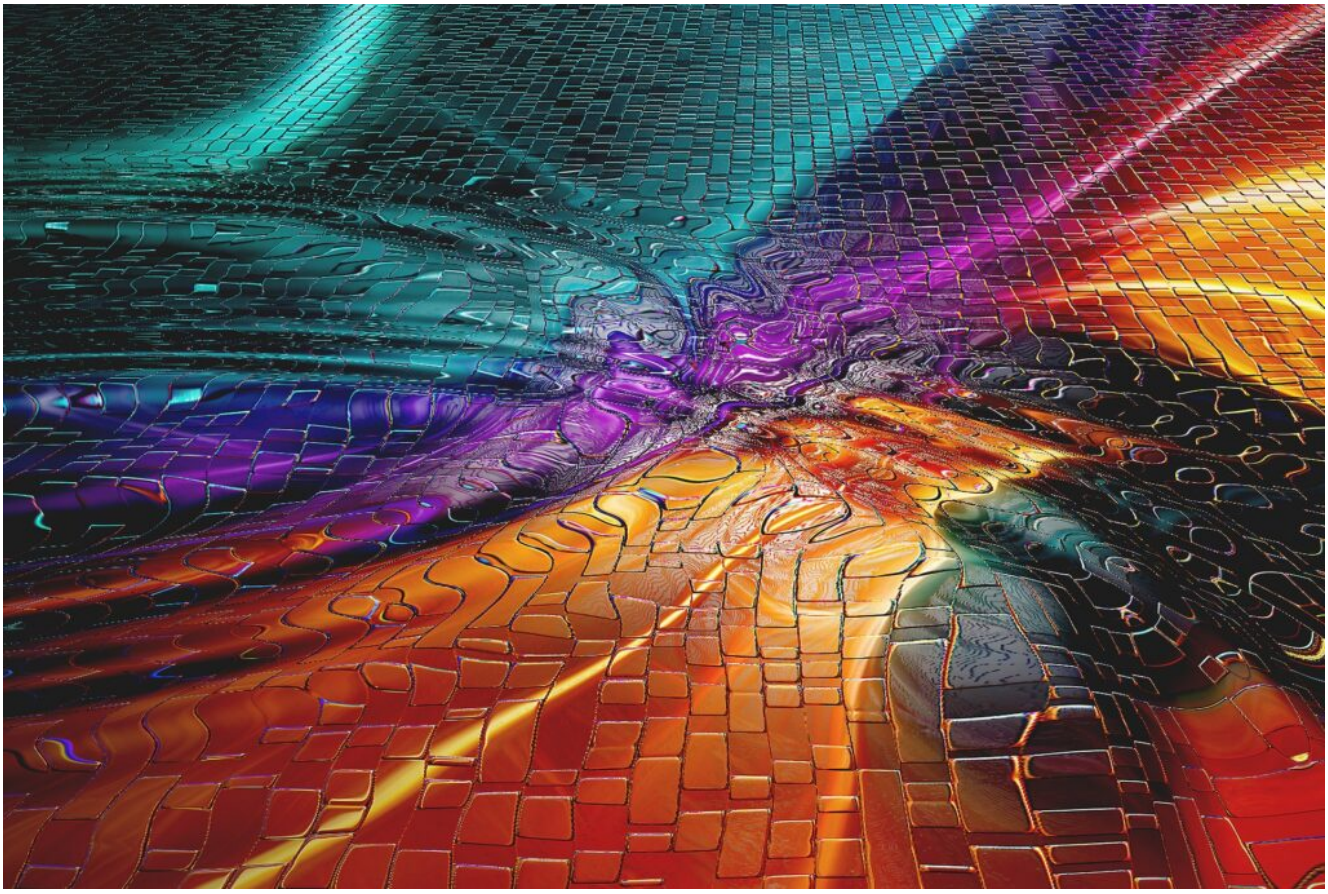
Decolonising Economic Geography



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The movement to decolonise science has left economic geography behind (Cox and Evenhuis, 2020), prompting questions about the discipline's inherent biases, relationship with knowledge creation, and role in perpetuating colonial legacies. But how do we even start thinking of decolonising a discipline whose historical roots and evolution are deeply intertwined with white, northern, western, Anglo-Saxon, and male perspectives (Pollard *et al.*, 2009; Pugh, 2018; Rosenman, Loomis and Kay, 2020)? Furthermore, with all the prefixes that continue to emerge to position ourselves within one or another strand of the discipline, is decolonial economic geography another prefix to be added to the list?

Geography itself is acknowledged as a colonial discipline, having played a significant role in imperialistic exploration, mapping, and territorial control

(Laing, 2021). To decolonise economic geography, we must critically examine the discipline's role in reinforcing colonial structures and narratives perpetuating power imbalances and a Eurocentric worldview. In this paper, I set out to argue that decolonising economic geography is an imperative that is better addressed not as another strand or school of thought but as a transversal principle that cuts across the discipline and challenges how we contribute to its progress.

The imperative of decolonisation

Decoloniality is a concept and a movement that challenges universalised Western modes of thought and systems of knowledge. It seeks to move away from Eurocentrism by focusing on recovering 'alternative' or non-Eurocentric ways of knowing (Walsh, 2018). Decoloniality builds upon rejecting monoculturalism and celebrating epistemic diversity. It is not limited to formerly colonised spaces; instead, it can be applied to broaden critical thinking, challenging how we, as researchers and teachers, search and reproduce knowledge (Mignolo and Escobar, 2010). It invites us to imagine a world where various perspectives can coexist, recognising that knowledge is multiple and can't be constructed with just one approach (Mignolo, 2011).

Decolonising economic geography raises profound theoretical, methodological, and pedagogic challenges, along with acknowledging the geopolitics of knowledge production and appropriation (Radcliffe and Radhuber, 2020). Thus, as Gradin has suggested while analysing the notion of value in global value chains (Gradin, 2016), we can start by borrowing two key analytical tools: i) the rejection of economism or the assumption that the economy is separated from other social forces, and ii) the rejection of totalising narratives that privilege Western rationality as the only valid mode of building knowledge (Quijano, 2000; Gradin, 2016).

Rejecting economism

Development, modernity and economic growth have been at the core of economic geography. These intertwined concepts have been defined and reproduced according to the experiences of the core regions in the Global North, and continue to prevail in economic geography (Bakker, 2012; Schulz and Bailey, 2014; Donald and Gray, 2019), even at a time where economic growth has

become a threat to human societies (Rockstrom *et al.*, 2009). According to Europe's recipe, development and modernity have been pursued and imposed following a Rostowian path of industrialisation, investment and productivity (Escobar, 1995; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021b). This perspective did not change with the rolling out of neoliberalism; rather, 'renovated' recipes created in the Global North were imposed over the Global South with the use of violence and repression in many cases (Goldstein, 2012; Gago, 2015; Svampa, 2017). The idea of modernity continues to reinforce colonial perspectives, wherein the global majority can only seek progress according to predefined models instead of seeking endogenous pathways. Economic geography can reinforce this worldview by supporting policy interventions to attract foreign investment, knowledge, and technology without enhancing local resources and potential. These approaches often prioritise economic values, making the economy and not the communities the focal point of those policies.

The idea of modernity sustains unequal development dynamics and perpetuates the global economic divide. 'Underdeveloped' regions are assigned the role of suppliers of raw materials, while other 'developed' regions are designated to purchase, transform, and sell those resources. A current example of these dynamics can be found in the green transition, strongly marked by discourses of modernisation (Bailey, Gouldson and Newell, 2011; Morales, 2021; Alkhalili, Dajani and Mahmoud, 2023). Critical geographers have shown how the greening of certain regions is achieved at the expense of others. The materials to fuel the green transition are extracted from peripheral areas deemed unproductive to capitalist lenses, often in the global south (Bustos-Gallardo, Bridge and Prieto, 2021; Soto Hernandez and Newell, 2022; Andreucci *et al.*, 2023).

Critical geographers, notably David Harvey, have highlighted the spatial unevenness of the global economy. Uneven development is a core concept in economic geography (Harvey, 2006; Peck, Werner and Jones, 2023). However, the Marxist foundations of uneven development emerged as anticapitalist struggles, while '*anticolonial struggles are defined by racism… anticapitalist struggles are defined by classism… and emphasize the working class (proletarian and peasant) but are not specifically concerned with occidentalism*' (Mignolo, 2011:21; see also Bhambra and Holmwood, 2021).

Rejecting totalising narratives

Knowledge and theorising are embedded in time and space; hence, geographers are well-positioned to unravel the contextual circumstances in which knowledge and theoretical development emerge. However, with a few notable exceptions (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020), diverse forms of understanding and organising local and regional economies, including the ways in which those are intertwined with social practices and dynamics, are rarely acknowledged and used to theorise in economic geography. This often means privileging industrial and capitalist development as opposed to endorsing other livelihood forms, such as communally owned production or non-monetary exchange (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Decolonising economic geography involves acknowledging that various forms of economic and social exchanges are interconnected, coexisting simultaneously in the same space and time. These exchanges are integral to regional socio-economic dynamics, and no one should be privileged when theorising and explaining spatial phenomena.

Rejecting totalising narratives also implies recognising a relationship with nature beyond the language of resources, monetary value, endowments, and property. Narratives of transition (the green transition, sustainability transitions, bioeconomy, etc.) are becoming prominent in economic geography research (e.g. Grillitsch and Hansen, 2019; Steinböck and Trippl, 2023). Yet, there is not a fluid conversation with ideas of degrowth, transition initiatives, debates on the Anthropocene, postdevelopment, Buen Vivir, and the rights of nature (some exceptions are Schulz and Bailey, 2014; Bell, 2017; Schmid, 2019). While some transition narratives advocate for a shift away from modern dualist, reductionist, and anthropocentric perspectives, the mainstream of economic geography remains rather focused on accounts of modernity and industrialisation.

Decolonising economic geography requires critical reflection and a commitment to inclusivity. It also implies having uncomfortable conversations to confront its colonial legacy, challenge unconscious biases, and actively engage with diverse perspectives. From revising curricula to transforming citation practices, we play a crucial role in shaping a discipline that advocates for equitable and inclusive futures.

Conclusions

Challenging Western paradigms of knowledge and knowledge construction does not imply rejecting them, rather, it means recognising that Western science is not the only way of knowing, and that there are different forms of knowledge that are valid for different purposes. Our work is to question what kind of knowledge we seek and for what purposes; for example, Western science has taken us to the moon, but it probably won't solve the environmental crisis (de Sousa Santos, 2016).

The question of decoloniality provides different avenues. First, making visible 'other ways' of knowing. It means opening up our curriculums and research to other bodies of knowledge and geographies embracing epistemic diversity. It also means recognising that knowledge (the one we absorb and reproduce) is constructed within a context and embedded in time and space, in specific cultures, ideologies and political views (geography matters). Finally, it also means engaging with authors, academics and activists beyond our current circles (Radcliffe and Radhuber, 2020). This will not only enrich our worldviews and theoretical contributions but also prevent us from appropriating knowledge and claiming novelty and 'discovery' over knowledge built by others (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021a). Second, it challenges the idea of totalism, that is, supporting, enforcing, and allowing the expression of one cultural, ethnic, social, or religious group to the exclusion of others. Totalism encourages assimilation, where members outside this dominant group may be expected to adopt its behaviours and practices (Mignolo, 2011; Walsh, 2018). In economic geography, this is best seen through the idea of modernity and the concepts of development and growth.

Embracing decoloniality as a transversal principle for economic geography is key to addressing inherent biases and avoiding perpetuating colonial legacies. In rejecting economism, decolonial economic geography confronts the discipline's historical focus on development, modernity, and economic growth, predominantly shaped by experiences in the Global North. This perspective has sustained colonial viewpoints, reinforcing predefined models of progress and perpetuating unequal development dynamics. Decoloniality as a transversal principle also uncovers the need to theorise recognising diverse forms of understanding and organising local and regional economies, rejecting totalising narratives and recognising a relationship with nature beyond economistic language.

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