

Exchange to change

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To contact us:

IOB - University of Antwerp
Lange St.-Annastraat 7
2000 Antwerp

e-mail:

iob@uantwerpen.be

website:

www.uantwerpen.be/iob

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E2C team: Divin-Luc Bikubanya, Hans De Backer, Sara Dewachter, Joëlle Dhondt, Mark Kadigo, Mohammed Norul Alam Raju, Diana Tiholaz, Ngan Ha Tran, Cassandra Vet

The IOB zipline: navigating heights, challenges, and achievements

Dear Zipliner,

As I write this, I'm on holiday, watching my children soar from treetop to treetop, suspended on a zipline. Each tree they depart from is unique—differing in height, width, altitude—yet regardless of these differences, each zipline journey evokes the same expressions: a mix of exhilaration and being overwhelmed while in flight, followed by wide smiles upon landing.

This scene reminds me of the journey our IOB students experience. Much like a zipline, the IOB year is often described as a rollercoaster—a rapid, thrilling ride filled with highs, lows, and everything in between, that seems to fly by in an instant. The quotes in the yearbook capture this 'zipline' experience perfectly, reflecting the fast pace, the excitement, the challenges, and the joys of accomplishment that will culminate in the smiles at graduation. Some of these stories are shared in our alumni magazine through the "This was the Year 2023-24" photos and articles (p. 12). And while this cohort prepares to land, a new group of students (2024-25) eagerly anticipates their own takeoff.

But it's not just our Master students who are reaching the end of their journey. This edition also features the stories of five PhD students (Elie, Filippo, Ivan, Hanne and Héctor) who are nearing the completion of their own long, intense, and occasionally bumpy, but ultimately rewarding, academic ziplines. You can learn more about their fascinating research in this issue (p. 7), and we extend our heartfelt congratulations to them on their remarkable achievements.

September also marks another significant transition as the former IOB Bureau team—Chair Danny Cassimon, Tom De Herdt, and Nadia Molenaers—passes the torch to the new team led by Chair Nathalie Holvoet, alongside Sara Geenen and Kristof Titeca. We want to convey our deepest gratitude to the outgoing team for their dedication and hard work, and we warmly welcome the new team, wishing them a smooth and successful slide into their new roles.

Happy reading!

Sara Dewachter

Alumni Coordinator

Religion and sport: coexistence or separation...

by Baudoin Koussognon and Divin-Luc Bikubanya



In the context of the current prevalence of sporting competitions, the issue of inclusiveness is becoming an increasingly pertinent concern. The relationship between sport and religion can be complex, depending on the region and the social, cultural, or institutional context. The fusion of physical talent and divine worship dates back to ancient civilisations, including the birth of the Olympic Games among the Greeks. This is also the case for many indigenous communities, who often incorporate religious rituals to connect sport and the spiritual realm in some way. In what follows, we use concrete examples to explore the dynamics of sport and religion, examining the divergences around the issue of cohabitation between the two and their potential within contemporary society.

While human rights state that people are free to practise their religion as they wish, in the world of sports opinions differ. While some players embrace the possibility of a perfect cohabitation, others do not hesitate to draw a line in the sand. As Eric Borghini, a member of the executive committee of the French Football Federation (FFF), points out, “There is a time to play sport and a time to practise your religion”. While this ideological ‘war’ is increasingly echoed around the world in the context of various international sporting competitions, it is important to remember that there have been rumblings for several decades. In 1965, Sandy Koufax, the famous baseball player, refused to take part in an important match for his team out of respect for Yom Kippur, a holy day in the Jewish calendar. The same was true

of British Olympic champion Jonathan Edwards, who was unable to take part in the 1991 World Championships because of his Christian convictions. The same could be said of Eli Herring, a player in the National Football League (NFL) who was prepared to close the door on any team that did not allow him to observe the Sabbath in accordance with his faith.

In recent years, this discord has been growing, and the consequences are becoming more and more serious. The organisation of international and national sporting competitions such as the Olympic Games, the football World Cup, various local championships, etc. has given rise to controversy relating to which religious attitudes are permitted and which are not.

Wearing the hijab in sport

Recently, as part of the opening

Photo 1: Marine Le Pen's radical stance on the hijab in sport



Marine Le Pen
@MLP_officiel

Le hijab dans le sport, c'est NON ! Et nous ferons une loi pour faire respecter ça.

[Translate post](#)



ceremony of the Olympic Games in Paris on October 24, French athlete Sounkamba Sylla was banned from wearing the headscarf she had been using during the previous European Athletics Championships. While the French Minister for Sport, Amélie Oudéa-Castéra, has aligned herself with this decision out of respect for the “principle of neutrality”, Amnesty International has distanced itself from the decision, stating that: “The French authorities have demonstrated assertively that their efforts to improve gender equality and inclusiveness in sport do not apply to one category of women and girls, namely Muslim women and girls who wear religious head coverings”, in a report published on July 16. In addition to the Paris 2024 Olympics, the ban on wearing the hijab is also the subject of Article 1 of the FFF, which states that the FFF is opposed to “the wearing of any sign or dress ostensibly expressing a political, philosophical, religious or trade union affiliation”. For their part, the French political class has not hesitated to get involved, notably through tweets, to the point of suggesting a law on secularism in sport. French MP Marine Le Pen tweeted that “The hijab in sport is a NO! And we will pass a law to enforce it” (Photo 1). . . Such views see sport and religion as opposites. In our view, this seems to

dismiss the constructive relationship that can exist between the two dynamics. Alongside these radical positions on the hijab in sport, many of the key players within the major sporting goods brands have used their voices over the last decade to break down the practical barriers that can exist between exercise and religion. As weightlifter Amna Al Haddad from the United Arab Emirates explained on Pro Hijab Nike products, sports must be inclusive for all, and athletes should not have to choose between what to wear and pursuing sports.

Managing the month of Ramadan in sport

The observance of the month of Ramadan is creating a huge amount of discord in the world of sports, and football in particular. Here, two major questions arise: Should there be a break during matches to allow Muslims to break the fast? Because of the energy demands involved in practising sport, should sportsmen and women be prevented from breaking fast during this holy month? The answers to the first question vary from country to country. Let's take the example of four of the best and most famous football leagues in the world: France, England, Holland and Germany. In France, the answer is a firm “NO”, in accordance with the principle of

secularism. In England and Holland, a break is officially accepted for the occasion. In Germany, although there is no official decision on the matter, the players in a match are nevertheless free to observe a break or not. The answer to the second question is often specific to each sports person or their direct employer. For British rower Mohamed Sbihi, gold medallist at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio, there is no question of ignoring the month of fasting. He defends himself by pointing out that he set his personal best during a competition that coincided with the fasting period. Sometimes the management of this holy month can lead to conflict. During the 2021-2022 football season, a major controversy of this kind erupted within Nice's professional team. According to local newspapers, Christophe Galtier, the team's coach at the time, objected to the observance of Ramadan by some of the team's players, creating a conflict. As a result, the team — which until then had been performing well — suffered a slump, with the coach leaving at the end of the season and even appearing in court on the charge of “discrimination”.

Sexual orientation and alcohol at the heart of the religion and sport divide

The stance taken by sportsmen and women on homosexuality is a highly sensitive subject. Indeed, sporting events are sometimes the ideal channels for promoting certain values, regardless of the opinions of the players involved. During the 2021-2022 football season, several players from the French football league, including Idrissa Gueye, Donatien Gomis and Mostafa Mohamed, refused to take part in a match that required them to wear a shirt with a rainbow insignia to mark the day against homophobia. Far from being regarded as an opinion, this was interpreted as an offence, to the point where the French football authorities demanded an explanation. For Idrissa Gueye in particular, this attitude created a rift with his club and was one of the reasons for his departure at the end of that season. Then, during the 2022 World Cup in the Muslim country of Qatar, the captains of the national



teams of England, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Wales and Switzerland were forced to abandon their plan to wear One Love armbands in support of the LGBTQ community, under penalty of punishment. On another note, the consumption of alcohol, and public displays of affection, were also forbidden during this World Cup in accordance with the religious convictions present in this country.

Sport in Muslim countries

The integration of certain Muslim religious practices within the domain of sport gives rise to significant challenges, particularly in relation to the participation of women. In an interview with *The Conversation*, Chuka Onwumehili, author of the book *Women's Football in Africa*, states that "in most Muslim countries in the world, girls and women are not allowed to play football because sportswear exposes their legs and hair and they become a focal point for the male gaze". In extreme cases, human life is at stake and exile is the only way out. With the Taliban taking power in Afghanistan and imposing Sharia law, practising sport there is now a highly sensitive activity. The case of Afghan athlete Zakia Khudadadi, who was unable to take part in the Tokyo 2021 Paralympic Games, is a case in point. In a video, she said she felt "imprisoned" and would not risk going out to train. In an interview, Khalida Popal, the founder of the first Afghan national football team in 2007 and a refugee in Denmark since 2016, claims to have received death threats and explains that most

of the former members of the team are now living in hiding. Instead of hosting football matches in the various stadiums built for the purpose, the Taliban use them to show floggings and executions. Their power since the botched departure of the West from Afghanistan does not suggest that things will get any better.

Sport and fetishism

In Africa in particular, beliefs in divine or supernatural powers play an important role in sports. For example, many African athletes and sports teams believe strongly in fetishism, to the point where it can be an integral part of the hygiene of the athlete or the team's technical staff. It can take the form of incantations, various buried objects, magic necklaces, special massages, and so on. A report by Radio France International (RFI) in 2012 sheds light on this practice in South Africa. We learn that football teams recruit healers capable of prescribing 'medicines' to weaken their opponents. This may involve stealing the jersey of the opposing team's leading goal scorer and burning it, or discreetly sprinkling powder on players to leave them out of breath.

In 2015 a former coach of the Congo-Brazzaville national team told *Jeune Afrique* magazine that the players in his team are "almost all very religious" and that "fetishism is still quite prevalent". Kamel Djabour, also a former coach of the Congo-Brazzaville team, confirms that some players "hide small fetish objects in their shorts, socks, and shoes before taking to the field".

Some former sportsmen are also making revelations. Writing in the magazine *L'EXPRESS*, a former striker for ASEC Mimosas (Côte d'Ivoire's leading club) looked back at a national cup final in 1967: "The night before, the directors came to the dormitory with a fetishist. They had us all in just our pants for some

special preparation". This is also the case of Taribo West, a former Nigerian international, and gold medallist at the 1996 Olympic Games, as well as a former player at football clubs such as Inter Milan and AC Milan. In comments relayed by *Afrik Sport*, he confirmed that "at certain clubs, before each match, the president gives you a lucky charm to play with. They tell you to put it in your shoes or socks. Some coaches call on African sorcerers and fortune-tellers from Senegal, Burkina Faso, Congo and even Nigeria".

These examples, and many others, show the almost inevitable intersection between religious beliefs, cultural practices, and social practices on the one hand and sports on the other, making it hard to imagine a world in which religion and sport do not meet. It is, therefore, highly likely that such divergences will grow to the point where more radical attitudes and movements will emerge. A cohabitation governed by a consensus between all parties is the ideal option to prevent this crisis in the making. The coexistence of the two dynamics – sport and religious beliefs (but also social practices) – shows that it is possible for both to operate harmoniously, insofar as their purpose is physical fulfilment and expression on the one hand and spiritual devotion on the other. For the 'radicalists', this would mean seeing sport as a pure and simple way of growing spiritually through moral values and ethical conduct aimed at community cohesion.



PhD in the field

2024 is shaping up to be a fruitful year for IOB PhDs. A batch of PhD candidates will be hustling to finalise their full draft, plan their defence, and get that title. Ivan Ashaba has already defended his PhD – an apotheosis of his work - and we may now officially call him Dr. Ashaba. Others, such as Hanne Van Cappellen, Elie Lunanga and Filippo Grisolia were given the green light at their pre-defence. The pre-defence is a defining - or even the defining - moment in a student's PhD trajectory - as jury-members decide whether you are ready to plan your public defence and provide comments to be addressed before the defence. Nerve-wracking, right? Héctor Herrera has handed in his full draft and is now testing out his pre-defence presentation at conferences. The PhD topics are diverse and range from climate justice and green bonds (Héctor) to militarised conservation (Ivan), as well as unconditional cash transfers (Filippo). One thing that connects all these PhDs is their passion for locally embedded research, fieldwork, and justice. Besides providing an insight into the work of their respective authors, these PhDs share strategies on how to get started in the field, to wrap up work and deal with unforeseen circumstances (COVID!).

Fieldwork amidst volcanos, pandemics, and political instability: Elie Lunanga's PhD insights

What is your PhD about?

I obtained a scholarship to evaluate the impact of electrification around the Virunga National Park in North Kivu, DRC. That is where my PhD journey began, but political instability in the region, together with COVID-19 and ebola outbreaks, and even the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano, broadened the scope of my PhD and forced me to adopt a flexible approach. Security threats had both an impact on our access to certain areas and the rollout of the electricity grid in those areas. Field trips were postponed because of security reasons but mostly because of COVID-19. I was able to coordinate data collection from home but you do miss some contextual information when you are not able to interact with your respondents directly. Then, while preparing another round of visits, the Nyiragongo volcano erupted. Our visits again had to be postponed because of the evacuations and people were still recovering from the shock. We had to adjust our data collection plan as the electricity grid was damaged. Ultimately, the four essays included in my thesis resulted from transforming the various shocks that occurred during my PhD journey, which caused delays, into research opportunities. This was made possible by being part of an amazing research team with Marijke Verpoorten, Nik Stoop, and other PhD students. My PhD now begins with a chapter on the impact of COVID-19 and Ebola on populations in North Kivu, followed by a second chapter on vaccination willingness, a third on the volcano eruption, and a fourth on the impact of electrification. Shocks have become a common theme in my PhD, with electrification representing a positive one.

Which result surprised you the most throughout your research?

First, it was interesting that the impact of COVID on people's lives was much higher than that of Ebola. This showed us that transmissibility mattered much more than the fatality rate of

the disease. Second, we found that the president's vaccination behaviour only has an impact if people consider him a role model and if information about his behaviour actually reaches people. Trust and communication similarly proved crucial in determining whether or not people follow up on evacuation orders. Even in the case of electrification, a lack of trust in institutions would prevent people from using the available electricity grid.

What advice would you give incoming PhDs?

Try, if you have the chance, to be part of a strong team. You can be creative and still follow the leader of your team. As a team, we have already published quite a lot of data in journal articles and these papers benefitted from team writing. This has really strengthened my work and that of my colleagues. Secondly, spend as much time in the field as possible. In the end, I was able to spend a substantial amount of time in the area and am proud of how I navigated difficult situations. My research is locally grounded and is really about collecting and analysing macroeconomic data in difficult settings. Knowledge of the context is therefore crucial and data collection is a great opportunity to learn.



Navigating the complexities of conservation: Ivan Ashaba's PhD fieldwork in Uganda

What is the focus of your PhD?

My PhD looks at wildlife conservation law enforcement in a Ugandan protected area. I specifically look at how conservation law enforcement practices have evolved from British colonial Uganda to the present. To unpack these practices, I use the concept of green militarisation which, simply defined, refers to the use of actors, logics, technology and partnerships traditionally used in the military world but increasingly being popularised in wildlife and biodiversity protection. I scrutinised ranger instruction material produced by the Ugandan military and foreign armies, and observed that a large part of the curriculum was geared towards warfare and combat. This has implications regarding how rangers understand their roles in wildlife protection. Also, the framing of impoverished local communities living in close proximity to the park as 'the enemy' produces some problematic outcomes.

How did you organise your fieldwork?

I traveled to Uganda for preliminary fieldwork on my initial topic: the "illegal wildlife trade". There, I interviewed various actors and learned how the wildlife trade worked, methods of disguise and concealment, and Uganda's role in the supply and transit of illegal wildlife products. At the same time, this fieldwork opened my eyes to on the challenges that lay ahead of me in terms of gathering adequate data to write a thesis, given the clandestine nature of the trade. It was during this preliminary fieldwork that I visited some communities living in close proximity to protected areas. Some of the tensions that I observed firsthand were related to the park's law enforcement policies and this became the new focus of my PhD. I believe that I managed to reach the 'right' people through patience and long-term engagement. Some parts of my research involved sensitive work with local communities. This meant that I had to continuously visit these local communities and build trust for the people to be able to open up and share their stories. In the methodology section, I also reflect on the time I spent with rangers and getting close to the actors we are critical of, and in my case study I describe the dilemmas I was confronted with and how I dealt with them.

What is one of your most memorable moments in the field?

During my fieldwork, I stayed at the student center at the heart of Murchison Falls National Park. Different groups stayed at this center: tour drivers and students on field trips, for example, but also rangers coming from different protected areas to undergo training. On the last day of one of these training sessions, we gathered around the fireplace listening to stories from the different parks. Then, one ranger stood up and started dancing while mimicking animals from the park he worked. The baboon dance for me was the winner of the night and I think many others agreed. There were other memorable stories from the

wild but this was definitely a highlight.

Do you have some advice for incoming PhDs?

Some PhD-related challenges cannot be taught in any winter or summer school. Take the example of handling your mental wellbeing. This should never be compromised but there is no one-size-fits-all approach. I, for instance, planned my fieldwork during the peak of winter and summer. This allowed me to change my environment at tricky moments in the year and helped me take care of my mental wellbeing. Also, I would advise incoming PhDs to find their own rhythm of writing and follow that. My own experience is that I was productive at night and, speaking sincerely, I wrote most of my chapters at night when most people were asleep. The COVID-19 pandemic further entrenched this nocturnal way of doing things. There will be days when you go to the office and fail to do anything during the daytime but if it's night time that sets your writing in motion, why not?



Municipal green bonds and climate justice: Héctor Herrera's exploration of global and local impacts"

What is the main topic of your research?

My research aims to provide new qualitative and empirical insights about municipal green bonds from a climate justice perspective. It addresses the overarching question of how municipal green bonds, as instruments of climate finance, engage with climate action (both adaptation and mitigation), and interact with local and global climate injustices. Before coming to IOB, I worked as a coordinator of the environmental justice network in Colombia, and this experience which helped convince me to ground my research locally and understand climate and environmental justice through social movements. It is also important to acknowledge the diversity of interpretations on what climate justice and environmental justice entails. For instance, in the academic literature common pillars of climate justice are distributive justice, procedural justice and recognition. But when we understand this through social movements – such as some indigenous communities, for example – environmental justice means respecting is respect to their autonomy in their territory, or climate justice might be seen as having breathable air or access to drinkable water. It is, therefore, important to take the context into account. I used studied three case -studies – in Mexico City, San Francisco and Cape Town – to ground my research. The reason I emphasise the experience of local communities is because most research on climate finance focuses on financial and economic perspectives such as interest rates, access to market and market conditions, and takes their transformative impact on communities for granted.

What is one of your most important findings?

In all three cases, I collected evidence to support the argument that climate finance needs to be approached from a climate justice perspective and with a focus on implementation from a community perspective. To illustrate this, I looked at how a municipal green bond was used to finance a water infrastructure project in Mexico City. Gender was not considered in the design of the bond or in the implementation of the project. However, when I went to see how this project was implemented, the gender dimension was important because the project

interfered with how the community accessed water. This directly impacted some of the women, who then were responsible for the additional labour of collecting the missing water for their household.

How did you organise your fieldwork and manage to get "connected"?

I used two strategies that helped me a lot. First, I tried to get in touch with local organisations, initiatives and activists working on environmental and climate justice. I reached out to people fighting for their right to water. Second, in each city I would seek out an event or workshop on topics such as climate adaptation and equity that would bring activists, academics and policy-makers together. This plan really helped me get connected in Cape Town.

What really struck you during your fieldwork?

I was impressed by how hardworking people continuously try to do their best within a difficult context. I remember that during an interview in Mexico City, while we were discussing the current water infrastructure, the interviewee kept getting up to reuse the water from the laundry machine to do some gardening. This person was just doing an everyday water activity in front of me while trying to make the best use of the time available. In Cape Town, I participated at a conference for water activists and it was inspiring to witness how community leaders defended their right to water so strongly and fought to have their water rights materialised.

What advice would you give incoming PhDs?

I think it is helpful to think about the scope of your research early on. Initially, I wanted to study everything that had to do with green bonds and climate finance but I really had to narrow it down. For instance, I decided to focus on water infrastructure projects and had to make similar choices for my conceptual framework. Long story short, just try to limit the scope of your empirical and conceptual work. Finally, try to go on fieldwork as soon as you can. Observing how things work in reality will help you make sense of your research.



Bridging economics and anthropology: Hanne Van Cappellen's interdisciplinary approach to rural labour dynamics

How did you end up at IOB in the first place?

I did some fieldwork when studying economics and anthropology and thought IOB would be an interesting space to study as it is an interdisciplinary institute. I had studied the link between conflict and female empowerment in Rwanda, and farming practices in Ethiopia. Throughout my PhD, I tried to combine economics with anthropology as I was intrigued by how two disciplines can have such a different approach to understanding development and development processes.

What is the main topic of your PhD?

My research looks at how urbanisation influences labour allocation choices, specifically the perceptions and aspirations of rural individuals around work and work-related opportunities. I focused on two case studies within sub-Saharan Africa, Tanzania and Malawi, and analyzed rural labour dynamics within a context of rapid urbanisation. The topic brings my two disciplinary backgrounds together and I tried to transcend disciplinary boundaries to come to a more complete explanation of the topic. However, I had to make concessions because of canceled field trips due to COVID and the loss of one of my supervisors. It is more a patchwork of approaches than I originally intended but I still managed to write an interdisciplinary study. In my methodological section I reflect on these challenges, the tension between economics and anthropology, how disciplinarity affects doing research, and thinking about theories and concepts.

How did you organise your fieldwork?

I had to reorganise my fieldwork quite a bit during my trajectory. Before the COVID outbreak, I carried out fieldwork in Tanzania but this was mostly exploratory. When it was time to return, the pandemic had started and I had to postpone my trip. Afterwards, my supervisor Bert Ingelaere, who had been guiding my fieldwork in Tanzania, passed away and I decided not to continue my fieldwork in Tanzania.

Luckily, an opportunity opened up to do fieldwork in Malawi together with Adriana, and with the support of Joachim De Weerd, my other supervisor. Adriana and I collected some interesting data and it was a great experience to collaborate during fieldwork. It's quite a unique situation, but there are many advantages. You can discuss your research, save time in terms of preparation, and share costs. You also experience memorable moments together. Adriana and I, for instance, spent quite some time in the car as we were doing fieldwork in three different locations all over Malawi. Although it was

often exhausting, it was also really enjoyable as we would take turns putting our music on and sharing our favorite songs – often leading to funny and joyful moments. Not only that, but I think we all know that being in the field is not always easy on a personal level. It's really nice to be able to share these struggles and know that there is someone who understands where you are coming from.

What is the most important lens you draw from your research?

The interdisciplinarity lens showed me that within development studies we use development theories that come from a certain history and worldview. My main message is that we need to be reflective as a researcher, but also as a discipline or a field of study, and remain reflective on the ontology that is leading the way we do research. In addition, I think that no single methodology is able to answer every question. We should separate the responsibilities of the different methodologies and think about how different kinds of methodology add to our understanding of development processes.

Do you have some advice for incoming PhDs?

Yes, my advice would be to push yourself to write down ideas and things that you are working on early in the process. I spent so much time thinking about things and reading, and thought very carefully about how to develop an idea in the best way. But there are so many ways of telling a story and it is fine to just start and change it afterwards. Writing down your ideas helps you structure your thoughts.



Unconditional aid, unforeseen benefits: Filippo Grisolia's research on cash transfer programs in Uganda

How are you handling the stress of your upcoming public defence on 24 September?

I think the really big hurdles are handing in your full draft and the pre-defence. However, I do find this time between pre-defence and public defence stressful, but for other reasons. It is a decisive time to write job and project applications and figure out what my next steps and future will be. I am, for instance, considering a traineeship at the European Commission. As for the public defence itself, I expect that it will be a bit of a re-run of my pre-defence. So not too much stress there.

What is the major puzzle driving your research?

Together with Sara Dewachter and Nathalie Holvoet, I had the opportunity to follow the impact of the implementation of two cash transfer programs in rural Uganda. We studied the potential impact on social capital, collective action, agency, labour and savings investment, and the repercussions for climate change adaptation. The design of these cash transfer programs is quite unique as they are universal and unconditional. Within a village every adult would receive a certain amount and any female care-takers additionally received a reduced payment reserved for the children. To some extent, it was a basic income experiment. The impact on the collective level – social capital and collective action – was quite impressive, but we also witnessed beneficial effects on most of our variables. We were most surprised by the continuation of positive finance consequences after the end of the program. Most scholars label these programs as short term poverty alleviation but we found a potential long lasting effect on financial decision-making. Still, this is something we foresaw in our theory of change. The fact that the program was universal created the expectation that the transfers would change the agency of the recipients, and their social capital, and together this would create a push for collective action in the form of infrastructure investments or the provision of services.

How did you experience your field visits?

In the end, I only traveled to Uganda once because of COVID-restrictions and did not take part in the data collection. This was a deliberate choice, mostly from the funding agency – they had their guidelines - and the idea was that we remained rather invisible, in order not to influence the results. I designed the survey instrument myself and attended several focus group discussions. Nonetheless, I found it difficult to understand know my role during my visit, even though it was still a positive learning opportunity. Hanne and Adriana's shared field work experience inspired me and I think that collaborating with another PhD student might have helped me find my purpose in the field. I did interact with local authorities and benefitted from the fact that these appointments were pre-planned. I will also never forget how that my laptop was stolen after arriving in a the rural area. Luckily, I kept my head cool and I can laugh

about it now – but it was quite a challenge to find a new laptop in a small village.

What is your advice for incoming PhD students?

It is an obvious one but try to have your PhD draft version ready in advance. I will share one concrete strategy that I used. During the publication process we would cut parts here, and there and an article looks quite different to a PhD chapter. I would therefore work on both versions simultaneously and already try to get a version ready that would be suitable for the final PhD. This helped me a lot. Secondly, reach out to others as much as possible. IOB is a great place to be part of, and I feel lucky to have had this opportunity and enjoyed great moments with colleagues. On the other hand, there is a lot to figure out when moving to Belgium: the administration, certain other challenges and getting to know how things work. IOB does its best to inform us of the possibilities out there, but in the end it is on us. Looking up some things in advance and reaching out to others will really help you.



This was the year 2023-2024

Diverse, intensive,
and practical



The challenging
academic environment
pushed me to critically
analyze global
development issues



The most significant change
IOB triggered in my life is a
profound appreciation for
diverse perspectives, enriching
my professional approach to
development and broadening my
personal worldview.

The most significant change IOB
brought to my life is a stronger
dedication to evidence-based
development

After 1 year in IOB, I believe
that I can be an agent of
change for development

Intense, but
transformative

Challenging, fun,
and a life-changing
experience

IOB has broadened my
worldview, deepened my
understanding of global
issues, and strengthened
my commitment to making a
positive impact in the field of
development

IOB ignited my passion for
research, inspiring me to
explore new pathways

Challenging, fun,
and a life-changing
experience





Glaister Leslie
DEM 2012 |
Jamaica - Canada

Where are you currently living? I am living in Toronto, Canada.

Where do you work? I

work for a software development company called Procore, which sells construction management technology to the people who build the world. As a Global Professional Services Advisor, I train consultants at Procore worldwide, helping them implement our technology for construction projects. My role involves training them in consulting and project management skills, as well as providing change management expertise to the organization.

Tell us more about one of the exciting projects/programmes/ideas you are currently working on.

I'm currently building a coaching practice to help executives successfully lead change within their organizations. Change is a constant and often painful process for companies, but there are ways to manage it without making employees, as I say, "cry, curse, or quit." I coach executives to achieve this. Additionally, I'm venturing into motivational speaking, both on social media and in person, focusing on the importance of compassion—toward others and ourselves.

Advice for incoming IOB students on how to make the most of their IOB experience

The most valuable lessons you will learn are from your students, not in the readings, so make time to connect with people from different countries. Be curious, ask them questions, try and understand their experiences. It's unlikely you'll ever have an opportunity like that again.



Ana Júlia França Monteiro
GOV 2015 | Brazil

Where are you currently living? I am living in Brasília, Brazil.

Where do you work? I'm currently a member of GEPEAR, a research group on Antiracist Education, at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). There, we discuss tools to promote and implement true antiracist education. Based on critical approaches to race and racism, I participated in the Course on Antiracist Education to provide teachers in the public teaching system in Rio de Janeiro with themes and tools to incorporate African and Afro-Brazilian history into the school curriculum.

Last year, I held a teaching position at the Political Science Institute, University of Brasília, where I taught Introduction to Political Science and Civil Rights in Latin America from a racial inequalities approach to undergraduate students.

Currently, I am focusing on disseminating the research I developed during my PhD. I am working on several articles for academic journals and participating in conferences, such as the Third Continental Conference on Afro-Latin American Studies 2024, held in São Paulo and organised by the Harvard Afro-Latin American Research Institute. My thesis research focused on the Transnational Black Movement in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s in Brazil and Peru, a period marked by military dictatorships when such movements were often persecuted and censored.

Tell us more about one of the exciting projects you are currently working on?

I'm currently working on publishing my thesis, "Black Articulations in Military Dictatorships: Peru and Brazil (1968-1982)," in book format.

Alumni panel



Bridget Thielens Lomo
GLOB 2022 | Belgium/
Ghana

Where are you currently living?
Currently I live in Hasselt, Belgium.

Where do you work? I work as a Trainer and Project Manager at CIFAL Flanders, an International Training Centre for Authorities and Leaders.

CIFAL Flanders is a UNITAR-affiliated center of expertise on the Sustainable Development Goals, offering training, project development, and coaching. We provide customised training through various formats, including in-company sessions, seminars, workshops, e-learning, and lectures, tailored to meet specific learning objectives and audience needs.

In my opinion, an urgent blind spot in development studies or research which should be studied extensively in the future is...

The militarisation of wildlife conservation is the topic I have chosen for my EoMP 2 and my dissertation. It is a fascinating subject, and there is a growing debate about whether the use of green militarisation is an appropriate approach to protecting and secure endangered and threatened species in protected areas in Africa.

The study aims to contribute to the memorialisation of América Ladina from the perspective of the history of the Black movement in the Americas. I investigated the articulations established by organisations and individuals, using the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas as a starting point. Mapping these networks and the debates within and around the congresses led to an analysis of the domestic contexts in Brazil and Peru between 1968 and 1982, during periods when both countries were under military dictatorship regimes. In this sense, this mapping is important for understanding the congresses as an exercise in memorialisation.

How did IOB experience affect your life or career?

Being at IOB was one of the best experiences of my life. I met wonderful colleagues from different backgrounds, and it was my first time in such an international environment. We had to study hard, but the workload was well distributed, and I truly believe I learned a lot while I was there. The diverse cultural and professional backgrounds of my peers exposed me to new perspectives.

IOB opened the doors for me to think beyond my country's reality, to recognise opportunities abroad, and to expand my understanding of the world. This experience inspired me to pursue a PhD abroad as well. I believe that an interdisciplinary approach to human rights and development studies is essential for creating a rich educational experience and applying these tools in our everyday lives. I also felt it was important to bring my own background to IOB, which is why I chose to study racism in Brazil—bringing my perspective and my country's reality to the forefront.

From Agora to Gaza: IOB students share their experience from participating in the 44-day solidarity protest



During May and June, dozens of University of Antwerp students occupied the Agora building, setting up a tent encampment in solidarity with Gaza. The occupation, which lasted for 44 days, was aimed at urging the university to terminate all collaborations with Israeli institutions. Many students joined the encampment during the daytime, amplifying the demands made by the group. In this issue of Exchange to Change, we feature interviews with two IOB students who actively participated in the event. Their perspectives offer valuable insights into the motivations and impacts of the campaign.

Lore Van Opstal, a student in Globalisation and Development and a Belgian citizen, shared her experience. *Raju*, from the Exchange to Change team, recently had a conversation with Lore about her participation in the campaign.



What motivated you to participate in the encampment event organised by the students of the University of Antwerp, and what were the key demands you hoped to achieve through this action?

Lore: My motivation to participate in the encampment stemmed from what I've learned at the Institute of Development Policy (IOB) about social justice and activism in last year. Before my time here, I never really thought about these issues in such depth. The insights I've gained have been truly eye-opening, and they've inspired me to take action.

The complexities and nuances of social issues have made me realise just how much injustice exists in the world, and I felt compelled to join the encampment to stand against it.

For me, the key demand was not so much about what the university could do directly, as I believe their capacity for action is somewhat limited. Instead, it was about raising awareness among the broader public. I wanted people to become more conscious of the violence occurring in Gaza and to recognise that this is an issue of global concern. While the university's role may be constrained, it can still make a difference, and seeing so many people concerned and taking action was meaningful to me.

How do you think the encampment has impacted public opinion - both within the university and in the wider community - regarding the situation in Gaza and the collaboration with Israeli universities?

I believe the encampment created significant awareness among university

stakeholders. It forced people to engage with the issue because it was impossible to ignore. Conversations about the situation in Gaza started happening organically, and I think that's important. In terms of public opinion, I have mixed feelings. Some people responded positively, recognizing the importance of the issue, while others reacted negatively. I think this is typical of any social event - there are always mixed reactions. Even regarding those who reacted negatively, I believe there's a silver lining. The encampment helped to bring these conversations out into the open, making people confront uncomfortable truths. There was some negative publicity, especially at the University of Ghent, but I believe any publicity can spark important discussions.

How do you respond to critics who might view the encampment or your demands as controversial or polarizing?

I understand why some people might view the encampment as controversial, but I see it differently. For me, it was a peaceful social event that provided a platform for students to voice their concerns. The university didn't have a structured way for us to raise these issues, so the encampment became that space for dialogue. It might not have been the most comfortable or ideal setting, but it gave us a place to gather, discuss the issue, and express our views.

The situation in Gaza is inherently polarizing, much more so than our actions on campus. That polarisation motivated me to participate because I believe it's important to talk about these difficult issues. Those who see it as polarizing might be uncomfortable with the conversation itself, but I felt it was necessary to address these concerns openly.

What personal experiences or insights have you gained from participating in the encampment, and how have they influenced your views on activism and social justice? Did you engage in similar kinds of social or other activism before?

Participating in the encampment made me reflect deeply on what it takes to enact change. When the conflict in

Gaza escalated, I felt frustrated and helpless, wondering what could be done. I found myself shouting at home, trying to process the horror of what was happening. Joining the campaign gave me an outlet, a place where I could make my voice heard, even if it was just through a slogan. It was empowering to be part of something larger than myself.

One of the most cherished memories I have from the encampment is the sense of community. I wasn't alone; we were there like a big family, united by a common cause. This experience reinforced my belief in the power of collective action.

In 2017, I participated in a climate change march in Brussels that was organised worldwide. That event was a turning point for me, showing me that social action can be a powerful tool for raising awareness and demanding change. Living in a society where the general belief is that change should come from the government, I've realised that we, too, have a role to play. This past year has been transformative for me, and I'm determined to continue engaging in activism in the future. Although I'm just one person, I know I'm not alone, and that feeling of connectivity is something we desperately need in our society.

Mohammed Norul Alam Raju, a student in Globalisation and Development and a Bangladeshi citizen, shared his experience. Ha Tran, from the Exchange to Change team, recently had a conversation with Raju about his participation in the campaign.



What motivated you to participate in the encampment event organised by the students of the University of Antwerp, and what were the key demands you

hoped to achieve through this action?

Raju: On 7 October last year, Israel's response in Gaza, following the horrific attack by Hamas, deeply affected me. Witnessing the widespread violence and the vulnerability of civilians left me feeling saddened and frustrated. Seeking a way to express my feelings, I decided to join the protests, eventually participating in the "Antwerp for Palestine" campaign, which aims to stop wars not only in Gaza but around the world.

Through this campaign, my primary goal is to connect with people from different cultural backgrounds to protest against war and the killing of children, wherever it is in the world. I believe this movement can help raise awareness among the stakeholders in Antwerp and beyond, potentially reaching a wider community. Additionally, I hope it will pressure the Belgian government to influence Israel to end the conflict.

How do you think the encampment has impacted public opinion, both within the university and in the wider community, regarding the situation in Gaza and collaboration with Israeli universities?

During the encampment days, I noticed that many strangers came to the event at Agora and joined in. Some passersby took the time to read all the posters and brochures displayed on the walls. The media covered the event, and many students participated in the side events organised as part of the campaign. These activities significantly helped raise awareness among stakeholders at various levels. One day, during a discussion session at Agora, a man suddenly came in and told us about how he disagreed with the campaign. He argued that Hamas is a terrorist organisation and that Israel's actions were justified. We respected his opinion and engaged in a conversation with him.

Throughout the encampment, I had many casual chats about the wars happening in different parts of the world. I believe these conversations and efforts will have a long-term impact, helping to make the world a safer place.

How do you respond to critics who might view the encampment or your demands

as controversial or polarizing?

That's an interesting question. I had several conversations with my classmates, some of whom didn't attend the encampment but supported the cause, and some of whom disagreed. They had valid points, and it led me to think more deeply about our efforts. I often asked, "What can we all do to make the world a better place?" On an individual level, can we come together under a common cause and raise our voices to say we don't want war anymore? From that perspective, was the encampment wrong? What else could we have done? Why can't we push for peace from our side? Not just from the perspective of Israel or Gaza, but finding common ground to stand against war. That's my argument.

What personal experiences or insights have you gained from participating in the encampment, and how have they influenced your views on activism and social justice? Had you engaged in similar kinds of social or other activism before?

I was fascinated to see how a group of people from different countries and cultures came together for a common cause. The dedication and diversity of perspectives on a shared platform were truly inspiring. The organisers also took a systematic approach in their dialogue with the university administration, engaging them in the cause, which was a valuable learning experience for me.

I've been an activist since my undergraduate years in Bangladesh, participating in various campaigns and movements on different issues, both in person and virtually. So, while attending this campaign wasn't new to me, it was inspiring and refreshing to do so in a new environment.



IOB - University of Antwerp
Lange St.-Annastraat 7
2000 Antwerp

Tel +32 (0)3 265 57 70

e-mail:

iob@uantwerp.be

website:

<https://www.uantwerp.be/iob>

Find us on **Facebook:** IOBANTWERP

Follow us on **Twitter:** @IOBUA

lay-out: Joëlle Dhondt



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