ‘dangerous’ development. I first ask students to consider why I have used the adjective dangerous. What is helpful about seeing ideas as *dangerous*?

Our consideration of ‘dangerous development’ is used as a means to encourage learners to confront the importance of language, concepts and categories within development. How might language be important in maintaining colonial knowledge regimes (i.e, the dismissals of reparations or socialism, for example)? Our discussion centres on power, authority and situatedness: To whom is an anti-capitalist development idea, for example, *dangerous*? What ideas have been or continue to be neglected, dismissed, diminished or ‘killed’ through colonial logics? What are the terms set by the logics of ‘international development’? What is rendered impossible? How are the terms of development regulated, racialised and gendered? Students have frequently been hesitant to engage with the concept of a ‘dangerous’ idea, given its contextual significance. In Ethiopia, for example, Marxism has a historically fraught role in the country, including the overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974 by the communist party (the Derg), and the party’s subsequent economic mismanagement during a time of ecological crisis. In the United States, learners connected ‘dangerous’ ideas to the capitalist backlash against communism and to the ‘danger’ of publicly acknowledging racism in the first months of Donald Trump’s presidency. Teaching in

Cairo after the ‘January 25th Revolution’, students were regularly wary of speaking of political transformation at any scale.

In each classroom, our conversation would transition to a sustained consideration of the ‘dangerous’ development ideas of Thomas Sankara (a topic I have written on at much greater length elsewhere; see [name removed] 2018). Through selected speeches, excerpts of a biography and screening of the 2006 documentary film *The Upright Man*, students learn about Sankara, the former revolutionary leader and president of the West African country, Burkina Faso. While he was as remarkable as he was controversial, Sankara’s political trajectory (from his ambitions to his ambiguities) offers important lessons for learners of international development for a number of reasons.

First, Sankara was unique for his adamant rejection of the logic of international development aid, which he deemed both neo-colonial (saying, ‘he who feeds you, controls you’) and detrimental in practice, for it fostered a certain form of complacency and discouraged collective, endogenous empowerment (for more on Sankara’s critique of international development, see Biney 2018). Second, Sankara and his revolutionary government accomplished nearly unthinkable ‘development’ successes in nearly every sector of society—food, environmental, gender, health/wellbeing, the arts and anti-imperial justice were pursued holistically and relentlessly (for more on Sankara’s idea of a ‘political economy of happiness’, see [name removed] forthcoming). Further, these accomplishments were made with tremendously little by way of material resources—in a landlocked country facing intermittent drought—and often in the face of economic and political obstacles from Western and regional elite who feared ‘revolutionary contagion’ (Murrey 2018). Sankara was impatient for change and convinced that the ‘roots of the [development] problem were political, therefore the solution must be political’. For Sankara, each and every Burkinabè must fight for their collective liberation for emancipation to be holistic and lasting. Wellbeing, happiness and justice could not come from external sources; *development* could not originate from outside Burkina.

Learners are asked to consider Sankara’s Political Orientation Speech, which he delivered on 2 October 1983 in a radio and television broadcast. In the speech, Sankara gave both a summary and analysis of the ‘immediate and medium-term revolutionary tasks’ as well as a class analysis of Burkinabé society. He said,

In essence, neo-colonial society and colonial society differed not at all. The colonial administration was replaced by a neo-colonial administration identical to it in every respect. The colonial army was replaced by a neo-colonial army with the same characteristics, the same functions, and the same role of safeguarding the interests of

imperialism and its allies. The colonial school system was replaced by neo-colonial schools, which pursued the same goals of alienating our children from our country and reproducing a society that would primarily serve the interests of imperialism and secondarily those of its lackeys and allies. (Sankara 2007 [1983])

In this way, Sankara's 1983 speech becomes a platform for students to address and analyse the persistence of colonialism following formal independence, particularly the ways in which the university generates, fosters and perpetuates dominant and imperial ideas and ideologies. At the 39th Session of the UN General Assembly on 4 October 1984, Sankara denounced models and concepts imposed on African countries that perpetrated their economic subjugation to their former colonial masters. He said,

We must state categorically that there is no salvation for our people unless we turn our backs on all the models that charlatans of all types have tried to sell us for twenty years. There is no salvation outside of this rejection. There is no development separate from a rupture of this kind. All those new intellectual giants who are emerging from their slumber – awakened by the dizzying rise of billions of men in rags, aghast at the threat of this hunger-driven multitude weighing in on their digestion – are beginning to rework their speeches. Rather than looking to us, they are once more anxiously searching for miracle concepts and new forms of development for our countries.

...we encourage aid that helps us to overcome the need for aid. But in general, the policy of foreign aid and assistance produced nothing but disorganization and continued enslavement. It robbed us of our sense of responsibility for our own economic, political and cultural territory. (Sankara 2007[1984])

These and other excerpts from Sankara's speeches challenge learners to return to the notion of 'dangerous' development ideas. While we do not shy away from considerations of frictions, contradictions and critiques of Sankara's politics nor the revolution—(indeed, learners are often the chief and most powerful opponents of their educators' provocations and curricula and I have learned much from my student's provocations)—Sankara's ultimate demise demands not only that learners address the violence of empire and coloniality, but that we consider the role and function of killing and elimination in structuring possible political imaginaries, including how these relate to international development (see Hickel 2018, 99-134 for an examination of the role of political coups and assassination in the underdevelopment of Africa).

Sankara's assassination

On 15 October 1987, Thomas Sankara and 12 of his comrades were gunned down during a meeting. Blaise Compaoré, Sankara's second in-command and long-time friend, assumed

the presidency that evening. Sankara's cause of death was declared to be 'natural causes' in the government's public statement the following day and in the eventual death certificate (see Figure 1). From his autopsy report, we know that he sustained 12 entry wounds, including one under the armpit. According to Alouna Traore, the only surviving witness, Sankara walked out of the meeting room at the sound of gunfire, telling his comrades to remain in the room as 'it is me they want' (for more on Sankara's assassination, see Jaffré 2018). He went peacefully to his death (Jaffré 2018).

Within the learning environment, I circulate a timeline of some of the assassinations and suspicious deaths of African political dissidents, anti-imperialists and Pan-African thinkers (see Figure 2¹). I prompt students to consider: Why might such a timeline be important for us, people learning about, and possibly preparing for a vocation in, international development?

The scale of the timeline is often daunting and overwhelming for learners. I have had students snap photos on their phones in the middle of our sessions. Given the volume of assassinations, students have been moved to anger, shame or guilt. In Cairo, the outrage of students was equally split between anger at the historical injustices of imperial targeting and outrage that they had never had sessions on assassinations in other coursework. Ultimately, learners acknowledge that the timeline is valuable for development students because it shows how Sankara's assassination fits within a larger landscape of the assassinations of anti-imperial and anti-capitalist leaders and activists. The assassination of political-economic dissidents and leaders during and beyond the post-independence and Cold War period in Africa occurred alongside the rise of 'Development' as an international, externally-driven project for social change.

I urge students to consider how the spectre of killing becomes a fog covering the political landscape, contributing to an atmosphere of instability and epistemic conformity. The frequencies of assassination created what Ali A. Mazrui (1968) referred to a 'manifestation of instability'. He writes of post-colonial Africa,

the risk of assassination was not only objectively there, but was keenly felt to be there by many leading participants in African politics. African leadership soon developed a conscious or subconscious fear of the assassin. This fear exerted an important

¹ The inspiration to use a timeline of assassinations in my teaching came from a discussion with the historian Carina Ray, who had put together an abridged sketch of the assassinations of Pan-Africanists between 1961 and 2005, including Patrice Lumumba, Amílcar Cabral, Steve Biko, Maurice Bishop, Walter Rodney and Chris Hani.

influence not only on their personal behaviour from day to day, but also on their policies and ideologies. (1968, 42)

Targeted eliminations were not isolated events, but occurred as established sets of practice within wider colonial and political networks. In the classroom and in this article, I do not offer simple Machiavellian-style explanations that would presume to elucidate the details of each assassination as a singular plot. Rather, I emphasise that such violence is patterned and often fostered through colonial antecedents and imperial logics, and that the atmosphere of violence shapes and informs political possibilities, including the emergence of alternative, decolonial and Indigenous counter-epistemes. This includes the fostering of a ‘fear of violent removal’ (Shaw and Thomas 2016, 603) that constrains what is imaginable as development action.

Yet, development scholars have not paid much attention to the impacts of the assassinations of African anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and Pan-African figures nor the trauma, violence and limiting of possible alternatives effected through such killings. These absences have likely been replicated in international development curricula. In this way, our discussions around assassination de-mythologise the ideology of a benevolent development project at the same time they raise students’ critical awareness of the importance of identifying silences in their ‘development’ curricula. This conversation creates the groundwork for our later readings that similarly expand the ‘whitestream’ syllabus of international development, including, for example, Uma Kothari’s (2006) pioneering article articulating the need for a racially attuned analysis to understand the unstated dominance of whiteness within the domains of international development and Waibinte E. Wariboko’s (2011) text tracing the historical longevity of whiteness and anti-blackness within colonial and later development ideologies.

Appropriating decolonisation through colonial assimilation

Taking ‘dangerous’ ideas

In my critical development courses, I have organised one week of readings and activities to consider the appropriations of Indigenous, subversive or alternative epistemes by corporate, financial or hegemonic development entities and institutions. This session follows on a classroom discussions of the rise of alternative, grassroots and sustainable approaches to development in the late 1980s, while also setting the tone for a subsequent session with students on appropriations of decolonial thought and decolonising projects.

I begin by asking students to recall some of the techniques through which alternative

epistemes in Africa have been trivialised or diminished. These might include colonial language restructurings (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986), imitation and mimicry (Fanon 1952; Bhabha 1990), colonial-missionary education (Wariboko 2011; Nyamnjoh 2019) and latter austerity within higher education (Mamdani 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2014, 2017), structuring of knowledge around racist and Othering imaginaries (Fanon 1961; Said 1978), segregation and objectification (Spivak 1988) or the threat of violence and reprisals (Césaire 1950). We think back to previous conversations on the importance of indigenous and decolonial thought for the emergence of epistemological possibilities, including Seth Oppong's (2013, 36) assertion that, 'endogenous or indigenous knowledge refers to knowledge about the people, by the people and for the people' (see Harrison's *Decolonizing Anthropology* 1991). Edward Shizha (2010, 116) similarly argues that

Indigenous knowledge and voices should be integrated in the academic corridors in a manner that does not perpetuate their domination and recolonization. Through an antiracist and postcolonial approach, indigenous communities can contribute to the much needed voices in curriculum planning and knowledge dissemination.

In my courses, I have endeavoured to pursue a disobedient pedagogy that simultaneously seeks pluriversal alternatives while retaining a vigilance against the designs to erase and 'kill' dangerous development ideas.

In this session, learners are challenged to consider the ways in which indigenous knowledges are often twice menaced: vulnerable to outright dismissal, effacement and epistemicide as well as misappropriation—and that these actions are undertaken, frequently, in the name of 'development'. By grounding our conversation in self-awareness of ourselves within spaces of higher education, students are asked to consider the ways in which ideas in the social sciences can be weaponised. Nigerian political theorist Claude Ake (1979) called social science the 'most pernicious form of imperialism' for its role in proliferating the imagined geographies and ideologies of the capitalist core (see also Cabral 1966; Poesche 2019). In such a milieu, what are the collective resources to resist or challenge appropriations, disciplining(s) and other efforts to render decolonial and Indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies not only manageable *but convenient*?

Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline

As part of this learning exercise, I introduce the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline and I draw from my ethnographic research in two Cameroonian towns, Kribi and Nanga-Eboko, along the pipeline. The actors in this oil pipeline are ExxonMobil, the World Bank, a Transnational

Advocacy Network of various activists, intellectuals, NGO employees and more who were publically critical of the pipeline, the governments of Chad and Cameroon, and the people living in the 1,032 communities situated within two kilometres of the pipeline (see Figure 3). The project was negotiated and engineered during the decade from 1990 to 2000, constructed between 2000 and 2003 and the first tanker with crude left the shores of Cameroon in late 2003.

Several things were unique about this pipeline. One of which was its scale: at 1,070 kilometres long, it appropriated enormous portions of land in Cameroon and Chad's most fertile regions. Another was the scale of the financial investment: it was the single largest private investment project on the African continent at the time, as well as being the World Bank's largest African investment. Another feature of this pipeline was its framing as a 'development' intervention in the context of a rising awareness of the so-called 'resource curse'. This kind of intervention is often referred to through the offhand of 'oil-as-development', meaning the idea that petro-extraction will contribute to development in local communities or national governments (Watts 2005; Murrey and Jackson 2019).

In the classroom, I describe some of the corporate attentions to and investments in understanding and including local knowledge, local communities and local practices in the pipeline project. In one example, an American Anthropologist was contracted by Exxon in Chad. Ethnographic work in southern Chad revealed that she seems to have been involved in the deflection of NGO criticism of the project (Grovoqui and Leonard 2007). Her cultural and linguistic knowledge of the region helped in the domestication of potential tensions. In particular, we consider her role in curtailing community response to the destruction of spiritually meaningful places during the construction phase of the project. This anthropologist conducted a great number of chicken sacrifices during the construction period—so much so that people referred to her as 'Madame Sacrifice'.

In practice, some of the efforts to include Indigenous and alternative epistemes within large-scale development have not done much to alter existing political or economic structures, nor the power imbalances that they reproduce. Such forms of development are nonetheless bound up in a local-centric rhetoric that appropriates the language of critics—that is, a language of 'empowering the grassroots'. Proficiencies in 'local' knowledge are sometimes re-deployed against those very people for the purposes of containment and domestication (Cabral 1966). Suárez-Krabble (2016, 1) explains that

the force of colonial discourse lies in how it succeeds in concealing how it establishes and naturalizes ontological and epistemological perspectives and political practices that work to protect its power.

Students are encouraged to think about the importance of distinguishing between different political projects carried out in the same name. As we see by comparing different development projects, there are a great many projects carried out in the name of Indigenous justice (Briggs and Sharp 2004), or environmental justice (Goldman 2001), or women's empowerment (Koffman and Gill 2013), yet they are not equivalent. In the case of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline, the corporate appropriation of the practice of animal sacrifice (through the intermediary of the social scientist) assisted in the facilitation of dispossessing extraction. This was not a banal ideological misappropriation but an expression of colonial power in which people were deprived of land and livelihoods (Murrey 2015, 2017). Here, I circulate discussion questions that encourage students to make connections between the concepts of appropriation and assassination as a means to de-mythologize the notion of development as benevolent. Students are asked to sit with and reflect upon the real, material violence of such 'development' practice. Finally, we bring the discussion back to consider the significance of appropriation for development as a *practice*. Learners respond differently here, as some are committed to pursuing alternate (non-institutionalised) work for social and ecological justice while others want to re-fashion 'development' by acknowledging these inaccuracies and wounds. I highlight the ways in which developing this critical capacity to identify such appropriations is an important part of the 'fight against further neo-colonial encroachments' (Shizha 2010, 121).

Conclusion

What does it mean for learners (and potential-pre-practitioners) to engage with international development at the crossroads of appropriation and assassination?

If we are presently in a 'prelude to decolonisation', as suggested by the title of the conference at University of Johannesburg's Department of Politics and International Relations and Institute for Advanced Studies from which this paper emerged, how do we use it to anticipate frames and forms of coloniality in our pedagogies? The Call for Papers for the JoBurg conference urged contributors to 'retrieve the voices of indigenous opposition prior to the crescendo and irresistible force of decolonisation and postcolonialism'. A pedagogy of disobedience should gesture to the colonial ontology eager to subsume and speak for the marginalized in the name of empowerment. This has long been the seductive logic of

development-think. Should we be, for example, foretelling the World Bank's likely future workshop on 'Decolonizing Lending' or the UN's potential new forum on 'Decolonizing Bad Governance'? Can such an agenda be helpful for students in moving beyond critique or beyond that inclination to *react* rather than pre-empt and create in the will-to-life? In moments of critical and explicit exchanges in the classroom, I am fortunate to have participated in earnest and grounded talk on precisely these uncertainties.

In the context of coloniality and the neoliberal academy, the challenges to pedagogical disobedience are many. Seth Oppong (2013, 47) and Francis Nyamnjoh (2019) have written at length of some of the logistical barriers and potential material dangers of radical scholarship and their thinking can be expanded to include a disobedient pedagogy. Their critiques speak to the simultaneous violence of the coloniality of knowledge: the patterns, rhythms and potentialities of violence alongside pressures to conform, standardise and pursue efficiency. Yet, the collective project to 'decolonise development' and to 'de-centre its white gaze' (Pailey 2019) continue to grow in dynamism and collective intensity. The classroom is an ideal space to work towards what Robtel Neajai Pailey (2019, 14) calls 'an emancipatory kind of recruitment that values and elevates radical rabble rousers who challenge and dismantle the status quo'. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang remind us of the importance of being humble and being real about the scale of coloniality in the present: 'the development of "critical consciousness" in the curriculum [is] a "stop gap" *en route* to decolonisation' (Daley 2018, 84). A pedagogy of disobedience aims to foster tactical alertness to the practices of coloniality, including assassination and appropriation, while contributing to the already-occurring meaningful engagements with decolonial possibilities for the will-to-life (Dussel 2013).

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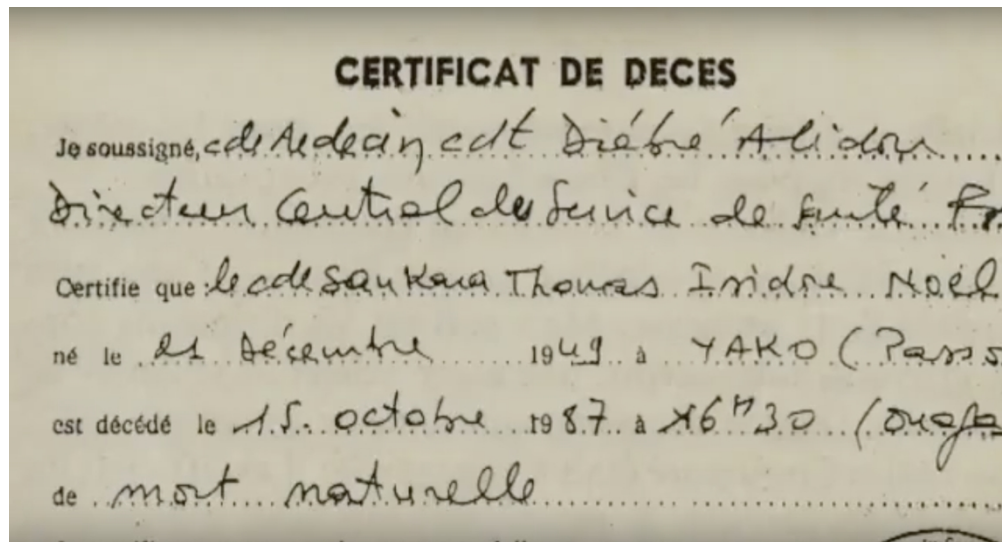


Figure 1: Thomas Sankara was assassinated on 15 October 1987. His death certificate was issued on 17 January 1988, more than a year after his death. Cause of death is listed as 'natural causes'.

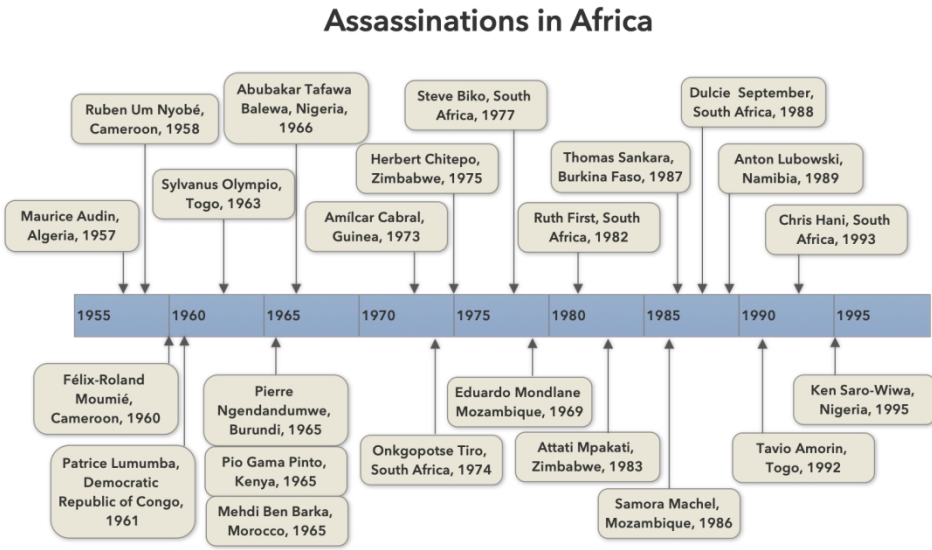


Figure 2: Incomplete timeline of assassinations and 'suspicious' early deaths of anti-colonial, anti-imperial, anti-apartheid, anti-capitalist, nationalist and/or socialist figures in Africa from 1955 to 1995. Source: Timeline by Author.



Figure 3: Map of Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline. Source: Author.

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