

Does Economics need to be decolonised?



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Economics does lose with the lack of gender balance

CONTEMPORARY
ECONOMIC POLICY



ARE DISAGREEMENTS AMONG MALE AND FEMALE ECONOMISTS MARGINAL AT BEST?: A SURVEY OF AEA MEMBERS AND THEIR VIEWS ON ECONOMICS AND ECONOMIC POLICY

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Abstract

The authors survey economists in the United States holding membership in the American Economic Association (AEA) to determine if there are significant differences in views between male and female economists on important policy issues. Controlling for place of current employment (academic institution with graduate program, academic institution—undergraduate only, government, for-profit institution) and decade of PhD, the authors find many areas in which economists agree. However, important differences exist in the views of male and female economists on issues including the minimum wage, views on labor standards, health insurance, and especially on explanations for the gender wage gap and issues of equal opportunity in the labor market and the economics profession itself. These results lend support to the notion that gender diversity in policy-making circles may be an important aspect in broadening the menu of public policy choices. (JEL A11, J78, A14)

Citing Literature

- male economists express greater opposition to mandating that employers provide health insurance than female economists
- male economists are generally more likely to see the costs associated with government intervention
- Male economists are more likely to see a loss of employment from raising the minimum wage



Economics does lose with its 'whiteness' and US/EU dominance



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U.S. and them: The Geography of Academic Research ☆

Jishnu Das ^{a, b} ✉, Quy-Toan Do ^a ✉ ✉, Karen Shaines ^{a, c}, Sowmya Srikant ^d

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Abstract

Using a database of 76,046 empirical economics papers published between 1985 and 2005, we report two associations. First, research output on a given country increases with the country's population and wealth, yielding a strong correlation between per-capita research output and per-capita GDP. Regressions controlling for data quality, governance and the use of English give an estimated research–wealth elasticity of 0.32; surprisingly, the U.S. is not an outlier. Second, papers written about the U.S. are 2.5 percentage-points more likely to be published in the top five economics journals after accounting for authors' institutional affiliations and the field of study. This is a large effect because only 1.5% of all papers written about countries other than the U.S. are published in first-tier journals. No similar premium for research on the U.S. is detected in second-tier general interest journals, where papers from the UK and Europe command a substantial premium instead.

- researchers working on countries other than the US do not get a fair deal in the top economic journals
- The probability of publication in a top-five economics journal is much larger for papers on the US relative to other countries
- Over the 20-year span: 4 papers published on Burundi, 9 on Cambodia, and 27 on Mali versus 36,649 empirical economics papers published on the US over the same time-period



Outline



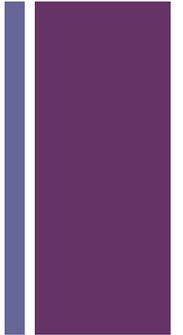
- Whither economics?
- The problem
 - Race and Racism in Economics (Representation)
 - Issues with racial economic inequality theory
 - Eurocentrism
- What can be done? Decolonising economics...



Whither economics?

- Marshall: “Economics is the study of human activities in the ordinary course of business. It studies how man attains his income and how he utilizes it. In this way, it studies wealth, on one hand and on the other hand, it is a part of the study of man, which is more important” (1890)
- Neville Keynes defines economics in two different ways. One associates economics with an action that attains “its end with the least possible expenditure of money, time, and effort”; the other is related to “human activities that direct themselves towards the creation, appropriation, and accumulation of wealth” (Keynes, 1891)
- Robbins: “The science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses” (1932)

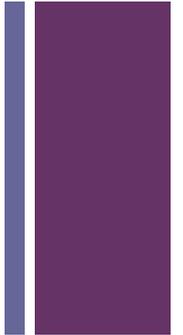
+ Whither economics?



- Many definitions, disputes...
 - normative-positive distinction
 - Focus on production and distribution or choices

- An economic history that takes us back to Physiocracy and classical political economy (Adam Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, Jean-Baptiste Say, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, Johann Heinrich von Thünen e Anne Robert Jacques Turgot)

+ Whither economics?

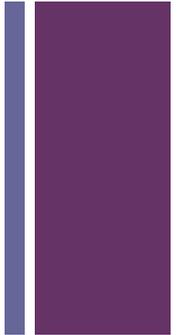


- From the period of classical political economy to the marginalist revolution and the formalisation of economics (1950s), the social and historical contexts have been increasingly removed from economics (Alves and Kvangraven, 2020)
- Economics treats the economy as a separate entity, rather than situating it within broader societal aspects related to, for example, nature, ethics, and power (critiques: De Martino 2013; Foster 1997; Hirsch 1977; Marglin 1974; Palermo 2014; Sen 1999)
- This journey involved the development of economic principles abstracted from society and considered apolitical and ahistorical, building on European positivist assumptions of a universal objective truth (Kayatekin 2009).

+ Whither economics?

- Nowadays ...

- As we move further into the second half of the twentieth century, an increasing number of economists think of themselves as modellers, “simplifying” reality through models and invoking the necessary assumptions regarding equilibrium, representative agents, and optimisation





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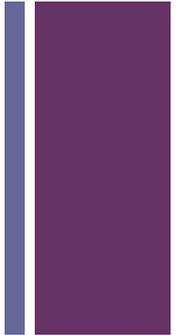
Race and Racism in Economics (Representation)

AEA Survey

- Only 3% of the profession identifies as Black
- Almost half (47%) of Black respondents reported experiences of discrimination in economics
- Only 45% of all survey respondents (regardless of race) believed that economists who are not White are respected in the field.”

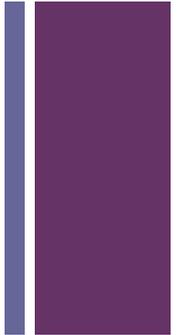
+ Race and Racism in Economics (Representation) – AEA Survey

- The well-known ‘leaky pipeline’ problem
 - 1.6% of all assistant professors
 - 1.5% of associate professors
 - ...and 1.3% of full professors
- In the UK, there are zero professors who are black and female
- The Black Economists Network: an organisation dedicated to providing a platform through which professionals and students of African and Afro-Caribbean





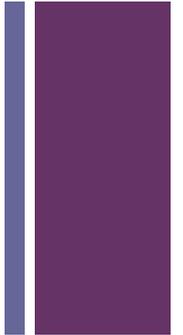
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Economic theory & racial economic inequality



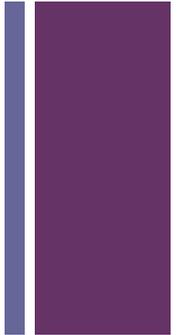
- [The mainstream] economic theory essentially discusses race when dealing with racial economic inequality
- 3 important models
 - taste-based discrimination (Becker)
 - human capital theory/statistical discrimination (Arrow)
 - dual labour market theory

+ Economic theory & racial economic inequality

- Mainstream approach is inadequate. Why?
 - Mainstream assumptions are incompatible with a realistic approach to race and racism in our society – race as a social construct
 - Marginal productivity of labour
 - Perfect Competition
- In a way or the other, these theories always have the assumption that...

back people are inferior until proven otherwise remains, something deficient about black people (William Spriggs, 2020)

+ Economic theory & racial economic inequality



“Consider the Negro as a neighbour. He is frequently repelled and avoided by the white man, but is it only colour prejudice? On the contrary, it is because the **Negro family is, on average, a loose, morally lax, group, and brings with its presence a rapid rise in crime and vandalism.** No statutes, no sermons, no demonstrations, will obtain for the Negro the liking and respect that sober virtues commend. And the leaders of Negro thought: they blame the crime and immorality upon the slums and the low income— as if individual responsibility could be bought with a thousand dollars a year.”

George Stigler, winner of the 1982 Nobel Prize in Economics, writing in 1962

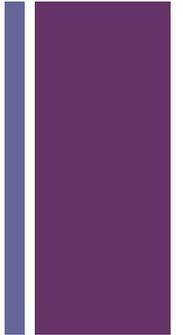


Economic theory & racial
economic inequality

“black people are a
problem for believers in
orthodox economic theory”
(William Darity)

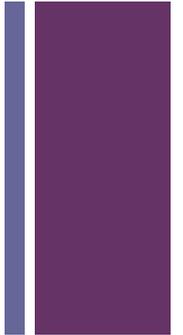


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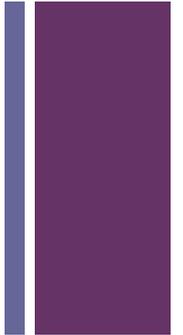
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- What can be done? Decolonising economics...
- Neo-Colonialism in modern economics

+ Eurocentrism



- Economics is shaped by the historical and political context in which it developed.
 - the relationship between economics and the development of capitalism
 - the distorted view of the history of economics that comes from the prevalent, biased reading of the history of economic thought (Adam Smith!? Why not Ibn Khaldoun -14th Century?)
 - how economics further narrowed to a fairly monolithic discipline during the Cold War, and how this, in turn, relates to Euro-centrism
 - ways the biases of the field persist through pedagogy, academic gate-keeping, the media and through the hegemony of mainstream economic ideas in policy institutions

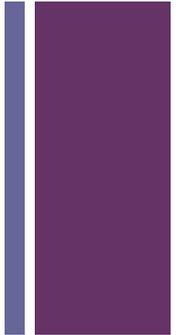
+ Eurocentrism



- Difference between Eurocentrism and issues of representation
 - The Eurocentrism at the core of the field stems from two main sources:
 1. economic theories that developed in Europe took European conditions as a starting point, but purported to be universal theories.
 2. Only scholarship that pertains to Western societies is valued. Scholars from the non-Western world may indeed do professionally well if they apply contemporary mainstream theories to study issues in the West
 - Issue: economists choose (to be success in their careers) to apply/use economic theories developed/elaborated in the Global North.
 - While the inclusion of these non-Western scholars can make the field more diverse, it does not necessarily challenge embedded Eurocentrism.



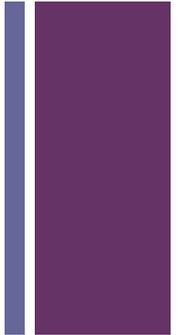
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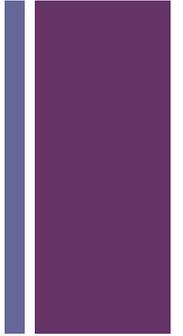
What can be done? Decolonising economics....



- Decolonising economics is about breaking the hegemony of the West in the process of knowledge production, and creating an academic space where theories grounded in non-Western thought are acknowledged as useful starting points
- More specifically: decolonising economics means to break away from the discipline monolithic 'mainstream' and its strong claim to universality, objectivity and neutrality.



Decolonising economics, how?

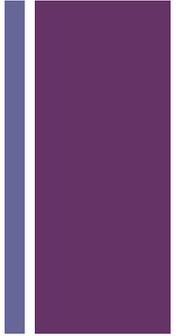


■ Necessary step

- Investigating how the Western intellectual hegemony, with its colonial origins, have influenced the development of the field
- Tracing the development of the discipline to show how economics came to be monolithic and Western-centric by:
 - exposing both how alternative (now considered “heterodox”) and non-Western ideas have been systematically excluded
 - and how structural factors such as imperialism, elitism, racism, and sexism are marginal in the discipline



Decolonising economics, how?

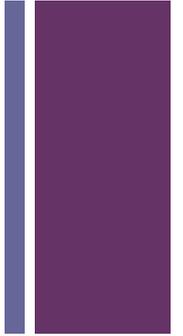


■ Necessary steps

- explores what it means to develop a decolonialized understanding of a rational individual...
 - Since rationality might be understood differently across the world, we question the imposition of a Western understanding of rationality as universal
- Challenge the claim of a universal, objective, and neutral discipline, as it excludes...
 - A myriad of views, interpretations and different perspectives. There are objective realities within different cultures, different ways to express them, different methods to study them, and this is not utterly subjective or ideological



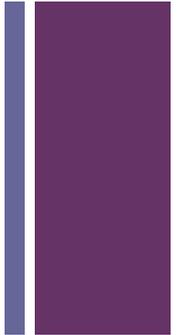
Decolonising economics, how?



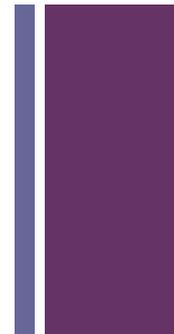
- Necessary steps
 - Study and unpack the concept Racial Capitalism (Cedric Robinson)
 - Is the a modern world a system dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide?



Important observation...



- Decolonising economics does not means...
 - Promoting an alternative explanatory framework to the mainstream
 - Nor is it simply about studying economics at the margins
 - It is not about fight racism within the discipline (or accuse economist and their research of being racist)
- Decolonizing economics is to fundamentally question and explore the development of the field, how it came to be represented as a universal and objective science, to question who gets to define it, and to work towards breaking down the intellectual hierarchy that has colonial roots



- Decon takes a holistic approach, as our mission involves three related, yet distinct, goals.

- These are:
 1. More equal representation in terms of identity,
 2. More openness in terms of theoretical and methodological approach, and
 3. Decolonising economics by tackling the historically produced Eurocentrism in our field and its claim to neutrality and universality.

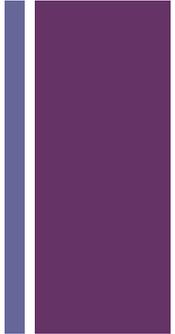
Get involved!!

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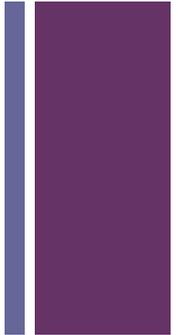
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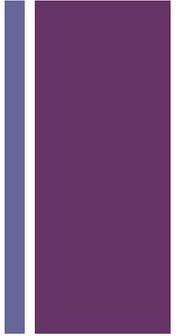
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