

# Le Malentendu International: Remembering International Relations with Jean-Marie Teno

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## **Abstract**

The discipline of International Relations and cognate fields of Comparative Politics and Development Studies have more or less successfully contained the study of Africa's condition within the limits of the dominant Western imagination, with grave consequences. Africa is seen and analyzed as a site of weak states and neopatrimonial rule. The continued dominance and ubiquity of such analytical vocabularies and their underlying methods rests on many forces, one of which is the reluctance to acknowledge that Africans can and do articulate their own analyses of their condition and to respect such analyses. This article seeks to remember some of the routinely forgotten international relations which structure Africa's contemporary condition, by turning to the work of Cameroonian film director Jean-Marie Teno. Teno's work, in particular *Afrique Je Te Plumerai* and *Le Malentendu Colonial*, is profoundly important for students of international relations. This article examines the content, form, and effect of the critique Teno elaborates in *Afrique Je Te Plumerai*.

## **Keywords**

Africa, decolonization, anticolonial critique, collage/montage, film

In his contribution to the 2001 special issue of *Alternatives* on "Race in International Relations," Sankaran Krishna argued that the discipline of International Relations "is predicated on a systematic politics of forgetting, a wilful amnesia, on the question of race."<sup>1</sup> It is a discipline that seeks to comprehend the world today with a set of apparently universal and singular concepts whose definition has been achieved by means of evacuating histories of colonial and racial violence. Krishna exposes how the stability of these concepts is secured by its preferred methods of abstraction—forms of theorizing, quantification, or comparative analysis. These methods of abstraction constitute the discipline's "strategies of containment," presenting an appearance of coherence and comprehensiveness which systematically conceals race, colonialism, theft, enslavement and genocide. Krishna thus

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observes, “To decolonize IR is to deschool oneself from the discipline in its current dominant manifestations: to remember international relations, one needs to forget IR.”<sup>2</sup>

Within mainstream discourse of International Relations (IR), and cognate fields of Comparative Politics and Development Studies, the study of Africa’s politics and international relations is generally framed in terms of the weakness of states, the corruption of leaders, the failure of economies, the prevalence of conflict, and the violence of insurgents, militias, and “warlords.” Much of this is underpinned by a desire to help: to find solutions, to provide policy advice, and to design effective forms of prediction, prevention, or intervention. The internal coherence and plausibility of this set of concerns and approaches is maintained by means of the strategies of containment that Krishna examines. Siba Grovogui, in the same issue, examines the processes of racialization of IR theory which have led to these abstractions and omissions. With regard to Africa in particular, Grovogui documents how IR scholarship has failed “to historicise modernity, colonialism and the postcolonial situation.”<sup>3</sup> Instead, relying on incomplete historiographic data, assuming the West’s universal moderation and toleration, discounting the global contexts of African politics and ignoring the views and visions of Africans themselves, Africanist scholarship is only able to apprehend Africa’s postcolonial condition in terms of a peculiar cultural pathology of African politics.<sup>4</sup>

Taking these arguments as a point of departure, I focus here on an alternative source of knowledge about African politics and international relations. Mindful of Krishna’s warning to “remain sensitive to the routine, everyday policing of the study of international relations by the very strategies we use to demarcate our field from that of subjects such as history, comparative politics, anthropology, literature and cultural studies,”<sup>5</sup> I am turning to film. Challenges to hegemonic colonial discourse and its postcolonial iterations have long been provided by African writers, scholars, and film makers, and these works offer an important source for the imperative of “deschooling” oneself from the dominant scholarly traditions. Films such as Ousmane Sembène’s *Emitai* and *Camp de Thiaroye* and Med Hondo’s *Sarraouina* reclaim the telling of Africa’s histories and experiences, refusing the narrations and amnesias of European accounts. Others, especially Djibril Diop Mambéty in *Contras City* and *Touki Bouki*, have constructed new visual and aural film languages. Jean-Marie Teno’s essay films *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai* and *Le Malentendu Colonial*<sup>6</sup> continue both of these traditions of historical and formal critique, of telling Africa’s histories and condition and of developing new narrative, visual, and aural languages fit for this task. Both films have a complex nonlinear structure, weaving threads of analysis, reflection, and probing back and forth across multiple sites, events, and times, combining a wide diversity of source materials and narrative forms. Teno’s films address many audiences: first and foremost, he seeks to communicate with his fellow Cameroonians. His films were intended for broadcast on television so as to reach the widest possible audience, but because of censorship his films remain “totally inaccessible on Cameroonian television.”<sup>7</sup> Teno also addresses the West, however, and these two films speak powerfully to the analysis of international relations and to the Africanist mainstream.

Teno’s films constitute a distinct mode of knowledge production or narration of Africa’s politics and international relations. In clarifying the form and efficacy of preferred devices of abstraction in the analysis of international relations, Krishna underlined that, of course, some form of abstraction is always necessary in knowledge production: “the precise strategies and methods of abstraction in each instance decide what aspects of a limitless reality are brought into sharp focus and what aspects are, literally, left out of the picture.”<sup>8</sup> My focus here is on the method of abstraction in Teno’s film *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai*, which I characterize as collage/montage. Perhaps this could be thought of as a form of anti- or counter-abstraction, insofar as it offers the possibility of simultaneously bringing into sharp focus the very forms of knowledge normally dominant and bringing back into the picture those aspects which are systematically left out of dominant narratives.

## *IR and the Containing of Africa*

The study of Africa in IR, Comparative Politics, Political Science, and Development Studies is characterized by considerable diversity and an expanding critical literature. Nevertheless, across these disciplinary fields, much of the scholarship remains in thrall to one notion which concentrates the very methodological strategies of containment and the consequent effect of racialization that both Krishna and Grovogui highlight: the notion of neopatrimonialism. The notion of neopatrimonialism and its extended conceptual family—the “big man,” personal rule, clientelism, prebendalism—have acquired the status of common sense in Africanist scholarship<sup>9</sup>; few scholars pause to rehearse the origins of this conceptual language and mode of analysis.

The notion of patrimonialism arises from Max Weber’s major work *Economy and Society* of 1922 in which he sought to develop a universal historical approach and to identify the roots of European progress, the distinguishing features enabling Europe’s historical advance from the traditional to the modern.<sup>10</sup> Weber distinguished three types of political authority: charismatic, patrimonial, and bureaucratic. There is an integral relationship between these typologies of political authority and Weber’s universal structure of historical time: as Johannes Fabian underlines, “Weber cannot be read as if his central concern, the process of rationalization, did not exist.”<sup>11</sup> Weber’s analyses of these different forms of political authority abound with temporal references: notions of process and emergence in the development of these political forms constitute the “temporal, directional qualifications which signal fundamental links between typologizing and temporalizing.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the exercise of defining distinct types of political authority simultaneously involved their plotting at different points on a single progressive trajectory of universal historical time. The method of historical analysis by means of theoretical abstraction at the heart of Weber’s account entails what Krishna terms “a process of concealment and unknowing.”<sup>13</sup> The foundational assumption of a universal historical trajectory forecloses the possibility of contrapuntal analysis, and thus renders invisible the intertwined, overlapping, and *coeval* histories, above all imperial histories, which combine to structure distinct forms of political order.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1960s, searching for a conceptual language adequate to apprehend the entry of Africa’s “new states” into the modern world and their attendant processes of political development, Africanists turned to Weber’s typology of political authority, eventually coining the term *neopatrimonial* to capture a quality apparently specific to African politics: the endurance of the traditional (patrimonial) alongside the incomplete embedding of the modern (bureaucratic).<sup>15</sup> This approach exemplifies the forms of racialized knowledge that Grovogui identifies.<sup>16</sup> Instead of acknowledging and historicizing the violence of colonial state formation, Africanists relied on outdated ethnographic typologies and radically incomplete historiographic data to design a framework capable only of theorizing “the cultural deficiency of Africa.”<sup>17</sup>

Africanists’ widespread adherence to the notion of neopatrimonialism as the dominant or defining form of politics in Africa betrays a tacit acceptance of the historical assumptions necessarily carried by this Weberian concept: the central characteristic of African politics which underpins everything else (corruption, violence, authoritarianism, dictatorship, conflict, economic crisis, or lack of growth) is the endurance of tradition beneath the veneer of the modern. Colonialism, this narrative assumes, introduced modern bureaucratic political forms; however, these did not entirely replace, but were grafted onto existing precolonial practices and cultures of politics: “neopatrimonial systems of governance . . . can be understood as state–society complexes where the machinery of the modern bureaucratic state is infused with traditional ideas about patronage and clientelism.”<sup>18</sup> A recent textbook on African politics offers a telling summary:

The exogenous origins of African states have combined with precolonial patterns of rule and problems of social heterogeneity to produce a peculiar type of rule that has dominated across the continent since

independence. Because it mixes elements of formal institutionalized statehood with more informal and personalized dimensions, it is commonly referred to as neopatrimonialism. Understanding neopatrimonialism might be one of the most important steps in acquiring knowledge about African politics.<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, the persistence of the traditional renders the modern little more than a façade, and it is this incomplete or flawed form of modernization which has endured and which underpins the political, social, and economic ills of Africa in the postcolonial period.<sup>20</sup> This consistently positions African states and societies within a universal historical scheme, in a position of lagging behind.

Few studies of neopatrimonialism examine any actual precolonial political entities; the accordance of African political tradition with Weber's patrimonial type is largely taken as given. Similarly, as Grovogui and Krishna underline, the structures and practices of colonial power are rarely examined.<sup>21</sup> Africanists are generally happy to accept the fit between Weber's modern, bureaucratic-legal type and the institutions of power "imported" to Africa by European powers. In other approaches, abstract ahistorical models of universal rational behavior are employed to analyze the variables and patterns of events, behaviors and choices in Africa in order to explain why, after a few decades of independence, "political order gave way to political conflict."<sup>22</sup> Pierre Englebert combines the notion of neopatrimonialism with quantitative analysis to identify how the degree of coherence between the traditional and the modern (the precolonial and the "imported" state) is causally related to postcolonial patterns of economic growth and good governance. He finds that the "greater the variety of pre-colonial political cultures and systems that a state comprises, the weaker its capacity"; while on the other hand, "Colonization by Great Britain and France seems to favour the development of state capacity whereas Belgian rule had the opposite effect."<sup>23</sup>

The various methods and attitudes of Africanist scholarship thus exemplify the problems examined by Krishna and Grovogui in the dominant discourses of IR. The silent premise underpinning this approach is an acceptance of the legitimizing discourse of colonialism—bringing civilization to the uncivilized—and hence a refusal to acknowledge colonialism as a crime of modernity, a wilful amnesia on the question of race.<sup>24</sup> The colonial encounter is rationalized, while its violent details are denied. Goran Hyden states explicitly what remains implicit across much of this literature: "Understanding politics in Africa begins by understanding society and the continued presence of premodern features that determine behaviour and choice. Although the colonial powers tried to modernize African society, they did not do enough of it."<sup>25</sup> Here Hyden merely voices out loud the "recuperation of colonialism" which, Krishna has shown, is enabled by the disciplinary devices of abstraction.<sup>26</sup>

Cameroon's postcolonial condition has been repeatedly characterized in terms of neopatrimonialism, which has been assumed to explain the authoritarian stability of Ahidjo's and then Biya's regimes, the "sluggish" pace of political and economic reforms in the 1990s, and the unsatisfactory progress of neoliberal reforms.<sup>27</sup> Although neopatrimonial, Cameroon is seen by some as "a political success story . . . Cameroon's two presidents to date, Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960–1982) and Paul Biya (1982), have both managed to keep the country from joining the ranks of failing states."<sup>28</sup> Jean Marie Teno's film *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai* addresses Cameroon's postcolonial condition in its various dimensions—the dismal economic plight of ordinary Cameroonians and the brutal realities of authoritarian rule. His opening concerns appear to be phrased similarly to those of the Africanist enterprise—"I sought to understand how a country, composed of well-structured traditional societies, could fail to succeed as a state, so that people could live simply from the fruit of their labours"<sup>29</sup>—but the understanding which unfolds through Teno's enquiry differs radically from that of Africanist analyses. The strategies of abstraction employed in Teno's films, characterized here as a method of collage/montage, produce powerful effects which enable and compel us to remember forms of international relations systematically excluded from and silenced by prevailing disciplinary accounts. Teno's practice of collage/montage focuses precisely on "that which IR discourse

represses, hides, elides, conceals, and prematurely closes off as avenues for inquiry.”<sup>30</sup> In the next section, I consider why collage/montage provides effective tools of anticolonial critique.

## **Collage/Montage as Method: Disturbing and Disorienting the Orthodoxy of Thought**

*Afrique, Je Te Plumerai* examines Cameroon’s postcolonial condition, exploring the lived experience of the present: everyday life in the city, the livelihoods and daily rhythms of ordinary people who fill the streets of the city every morning—commuters, students, traders, young men, old women, a father with his small children, young children playing, collecting water. Seeking to understand this condition, Teno delves first into the realm of writing—libraries, bookshops, secondhand book stalls, the school curriculum, publishing houses and printing presses, newspapers—for, he asks, “who, better than writers can record our era?” These forays reveal brutal state repression of writers, journalists, and publishers who challenge Paul Biya’s rule, and an extreme domination of the market, libraries, and school curriculum by books produced in the West. So Teno continues his exploration following the overlapping threads of street protests, demonstrations, and campaigns for democracy and freedom of the press; his own childhood memories of learning to read, watching Indian movies, and listening to his grandfather’s stories; Charles de Gaulle and the celebrations of Independence; and on to the innovations of the King Njoya in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; the export economies of German, British, and French colonialism; the formation of trade unions and the anticolonial struggle. *Le Malentendu Colonial* is similarly multistranded, exploring the history, motivations, and practices of European missionaries in Africa; Germany’s reckoning with its colonial past; life and religion in the popular neighborhoods and shantytowns of Windhoek; practices and discourses of display in the European museum; and fundamental dimensions of colonialism in Africa: the “collective assault” coordinated at the Berlin conference; the genocide of Herero and Nama peoples in German South West Africa; racial science; and the domination and appropriation of land, culture, and thought.

Teno refuses the multiple disciplinary and categorical boundaries which structure dominant knowledge, especially the authoritative knowledge of the Western academy: the boundaries between history and contemporary politics; between politics and economics; between economics, politics, and culture; between the national and the international; between Africa and Europe; and between past and present. Instead, a diverse array of themes are threaded together in a complex structure which weaves back and forth across physical, visual, and temporal sites and modes of address, between past and present, observation, memory and archive, news footage, interviews, and Teno’s own spare reflective commentary—sometimes soft, meditative, or humorously ironic, sometimes urgent. This is the method of collage/montage, which, by assembling and combining different elements in a nonlinear fashion to produce aesthetic, cognitive, and analytical effect, simultaneously challenges dominant knowledge forms and opens a register of counterhegemonic possibilities.<sup>31</sup> Gregory Ulmer observed that collage was considered “by most accounts . . . the single most revolutionary formal innovation in artistic representation” of the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> Collage/montage transgresses conventional boundaries “of the canvas, of the text, of different media and codes,” of abstraction and representation.<sup>33</sup> Many discussions maintain distinctions between collage and montage, but here I wish to consider a more general collage/montage method which might operate in various media, in order to underline how a set of shared features can enable political effect and critique. These include the use of a diversity of forms and materials; the use of pieces or fragments of “the real”—real objects, taken from their original location and placed in a new context; the reassemblage of diverse objects and fragments in new arrangements; and the juxtaposition of different and contrasting material, in terms of content and form. William Wees discusses strategies of collage and montage, and concludes

As far as I am concerned, either term will do, so long as it is understood to mean the juxtaposition of pre-existing elements extracted from their original contexts, diverted . . . from their original, intended uses, and thereby made to yield previously unrecognized significance.<sup>34</sup>

Marjorie Perloff similarly draws attention to these defining elements: “collage always involves the *transfer* of materials from one context to another.”<sup>35</sup> She cites the Manifesto of the Group *Mu*:

Each cited element breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse and leads necessarily to a double reading: that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin; that of the same fragment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality.<sup>36</sup>

Strategies of collage/montage have been employed in visual art, literature, and film to challenge dominant representations and narratives regarding race and the legacy, experience, and memories of colonialism, slavery, exile, and diaspora—to challenge the forms of amnesia that Krishna has foregrounded.<sup>37</sup> The work of the visual artist Romare Bearden addressed the condition and experience of African Americans. Bearden sought intellectually, politically, and aesthetically to challenge the essentialist representations of blacks and Africans, observing in 1946 “it is the privilege of the oppressor to depict the oppressed.”<sup>38</sup> Bearden first began to use collage in 1964 in the context of an artists’ initiative responding to the Civil Rights movement, and it remained central to his work until his death in 1988. Reflecting on the significance of collage to Bearden’s work, Kobena Mercer suggests, “it is . . . compelling to think of the formal dynamics of collage as especially relevant to the hyphenated character of diaspora identities historically shaped by the unequal interaction of African and European elements.”<sup>39</sup> Mercer considers that the formal principles of collage/montage enable the articulation of an anti-essentialist understanding of black identity: “what Bearden’s art bears witness to, as he cuts into the signifying chains of ‘race’ and representation, is the dialectical flux of historical becoming.”<sup>40</sup> Mercer focuses on “the cut” as the core principle which proves so powerful in Bearden’s work:

It is precisely the formal agency of “the cut” in his *Photomontage Projections*, often marked by a paper tear, that demands close attention if we are to understand the emotions that play a part in responses to these powerful works. . . . [The cut] plays a significant role in the disturbing and disorienting effects produced in Bearden’s collage practice.<sup>41</sup>

Some form of collage/montage is often employed in film works which take the form of an essay.<sup>42</sup> The essay film combines and goes beyond documentary, feature, and narrative film, often containing a strongly personal element of testimony and memory: “the politically engaged, aesthetically bold documentary voiced with strong personal expression.”<sup>43</sup> In her reflection on this mode of film critique, Nora Alter cites Theodor Adorno’s observations on the essay form: “The essay’s innermost formal law is heresy. Through violations of the orthodoxy of thought, something in the object becomes visible which is orthodoxy’s secret and objective aim to keep invisible.”<sup>44</sup> Again the essay film, a form that is “as international as it is interdisciplinary,”<sup>45</sup> has in particular been developed by directors confronting race and the legacy of colonialism, such as the work of Isaac Julien, Raoul Peck, and the Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC), as well as William Klein’s essay film on the Pan African Festival of Algiers 1969.<sup>46</sup>

A central preoccupation of the BAFC, Julien, Peck, and others has been the systematic absences, denials, and amnesias of colonial and imperial discourse and attendant authoritative historical narratives which refuse any space for the experiences of the colonized, and therefore cannot offer any analytical, discursive, or visual language to begin to bring such experiences “back in.” A more profound mode of critique and method has been necessary which can expose and disarm the

authoritative discourse while articulating complex experiences, legacies, memories, traumas, as well as the resistances, humor and agency of the colonized. Noting the BAFC's preoccupation with the question "How can the past and present be made to communicate with each other?" Jean Fisher describes how a method of collage/montage constituted an important element of their response:

BAFC's radical solution, exemplified by their acclaimed film *Handsworth Songs* (1986) was to put into play several incommensurate but complementary discursive registers to produce an innovative "film essay" style that was both poetic and political without being didactic: a montage of imagery drawn from the still photograph, the staged *tableau vivant* or dramatization, filmed and archival footage; a polyvocality of recorded testimonies and intercessional poetic voice-overs that, contrary to the "explanatory" panoptical impulse of the documentary narrator, build an oblique relation to the audiovisual track; and an immersive sonic space of sampled music and original electronic or digital composition, autonomous from the image, but animating it with an extended conceptual resonance. The result is a narrative which is not "given" through any totalising or transcendental perspective, but emerges as a virtuality in the interstices between its different registers and in engagement with the imagination of the spectator.<sup>47</sup>

Echoing Mercer's analysis of Bearden's strategies, Fisher discusses the effects of the "cut" in BAFC's films, shots "that work inside the film against narrative continuity and outside as metonymic sign of the continuities and discontinuities of diasporic experience."<sup>48</sup>

Teno's essay films *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai*, and *Le Malentendu Colonial* are also underpinned by a central preoccupation with the colonial past in the postcolonial present, and with the enduring tendency for, in Bearden's words, "the oppressor to depict the oppressed." He presents and challenges the tone, attitude, and style of colonial discourse, and articulates an account which confounds the philosophy of history implicit within the dominant narrative, its constitutive categories and strategies of containment. Krishna has demonstrated how the preferred methods of abstraction in IR and Africanist scholarship assume the universal coherence and stability of central concepts—the state, sovereignty, war—whose very definition renders invisible multiple and diverse historical experiences.<sup>49</sup> Above all, the bloody histories of empire and the legitimacy of anticolonial struggles are "excised from the genealogy of international relations."<sup>50</sup> Teno is concerned to counter exactly this silencing of historical experience, and his films powerfully exhibit the contrapuntality that Krishna advances, developing "a simultaneous awareness of both the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts."<sup>51</sup>

In the rest of this article, I attempt to explore how Teno's distinct film language of collage/montage facilitates a particularly effective form of contrapuntal analysis, of critique and counternarrative. Focusing on *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai*, I consider three strands of critique and re-staging: a refusal of IR's temporal imagination of linear historical time and progress; a challenge to IR's spatial imagination of atomized units of state/economy; and, finally, the remembering and narrating of distinct modes and practices of international relations conventionally rendered invisible by orthodox thought.

## Folding and Refolding the Past and the Present

The dominant and conventional accounts of Africa's contemporary political and international relations, framed within a universal narrative of historical progress, are often structured around periods, events, and transitions.<sup>52</sup> The period of colonial rule is followed by the event of independence, the transfer of power that marks the transition to the postcolonial period. The postcolonial era is further differentiated into temporal periods and marked by transitions: first, the period of authoritarian rule and then the event of multiparty elections which marks the beginning of the transition to democracy.

Thus, examining what he called Cameroon's "neopatrimonial dilemma" and lack of "good governance," Jürg Gabriel begins:

Of the 47 sub-Saharan states, only a few have not suffered from coups or civil wars; Cameroon is one of these. It has had two presidents, and the transfer of power was constitutional. In addition, Cameroonian politics have become more liberal in recent years: the single-party system has been abandoned in favour of multipartyism, and parallel to the governmental information channels, there is now a lively printed press. In comparison with other African countries, Cameroon is a rare case of pluralism and stability.<sup>53</sup>

In *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai*, some of the same defining moments conventionally plotted as events and transitions on the linear path of periodization and progress are examined, but they are evoked and disrupted in a manner which questions every element of the conventional narrative—the process and meaning of independence; the relationship between the colonial past and the postcolonial present; notions of change, beginning and ending. In Teno's film, "Time here is not spatialised into a conventional narrative logic," as Fisher observed of the BAFC films; "instead, it is dislocated and temporalized as a folding and refolding of disparate times, locations and points of view."<sup>54</sup> Teno refuses what Grovogui has termed the "chronopolitical narratives" and "teleological contemplations" of the mainstream, which serve to sanitize and contain the effects of colonialism in the chronological past.<sup>55</sup> In place of a sequence of discrete periods along a path of historical progress, the transitions from one to the next marked by symbolic events, Teno reveals an alternative temporality: arcs of bitter continuity, marked by cycles of repetition; an accumulation and intensification of historical experience and practice, rather than a passage of linear time; an acceleration of history. This radically different articulation of time, change, and meaning, and Teno's alternative coding of the events of independence, emerge from his deep understanding of the injustices and crimes perpetrated by the colonizers against legitimate and just anticolonial struggles. It is precisely such a vision which, Grovogui argues, the discipline of IR has been incapable of grasping.<sup>56</sup>

The film begins with scenes from two of these events—the transition to independence and the apparent transition to democracy—but immediately Teno counters any complacent external judgment of Cameroon's "pluralism and stability." Surveying the rooftops of Yaoundé from a distance, the film opens with Teno's poetic reflection, a concentrated denouncing of the violence of the present:

Yaoundé, ville cruel  
 You stuffed our heads with your official lies,  
 You tread our distress underfoot in an arrogant gesture  
 To your children shouting liberty  
 You reply with machine gun fire  
 And the soldier's uniform is soiled with our children's blood.  
 Yaoundé, ville cruel  
 You inspire shame.

This is followed by color news footage showing battles between crowds on the streets and armed soldiers, a child lying dead surrounded by crying and shouting people. Over scenes of peaceful democracy demonstrations and street marches, banners proclaiming "*democratie = dialogue*," "*non à la démocratie sauvage*," "*pouvoir au peuple*," Teno continues "Doula, Bamenda, Kumba, Bafoussam, Garoua, across the country young people died by the dozens for daring to call for a national conference, the only hope for democracy, liberty and a better life." Then, as the sight and sound of streams of people marching and chanting in the streets of the early 1990s lingers in our audio vision, there is an abrupt cut to another scene of marching: black and white footage of a

column of children marching in line, holding a banner; crowds cheering; and we hear the joyful song “*Indépendance, cha cha.*”

This visual juxtaposition, placing side by side or in quick succession the scenes of two events, two moments of apparent transition—*independence; democracy*—establishes a frame of enquiry entirely at odds with dominant methods and narratives: how is the violence of the present rooted in the colonial past and the process of decolonization? In contrast to mainstream scholarship, Teno insists on historicizing colonialism and the postcolonial situation, rejecting the whitening of history that conventional narratives entail.<sup>57</sup> Teno’s refusal of the conventional notion of independence marking the end of one period and the start of the next is communicated through the polyvocal layering of contrasting images, sounds, and words. We watch archetypal images of the event of independence: motorcades, salutes, and smiling faces, the new African leader shaking hands with the departing Europeans. The apparent meaning and symbolism of these images, the hopes and achievements of a people, a nation, and a continent, are echoed and reinforced in the upbeat rhythms, tunes, and lyrics of the great Congolese musician Joseph Kabasele Tshamala’s song.<sup>58</sup> But immediately the singular meaning of these events and images is disrupted by a counteranalysis layered over the conventional. As the song continues, full of hope and the sense of a new beginning, the black and white footage seamlessly moves from the ceremonies and celebrations of independence to scenes of armed police and soldiers controlling the streets, men with guns, uniforms, and metal helmets pushing ordinary Cameroonians around, while Teno provides a concentrated historical summary:

On January 1st, 1960, we celebrated our independence. After three centuries of slavery and colonialism, a light appeared at the end of the tunnel. All over the continent, Africans took charge of their countries’ affairs. They believed things were changing for the better. On September 1st, 1966, Mr. Ahidjo, Father of the Nation, assembled all Cameroonians in a single party, and thus concentrated all power in his hands. Night descended on Cameroon, a long night which lasted until November 6, 1982. That day, Ahidjo left office, to his successor Mr. Paul Biya, who had been his Prime Minister for 15 years.

Just as Teno reaches the apparent narrative conclusion, the good news of political transition, a second cut provides abrupt audiovisual and thematic interruption. The screeching sound and sight of a water cannon driving past, followed by more scenes of soldiers in the streets, people running, gunshots, provides the conceptual link to the continuation of Teno’s account: “But the new euphoria was very quickly dashed; the apprentice was to surpass the mentor.”

By layering and juxtaposing discordant images, sounds, and voices, Teno’s framing of the relationship between the past and present and the pivotal “transition” of decolonization disrupts the dominant narration of history and progress, plotting an alternative understanding of the colonial and postcolonial historical constellation. The Africanist voice calmly proclaims that “the colonial interlude—as historians typically describe it—lasted until 1960 . . . It was quite brief,” while further bemoaning that very brevity.<sup>59</sup> While not all scholars are as explicit as Hyden, we have seen that the prevailing methodological devices and abstractions consistently assume the essential *benevolence* of colonialism. This foundational assumption necessarily issues in racialized accounts of the postcolonial condition understood as a series of pathologies arising from African political cultures. Teno’s comment “but History has accelerated in an unpredictable way” evokes a radically different temporality and politics. His counternarrative presents the profound violence of colonialism and the continuity and deepening of such violence during and after the event of independence.

This nonlinear sense of temporality deepens as the film proceeds in its enquiry, pursuing a thread which takes us through diverse sites and encounters, through the streets, gutters, public institutions, and newspapers of Yaoundé and Douala to the landscape of Teno’s childhood: the pages of the

comic books he and his friends poured over as they learned to read, and his grandfather's fables, "sometimes complicated but always sad," recounting the story of colonialism and decolonization. Teno examines the realities of Cameroon's apparent "pluralism and stability" under Paul Biya, a stability structured by widespread poverty, routine everyday violence, and censorship, and punctured by demonstrations, arrests, and detentions. Commenting that words can "reveal or deform reality," Teno examines incidents of three modes of censorship, control, and hegemony which constituted props of Biya's "stability": the brutal arrest of newspaper editor Pius Njawé and writer Célestin Monga; the firm refusal of the national television channel to broadcast Teno's films; and the enduring promotion of Western literary cultures.

Teno's method is not simply to provide an alternative account of Cameroon's historical experience, nor an alternative documenting of contemporary realities. Rather, tracking between apparently disconnected themes, moving from dramatic moments of political repression to poetic reflections and meanderings through the mundane routines of everyday life, Teno presents and connects a complex historical constellation which persistently contains within it the articulations of dominant knowledge he rejects. Arcs of continuity between past and present are established in multiple ways, from stark juxtapositions and cuts to subtle thematic echoes of continuity across contrasting scenarios, eras, and materials. Thus, our encounter with the Director of the National Television and the hegemony of Western productions is followed immediately by colonial propaganda film recounting the original arrival of European civilization to Cameroon. Over the image of an outline map of Africa a clipped French voice announces, with a pronounced sense of pride and accompanied by dramatic music, "Installed for centuries on the African coasts, Europe hesitated on the threshold of an unknown world." This excerpt of the colonial archive is inserted between apparently innocuous forms of cultural hegemony in the present: the preference for "Dallas," "Dynasty," and "Chateaufallon" over Cameroonian film and documentary, and a tour of the institutions promoting European literature and culture—the French Cultural Centre, British Council Library, and Germany's Goethe Institute.

We can think of this insertion of the colonial archive as a quotation, which, breaking the continuity of the narrative, leads necessarily to a double reading: "that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin; that of the same fragment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality."<sup>60</sup> In his analysis of the use of collage in "found footage" film and the radical forms of critique it enables, Wees elaborates Walter Benjamin's notion of historical analysis by means of a "montage" of "quotations."<sup>61</sup> He notes how quotation—the extraction of a fragment of media reality from its original context and its insertion into a new context, beside other materials—generates new understanding, but "by concrete example rather than discursive reasoning."<sup>62</sup> This construction of meaning involves the audience in a direct rather than passive way; rather than being told, the viewer realizes or feels the significance of the sequence and combination of material (image, sound, text, narrative, and content): "A creative technique that is also a critical method, the collage/montage obliges the audience to recognize the motivations behind the choice of the elements extracted, as well as the significance of their new juxtaposition."<sup>63</sup>

Teno's use of colonial propaganda footage inserts the colonial past into our present in a manner which disrupts and refuses the usual containment of colonialism in the linear historical past. Placing in sequence the contemporary saturation of Cameroon's television with Western imports, colonial propaganda film, and Europe's cultural institutes and libraries in Cameroon, Teno confronts the audience with the ongoing politics of civilizational superiority and hegemony; the juxtaposed scenarios yield a previously unrecognized significance of benign cultural policy. This enables Teno to attend to what Anthony Bogues has termed the "politics of the present" in the colonial archive.<sup>64</sup> Discussing a project which compiled an archive of British colonial film, Bogues emphasized the need for an interrogation which could be attuned to, and could reveal, the endurance of the colonial past in the present, in various dimensions:

to think about this colonial film archive is to reflect on the spectres and traces of imperial rule in our contemporary moment as well as to think hard not so much about the images and what they represented at any precise historical moment but rather about the work these images do in creating knowledge categories which still have currency today.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, as Teno observes of the archival film he obtained for *Afrique*, “When you look at this footage, you can see that there has been no shift in the French colonial mentality—between that discourse and what is happening today.”<sup>66</sup> Teno’s use of colonial archival material counters the strategies of containment effected by prevailing modes of scholarly abstraction as well as the actual attempts at containment practiced by European governments. Teno recounts his efforts to obtain material from the French military archives, which “required a lot of negotiating”:

When I requested the archival footage, the authorities in France wanted to give it to me without sound, but I needed the sound also. They tried to convince me that the sound was no longer relevant, but my response was that there has been no public statement denouncing what was said. I needed that footage to assess contemporary reactions.<sup>67</sup>

## Revealing the Colonizing Structure

Teno’s disruption of the temporality and politics of conventional narrative logic simultaneously disrupts the implicit spatial or geographical common sense of IR. Krishna examined how the abstraction of the sovereign state systematically conceals histories of colonialism and violence.<sup>68</sup> The sovereign state’s conceptual twin is the abstraction of the “national economy.” Since the era of decolonization, the disciplinary common sense of IR imagines a world order constructed of units which differ tremendously in their internal empirical attributes but can nevertheless be conceptualized in the same universal terms and compared against a standard model: the state and the economy. Critics such as Timothy Mitchell have emphasized the relatively recent construction or invention of the very idea of the “national economy” as a discrete entity.<sup>69</sup> This invention, as Krishna’s analysis shows, serves as a device of abstraction which instantly sanitizes or renders invisible long international histories of economy constructed through racial violence.<sup>70</sup> With independence, the idea of the national economy simultaneously and at a stroke removes two entwined colonial histories of economy: the colonial construction of *European* industrial economies *and* the violent and racialized construction of economies of extraction in colonized territories. Colonialism thus “falls out of” the concept of “the economy.”<sup>71</sup> This renders invisible the colonial construction that Stuart Hall richly recalls in his summary of Britain’s economy: “for centuries, its wealth was underpinned, its urban development driven, its maritime and commercial hegemony secured, its thirst quenched, its teeth sweetened, its cloth spun, its food spiced, its carriages rubber-wheeled, its bodies adorned, through the imperial connection.”<sup>72</sup> The category of national economy becomes an empty abstraction which, when employed in comparative analysis, is necessarily rendered devoid of historical and relational content.

Robert Bates’s analysis of African economies exemplifies this peculiarly ahistorical effect of abstraction that Krishna has foregrounded. Beginning his account with “in the post-independence period,” Bates notes two empirical “givens” of African economies: their “low level of industrialization” and the fact that “agriculture is the largest single industry in most African countries.”<sup>73</sup> Implicitly assuming a universal category of the “national economy,” Bates takes as given two defining features of colonial economies structured to serve European capitalist accumulation. He goes on to observe a further structural characteristic shared by many African economies: a marked pattern of uneven development.<sup>74</sup> While uneven development is an inherent feature of capitalist development as such,<sup>75</sup> the often acutely uneven structure of colonial economies betrays their racialized

construction. European ideas about racial hierarchy did not just formally legitimize political subjugation of African societies, but informed every aspect of the construction of the colonial order, such that the “colonial economy” cannot be apprehended separately from practices of racial violence. V. Y. Mudimbe observes that colonialism constituted a process of organization: that all colonialists and settlers “tended to organize and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs” which entailed three integrally related dimensions: “the domination of physical space, the reformation of natives’ minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective. These complementary projects constitute what might be called the colonizing structure, which completely embraces the physical, human, and spiritual aspects of the colonizing experience.”<sup>76</sup> This was premised upon a vision which reduced the African to the status of a resource, one of the various resources of the colonial territory, to be made to work, to be managed efficiently, to be relocated according to demand. This is the racial vision and practice underpinning the historically “uneven” structuring of colonial economies that Bates observes so matter-of-factly.

In Cameroon, the generally uneven structure of the colonial economy was further entrenched by the character of French investment after the second world war, in the context of the *Fonds d’Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social des Territoires d’Outre Mer* (FIDES). This program was established in 1946 as part of the plan “for the re-launching of the national and imperial economy” after the war.<sup>77</sup> A substantial proportion of FIDES funds went to Cameroon. Martin Atangana’s detailed examination of this program reveals that “the power that direct political domination granted to France allowed her to channel Cameroon’s resources and expenditure according to the need of the metropole, and to finance a significant part of the basic infrastructure by using the territory’s budget.”<sup>78</sup> The investment in Cameroon during this period centered mainly on infrastructural projects serving the port of Douala and its hinterland: “Industrialization disappeared from the agenda of the Plan in the course of its implementation . . . the emphasis was placed once again on the need to supply metropolitan France with cheap raw materials and to establish an infrastructure capable of improving the productivity and quick export of agricultural and mining products.”<sup>79</sup> Atangana underlines the economic importance of Cameroon for France in the postwar period, noting “we must think of ‘the economy’ in the broadest sense here,” taking into account three interconnected aspects all of which were informed by French national and imperial needs: “the economic importance of the territory as a potential source of profits; the geographical significance of Cameroon in comparison with the French territories of Equatorial Africa; and a third factor which reinforces the second, that is the crucial role of the port of Douala for the economic development and exploitation of the entire region.”<sup>80</sup>

Atangana’s research provides concrete and detailed demonstration, in the context of Cameroon, of Mudimbe’s general observation regarding the colonizing structure’s tendency “to organize and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs.” In a manner quite different from the detailed analysis of Atangana but no less effective, indeed complementary, Teno’s examination of the past which has produced Cameroon’s present refuses the sanitized abstractions of an ahistorical “economy.” Teno’s enquiry arrives at the colonial economy indirectly, through an encounter, first, with the Bamun King Njoya and the shumom writing system he established at the end of the nineteenth century, and from there to a focus on the forms of education established under German and French colonial rule—that is, to recall Mudimbe, “the reformation of natives’ minds.” A contemporary scene of a Cameroonian teacher explaining the history of Njoya and his alphabet is followed directly by archival propaganda footage presenting the colonial education system. Accompanied by stirring music, black and white footage presents a military-style formation in a school yard: lines of barefoot boys and young men, wearing only shorts, marching in step with their arms outstretched. Another French voice filled with pride explains: “In the school yard, the teacher serves as an example. Joyously his young charges imitate him. It is a school among ten others, where young Blacks receive a practical education that orients their minds to the needs of a normal life. It educates

shopkeepers, tradesmen, and specially trained peasants.” And so we arrive at the colonial economy: *a practical education for the natives*, to fill them with a love of France and the skills necessary for efficient labor. This time it is not Teno who first draws this connection, but the archive itself. As the French voice from the archives continues—

Each year, a hundred new classes open their doors to indigenous children. Their vivacious intelligence is generally superior to European children, up to the age of puberty. We instil in them knowledge and love of France. We provide a practical, simple education, and especially training in moral character. . . . The French teacher loves his work which he exercises without bias. For these boys, the teacher’s face embodies France. These rudiments of our language, which they learned with such a touching fervour, is certainly a sign of surrender

—the scene moves directly from young African men smiling as they listen to their French teacher, his face benevolent beneath his pith helmet, to a line of men marching energetically into the forest, pick axes and hoes over their shoulders. Are they on their way to plough a field, or to build a road? Who knows?

More colonial footage presents a series of economic activities: long lines of men carrying heavy sacks of grain; long rows of women sitting threshing wheat by hand; road-gangs digging in unison; and more lines of men, carrying large bales of cotton. Teno’s use of colonial newsreel images performs a powerful work of reformulating the historical content of the conceptual category of the economy. The archival images enable the historicization and social content that Grovogui and Krishna note are so absent from IR discourse. We *see* the colonial economy, a racial economy of extraction based on forced labor. The potential for images and specifically film to disrupt dominant categories of thought was articulated by the German avant-garde filmmaker Hans Richter in the 1940s. Alter reflects on Richter’s call for a form of critique which could “broach the problem of the im/perceptible”: “by making ‘problems, thoughts, even ideas’ visible, he sought ‘to render visible what is not visible’.”<sup>81</sup> Teno dwells on archival footage of Africans chopping vast trees in the depths of the forest; splitting cocoa pods; hauling on their shoulders or heads huge sacks of grain, bales of cotton, bunches of bananas (the *bunch*, weighing forty to fifty kilograms, not the “hand” of bananas that we encounter on supermarket shelves); digging roads and railways. This powerfully forces recognition of the historical, social, and racial content of “the economy” as constructed through colonial relations.

From the work of the native laborer, the archive’s focus moves to the port of Douala. First, we encounter the German economy. Scenes of docks and large ships are presented as we are told:

Without delays, on fast boats equipped with the most modern refrigeration system, 4.5 million to 6 million bunches of bananas travel from Cameroon to Hamburg, in 30 days totalling 4.5 to 6 million pieces of fruit for Germany.

And then the French economy—similar scenes but now with more docks and larger ships; the French voice proudly continues

Everything exported from or imported into Cameroon arrives at the port of Douala. When Douala was the great German commercial centre, it had only one wharf for shipping operation. We turned it into a great port including 500 meters of pier, equipped with the most modern hoisting equipment, allowing 6 large boats to dock there simultaneously. Ships from all nations can be seen, as well as sacks of palm nuts, cattle from the North, billets of precious timber, and oil barrels awaiting their departure for Europe and the South.

The archival images thus reveal “the insertion of the colonised space into the Western economy,” and the intertwined, co-constituted but profoundly uneven colonial histories of both African and

European economies; rendering visible what is not visible in the theoretical abstraction of “the economy.”

As effective as this strategy is—of allowing the archives themselves to do the work of revelation—Teno brings in Cameroonian voices too, those who experienced colonial labor, those who formed trade unions to fight for their rights, and scholars who have researched their history. The constant weaving between the colonial archive and accounts and experiences of Cameroonians bitterly exposes both the racial violence of the colonial economy and the fraudulent character of colonial discourse and its narrative of civilization and development. Teno dwells for some time on the colonial experience, sometimes with the colonial voice-over and sometimes his own. Multiple scenes are presented, at length, all from colonial footage. This contrasts sharply with discourse of IR which, as Grovogui and Krishna observe, has largely marginalized colonialism from serious substantive narration and theoretical reflection.<sup>82</sup> Teno’s prolonged examination of the colonial experience and relationships denaturalizes colonialism, wrenching this historical relationship and practice from its routine containment in “the past,” or better still “the African past,” and insisting that we—Europeans, Westerners—look again at this major dimension of our own history.

In *Afrique* as well as in *Le Malentendu*, Teno’s analysis articulates a sense of the colonial experience and its legacy which is altogether different from that admitted within the imagination and abstractions of IR. Colonialism was not a period of time, now over; it was not just a type of political rule, to be compared with other types; nor was it merely a form of economy, a mode of production. Teno’s films express a radically different grasp of colonialism, the “civilizing” form imposed on Africa from the 1890s, concentrated in his short but devastating observation in *Le Malentendu Colonial*: “to civilize: to persuade the victims that the atrocities inflicted on them are necessary for their development.” Teno articulates what Bagues has termed the “historical catastrophe” of colonialism: “specific forms of domination in which power pressed flesh, in which the spectacle of violence was the everyday ordinary,” which endured over long periods, in which trauma accumulated, and which continue to shape the present.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, this echoes the vocabulary of Cameroonian historian Jean-Pierre Essomba. Speaking between excerpts of the archive, Essomba explains of the colonial economy: “For the local population, the first catastrophe was demographic. Most of the time it was the young and [strong] who were sent off to forced labour. Of course, they were not even paid for it.” Teno’s examination of the catastrophe of colonialism in Africa insists on its enduring legacies in the postcolonial present. In the final section, I explore how Teno remembers the international relations of Cameroon’s decolonization. Teno’s account responds precisely to the questions posed by Bagues:

What does the process of historical trauma or of an event of historically catastrophic proportions mean when its legacies linger and shape the present? . . . how do the processes of historical trauma, not as a single event, but as a historical event of long duration, through repetition become catastrophic, producing conditions and practices in the political realm? . . . how do these conditions and practices shape democracy?<sup>84</sup>

## Remembering “Pacification”

The final part of the film brings us back once more to the moment and process of independence. Colonial discourse and ceremonies presented independence as the achievement of the colonizers, finally bringing the colonized to the point of self-rule. This understanding is tacitly echoed today in accounts which accept the benevolence of colonial rule. In doing so, as Krishna, Grovogui, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot underline, the discipline of IR erases historically significant political struggles and ignores or conceals the crimes of modernity “in order to project moral rectitude, the rule of

reason, and historical purpose.”<sup>85</sup> Teno’s assemblage of sources and commentaries delineates the African struggle to free themselves from colonial racial oppression and the brutal colonial *defeat* of those struggles. Teno thus forces recognition of the historical and political reality that, as Grovogui argues, the discipline of IR has been reluctant to accept that “the primary object of anticolonialism was another crime of modernity, colonialism, just as the primary culprits were the European individuals, groups and nations behind that project.”<sup>86</sup>

The film’s narrative path back to the moment of independence traces first the struggles of the unions against the racial oppression of the colonial economy, recalled in the words of Cameroonian historians and unionists, and moves from there directly to the political struggle for independence. After the second world war, the struggles of Cameroonians to restore their humanity and freedom led to the emergence of trade unions and of political organizations, the most important of which were the main radical trade union, the Union des Syndicats Confédérés du Cameroun (USCC) created in 1944, and the main nationalist party, the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), established in 1948 with trade union leader Ruben Um Nyobé as Secretary General.<sup>87</sup> Teno’s concise account, spoken over archive newsreel of wounded men in hospital beds and armed police patrolling the streets, draws together the inseparable strands and cycles of legitimate struggle and colonial violence which remained entwined throughout Cameroon’s decolonization:

the union movement for our leaders served as a school of political education . . . Racial discrimination was one of the pillars of the colonial regime, racism was rampant, and it invited violence. Douala, the rebel, responded to the call. In September 1945 strikes broke out, and workers marched for the first time in Douala, demanding better salaries and more humane treatment. Armed colonists took to the streets and for several days unleashed a veritable manhunt. Hundreds of Cameroonians were gunned down. Ten years later, in 1955, the colonial administration openly declared war on the UPC, which set off a cycle of violence which lasted into the late 1960s with the arrest and assassination of Ernest Ouandié.

The central principles of the UPC political campaign were the call for full and total political, cultural, and economic independence and the reunification of the British and French Cameroons.<sup>88</sup> The UPC’s call for independence conflicted with France’s goal of establishing a French Union within which former colonies would have limited political autonomy—a goal which the UPC denounced as illegal, calling attention to Cameroon’s status as a UN Trust Territory and the attendant responsibilities of France to proceed toward full independence rather than incorporation within a French Union.<sup>89</sup> Working closely with USCC, its youth wing and women’s organizations, the UPC established a substantial social base throughout the territory of French Cameroon and with bases in British Cameroon.<sup>90</sup> The French colonial regime under Governor Roland Pré sought to disrupt and prevent their political activities, banning meetings and arresting UPC activists while trying to establish and encourage rival conservative political organizations and parties. When this culminated in riots in May 1955, as the UPC started to resist police attacks on their legally constituted meetings, “Roland Pré was ready. His forces hunted and tracked down UPC and USCC militants, whether or not they were implicated in the events.”<sup>91</sup> In July 1955, the French declared the UPC an illegal organization, in a law “based on the old French law passed on July 10, 1936 banning fascist organizations.”<sup>92</sup> This paved the way for the French to establish control over the emergence of Cameroonian political groups and leaders favorable to cooperation with France and the protection of French political and economic interests, while forcing the UPC leaders and militants underground or into exile. Still the UPC sought negotiations while members of the Cameroonian opposition called for an amnesty and the legalization of the UPC in order to enable full national participation in discussions leading toward independence. The French colonial government resisted such calls, instead implementing a brutal police and military campaign against UPC militants and, in 1959, declaring a state of emergency.<sup>93</sup>

In January 1958, the French army sent reinforcements to Cameroon for a campaign of “pacification”<sup>94</sup> to crush the UPC. Teno allows us to witness scenes of this history from the colonial archive: tanks driving through the streets; children running; French soldiers firing from armored vehicles; dead bodies on the pavements, fallen where they were shot or lined up in rows, women, men, children, youths; a man writhing face down on the ground, a soldier’s boot at his head; young men of the French army smiling, looking confident—shocking and extended scenes of callous violence and brutality. Teno summarizes, “In the name of the struggle against communism, thousands of Africans were assassinated, whole villages were wiped off the map.”

These scenes are followed a moment later by the archive’s celebratory footage of the independence ceremonies, of Cameroon and of Congo. These juxtapositions present very clearly that the smooth transfer of power from French colonial rule to the rule of Ahmadou Ahidjo was accomplished on the basis of sustained violence against the UPC—military onslaught, arrests, detentions, executions, and assassinations. Cameroon’s experience is placed in the context of the continental experience, thus underlining these international relations of decolonization as general rather than exceptional. Teno pauses to dwell on the fate of Lumumba and Congo—Lumumba’s arrest and assassination by Belgian forces and their allies and the passage of power to Mobutu—before returning to continue the narrative of Cameroon’s similar path from assassinations to dictatorship. As Grovogui has argued,

Decolonization is assumed to have taken place within mutually agreeable conditions between the formerly colonized and the colonizers. . . . In fact, the imperialist powers selectively imposed jurisprudential rules of entitlement with the deliberate intent of maintaining their own hegemony within the new regime. . . . decolonisation was subject to external requirements, in particular the preservation of the national interests of the former colonizers. Indeed, the process of decolonization was fraught with open and concealed battles. In their quest for continued hegemony, Western powers deployed all means—textual interpretations as well as military, economic and political leverage—to reduce the expression of self-determination to a neo-colonial state.<sup>95</sup>

The general rather than exceptional character of Cameroon’s experience is reinforced by the visual similarity of the archival record Teno presents to us: strikingly similar images of the transfer of power (France to Cameroon, Belgium to Congo), of the ultimate recipients of that power (Ahidjo, Mobutu), and of the violent treatment of progressive anticolonial nationalists (Nyobé, Moumié, and Lumumba). Against the same urgent music which, through “animating . . . [the images] with an extended conceptual resonance”<sup>96</sup> further underlines this shared historical experience, footage of the arrest of Lumumba is followed by a series of still black and white photographs of the UPC leaders, shown on a red background alongside details of their deaths:

Ruben Um Nyobé

Secretary General of the UPC, aged forty-five years

killed in the Cameroonian underground, on September 13, 1953, by the colonial forces.

Ernest Ouandié

President of the comité révolutionnaire (CR) of UPC, aged forty-six years

assassinated at Bafoussam on January 13, 1971 after a mock trial.

Félix-Roland Moumié

President of UPC, aged thirty-five years

died on November 5, 1960, in Geneva, poisoned by a French secret agent; buried at Conakry.

Drawing on numerous accounts of Um Nyobé’s death including the detailed research of Abel Eyinga, Atangana concludes that “the assassination of the UPC leader was programmed at the

highest level of the colonial administration. The decision to kill Um Nyobé was made by Prime Minister Ahmadou Ahidjo and was approved by French authorities who could have opposed it.<sup>97</sup> Having secured the path to a neocolonial state under the leadership of their favored figure, France continued to work with Ahidjo's government after independence to complete the elimination of the UPC. Within weeks of formal independence, and while Cameroon's new constitution was being drafted by French constitutional experts, Ahidjo requested urgent military reinforcements from France to finally crush a renewed UPC rebellion.<sup>98</sup> Atangana recounts the events:

The campaign begun on 16 February 1960. It was led by General Max Briand who . . . had at his disposal five overseas battalions, T-26 fighter-bombers and tanks. Eight months later, it was officially announced that 3,000 rebels and 30 French soldiers were killed. In reality . . . this corresponds to only a very small number of all the victims; thousands had died in the forest, either from disease or exhaustion, like those in Madagascar after the 1947 insurrection.<sup>99</sup>

This was accompanied by a consistent campaign to eliminate the UPC leadership: Noé Tankeu, leader of the UPC army, was captured, and then killed by public execution in January 1964; Ossendé Afana, the UPC provisional secretary general, was killed in March 1966. These efforts did not stop in Cameroon. When the organization was banned in 1955, Nyobé remained leading the UPC underground in Cameroon while Félix-Roland Moumié, Ernest Ouandié, Abel Kingué and others had escaped into exile to continue the nationalist struggle.<sup>100</sup> After Nyobé's death, UPC leadership was assumed by the group in exile, with Moumié as President and Kingué and Ouandié as vice presidents. Félix-Roland Moumié was killed in Geneva on November 3, 1960, poisoned by a French agent; and finally Ernest Ouandié was captured in 1970, and executed in January 1971.<sup>101</sup>

Jean-Marie Teno brings these events and processes to the foreground, inserting them into a central and defining position in the narrative of Cameroon's independence and postcolonial state formation. In doing so, he defies both the silencing effected by the strategies of containment of IR and Africanist scholarship and thirty years of official censorship in Cameroon, a censorship which refused any discussion of the UPC's struggle and defeat, any recollection of the UPC as the central actor in Cameroon's anticolonial struggle, and any memory of the UPC leaders Ruben Um Nyobé, Ernest Ouandié, and Félix-Roland Moumié.<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion

The persistent characterization of postcolonial Cameroon as "neopatrimonial" assumes a general teleology to account for the failings of the Cameroonian state and economy. This teleology, rarely examined by Africanists, accepts generalizations about a "patrimonial" African tradition of personal rule, and assumes the benign modernity of the bureaucratic institutions that Europe imported to Africa during the "brief interlude" of colonial rule. The Africanist discourse of neopatrimonialism, by virtue of its devices of abstraction, encapsulates the systematic politics of forgetting, the wilful amnesia on the question of race that Krishna identifies at the heart of IR discourse more broadly. These strategies of containment, effected by the unacknowledged racialization of Africanist abstractions and comparative procedures, have the effect of rendering such accounts complicit with the actual practices of censorship employed by Ahidjo and Biya as part of securing their extended rule. Dwelling on the empirical details of postcolonial authoritarianism, Africanist analyses are unable to trace the origins of postcolonial violence to the colonial practice of the West. Africanist and IR discourse thus echoes Western governments in failing to acknowledge the justice of anticolonial struggles and refusing to implement postcolonial justice.<sup>103</sup> European leaders and dominant scholarship have yet to acknowledge colonialism as a central "crime of modernity,"<sup>104</sup> a historical catastrophe

whose legacies, forms, structures and practices endure, repeat, and accumulate in the postcolonial present.

Instead, as Grovogui notes, scholars should pay more attention to “the views of their ethnographic objects.”<sup>105</sup> In an interview, Teno explained that by turning to film, employing images, sound, and poetry, he was “trying to survive the onslaught of dominant thought.”<sup>106</sup> Teno’s film *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai* demonstrates that the project of decolonizing knowledge requires not just providing alternative historical accounts, though this is always necessary and important, but also confronting and exposing the enduring role of dominant knowledge forms in constructing, legitimizing, and sustaining colonial and neocolonial social and international orders. This project can be effectively approached by contrapuntal methods, as Krishna has demonstrated.<sup>107</sup> The method of collage/montage constitutes a particularly powerful avenue for the realization of contrapuntality. By presenting a diversity of contrasting voices, modes of narrative and source material, Teno constructs a challenging account which sharply disrupts or violates “the orthodoxy of dominant thought,” making visible the events, processes and meanings which are “the orthodoxy’s secret and objective aim to keep invisible.” As Mercer has demonstrated, the formal dynamics of collage/montage are “especially relevant to the hyphenated character of diaspora identities historically shaped by the unequal interaction of African and European elements.” Teno employs these same elements to explore the contradictions of postcolonial social and political orders shaped by the unequal interaction of African and European elements. In particular, his extended use of colonial archival footage and newsreel, juxtaposed and overlaid with voices, images, and sounds of the present, disturb and disorient the comfortable amnesia which leaves colonialism behind in the past, while tacitly accepting its benign, modernizing effect. Instead, the Western viewer is confronted with the violence of our own history and its legacies and repetitions.

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### Notes

1. Sankaran Krishna, “Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 26, no. 4 (2001): 401.
2. *Ibid.*, 407.
3. Siba N’Zatioula Grovogui, “Come to Africa: A Hermeneutic of Race in International Theory,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 26, no. 4 (2001): 427.
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5. Krishna, “Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations,” 420.
6. Jean-Marie Teno, *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai* (Les Films du Raphia, 1992, 88 min); *Le Malentendu Colonial* (California Newsreel, 2004, 73 min).
7. Jean-Marie Teno, “Interview with Melissa Thackway,” in *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspectives in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Film*, ed. Melissa Thackway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 204.

8. Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 403.
9. In a recent review of decades of research, Nicolas van de Walle observes that "most scholars agreed that African political dynamics were structured by a set of informal institutions they labelled as 'big man politics,' 'personal rule,' 'politics of the belly' or neopatrimonialism"; while David Leonard and Scott Straus note "an academic consensus about the modal dynamics of African politics—the personal rule paradigm." Nicolas van de Walle, "The Path from Neopatrimonialism: Democracy and Clientelism in Africa Today," in *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond*, ed. Daniel C. Bach and Mamoudou Gazibo (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012), 111; David K. Leonard and Scott Straus, *Africa's Stalled Development: International Causes and Cures* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 2.
10. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1922); Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Max Weber's "Grand Sociology": The Origins and Composition of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Soziologie*," *History and Theory* 39, no. 3 (2000): 364–83.
11. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 23.
12. *Ibid.*, 24.
13. Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 403.
14. *Ibid.*, 404.
15. Guenther Roth, "Personal Rulership, Patrimonialism, and Empire-building in the New States," *World Politics* 20 (1968): 194–206; Samuel N. Eisenstadt, *Traditional Patrimonialism and Modern Neopatrimonialism* (London, UK: Sage, 1973).
16. Grovogui, "Come to Africa," 427–28.
17. *Ibid.*, 428.
18. Paul D. Williams, *War and Conflict in Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011), 55.
19. Pierre Englebert and Kevin C. Dunn, *Inside African Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013), 8.
20. Goran Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Williams, *War and Conflict in Africa*, 2011; Nicolas van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979–1999* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford, UK: James Currey, 1999). Many Africanists point out that forms of "patrimonialism" or "clientelism"—modes of political authority based on relations of personal or particular loyalty and material reward rather than abstract bureaucratic and legal rules, norms, and principles—exist in all societies, while maintaining that such features are more prevalent and, indeed, generalized and defining in Africa. See Walle, "The Path from Neopatrimonialism," 2012.
21. Grovogui, "Come to Africa," 428; Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 404–7.
22. Robert H. Bates, *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-century Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3; cf Grovogui, "Come to Africa," 428.
23. Pierre Englebert, "Pre-colonial Institutions, Post-colonial States, and Economic Development in Tropical Africa," *Political Research Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2000): 20.
24. Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 2001; Grovogui, "Come to Africa," 2001.
25. Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*, 238.
26. Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 403, 411.
27. Piet Konings, *The Politics of Neoliberal Reforms in Africa: State and Civil Society in Cameroon* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Laanga, 2011); Sam Hickey, "Caught at the Crossroads: Citizenship, Marginality and the Mbororo Fulani in Northwest Cameroon," in *Making Nations, Creating Strangers: States and Citizenship in Africa*, ed. Sarah Rich Dorman, Daniel Patrick Hammett, and Paul Nugent (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 83–104; Ketil Fred Hansen, "The Politics of Personal Relations: Beyond Neopatrimonial Practices in Northern Cameroon," *Africa* 73, no. 2 (2003): 202–25; Jürg Martin Gabriel,

- “Cameroon’s Neopatrimonial Dilemma,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 17, no. 2 (1999): 173–96; Nicolas van de Walle, “Neopatrimonialism and Democracy in Africa, with an Illustration from Cameroon,” in *Economic Change and Political Liberalization in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Jennifer A. Widner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 129–57; Jean-François Bayart, *L’État au Cameroun* (Paris, France: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1979).
28. Gabriel, “Cameroon’s Neopatrimonial Dilemma,” 175.
  29. Teno, *Afrique, Je Te Plumerais*, 1992. The film is in French with English subtitles. Direct quotations in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are from the English subtitles of the film.
  30. Krishna, “Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations,” 408.
  31. In employing this idea of a collage/montage method, I am not implying an analysis or assumption of the intentions nor the actual sources of inspiration of Teno as a cinematographer. Instead of tracing intentions and influences, my concern here is to consider the political effect of his film method in enabling a powerful form of critique of dominant IR knowledge.
  32. Gregory L. Ulmer, “The Object of Post-criticism,” in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London, UK: Pluto, 1985), 84.
  33. Patrizia C. McBride, “The Game of Meaning: Collage, Montage, and Parody in Kurt Schwitters’ *Merz*,” *Modernism/Modernity* 14, no. 2 (2007): 250.
  34. William C. Wees, *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1993), 52.
  35. Marjorie Perloff, “Collage and Poetry,” in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (vol. 1), ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 384, original emphasis.
  36. Group *Mu*, eds., *Collages*. Revue d’Esthétique, nos. 3–4 (Paris, France: Union Générale d’Editions, 1978) cited in Perloff, “Collage and Poetry,” 384–85.
  37. Krishna, “Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations,” 2001.
  38. Romare Bearden, “The Negro Artist’s Dilemma,” *Critique*, November 1946, 17, cited in Kobena Mercer, “Romare Bearden, 1964: Collage as Kunstwollen,” in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge, MA: Institute of International Visual Arts, MIT Press, 2005), 130.
  39. Mercer, “Romare Bearden,” 126.
  40. Ibid.
  41. Ibid.
  42. See Wees, *Recycled Images*, 1993; Jane Tormey, “The Cinematic Essay,” in *Telling Stories: Countering Narrative in Art, Theory and Film*, ed. Jane Tormey and Gillian Whiteley (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars’, 2009), 176–79; Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne to Marker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 154–80.
  43. David Oscar Harvey, “The Limits of Vococentrism: Chris Marker, Hans Richter and the Essay Film,” *SubStance* 41, no. 2 (2012): 6.
  44. Theodor W. Adorno, “The Essay as Form,” in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 23, cited in Nora M. Alter, “The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film: Farocki’s ‘Images of the World and the Inscription of War,’” *New German Critique* 68 (1996): 165.
  45. Alter, “The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film,” 171.
  46. Kodwo Eshun, “Untimely Meditations: Reflections on the Black Audio Film Collective,” *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 19 (2004): 38–45; Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar, eds., *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective 1982–1998* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2007); Olivier Hadouchi, “‘African Culture Will be Revolutionary or Will Not Be’: William Klein’s Film of the First Pan-African Festival of Algiers (1969),” *Third Text* 25, no. 1 (2011): 117–28.
  47. Jean Fisher, “In Living Memory . . . Archive and Testimony in the Films of the Black Audio Film Collective,” in *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective 1982–1998*, ed. Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 19–20.

48. Ibid., 24.
49. Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 404–8.
50. Ibid., 405.
51. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 51, cited in Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 404.
52. For example, Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
53. Gabriel, "Cameroon's Neopatrimonial Dilemma," 173.
54. Fisher, "In Living Memory," 24.
55. Grovogui, "Come to Africa," 438, 442.
56. Ibid., 444–46.
57. Grovogui, "Come to Africa," 427; Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 406.
58. Kabasele's song was written to celebrate the achievement of Congo's independence. Appealing for unity among the contending political groups in the final stages of the process leading to independence, the song was first performed by Kabasele and his group African Jazz in Brussels on the occasion of the Round Table Conference on Congo's independence. The song names the politicians involved and their parties, praising the success of the round table and the achievement of impending independence. Knowing as we do the tragic fate of that short-lived unity in Congo, the layering of this song over the scenes of Cameroon's independence expresses the bitter disappointments of that process. See Jules Bagalwa-Mapatano, "La chanson populaire politique face à la violence politique au Congo-Zaïre post-Mobutu," in *African Media Cultures: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. R. M. Beck and F. Wittmann (Köln, Germany: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2004), 198–99.
59. Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*, 14.
60. Group *Mu*, eds., *Collages*, 1978.
61. Wees, *Recycled Images*, 50–53.
62. Ibid., 52.
63. Ibid.
64. Anthony Bogues, "The Colonial Regime of Knowledge: Film, Archives and Re-imaging Colonial Power," in *Film and the End of Empire*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe (Basingstoke, UK: BFI and Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 279.
65. Ibid., 278.
66. Jean-Marie Teno, "Interview with Nwachukwu Ukadike," in *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers*, ed. Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 306.
67. Ibid.
68. Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 404–7.
69. Timothy Mitchell, "Economists and the Economy in the Twentieth Century," in *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and its Epistemological Others*, ed. George Steinmetz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 126–41.
70. Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 406.
71. Compare with Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 405.
72. Stuart Hall, "Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage,' Re-imagining the Post-nation," *Third Text* 13, no. 49 (1999): 6.
73. Bates, *When Things Fell Apart*, 57, 62.
74. Ibid., 64–67.
75. David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London, UK: Verso, 1999).
76. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 1–2.

77. Martin R. Atangana, *French Investment in Colonial Cameroon: The FIDES Era (1946–1957)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 9.
78. *Ibid.*, 2.
79. *Ibid.*, 18.
80. Atangana, *French Investment in Colonial Cameroon*, 135.
81. Alter, “The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film,” 170, citing Hans Richter, 1940.
82. Grovogui, “Come to Africa,” 437; Krishna, “Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations,” 404–7.
83. Anthony Bogues, “And What about the Human? Freedom, Human Emancipation and the Radical Imagination,” *Boundary 2* 39, no. 3 (2012): 38.
84. Anthony Bogues, *Empire of Liberty: Power, Desire, and Freedom* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press and University Press of New England, 2010), 39.
85. Grovogui, “Come to Africa,” 438; also Krishna, “Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations,” 406; and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995).
86. Grovogui, “Come to Africa,” 438.
87. Martin R. Atangana, *The End of French Rule in Cameroon* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010), 13–16; Meredith Terretta, *Nation of Outlaws, State of Violence: Nationalism, Grassfields Tradition, and State Building in Cameroon* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 88–93.
88. Terretta, *Nation of Outlaws, State of Violence*, 97–133; Richard A. Joseph, “Ruben Um Nyobé and the ‘Kamerun’ Rebellion,” *African Affairs* 73, no. 293 (1974): 428–48.
89. Terretta, *Nation of Outlaws, State of Violence*, 2014; Atangana, *The End of French Rule in Cameroon*, 2010; Nicodemus Fru Awasom, “Politics and Constitution-making in Francophone Cameroon, 1959–1960,” *Africa Today* 39, no. 4 (2002): 3–30.
90. Richard A. Joseph, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the UPC Rebellion* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1977); Terretta, *Nation of Outlaws, State of Violence*, 2014.
91. Joseph, “Ruben um Nyobé and the ‘Kamerun’ Rebellion,” 435.
92. Atangana, *The End of French Rule in Cameroon*, 17.
93. Awasom, “Politics and Constitution-making,” 2002; Atangana, *The End of French Rule in Cameroon*, 2010; Terretta, *Nation of Outlaws, State of Violence*, 2014.
94. Atangana, *The End of French Rule in Cameroon*, 62–63, 122–23.
95. Siba N’Zatioula Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-determination in International Law* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 182, 195.
96. Cf. Fisher, “In Living Memory,” 2007.
97. Atangana, *The End of French Rule in Cameroon*, 92; Abel Eyinga, *L’UPC: une révolution manquée?* (Paris, France: Chaka, 1991).
98. Awasom, “Politics and Constitution-making,” 2002.
99. Martin R. Atangana, “French Capitalism and Nationalism in Cameroon,” *African Studies Review* 40, no. 1 (1997): 103. Atangana provides additional detail in his book, citing several sources which describe the burning of villages, intensive air raids, killing of thousands of unarmed civilians, and the use of napalm. *Ibid.*, 117–23.
100. Atangana, *The End of French Rule in Cameroon*, 89–95; Meredith Terretta, “Cameroonian Nationalists Go Global: From the Forest Maquis to a Pan-African Accra,” *Journal of African History* 51, no. 2 (2010): 189–212.
101. Atangana, *The End of French Rule in Cameroon*, 125–26.
102. Eckhard Breitinger, “‘Lamentations Patriotiques’: Writers, Censors and Politics in Cameroon,” *African Affairs* 92, no. 369 (1993): 557–75; Baffour Ankomah, “Cameroon’s Forbidden Topics,” *Index on Censorship* 17, no. 2 (1988): 22–24; Richard Bjornson, *The African Quest for Freedom and Identity: Cameroonian Writing and the National Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

103. Grovogui, "Come to Africa," 444.
104. Ibid., 438.
105. Ibid., 445.
106. Teno, "Interview with Melissa Thackway," 205.
107. Krishna, "Race, Amnesia and the Education of International Relations," 2001.

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