Decolonial Narratives in Economics: Alternative and Underrepresented Voices

Call for Book Chapters (Edited Volume)
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Short Description of the Edited Volume

What are the narratives that are underrepresented in the history of economic thought? How do economists account for freedom, justice, and democracy in non-Western cultures? How are ideas in non-English speaking countries disseminated? What are the political and intellectual challenges in the colonised world?

This edited volume presents historical and contemporary papers that cover

1. the evolution of political economy in non-English speaking countries in specific periods,
2. perspectives that are systematically rejected by orthodox journals, marginalised in academic conferences, or discriminated against in the job market,
3. contributions that have not received sufficient attention from the global scholarly community due to language barriers, travel restrictions, or lack of funding.

The volume will contain works by authors from underrepresented classes, genders, and ethnicities. It will offer alternative perspectives to reform the official rhetoric in economics that ignores the existence and significance of colonialism in knowledge production. We will move beyond the monist narratives in economics and have a pluralist conversation on the ignored scholarships that have theoretical and practical significance today.

The Scope of the Edited Volume

Our main motivation for producing a book on alternative perspectives in economics is to initiate a dialogue with authors who produce decolonial narratives within or about the nations and cultures that are underrepresented in economics. The chapters in this edited volume suggest that the official rhetoric of economics (McCloskey 1985) is monolithic, misrepresentative, and frequently disregards alternative perspectives that do not originate from or consider the markets, governments, and institutions of the Global North (Charusheela and Zein-Elabdin 2004; Kayatekin 2009; D-Econ 2023).

The chapters contained in this volume indicate that there are various properties associated with decolonial narratives in economics. Within academic economics, a range of decolonial methodologies are employed, such as counternarratives and alternate storytelling (Smith 2021). Issues related to policy making (such as nation-building and economic modernisation) are given significant attention in economic theorising in the Global South. However, decolonial narratives are not adequately represented in mainstream economics journals, books, and conferences. The questions that arise are: How can we recognize decolonial narratives in economics? What is the nature of decoloniality within the history of political economy? And what steps should we take to address this problem?

One way to examine coloniality in economics, which the editors of this volume would like to suggest, is to view it as a form of questionable research practice and study the subject as part of the problem of scientific ethics in economics (Yalcintas and Wible 2016; Yalcintas and Kosel 2021). We claim that coloniality in economics is a pervasive issue that has resulted in the marginalisation of alternative perspectives in economics. By examining coloniality as a questionable research practice, we can better understand how it operates and begin to develop strategies to address the ethical issues associated with it.

Decoloniality, in our understanding, is a moral stance about how science should operate. "Good" decolonial scholarship is a scholarship where scientific practices do not harm sustainable knowledge production processes around the world. Decolonial narratives are stories of care about the social, economic, and epistemic institutions of the Global South where the logics of thinking, learning, and understanding of the society and economy significantly deviate from the logics in the colonising world.

The term "Global South" is debated and may be too broad. While we acknowledge this debate (Connell 2007), our goal in this edited volume is to invite scholars working on cross-cultural hegemony, economic modernism, and nation building to reach solutions that have global significance. We are concerned that many scholars from non-English speaking regions publish in languages other than English. These scholars are not well-represented on editorial boards and do not frequently act as referees. We believe that this can lead to problems of inclusivity and is an ethical issue that needs to be fixed on pragmatic grounds.

Therefore, when we use the term "Global South," we depart from a real-world problem (i.e. underrepresentation) and show how economics would have looked if decolonial scientific ethics were an internal part of lecturing and publishing practices in the economics profession.

We use the term "underrepresentation" to refer to the lack of interest among economists in how institutions in the peripheral countries operate. Decolonial narratives, which are produced in languages other than English and published in national journals or books, are not typically discussed in conferences held in the Global North, and therefore, they do not receive much recognition or citation. Nevertheless, they have a significant influence on national policy-making because they are insightful and effective. (See, for instance, Chelwa 2021 and Amarante *et al*. 2022.) How can we reach out to these perspectives and bring more attention to these ideas? This is a question we would like to address by initiating conversations with authors whose contributions are underrepresented in mainstream economic journals, books, and conferences.

We believe that underrepresentation is a scientific ethics problem that harms economic scholarship. Fortunately, there are steps we can take to address this issue. Above all, we need to care about others and ourselves. We can start by rethinking how the publishing industry operates, emphasising the importance of memory studies in economics, and recognizing the value of scientific research in economics. Most importantly, we should move beyond the monolithic understanding of the evolution of ideas in economics.

Our primary aim is to critique the prevailing orthodoxy in economics and present alternative perspectives. We are also aware that decoloniality is not sufficiently debated in heterodox economics (Rodney 2022). The concept of underrepresentation as explored in the proposal addresses the issue of scientific ethics which we believe is crucial in economics today. George DeMartino and Deirdre McCloskey, among others, have published on the lack of professional ethics in economics. Decoloniality, however, has not been discussed as part of professional ethics in economics. We recognize the need to ensure that the solutions offered in the contributing chapters address the broader problem of underrepresentation and marginalisation while still offering decolonial narratives on orthodoxy.

Scholarly justifications for monolithic (linear) progress of science can be found in the positivist philosophies of the early twentieth century. In the introduction of this volume, we would like to focus our attention on Abraham Flexner, the founding director of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and his influential article “The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge” (1939). In “The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge,” Flexner states that “[f]rom a practical point of view, intellectual and spiritual life is, on the surface, a useless form of activity, in which men indulge because they procure for themselves greater satisfactions than are otherwise obtainable. In this paper I shall concern myself with the question of the extent to which the pursuit of these useless satisfactions proves unexpectedly the source from which undreamed-of utility is derived.”

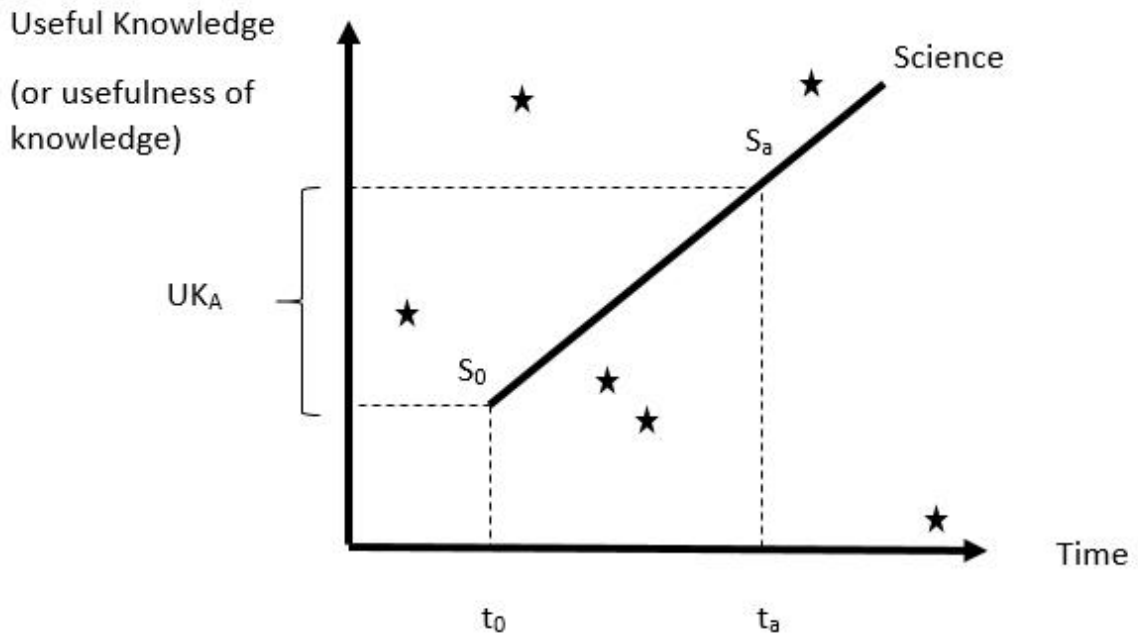
Flexner was an important scholar and educator in America during the 1930s and 1940s. He spent most of his time thinking about reforming the American system of higher education. He published two books on this subject matter, *The American College: A Criticism* (1908) and *Universities: American, English, German* (1930). He was the first director of the Institute for Advanced Study between 1930 and 1939. Albert Einstein, Kurt Gödel, John von Neumann, and many others visited the Institute

while he was in office.

In the article, he argues that academic institutions in the US in the 1930s do not spend much on curiosity-driven research although he thinks “useless theoretical work” would lead to “discoveries which may well prove of infinitely more importance to the human mind and to the human spirit than the accomplishment of the useful ends for which the schools were founded.”

According to Flexner, the difference between useful knowledge and useless knowledge is a matter of time. Given sufficient time, useless knowledge can “turn to some unexpected practical use or that an ultimate practical use is its actual justification.” Useless knowledge is useless at the moment; it is likely that it will become useful later. In other words, useless knowledge is not-yet-applied knowledge.

The visualisation below demonstrates the process in which useless knowledge turns into useful knowledge. It is a matter of time for a scientific claim, such as S_0 at t_0, to become a more useful claim, such as S_a at t_a. UK_A represents the size of usefulness from t_0 to t_a. The stars represent the knowledge that remains useless.



Such visualisations are shortcuts that help us see how philosophers think and make connections among different ways of thinking. Here, Flexner makes an important remark on scientific progress and his remark is similar to Popper’s remarks on verisimilitude or “the nearness to the truth.” Popper (1976) argues that we could measure the distance between scientific theories and the truth. He claims that true theories are nearer to the truth. As the content of a theory increases, the theory becomes truer. As theories get closer to the truth, their content gets stronger or richer. This is a continual process in which science approximates the truest description of facts. As a consequence of the accumulation of truer theories that are rich and strong in terms of content, “new, relevant, and previously unsuspected

aspects may always be discovered in the situation, however far we may have driven our analysis." In "Concluding Remarks," Popper argues that "Einstein's theory of gravitation is nearer to the truth than Newton's."

Verisimilitude is one of the most popular views on how science works. You often hear scientists who would tell you such phrases as "time will tell," "justice will be served," "all's well, that ends well," and of course "the truth will be out." According to this view of science, scientific progress is often a matter of time for scientists to find solutions to problems. The success stories in science are possible when you persistently apply the methodology of trial and error where you correct your mistakes.

There is, in fact, a significant difficulty. Popper and Flexner are naive when they claim that scientists only need time to turn useless knowledge into useful knowledge. But how do we know that scientific evolution follows a single, continuous, and progressive pathway? What if there are a number of pathways where ideas coevolve? And most importantly, who decides on the uselessness of knowledge (represented by peripheral stars in the above representation)?

Scientific evolution does not follow a single, continuous, and progressive pathway (Yalcintas 2016). The problem with the monolithic theory of progress in science is that it fails to acknowledge the contributions of those who are unable to speak (Spivak 1988). The coexisting counter-narratives are often deemed "useless" and are not recognized as part of the pathway. Instead, they are seen as outliers. Scholars speaking of themselves and their intellectual genealogy must recognize the danger of perpetuating the monolithic theory of progress in science. Instead, they must critically assess the historical and cultural contexts that shape their perspectives and acknowledge the complexity of knowledge creation. Decolonial scientific discourse requires the integration of diverse perspectives and the recognition of counter-narratives, including those that have been silenced and oppressed by dominant discourses. Only through decoloniality can we achieve a truly inclusive and equitable scientific community that reflects the diversity of human experience.

Flexner's scientific methodology provides a useful case study demonstrating how the concept of ongoing progress eliminates the possibility of alternative explanations in economics. The idea of (continual) progress, as Bret Browden has shown in *The Empire of Civilization The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (2009), has been one of the analytical tools to justify colonialist practices around the world. The ethical claim we make here is that as philosophers and historians of economics, we should question this mainstream view of science and be concerned about the lack of plurality in economics (Decker, Elsner, and Flechtner 2019).

Submission Guidelines

The editors will undertake a thorough peer review of all the selected chapters prior to delivering the final manuscript. The decisions will be given by the editors upon the referee reports.

Word Limits: 6000-8000 words (including footnotes and references)

30 September 2023 : First drafts of manuscripts
October 2023 : Assigning referees by the editors
December 2023 : Delivery of referee reports
February 2024 : Decisions by the editors (upon referee reports)
March 2024 : Final versions of manuscripts to the publisher

References: Harvard-style in-text and reference list citations

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