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Decolonization in the everyday practices of NGOs – case of Oxfam Belgium

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ABSTRACT

This thesis highlights the ambiguous nature associated with decolonization practices within the NGO community. It explores the underlying coloniality of the sector, power relations, white gaze, issue structural racism and language. Based on the theoretical accounts of the concepts it seeks to explore the biases associated with a practical account of decolonization. It seeks to respond to the questions "*What can be learn about decolonization through the study of everyday NGO practices",* therefore tackling both a theoretical and practical perspective. It explores the decolonization practices through the case of Oxfam Belgium, revealing department, organization, and confederation-specific insights. It also reveals friction-factors that explain the difficulties of practicing decolonization. Lastly, it looks at post-development alternatives to incorporate decolonial agenda in the work.

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Introduction

This research will tackle fundamental questions related to the topic of the everyday decolonization practices of NGOs, as it has been central to the understanding and the positioning of the developmental aid sector as a whole. According to Cullen, McCorriston and Thompson (2021), decolonization is a global phenomenon that includes a wide range of non-state actors in the process of shaping the post-colonial world. The authors also argue that there is strong evidence to suggest that the activities carried out by NGOs are linked to the exercising of control over former colonies as well as replicating colonial connections as a whole. Theoretically decolonization as a concept was first coined by political scientists, activists and philosophers of the first half of the 20th century, with authors like Fanon, Césaire and others, who most broadly referred to it as a struggle of colonies gaining social, political, and economic independence from their metropoles through an active struggle against colonial institutions, relations, and ways of being. According to Jansen and Osterhammel (2017, p.33), decolonization can be associated with "a plethora of meanings, ambiguities, conflicting memories, and competing narratives". Therefore, when talking about decolonization we need to look beyond the known "struggles against" and look for the impact that the process has had on our everyday life.

It is crucial to note that decolonization is not solely limited to a political understanding of it, as it also entails a deconstruction of colonial ideologies and Western-dominated approaches, dismantling structures, and the imbalances within given power relations (Tuck, 2012). Additionally, this concept shapes the ideals and living patterns of our day-to-day life, reproducing the Western-dominated model of knowledge cataloguing (Vaughan, 2018). To this end, one looks at the deep reflections on the boundaries of the impact of decolonization on people, as it transcends the territoriality aspect and engages in the critique on the domination of Western ideas and traditions of thought. Therefore, this work will start with underlining the fact that decolonization as a concept is highly multi-faceted and there are different ways of defining decolonization, depending on which approach the author takes. Consequently, this paper will focus on a more practical dimension of the issue at hand and will seek to define it within the framework of a policy-related approach of NGOs. It will use the case of Oxfam Belgium to explore these topics.

The choice of Oxfam Belgium is motivated by the positionality of the organization within the humanitarian and development sector, as it is one of the leading ones tackling the issues of inequality and poverty. As stated on the official website: "Oxfam works in more than 90 countries, in collaboration with 3,200 partner organizations. We are helping 25 million women, men and children to get out of poverty through development, emergency aid and awareness-raising projects." (Oxfam, 2022). According to the data of 2012, worldwide Oxfam had 10,230 staff; 47,097 volunteers; an income of 918 million (639 million euros spent on programme implementation, management, campaigning and emergencies; 144 million euros on trading; 77 million euros on fundraising and marketing; 40 million euros on management and admin) (Reuters, 2013). Undoubtedly, the organization has a multidimensional scope, occupying itself with development, campaigning, emergency relief, advocacy, and policy research, which can be counted as one of the main motivations to use the organization as a close-up case study. Consequently, the topic of decolonization is also no stranger to the NGO sector and the development sphere as well as the Belgian context Oxfam operates in. As argued by 11.11.11, a Belgian coalition of NGOs in "Decolonize now!": "Decolonisation begins with the realisation that the past leaves traces in the present. That structures and power relationships that exist today are determined by what came before and lives on in our society, however different it may seem from times long past." (11.11.11, 2021, p. 9) and that it is specifically skewed in the development sector, where certain power structures remain unchallenged. Belgium in this case is a perfect research opportunity to investigate the dimensions to which the "shedding" of these imbalances has taken place, as up until 1961 the Belgian Ministry of Development Cooperation was called the Ministry of Colonies with missionary mission sent to "civilize", for instance, Congo, Rwanda or Burundi. Therefore, the issue of how NGOs practice decolonization, especially such big ones like Oxfam, is a crucial point of research both for the internal and external functioning of the sector as a whole.

The relevance of the work is associated with the growing emphasis of decolonial scholarships as well as the societal changes associated with the rise of Black Lives Matter movement. The work aims at addressing the inequalities which are not solely limited to race, but also to social class and mobility, gender and sexuality, and language and culture, because these issues always intersect each other. The work seeks to open the necessary conversation on the biases within the development sector. To this end, one needs to look at the deep reflections on the boundaries of the impact of

decolonization on people, as it transcends the territoriality aspect and engages in the critique on the domination of Western ideas and traditions of thought.

Specifically, when it comes to discussing development Cowen and Shenton (1996, 1998) distinguish between two meanings of the term 'development' that have been consistently confused: 'development as an immanent and unintentional process as in, for example, the "development of capitalism" and development as an intentional activity' (1998, 50). Hart (2001, 650) amends this distinction slightly to talk of 'little d' and 'big D' d/Development, whereby the former involves the 'geographically uneven, profoundly contradictory' set of processes underlying capitalist developments, while the latter refers to the 'project of intervention in the "third world" that emerged in a context of decolonization and the cold war'. This insistence on distinguishing between notions of intervention and of deeper forms of political, economic, structural change should not lead us to lose sight of the clear, if non-deterministic, relationships between these two dimensions of development. Rather, it offers a means of clarifying the relationship between development policy and practice and the underlying processes of uneven development that create exclusion and inequality for many just as they lead to enhanced opportunities for others.

Despite extensive research on the theoretical and philosophical understandings of what constitutes decolonization, so far there is little academic attention paid to the practical understanding of decolonization and specifically within the NGO community. The paper at hand will try to bridge the gap between the theory and practice and will try to present a thorough self-reflective image of how the implementation of decolonization practices takes place, what are the criteria that constitute a "decolonization practice" as well as how does the "decolonized" humanitarian aid and development sector will look like.

CHAPTER 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Modernity, Coloniality, Decoloniality project

One of the main tasks of this paper is to define what decolonization entails in the practical understanding within the NGO community. Therefore, in the conceptual framework it is essential to mention the grounds of the analysis used. The following paper bases itself on the MCD (Modernity, Coloniality, Decoloniality) project which started in the early 2000s by a group of prominent Latin American scholars, such as the Peruvian sociologist, Anibal Quijano, Argentinian writer and political scientist Walter Mignolo, Argentinian Mexican writer and philosopher, Enrique Dussel, to name a few (Shepherd, 2018). The project is inspired by the post-colonial liberation thinking and writers like Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césiare, as well as monumental events that have shifted the experience of colonial states, for instance, the Bandug Conference of 1955 which promoted cooperation between Asian and African states to collectively oppose colonialism and neocolonialism. The choice of this specific school for the theoretical analysis can be explained by three factors. Firstly, the MCD project makes a critical shift from the post-colonial scholarship by expanding the temporal and geographical analysis and arguing that European coloniality could not have existed without modernity (Mignolo, 2008). The project suggests that through the flow of goods, resources, technologies and people, the Old World was able to benefit so much becoming the main driver of the European modernity, contrry to post-colonial authors who have simply argued that colonialism was an unfortunate consequence of the European modernity and its "secondary symptom" (Delanty 2007, Giddens 1990). Therefore, the MCD authors have tried to analyze the colonial past of Latin American countries and have put out the thesis of colonialism being an essential part of the economic, political, institutional setting at the birth of modernity (Shepherd, 2018). As Mignolo (2008, p.39) puts it: "The basic thesis is the following: 'modernity' is a European narrative that hides its darker side, 'coloniality'. Coloniality, in other words, is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality".

Secondly, the MCD school in contrast to underdevelopment theory, world systems theory and Marxism and neo-Marxism shifts its attention from political and economic implications, identity

that was the focus of post-colonial studies, to the system of *knowledge production*. MCD highlights the inherent coloniality of knowledge and the attempt to take Western knowledge as a given universal. Along the same lines, there is a process of "consuming" local knowledge that it is deemed useful for the Western *universal* knowledge. As argued by Knudsen (2018), there is a process of *appropriation* and *reframing* and claiming them as a part of the Western knowledge paradigm. On top of that, Shepherd (2016) argues that local knowledge not only gets wiped out by the more dominant Western paradigm, but also it gets reduced to the notion of tradition and belief, denying its "knowledge form". In a recent work of Mignolo (2013) the author connects colonial modernity with the idea of the "ego-politics" of knowledge, and he contrasts it to the idea of "body-politics of knowing/ sensing/ understanding" which pays attention to the sources of knowledge. The author argues that there are different degrees that differentiate between how people perceive and carry out knowledge: "In Munich, you do not see or feel coloniality. In La Paz, Bolivia, you feel it all the way, all the time, in your bones: modernity is constantly reproducing coloniality" (Mignolo, 2007, p.349). This type of analysis is crucial to understanding not only how Western knowledge has been universalized but also to see how and if there are systems in place that can dismantle it.

Lastly, the MCD provides a revolutionary shift by refusing the self-conceptualization of itself as a theory. As Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) argue the aim of the Decolonial project is to refuse the theoretical orientations and invite people to break away from the conceptual analysis. There needs to be a *total shift in perspective* where modernity will be viewed as an inherent part of the European colonial project. What the MCD scholars are trying to achieve is rather than diminishing their impact, creating an over-reaching epistemology by refusing the notions that are perpetuated by the Western civilization. On top of that, MCD practioners have stated that there is no goal to create a new ground-breaking theory and see universal applicability and relevance, rather the MCD is a *pluri-versatile* multi-faceted project that connects many schools of thought. Fundamentally MCD rejects the universalism imposed by the modern Western thinking. Mignolo (2007, p.500) states that "the struggle for epistemic de-coloniality lies, precisely, here: de-linking from the most fundamental belief of modernity: the belief in abstract universals". Therefore, the perspective taken up by MCD has been grounded in breaking away from the Western universalization and theorization and using the pluri-versality to create a greater scope for distributing ideas.

To infer, the importance of the MCD project cannot be overstated as the three factors mentioned above allow the paper to position itself in the theoretical framework of what is decolonial thinking and its criteria. The next part will be dedicated to the discussion of specific elements that are central to learning more about decolonization.

1.1.1 Decolonization – A Theoretical Perspective

This part of the conceptual framework will be the basis for the analysis of decolonization as a concept on the theoretical level. The task of this part is to put forward multiple criteria, meanings and attributes that are associated with decolonization and decolonial thinking based on the MCD project framework as well as other contributions that are centered around the same topic. Decolonization, therefore, will be presented as multiple aspects where each of them will be analyzed and explained. Several concepts will be reviewed: power dynamics, language and imaginary, white gaze, white saviorism and habitus.

1.1.2. Power dynamics

Starting with the most central point of the paper's focus on power and unequal power relationships, it is essential to look at the contribution brought by Aníbal Quijano who introduced the concept of the *"coloniality of power"*. This concept reflects the power structures, hegemony and control that is rooted in the modernist era and colonial ties and is manifested in the realities of today between the West and post-colonial states (Quijano, 2000). The author demonstrated how in the 15th century, a new model of colonial power emerged that had the idea of races which differentiated between the "conquered" and the "conquerors" putting a natural position of inferiority and perpetuating discrimination in post-colonial societies. According to him, there is a distinction between colonialism and coloniality. Colonialism can be equated to the Western colonial expansion which was at the core of the Christianizing mission in the Americas and Asia. Starting with the efforts from the Spaniards and the Portuguese, the colonial force grew up to the Dutch, French and British, making them great colonial powers, with Germany and Italy becoming "minor" colonial powers (Quijano, 2000). Yet the idea of *coloniality* was used to highlight that imperialism cannot exist without the underlying logic of *Western* as well as *modern* imperialism. That was a radical shift in

the academia at that time as coloniality was now viewed as a central component of modernity and largely proved that it cannot be dismantled unless the Western modernity is overthrown (Mignolo, 2017).

Along the same lines, a prominent scholar Gurminder Bhambra advocates for a triple-nexus process of deconstructing-reconnecting-reconstructing approach that would allow for incorporating the overlooked and forgotten side of history. Through reconnection and reconstruction, she argues that there needs to be an acknowledgement of complexities and resilience in marginalized communities that goes beyond their simple classification within the colonizer versus colonized understanding (Bhambra, 2019). She suggests that to balance out these inequalities, there needs to be a shift towards completing marginalized histories in opposition to Western and European-led ideas of exceptionalism and dominance. The contribution of Grosfoguel (2002) is also of immense value here as he states that coloniality did not end, rather it has been perpetuated by big institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, NATO. The author argues that simply using post-colonial theory and the notion of decolonization will not be sufficient to explain the current power imbalances existing between states.

These ideas can be greatly summarized by Frantz Fanon who stated that after independence, colonial foundations are not truly broken, just replaced (Fanon, 1968). The process of true decolonization happens when we *decolonize our minds* and become aware of the colonial dimensions of the current world order. To this end, there needs to be an additional linkage between decolonization and power structures in place. According to a policy report "Time to Decolonise Aid!", decolonization comes along with the concept of decoloniality which could be viewed as the "the process of examining the matrix of power that emerged during and after the colonial period" (Peace Direct, 2021, p. 15). It also examines how these dynamics have lasting effects, privileging a Eurocentric conceptualization of the future from which several marginalized groups, including people of color, are excluded. With this knowledge in mind, it is essential to state that decolonization is a process that requires "discomfort" and is associated with deconstructing old habits, practices, and beliefs (Gray et al., 2013).

What is more, the effects of unequal power relations on decolonization have a long-lasting effect and shed light onto one of the most crucial aspects of this relationship. Mignolo (2007) highlights that what is crucial is not only looking at the coloniality of power but also its impact on knowledge systems and the ways to dismantle it. He also introduced the idea of *border knowledge* that is aimed at addressing the position of subaltern knowledge not as something separated from the Western knowledge but rather a bordering position. Alcoff (2007) suggests that Mignolo does this to highlight the locality of subaltern knowledge that is positioned within the fault-lines of Western hegemony thinking, as from the start it already acknowledges the incoherencies of the Western-led knowledge systems. With that, the approach undertaken by Raewyn Connel is of great importance here, as she argues that colonial histories narrated through the Western and European lens have subsequently become the ultimate source of knowledge and science production. Therefore, this results in the production of standardized sources that limit legitimization and capacity of other peoples and cultures to contribute to its production (Connel, 2013). Linking these two thoughts together Noxolo (2017) suggests that knowledge production is fundamentally imbricated in power. This discussion is essential as the production of knowledge and diverging discourses is what drives the everyday practices and ultimately narrates a certain viewpoint. Therefore, it can be inferred from the contributions of the above-mentioned authors that the power dynamics are observable not only during the analysis of history or institutions but also in the knowledge systems that govern the societies of today.

1.1.3. Language and imaginary

The issue of language is crucial regarding what the previous section touched upon - the decolonization of the *mind.* As much as it is a wide and vast concept, it is essential to review its intricacies concerning people's perception of culture, language, and representation. Specifically for this part, I wanted to turn to the issue of language and its influence on imaginary that people have regarding the process of decolonization. Consequently, it is essential to highlight the work of the Kenyan novelist and writer Ngúgí wa Thiong'o and specifically his book "Decolonizing the Mind" from 1981. The author argues that: "the most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world" (Ngúgí, 1981, p. 17). As we have seen from the previous section, grounded

in unequal power relations and the imposed feeling of inferiority the colonized societies could never achieve the level of Western advancement due to their racial and cultural inferiority perpetuated by the same Western knowledge traditions (Andersen, 2018). Specifically, Ngúgí talks about the Western "culture bomb" that destroyed colonized people's belief in their language, customs, and cultural background, leaving them as the "wasteland of non-achievement" (Ngúgí, 1981). The task was to decolonize the mind, and, therefore, for Ngúgí it was essential to get rid of the language of the colonizer, change the educational system, and to pursue a liberating perspective where non-Western forms of culture have the space to emerge and be supported. Additionally, Mbembe (2016) contends that decolonizing the mind requires getting rid of the assumption that the Western knowledge as well as language are at the center of the African culture. Practically on the institutional level Auerbach (2017) suggests that there is a growing demand for change on the educational level. One of the examples is the African Leadership University which took steps to guarantee inclusion of native languages rather than solely English, giving access to open sources related to decolonization as well as ensuring equal opportunities when it comes to mobility and collaborative modes of teaching. Along the same lines, Andersen (2018) highlights that the striking point of the decolonial thought and decolonization efforts are precisely in the fact that they lead to real institutional change, which is a crucial point for the analysis of the case-study later.

Related to the impact of language and its link to decolonization stands *imaginary*. Before discussing the theoretical implications of the concept, it is necessary to define what it means. This paper will address imaginary as a collection of hegemonic epistemological approaches, identities, realities to how one looks at something (Perez, 1999). For instance, in an interview to Vice, Ngúgí wa Thiong'o states that "images are a part of the entire struggle". He suggests that the narratives used about Africa in European film, books are represented from a very colonial perspective "associated with animals, underdevelopment and the use of the word 'tribe'" (Tuwe, 2018). This type of imaginary has become internalized by people in Africa and therefore it is a common duty to dismantle these images. Moreover, Mignolo (2000) notes developmental governmentality is the prime example of such imaginary being reinforced. Under these developments nation-states became comparable to one another, and specifically according to abnormalities such as mortality rates, poverty, illiteracy, etc. This would have a great impact on the imaginary that we have of post-colonial states of today. As argued by Quijano (2000) noted previously, colonized peoples were associated with the *pre-*

dispositioned inferiority. With the rise of the development sector, European states started using many images reinforcing patronizing attitudes, so that white Europeans would be more inclined to donate to charity resulting in rendering post-colonial population powerless and voiceless.

On the intersection of imaginary lies the critique that was brought up by Maria Lugones who emphasized that the inferiority was not only related to race as was argued by the scholars from the Modernity, Coloniality, Decoloniality project but also *gender*. Lugones (2008) claimed that the biological dimorphism, the patriarchal and heterosexual organizations of relations are crucial to an understanding of the different gender arrangements along "racial" lines. Colonized people are labelled as *not human* and were categorized as *neither men nor women* since men and women would only come from the Western world (Lugones, 2008). In this way, the colonial system denies colonial subjects from gender and hence from their humanity because the imposition of the Western gender system is also a process of dehumanization that distinguishes those who are fully human against those who are not. This critique of overlooking the importance of gender in relation to the perception of colonized people is essential when linking it to imaginary. Along the same lines, Perez (1999) provides a great illustration of what imaginary means in relation to decolonization. The author talks about fragmented identities and the realness of them, meaning that each of us should ask if the identities that we have are indeed real or *imposed*. She asks the reader: "How might women of color spectators be like or different from their representation? How does the colonial object imagine her own desire when it is policed, restricted, and constructed through rape, for example? Finally, how does the colonial object become decolonial subject?" (Perez, 1999, p.111). This quote makes it evident that imaginary imposed by coloniality most importantly has the effect on the people, their self-perception and behavior. Furthermore, the gendered aspect creates new linkages between race, power, and the imaginary experience in the decolonial thinking.

1.1.4. Structural racism

A crucial point in understanding coloniality is the idea of *race* which was grounded in land and labor exploitation. Natives were refused property rights to their land upon conquest, thus making them subordinate to the colonizers. Along the lines of racial differentiation colonizers were able to create diverging identities according to which people were denied property rights to their land as

well as promoted slavery (Quijano, 2000). This is vital as it contributed to the juridification of the subordinate rules and laws that were manifested in the everyday life. Another key aspect for this research is associated with the idea of "white supremacy" that is derived from the concept of "whiteness" that was imposed in the English colonies (Quijano, 2000). The phenomenon of white supremacy and consequently its impact can be explained by the fact that the concept itself already assumes racial superiority grounded in the notion of "whiteness", meaning that other races are *always* and *already* inferior to everything that is considered white. Therefore, white supremacy as a concept can be equated to an institutional self-reproducing mechanism that has a goal to maintain itself "white". Racialization is the foundation for all the sectors of power and most importantly Eurocentric coloniality. According to Quijano (2000), racialization is precisely what we need to erase. Furthermore, Mignolo (2009) brings race into deep connectivity with development, underdevelopment as well as knowledge systems. The author suggests that "racism, as we sense it today, was the result of two conceptual inventions of imperial knowledge, certain bodies were inferior to others, and that inferior bodies carried inferior intelligence" (Mignolo 2009). Therefore, the analysis of race by Quijano suggests the link to the everyday subordination grounded in the ideas of whiteness and superiority.

Consequently, this connects to the idea of the *hegemonic mind*. The concept shows how the criteria discussed above manifest in the everyday life in the social, political, personal aspects. Precisely the hegemonic mind is associated with the superiority of the nation-state as a concept. As we know it today nation-state is the ultimate institutional subjugation like individual control or violence. Nation-states preserve their institutional framework through the maintenances of hierarchies and interiorizations imposed on the people in the state (Martinot, 2022). What is interesting here is that the existence of the nation-state perpetuates privileges even amongst the most progressive social groups, as people have always the right to fall back to the institutional structure (Crenshaw, 1991). For instance, feminist movements historically have been centered around white middle class women's experiences, overlooking the struggles of women outside of that social, economic, and political spectrum. Quijano (2000) argues that this hegemony must be challenged, most importantly decolonized. Therefore, colonialism needs to be fought in three different levels: getting rid of the domination imposed by Eurocentrism on former colonies, on people within the colonies, i.e., *personnes racisées*, and lastly the hegemonic mind. Therefore, the goal is to get "decolonized" and

create a new political culture which would be autonomous from Eurocentrism, it needs to erase the differentiation between the subject and the object as well as critically address the power structures in place. Overall, Quijano argues that decoloniality is a process, it is "a perspective, stance, and proposition of thought, analysis, sensing, making, doing, feeling, and being that is actional (in the Fanonian sense), praxistical, and continuing." (Mignolo, 2000).

So far, the theoretical account of decolonization has provided the reader with a broad understanding the debates surrounding the topic. The aim of this part was to introduce the key concepts that are associated with the theoretical understanding of decolonization and its underlying conditions. Evidently the list is not exhaustive here, but the choice of the three criteria was not accidental: *power dynamics, language, and imaginary as well as structural racism* – are an integral part of the analysis of decolonization as a practical concept within the context of the NGOs' functioning. However, as NGOs are an integral part of the case of Oxfam Belgium, it is essential to link another concept to the theoretical account of decolonization – *development.* In the next section *development* will be analyzed on the backdrop of decolonization efforts to converge these two concepts together.

1.1.2 Development – situating debates

The second concept that is key to this paper is the *development* and it is crucial to link it with decolonization as the intersection between them will be the basis of the theory used to critically analyze the case of Oxfam Belgium and the everyday practices of NGOs. This part aims at presenting theoretical debates related to the biases of the concept of development and development cooperation and in the end ties everything together to create a theoretical understanding of what it means to practice decolonization in the developmental setting. It can be argued that there are various ways to interpret what development stands for and how one should account for it. Development can be viewed as a political discourse (Zai, 2013), it can be based on the measured by different indexes, i.e., 2015 UN Sustainable Development goals or 2019 Human development classifications, however, this work will look not at the numerical definition of what development stands for. The main task of this part will be not to uncover the mainstream discourses, nor the policies made available rather also about the *silences,* what is not said and what is being concealed from the conceptualization of development (de Almagro, 2022).

Historical overview of the concept

Development has a complicated history as a concept and, therefore, has been heavily criticized along the criteria that is bases itself on to evaluate the level of development from country to country. Mignolo (2000) in relation to the previous ideas promoted by the MDC project states that development is related to the idea of the *"standard of civilization"*. It comes as no surprise that the criteria for assessing the standard of the civilization were imposed on colonial states based on the Western way of governance: property rights, nation-states, and (neo)-liberal trade were the essential components. Colonial states were judged on the level of advancement of these criteria and those countries who were unable to fit in were refused the right to rule themselves. An illustrative example would be the 1885 Berlin Conference on Africa, the purpose of which was: "to watch over the preservation of the native tribes and to care for the improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being" and "instructing the natives and bringing home to them the *blessing of civilization*" (Sarkin, 2008). Therefore, under these processes nation-states became comparable to one another as well as great attention was paid to the abnormalities they had to deal with (i.e., mortality rates, poverty, illiteracy, etc.). The worse the performance was, the lower the treatment was for a colonial state from the metropole. This is how the concept of *developmental governmentality* occurred (Watts, 2003). This meant that development was no longer about contributing to the advancement of the colonized societies, rather the maintenance of the trusteeships installed by the colonial powers. As development governmentality has been perpetuated by the metropole states, soon development has become a part of the *global design* (de Almagro, 2022). Global in the sense that development could be traced back to the post-war 1945 and decolonization era where key institutions of the West were established, and a new international order was accepted. It is essential to look at how this concept has been changing over time. It can be argued that development gained real substance as a concept on the backdrop of decolonization movements closer to the end of colonial rule of the British Empire. Specifically, the post-World War II period gave impetus to the provision of different types of aid to countries that have suffered consequence of the war as well as to the newly independent states who needed the assistance. For instance, the World Bank and the IMF were established at Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 as well as the UN was officially created in 1945 - these events led to tightening of linkages between countries through the spread of globalization and Western values of modern industrial-technological growth, capitalism, and human rights.

Along that since the late 1950s there was a growing anti-colonial civil rights movement for democratization which opposed the Western-led developmental projects. A prime example to that would be the work of Boserup (1970) where she criticizes the modern developmental projects based on the analysis of the gendered impact they had. She argues that in developmental projects employed by the West, in most cases the role of women was overlooked even though they are the main drivers behind the agricultural efforts and productivity. Boserup asserts that most of the developmental projects targeted men rather than women, completely disregarding the struggles of women in agriculture and leaving them with little to no support. Right around 1970s there are new critical voices coming from Latin America that have become known as the school of *dependency theory as well as the world's systems theory* (Rodney, 1972; Wallerstein, 1974). The scholars were heavily critical of the growing liberalism in the West and the cultural relativism that has spread to the post-colonial states. Furthermore, Western ideas of the nation-state and Western-like industrialization were rejected, development started to be perceived not as a linear one-time monetary measure, rather it became a process with long-term goals and finally there was a growing interest in the local context and capacity-building on the local level related to human needs (Blum, 2010).

Nonetheless, the policies around development employed in the end of 1980s-1990s had a reversal effect on the states due to the adoption of neoliberal economic policies that tremendously fractured the growth of post-colonial states. Developing countries were forced to accept loans and Structural Adjustment Programs for aid based on the acceptance of free trade, cutting of social benefits for people as well as large privatization. According to Thompson (2017), the policies that were perpetuated in the mainstream development by SAPs had a detrimental effect on the maternal and child health. The authors contends that these programs have undermined access to affordable health care services and have negatively impacted food availability for mothers and their children. The SAPs were a typical neoliberal project at that time which soon turned into the *donor fatigue* that was experienced by Western states. By late 1990s-early 2000s SAPs were changed into Poverty Reduction Strategies which were aimed at reversing the effects of the former and focus on improving social conditions. According to Lopes (2019), a high number of African countries have taken at least two generations of PRSPs to ensure eligibility for debt relief. Unfortunately, the PRSPs still

remained short-sighted, therefore, pushing developing countries to seek developmental aid either through their own means or engaging in politicization of the development processes with the West (ibid.). Hackenesch (2021) suggests that the politicization of development

This all resulted in the adoption of several new development initiatives that were driven by various UN conferences, i.e., the 1992 Rio Conference on climate change or the 1995 UN Women Conference in Beijing – the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. Development as we know it today is now linked to political conditionality and the aid provided through the developmental programs is only issued upon the compliance with neoliberal policies perpetuated by Western states. However, there is a growing focus on global collective action, which manifested itself in the *2030 Sustainable Development Goals* which are now made for all countries on equal basis. The latest developmental program is based on the values of resilience building, partnership, prevention, and local ownership. As argued by Kraus et al. (2022), despite the attempt to include alternative voices in the main international developmental project, SDGs fail to address what decolonial thinkers like Santos (2014) call as *absences* – privileging certain forms of knowledge over the others. The scholars assert that after the consideration of SDG goals 8, 9, 12, 13 and 15 there is an explicit reliance on the universality of concepts and notions that trace back to the modernity-coloniality debate proposed by decolonial thinkers. What is more, the concepts used benefit the so-called Global North countries, as Kraus et al. (2022) highlight that their analysis confirms the Northern-inspired solutions to such problems as climate change. To infer, despite the latest strive to pursue more equal and equitable solutions for international development programs, there is evidence that development has far more underlying drawbacks related to the colonial nature of the concept.

Consequently, putting the concept of development into perspective gives the reader a chance to connect its ambiguities and prejudices with the close colonial history. This part has aimed at looking at the historical overview of development, precisely highlighting the contributions from decolonial thinkers linking the two concepts together. This first step is crucial to develop the conceptual framework between the two concepts narrowing it down to decolonization within the development sector. Therefore, the next part will be dedicated to addressing this paradigm through the discussion

of the process of NGOization and development cooperation closely linking the two concepts to the case of Oxfam Belgium.

NGOization and development cooperation

This part will be dedicated to the analysis of the phenomenon of NGOization in the development sector. To begin with, there are various accounts on how to define NGOs. Bebbington et al. (2008) argue that NGOs truly become NGOs only when they offer politically viable alternatives to development: models, practices and ideas that are new to the existing discourses. According to the 2016 Development Cooperation Forum Policy Brief, development cooperation can be defined as "an activity that aims explicitly to support national or international development priorities, is not driven by profit, discriminates in favor of developing countries, and is based on cooperative relationships that seek to enhance developing country ownership". Donini (2020) provides a deep analysis of developmental sector within the framework of self-reinforcing agendas of "the political" reveals that much of the efforts carried out under the aid/cooperation framework is an extension of European and Western worldviews. Adding to this idea, Quijano (2007) states that there is an inherent and "alive" factor of the Western model and its hegemonic quality.

Consequently, with the constant self-reinvention of NGOs are entities trying to influence the development strategies, the process of NGOization is tightly linked to that. According to Armstrong and Prashad (2005) process of NGOization is understood by different social movements, activists, and academics as "the continuation of institutionalization, professionalization, depoliticization and demobilization of movements for different types of social change". Reinsborough (2004) notes that through the process of NGOization, the idea of *social change* has become equal to specialized professionals, strategists, and negotiators to make one believe that paid staff will be "enough to save the world". According to prominent scholars Choudry and Kapoor (2013) that have made a major contribution to the analysis of NGOization in the academia with their book "NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects" and argue that the process of NGOization ultimately undermines local and international movements that advocate for social change and justice along the rhetoric of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist discourses and following the interests of private sector. The authors suggest that NGOization is closely linked to the rise of neoliberalism, where the policies adopted in 1990s have significantly reduced the role of the state, leaving holes for the civil society initiatives to flourish. With less reliance on the state, NGOs became the primary drivers of

developmental projects (Fowler, 2000). Given that they became the primary actors for provision of services and public goods, NGOs were also given access to setting policies within the larger international context related to developmental agenda. As argued by Mojab (2009), in the late 1990s Northern governments used NGOs to "democratize" countries through civil society efforts. With the rise of security as the main discourse for development following 9/11, Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin (2008) argue that NGOs became closely linked to the *label* of development, humanitarianism and peace and security. This idea can be related to the fact that NGOs provide support only for a limited restructuring of the state that still exists within the neoliberal free market paradigm. Consequently, Kamat (2004) underlines that the process of NGOization leads both to the professionalization and depoliticization of NGOs as community-based initiatives within the neoliberal regime that we live in. Petras and Veltmeyer (2005) argue that precisely this circle of influences allows NGOs to exist within the given power structure while advocating for societal and developmental change. Therefore, the process of NGOization places NGOs within a convenient circle of self-replication without fully addressing the roots of the causes they are trying to fight. This is what Kamat (2004) calls "the privatization of the notion of public interest". To infer, the process of NGOization has rather a negative impact on the equitable and intersectional character of development cooperation, however, it is undeniable that it is indeed a part of the reality where NGOs exist now.

Another crucial contribution that needs to be considered is the one by Goodman (2002) as he specifically focuses on the position international NGOs find themselves in which is topical for the case of Oxfam Belgium. The author questions the legitimacy of international NGOs that are based in the so-called Global North, as he views them reformist that target elite interests rather than people-led priorities. This type of relationship by big NGOs is further promoted by the tight connection they have with national governments for the support of which they rely. The critique goes even further by paying attention to the fact that these types of NGOs do not refute these principles that perpetuate unequal institutional capacities on the international level. Along the same lines, Burrowes et al. (2007) assert that even if some NGOs have started as grassroot social movement, overtime they have become disconnected from their progressive stances grounded in the deepening institutionalization. An additional dimension that can be linked to these processes is the fact that

such types of NGOs that function within the framework of development cooperation and aid have intact funding relations with partners in the so-called Global South. Therefore, they assume the role of an intermediary or a gatekeeper between the local social movements and civil society organizations (Burrowes et al., 2007; Choudry and Shragge, 2012). Townsend and Townsend (2004) argue that in this case NGOs from the so-called Global North oversee the narrative by assuming a role of a "gatekeeper", which in turn creates a sense of apathy and lack of initiative from the Southern counterparts. This again touches upon the process of professionalization suggested by Kamat (2004) as for organizations to operate within that context, they need to appeal to technical and managerial capabilities as well as experience of project funding. This leads to the overshadowing of politically mobilized grassroot movements (Faraclas, 2001). For instance, Jad (2007) argues that the process of NGOization undermines women's participatory rights in the Palestinian civil society, as the process of professionalization leads to exclusion rather than inclusion of women in the decision-making processes. To infer, the process of NGOization has been analyzed in a very critical manner linking it both to the nature of international Northern-led NGOs that leave little space to local civil society organizations to flourish by imposing professionalization in the sector.

Furthermore, NGOization of the civil society initiatives in the development sector can also be linked to a more globalized paradigm of capitalism. Specifically, as suggested by Choudry and Kapoor (2013) the language and the rhetoric used by NGOs seeks to preserve the capitalist system and the interests of larger corporations while struggling for justice. They give an example of a close link between NGOs and different regulations imposed by institutions like the World Bank or the WTO. Specifically, the WTO in 1996 adopted a special package to regulate relations with the NGOs, in 2008 the World Bank started publishing a newsletter targeted as civil society engagement. This illustrated the interconnectivity between the neoliberal capitalist system and the link with growing number of NGOs as international actors. This process led NGOs to operate within the guidelines set by these larger institutions leading to the former producing policies and strategies that became out of touch with the people's demands and social realities.

The process of NGOization as well as professionalization are deeply connected by the knowledge systems used. According to Smith (1987) the process of professionalization leads anti-capitalist movements to detach from their core ideals and bringing them closer to the relations of power. In this regard, NGOs are actors who facilitate bringing together these power relations within the system of a deeply ingrained bureaucracy instead of building a strong oppositional movement leading to social change. Along the same lines, Smith (1999) also argues that there needs to be an account of the recolonizing aspect of an NGOs that is connected to the usage of Western concepts, sources, and assumptions. The author asks similar questions to the present paper, as she's trying to investigate where NGOs practices come from and what knowledge system drive them. She highlights that the West has created a set of views which lead to a legalistic approach to NGO's work rather than engaging in informal or traditional forms of governance. In this vein, the expert is the person with better training and knowledge of the formal rules and norms which follow organizational accountability rather than a person with local knowledge (Smith, 1999). Therefore, the link between NGOization and the Western-led knowledge system need to be analyzed as it is an important dimension of both the superiority of Western thinking as well as neoliberal capitalist orientation of NGOs.

Finally, it is imperative to discuss the dimensions between the donor-recipient relationship that is at the core of both the NGO community as well as the development cooperation sector. As most of the resources are based in the so-called Global North, partners experience additional pressure through the donor relationships. Funding is interconnected with the criteria that the partners need to comply with to receive the money, however, in most of the cases they are deeply burdensome. As suggested by Sinwell, and Kim and Campbell (2013) organizations are thus pushed to transform their agendas according to the preferences of the donors. This places a set of expectations on the partner organization which can unfortunately show the structural differences in the capacity to complete the administrative tasks assigned. Therefore, this another crucial dimension that needs to be accounted with the process of NGOization, as Smith (1999) puts it there are other ways that can bring development, i.e. through the process of *sharing* resources, rather than engaging with dominant organizations in a neoliberal fashion.

White gaze

The concept of development is central to this work, however, it is crucial to link the issue of structural racism and whiteness to the development sector and discourse. To begin with, there are numerous interventions that link development with conceptualization of race and whiteness, i.e.: Kothari (2006) suggests that the two concepts are closely linked through the process of agenda-setting; Wilson (2015) argues that the perception of race is deeply ingrained in the gendered development interventions such as population control and microfinance; Kothari (2005) also notes the issue of unequal staff representation in the development sector. As the focus of the paper lies within the sector of development, I deem it relevant to pay more attention to linking the idea of structural racism and white gaze to the development sector.

To begin with, white gaze can be defined as the primacy of whiteness in relation to power, prestige and progress (Pailey, 2020). Moreover, it can be equated to the wholeness and the superiority of white experiences across the globe. In the development sector, specifically, white gaze refers to the differentiated measure of political, socio-economic, and cultural processes of BIPOC people against the standards of Northern Western white people as incomplete and regressive (ibid.). According to a policy report by Peace Direct named "Time to decolonize aid" (2021), white gaze in the development sector manifests itself in the lack of trust in non-Western practitioners. White in this regard equals white ethnocentrisms and has whiteness as the point of reference for the social, economic, and political progress (ibid.). One of the contributors to the report, Katie-Jay Scott argues that white gaze allows to perceive white practitioners not only as experts but most importantly neutral actors in all contexts, that is contrary to local practitioners who not only lack the capacity but also are not neutral for the contexts they are operating in. This notion links the concept of white gaze to white saviorism as white Western practitioners are believed to be "benevolent" humanitarians necessary for the advancement of developmental projects. Their neutral position together with their expertise perpetuates the notion of white saviorism across the sector, and as Mbembe (2017) states: "We can speak of race (or racism) only in a fatally imperfect language, gray and inadequate. Race is a form of primal representation". Likewise, Omi and Winant (2015) argue that most development projects can be taken as racial projects as they perpetuate "structures of domination based on racial significations and identities". Kothari (2006) notes that there is a certain *silence* around race in the development sector specifically between the Western practitioners, which

in her view avoid addressing accountability for powers, privileges and inequalities that stem from their whiteness. In the same vein, White (2002) states that development as a sector consists of a series of *"racial projects"* which are often colorblind to the struggle of people of color, women, and other minority groups.

Prominent post-colonial and decolonial scholars that have been quoted earlier in this work, such as Rodney (1972), Mohanty (1988), Said (1978), etc., viewed development as another form of Western domination over former colonial states. Escobar (1995) claims that development creates another level of differentiation between the so-called Global South and Global North by highlighting the lack of capacities of the former and the subsequent domination of the latter. Along the same lines, Kimou (2020) adds that this type of dynamics comes into play nearly in every aspect of developmental work, for instance, monitoring, evaluation, storytelling, and media. In her interview she states that to dismantle the white gaze NGOs need to serve the interests of the people towards who the programs are addressed rather than creating frameworks for the activities with funders in a vacuum space of Northern rich capitals. She highlights that donors as well as NGOs need to reach to locals to tell their own stories and directly partner with grassroot organizations to decolonize their way of working.

The question then lies in the self-perpetuation of the white gaze within the development sector. Pailey (2020) brings an interesting theoretical perspective by linking social contract theory and specifically the *racial contract*, suggested by Mills (1997) where the contract is enforced through violence and ideological conditioning, with Di Angelo's (2018) *white fragility* concept which describes how seldom white people experience racial discomfort. She argues that together these two ideas sum up the consistent self-reinventing nature of the white gaze over space and time. Even despite efforts of BIPOC people who are trying to take lead in the development sector and demand alternatives to power imbalances, current developmental agenda as well as structural inequalities, still most of the sector positions are sustained by white people. On top of that, she uses the analysis of the critique of desegregation of American schools by Bell (1980) to illustrate that the emphasis on race and the dominance of white gaze will only be erased upon the convergence of both BIPOC development actors as well as the white elite counterparts. As suggested by Bell (1980), the historic 1954 Brown vs Board of Education ruling was possible only based on the so-called "interest

convergence", meaning that both the dominant and the marginalized group interests converge on a particular issue. Therefore, Pailey follows his logic to argue that this a way to get rid of the dominance of the white gaze in the sector. Another dimension is concerned with the need of mainstreaming the issues of race in every aspect of development. Race should get the same amount of "coverage" as gender or class, and Pailey (2020) states that race needs to become a cross-cutting issue which should have the needed visibility either in education, development, or politics.

To infer, white gaze and its impact on the development sector has deep rooted consequences both for the issue of overlooking the effects of race as well as overall dominance of white people. It is vital to look at the other side of the coin and recognize the effects white gaze produces, most important of which is white saviorism.

White saviorism

This part will be dedicated to linking development white saviorism as well as white gaze. White saviorism can be broadly defined as the notion of altruism following the modernist interpretation of universal human compassion (Burr, 2010). The idea is closely linked to ethics, rationality and Western Enlightenment and goes hand in hand with the modernist idea of development (ibid). The concept of white saviorism specifically referring to the development sector has been coined by Teju Cole. He introduced the idea of the White Savior Industrial Complex upon the issue of a documentary *Kony 2012* that revolved around experiences of a white Western activist within the context of a civil war in Uganda. The movie shows the appropriation of victimhood that establishes a deep connection with the white humanitarian rather than the local people fighting in the conflict. This subsequently leads to the silencing and patronization for the local African community. In this vein, Cole (2012) states that: "the white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening". He adds that "the White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege". Therefore, white saviorism offers an invitation for self-reflection and reveals the damaging effects of white people prioritizing their experiences and struggles over solving systemic issues of inequality, power imbalances, violence, and oppression. It is also a way to justify white people's actions masked under the strive for benevolence. As argued by Cammarota (2011) the

widespread emphasis on the altruistic manner of white saviors marginalized BIPOC people from the mainstream of development agenda and refuse their own benevolence and disposes them of their agency.

Specifically, white saviorism can be observed on the different levels of analysis in the development sector. According to Hebl et al. (2020), racial and ethnic minorities are more prone to face interpersonal barriers when it comes to the representation in the leadership positions in the development sector. As highlighted by Saez and Worden (2021), to look at decolonization within the framework of NGOs, one needs to consider its corporatization. The authors indicate that the standards implemented within the NGO framework prevent local communities "from exerting control and oversights", which precisely correlates with the contextual framework. Following this thought, Cook and Glass (2014) add that in the case of the decline of organizational performance by a minority leader, they are most likely to be replaced by a white male, referring to the "savior effect". According to an analysis by Humentum, leadership positions of the US-based NGOs are occupied by 84% by white people, with 67% of board members being white. Another research done by Bheeroo (2021) at Bond UK, concludes that 89% of staff in the UK-based INGOs felt that their organizations "weren't truly committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion" as well as 68% of staff having experienced or witnessed an act of racism. Both papers clearly underscore that the topic of decolonization is highly difficult to implement within the NGO sphere, with high levels of both white saviorism and subsequent lack of awareness in terms of decolonization initiatives.

Different accounts also pay attention to the reasons why people become NGO workers, like Malkki (2015) suggests, contrary to popular belief, the reason is not necessarily to save lives. The author argues that in the case-study of Finnish ICRC workers, it is revealed that the employees just want to be good professionals. Indeed, NGO workers often choose their careers to help themselves (as forms of self-care or as fulfilling their own needs). According to Feldman (2007), these ethnographies reveal the often-uncomfortable positions in which development experts as well as humanitarians find themselves: as gatekeepers to resources. This can be linked to the issue of fundraising that is closely related to both donor and communications in the NGO setting. Thus, white saviorism is used to perpetuate the image of people from the so-called Global South as helpless and lacking agency to get the funding and sympathy of donors. On top of that, according

to Peace Direct (2021), Degan Ali states that not only white saviorism contributes to the increasing power relations but also to the embedded image of whiteness as inherently neutral and well-meaning, which as we have noticed from the previous section is not the case. White saviorism also invites people to think that aid or development workers cannot be racist as they dedicate their lives to helping people in areas of need.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the link between white saviorism, white gaze and development is crucial for the analysis of dimensions related to the decolonization efforts. This part adds on an additional layer of complexity which ultimately describes the interlinkages that come into play when talking about race, whiteness, development, and the functioning of NGOs.

Conclusion

This literature review has aimed at bringing together different theoretical accounts of the two main concepts: decolonization and development. To begin with, I tried to fundamentally place the discussion within the Modernity, Coloniality, Decoloniality project promoted by Latin American decolonial scholars, as they extended the understanding of the notion of coloniality to European modernity and have raised the issue of power imbalances, knowledge production which is a big part of critique that NGOs face. Furthermore, I have tried to connect three crucial aspects of the theoretical approach to decolonization: power imbalances, knowledge and imaginary, and structural racism. These concepts were necessary to show case the complex nature of decolonization through theoretical accounts of it, furthermore, being highly relevant when talking about practicing decolonization. The second part of the literature review was dedicated to the discussion of development. I tried to bridge the gap between decolonization and the NGOs/developmental setting by firstly looking at their historical links and intersections. The way to connect development with the specificities related to the functioning of NGOs was discussed in the section of NGOization. Through a deeper analysis of that process, it was revealed that NGOization has highly contributed to both the white gaze and white saviorism developments in the sector. With this, it is possible to conclude that decolonization is an integral part of the developmental process.

As this specific work takes a more practical outlook on the issue, more research would be beneficial as to observe how theoretical accounts of the intersection between decolonization and development play out in the lives of functioning organizations, be it NGOs, INGOs or TNCs. Despite there being a few policy reports on the topic, there is little to no research using specific cases for the analysis. I believe this research can be a step towards taking a more practical outlook on this discussion and giving a more tangible form to defining what, for instance, power imbalances mean in practice and how one can fight against them. The next chapter will be dedicated to discussing the main research questions and the methodology related to the case of the paper – specifically Oxfam Belgium.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Applied methods and motivations

This research tackles fundamental questions related to the topic of the everyday decolonization practices of NGOs. The paper will use the case of the functioning of Oxfam Belgium, which is regarded as one of the main developmental aid-oriented NGOs, to answer the research questions at hand.

To this end, the work delves into the following main research question:
"What can be learnt about decolonization through the study of the everyday work of NGOs?".

There will be 3 additional sub questions.

1) How does one define decolonization practices within the NGO setting?

This question refers to the ambiguous nature of decolonization and the difficulties of defining the concept in reference to the everyday practices of non-governmental organizations. Why is it hard to observe decolonization? Is it defined as an institutional criterion within the structure of the organization? Is it the employment criterion, where one looks at the diversification of the staff and concludes that indeed decolonization is present in an NGO? Or is it something totally different from

a predetermined definition? With this fundamental question, I am trying to situate myself within my conceptual framework and define what decolonization practice is.

2) What are the challenges of implementing decolonization practices in an everyday working environment?

With this question, I want to delve into the difficulties of what it takes to implement a decolonization practice within a working environment. Through conducting interviews, I received insights on employee's personal perspectives as to why decolonization is a hard topic to address in the NGO community. To this end, the aim is to analyze what challenges the implementation of decolonization in the everyday environment. All in all, I will try to conceptualize the difficulties of implementing change in systematic and repetitive practices.

3) What has to happen to implement decolonization practices in an everyday working environment?

This is a final and summarizing question for the whole paper. I intend to present the reader with several bullet points to have practical outcomes at the end of the paper. The emphasis here is on the outlook for decolonization practices and what can be learnt from them. Most importantly, this question also shows how hard (or easy) it is for NGOs to engage in these practices. On top of that, it would be interesting to look at the NGOs' sector dialogue on the topic and share experiences and knowledge on decolonization.

To answer these questions, the paper uses qualitative methods, specifically it uses *grounded theory* approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The choice behind this method is driven by the nature of the research and the data collection. Due to the proximity to Oxfam Belgium which is the organization used as the case of the paper, I was able to get in contact with 10 employees from different departments. The biggest advantage of me using grounded theory in this research is concerned with the fact that I was aiming to explain why the topic of decolonization is perceived a certain way by Oxfam Belgium employees, and then relying on the replicability of theory, make a general theoretical overview of these dynamics. On top of that, through conducting interviews I wished to create new approaches that would complement existing literature on decolonization

practices within the NGO community. Through constant coding and narrowing down I was able to create my own understanding of the concepts and use the data from the interviews as proof of my analysis. According to Bryman (2016), qualitative methods in general offers a more thorough and in-depth analysis of specific phenomena, and respectively comprehensive interviews lead to better data collection. Through the 10 conducted interviews, the paper aims to receive insight into the topic of decolonization and as argued by Hammersley and Atkinson (2012), the type of examined information or data needs to be perceived as a social phenomenon within a particular context, therefore, the attention will be paid not only to what is being said but also when, where and by whom. Therefore, the section of results will be closely tied to the concepts that were developed based on the interviews conducted. Grounded theory in this case is one of the best methods to use as the paper is built bottom-up, meaning that firstly 10 interviews were coded, then based on them I developed several concepts which were summarized in categories and lastly created a theoretical framework.

2.2 Sampling and Research design

To answer the main research questions, in total over the course of March-June 2022 I conducted 12 interviews, with 13 people as one of the interviews was a group interview. 10 interviews out of 12 were with the employees of Oxfam Belgium, where 10 out 11 interviewees identified as white, at least had a bachelor's degree, in most cases a master's degree in their specific fields. Additionally, the first two ones were conducted with people from different affiliates that gave me the necessary insights into the topic on the level of Oxfam International.

For the clarity of this section, I will briefly explain the difference between *Oxfam Belgium (OB)* and *Oxfam Confederation (OC)*. Oxfam's website states that there are 21 member organizations or also known affiliates who coordinate and lead this fight against poverty via the OI (Oxfam website, 2022). Each affiliate is an independent organization and has their own range of activities and expertise within the framework of the confederation (ibid.). Therefore, OB is an affiliate of OC, which has its own agenda but also follows it developments. The focus is specific to the information pertained from the interviews of OB employees as it is the case of the research at hand. I use OB as

the case for the research as put by Gerring (2004) as an intensive study of a specific unit with the aim to generalize findings onto a larger set of units.

Within Oxfam Belgium there are 7 departments as well as the General Management consisting of the heads of all 7 departments. I managed to interview people from 4 departments out of 7, them being Programs and Advocacy, Public Engagement, and HR. In late March 2022 after conducting the first two interviews with representatives of other OI affiliates, I was put in contact with Oxfam Belgium's Gender and Diversity Advisor *Elisa Keustermans* (EK), and she was the one who put me in contact with the rest of the participants. The interviews were conducted upon the interest in my research through a one-pager which was distributed by EK among her colleagues. All interviews took an hour with an obligatory signature of a UGent consent form. On the last stages of this research, it was agreed with EK that all participants despite their answers on the signed consent forms would remain *anonymous* with the possibility to mention their position in the managements, i.e., higher of lower as well as the department they are working for. All the interviews except for the concluding one with EK happened in real life at two locations: Oxfam's office in Ghent and Brussels. The interviews were semi-structured and followed a rough script. Here the reader can find the link to take a look at a general script that was used, however, depending on the interviewee and their department some questions were changed or not asked at all. Creswell (2014) notes that the qualitative methods are beneficial to use with open-ended questions, to encourage participants to share their personal attitudes and emotions, and this is precisely what I tried to do in my interviews.

As I decided to use grounded theory as my main methodological approach, I did most of my theoretical review and research post-data collection period, as Glaser and Strauss (1998) suggest that prior knowledge of literature on the topic can contaminate the analysis. Still, it needs to be acknowledged that I had prior understanding of Oxfam's system from the two first interviews from OI affiliates' employees as well as my experience working for Oxfam Russia. Furthermore, having studied decolonization as a theoretical concept during the year of my master's provided me with in-depth knowledge about the issue, therefore, I cannot say that I was completely disconnected from the theoretical assumptions and consideration. On the other hand, Andrew (2006) argues that the dysconnectivity from theory and literature on the topic is not as detrimental as classical theorists of grounded theory describe to be as it helps to generate new categories while analyzing the data.

Therefore, I tried to approach the data collection as well as the analysis with an open mind and without any pre-existing orientations.

When it comes to sampling, the research is centered around theoretical sampling with predetermined interviewees. As mentioned before the focus on specific departments was driven both by the department's proximity to the research topic from my side as well as OB's employees' personal interest. Sampling happened in three waves: first, the end of April – beginning of May, second, the middle of May, and third the end of May – June. This was done intentionally to have time in between the interviews for memoing and analysis as well as modifying the interview questions and extract new nuances from the data. As suggested by Glaser (1978), one of the main advantages of grounded theory lies in its ability for constant comparison and continual memoing process. Myers (1997) highlights that theory development happens exactly within the framework of the "continuous interplay between data collection and data analysis". That is why I found this specific spread-out data collection to be beneficial.

Coding is also a crucial part of the methodology. As suggested by Urquhart et al. (2013) codes developed should be based on the data rather than literature, and this was exactly my goal in this research as well, as I have tried to distance myself from previous knowledge on the topic. For coding I followed the 4-step approach developed by Glasser (1978) and coded line by line. This was the most time-consuming process, however, as highlighted by Urquhart et al. (2013) it makes the data analysis write up much easier, which I also found to be the case. Then I switched to selective coding, I used a cloud map to help me remember all the concepts that were emerging. For instance, each interviewee was a different cloud where I could differentiate between bigger and smaller themes emerging. Then I related the found codes to one another in the theoretical sampling stage, and as highlighted by Glaser (1978) this is the step that makes new thematic connections and brings forward the main ideas of the data. After the competition of the data analysis and theoretical coding, I advanced my literature study and connected the findings with the theoretical framework. Spradley's (1979) relationships for the purpose of theory building were utilized to advance the generalization of the outcomes. Consequently, the 4 theoretical outcomes can be summarized:

1. *The concept of a decolonization practice within the NGO community has not reached a level of a unified theoretical understanding;*
2. *Practices of decolonization are multidimensional and department-specific in the NGO context;*
3. *"Friction-factors" can summarize difficulties associated with practicing decolonization;*
4. *The concept of a "network of equals" can be a way to theorize about the future of decolonization within the NGO community.*

To infer, these findings will be discussed in the section of "Results" in the next chapter.

2.3. Limitation of the applied methods

It is also necessary to address the limitations of the methods being used. Grbich (2007) argues that grounded theory can have quasi-subjective outcomes, as it relies on replicability and variables which could lead to contradictory findings. Additionally, Schonfeld and Mazzola (2013) suggest that grounded theory allows for too much subjectivity in the work, as it is impossible for the researchers to free themselves from the predetermined knowledge and understanding of the concepts that would lead to the bias analysis of data. There is a great criticism that is related to the one-dimensional nature of solely interview-based grounded theory that according to Benoliel (1996) can limit theory development by focusing too much on the lived experiences rather than social processes. Therefore, Glaser (1992) recommends to also part-take in participant observation for better accuracy. In this case, I can partly counteract this criticism as I was able to visit the offices of OB and take a glimpse of how they look, where they are located and what kind of image they represent for the external population, which was a part of the discussion that happened with the interviewees, which is not reflected in this paper as it is beyond its scope.

As one of the main tasks of this paper is present a theoretical framework that can be generalized for the sector, it is worth looking at how Hussein et al. (2014) note its limited generalizability. According to Polit and Beck (2010): "generalization is an act of reasoning that involves drawing broad conclusions from particular instances that is making inference about the unobserved based on the observed" and indeed it's a beneficial method to use when it is systematically replicated and

confirmed. Grounded theory is then applied to deeper the analysis and present the general framework, however, the criticism is concerned with the fact that sometimes findings are not easily generalized. That is why the researcher needs to be extra-careful when presenting the findings and making sure that they are indeed generalizable, which was my goal for this paper. Nonetheless, even harsh critiques of grounded theory methodology such as Thomas and James (2006) acknowledge the benefits of constant comparison of data that leads to generalization.

Another point that was touched upon earlier is the "post-data analysis literature review" that according to grounded theorists can comprise the objectivity and clarity of the research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). These classical authors highlight that the literature review needs to happen after the data analysis not to contaminate the findings, as Corbin and Strauss (2008) put it "there is always something new to discover". In opposition to this view, Schreiber (2001) argued that this lack of theoretical knowledge can lead to loss of sensitivity to the data. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) underlined that a literature review in one form or the other is necessary for "setting the stage" for the paper, and this is precisely what I tried to achieve both having my background knowledge of decolonization which I acquired during my academic year as a master student, but also leaving room for adopting concepts upon further consideration.

Finally, due to the large amounts of data a researcher with limited experience can run into trouble to properly analyze data and produce an incoherent body of theory. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) note that with the failure to recognize these limitations, the role of the researcher becomes obscured and his or her agency and contribution to the analysis is often overlooked. The way to solve this issue can be through engagement in future research opportunities that would excel my research and analysis skills to avoid this limitation.

2.4. Positionality

Reflecting on the positionality taken for this paper, the choice of the topic and the case was purposeful. In the sphere of objective categories: I am a white Russian 23-year-old, upper-middle class, queer, left-wing woman having previously worked at Oxfam Russia. My personal positionality is a crucial factor to be aware of. Firstly, my academic experience as a master student

in a European university in Conflict and Development positions me within a very leftist orientation that in turn influences my personal definitions of certain concepts developed in the paper as well as choices for the theoretical framework. For instance, one being *the future of NGOs* which is going to present a rather harsh outlook and the status quo NGOs and ways to improve it. As much as one wants to avoid installing their own biases, the probability of a more liberal spirit and theoretical interpretation needs to be accounted for. On top of that, decolonization being the center concept of the research has strong implications on my positionality. As this work develops criteria according to which it is possible to theorize about decolonization, personally I have little to no understanding of what it is to experience structural racism and discrimination, live in a colonial world and experience power imbalances related to developmental projects imposed on the so-called Global South. Nonetheless, I do experience the phenomena of white saviorism and white gaze. This was the primary reason why I chose to concentrate on this issue in the case to begin with and that was the focus of one of my research questions.

Secondly, having experience working within the Oxfam community, I inherently have a higher chance to be viewed as an insider (Holmes, 2020). I would suggest that my positionality can be summarized as a *partial insider*. To begin with, the access to the field was given to me through the network of my former colleagues as I was able to get interviews with people outside the scope of my research that ultimately linked me with Oxfam Belgium. Even though I was introduced as a researcher, some employees of Oxfam Belgium remembered the fact that I used to be a part of the organization before, meaning had a better understanding of the culture, being "one of us" (Holmes, 2020). Having support from the Elisa Keustermans, Gender and Diversity Advisor of Oxfam Belgium, my positionality gave better opportunities to learn more about the organization as well as have private meetings on the internal structure that would ultimately make my interviews more meaningful and insightful (Geertz, 1973). However, with the position of a *partial insider*, there is certainly an inclination to a more favorable and optimistic interpretation that go into the concepts and issues being discussed. Nonetheless, in some cases I have encountered the reverse effect of the "one of us" typology, where certain interviewees given my positionality assumed that I was aware of certain codes and events, when I wasn't which were sometimes difficult to grasp without a thorough explanation.

2.5. Ethical dilemmas

When it comes to the ethical considerations for the paper, decolonization within the framework of NGOs functioning can undoubtedly be a tricky topic to discuss, especially given the fact that the paper will be focused on the working of the day-to-day functioning of a specific NGO office. The main challenge will be on how to analyze the case, without putting judgement of the organization itself, solely analyzing it through a lens of the theory build-up. Therefore, there is an ethical dilemma on how to interpret the answers and then summarize them in a way that would be considerate for the organization. The analysis is not aimed to be critical, rather it strives to use the theory with the case, making sure things correlate.

The research was supported by Gender and Diversity Advisor Elisa Keustermans who put me in contact with the rest of the participants. I have been working very closely with her to identify interested parties and her help was instrumental in arranging the practical part of the research. I communicated to her in advance that the research is not research on Oxfam Belgium, rather a point of reference of general dynamics of big NGOs and their perception of the topic of decolonization. To avoid any leakages of internal information related to sensitivities of Oxfam Belgium as well as to avoid the research becoming exploitative from my side, we have agreed for me to write a separate policy report specifically for the internal usage based on the interviews conducted that would be used for further analysis by Oxfam Belgium. I believe that it was the best decision in terms of resolving ethical problems, as ensuring that sensitive information does not become central in the research (Ethical Forum, 2012). To this end, the best way to avoid such clashes was by asking for consent about everything that will be written down and discussed with the employees, making sure that their identities remain anonymous by signing the UGent consent form. The data collected was be stored on a separate cloud space securely protected, where EK and I were the only ones that had access to them. It was essential to communicate about this arrangement with the participants prior to the start of the data collection, so it was accepted by all. Therefore, we agreed that despite people having different preferences in the consent form, everyone would remain anonymous with the possibility of mentioning their position and department.

CHAPTER 3. RESULTS

3.1 The definition of a decolonization practice

This part of the findings will be dedicated to the discussion of the first sub-question of *"How does one define decolonization practices within the NGO setting?".* This section will be aimed at bringing in the analyzed data from the interviews and literature together to shape it into coherent theoretical concepts. As decolonization was the central point of the interviews, different account of definition will be brought into question with specificities according to the functioning of the department.

During interviews, each person was indirectly asked about their positioning on decolonization and their own ways to defining the concept. The goal was to compare different answers and bring together a coherent definition of how a decolonization practice can be defined within the NGO setting. I was lucky enough to receive a lot of different perspectives on the topic which were also department specific. However, it is worth mentioning that Oxfam Belgium is on the initial stage of the development of decolonization efforts and creating a framework that would be universal for the whole organization. Nonetheless, the insights from the interviews were of great value despite a more personalized and team/department/organization-specific elements.

I believe it is crucial to open this section be the quote from the interviewee from the Programs & Advocacy which sets the tone for the rest of this section, as they stated that:

"I think it (decolonization) can still mean a lot of different things to different people. I think often by decolonization, we hear "having less practices that can be racist". But I think the colonization part, the dynamics of that, is a bit forgotten. So, you have different understandings, and there is a risk to have a false consensus. It's like, okay, everybody is on board. But everybody's on board his or her own ship." (Brussels, 30.05.2022)

Similarly, an interviewee from the HR department in the higher management has highlighted that:

"Does everybody attribute the same meaning to it (decolonization) or the same importance? No." (Ghent, 04.05.2022)

Another person from the Programs and Advocacy department stated that:

"Decolonization is definitely a topic that lives within the organization and it's not always just decolonization. I think it's connected to many other types of conversations we have." (Brussels, 05.05.2022)

These quotes are illustrative of a very complex nature that is linked to decolonization efforts in the sector. From the 10 interviews that I conducted several interviewees have highlighted difficulties with a unified theoretical definition of the concept. To this end, I would like to turn to the few policy reports written on the topic. According to the report "Decolonise. Now!" by 11.11.11 (2021), practicing decolonization in the NGO setting contains several aspects: anti-racism, imagery and discourse, knowledge production, representation, and partnerships. The document opens each of the aspect and gives tangible action plan on how to address decolonization. Along the same lines, the report by Peace Direct (2021) "Time to decolonize aid. Insights and lessons from a global consultation" deepens the discussion around decolonization. The report introduces more categories than the previous report highlighting the correct usage of language, fostering discussion on power dynamics, creating space for change, adopting different recruitment strategies, ending white gaze, and white saviorism, re-evaluating partnerships with local organizations. However, I found these works not exhaustive and have concluded a pattern according to which each policy report address decolonization differently. I believe this is one of the first challenges to push the decolonization agenda forward in the sector. I would like to turn to the literature that has been analyzed before. As this work is theoretically based on the MCD project, it is important to highlight Mignolo (2017) emphasizing the versatility that comes with decolonial thinking, suggesting the shift to pluri-versatility, meaning that there are always going to be ambiguities and "in-betweens" when it comes to decolonization. This is precisely the difference of decolonial thinking with Western-imposed universality. It allows for the freedom to practice and carry out knowledge depending on the context (Mignolo, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that decolonization practices are inherently versatile due to the very own nature from which the concept stems from as a part of the decolonial

project. This is not to say there cannot exist an approach that tackles the issue of decolonization within the NGO community. My findings suggest that there is a great awareness on the topic within the NGO community, however, in the attempts to pinpoint what decolonization practices are, there is little realized acknowledgement of the *pluri-versatility* (Mignolo, 2017). Therefore, this part will present the findings department by department discussing the meanings decolonization practices have acquired. As I was able to interview 10 people from 3 different departments (Programs and Advocacy, Public Engagement, and HR), it is also worth mentioning that within these departments I had interviewed several teams for Programs and Advocacy – Team Safe, Team Sustainable; for Public Engagement – Campaigns, Education, which gave me an insight into the specificities of their work. With the data analysis I tried to breach them together and find common patterns.

The discussion will tackle different levels: department, organization as well as confederation level. Therefore, for the efficiency and clarity the reader can access the data visualization here.

3.1.2 Conscious-making and the habitus in the HR department

Let us start with the discussion of the practices that I have gathered through interviews with the higher management of the HR department. I can summarize the findings through this quote with one of the interviewees:

"I think it's really a work of conscious making. For instance, color conscious and gender conscious." ... "I believe in positive discrimination. I think it's necessary because people have been negatively discriminated for so long, you kind of have to redress the balance to make sure that people get the same opportunities." (Ghent, 04.05.2022)

Conscious making is one of the central ideas that was developed through the interviews, and I believe it is a valuable contribution on the discussion that involves decolonization. Inevitably the conversation revolving decolonization will be linked to change, therefore, the organization should strive to create a space where employees are able to learn about the new ideas and systemically change their views. What is interesting here is the idea of *habitus* that can stand in opposition to the conscious making. According to Bourdieu (1977), the idea of habitus refers to a system of structures,

schemes, perceptions that are common to members of the same group, meaning that it instills a certain worldview for people. It is also perpetuated by institutions and people within the habitus reinforce and reproduce it through the spread of the dominant ideas and modes of living. Therefore, habitus becomes the reference point for its subjects, while they perpetuate the same standards and values over and over. However, as argued by Gillespie (2022) habitus perpetuates unfair distribution levels as it is possible to infer that not every socio-cultural or economic norm has the same value and is placed in the same level in the hierarchy. She highlights that within the framework of habitus the dominant structures, social groups or discourses will be seen as objective and righteous, when the position of the dominated will come as the post-effect of the dominance from the first group. Furthermore, this process is closely linked to Fanon's (1968) idea of "decolonizing our minds" and the necessity of diving into the process that will ultimately be uncomfortable, new, and deconstructive (Gray et al., 2013).

Therefore, if one is to achieve the dominance of the decolonization within a certain framework, the habitus needs to change, and it can be precisely done through the process of *conscious making*.

From a more practical perspective, here are the ways that it is possible to achieve that shift:

- *Educate the management of the organization through conducting leadership meetings as to help spread the ideas on decolonization efforts through the network;*
- *Introduce a moral aspect to the discussion of what it means to practice decolonization;*
- *Adopt positive discrimination policies in relation to marginalized groups;*
- *Providing the space for sharing stories and opening conversations;*
- *Lowering years of experience for a more inclusive hiring practices and staff diversification;*
- *Apart from inclusive recruitment, exploring the reasons why certain categories of people; that the organization wants to attract are not represented in the process hiring.*

3.1.3 Partner-led approach, power dynamics and language in the Public Engagement department

The following part will be dedicated to the discussion of the principle of the partner-led approach in the Public Engagement department. It is essential to highlight that as Oxfam Belgium is a part of the Oxfam Confederation and has its own campaigns within the Belgian context, however, the office

does collaborate with partners elsewhere in boosting their outreach. The employee from the department stated that:

"One of the key evolutions in my own job over the last decade has been that we as campaigners of Oxfam Belgium can no longer count on Oxfam International to develop campaigns for us. I think that's very good thing because the focus of OI has switched to developing campaigns for the partners of the Global South. So that's where the resources go, that's where the money goes, that's where the expertise goes. And essentially in Belgium we need to do our own development work and so within that there was an evolution." (Ghent, 28.04.2022)

Through the conversation it became evident that one of the best practices is concerned with:

"…partner driven approach and the idea that we're not there to take or to claim space or to even have a very prominent or visible role." (Ghent, 28.04.2022)

This is precisely the practice that I would like to pay attention to, as I wanted to find out what is the "recipe" for introducing decolonization practices along the campaigning efforts. When talking about the ideal decolonial strategies for campaigning and the interviewee responded:

"I feel like that's when where if I had clear answers, I'd be implementing [them], right? For me [it] starts with consultation and listening to the partners in the South, listening to what they have identified as the key priority areas. And then bringing that back to our context and doing a very pragmatic, but still very necessary check of what that means for our effectiveness as a campaigning organization in the Belgian context." (Ghent, 28.04.2022)

I believe that this is a very valuable quote in terms of bringing a practical outlook on the topic of decolonizing NGO campaigns by giving partners the power to set their own agendas, specifically when it comes to campaigns. It vividly illustrates the idea of Bhambra (2019) that advocated for

reconnection and reconsrtuction when it comes to the empowerment of the marginalized voices. Furthermore, Peace Direct (2021) highlights that there is a growing movement for adopting "Southern agendas" which supports the work of the local civil society organizations. In the same vein, there is a call to #ShiftThePower by Global Fund for Community Foundations in 2016 in the NGO community that ultimately calls for systematic change in the development sector by addressing power inequalities. The interplay of the dynamics that are brough about by the so-called Global North offices and the local partners are linked with unequal power relations, which bring us back to the theories discussed earlier. As Grosfoguel (2002) states there colonial relations don't simply stop with the abolition of colonial power, they are pepetuated by institutions in place, therefore, we need to aim to discovering the power dynamics within them. It is a challenge for the whole sector, and specifically for the Public Engagemnt, as they are the ones who bring and tell stories to the wider public.

On top of that, the department is highly connected to the usage of language and creating a specific imaginary for the public, and it is interlinked with the part of language and imgainary discussed earlier. As the interviewee stated:

"The intention and the sensibility that we try to have in the way that we portray people we ultimately try to represent is one of the areas where we've made real progress over the last couple of years. So that's really in terms of COMs and images, language that we use. They've been real and genuine, necessary efforts to be more inclusive, to not to instrumentalize people and not to victimize people." (Ghent, 28.04.2022)

This quote reveals an important underlying aspect that was highlighted in the theoretical part of the research, where people are often denied agency, and specifically, in the NGO setting there is a tendency for white people to fall back onto the ideas of white saviorism and white gaze, which are directly connected to the victimization and instrumentalization, the interviewee has mentioned in the quote. On top of that, as stated by Mbembe (2016) decolonizing the mind will be linked to decolonizing your vocabulary. The process of banning victimization and instrumentalization of local population is related to the idea of Quijano (2000) that highlighted the feeling of *pre-despositioned inferiority* that is deeply intervowen with the colonial heritage as well as developmental aid. This

section seeks to merge power relations, language and imaginary together to create solid base for the decolonial approach on the topic.

Therefore, based on the data collected there are direct steps to promote a decolonial and equitable outlook in NGOs's future campaigns.

It can be inferred that in order to practice decolonization within the Public Engagement department, these are some essential steps:

- *Take priorities from partners and bringing them back to the local context of the office;*
- *Organize activist trainings and exchanges with local activists;*
- *Deepen contacts in public engagement with volunteers, donors, and use petitions;*
- *No usage of victimization and no instrumentalization.*

3.1.4 Donor relations, funding and power in the Program and Advocacy department

The Program and Advocacy department's work is closely linked to the advocacy efforts of OB in different spheres related to developmental projects. Through multiple conversation with the employees from different sections of the department it was possible to infer that the main concern with decolonization comes with addressing the donor relationship, funding, and subsequent unequal power distribution. I would like to open up this section with this quote:

"There are many types of power relations. I think one of the most important which we don't like to talk about but it's there is the monetary relationship, where funds flow from the donor to us to the country, to the partners and and yeah, it does it makes power balance unequal. Like we have power in deciding, where we work, where we don't work and we work and who we don't work with." (Brussels, 05.05.2022)

Furthermore, when talking about the exploration of power relations and implementing an equitable decolonial arrangements with partners, the interviewee stated that:

"Local partners are dependent on Oxfam or other international NGOs to have access to funding. In that sense, we do have a power relationship as well. And it also works the other way we also dependent on them, which is an interesting dynamic, sometimes. I do feel like we are colleagues, but we have the power to decide with whom we continue, or we don't." (Brussels, 05.05.2022)

"It's hard for certain organizations, with little access to funding, to be able to connect to this machine, which it also weighs with its own rules and with its own objectives. And I think Oxfam can be a powerful player in that because we're big. But I imagine for other smaller NGOs and might be also more difficult." (Brussels, 05.05.2022)

"It's a complex relationship because country offices have much more power than before. They are holding the pen for the proposals. We are negotiating with them and trying to not only comply with donor, but also what oversee the quality of a proposal. But these are hard negotiations. I think that now this relationship is much more horizontal. Because with a partner, we don't have any direct relation, but the relationship between the local prophet and a country office his practices the more unequal looks very difficult for me to judge. Is it inherent when we can analyze public funds? Probably, if we would only have private donor funds, there is a lot more flexibility and it's a really attends to their priorities. I think accountability remains crucial. It's also our general assembly has to be sure that the money is spent as they decided because they approved our strategy, our frameworks." (Brussels, 11.05.2022)

This is precisely one of the main underlying power inequalities in the NGO sector, and my goal was to link the ambiguities from the funding position Northern NGOs find themselves in to shifting to a more decolonial approach. According to Peace Direct (2021), donors need to address the power inequalities when it comes to the space, they occupy contrary to local groups, on top of simply emphasizing the material and economic needs that come into play. This can be closely linked to the process of NGOization and subsequent professionalization aspects that were touched upon earlier as Northern NGOs play solely an intermediary role of a gatekeeper of resources (Townsend and Townsend, 2004). On top of that, Sinwell, and Kim and Campbell (2013) rightfully note that the local organization have to shift their priorities in attempt to receive needed funding. Consequently, power relations observed in the interviews are closely linked to the process of NGO

professionalization. Furthermore, the space and power should be given to the marginalized voices of women, minority groups and children to address their concerns. Peace Direct (2021) also highlights that only 12% of international grant money from US foundations goes directly to local organizations, therefore, the financing comes and is controlled by the organizations in the Global North. From the interviews I have gathered that there is a growing awareness of this dimension, and specifically Oxfam has implemented the Global balance shift:

"Global balance shift and putting partners at the center is a practice of our organization and our department. There is a lot of questioning around safe space. We try to really talk about this, make this conversation explicit with different ways of decision-making, sharing, etc." (Brussels, 05.05.2022)

Indeed, donor relations are at the core of the unequal power distribution, as another interviewee from the same department stated:

"…compliance with donor requirements is still on top of the agenda. Because if you do not comply then you don't have any funds the next time." (Brussels, 11.05.2022)

When asked what practices the department has, the interviewee suggested that:

"We have to be careful with how we act, how we make do meetings, avoiding this conscious or unconscious monopolizing. Being conscious of invisible power." (Brussels, 11.05.2022)

Another person when talking about power relations and ways to make to equalize donor-partner relationship highlighted that:

"It means a lot of investment also in country program and country teams so that they will be completely capable of responding to donor requirements." (Brussels, 05.05.2022)

Therefore, I learnt that there are two main ways of addressing decolonization and practicing it when it comes to power inequalities which lie precisely in the unequal funding distribution. Of course,

funding is not administered by the specific department that I interviewed, however, both employees highlighted the ambiguous nature of the work concerning that specific topic. For further research purposes, it would be beneficial to talk to employees who are linked to donors and funds directly. Consequently, there are two ways to look at decolonization in the department:

- *Northern NGOs need to advocate for the simplification of donor requirements;*
- *Raising capabilities of country teams for application for funding.*

3.1.4 Identity, language, self-image, and partnerships in Oxfam Belgium

As I have tried to focus on the decolonization practices and perceptions on the topic according to each department I have interviewed, I deem it important to turn to a bigger picture and highlight that the practices concerning decolonization are multidimensional and specific to each context. Therefore, it is fruitful to have the analysis on the organizational level. They are divided into 3 subcategories that have been covered in the conceptual framework and relate to self-image of the organization to the wider public, the usage of language and the partnerships that the organization partakes in.

To begin with, I would like to turn to the question of identity and language. In recent years in the NGO community there is a growing awareness to adopt new terminologies that would be empowering and equitable to the partners in the so-called Global South. This clearly correlates with the dominating Western language that was touched upon by Ngúgí wa Thiong'o. To tackle the structural issues related to language, NGOs should aim at listening to local partners and adopt terminologies that are inclusive. One of the main findings here is that due to the lack of a unified understanding of what it means to practice decolonization and the issue of language is central on a higher level of the organization. According to Peace Direct (2021), the process of decolonization requires unpacking the language and terminology around development and aid. The report mentions the same concepts that were discussed in the literature review earlier. It looks at the biases associated with structural racism, decolonization and decolonial thinking, white gaze and white saviorism. The interviews have helped me reveal a tangible approach to countering the biases related to the concepts used in the sector.

One of the interviewees said that the discourse in relation to actively practicing decolonization has only started recently in the sector as a whole:

"It's really in the recent years that it's getting in the discourse, and we talk about racial inequalities more directly in reports and such. For example, personne racisée/geracialiseerde mensen – using a new term to show that it's a sociological process to racialize people and that this is an inequality, is not always easy for colleagues. And I think it helps in internal discussions on terminology that you can fall back on the fact that well." (Brussels, 30.05.2022)

I found the vocabulary of the report "Decolonize Now!" very beneficial, however, this research did not have the scope for the discussion of every term. Therefore, I would like to link language to identity, as it was an emerging topic in the interviews. Identity in the NGO setting is directly linked to the people that work for it which is way I thinking the following quote is a great explanation as to how decolonization practices are linked to identity and language.

"I think also it would be interesting to consider the personal histories of staff. I think where you come from plays a part in how you approach the topic. What's the family story? What's your link with colonization? And I think we don't often talk about like the personal experiences with that, which maybe we tend to do more in the discussion around feminist principles." (Brussels, 30.05.2022)

This quote shows that practicing decolonization starts with exploring your own identity and history. Specifically for the people that work for the organization that historically stem from the colonial history of both development and aid – it is necessary to delve into personal stories normalizing the conversation around unequal relations. On top of that, the correct language must be in place to avoid victimization and instrumentalization. This is precisely what Perez (1999) meant by hegemonic epistemological approaches to power and imaginary. On top of that, the perspective of Lugones (2008) on gender is also crucial as it offers an insight on overlooking of minority groups in the decolonial process. Consequently, one of the ways to bring these aspects into the conversation could be through addressing one's own positionality in the spectrum of decolonial thinking.

Therefore, this section concludes that on the organizational level there can be definite steps to link decolonization practice that are related to identity and language through:

- *Sharing personal stories among the staff members related to decolonizatrion as a part of desensitising the topic;*
- *Use inclusive terminologies.*

Let us now move to the section related to the self-image of the organization. With this concept I wanted to emphasize the importance of self-reflectivity which is inevitably associated with the process of reinvention and change in the organization. As the paper highlights, there is no common ground according to which there would a decolonization plan for an organization, therefore, this process will be ultimately connected to the core values of an NGO at hand. Through conversation I have emphasized 4 key points which stood out mostly in every interview I had:

- *Openness to being self-critical and self-reflective;*
- Giving employees a platform and a voice to raise a certain issue;
- Emphasizing the importance of feminist principles along the same conversation;
- Paying attention to power inequalities.

I will illustrate these points with some of the quotes:

An interviewee from the Public Engagement department said:

"…most of the questions related to the decolonization process come into play when it comes to legitimacy as an actor for change, and who were speaking for and what space we are taking?" (Ghent, 28.04.2022)

"I do see the need for us to be self-reflective, self-critical. I think perhaps even more than in terms of identity and language." (Ghent, 28.04.2022)

In terms of the feminist principles, several interviewees mentioned that they go hand in hand with the decolonial principles, therefore there should be a growing emphasis on feminist principles implementation. In the "Feminist Principles" document by Oxfam (2020) there are 11 points

according to which an organization can implement a feminist inclusive agenda. The points refer to sharing power, challenging behavior, celebrating diversity and safety. One of the points that was emphasized by an interviewee from the HR was "Nothing about us without us" (Oxfam, 2020).

"Nothing about us without us (means) being very conscious of your position of power relations, making sure that the way we work both internally and with external partners according to the feminist principles. There used to be this kind of colonial idea of we're going to go and help people. We try and avoid that as much as we can are also structures that we've created. So it used to be that the let's say the Global North and Global Northern countries were kind of responsible for work in the Global South. That's no longer the case. We support the work, that's done there both financially and for example, with HR, but the management or the decision about the projects that we do abroad is taken by the people who live there. So that's changed." (Ghent, 04.05.2022)

Therefore, it is possible to infer that decolonization efforts are closely linked yet again to addressing power relations through self-reflectivity and adopting a feminist approach within the decolonial practices.

3.1.5 Wider practices in Oxfam Confederation

Oxfam Confederation being the wider framework for the analysis is also worth mentioning as many of the interviews have highlighted different dynamics that happen on department, organization, and confederation-levels. Therefore, here are some of the wider underlying themes that have emerged:

- *Reforming structural power relations by giving it to local offices;*
- Northern offices are now in charge of the thematic, methodological, and technical support;
- Stiving for equal partnership for local actors.

The first and the third point were vastly covered by the previous section, so I would like to pay more attention to the role of the Northern Oxfam offices as "supporters" of the activities that are related to aid and development efforts elsewhere. In the words of an employee from the Program and Advocacy department:

"And my role is mostly to provide methodological support, for instance to my Oxfam colleagues. But also, to make sure that donor guidelines as well as reporting guidelines are known by partners." (Brussels, 05.05.2022)

"And there is this shift towards people wanting to have self-determination in the real sense and we cannot sit here and act like that has nothing to do with us or something. This is also a reflection on our level. So, I think it's also our partners who are demanding, maybe not literally all of our partners, but there is people that we work with, in country offices are demanding they are asking hard questions within the Confederation." (Brussels, 05.05.2022)

These quotes touch upon the discussion of NGOization and its continuation of depoliticization and institutionalization of social change (Armstrong and Prashad, 2005). It also contributes to the questioning of the positioning of Northern European NGOs as targeting elite interests rather than strengthening an anti-capitalist and decolonial movement (Smith, 1987). Faraclas (2001) also argues that big NGOs overshadow grassroot political movements. Multiple people have talked about their newly perceived roles of support and technical assistance rather being primary actors in the field of development and aid instead of the local initiatives, which to be goes hand in hand with the ideas linked to the process of NGOization and professionalization that are described in the literature review. However, it also needs to be noted, that despite this being an overreaching "supporter" role, the employees fairly recognize their power and are making steps towards acknowledging the biases in their work. This specific point will be illustrated in the last section.

3.1.6. Conclusions

The first part of the results aimed to answer the first sub-research question: *"How does one define decolonization practices within the NGO setting?".* I have illustrated that there is no unified definition of a decolonization practice, neither a solid practical approach on how to implement it. There are, however, numerous aspects to the topic, that when discussed need to be department-specific, as each department has various and diverging power inequalities, decolonization efforts and other ambiguities.

To this end, decolonization practice can be defined as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon in the NGO and development sector that aims to address power inequalities in different contexts, balance out knowledge systems, open the space for conscious making, adopt inclusive terminologies and take priorities from partners. Therefore, decolonization practice starts in a multidimensional setting when its scope is not limited to solely tackling structural racism, rather several other underlying power inequalities mentioned above. On top of that, by highlighting the fact that there is still no unified framework for NGOs to unite over this topic, this research emphasizes the need for future research and reports on how these practices can be measured and sustained long-term.

3.2 The challenges of implementing decolonization practices

For the second part of the research, the goal is to answer the second sub-question "*What are the challenges of implementing decolonization practices in an everyday working environment?".* To this end, I have developed the concept of a friction-factor that will summarize the difficulties associated with implementing decolonization practices. To begin with, I would like first to define what I mean by the concept: it is an umbrella term that describes a set of conditions that can be both related an unrelated to each other that prevent the implementation of decolonization practices. They are mostly concerned with complex phenomena that underly the difficulties associated with decolonization. In total there are 5 friction-factors that I was able to analyze through the interviews. Each of them will be presented in this section and the reader can find a visualization here.

3.2.1. Friction of lived experience – NGO worker's dissonance

Through the interviews that I have conducted, more than half of the interviewees have questioned their position, power, and legitimacy as NGO workers. Therefore, I called this section NGO worker's dissonance, as the friction factor relates to the systematic lack of lived experiences with the people that NGOs advocate, campaigns, educates or funds for. The dissonance in this way can be viewed as inconsistencies between the attitudes and beliefs and actions of a person. This process is another way to look at how NGOs from within are legitimizing their activity, however, it turns out there are critical outlooks on the activities being carried out. Therefore, the idea of a friction is

a great way to illustrate the "crack" in the process. I deem it best to illustrate this friction through several quotes.

"We are there to defend people's rights. So it's a rights-based approach, but essentially how do you defend people's rights that we don't necessarily represent and that particularly we don't have shared experiences with. So the main question for me at this point is how much of a problem is that? One of the speakers for a session I attended was a member of the Libyan diaspora, and so during the QA she received a question about the situation in her home country, where, essentially, she chose not to answer because she felt that she wasn't representative or legitimate to speak for her brothers and sisters in Libya, where she has not been there for 25 years. That frame of that analysis takes it to its logical conclusion. Basically, means we need to stop doing what we're doing immediately, and I sort of understand where it's coming from. If that person wasn't legitimate to speak for the situation there is a very, very, very short list of people who are. And it's not always easy, getting them into the spaces where those voices can be heard. So, there's that element. But there's a realization that we do have certain privileges in terms of access and resources etc, but that can, at least I'm convinced of that, be utilized in a way that's not by definition exploitive. So, I feel that we still have a role to play. But yeah, essentially, if legitimacy as an actor is entirely based on shared lived experiences, then classical NGOs don't really have a basis to continue their work."
(Ghent, 28.04.2022)

This quote is illustrative of underlying issue of representation, legitimacy, and the importance of lived experience. According to Clark (1991) in the late 1980s NGOs had a unique access to advocating for a set of ideological values grounded in local legitimacy, good governance, connectivity with the people, shared learning, and transparency. However, with the rise of the neoliberal policies that were touched upon earlier the main activity of NGOs has been shifted to being a funding development intermediary which ultimately has reversed NGOs and their relationship with local communities. This has also been illustrated in the previous section on donors and funding. As the fund now are channeled through bigger Northern European NGOs, the organizations simply become "contracted service providers" which yet again falls into the biases of NGOization processes. In the same vein, Burrowes et al. (2007), NGOs assume the role of an

intermediary which prevent civil society movements from fully gaining their political and financial independence.

Another interviewee suggested that the reason for this friction could stem from the internal dynamics of the organization related to lived experiences:

"I mean, first we are a very white organization. That's a fact. And especially the programs and advocacy department is quite white, which is an issue. And so it means racism is not something that is lived directly by so many people in our department, and I think that impacts the way we approach the issue. There was a lot of effort done on gender inequality, and that took a whole path to sensitize colleagues. I think this path on gender inequalities and feminist justice has also contributed to bring forward racial inequalities." (Brussels, 30.05.2022)

On top of that, there is impetus for decolonial efforts to take center stage like gender equality issues did couple of years ago, however, yet again it is vital to look at the internal structure of the organization as it might be the case the friction of lack of lived experience would prevent the change from taking place.

"I can compare it to gender inequality work in that it's much easier to do gender inequality work in your organization when you also have women, and gender diverse people in the group. Not necessarily that all women are feminists, or all women are gender experts, because it's not the case. But there is a lived experience that helps with understanding some issues, seeing some linkages, going deeper. So that would make it less theoretical, that would help, if we would be more racially diverse in our staff. But I also think that you need a threshold of people to get there: you can't just hire one person of color and then expect that person to be your resource on racism, because that's heavy and tokenistic. And yeah, I don't think anybody wants to end up being like the sole spokesperson on racism in an organization." (Brussels, 30.05.2022)

This highlights the friction that was explored in the idea of structural racism and white gaze. Precisely due to the lack of diversity within staff, it is harder for the organization to address decolonization in a systemic way. As it was previously noted, white gaze has been prevalent in the

sector for decades, hegemonic mind is an inherent part of the sector (Martinot, 2022). Therefore, it is possible to infer that the lack of lived experience and lack of staff diversity can be one of the most crucial difficulties associated with implementation of decolonization practices.

3.2.2. Friction of priorities – donor's and partners' overlap

From the data collection, I inferred that Oxfam Belgium has a support role for its partners in the Global South, and as it was noted before there are direct steps within Oxfam Confederation to give more power to partners through putting them in the driving seat of the development and aid projects. However, I have still encountered a friction which is related to ensuring that priorities of both the donor and the partner overlap which is not an easy thing to do. This relates to the bigger power structures in place as I wanted to explore why project proposals most often come from the so-called Global North rather than the Global South. An interviewee from the Programs and Advocacy stated:

"…the most important dynamics has become the opportunities of funding, right? But they do have their country strategy. So they know very well, what is their priority and proposals have to fit. It's also challenging, because we are also defined our priority. So, they have to be in an overlap with the donor, country office and our priorities." (Brussels, 11.05.2022)

This dynamic illustrates a friction between priorities of the offices in the Global South and the Global North even within the same organization. There appears to be a three-level dimension which pushes local offices into the layers of compliance with regulation apart from ensuring the capabilities of a specific development program with their own strategy. However, I already described some of the approaches that Oxfam partakes to counterbalance the inequality. The same interviewee stated that when it comes to general dialogue within the sector, there are few institutional changes that could prevent this situation (Brussels, 11.05.2022). Therefore, the idea of Sinwell, and Kim and Campbell (2013) of donor pressuring partners to shift their agendas also comes up as a difficulty to tackle in this situation.

3.2.3. Friction between covering the basics and engaging with decoloniality

Another critical point that needs to be addressed is related to the prioritization of decolonization within the organizational environment. From the interviews most of the employees have highlighted the overall openness and readiness to discuss the topic as well as take necessary steps for its implementation. However, most of them have also linked it to the changing the structure and resource allocation. This quote will be illustrative of this friction:

"So, there's a purely practical element where the metaphor of the old tanker is used a lot when it comes to Oxfam. In general, we are massive, we've got a quite large overhead in terms of structures, and we're not exactly an agile organization. So that clearly is, is an obstacle to implementing any sort of change. There's also clearly a dimension and a degree to which the first wave of post-war humanitarian INGOs have all been to some degree institutionalized and suffer from the necessity of being self-perpetuating." (Ghent, 28.04.2022)

"But there's also a side to it where if we want to be effective in terms of impact, we can't spend too much of our time and resources looking and reinventing ourselves." (Ghent, 28.04.2022)

There is a clear friction between the willingness for change and setting decolonial agenda on track with focusing on the everyday tasks and fulfilling the plan when it comes to strategic goals within the organization.

An employee from the HR department has stated:

"It's not true what I'm going to say, but I think the whole aspect is almost like a luxury. I don't think it is. But I think when you look at, for example, in HR department, and you have a turnover that goes up, you need to recruit people, you need to make sure the salaries are paid. People, leave the company, people fall ill, your priority is to make sure that the basics are covered. It shouldn't be seen as something extra, but I think only when the basics are covered, do you have time to start thinking about gender, equality, racial equality, all these things." (Ghent, 04.05.2022)

Employees from the Programs and Advocacy department have also suggested that there are certain limitations that come with properly engaging in the topic that are related to the prioritization of

mundane work that does not allow the space for challenging topics to emerge. According to 11.11.11 (2021), each organization needs to create the necessary space based on its size, culture, and power relations, leading to either a bottom-up or top-down approach. There is a need to work on all levels of the organization and creating an action plan that would tackle all the sides to the question.

Therefore, there is a great limitation associated with the predominance of daily mundane tasks in comparison to the efforts that require critical approaches and addressing change within the organization. As highlighted by Petras and Veltmeyer (2005) in the literature review, NGOs are caught into circles of existing in the same power structures and still adopting social and societal change.

3.2.4. Friction between accessibility, departments, and inclusivity

This friction is related to the inclusivity that is inevitably linked to decolonization practices. From the interviews I have conducted it became clear to me that despite the deep commitment of Oxfam Belgium to decolonial efforts and practices, organization's focus is still the public in Belgium. In the words of an employee from the Campaigns Team when asked about the choices behind the terminologies used:

"So, that's an interesting one because the terminologies evolved a lot and rapidly over the years. This I think that's also part of where we first start running into ambiguities on our role as a department. As my priority is that the words that I use are understandable to the average Belgian citizen. And so, to put it bluntly, the more modern terminology isn't well known."

The friction is concerned with the accessibility of campaigns to the public that does not have deep knowledge within the sphere of development at the same time engaging with the new inclusive vocabulary. I believe this is a great insight from the interview, as I have not encountered a theoretical explanation that relates to this friction.

Furthermore, the difficulties not only stem from the fact that local public is not aware of evolving terminologies but is also concerned with the different techniques departments use within the organization itself. As stated by an employee from the Programs and Advocacy department:

"I think we do have a role to play also within our organization, more of a critical role sometimes when it comes towards other departments. For instance, Fundraising, Communication or Public Engagement departments, where they might have other interests, and I'm not saying they are neocolonialist in any way. Especially with Fundraising, they might show certain pictures or have a preference for certain stories that might be more visible. Maybe we don't do it enough, but I think we try to work with our colleagues to tell different types of stories or share different type of messages. So I think it's also that side of a role."

Therefore, one can note that the issue of accessibility is related to both external and internal factors of the public and different techniques of telling stories departments use. The friction is related to a different perception of imaginaries and subsequent divergent inclusivity experienced by different department within the organization.

3.2.5. Friction of legitimacy

The last friction factor is related to the perception of legitimacy that employees associate to their own work. It refers to the contradictions between decolonization efforts and employee's self-image of the NGO sector. I wanted to explore what people perceive as ideal decolonial humanitarian aid and development, and many have mentioned that in the ideal decolonial world "it should not exist" as NGOs simply do not have the direct legitimacy to be representing people from other states (Brussels, 11.05.2022). However, upon further exploration with the second wave of interviews has suggested that even though the legitimacy of NGOs is brough into question within certain contexts, as the interviewee from Programs and Advocacy puts it:

"The whole idea behind the recent reforms in the confederation was to give more power to the country offices, to have them on the steering wheel and all that. So, some roles within our organization and my department, have changed. I think some rules will still change. I don't know if

I would necessarily agree with the statement that Oxfam Belgium should not exist. Because I think it simplifies it, as even in the ideal world, I would still want civil society organizations to exist. I can't think of an ideal world where we would have no civil society." (Brussels, 30.05.2022)

However, as it was possible to infer from the literature study, big NGOs can play a reverse role of suppressing local movements through reformist programs and leave little to no space for meaningful political action in relation to developmental programs (Goodman, 2002). Therefore, this friction of legitimacy touches upon the underlying image of NGOs on their impact as in some ways they realize that there is growing movement that rejects the NGOization of development, however, there is still a need in the civil society efforts that would bring international parties together. Would be possible that NGOs continue to be this linking element? My research suggests that it would not be probable. That is why I would like to turn to the section of future implication for the NGO sector in relation to decolonial practices.

3.2.6. Conclusions

Before I do that, I would like to summarize 5 friction points that illustrate the difficulties and ambiguities related to decolonial practices:

- *Friction of lived experiences refers to the dissonance that an NGO worker experiences when they tackle a problem that they have no lived experience with;*
- *Friction of priorities that highlights a high number of compliances partners need to get the funding;*
- *Friction between keeping up with mundane tasks and introducing systematically challenging aspects into the working environment;*
- *Friction between ensuring internal and external inclusivity;*
- *Friction of legitimacy of the necessity for NGOs to exist.*

These points summarize the answer to the second sub-research question as to what the main difficulties are for implementing decolonization practices. Of course, the list is not exhaustive, however, it highlights the necessity to addressing the "in-betweens" as to why decolonization cannot not simply take center stage in the everyday working environment.

3. Future of NGOs – network of equals

This is last part of the results that will offer some alternatives given the downsides that come with the process of NGOization in the developmental sector. It will aim at answering the third sub-question of "*What has to happen to implement decolonization practices in an everyday working environment?".* From analyzing both the definition of decolonial practices as well as difficulties associated with their implementation, it becomes evident that if we are to erase the power dynamics and give local voice a just and equitable platform to pursue its goals, the development sector would require fundamental changes. Therefore, this part is going to explore several alternatives to the current system through the concept of the *network of equals*. This concept was developed through the interviews and was explicitly stated by one of the interviewees. I believe it is a great term which bring together different perspectives on the future of NGOs.

The interviewee from the Programs and Advocacy department when talking about the future role of NGOs and the ideal world stated that:

"I don't think my job will exist in 30 years and I think that it might be a good thing. I don't think we should exist the way we have existed for 30 years, but I do think because we're not just a pool of funding, we also have sort of a political objectives and but maybe it doesn't have to be Oxfam. If it's no longer Oxfam that's fine too. There are other ways of organizing civil society or creating international solidarity." (Brussels, 05.05.2022)

"Ideally there would be no financial relationship. So ideally we would work together with no sort of accountability reporting relationship. And I think in our policy work that is already more or less would be connect strong civil society partners on both ends with both their strengths and their weakness for mutual exchange" (Ibid.)

Another interviewee from the same department also added:

"…my salary is paid by the Development Corporation sector. I think there will be still something like that, but it would be much more voluntary, which I also do in my free time. But that kind of work

on voluntary basis, will continue strengthening relationships between groups here and there on the same issues because that's globalization" (Brussels, 11.05.2022)

Therefore, there is a growing awareness that the NGO sector in the way that it exists now will likely change within the next 30 years under the pressures that relate to the fundamental coloniality of some relationships in place. Consequently, there needs to be other adaptations such as the view of post-development world through unification on voluntary bases. I believe that Kothari's (2022) *flower of transformation* is a great way to come up with alternatives to development. The flower touches upon a range of topics from cultural diversity to justice and economic integrity. The goal is to highlight the mass resistance movements that go against the global structures of neoliberalism and neocapitalism, grounded in radical alternatives that can become sustainable in the long run.

In the same vein, there are certain solution that can positively contribute to the efforts specifically for the NGO sector:

- Creating shared definition on decolonial efforts;
- Involving local diaspora voices in the process as guiding partners.

Moving forward we need to adopt understanding for NGOs on what is the action plan when it comes to practicing decolonization, what concepts organization have to be looking, what difficulties they might entail. As an interviewee states:

"There are some general declarations on that. And as I said, there are good practices but having this the shared definitions and then ways of tackling these issues which are raised by people from diaspora, people in this in the South would be good." (Brussels, 11.05.2022)

The emphasis on the creation of a network of equals is reflected in other policy suggestion that I have analyzed. According to 11.11.11 (2021), to deconstruct power relations the voice of local diaspora groups needs to be uplifted and listened to. Expertise based on "lived" experiences is what matters as well as the dialogue with locals is essential. Therefore, it can be concluded that future for NGOs highly depends on the possibility for change within a given organizational structure. Additionally, decolonization cannot simply be imposed once, as it has been argued that it has a

multitude of meanings and should be addressed within all of the organizational levels. One of the first steps to incorporating decolonization in the everyday working environment is looking at the changing capabilities of an organization as well as equitable conditions for exchange with other partners in the sector.

General conclusions

Therefore, this paper has aimed at addressing the ambiguous nature of decolonization practices and answering the three main research questions. It has tried to respond to every research question set. It has illustrated that decolonization is a multifaceted concept that lacks a unified theoretical understanding within the NGO setting. It has also provided different outlooks that are related to decolonization practices that turned out to be department specific. Friction-factors were used to illustrate the difficulties associated with practicing decolonization. Lastly, the post-development and future of NGOs was explored as a response to tackling the issues of structural difficulties associated with its implementation. Thus, the paper would like to invite future research regarding practicing decolonization and breaching the concepts that would allow for a common framework. Moreover, the concepts discussed in the conceptual framework can be explored even further. There needs to be a further practical exploration of the following concepts in a policy-related manner.

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