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Decolonising to reimagine International Relations: An introduction

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Abstract

Seeing as colonialism is ubiquitous to where International Relations (IR) comes from, what it explains and who it represents, many have argued that the decolonisation of the discipline is impossible. However, in this agenda-setting introduction, I place decolonisation squarely in the realm of possibility and ask, 'what would a decolonised field look like?'. In answering this question, the contributions in this forum take point of departure from varied sites within the discipline, as they seek to materialise real change that reimagines what IR is and does as a discipline that was established as a scholarly defence for colonialism. Herein they propose decolonisation as a structure that upends the discipline's colonial epistemological roots, rethinks core concepts and underlines the need to forefront geographies, peoples, and perspectives that were under-represented in a colonial discipline. Equally, they recognise that decolonisation is a messy affair, that takes a non-linear trajectory. However, seeing as colonialism did not just inflict material impoverishment but also sought to alienate the colonised from their sense of self, this messiness is only expected. So, rather than be discouraged by this, this forum views the non-linear trajectory to be an unavoidable facet of any attempt at decolonising the discipline.

During a department seminar a senior colleague had wondered, 'but, in practical terms, is decolonization really possible? Can we decolonize something like food?'. I had just delivered a talk on decolonising International Relations (IR). In general, those in attendance seemed to acknowledge the colonial roots of the discipline. Yet the rhetorical question was meant to argue that just as reclaiming indigenous food sovereignty was seemingly too big an ask after generations of colonial destruction of indigenous food systems,[1] it was impossible to decolonise IR. As such, the insinuation is that when colonialism is so ubiquitous to where the field of IR comes from, what it explains and who it represents, decolonisation is an impractical aspiration.

This forum, however, places the task of decolonising IR squarely in the realm of possibility and asks, what would a decolonised field look like? Here, it builds on a wide range of scholarly works that have established the deep-seated coloniality of the discipline. They have argued that the discipline replicates the asymmetry in power relations in a global order that is informed by the long

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[1]Katherine Bradley and Hank Herrera, 'Decolonizing food justice: Naming, resisting, and researching colonizing forces in the movement', *Antipode*, 48:1 (2016), pp. 97– 114; Asfia Gulrukh Kamal, Rene Linklater, Shirley Thompson, Joseph Dipple, and Ithinto Mechisowin Committee, 'A recipe for change: Reclamation of Indigenous food sovereignty in *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree* nation for decolonization, resource sharing, and cultural restoration', *Globalizations*, 12:4 (2015), pp. 559–75; Lila Sharif, 'Savory colonialism: Land, memory, and the eco-occupation of Palestine', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 11:2 (2015), pp. 256–7.

shadow of colonialism.[2] This is especially evident in the relative positionality of the Global North *vis-à-vis* the Global South in disciplinary musings. The former is considered a source of universally applicable 'big ideas' (i.e., grand theory). But the latter, Robbie Shilliam notes, is accorded little agency as a source of intellectual perspectives that are valuable or influential enough to shape the mainstream disciplinary agenda.[3] Amitav Acharya thus argues that IR theories are 'too deeply rooted in, and beholden to, the history, intellectual traditions, and agency claims of the West'.[4] Similarly, David Blaney and Arlene Tickner – while recognising the ongoing scholarly efforts within IR to acknowledge 'multiplicity, coexistence, and difference as the basis of our human world' – propose that the discipline remains epistemologically 'imprisoned' to a colonial conception of modernity. This, they add, limits IR's ability to incorporate a diversity of 'experiences [and knowledges] of global politics' and meaningfully rethink the 'category of "the international"'.[5] In this sense, coloniality is not just *a* facet of IR. A critical assessment of the imperial and 'racialized epistemic core of the discipline',[6] reflected not least in the writings of its founding fathers,[7] reveals that IR was purpose-built to forefront the perspectives of the metropole, while also marginalising the experiences and knowledges of the 'darker … races'.[8] For this reason, Errol Henderson concludes that a 'hierarchical racial order' is foundational to how IR theorises and, in effect, serves as an 'intellectual justification for colonialism and imperialism.'[9]

Undoubtedly, this strand of scholarship has had a groundbreaking impact on the discipline and forced acknowledgement of the colonial roots of IR. From the appearance of a multiplicity articles and special issues in the major IR journals to panels and roundtables at large international conferences focused on the colonial makings and imperial workings of IR, there seems to be a reasonable degree of mainstream recognition of the discipline's coloniality. But as was also evident during my department seminar, recognition does not necessarily lead to the acceptance of reparative strategies. Be it under the pretext of decolonisation being too expansive an agenda, too

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[2]Arlene B. Tickner, 'Core, periphery and (neo)imperialist International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 19:3 (2013), pp. 627–46.

[3]Robbie Shilliam, 'Non-Western thought and international relations', in R. Shilliam (ed.), *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), pp. 1–2; Robbie Shilliam, *Decolonizing Politics: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2021), p. 13. See also Sophie Harman and William Brown, 'In from the margins? The changing place of Africa in International Relations', *International Affairs*, 89:1 (2013), pp. 69–7; Alistair Iain Johnston, 'What (if anything) does East Asia tell us about International Relations theory?', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15:1 (2012), pp. 53–78; Lucy Taylor, 'Decolonizing International Relations: Perspectives from Latin America', *International Studies Review*, 14:3 (2012), pp. 386–400.

[4]Amitav Acharya, 'Global International Relations (IR) and regional worlds: A new agenda for international studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 58:4 (2014), p. 649.

[5]David Blaney and Arlene Tickner, 'International Relations in the prison of colonial modernity', *International Relations*, 31:1 (2017), p. 71.

[6]Somdeep Sen, 'Colouring critical security studies: A view from the classroom', *Security Dialogue*, 52:1 (2021), p. 135; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

[7]Paul Samuel Reinsch, *World Politics at the End of the Nineteenth Century* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1900); Paul Samuel Reinsch, 'The negro race and European civilization', *American Journal of Sociology*, 11:2 (1905), pp. 145–7; Philip Henry Kerr, 'Political relations between advanced and backward peoples', in A. J. Grant, A. Greenwood, J. D. I. Hughes, P. H. Kerr, and F. F. Urquhart (eds), *An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1916), pp. 141–82; John Atkinson Hobson, 'The scientific basis of imperialism', *Political Science Quarterly*, 17:3 (1902), pp. 460–89; Franklin H. Giddings, 'Imperialism?', *Political Science Quarterly*, 13:4 (1898), pp. 585–605.

[8]William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Fawcett, 1903), p. 23. See also Olivia Umurerwa Rutazibwa, 'From the everyday to IR: In defence of the strategic use of the R-word', *Postcolonial Studies*, 19:2 (2016), pp. 191–200; Robbie Shilliam, 'Race and racism in international relations: Retrieving a scholarly inheritance', *International Politics Reviews*, 8 (2020), pp. 152–95; Sankaran Krishna, 'Race, amnesia, and the education of international relations', *Alternatives*, 26:4 (2001), pp. 401–24.

[9]Errol A. Henderson, 'Hidden in plain sight: Racism in International Relations theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:1 (2013), p. 85.

vindictive to the beneficiaries of IR's coloniality[10] or too unsettling to the established disciplinary and institutional practices and norms – decolonising IR, detractors would argue, is impossible. Of course, by acknowledging IR's colonial being, these detractors seek to exhibit their own moral high ground. At the same time, by deeming decolonisation to be impossible, they also make the continued shadow of this colonial legacy into the present seem unavoidable and secure their futures as beneficiaries of the norms and practices of a colonial discipline. With decolonisation being unactionable in this manner, it becomes all but metaphorical and performative, applied everywhere and in everything without any material consequences or threat of real change.[11] However, in proposing that decolonisation is a possibility, here I am concerned with the prospect of materialising real change that unsettles what IR *is* and *does* as a discipline that was established as a scholarly defence for colonialism and imperialism.

At its core then, this forum understands decolonisation as the unmaking of this long shadow of IR's colonial legacy. And, to this end, it puts forth a reimagined disciplinary architecture that accounts for and remedies the ways in which this legacy continually shapes the intellectual priorities and the related materiality of IR. Herein, the contributions in the forum understand decolonisation as a structure. In general, colonialism can be said to be, 'not an event',[12] but a structure that ensures '[colonial] continuity through time'[13] and the long-term reproduction of the localised domination of an exogenous entity.[14] Adapted in a disciplinary context, this structure involves scholarly and institutional norms, traditions, and practices that keep up the coloniality of IR in the present. Then, as an antidote, decolonisation of IR necessarily also needs to be a structure. This structure would replace the colonial disciplinary architecture with one that embodies scholarly and institutional norms, traditions, and practices that seek to both, mitigate the effects of IR's colonial origins, and reimagine the discipline anew as one that also meaningfully engages with and represents the past, present, and futures of peoples (and perspectives) that have thus far been marginalised and deprioritised in the discipline.

Driven by this agenda of reimagining IR, the contributions in this forum take point of departure from varied sites within the discipline. Ilan Kapoor, for instance, focuses on development studies as a site for deliberating the possibilities and impossibilities of decolonising IR. Both as an interdisciplinary field of scholarship as well as a field of practice, development has often been considered a vehicle of imperialism that seeks to maintain the hierarchies in the global order – established under colonial rule – in the era of the postcolonial state.[15] In proposing Western modernity as a universal aspiration, development has long revealed itself as occupying a 'hegemonic epistemological space' and unable (or unwilling) to recognise 'alternative futures' that break radically from imperial imaginations of the global order.[16] In fact, the very binary of the 'developing' vs 'developed' creates a powerful and violent imagery[17] that valourises the Global North as a place of material progress

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[10]Anonymous, 'Disciplinary "Redlining" is Not Decolonization', Inside Higher Ed (2022), available at: {https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2022/08/01/redlining-white-scholars-not-decolonization-opinion} accessed 2 August 2022.

[11]Here I am drawing on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang deliberations on metaphorical decolonisation and the way it 'extends innocence to the settler' and secures 'settler future'. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1:1 (2012), p. 2.

[12]It was Patrick Wolfe who argued that settler colonialism was a structure and not an event. Here I have adapted this conception of settler colonialism to the workings of colonialism in general. Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8:4 (2006), p. 388.

[13]Ibid., p. 290.

[14]Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 3–4; Somdeep Sen, *Decolonizing Palestine: Hamas between the Anticolonial and the Postcolonial* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), p. 6.

[15]Somdeep Sen, 'A postcolonial critique of EU-Middle East relations', in D. Bouris, D. Huber, and M. Pace (eds), *Routledge Handbook of EU–Middle East Relations* (Abingdon, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), pp. 47–56.

[16]Arturo Escobar, 'Imagining a post-development era? Critical thought, development and social movements', *Social Text*, 31 (1992), pp. 21–2.

[17]Randolph B. Persaud and Narendran Kumarakulasingam, 'Violence and ordering of the Third World: An introduction', *Third World Quarterly*, 40:2 (2019), pp. 199–206.

and superiority and perpetuates the 'subalternity of the Global South'.[18] Development discourse and practice thus writes itself into 'the logic of a-historical "generous" superiority' as it reproduces and rationalises the 'ills of poverty, conflict, deprivation, diseases, environmental degradation and exploitation of the colonial project'.[19]

Development studies then being this '(neo)colonial [sub-]discipline *par excellence*', carrying with it the legacies of 'imperial plunder … and colonialism's civilizing mission',[20] is the ideal starting point for priming a canon for decolonising IR. But, as Kapoor argues, this manner of entrenched coloniality that is equally characteristic of IR more generally, requires both epistemic and material decolonisation. The former entails a decentring of the intellectual core of the discipline through the recovery of, and meaningful engagement with, indigenous/subaltern conceptions and experiences of the world. This manner of engagement does not just valourise subalternity.[21] Instead, epistemic decolonisation grants agency to indigenous/subaltern knowledge in a way that allows it to alter 'how *we* work and live'.[22] Though, the nature of disciplinary knowledge that is produced is also a reflection of who and what this knowledge is meant for. In this regard, Kapoor reminds us that universities are 'deeply complicit in the production of [societal] inequalities'. Therefore, material decolonisation would need to ensure 'critical learning and knowledge production'[23] is available and accessible on campus. In part, this involves lowering the material barriers to accessing higher education by, for instance, reducing tuition fees and increasing merit/need-based scholarships. Equally, it is necessary to combat the commodification of education and research that has resulted in knowledge being valued only when it is 'offers solutions' to problems.[24] The decolonisation agenda is therefore colored by the 'task of citizenship and critical thinking' and proposes that the foundational purpose of decolonial knowledge production is to also critically question how and why these problems are constructed in the way that they are.[25]

One manner of epistemic decolonisation would need to occur at a conceptual level. Like any other discipline, IR encapsulates a conceptual vocabulary that forms the 'building blocks' of its grand theoretical claims about the world. Herein, if coloniality shapes the foundational purpose of IR, a scholarly validation of colonialism and imperialism is also reflected in the conceptual lexicon through which the discipline theorises. For one thing, this 'lexicon and theoretical register' is unable to comprehensively explain the workings of the global order.[26] Equally, as Sankaran Krishna adds, IR theory perpetuates its coloniality by 'fetishising' a manner of conceptual abstraction that willfully overlooks 'the violence, genocide, and theft that marked the encounter between the rest and the West'.[27] Then, in view of this task of formulating a decolonised disciplinary lexicon, Ajay Parasram focuses on the concept of 'sovereignty'.[28] Within IR, the author notes, there is a disciplinary assumption that an understanding of sovereignty rooted in a 'Eurocentric genealogy' has universal validity. This commitment to a uni-versalist conception is colonial and white supremacist, as it willfully marginalises (and stigmatises) *other* ways of being in the global order. So, by drawing on the example of Mi'kmak conceptions of sovereignty *vis-à-vis* the settler colonial state's claim

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[18]Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Coloniality of power in development studies and the impact of global imperial designs on Africa', *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 33:2 (2012), p. 48.

[19]Olivia Umurerwa Rutazibwa, 'On babies and bathwater: Decolonizing international development studies', in S. de Jong, R. Icaza, and O. U. Rutazibwa (eds), *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning* (Abingdon, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), p. 160.

[20]Ilan Kapoor, 'Decolonising Development Studies', *Review of International Studies*, this forum (2023), p. 347.

[21]Ibid., pp. 350–351.

[22]Ibid., p. 352.

[23]Ibid., p. 353.

[24]Ibid., p. 353.

[25]Ibid., p. 353.

[26]Julian Saurin, 'International Relations theory and the hegemony of Western conceptions of modernity', in Branwen Gruffydd Jones (ed.), *Decolonizing International Relations* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), p. 34.

[27]Sankaran Krishna, 'Race, amnesia, and the education of International Relations', *Alternatives*, 26:4 (2001), p. 401.

[28]Ajay Parasram, 'Pluriversal sovereignty and the state of IR', *Review of International Studies*, this forum (2023), pp. 356–357.

of sovereign authority this intervention proposes a departure from IR's Eurocentric commitment to 'uni-versal state sovereignty' in favour of a pluriversal understanding of sovereignty.[29] In fact, Parasram argues that persisting with a uni-versalist understanding is 'akin to ongoing colonisa-tion'.[30] And, the decolonisation of the discipline is only possible when IR is able to espouse a pluriversal view of the global order.

Of course, it is not mere happenstance that Parasram 'travels' to the Mi'kma'ki territory to pro-pose a pluriversal viewpoint. What IR says often has a lot to do with the geographical location from where the global order is theorised. Looking outwards from the metropole, expectedly, leads to knowledge production that is in service of the colonial and imperial. Therefore, it becomes nec-essary to 'travel' elsewhere to formulate a scholarly perspective that can unsettle IR's colonial and white supremacist worldview. For this reason, in their respective contributions, Kristina Hinds and Dana El Kurd also looked to theorise the world from someplace else. Here they present Caribbean and Arab perspectives on decolonisation, respectively. However, the purpose is not to simply hint at the existence of *other* scholarly voices and perspectives, while maintaining IR's mainstream as is. Cognisant of the wider disciplinary politics of how the mainstream became the mainstream[31] – not least as synonymous with the white, male perspective of the world[32] – they take seriously the veracity of Caribbean and Arab intellectual traditions and, like Kapoor, underline their ability to fundamentally alter our worldview.

With regard to the Caribbean, Hinds notes that it is often assumed that the region's invisibil-ity 'on standard world maps' is synonymous with its presumed 'insignificance in world affairs and within the discipline of IR'.[33] Further, when the Caribbean does become visible in scholarly mus-ings, it is presented as a place of 'vulnerability, under-development and illegality'.[34] However, this contribution proposes that the region has played a significant role in 'building systems of empire'. Meaningfully engaging with 'Caribbean vantage points'[35] and intellectual traditions can then offer important insights on the 'capitalist, exploitative, racialized, and gendered' workings of world.[36] Also, taking these insights into account sheds new light on the way Caribbean states navigate the global political landscape. Herein, Hinds departs from a conception of the Caribbean as insignifi-cant to the workings of the global order. Instead, by looking at the functioning of offshore financing centres (OFCs) in Caribbean states as not 'rule-breaking gimmicks' but a means of exercising agency that is foundationally shaped by global processes,[37] this contribution reveals the region to be a valuable site for better understanding and theorising the global order.

Like the Caribbean, El Kurd notes that the Arab world is largely 'missing' in (often, Global North-driven) efforts to decolonise IR.[38] Here, as a means of bringing to the fore decolonising efforts originating elsewhere and, in line with Kapoor's conception of decolonisation encompass-ing material facets, El Kurd assesses the initiatives of the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI) and the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) to increase access to the discipline,

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[29]Ibid., p. 359.

[30]Ibid., p. 359.

[31]Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling, 'The house of IR: From family power politics to the poisies of worldism', *International Studies Review*, 6:4 (2004), pp. 21–49; Cynthia Weber, 'Why is there no queer international theory?', *European Journal of International Relations*, 21:1 (2015), pp. 27–51; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

[32]David Lake, 'White man's IR: An intellectual confession', *Perspectives on Politics*, 14:4 (2016), pp. 1112–22; Meera Sabaratnam, 'Is IR theory white? Racialised subject-positioning in three canonical texts', *Millennium*, 49:1 (2020), pp. 3–31; Somdeep Sen, 'Race, racism and the teaching of International Relations', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2022), pp. 1–20.

[33]Kristina Hinds, 'Invisible on the globe but not in the global: Decolonizing IR using small island vistas', *Review of International Studies*, this forum (2023), p. 368.

[34]Ibid., p. 369.

[35]Ibid., p. 369.

[36]Ibid., p. 369.

[37]Ibid., p. 369.

[38]Dana El Kurd, 'Elusive decolonisation of IR in the Arab world', *Review of International Studies*, this forum (2023), p. 380.

decolonise pedagogical approaches to teaching IR, and facilitate theory production in the Arab world.

That said, in her critical assessment of these material initiatives, El Kurd also reveals a certain a 'messiness',[39] where substantive decolonisation is undermined by regional scholars' focus on 'performative metrics'[40] and by Northern scholars who 'pretend at localism' while continuing to exclude regional scholars from the disciplinary mainstream.[41] Once again, this messiness may lead detractors to emphasise the futility of any effort to decolonise the discipline. However, it is also a reminder that decolonisation rarely follows a linear trajectory. Frantz Fanon's influential works have demonstrated that the colonial endeavour did not just inflict a permanent state of material impoverishment and destitute in the sector of the colonised.[42] It also set out to disconnect the colonised from their indigeneity and sense of self,[43] eventually leading to an erasure of any memory of who we are are/were before 'colonial deformation' set in.[44] It is then not surprising that the struggle to escape the yoke of colonialism and imperialism tends to chart a long, laboured and often circuitous process.[45] In fact, some have argued that the material remnants as well as the socioeconomic and political legacies of colonialism are so entrenched that 'postcolonial strivings' for a new, decolonised identity are unable to entirely 'banish the colonial past'. Instead, the 'selective retrieval and appropriation of indigenous and colonial cultures' becomes the most appropriate representation of postcoloniality.[46] That is to say, it becomes impossible to simply sidestep history in our efforts to revive a sense of indigeneity, unaffected by the legacy of colonialism. And postcolonial modernity is somewhat compelled to eternally being challenged 'by the claws of colonialism'.[47]

But rather than be discouraged by this long and seemingly immovable shadow of colonial deformation, Consolata Raphael Sulley and Lisa Ann Richey view this messiness to be a part and parcel of any attempt at decolonising the discipline. Their contribution takes point of departure in the effort to decolonise a concept like 'humanitarianism' in the context of a collaborative research project in Tanzania. While often defined as 'state-centric, formal, Northern-driven helping' of the South,[48] the concept is steeped in 'white saviourism'.[49] The authors propose the framework of North-South research collaborations as a platform for engaging in conceptual decolonisation, not least as means of undoing the (core-periphery) hierarchies that have come to characterise the workings of IR as a discipline. Though, in venturing to decolonise 'humanitarianism', they then recognise that the concept is 'fundamentally tainted by colonialism'. But instead of simply abandoning it, they engage in a critical mode of conceptual decolonisation[50] wherein North-South collaborations help incorporate 'indigenous knowledge systems'[51] and their understandings of 'helping'. The authors then take an inductive and practice-based approach to decolonial theory building through an 'iterative back-and-forth exchange'[52] that strives to neither '[retreat] into relativism' nor relinquish the

[39]Consolata Raphael Sulley and Lisa Ann Richey, 'The messy practice of decolonizing a concept: Everyday humanitarianism in Tanzania', *Review of International Studies*, this forum (2023), p. 391.

[40]El Kurd, 'Elusive decolonisation of IR in the Arab world', p. 383.

[41]Ibid., p. 380.

[42]Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963), pp. 3–5.

[43]Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 1963), pp. 45, 157.

[44]Gregory B. Lee and Sunny S. K. Law, 'Wicked cities: Cyberculture and the reimagining of identity in the "non-Western" metropolis', *Futures*, 30:10 (1998), p. 968.

[45]Sen, *Decolonizing Palestine*, p. 125.

[46]Brenda S. A. Yeoh, 'Postcolonial cities', *Progress in Human Geography*, 25:3 (2001), p. 459.

[47]Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literature* (New York, NY: Verso, 1992), p. 77.

[48]Sulley and Richey, 'The messy practice of decolonizing a concept', p. 393.

[49]Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, '"The white man's burden": Globalization of suffering, white savior complex, religion and modernity', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 27:3 (2019), pp. 327–43.

[50]Alex Broadbent, 'It will take critical, thorough scrutiny to truly decolonise knowledge', The Conversation (2017), available at: {https://theconversation.com/it-will-take-critical-thorough-scrutiny-to-truly-decolonise-knowledge-78477} accessed 2 December 2021.

[51]Sulley and Richey, 'The messy practice of decolonizing a concept', p. 391.

[52]Ibid., p. 390.

'power for generalisability'. Expectedly – being an iterative process – this manner of decolonisation is messy. In fact, the entrenched coloniality of the concept of humanitarianism makes decolonisation all the messier. But Raphael and Richey conclude that is only a reflection of the wider messiness that often involves decolonising a discipline like IR.[53]

In the end, by rethinking core concepts, representing underrepresented geographies and contending with the messiness of reimagining IR, the contributions to this forum underline that decolonisation needs to be a multisited and multifaceted endeavour. That said, the decolonisation agenda has also become a contentious topic of public and political discourse. And, in a postscript, I reflect on the wider implications of decolonising the academy and, with it, unsettling the assumption that scientific knowledge production is an apolitical affair.

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[53]Ibid., p. 394.