

ISS BLOG  
**blISS**

**THE BIRTHDAY ISSUE**

**October 2023**





# **CELEBRATING SIX YEARS OF SOCIAL IMPACT**

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# THE BLISS TEAM

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# EDITOR'S LETTER

It is difficult to believe that Bliss is six years old. Yet it also isn't — I can clearly recall key moments in the past six years that remind me that we've come very far and that much has been done to get Bliss where it is today. The first lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic was one such moment that catapulted Bliss to its current shape, namely a platform that is recognized as one of several ways in which to increase the impact of our research activities on the contexts in which we're embedded and on the people we conduct research with and for.

Over the past six years, Bliss has become a fully functional and institutionally embedded platform for talking about more than just research. It has been widely used to communicate ideas, activities and insights of researchers and students alike who work at ISS or are linked to the institute in one way or another. I have edited a great range of articles that include those communicating (1) substantiated/evidenced opinions or views of key global, national, and local developments, (2) lessons from conducting research in novel or transformative ways, (3) newly launched research projects or programmes and the objectives and importance of these, and (4) summaries of discussions found in research publications, seminars, workshops, and conference presentations.

These articles show that the researchers behind the research *matter*. It's not simply about producing and presenting knowledge but, quite crucially, about the *process* of producing knowledge and the implications of the knowledge. Blog articles have shown what happens behind the scenes, because researchers obviously do a lot more than simply conduct research. They attend conferences. They publish things. They give public talks, write for newspapers, participate in protests and, most of all, think about many things, including what they're doing and how the academe and the field of development studies is changing (or isn't) and what this means. And they dream of new ways to do things that challenge the status quo. Of alternative futures.

I am particularly pleased to notice that more PhD researchers and students have been writing for Bliss. I commend especially those people for whom English is a second or third language or who don't have much experience blogging. One of my missions as editor of Bliss — and something I am very passionate about — is working with authors to help them become better at blogging. When editing submitted articles, I therefore strive to motivate changes I make to articles and provide advice on how to present arguments or ideas.

Linked to this, an objective for the coming year is to spend even more time working with authors on their writing and blogging skills, not only when editing articles to publish on Bliss but also through skills-sharing workshops. The academic blogging workshop forming part of this year's Development Dialogue PhD conference will hopefully be the first of many I give at and beyond ISS.

To conclude, Bliss has been immensely important in showing who the researchers are behind the research being conducted at ISS, particularly what they care about, what they're doing, and how they hope to make a difference in the world. My hope is that in the coming year, even more people will recognize the power of such research communications platforms in moving beyond the one-way communication of research results and outcomes toward an ongoing, collaborative dialogue about the world we live and work in.

*Lize Swartz*

**Editor**



**Bliss has grown exponentially in the past six years, becoming a popular platform for researchers and students to communicate those parts of research beyond research results: inspiring ideas, insightful opinions, and everyday discussions and developments. It signifies a move toward greater social impact.**

**At Bliss, we don't like using metrics to measure the performance of people, but statistics are useful for showing how Bliss has grown and the important role it plays within the ISS.**

**420**

**TOTAL POSTS**

**128,000+**

**TOTAL VISITORS**

**230,000+**

**TOTAL VIEWS**

**IN THE PAST SIX YEARS\***

**\*BY 15 OCT 2023**

**482**

**subscribers**

**701**

**Facebook followers**

**776**

**Twitter/X followers**

**184 NEW**

**LinkedIn followers**

# OUR TOP POSTS OF ALL TIME\*

1

## Germany is a deeply racist country—stop pretending otherwise

BY JOSEPHINE VALESKE

While Germany has been lauded for agreeing to take in 1,700 refugees from refugee camp Moria that recently burned to the ground, the country has been cited as a role model for its rational, yet humane stance toward refugees ever since it took in more than one million people in a single year during Europe's so-called 'refugee crisis'. However, within the country a different type of crisis is brewing—one characterized by deep structural and societal racism. Only if Germany and international observers shake the deceptive perception of the country as 'welcoming', change can finally happen, writes Josephine Valeske.

1 OCTOBER 2020



# 2

## **Ecuador, COVID-19 and the IMF: how austerity exacerbated the crisis**

BY ANA LUCÍA BADILLO SALGADO AND ANDREW M. FISCHER

**Ecuador is currently (as of 8 April) the South American country worst affected by COVID-19 in terms of the number of confirmed cases and fatalities per capita. While even the universal health systems of Northern European countries are becoming severely frayed by the nature of this pandemic, Ecuador serves as a powerful example of how much worse the situation is for many low- and middle-income countries, particularly those whose public health systems have already been undermined by financial assistance programmes with international financial institutions (IFIs). The IMF and other IFIs such as the World Bank must acknowledge the role they have played and continue to play in undermining public health systems in ways that exacerbate the effects of the pandemic in many developing countries.**

**9 APRIL 2020**

# 3

## **COVID-19 and the ‘collapse’ of the Philippines’ agricultural sector: a double disaster**

BY CYNTHIA EMBIDO BEJENO

The enduring COVID-19 pandemic has led to a sharp spike in hunger among Filipinos resulting from an extended lockdown in this Southeast Asian country. This is driven in part by its problematic trade policy based largely on food imports and fluctuating global food prices. For those who also have to deal with the financial repercussions of the lockdown, increasing hunger due to poorer food availability along with increased poverty thus form a double disaster. Without the government’s immediate promotion and prioritisation of local food production and sustainable agricultural development, this could lead to even more widespread and severe hunger during and long after the pandemic.

**30 APRIL 2021**

# 4

## Understanding epistemic diversity: decoloniality as research strategy

BY OLIVIA U. RUTAZIBWA

How do we make sure that our efforts to diversify knowledge production go beyond a window-dressing/Benetton operation? How can we move beyond merely adding some colour and other markers of 'diversity' to existing structures—a move that too neatly serves the neoliberal project embedded in our institutions, and their related unquenchable thirst for all that looks new, 'shiny' and exciting? I propose that an explicit decolonial engagement with epistemic diversity is one of the ways to productively address and navigate these challenges of co-optation and commodification.

**4 JULY 2018**

# 5

## **Emergency sexwork: should NGOs recognize transactional sex as livelihood strategy?**

BY DOROTHEA HILHORST

Transactional sex is a widespread reality in humanitarian crises, and one of the strategies that many people use to secure their livelihoods. Dorothea Hilhorst argues that humanitarian agencies, instead of ignoring this reality or understanding it solely as a form of sexual violence should rethink their view on the issue.

**27 OCTOBER 2017**

# 6

## Fighting racism and decolonizing humanitarian studies: toward mindful scholarship

BY DOROTHEA HILHORST

Addressing racism and decolonizing humanitarian studies is urgent, and as scholars we need to step up our efforts. Partnerships between scholars and conflict-affected communities are as unequal as ever, and the disparities between humanitarian studies in the global North and global South remain large. Dorothea Hilhorst here introduces the importance of localization in humanitarian studies that will be discussed in an upcoming workshop on 20 August, highlighting the need for equal partnerships and meaningful participation, as well as continuous debate to move beyond quick fixes in addressing structural and persistent inequalities.

**18 AUGUST 2020**

# 7

## Moria's male refugees need help just as much as anyone else

BY DOROTHEA HILHORST

The recent fire that razed refugee camp Moria in Greece has left around 13,000 refugees homeless and fleeing once again — this time to an unknown destination where they hope to find safety at most, or temporary shelter at the least. While humanitarian aid organizations have scrambled to provide aid to the destitute refugees and Europe's leaders have assumed a cold and calculating approach, it seems that refugee men are being forgotten. Dorothea Hilhorst argues that all refugees, regardless of age or gender, should be helped and that the plight of young men, who are often not considered 'real' refugees, should also be highlighted.

**18 SEPTEMBER 2020**



# 8

## What determines societal relevance?

BY ROY HUIJSMANS AND ELYSE MILLS

**An external committee found that the ISS's research is highly societally relevant, but what does that really mean, and what determines it? Here four broad questions guide us toward a better understanding of societal relevance and impact to contribute toward an ongoing conversation on the topic within the ISS community. We find that the complexity and contingencies of societal relevance in relation to research must be appreciated before attempting to develop a methodological framework for measuring it.**

**10 JANUARY 2019**

# 9

## **Why virtual sex work hasn't helped sex workers in India survive the COVID-19 lockdown**

BY BIRENDRA SINGH AND CHITRAKSHI VASHISHT

Virtual sex work, although around for many years, has become an alternative to traditional sex work during the global COVID-19 pandemic. In India, like elsewhere, sex workers due to a strict lockdown and the limiting of their movements have turned to virtual sex work to earn a living. Yet it has not become a viable solution for many due to a number of challenges the workers face when resorting to this type of sex work, write Birendra Singh and Chitракshi Vashisht.

22 JANUARY 2021



# 10

## Back to basics: embracing frugality in high-resource contexts and beyond

BY BIRENDRA SINGH

The use of rather rudimentary wicker shields by Dutch police during recent anti-lockdown protests is surprising given the availability of resources in the Netherlands to invest in more high-tech protection gear. This act of frugality in a context where it isn't considered 'necessary' can help us better understand frugality as a strategic choice and supports the argument for the need to embrace frugality at an institutional level, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**14 APRIL 2021**

# THE BLISS TEAM

BLISS IS SUPPORTED BY A COMMITTED TEAM OF PEOPLE WHO EACH PLAY AN INTEGRAL PART IN KEEPING THE BLOG RUNNING. HERE'S WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO.

**LIZE SWARTZ**  
EDITOR



The blog editor ensures that articles submitted to Bliss are written in an accessible, understandable, and interesting way. Our blog editor Lize works *with* authors throughout the editorial process to help them develop blogging skills that are crucial in a world where time is limited and information overload is a reality.

**EZINNE ANINWE**  
BLOG MANAGER



The blog manager coordinates the blog editing process, ensuring that submitted articles are reviewed, edited, scheduled for publication, and shared on social media. Our blog manager Ezinne besides keeping things running smoothly is constantly sourcing new articles and thinking of new ways to make Bliss known at ISS and beyond.

**ALL ARTICLES  
PUBLISHED ON BLISS GO  
THROUGH A RIGOROUS  
EDITING PROCESS.  
HERE'S HOW WE GET  
ARTICLES READY FOR  
PUBLICATION.**

# **THE EDITING PROCESS**

**AUTHOR SUBMITS ARTICLE  
TO BLOG MANAGER**

**1**

**2**

**BLOG EDITOR DETERMINES  
DEPTH OF EDITING NEEDED**

**ARTICLE IS SENT TO EB  
MEMBER TO REVIEW**

**3**

**4**

**EB MEMBER REVIEWS  
ARTICLE FOR CONTENT**

**EDITOR REVIEWS AND  
ADJUSTS ARTICLE**

**5**

**6**

**AUTHOR CHECKS  
ADJUSTMENTS**

**AUTHOR RESUBMITS  
ARTICLE**

**7**

**8**

**EDITOR REVIEWS  
ADJUSTED ARTICLE**

**STEPS 5 TO 8 MAY BE  
REPEATED UNTIL THE  
ARTICLE IS READY**



# WRITE FOR BLISS

**DO YOU HAVE IDEAS RELATED TO YOUR RESEARCH (FIELD), HAVE A BURNING QUESTION, OR HAVE THOUGHTS ABOUT SOMETHING THAT'S HAPPENING AT ACADEMIA OR IN THE FIELD OF DEVELOPMENT? WRITE FOR US! EMAIL OUR BLOG MANAGER AT [BLISS@ISS.NL](mailto:BLISS@ISS.NL) FOR THE BLOGGING GUIDELINES.**



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