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Intertwined natures: Reflections on green pedagogy in a tech classroom

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Abstract

In this article, I demonstrate that the Hindi film *Sherni* (Masurkar, 2021), Atlanta's Cop City project, and genocidal violence against Palestinians intertwine in their decolonial possibilities to create an environmentally and anti-war conscious classroom. I have utilized the above-mentioned Hindi film, Atlanta's environmental concerns, and the war on Palestinians to encourage green mindfulness in an otherwise tech-dominated western academic space. "Cop city" is what activists call a police and fire department training center that is currently under construction. This \$90- million police training facility would be one of the largest militarized police training centers in the country—all built by clear-cutting Atlanta's largest green space. Hence, the project faces massive opposition. It also maintains a relationship with the Israeli Defense Forces, creating an exchange of oppressive mechanisms between the two settler colonial nations. In such a case, I raise a political green consciousness among my students beginning with the Hindi film *Sherni*, which shows how the rhetoric of expansion, extraction, and land development in a postcolonial world is often based on the erasure of indigenous farming practices, forcible relocation of population from their lands, and recruitment of law, criminals, and political figures to build oppressive regimes. Once the tone is set, discussions on the local issue of cop city and the global case of Palestinian territories help drive the arguments home that colonization is deeply rooted in the erasure and control of natural resources and often a postcolonial nation-state functions through such colonial mechanisms that give rise to intra-national green neocolonialism.

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Introduction

"We need to stop being complicit with the silencing structures of the colonizing university. We need to share information, stories, and knowledge"

Lorgia Garcia Peña

As a postdoctoral fellow at Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta (US), I mostly engage with STEM majors in my classes – a young generation that puts their unabashed faith in technology for a better future. This optimism often remains comfortably distanced from the imperial footings of technology. So, how can teaching a Hindi film, Atlanta's Cop City project, and the ongoing genocidal violence against Palestinians create an environmentally conscious and anti-imperial learning experience? I reflect on those pedagogical possibilities here by discussing the imperial foundations of the western education system, positioning myself as the "other", the anti-green context that needs centering in western academic spaces, and briefly discussing the ways I follow decolonial teaching in my classrooms and beyond. Through designing themed English courses on postcolonialism, film, and literature, I have used the Hindi film *Sherni* (Masurkar, 2021), Atlanta's environmental concerns, and Israel's occupation of Palestinians as a critical lens to encourage decolonial green mindfulness in an otherwise tech-dominated western academic space. Though seemingly disparate, these three subjects expose the intertwined capitalist imperial machineries of land control, resource extraction, and subjugation of people that a tech-obsessed academic space must become aware of.

The Hindi film *Sherni* functions as a starting point to understand how the rhetoric of expansion, extraction, and land development in a postcolonial world is often based on the erasure of indigenous farming practices, forcible relocation of population from their lands, in addition to recruitment of law, criminals, and political figures to build oppressive regimes. Once the tone is set, discussions on the local issue of cop city and the global case of Palestinian territories help drive these major arguments home: 1) colonization is deeply rooted in the erasure and control of natural resources and 2) often a postcolonial nation-state functions through such colonial mechanisms that give rise to intra-national green neocolonialism. It is crucial to note that I inhabit a space in the United States of America, where "settler colonialism triumphed"—a country which is a "fragment of Europe" (Mamdani, 2015, pp. 596–598). Thus, it is not impertinent to ask: what does it entail to practice an anticolonial/anti imperial/environmentally conscious pedagogy in a land rooted in genocide, slavery, and white supremacist ideology? But first, a brief look at the colonial footings of US academia follows.

Colonial residues and green crimes of the US empire

In the book *Unsettling the University: Confronting the Colonial Foundations of US Higher Education*, Sharon Stein (2022) skillfully argues that the liberal foundations of US universities are still "rooted in long-standing architecture of dispossession and accumulation" calling it a "colonial template" on which US higher education has been founded

(p. 4). Scholars have also uncovered the connections between colonialism, capitalism, and climate change that continue to this day. Stein goes on to state that:

these connections point to the close relationship between...the systemic, historical, and ongoing racial-colonial violence that enables the US socioeconomic system and the comforts and securities it promises its citizens (especially white citizens) and... the inherent ecological unsustainability of a socioeconomic system that is premised on infinite extraction, growth, and accumulation, given that we inhabit a finite planet. (p. 10)

It is thus critical to be aware of the green crime that the US continues to commit with impunity. For instance, a cursory look at the Wikipedia page of Bhopal Gas Tragedy unveils that the Union Carbide Corporation has been responsible for what is considered the world's worst industrial disaster. More than 500,000 people in the small towns around the UCC plant were exposed to the highly toxic gas methyl isocyanate. A Yale Review's report titled "The Colonial Legacy of Environmental Injustice in U.S. Territories" (Rudge, 2022) holds the US responsible for violating environmental laws and damaging Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, and Marshall Islands, to name a few and continuing "environmental oppression" (Rudge, 2022).

In the case of Gaza, the United Nations (2024) has notified that removal of the 40 million tons of rubble left in the aftermath of US-funded Israel's bombardment could take 15 years and cost between \$500-600 million. TRT World (2024) also reports that more than half of Gaza's agricultural land, which could have been crucial for feeding the starving population, has been ruined by the carnage. United Nations collected data that reveals a rise in the destruction of orchards, field crops and vegetables in the Palestinian enclave. In "Beyond famine and chaos: The case of Gaza", Mohamed Buheji and Amir Hasan elaborate how agricultural de-development has been a trusted agent in times of war and chaos. During the Vietnam War from the early 1960s to 1973, the extensive bombing campaigns conducted by the US destroyed infrastructure displaced millions of civilians, and disrupted agriculture and daily life while chemical agents destroyed jungle areas resulting in long-term environmental devastation and health issues (2024, p. 3). Similarly, the Israeli Defense Forces' deliberate "destruction of the food stores, food convoys, and other civilian food market infrastructure exacerbate the humanitarian situation in Gaza and impact food security." Reports show that "the damaged agricultural land has risen from 6.6 per cent in October 2023 to 34.2 per cent in January 2024", which means a "418.8 per cent increase in the damaged agricultural land in four months" (2024, pp. 5, 12).

Likewise, Atlanta contains the most tree canopies in the US, which cover around 48% of the city. The South River Forest greenspace is known as the lungs of Atlanta, which is now slated to be turned into a police-military training complex. *Columbia Climate School* report (2023) states that in DeKalb County, which contains the neighborhoods surrounding South River Forest, the population is predominantly Black.

The majority live at or below the poverty level and also have some of the country's highest rates of poverty, asthma, and diabetes. The South River Forest is considered one of the largest unspoiled areas left in the Atlanta metro area, and the tree canopy is critical to reducing the urban heat island effect that raises temperatures in Atlanta by up to 10 degrees. Furthermore, with a 75% increase in heavy rainfall in Atlanta, green space is needed to reduce stormwater runoff. These benefits will be lost due to the deforestation of Cop City (Desai, 2023).

It is therefore not surprising that the environmental cost of war on Gaza and the Cop City project remains decentralized and actively removed from students' cognizance as learning about them destabilizes the "ivory towers of western education systems" that have "appropriated knowledge as an exclusionary, ego-centric, and universalized system of capitalistic pleasure" (Dey, 2023, p. 2).

In his book *Green academia: Towards eco-friendly education systems*, Sayan Dey (2023) connects such practices to colonialism-controlled knowledge creations and states that "the knowledge systems that were rooted in the natural environment were systematically, epistemically, and institutionally disrupted by the European colonizers" (p. 2). Thus, when it comes to the question of green pedagogy within US academic spaces, drawing connections between European colonial empires, US imperialism, capitalism, and nature is hardly a beginning point for environmental concerns. Consequently, an anti-imperial green consciousness among young students remains severely underdeveloped. So, what happens when an immigrant woman of color from a previous British colony attempts to develop a green pedagogical foundation? What anxieties and fears cripple her?

Positioning the other

A tectonic shift occurred in the US academic spaces after October 7, 2023. Conversations on colonialism, environmental issues, and decolonizing academia which were common around me came to a sudden halt. Several of my peers and friends confided in me how their attempts at discussing the genocide of Palestine have been met with silence, microaggressions, or in many cases, retaliation. They were asked to stay mum. Opportunities were taken away and microaggressions followed. I was at the receiving end of such imperial attitudes too. One of colleagues invited proposals for a workshop on innovative pedagogical practices. As she had worked with me on a committee dedicated to challenging white hegemonic pedagogical practices before, I promptly proposed a session on "Teaching Palestine and its Benefits in a Communication Class." Three weeks went by. I did not receive any response, and my so-called friend simply stopped talking to me. I was reminded yet again not to read white niceness as solidarity. Even though, my experience at my current institution was comparatively more positive, I feared being suspended, and losing a job I loved, or the worst—being deported.

In the 2022 book *Community as Rebellion: A Syllabus for Surviving Academia as a Woman of Color*, Dr. Lorgia García-Peña, a writer, activist, and scholar specializing in Latinx

Studies with a focus on Black Latinidades, narrates the various ways she struggles to "to find [her] place in [US] academia" (p. xv). Quite similarly, as an Indian immigrant woman from a working-class background with strong postcolonial training, I navigate the multitudes of power dynamics and imperialist restrictions to raise students' consciousness in decolonial concepts and perspectives. My chosen decolonial pedagogical ethos often keeps me on edge. Harsh judgements and negative evaluations could cost me my career. Such suspicions remain abundant. Most importantly, as a postcolonial educator who centralizes praxis in her classrooms and scholarship, I often find myself as an outsider in the US academic space. In this settler colonial and imperialist space, such an "unbelonging" leads to what Peña terms as "violence of exclusion" that continues to shape universities as per the European colonial racist structure (p. xv). This violence can be silent but is nonetheless piercing and painful.

The feeling of unbelongingness intensifies while bringing issues like the Israeli occupation of Palestine to an American tech classroom as ramifications follow. *The Intercept* reports (2024), "when scholars themselves espouse support for Palestine and opposition to the Israeli state, professional consequences have frequently been grave" (Lennard, 2024). Atlanta's Emory University's students and professors led a series of courageous nonviolent protests only to be assaulted by the police and thrown into prison. Writing for *Common Dreams* (2024), Julia Conley reports how Dr. Caroline Fohlin and Dr. Noelle MacAfee were pushed to the ground and handcuffed simply for intervening police violence against protesting students. People I know have been teargassed, hit in the face, and called terrorists. *Al Jazeera* (2024) reports how international scholars face "heightened consequences" for their involvement in pro-Palestinian protests (Gohn, 2024). In the essay "The coloniality of academic freedom and the Palestine exception", Jairo I. Fúnez-Flores (2024) meticulously details his ordeal after he voiced support for Palestine at his university. He received death threats, was put on leave, and did not receive any institutional support. He argues that educational institutions weaponize antisemitism and "knowingly violate academic freedom and speech" (pp. 466-467).

These attitudes reek of privilege and orientalist attitudes of Western academia that Edward Said talks about in his book *Politics of Dispossession* (1995). Teaching Palestine is criminalized in such spaces and is "made worse by the incredible silence of Western academics and intellectuals" (Said, 1995, p. 131). Speaking of such attitudes, Professor Peña has rightfully stated, "While strangers...are invited to be part of the elite university through neoliberal practices of diversity and inclusion... [women of color in academia] are also asked to assimilate via silence or erasure" (2022, p. 9). The expectation is to be likeable by the average white population and their imitators. Thus, criticizing an ongoing genocide and annihilation of a civilization is deemed *complex* and *controversial*. The silence on this subject around me exacerbated my fears. While colleagues appreciated my efforts to teach about the subject – hardly anyone volunteered to share the load. This load was also emotional as my close Palestinian friends were battling colonial violence in Gaza and Hebron, West Bank. When I

shared the nightmares that kept me from sleeping, I received a “Oh, that is sad. I am sorry” in a typical American way—performative and hardly interested in building solidarity—“words of consolation...offered in private” (Peña, 2022, p. 43). I was alone on my journey. Furthermore, technologically driven learners place undying optimism in the successful future that severs them from the ground realities of colonial expansion, environmental degradation, and genocidal governmental policies. Tech-oriented solutions are hyped in such spaces and hardly any consideration is put into the rise of tech colonialism. Helga Tawil-Souri’s 2012 essay “Digital occupation: Gaza’s high-tech enclosure” is a good beginning point to understand how technology strengthens colonial and imperial occupying powers. How can I make my students realize that not being encouraged to study Palestine and Cop City is a colonial project that is “framed around narratives aimed at sustaining dominant structures of power?” (Peña, 2022, p. 15).

One of the ways to challenge this hegemony of US education systems was to wear my unbelonging as a “badge of honor” (Peña, 2022, p. xv) and continue the ethical work of shaping decolonial intellectualities. But I also noticed that the Gen Z generation I was teaching was more environmentally conscious than their previous generation. This group was also “inheriting significant sustainability, climate change and socio-economic challenges compared to their predecessors... and were more inclined towards sustainability concerns” (Tan et al., 2023, 317). At my institution, recently, an organization called *Students Organizing for Sustainability* held an event to mark the 40-year anniversary of the Bhopal disaster. Two female survivors spoke about the continued health issues and lack of reparations their families face. I found this an opportune moment to teach colonial, “environmental and social issues...together rather than separately” (Tan et al., 2023, 316). For this pedagogical praxis to materialize, I also understood the need for a safe learning community that encourages “problem-posing, authentic democratic dialogue, and praxis-based learning outcomes” (Tan et al., 2023, p. 316). I began this journey by first connecting the ecological disasters across the globe and using a narrative film in the process.

From India to Atlanta to Palestine: The (anti)green context

The images below fictional or otherwise, point towards state-led deforestation, restructuring of indigenous lands in ways that restrict people’s mobility, and most importantly capitalist greed. The Hindi film *Sherni*, the construction of a massive police training center by obliterating a large green space, and the environmental disasters that will continue to affect heavily bombed Palestinian areas reinforce the fact that the colonial tool of expansion, abuse of natural resources, and apathy of the state and its repressive apparatuses converge. In the 2024 book *Beyond Cop Cities: Dismantling State and Corporate-Funded Armies and Prisons*, Joy James states how studying Atlanta’s Cop City project reveals the links between militaristic policing and genocidal wars (p. 2).

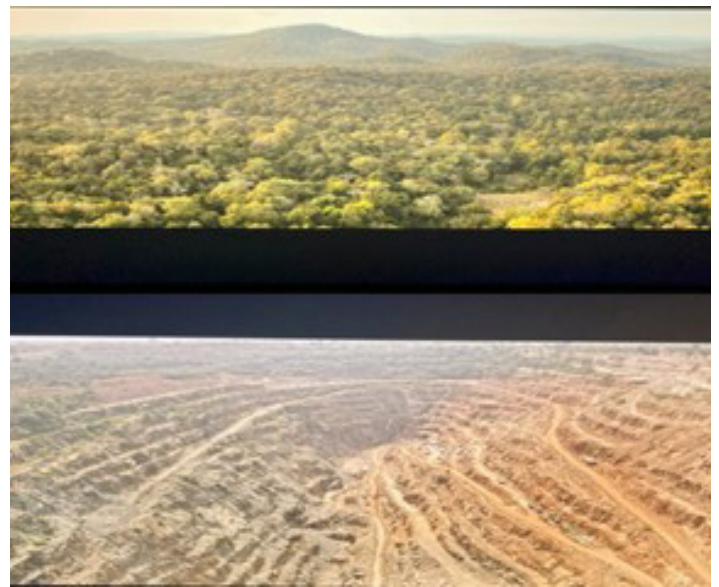


Figure 1: *Sherni* (2021), Amazon Prime.



Figure 2: “Atlanta Police Foundation unveils preliminary renderings of new training center.” The Atlanta Journal Constitution.

Atlanta’s environmental activists attribute the name “Cop City” to an 85-acre police and fire department training center currently under construction. The city of Atlanta wants to build a \$90 million police training facility that would be one of the largest militarized police training centers in the country—by clear-cutting Atlanta’s largest green space. *Unicorn Riot* notes that this facility costs \$90 million for its initial phase and will be built on an 85-acre land “within a huge swath of forested land in unincorporated DeKalb county southeast of Atlanta.” That part of land was formerly a city-run prison farm from 1920 to 1989. “The facility was used to house prisoners from Atlanta who were forced to work on the farm raising food for the city’s prison population.” Previously the land was used by Atlanta city as a “dumping ground”, and the forest around it has continuously been a victim of such “carceral infrastructure.” (Fatica, 2022). This project faces massive opposition in the city as local activists argue that “Israel’s Defense Forces (IDF) may become a component of Atlanta’s Cop City, thanks to the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange (GILEE) program, a university-based police exchange program that focuses on enhancing homeland security efforts through international cooperation and training programs (Herskind, 2023).” The interconnected imperial mechanisms of the US

empire on local and global level motivated me to center these concerns in my post/de-colonial themed classes.

Furthermore, I have previously written about how in the film *Shermi* “a nature-wildlife-human triad illuminates the environmental deterioration at the hands of a powerful few” (Rathour, 2022, p. 31). Scholars like Nasooha (2024) have astutely explored how the destruction of Palestinian land, olive trees, and its indigenous ways of living has led to “environmental apartheid.” She states,

The appropriation of land and ecology is just one of the various methods employed by Israel to support Zionist claims. In an effort to erase Palestinian traces from the land and establish Jewish settlements, Israel has engaged in environmental apartheid, by which they systematically exploit the Palestinian environment through discriminatory practices like water and land restrictions, destruction of agricultural land, and uprooting or burning of trees. (Nasooha, 2024, p. 114)

The natural habitat, the environment, and the indigenous lands have mercilessly fallen victim to the colonial, neocolonial, and neoliberal western empires—or to the postcolonial states who frantically aim to construct themselves in the image of the west. As such, teaching these connections “mak[e] sure that the planetary effort to transform ego-centric education systems into ecofriendly education systems never ceases” (Dey, 2023, p. xvi). However, when educational institutes actively nurture an oppressive police and imperial US state, practicing this pedagogy as an immigrant woman of color automatically becomes an act of rebellion. The application of green pedagogy can be thus considered a political, antiracist, and decolonial instrument as an environmental one.

Training the self to transgress

In order to create an ecofriendly and antiimperialist education space, one must take time to train themselves to transgress these oppressive imperial boundaries of western academia. I began armoring myself with the wisdom of educators like Bell Hooks (1994) and Paulo Freire (2017). Sayan Dey’s 2023 book *Green Academia: Towards Eco-Friendly Education Systems* brought together the anticolonial, antiracist, class-conscious, and environmental orientation I needed before beginning such a pedagogical endeavor. The reality of Palestine is often misrepresented in the US. Palestinian American scholar Edward Said’s work has “illustrate[d] how knowledge systems are constructed to serve imperial benefits and fulfil their colonial visions” (Ismail et al., 2024, p. 11) that have largely distorted Arab histories and culture. Within this context and considering the US state’s unabashed military support to the Zionist regime in Israel, it is essential to question and critique the colonial foundations of US knowledge production.

Professor Hatem Bazian states that “pro-Israel groups in the [US] are the primary funders, producers, organizers, and distributors of Islamophobic content, which dominat[es] political and public discourses in Western societies.” In such

a context, because of the “existing fear of being targeted for writing or highlighting Israeli links... an academic distance from the subject of Palestine is reinforced” (2015, p. 1058). Furthermore, the Israeli colonial regime maintains deep ties with the Atlanta Cop City project, as stated above.

Centering activists’ voices in academia

To gain a deeper understanding of the ties between Israeli imperialism and Cop City, I reached out to student activist Garrett Brand, asking if he would want to be interviewed and quoted for this essay. Brand readily agreed. During our video chat, he revealed the explicit connections between Israel and Cop City. He said that the “idea of Cop City is directly modelled off an IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) training facility called ‘Little Gaza’—a miniature version of Gaza to train [the] IDF soldiers” that can be verified by reading *Wall Street Journal’s* article titled “A look inside little Gaza” (Rasmussen et al., 2023). The second connection, Garrett revealed, exists between the GILEE program within which the Georgia Law Enforcement Officers “get shipped off across the world but most notably to Israel to train with the IDF and in exchange the IDF officers come and train [in Atlanta and the US]” creating a collaboration of oppressive police and military power (G. Brand, personal communication, June 18, 2024). While one would emphatically agree that teaching about the environmental degradation of our local community and Palestine seems urgent, one would also agree that doing so in the heart of Georgia, the US, as an immigrant woman of color seems like a step towards career suicide. US academic spaces discourage practices of anticolonial green pedagogical practices by obscuring its complicity “under the glossaries of capitalism/colonialism that consist of terms like ‘modernism,’ ‘industrialization,’ ‘sustainability,’ ‘green capitalism,’ ‘ecological balance,’ environmental stability,’ and ‘economic growth’” (Dey, 2023, p. 10). Thus, while events and conversations around environmental issues frequent US college campuses, they hardly play a part in turning passive students into active critical thinkers and action-takers. When someone like Garrett Brand does so, they immediately turn into a threat to the status quo. But Brand also reminded me that to puncture the imperial core, sacrificing personal interests is a requirement. Additionally, utilizing activists’ voices as a pedagogical tool helps ground academic discussions into material realities affected by colonialism and eco-imperialism. Also, Bell Hooks reminds us that for women like me “our devotion to learning... was a counter-hegemonic act [and] a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization” (1994, p. 2). Like Hooks, I adhere to centralizing pleasure and excitement in a classroom dedicated to decoloniality and green consciousness in opposition to the western expectation of seriousness in learning (1994, p. 7). From Paulo Freire, I commit to establishing *conscientização* in the classroom—“learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality” (2017, p. 9). This form of radical, decolonial and green pedagogy requires an “increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality” (Freire, 2017, p. 11). I never forget Sayan Dey’s words that “human existence is always attributed to nature” (2023, p. 2). Thus, an ethical

necessity arises to reorient my learners into realizing that Palestine's colonization is deeply connected to Atlanta city's neocolonial practices towards its "local environmental and economic systems" (Dey, 2023, p. 3). Moreover, Edward Said's advocacy for interdisciplinary approaches in academia that could encourage the dissolution of artificial barriers between disciplines (Ismail et al., 2024) encouraged me to teach these different yet connected eco-cultural identities. I hope that learners can be motivated to examine power dynamics between the colonizing and the colonized world that could eventually create a sense of social responsibility, and global awareness embedded with empathy (Ismail et al., 2024).

Empowered by these educators, activists, and thinkers, I remind myself that "no education is politically neutral" (Hooks, 1994, p. 37) and that I am no longer going to be the "objectified" postcolonial educator within a white/west "bourgeoise" space (p. 16) that cages one into "ivory tower isolation" and that I was going to create pathways to holding dialogues with my students and practice "problem-posing" pedagogy to get them thinking about solutions or the lack of it (Freire, 2017, p. 50). But how exactly does a fictional Hindi film fit into this ambition? Because fun is essential to resistance, an escape in a fictional world is sometimes needed.

Film and its radical pedagogical possibilities

For the Senegalese filmmaker, Ousmane Sembène films were like a "night school"—a tool to educate and encourage the masses to question their reality and the world (Gadjigo, 1993, p. 2). I use cinema as an anti-imperialist tool in my classes. Teaching the Hindi film *Sherni* (Tigress in English) provides a brooding environmental commentary on the growing intra-national neocolonial practices that endanger indigenous populations whose livelihood remains dependent on nature and wildlife. The intricate connections between environmental conservation, bureaucratic corruption, wildlife preservation, and indigenous proletariat rights are explored through Vidya Vincent in the film – a newly appointed Divisional Forest Officer who must solve the case of a human-eating tigress that puts local villagers' lives in danger. Soon, Vincent finds that between the iron mining capitalists, landowners, and the local officials who side with the powerful, the tiger and the human population remain neglected, abused, and in a continued "state of injury" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 21).

In the context of green pedagogy, this film provides numerous possibilities. Firstly, students are introduced to Hindi cinema beyond white-western assumptions that classify them as a form of unserious cinema or as Madhava Prasad argues, "not yet cinema" (1998, p. 2). Including such movies also "afford the college instructor an opportunity to provide students with a window into what for many of them is a foreign culture while also focusing on a specific topic" (Mehrotra & Gibbs, 2022, p. 11). Secondly, one can analyze how the rhetoric of capitalist development, progress, deforestation, and/or industrialization in postcolonial societies mirror the European colonial practices of pillaging, land grabbing, feudalism, and resource exploitation. The film shows how an

iron mining project has led to massive deforestation and has made travelling for villagers excruciatingly longer or nearly impossible. The shortcuts through the forest are no longer accessible as the forest officers have asked the villagers to stay away from the danger of the tigress. The tigress emerges as the scapegoat for governmental practices, very much like the indigenous populations who are often categorized as troublemakers or terrorists when they rise against their subjugation. Thirdly, the film puts forward the issue of gendered environmentalism for discussion. While patriarchal ethos requires the success-oriented male figure to be profit-focused, concerns about the climate and nature are often termed as feminine virtues. Through the character of Vidya Vincent, one clearly understands this dichotomy as those who make her work difficult are exclusively men: local political parties, her supervisor, and the hunter hired to kill the tigress.

The Indian film *Sherni* proves useful in discussing global environmental issues. Moreover, by placing a fictional film besides the issues of police brutality and genocide, students can be led to discuss the need of green storytelling and filmmaking. In an American institute that often holds tech-savvy and sports-obsessed student population, *Sherni* can severely dismantle the culture of gadgetry obsession that reduces the human component in learning. An institute like mine boasts about its majority-minority population—more than 40% carrying Asian, South Asian, Hispanic, and Native ancestry—populations that navigate East and the West carrying a strong dose of postcolonial ambivalence within them. That is why, Hindi films like *Sherni* come in handy in creating a solid postcolonial foundation upon which discussions on Palestine or a police state can take place with some ease. And of course, one must not underestimate the power of joy and pleasure that Hindi films carry. Bollywood (as the Hindi film industry is popularly called) is immensely helpful in providing a relief when teaching intense topics like colonial violence, apartheid regimes, and American imperialism to those who have been majorly trained to glorify US exceptionalism.

Teaching Cop City

In my close to a decade of experience of living and engaging with progressive/liberal chatter in the US, I have noticed a shameless hypocrisy. On one hand, the neoliberal population, academic or otherwise, hails a figure like Greta Thunberg while remaining willfully ignorant of the environmental crisis caused by their favorite celebrity Taylor Swift's private jets. When I was organizing events around Iranian women and their rights during my graduate school, liberal white feminists cheered me on overwhelmingly. They also made sure to teach and talk about the subject without any fear. The same feminists, Thunberg-supporting-warriors, fell silent when mothers in Gaza lost their children. This silence still continues. Maybe this sounds like a bitter opinion but in a settler colonial state, such opinions carry obvious patterns of truth. Sharon Stein (2022, p. 15) says that:

Dominance of the Western university significantly narrows which (and whose) knowledges, experiences, and forms of education are perceived

to be legitimate and worthy of study, and this narrow range of possibilities is repeated in most mainstream US higher education history texts.

Within this colonial capitalist context, it does not seem surprising why issues affecting the poor, racially marginalized, or Arab and Muslim women remain ignored. Stein also states that this model of growth, expansion, and wealth accumulation hardly worries about “its negative impacts on the human and other-than-human beings” (2022, p. 3). Paulo Freire says that one can “witness the oppressed becoming the oppressors by remaining silent today” (2017, p. 20). While the US culture boasts of progress and caring for human rights, talks hardly translate to action. Teaching Cop City and especially its connection to Palestine’s occupation is essential as it holds a mirror to the proponents of human liberty. In an imperialist context, the creation of knowledge, no matter how progressive, still positions the white colonial system as a de-facto zone of culture and knowledge production. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* painstakingly discusses this very phenomenon that “invent[s] a tradition” for knowledge production laced with imperialist connotations (1994, p. 191). Here, the Western point of view still remains unchallenged and escapes accountability.

Teaching Cop City is the ethical test for those liberals whose theories do not match their actions and who cannot create “links between themes” (Freire, 2017, p. 81). Moreover, it poses the questions: “how can one focus on their local communities and create a bridge between theory and practice? How can learners commit to praxis of reflection and action” and “perceive... and understand [their immediate reality] in order to transform it” (Freire, 2017, pp. 25–27).

Georgia, Atlanta consists of a strong Jewish population—both who resist Israeli occupation of Palestine and those who support it. A classroom in such a context can be a troubling place for an educator like me. However, teaching about Cop City and its collaboration with the Israeli Defense Forces can be used to discuss the global reach of US policing systems. Connecting this topic to reproduceable colonial tactics which will go on harming the Black communities in the longer run can encourage the learners to move beyond their personal beliefs and think about other vulnerable populations. In this way, green pedagogical practices can challenge the hyper-self-indulgence of US culture that often gets popularized as self-care.

Palestine: The ultimate moral test of anticolonial principles

The necessity to teach about Palestine and its environmental crisis must begin with a strong decolonial responsibility. Sharon Stein (2022, p. 263) recommends the following ways to do so:

attributability, or recognition that the privileges and benefits [US Americans] enjoy are rooted in historical and ongoing colonial, racial, and ecological harm; *answerability*, or recognition of one’s role in the systemic dimensions of harm; and *accountability*, or recognition that one is both

systemically culpable and individually complicit in harm and that there is thus both an individual and collective obligation to interrupt the reproduction of harm, enact restitution, and repair harms already done.

The attributability begins with the horrid fact that the US imperialist state is majorly responsible for the genocide (human, livestock, and environmental) of Palestinians. Truthout reports (Zhang, 2024) that “nearly \$25 million in weapons and military assistance sent to Israel each day.” Since this report, three months have passed (Zhang, 2024). One must also recognize that to support decolonization of Palestine is not antisemitic. If it was, one would not have Jewish educators, scholars, activists, and Holocaust survivors working relentlessly for Palestinian liberty.

Once this recognition has been made, the path to recognize one’s role in this colonial setup would be a natural urge. As an educator, the recognition of my caste’s role in maintaining a casteist hegemony was mentally and emotionally torturous. However, the reduction of harm is impossible without this step. Several anti-Zionist scholarships/art/films from Jewish writers, activists, organizations, and scholars like Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, Norman Finkelstein, Miko Peled, *Jewish Voice for Peace*, *Rabbis for Ceasefire*, Gabor Mate, Jonathan Glazer and many more are readily available to unlearn that one’s sovereignty must not be attained via another’s annihilation. And to undo the harm, teaching and talking about Palestine is a good first step. For example: In my case, teaching excerpts from Israeli historian Ilan Pappé’s *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006) has proved eye-opening for my students. Throughout the years, several have expressed how much they appreciated that conversation on Palestine-Israel was normalized in the classroom. In the next section, I most humbly share my experiences and continued work to bring green consciousness to my students and the larger Atlanta community.

Green pedagogy in praxis

Urban Atlanta is a city of possibilities but also a strong reminder of a decaying culture with severely segregated urban and green spaces. Accessing nature takes special trips and detailed planning. One cannot even open the window to let the breeze get in. We live in apartment complexes that resemble prisons. Closed off, fenced off, on higher mounds signaling its expansiveness. In this pronounced difference between natural/corporate-like and rich/poor, one is reminded of the “imperial tradition which serves to underwrite a managerial and instrumental approach to nature” (Jorgenson, 2011, p. 51). The ways to implement decolonial and green pedagogy came as an epiphany.

One fine day, as I was preparing to embark on my postdoctoral position at the prestigious and highly revered Georgia Institute of Technology, my laptop reminded me of a new email, musically. In that typical before-you-begin type of long note, I noticed the sender’s signature saying this at the end in italics: “Georgia Tech is located on the ancestral lands of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, ceded as part of the coerced First Treaty of Indian Spring in 1821.” The framing

of this sentence was peculiar. The words 'located,' 'ceded,' 'treaty' hid the settler colonial intent of dividing and ruling the Muscogee and the Creeks and thwarting their alliance against a common enemy. Such land grabs under white man's laws have always meant getting rid of the native ways of living—entwined with nature. To turn this epistemological violence on its head, I wrote the following in the header of the syllabus for Fall, 2023: "*Georgia Tech occupies the lands of the Mvskoke (Muscogee/Creek) peoples.*"

The class was called *Postcolonial Narratives*. The first step towards a green pedagogy is to centralize the European capitalist-colonial occupation of Native Americans. Georgia Tech, hence, is not *located* but actively *occupies* the Native lands still. Relegating the reality of settler-colonialism to a last sentence in an email signature while reducing the impact of its inherent violence through passive voice and hence making the perpetrator invisible is exactly what is wrong with the US colonial education model: performative action that leads to no mental registration of the meaning of the sentence. Frantz Fanon has argued that the practice of decolonization means "The last shall be first and the first last" (2004, p. 14). Pedagogically, I began so with a simple rewriting and repositioning of a last sentence in an email signature. Beyond that here's what I did and continue to do:

1) Addressing the wounds on both sides: Rolando Vazquez's "Pedagogies of relationality" ask one to recognize the "paths into the future that have been severed by coloniality" (2020, p. 173). This positions us "toward a path of healing the colonial wound"... mourning on the connected patterns of loss and trauma on both Jewish and Palestinian sides so that one can teach to "create the possibilities for unlearning, listen-ing, receiving, sensing, creating, recovering, and healing that is necessary for knowledge cultivation" (Bibi-Sheik, 2022, p.102). Teaching Palestine must not begin by overlooking the horrors of the Holocaust that created a dire need for Jewish safety. Once I explain the human condition on both sides, I use Vox as my trusted media source. Its 2023 YouTube explanation "How Palestinians Were Expelled from their Homes" exposes the mastermind behind it all: The British Empire. How two vulnerable communities were lied to, and how Palestine became the sacrifice zone for Europe and Germany's desperate attempts to leave behind its Nazism-ruled past proves eye opening for my US students growing up in the prime of US propaganda.

2) Getting educated to educate: I attend teach-ins and workshops locally and online on a variety of subjects: Zionism, Israel, and Settler Colonialism, Environmental Aftermaths of US-led Wars organized by scholars, academics, and organizations like *Jewish Voice for Peace*. Additionally, the scholarships of Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi, Noam Chomsky, to name but a few, continue to deepen my understanding of the issue at hand. I also collect social media educational resources and watch numerous YouTube videos from trusted sources like Vox, Al Jazeera, and Democracy Now. Whatever I learn, I share with my students and encourage them to bring their existing knowledge to the classroom. I often emphasize that I do not claim authority on this subject.

3) Recognizing bias, creating dialogue and synthesis: When we engage with the first step, my students and I create a Google document including a table divided into three sections: a) What have I heard about Palestine-Israel? b) What research have I done, and what sources have I used? c) What would I like to know? The document was editable by everyone in the classes. In the Spring and Fall of 2024, we looked at one column and row and discussed the points in detail. I projected that Google document that enabled students to see various and differing points of view. We ended with the synthesis of these ideas and questions that needed further research. I call this activity "cutting the noise." The rationale is to question what we know, how we know, and what we do not know. This exercise also involves students in the process of their learning (Lorenz & Guan, 2023, p. 273). Since October 7, 2023, western media outlets have engaged in biased reporting on Gaza and Palestine. By engaging with examples of biased reporting, my students understand how English language as a tool of empire has dehumanized Muslims and Arabs in the American minds.

5) Connecting colonialism, modern state, and environmental concerns: Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe (2019)'s essay "Necropolitics" proves to be a masterpiece when it comes to connecting colonialism, the foundation of violent sovereignties, and the colonization of Palestine. Teaching this has always shown my students that the state has a monopoly on violence, and it kills with impunity. To kill is to self-define and self-actualize. Linking these points to the far-right Zionist propaganda against Palestinians then becomes easy. Furthermore, the discussion of slave plantations, the construction of Nazi concentration camps, and the apartheid regime in Palestine drive the points home. Additionally, sources like Nelson Mandela's speech (1997) on solidarity with Palestine and explaining the similarities between South African and Palestinian colonial conditions prove hugely beneficial.

6) Building community: I successfully created an assignment called "Walk with Me on the Atlanta Beltline" as an extra credit option during my Spring 2024 English class. While our class had built a truly de-hierarchal learning community based on the principles of "pedagogical fluidity", I was tired of the monotoned classroom walls that still kept our new formed anticolonial green consciousness within the confines of a tech institute (Dey, 2023, p. 79). I saw this as an attempt towards "de-authorizing and de-monopolizing an English curricula...where the individuals do not merely function as suppliers and consumers but collectively participate in ecological" learning and "community building" (Dey, 2023, p. 75). As we walked in groups, we discussed how urban spaces are designed, why our walking routes are accessed mainly by upper middle-class Americans, why some houses are built on higher mounds, and what could be the implications of carving out streets from lush jungles. These questions also made students critically evaluate the Cop City project and find commonalities with the Hindi film *Sherni*. Furthermore, I invited my students to participate with me on a symposium panel titled "Postcolonialism and Media." As a panel, we prepared and presented work ranging from reality TV shows, Taylor Swift's role in environmental damage, and Palestinian short films *The Present and Bonbone* that skillfully show the limitations to accessibility for Palestinians and the reshaping

of indigenous lands to put Israeli apartheid systems into play. As Dey rightly asserts “eco-centric, community-based [pedagogical] methodologies” accentuate the advantages of teaching practices that are “anti-capitalistic, collaborative, and [based on] shared agencies” (2023, p. 79). Beyond building communities with my students, I also reached out to several student organization on campus. Student activists were involved in sustainability initiatives, Stop Cop City movements, centering Palestinian narratives, and demanding Georgia Tech to disclose its involvement with US military and Israeli war machinery and dissociate itself completely. In my unbelongingness in white imperialist US academic spaces, these young leaders became my hope. By attending their events, I have continued my goal of getting educated to educate.

7) Resistance cinema and the role of environmental films:

It was the summer of 2024. Empowered by successful implementations of my decolonial, non-white pedagogical standards and local and national student activism against Palestine’s occupation and Cop City projects, I was desperate to create a city-wide educational initiative. In May, my husband, a fellow postcolonial educator enthusiastically introduced *Refaat Mobile Library*, a “traveling volunteer-run liberation library in Atlanta in honor of martyred Palestinian poet and professor Refaat Alareer” (<https://www.refaatlibrary.com/home>). We both immediately joined as volunteers, which opened the much-needed floodgates of decolonial, anti-war, and environmental organizing.

In June of the same year, my husband and I decided to merge our cinephilia and love of teaching in the form of *Resistance Cinema* – a free monthly film collective aimed at radical education via cinema. Since June of 2024, our collective has screened thirteen films including a 3-film series on Palestine and a short documentary, Cop City. To bridge the gap between education and activism, we invited Georgia Tech’s *Stop Cop City* members for a panel discussion after the screening. The event was attended by more than 50 people. In November, we hosted a South Asian film and teach-in series including films/documentaries on Kashmir and the Bangladesh Student Protests of 2024.

Resistance Cinema also screened essential documentaries like *The Settlers* and *1948: Creation and Catastrophe*, which shows the loss of Palestinian land, livelihood, and continued ecological colonialism practiced by the Israeli government and military. As the war continues, “the planet-warming emissions generated during the first two months of the war in Gaza were greater than the annual carbon footprint of more than 20 of the world’s most climate-vulnerable nations,” *The Guardian* reports. The report further states “the climate cost of the first 60 days of Israel’s military response was equivalent to burning at least 150,000 [tons] of coal.” As I write this, Palestinians have endured more than 400 days of non-stop killing and relentless bombing.

Conclusion

Climbing on trees, getting bitten by bugs, or drenched in rain were the best times of my childhood. Interacting with nature was highly encouraged along with its relishes and

dangers. I come from a family that has been displaced multiple times. My father worked as a bank manager in Hindustan Fertilizer Township, Barauni, in the Indian state of Bihar. The township was built in the late 1970s where the employees of The Hindustan Fertilizer Corporation of India lived. As HURL’s (Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Limited) new fertilizer plant was announced to take over the township, the displacement of existing residents was announced. Being a bank employee, my father had no choice but to leave as soon as possible. We had no funds to buy a house or build one. I choose to leave this story incomplete. However, I must confess that my life made me acutely aware of corporations, their logic of appropriation of natural resources, and their manipulation of the local population for profit.

Through this essay, I have shared my utilization of the Hindi film *Sherani*, Atlanta’s Cop City project, and genocidal violence against Palestinians to create an environmentally conscious and anticolonial learning community. I have also shared my implementation of green pedagogy in and beyond the classroom spaces. These pedagogical practices encourage learners to think about governmental and institutional policies and put into practice the “ecopedagogical conceptual framework for sustainability education” as discussed by Tan, Wanganoo, and Mathur (2023, p. 218). While still a work in progress, I hope these musings provide some insight into enabling and strengthening green academic practices. I also hope they initiate more conversations on “the oppressive regimes use [of] science and technology for manipulation and repression” (Freire, 2017, p. 34). But most importantly, I hope my essay activates a global teachers’ solidarity movement so that we can “deal with the problem of oppressed and oppressor consciousness” and initiate a longlisting green-minded “conversation leading to love” (Freire, 2017, pp. 29–30).

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