

The Periodical as Political Educator

Anticolonial Print and Digital Humanities in the Classroom and Beyond

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The night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom.

—Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind*

Twentieth-century revolutionary print was key to organizing struggle, theorizing political subjects, and galvanizing cultures of protest in the Global South. In this essay, “revolutionary print” or “revolutionary papers” collectively refers to diverse forms like the political magazine, pamphlet, cultural journal, and party newspaper. It also encompasses the communities and practices that coalesced around these publications in contexts of anticolonial and Third World struggle. While other essays in this special issue explore how such publications operated as “political organizers” and fora for visual and aesthetic experimentation,¹ this section focuses specifically on how these periodicals constituted a Global South infrastructure for pedagogy and political education. Often embracing a multigeneric form with content ranging from reportage to illustrations, poetry, manifestos, and cultural commentary, revolutionary papers doubled as a teaching library built on historical and ongoing struggles facing colonial and authoritarian repression. As fora for public debate and “movement thought,” these publications served as alternative educational

Radical History Review

Issue 150 (October 2024) DOI 10.1215/01636545-11257460

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institutions in their own right.² Revolutionary papers fostered communities of shared inquiry and action to combat the “psychological violence” of the colonial classroom and, indeed, of the colonial condition at large.³

Inspired by the pedagogical mission of revolutionary print, this section of the issue explores its relationship with pedagogy through a series of digital “teaching tools” centered on periodicals that resisted colonialism, capitalism, and authoritarianism in the Global South. The Revolutionary Papers teaching tools were conceptualized as interactive digital presentations that could be used in both classroom and organizing settings by scholars, students, and activists to engage and learn about, and with, anticolonial and left periodicals.⁴ This essay offers an introduction to these teaching tools. I elaborate the impetus behind creating them and reflect on their use in the classroom through a Revolutionary Papers teaching initiative based in Lahore, Pakistan. This initiative developed an experimental undergraduate syllabus that drew on revolutionary print and digital teaching tools that study its forms and cultures. Along the way, I incorporate insights from students who participated in the course and introduce and discuss the seven teaching tools featured in this special issue, including one contributed by these students. I also discuss the potential posed by Global South revolutionary papers as an alternative curriculum and pedagogical guide for addressing contemporary calls to “decolonize” the university.

Revolutionary Papers as “Pedagogical Infrastructure”

As Katerina Gonzalez Seligmann argues, a lack of “literary infrastructure” in imperialized geographies created the push for periodicals to function as both aesthetic and material resources.⁵ “Literary infrastructure” here refers to structures and resources such as “the book industry that includes publishers, editors, and mechanisms of national, regional, and international literary circulation.”⁶ As I discuss in this essay, Global South print also operated as a pedagogical infrastructure that created an alternative curriculum and fostered critical practices of collective reading, writing, and reflection. As an alternative curriculum, these publications created and disseminated critical knowledge about ongoing struggles, regional languages and their literatures, alternative histories, and global solidarities against the nexus of empire and dominant nationalism. As pedagogical forms, they experimented with both Freirean and vanguardist approaches in engaging their readership, feeding cultures and spaces of political community through debate. They also served as community archives.

For example, the quarterly *Pancham* (*The Fifth*) is a left-leaning Punjabi-language literary journal published in Lahore, Pakistan, that functions as both a literary and pedagogical infrastructure to counter the colonial and post-colonial marginalization of the regional language.⁷ It operates as an alternative institution for Punjabi literary culture built around a program of people’s language. The magazine publishes original poetry and essays and carries translations of anticolonial, Marxist,

and feminist writings. *Pancham*'s office hosts study circles where the magazine's latest issue is read and discussed. Through these study circles, *Pancham* also offers a space for Punjabi language learning where none is provided by formal education, invigorating a culture of reading, writing, and speaking in a language seen as a "vulgar" "rural patois" spoken by the so-called illiterate working masses.⁸ *Pancham* is an archive, a public library, and a language school that resists the confines of dominant knowledge in Pakistan. Helmed by the veteran Marxist intellectual Maqsood Saqib, *Pancham* has also provided political education to left-wing cadres across the city.

Thus the struggle for "the means of communal self-definition" against the alienation imposed by colonial/neocolonial education came to rely heavily on media like *Pancham*, that is, on the "little magazines" of the Global South.⁹ The pages of these periodicals combated the "exclusionary practices of 'metropolitan publishing houses'" and state censorship.¹⁰ For example, journals like the Afro-Asian literary magazine *Lotus* imparted "non-Eurocentric modes and models of comparatism" through Afro-Asian literary translation to its transnational readership, while magazines like the 1920s Punjabi language monthly *Kirti* (*Worker*) translated and introduced Marxist texts into colonial India.¹¹ Thus, print forms like political magazines were organizers, institutions, and political educators in their own right. They trained cadre and community alike by coordinating struggle, raising political consciousness, and documenting movement history. They did so by offering an alternative curriculum and accessible resources for a program of people's education.

This pedagogical impulse was a key component of anticolonialism. Revolutionary papers fostered what Daniel J. Elam calls "anticolonial readerly communities" across the Global South.¹² These communities imagined a world "in which the circulation of aesthetic ideas could be made common and egalitarian," instituting "serious engagement with reading and critique as anticolonial practice."¹³ Elam's insistence on reading as a revolutionary act locates Global South print culture as a key site for anticolonial politics and theory, expanding debates on decolonization beyond national independence, sovereignty, and statehood. Further, the focus on reading—and especially, on reading *with* others as anticolonial practice—emphasizes the role of revolutionary papers as political educators. In this capacity, revolutionary papers reflected the mobilizational forms of ongoing left and anticolonial movements, innovating pedagogies ranging from vanguardist to Freirean approaches. Periodicals that operated as Freirean "educational projects" tried to forge pedagogy with and not simply for the oppressed, serving as organizational and intellectual tools for liberation.¹⁴ Often, they embodied a form that was collectively authored, multilingual, popular, and noncanonical. For example, the *Congress Militant*, a newspaper published by the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the African National Congress, engaged its working-class readership in its production through collective writing exercises, literacy education, and oral history in an effort to generate "writing from below."¹⁵ In an article in this issue, Noor Nieftagodien describes

how the paper developed a practice to interview and assist comrades overwhelmed by daily struggles and hindered by low literary levels in writing about their experiences.¹⁶ Revolutionary papers like the *Congress Militant* challenged what Paolo Freire described as the “fundamentally narrative character” of the “teacher-student” relationship. In the pedagogy of the oppressor, the “teacher” acts as the narrating subject, while the “student” is merely a passive, listening object.¹⁷ Freirean pedagogy seeks to transform teachers and students into “teacher-students” and “student-teachers” that both learn from and teach one another. This approach to education as liberation can be read into the collective institutional form of many revolutionary periodicals.

Conversely, other revolutionary publications embraced a hierarchical editorial and institutional structure rooted in vanguardist approaches. Writing about the iconic Bolshevik publication *Iskra* (*Spark*), Lenin described the vanguardist role of the paper as a “collective propagandist and a collective agitator . . . [and] also a collective organizer.”¹⁸ In this capacity, periodicals served as a forum for communication between party members, coordinating and documenting struggle, and helping cadres imagine communities of political action. For example, Sam Longford’s study of the journal of the militant wing, UMkhonto weSizwe of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party details how *Dawn* mythologized the contested figure of Chris Hani (1942–93) to inculcate discipline and obedience among MK cadres.¹⁹ Hani, an MK leader who was assassinated by Conservative Party members, became an important symbol of the ANC’s struggle for freedom, while for critics of the ANC’s post-apartheid project, his figure “haunts . . . and unsettles the ANC’s triumphalist narratives.”²⁰ Yet other revolutionary papers were dictated by CIA, Soviet, or authoritarian states, or operated as vanity projects of lone left intellectuals. For example, *Tulu* (*Rise*) was a Soviet-backed Urdu-language periodical published in 1970s Pakistan whose editorial line was closely controlled by Moscow.

While an emphasis on the party line and discipline animated the vanguardist pedagogy of revolutionary publications like *Dawn* and *Tulu*, this did not detract from their collective and popular nature. For one, their circulation and reception in what Mae A. Miller-Likhethe identifies as “lesser-studied sites of print culture”²¹ such as study circles, canteens, and family settings exceeded and indeed expanded the leadership’s disciplinarian and propagandist visions. Further, in their afterlives such print forms came to function as movement archives that could be critically engaged by broader communities and contemporary activists. For example, in this issue, a teaching tool authored by Koni Benson, Asher Gamedze, and Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja engages the *Namibian Review* to invigorate cross-border connections and radical political remembering in contemporary South Africa. Namibia, a former German colony then known as South West Africa, was governed by the South African apartheid state between 1915 and 1990. Through the archive of the *Namibian*

Review, a journal published in 1970s southern Africa by anti-apartheid Marxist revolutionaries, the authors construct an alternative curriculum and people's history around one of its editors, Ottilie Abrahams (1937–2018). Abrahams was a Namibian revolutionary whose political life history maps key shifts and developments in revolutionary politics in the region. Her experiences with militant underground reading groups in Cape Town, exile in Zambia and Sweden, and education camps in Tanzania in turn inspire and shape the tool authors' own pedagogical and organizing work in contemporary Cape Town and Windhoek, where renewed calls for decolonization have challenged persisting racial and class-based disparities in the post-apartheid era. Benson, Gamedze, and Mushaandja, present teaching materials like "Radical History Bingo" and an imaginative, interactive timeline of educational history as windows into the Pan-African, anticolonial, socialist, and Black consciousness movements that swept across southern Africa in the twentieth century. Through these materials, they introduce readers to key struggles and organizations including 1960s radical left study groups such as the Yu Chi Chan Club and the South African Committee for Higher Education, which countered segregated education under apartheid.

Through contemporary engagements of this kind, publications like the *Namibian Review* can serve as alternative history and pedagogical guides for educators and activists. Inviting students to learn about the political life of a revolutionary woman of color like Aunty Tilly, whose work spans the supposed pre- and post-apartheid divide, grounds education and inquiry in self-reflexive and community-led methodologies for engaging movement archives. Featured in this issue, the teaching tool on the Ukombozi Library similarly elaborates how anticolonial print cultures continue to serve as pedagogical infrastructure for contemporary political education on the Left. Activist-archivist Kimani Waweru and scholar-organizer Njoki Wamai present an annotated guide to the library and its archives, discussing the magazines, bulletins, and pamphlets published by Kenyan revolutionaries between the 1930s and 1990s. The Ukombozi Library was founded in 2017 by a cluster of political collectives including the Progressive African Library and Information Activists group and the Mau Mau Research Centre. The library houses resources on Marxism and Pan-Africanism alongside a plethora of print emanating from the Kenyan African Union Party in the 1930s and 1940s, the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau, active during the 1960s and 1970s), and Mwakenya, an anti-dictatorship socialist movement in 1980s Kenya. The library collaborates with local communities and political movements to author and archive a people's history of Kenya focused on anticolonial and anti-authoritarian struggle. The Ukombozi Library's practice counters colonial and dominant approaches to archiving, shunning academic notions of "objectivity" and "neutrality" to embrace a collective and creative recordkeeping practice committed to "a socialist world outlook" that can "[liberate] minds from the capitalist and imperialist stranglehold."²² It highlights

the possibilities presented by a movement archive to not just serve as a historical repository but to function as an “agent of political representation” that can transform “distant and passive memory” into an insurrectionary present.²³

Thus, such revolutionary periodicals constituted a pedagogical infrastructure that countered dominant knowledge and fostered popular cultures of critique and intellectual engagement. They developed curricula for political education as well as social institutions and cultural practices within party formations and beyond. Inspired by these aesthetic, intellectual, and political experiments, the teaching tools featured in this issue take a multimedia and flexible form to capture the variety of the publications they study.

Learning from Anticolonialism in the Digital Age

The Revolutionary Papers teaching tools are a meditated departure from the academic essay form with an eye to a more inclusive, accessible, and creative form for showcasing insights about and archival material around anticolonial and Third World struggles. They emerged from a series of conversations between scholars, activists, and design practitioners exploring the intersection between digital humanities, archiving, and political organizing in Global South contexts. Between 2021 and 2022, the Revolutionary Papers team, comprising Mahvish Ahmad, Koni Benson, Chana Morgenstern, Ben Verghese, and myself, worked with digital humanists Lizzie Malcolm and Daniel Powers to develop a digital interface. The tool design is inspired by and attempts to echo the variety of print forms that accompanied revolutionary movements of the Global South, and draws on interdisciplinary multimedia combining audio, visual, archival, and analytical content. As a teaching aid in the classroom, the tools can be assigned as background reading, deployed as an in-class exercise in close reading or visual analysis, or used to present archival material during a lecture. In community and organizing settings, they can serve as resources for study circles and group discussions. They also function as archival engagements and platforms to house and curate movement archives. In this way, the tools can serve as a digital repository of community memory and movement history, especially in Global South contexts defined by state censorship, underfunding, and erasure.

In terms of form, revolutionary papers made aesthetic choices that rejected fetishized design. They prioritized communication and community access, with artwork and templates often sketched not by professionals, but by designers embedded within movements.²⁴ Taking their cue from this mode of design, the teaching tools deliberately attempt to diffuse *author-ity*. The result is a dialogic format that draws on scholarly interpretation but resists the subjugation of the archive to the interpreter’s voice. Thus, while each tool is presented by a scholar or archivist, the design emphasis on periodical elements like excerpts, images, and table of contents incorporates unmediated access to archival voices. For example, Hana Morgenstern’s teaching tool on a Haifa-based, Arabic-language journal offers crucial insights on



Figure 1. Hana Morgenstern's teaching tool features a translated reproduction of the table of contents of *al-Jadid* (*The New*).

left-wing Palestinian cultural activities in the aftermath of the Nakba, highlighting the role of periodicals in “literary reconstruction” in a landscape of colonial destruction and dispossession.²⁵ The tool is structured around Morgenstern’s selection of a table of contents from a 1954 issue of *al-Jadid* (*The New*), and reproduces the table of contents in its entirety, in both English translation and as the original Arabic archival document. However, on the page, readers can only see the table of contents, with highlights that reveal Morgenstern’s annotations only when clicked (fig. 1). Thus, the design privileges the revolutionary archive over academic analysis, reversing the typical form of an academic article in which archival sources are embedded to reinforce the voice and authority of the scholar. In this way, the teaching tools strive to establish a more open and dialogic relationship between scholars, archives, and students. Through their visual and accessible form, they seek to demystify archives as obscure “objects” and footnotes to academic production, inviting both students and teachers to become interpreters and interlocutors for revolutionary papers.

Following a series of conversations between 2020 and 2021, three distinct templates for the teaching tools were created. Dubbed the “linear,” “close reading,” and “table” models respectively, each template was designed to encourage focused exploration of and reflection on a specific aspect of the revolutionary publication under study. The linear teaching tool emphasizes historical detail, allowing tool authors to explain the context that surrounded the periodical through a range of eclectic materials including but not limited to excerpts, covers, photographs, music, and maps. Each linear tool is divided into “chapters” that allow the presenter

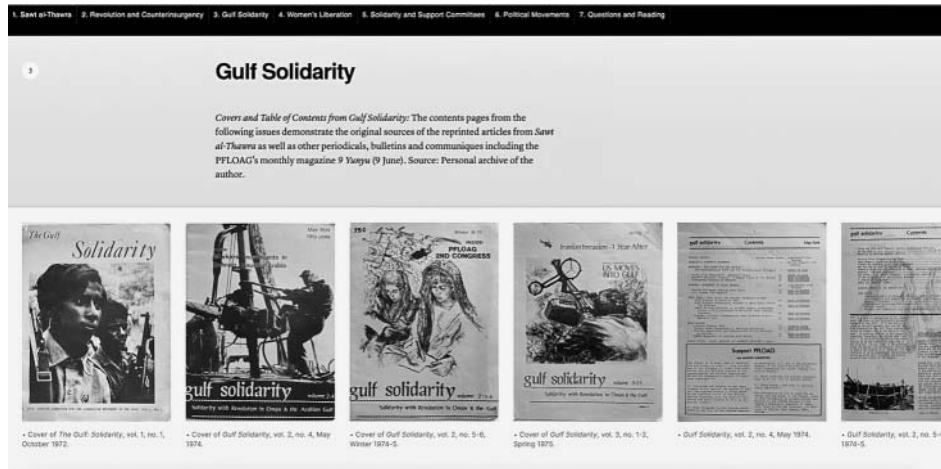


Figure 2. A chapter in Marral Shamshiri-Fard's linear tool presents archival scans of reprinted articles from *Sawt al-Thawra*.

to map the development of movements across longer periods of time. This narrative nature of the linear teaching tool was inspired by the desire to tell untold stories—to contextualize, elaborate, collate, and hence render legible histories buried by state violence, colonial thinking, and bordering logics. In this issue, Marral Shamshiri-Fard's linear teaching tool on *Sawt al-Thawra* (*Voice of the Revolution*) narrates the understudied pan-regional history of Marxist internationalism and armed struggle in Oman and the Arabian Gulf. *Sawt al-Thawra* was a bilingual Arabic and English periodical published by the Marxist-Leninist People's Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) from 1972. *Sawt al-Thawra* addressed a global audience to build internationalist solidarity for Dhufar revolutionaries fighting the British-backed puppet regime of the Omani sultan. As Shamshiri-Fard details, the magazine's linguistic form and political content consciously connected the Dhufar Revolution in Oman with the regional Arab Left and global Marxist networks that ranged as far as Latin America and Vietnam (see fig. 2).

As a teaching tool on left-wing revolutionary politics in the Middle East, Shamshiri-Fard's reading of *Sawt al-Thawra* offers an alternative curriculum for the region. As Taymiya Zaman observes, the region's study in the post-9/11 Global North classroom is often mired in a "self-referential, shifting and urgent present" that focuses on contemporary geostrategy and international relations to the exclusion of alternative and regional histories. These histories face "forms of historical erasure that are central to modern state formation" within the region and beyond, and can contest the frequent flattening of the region's complex history into Orientalist tropes around the Arab world and Islam.²⁶ By teaching *Sawt al-Thawra* and its resistance against imperialism and regional authoritarianism, educators can hope to

unsettle these reductive and essentialist constructions. Offering people the textured and intimate experience of perusing the pages of the magazine as well as letters, photographs, and songs, Shamshiri-Fard's tool on the PFLOAG unearths revolutionary pasts that can shift student perceptions about a widely misunderstood region. Thus linear teaching tools like *Sawt al-Thawra* present scholarship that challenges institutionalized methods in history and archiving by incorporating noncanonical archival sources like political pamphlets, songs, and interviews with activists.

The second model for teaching tools discussed in this issue is designed to facilitate close reading. Compared to the linear model, which emphasizes the historical development of struggles and organizations, a close-reading teaching tool encourages intimate engagement with movement texts. It is structured to center multilingual, noncanonical Global South texts as key sites for political concepts and alternative vocabularies. Furthermore, by spotlighting key formal elements of revolutionary papers such as tables of contents, editorials, and published poems, the close-reading tool digitally reproduces the material experience of perusing the pages of a magazine. The tool design works with a limited, excerpted text that is annotated to provide translations, context, and commentary on periodicals and their contexts. As a methodology inspired by literary criticism, the close-reading digital tool embodies sustained attention to the textual and the particular. For example, in this issue, a close-reading tool authored by students from the Revolutionary Papers Classroom (RP Classroom) translates Urdu poetry and essays from *Savera* (*Dawn*) to discuss literary production as shaped by decolonization and the 1947 Partition. *Savera* was a literary magazine published since 1946 in Lahore, in present-day Pakistan. It was prominently associated with the Progressive Writers' Movement, a South Asian anticolonial writers' collective founded in 1936 by a group of primarily North Indian intellectuals.²⁷ Areej Akhtar, Javaria Ahmad, and Sana Farukh Khan discuss how the PWA sought to liberate and modernize Indian literature and championed Marxist-inspired approaches to aesthetics, urging members to ground their art in the material conditions facing a colonized India strapped with the internal oppressions of caste, class, and patriarchal tradition. In particular, the authors chart how progressive intellectuals interpreted the events of the 1947 partition of the subcontinent, the formation of nascent states in India/Pakistan, and the cultural implications of a newly erected international border in South Asia. "Annotations" in their teaching tool sketch in the lives of key literary figures, such as the feminist writer Ismat Chughtai, to situate close readings within the anticolonial movement. Embedded within the translations and archival text presented in the tool, these annotations are design elements that frame crucial historical context and comparative linkages.

The close-reading tool forces intimate engagement with texts that often constitute "sources" routed into the privileged space of academic theorizing but are seldom considered as theoretical texts in and of themselves. In so doing, it hopes to

enable a “Global South theory from below” rooted in noncanonical text authored at the margins of state and elite intellectual institutions. In this vein, Thayer Hastings’s tool in this issue deploys the close-reading template to spotlight the theoretical and political labor performed by Palestinian *bayanat* (leaflets). The *bayanat* (singular *bayan*) were communiques and pamphlets circulated during the first intifada, a grassroots anticolonial uprising between 1987 and 1993 that challenged the Israeli occupation and oppressive regime in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. More than half a million Palestinians participated in civil disobedience, general strikes, boycotts, and advocacy in an environment of brutal state repression and violence. The *bayanat* were authored and circulated by the United National Leadership of the Intifada (UNLI), a broad coalition established during the uprising to coordinate Palestinian resistance.²⁸ Hastings presents translations and archival reproductions of selected *bayanat* to teach readers about the forms, aesthetics, and political practices deployed by Palestinian anticolonial resistance. The leaflets were often slipped under doorsteps, deposited at bus stops, and distributed by night under curfew, working to connect an underground leadership with the mass and serving as an organizing tool for the first intifada.

The third template for teaching tools is the “table.” The table model takes its name and concept from a literal tabletop, recreating the visual spread of documents laid out on a desk in a library. Inspired by the visual experience of exploring documents in an archive, the table model curates selected political and cultural documents produced by movements. The tool’s interactive digital design allows readers to enlarge, reorder, and map clusters of documents arranged according to themes suggested by the tool author. The table template is most directly tailored as an archival engagement, offering a repository for preserving and contextualizing print ephemera associated with movements. Thus table teaching tools built around oppositional publications can help contemporary struggles and political educators construct syllabi and alternative archives. They can also counter the enclosure of revolutionary print by elite institutions and official archives, and combat the state-led erasure of alternative histories in authoritarian Global South contexts. For example, in this issue, Sara Marzagora and Rafeef Ziadah’s table tool on *Lotus* presents a curriculum for teaching and engaging anticolonialism (fig. 3). *Lotus* was a literary journal published by the Afro-Asian Writers Association from Cairo and Beirut between the 1960s and 1980s. It featured poetry, short stories, and essays in translation, drawing contributions from a wide range of Third World contexts and connecting newly decolonized populations with those still fighting for liberation. The tool is clustered around pedagogical resources and provides historical background and archival access to the magazine. It is based on a collaborative project at King’s College London that explored student-led pedagogy rooted in the anticolonial archive in conversation with contemporary politics and student experiences. Marzagora and Ziadah argue that the multilingual and multigeneric form of *Lotus* offers productive

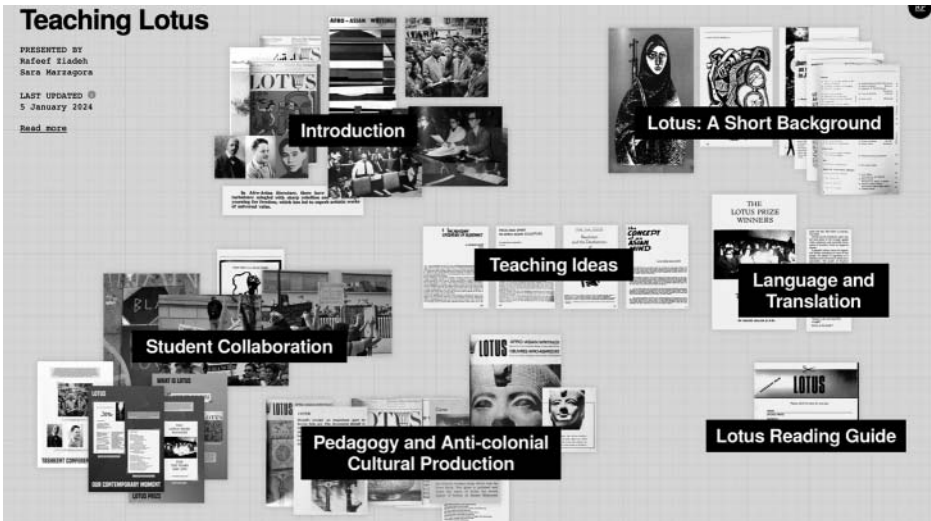


Figure 3. The table tool “Teaching *Lotus*” maps a syllabus built around the iconic Afro-Asian literary magazine.

entry points for a more inclusive, collective, and creative pedagogy, as the magazine pushes disciplinary bounds and academic form to prompt reflection on racialized and uneven structures that persist within the university and beyond. The table tool emphasizes the visual and aesthetic practices of anticolonial, left, and oppositional movements through the minimal use of text and commentary in its design. Marzagora and Ziadah deploy this visual focus to exhibit classroom engagement with multilingual literary and visual production. They discuss how it helped develop a nuanced understanding of colonialism in ethnically and linguistically diverse classrooms and how a creative and collaborative approach to assignments encouraged students to connect reportage on Martin Luther King’s assassination with Black Lives Matter. The tool presents a blueprint for similar pedagogical initiatives to be replicated in other contexts with other periodicals.

Another table-format tool in this issue, Pablo Álvarez and Francisco Rodríguez’s study of *APSI* magazine presents a snapshot of Chilean resistance to the military dictatorship during the 1970s and 1980s. *APSI* (Information Services Advertising Agency) was born in the early years of Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship, an era marked by a brutal crackdown on left forces in Chile. Álvarez and Rodríguez present archival covers, articles, and illustrations from the magazine, which styled itself as a fortnightly “international news bulletin” to dodge state censorship. As the authors detail, the ban on publishing on Chilean politics and internal affairs compelled an internationalism that came to form the core of *APSI*’s journalistic and political practice. Their teaching tool maps the development of a dissident Global South publication under extraordinary conditions of political repression and silencing, outlining

the strategic aesthetic and editorial choices made by journalists to keep democratic cultures alive under authoritarian conditions. *APSI* improvised a range of formal and rhetorical strategies to sustain anti-dictatorship political critique in Chile, as the magazine's deliberately nondescript name, its use of humor, and its ventriloquism of Chilean politics through coverage of socialist and anticolonial struggles elsewhere enabled its survival. The tool also unearths the alternative political institutions and revolutionary networks that supported and were in turn sustained by *APSI*. It discusses the intersection between Catholicism and anti-dictatorship politics in 1970s Chile through the role played by the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity) and the support of left-wing Chilean exiles based in Italy. The teaching tool presents *APSI* as a platform for coordinating popular and left-wing critique of Pinochet's dictatorship and teaches us about the connections between Chilean resistance and similar struggles across the Global South.

As a teaching aid, the three teaching tool templates offer an eclectic and interactive form that seeks to democratize learning about Global South revolutionary cultures. As such, the tools are a direct engagement with contemporary calls to "decolonize the curriculum" as they excavate and interpret noncanonical, anticolonial, and left production archived in revolutionary periodicals. In the following section, I expand on this engagement by discussing how these digital teaching tools attempt a project of "learning from anticolonialism" by sharing reflections from the RP Classroom.²⁹

Revolutionary Papers in the Classroom: On "Decolonizing" the Curriculum

The ongoing struggle to decolonize universities emerged out of the "Rhodes Must Fall" movement in South Africa. The Must Fall movement was sparked by the resistance of primarily Black students at the University of Cape Town against restricted access to quality higher education, racial representation at the university, and a white-washed curriculum.³⁰ The mobilizations spread to campuses in the UK and other global north locations and have brought the demand for decolonization to bear on sanitized conversations around "diversity" and "multiculturalism." Protesting the egregious absence of nonwhite voices and non-European thought in the curriculum, students have called for overhauling the colonial university and structures of white supremacy that govern teaching and scholarship. While the question of "decolonizing the mind" was raised decades ago by the likes of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o in contexts of anticolonial struggle, its revival and belated engagement by global north publics is a welcome development in metropolitan reckoning with the legacies of empire. At the same time, however, decolonization has swiftly been appropriated by university administrations as a "buzzword" and "shorthand for reforms."³¹ As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang rightly point out, decolonization is not a metaphor, and the "cultivation of critical consciousness" cannot be allowed to stand in for "the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land."³² These concerns echo Frantz Fanon and

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, who insisted that decolonizing the mind is only the first step toward overthrowing empire, and that the task of liberating knowledge must go hand in hand with that of organizing political resistance. Without a doubt, the “cultivation of critical consciousness” is no substitute for political action, however, that does not render futile the pursuit of critical knowledge around imperialism’s past and present. One way to guard against the fetishization and metaphorization of “decolonization” is to shift emphasis toward anticolonialism—defined, “in this specific context of intellectual labour and knowledge generation as the practice of thought and action towards the goals of decolonisation . . . ‘anti’-colonial *practice* [thus] invokes a critical and radical spirit of enquiry and action rather than a singular state to be feasibly arrived at” (emphasis mine).³³ The Revolutionary Papers teaching tools seek to participate in the movement to decolonize the curriculum by “learning from anticolonialism”³⁴ by archiving, analyzing, and connecting the contexts in which it emerged. They are an experiment in anticolonial pedagogy today, an attempt to excavate earlier imaginaries of decolonization that can shape present resistance to neocolonial knowledge. The tools combine scholarship centered on the Global South, engaging the terrain of anticolonial, Marxist, and antiracist movements as debated, organized, and documented in oppositional periodicals. This focus on the archive of noncanonical print is also a response to calls across disciplines to overcome dominant frameworks for studying colonialism. Centering revolutionary papers in scholarship and pedagogy can challenge the postcolonial theoretical emphasis on the bordered nation, the canonical status of anglophone writing, and the privileging of a small group of male anticolonial figures like Nehru or Mandela. Thus, through digital tools that are interactive, conversant with the contemporary, and focused on movement archives, we hope to emphasize anticolonialism as *practice* and *process* over a “postcolonial” that signals the formal end of empire even as it studies its afterlives, or a “decolonial” that threatens to become a homogenizing precolonial nativist “state” to be arrived at.

The RP Classroom emerged out of this pedagogical experiment. The initiative convened a semester-long undergraduate course and workshop at LUMS University in Lahore, Pakistan. The course drew on revolutionary periodicals as a syllabus for teaching a comparative history of anticolonial, Third World, and left movements. Digital teaching tools were used extensively as a teaching aid for class discussions and background reading in the course, which ran from January to June 2023. In the course, undergraduate students studied periodicals published by a range of anticolonial and left movements across geographical contexts, including the bulletin of the Black Panther Party and *Publica(c)tion*, a 2017 Black, student-driven publication printed in South Africa to extend the work of the Must Fall movement.³⁵ In the end, students worked on a collaborative final project in which they created their own teaching tools presenting anti-authoritarian and dissident magazines from Pakistan sourced from the Punjab Public Library and the South Asia Research and

Resource Centre (SARRC), an independent archive that houses Pakistan's anti-dictatorship and left histories.³⁶ One of these student projects, presented by Areej Akhtar, Javaria Ahmad, and Sana Farrukh Khan, is featured in this issue.

After the course concluded, I met the students to reflect collectively on the process of learning from and teaching with revolutionary print in the classroom. We discussed how even though the course was offered under the aegis of a comparative literature and culture studies program, the focus on the nonacademic and multigeneric form of the revolutionary periodical enabled engagement that subverted disciplinary boundaries. Students described how the focus on periodicals as curriculum pushed their learning in an interdisciplinary and collaborative direction. For instance, for history students, the cross-border and internationalist linkages explored in teaching tools like "The Social Lives of the *Namibian Review*" challenged the methodological nationalism of dominant historiography that tends to rely on territorially bounded, state-centric archives. Similarly, for students of comparative literature and English, an emphasis on the Global South literary magazine as form helped "destabilize the [Eurocentric] canon" and unsettle hierarchies of literary merit that privilege genres like the anglophone novel.³⁷ For students across the board, the process of visiting archives, interviewing activists, compiling periodical artwork, and translating excerpts from Pakistani periodicals became an "immersive" dive into alternative histories of their own context.³⁸ Thus, engaging teaching tools on related contexts and authoring their own tools on Pakistan enabled students to become interlocutors and creators for alternative knowledge on their region. Moreover, students described periodicals studied in their teaching tools as powerful counters to the state-mandated Pakistan Studies curriculum, a compulsory component of undergraduate education in Pakistan that was imposed by the 1980s military regime of General Zia ul Haq to cement the "patriotic" Sunni Muslim citizen-subject.³⁹

For some students, the classroom engagement with revolutionary periodicals and teaching tools opened up possibilities for unearthing buried political pasts. Given the colonial conditions governing languages in Pakistan, almost every student reported that they required language-related assistance in engaging Urdu and Punjabi periodicals studied in the course. With no formal language support available at the university, an elite institution offering instruction almost exclusively in English, students naturally turned to family and community members—uncles, mothers, grandparents—as guides and collaborators to read with. In part, this was enabled by the nonacademic and popular form of these periodicals, which included publications that family and community members were already familiar with. This facilitated an intergenerational conversation about political resistance and alternative histories of Pakistan, an engagement eased by community familiarity with the Urdu magazine form.⁴⁰ In contrast, assigned academic articles in English, which supplemented the syllabus, could not create this kind of dialogue.

For one student in the class, engaging with and researching *Tulu (Rise)*, a Soviet-funded Pakistani socialist propaganda magazine, became a means to discover and document the entanglements of print culture and political organizing with family histories. Noor said that she had “always known that her father and uncles had been involved in student politics” back in the day, but she had never found the opportunity to talk to them about their political activities in any detail.⁴¹ It was when she sought her father’s help with reading the original Urdu articles published in *Tulu* that she discovered more. Her father was deeply familiar with the publication and had received a stipend from the Soviet Union embassy for distributing copies of *Tulu* to students and intellectuals associated with the National College of Arts in Lahore in the 1980s. Noor ended up interviewing her uncle who had also been involved in socialist student politics and *Tulu*. Thus Noor’s engagement with revolutionary papers in the classroom enabled her to link family pasts with histories of political resistance in Pakistan. Scholarship and community memory could be synergized through the *Tulu* archive, revealing connections between political movements and the practices and subjectivities of ordinary people. Moreover, student engagement with periodicals as living archives rather than textual objects compelled them to take the lead in sketching the ecologies surrounding these print forms. The interdisciplinary methodology of the digital tools prompted students to go beyond engaging movement archives to contributing and generating materials through interviews and translations of content. By incorporating political biography, subalternized oral narratives, and ethnographic insight into community memory, students worked toward an expansive view of revolutionary print. As Miller-Likhethe eloquently argues in an essay in this issue, this analytical move is necessary for scholarship on print culture “from below,” which must go beyond textual study to address the “processes of political education and practices of collective readership” that defined ordinary people’s relationship with print culture.⁴²

For Sohaib,⁴³ another student in the course, reading revolutionary periodicals enabled both an excavation and a critical reflection on community history. Reading about the Baloch insurgency in Pakistan alongside Marxist-Leninist militancy against the sultan in Muscat triggered a critical discussion in the classroom on the dangers of romanticizing community memory and the erasures and elisions that can exist therein. Students studied Mahvish Ahmad and Mir Muhammad Ali Talpur’s teaching tool, which presents a detailed, linear account of the Baloch liberation struggle, focusing on the Balochistan People’s Liberation Front’s (BPLF) battle against the occupation of Baloch lands in Pakistan.⁴⁴ As the only Baloch student in the classroom, Sohaib possessed a deep familiarity and unique insight into the context surrounding *Jabal*, the underground organ of the BPLF. However, when the syllabus turned from *Jabal* to Marral Shamshiri-Fard’s teaching tool on the PFLOAG, Sohaib saw a gap in the same Baloch oral history that had transmitted to his generation the memory of the BPLF’s struggle. In 1970s Oman, scores of

Baloch mercenaries fought the PFLOAG revolutionaries at the behest of the sultanate in Muscat, and Sohaib described how he had heard elders relay how many of them had fought “terrorists” in Oman at the behest of the sultan during the 1970s. He thoughtfully addressed the erasure of the PFLOAG’s struggle within community memory, commenting on the conflation of Omani liberation struggle with terrorism in the same Baloch oral history that extolled the BPLF’s anticolonialism. Thus, in the classroom and beyond, close engagement with revolutionary papers can encourage a comparative, connective perspective that can nuance histories of anticolonial communities and Third World solidarities.

Conclusion: Reflections on “Decolonial” Scholarship, Politics, and Digital Pedagogies

As this essay has suggested, centering the archive of revolutionary papers drawn from anticolonial, left, and Third World struggles in scholarship and pedagogy can deepen ongoing attempts to answer the question: what does a decolonized curriculum look like? One possible answer lies in a focus on print cultures of revolutionary movements, which can ground decolonization in the terrain of struggle. Anticolonial and left struggles of the Global South were embedded in particular, regional contexts and literary-linguistic cultures and therefore furnish a productive site for excavating situated knowledges. Such perspectives are often marginalized in the colonial archive and by academic production that privileges canonical, single-author anticolonial texts authored in dominant languages like English. Through a comparative focus on revolutionary papers, we can unearth and internationalize situated knowledges emanating from distinct geographies to anchor extant understandings of key anticolonial concepts like freedom, solidarity, and critique. Further, privileging the intellectual production, political practices, and communities of Global South print as a site for theorization can expand understandings of decolonization and anticolonialism beyond the circumscribed logics of the nation-state. For example, alongside others featured in this issue, periodicals like *Sawt al-Thawra* and *Lotus* subverted the boundaries that govern language, genre, and national geography to present historically located theorizations of concepts like socialism, Afro-Asianism, and Third Worldism. Moreover, by inhabiting the messy, shifting terrain of ongoing movements, these publications often directly engaged, or at the very least reflected, contradictions within anticolonialism and decolonization. Therefore revolutionary papers can serve as a teaching tool to sharpen and complicate understandings of decolonization by pushing existing postcolonialist theorizations that often only offer a reductive “choice between stark oppositions of colonizer and colonized societies, on the one hand,” and “notions of hybridity” with little room for resistance outside that allowed by the colonizing power, on the other.”⁴⁵

In doing so, revolutionary papers can guard against what Tuck and Yang decry as the “vague equating of colonialisms.”⁴⁶ They can bring into analysis

injustices *internal* to colonized societies by highlighting how movements debated and contested the oppressions of native elites and postcolonial states alongside the ravages wrought by empire. This remains a pressing concern, for example, Kalpana Wilson, Giti Chandra, and Lata Narayanaswamy point out how in India, far-right Hindutva ideologues are “gaining legitimacy by adopting decolonial language,” propagating an Islamophobic, upper-caste imaginary of an Indian past in which “‘Hinduism’ is produced as a singular, decolonial and monolithic narrative.”⁴⁷ Thus, in a contemporary climate in which responses to decolonization range from misinformed hue and cry about the wholesale “cutting of white men from university reading lists”⁴⁸ to blanket “epistemic deference”⁴⁹ to any and all knowledges rooted in “non-Western” contexts, a focus on revolutionary papers can emphasize the political and pedagogical practice of decolonization as an engagement with anticapitalist and anti-imperialist visions oriented toward social justice.

That said, it is important to acknowledge the limitations presented by digital humanities interventions for radical archiving and movement history. While the tools are a conscious step away from the political economy of academic publishing and toward an alternative curriculum that can connect anticolonial knowledges with political struggle, there is much to be done to collectivize their form. For one, their online digital availability increases their accessibility and ensures a home to movement documents that might otherwise be neglected in state and institutional archives. However, in contexts with limited digital and functional literacy, web-based archival engagements like the teaching tools in this issue may remain an alienating and exclusionary medium. Especially among working and rural classes in areas like Pakistan, computers and mobile devices are not readily available or affordable, and access to the internet can be limited. Even a few of my mostly urban, elite-educated university students struggled to access and navigate the teaching tools and needed to be guided through the design and digital functionality of the tools before they could engage with them independently.

Thus, at the very least, digital tools require a community setting, with facilitators familiar with the technology involved. Only then can they function as an aid for pedagogy and political education. Moreover, communities and movement intellectuals should be engaged as coauthors and interlocutors in an attempt to push the tools’ digital form in more inclusive and collective directions. For example, the teaching tool on the *Voice of the Children / Die Kinderstem / Izwi Labantwana* presented by Mishca Peters and Children’s Movement organizer Marcus Solomon facilitated an intergenerational reflection between anti-apartheid activists and the Must Fall-aligned Interim People’s Library collective, who were both present at the Community House in Cape Town at the 2022 Revolutionary Papers workshop.⁵⁰ In this way, teaching tools on revolutionary periodicals can embed digital humanities scholarship in community settings to aid collective remembering and people’s archiving. However, only a few tools on the Revolutionary Papers website were

authored and disseminated with direct community and activist engagement. These include “The Social Lives of the *Namibian Review*” (Benson, Gamedze, and Mushaandja) and “Regimes and Resistance: Kenya’s Resistance History through Underground and Alternative Publications” (Wamai and Waweru), which are featured in this special issue and emerge out of the Know Your Continent popular education series and the archival activism of the Ukombozi Library.

Moreover, digital tools also stand to gain from community and activist involvement at the design level, that is, through co-creative processes that engage movement voices in shaping not just the content and circulation of the tool but its very form and function. For example, Ahmad and Talpur’s tool on *Jabal* was also created, like *Voice of the Children*, through close collaboration and discussion with movement intellectuals. The *Jabal* teaching tool was widely circulated in Baloch political circles and discussed at length in an online seminar. Many who had been part of the 1970s Baloch insurgency were present, and the teaching tool sparked reflection and remembering around a history facing erasure, censorship, and controversy in Pakistan. Although for most of their lives, BPLF members remained reluctant to disclose details of their political activities due to ongoing state repression and fragmentation within the Left, *Jabal*’s excavation encouraged renewed engagement with the history of left-wing militancy in Pakistan. In fact, editors and readers of the 1970s magazine volunteered their personal copies for digitization so that the teaching tool could function as a complete archive of the BPLF’s political and intellectual history. It became apparent that the design and function of the teaching tool would have to be stretched to accommodate the community’s needs, who wish to deploy its digital technology for archiving and documenting, alongside analyzing and narrating insurgent Baloch pasts.

Thus digital humanities projects must also work to undo hierarchical paradigms for design and technology in which specialists like archival scholars determine the aesthetic and form in which movement histories are presented. Any Freirean approach to pedagogy must extend to embrace design practices, and constitutively engage with the ways in which communities instrumentalize and relate to technology and digital infrastructures. Sasha Costanza-Chock points out how “everyone designs, but only certain kinds of design work are acknowledged, valorized, remunerated, and credited,” calling attention to the ways in which “the political economy of design” can often deter community control of design processes and practices.⁵¹ Given the recent turn toward the digital humanities, shifting methodologies of archival research and literary studies threaten to fetishize and enforce the enclosure of movement documents in elite academic and state institutions. Thus, going forward, the digital pedagogical experiment presented in this issue must interrogate the relationship between design, power, and social justice alongside a critical engagement with the archive and canon. Although we are not there yet, as a collective, Revolutionary Papers is striving to resist the framing of revolutionary print and its communities as fetishized objects

or research subjects, and to engage movements as co-researchers and co-designers. The teaching tools in this issue hope to reflect and share for wider discussion this ongoing process, an effort and as yet unfinished project to document and understand through anticolonial periodicals “the ever shifting spaces and moments in which collective resistance and dreams for justice are made and remade.”⁵²

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Notes

I would like to thank Mahvish Ahmad, Koni Benson, and Chana Morgenstern for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay, which emerges out of our work together on the Revolutionary Papers project. I am also deeply indebted to my students, whose engagement has inspired and clarified the insights in this piece. Thanks is also owed to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at LUMS University for supporting and facilitating the Revolutionary Papers Classroom initiative through a research grant.

1. See, respectively, Nieftagodien, “*Congress Militant*”; Katzeman and Broderick, “‘Ka Aina No Ka Poe o Hawaii.’”
2. Ahmad, “Movement Texts.”
3. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 9.
4. Revolutionary Papers, “Teaching Tools,” <https://revolutionarypapers.org/teaching-tool/>.
5. Seligmann, “Literary Infrastructure.”
6. Seligmann, “Literary Infrastructure,” 2.
7. For a detailed analysis of colonial language policy in Panjab, India, see Mir, “Imperial Policy, Provincial Practices”; for more on colonial and postcolonial language politics in the region, see Rahman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan*.
8. Mir, “Imperial Policy, Provincial Practices,” 412.
9. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 4. See Bulson, *Little Magazine*.
10. Bulson, *Little Magazine*, 195.
11. Halim, “*Lotus*,” 563; Chandan, “A Capital Gain.”
12. Elam, *World Literature*, xiv.
13. Elam, *World Literature*, 7.
14. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 54.
15. Nieftagodien, “Congress Militant,” conference paper.
16. Nieftagodien, “*Congress Militant*.”
17. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 71.
18. Lenin, “Declaration of the Editorial Board of *Iskra*.”
19. Longford, “*Dawn*.”
20. Longford, “*Dawn*.”
21. Miller-Likhethe, “Black Internationalism.”
22. Waweru and Wamai, “Ukombozi.”
23. Flinn and Alexander, “Humanizing an Inevitability,” 331, 332–33.
24. Lizzie Malcolm, in conversation with the author, December 12, 2023, online.
25. Morgenstern, “Archive of Literary Reconstruction.”
26. Bsheer, *Archive Wars*, 32; Zaman, “Pedagogy.”

27. For more on the Progressive Writers' Movement, see Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India*; and Jalil, *Liking Progress*.
28. Hastings, "Manasheer al-Intifada."
29. Gopal, "On Decolonisation and the University," 887.
30. Chantiluka, Kwoba, and Nkopo, *Rhodes Must Fall*, 24.
31. Gopal, "On Decolonisation and the University," 882.
32. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization," 19.
33. Gopal, "On Decolonisation and the University," 889 (emphasis added).
34. Gopal, "On Decolonisation and the University," 887.
35. Naidoo, "Publica[c]tion."
36. To hear Ahmad Salim introduce his archive and his work, see his talk delivered at the event "Dissident Histories of Pakistan," November 1, 2021, LSE Sociology, cohosted by SARRC, Revolutionary Papers, and Archives of the Disappeared, YouTube video, 13:37, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMRwkMDFx_I&t=172s. For other teaching tools based on SARRC's collection, see Kazmi, "Mazdoor Kissan Party Circular"; and Ahmad and Talpur, "*Jabal*."
37. Areej Akhtar, in conversation with the author, December 10, 2023, online.
38. Munema Zahid, in conversation with the author, December 10, 2023, online.
39. For a detailed account of the complex development of ideas of citizenship and identity in Pakistan, see Qasmi, *Qaum, Mulk, Sultanat*.
40. For more on the history of print culture in modern South Asia, see Robb, *Print and the Urdu Public*.
41. Noor Us Sahar, in conversation with the author, December 10, 2023, online.
42. Miller-Likhethe, "Black Internationalism."
43. The student's name has been changed to protect their identity.
44. Ahmad and Talpur, "*Jabal*."
45. Loomba, "Overworlding the 'Third World,'" 172.
46. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization," 19.
47. Wilson, Chandra, and Narayanaswamy, "Contested Development Imaginaries."
48. Gopal, "On Decolonisation and the University," 874.
49. Wilson, Chandra, and Narayanaswamy, "Contested Development Imaginaries."
50. Peters, "Voice of the Children."
51. Costanza-Chock, *Design Justice*, 14.
52. Nagar and Arasu, "Holding Movements."

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