Rethinking Development and Decolonising Development Studies

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The COVID-19 pandemic, which led to almost seven million deaths (WHO, 2022), revealed the world to be even more complex and unequal than previously thought. It brought to the fore the need to rethink the

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'fault lines' since global inequalities had clearly worsened (Taylor & Tremblay, 2022, p. 11) as vulnerable people in the Global South suffered most from the consequences of the pandemic. Yet at the same time, it highlighted how dichotomies between North and South are becoming increasingly blurred (Sud, 2022).

We are writing this introduction in late 2022, just after the most difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have ended. We are currently facing a global escalation of the war triggered by the Russian invasion in Ukraine and serious tensions between the United States and China. Meanwhile, the failure to commit to the Paris environmental agreements, discussed during COP27 in Sharm al Shaik (Egypt), suggests that many national governments continue to undermine the ecological future of our planet. Taken together, these events indicate that we are in the midst of multiple global crises, dubbed the polycrisis by economic historian Adam Tooze (Lawrence, 2022). While these crises are not necessarily new, they are increasingly complex and interlinked.

The European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) hosted a Roundtable in November 2022 on crises. As a current stock taking exercise, we decided to include the reflections as presented then by Uma Kothari, Melissa Leach, Alfredo Saad-Filho, and Henrice Altink (Chapter 13 in this volume). During this event, Kothari pointed out: 'when no environmental crisis, health crisis, war, poverty, or economic crisis is deemed alarming enough to fundamentally change the structures and systems that create and maintain inequalities, we clearly need new tools to counter these deep injustices'. Melissa Leach added that these 'crises have structural roots, yet economic and political power are increasingly concentrated amongst those with vested interests in maintaining those structures'. This highlights how inequalities and injustices underpin crises and in turn challenge the principles of inclusion and basic human rights. While Alfredo Saad-Filho argued that we are witnessing a convergence of crises in neoliberalism, Henrice Altink maintained that crises often overlap. What is new, she says, is that now 'crises seem to come more often and last longer and can intersect with short-term crises and shocks'. All participants of the Roundtable agreed that these multiple crises affect everyone and that this calls for a global response.

No longer content with tinkering around the edges, levelling critiques at this or that definition of development, policy directive, or methodological approach, this volume explores what a fundamental reconsideration

of Development Studies might look like. Drawing on notions of decoloniality and reflecting on ideas around solidarity this volume explores how our critiques can disrupt and renew understandings of development and articulate a more progressive politics. Furthermore, contributions engage with approaches to, and processes involved in, studying development. This requires a critical analysis of the practices of development researchers, the nature of research partnerships, and the selection of themes to study. As such, this volume provides a reconsideration of how knowledge is produced, validated, and disseminated. It highlights ways in which transformative processes of knowledge production can be achieved.

With recent global campaigns and movements responding to growing demands to decolonise knowledge we are arguably positioned at a critical moment, one replete with potential to shape the future of Development Studies. This volume contributes to these attempts to decolonise Development Studies and in so doing introduces ways in which new forms of solidarity that work towards achieving global social justice can be promoted. Recognising the historic injustice of global poverty and inequalities, contributors address how these can be combatted through teaching, research, and engagement in policy and practice and the sorts of political challenges these might encounter. They examine the contexts in which decoloniality can be developed, analysing these on firm historical, theoretical, epistemological, and empirical grounds.

In an earlier volume, EADI published essays outlining perspectives on Development Studies in the new millennium (Baud et al., 2019). The present volume aims to provide renewed perspectives, focusing on decoloniality and revealing ideas about solidarity while also addressing the epistemological and methodological limitations of Development Studies. This volume brings in new voices including those of early-career researchers located outside Europe and North America. As Langdon (2013, pp. 389–390) proposes, decolonising Development Studies can be achieved by supporting the emergence of a new generation of scholars able to challenge 'normalised coloniality' in its globalised context by destabilising Eurocentric colonial frames. As such, this book also includes reflections on how we teach development in multiple and varied ways and in different settings and how we engage with the world outside academia.

Furthermore, chapters in this book highlight how distinctions between Global North and Global South are as Taylor and Tremblay (2022, p. 16) argue, 'becoming increasingly meaningless and even counterproductive to efforts that need to be collaborative, joined-up and inclusive'.

They remind us that current challenges are interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation. Instead, they suggest that 'to address them collectively, it seems important to move beyond perceptions of the world as 'them and us', as 'developed and undeveloped', as 'North and South' (Horner, 2020; Levander & Mignolo, 2011; Roy, 2022). Development has been founded upon the forging of dichotomies, be they geographical, spatial, material, cultural, or temporal. This has led to identifications, classifications, and categorisations of people and places using racialised, gendered, pseudo-cultural, and ethnic binaries. This volume confounds these distinctions by illuminating how they reinforce differences and inequalities. Fundamentally, this requires the inclusion of diverse perspectives that have been invisible or marginalised, combined with an explicitly anti-racist lens.

Key ideas such as post-developmentalism, decoloniality, and the pluriverse increasingly challenge mainstream development, signalling a renewed awareness of the 'limits to growth' as integral to the modernising trajectory and of Western dominance. These ideas are beginning to counter the hitherto almost universally accepted Eurocentric understanding of what 'development' means. Shifts in concepts and conceptualisations framing 'development' can already be traced in the evolution of ideologies and narratives since World War II (Jolly & Santos, 2016) and in more historical depth since the days of the 'civilising mission' (Ziai, 2016). They show that the idea of development has always been challenged and debated. Furthermore, the way in which development has been understood, explained, and studied has been constantly under discussion (see Sumner, 2022). Despite this, however, Parpart and Veltmeyer (2011, p. 9), building on Escobar (1997), argue that 'development discourse shaped social reality in ways that reflected the understandings and meanings of those who crafted that discourse, namely development experts from the North (and some sympathetic Southerners, often trained in Northern institutions)'. It can therefore be argued that development as it is currently practised can never bring about complete and equitable social transformation. In this context, abandoning the whole idea of development has for some time been proposed by several Southern scholars (Escobar, 1997; Esteva & Prakash, 1998; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1998).

Thus far, much critical research on development work has emphasised its failings. Either development does not achieve what it sets out to do or is actively complicit in the reproduction of systems of dominance and

exploitation. The difficulty with these approaches is that they lead to dead ends: we know what is wrong, but not what might be a better approach towards meaningful change. This volume aims to address this lacuna.

The Narrative of Rethinking Development

The volume begins with Telleria's provocative analysis of the ontological assumptions that sustain development thinking, which argues that these impose important limitations to the way global issues are understood and tackled. He suggests that while in the last fifty years development thinking has internalised a political and epistemological critique, it has not reflected critically on the ontological foundations of development logics. His argument is supported by an analysis of the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which exposes the limits imposed by its ontological assumptions. The next contribution, by Ziai, focuses on how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—so widely known that they even form the basis of University ranking systems—reiterate the promise of 'development' and legitimise the capitalist world order. The SDGs represent a model based on inequality, pollution, and non-sustainable use of resources. In contrast, post-development approaches offer alternatives by, for example, highlighting the struggle of Indigenous peoples against 'development' projects. To counter those who refuse to recognise alternatives and illustrate the potential of post-development, he draws on three examples from the Sahel, India, and Mexico. These embody respectively alternatives to 'development' cooperation, protests against 'development projects', and an alternative based on non-Western models of politics, the economy, and knowledge.

Kothari picks up the baton in describing the sorts of transformation needed if we are to move towards socio-economic equity and justice, and ecological sustainability, drawing on initiatives founded on principles of social justice, well-being, and cultural diversity. While he acknowledges that these are mostly on the margins, he argues persuasively that they show the potential of a different future to that envisaged by the developers of the SDGs. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's contribution places the question of underdevelopment in Africa in the longue durée of structural adjustments of African lives and economies since the fifteenth century. Rather than focus solely on the infamous Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s and 1990s, he identifies five phases of structural adjustments from enslavement and physical colonisation to cold war coloniality, Washington

Consensus-driven structural adjustment and globalisation. His macro-historical approach highlights the position occupied by Africa in the contemporary global order, which constrains its pursuit of autonomous development.

Castro-Sotomayor and Minoia argue that the ways humans occupy Earth currently are unsustainable and pose an existential threat to all species. Notions of sustainable development are unable to tackle this as 'development' itself is anthropocentric and this shapes how human-nature relations are represented in plans of environmental governance. Drawing from their research on territorial justice, ecocultural identity, environmental global discourses, and Indigenous movements in Latin America, concerns that are rarely engaged with by mainstream development research, they argue that post-development practitioners should depart from culturalist and anthropocentric notions of identity, embrace place-based embodied experiences, and attend to nonhuman voices and agency. Through embracing pluriversal ways of being, knowing, and acting, development practitioners can find creative and hopeful sources of political imagination.

Zeweri and Farmer look at ways of knowing that are more common to development through their analysis of area studies programmes in the United States, which were created to train future generations of regional experts. They show how the entanglement of these programmes with US imperial policy means that decolonising area studies is an ethical as well as an epistemological problem. More practically, they consider pedagogical and curricular practices that could contribute to a decolonial approach, for example, carefully attending to scholarship on South–South relations in the syllabi. The specific case they present has broader implications for all post-development scholars who teach as they struggle to meet the perceived needs of their 'customers' and fit a critical and deconstructive approach within a broad and practice-focused curriculum.

Tynan challenges the adequacy of university human research ethics processes where they enable researchers to take knowledge, publish it and become an expert. She draws on the work of other Indigenous scholars, and her own experiences of research, to theorise ideas of relational accountability, refusal, and Indigenous Data Sovereignty. Tynan proposes moving away from concepts of 'data collection' and 'fieldwork' by understanding data as knowledge and the field as a place of relations, not a research location to fly in and fly out of. This picks up on broader

ideas of relational well-being, now increasingly common within development (White, 2015). She also reflects on authorship and publication and suggests that merely working in collaborative and relational ways may not be sufficient: researchers should be advocating for stronger research protocols, ongoing relations of accountability, and real engagement with Intellectual Property, copyright, and co-authorship.

Teresa Armijos-Burneo, Luis David Acosta, Eliza Calder, and others explore the nature of disasters and risk as historical, political, social, cultural, and economic constructions that primarily affect people and communities who have faced and continue to face epistemic injustice. They do this by looking at the relationship between the researcher and the 'researched' to show why it is important to discuss emotion and affect more openly if we want to decolonise development research. Armijos-Burneo et al. share what it means to produce knowledge through decolonial methodologies that break with the conventional research subject-researcher relationship. Alongside thinking with the 'other', they propose learning to feel alongside the 'other', as well as from them, thus breaking down traditional hierarchies of knowledge. The rich, multi-faceted, and ultimately fractured nature of their narrative meets the challenge of writing in a genuinely decolonial way by creating spaces for polyvocality and emotion, alongside analysis.

The book concludes with a number of epilogues that reflect on the themes of the volume and add different perspectives. Saad Filho highlights the contested nature of 'development' and the limitations of middle-range theories that are increasingly used to examine processes of systemic change, for example, in development evaluation. He explains that their shortcomings are due to their derivation inductively from specific cases, rather than from abstract or foundational principles. Saad Filho proposes that the weaknesses of post-development approaches relate to their use of middle-range theory which inevitably replicate the forms they critique. He then outlines the challenges to thinking about development in a time of multiple, and overlapping, system-wide crises.

Mawdsley notes the lack of dialogue between the degrowth movement and scholars debating post-development, decoloniality, and the pluriverse. She suggests that this is partly attributable to the origins of degrowth within the former heartlands of capitalism, which have perpetuated the structural and systemic inequalities contested by post-development

scholars and activists. In so doing, she identifies interlinked achievements, debates, contradictions, and dilemmas within these movements, and illustrates the potential offered by increased dialogue.

Scott's contribution touches on debates about the exploitative nature of management systems, and the increasingly rigid and demanding systems of upwards accountability that have become widespread in the development sector. She examines how development organisations have been grappling with the implications of decolonisation and how their embedding within aid chains and the aid industrial complex constrains the potential of these efforts. Her critical analysis encourages us to more realistically assess the potential of exercises such as Race audits when they are embedded within capitalist and ultimately colonial systems.

Finally, Narayanaswamy reflects on the centrality of coloniality to academic conceptualisations of development to reveal how decolonising development discourse and practice can move beyond the critical to deliver 'global social justice'. She challenges development researchers to be aware of their own role in the persistent a-historicity of their discipline, arguing that we need to understand how we are part of the problem before we can be part of any proposed solution.

In closing, as mentioned at the beginning, we have documented the contributions to the EADI Roundtable on Re-casting development studies in times of multiple crises, which engaged with the challenges we are facing as a field as part of the annual EADI Directors' Meeting (held at King's College on 3 November 2022).

The Need for New Perspectives

There is growing frustration with the association of economic growth with development. In her epilogue, Lata Narayanaswamy recognises that studying development today often translates into studying crises caused by development processes themselves. Thus, those responsible for causing development problems remain in charge of solving them. While new and critical ideas and concepts may be integrated into mainstream development discourse and practice, they do not necessarily challenge orthodox development. Instead, these radical insights are often co-opted into the mainstream, losing their radical edge and in turn become depoliticised and ahistorical. Thus, the power of definition and implementation remains unchallenged.

With the Millennium Development Goals as a significant marker (Wilkinson & Hulme, 2012) and the SDGs as the latest reference point on which much Development Studies funding depends, development discourse has entered a new stage by shifting from a North–South perspective towards a more holistic view of global challenges. But while the SDG-triggered agenda opens new opportunities in the global North, it also closes others, by reducing the notion of development to a series of goals, targets, and checklists.

Indicators and measurements of development continue to fail to capture wider social processes. 'Dataism' has emerged as a new currency, problematically considered to be a revolutionary way of producing knowledge (Harari, 2016). Yet, by reducing knowledge to algorithms such trends reinforce oppressive, anti-humanist versions of 'modernity'. Instead, what is required is deeper understanding of knowledge production as a process which involves interactions based on respect and recognition of 'otherness'. Standardising life as data for decision-making processes sacrifices other forms of knowledge founded upon empathy, social justice, and related motives—such as solidarity. If knowledge is no longer a combination of the multiplicity of experiences, it is part of the problem rather than the solution.

It remains imperative to examine the nature and intention of the knowledge created and applied. It is important to critically explore and question the conditions, forms, substance, and likely impact of knowledge produced. Additionally, it is necessary to be cognisant of the structural asymmetries of power and interests that reproduce societies and institutions. It is important then to be cautious as 'universal knowledge' in the singular is the reference point of a 'darker side of Western modernity', rather than the 'pluriversality' of *knowledges* (Mignolo, 2011).

Decoloniality and justice can only be achieved with the acknowledgement of historical wrong doings and with the recognition of the ongoing coloniality of knowledge. Imperial knowledge, used to repress colonised subjectivities, emerges from the experiences of humiliation and marginalisation enacted by the implementation of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2016, p. 492).

The slogan that 'knowledge is power' is visible in the landscape we navigate as development scholars and practitioners. While this dictum is not new, it has more pronounced meanings and more extensive reach today through information technologies and social media. However, as Broadbent (2017) alerts us, academics 'are much happier asserting that

knowledge is power than they are conceding that power is knowledge'. But if we are serious about partnerships, we must scrutinise not only how knowledge is power, but also how power is effective in terms of knowledge. After all, the definitions and framings of development often remain 'Western property', even when presented in a different guise. Despite these pitfalls, however, we must also be aware and recognise that there has always been resistance to colonial forms of knowledge and to the concentration and exercise of power.

Organisations such as EADI can encourage robust individual scrutiny among scholars to explore and question our socialisation, mindset, values, and practice. In this way, our collective efforts can contribute to change by shifting our own perceptions and activities. At the same time, we must remain cautious about the form and extent of the current popularity of *development as decolonisation*. Thus, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 42) reminds us of the importance of a pedagogy of unlearning 'as part of epistemological decolonisation which results in the removal of that colonial/Eurocentric hard disk of coloniality together with its software'. And Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021, n.d.) maintains that 'colonialism was never an event. It has always been a power structure with far-reaching consequences'.

Solidaristic 'humane security' (Khoo, 2023) demands frameworks, mindsets, and approaches to analyse structural confinements and the reproduction of asymmetric power relations. Social theory is not sufficient without an acknowledgement of the burden of the past and the need to face the consequences in the present. Wole Soyinka (1998) insists that the distance in time to a crime with impact on the present, is no argument for or against reparations. For the descendants of those who were turned into global commodities since the times of the slave trade or became victims of colonial and imperialist exploitation, this history had irreparable consequences. He refers to a healing trilogy of truth, reparations, and reconciliation. In his posthumously published notes, James Baldwin (2017) endorses this perspective when stating that history is not the past but the present. Charlotte Wiedemann (2022, p. 78) insists that we can approach an inclusive attitude guided by solidarity only if we dismiss any categorisation of deaths as relevant or irrelevant. She offers an anatomy of empathy as a mental and emotional self-positioning within a landscape of history in which Europeans were socialised, impregnated by 500 years of colonial and postcolonial asymmetries. In global realities of asymmetric power relations, European views often carry reduced empathy

(if any) with the victims of colonialism. Knowledge about colonial legacies then is largely envisaged without pain, without mourning.

Development is not only a transactional process of implementing formal knowledge based on a cognitive act. It is also a value-based affair with emotional, moral, and ethical dimensions. Thus, development needs a human core, based on people, on their perspectives, emotions, and their voices. We need to critically interrogate the cultural and mental foundations of our world views and our framing of knowledge. Perceptions of *us* and *others* must be challenged. What we take for granted must be questioned. Only from there can we initiate meaningful efforts to understand. This includes the willingness and ability to vacate the space to the experiences of those marginalised whose voices have for so long been silenced.

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