

## A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

# A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

<https://www.e-ir.info/2017/06/24/a-postdecolonial-geography-beyond-the-language-of-the-mouth/>

AMBER MURREY, JUN 24 2017

**This is an excerpt from *Critical Epistemologies of Global Politics*. Get your free copy on E-International Relations.**

In this chapter I reflect upon what was a transformative conversation during research in Nanga-Eboko, a town in central Cameroon that is located along the pathway of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline. This brief conversation, I argue, was figurative of the on-going debates about political epistemologies and knowledge making within border-ridden fossil fuel capitalism, including the ways in which, despite a rich literature that criticises extraction, researchers and scientists continue to play significant roles in providing information and validating the socio-economic agendas of oil and gas corporations. More than this, the conversation is an avenue through which we might demystify the World Bank and oil pipeline sponsorship of primary school construction along the Chad-Cameroon pipeline. Recent criticism of the 'epistemic murk' obscuring the social worlds of oil and gas (Appel et al. 2015) emphasizes the continued need to focus on the infrastructures, structures, networks, and border making constitutive of resource extraction. More than this, the 'epistemic murk' of the global oil and gas industry is deeply political and is situated within a global coloniality of knowledge: such 'murk' is often intentionally generated and it is an important component of the dismissal of people's everyday confrontations with violences of extraction as unsubstantiated, unmeasured (often unmeasurable) and unverified by 'experts.' Oil corporations and the International Financial Institutions that often finance oil development projects actively contribute to the corporate manufacturing of uncertainties regarding the social, ecological, and political costs associated with extraction. At the same time, cleverly crafted knowledge management and marketing ventures cast oil companies as eco-friendly corporations that operate on behalf of women, Indigenous, and 'local' people.

Working from a decolonial orientation, I explore the ways in which the Chad-Cameroon oil consortium (comprised of ExxonMobil, Petronas and, until recently, Chevron) and a major financier, engineer, and proponent of the pipeline, the World Bank, embarked upon highly publicized and celebrated projects to support 'local' education through the building of schools as a mechanism of community compensation. These endeavours cast the oil pipeline as a development project. Through a decolonial orientation, I situate my intellectual and existential consciousness *against* the geopolitics of knowledge embedded within the World Bank's policies, projects, and amnesias — what I call 'the language of the mouth' (as you will see below). Despite claims that the oil pipeline would empower 'local' people through various consortium-sponsored educational initiatives, the narratives of people in the villages near Nanga-Eboko and Kribi in Cameroon reveal key insufficiencies in such claims. I focus particularly on the claim that the oil pipeline contributed in a meaningful way to educational development along the pipeline. Without subscribing to the trope of grassroots politics or 'giving voice' to subaltern perspectives (Spivak 1988), I argue for a decolonial research consciousness that is foremost attentive to the productions, circuits, policing(s), and geopolitics of knowledge within socially, culturally, and psychologically destructive forms of imperial development and extraction.

These approaches refrain from claims to authority (see Icaza, this volume) and challenge the positivist notions of objective knowledge that are central to the operating mechanisms of neoliberal projects (see interview with Mignolo, this volume), including the multiple powerful actors of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline. This is an ethos that is questioning, humble, and grounded in the respectful turn and return to the voices and stories of people. Much like

## **A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'**

Written by Amber Murrey

Rosalba Icaza's chapter in this volume, I am interested in seeking, thinking, and experiencing a place of conscious dwelling that unsettles the privileges that are ascribed by modernist thought to myself-as-author. Here I approach knowledge as co-created through conversation and endeavour to incorporate forms of de-privileged knowledge expression, including poetry, joke-telling, and narrative.

### **Nanga-Eboko, Cameroon, August 2012**

Seated on a wooden bench under the raffia-thatched roof of Monsieur Tené's courtyard stall, I listened as he recounted the story of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline's construction in 2000. The construction of the pipeline dispossessed his family of their ancestral mixed cacao, banana, and avocado plantation. As he spoke, a tall woman walked along the roadside nearby. He called her over to join us.

'She is my neighbour and can tell you about the pipe,' he said by way of explanation.

The woman was on her way to sell food to a group of migrant labourers employed by a Chinese road construction company nearby. An iron pot was balanced neatly atop her vivid red hat. The woman, who I would later learn was called Nadine, walked up to where we were seated and placed the pot on the bench next to Monsieur Tené. She eyed me with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion. She did not sit down.

Monsieur Tené told her that I was there 'to ask questions about the pipe.'

She replied, 'Aikiéééééé, encore vous?'

Her words, 'you again,' were said in reference to her previous interactions with researchers working along the pipeline: the academics, journalists, non-profit employees, oil consortium representatives, and World Bank researchers who visited Nanga to conduct studies, surveys, and interviews on-and-off for the preceding decade.

## A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey



Figure 1: 'La Langue De La Bouche'

Clapping her hands together for emphasis and then rolling them outward with a graceful flick of her fingers, Nadine said, 'Nothing ever comes of the visits from researchers to Nanga village.' She succinctly concluded, 'tout ça c'est la langue de la bouche. Moi, je m'en vais vendre ma viande.' All of that is the language of the mouth. I am going to sell my meat. She resettled the pot atop her hat and walked back down the road (see Figure 1: *La Langue de La Bouche*). As she strode briskly away, she continued talking about the 'n'importe quoi' and futility of the pipeline, her hands gesticulating on words as she looked intermittently back up at us.

Nadine's expression, 'la langue de la bouche,' distinguishes between an *inactive* language of the mouth and an *active* language of movement and of the body. Her provocative monologue was a challenge against the language of

## A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey

inaction: the 'empty words' of politicians, professionals and, too often, academics, from whose mouths come words — or from whose fingers come pages of words — that are 'merely speculative, merely theoretical' (Hall 1974: 151) and without material effect. Within the presence of substantial contestations of global knowledge — as diverse actors negotiate to establish evidence, fact, proof, and truth — the languages and experiences offered by Nadine and those living along the pipeline are often de-legitimized and dismissed by more powerful actors (government officials and corporate entities) as non-factual or as unsubstantiated.

In his analysis of Frantz Fanon's existential phenomenological technique, Lewis R. Gordon (1995: 45, emphasis in original) argues, 'An existential standpoint rests upon the following thesis: that the lived body is the subject of agency ... [and that] however universal the hostile structures against black presence may be, we must ... remember that all those structures are *situationally* lived by the people of flesh and blood.' In my work along the oil pipeline in Cameroon I return again and again to the '*situationally* lived' sufferings of the compound disasters of colonial violence: social, ecological, epistemic. My time of eight months living in two communities in Cameroon along the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline, Nanga-Eboko and Kribi, brought me face-to-face with tangible, lived politics of knowledge among vulnerable and resisting people who have experienced long-term systemic and colonial violence(s), including land dispossession, displacement in-place (through socio-ecological destructions, see Murrey 2015a) and consequent cognitive violence(s) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: 'L'e Cri Vain'

My commitment to post-/decolonial praxis is centred upon the concurrent need to (i) critique the colonial geopolitics

## **A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond ‘the Language of the Mouth’**

Written by Amber Murrey

of knowledge that sustains the ‘coloniality of power’ as well as to (ii) “learn ... from” those who are living in and thinking from colonial and postcolonial legacies’ (Mignolo 2000: 5). Herein, I offer reflections on complexities characteristic of the pursuit of decolonial ethics while seeking knowledge on the ground, during exchanges with people.<sup>[1]</sup> A range of intellectual efforts have sought to ‘decolonise knowledge’ and yet many times such efforts are made with little specification of the exact processes crucial for the decolonisation of the knowledge regimes at the centre of the (post)colonial global order (Shilliam 2014). Addressing Nadine’s critique, I draw from heterogeneous post-/decolonial thought to outline a holistic decolonial ethos (or, an orientation) that critiques and moves toward the creation of epistemes against la langue de la bouche. I understand my efforts as part of a larger collective energy to decolonise knowledge and think at the borders (Anzaldúa 1999), or what Walter Mignolo (2000: 5) describes as ‘creating a locus of enunciation where different ways of knowing and individual and collective expressions mingle.’

I am inspired by the ‘decolonial turn’ as well as the burgeoning body of work on Indigenous methodologies to elucidate an orientation that is grounded in storytelling, narrative, and sustained efforts to de-centre and de-privilege the scholar/author/self (without erasing my presence from the project). This is possible, I posit by echoing decolonial thinkers, through an attention to the scholar’s place of conscious dwelling. This dwelling place, following Walter Mignolo (2000; also this volume), is metaphysical, geographical, and temporal; that is to say, it is sustained and committed through time. Rather than an exclusive focus on my positionality, the emphasis is placed on building and maintaining sustained (long-term) relationships with people where we work and a grounded ethical and political orientation that is attentive foremost to the voices and experiences of the people.

### **An orientation that pursues life: Vivons seulement**

Decolonising ethics focuses on healing, dignifying, and advancing a community rather than a discipline. In order to break from the trajectory of colonialism and the ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano 2000), these orientations firmly centre life (human, animal, plant) in the knowledge project. This distinguishes decolonial thought from conventional scholarship, where the transformation of the discipline and the making of a ‘contribution to theory’ is the central focus. ‘On est déjà die ici au pays!’<sup>[2]</sup> Valery Ndongo, the Cameroonian comedian, joked in one of his political skits: We are already dead in this country! Again, in his satirical song, *Touche Pas Mon Manioc Avec le Mfian Owondo*, he establishes the tongue-in-cheek tone of the song in the beginning with a nonchalant, ‘On va tous die ici au pays-ééé.’ We will all die in this country. Against a seeming permanent presence of death is a celebration of life, conveyed through the popular Cameroonian expression, ‘vivons seulement’ (just live) — often said in dire or grim circumstances (see Figure 3).

## A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey



*Figure 3: 'On a falli die sans vivre!'*

Nurturing a scholarly consciousness attuned to people is an approach useful for navigating the entangled histories of colonialism and the imbalances of power in (post)colonial places. This approach refrains from claims to absolute authority and challenges the positivist notions of objective knowledge that are central to the operating mechanisms of neoliberal projects, such as the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline. This is an orientation that is questioning, humble, and grounded in the respectful turn and return to the voices and stories of people (Chi'XapKaid 2005; Chilisa 2012; Tuhiwai Smith 2012).

The decolonising orientations articulated here are not a neatly synthesisable or formulaic set of rules intended to determine or authorise certain knowledges.<sup>[3]</sup> Instead, they arise within a contextualisation of the geopolitics of knowledge in Nanga-Eboko and Kribi. Geopolitics of knowledge refers to the ways in which knowledge and knowing are embedded in and reproduce global structures of political economy, in this case an intellectual project juxtaposed with (neo)colonial epistemic dispossession.<sup>[4]</sup> The epistemic possibilities of established social sciences are limited by their foundation within the rigid rules and regulations of 'the methodology.'<sup>[5]</sup> Inflexible and pre-set methodologies preserve boundary-making and border-making within academia, wherein the delineations between academic and non-academic knowing are mapped, regulated, and policed. Particular 'methodologies' are endorsed as 'effective' means of 'producing' valid, scientific knowledge. Historically the 'methodology' has been rooted in an obscuring of the 'knower' or the researcher's subjectivities and personal engagements. Santiago Castro-Gómez (2005) calls this 'la hybris del pinto cero': the hubris of the zero-point. This hubris has been essential to academic border-making, in which an 'unbiased,' non-corporeal, scholar is presumed to be capable of universal, fact-based abstractions for

## **A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'**

Written by Amber Murrey

scientific 'truth.' More than this, *la hybris del pinto cero* is a mechanism for the de-legitimisation of other ways of knowing; it functions by relegating Other knowledges (embodied, subjected, and emotional) to the margins (as lacking measurability, calculability). Along the pipeline, it is precisely this hierarchisation of knowledge that created the contexts within which complaints about the pipeline's social, economic, ecological, and other consequences were dismissed as 'lacking substance.'

Rather than a methodology, I outline an ethical and political ethos that is established on the ground, in meeting with people. This ethos is constantly and uniquely negotiated through the organic maturing of relationships within the course of knowledge-creation (not 'knowledge production') over time.

### **Post-/decolonial Orientations**

A post-/decolonial orientation arises in response to a discomfort with the limitations of reflexive social science. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a reflexive turn in research methodologies, as the researcher's position *vis-à-vis* the people involved in the research became a central focus of criticism. This moment produced an important body of literature identifying and critiquing notable weaknesses and biases in the scientific production of knowledge, including the racisms, sexism, and inadequacies of such observations (hooks 1984; Minh-ha 1989; Collins 1990; Haraway 1991, 1992; Behar 1996; Rose 1997; Mountz 2010).

The reflexive turn failed, however, to bring about a wholesale transformation of *how* knowledge is co/created, made, gathered, and assessed. In some cases, the move gave rise to what Richa Nagar and Susan Geiger (2007) characterize as a 'paralyzing' reflexivity as the centrality of the author prompts self-centred reflections that lead to political inertia (see also Maxey 1999; Horner 2002; Moser 2008). This re-centring of the author reinforces the power hierarchy between 'the scholar' and 'the subject.' Furthermore, the focus on positionality is limited, I note, in the tendency to compartmentalise the researcher's self-reflexivity within the methodological section of the write-up, after which there is a sort-of return to business-as-usual, as Eurocentric and/or Western ontologies, epistemologies, and theories remain dominant frameworks and reference points (this is particularly reflected in postgraduate student training and requirements). Mignolo (2000; 2011) argues instead that scholars make explicit the conscious place from which knowledge emerges as a means to decolonise the fictitious *hybris del pinto cero* without (re)centring the author. This consciousness within the geopolitics of knowledge is existentially, geographically, politically, and ethically committed to decolonisation. This conscious place where we think is a geopolitical and metaphysical space.

### **Against la langue de la bouche along the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline**

For me, this consciousness within the geopolitics of knowledge requires first and foremost an engagement with *la langue de la bouche* in Cameroon, including the epistemological dispossessions effected first through missionary education and subsequently through the International Financial Institute-endorsed neo-liberalisation (taken to mean the withdrawal and minimization of the state) of education since the 1980s. *La langue de la bouche* — not only inactive but also repressive knowledge — in Cameroon has been enacted at multiple levels: the service of colonial knowledge to socio-political and economic control, which was intimately tied with missionary activity and the development of the sciences, including agronomy, anthropology, geography, medical, and pharmaceutical science (Leslie 2013).

In the 1700s, British Baptist missionaries settled permanently in Limbe (at the time the town was named 'Victoria') on the coast of Cameroon. By the early 1870s, American Presbyterian missionaries had established settlements at Grand Batanga, where today the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline extends eleven kilometres beneath the Atlantic Ocean (in a marine pipeline) to the floating storage offloading vessel (see Figure 4).

# A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey





## **A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'**

Written by Amber Murrey

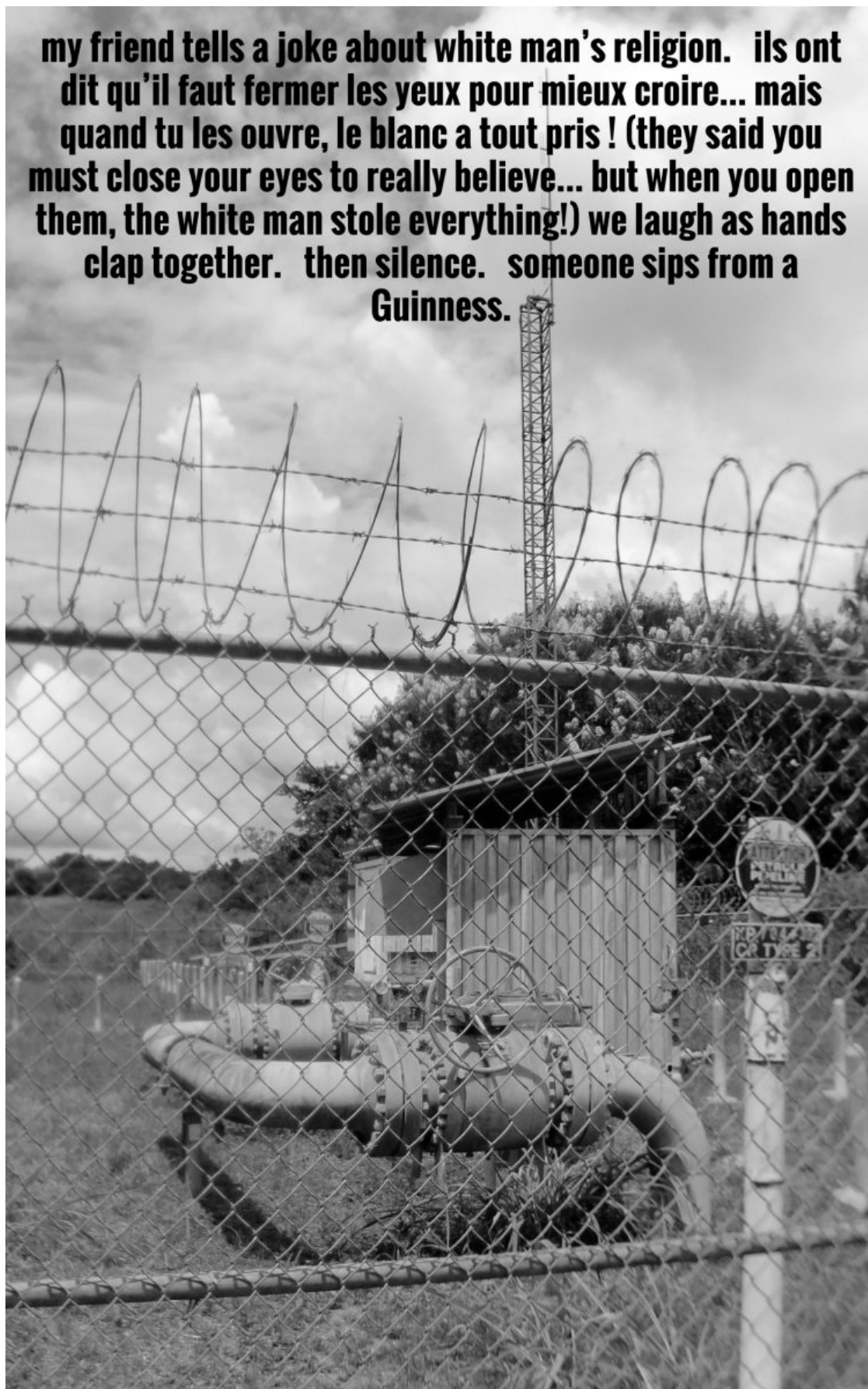
*Figure 4: 'Map of Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline'*

Early missionaries and charter company employees prepared the landscape (sometimes directly, other times indirectly) for colonialism. They set up permanent trading posts with guns and cannons that would facilitate the violent appropriation of resources. They also established the missionary schools that educated people in European languages and socialised pupils as human capital for brutal and often forced colonial labour (Kanu 2006). This implementation of Eurocentric, Christian-oriented, fixed-classroom instruction was unlike previous oral-based and practice-based educational styles, which focused on holistic wellness — physical, moral, emotional, spiritual — of the community and self (Diang 2013).<sup>[6]</sup> Pre-colonial educational practices centred upon family- and community-engaged learning, with mothers responsible for a child's education until age eight, after which the mother and female relatives continued teaching girl children and the father and male relatives would teach boy children. Through storytelling, legends, proverbs, riddles, and arithmetic, education consisted of fostering an awareness of the community through social engagement, respect for elders through interaction, observance of custom through practice, and respect for nature through living on the land — so that the centre of knowledge encompasses the ethical, intellectual, and physical simultaneously (Che 2008). The implementation of Christian values in missionary education — including 'forgiveness, submissiveness... patience [and the belief] that life on earth was temporary and should be a preparation for eternal life' (Diang 2013: 10) — alongside a condemnation of Indigenous world views, supplanted previous conceptualisations of community and self, effecting epistemic dispossessions on a grand scale (see Figure 5).

## A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey

**my friend tells a joke about white man's religion. ils ont dit qu'il faut fermer les yeux pour mieux croire... mais quand tu les ouvre, le blanc a tout pris ! (they said you must close your eyes to really believe... but when you open them, the white man stole everything!) we laugh as hands clap together. then silence. someone sips from a Guinness.**



## A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey

Figure 5: 'Close your eyes to really believe'

Nearly one hundred years later, the engineers of the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline drew upon the framework of missionary ideology in positing the pipeline project as another venture in 'African development.' The multinational-corporation-as-development-instrument echoes the ways in which early European charter companies and missionaries were rhetorically presented as a continuation of 'la mission civilisatrice' (Césaire 1955). There are uncanny similarities between these charter companies, cast as quasi-humanitarian bodies in an Enlightenment epistemology of human evolution that naturalises the domination of one people over another (Mudimbe 1985) and the ethos of social corporate responsibility in today's multinationals.<sup>[7]</sup> Elizabeth Ocampo and Dean Neu (2008: 9), in *Doing Missionary Work: The World Bank and the Diffusion of Financial Practices*, argue that 'The powerful church of the colonial era has been replaced by a cadre of institutions that are equally, if not more, powerful than the church ever was.' In this newer missionary paradigm, 'the field of dissemination is not religious but economical. And the main objective is corporate globalization. These central institutions, uniquely positioned within the web of the world's major economic players, be they countries or corporations, are the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)' (ibid.).

La langue de la bouche along the pipeline can be conceived of as the techno-scientific vocabulary embedded within and supporting the ideological paradigm of economic growth based on the primordality of the market — a language that facilitates material violence and has enormously destructive consequences for the peoples, ecologies, and epistemologies subsumed within their schematic worlds. Indeed, la langue de la bouche was fundamental to the World Bank's framing of the pipeline project. In this case, the 'civilising' agenda was a 'civil-society agenda.' Central components of the consortium's developmental approach to oil exploitation in the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline were its educational initiatives and apparent efforts to support educational infrastructure, almost exclusively through the construction of schoolrooms. In Chad, the World Bank's Petroleum Revenue Management Law (PRML) earmarked eighty per cent of oil revenue for public health and poverty alleviation measures, including education. In Cameroon, the consortium constructed schoolrooms as a mode of community compensation (at the individual, communal, and regional levels) and held educational campaigns on oil and pipeline safety.

In Etog-Nang village near Nanga, two brothers explained to me that the local schoolroom built by the Cameroon Oil Transportation Company (COTCO) as a part of community reimbursement for the passage of the pipeline was never filled with benches or a chalkboard. The brothers, Elie and Joseph, explained that one of the exterior walls of the schoolroom partially collapsed during a rainstorm while the children were inside attending class. 'Fortunately,' Joseph said, 'the wall fell *out* instead of *in*.' COTCO declined to pay for building repairs and the parents collected money over a period of several months to replace the wall. During this time, children continued to attend school, as Joseph said sarcastically, 'en plein air': in the open air (see *Figure 6*).

## A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey



*'Figure 6: In Kamer, they say primary school is "free"...*

In another case, in Mpango village near Kribi, the parents, who were already working together to collect funds, initiated construction for a school building and 'then COTCO,' Sewa, the son of the chief of Mpango village outside Kribi, explained, 'came in and completed the funds.' Sewa and I had many such conversations during my time in Kribi. He earned his Bachelor's degree at the Université de Douala and returned to Kribi after graduation. With a young son to care for, he was the only young man in a group of sixteen (during a later discussion) from Mpango who was employed. In 2013, he was working as a negotiator and real estate agent.

The schoolrooms built by COTCO as community compensation were not staffed with teachers nor filled with desks, benches, chairs, chalkboards, nor books. With 'école' painted on the doors and the signs outside, these are little more than rectangular rooms: four walls and a roof. Sultan Oshimin, an artist who popularised 'le reggae Kamer,' powerfully critiques the tendency of a minimalist educational infrastructure in Cameroon, from primary school through to university. In his song, *Quelle École* (What School?), Oshimin sings,

*Ils disent l'école primaire au Kamer c'est 'gratuit'*

*Les frais de l'APE sont toujours exigés*

*Des parents n'ont pas d'argent pour acheter des livres*

*...Les jeunes ont compris, ils sont tous au centre ville*

*Ils vendent des bonbons, ils vendent des arachides*

*...Babylone rigole, rigole, rigole*

*...Amphi 500 pour trois mille étudiants*

*'Université'—il y'a pas des toilettes*

*...Viens faire un tour du côté de SOA*

## A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey

*Ya pas d'eau potable, pas de campus étudiants*

*Le premier ministre a construit ça...*

*Mais on dit 'école', 'école'*

*Mais on dit, on dit 'université'*

(translated) In Kamer, they say primary school is 'free'

[Yet] PTA [Parent Teacher Association] fees are still required

Parents do not have money to buy books

...The youth understand: they're all in the city centre

They're selling candy, they're selling peanuts

...Babylon [i.e., the West] laughs, laughs, laughs

...Amphitheatre [#]500 seats 3,000 students

'University' [they say, but] there are no toilets

...Come take a tour of [the University of Yaoundé] SOA

There is no drinking water, there is no student campus

The prime minister 'built' that...

But we say 'school', 'school'

But we say, we say 'university'

The song provides a critique of the hollow language or naming of 'school' and 'university,' demanding that we look beyond empty buildings at the human infrastructure of education.

More than the lack of infrastructure — books, instructors, benches, chalkboards, notebooks, writing utensils, drinking water, toilets — people's conversations revealed that there is a lack of 'real teaching' or 'relevant knowledge.' For example, in Mpango along the pipeline, Jean said, 'nearly every village between Kribi and Douala has a primary school, so why do they keep building more schoolrooms? We need technical training! We need jobs... We do not need more training in le bon français [speaking proper French].' Jean echoes Oshimin's assertion that a material classroom does not translate into education. Likewise, education does not translate into wisdom or knowledge. Nor does education translate to employment, for that matter.

I have recounted this exchange as a means of demonstrating a disconnect between a neoliberal promise of education and concrete pervasive joblessness and epistemic violence in (post)colonial Cameroon. The schoolrooms constructed by the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline were quite literally empty. As I explore more elsewhere, the impetus for schoolroom construction along the oil pipeline is particularly hollowed when situated within the longer and on-going paradigm of 'knowledge management' by the World Bank in Cameroon, beginning with its shifting educational paradigms in the 1970s (Murrey 2015c). This is, in résumé, la langue de la bouche that Nadine linked my research

# A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey

and writing with. In this paradigm, border thinking — or creating a 'condition of possibility for constructing new loci of enunciation' (Mignolo 2000: 5) that is attentive to 'knowledge from a subaltern perspective [that is] conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system' (ibid.: 11) — is empowering as a set of tools to advance those 'undisciplined forms of knowledge [that have been] reduced to subaltern knowledge' (ibid.: 10). But how do we ensure that this knowledge moves beyond yet another form of language of the mouth?

## By way of conclusion

In Cameroon we tell each other that, 'on est ensemble.' 'We are together,' I say, even as we close our convivial exchange. Relationships are a basic edifice to our senses of being in the world. A relational, sustainable conception of the world is one in which, 'I am because you are.' In a decolonial orientation, relationships are central to life, research, cosmology, and ontology. Wilson (2008: 39, 80) argues that an, 'axiology of relational accountability' is central — so central that, 'we are the relationships that we hold.' A researcher's relationship(s) with the community informs the knowledge that emerges from the project. How we speak to others and are spoken to as well as how we are embraced or pushed away shape the politics, the practices, and the form(s) of our knowledge.

In the current moment of neoliberal capitalist global expansion and its concurrent manifestations of the commercialisation of land, landlessness, land grabs, displacement, displacement in-place, and place-based struggles, an ethos that returns to the ground and is grounded by human dialogue and human voice is immanently urgent (Escobar 2008). At the same time, the historic centres of global knowledge production are being continuously ruptured and displaced: 'Knowledge, like capitalism, no longer comes from one centre; it is geographically distributed' (Mignolo 2013: para. 1). The ground that we walk on, the buildings that we inhabit, the air that we breathe, the food that we eat, the people that we engage with, and the language that we speak are all ingredients that shape knowledge in particular ways. Who we are with on the ground and how we consciously politically and ethically orient our intellectual projects are all decisive in shaping social worlds, politics, and imagination.

Nurturing a political and ethical consciousness attuned to people and relationships is an approach useful for navigating the entangled histories of colonialism and the imbalances of power within the creation of knowledge. The place where we think is a geopolitical and metaphysical space; it is a place 'that has been configured by the colonial matrix of power' (Mignolo 2011: xvi). *Where we consciously* locate ourselves is a deliberate and mindful place-making process. Our place of dwelling is our political and ethical ethos or consciousness. It is an approach that is forever mindful of the language of the mouth.

## Notes

[1] See Shollock (2012) on the significance of 'epistemic uncertainty.'

[2] See Murrey (2015a; 2015b; 2015c).

[3] For a critique of 'disciplinary decadence' in which 'becoming "right" is simply a matter of applying the method correctly,' see Gordon (2011).

[4] For a related decolonial analysis on the resistance potentials and limitations of epistemologies of witchcraft along the pipeline, see Murrey (2015b; 2016).

[5] Camfranglais vocabulary is a mix of French, English, and Indigenous Cameroonian patwas.

[6] Here the focus is on the role of Christian missionaries as they were more common in the central, southern, and western regions of Cameroon and not Islamic schooling, which was more common in the northern regions. For an analysis of Islamic schooling in Cameroon, see Diang (2013).

[7] See Ottaway (2001) for a compelling examination of such 'reluctant missionaries' in the oil industry.

# A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey

## References

- Ake, C. (1979) *Social science as imperialism: the theory of political development*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1999) *Borderlands/la frontera: the new mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Behar, R. (1996) *The vulnerable observer: Anthropology that breaks your heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Castro-Gómez, S. (2005) *La hybris del punto cero: Ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granda (1750-1816)*. Bogotá: Universidad Pontificia Javeriana.
- Che, Megan. (2008). Domestic and international power relations in a Cameroonian mission school system. *International Journal of Educational Development* 28(6): 640-655.
- Chi'XapKaid or Pavel, M. (2005). Decolonizing through storytelling. In: Waziyatawin, A.W. and Yellow Bird, M. eds. *For indigenous eyes only: a decolonization handbook*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research. pp. 109-126.
- Chilisa, B. (2011). *Indigenous research methodologies*. London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Césaire, A. (1955). *Discourse on colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review.
- Diang, M. C. (2013). Colonialism, neoliberalism, education and culture in Cameroon. *College of Education, DePaul University*. Paper 52. Available at: [http://via.library.depaul.edu/soe\\_etd/52](http://via.library.depaul.edu/soe_etd/52).
- Escobar, A. (2008). *Territories of difference: place, movements, life, redes*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Gordon, L. R. (1995). *Fanon and the crisis of European man: an essay on philosophy and the human sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Gordon, L. R. (2011). "Shifting the geography of reason in an age of disciplinary decadence." *Transmodernity* 1(2): 95-103.
- Haraway, D. J. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs, and women*. London: Routledge.
- Haraway, D. J. (1992). *Primate visions: gender, race, and nature in the world of modern science*. London: Verso.
- hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist theory: from margin to center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Horner, B. (2002). Critical ethnography, ethics, and work: rearticulating labor. *Journal of Advanced Composition* 22(3): 561-584.
- Jackson, J. L. Jr. (2004). An ethnographic flimflam: giving gifts, doing research, and videotaping the native subject/object. *American Anthropologist* 106(1): 32-42.
- Juris, J. S. and Alex Khasnabish, eds. (2013). *Insurgent encounters: transnational activism, ethnography, and the political*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Lassiter, L. E. and Campbell, E. (2010). What will we have ethnography do? *Qualitative Inquiry* 16(9): 757-767.
- Low, S. M. and Merry, S. E.. (2010). Engaged Anthropology: Diversity and Dilemmas. *Current Anthropology* 51(2): 203-226.

## **A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'**

Written by Amber Murrey

- Madison, S. (2012). *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Magnat, V. (2011). Conducting embodied research at the intersection of performance studies, experimental ethnography and Indigenous methodologies. *Anthropologica* 53(2): 213-227.
- Maxey, I. (1999). Beyond boundaries? Activism, academia, reflexivity and research. *Area* 31(3): 199-208.
- Moser, S. (2008). "Personality: a new positionality?" *Area* 40(3): 383-392.
- Mountz, A. (2010). Feminist politics, immigration, and academic identities. *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 9(2): 187-194.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2000). *Local histories/global designs: coloniality, subaltern knowledges and border thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The darker side of Western modernity: global futures, decolonial options*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Minh-ha, T. T. (1989). *Woman native other*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Murrey, Amber. (2015a). Narratives of life and violence along the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline. *Human Geography—A New Radical Journal*, 8(1): 15-39.
- Murrey, A. (2015b). Invisible power, visible dispossession: the witchcraft of a subterranean pipeline. *Political Geography* 47: 64-76.
- Murrey, Amber. (2015c). *Lifescapes of a pipedream: a decolonial mixtape of structural violence and resistance in two towns along the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline*. PhD dissertation in Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford.
- Murrey, A. (2016). Slow Dissent and the Emotional Geographies of Resistance. *The Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 37(2): 224-248.
- Mudimbe, V.-Y. (1988). *The invention of Africa: gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Nagar, R. and Geiger, G. (2007). Reflexivity, positionality and identity in feminist fieldwork revisited. In: Tickell, A., Sheppard, E., Peck, J. & Barnes, T. eds. *Politics and practice in economic geography*. London: Sage. pp. 267-278.
- Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*, 21: 305-320.
- Robben, A. C. G. and Nordstrom, C. (1995). The anthropology and ethnography of violence and socio-political conflict. In: Robben, A. C. G. and Nordstrom, C. eds. *Fieldwork under fire: contemporary studies of violence and survival*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp.1-24.
- Shollock, A. (2012). Methodology of the privileged: white anti-racist feminist, systematic ignorance, and epistemic uncertainty. *Hypatia* 27(4): 701-714.
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography*. Newbury Park, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and Indigenous peoples*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London: Zed



## A Post/Decolonial Geography beyond 'the Language of the Mouth'

Written by Amber Murrey

Books, Ltd.

Wilson, S. (2009). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Manitoba, Canada: Fernwood Publishing Co., Ltd.

Zilberg, E. (2004). Fools banished from the kingdom: remapping geographies of gang violence between America and El Salvador. *American Quarterly* 56(3): 759-779.

---

### About the author:

**Amber Murrey** is an Associate Professor of Political Geography at the University of Oxford and Associate Editor of *The African Geographical Review*. Her award-winning scholarship on political ecologies and economies in Central Africa focuses on dissent and resistance amidst racialised extractive violence. Amber is the co-author of *Learning Disobedience: Decolonizing Development Studies* (2023) and editor of *A Certain Amount of Madness: The Life, Politics and Legacies of Thomas Sankara* (2018). She posts occasionally on "X" @Amber.Murrey but encourages correspondence via email at [amber.murrey-ndewa@ouce.ox.ac.uk](mailto:amber.murrey-ndewa@ouce.ox.ac.uk).