

A NOTE FROM THE DECOLONISING SOAS WORKING GROUP

It is an enormous pleasure to be invited to write an introductory note for this special issue 'Decolonisation in Praxis'—which is, as one would expect from SOAS's Research Students, full of original, theoretically sophisticated, empirically rich and reflexive contributions to scholarship in a number of subject areas. Learning about new research projects such as these is one of the many joys of an academic role, and it is crucial that venues such as the RSA Journal exist to disseminate and debate this scholarship.

This issue is of course particularly timely, as efforts to decolonise the academy and other structures globally are gathering momentum and attention from the mainstream media. As the Editors' Introductions note, however, the term 'decolonisation' can begin to appear merely cosmetic when not accompanied by a more fundamental transformation in attitudes and being. I appreciate this understanding of 'decolonising' for us as being about a disposition, a way of being that emphasises epistemic humility and the need to de-centre from one's own intellectual authority.

However, it is important to be aware that this way of thinking about it is asymmetric; it assumes that one approaches the project of decolonisation from a position of relative authority (as many within the Western academy will). There is of course another side to the dialectic; the peoples, ideas and ways of being that have had epistemic humility and polyglotism forced upon them precisely through colonial encounters. Decolonisation for such groups may not mean the same thing at all; indeed it may mean its presumptive reversal. This does not mean that in either case the 'decolonisation' in question is *inauthentic* or incomplete, but it means that one's relationship to power structures will profoundly shape what 'decolonisation' means for different people—theoretically, practically and ethically.

The issue's emphasis on 'praxis' is thus critical for cultivating an appreciation of these differences and diversities *within* decolonisation, which emerge both within the individual projects and reading across them as a whole. I congratulate the Editors—Romina Istratii, Monika Hirmer and Iris Lim—for their thoughtful curation and editing of this issue, and the contributors for their fascinating contributions.

As the Decolonising SOAS Working Group looks forward into the next year, we are keen to ensure that our own work is never just 'cosmetic' but concretely focused on transforming praxis within our teaching and learning, our research, our collaborations, our institutional culture and our external partnerships. We are very happy to have supported the RSA's work this year and look forward to further engaging with SOAS's Research Student community in the next phases of the project.



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