



Decolonising Development

COST ACTION CA19129



U N I K A S S E L
V E R S I T Ä T



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This publication was created by Laura Sobral as part of COST Action CA19129 and supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

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EUROPEAN COOPERATION
IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

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The South in the North

decolonisation as a hacker posture: life, academia, politics

Where are you from
and where are you based?



what is the Global South (GS) for you?

a self-revealing path towards
the humanization of the world.

equatorial geographies in the Americas, Africa, and Asia that saw colonial or military presence from North American, European, and Asian powers, marked by resource extraction, environmental destruction, and ongoing movement policing in migratory processes

a shared experience of economic dependence, cultural marginalisation, and political oppression. It is a sensibility that emerges out of a common attempt at liberating ourselves from these dynamics

The south countries and regions, often known as "third-world countries"

it occupies a similar slot for what formerly called "developing countries." Accordingly there is a sense of continuous incompleteness in the concept.

I hate the term. I feel like we've gone from East and West, to North and South. And just as the "West", you know, doesn't mean anything anymore. I think that it allows us to not say what we really want to say, are we talking about people who are discriminated, like people of color? Are we talking about social? Political? I think we could say exactly what we want to say.

the Global South is everything that is not Europe and North America. Every place that has been systematically marginalized by these big colonizers, every place that has been impacted in one way or another in a direct way or an indirect way, by these powers. All of these marginalized places around the world that have been influenced by the power efforts that have been exerted by these big powers of the world.

do you consider yourself from the GS and what do this mean to you, to be so-called 'from' the GS?

Yes. I am from one of the oldest colonies in the world, Puerto Rico. Both in terms of ethnicity and other cultural markers, I have been marked as a migrant in countries of the global north, particularly white members of society.

I do! It means that I share the experience of economic dependence, cultural marginalisation, and political oppression with my common citizens and it is through actualisation of our liberating actions that I feel a part of the GS movement.

Not really. I was born and worked in Jakarta and the city has been experiencing a considerable improvement in public transportation infrastructure for the last decade. This is an exception in comparison to other parts of the country. It feels like being in the North of the South, if any.

I occupy a position of privilege within the university. And so it's a very insider, outsider kind of thing.

Yes, I consider myself from the GS and that means also the recognition of the injustices of colonization in these countries and the reproduction of these injustices through privileges and inequalities.

I do consider myself from the Global South and automatically when I say that it kind of gives me a mark, marginalized victim kind of label and this is what it means to say I am from the Global South, I am from these communities that have been systematically marginalized, that have been displaced, that have been enslaved, that have been exploited, that are still exploited. And I think that, that this is what it means, especially when someone refers to you from the Global South. And I really hate that because it puts such a big label of a victim on you have an exploited person on you have a underprivileged kind of label. And it also means a lot of times that you get "tokenized", you know, you become a token of diversity in every institution that you go to, where teams often celebrate that they have someone from the Global South.

how was/is the feeling of being recognised – by yourself or others – as from the GS, once in the Global North (GN)?

It is a constant state of 'othering' by people in the global north, specially white people. It includes the constant feeling of precarity when it comes to everyday interactions and bureaucratic processes; feeling fear of being left out or behind; and of potential everyday violence or microaggressions.

I would say that these are not fixed categories, I see them rather as a scale to which we could recognise each other in our experiences, or not. The moment of recognition, I would argue, is a sparking moment that offers an opportunity for exchange. It is up to us to transform these rare instances of mutual recognition into activities that might work towards sensitisation of each other - thus establishing connections rather than outlining the difference between or within the GS and the GN.

Mixed up feelings. Sometimes there is a sense of being discriminated, especially in the first years in Munich. But as I improve my German and now that I live in Strausberg, there's a little sense of discrimination.

There were mixed feelings of not belonging and needing to find an identity. On the one hand, I got to think about racism only from the moment I was away, since in Brazil it is not clear, it is a subsurface subject, and confronted with the injustices of privileges, also my own, among my home country peers; and on the other hand to be considered by the people of the global north as a person from the poor colonized countries, not qualified enough, traumatized, as I already heard.

You become a token that the global north uses a lot of times to show how decolonial they are or how diverse they are, or how welcoming they are, or how progressive they are, just because they have someone from the global south or from the force displaced communities on their team. (...) One thing I always say, you know, when people asked me about how the shift is going from the Global South, the global north, I always say that it wasn't going from sad to happy as people expect. Unfortunately, it didn't work that way. It was the other way around. Because I went from being in a homogeneous community where everyone is as much of a stranger as I am coming to a community where everyone looks down on you and feels sad for your story.

Then you come into this community where everyone is 10 times more privileged, and you will need another 30 years to catch up with the privileges that they have. The feeling is horrible. The feeling is, is quite terrible, because suddenly you stand out as the underprivileged, marginalized person who will never catch up with the rest of them. You really realize what kind of an image the world has of you what kind of assumptions they have about you.

in which ways being in, or considered of, the 'West' now that they you are in the GN is being experienced?
is that further dislocating to how you see yourself but also how you think others perceive you, both in the GN and at your place of origin?

Being Latin American in Europe is different than in the US. I am seen in more exotic and benign ways perhaps than Arab, African, Turkish migrants which are historically ostracized as undesirable migrants here. Even then, interactions are led by historical stereotypes about social mannerism and work/professionalism.

I see it as an enriching experience, an expanding one that enables me today to establish more connection with the world around. As Paulo Freire taught us that we are moving through liberation to a new level of freedom perpetually, from one freedom to another, from political recognition, to economic independence, to cultural expression, etc., similarly, by being in the "west", I am moving ahead only to realize where, how and with whom I should move further.

When I return to Indonesia, friends and family members see me as someone who has been (and will continue) living in Germany for some years. But rarely, if almost never, as far as I could recall, that friends use the terms "South" and "North" to categorise "Indonesia" and "Germany." Again, there are mixed-up feelings. I already absorb some German habits (e.g. being straightforward and meticulous on time) and they may not be comfortable for Indonesians. In contrast, some Indonesian habits linger and stick (e.g. eating), and they might not be adhering to German standard.

now there are just so many people who are living between different countries, at least among the people that for my cycle, that I don't think that this perception is something significant.

I was able to understand in fact that the world is not only divided between GN and GS, but that it is interdependent, that identities are not homogeneous, but the sum of differences and diversity, that is, heterogeneous. I realized that the need and pressure to seek a single, homogeneous identity can bring and generate a lot of suffering. But this pressure maintains (as so the social hierarchy' injustices), so it is possible to see how some people are able to recognize me as I recognize myself, that is, as a multi-cultural person, but at the same time people see me as Outsider, that is for the GS I am from GN, for the GN I belong to the GS.

I cannot claim that now with the privileges that I have, that I live the same way that I lived, when I did live in the Global South. And the problem is that you become this person in a limbo, you become this in between person where people from the Global South, even your own people look at you, like you have so many privileges, like you cannot fully relate to their struggles anymore. (...) Even though this is not fully an accurate image, because here, you don't have the same privileges as a non migrant. You don't have the same privileges as a non white person. But yet still, even though you are excluded, and you are discriminated against, this white community still expects you to be incredibly grateful for the privileges that they're giving you. So they both have expectations from you, the Global North has these great expectations that you should be so thankful that you're not in the global south anymore, and they treat you accordingly. And the global south treats you like, now you have way more privileges than us. And you know, you will never relate to our struggles, and you can never even or they don't expect you to be part of the conversation as you used to be when you were living there. And I think you'd become an intruder to both societies.

do you believe that you perform or do you intentionally use decolonising tactics or strategies in your daily life?

I am not too aware of me doing precise decolonising tactics in my everyday life. Maybe not.

I am now becoming part of this colonial machine that is the university that has for so long oppressed these people. I'm part of this machine now, I'm giving legitimacy to these people, to these institutions. I am giving them legitimacy and producing research for them saying how progressive they are, while they on the other end are normally producing research that misrepresents my communities and ends up harming them. And this is this is horrible, but at the end of the day, what should I be doing? I mean, no matter how decolonial I tried to be I'm never going to be able to change the entire university at least not alone and not at the scale and not at this time. However, I think I definitely try.

I would say yes, not only at my work, but also in my daily life. I believe that inclusion, sharing and opening opportunities for underprivileged people are fundamental when thinking about decolonising. If we think that culture and system are restricted and determined by a dominant culture, it is necessary to open space to other cultures, from GS, but also the ones from GN excluded by the dominant ones, to open space to allow exchanges, assistance, spaces of solidarity, as opposed to simply perpetuating and reproducing this dominant culture. So I try in my daily life to support underprivileged groups and initiatives, to share information, learn different cultures, help people who want to come, help people who want to stay, help people to network, or help people who struggles and suffers by adaptation. I mean that not only in social and emotional terms, but also in all aspects of daily life, like social, emotional, environmental, financial, that is to support also initiatives committed with sustainability, local and environment, wellbeing of people, to degrowth.

instead of pretending that it doesn't exist, I just put it on the table. I just put it out there. I put it on the table so that we can talk about it. Enabling these conversations with people that don't know how to talk about these things. let's talk about it.

I think that these tactics are immanent in the idea of survival. However, to make them strategic and intentional one has to be privileged enough to stop and "zoom-out", as it were, in order to determine the direction of movement. I found myself in this position and I do believe that my everyday life choices are informed by my strategic orientation. Staying on this path is not always easy but what matters is that we keep going back to it and not giving up from it.

Certainly: in centering other migrants or marginalized identities in Europe, particularly black Europeans or from countries in Africa. Personally, I tend to also strategically use stereotypes projected on me and our counter them accordingly by sharing historical or political reality.

how do you think, if you do, that you contribute to decolonizing development through your positionality and/or activities?

I am now starting a research project with Indonesian researchers (the Floating Tech-Lab), the research site is a suburb of Jakarta, and thus able to channel funding from Germany and allow them to experiment (and do art as well) beyond what university norms permit us to do conventional research.

By being committed to the common path of liberation. In my case, this path is one of self-organised, locally-based action-research collectives in Belgrade (SKOGRAD AND KO GRADI GRAD). It is through these paths that I contribute to the decolonizing of the education system of Serbia in the case of the former, that is of the housing provision in Serbia in the case of the later.

Trough sharing, understanding and empowerment. I work in social projects with refugees and offers also counselling for migrants and Germans. In those projects it is important for me to reflect about our history and culture, to give and open opportunities to share, to understand ourselves and the systems that we are engaged. Thus, one can be empowered to develop oneself, reflect on the boundaries of others and oneself, and fight suffering, also suffers from being labeled, feeling inferior, unable to adapt, etc. I think it is important not only to be able to open a space to give voice to people, but also to listen to it and reflect about it together.

My work is based in the Caribbean, and revolves around bringing modern biomanufacturing capabilities to increase resource independence locally. Investors are by far from the global north, so in a way it is bringing investment locally.

By using in my work using decolonial methodologies, using participatory research, and also in daily life by speaking to people, introducing certain topics through discussions and debates. Creating decolonial content in daily life conversations within the community that I'm in, you know, doing movie nights, that really surprised people most of the time, or having debates on the dinner table that really tried to change people's perspectives.

would you say that your contributions somehow are hacking the Global North context, politics and/or institutions? how?

Maybe. I hope so. Channeling funds from Germany to Indonesia is already hand. Also, it is hard to make the research products fit into the German standard.

In a way: using privilege of US passport but representing a Puerto Rican identity in a way affords me some additional access when it comes to certain bureaucracies. Also, working in corporate settings - and often the only one from a Caribbean or poverty background - affords me additional ways to work from within.

Maybe. Just for being there, making people confront their stereotypes. It's very important that people see face to face that you're not a statistic.

The idea of hacking is very dear to me, interfering with protocols by introducing new ones is the mechanic I often use in my work. One tactic that I find particularly effective in the GN is exaggerated compliance, as framed by Keller/Easterling. By doing more than expected in times when nobody expects anything one can do quite a lot!

Yes, already just for our existence, since it asks to deal with differences. But in political and institutional contexts it calls to develop new systems of recognizing educational background and theories beyond the european ones (such as Paulo Freire), it calls also to develop inclusion projects that recognize the voice of others, and to reduce inequalities. If you think about my profession, I belong indeed to the crises of global care chain, which asks also for real changes of what care matters in order to overcome this crisis. That means to recognize and engage our interdependency.

Small things that happen, whether at home, or whether at university, when you see more students, for example, engaging with decolonial methodologies, it really does make you feel like there is hope for this small movement to grow and slowly conquer and slowly change academia in a way. Also, at university, when I give a lesson or two, or when I speak to the students for a little bit, and I try to explain how effective these methods are, or how much colonized their minds have been so far, I think even the small talks on the long run you, you notice you spark something in them, and that they really get interested in the whole concept of decolonizing. And, deviating from all of these mainstream ideas that we felt were normal for such a long time. So I do think it works. I just think it's a really, really long battle.

when I think of hacking, I think of something small that infiltrates a big system and manages to make a change. I think that will we are doing little change every day, I think that we are making smaller changes. And I'm proud about it, I'm happy about it, I'm happy to see young scholars from the global south every day making small changes in the big system.

how do you see possible decolonizing results from the experience and action of GS people located in GN?

I'm expecting **substantial results and not only the superficial use of the term "decolonial"**. I have not seen yet clear results. Perhaps it takes some more years before I could reflect upon the various projects I am involved at this moment.

Depends on their economic and social background: often our roles within GN society don't necessarily serve decolonizing actions in relation to the actual geographies we come from, and might be limited to **self-preservation or immediate survival strategies** that might or might not have to conform to GN questions of assimilation.

Just by existing and sharing, it asks people to deal with diversity and differences. But the possibility of opening opportunities for GS people helps indeed not only to develop a heterogenous world but also with that to reduce inequalities, since the idea of a homogenous world belongs also to a dominant culture. I tend to see this experience from GS people in GN nowadays more aware and engaged, which **contributes to the openness to others**. So I see nowadays despite of the still existing injustices, there are more people from GS being recognized for their qualifications and being able to join lead positions and share their voices, the support of ideas and initiatives towards well-being **instead of the maintenance of the dominance**.

I don't see them in some fixed predetermined terms. However, one thing is shared institutional support, shared resources, by-passing local structures of oppression in the GS, networking, and **amplifying voices of those less heard**.

the experience of **living with the different is transformative**. We can talk all we want, but experiencing it, interacting, is much stronger.

there's the strong contribution of these ambitious, but really passionate people who come here and really attempt to change something in the academia. And I really see it with the kind of research that they produce. But I also know that it's very challenging because the more you speak of decolonial methods, the less space they make for you in academia. (...) When you're calling for change, you have less space to be accepted, you have less space for funding, you have less space to find a job to get a grant, it's really more challenging. I think that there has to be ways we can, I don't know, **expand the platforms that do support people in this field so they can keep actually fighting and keep the struggles otherwise it's unsustainable after a while**. I think there could be great results. Just that we really need to pool the efforts and to expand the possibilities for these people so that they can really express their decolonial approaches and decolonial research.

This topic is essentially dealing with the question of shifting identities. To be recognised, identified, and active in a specific role means being clear about our own understanding of our position. Therefore, being reflective of our identities is a very important exercise that could keep us on our way to liberation, from one freedom to another!

By far, there has to be a lot more intersectional critical analysis of migrants: many migrants from GS come from economic or social privilege. Also, relations between diaspora and members of GS coming for temporary work is also a dimension that has to be analyzed.

people interviewed

Predrag Milic (WG3), from Serbia, living in Austria

Giti Chandra (WG2), from India, living in Iceland

Yafa El Masri (WG1), from Palestine, living in Italy


Jorge Vega, from Puerto Rico, living in Germany

Indrawan Prabaharyaka, from Indonesia, living in Germany

Manuela Monti, from Brazil, living in Germany

[list in expansion]

*the highlights in the quotes were made by the organiser: MSc and PhD candidate Laura Sobral



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