RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Decolonizing Development Studies:
Pedagogic Reflections

by Andrea Cornwall

OPENING SLIDE WITH FAMILIAR TROPES FROM DEVELOPMENT AGENCY "POVERTY PORN". IMAGE COURTESY AUTHOR.

Development Studies has been taught in British universities for at least as long as the countries that feature in its curricula have been independent of colonial rule. And yet, for all that decolonisation marked a very different approach to development taken by national governments across the global south, the continued coloniality of the development industry is often reflected in what and how students of Development Studies are taught. In *The White Woman's Burden: From Colonial Civilisation to Third World Development,* Jawad Syed and Faisa Ali explore what they call "the white appetite for stories of victimage" (2011:352) and point to the "unceremonious role of white women as willing agents in promoting and furthering the colonial agenda of a white elite across the globe" (p356). Tracing an unbroken continuity between colonialism and contemporary development policies in the post-colonial era, they call for a "more holistic and realistic understanding of development [that] would put all forms and colours of knowledge at the centre, producing other understandings based on contextual and empowering ideas emanating from indigenous cultures" (p. 362).

What would it take to bring this "more holistic and realistic understanding of development" into the classroom and decolonise the way development studies is conceived of and taught? This article reflects on my attempts to decolonise my teaching of an introductory first year, first term module to students enrolled for single or joint honours undergraduate degrees in International Development at the University of Sussex, and how it changed me in the process. Founded in the 1960s to challenge the status quo in British higher education, the University of Sussex is known for its interdisciplinary and critical ethos. It is also famous for the world-renowned thinktank on its campus, the Institute of Development Studies. Together, Sussex and IDS pip Harvard to the top of the QS World Rankings for Development Studies. My colleagues and I were interested in alternatives to the neo-colonial, neoliberal development industry. We prided ourselves on our critical interrogation of the political economy of international development. But we were faced with a contradiction.

In growing numbers, we were recruiting students who wanted study international development so that they could get a job in what Teju Cole so memorably dubbed the "white saviour industrial complex".[1] What were we to do with this desire to "help"? I was at first convinced that such was international development's inherent coloniality, the most useful role I could play would be to disrupt and discourage those who wanted to go into the development industry. I would count my success, I thought, in the numbers of students who woke up and switched courses, went into activism, or took up careers in domains like community and youth work in the UK. But I changed my mind. In this article I share what made that happen.

Stuart Hall writes:

The "post-colonial" signals the proliferation of histories and temporalities, the intrusion of difference and specificity into the generalising and Eurocentric post-Enlightenment grand narratives, the multiplicity of lateral and decentred cultural connections, movements and migrations which make up the world today. (1996:248)

Hall's words inspired the design of the module, called "International Development: Ideas and Actors." I wanted it to have within it something of the pluriversal in Walter Mignolo's terms:[2] plural, located, histories, temporalities, positionalities, narratives and possibilities. With this, I would, I thought, explore and reveal the plurality of connections weaving through the lives of those taking and teaching the module and those distant others evoked by the word "development." My ultimate aim was to bring the international development enterprise so into question that my students could not go into it with their eyes shut. In what follows, I locate those strands of my own story that brought me to a dis-enchantment with international development and, with that, to the genesis of this module. I go on to narrate how I took this into the classroom, how that experience changed me, and what I learnt from it. In doing so, I reflect on some of the wider challenges of decolonising the teaching of development studies.

Close Encounters with Coloniality

Like many of the white undergraduate students who come to the University of Sussex to study International Development, "Africa" was a place I first came to know as somewhere in need to which I had something to contribute. Born in the period in which one African country after the next was gaining independence, I'd grown up in post-colonial Britain with a sensibility shaped by an early awareness that my white working-class English grandparents were racist. They lived in Handsworth, in Birmingham. They'd seen more and more people from Britain's imperial past fill council houses like theirs. I knew their words about their black and brown neighbours, so full of prejudice and ignorance, to be utterly, badly, wrong. I'm not sure where I got this from. I'd grown up in the white expanse of the north east, knowing barely a single person of colour. But by the time I went to university, I considered myself anti-racist.

Whiteness and white privilege had not yet been part of my consciousness. My image of Africa was shaped by what I saw on TV. There were no books by African writers on our English literature curriculum, no facts about Africa in my history lessons. Africa was a place represented to me in the media as lacking, vulnerable to natural disaster and the ravages of war, with wide open skies and wild animals. I knew South Africa to be a Bad Place; like many of my generation, I'd marched against apartheid and protested against those who sustained it. But I had no real knowledge or understanding of the continent, or its history. I can't remember where I got the idea to go to Africa. I'd dropped out of university and set my mind on earning enough money from working in restaurants in London to get away from the grimness of Thatcher's Britain. I chose Ghana, but was put off by a flirtatious gaggle of men behind the counter at the embassy. The only other people I knew who had been to Africa had gone to Zimbabwe. So that's where I decided to go.

Arriving into the bright sunshine of the Zimbabwean summer, early in 1986, I looked around me and found an Africa very different from the place of my imagination. Harare's main streets were lined with buildings that looked like something out of an American Western, with their wooden balconies and long porches. Smooth tarred roads radiated out from the capital, through settlements that seemed like a chain of staging posts with the same shops and houses, dots on a landscape of balancing rocks in acres of iridescent green. Most Black Zimbabweans lived in what were euphemistically called "high density suburbs." Zimbabwe's whites lived in expansive bungalows, their interiors all chintz and little England. I wanted none of that. I met a white Irish volunteer teacher. She found me a job in the rural school where she taught, my whiteness enough of a qualification. I slept on a thin roll of foam on a cold concrete floor, cooked over a little paraffin stove and marked books by candlelight. In the early morning light, we'd gather outside the school and neat rows of gingham-clad children would sing the national anthem, *Ishe Komborera*, as the teachers stood straight-backed to attention.

Educating the nation was the way to make change happen in a country where my forebears had stolen chances of a better life from generations of Zimbabwean children. I was proud to be part of it. The word "development" wasn't part of my vocabulary. I worked tirelessly, marking hundreds of books every week, each stroke of my red pen an act of care. A powerful combination of guilt and fury would come over me as I came face to face with the privileges that were mine to enjoy by virtue of being born into whiteness in a country that held sway over as much as a quarter of the planet's land mass at the height of the British Empire. People from my country had shoved the forebears of these children off productive land. The masses were left without. Men's education was just enough to create a generation of low-level clerks to administer colonial governance. Hygiene and home-craft were administered to the thin stratum of women who had any access to the "benefits" of development. A world apart, we were connected by this history.

I moved south to a recently built school in a distant rural area where there had been no access to education, to a building with walls but no books, crowded with children seeking a better future. I used my classes as an opportunity to create spaces for creativity in a school setting where rote learning and regular beating were the norm. I learnt that parents were keeping girls at home, fearful of them becoming pregnant. Visiting their mothers, I found them worried about something else: the pills they'd been given by the community-based distribution agents were making some women have headaches, bloat, feel sick, miss periods. These pills were supposed to free women from the uncertainties of their bodies, not become a source of pains and worries. Women sought my help, assuming that as a white woman I must know. I was worried about these women. I was angry that they were not being given a choice of contraception. I'd experienced the capricious effects of these pills in my own body. I felt a deep sense of injury that these black women saw me as someone whose knowledge was superior to theirs, someone who would have the power to give them answers simply because of the colour of my skin.

Seeing me walk from the borehole trying to balance a bucket on my head with none of the effortless grace of the women around me, women would comment that they'd always thought white women were not strong enough to carry things for themselves. They'd only ever seen them with people carrying their bags and boxes for them. Long walks in the hot sun were observed with surprise. People told me that they'd always thought white people were not able to walk very far, as they'd only ever seen them being driven around in cars or trucks. And they told me that I was so lucky. Wasn't it true that white women didn't suffer from period pains or have any pain in labour? I began doing all I could to make my white privilege visible so as to repudiate it, and to demonstrate our shared humanity. Race and racism became part of my world in a way that they had never been before.

> ### *Race and racism became part of my world in a way that they had never been before.*

Disruptions

My engagement with international development, and my understandings of the term, stem from these encounters. "Ah, de*velop*ment!" the young men in the compound where I lived in Zimbabwe would crow when someone appeared with a new purchase like a pair of shoes, a cap, a bicycle; to them, development meant something tangible. I came to understand development as reparative: trying to make good something that was broken or damaged, trying to make up for something that was bad or went bad. But I soon began to recognise that much of what is done in the name of international development is extractive and exploitative, whether pouring aid into countries that might otherwise spill over into situations that would generate a tidal wave of refugees, "stabilising" regimes that might otherwise threaten access to oil and other resources, or providing "assistance" in the form of a gift that can't easily be refused and that costs the receiver more than they might ever have imagined.

By the time I arrived at Sussex University in 2010, I had lost sight of anything positive that could be said of international development. I'd spent the best part of twenty years working on the margins of the international development industry. The first task I'd had in the place where I'd worked for most of that time, an independent thinktank located on Sussex University's campus called the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), was running a session on gender in a training course for Indian civil servants. The course was called something like "managing the public sector in a market economy." There I was, touted as white expert teaching brown elite administrators how to better manage their public services in a vast and powerful land that my tiny little country had brought into its dominion and had been repulsed from fifty years earlier. IDS had been set up in the mid-1960s in the era of decolonisation. When I joined, it had precisely fewer faculty members from the global south than I could count on one hand and subsisted on revenue derived largely from the British aid ministry. By

the time I left, I'd tried all manner of ways of reframing development as resistance, explored every avenue for subverting my engagement with it. I'd come to a cul-de-sac and I simply did not have the imagination to think my way out of it.

In the autumn of 2011, I delivered my first lecture in what was then one of the largest of the University of Sussex's lecture theatres. It was packed with almost 200 students, the vast majority of them white, with the tiniest presence of black British and international students. I asked how many of them wanted to work in development when they graduated. The answer was almost everyone. I came face to face with a generation of young people who had bought into the *assistentialism* peddled by British NGOs with their poverty porn, jamboree fundraisers, and collection boxes. If Sussex produced so many people seeking employment in the development industry every year, plus those on our expanding MA programmes, were we not guilty of feeding the rapacious coloniality of the development industry with new blood? And, if that was the case, what was there to be done?

I wanted, in the 10 brief weeks of my module, to put as many of them off careers in the development industry as possible. I took my mission very seriously. I'd been asked initially to do things in a manner in which I was neither familiar or comfortable: to give a fifty-minute lecture to almost 200 students, and for a team of doctoral student assistants to then take the students off in groups for hour-

long seminars. I found this way of working totally alienating. Students were the passive consumers of my edu-tainment. The *real* teaching – critical questioning, exploration, dialogue – took place out of my reach in those small seminar groups. After a year, I jumped at the opportunity to be part of an experiment with interactive lecturing. I used it to create giant two-hour workshops and to dispense with both lecture and seminar. I drew on more than a decade working as a facilitator of participatory methodologies, and on my experience in those Zimbabwean classrooms trying to infuse my pedagogic practice with ideas from bell hooks and Paulo Freire.

I wanted to get the students thinking critically about what the term "development" was used to signify. And I wanted them to interrogate the meanings that they and each other gave it. I began by giving them the work of two influential older white men, Gilbert Rist and Robert Chambers. Rist's (1997) history of development situates the industry as one overripe for its own demise. I chose not Chambers's bestsellers *Putting the Last First* (1983) or *Putting the First Last* (1997), but an article on what he called "responsible wellbeing" (Chambers 1997), a term he had tried – without much success – to mobilise as a development buzzword. Rist was relentlessly negative, with good reason; Chambers was relentlessly optimistic, also with good reason. For the first interactive workshop, I asked the students to bring newspaper articles with headlines that captured something that they thought of as a development issue. Already, some questioning was beginning: was

FIGURE 1: OPENING SLIDE WITH FAMILIAR TROPES FROM DEVELOPMENT AGENCY "POVERTY PORN"

"development" something that only happened in far-flung places, or could it be the case that the food banks and climate activism that were taking place in the towns where they were from in Britain could also be seen in these terms?

We looked at what those organisations we all associate with development - the World Bank, Oxfam, the UK's Department for International Development, the UN - had to say about themselves and what they stood for and did. I created Wordles, pictures composed of words of different sizes by the frequency of mentions, out of texts from their websites.
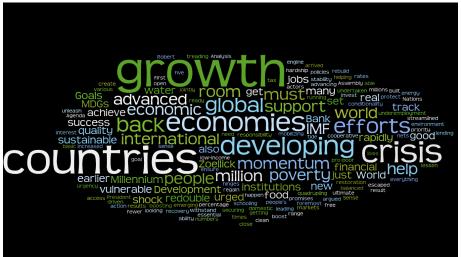

FIGURE 2: WORDLES FROM TEXTS ON THE UN AND WORLD BANK WEBSITES

I got the students to guess their names, deconstructing these organisations' use of language in the process. I accompanied this with video clips taken on my iPhone at an international workshop that had brought together colleagues from across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. I'd asked them the same question: "what is development?" Students were asked to read, think, react, and write their own short reflective piece on "what is development." I gave them instructions on how to set up a WordPress blog and they put these short pieces online, their writings open to each other and the world.

The next move was to give the students a taste of history. Scotching the myth that development was a post-WW2 enterprise, I got the students to read the UK's 1929 Colonial Development Act, dip into debates in the British Parliament from that period,[3] and reflect on what it might mean to classify countries in terms such as "lacking responsible government." We traced alternative histories and narratives of development, exploring counter-narratives to that of development-as-progress. I divided the students into groups of 10, and pre-assigned them a period in history from Official Development Assistance onwards. Each had the task of researching development-related historical facts and processes to bring to the interactive lecture with them: invasions, discoveries, crises.

With flip charts and marker pens, crouched in the aisles of the lecture theatre, the groups created visuals that became a time-line of colonisations, advances and disasters. A representative from each group gave a quick introduction to the highlights on their poster; then we stuck the flip chart papers up on the walls of the lecture theatre, arranging them in time sequence. Students milled around looking at what was on the walls. Prompted to pick out the most surprising and interesting things they'd found out, they came to confront development's presentism and challenge the convenient fiction of its post-WW2 origins. This allowed us to bring into view ancient India, Egypt, and Zimbabwe, with the contributions they have made to mathematics, medicine, engineering, philosophy, and literature, as well as to place within history the colonisation of our own small island by Christianity in the early centuries of the first millennium and the reverberations of the slave trade, linking its terrible history to Britain's own development. Using free online tech, www.dipity.com, we continued the exercise after the class, building an online timeline of development.

Onto this canvas, the third interactive lecture sought to locate the ssociated with the development industry. I began with slide after slide of numbers, painting with them pictures of the geopolitical dynamics of the business of aid. A slide comparing "official development assistance" (ODA) with "official aid" (OA) brought gasps of surprise as we considered the way that Western governments use transfers of resources, and students learnt that military assistance can

FIGURE 3. MAKING A TIMELINE

be described as "aid" under the definition of OA. Another slide showing the relative balance of remittance income, private investment, and development aid prompted us all to think about where money from outside a country goes, to what and to whom. I downloaded the spreadsheet with the UK Department for International Development's (DFID) aid spending for the previous year and crunched it on the big lecture theatre screen, highlighting the flows of resources to major consultancy consortia and the big global accountancy corporations. These pictures became artefacts for us to reflect on.

To facilitate reflection on what we as publics are told about the way our taxes are spent, I showed the class two YouTube clips produced by the British and American official aid institutions, DFID and USAID. One was an advert featuring ordinary people in London guessing how much money is spent on aid, discovering that it's not as much as they thought and then being told it is being spent on vaccinating children and sending them to school. I contrasted this with the breakdown from the OECD database of where Britain spends its aid, noting the substantial sums being channelled into securitisation and private sector development, amidst shrinking social spending. I then dipped into a longer film about British investment in biofuels in India that shows how, in a manner grotesquely reminiscent of the occupation of land in Britain's settler colonies, the private companies funded by the British government colonised arable lands with an inedible crop that strangled all else.[4] The hungry, disenfranchised villagers had their own story of "development" to tell.

A week considering the role of governments as development actors reminded students that it wasn't just foreign NGOs, donors, companies, and banks who did "development." I took the students on a journey that started

with the white male political theorists – J.S. Mill, Thomas Jefferson, John Locke, Adam Smith, Kropotkin, Marx, Thomas Paine – who frame so much of the way in which the West has come to think about the state, unpeeling the assumptions associated with them and with representations of governments in previously colonised countries. I gave them readings from the "grey literature" on governance that constitutes an in-all-but-name continuation of colonial intervention. This allowed us to reflect on the role of colonialism in the creation of states as well as in the construction of governments, from the carving up of Africa by a bunch of white men in a late 19th century Berlin meeting room to the origins of the Panchayati Raj system in British colonial rule. This enabled us to locate development's governance discourse historically and explore how much of today's ways of doing government in the global south were direct results of their colonial past.

Sessions on NGOs, social movements, and the private sector completed the round of "actors." The next step was to take a series of "development dilemmas" and look at them through a critical historical lens. We returned to themes raised earlier in the course about the nature of the aid relationship, the power of representations of development and their effects on racism and xenophobia in aid-giving countries, the ambiguities of the turn to "investing" in women's empowerment, the role of multinational corporations and their employment practices at home and abroad. Perhaps the most pertinent dilemma of all was that of whether aid does harm or good. Bringing into view the very possibility that something that is well intentioned might be a source of negative outcomes is challenging. But to consider, alongside this, whether it might be better to advocate for an end to aid altogether unsettles the very impulse to "assist" that underpins some of the most colonial dynamics of the business of aid.

FIGURE 4. GROUP WORK, SITTING ON THE FLOOR IN THE AISLE OF THE LECTURE THEATRE

We tackled the debate full on. For all that her solutions might be seen as problematic, Dambisa Moyo's (2010)

compelling diagnosis of the problem struck a chord with many of the students. I contrasted her vision of the role of business – with videos of her being flown in by Rwandan President Paul Kagame[5] and appearing on TV debating with figures from the UK aid establishment – with a YouTube video of Ugandan journalist Andrew Mwenda[6] talking about the positive role of taxation in creating a citizenry who would hold their own governments to account for corruption. This brought other representations of Africa into the frame as a vast diverse continent with abundant resources, including brains and vision. I introduced the students to other prominent African analysts, via TED Talks and YouTube, with their commentaries on economics, the role of the private sector and the state, and the stultifying effects of aid. I supplemented this with readings from the live domain of the internet rather than the mainly white authorities whose work remains trapped behind the paywalls of commercial journals.
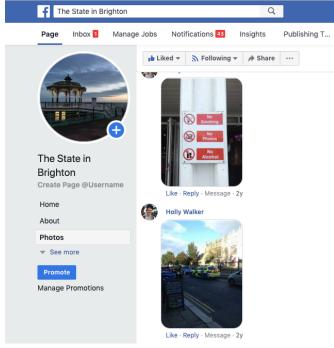

FIGURE 5. LOOKING FOR THE STATE IN BRIGHTON

I was assigned a doctoral teaching assistant each year because of the size of the cohort. I didn't want them to disappear off with students to run seminars, so I got them involved as facilitators. Each took a slot to do a session on a contemporary dilemma of their own choosing. Ana Porroche brought to the module her interest in the role of celebrities, Tom Chambers explored the migration crisis in Europe, and Althea Rivas brought a perspective on decolonising learning that transformed mine. My colleague Evan Killick ran several slots in the first couple of years, drawing on his work with indigenous social movements and NGOs in the Amazon to introduce these actors, and their dilemmas. I learnt a lot from working with them; they played an important role in contact with the students, running office hours to discuss students' questions and meet their technological needs, commenting on blogs, and reflecting with me on how it was all going as we drew on what was being written in the blogs to assess what and how the students were learning.

The very last assignment was to take what the students had learnt from the course and think forward thirty years to a time when they would be at the apex of their careers – and to imagine the world around them, one that they might have played a part in changing. Some students were completely thrown by this: it was a task with no readings, no references, just imagination. But then they got into it. And the writings they produced were a mix of the dystopian and the visionary. It was quite something to think of what we were learning not only contributing to understanding how the world might be different in future, but actually being *part of* making a difference.

Creating Understanding Together

I've come to see decolonial practice as not only about what is conveyed, but also about pedagogy and above all about decentering the academy as the only site for expert knowledge. The module was deliberately anti-academic in its approach to knowledge, something that would bring me much criticism from colleagues. They felt I was dumbing things down, not teaching the canon, and setting a bad example. I even was charged with raising expectations of the kind of engagement students might expect to have with their lecturer. My aim was to encourage the students to have their own opinions. I wanted them to feel able to be critical of everything, rather than slavishly copying out quotes and trailing through literatures that imprinted on their minds a correct way to think, know, and write. The worst thing I did, from my colleagues' point of view, was encourage students to write regular short public blogs rather than write essays at the end of term.

The idea for the blogs started with the idea of small, regular assignments throughout the course that students could revise and resubmit, with only the final version "counting" for their grade. I'd been chatting with my son Jake, then aged 14, about tech and asked him what platform I could use to do this on. He said, "why not get them to set up a WordPress site and write a blog." Genius. So that's what I did. I threw the students in at the deep end by getting them to write and publish for all the world to see their own take on the question "what is development" after the very first week of class. It was scary. The academy privatises assignments. The blogs broke with this. And students got into it. I told them that they did not only need to write. They also needed to find visuals, a photo or video clip, that spoke to what they were trying to convey in their blog posts. This led to an explosion of creativity on their WordPress sites with beautifully designed visuals: photos taken of artefacts the students had made for themselves, a face painted with development buzzwords, a distorted globe made of paper money.

Jake designed for me an online learning platform on a customised WordPress site, integrating social media (Facebook and Twitter), a collective Flikr site, an interactive FAQ where students could post and I could answer, resources pages, and pages for each of the weeks on which I posted a video of the class, videos to watch, readings, take-aways, and the materials produced by the class. With

Jake's help, I created an interactive open access spreadsheet with all the links to the blogs on it. I put the students into groups, encouraged them to read and peer review each other's blogs, leaving comments, suggesting improvements. I held writing clinics to which they could bring their blogs-in-the-making for peer critique. I found it remarkable how gripped they were as I narrated comments on the blogs I was passed one by one on students' laptops, and then realised how useful it was to the students to hear someone else's work critiqued and to think through what made a good piece of writing.

Their blogs were fascinating, a window into their worlds.[7] I wrote my own blog posts to accompany those my class were writing. It got us thinking together. One of my blogs transposed reflections on whiteness, inequality, and dignity from my days in Zimbabwe onto a trip to the UN in New York at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement.[8] Another was about the hypocrisy of the corporate NGO headquartered in an immaculate, extravagantly designer-chic building, with "poverty" and "suffering" etched into expensive glass room dividers, corporate touches like a table football table, and a map of their dominion charting their reach into previously colonised countries: all touches, in my view, of the pervasive coloniality of the entire enterprise.[9] I lampooned those who benefited from the industry, confessing my own complicity and giving the students that damning poem "The Development Set" to read.[10] I even produced my own little spoof film of Annabel the consultant jetting off to Tanzania to do a consultancy when snow closed the campus one week.

So often, marking is done in a perfunctory way at the end of what is being taught, rather than being regarded as a rich source of learning material for the teacher. By engaging with students' work throughout the module, my doctoral teaching assistants and I adjusted the way we worked in the space of the interactive lecture and the support we offered the students with their reading, writing, and reflection. Students got comments from their peers, from the public in some cases – and it was fun to see how many viewers from different countries their blogs attracted – and from the teaching team. Everyone could take those comments and revise their pieces as much as they wanted until they felt they were ready. Half way through the term, we gave them a provisional mark so they could get a sense of where they were. Some found themselves doing far better than they'd hoped. Others took it as a wake-up call; some completely re-wrote their blogs and one person, who'd been given a C+ for their work to date, completely revised their website and ended up with one of the highest grades. Student feedback on this part of the learning process provides insight into how this way of working helped build their confidence and skills:

> Getting feedback throughout the term was really useful. Also, knowing that other people would be reading my work made me more conscious of how I was writing and thus was invaluable in teaching me about how to "write for an audience" rather than just writing within the traditional academic framework.

> I enjoyed having regular small assignments, as opposed to all other modules that had long essays at the end of term

> I would like to do blogs for all the assessments! Seeing what other people write is a great way of learning also seeing their mistakes makes you realise your own. I think it is the best format for constant learning, expanding, and a good exercise in not rambling as the word limit was quite small!

> I was very anxious about writing the blogs in the beginning as I feared that they would not suit my strengths. However, after even the first one I really got into writing them and seeing the ways I could explore different topics. Also there is a real sense of achievement seeing the progress of your blog on the web, with views and comments also. I think they are a really good way to build confidence in your own writing.

> Made me engage with what we were discussing each week and create my own opinions and views on the subject.

> For me, being able to read my peers work and discuss topics together meant that this was much more effective than a seminar ever could've been. There is a tendency for seminars to be very quiet, with the online blogs your peers could comfortably express their opinions without feeling they had to speak in front of a class. A very worthwhile exercise.

> Getting so much feedback was VERY helpful. Plus writing the blog made me learn a lot of skills such as referencing, which I was able to practice a lot and master in the end!

> None of the development modules since have been delivered with such enthusiasm and energy so it has kind of put a downer on the rest of them. That's a compliment to Ideas and Actors though. It was vibrant and enjoyable and I still take more from that in terms of second year essays/exams than I do any other.

The module was not universally popular. Some students wanted a more conventional format, complaining that there were no seminars. Others didn't think the blog pieces were serious or academic enough. But if one test of whether a module is working or not is how many students attend the lectures deep into the dregs of the term, it did seem that something was working. Every week I expected numbers to fall away, and every week, the lecture theatre was filled with enthusiastic students, bringing the materials of that week's before-the-lecture assignment with them. And there was something levelling about the whole experience: I learnt as much or more from them as they did from me, and I saw those whose voices are so often eclipsed in class find their voice.

Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

I'm in little doubt that the person who got the most out of

the module was me. It was one of the most powerful educational experiences of my life. Once we'd picked apart the development industry and its perverse effects, what we were left with was the same reality that had brought students, in their hundreds, to study International Development in the first place: an unfair, unequal world in which millions of people have no access to education, shelter, food, sanitation, health care, and the basic necessities of life. Development may be a word that is both overstuffed with meaning and full of empty promises. But it's also one that promises a better world than we live in now, and one that captures the imaginations of so many young people fired with passion for change. I had fallen prey to conflating international development with the international development industry, to lumping together every possible kind of external actor into a single problematized category, weaving them into a narrative of encroachment in which their promotion of international development became a predation on the dignity, integrity, and life-worlds of those they sought out as their subjects. But in doing so I lost sight myself of what had seduced me into my own engagement with international development.

With each year, I shuffled more and more of the international development industry sessions off the module. We stopped being mired in what was wrong, and started engaging more with what makes change happen. A leadership role got in the way of my teaching, and I was forced to wind up my engagement with the module. The very last time it ran, I focused an impromptu final session on a practical exercise of identifying solutions to global issues. I divided more than a hundred students into teams of 5-6 and sent them off with flip charts and marker pens to design an intervention that could change the world, promising rewards of chocolate and a small amount of funding to help make their idea happen if they came up with anything we could act on locally.

The creativity of the students was striking, and beautiful. None of their solutions resembled the coloniality of all we had rejected. They had left it completely behind. Most focused on ecological interventions we could make in our own campus. One group advocated a co-operative garden project that could provide vegetables to students on the campus, taking over the perimeter of the campus as an extended allotment. Another proposed a network of green spaces to run across the flat roofs of our 1960s campus. Another still came up with a decolonising cultural intervention, taking a narrative of pluriversality to youth across the nation to combat the myths propounded by the NGO pity industry.

Reframing international development in this way as a global quest for social, gender, racial, and ecological justice makes it is as relevant to the people sleeping on the streets in Brighton as to the abject child portrayed in NGO marketing campaigns. From here it is possible to see what a decolonised development studies might look like. It would focus on understanding the makings of the modern world as a process deeply inflected by the colonisation of minds as well as lands, with indelible marks on world history, including in places that were never part of the colonial dominion or colonising project. It would seek out and situate attempts to change the world for the better, locating them

not in the narrative of intervention, but in one that includes insurrection.

Rather than be cynical about Britain's promise to "leave no-one behind" as it signed up to the global goals,[11] this generation of students could insist on taking it literally and using it to drive change in the way Britain treats its Black and Asian citizens, in Britain's immigration policy, in the mortal threat the government poses to our welfare state, in this time of Brexit and rising xenophobia, in the pursuit of climate justice. By expanding understandings of international development beyond planned intervention and subsuming within the very idea of it a constellation of processes of social change, students could then claim their own part in making the future without needing to attach themselves to perpetuating the colonial project. They could do this by stepping away from where they are currently positioned to explore the world of possibilities that *global* development offers, learning about how change happens and what can serve as impetus and as sustenance in that process. Then they could harvest that understanding, bring it back to their own neighbourhoods, their own cities, their own countries. If teaching development studies could be about transformative education that ignited a generation of global citizens who were unafraid to look deeply at the causes of injustice, come to terms with their own privilege, and learn how to listen and act with compassion and humility, I can't help thinking the world would be a better place.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/

2 http://waltermignolo.com/on-pluriversality/

3 See, for example, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/acts/colonial-development-act-1929

4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l6YZCuKM2Q

5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJ-CvQSsMF0

6 https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_mwenda_takes_a_new_look_at_africa/discussion?c=162117

7 For some examples, see Felicia Lomotey's https://delusionaldemocracy.wordpress.com/; Molly Scott's https://internationaldevelopmentstudiesblog.wordpress.com/; Jordan Isaac's https://jisaacblogs.wordpress.com/2017/07/18/why-are-we-losing-faith-in-development-aid/; Anoush Rajabian's https://internationaldevelopment379.wordpress.com/blog/.

8 https://developmentdissident.wordpress.com/2015/01/06/respect-solidarity-justice-humanity-end-white-supremacy-now/

9 https://developmentdissident.wordpress.com/2014/10/21/hello-world/

10 https://morenewsfromafar.wordpress.com/2012/01/27/the-development-set-by-ross-coggins-2/

11 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leaving-no-one-behind-our-promise/leaving-no-one-behind-our-promise