ORIGINAL ARTICLE

After inclusion. Thinking with Julian Go's 'Thinking against empire: Anticolonial thought as social theory'

Olivia U. Rutazibwa ⬤

London School of Economics and Political
Sciences, London, UK

Correspondence
Olivia U. Rutazibwa, London School of
Economics and Political Sciences, London, UK.
Email: o.u.rutazibwa@lse.ac.uk

Abstract

This contribution engages Go's generative invitation to *think against empire* by thinking through the epistemic and disciplinary implications of such endeavour. I zoom in on the need to explicitly address the purpose and ethos of scholarly inquiry and how that translates into decolonial academic praxis. Thinking with Go's invitation to *think against empire*, I feel compelled to constructively engage the limitations and impossibilities of decolonising disciplines such as Sociology. I glean from the various attempts at inclusion and diversity in society and argue that adding or including Anticolonial Social Thought/marginalised voices and peoples in the existing corridors of power—such as canons or advisory boards—is at best *a minimal rather than a sufficient condition* of decolonisation or going *against empire*. This raises the question of what comes *after inclusion*. Rather than offer a 'correct' or single alternative anticolonial way, the paper explores the pluriversally inspired method(ological) avenues that appear when we commit to thinking about what happens *after inclusion* when the goal is decolonisation. I expand on my 'discovery' and engagement with the figure and political thought of Thomas Sankara and how this led me to abolitionist thought. The paper then offers a

patchwork of methodological considerations when engaging the *what, how, why*?—questions of research. I engage with questions of purpose, mastery, and colonial science and turn to the generative potential of approaches such as grounding, Connected Sociologies, epistemic Blackness, and curating as methods. Thinking with abolition and Shilliam's (2015) distinction between colonial and decolonial science, between knowledge *production* and knowledge *cultivation*, the paper invites us to not only think of what we need to do more of or better when taking Anticolonial Social Thought seriously, but also what we might need to let go of.

1 | INTRODUCTION

This contribution engages Go's generative invitation to *think against empire* by thinking through the epistemic and disciplinary implications of such endeavour. I zoom in on the need to explicitly address the purpose and ethos of scholarly inquiry and how that translates into decolonial academic praxis.

I am very excited about the rich engagements in Go's work—as well as my own (re)discoveries of—with understudied anticolonial figures *as thinkers* such Mabini, Mukerjee, S. Césaire, Cabral, Nguyen An Ninh and others. What appears through these engagements, are the various possible sociological imaginations of worlds and ways of living together that do not reproduce the colonial status quo. At the same time, I think that the text holds, but stops short of fully embracing or centring the question of what the anticolonial implications are for our discipline(s). I have chosen to focus on this question as it is a challenge that also appears in society more widely now that more sectors are taking note of calls to decolonise, include and diversify—three very different goals.

Thinking with Go's invitation to *think against empire*, I feel compelled to constructively engage the limitations and impossibilities of decolonising disciplines such as Sociology. I glean from the various attempts at inclusion and diversity in society and argue that adding or including Anticolonial Social Thought/marginalised voices and peoples in the existing corridors of power—such as canons or advisory boards—is at best *a minimal rather than a sufficient condition* of decolonisation or going *against empire*. This raises the question of what comes *after inclusion*.

The first part of the paper: *On 'knowing', 'forgetting' and organised, wilful ignorance* starts off with some insights from the various recent calls to globalise, diversify, include and decolonise just about everything, both within and outside the academy. I build on Sven Lindqvist's opening and closing lines in *Exterminate all the Brutes* to tackle the epistemic conundrum of simultaneously knowing, not knowing, and forgetting. Lindqvist and others remind us that not knowing/being (wilfully) ignorant and forgetting, are very similar but not the same; and that we are having these conversations against a background of sustained structural colonial amnesia. These reflections lead me to argue that if we do not explicitly address and centre the question of what Sociology and academic Thought, organised in their various disciplines, were and are set out to do, we risk reproducing what neoliberal corporate engagements with calls for decolonisation, diversity and inclusion have been doing so well: adding and stirring at the service of a silent and disavowed reproduction of the colonial status quo. In the second part: *'From "discovering" Thomas Sankara to abolishing International Development Studies'*, I offer a narrative example of my own "discovery" of the figure of *Thomas Sankara*

as an anti-imperial political thinker. I do this to further address questions of how and why we (want to) know (or not), and how engaging his thought led me to abolitionist and reparative approaches in International Relations (IR) and International Development as fields of study/ideology and practice/industry. The third part: *On Mastery and Curation: some epistemic and method(ological) implications of centring anticolonial purpose* ties the empirical examples to ongoing scholarly discussions about the epistemological implications of decoloniality. This section offers a patchwork of methodological considerations when engaging the *what, how, why?*—questions of research. I engage with questions of purpose, insights by Grovogui (2017) on the origins of our disciplines and what they were set out to do, as well as (de)colonial science and knowledge cultivation (Shilliam, 2015) as a diagnosis of the colonial status quo and its potential epistemic alternatives. I am inspired by an eclectic set of authors to help us think beyond the minimal imperative and condition of unmuting silenced voices in places of power. Singh (2018) points to *Unthink[ing] Mastery*; Azoulay (2019) to thinking about *Potential History* and how this relates to *Unlearning Imperialism*. I then turn to the generative potential of approaches such as *Connected Sociologies* (Bhambra, 2014), *epistemic Blackness*, *re-membering* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Stack, 2017), and *curation* (el-Malik and Kamola, 2017) to illustrate the method(ological) implication of connecting the desire to take Anticolonial Social Thought serious to our disciplines. So, rather than offer a 'correct' or single alternative anticolonial way, the paper explores the pluriversally inspired method(ological) avenues that appear when we commit to thinking about what happens *after inclusion* when the goal is decolonisation or *thinking against empire*. In *Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary* (2019) editors Kothari et al. describe the pluriversal as follows:

> [the various entries in the dictionary] ask: What is so badly wrong with everyday life today? Who is responsible for it? What would a better life look like, and how do we get there? As feminists for the "*sostenibilidad de la vida*" ask: "What is a life worth living? And, how can conditions that allow it to happen be met?" 27 Together, these perspectives compose a "pluriverse": a world where many worlds fit, as the Zapatistas of Chiapas put it. All people's worlds should co-exist with dignity and peace without being subjected to diminishment, exploitation and misery. A pluriversal world overcomes patriarchal attitudes, racism, casteism, and other forms of discrimination. Here, people re-learn what it means to be a humble part of "nature", leaving behind narrow anthropocentric notions of progress based on economic growth.
>
> (Kothari et al., 2019, p. xxviii)

In conclusion, the text returns to the offerings of reparative and abolitionist approaches, that is: what do we need to let go of rather than enrich or diversify, even if the add-on is Anticolonial Thought, and what for, that is: to right wrongs and actively not contribute to the reproduction of the status quo. I argue that the anticolonial challenge raised against metrocentric Sociology contains the question of what Social Thought at the service of *life-over-death* rather than *power-for-control-and-mastery* could look like. The paper combines abolitionist thought with the idea of the pluriversal as a way to seriously engage Anticolonial Social Thought and is thus an invitation to not only think of what we need to do more of or better but also what we might need to let go of.

2 | ON 'KNOWING', 'FORGETTING' AND ORGANISED, WILFUL IGNORANCE

Ever since the book was suggested to me by a dear friend during the International Studies Association's (ISA) Annual Convention in 2019 in Toronto, the opening and closing paragraphs of Sven Lindqvist's *Exterminate All the Brutes* ([1992] 1997) has been haunting—in the best and most generative of ways—my academic and pedagogical thinking.[1] It reads: 'You already know enough. So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions.' (Lindqvist, 1997, pp. 2 and 172) The paragraph preceding the last one says: 'Everywhere in the world where knowledge is being suppressed, knowledge that, if it were made known, would shatter our image of the world and force us to question ourselves—everywhere there, *Heart of Darkness* is being enacted.' (Lindqvist, 1997, p. 172).

The generative haunting resides in the seeming contradiction between the two sets of statements: one that invites a balancing act between acknowledging that we know (enough), and that knowledge is actively and systematically being suppressed (at the service of a colonial status quo), thus suggesting that we do not know (enough)? An additional aspect of the haunting is the realisation that those of us in academia or other corridors of power where knowledge is produced and disseminated, like journalism for instance, have been socialised to be active participants in this organised system of courage suppression and amnesia.

I have come to understand that these two seemingly contradictory statements of knowing enough but lacking courage and collectively being subjected to a system of knowledge suppression, coexist in the same time-space reality in our the main corridors of knowledge-making, of which our various disciplines are the most organised and authoritative ones. Initiatives and desires to contribute to anti-colonial knowledges, those that actively fight against the reproduction of the *Heart of Darkness*, have to attend to this contradiction.

I was reminded of this most recently during the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter protest marches and the ensuing mainstream reception (and co-optation/commodification) of anti-racist and decolonial agendas in our various metropoles. The systemic (reproduction of) the disposability of Black lives, known and reported on for centuries now, was in 2020 yet again registered with an astounding level of surprise in many (White) progressive circles. Surprise and discovery take centre-stage (and a lot of space, time, and oxygen) there where a renewed commitment to anger and politics of refusal to the colonial status quo of the disposability of the lives of the global majority is beyond urgent. Instead we saw 'black square' Instagram clictivism and antiracist posturing by the major (global racially) exploitative brands, the nevertheless important toppling and vandalisation of statutes (Colston, Leopold II, …), lots of online antiracist podcast and reading list initiatives, academic roundtables, special issues, a proliferation of institutional EDI ('equality, diversity and inclusion') initiatives, academic cluster and token hires and of course the decolonisation of the curriculum and diversification of readinglists and the syllabi (Again, two very different activities). We saw political responses in countries like Belgium and the Netherlands, with parliamentarian and government initiatives to explore the colonial past (the failed Belgian 'Congo Commission'[2]) and apologies for slavery and empire (apologies by the Dutch Prime Minister Rutte in December 2022).

While observing all of this with very mixed feelings (because we do not have the time, nor the luxury to get stuck at the level of cynicism only) I found Gloria Wekker's concept of White Innocence (2017) helpful to make sense of this contradiction of knowing/not knowing. She offers: 'Innocence (…) thickly describes part of dominant Dutch way of being in the world. The claim of innocence, however, is a double edged sword: it contains not knowing, but also not wanting to know, capturing what philosopher Charles W. Mills has described as the epistemology of ignorance' (Wekker, 2017, p. 17). To understand how innocence is accomplished and maintained (p. 18) she develops the analytic of the *cultural archive*: '(…) is located in many things, in the way we think, do things, and look at the world, in what we find (sexually) attractive, in how our affective and rational economies are organized and intertwined. Most important, it is between our ears and in our hearts and souls. (…) its content is also silently cemented in policies, in organizational rules, in popular and sexual cultures, and in common-sense everyday knowledge, and all of this is based on four hundred years of imperial rule.' (Wekker, 2017, p. 19).

It is from this haunted place of organised (not) knowing (enough) and the various seemingly inclusive practices of co-optation at the service of the status quo, that I will seek to engage Julian Go's invitation to *think against empire* and imagine Anticolonial Thought as Social Theory. To Julian Go's invitation I add one to sit and reflect on what comes *after inclusion*. Inclusion of those voices and practices of Anticolonial Social Thought so beautifully offered in Go's work. In what follows I engage a grounded (part two) and theoretical/analytical illustrations (part three) of what such exercise could look like.

3 | FROM 'DISCOVERING' THOMAS SANKARA TO ABOLITIONIST THOUGHT

In 2011 I was working as a journalist in Belgium. Our magazine was invited to send a reporter to Burkina Faso in the context of the bi-annual film festival FESPACO. Being the Africa editor, I got the assignment and my editor in

chief tasked me to—apart from reporting on the festival—pitch a story on Burkina Faso that would still be relevant 2 months after my return, when the print issue of our magazine was to be published.

Thinking with the notion of 'not knowing', to be frank, at that time I knew very little about Burkina Faso. A dry, poor country in West-Africa, formerly colonised by the French. This lack of details did not come out of a particular disinterest in the country or region—on the contrary. Rather, it was the outcome of an above average education in postcolonial continental Europe. In today's era of search engines and the Internet, it was not difficult to find factual information about Burkina Faso; discerning what a meaningful feature story could be about, required something else though.

I turned to those around me who I knew to be more knowledgeable and equally emotionally invested in the continent, like my dad and my friends of the Rwandan and wider African communities in Belgium. I approached them with the simple question: 'If I had to tell one story about Burkina Faso, what should I write about?' The answers were quasi unanimous: 'Thomas Sankara. Write about him. The late president who renamed his country *Haute Volta* into *Burkina Faso*, the *Country of Upright Peoples*'. Other lofty details followed: he was against imperialism, corruption, and opulence; he successfully tackled food insecurity in his short 4 years in power (1983–1987); he believed in and actively promoted gender equality in private and public life; he deployed massive reforestation, vaccination and literacy programmes in the country; he was vehemently against aid-dependency, pro self-sufficiency and called on all African nations to refuse to pay their so-called debt; he had been assassinated. And that, if he was known in the West, it was often as the *Che of Africa* (as he was otherwise unintelligible to us in the racist postcolony without this point of reference).

In the course of these conversations, it dawned on me that I had heard of Sankara before. Not in school or on the news, where knowledge is automatically legitimised, but from my migrant/refugee dad hidden among the many other (hi)stories he conveyed to us in passing. I had probably filed it under the many dismissible stories and insights which I failed to recognise as important or valuable as they did not connect with any of the stories in the White World we were exposed to. (There was no point of reference.)

In the end I went to Burkina Faso to write a story on the spirit of Thomas Sankara in the streets of the capital Ouagadougou. Remembering him was banned from public life but his presence was everywhere. In peoples' stories, memories and sensemaking of everyday life.

Three years later, and 3 decades after his assassination, a popular uprising ousted Sankara's successor, closest friend and one of his alleged assassins Blaise Compaoré.

Around the same time I started teaching International Development Studies at the University of Portsmouth and I included the study of speeches by Thomas Sankara as required course reading: His address in front of the UN General Assembly in 1984 where he speaks 'on behalf of all of those who suffer, wherever they may be', and expresses solidarity with Black peoples, Native Americans, the unemployed, women, with mother and their children dying of preventable diseases, with artists, journalist forced to tell lies because of capitalism, exploited athletes, the sick looking to science for solutions, but finding a system that has been taken over by gun merchants, those suffering from the destruction of nature, Palestinians and their Anti-Zionist Jewish brothers (sic), struggles and peoples in Iraq and Iran, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Ireland, Grenada, East Timor, the ANC in South Africa, he speaks up on behalf of all those whose voice are not heard or taken seriously.[3] We studied his speech in Harlem—'our White House is in Black Harlem'—which he gave the day before his UN speech as well as his various political speeches in Burkina Faso, setting out his political programmes (Sankara, 1988). We watched documentaries about him to make his insights tangible beyond rational cognition. (After all, he landed in a context void of points of reference. A context that called for reductive comparisons like the *Che of Africa*.)

We soon discovered that many of the issues raised and tackled by Sankara in the '80s, and how he stressed their interdependence, prefigured for instance the 2000 UN Millennium Development Goals. The main difference, we figured out, was the stance on self-determination and self-reliance: who was behind the steering wheel in both imagining, setting and implementing these agendas. There was a world of difference between Sankara's in Burkina Faso grounded popular democracy with global outlook and the Western-led technocracy of the UN system and other global governance bodies.

So, in a way, again, we knew, without knowing.

Something more important happened after the so called 'discovery' and inclusion of Sankara into that canon. Engaging Sankara, but also Aimé Césaire for that matter, as required material in the course at the start of the Bachelor International Development Studies, pushed us early on to address the untenability of the idea of International Aid (after slavery and colonialism).

We went beyond the various reform-inspiring critical approaches that recognise that a lot of what we set out as so-called development goals never come to fruition. They tend to focus on technicalities, capabilities or maybe on the lack of political will or conflicting geopolitical interests. If we start the story with the insights of Césaire (1955) or Sankara or Walter Rodney (1972) for that matter—not as mere empirical fait divers to colour or diversify our sources of knowledge, but as Go invites us to do as (Anticolonial) Social or Political Thought, the mere notion of former formal colonial powers framing their relations with the formerly formally colonised world as 'aid' or 'development coopera-tion' is not only untenable but also obscene. At the same time, it makes sense in a postcolonial understanding of the world order, where colonial power-dynamics are trying to reproduce themselves amongst others through invisibili-sation and disavowal. The International Development Aid logics and practices is one such sight where the colonial status quo is being reproduced and disavowed.

Thus, thinking with, and maybe extending Julian Go's invitation to engage Anticolonial Social Thought, I turn to the generative invitation embedded in abolitionist thought (see e.g., Davis et al., 2022; Gilmore Wilson, 2020). To move beyond inclusion, beyond valorising marginalised knowledges and deploying reductive comparisons to make them intelligible, if we follow Lindqvist's gaze, we are called to also address the question of what needs to go, beyond that what needs to be enriched or reformed. I gave the example of International Development Studies (see also Rutazibwa, 2018) because I only recently joined the world of Sociology, but also to point to the fact that this is not a Sociology specific charge. More generally, it is one that pertains how we have organised and sacralised knowing through canons and disciplines. I am also not advocating that these insights of abolition (for instance to make space for a logic of repair and reparation rather than aid) can be simply mapped onto other disciplines like Sociology, Politi-cal Science, or, as I have previously tried to think through for IR (Rutazibwa, 2020). I think that just 'simply' raising the question is generative and important in and of itself. (As such, it is clearly not to be confused with 'cancel culture'.)

This is especially important if we think of the fact that many of these disciplines, and disciplines and canons in and of themselves, came to be at the service of the rise, formation and reproduction global racial capitalism organ-ised in nation-states. In the next section I turn to these broader questions of what comes *after inclusion* in relation to our knowledge philosophies (epistemologies, methodologies) and practices (methodologies and methods) expressed through our disciplinary and canonical desires of expertise and mastery. I explore examples that expand the reach of our imaginations of praxis and purpose(s). What needs to go? What needs to stay? What needs to change?

4 | ON MASTERY AND CURATION: SOME EPISTEMIC AND METHOD(OLOGICAL) IMPLICATIONS OF CENTRING ANTICOLONIAL PURPOSE

> If we are committed to anticolonial thought, our starting point must be one of disobedient relationality that always questions, and thus is not beholden to, normative academic logics.
>
> (McKittrick, 2021, p. 45)

> Method-making is the generating and gathering of ideas – across-with-outside-within-against norma-tive disciplines – that seek out liberation within our present system of knowledge. The goal is not to *find* liberation, but to seek it out.
>
> (McKittrick, 2021, pp. 47–48)

One of the ways to address the question of what comes *after inclusion* is to turn to a version of the three basic ques-tions we ask our students and ourselves when designing research: *what, how, why?* In what follows I take them as a

compass; not to offer an alternative framework. Instead, I curate a patchwork of potential diagnoses and alternatives to illustrate what a pluriversal (see e.g., Kothari et al., 2019), incomplete (Nyamnjoh, 2017)[4] engagement with the implications of *after inclusion against empire* could look like.

Usually, the *what* question covers the topic and more or less operationalised research questions or puzzle of a project. Go invites us to shift our gaze of social inquiry towards anticolonial voices. 'The epistemic commitment of my project is to consider a standpoint (heterogeneous though it may be) that has not yet been considered', he writes. 'The goal is not to replace one standpoint for another but to reflectively proliferate them.' (Go, 2023) I fully align with this invitation to proliferate and include against the background of the (methodological) Whiteness (see e.g., Sabaratnam, 2020) of ours disciplines.

At the same time, it is also a reminder that the *what?*—question is or ought to be closely followed by an engagement with the *why?*—question. I would argue that this is true for all approaches and research projects; decolonial approaches make a point of being explicit about it. They also stress the importance of having a motivation that goes beyond academia or scholarship. This does not translate into doing practical problem solving or policy-oriented research only. It is rather a commitment to knowing at the service of live in dignity of this planet's majority (human and beyond human, sentient and other beings). By invoking the colonial, this abstract commitment is historically and geographically grounded in a context of violence that needs reparative tending to, or strategies to avoid participation in its reproduction. This requires detailed study, diagnosis, and deconstruction of any chosen context for how a colonial status quo is reproduced even amidst apparent and constant change. Here, I would say that our scholarship itself and the context in which it operates, should undergo a similar scrutiny and diagnosis. By calling for inclusion and proliferation of anticolonial thinkers as Social Thought, Go points to a first very important site of colonial reproduction: that of the knowledge sources we engage and take serious when trying to make sense of our social worlds. There is a glaring absence of the global majority, or maybe more aptly: a systematic over-representation of White-Western standpoints. To this site of reproduction we can add attention to the genealogy of our disciplines and chosen approaches. In what context did they come to be, for what purpose? Grovogui (2017) traces the appearance of our distinct disciplines and the role of archives to reflect of what a decolonial repurposing should be mindful of. Of the various disciplines that came to be towards the 19th century he writes: 'These were all bound up in the desire of imperial states for social control and social engineering on behalf of nation-building within the context of the industrial revolution, urbanization, rural dislocation, and the administration of formal empires.' (Grovogui, 2017, p. 23) For him the decolonisation of the archives needs to 'strip modern archives of their central function of preservations of the notions of sovereignty, citizenship, and subjectivity, along with those of community (including the commonwealth), race and state.' (Grovogui, 2017, p. 33) He goes on to state that decolonising them should consist of 'imagining non-hegemonic and non-racialized archives worldwide on the basis of epistemologies and ontologies that are not beholden to the current functions of archives.' (Grovogui, 2017, p. 33) He ties the purpose of decolonising archives to a shared desire of 'plausible futures that hold greater (probable) promises for justice and postcolonial reconciliation.' (Grovogui, 2017, p. 36) This resonates with what Azoulay offers through the notion of *Potential History*, worth citing at length here:

> Potential history does not mend worlds after violence but rewinds to the moment before the violence occurred and sets off from there. This can hardly be imagined without rehearsals, since our daily habits are so entangled in the operation of imperial technologies. Such rehearsals in nonimperial political thinking and archival practice are not undertaken in preparation for an imminent day of reckoning, but rather as a mode of being with others differently. (…) Unlearning imperialism means unlearning what one's ancestors inherited from their ancestors, and them from theirs, as solid facts and recognizable signposts, in order to attend to their origin and render imperial plunder impossible once again.
>
> (Azoulay, 2019, pp. 10–13)

We can think of this as committing to a radical overhaul of the purpose of our disciplines and practices such as archives/-ing, pending us abolishing them. It seems important to tie these activities to a resolve to not reproduce

mastery, and to remember that this mastery does not magically disappear just because we thematically focus on the anti- or decolonial. I have found Singh particularly generative in trying to understand how logics of extraction and mastery are reproduced even in a context of anticolonial research.

> Precisely because mastery is "everywhere", she writes, "mine is an impossible project whose impossibility is what has made it inescapable for me. I attempt to unfold mastery rather than foreclose it, and to dwell on its emergence where it is least expected. Rather than define mastery (and in so doing to reproduce it), I am across these pages to trace some of mastery's qualities, drives, corollaries, and repetitions across two crucially entangled moments of decolonization: the anticolonial and the postcolonial."
>
> (Singh, 2018, pp. 1–2)[5]

In a similar spirit of Singh's mastery, Robinson (2020, pp. 2–3) offers the evocative image of *hungry listening*:

> As a form of perception, "hungry listening" is derived from two Halq'eméylem words: shxwelítemelh (the adjective for settler or white person's methods/things) and xwélalà:m (the word for listening). shxwelítemelh comes from the word xwelítem (white settler) and more precisely means "starving person." The word emerges from the historical encounter between xwélmexw (Stó:lō people) and the largest influx of settlers to the territory during the gold rush. In 1858, thousands of xwelítem (largely men) arrived in a bodily state of starvation, and also brought with them a hunger for gold. (…) I use shxwelítemelh and xwélalà:m individually and together throughout the book in order to address positionalities of the listening encounter (how we listen as Indigenous, settler, and variously positioned subjects), but also to guide this book's larger questions around the ontological and epistemological stakes of what listening is. (…) shxwelítemelh xwlala:m / "hungry listening" names settler colonial forms of perception. However, their superimposed positionality also seeks to acknowledge the current reality of many if not most Indigenous people at various points of perceptual in-between: of knowing, learning, and using resurgent forms of perception. (…) shxwelítemelh xwélalà:m does not reduce simply to "listening through whiteness;" it is a state of perception irreducible to racial identity.

Thus, paying attention to the genealogies of our disciplines, walking with thinkers such as Singh, Grovogui or Robinson, is less about assigning a fatal, inescapable impact to colonial history than about investigating what traces of coloniality persist in the present. For this exercise, and especially when seeking inspiration for radically alternative approaches to knowledge making, I often turn to what Robbie Shilliam offers in his book *The Black Pacific* (2015). He gives us a useful distinction between colonial science and decolonial science, a distinction that allows us to align ourselves with the idea of knowledge *cultivation* rather than *production*.

> "To my mind", he writes, "decolonial science cultivates knowledge, it does not produce knowledge. Using the Latin roots of these words, we could say that to produce knowledge is to lengthen, prolong or extend, whereas to cultivate knowledge is to till, to turn matter around and fold back on itself so as to rebind and encourage growth. Knowledge production is less a creative endeavour and more a process of accumulation and imperial extension so that (post)colonized peoples could only consume or extend someone else's knowledge (of themselves)". (Chatterjee, 1998) In short, a colonial science produces knowledge of and for subalterns. Alternatively, knowledge cultivation is a necessarily creative pursuit as it requires the practitioner to turn over and oxygenate the past. Most importantly, cultivation also infers habitation, which means that knowledge is creatively released as the practitioner enfolds her/himself in the communal matter of her/his inquiry. What is more, this constant oxygenation process – a circulatory one – necessarily interacts with a wider biotope, enfolding matter from other habitations. To cultivate knowledge of deep relation can therefore be understood as "grounding".
>
> (Shilliam, 2015, pp. 24–25)

With this, Shilliam invokes Rastafarian cosmologies, which we also find in Walter Rodney's work. In *Groundings with My Brothers* Rodney addresses ways "to break out of this Babylonian captivity" (1969, p. 66).

> "I suggest first that the intellectual, the academic, within his [sic] own discipline, has to attack those distortions which white imperialism, white cultural imperialism, have produced in all branches of scholarship", he writes. "(…) My second point is that the black intellectual has to move beyond his [sic] own discipline to challenge the social myth, which exists in the society as a whole. In other words, this myth about the multiracial society. (…) Thirdly, *the black intellectual, the black academic, must attach himself to the activity of the black masses*. (…) I was prepared to go anywhere that any group of black people were prepared to sit down to talk and listen. Because that is Black Power, that is one of the elements, a sitting-down together to reason, to "ground" as the brothers say. We have to "ground together"."
>
> (Rodney, 1969, pp. 66–67)

It is in this spirit of knowledge cultivation that certain research praxes or methods come to the fore as worth exploring further when we are *thinking against empire*. This brings us to the *how?*—question. It is anything but a technical question only, nor one that has singular answer of the best, only and 'right' methods. We are also reminded that considerations of exploitation, extractivism and silencing also come up when deciding on the *how*, and hence that the distinction between the what, why, how questions is an artificial one for analytical purposes, rather than one that can be maintained in practice.

I believe that *thinking against empire* understood decolonially, contains an invitation to also proliferate our methods as well as redimension or radically question—in abolitionist terms—certain practices like canonisation or discipline building for the sake of it. I am advocating an explicit commitment to a plethora of practices that have not themselves or the discipline as their raison d'être. In this sense, one could read for instance Bhambra's offering of *Connected Sociologies* (2014) as both a methodology and method. Similarly, when Wekker (2017) calls in *White Innocence* for treating The Netherlands and Suriname as one analytical space, we can imagine this as a replicable practice in the way we design our research. Building on what Rodney offers in grounding, in recent years I have been exploring the generative potential of something I call *epistemic Blackness* as method. It could easily be misinterpreted as an essentialist identitarian move, but as a method, epistemic Blackness is about centring the knowledges and experiences of peoples of African descent/ (politically) Black peoples. Sabaratnam (2020) reminds us of what centring Blackness is about: 'One way of doing this might be, as Wynter does, to re-centre blackness as the starting point for the embrace of the "human". Another way of saying the same about the stakes of engaging epistemic Blackness is to say that it interpolates our knowledge-making efforts on the extent to which they engage questions of life and death and the unevenly distributed value of life. The argument is not that a focus on Black/African experiences and knowledges is the only way to go about this, but that it saves us crucial time. 'We have no time', McKittrick pointedly writes (2021, p. 6). In her book *Dear Science* she points at the almost by default interdisciplinary nature of Black engagement with knowing, and how it is at the service of challenging racism. She also connects it to something akin to what Singh seeks to address when talking about mastery. '(…) black people bring together various sources and texts and narratives not to capture something or someone, but to question the analytical work of capturing, and the desire to capture, something or someone.' (McKittrick, 2021, p. 4) Christina Share looks in the same direction when offering her thoughts on the idea of wake work:

> (…) I've been trying to articulate a method of encountering the past that is not past. A method along the lines of a sitting with, a gathering, and a tracking of phenomena that disproportionately and devastatingly affect Black peoples any and everywhere we are. I've been thinking of this gathering, this collecting and reading towards a new analytic, as the wake and wake work, and I am interested in plotting, mapping, and collecting the archives of the everyday of Black immanent and imminent death and in tracking the ways we resist, rupture and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially.
>
> (Sharpe, 2016, p. 13)

Finally, to do this in practice, especially if one finds oneself not to engage with epistemic Blackness directly, I have found the idea of *curating* as offered in Shiera el-Malik and Isaac Kamola's edited volume *The politics of African Anticolonial Archive* (2017) quite inspiring and appealing as a way to envision what knowledge *cultivation* might look like. el-Malik sees curating as 'collecting materials and organizing according to a set of meaningful (…) as an act of contemporary politics' even (el-Malik, 2017, pp. 40–42). She draws 'on a practice of art because there is something about how artists have to confront materials, and contemplate how to curate it, that disrupts notions of expertise. (…). The process of curating then is one that is alive with possibility' (el-Malik, 2017, p. 50). Pedagogically, the image of curation can be a powerful alternative to guiding students to find that 'gap in the literature'. It holds something that might help us think about and practice how not to re-erect a canon but to embrace the generative power of situated randomness.

5 | CONCLUSION: COMMITTING TO THE IMPLICATIONS OF ANTICOLONIAL THOUGHT

I moved to the UK from Belgium a decade ago to teach European and International Development Studies. Compared to continental Europe, Britain was known as the place with much greater acceptance from the so-called critical approaches. Compared to back home, I did not have to explain to anyone that Postcolonial approaches were not just an opinion but a valid, scholarly way of making sense of the world.

Quite soon though, it became clear that so much 'acceptance' and 'open-mindedness' came with incredible systemic skills of co-optation, commodification, and neutralising of the radical transformative potential of these critical approaches. 'We've done postcolonialism, that's old now, what's new?' seemed to be the message. I believe that anyone involved in the many 'turns' in the social sciences easily recognises this; so does anyone following debates on decolonisation and decoloniality today. For some it has been a reason to abandon it and/or move on to the next 'turn' maybe. If we understand the anticolonial imperative in postcolonial, decolonial or anticolonial approaches as in excess of the academy, its various disciplines and their raison d'être, and instead as a politics of will-to-life over will-to-power (Dussel, 2008, p. 78), that is, as a politics concerned with the structures of premature death and violent systems of imposition, extraction, exploitation and destruction, or ecocide, epistemicide, and genocide, I do not think that we have the luxury to abandon it, just because desires for the status quo have occupied it. As we understand it as a project that cannot be abandoned we also see that—at the end of the day—what label we give it, is of little importance.

This is how I understand and walk with Julian Go's invitation to *think against empire* in the social sciences, and through Anticolonial Social Thought in particular. With Lindqvist, I have tried to think about the implications of such invitation, beyond the minimal condition of indeed proliferating our sources of knowledge and including them in our existing structures. Anti- or decolonial invitations push us to courageously look at these structures too. How they relate to the colonial status quo, by reproducing and invisibilising its violences, and our desires to be part of it. With Sankara, I tried to illustrate the tension between forgetting that we know, and how remembering can denaturalise a whole discipline/industry (International Development/Studies). With the patchwork of method(ological) examples I tried to speak to the outstanding imperative of confronting our desires of mastery. I then tried to illustrate what a pluriversal engagement with this challenge could look like: forever incomplete knowledge cultivation against the colonial status quo. Disciplines and canons are not necessarily not part of this endeavour, but they might need re-dimensioning as just one of the infinite ways to make sense of the world. As scholars in the ivory tower, this entails a double challenge: how do we actively disentangle ourselves from the desires of mastery and canonisation? How do we transform our pedagogies to demystify the disciplines, while teaching in our various departments in the neoliberal university where there is always space for the new, but much less for the abolitionist revolutionary? I end with this inviting quote by Stack in the same *The Politics of African Anticolonial Archive*, by way of expressing my gratitude to be part of this collective exercise of what *thinking against*

empire could mean for our Social Sciences *after inclusion*: 'Social science then need not to analyse and summarise, but rather remember, cherish, curate and teach these anticolonial visions—and teach them not as bygone chapters in a linear history from which the present moment is receded, but rather as open-ended questions and imperatives, born of a disjointed present, a present which both forgets and remembers what it had promised itself.' (Stack, 2017, p. 254).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

ORCID

Olivia U. Rutazibwa 🔟 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1123-2355

ENDNOTES

[1] I am not the only one inspired by Lindqvist's bold statement to think through knowledges and pedagogies. Naeem Inayatullah's recent book *Pedagogy as Encounter* (2022) thinks with Lindqvist to contemplate the impossibility or our unwillingness to learn (pp. 1–2).

[2] See for example, my refusal in an open letter to be part of the expert group that was to assist the parliamentary Congo Commission here: https://oliviarutazibwa.wordpress.com/2020/07/21/congo-commissie-why-i-will-not-participate-in-the-expert-group/ and the full text of Dutch Prime Minister Rutte here: https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2022/12/19/government-apologises-for-the-netherlands-role-in-the-history-of-slavery

[3] This is my paraphrasing of parts of Sankara's speech before the UN General Assembly on October 4, 1984 in New York.

[4] Francis Nyamnjoh's generative take on incompleteness reads as follows: 'Things words, deeds and beings are always incomplete not because of absences but because of their possibilities.' (Nyamnjoh, 2017, p. 256)

[5] What are the stakes in engaging mastery? Singh offers: 'The outright repudiations and reinscriptions of mastery across anticolonial and postcolonial discourses are vital places from which we can begin to address how drives towards mastery inform and underlie the major crises of our times—acts of intrahuman violence across the globe, the radical disparities in resources and rights between the Global North ad Global South, innumerable forms of human and nonhuman extinction, and escalating threats of ecological disaster.' (Singh, 2018, p. 3)

REFERENCES

Azoulay, A. A. (2019). *Potential history: Unlearning imperialism*. Verso Books.

Bhambra, G. K. (2014). *Connected sociologies*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Césaire, A. (1955/2000). *Discourse on colonialism*. Monthly Review Press.

Chatterjee, P. (1998). Talking about modernity in two languages. In *A possible India: Essays in political criticism* (pp. 263–285). Oxford University Press.

Davis, A. Y., Dent, G., Meiners, E. R., & Richie, B. E. (2022). *Abolition. Feminism. Now* (Vol. 2). Haymarket Books.

Dussel, E. (2008). *Twenty theses on politics*. Duke University Press.

el-Malik, S. (2017). Curating and politics: Searching for coherency in African anticolonial archive. In S. el-Malik & I. Kamola (Eds.), *Politics of African anticolonial archive* (pp. 37–57). Rowman and Littlefield International.

el-Malik, S., & Kamola, I. (2017). Introduction: Politics of African anticolonial archive. In S. el-Malik & I. Kamola (Eds.), *Politics of African anticolonial archive* (pp. 1–16). Rowman and Littlefield International.

Gilmore Wilson, R. (2020). *Abolition geography. Essays towards liberation*. Verso.

Go, J. (2023). Thinking against empire: Anticolonial thought as social theory. *British Journal of Sociology*. (online first p. 1–15).

Grovogui, S. N. (2017). An abbreviated postcolonial account of the archives. In S. el-Malik & I. Kamola (Eds.), *Politics of African anticolonial archive* (pp. 17–36). Rowman and Littlefield International.

Inayatullah, N. (2022). *Pedagogy as encounter. Beyond the teaching imperative*. Rowman and Littlefield.

Kothari, A., Salleh, A., Escobar, A., Demaria, F., & Acosta, A. (2019). *Pluriverse. A post-development dictionary*. Tulika Books.

Lindqvist, S. (1997). *Exterminate all the brutes*. Granta.

McKittrick, K. (2021). *Dear science and other stories*. Duke University Press.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018). Racism and "Blackism" on a world scale. In O. U. Rutazibwa & R. Shilliam (Eds.), *Routledge, handbook of postcolonial politics* (pp. 72–85). Routledge.

Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2017). Incompleteness: Frontier Africa and the currency of conviviality. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *52*(3), 253–270. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909615580867

Robinson, D. (2020). *Hungry listening. Resonant theory for indigenous sound studies*. Minnesota University Press.

Rodney, W. (1969/2019). *The groundings with my brothers*. Verso Books.

Rodney, W. (1972/2018). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. Verso Books.

Rutazibwa, O. U. (2018). On babies and bathwater. Decolonizing international development studies. In S. de Jong, R. Icaza, & O. U. Rutazibwa (Eds.), *Decolonization and feminisims in global teaching and learning* (pp. 158–180). Routledge.

Rutazibwa, O. U. (2020). Hidden in plain sight. Colonialism, capitalism and race/ism as far as the eye can see. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, *48*(2), 221–241. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829819889575

Sabaratnam, M. (2020). Is IR theory white? Racialised subject-positioning in three canonical texts. *Millennium*, *49*(1), 3–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829820971687

Sankara, T. I. (1988). Thomas Sankara speaks. The Burkina Faso revolution (1983–1987).

Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Duke University Press.

Shilliam, R. (2015). *The Black Pacific: Anti-colonial struggles and oceanic connections* (p. 208). Bloomsbury Academic.

Singh, J. (2018). *Unthinking mastery. Dehumanism and decolonial entanglements*. Duke University Press.

Stack, A. (2017). Archiving Thomas Sankara's presence. In S. el-Malik & I. Kamola (Eds.), *Politics of African anticolonial archive* (pp. 231–256). Rowman and Littlefield International.

Wekker, G. (2017). *White innocence: Paradoxes of colonialism and race*. Duke University Press.