

Thank you Katharina for the introduction,

I will follow Katharina's example, introducing myself first and then saying a few words about the Conference and the theme of Decolonisation in Praxis and then Monika will take over.

My name is Romina Istratii and together with Monika and Iris we are editing The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research. I am a Doctoral student in the Department of Religions and Philosophies in my third year and I was born in the Republic of Moldova and raised in Greece. My current research is in Ethiopia.

The theme Decolonisation in Praxis literally means decolonisation in action or the enactment of decolonisation and is the current Call for Papers for Volume 11 of The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research which will be issued in September 2018. Our selection of this wording was deliberate and was premised on a rationale that I would like to share with you.

We understand that decolonisation has been defined in various ways by various people, sometimes with its more literal meaning as removing colonial authorities in specific geographies and sometimes more symbolically as removing colonial influences in the minds and knowledge systems of the historically colonised or less powerful. Decolonising the academic curriculum has been especially salient in British universities, including at the School of Oriental and African Studies which has been steadily moving in this direction. At SOAS the Decolonising SOAS Working Group has been at the forefront of promoting more reflexive teaching and pedagogy in view of historical biases imbricated in colonial politics.

At the Journal, we have rather placed emphasis on epistemology. We understand that colonialism in our times continues epistemologically, perpetuated by a lack of reflexivity among researchers and scholars of their own 'epistemological situatedness,' which has tended to favour a western framework of analysis. In simple terms, this means that we often analyse the world and produce research through approaches considered valid and credible in western academia, criteria that are inevitably influenced by western worldviews disproportionately more than by other worldviews. Both Monika and I have diverse backgrounds and have lived in non-western societies and we acknowledge that people differ and have very different criteria of analysing and making sense of their world. In our understanding, to truly decolonise epistemology is to decentre the persistent perception that there should be a standard epistemology in the first place, a single normative framework in which knowledge is validated.

We believe that to promote a decolonisation of sorts we need openness and willingness to consider and try to understand each other's knowledge-making approaches and research outputs. Only then can we actively start communicating, learning from each other and building together multidimensional understandings of the world, human society and shared human challenges. We believe that this is especially urgent in this era where cultural misunderstanding, extremism, fanaticism, isolation and antagonisms of all sorts thrive and separate us.

Our hope through this conference and the upcoming journal volume is to contribute toward sensitising ourselves, SOAS PhD students and scholars globally and to underscore the importance of humility in the process of knowledge-making and sharing. Through platforms such as this we do not want merely to talk about decolonisation or to produce post-colonial theory, but we want to enact it with our attitudes by humbly and respectfully sharing our diverse worldviews with each other and listening to perspectives that may emanate from cosmologies different than our own. Decolonisation in Praxis is not about displacing a normative perspective or epistemology to replace it with another normative

epistemology, but rather it is about enabling a dialogue of different ideas from which everyone can benefit in some way.

Through the panel discussions and the roundtables we have prepared for today our aim is to motivate critical dialogue and collective contemplation on these urgent matters. We hope that you will honour us by sharing your voices and thoughts, enacting the sort of decolonisation we envision.