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Decolonization
Where and how does it fit at IOB?

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IOB | Institute of Development Policy

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Preface

The paper that follows is part of a wider effort IOB initiated last year – under the mandate of the previous Bureau of IOB - to question its "DNA" in view of rethinking its academic activities, particularly in the field of education.

We are thankful that Mollie Gleiberman, who has been working here as a research and teaching assistant and who knows the institute quite well, was able to invest time and energy in the decolonization challenges for institutes like IOB and for IOB particularly. What came out of this exercise goes clearly beyond the field of education, the author not only situates the recent "decolonization movement" in a wider set of related literatures, her recommendations also question other dimensions of what we do and how we do it. The report is openly (self-)critical and this is exactly what we need to learn from in order to (at least try to) improve current practices. This being said, the critiques and recommendations are evidently just suggestions by the author, meant as inputs into a further collective decision-making process. In this sense, the standard sentence of a Working Paper applies: "The findings and views expressed in the IOB Working Papers are those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of IOB as an institute".

This paper also accompanies one other paper on North-South Partnerships (Titeca 2021), which was also discussed with a number of people from our partner institutes (July 2021), and a report (to be written) that analyses the student survey on decolonization which was carried out in August of 2021. All of these will be "inputs" into a further process of reflection we plan to carry further in the months to come.

Tom De Herdt

Chair of the Research Commission 2021-24

In recent years, decolonization has become a hot topic not only in development studies, but within academia more broadly and across many other arenas of social and political life (Last, 2018; Merritt, 2019). While decolonization has historically been present, either explicitly or implicitly, throughout development studies and many of the disciplines which fall under its aegis, contemporary discussions about decolonizing university curricula—catalyzed by the *Rhodes Must Fall/Fees Must Fall* movements in South Africa in 2015-2016, the *Why Is My Curriculum White?* movement launched by University College London in 2015, and the globalization of the USA's *Black Lives Matter* movement in 2019—have gained new urgency amongst students and faculty around the world (Charles, 2019; Swain, 2019).

At the IOB, too, interest in decolonization seems to be at an all-time high. Whereas just last year, a survey conducted amongst alumni revealed limited interest in decolonization as a topic for discussion,[1] current students are highly engaged and have even taken the initiative to form their own working-group on decolonizing development studies. Traditionally, IOB students have generally espoused a willingness to take a critical perspective toward development while remaining fully committed to the idea of development, approaching their studies from a mainstream, practitioner-oriented perspective that seeks to refine and improve existing practices. It is not clear whether the new enthusiasm for decolonization at IOB reflects the general mainstreaming of decolonization discourse or a shift in the type of students that IOB is attracting. Either case signals that grappling with decolonization can no longer be relegated to IOB's proverbial back-burner. Given IOB's longstanding commitment to organizational learning as well as the institute's ongoing efforts to deepen and strengthen research and education partnerships with institutes in the Global South, this seems like an opportune moment to take stock of what is meant by 'decolonization' and to explore some of the different vectors along which decolonization intersects with IOB's mission in research and pedagogy, as well as in IOB's outreach efforts beyond academia.

The aim of this paper is fourfold:

- To **briefly sketch the contours of how decolonization is defined**
- To offer a **critical reading of contemporary decolonization discourse** and highlight some of the tensions/inconsistencies that complicate the search for best practices
- To attempt to identify **best practices and lessons-learned** from other academic institutes (especially, but not exclusively, development studies departments)
- To **tentatively formulate some thoughts for IOB moving forward** based on both the author's own observations and on existing feedback about current policies and practices.

A few points of clarification about your author are in order: this paper was prepared as part of an exercise reflecting on the idea of decolonization at IOB, with an eye toward identifying concerns and suggesting possible steps toward addressing such concerns. As such, it presents but a sliver of my own thinking and views on the topic — i.e., points that I believe especially salient for the current context. The document does not pretend to represent a complete or consensus view on the various strands of decolonial thinking, literature, and activism (and should not be read as attempting to provide anything of the sort), nor is it intended as a manifesto or representative tract. It is, rather, a meditation that unites my own sense of unease regarding how the concept of decolonization has been received in the past (i.e., with distance and even some suspicion) and how it is being deployed today (i.e., in highly charged and at times accusatory rhetoric, but milquetoast actions). I am particularly motivated to confront the paradox of the inverse relationship between decolonization's mainstreaming and its potential to induce transformational change, a point I return to several times. Furthermore, in the specific context of IOB, it is important to note that the discussion of decolonizing the curriculum raises deeper issues regarding the type of program that IOB offers, in terms of what, precisely, 'development

[1] Compared to other surveys that alumni have been asked to complete, the 2020 survey asking about decolonization yielded surprisingly few respondents.

studies' is. I wish to state categorically that I do believe IOB is justified in remaining a big-tent institute, welcoming those who dream of working in the World Bank *and* those who dream of dismantling it. I am, however, less convinced that these divergent conceptualizations of what 'development studies' *consists of* can be reconciled within the same program(s), in the way that the current master programs valiantly attempt to do. I believe that IOB will see an increase in dissatisfied students, with those more inclined toward an economic approach to development studies annoyed by anti-capitalist rhetoric and anthropological jargon, and those who envision development studies as an activist project for social justice or an interrogation of the notion of progress put-off what they perceive as an insufficiently critical perspective. Obviously, there is much room for maneuver and cross fertilization, but in its current form the master programs blend divergent understandings of 'development studies' as effectively as oil and water: no matter how much you stir and mix, they continue to naturally separate.

In the interest of space, I will eschew further editorializing, and trust the reader to know that the usual disclaimers about my own partial perspective and positionality apply.

Decolonization: What Do We Mean?

It is by now passe to observe that decolonization has become a central theme not only in development studies, but both within and outside of the academy more broadly, and indeed, across virtually all facets of social, cultural, and political life. It is likewise ubiquitously acknowledged that understandings of what 'decolonization' *is*, *means*, or *does* remain ill-defined, contested, and heterogeneous (Bhambra et al., 2018). In this section, I provide a brief overview of the different ways the term decolonization has been used. Given the sheer number of thinkers and works that have been produced on the topic, my sketch is admittedly oversimplified, and perhaps even crudely reductionist. I am guided by the belief that my audience is already very familiar with much of what will be said in this section, hence I eschew nuance and detail in favor of blunt contours.

Decolonization as a term is used in four main ways. First, as ***physical/geographical decolonization***: here, decolonization refers to the historical period from the late 1940s to early 1970s during which (predominantly European) colonizers were ejected from the lands they had colonized, which subsequently transitioned into nation states. In this sense, decolonization refers to both the physical withdrawal of the colonizers and the excision of their operational influence over the newly-independent states. The second sense refers to ***intellectual decolonization***, a conceptual analog to Paulo Freire's notion of 'conscientization'. Here, decolonization means the process by which intellectuals and scholars in colonized or formerly colonized lands articulate the need to break out of the enduring predominance of Western/European economic models, languages, epistemologies and tastes—what the scholar Ngugi wa Thiong'o refers to as *decolonizing the mind* (wa Thiong'o, 1981). The third meaning inverts this, turning the praxiological impetus back on to the West by calling for Western/Euro-American individuals and institutions to recognize the non-universality of Western categories and knowledges, and to acknowledge their own complicity—often inadvertent, but no less problematic (and perhaps even more) because of that—in perpetuating the hegemonic position of Eurocentric, white, patriarchal ways of knowing, interpreting, and being in the world. Dipesh Chakrabarty refers to this as the task of ***provincializing Europe*** (Chakrabarty, 2000). Most contemporary usage[2] combines and extends the latter two meanings, emphasizing a ***pluriversal*** approach to knowledge creation, while foregrounding the need to address the historical silencing of non-white/non-European perspectives, epistemologies, voices and rationalities (Mignolo, 2005). A useful referent for the contemporary manifestation of decolonization is formulated by Bhambra et al., (2018), who explain decolonizing as:

[2] In their oft-cited work, Tuck and Yang (2012) argue against an expansive, metaphorical understanding of decolonization out of concern that this turns it into an empty signifier; instead, they argue that 'decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically' (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 7).

> a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study [and] re-situates these phenomena as key shaping forces of the contemporary world, in a context where their role has been systematically effaced from view [while also] offer[ing] alternative ways of thinking about the world and alternative forms of political praxis. (Bhambra et al., 2018, p. 2)

In her now-classic text, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith offers a succinct definition:

> Decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values which inform research practices. (Smith, 1999, p. 20)

While the current enthusiasm for 'decolonization' represents a new wave of decolonial thinkers, the ideas advanced are part of a much larger genealogy of works that have, over the course of many decades, questioned the privileged positionality of Western/Northern institutions, ideas, scientific practices, epistemologies, methodologies, and actors. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to account for this vast, heterogenous literature, which includes far too many authors, strands of thought, positionalities, to neatly fit into any summary[3].

The vast body of literature produced over many decades by indigenous and 'Southern' scholars on decolonial thought and theory is at times overlooked by white/Euro-American scholars who have recently joined the 'decolonial bandwagon' (Moosavi, 2020). As Moosavi argues, in the enthusiasm generated from their own epiphanies, those new to these ideas may mistakenly assume that they are the first people formulate such thoughts and inadvertently perpetuate 'an ironic but troubling intellectual colonization whereby Northern scholars may take ownership of intellectual decolonization and silence decolonial scholars from the Global South' (ibid., p. 341). Indeed, a tendency for 'columbusing'—interpreting one's *personal* discovery of an idea or thinker as if it represents the *universal* discovery of the idea or thinker—is palpable in certain corners. Ironically, the assumption that one's own ignorance signifies a general lacuna in knowledge exemplifies precisely the kind of epistemological chauvinism that decolonization aims to eliminate. Mignolo therefore cautions against 'the temptation of European scholars to take the lead' and thereby produce a form of 'rewesternization disguised as dewesternization or decolonization' (Mignolo, 2014, p. 589). The feminist scholar Trinh Minh-ha famously criticized this tendency for Western people to believe they must lead non-western people in the fight against racism and colonialism:

> *They* decide who is "racism-free or anti-colonial," and they seriously think they can go on formulating criteria for us, telling us where and how to detect what they seem to know better than us: racism and colonialism. Natives must be taught in order to be anti-colonialist and de-westernized; they are, indeed, in this world of inequity, the handicapped who cannot represent themselves and have to either be represented or learn how to represent themselves. Whatever the issue, they are entrapped in a circular dance where they always find themselves a pace behind the white saviors. (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 59)

Troublingly, this may not be pure cluelessness, but represent an opportunistic struggle for strategic advancement by white scholars, who fear that true decolonization could potentially render their expertise and authority irrelevant. Enthusiastically embracing the decolonizing trend thus emerges as a

[3] I had initially proposed the idea of creating a table with some key thinkers, but the very process of deciding who to consider 'key' or which works to consider 'canonical' left me paralyzed: if, for example, I decided to only include non-Western/non-white authors, what then of Walter Mignolo, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Paulette Regan, and Raewynn Connell? And what about the feminists? Should I include the authors of the civil rights/anti-racism movement, or focus specifically on the 'post-colonies'? Should I divide thinkers by period, by focus, by region? And so on. No one would have been happy or satisfied with the end result, myself included, thus I abandoned the task.

self-preservation strategy, and positioning oneself as spearheading the decolonization movement becomes a tactic to get or stay ahead:

> the rapid uptake of decolonising as the new buzzword of critique has become a new form of academic production that adds value to one's reputation as a critical scholar while also opening a pathway to profit through making the histories, bodies, and experiences of Black people and people of colour consumable and marketable, transforming them into a viable subject for the entrepreneurial academic agenda. (Dar et al., 2018)

In other words, recognizing that the critique of Western expert knowledge might render their own contributions suspect, Western academics may pivot to decolonization itself as their new terrain of specialization, rescuing their status and reinscribing their authority[4] [5].

It is a testament to how difficult it is 'to decolonize' that many of the arguments launched in the 1970s and 80s are being repeated today. This suggests that the problem is not that the significance of decolonizing has not been made clear, or that those who understand the significance of decolonization have failed to adequately communicate its importance. I am perhaps far more cynical than today's observers, because I do not think that repeating the same things that have been said for the past 40+ years will do anything to change anyone's mind, who has not already been convinced. It is not that what is said today is not important, rather, simply that it has all been said at great length already. In my review of the literature produced in the current decolonizing turn, what was perhaps the most surprising thing was how derivative (and dare I say, stale?) many 'new' texts tend to be, offering little more than a litany of obligatory incantations, like beads on a rosary[6].

When scholars interpret the non-universal adoption of decolonizing approaches as evidence that the decolonization efforts of the 1980s did not work, they assume that the problem is that previous generations were not committed enough, or aware enough, or decolonized enough. I am not so sure that this is a satisfying explanation. When Zoe Todd says that today's 'decolonial turn 2.0' in anthropology indicates that the lessons of the 80s were incomplete or insufficient, she is right…but yet not quite right (Todd, 2018). It is true that some of the most elite institutions (and those which emulate them) exhibit an enduring Eurocentric perspective; but it is also true that this poorly reflects how many (most?) anthropologists today approach the discipline (a point that Todd acknowledges in the comments on her post). Thus, the supposed ignorance of decolonization is, I propose, not an ignorance that can be rectified by more articles about the importance of decolonizing, since it is *willful*—that is, it is *disinterest (*or *disagreement)* rather than actual ignorance, borne of a desire to maintain the status quo. Linsey McGoey calls this productive form of ignorance 'strategic ignorance': a willful overlooking of knowledge that operates as a strategy of power (McGoey, 2012). The form of power being exercised is the maintenance of one's own paradigm. People rarely change their worldview wholesale; to adopt a decolonizing lens in the sense advocated by many today would mean that other people would have to let go of their own deeply-held, cherished beliefs about how the world works. Many of the people who advocate neoliberal positions today do so because they *want* to, because they believe it is the system that works best. [I obviously disagree, but the point is this: who am I to tell others what they ought to

[4] Lest I be accused of producing this paper in such an attempt, I was requested to compile this paper as part of a work package. I do not write under the pretense that I am saying anything that hasn't been said many times before, generally by scholars with greater experience, insight, and clarity of vision. However, perhaps the added-value that justifies this paper's existence is its attempt to move beyond abstract concepts to unpack some of the ideas most salient for IOB.

[5] Another important point to clarify is that is it not only white/Western scholars who strategically capitalize on decolonization as a name-maker; as Kevin Okoth notes, some scholars who write most devastatingly about their own marginalization in the academy do so from the comfort of tenured positions at elite universities (Okoth, 2020).

[6] An annoying side-effect of this is that many articles spend more words running through the requisite disclaimers, references, and obligatory statements of solidarity, positionality, partial perspective etc., than they do on whatever argument they intend to make.

believe? Who am I to claim to know what *really* works best for other people? This observation highlights the importance of the *provincializing* approach to decolonization: it enables European paradigms and worldviews, including those of scholars who do not consider themselves leftists/progressive/anti-capitalist to co-exist with others in the world but dislodges them from their hegemonic status as 'truth'. Obviously, this diminishes the force of more activist modes of decolonizing (which would advocate the dismantling of departments dedicated to spreading neoliberalism rather than merely asking them to admit their perspective is partial), but, in the context of IOB, and given the institute's 'DNA' and specializations, this may be a more productive approach to decolonizing.]

This suggests a shortcoming in the current decolonial turn's approach. As it currently stands, much of it is preaching to the choir, and then wondering why everyone else (i.e. everyone that has already made clear they are not interested in joining that particular choir) aren't singing along. As a result, the strategies for decolonizing that are often advanced today have little potential for actual impact. For instance, several students proposed that IOB signal its commitment to decolonization by … crafting a public statement affirming a commitment to decolonization for the website. I wanted to scream: *This is your demand?* As Sara Ahmed (2012) cogently argues, it is not in *statements* that we observe an institute's commitment to diversity and decolonization.

Whither, Decolonization?

In what follows I explore several concerns about the current decolonial turn. To be clear, none of these concerns are against the principle of decolonization per se, nor are they to suggest that decolonization should not be embraced by higher education (and, obviously, elsewhere). The reason these concerns matter is precisely *because they threaten to derail actual decolonization*.

Posturing and Tokenism: The 'Decolonial Bandwagon'

Many scholars have cautioned against allowing the term 'decolonization' to be reduced to an empty signifier (Long, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012). As decolonization becomes more and more central to contemporary discussions about university curricula and departments, professional workplaces, art, media, public spaces and so on, actors holding divergent understandings and opinions have hopped onto the 'decolonial bandwagon' (Moosavi, 2020). Employed as a virtue word—a 'glittering generality' (Lee & Lee, 1939)—actors with different (and competing) interests appropriate and deploy the term. Below, I outline three ways that 'decolonization' (in the current trend) is employed in a manner that belies the term's emancipatory sheen.

First, decolonization has become what Wahbie Long refers to as 'another one of those radical chic terms' (Long, 2018), a concept that leftist academics are expected to pepper throughout their work and profess allegiance to. To express skepticism towards current decolonization rhetoric (or about other emergent formulations of identity-based/'woke' politics) is often to invite the charge of racism. In other words, decolonization is conceived by some a badge of honor to be worn, to broadcast one's virtuousness, and—vexingly—to shut down conversation. There is, of course, much more that can be said about this particular dynamic but for our purposes here, the point is that decolonization is being used by some to advance a pernicious form of activism wherein 'one's identity constitutes an argument in and of itself' (Long, 2018).

Second, the ubiquity of decolonization rhetoric has given rise to a proliferation of 'fake decolonization': a 'tasteless tokenism that too often passes as progressivism' (Shringarpure, 2020). The result is the creation of 'a buzz around decolonization while co-opting and diluting the term, and shrewdly integrating it into a mainstream narrative' (Shringarpure, 2020).

Troublingly, this threatens to recapitulate the trajectory of terms like 'participation' and 'diversity'. *Participation* was lauded as an emancipatory corrective to top-down, externally-imposed development, promising to empower local people and prioritize local knowledge (Mosse, 2001). Yet it has been

summarily co-opted and turned into a set of technical exercises or procedures, rather than a form of radical redress (Anderson et al., 2012; Cooke, 2004; Kothari, 2005). As such, participatory approaches 'ironically reinforced the centrality of Western knowledge and expertise' (Kothari, 2005, p. 437) via a form of 'inclusionary control' that incorporates critique only insofar as the threat it poses to the status quo can be neutralized. Similarly, commitments to *diversity* (and inclusivity) are enshrined in the speech of universities and corporations (for instance on web pages and featured prominently in job vacancies), yet such statements do little, if anything, to dismantle the institutionalized structures that reinforce and reproduce the conspicuous and continued *lack* of diversity in such spaces (Ahmed, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). The danger, then, is that decolonization rhetoric is becoming little more than a 'a glib way of proclaiming all kinds of radical and progressive reckonings with colonialism while tightening the screws on a skewed, neoliberal, and necropolitical political system' (Shringarpure, 2020).

Third, some elites in the global south cannily adopt the language of 'decolonization' to paper over corruption and human rights violations (Vandeginste, 2021), or to perpetuate the exclusion and persecution of LGBTQ people (Smith, 2014) by invoking relativity claims that appeal to notions of authentic, traditional hierarchies and beliefs[7].

Recognition Versus Redistribution

This section is perhaps less relevant for the context of IOB, but given the fervor with which 'decolonization' has been embraced in recent years, it seems important to raise, particularly as increasing numbers of students and researchers express interest in decolonization, albeit with sometimes divergent ideas about what this means and entails. It is important to stress that the tension between recognition and redistribution (Fraser, 2000) that I will raise here has nothing to do with denying that racism exists and persists throughout society, both at large in the world and within academic knowledge production. Nor do such critiques seek to buttress the continuation of western, Euro-/white-, male-centric forms of knowing, or to reinforce the silencing of indigenous voices and knowledge, or to suggest that the project of decolonization is unnecessary or unworthy. Quite the contrary. Rather, the substance of the critique centers on the *locus of struggle* in effecting social change, and expresses a concern that the contemporary fad for decolonization is a facet of a broader identitarian movement which, by dismissing the possibility of class solidarity in favor of essentialized identity claims, inadvertently fortifies structures of oppression by permitting symbolic victories to substitute for (and subsume) more fundamental demands. Put simply: my intervention in this section is targeted at a debate largely internal to 'leftist' approaches to decolonization.

Much of the current decolonial turn is focused on the struggle for recognition: it is highly focused on symbolic violence and cast in individualistic, identitarian terms, stressing categories such as race, ethnicity, religion, ableness, indigeneity, sexuality and gender—but rarely, as Jodi Dean (2016) notes, class. As a result, solutions center on efforts of persuasion, particularly encouraging confessions by (white) individuals (e.g. implicit bias training; acknowledgement of privilege and positionality; personal commitment to anti-racism). As such, it reproduces the methodological individualism of mainstream neoliberalism, positing social change as the outcome of aggregate individual behaviors (the assumption goes: *if individuals can become less racist and more aware of their privilege, society will become less racist*)[8]. Calls for solidarity dissolve and are replaced by calls for self-care, individualizing

[7] Though it should be noted that queer scholars also question the globalizing presumptions and pretensions of Western queer politics (Morgensen, 2011).

[8] Clearly, encouraging individuals to reflect upon the ways in which they may inadvertently perpetuate marginalization of others and benefit from unearned privilege has a role to play in dismantling structural oppression. But while changing the hearts of individuals is a valuable goal, it is woefully insufficient—particularly given that most of the individuals targeted in these interventions, and who take their teachings to heart, do so because they themselves lack substantial decision-making power and authority and can relate.

both the problem and the solution. Furthermore, such an intense focus on the self can also become a tactic that too easily lets people off the hook:

> [T]he "unlearning" of bias often takes the form of confession in which the emotional struggles of those with unconscious biases are recentered and a form of self-forgiveness is produced that reduces blame and guilt. When confession becomes the remedy for racism it functions as a "fantasy of transcendence" (Ahmed 2004) where one is distanced from the very thing confessed. Confessing bias, thus, becomes a performative act that allows one to believe that one has moved beyond racism. (Applebaum, 2019, p. 133)

Paradoxically, the invocation of collective guilt can yield a similar result. Hannah Arendt cautioned that demands for acknowledgment of collective guilt can backfire, with the acknowledgment standing in for actual redress and allowing 'the very magnitude of the crime' to become 'the best excuse for doing nothing' (Arendt, 1972, p. 162). A similar point is made by Sara Ahmed (2004; 2014) who writes about the role that feelings of *shame* play in contemporary Australian discourse when white and non-indigenous Australians are confronted by legacy of settler colonialism:

> Shame collapses the 'I' with the 'we' in the failure to transform the social ideal into action, a failure which, when witnessed, confirms the ideal, and makes possible a return to pride. [...] [T]he transference of bad feeling to the subject in shame is only temporary, as the 'transference' can become evidence of the restoration of an identity of which we can be proud (the fact that we are shamed by this past 'shows' that we are now good and caring subjects). (Ahmed, 2014, pp. 109-110)

In other words, defining racism as 'unwitting and collective prejudice' results in a paradox whereby

> saying "we are racist" becomes a claim to have overcome the conditions (unseen racism) that requires the speech act in the first place. The logic goes: we say "we are racist", and, insofar as we can admit to being racist (and racists are unwitting), then we are showing that "we are not racist", or at least that we are not racist in the same way. (Ahmed, 2004, para. 20)

Those who are skeptical of the idea that oppression and epistemic injustice can be rectified through intense self-reflection by those who hold privilege do not (as it is sometimes charged) disagree that symbolic violence exists and ought to be confronted, nor do they deny that individuals ought to become more aware of their implicit biases. The crux of the critique is that questions of political economy (class and the materialist analysis of the effects of oppression) are increasingly evacuated from the conversation in favor of philosophical discussions about positionality and hyper-reflexivity. As Lauren Michele Jackson notes in her commentary on *White Fragility*, DiAngelo's book 'changed how white progressives talked about themselves — and little else' (Jackson, 2019). In the end,

> the politics of recognition displaces the politics of redistribution, [and] may actually promote economic inequality; insofar as it reifies group identities, it risks sanctioning violations of human rights and freezing the very antagonisms it purports to mediate. (Fraser, 2000, p. 108)

Demands for redistribution are more common amongst those who are concerned that the intense focus on identity distracts from the overarching economic system that perpetuates those very categories of identity-based exclusion (Sivanandan, 2001). Those who adopt this perspective argue for the reassertion of class as an important analytic category to overcome fissures, but are often accused of retreating into a class reductionism that ignores racism and other forms of oppression (Reed, 2019). This charge relies on a caricature; as Reed (ibid.) notes, no one 'on the left seriously argues that racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia are not attitudes and ideologies that persist and cause harm'. It

is beyond the scope the present paper to go deeply into the politics of whiteness studies and Afro-pessimism, but I would like to suggest that the tendency to identify a desire to assert white supremacy at the heart of (most? all?) oppression obscures important matters of class and inequality, as indeed, many scholars have argued (Chibber, 2013, 2017; Deloria Jr., 1988 [1969]; Fields, 1990, 2001; Long, 2018; Okoth, 2020; Reed, 2018, 2019, 2021; Reed, 2015, 2020; Stephens, 2017) — perhaps none more pithily than historian Barbara Jeanne Fields:

> Probably a majority of American historians think of slavery in the United States as primarily a system of race relations—as though the chief business of slavery were the production of white supremacy rather than the production of cotton, sugar, rice and tobacco. One historian has gone so far as to call slavery 'the ultimate segregator'. He does not ask why Europeans seeking the 'ultimate' method of segregating Africans would go to the trouble and expense of transporting them across the ocean for that purpose, when they could have achieved the same end so much more simply by leaving the Africans in Africa. (Fields, 1990, p. 99)

The result is a decolonization movement that becomes neutered of any concrete aims, by locating racism in individuals or abstract groups 'rather than in concrete institutions, interests and social relationships' (Reddy & Nassen Smith, 2019).

South African scholars Niall Reddy and Michael Nassen Smith show how debilitating the focus on recognition can be. No strangers to decolonial thought, and deeply committed to the project of decolonizing the university, they recount how they were initially excited about the University of Cape Town's Curriculum Change Working Group (CCWG), which promised radical changes. Reflecting on the final report by the CCWG, they register their dismay at its privileging of rhetoric and abstract theory over practical, material goals. The post is worth quoting at length:

> [T]he report evinces a curious inattentiveness to the particularities of UCT in the name of repeated sweeping generalizations about "coloniality": an odd outcome for a theoretical approach supposedly founded on hostility to grand narratives. [...] The consequence of this is that most of the contextual details which would seem necessary for any commission to arrive at practical recommendations for curriculum change are entirely elided. There is no description anywhere in the report of the relevant institutional structures, no account of how curricula decisions are made or what systems govern who gets to make those decisions. Indeed, shockingly, there's no description of an existing curricula in the report, nor any attempt to flesh out what form a decolonized curricula may take. Considerable space is devoted to explicating the finer points of Homi Bhabha's ruminations on "liminal third spaces," but the substantial local scholarship on university reform in the post-Apartheid era is not graced with a single citation. [...] Most seriously, it has effectively squandered the institutional opening won by the student movement by putting on the table a set of quixotic, toothless recommendations which, even should they be adopted by the Senate, have little hope of making a substantial dent in institutional racism or ideological bias. The list of these recommendations ("read with conscious intent," "leadership with integrity," "authentic engagement") reads more like the chapters of a self-help book than the demands of a militant movement. (Reddy & Nassen Smith, 2019)

It is important to stress, of course, that concrete, material demands also risk devolving into mere tokenism. Individuals with minority backgrounds who uphold rather than challenge the status quo may be more likely to be hired, since they provide 'diversity cover' (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) while not actually threatening the dominant system. Entrenched ideologies must be actively confronted, and one's appearance or status as a minority does not automatically map on to being an advocate on behalf of others who share that status, or of questioning existing power relations. As Francis Nyamnjoh observes, 'African universities have significantly Africanized their personnel, but not their curricula or

pedagogical structures' based on the mistaken assumption that 'because one is or appears African [...] one is necessarily going to be critical of the colonial intellectual traditions, rituals, and habitus in one's teaching and research, and offer a menu sensitive to local realities and endogenous epistemologies' (Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 138). This tension does not have an easy solution. On one hand, for some students, simply seeing someone who looks 'like them' can be an important way to signal that they belong, that they are welcome in academia. Furthermore, a truly pluriversal model would not dictate that people of certain identities only hold particular views. On the other hand, many people who push for decolonization today also hold progressive views in which decolonization is linked in a chain of equivalence to anti-capitalist activism; as such, merely changing the appearance of faculty without challenging neoliberalism is seen as a betrayal of decolonization's promise.

The Problem with Decolonial 'Quick Fixes'

As it is discussed today, decolonization appears as a slogan for a clear-cut activity (i.e., 'we must decolonize _____!'), as if there was a 'start' button that could be pushed. This is unfortunate, for it oversimplifies what decolonization entails, assumes that decolonization is appropriate/necessary everywhere, and overlooks the existing practices of scholars who have pursued emancipatory agendas and incorporated a truly global roster of thinkers in their classes and research for many years (albeit typically without proclaiming 'decolonization!'). Decolonization should not be seen as a series of tick-box items that can be conveniently identified by our alumni, students of color, and foreign affiliates (whether masters/PhD students, or 'Southern' partners). This is not to say that such input is unwelcome—in fact, such feedback is an important component for concretely identifying what is 'missing' from or problematic with current offerings—but to emphasize that decolonizing a curriculum cannot be reduced to merely looking at the syllabus (or asking people of color/women/the historically oppressed to look at the syllabus) with a red pen and strike out mistakes as if they were spelling errors to be fixed by rearranging a few symbols. Tokenistic inclusion (and/or targeted excision of content deemed problematic) permits minor changes to be made, but does little to question the fundamental perspective (Sultana, 2019). Decolonization is not just about adding authors to the syllabus as a 'fix'; it's about engaging in the deeper process of asking why those authors weren't already there, in the first place (Akel, 2020).

Keele University's frequently-cited *Manifesto for Decolonizing the Curriculum* explains why it is so important to subject program contents—and the very idea of disciplinary canons—to greater scrutiny:

> For too long, teaching in universities has encouraged a 'traditional' and 'canonical' approach that privileges the work of selected authors. If we mainly cite white men in our work, we recreate a world where only knowledge produced by them is considered important, having the effect of marginalising the knowledge produced by others. Even where the curriculum includes the intellectual work of people racialized as other-than-white, it can still operate as a white curriculum. Those non-white writers are often presented as offering a response to 'mainstream' (i.e. white) thought, rather than as thinkers who themselves demand response. (Keele University, n.d.)

This draws attention to why decolonizing a curriculum cannot be reduced to the simple addition or removal of authors from a course reading list. More than just adding a few non-white writers, it involves interrogating how disciplinary canons are created in the first place: why have certain writers/thinkers come to be considered the *canonical* thinkers of a discipline? What types of knowledge, evidence, and truth claims have historically been considered valid, and what types not? Which pieces of evidence, perspectives and facts are routinely taught, and which ones are left out? What types of knowledge are stamped with the mark of 'objectivity' and 'science', and which ones are deemed 'subjective' and 'folk wisdom'? Colonialism, wa Thiong'o writes, involved 'two aspects of the same process: the destruction or

the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser' (wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 16); it is the politics of the credibility excess/deficit (Fricker, 2007; Manne, 2018; Medina, 2011) applied to entire cultures.

This occurs not just in syllabi or curricula, but across publishing more broadly, wherein (certain) scholars have editorial power to decide what gets included. Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that anthologies 'are not natural or neutral selections of texts' but rather the result of a selective process that can frame a tradition and have real effects on a discipline (Smith, 2000, p. 523), consolidating the dominant position or unsettling it through the articulation of a counter-hegemonic position. Absence is the obverse of inclusion, and both evince the exercise of power—a point driven home by Michel-Rolph Trouillot's seminal text, *Silencing the Past*, which examines the production and operation of silences in historical knowledge (Trouillot, 1995).

Disproportionate Burden on Minority Faculty

Placing the burden of decolonizing a curriculum, program, or institute onto those who have historically experienced marginalization merely reinforces the higher levels of service delivery delegated to women and minorities. While this is often driven by proportionality concerns that seek to increase representation, often it perversely results in higher workloads for non-white/male/cisgendered people, leaving them with less time for their own research interests (Guarino & Borden, 2017). In the current climate of higher education evaluation metrics, this forms another barrier to climbing the academic ladder, given the much higher weight accorded to research, publications, and grants over teaching and service delivery (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). It is therefore a worrying trend that in the new calls for decolonization much of the 'responsibility for ending racism [...] falls to Black and Minority ethnic faculty's shoulders' (Doharty et al., 2020, p. 4). Doharty et al. recount the reaction of a (black, female, junior) professor when a (white, male, senior) professor who asked her to help him transform a program into one that was 'decolonized':

> Therein lies the problem: the assumption that ALL race scholarship is the same; the assumption that we can be called upon, at will, to sort out the Eurocentric mess FOR white people; that we have the resources, support, time within our workloads and energy to do so; that we all work on race simply because we are non-white; that we even want to participate in a fundamental misunderstanding of decoloniality. (in Doharty et al., 2020, p. 4)[9].

Reflecting on the frequent invitation that faculty of color receive for teaching guest lectures and workshops on diversity and decolonization, some academics might be tempted to point out that guest lectures are useful for a CV and should not be spurned so carelessly. But there is a mistake in this logic: guest lectures are additive when they relate to an academic's actual area of expertise, otherwise, they merely consume time and intellectual energy better directed toward furthering one's own research. Far from beneficial to minority faculty-members' careers, this form of 'epistemic exploitation' compels minority scholars to assume extra service delivery tasks based on their status as minorities (Berenstain, 2016; Prescod-Weinstein, 2019; Wilson, 2015). There is also the subtle but pervasive effect of credibility excesses and deficits. Generally, white men tend to have a credibility excess, wherein what they say is accorded greater authoritative weight and it is presumed that what they say is correct (even when it may be incorrect or inaccurate); women and minorities tend to suffer from credibility deficits, wherein their

[9] Note that Doharty et al. have assembled three 'composite characters' that each combine accounts from several different people, in an effort to preserve the anonymity of their interlocuters. I reference quotes from these 'composite characters' according to the authors' assemblage.

knowledge is presumed to be incorrect until proven otherwise, and their expertise is questioned, undermined, and doubted (Fricker, 2007; Manne, 2018; Medina, 2011).

There is another point that emerges out of these observations, however, which is more unsettling to confront. While some white academics may be clueless or acting in bad faith (i.e. expecting others to do what they are too lazy to do themselves), it may also be that overreliance on minority faculty can be traced, at least in part, to the increasingly prevalent linkages drawn between identity and permission to speak about topics related to race. An unintended side-effect of the heightened attention to individual positionality, implicit bias, and privilege may be that white academics internalize the idea that their role is to step back and be quiet so that others may speak and be heard[10].

This is emblematic of a deeper paralysis and fear of 'speaking for others' (Alcoff, 1991) that has emerged in tandem with standpoint theories and concerns about reflexivity and positionality. As Farhana Sultana writes:

> A key concern in pursuing international fieldwork that has plagued critical/feminist scholars is the issue of representation, where over-concern about positionality and reflexivity appear to have paralyzed some scholars into avoiding fieldwork and engaging more in textual analysis; in other instances, criticism of research for perpetuating neocolonial representations, having Western biases, and purporting to speak 'for' women, has generated resistance to engage with fieldwork. (Sultana, 2007, p. 375)

This is a complex issue that warrants a far more in-depth discussion than I can provide here, but forms yet another reason to be skeptical of identity-based claims for authority that surrender the possibility of shared struggle and empathy.

General Best Practices?

In preparing this paper, I sought out existing best practices and guides that might be useful for IOB. The result of my search is, however, of limited value. While I did find a plethora of examples of universities, university departments, museums, scholars, faculty members, and students writing about *the importance* of decolonizing, few specify concrete actions that go beyond self-evident advice and platitudes (e.g., cultivate trust with students; commit to anti-racism; discuss decolonization with students and colleagues). This echoes the assessment of the Curriculum Change Working group at UCT by Reddy and Nassen Smith (2019), quoted earlier. Some of the guides were simply less useful because they do not fit the context of the IOB classroom (e.g. many are targeted at institutes where the student body is majority white, or are targeted at classrooms in countries that were colonized). I highlight four guides that offer concrete actions or questions for reflection below and attached in annex.

1) **Sofia Akel, *Decolonising Lancaster University:*** An engaging handbook packed with information, suggestions, tips, scripts, and many references to other works. The resource combines anecdotes from faculty about what worked/didn't work in their classrooms, examples of actions undertaken by high-profile organizations/institutions to 'own-up' to their problematic past actions (e.g. National Geographic Magazine), and reprints the main points from Keele University's decolonization manifesto. (The "Easy Steps" at the end are less helpful than other aspects of the guide). (Akel, 2020)

2) **Angela Okune, Self-Review of Citational Practice:** A checklist for reviewing the literature, perspectives, authors, that one draws upon in one's work, which encourages reflection. Okune describes it as helping scholars to 'note patterns in terms of publication venues, diversity of

[10] The opposite can also occur: I started this paper planning to reach out to several scholars of color, but then quickly shelved that idea out of fear it would be seen as contributing to the very disproportionate burden this section addresses.

sources, where the authors are from geographically, institutionally, intellectual genealogy, categories of race, gender, other intersectional categories.' (Okune, 2019)

3) **Kingston University's *Inclusive Curriculum Framework***: Provides a concise matrix of prompts for faculty to ask themselves when designing a course, focusing on concepts, content, learning and teaching, assessment, feedback and review in terms of how to build a curriculum that is accessible, that enables students to see themselves reflected within it, and which equips students to work in a global and diverse world. (Kingston University)

4) **The Spindle/Partos, *Power Awareness Tool: A Tool for Analysing Power in Partnerships for Development:*** Offers a frank assessment of the power asymmetries that persist in North-South development partnerships, and a worksheet that both partners complete to make power dynamics more explicit. (The Spindle, 2020)

Another possible 'good practice' that I noticed in the course of my research was how several programs are quite explicitly emphasizing *global development*, putting greater stress on the interconnectedness of 'North' and 'South' in understanding that poverty/inequality are not exclusive to the 'South'. This follows the observations of Rory Horner (2020), who writes that ''in preference to the rather outdated idea of international development, the term global development can be increasingly regarded as more fitting for the contemporary map of challenges facing our world' (Horner, 2020. P. 416), adding that '[i]ncreasingly various English-language research centres/higher education institutes, degree programmes/specializations and think-tanks/organizations incorporate "global development" into their name' (ibid.). For some examples from other development studies institutes, see box 1 (next page).

Box 1: Descriptions of Development Studies Programs

Development at The Open University addresses the many challenges facing the global community. Our approach to development focuses on how power can be used to bring about change anywhere in the world, the conflicts of interest, values and agendas that can affect the actions taken, and the negotiations required to resolve those conflicts and bring about positive change. **Our courses and research recognise that the challenges – in particular those of poverty, inequality and injustice – posed by development are global in scope, facing people in all countries across the whole world**. Our focus is on finding alternative approaches and policies to address development challenges and promote a sustainable future. (The Open University, https://fass.open.ac.uk/development)

International Development is **a dynamic field concerned not only with processes of change in the Global South, but also of social, economic, political and cultural change in middle income countries and the Global North**. The perspective of International Development analyses these processes as interdependent and engages major policy challenges as well as efforts to overcome poverty and insecurity while also presenting a structural analysis. This programme provides a solid interdisciplinary social science formation in the political economy and sociology of development and develops students' capacities for independent and critical analysis. (SOAS, https://www.soas.ac.uk/development/programmes/msc-international-development-online/)

Global Development Studies (formerly known as Development Studies) examines development, poverty, inequality as well as social, political, environmental and cultural changes from a multidisciplinary perspective. At the University of Helsinki, Global Development Studies focuses on topics such as the theory of development, global extractivisms and transformative alternatives, decolonising struggles, political ecology of environment and development, development policy and interventions, justice, and the relationship between development and culture, gender and other intersecting inequalities, space and the environment as well as global political economy. **It seeks to explain and understand complex social transformations first and foremost – although not solely – in Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as in the Global South – North relations with the purpose of finding creative opportunities and alternatives for the future**. (University of Helsinki, https://www2.helsinki.fi/en/faculty-of-social-sciences/research/disciplines-and-research/global-development-studies)

In this Master's programme you will examine global inequalities, ranging from their causes, characteristics and possible solutions. **International Development Studies is concerned with a broad range of topics like poverty, conflict, security, social and gender inequality, sustainability, education, the environment and the relationship between local, national and global processes**. (University of Amsterdam, https://www.uva.nl/en/programmes/masters/international-development-studies/international-development-studies.html)

To achieve hands-on experience, the programme requires that all students carry out fieldwork of 8-10 weeks as a basis for the Master thesis. The fieldwork takes place in a development setting, in a country predominantly in the 'Global South'. Nonetheless, **the geography of what constitutes a development setting is changing dramatically** and our IDS programme also seeks to keep up with these changes and facilitate students in learning more about them by **also providing the possibility to do their research in the 'Global North'**. (University of Amsterdam, https://studiegids.uva.nl/xmlpages/page/2021-2022-en/search-programme/programme/6633)

Decolonizing IOB: Some Food for Thought and Action

Recruitment
IOB represents itself to prospective students as a highly diverse academic institute. The website proclaims that 'IOB has an academic staff of more than 60'[11], but fails to point out that this includes virtually every PhD student, post-doc, and affiliated researcher—not the actual teaching staff. The professoriate of the IOB is less than a fifth of the total academic staff and constitutes its most homogeneous sub-group: every member of the full-time teaching staff is white and Belgian, with about half being economists by training. The obvious counter to this is that IOB is, in fact, a Belgian institute and one that is oriented around an economic perspective of development studies. Yet this seems at odds with the international, multi-/inter-disciplinary profile the institute seeks to cultivate and which it projects to prospective students in promotional materials.

The process for recruitment and hiring should be re-examined, particularly to ensure that superficial personal characteristics do not influence outcomes. Care must be taken to avoid the kind of gatekeeping that facilitates systemic, institutional racism—*even by people who are not themselves racist*. For example, appeals to the difficulty of understanding someone's accent is one of the forms of academic gatekeeping explicitly mentioned by Sensoy and DiAngelo, who argue that the difficulty of understanding accented English should be considered a deficit on the part of the *listener*, not the speaker (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

In academia, gatekeeping may operate at a subconscious institutional level, stemming from 'the bureaucracy and compartmentalization [that] nourishes rigid and sometimes hypercautious thinking and behavior' (Tyeeme Clark, 2004, p. 220). Intellectual, personal, and cultural affinities can inadvertently promote favoritism, cronyism, and even nepotism, thereby reproducing and reinforcing the predominance of certain perspectives and profiles within academic faculty, while systematically excluding others (James, 2004). As Keith James notes, the real locus of decision-making may be outside the formal settings where decisions are presumed to take place:

> There is a logical argument to be made for discussing options and analyzing facts outside of the temporal and structural constraints of formal meetings. When some groups or individuals who supposedly have a right to participate are systematically excluded, however, informal decisions pervert the official organizational system. When lines of inclusion and exclusion are based on social group membership, friendship, or conjoint cover-ups of unethical or unfair practices, the result is a corrupt, discriminatory system. (James, 2004, pp. 48-49)

For instance, despite going through an open vacancy procedure that advertises widely and uses objective criteria set by the university, virtually all the recent hires to the professoriate have been white, Belgian applicants with existing affiliations to the institute. While this does not result from intentional engineering, it exemplifies how those who possess the tacit, insider knowledge about criteria valued by the institute/university are better positioned to be successful candidates.

When there is such a continual pattern of white hires, Sensoy and DiAngelo note, a litany of justifications are typically offered, including excuses like 'there just aren't many qualified people of color in this field', 'candidates of color just aren't applying', 'we need someone who can hit the ground running', and 'are you saying we shouldn't have our jobs?' (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 573). IOB may want to reflect on whether these excuses sound familiar.

Who wants to 'decolonize', and how? IOB's 3 camps
Amongst the faculty, there seem to be three camps of decolonization. These are crude caricatures drawn for heuristic purposes, not representing any particular individual but rather composite features. A first

[11] https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/about-uantwerp/faculties/institute-of-development-policy/about-iob/

camp is committed to decolonization (in the sense of rejecting Eurocentrism) and is firmly anti-racist, but also believes in the preservation of the current approach to development studies and thereby implicitly supports continuing (rather than challenging or displacing) the epistemologies and methods of inquiry predominant in the social sciences and mainstream development practice today. A second camp is inclined toward a more critical approach that questions the hegemony of mainstream development approaches and incorporates plural perspectives and ways of knowing into research and education. This camp is not necessarily pursuing an explicit 'decolonizing strategy' and does not target the institute as a whole; rather, in its own research and pedagogy, this camp incorporates decolonizing approaches out of a conviction that it is good practice. A third camp consists of those swept up in the current decolonization trend, for whom decolonization is perhaps an epiphany. It flies the decolonial flag, and it wishes to enact broad institutional transformation; in its enthusiasm, it occasionally accuses those who do not align with its specific approach as being insufficiently radical.

A development studies program that decolonizes according to the vision of the 'third camp' will never satisfy the 'first camp', and vice versa; meanwhile the 'second camp' is chastised for being insufficiently activist, or activist in the 'wrong' way. The incompatibility of these different camps suggests that IOB may experience escalating internal tensions if it continues to hope that its branding as a "mixed methods institute" is a sufficient to hold everyone together. A resolution could be to reconceptualize the master programs, and offer one program that takes a more mainstream public choice perspective toward development, and one program that takes a more critical development studies position.

Partnerships in the South: Climbing the University Totem Pole?

A fuller treatment of the idea of decolonizing institutional partnerships as it relates to IOB can be found in Titeca (2021), hence I will only touch upon this topic briefly. IOB currently formulates its mission statement around the idea of helping the most vulnerable, therefore concentrating its research on the poorest countries. However, to outside eyes, it may appear as though IOB, as a relatively small institute, focuses on the poorest countries because it is in these countries that a small institute can still have significant leverage. Lacking heavyweight power, it perpetuates the focus of research downward, on to the poorest and least likely to resist the imposition of researchers. This dynamic is discussed at length in Marchais et al. (2020), who argue that race is (unconsciously) turned into a resource that facilitates data collection, increases production, and enhances the competitiveness of (Western) researchers on the academic job market. Even those researchers that enter into partnerships specifically to redistribute resources are still participating in a system wherein Northern researchers hold the purse strings: 'power, prestige, timescales, publishing requirements, budgetary overheads, and opportunities for further funding remain tied to Europe and America' (Kessi et al., 2020, p. 274).

This is not a new critique. Addressing the asymmetrical benefits of research on indigenous and minority communities by anthropologists, Deloria offered a frank interpretation decades ago:

> [I]n defense of the anthropologist, it must be recognized that those who do not publish, perish. That those who do not bring in a substantial sum of research money soon slide down the scale of university approval. [...] The implications for the anthropologist, if not for all of America, should be clear for the Indian. Compilation of useless knowledge "for knowledge's sake" should be utterly rejected by the Indian people. We should not be objects of observation for those who do nothing to help us. [...] [T]he real motives of the academic community [...] is not the ultimate policy that will affect the Indian people, but merely the creation of new slogans and doctrines by which they can climb the university totem pole. (Deloria Jr., 1988 [1969], p. 94)

This sentiment has been echoed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, and more recently in the cogent argument for *ethnographic refusal* elaborated by Audra Simpson (2007) and echoed by Tuck and Yang (2014). Recognizing the right of indigenous and vulnerable populations *not* be

the subject of foreign research means rethinking the emphasis on fieldwork, particularly when it is carried out merely to satisfy IOB's idea of what 'development studies' means.

Keim (2008) observes that Europeans and North Americans often expect African social science researchers to focus on their 'home' countries. This resonates with the experience of Chisomo Kalinga, as recounted in Nordling (2020): Kalinga, who was born in Malawi but raised in the US, was discouraged from researching HIV/AIDS patients in the US during grad school, and instead advised to focus on patients in Malawi. 'Who gets to research who?' Nordling asks. The anecdote highlights that what may start as good intentions has 'developed into an unspoken idea that scholars from the developing world should study their own' (Kassimir, in Nordling, 2020); furthermore, it is clear that even the most superficial connections (Kalinga was not raised in Malawi and thus did not consider herself a 'native' anthropologist there) may be interpreted as somehow being more legitimate/authentic (Kalinga, because she was a student of color, was seen by colleagues as an 'insider' that could/should do research on Africa that they could not do). Reflecting on this, it might be an interesting exercise for IOB to take stock of the topics/regional focus of the PhD students currently enrolled at IOB. For example, how many of the PhD students from Africa are researching their 'home' countries?[12] Is there a tacit expectation that these students act as both researchers and as 'informants' for their supervisors' work?

A few tentative suggestions for IOB:

- Be sensitive to how the institute projects its image in public (e.g. website) and the language used to describe the institute's approach, history, mission, and the way its 'added value' as an institute located in the 'North' is conceptualized and described.

- *Provincialize* IOB, not in the sense of a retreat to parochialism, but rather in recognizing that IOB's master program was conceived, designed, and remains taught by a teaching faculty that is virtually entirely white, European, and Belgian and oriented toward economic perspectives on social change. This could include more deliberate and conscious unpacking of the ontological/epistemological premises of different theories presented throughout the program, grounding them within particular lineages of thought rather than merely presenting them as the 'state of the art'.

- Reconceptualize the Theories of Development course.

- Reflecting on the EADI document for re-visioning 'development studies' that was circulated at IOB in 2015, consider formulating an approach to development studies in a way that acknowledges how the field is evolving, using language that transcends rather than entrenches geographical dichotomies. For instance, one strategy could be to avoid reifying conceptual categories and tropes that portray certain countries or regions as inherently and intractably beset by conflict and chaos by emphasizing *topics*—poverty, inequality, sustainability, fairness, justice—rather than *places* (see, e.g. Horner, 2017, 2020; Lewis, 2015; Monks et al., 2017).

- Consider dividing the master programs differently, to accommodate students who seek a more mainstream, economically-oriented development studies program and those who seek a more critical development studies program. Furthermore—this is crucial—make it *clearer* to prospective students what type of program they are applying to.

- <u>Diversify the faculty.</u> It does not matter how many PhD and master students are people of color or non-Belgians or from the South, if the entire professoriate is Belgian, white, and graduates of the same few universities/faculties. This may entail reworking faculty selection criteria (in

[12] Kalinga states that she 'never met a white student … who was told to study their own' (Kalinga, in Nordling, 2020). In my own experience, I was once told quite explicitly that I should *not* focus on my own country (i.e. my project of 'studying up' and looking at the influence of American billionaires on development policy and practice) but rather do a case study in Africa.

conversation with the central administration of the university that is responsible for setting such criteria) to ensure that white, Belgian, IOB-educated candidates do not somehow rise to the top of these 'objective' criteria every time. If the IOB was an institute dedicated to the teaching of Flemish art or contemporary Belgian literature, the homogeneity of the staff might be understandable. As an institute that claims to have an international profile, the lack of diversity amongst the professoriate is jarring. The IOB must commit to hiring people of color. Accents and other coded racialized biases should never be factors in ranking candidates.

- Strategize about how to productively engage with and respond to students who adopt essentialist, identity-exclusionist perspectives. It can be tempting to immediately point out the hypocrisy of silencing someone based on their identity, or to draw attention to the powerful critiques that indigenous, black, non-Western, and feminist scholars have themselves mounted against essentialist identity claims and the kind of relativism that forecloses any opportunity for mutual dialogue, learning, or critique (cf. Benhabib, 1995; Langton, 2011; Nandy, 1987). Yet, as bell hooks explains, the impulse to assert strong identity-based authority claims (what she calls 'excluding essentialism') can be a powerful survival strategy for students accustomed to having their voices marginalized within academia; the appropriate response for lecturers is to 'think carefully about whether and how such students might have been made to feel excluded or undermined in the classroom, rather than by quickly shooting down their essentialist position with a counterargument that leaves the student feeling more marginalized' (Matthews, 2018, p. 62).

- Reconsider the appropriateness of 'Going Global' as the name[13] and as the motivating concept for IOB's VLIR internationalization program. This unfortunately sounds like academic imperialism: the colonization of other universities, by imposition not invitation. It also seems as though the institute may wish to reflect on whether the vision of internationalization outlined by IOB is *synergistic with*, or *antagonistic to,* the institute's other goal of decolonizing (see, e.g., Last, 2018).

[13] In their much-cited article Tuck and Yang use this very expression to describe colonialism: 'The current colonial era goes back to 1492, when colonial imaginary *goes global*' (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 4, f. 2).

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