

Summer academy 2021, SE21 Decolonizing Economics

(Un)Thinking Economics A Reading List

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#1. Andre - Reading and rewriting the cartesian notion of modernity.

Reading the word, as stated by Paulo Freire (brazilian and globally acclaimed educator) in “The Importance of the Act of Reading”, is preceded by reading the world, for reality and language are deeply interlinked. This Reading List for (Un)Thinking Economics, thus, beyond an invitation to the selected works below, is an approach to the critical perspectives of its authors, people who devote their conscious practical work to rewriting reality. We hope they may inspire other researchers from anti-discrimination, cooperative, ecological and feminist economics to engage in decolonizing practices towards an Economy for the liberation of the oppressed.

Masters and possessors of nature: that is the destiny of mankind in Modernity according to the cartesian dream. Mathematics, through science and technology, would be able to model, predict and control not only the natural world, but the social and political one. Despite being contested throughout history, this dream is still alive in many spheres, including Economics, where numbers remain the ultimate expression of objectivity in representing knowledge. In order to build fair relationships between humans, regardless of their class, race or gender, and a sustainable one between us and nature, researchers must unlearn the specific knowledge and knowledge production mode that eurocentric epistemicide violently made universal. Understanding the cartesian dream (it’s implications and weakspots) is an essential step of learning how to make the decolonial dream of an alternative modernity come true.

References

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Freire, P. (1991). The importance of the act of reading (L. Slover, Trans.). In C. Mitchell & K. Weiler (Eds.), *Rewriting literacy: Culture and the discourse of the other* (pp. 139-145). New York: Bergin & Garvey. (Original work published 1983)

Reading recommendations

1. "[Ideas to Postpone the End of the World](#)", a collection of texts by [Ailton Krenak](#), a very important Brazilian leader of the indigenous movement, and also a renowned philosopher, journalist and writer. As someone who has always faced the environmental consequences of economic growth at all costs (such as the effect of predatory mining on the ecology of his homeland), he questions the value of human and non-human life in a market society that only values production. The Book introduction, for example, "Tomorrow Is Not for Sale", talks about how an unstoppable world suddenly stopped when earth, as a loving mother, said "Son, silence", and why we should not want to go back to normal after Covid.

2. "[The Three-Body Problem](#)", a science fiction novel by the Chinese writer [Liu Cixin](#). The story takes place in China, in two periods (both starring Chinese scientists): during the Cultural Revolution, and in the near future, when the Earth awaits the colonization of the Trisolaran, a scientifically very advanced extraterrestrial civilization. Interstellar travel and unimaginable technologies, of course, are just metaphors for humanity's traumas and doubts about nature, science and development. The book is a good lesson that no matter where and when in the Universe, the persistence of colonial thinking is a threat to justice everywhere else.

#2. Phokrizat on the question of knowledge production and ways of un-thinking

Instead of rethinking the existing knowledge, the idea and perhaps, the resistance and the assertion is unthinking the ways of knowing as we know now to constitute new ways perhaps or re-institute the forgotten and decimated ways of knowing. To (un)think is to move beyond the Cartesian duality and its aftermath, to learn to engage with more than the mind but the heart as well; to merge the objectivity of science and the subjectivity of human experiences and positionalities, intuition and the creativity of spirits (Amoo-Adare 2020: Rendon 2000). Economics, history, mathematics as subjects of study as we know to be are components of knowledge; formed, processed and perpetuated by human beings; when one way of knowing is challenged, the ontology is subject to further inquiry and scrutiny (Carr 1984: Smith 2012: Mignolo 2018). That we read the world before the word and reading the word

simultaneously allows us to read the world suggests that the body learns much as the mind (Freire 1983). Knowledge is knowledge that we learn today is, in Bolivian Aymara, a mere opinion of opinions - a spiral- whereas that of lived experiences is knowledge of 'the way things are'. The Aymara worldview is critical of how one could possibly be capable of knowing without feeling it (Burman 2012).

A fellow participant in the workshop asked on the first day if we can build good things with the wrong or bad tools. Maybe the idea of right and wrong tools here itself has a cartesian dualistic ring to it, and to continue writing about the different epistemologies may fall trap to the colonial knowledge system. Protocols of what may be said and how it may be said may indeed undermine the loadedness and intensity of meanings and implications (Santos 2018). However, we do not write for ourselves alone; who live it and breathe it. We write for people without exposure to knowledge systems beyond euro-centric epistemology. We may play the colonial master's games, but we can play by our own rules; formulate a new grammar to the old language with resistant intentionality, as Maria Lugones stresses to be central to counter a hegemonic power.

References

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- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. (2018). *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South.* Duke University Press
- Smith, Tuhiwai Linda. (2012). *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.* Zed Books

#3. Binar on questioning what is enough?

Amid and after this pandemic, the world suffered from the decline of economic growth. Yet mothers spend more time with their children instead of taking long hours of commuting to work, people stay at their home, not necessarily drive cars that pollute the urban air. Amoo-Adare (2020) stated that Covid-19 is here to remind us that 'Enough' is actually a feast that we have chosen to ignore for far too long.

The decline of a country's economy is merely measured by gross domestic product (GDP). Meik Wiking in his popular *The Little Book of Hygge* quoted Robert Kennedy "*The gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages; the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials . . . it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.*"

Perhaps in this social distance, you have more time by yourself, let us raise the question: what is enough? What is growth and why are we so obsessed with it?. While reflecting on that question, I also want to recommend a song by [Efek Rumah Kaca titled Pasar Bisa Diciptakan](#) roughly translates to "We Can Create The Market", here are some passages of the lyrics:

Kami bawa mengembara
We take you wandering

At the bottom of the soul, at the bottom of the soul
Di dasar jiwa, di dasar jiwa

Bermusim pada belantara sendiri (pasar bisa diciptakan)
Season in your own wilderness (markets can be created)

Membangun kota dan peradaban sendiri (pasar bisa diciptakan)
Build your own cities and civilizations (markets can be created)

References

Amoo-Adare, E.A. (2020). The Art of Unthinking: When Overproductivity Says 'Enough!' Is a Feast. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2, pp. 606-613.
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Wiking, M. (2017). *The little book Of Hygge: Danish secrets to happy living*. William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

#4. Miguel – Keep in mind who you are and from where you speak.

Power is beyond the traditional politics and politicians. There's power concentrated on what you read, listen and learn. There's power in your identity, in your sense of self (Moya, 2011). For example, have you ever asked about the personal story and motivations behind the white, male and north american or european authors that write the university textbooks what are used, without context concern, around the world? What about the editorials? They shape (within a positivist paradigm) the way almost every student understands Economics and naturalize the existing social system, the *status-quo* (Keating, 2009). There are only a few people willing to quit the academic microcosm and competitive "knowledge" production (Amoo-Adare 2020).

Being conscious about your positionality it's not only to researchers and scholars that see them as "heterodox". This is an invitation for everyone.

There were always happy faces on the screen. Separated by thousands of kilometers, each one found a safe place to talk about ourselves and share our thoughts. Hopefully, we will find a path to "hack" the system and change it.

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Further videos and reading: enjoy the delightful sound of the Colombian Tiple with a song related with our sensible connection with the territory, (re)think about the concept of "development" itself and find the way forgotten authors from the Global South bring discussion to a field dominated by the North.

A) Sara Lucía Saboya Music. (2020, July 20). [*Don't leave your land*](#) (Traditional Colombian music from the Andean Region) -en español-.

B) Escobar, A. (2011). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press.

C) Boisier, S. (2005). Is there room for local development in a globalized world? *CEPAL Review*, (86), pp. 45-60. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/11362/11091>

#5. Michelle - Understanding our positionality and acknowledging others'

"Our conceptual frameworks are inseparable from how we comprehend ourselves in terms of our gender, culture, race, sexuality, ability, nationality, religion, age, and profession—even when we are not consciously aware of how these aspects of ourselves affect our interpretive horizons" said Moya (2011). Moya's writings act as a catalyst for our conversation in this class, challenging each of us to better understand ourselves and how that affects how we see the world. We shall only be able to comprehend others after we have a clear understanding of our own positionality. I hope that this message reaches a broader audience since our incapacity to understand others might trap us in prejudices and make it difficult to think and act fairly.

As an Indonesian whose country was colonized by the Dutch for three centuries, I've often wondered, "Why do Western people believe they are superior to us and have the right to dictate to us?" I've only recently begun reading history and development-related books. As I read Multatuli's Max Havelaar book, my first thought was that it corresponds to the spirit to "rescue the poor people" through the Gospel spirit (referencing the Gold, Glory, Gospel). Nonetheless, this passage of Grosfoguel's (2013) mind-blowing prose had my jaw drop. *"Gines Sepúlveda argued in favor of the position that "Indians" are "people without a soul" and, therefore, they are animals that could be enslaved in the labor process without being a sin in the eyes of God"*. I attempted to comprehend their stance. It was a time when there was little engagement with people from other parts of the world, and they observed a diverse group of people. Nonetheless, I'm still dumbfounded as to how someone can see other people as animals. And they assume he can turn them into slaves?

I believe it is the time to decolonize the world given the same battle continues in other parts of the world today under a different sort of colonialism.

References

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- Moya, P. M. L. (2011). Who We Are and From Where We Speak. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1 (2), 79-94.

Reading recommendations

1. [Tan Malaka](#), an Indonesian philosopher who made a significant contribution at the time of the country's independence, but was silenced owing to his fierce opposition, anti-imperialism stance, and communist background. [Rencana Ekonomi Berjuang](#) is one of his books (roughly translated to the Struggle Economic Plan). Through the dialogues of five friends, he analyzes various economic systems as well as ideas for sustaining Indonesia's resources. This essay was written in 1945, during Indonesia's struggle to keep its independence. Translation of some of his works can be read [here](#).
2. [Max Havelaar](#), Multatuli ([Eduard Douwes Dekker's](#) pen name) wrote it in 1860. This novel depicts Dutch colonialism in Indonesia through the eyes of the Dutch people. It also exposes the multiple faces of a colony, as the Dutch collaborate with the local landlords to exploit the region's resources. One of Indonesia's most prominent intellectuals and authors, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, says that the novel brings an end to colonialism "After all, wasn't the world colonized by Europe because of Indonesia's Spice Islands? One could say that it was Indonesia's destiny to initiate the decolonization process." Read Pram's opinion [here](#).
3. [The Development Dictionary](#), edited by [Wolfgang Sachs](#). This is my first interaction with a point of view that challenges and questions the concept of "development." These remarkable writings by Sachs begin the book: "We propose to call the age of development that particular historical period which began on 20 January, 1949, when Harry S. Truman for the first time declared, in his inauguration speech, the Southern hemisphere as 'underdeveloped areas'. The label stuck and subsequently provided the cognitive base for both arrogant interventionism from the North and pathetic self-pity in the South." This tag then has an impact on a large number of people's lives. Sachs narrates the account of a community that previously believed they were in good living conditions in one of the chapters. However, they were considered to be impoverished by an outsider, thus this community believes that they are poor.

Special thanks to Epifania for the wonderful sessions and discussions who incredibly opened a whole new curiosity window.

Question for us and also for the visitors

- What have I learnt through the workshop that I didn't know before?
- What is the real-life relevance of the perspectives and/or practices studied in the workshop?
- What more would I like to know (e.g., questions or ideas raised during the workshop)?
- What do I think others should know about this workshop and/or the topics and issues discussed?