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Decolonizing Development Studies: Rejecting or Repurposing the Master's Tools?

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Abstract

Focusing on the project of decolonizing Development Studies, this thought piece reflects on tensions between Decolonial Studies and the critical political-economy of Development, known as Critical Development Studies. It highlights the divergent approaches to addressing epistemic inequalities between these two streams of Development thinking, demonstrating that Critical Development Studies has a longer history of valorising development knowledge from the Global South, and a focus on the need to address structural as well as epistemic inequalities. The analysis challenges the palliative cultural focus of Decolonial Studies and exposes its vulnerability to neoliberal capture at the epistemic and the political levels in ways that risk perpetuating colonial subordination. With examples from the African context, this thought piece argues that Critical Development Studies advances a more transformative approach to decolonizing Development Studies through its emphasis on the role of epistemic recognition as part of the wider objective of material redistribution.

Keywords Development Studies · Decoloniality · Decolonisation · Epistemic inequality · Structural transformation · Redistribution

Résumé

Se concentrant sur le projet de décolonisation des études de développement, ce texte de réflexion met en lumière les tensions entre les études décoloniales et l'économie politique critique du développement, connue sous le nom d'études de développement critiques. Il souligne les approches divergentes pour aborder les inégalités épistémiques entre ces deux courants de pensée du développement, démontrant que les études de développement critiques ont une histoire plus longue de valorisation des connaissances sur le développement provenant du Sud global, et un accent sur la nécessité de traiter les inégalités structurelles ainsi que les inégalités épistémiques. L'analyse remet en question l'accent culturel palliatif des études décoloniales, et ex-

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pose sa vulnérabilité à la capture néolibérale aux niveaux épistémique et politique de manière qui risque de perpétuer la subordination coloniale. Avec des exemples du contexte africain, ce texte de réflexion soutient que les études de développement critiques proposent une approche plus transformatrice pour décoloniser les études de développement grâce à son accent sur le rôle de la reconnaissance épistémique dans le cadre de l'objectif plus large de redistribution matérielle.

Introduction

In recent years, demands to decolonize development curricula have gained momentum amid the growing influence of Decolonial Studies and the explosive effects of the Rhodes Must Fall campaign and the Black Lives Matter movement. The rising decolonial tide has challenged the knowledge systems, historical representations, and policy priorities associated with the field of Development Studies. While the legitimacy of mainstream Development Studies has been shaken, the contemporary decolonial turn has tended to obscure the fact that a long-standing critical stream of Development Studies has been decolonizing development knowledge and practice since the rise of Dependency Theory in the 1960s, if not before. The real question however is not whether a given strain of Development Studies advances the decolonization of development knowledge, but whether particular approaches to decolonizing development knowledge advance the actual decolonization of the structures shaping development outcomes.

In order to reflect on how various strands of Development Studies have engaged with processes of decolonization at the epistemic and the structural levels, it is necessary to distinguish different variants of development thinking and different processes of knowledge decolonization. This thought piece will reflect on the distinctive approaches to decolonization evident in the critical political-economy variant conventionally referred to as Critical Development Studies,[1] and the 'post-development' variant originally known as Postcolonial Studies or Decolonial Studies.[2] In what follows, the term Critical Development Studies will be used for the former, and Decolonial Studies for the latter, with a view to avoiding confusion as well as a need to challenge recent efforts to rebrand Critical Development studies as old school, and Decolonial Studies as the new frontier of critical development thinking.[3] I will argue in this thought piece that Critical Development Studies has a long-standing

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[1] Veltmeyer, H., & Bowles, P. (Eds.). (2022). *The essential guide to critical development studies*. London: Routledge; see also the Routledge and the Practical Action Publishing 'Critical Development Studies' book series.

[2] E.g. Falola, T. (2023). *Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and African Decolonial Studies*. Taylor & Francis, the Taylor and Francis journal *Postcolonial Studies* (https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/cpcs20), or the Pluto Press book series 'Decolonial Studies, Postcolonial Horizons (https://www.plutobooks.com/pluto-series/decolonial-studies-postcolonial-horizons/).

[3] The terms 'Critical Development Studies' and 'Decolonial Studies' being used here map onto what have been called 'Classical' Development Studies and (somewhat inelegantly) 'Post-Development' Development Studies in Andrew Sumner's (2024) recent typology of contemporary variants of the field. Sumner's characterization of 'Classical Development Studies' as primarily focused on middle income

focus on the decolonization of development at the global as well as the national level, focusing on dismantling structures of inequality as well as promoting structural transformation.

Important disciplinary differences explain the distinctive approaches to decolonization between these two schools of Development thinking. Decolonial Studies, emerging from Anthropology, Philosophy and other humanities disciplines, frames colonial oppression in terms of cultural and epistemic power. Conversely, Critical Development Studies, arising from the critical side of a range of social sciences disciplines, espouses a more structural and institutional understanding of power, grounded in states, economies, and social systems. While Decolonial Studies focuses on freeing Development thinking of the blinders of Orientalism and Eurocentrism, Critical Development Studies sees knowledge systems as only part of a wider process of dismantling material structures of oppression.

In what follows, I will consider how recent attention to epistemic decolonization in Decolonial Studies has obscured deeper decolonizing processes embedded in Critical Development Studies in ways that risk undermining rather than promoting decolonizing objectives. I will focus on three issues relating to the interaction of epistemic and structural decolonization and their implications for transformative rather than performative change. These involve.

1. contrasting the Decolonial approach to decolonizing knowledge with long-standing forms of knowledge decolonization inherent in Critical Development Studies.
2. reflecting on how the radical rejection of Eurocentrism creates vulnerabilities to neoliberal capture and a tendency to perpetuate colonial structures of domination.
3. considering how more materially grounded approaches to decolonizing development knowledge manifest in Critical Development Studies can also promote the decolonization of structures and institutions, fostering more autonomous trajectories of development in the countries of the Global South.

Ultimately, I argue that by linking epistemic and structural-institutional analysis, Critical Development Studies advances a more transformative approach to decolonizing development. Using examples from developing countries and drawing on Nancy Fraser's (1995) rubric of redistribution and recognition, I will show that Critical Development Studies turns epistemic recognition into a tool for advancing material redistribution through a commitment to institutional as well as theoretical innovation grounded in the realities and priorities of the Global South. By contrast, the Decolonial project of redressing the devaluation of non-Western cultures offers only 'affirmative' remedies to development injustices, which offer the

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Footnote 3 (continued)

countries of Asia and Latin America is strongly disputed given a long-standing focus in this development stream on low as well as middle-income African countries, as evident in the work of Critical Development scholars such as Thandika Mkandawire, Christopher Cramer, and some of the early career scholars involved in this special issue. I would also count myself among those in Critical Development Studies who focus on low- as well as middle-income African contexts, and on global as well as national processes.

balm of recognition, but do little to redress the deep structures that generate material disadvantage.

Beyond Eurocentrism: Epistemic Decolonization

Decolonial critiques raise legitimate concerns about the Eurocentrism of the International Development mainstream, which Andrew Sumner (2024) has identified in a recent typology of Development Studies as the 'Aid-Fragility-Conflict' and 'Global Development' approaches, both associated with the 'Development Industry' and supportive of mainstream development agendas like the MDGs and SDGs. Unfortunately, Decolonial scholars have a tendency to tar all forms of development thinking with the same brush. In contrast to the heirs of Truman's neo-colonial approach to development, Critical Development Studies has always been a strong advocate of the decolonization of development knowledge, but has done so through engagement with Southern rather than rejection of Western knowledge. While Decolonial scholars are more concerned with cleansing development thinking of Eurocentric influences, Critical Development Studies focuses on incorporating Southern perspectives into the heart of development thinking. As noted by Olufemi Taiwo (2022), Decolonial efforts to challenge Eurocentric thinking tend to throw out the baby with the bath water. Decolonial scholars are left with a somewhat romantic and ahistorical approach to Southern epistemologies and a weak appreciation of the material dimensions of subordination, seriously limiting their decolonizing potential.

From Epistemic Cleansing to Critical Analysis

To be fair, Decolonial Studies starts from an important concern. Parting ways with Trumanite development thinking, Decolonial scholars draw on the Post-Structuralist thought of Michel Foucault (1980), Arturo Escobar (1995), and others to highlight the limitations of Orientalist and Eurocentric development perspectives. They challenge the universalist 'One-worldism' of Western framings of development, and seek to validate counter-hegemonic approaches based on a 'pluriverse' of community perspectives and indigenous knowledge systems from the Global South. There are calls for a more inclusive engagement with indigenous, communally grounded expertise, such as traditional medicine or agricultural knowledge, and a recognition of pre-colonial scholarly institutions, such as Islamic education in West Africa or Ethiopian monastic schools (de Souza Santos 2015; Abidogun and Falola 2020; Woldegiorgis 2021). Attention is also directed to indigenous notions of development and well-being, including the Latin American concept of 'Buen Vivir,' the Southern African 'Ubuntu,' and the Indian notion of 'Swaraj' (Ziai 2017; Demaria and Kothari 2020; Schoeneberg 2021).

Critical Development Studies shares many of the reservations of Decolonial scholars about the limitations of mainstream development knowledge and the importance of engaging with Southern institutions and perspectives. Indeed, Critical Development scholars have been active in decolonizing development

knowledge since the era of Latin American Structuralists, Early Development Economics, and the rise of Dependency Theory in the 1950s and 1960s, giving rise to strong critiques of the evolutionist, 'modernizationist' and methodologically nationalist framings of mainstream development thinking (Kay 1991; Fischer 2019). Critiques of One-Worldism have also been standard fare for decades, as exemplified by Albert Hirschman's (1981) critique of 'mono-economics,' repeated repudiation of the one-size-fits-all policies associated with neoliberal market reforms; and critiques by Evans (2004) and Mkandawire (2012) of the imposition of Anglo-American institutions on developing countries through a process of 'institutional monocropping.' Critical Development thinking has also involved a long-standing emphasis on the legacies of colonialism to expose how subordination and inequality have become woven into contemporary development structures. It also examines how indigenous institutions have been distorted in the process (Davis 2002; Habib 1975; Mamdani 1996). In fact, the damaging impact of colonialism on indigenous institutions through indirect rule, informalization, and social marginalization raises serious questions about their pristine character and suitability for decolonial revival.

As for resisting Eurocentrism and revalorising Southern knowledge, Critical Development scholars routinely challenge mainstream development thinking through a commitment to theory grounded in local realities, prioritizing extensive fieldwork and engagement with scholars and practitioners from the Global South. Southern scholars are central players in the pantheon of Critical Development Studies, posing continuous challenges to mainstream development thinking. Dependency Theory, which came out of Latin America, upended the Eurocentric framing of Modernization Theory; the political settlements approach developed by Mushtaq Khan reconfigured the Good Governance approach of the Post-Washington Consensus; and the Transformative Social Policy perspective developed by the development economist Thandika Mkandawire is at the center of an illuminating counternarrative to the neoliberal development agenda (Adésínà 2020; Kay 1991; Khan 2012; UNRISD 2016). All of these important innovations emerged from thinkers born and raised in the Global South.

The very term 'Eurocentrism,' coined by the Egyptian economist, Samir Amin, focuses on the need to demystify, not reject, Western development theory. In fact, Amin routinely adapted Western theory to Southern realities, forging more effective theoretical tools to decipher and dismantle the mechanisms of subordination within conventional development thinking and practice (Amin 1989; Kvangraven 2019). What makes Development scholarship non-Eurocentric is not the absence of Western ideas, but the innovative appropriation of ideas from the Global North and South to better address Southern concerns and development needs (Taiwo 2022; Kamata 2020)—as many Decolonial scholars themselves might recognize in the face of their own engagement with the ideas of Western scholars such as Foucault, Gramsci, Marx, and Wallerstein. Taiwo's (2022) musical analogy seems apt here, in which he explains that Yoruba musicians have used Western instruments to produce a uniquely Yoruba musical genre called Juju. Just as Africans can appropriate Western musical influences to produce authentically African music, such as Juju, African jazz or Afrobeat, scholars from the Global South can appropriate Western theory in

the service of South-centric perspectives that open space for more autonomous paths of development.

Sources of Decolonized Knowledge

Despite these reservations, the Decolonial project of valorising Southern voices and engaging with alternative cultural and institutional arrangements has re-energized critical thinking about development. Yet decolonization of Development requires a more nuanced reflection on how decolonized knowledge is produced, and by whom. Should all Southern voices be treated as sources of critical alternative knowledge? How do power differences between Southern research assistants, indigenous knowledge practitioners, and seasoned Southern development scholars shape the decolonizing effects of collaboration with Northern scholars?

In the universities of the Global North, decolonial efforts emphasize expanding the presence of Southern scholars on reading lists, in Development departments, and in the author bylines of scholarly publications. Disappointingly, this decolonial agenda has often degenerated into bean-counting exercises that gloss over the content and status of contemporary engagement with views from the Global South. There is often insufficient attention to the ways in which decolonizing initiatives are being captured by the pressures and interests of the knowledge systems of the Global North. Southern scholars are at least as likely as Northern scholars to be pushed toward mainstream rather than alternative perspectives in the intense competition for university admission, research funding, and academic jobs. Similarly, there is need for greater attention to whether research collaborators from the Global South or Southern names on authorship bylines are scholarly equals with a role in project design, theorization, and analysis of results, or are proxies or research assistants being used to burnish decolonial credentials while having little input into the framing and interpretation of development research (Jentsch and Pilley 2003; Cf. Mitlin et al. 2020; Naritomi et al. 2020).

Equally problematic, the celebration of indigenous knowledge systems as more authentic glosses over the difference between folk knowledge and scholarly knowledge. Is a focus on communal values and indigenous healing and religious education systems adequate to the task of decolonizing the power structures of national political and economic systems and international development organizations? Alongside its rich array of folk knowledge, the Global South produces a wealth of critical development scholars, as noted above, not to mention doctors, engineers, architects and urban planners, steeped in an understanding of local development problems and priorities. While indigenous knowledge systems have a role to play, putting them at the helm of decolonizing development thinking is a bit like trying to address contemporary socio-economic and health challenges in the UK through recourse to druids and herbal medicine. The quest to decolonize Development needs to look beyond traditional knowledge systems and asymmetric North–South intellectual collaboration to facilitating innovative Southern appropriation of ideas from the full pool of Development thinking, leavened by engagement with indigenous realities and knowledge systems.

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Radical Rejection and the Vulnerabilities of Decoloniality

Engagement with Southern scholarly, technical and indigenous knowledge, and innovative appropriation of theoretical perspectives from the North and South have long been embedded in the epistemic DNA of Critical Development Studies. The more essentialist understandings of decolonized knowledge emanating from Decolonial Studies not only deprive Southern development thinking of some of its greatest assets, but also increase its vulnerability to neoliberal capture. In the process, radical rejection by Decolonial scholars of all Western knowledge influences actually risks perpetuating processes of colonial domination. The celebration of the indigenous and communal threatens to fragment local development agency by failing to support key Southern knowledge and political institutions, such as universities and states, in the face of neoliberal challenges. In the process, Decolonial approaches to decolonizing knowledge may generate epistemic and political fragilities that undermine the decolonization of development structures, and indeed actually increase the vulnerability of the Global South to domination by colonial and neo-colonial forces.

Epistemic Vulnerabilities

There is no wish to deny the importance of revalorizing indigenous knowledge systems eclipsed and eroded by colonialism. Yet, the privileging of indigenous knowledge systems glosses over the Southern adaptation of imported Western education systems to address local needs, and weakens the struggle for their autonomy in the face of devastating neoliberal reforms. Although Africa hosted centers of scholarly knowledge for centuries before colonization, contemporary African universities were Western imports, but quickly became important centers of African development knowledge and innovation. In the 1960s and 1970s, the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, and Makerere University in Uganda were hives of innovative development research, attracting scholars from across Africa as well as from Europe and North America to engage with the vibrant local research scene. In the same period, Nigerian universities developed new disciplinary subfields, such as the Ibadan School of History and the Zaria School of Political Science, where colonial representations of African societies were contested through fieldwork, archival research, and innovative theorizing (Kamata 2020; Dibua 1997). Far from colonizing knowledge, these imported universities became dynamic sources of epistemic decolonization and local knowledge production in agriculture, politics, planning, and industrialization.

Yet, during the structural adjustment era of the 1980s and 1990s, Mamdani (1993), Mkandawire (1995), and others raised concerns about the erosion of autonomous scholarly knowledge production in African universities. They decried the political and economic devastation of universities across the continent, and the reorientation of university training toward donor demands for skills needed to run externally devised programs, often at the expense of local development and policy priorities. Mkandawire (2014) gives the example of the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) set up by a group of international donors in late

1980s to replace grounded heterodox economic training with econometric modeling. The result was an active deskilling of African states and civil service cadres and a crippling of future development capacity as African economists were transformed from agents of local development into hewers of equations and crunchers of data for international programs. By the turn of the millennium, when more active state engagement was back on the agenda, there 'were no national planners, no industrial economists, no urban economists, no transport economists, no health economists…' to devise locally tailored development plans capable of absorbing renewed supplies of donor resources (Mkandawire 2014, p.188). The upshot is a greater recourse to 'cut-and-paste' policy making—hardly a step forward for autonomous, decolonized development.

Equally problematic, Decolonial approaches have tended to provide avenues of distraction from these devastating blows against South-centric knowledge production and policy autonomy. The Decolonial creep is dulling the edge of transformative structural analysis and policy relevance among restive younger academics impatient for change, making inroads into university development programmes and progressive think-tanks and development research consortia in the Global North and South. In International Development fora, an emphasis on cultural recognition focuses increasing attention on the celebration of Southern artists, musicians and indigenous climate activists, accompanied by panels decrying 'Eurocentric' knowledge systems, while distracting attention from the erosion of Southern developmental autonomy through debilitating economic and political reforms. Far from advancing the decolonizing cause, these Decolonial exercises in cultural affirmation pose an existential challenge to the decolonization of development knowledge and practice in the Global South.

Political Vulnerabilities

The emphasis of Decoloniality scholars on communal organization and grassroots movements also draws attention to important needs and interests, but on its own, risks further deepening the vulnerability to colonial subordination. As Mkandwire (2009b), Claude Ake (1967) others have noted, the struggle against imperialism in post-colonial African states went hand in hand with a struggle against ethnic divisions, seen as a source of conflict and divide and rule tactics. The spirit of Bandung was not about reverting to communal forms of governance, but about liberation from neo-colonialism by developing macro-structures of political and economic independence. Confronting the forces of Western imperialism called for the development of accountable states and regional organizations, not their fragmentation into communal movements. In the contemporary era of global capitalism, a shift toward communal and grassroots forms of organization seems equally ill advised. Peter Houtzager (2009, p. 1) expressed concern about the appeal of such 'radical polycentrism,' wondering why '[a]t a time of unprecedented concentration of capital and power in the hands of a few private individuals and corporate conglomerates, the prescriptions for more equitable, affluent, and democratic societies all emphasize decentralization of action, association, and governance.'

The ability to resist the subordinating forces of Western capitalism depends on the ability to aggregate competing interests within society and between society and the state, not to shift toward an uncoordinated and potentially fractious focus on grassroots movements that are easily captured or sidelined. As Mkandawire repeatedly argues, the state, for all its problems, is the only agent powerful enough to shape policy in the interest of citizens of the Global South. 'Although states can and do foment internal conflict…they remain the single most important mediating institution,' key to driving development visions and coordinating social pacts around economic transformation. Autonomous development, according to Mkandawire (1999), Olukoshi (1998) and others, is not about downsizing or rejecting states as colonial artifacts, but about building better states, adapted to the needs of late development in poor, informalized or multi-ethnic societies. Indeed, Decolonial scholars often seem to forget that there were pre-colonial and pre-Columbian states in Africa, Asia and Latin America, suggesting that Eurocentric state structures can be reverse-engineered to fit the needs, values, and institutional arrangements of developing societies (Mustapha 1999). Moreover, as Ha-Joon Chang (2003) notes, it was not indigenous Confucian values and institutions that underpinned the legendary effectiveness of the East Asian developmental states, but the ability of East Asian states to import and retool selected institutions from across the globe, and adapt them to local development needs.

Conversely, retreat into communal and grassroots structures does not necessarily generate popular inclusion and immunity to Eurocentric interests. On the contrary, it can create a vulnerability to political capture and populist mobilization. There is a tendency to gloss over the fact that non-Eurocentric power structures also involve systems of domination, often representing wealthy, high-status, male interests that militate against equity and inclusion (Kiely 1999, 2020; Taiwo 2022). Indeed, as Nandini Sundar (2024) has argued in the case of India and Israel, the ideology of decolonization itself has been hijacked by right-wing populist regimes to justify 'othering' and violence against marginalized or minority communities. Barbara Harriss-White (2002) has noted in India that, for all their imperfections, state institutions of social mobility have been more effective than indigenous gender, caste, and religious institutions in enabling the advancement of scheduled castes.

Local institutions may be less tainted by Eurocentric origins, but local communities in the Global South remain susceptible to reactionary mobilization by national and international political and economic interests (Kiely 2020; Sundar 2024). As Kiely (2020, p 409) and Sundar (2024) point out, decolonial sentiments are easily mobilized by right-wing populist movements in ways that are compatible with ongoing neoliberal reform, politicizing nativist identities while depoliticizing neo-colonial economic structures and reforms. While progressive social movements may be needed to hold the state to account, simply cleansing Southern societies of Eurocentric state institutions can do more harm than good by stripping developing societies of the macro-institutional structures capable of aggregating progressive local interests and resisting colonial, neo-colonial, and reactionary indigenous forces that undermine inclusive and autonomous development.

Decolonizing Structures: Theoretical Innovation and Transformative Change

While Decolonial campaigns for the decolonization of knowledge tend to weaken the ability to decolonize material structures, Critical Development Studies uses the decolonization of knowledge to enable the transformation of material structures of oppression and inequality. Attention to both the epistemic and structuralist dimensions of decolonizing development resonate with Nancy Fraser's (1995) work on redistribution and recognition, and its implications for devising palliative or genuinely transformative processes of change. Fraser argues that transformative change depends on addressing cultural misrecognition as well as the underlying material inequalities that reinforce and reproduce it. As such, Decoloniality Studies risks overplaying the role of recognition by emphasizing cultural denigration at the expense of material inequality. As noted above, epistemic revalorization of non-European systems does little to correct the inequitable economic and political structures that obstruct inclusive development in the Global South. Indeed, Fraser (2000) contends that 'insofar as the politics of recognition displaces the politics of redistribution, it may actually promote economic inequality.' The objective of decolonizing development is not just to counter the colonial gaze with a revalorization of non-Western culture and knowledge systems; it is also about shining a light on embedded material and power inequalities within Eurocentric structures in order to chart a path to more inclusive development processes.

If colonial and neo-colonial power relations are woven into the very structures of contemporary development, true decolonization of knowledge must extend to deciphering the embedded sinews of power and domination within these structures in order to devise institutional, policy and organizational arrangements to reconfigure them. This requires a focus on the mechanisms through which the Global South has become integrated into the global system, with a view to opening space for retooling international structures of production, trade, aid and finance in the interest of national as well as popular needs and priorities. From this perspective, decolonizing development is not just about the validating indigenous knowledge and institutions, but about innovative adaptation of all manner of intellectual tools and institutions to the needs and aspirations of developing societies.

In contrast to the evolutionary development templates of Modernization Theory, Critical Development scholars since Gerschenkron (2015 [1962]) have emphasized the importance of using development knowledge for theoretical and institutional innovation to enable late developers to telescope or leapfrog over certain stages, having learned from the prior experiences of earlier developers. Thandika Mkandawire (2012) often drew on the work of Gerschenkron, arguing that studying the trajectories of early developers allowed late developers such as Scandinavian or Eastern European countries, and late developers of the Global South, to devise new institutional configurations, often drawing on local institutions and nation-building priorities to chart more appropriate development paths

in the context of contemporary political, economic, and technological options. For Critical Development scholars North and South, the key to moving forward is not about looking to a pristine past, but engagement with an eclectic array of theoretical and institutional knowledge to devise more empowering paths to the future. The revalorization of traditional knowledge systems can do little to address contemporary structures of inequality embedded in the global financial system, global value chains, digital development or the under-cover colonialism of global environmental governance, but critical political-economy and institutional analysis of existing development systems can. Two examples of international finance and public health offer useful illustrations of the link between decolonizing knowledge and transformative economic and social change, as well as highlighting the centrality of global, rather than merely national, issues in Critical Development Studies.

Challenging the perpetuation of colonial domination through the international financial system, new approaches such as Critical Macro-Finance (CMF), International Financial Subordination (IFS), and research on the structural power of financial systems have emerged within Critical Development scholarship to delve into the colonial legacies, unequal exchange mechanisms, and new processes of primitive accumulation woven into the contemporary structures of global finance (Gabor 2020; Alami et al. 2023; Dafe et al. 2022; Gabor and Sylla 2023). Through grounded empirical and theoretical research on financial issues, critical scholars of financial regulation from the Global North and South collaborate in laying bare the invisible imperialism of the global financial system, its deforming effects on the regulatory autonomy of states, and the subversion of prospects for equality and inclusion among societies of the Global South. Critical Development approaches to finance are also sensitive to underlying domestic forces which might work against progressive reshaping of international financial arrangements, whether emerging from indigenous or post-colonial institutional systems. Critical scrutiny of the unequalizing effects of global financial systems creates a basis for more liberating development policy and practice, using innovative research to contribute to South-centric institutional and policy innovation.

In the realm of global public health, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered Southern-focused challenges to the prevailing health consensus coming out of the WHO and other international organizations. Relevant concerns are about more than international disdain for local herbal remedies. They focus attention on the lack of engagement with national public health systems and medical knowledge, the inappropriateness of lockdowns in contexts of pervasive poverty and informality, and extensive pressures to adopt costly public health responses defined by the experiences and interests of the Global North (Birner et al. 2021; Haider et al. 2020; Meagher 2020). While Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) rightly protested that relevant local knowledge and experience were ignored or denigrated in the formulation of approaches to the pandemic in Africa, the ability to promote a decolonized public health approach calls for more than recognition of local knowledge. It also calls for understanding and addressing the Eurocentric and other forces shaping international COVID protocols, vaccine imperialism, and varied state responses to the pandemic across the Global South. Decolonizing global public health is about deciphering

the material and power relations that shape inappropriate global policy responses, and devising innovative institutional and political arrangements to reconfigure them around the distinctive needs, resources, and expertise of developing societies. Rather than reclaiming a pristine terrain of indigenous health knowledge, Critical Development Studies is focused on the deployment of local and global knowledge in the service of decolonizing inappropriate public health structures and institutions.

Conclusion

Through its ongoing commitment to decolonization and structural transformation, Critical Development Studies has shown itself to be the true heir of Bandung, transcending the showier Decolonial efforts promoted by the heirs of Foucault and Escobar. Contrary to conventional assumptions, Critical Development Studies is not only about the political-economic analysis of development structures; it is fundamentally about decolonizing development knowledge by engaging with the insights and experience of Southern scholars, practitioners, and popular groups who have lived at the receiving end of development. For all its claims to rooting out Eurocentrism, the Decolonial project of affirming indigenous knowledge while glossing over structural challenges threatens to perpetuate colonial domination by failing to address wider systems of economic and political power. By contrast, Critical Development scholars advance a more transformative approach to decolonizing development by valorizing Southern scholarly as well as communal knowledge as a means to tackling material inequalities, thereby addressing both cultural denigration and material deprivation. Ultimately, the decolonization of Development Studies is less about rejecting the master's tools than learning how to repurpose them in the service of Southern needs and priorities.

Declarations

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