Confronting the Discomfort: A Critical Analysis of Privilege and Positionality in Development

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Abstract

This autoethnographic piece seeks to demonstrate the continuous reflexive journey of researchers in acknowledging and addressing their privileges. Through reflections on fieldnotes and a subsequent paper written during my own doctoral research, I will explore how my immersion within postcolonial scholarship forced me to address how my own positionality in the field has re-enacted colonial dynamics in the field of global education. Thus, the paper will argue that in the same vein that we call on learners and educators to reflect on their privileges and positionality through pedagogical practices, we too as researchers must consider how the privileges we hold impacts our epistemological and methodological approach to study.

Keywords

decolonial, privilege, white privilege, positionality, reflexivity, development

Introduction

"Feeling quite self-conscious- I was also pushed to the front on the staff picture and then told 'my skin looks beautiful in a sari'. Makes me hyper aware I stand out in the staff group, when I want to be seen as a part of the group for my research and personal inclusion." (Researcher reflections, 2016)

This research reflection was the catalyst for this autoethnography. The reflection was one of many I wrote during my doctoral research in 2016, which I subsequently collated for a conference paper on positionality the month following my return from fieldwork in 2017 (Le Bourdon, 2017a). Research reflections became an integral part of my methodological practice in my doctoral work, researching how global belonging was experienced and practiced within an international education environment. Taking an ethnographic approach to research, I was both working on and observing a global education camp hosted in Lucknow, India. These camps were attended by 'delegations' of four children aged 11 years old and an 'Adult Leader' from several different countries around the world. Educational activities were run by the international team of Adult Leaders and explored global issues such as human rights, sustainability, diversity and conflict resolution through experiential learning. As a 'Staff Member' my role saw me helping to logistically manage the daily running of the camp such as mealtimes, and health and safety management. As a researcher, I took to jotting down feelings between tasks and creating time each evening to look back on my day. The intensity of the environment meant these reflections were often full of emotion, with indulgent narratives of how I felt or my relationships with others. A key thread throughout these passages was my own positionality and the impact it had on my research. Much of this considered how to balance being a researcher who had also previously worked for the organization within which I was researching. Reading these reflections and subsequent paper back in 2021, 4 and 5 years later, made me squirm with shame at my own privilege and lack of self-awareness. Throughout my writing there had been little acknowledgement of the multiple privileges I hold as a white, western, middle-class, cis-gendered,

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able bodies woman in the field. I wanted to bury the extract, rip up the whole paper and instead focus on the work I have done since, immersing myself in postcolonial scholarship and supporting the decolonizing movement.

Yet, it is this need to swiftly move away from such discomforts that makes those with privilege implicit in the maintenance of power systems and hierarchies found within the field of development (Kothari, 2006; Pailey, 2019). Acknowledging privilege and examining its role in systems of oppression has been at the forefront of much of my public facing positions. In my work in global education, I advocate for pedagogical practices which support learners to reflect on their own positionality in power structures. As a university lecturer I encourage students to analyse where and how colonial legacies shape political systems and dynamics in the field of development. I have written personal blogs on acknowledging my own privilege in my everyday life (Le Bourdon, 2017b). I champion reflexivity, I encourage students to reflect on their positionality, I underscore the need to acknowledge one's own privilege. So, why was this so hard to do when looking back at my own academic research?

This was a difficult question to sit with and my conclusion brought many emotions. I realized that externalizing the problems of privilege, hierarchies and oppression in development and academia more widely, felt more 'comfortable' than addressing my own role within it. Putting it 'outside' of myself meant not having to acknowledge that my presence and actions within the field has contributed, both directly and indirectly, to the entrenchment of colonial dynamics. Intellectualizing systems of privilege and power is much easier to do in academia than examining one's role within it. The methodological section in my doctoral thesis acknowledged my positionality, drew on key methodological theories and scholars, and thus, acted as a tick box exercise to justify my work as a researcher. However, the subsequent research reflections that followed feel woefully naive and unaware. In places they read as superficial, lacking an interrogation of the wider systems, legacies and intersectional privileges shaping my relationship with my surroundings and those within it. It is this which I seek to address here.

Through this autoethnographic piece, I will explore where some of my privileges showed up in my research, focussing on my identity as a white, western, female researcher from the global north. I will do this by drawing on, and critically interrogating, my own researcher reflections reflexively examining my positionality and this dynamic of "power relations and how that influences methods, interpretations, and knowledge production" (Sultana, 2007, p. 376). I wish to run headfirst into the discomfort, providing an example of where subtle and explicit power dynamics are enacted in the field.

I want to make it clear that I do not wish to provide a blueprint or 'How to' method of acknowledging privilege or practicing self-reflexivity. The intention of this autoethnography is to outline my personal journey, with the hope it encourages others to internally reflect on their own

positionality and action. Addressing my own professional and personal positionality both in the field and within my writing is fundamental for unpacking unequal power dynamics in the specific research setting but could also contribute to a wider narrative of how to decolonize development (Khandaker & Narayanaswamy, 2020; Uddin, 2011). As (Bilgen et al. (2021, p. 3) argue 'reflexivity in research processes can serve as a tool to dismantle embedded power hierarchies' and thus, collectively, these internal practices could contribute to the broader decolonization process.

In what follows, I will firstly outline the importance of reflexivity in the decolonization, drawing on the work of postcolonial and critical race scholars. Utilizing these insights, I will then turn to critically examine my positional and personal privilege through the lens of my research reflections.

Reflexivity and Decolonization

Postcolonial scholars in development call on researchers to reflect on how they contribute to systems of oppression, as many current practices within the field already embody colonial dynamics of power and authority (Bhambra et al., 2020; Kothari, 2006). By reflecting on how our views have been formed and how we subsequently engage in the world, we begin to unlock new ways of seeing, knowing and doing (De Sousa Santos et al., 2007, p. xxi). This can be seen as the first step in challenging oppressive structures in our own minds. Without recognizing how dominant narratives have shaped our being and doing we cannot fully grasp 'pluriversal realities' (Getachew 2019; Khandaker & Narayanaswamy, 2020).Thus, by default, and perhaps unintentionally, we continue to entrench colonial dynamics through our own thoughts and actions. As researchers and practitioners, we can contribute directly to the decolonizing movements seen across academia through the methodological process of 'continual self-examination' (Said, 1978, p. 327) and critical reflexivity (Idahosa & Bradbury 2020). Self-examination asks us to reflect on if and how our own belief systems and intersectional privileges shape our methodological approach, findings and conclusions, as a constant attempt to provide as true representation of the material and environment of study (Khandaker & Narayanaswamy, 2020). Critical reflexivity more widely sees individuals reflect on how their identity and social position come to dictate their view of, and impact within, society. In doing so, it is hoped they are too able to consider alternative ways of knowing and doing.

Similarly, in the field of global education where this research was based, best pedagogical practices emphasize the need for what postcolonial scholar Andreotti terms 'critical', rather than 'soft' reflexivity (Andreotti, 2007, p. 46). The former encourages learners to reflect on the production of knowledge and how this has shaped their own and others experience; the latter simple allows space for all experiences to be honoured without examination of where or how these beliefs have been fostered. Experiential learning practices

enable learners to feel and see themselves within the topics explored, question their beliefs and who they 'Other'. Emphasis here is on empowering learners to be the agents for change through reflecting on how they can see and engage in the world differently. Reflexivity is seen as key part of a learners' journey in global education, a continuous process of self-examination and life-long learning. Teachers, too, are encouraged to critically reflect on their own beliefs and teaching in global education (Hicks & Holden, 2007), not only to prevent bias in teaching but as they, too, are continuously transforming through unlearning and learning. In simultaneously experiencing this transformation process, teachers are able to support learners in their own journey of unlearning and relearning. Thus, rather than seeking to achieve a status or attain a grade, global education is understood as a personal transformative pedagogical process, opening new critical understandings and action which reflect feelings of global belonging.

As a development and global education researcher, therefore, reflexivity is a practice I continuously champion. I have written blog pieces (Le Bourdon, 2019), articles (Le Bourdon, 2018) and book chapters (Le Bourdon, 2020) outlining why we need to examine and how we need question our own roles in systems of oppression and power. Yet, reading back the paper I wrote in 2017 I realized that I had not only played it safe but even contributed to colonial enactments in the field. I had simply reflected on my role as a researcher and the power I held in this position impacted my work. There was little acknowledgement of my own privilege and the role this too played. As an insecure PhD student I remember trying to tick the boxes of what I needed to acknowledge when doing ethnographic observations; 'insider-outsider', knowledge of the organization, building relationships and merely mentioning I identified as a woman. I was so focused on ensuring my work read 'academically' I failed to see the glaringly obvious impact my own privilege had on my relationship with participants, the environment around me and my findings. Had I done so I would have also been able to reflect on how my presence, conducting, researching and writing in the fields of global education and development, too entrenched colonial dynamics. It is this which I wish to consider here, the discomfort I avoided in my research reflections and subsequent paper. I will do this by examining the very dynamics that I failed to address in my own work due to the uncomfortable feelings they provoke. To make clear, this is not as a way of eradicating the potential damage done, but to explore what can be learnt from self-examination and reflexivity which unearth these uneasy truths.

Privilege and Discomfort

Researcher

Conducting ethnographic research calls for the researcher to continuously reflect on their positionality in the field

(Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In advance of conducting my research I had read heavily around the concept of 'insider-outsider' dynamics (Coughlan & Brannick, 2001; Ergun & Erdemir, 2010; Mannay, 2010), and so entered my fieldwork hyper aware of traversing the dynamic of both researcher and, in this case, fellow Staff member. My immediate research reflections are interspersed with frequent hopes that '...Staff feel comfortable with me here', 'I hope I fit in… I know it's unavoidable, but I hope my work doesn't get in the way of the Adult participants work too much'. In the subsequent paper written proceeding field work I highlight these entries as part of '…the negotiation processes of conducting, ethnographic work, the struggle of being both inside and outside' (Le Bourdon, 2017a). I attempted to address uncomfortable power dynamics within the research setting by building trust with participants. In establishing these relationships, I felt I had ensured research was conducted 'with' participants, rather than 'on' participants. To some extent this was achieved, with researcher reflections stating my worry that I had 'become to close' with participants.

> "Staff and Leaders keep telling me of instances that I haven't witnessed that would be interesting for my research or tell me to go talk to a particular child who said something they felt was profound. The Staff even keep suggesting questions I should ask them or Adult Leaders in the next set of interviews. Does this mean I have got 'too close'?" (Researcher reflections)

Though concerns such as these are valid and important to reflect on, as I read through my entries now, I can see how superficial my reflections were. I had failed to look beyond my tick-boxing exercise of acknowledging the classic ethnographers 'insider-outsider' dilemma, to address how these dynamics were themselves shaped by unequal dynamics of power and privilege. This can be seen most clearly in my reflection entry made in the first day of the camp, during a meeting on health and safety with all adult participants.

> "We are discussing the risk of a faulty lock on the gate attaching us to the school. Abi [Health and Safety officer] laughs and quickly says "You can write that down Madeleine", though we are all taking notes on his brief. Straight away it is apparent that they are on edge about me being here. I tried to emphasize I wasn't here to judge but to observe and if they ever felt uncomfortable to tell me." (Researcher reflections)

The naivety of my response here jars with me. I can now see how superficial I took this dynamic to be-the dilemma of a researcher trying to 'blend in' with their surroundings. What I failed to acknowledge is how these re-enacted colonial dynamics seen in traditional anthropology, with the white western researcher observing the 'Other'. Ethnographies struggle with detaching themselves from the colonial legacies of anthropology, seen often as western imperialism extended through studying what is deemed as 'exotic' (Uddin, 2011, p.

458). Colonial dynamics become intertwined with the researcher-participant dynamics. Thus, compounding 'Othering' as an unequal power play based on the issue of privilege and positionality. In this incidence, Abi was an Indian man and I as British white woman. My reflection and subsequent discussion in the proceeding research paper failed to acknowledge and examine how my identity exacerbated Abi's self-consciousness here and thus, how my privilege fed into colonial dynamics. Without this reflection I, without intention, 'Othered' participants and re-enacted colonial power relations through a dynamic of observing something 'different', with participants feeling judged. Moreover, as a white, western middle-class woman coming from an educative setting, simply asking participants to tell me if they feel uncomfortable, centres the problem on 'them', not me. It fails to address the multiplex of unequal dynamics my own identity initiates with my participants and devoid me of responsibility. This is not to take away from participants own agency but to question whether I really did or could create a space where all participants felt able to express themselves if they did not feel comfortable. Especially as someone who holds so much privilege and thus, power due to my own positionality as a researcher but also, importantly my identity.

This then led to a panic of whether my research really represented their experience or if this unequal power dynamic and my own positionality had prevented me from not simply 'Othering' participants through my writing. This was very emotive for me, as I had worked hard to ensure that participants felt part of the research, were able to read and discuss the manuscript from their interview, and all subsequent pieces I had written including my dissertation and journal articles. I came to the conclusion that my privilege, both professional and personal, prevented me from producing a complete reflection of participants' experiences, as with any researcher hooded by their subjective bias. But through discussions during the ethnography and interviews after the camp, participants experience mirrored my own and highlighted the importance of these shared feelings and experiences. My methodological approach had allowed me to feel *some* of the emotions and ideas that they had, and that in sharing these emotions we had entered a dialogue of inquiry. Moore argues that it is these dialogues within ethnographies which open up a unique '…opportunity to practice a personal ethics that can be dissociated to a degree from anthropology's complicated history with the exclusionary practice and sanctioned ignorance of Western theorizing' (1999, p. 6). Similarly, Uddin (2011) sees the conversations with participants, but also the writing part of ethnography, as a way to address power dynamics. This is not about looking exogenously at how to create more space for participation, though that is of course important. Instead, it is about the researcher looking inwards to question their role in entrenching these unequal relationships in the field. Here, the decolonizing project can only be furthered through action, conversation and writing, where the dynamics of 'Othering' are addressed directly. This does not

necessarily highlight a grey area between 'colonized' practices and 'decolonizing' ones but how methodological practices can both enact and seek to challenge these dynamics. Importantly, I am not suggesting we can, 'undo' our privilege or its impact in the field. Merely, through exposing my own failures and part within these power dynamics, I wish to demonstrate how I have sought to address them; confronting the uncomfortable truth of how I played in enacting these colonial dynamics through reflexive practices, challenging conversations and considered action.

Participants in my research came from several different countries and backgrounds within the global north and global south, therefore, the power dynamics between each of my participants varied greatly. However, if we are to build on the idea that decolonization must start with self-examination, it is undeniable that my own identity as a white western woman from the global north to conducting research in the global south, significantly impacted both my research. Thus, in order to move forward in this journey, I must face the uncomfortable truth of how my personal privilege impacted my participants, the research project and the field of development more widely.

Western Academic

My status as an academic coming from a UK university felt an important part of the dynamics with local staff members in Lucknow. Initial email exchanges saw Staff from the organization state what an 'honour' it was to host a research project from a UK University, with the local branch of the organisation offering to pay for my accommodation and meals on the camp. My unease of the cost was outweighed by the convenience, helping me to manage the budget for the research. I offered to write a research report for the local branch and help in any way I could on camp as a Staff member. Though I upheld these offers with great enthusiasm, these did not compensate the monetary expense of hosting me. My 'labour' in exchange for hosting. Yet, the local branch did not ask for my presence, my research, my labour – I did. They could have declined to support my research but it became clear as time went on that my identity as a western academic held much power in the view my hosts. My first meeting with members of the organisation sees our conversation and interactions centre on my academic background;

> "Met the Chairman of the Indian Chapter, the first thing he tells me is that he studied in the US and his children are studying in the UK. Not sure he even asked me my name? He then introduces me to guests as an esteemed academic from the UK, stating which guests had studied in Europe or the UK." (Researcher reflections)

Uncomfortable questions arose for me as I reflected on our agreement after our initial meeting. How did my identity and background influence my hosts hospitality? Would this have been received differently if I were not a western academic? Did my hosts care about the content of my work or just the

context? Here and in my subsequent paper (Le Bourdon, 2017b), I reflected on the perceived 'prestige' of western academia, the guilt that colonialism had meant UK education is upheld in such high regard, my frustration that white academics voices are given more weight or credit and the privileged nature of the academy as a whole.

What I failed to do was centre myself and my personal privilege within these reflections. To ask-had I used my position as a white, western academic and taken advantage of my host's hospitality? The perceived prestige of my 'status' was far more convenient for me to use, then to critical reflect on what this meant. I externalised the problem to the legacy of colonialism, the systems that had been left behind and the inequality they bred. I had neglected or even avoided to applying the 'self-examination' Said outlines (1978, p. 327), instead using my privilege, without questioning its ethical impact, to conduct my research with little compensation or return. Looking back, it seems the slight discomfort I had felt in considering the ease of obtaining access, the discomfort at how my hosts introduced themselves on initial meetings, had either been too inconvenient or uncomfortable to address. In addition, I had felt that the Adult Leaders and Staff had been enthused by my research because they were passionate about the organisation and its cause. However, this cannot be understood fully without the acknowledgement of my own identity within this dynamic (Kothari, 2006). Though in relation to participants I held multiple identities on the case-study camp, researcher-staff-former volunteer-friend, my privileged identity thread through all of these.

As someone who holds multiple privileges, these inevitably shaped my relationship with the environment around me, the people in it and thus, my research. This is something I have tried to acknowledge in my everyday life and have encouraged students to do both in my university teaching and as a global education practitioner. Yet, research reflections fell short in examining my own privilege, which cut across the intertwined identities I held on the camp. This sits very uncomfortably for me. I cannot undo the damage done by my inadequate reflexive practices. All I can do is acknowledge this loud and clear, and to start conversations around these methodological dynamics to ensure in future research I do not, to my best abilities, use my identity in the same way. Importantly, this included the need to acknowledge and reflect how my whiteness showed up and impacted my research. Rather than externalise the inequality, I seek to directly address my role as a first step in challenging colonial dynamics I enacted (Millora et al., 2020).

White Western Woman

Before conducting my research I had engaged with the broad scholarly discussion on the impact of whiteness within the field of development research (for example Kothari 2006; Kothari & Wilkinson, 2010; Uddin, 2011). I had thought I had understood the connection of ethnographic work in development with colonial understandings of 'uncivilised Others' (Uddin, 2011, p. 455). I had believed that through taking a methodological approach which sought to conduct research *with* rather than *on* participants, by building relationships based on trust, that I had avoided this dynamic. I reflected on my positionality for 'good methodological practice'. My research reflections are full of snippets where I feel part of the group with my colleagues calling us 'Staff sisters' or with one child calling me 'mom' by mistake. I felt part of the community, these emotions were strong and a key part of my research findings. I remain confident that these emotive feelings of belonging were shared within the group. Interviews with participants following the camp reflect many of the emotions I too felt. However, such shared experience and connection do not mean my identity, and the many privileges they hold, did not have an impact on my research. In fact, my ability to so easily slip into feeling connected to the group, to forget my identity in parts, is a stark example of privilege. Was this process as easy for my participants? Did they feel like I was conducting research with them? My research reflection neglected to analyse what my privileges were preventing me to capture, to understand and thus, miss out in findings. Self-examination here is key for challenging the dominance of a western view of development and how whiteness 'imprints itself on the bodies of the researcher' (Bilgen et al., 2021).

Pailey outlines the multiple ways western racial framing of development has been discussed through terms such as 'Eurocentrism' (Amin, 1972), 'Colonial frame' (Coulthard, 2014, p. 14–15) and 'White racial frame' (Feagin, 2013, ix.3). Pailey herself offering 'White Gaze', a term widely used by Black American intellects, to describe a view of development that

> "…measures the political, socio-economic and cultural processes of Southern black, brown and other people of colour against a standard of Northern whiteness and finds them incomplete, wanting, inferior or regressive. In essence, white is always right, and West is always best" (Pailey, 2019, p. 733).

At the same time, Pailey (2019, p. 735), in a similar vein to Kothari (2006) outlines how these racial binaries, hierarchies and inequalities are silenced within development. Kothari (2006, p. 20) argues that silence around race in development by western practitioners can be seen as a way '…to avoid being accountable for the powers, privileges and inequalities that continue to flow from whiteness'. Pailey reads this silence as a direct consequence of 'white fragility' drawing on work by DiAngelo (2018) which outlines white peoples' discomfort in addressing the many privileges they obtain due to their race. The former argues the racial framing of development and the silence in addressing race in development 'enable the erasure of race in development discourse while simultaneously entrenching the "white gaze" over space and time' (Pailey, 2019, p. 735).

It is through this lens, that Pailey asks us to consider how we reproduce this 'white' gaze either consciously or subconsciously. Though I had not consciously sought to 'whitewash' the field, my lack of critical self-examination and, crucially, my deafening silence in acknowledging my privilege makes me complicit in enacting a 'white gaze' of development. Without addressing privilege and race directly in situations which arose in my research, I too became complicit in enacting a white view of development, where the question of race is external rather than positioning myself within racial dynamics. Interestingly, it was only in moments of discomfort that I really became aware of my race. DiAngelo (2018, p. 1) explains this stating that often white people see themselves as 'raceless' 'Given how seldom we [white people, generally] experience racial discomfort in a society we dominate' due to the systemic racism we have seen established through the historical legacy of imperialistic white powers.

Though scholars like DiAngelo examine race in the context of contemporary society in the United States, their core argument resonates with my own experience and feelings. My privilege had meant I viewed myself as 'raceless' until I was made aware of it through a moment of discomfort. I distinctly remember the moment I felt aware, as I felt stumped with how to react.

> "When we were getting ready my fellow Staff member commented 'she wishes she was as pale as me' and discusses the different powders she has in a really light-hearted way. I didn't know what to say, I tell her how beautiful her skin is. We discuss how white women in UK often want to be more tanned while women in India want to be paler." (Researcher reflections)

In reading this back I realise how ignorant, naïve and damaging my response was, conflating historical, colonial and racial oppression with the desire for tans. The moment felt tricky to navigate, I recall feeling so cautious about saying the wrong thing that I sought instead to move on from the conversation quickly. She had made the comment in passing and I simply mirrored this back, putting it down to a universal gendered issue of perceptive beauty. I did exactly as Pailey and DiAngelo outline, I ran away from the discomfort. I not only remained silent here but I used our common identity as women to dilute the situation. In telling my colleague that her skin was beautiful and that many people in the UK wish they were not pale, what was I trying to achieve? Was I implying that some in the UK would make a similar comment to her? Who was I trying to comfort? Truthfully, I think I subconsciously thought that by making this a universal problem it would alleviate the heavy reality that my skin makes it far easier for me to live in the world. I wanted her to not feel my skin colour was more 'beautiful', I wanted her to feel like they were 'equal'. But in doing so, this also made me feel better. I was able to avoid the fact that it was not really about beauty. It was about intersectional systems of power and privilege. Rather than examining the broader framings of these racial dynamics on the

camp, my reflection remained surface level or completely absent. DiAngelo terms this 'white fragility', where for white folk 'The smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable — the mere suggestion that being white has meaning often triggers a range of defensive responses' (p. 1–2). For me, this was complete avoidance or denial in the moment.

I still do not have the answer as to how to address conversations like these, other than to acknowledge where these ideas of racial hierarchies have come from and how damaging they are. As a global education practitioner, we would have encouraged learners to reflect on the wider systems of power and their positionality within it through conversation with their classmates. Instead, I swallowed the discomfort and ignored the gnawing fact that my very presence as white western academic researching in the global south was playing into the racial dynamics of power and privilege in the field of development.

My failure to label and reflect on my privilege is seen through another research reflection from later in the camp. Here, I seem to suggest my feelings of alienation, due to my inability to speak Hindi and cultural difference with the Staff, is similar to how many of the children must have felt;

> "Sometimes I feel a little alienated by the other Staff, they make jokes in Hindi to each other and I get paranoid. They try to translate when I ask but it isn't the same. Is this how some of the kids feel when they don't understand others' languages, or how Staff do with English?" (Researcher reflections)

Reading this makes me squirm with discomfort for several reason. Firstly, even within ethnographic research the researcher is inevitably the outsider. To feel completely as my participants do is impossible, I could have never truly felt how they did completely, no matter my privilege or identity. A lived-experience is unique, subjective, and totally personal. What should be more important is that participants are not so uncomfortable with my presence in these spaces that they feel and act as outsiders. Ironically, this consideration here took up more reflective space in my journal than any other reflection on discomfort. This hits to the heart of 'insider' and 'outsider' narratives round ethnographies in the field of development, exposing a second uncomfortable truth. As a white, western researcher I may feel like an 'outsider' in the environment in which I conduct research but my privileges make me an 'insider' within the wider dominant structure of knowledge production. As Pailey (2019) highlights, development actors and universities departments are dominated by white practitioners and academics. When reflecting on the methodological dynamic, especially in the context of development, this overarching privilege needs to be acknowledged. The ability to move between 'insider' and 'outsider' described in ethnographic methodologic writing, is thus, based on privilege. Therefore, even though I may have felt like an outsider in that moment, my privilege makes it easier for me to belong in the wider field of development research. Crucially, this speaks to a

third wider point, my experience can never be compared to the historical and contemporary macro and micro exclusions of marginalised and former colonised communities experience on a daily basis. To even try to compare again looks to a white colonial gaze to understand the experience of those impacted by oppressive systems of power. By trying to conflate others experience with my own, I am occupying spaces of those directly affected. My failure to understand that here, demonstrates my failure to acknowledge my own privilege.

Moving with the Discomfort

The research reflections I have outlined are merely two overt examples of where my privilege showed up and how my responses enacted colonial dynamics in development research. There will have been many overt or subtle instances where I failed to address my privilege and feel the discomfort. Even simply conducting ethnographic research as a white western academic, could be seen in itself as contributing to the presence of 'white gaze' in development. Even in writing and reviewing this autoethnography I am questioning if and where I am further exacerbating this dynamic.

So how do I move forward? Does this mean I should step out of research entirely? Or is this too running from the discomfort? I am not sure of my answer to these questions. All I can do is to keep learning, keep reflecting on my practice and keep acting to decolonize the field through conversation, writing and action.

I have been actively engaged in a process of self-reflection since finishing my PhD research in different ways. I have sought to immerse myself in postcolonial, critical race and indigenous scholarship; to educate myself on epistemologies from the global south; and to critically reflect on my western learning. Conversations here have been particularly important for me, attending reading groups dedicated to 'Critical Race Theory', seminars exploring 'Decolonising Development', and creating space in my teaching to discuss race, power and privilege with students. This process of unlearning, reflecting, listening and learning is an ongoing one and has had a profound impact on my view of development, academia and global society. I want to highlight three key ways addressing my discomfort, has challenged my thinking and actions.

Firstly, it has made me re-frame 'international development' to 'development studies' and even here I feel there may be further shifts to come. This is more than a change of name; it is a change of mindset resulting from a simple question: international for whom? In the same way I externalised racial inequalities in development, the 'international' externalises the need for development outside of the western world. Poverty, discrimination and injustice occur on different scales in every crux of our world, and more importantly, we are all implicit and responsible to address it. Personally, this shift has made me centre myself in the field, to reflect on how my thoughts and actions impact, contribute or challenge the pursuits of development. Secondly, as an educator in higher education, it has made me address my own privilege in

obtaining and maintaining a job but also my approach to teaching. I cannot single-handedly dismantle the systemic inequalities we see across academia, however, I can use my privilege to call it out, to take action and work to decolonize my own teaching. Creating safe spaces that address privilege in educative environments is a key part of the pedagogical philosophy of global education. Adopting these in my university teaching has opened up insightful discussions with students in which I have also learnt alongside and from my students. Lastly, in examining my research practices in my PhD research, I have set myself new boundaries for further work. Through continuous self-examination, I will endeavour to choose research projects carefully, to reflect on whether I am best placed to conduct this research and to identify where I can work in collaboration with scholars from the global south. These are small contributions and will not prevent me from enacting colonial dynamics or overseeing my privilege. Instead it is the beginning of a pursuit, as Bilgen et al. (2021, p. 13) state;

"…becoming aware of our positionalities requires the willingness to encounter discomfort and the courage to reflect this in the words we write down as academic contributions… having such an awareness (about the self) is an essential step towards reconceptualizing research as a 'co-construction" of knowledge as well as conducting research 'with', rather than 'on' or 'about' a group or area of interest."

Leaning into the discomfort through this autoethnography, analysing my failure to address my privilege as a white western academic in a field framed through colonial dynamics, I hope to open up a space for other white academics to address their own privileges and failings. Personally, I will continue to move with the discomfort; practice self-reflexivity, acknowledge my privilege and act to challenge racial hierarchies in development.

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