

THE NEW SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

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May 2021

Working Paper 10/2021

Department of Economics

The New School for Social Research

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Standing in the Way of Rigor? Economics' Meeting with the Decolonizing Agenda

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Abstract

This paper critically engages with various aspects of the decolonization movement in economics and its implications for the discipline. We operationalize the insights from this engagement using a survey of 498 economists that explores how faculty across different kinds of departments, disciplines, geographies, and identities perceive the problems of economics teaching, how they think economics pedagogy should be reformed, if at all, and how they relate to decolonial critiques of economics pedagogy. Based on the survey findings, we conclude that the mainstream of the field's emphasis on technical training and rigor, within a narrow theoretical and methodological framework, likely stands in the way of the very possibility for decolonizing economics, given its strong contrast to key ideas associated with the decolonization agenda, such as positionality, centering power relations, exposing underlying politics of defining theoretical categories, and unpacking the politics of knowledge production. Nonetheless, the survey responses clearly chart out the challenges that the field faces in terms of decolonizing pedagogy, which is a first step towards debate and change.

JEL codes: A20, B40, B50, F54

Key words: Economics teaching, economics pedagogy, decolonial theory, postcolonial theory, decolonizing economics

Acknowledgements: We want to thank Ariane Agunsoye, Carolina Alves, Danielle Guizzo, Paul Gilbert, Lucia Pradella, and Reinhard Schumacher for their helpful comments and feedback at various stages of this project.

1. Introduction

The calls to decolonize the social sciences - that question the projection of the partial, Eurocentric understandings onto the rest of the world - has recently permeated, albeit partially, the discipline of economics. These calls have especially gained momentum in the wake of the escalation of the Black Lives Matters matter movement in the US in 2020 that questioned the discipline's limited capacity to address the structural underpinnings of racialized inequalities.

By virtue of questioning the building blocks of economic theory itself, a radical decolonization agenda presents one of the most fundamental critiques of economic theorising and teaching. Given the economics discipline's status as the 'queen' of the social sciences and its strong influence on other disciplines as well, the Eurocentric bias - and its critiques - in economics are of central importance in informing the evolution of other social sciences as well (Clift et al., 2020; Fine and Milonakis, 2009).

In this paper, we critically engage with various aspects of this decolonization movement, what the movement entails, its implications for economics, and identify the scope of decolonising the discipline. We begin by discussing the broader movement to decolonize the social sciences and pedagogy, before delving into how this is relevant for the economics field in particular. Next, based on a survey of almost 500 economists, we assess the extent to which economists at the 'top'¹ of the discipline are concerned with decolonizing economics in their pedagogical practices. These practices entail exposing students to alternative ways of understanding economics, challenging the notion that mainstream economics is a universal science, and reconsidering the idea that we as educators simply 'deliver' ready-made knowledge to students. The survey, conducted between January and March 2020, draws on established debates about pedagogy as well as insights from decolonial pedagogy, asks questions about what the respondents think about economics pedagogy generally, the ways in which it could potentially be reformed, and what the constraints to such reform are. An analysis of these top universities is important, since they play a central role in what gets

¹ The 'top' of the discipline is here defined by the power hierarchies of the field, not by any measure of quality or relevance of the research that those departments produce. In line with this, we draw on mainstream rankings of departments of Economics, Politics, and International Development, including RePEC for Economics departments and QS World University Rankings for other social science departments. In this article, we employ a broad definition of what it means to be an economist, to include any academic working on economic issues, whether in mainstream economics departments, heterodox economics departments, departments of politics, or departments of development studies.

accepted as knowledge and in shaping the field. We, further, evaluate how different departments, including mainstream economics, heterodox economics, and non-Economics departments approach the question of decolonizing pedagogy differently, before exploring how this approach towards decolonizing differs across different geographies, university, and identities, such as sex and race of the respondent. Subsequently, we analyze the results and reflect on what may lie behind the differences in the responses, focusing especially on the theoretical and methodological training and positionality of the respondents. Finally, we conclude.

2. The evolution of a colonial field and the challenges of decolonizing economics pedagogy

While postcolonial critiques of Eurocentric knowledge production were mainly associated with literary and cultural studies when they emerged in the 1970s, they later took hold in anthropology, geography, politics, and sociology, albeit still on the periphery of those fields. However, applications of these postcolonial critiques of economics have been severely limited. As pointed out by Kayatekin (2009, p.1113), ‘economics proved to be the discipline most resistant to change.’ Furthermore, decolonial critiques, which have a more material and anti-colonial focus than the relatively more culture-focussed postcolonial theories (Bhabra, 2014), have been severely neglected in economics.

There are many entry-points from which to understand and critique *Eurocentrism* in economics. For example, postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said view Eurocentrism as a set of deeply patterned structures of attitudes that take the form of a particular discourse, but do not necessarily explore the ways in which it might produce specific regimes of accumulation, expropriation and exploitation (Lazarus, 2011). Meanwhile, neo-Marxists such as Samir Amin (1988) do not see Eurocentrism as merely a particular understanding of the world, but instead view it as a polarising global project that reinforces imperialism and systemic inequalities. For the purpose of this article, and with a view of the economics field in particular, we see Eurocentrism as an understanding of the world that centers the idea of endogenous capitalist development of Europe and the associated Enlightenment values of rationality and objectivity, and evaluates realities elsewhere as mere deviations or aberrations from the European experience. In other words, Eurocentrism both camouflages the colonial and racial violence associated with European capitalist development, and *universalises* this

idealised understanding of the European experience. It is irrelevant for this article whether classical political economists such as Adam Smith and Karl Marx were *actually* Eurocentric or not.² Rather, the key problem is that theorising in economics today - both mainstream and heterodox - often takes a limited view of the European experience of capitalist development as the central starting point and universalizes it, and is, therefore, Eurocentric (Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela, 2004; Sanyal, 2007).

There are three key tasks that stand before us if we want to decolonize economics theorising, research and pedagogy.³ The first is to unpack the mainstream of the field itself to understand how it may generate and perpetuate Eurocentrism (Kayatekin, 2009). The second is to explore and center non-Eurocentric ways of understanding the world, which include economic knowledge that takes non-Eurocentric theoretical, philosophical, and methodological apparatuses as their starting points (Santos, 2014). The third is to center colonialism, empire and racism as important forces that need to be grappled with in order to understand how the contemporary global economy is shaped (Mendoza, 2016).

Given that universities are currently among the most important sites for knowledge production and dissemination, they are also a crucial site for a critical evaluation of the nature of knowledge production and pedagogical practices. Although it is often assumed that universities stimulate critical thought, there is also evidence of universities playing a salient role in reproducing colonial and patriarchal oppressions (Blackmore, 2001). This should, perhaps, not be particularly surprising given that universities historically, in Europe in particular, were central for colonial intellectuals as spaces to develop theories of racism and to bolster support for colonial endeavours (Pietsch, 2013; Steinmetz, 2014). Even after the fall of the old forms of colonial oppression, advancement of specific kinds of knowledge have been used as a powerful tool by the imperial powers to exert their influence over the rest of the world (Rist, 1997). While the universities in the Global South were able to reimagine

² See e.g. Pradella (2017) for a critique of claims that Smith and Marx were fundamentally eurocentric, Anderson (2010) on some contesting views on Marx, and Chakarabarty et al. (2019) and Burczak et al. (2018) on how a Marxian framework can be utilized to understand the contemporary processes in the economics of the Global South.

³ See Bhambra et al. (2018) for an introduction to the multitude of definitions and interpretations of decolonization in the social sciences. It is worth noting that decolonization has been critiqued for being co-opted in ways that empty it of its specific political aims by employing it as a metaphor rather than a concrete and material political struggle. For example, Tuck and Wang (2012) see decolonization as being about the repatriation of dispossessed indigenous land, not about knowledge production in universities. However, the dispossession of land is not the only relevant aspect of colonialism. Indeed, universities were key sites through which colonialism was institutionalised and naturalised (Pietsch, 2013, Steinmetz, 2014).

knowledge dissemination on their own terms to some extent, the hegemony of institutions in the Global North continues to shape and inform curricula across the globe (Bhambra et al., 2018).

As with universities more broadly, classrooms can both be spaces of ‘possibility’ (hooks 1994, p. 13) as well as spaces of marginalization and alienation (Autar, 2017; Icaza and de Jong, 2018). While decolonizing pedagogy is the natural companion to decolonizing science and the university more broadly, Bhambra et al. (2018, p. 3) find that the relationship between coloniality and pedagogy is ‘deeply understudied’. With this background, we now turn to unpack what decolonizing *economics* and decolonizing economics *pedagogy* means.

2.1 The compounding of a colonial economics

In order to understand why Eurocentric perspectives came to colonize the world and, more importantly, for our purpose, to colonize economic knowledge, it is necessary to situate the analysis in the context of emergence of capitalism as the most powerful force and as the hegemonic global order (Lazarus, 2011). Following this, the Global North, on account of having successfully undertaken a capitalist transformation and being the locus of the emergence of capitalism, came to represent the ‘essence’ of capitalism, thereby placing the Global North in a power hierarchy vis-a-vis the rest of the world. In contrast, the economies that were not able to undergo this transition, or that were not capitalist enough, were viewed as mere aberrations that had to be corrected (Sanyal, 2007). In fact, the realities of the economies of the Global South are not even studied in the core of the discipline, instead specific sub-disciplines, such as development economics, came into being to explain these ‘out of ordinary’ phenomena of the non-West (Rist, 1997).

Mainstream economics retains a strong Eurocentric core, where capitalism is conceived of as a rational, organized system with ‘laws’ that are meant to function in the same way everywhere (albeit with aberrations and imperfections), which, on one hand, abstracts from violent structures such as slavery, racism or imperialism (Kayatekin, 2009), and, on the other hand, denounces non-capitalist and non-Western institutions and rationalities as devitations (Zein-Elabdin, 2009).

These Eurocentric underpinnings became increasingly hidden with the formalisation of neoclassical economics in the 1950s, when social and historical contexts were gradually removed from economic analyses (Fine and Milonakis, 2009). Indeed, Léon Walras - the economist who pioneered the development of general equilibrium theory and formulated marginal utility theory, which are both pillars of mainstream economics today - was convinced that economics would gradually evolve into a scientific discipline similar to the hard sciences, with economic laws being rational, precise and as incontrovertible as the laws of astronomy (Jaffé, 1965). With this development, the field moved away from viewing the economy as embedded in societal processes towards a more limited view of social behaviour seen through the lens of methodological individualism and economic macrodynamics through the lens of equilibrium solutions of mathematical models, thereby further constricting the space for alternative understandings (Alves and Kvangraven, 2020). Economists have generally seen this shift as a positive development, believing it to be in the interest of rigor and objectivity as well as ‘coherence and consistency’ (Arrow and Hahn, 1971, p. 2). This has involved the development of ahistorical and apolitical economic principles, building on European positivist assumptions of a universal objective truth (Kayatekin, 2009). This has led to critiques of economics - and economics education - for being too abstract (e.g. Joffe, 2014).

The mainstream of the field’s centering of methodological individualism makes it challenging to see structural inequalities and processes of exploitation and domination such as imperialism and systemic racism that are much more likely to reveal themselves if one were to begin with social relations - an entry point employed in heterodox theories (Tilley and Shilliam, 2018; Kvangraven and Kesar, 2020). These heterodox approaches, such as Marxist, Post-Keynesian and Institutionalist Economics, rather than being centred on the study of the allocation of scarce resources, are concerned with the study of production and distribution of economic surplus, including the role of power relations in determining economic relationships, the study of economic systems beyond market relations, and the employment of theories focusing on these issues (Kvangraven and Alves, 2019). While several heterodox economics strands are also founded on Eurocentric assumptions of capitalist development, given their focus on power relations and structures, provide a more amenable framework understanding processes of colonialism and empire (Kayatekin, 2009; Danby, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 2006). However, particularly with the cementing of the dominance of mainstream economics since the 1970s (Lee, 2009), the field has become

‘unique among the social sciences in having a single monolithic mainstream, which is either unaware of or actively hostile to alternative approaches’ (King, 2013, p. 17).

Beyond the exclusion of heterodox approaches in the Global North, epistemes from the Global South are also often entirely neglected (Mignolo, 2010; Walsh, 2015). As the Beninese philosopher Hountondji (1997) describes the situation, scholars from the Global South travel to the North for training in Northern intellectual frameworks, to then get published in Northern journals.⁴ This ‘extraversion’ entails a strong orientation towards sources of authorities in the Global North, where the only legitimate theorising is assumed to be done in the metropole, while the Global South plays the role of a site primarily for data collection (Hountondji, 1997). The relatively recent rise of randomized control trials (RCTs) as a ‘gold standard’ in development economics has strengthened this colonial pattern (Kvangraven, 2020).

The field’s quest for *objectivity* has made it increasingly difficult for the field to grasp its own Eurocentric biases and to allow it to consider non-mainstream approaches as legitimate starting points for knowledge generation. This has been particularly strengthened in recent years with the ‘empirical turn’ of the field (Angrist and Pischke, 2010), which culminated in the recent Economics Nobel laureate likening economists to ‘plumbers,’ thus suggesting that economists’ work is purely technical, objective and value-neutral (Duflo, 2017), rather than recognizing that all social science theory is underpinned by particular values (e.g. Myrdal 1932/2017). In this way, the Eurocentric dichotomy identified by Said (1978), where scholars within the (Eurocentric) late neoclassical paradigm produce logic and science, while the ‘others’ produce myth and superstition, has been compounded.

The way that objectivity is understood within the mainstream, therefore, appears to be in line with what Harding (1992) would call ‘weak’ objectivity - where theorising and research rests on technique rather than a reflection on positionality and how research questions are formed. Harding (1992) argues that feminist standpoint theory can allow for *more* objective research, or ‘strong’ objectivity. Her argument is that in contrast to pretensions to neutrality or

⁴ This is exacerbated through the tight knit editorial networks and publishing practices of ‘top’ journals, which tend to not publish non-Eurocentric research or the work of scholars based in the Global South. Even in development economics journals, where one might expect the proportion to be higher, only 10% of articles in the top development economics journals had an author or co-author based in the Global South (Naritomi et al., 2020).

objectivity in the mainstream, the strongest form of objectivity is one that encompasses a sense of completeness and a lack of distortion, and would therefore need to include all standpoints to enable the revelation of different aspects of truth. Where mainstream economics pretends to be ‘aperspectival’ in its objectivity, a feminist or decolonial approach to science argues that by making one’s perspective clear, one can *improve* the objectivity of the scientific enquiry (Harding, 1992). A perspectival approach recognises that theories, based on their entry points and differing theoretical apparatuses produces a partial explanation of the multidimensional social totality (Resnick and Wolff, 2007). Outlining one’s partial perspectives and one’s own positionality (Kaul, 2008), therefore, allows the advancement of a more rigorous understanding. In line with this, Nelson (1995:138) insists that what the mainstream of economics considers ‘objective’ methodologies does not project economics against biases, but rather constrains economic analysis.⁵ Positioning the field as ‘objective,’ then, makes calls for decolonization seem irrelevant or even damaging for the discipline’s claim to neutrality.

Given that such structures work for those at the centre, they are often not critical of such Eurocentric frameworks (Millman and Kanter, 1975). Employing a decolonial perspective, then, by offering a critique of Eurocentric views and by starting inquiry at the margins, provides a better framework to view the unequal structures that produce injustice (Harding, 1992). This is because thoughts that begin from conceptual frameworks outside Eurocentric frameworks may allow for accounts of society that can better see the context in which modern science evolved and how it impacted societies beyond its origin. Such an understanding of anti-colonial knowledge production also informed a lot of Latin American intellectuals’ desire to decolonize the social sciences by constructing alternative theories to the dominant orthodoxies from the centre (Stavenhagen, 1971; Kay, 1989). Finally, acknowledging that decolonial perspectives may provide more relevant knowledge and deeper insights than Eurocentric perspectives, does not, however, mean replacing one kind of universalism with another. A decolonial perspective sees all knowledge as situated and perspectival, and rather seeks to provincialize Western knowledge production, rather than replace it (Chakrabarty, 2000).

⁵ The impossibility of purely ‘objective’ or neutral knowledge has also been recognized within Marxian thought (Foley, 1986; Resnick and Wolff 2012).

2.2 Decolonizing economics pedagogy

Generally, the core of the Economics curriculum is fairly standard across the world and has some almost universally applied features, such as micro and macro theory courses, supplemented by applied options, and a heavy reliance on textbooks. This makes this discussion relevant for economics teaching across the world, although with local variations (e.g. Bhattacharya and Mukherjee, 2014; Maistry and David, 2018). Even in Brazil, where economics education has long been known for its heterodox and a pluralist curriculum compared to what is the case in the US and Europe, the neoliberalization of higher education suggests that this is about to change (Guizzo et al., 2019).

The standard economics curriculum presents economics as a universal and objective science, extricated from the social and other non-economic spheres, with little to peripheral discussion on power and relations of domination. Textbooks tend to present economics as a set of principles to be learned, such as ‘markets are usually a good way to organize economic activities’ or ‘governments can sometimes improve market outcomes’ (some of Mankiw’s principles listed in Zuidhof 2014, p. 175). This is in line with the Economics field’s sustained focus on training students to ‘think like an economist’ (Mankiw, 2005). This way of teaching economics presents economics more as an approach to learning than an object of study (in line with Becker, 1976). As Stilwell (2006, p. 43) points out, teaching students to think ‘like an economist’ only provides students with a ‘sub-set of a broader array of possibilities for understanding the economy in practice’ and it requires students to fit economic questions into pre-existing frames. What’s more, the foundational textbooks continue to take economies in the Global North with utopian forms of capitalism as a benchmark, assessing alternative realities only in relation to this utopia, rather than on their own terms (Zuidhof, 2014).

This approach to economics teaching has not gone uncontested. There are many movements in the Global South that are at the forefront of calls to restructure and decolonize the university by questioning the manifestations of racial, colonial, and patriarchal power in the universities. For example #RhodesMustFall in South Africa, #FeesMustFall, campaigns against caste prejudice in various Indian universities. Meanwhile, the UK’s National Union of Students (NUS) has been running ‘Why is my Curriculum White’ and #LiberateMyDegree flagship campaigns since 2015. These movements are tied to concrete demands for ways that teaching, pedagogy and curricula can be reformed.

We have identified six central features of a decolonised approach to economic pedagogy. First, informed by need to incorporate decolonial perspectives in social science, a central critique of economics teaching that has been emphasized since 2008 is the treatment of the economy as a *separate* entity, instead of embedding thinking about the economy within broader societal aspects related to, for example, relations of domination and exploitation (e.g. Earle et al., 2016). This may be why economics has been identified as the *least* interdisciplinary of social science fields (Fourcade et al., 2015) and for engaging with other disciplines through economics ‘imperialism’ (Boulding, 1969; Fine and Milonakis, 2009) - the practice of seeking to generalize and expand neoclassical economics to domains outside economics. A classic example of this is the work of Economics Nobel laureate Gary Becker (1976), who introduced social dimensions within neoclassical economics. However, he did this by introducing market-like economic interaction within the social sphere, based on neoclassical principles, thus falling markedly short of any serious engagement with non-economic motivations (Becker, 1976).

Second, a decolonized perspective directly challenges the field’s claim to *neutrality*. This challenges the ‘privileged place of neutrality’ that the so-called founding ‘fathers’ of economics such as Adam Smith currently hold (Dennis 2018, p. 196). It also involves recognizing that Western epistemologies often repress others (Andreotti, 2011) and not relying on one single authoritative voice, perspective and approach (Dennis, 2018).

Third, and related to this, is the need to challenge the field’s claims to *universality*. It is particularly the Eurocentric universalism, which presents the realities of the Global South as mere deviation from a pre-ordained path that decolonial scholars challenge (Santos, 2007). One important example of this is the field of development economics, where the Global South continues to be characterised as an aberration for not being adequately capitalist (Rist, 1997).

Fourth, a concrete demand from the decolonizing movements is the decolonization of the *curriculum*. These movements have made it increasingly visible that the content of university syllabi remain principally Eurocentric (Peters, 2015) and that Eurocentric histories in curricula continue to reproduce colonial hierarchies, and, in turn, normalize them (Sithole, 2016). Teaching about the role of empire and colonialism in shaping societal outcomes is one

concrete way that economists can move away from Eurocentric understandings of history and social relations (Zembylas, 2018a; Mackinlay and Barney, 2014; Tejada et al., 2003). While any curriculum must by definition exclude, the question is what is excluded and why.

Related to calls to diversify and decolonise the curriculum are calls for *pluralism* - a call that escalated in the wake of 2008, mostly by heterodox economists and the student movements (Dobusch and Kapeller, 2012; Morgan, 2014; Earle et al., 2016; see Fullbrook, 2003 and Stilwell, 2006 for earlier critiques). The pluralist critiques question the dominance of the field by one theoretical tradition, namely neoclassical economics, and its methodological narrowness in terms of relying too heavily on defined econometric techniques (Lawson, 1997; Chick and Dow, 2005). Although this is to some extent in line with decolonial critiques, there are also critical differences. The calls to pluralise, while focussing on expanding the umbrella of theoretical traditions that the students are exposed to, often do not address the challenge of how to choose the theoretical entry points and the political implication of that choice. In contrast, calls to decolonise specifically lay bare the eurocentric underpinnings of different theoretical entry points and, in doing so, also identify which specific theoretical frameworks in economics are more amenable to advancing a decolonised knowledge. Such calls are, therefore, also in line with the calls to re-politicize the process of knowledge creation, which attempts to bring to the fore the different political implications of distinct theoretical apparatus (Resnick and Wolff, 2007), unlike the calls to pluralise that often place different theoretical traditions on a similar plane. A decolonial approach to pedagogy counters Eurocentric epistemic monocultures by identifying ‘other knowledges and criteria of rigor and validity that operate credibly in social practices pronounced nonexistent’ (Santos 2014, p. 176). Indeed, any decolonization project must avoid resulting in ‘a pluralisation of voices that leaves Eurocentric frameworks intact’ (Pradella 2017: 147).

Decolonizing the curriculum also entails presenting knowledge in their colonial and post-colonial contexts (Dennis, 2018). This may involve keeping the core the same, but providing a better understanding of economic history (James, 2012) or history of thought (Tavasci and Luigi Ventimiglia, 2018). As with all pedagogical reform, the way in which it is done has profound implications for how transformative the reform is. For example, the way history of thought has been incorporated into the mainstream has often been by presenting the history of thought as cumulative and linear, glossing over disagreements that exist (Mearman et al., 2018b). However, the history of ideas and theories are often multi-directional and ideas

often assumed to be Western often originated elsewhere (Helleiner and Wang, 2018; Anievas and Nisancıoğlu, 2015).

It is worth noting that many mainstream economists argue that the mainstream of the economics field has in fact made substantial improvements in terms of incorporating pluralism in teaching (e.g Colander et al., 2010) and that what is needed is simply that more cutting-edge methods and insights from the existing mainstream are included in teaching.⁶ This difference in perception stems from different ideas of what pluralism means (Dow, 2008). For example, the scholars that argue that the mainstream is now pluralist consider endogenous growth theory, behavioral economics, experimental economics and complexity economics to be ‘pluralist’ additions to the curriculum because they are different from neoclassical economics. However, heterodox economists point out that those innovations still rely on neoclassical building blocks such as methodological individualism, homo economicus, and utility and profit maximization and fail to break away from them (Lee and Lavoie, 2012; Stillwell, 2012; Madra, 2016). Even when these assumptions about the rational agent are relaxed in the late neoclassical theory, they are viewed merely as aberrations from the rule. In a similar vein, when institutions and culture are introduced in mainstream neoclassical economics, its role is limited to either act as a constraint on the rational behaviour or as causes that impact individual rationality, thereby leaving the capitalist modernity fundamentally unquestioned. Therefore, although behavioral economics, institutional economics, or complexity economics might exist side by side in economics curricula, there continues to be monism in terms of theoretical starting points.⁷

Fifth, beyond addressing power relations embedded in colonialism, empire and Eurocentrism, decolonizing economics pedagogy necessitates also acknowledging the *variety of power inequalities* that exist within a community, including gender, race, caste, and class. This opens up for addressing the inequalities that can exist within non-Western thought and spaces as well. This extends to questioning which forms of knowledge are accepted as objective knowledge and who gets accepted as a legitimate creator of knowledge within the Global

⁶ E.g. Manning (2018) considers the inclusion of behavioral economics as a legitimate way forward to improve economics teaching, although for heterodox economists behavioral economics falls firmly within the mainstream

⁷ The most elaborate efforts to discuss what a pluralist economics education might look like has thus far come from the heterodox community (Decker et al., 2019; Deane et al., 2019).

North as well as within postcolonial economies. In that sense, decolonization presents a fundamental critique of power in all its forms and manifestations.

Finally, decolonising economics pedagogy is not only restricted to its contents but also extends to *the way it is taught*, for example the concrete in-classroom practices, what types of material is assigned, and how assessments are carried out (Motta, 2018). A key way of challenging the idea of a single authoritative voice and knowledge as neutral is to draw the relational approach of critical pedagogy (Icaza and Vazquez, 2018). Taking a relational, rather than the traditional teacher-subject approach, involves seeing students and teachers as being co-responsible for the creation of a communal space for learning and for the creation of knowledge (Freire, 1970/ 2017). To stimulate critical exploration in the classroom, the teacher can also explore with the students how they may be implicated in the political and economic structures that they are studying. This includes the act of recognizing one's own privilege (Spivak, 1990), and to bring other voices representing other forms of knowledge into the classroom, such as that of community organizers (Langdon, 2013). Furthermore, Dennis (2018) argues that addressing decoloniality in the classroom, and what it is, should be considered as a separate, stand-alone action, given that it requires time and effort. This brings us to different forms of pedagogy and how they relate to decolonial approaches.

Mainstream economics tends to take an instrumental approach to education, rather than a critical or decolonial approach (Mearman et al., 2018a). Instrumental pedagogy involves students being trained in concrete, identifiable skills, such as problem solving, specific techniques, knowledge of facts, and perhaps knowledge of how to apply theory. While all education will involve some instrumental outcomes (e.g students remembering facts or equipping them with tools), only an education specifically with instrumental goals as an end in itself will be considered 'instrumentalist'.

Freire (1970/2017) critiqued what he considered to be the 'banking model of education', where students are seen as containers into which educators must put knowledge, which limits critical thinking on the part of the student. Instead, he promoted critical pedagogy, which aims to liberate those oppressed and excluded by the system (Freire, *ibid*; Hooks, 1994). In contrast to instrumental approach, critical pedagogy is student-centred and involves unpacking and critiquing everyday concepts in a process of promoting conscientisation, which is the process of becoming a critical thinker through unpacking dominant and

oppressive thought (Visano, 2016). Critical pedagogies could function as decolonial pedagogies if in their critical approaches to understanding the object of study, they explicitly confront the Eurocentric underpinnings of knowledge and its theoretical concepts and apparatuses, which is advanced as being universal.

While instrumental pedagogy often does not consider where the knowledge is arising from, decolonial pedagogy concurs with feminist standpoint theory that all knowledge comes from 'somewhere' (Kaul 2008: 138). Decolonial pedagogy explicitly acknowledges that all scholars are writing from their own 'subjective' and partial positions, even if they claim to write from a position of 'neutrality' (Dennis, 2018, p. 195; Kaul, 2008). Indeed, feminist and decolonial perspectives meet through pedagogies of positionality, as both traditions seek to create space for marginalized perspectives and emphasize the impossibility of 'objective' knowledge (Trinidad Galvan, 2016; Icaza and de Jong, 2018).

While there are obvious overlaps between critical pedagogy and decolonial pedagogies, these are not always in alignment and may sometimes be in conflict (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012; Tuck and Yang, 2012; Zembylas, 2018). For example, Freire's critical pedagogy has been criticized for being founded on Enlightenment principles of rationality, progress and individualism, thus being in line with, rather than opposed to, colonial structures (Greenwood, 2008). There have therefore been calls to localize or contextualize critical theory so that it understands relevant oppressions such as indigenous frameworks (Grande, 2004). Furthermore, feminist scholars have critiqued critical pedagogy for emphasising class at the expense of other forms of oppression, such as race and gender (Wheiler, 1991), and other scholars have made the same point at a more general level in terms of other forms of oppression (Mayo, 1999).

Critical and decolonial pedagogies open avenues for viewing learning as a transformative process and for recognising the politics of knowledge creation, instead of a rationalist way of acquiring knowledge. For our purpose, this discussion is interesting because it demonstrates that the assumptions underlying pedagogy - critical or not - cannot be taken for granted. Rather, they must be revisited, especially with reference to particularities of contexts (Zembylas, 2018). While empiricism tries to purify science of politics, standpoint epistemology considers this to be too weak a strategy if the goal is to maximize objectivity,

and, therefore, rather argue that the politics and position of the researchers need to be exposed (Harding, 1997).

Finally, decolonizing the university more broadly, is key for any attempt to decolonize specific fields or classrooms. This involves questioning the foundations of universities and how they relate to the rest of society and the world. As Freire puts it, the ‘solution is not to “integrate” [the oppressed] into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that [the oppressed] can become “beings for themselves”’ (Freire, 1970/2017: 47). Thus, it is not sufficient to make universities in the Global North more accessible to students and scholars from the Global South, or even to promote open access, unless deeper issues of extraversion (i.e. Hountondji 1997) and deeper global epistemic injustice are also addressed (Knöchelmann, 2021). One can take this one step further to link pedagogy directly to the empowerment of oppressed and marginalized communities and a movement to democratize knowledge (Motta, 2018; Freire, 1970/2017). In a more fundamental sense, this also extends to challenging education as a commodity space, whereby a student is reduced to a consumer and the teacher to a producer, and the critical process of knowledge creation to one of a commodity exchange (Eagleton, 2010).

3. Decolonizing economics in practice: a survey

To explore how economists actually teach in the classroom, their attitudes to pedagogy, and the constraints they face, we conducted a survey among economists in top economics departments, top heterodox/pluralist economics departments, top politics departments and top development studies departments. The survey is an operationalization of the insights from the literature on decolonizing pedagogy as well as the debates among economists on the issue, which we discuss above. The survey had two main themes, one asking respondents to identify problems with economics education and how they relate to decolonization, and one asking respondents for their views on how economics pedagogy should be reformed, if at all, how to do it, and what steps they are currently taking towards such reform.

Table 1: Economists included in the survey on economics pedagogy⁸

⁸ In terms of the non-Economics departments that were targeted, all faculty members that had something related to Economics in either their title or if they didn't have a descriptive title, then in their research/teaching descriptions on the faculty page, were included. For the purpose of presenting the results, we've grouped all respondents who said they were in a non-Economics department together.

Department	Number	Emails identified	Number of respondents (response rate)	Source
Economics	50	2778	299 (10.8%)	RePEC
Heterodox Economics or Pluralist	71	867	81 (9.3%)	A compilation of sources*
Politics / Political Science	25	348	43 (12.4%)	QS Top Universities
Development Studies / International Development	25	262	27 (10.3%)	QS Top Universities

*Since Heterodox Economics is not a well-defined field from an institutional point of view, there are no independent rankings by official bodies. Furthermore, it is often in the nature of Heterodox Economics programs that they are not in prestigious departments (although there are some exceptions to this rule). Therefore, we identified departments by combining lists found in Heterodox News, Reteaching Economics (any department listed with more than 4 members was included), Lee (2009), and we added some additional departments from the Global South that are well known in the Heterodox community, but not on any of the more western-centric lists. Note that not all heterodox economics departments were necessarily formally economics departments, but broader social science programs.

The sample included economists across heterodox and non-economics departments in order to explore how the pedagogical practices vary across economists trained in different theoretical paradigms. This is particularly relevant given the differences in types of critiques of economics pedagogy across different disciplines. See Table 1 for the composition of targeted institutions and respondents and the appendix for distribution of respondents across social and demographic characteristics. It should be noted that identification of the department as mainstream, pluralist / heterodox, etc, is based on self-identification by the respondent.

3.1 Identifying the problem

We begin by identifying the problem and analyse the survey responses to the question to identify what is wrong with economics education. The responses, interestingly, largely centre around issues that do not challenge the essence of the economics field itself, such as adding more empirics, interdisciplinary links, economic history and history of thought, yet retaining the core curriculum (Table 2). Surprisingly, despite the many relatively non-controversial options one could choose (e.g. it is not interdisciplinary enough) and having an option to

define other problems aside from those listed, a relatively high proportion of economists (16 percent) responded that *there is no major problem* with economics education. However, the interesting findings lie in the characteristics of the respondents. For example, while only 3 of economists in heterodox/pluralists and 10 percent in non-economics departments report that there is no major problem, 23 percent of economists within mainstream departments respond the same. In that respect, it is also interesting to note that economists in heterodox or pluralist departments are the most likely (49%) to recognize that economics teaching is too far from reality (the most voted option), while those in mainstream (24%) and other departments (35%) were less likely to see this as one of the most important problems. Similarly, while 22% of respondents based in the United States said there are no major problems, the same figure for respondents from the Global South was only 13%.

Table 2: Do you think there is a problem with traditional Economics education?⁹

Response	Number	Percentage of total
Yes, it is too far removed from reality	159	31.86%
Yes, it is not interdisciplinary enough	156	31.26%
Yes, there is not enough economic history	114	22.85%
Yes, there is not enough history of economic thought	101	20.24%
Yes, it is not pluralist enough	97	19.44%
Yes, it is too abstract	91	18.24%
Yes, it is too math-heavy	84	16.83%
There are no major problems	81	16.23%
Yes, it is not heterodox enough	59	11.82%
Yes, it is too textbook-based	52	10.42%
Yes, it is too Eurocentric	52	10.42%
Yes, it is too removed from students' own experiences	46	9.22%
Yes, it needs to be decolonized	19	3.81%

We employ a logit regression to estimate how the likelihood to identify a problem with economic education varies with the respondent characteristics (Table 3, Model 1). The categorical dependent variable takes value 1 if the respondents do not identify any major

⁹ Respondents could choose maximum 3 options.

problem and 1 if they do. We find that even after controlling for a vector of characteristics, which include global positionality, gender, racial/ethnic minority status, experience in academia (proxied by years since PhD), the respondents teaching in pluralist/heterodox departments as well as those in non-economics departments (these include interdisciplinary, international development, development studies, political economy, politics, political science, and will be represented as vector \mathbf{X} in the rest of the paper) are much *less* likely to not identify any major problem with economics teaching. It is also interesting to note that senior academics are relatively more likely than junior academics to identify a problem with traditional economics teaching.

Table 3: Logistic estimation; dependent variable for each specification listed below

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Department: Pluralist/ Heterodox	0.0892***	2.136***	4.733***	3.470***	11.32***
(Reference Group: Mainstream)	(0.0634)	(0.605)	(1.370)	(0.970)	(4.441)
Department: Non-Economics	0.425**	3.515***	4.672***	2.949***	11.61***
	(0.168)	(0.945)	(1.246)	(0.783)	(4.028)
Region: Global South	1.527	4.102**	2.241	5.155***	4.331**
(Reference Group: Global North)	(1.191)	(2.350)	(1.317)	(2.906)	(3.213)
Years since PhD: 5-15 Years	1.197	0.889	0.715	0.557*	1.972*
(Reference Group: Age 0-5 Years)	(0.519)	(0.274)	(0.226)	(0.171)	(0.723)
Years since PhD: 15-30 Years	0.965	1.851**	0.875	0.900	1.815
	(0.408)	(0.551)	(0.276)	(0.271)	(0.692)
Years since PhD: More Than 30 Years	2.471**	1.266	0.497**	0.476**	2.630**
	(1.022)	(0.412)	(0.171)	(0.166)	(1.038)
Gender: Woman	0.852	1.584*	1.545*	1.191	2.245***

(Reference Group: Man)	(0.273)	(0.373)	(0.380)	(0.287)	(0.616)
Gender: Prefer Not to say	1.192	0.855	0.737	0.588	0.808
	(0.853)	(0.622)	(0.601)	(0.393)	(0.587)
Belonging Ethnic/Racial Minority:	0.507	1.841**	1.101	1.270	0.844
Yes (Reference Group: No)	(0.249)	(0.552)	(0.357)	(0.393)	(0.296)
Belonging Ethnic/Racial Minority:	2.378*	0.247**	0.613	2.849**	0.754
Prefer Not to say	(1.229)	(0.159)	(0.324)	(1.397)	(0.458)
Constant	0.2282***	0.3181***	0.324***	0.391***	.2742***
	(.083)	(0.083)	(0.091)	(0.107)	(.0950)
Pseudo R2	0.1049	0.0802	0.1218	0.0913	0.2080
N	448	448	446	441	403

Robust standard errors in parenthesis,

Pseudo R square = percent

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Non-Economics departments include Interdisciplinary / International Development / Development/Political economy / Politics / Political science departments

(1) Logistic estimation, where the dependent variable is a categorical variable takes values 1 if the respondent identifies a problem with economics and 0 if they do not

(2) Logistic estimation, where the dependent variable is a categorical variable that takes value 1 if the respondents agree with the statement that “We need to move away from the Textbook Approach if we are going to be able to teach students to think critically and independently”, and 0 otherwise.

(3) Logistic estimation, where the dependent variable is a categorical variable that takes value 1 if the respondents agree with the statement that “we need to stop teaching students to “think like an economist”, and rather teach them that there are equally valid ways of thinking about economics phenomena”, and 0 otherwise.

(4) Logistic estimation, where the dependent variable is a categorical variable that takes value 1 if the respondents responded on affirmative to the question if they “find it difficult to relate the standard Economics curriculum to the specific country or socioeconomic context in which you teach” and 0 otherwise.

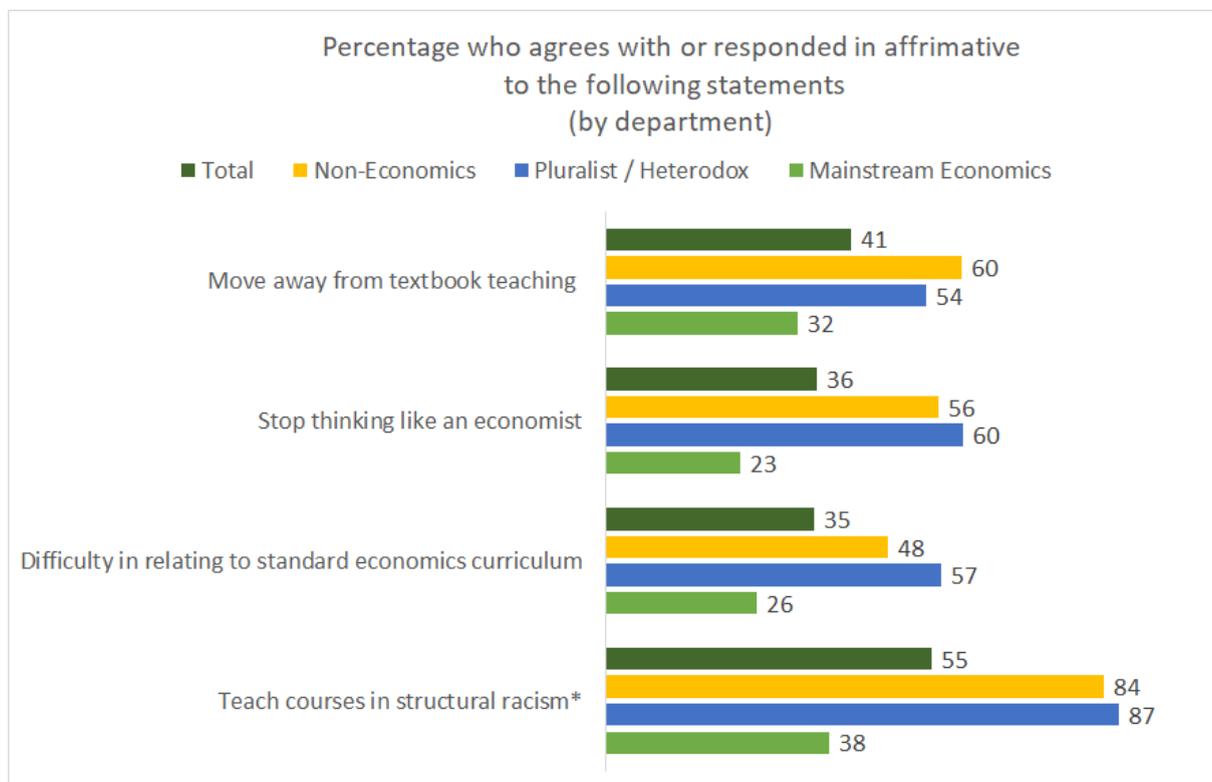
(5) Logistic estimation, where the dependent variable is a categorical variable that takes value 1 if the respondents responded on affirmative to the question whether the “courses they teach allow for an understanding of structural racialized inequalities and/or the role of European colonialism in shaping economic outcomes” and 0 otherwise.

Further to identifying the specific problems, the survey asked the respondents about their perception towards common methods of teaching in the mainstream of the field, such as the

‘textbook approach’ to Economics and the goal of teaching students to ‘think like an economist’.

First, the respondents were requested their preference for the statement ‘We need to move away from the Textbook Approach if we are going to be able to teach students to think critically and independently.’ Only 32 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement (as against disagree/neutral). Moreover, only 29 percent of the respondents disagreed with the need to go beyond textbooks (Figure 1). Breaking down the answers by department, we see that it is the economists in mainstream departments driving the enthusiasm for the ‘textbook approach,’ with respondents from non-economics departments being the most opposed to such an approach.

Figure 1: Evaluating various aspects of economics teaching, by department



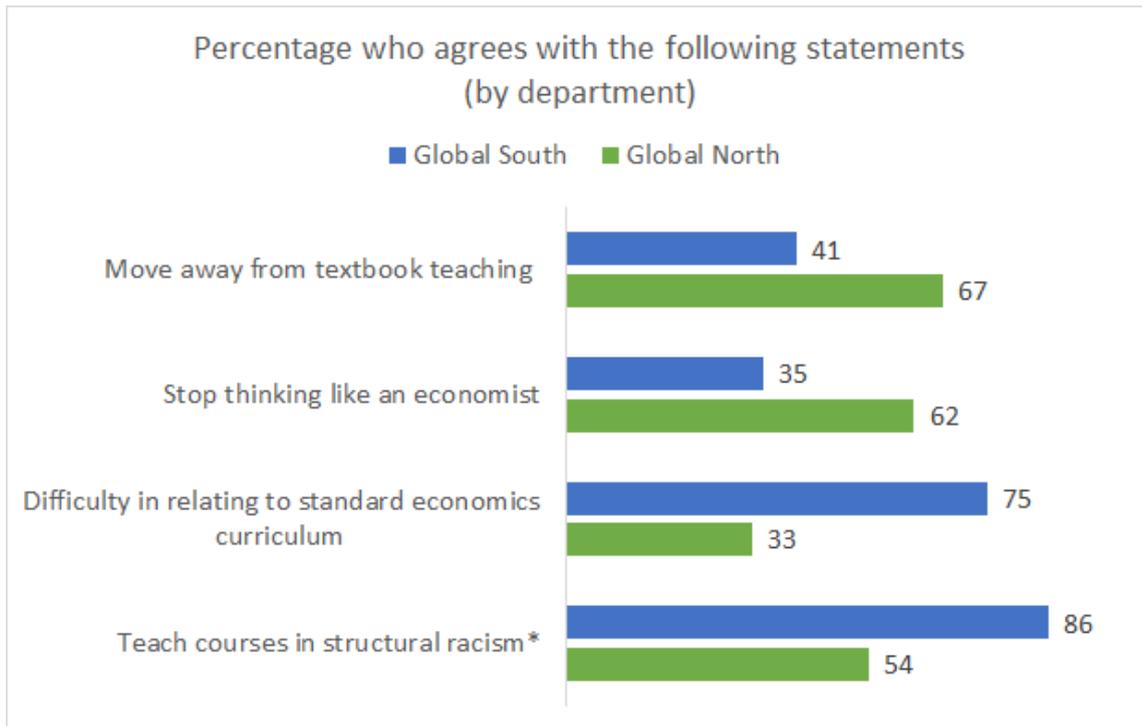
Full statements respondents were asked to evaluate:

- 1) We need to move away from the textbook approach if we are going to be able to teach students to think critically and independently
- 2) We need to stop teaching students to "think like an economist" and rather teach them that there are many equally valid ways of thinking about economic phenomena.
- 3) Do you find it difficult to relate the standard Economics curriculum to the specific country or socioeconomic context in which you teach?
- 4) Do any of the courses you teach allow for an understanding of structural racialized inequalities and/or the role of European colonialism in shaping economic outcomes?

The difference remains significant even after we controlled for the set of characteristics identified above (represented as vector \mathbf{X} above) and estimated the difference using a maximum likelihood (logit) estimation. On average, *ceteris paribus*, economists in heterodox and pluralist departments are twice as likely, and those in non-economics departments are almost 3.5 times as likely, to respond in favour of moving away from a textbook approach relative to those in mainstream departments (Table 3, Model 2). Further, women and scholars from the Global South are also much more likely to respond that it is necessary to move away from a textbook approach (Table 3; Figure 1).

Next, as demonstrated in Figure 1, only 36 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement about it being necessary to stop teaching students to ‘think like an economist’. Here too, respondents in pluralist/heterodox and non-Economics departments appear the most critical of training students in pre-given ways of understanding economic phenomenon, with 23 percent of mainstream economists agreeing with the statements as against 60 and 56 percent in heterodox / pluralist and non-economics departments, respectively (Figure 1). The difference is significant even after we control for other characteristics, with odds of being critical of training students to think like an economist being almost 5 times higher for non-mainstream economics and non-economic departments (Table 3, Model 3). Further, 62 percent of respondents in the Global South agreed with the need to stop teaching students to ‘think like an economist’, as against 35 percent from the Global North (Figure 2). However, the difference between Global North and the Global South are not statistically significantly different after controlling for other characteristics, i.e., \mathbf{X} , identified above.

Figure 2: Percentage who agrees with the following statements (by department)



Furthermore, our results demonstrate that economists from pluralist/heterodox departments, as well as economists in non-Economics departments, are significantly more likely to respond that they find it difficult to relate the standard economics curriculum to the specific country or socioeconomic context in which they teach (Figure 1). In addition, 75 percent of respondents based in the Global South responded that they found this difficult, as against only 34 percent of those based in the Global North. This might not be unexpected since a lot of texts, contextualised in the Global North setting, are imported, often without any tailoring to recognize the specificity and/or structural differences of the Global South. These findings are significant, even after controlling for the respondents' other characteristics (Table 3, Model 4). Interestingly, junior academics are also significantly more likely to find it difficult to relate the economic curriculum to the socioeconomic context in which they teach.

Finally, when it comes to whether the courses economists teach allow for an understanding of structural racialized inequalities and/or the role of European colonialism in shaping economic outcomes, we find that while 87 percent and 83 percent of economists in the heterodox/pluralist departments and non-economics departments, respectively, are likely to teach courses that allow for such an understanding, the corresponding figure for those in the mainstream departments was merely 38 percent (Figure 1). Here, the logistic regression (Table 3, Model 5) suggests that the odds of those from heterodox/pluralist as well as those

from non-Economics departments responding yes are more than eleven times higher relative to those in the mainstream department, indicating that the former are more likely to teach about racialized inequality and colonialism. Moreover, the odds for those based in Global South, relatively more senior academics, and women to teach such courses is significantly higher than those based in the Global North, relatively more junior academics and men, respectively.

Considering what our respondents identified as the main constraints to reforming economics teaching (Table 4), it is notable that the time required for technical training comes up as the most common answer for why it is difficult to reform Economics teaching. Relatedly, we see how the respondents' view of the role of an economics teacher varies by the characteristics of the economist (Table 5). While most economists, irrespective of the department, tend to view teaching students to think critically and creatively about economic questions as the main role of a teacher, the relative likelihood tends to vary by the department. For example, compared with economists in heterodox or pluralist departments, economists in mainstream economics departments are significantly *more* likely to respond that the main role of an economics teacher is to equip students with the skills and knowledge expected of them as economists.

This is interesting, given that around three decades ago the American Economic Association on the Graduate Education in Economics (COGEE) in a 1991 report on graduate economic association had concluded that 'the commission's fear is that graduate programs may be turning out a generation with too many idiot savants skilled in technique but innocent of real economic issues' (Krueger et al, 1991). Despite this strong conclusion, there appears to have been an increased focus on and prioritisation of technical training in mainstream economics teaching, in line with an instrumental approach to pedagogy. This is also in line with a recent survey of UK employers of economists that demonstrates that economics graduates are good at quantitative skills but do not know how to apply them to real world problems (Giles, 2018).

Table 4: What are the main constraints to reforming Economics teaching, in your own experience? (by department, in percentages)¹⁰

¹⁰ The respondents could pick as many as they deemed relevant.

	Mainstream economics	Heterodox / Pluralist Economics	Others	Total
None of these constraints are relevant	31	31	41	33
My institution requires me to teach Economics in a certain way	9	7	7	8
Students prefer the standard curriculum	9	11	11	10
Students need to be updated on “the canon” of their discipline	17	23	20	19
Students need technical training, which takes time	40	32	28	37
I don’t have the knowledge and background to teach decolonized Economics	15	11	10	13
I don’t have time to reform the courses I teach	17	16	14	16
My institution does not have the resources required to develop new courses	5	11	5	6
I don’t have the training and background to teach pluralist or heterodox Economics	11	4	10	10

Table 5: What is the main role of economics teachers? (in percentages)

Main role of economics teacher	Economics (mainstream)	Economics (pluralist / heterodox)	Others	Total
Creating a space for students to be co-creators of knowledge	21	4	4	3
Equipping students with the skills and knowledge expected of them as economists	25	6	8	19
Teaching students to be critical of their own field, its roots, and implications	4	13	8	6
Teaching students to think critically and creatively about economic questions	70	77	80	73

3.2 Identifying solutions

To start to identify what can be done to address the problems above, we asked the respondents ways to make Economics education as relevant and realistic as possible (Table 6).¹¹ The ‘give students realistic/real case studies’ dominates the answers. Notably, the top answers with more than 200 respondents are about providing case studies (empiricism), including readings from other disciplines (interdisciplinarity), including alternative economic perspectives (pluralism), moving away from mathematics (methodology), including more history of economic thought and embedding the course in economic history - none of which *directly* deal with decolonization.

Strikingly, the answers that have the lowest number of respondents are the ones that *do* deal directly with decolonization, such as breaking down the common idea of who is an expert, including more about colonialism and empire, and seeking to include perspectives, scholars, and case studies from the Global South (all of which were the only answers chosen by less than 150 respondents). The answers that have to do with critical pedagogy - shifting assessments and involving students' experiences in the courses - were somewhat more popular among the respondents.

Table 6: Percentage who chose the following options as ways to make Economics education as relevant and realistic as possible¹²

Response	Number of responses	Percentage of respondents
Give students realistic/real case studies	391	79%
Include readings and/or insights from other disciplines	246	49%
Include alternative economic perspectives	227	46%
Don't rely heavily on mathematics	213	43%
Include more history of economic thought	211	42%
Embed the course in economic history	204	41%
Shift to alternative assessments	197	40%

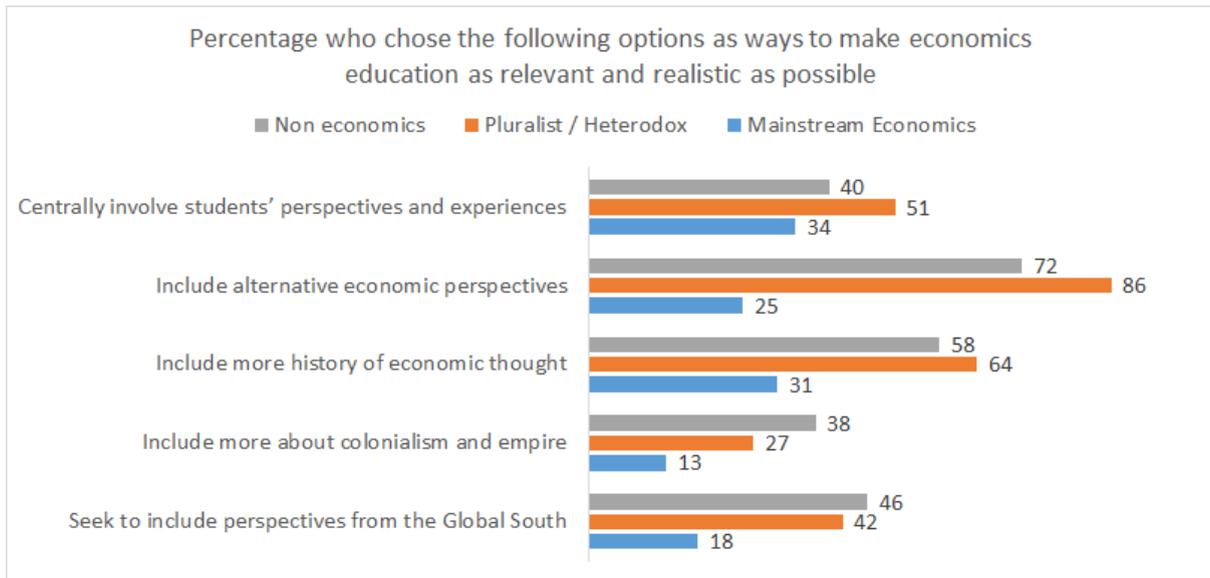
¹¹ In terms of what efforts the respondents themselves make, there was no restriction to how many answers they could select, which explains the much higher percentages here.

¹² The respondents could pick as many as they deemed relevant.

Centrally involve students' perspectives and experiences	189	38%
Seek to include perspectives from the Global South	149	30%
Seek to include more case studies from the Global South	136	27%
Include more about colonialism and empire	104	21%
Break down common ideas of who is an "expert"	101	20%
Seek to include readings from the Global South	97	19%
None of the above	18	4%

We stratify some of the key responses by department and find some notable differences (Figure 3). For example, while 42 percent of economists from pluralist/heterodox departments and 56 percent from non-economics departments chose inclusion of Global South perspectives as a way to make the economics education relevant and realistic, the corresponding figures for the mainstream economics department was only 18 percent. Notably, a significantly smaller proportion of economists across all departments chose the inclusion of colonialism and empire as one of options. Nevertheless, mainstream economists appear the most resistant to an inclusion of themes that have become part of movements in academia that seek to centre non-Western-centric perspectives or alternative ways of understanding economic theory. While 86 percent and 58 percent of economists from pluralist/heterodox departments chose inclusion of alternative economic perspective and inclusion of history of economic thought as viable ways to make economics education more relevant and realistic, the corresponding figures for mainstream departments were only 25 and 31 percent, respectively. Even something as 'non-controversial' as seeking to centrally involve students' perspectives and experiences in economics teaching was supported by only 34 percent of economists in the mainstream departments, while the figure for pluralist/heterodox departments was 51 percent.

Figure 3: Ways to make Economics education as relevant and realistic as possible



Taking this forward, we asked ‘what aspects of the movement to decolonize science, if any, do you find to be the most relevant for improving Economics education and teaching, especially in your own course(s)?’ The respondents could chose a maximum of three options out of ‘challenging eurocentrism’, ‘challenging universalism’, ‘Bringing in historical context to economic theories and concepts’, ‘Taking positionality, relationality and difference seriously’, ‘Equipping students with tools to question existing power structures and norms’ and ‘They are not relevant’. The top options chosen by the respondents deal with bringing in historical context and equipping students with tools to question power structures. However, 28 percent of economists in mainstream departments said the question was not relevant (versus only 4 percent in heterodox/pluralist departments). Following the same pattern, even the logit regression, which controls for other characteristics, suggests that economists in heterodox or pluralist and other non-Economics departments are significantly less likely to say that efforts to decolonize are not relevant. Women respondents were also significantly less likely to respond that such efforts are not relevant (Table 7, Model 1).

Next, we analyse what our respondents think about the importance of challenging the Eurocentrism that prevails in the field. While the respondents could choose two options among ‘Unpacking how Eurocentrism in Economics arose and in what ways it persists’, ‘Challenge Eurocentric portrayals of the “developing world”’, ‘De-canonising and de-centering the Eurocentric mainstream (e.g. by teaching non-European economic theories)’ and ‘I don’t think this is important.’ Notably most of the respondents (44 percent) reported that they don’t think it is important, followed by challenging the Eurocentric portrayals of the

developing world (33 percent). Again, when breaking the responses down by respondents' characteristics, we see that 56 percent of respondents from mainstream departments said it was not important, versus only 17 percent of respondents from heterodox/pluralist departments and 27 percent from non-Economics departments. On the other hand, while 46 percent of economists in pluralist/heterodox departments and 49 percent of economists in non-economics departments chose 'challenging Eurocentric portrayals of the developing world' as an important way to challenge eurocentrism, only 25 percent of those from mainstream departments chose this option.

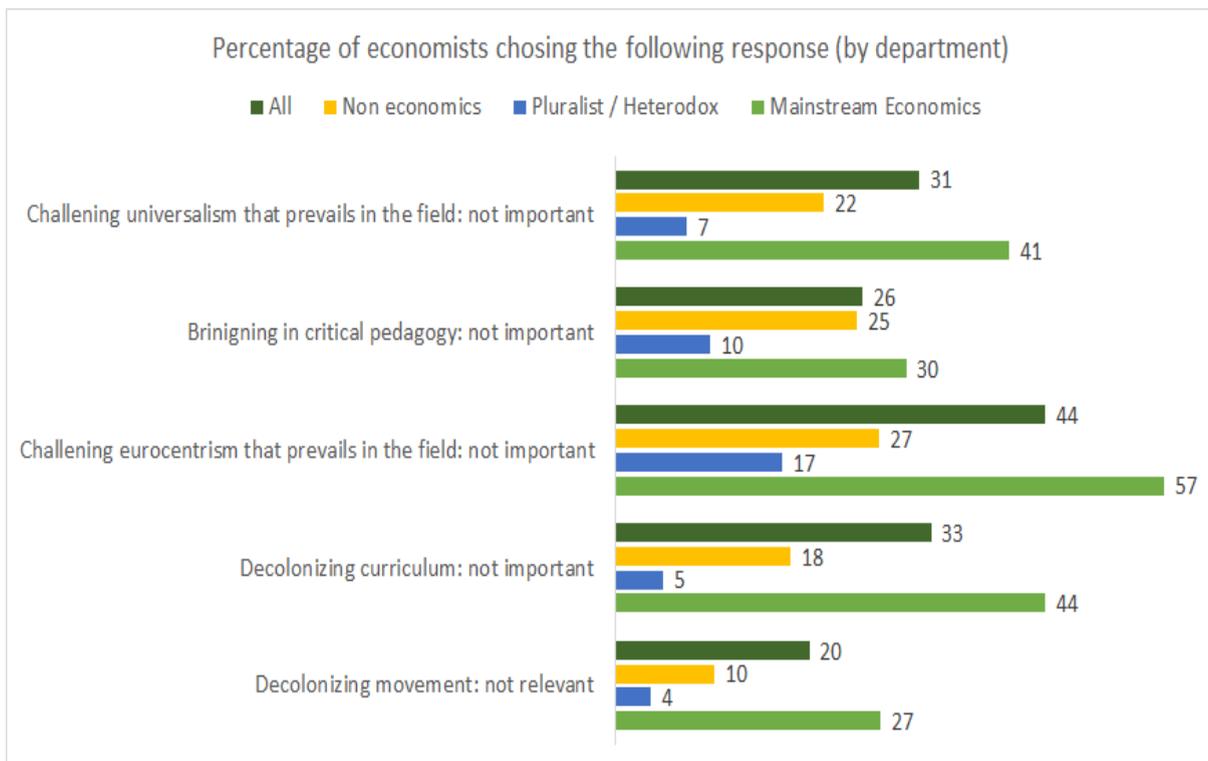
The results stand even after we control for other characteristics such as sex, ethnicity, years after PhD, and geographical positionality (Table 7, Model 3): whereby the odds of economists from mainstream department to deem challenging Eurocentrism as important are 0.16 times those from non-mainstream departments. Furthermore, women are twice as likely to respond that it is important to challenge the Eurocentrism that prevails in the field as compared to men. Worryingly, respondents that were further out of their PhD (15 years or more) were also *more* likely to say that this was important compared to more junior respondents.

When asked specifically about decolonising the curriculum, 33 percent of the respondents replied that decolonizing the curriculum was not important. Here, too, economists in mainstream departments were significantly more likely to not find it important, as were men relative to women, and more senior economists were more likely to find it important (Figure 4; Table 7, Model 2). By and large, respondents from pluralist/heterodox and non-economics departments, women, and those with more years since their PhD were much more likely to choose radical options in their responses.

This is also reflected in terms of bringing in critical pedagogy. Again, economists in heterodox/pluralist departments as well as women and economists that got their PhD 30 or more years ago are the respondents *least* likely to say that this is *not* important (Figure 4; Table 7, Model 3). Similarly, in terms of challenging the universalism that prevails in the field, economists in heterodox, pluralist, and non-Economics departments as well as women and economists that got their PhD 30 or more years ago are the respondents *least* likely to say that this is *not* important (Figure 4; Table 7, Model 4). While there was generally not much enthusiasm for reforms associated with critical pedagogy, heterodox economists were no

doubt the most concerned with ‘teaching students to be critical of their own field’ (13 percent of economists in heterodox/pluralist departments considered this as important versus only 6 percent of economists in mainstream departments).¹³ It is interesting to note that there is no significant difference here in terms of whether the respondents are from the Global South or Global North.

Figure 4: What aspects of the movement to decolonize science, if any, do you find to be the most relevant for improving Economics education and teaching, especially in your own course(s)?



¹³ Interestingly, economists based in the Global South were significantly more likely to say that the role of an economics teacher is to teach students to be critical of their own field.

Table 7: Logistic estimation; dependent variable for each specification listed below

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Department: Pluralist/ Heterodox	0.105***	0.0610***	0.162***	0.273***	0.113***
(Reference Group: Mainstream)	(0.0638)	(0.0328)	(0.0536)	(0.112)	(0.0510)
Department: Non-Economics	0.296***	0.260***	0.244***	0.766	0.404***
	(0.113)	(0.0815)	(0.0693)	(0.224)	(0.119)
Region: Global South	0.992	1.084	0.954	0.166*	1.125
(Reference Group: Global North)	(0.689)	(0.694)	(0.549)	(0.178)	(0.690)
Years since PhD: 5-15 Years	1.146	0.992	1.108	1.180	1.955**
(Reference Group: Age 0-5 Years)	(0.437)	(0.327)	(0.348)	(0.412)	(0.657)
Years since PhD: 15-30 Years	1.145	0.818	2.127**	1.117	1.139
	(0.432)	(0.270)	(0.665)	(0.390)	(0.388)
Years since PhD: More Than 30 Years	1.965*	2.683***	2.434***	2.613***	2.820***
	(0.772)	(0.953)	(0.835)	(0.943)	(1.013)
Gender: Woman	0.560*	0.464***	0.503***	0.543**	0.471***
(Reference Group: Man)	(0.175)	(0.127)	(0.124)	(0.157)	(0.128)
Gender: Prefer Not to say	1.630	1.026	1.066	3.611**	0.809
	(1.094)	(0.645)	(0.697)	(2.335)	(0.511)
Belonging Ethnic/Racial Minority:	0.787	1.024	1.388	1.314	0.861
Yes (Reference Group: No)	(0.324)	(0.356)	(0.444)	(0.456)	(0.301)
Belonging Ethnic/Racial Minority:	0.843	1.631	2.048	1.366	1.925
Prefer Not to say	(0.475)	(0.808)	(1.033)	(0.705)	(0.944)
Constant	0.368***	0.850	0.957	0.3433***	0.521**

	(0.121)	(0.242)	(0.263)	(0.105)	(0.154)
Pseudo R2	0.0989	0.1646	0.1358	0.0898	0.1210
N	448	403	448	448	448

Robust standard errors in parenthesis,

Pseudo R square = percent

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Non-Economics departments include Interdisciplinary / International Development / Development/Political economy / Politics / Political science departments

(1) Logistic estimation, where the dependent variable is a categorical variable takes values 1 if the respondent say that the Decolonizing movement is not relevant and 0 otherwise.

(2) Logistic estimation, where the dependent variable is a categorical variable takes values 1 if the respondent says that Decolonizing the curriculum is not relevant and 0 otherwise.

(3) Logistic estimation, where the dependent variable is a categorical variable takes values 1 if the respondent say that challenging the eurocentrism that prevails in the field is not important and 0 otherwise.

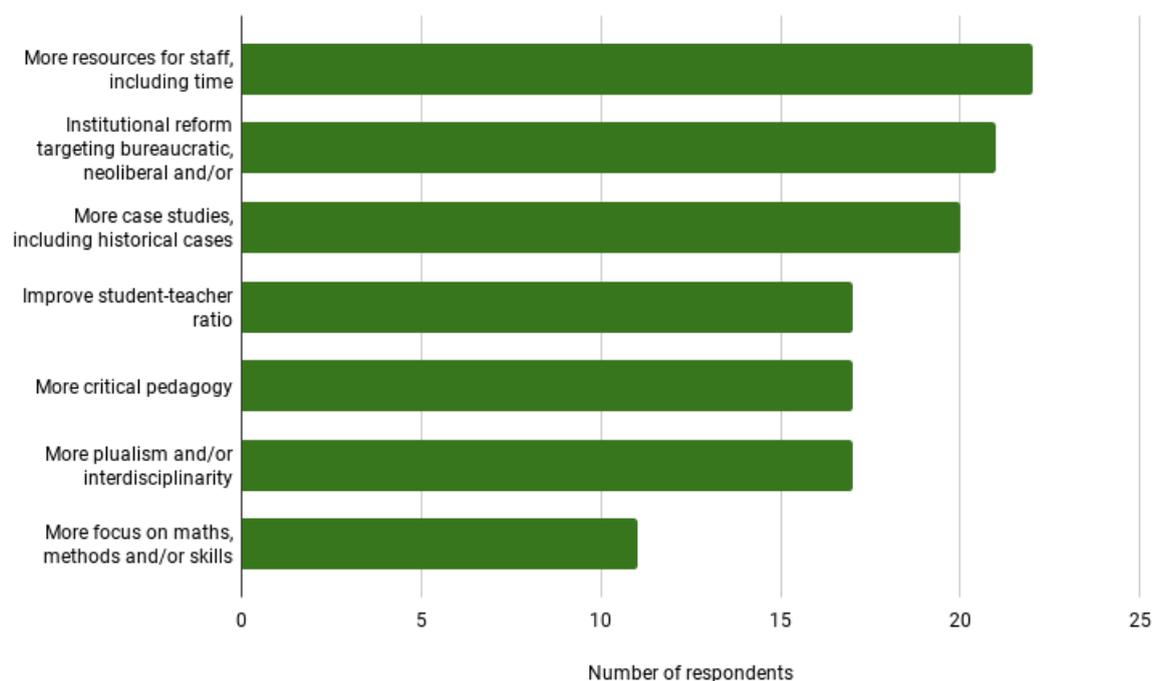
(4) Logistic estimation, where the dependent variable is a categorical variable takes values 1 if the respondent say that critical pedagogy is not imp and 0 otherwise.

(5) Logistic estimation, where the dependent variable is a categorical variable takes values 1 if the respondent say that challenge universalism in the field is not important and 0 otherwise.

Finally, 47 percent of the respondents responded to the open survey question ‘in which way is it possible to improve teaching and learning at your institution?’ which gave them a chance to give answers that were not predefined by the survey in the form of options. Analyzing the answers by grouping them in larger themes demonstrates that many respondents identify larger societal and university-wide structures as constraints, rather than simply the specific curriculum (Figure 5). Common answers involved reference to not having time or incentives to be able to focus on teaching, the staff-student ratio being too low, and references to the constraints imposed by the university in the form of bureaucracy and lack of flexibility. This demonstrates that any attempts to decolonize economics must be a part of a wider strategy to challenge the increasingly neoliberal university model, which since the 1990s has entailed a gradual marketization, privatization, and financialization of higher education across the world.

Notably, a substantial amount of respondents answered ‘I don’t have the knowledge and background to teach decolonized economics’ (13 percent) and ‘I don’t have time to reform the courses I teach’ (16 percent), suggesting that the issue is not only about their individual priorities but about broader constraints to their knowledge, training and institutional environment.

Figure 5: What is needed to improve teaching and learning at your institution?



Only responses with 10 or more respondents are included in Figure 5.

4. Discussion: who is decolonizing economics, and how?

The survey results clearly demonstrate that the decolonization agenda has gained very limited recognition among economists, particularly within top mainstream economics departments. In this section we situate the survey results in the broader discussion on decolonizing pedagogy, specifically economics pedagogy, and draw implications for understanding the need and the possibility for decolonizing the field of economics.

Objectivity and rigor over decolonization for the mainstream

The survey results suggest that despite various critical voices raising the need for reform in economics, rigour and objectivity continue to remain the central concerns for the mainstream of the discipline. Rather than recognising decolonization as a relevant challenge for economics teaching, economists in mainstream departments tend to point to changes at the ‘margins’ of the discipline as relevant, such as maintaining the core of the field, but adding economic history, insights from other disciplines, and adding more empirical case studies. Furthermore, in terms of identifying the constraints to economics teaching, the top choice

among mainstream economists was the need to equip students with technical skills, which takes time. In fact, very few respondents chose not knowing how to decolonize the curriculum or not having resources as one of the main constraints. This is further compounded by the fact that only 32 percent and 36 percent of economists agreed with the need to move away from textbook teaching and the need to stop teaching students to think ‘like an economist’, respectively, which is very low compared to responses by economists in other departments. Economists in mainstream departments are more likely to focus on students’ need for technical knowledge and real world case studies, which supports the disciplines’ view of itself as neutral and ‘empirical’.

This may explain why many mainstream economists who *do* want to reform economics teaching tend to see increased rigor as the central goal, and real world examples and cutting-edge research as a way to support that, but issues such as ‘decolonizing’ economics as a challenge to the field itself. Such understandings, that expect the data to reveal the truth, appear unaware of how the categories and frameworks employed in any empirical analysis are themselves rooted in a specific theoretical paradigm, and often limit the abilities to think beyond those set theoretical categories and frameworks. These efforts thus remain within what Harding would call ‘weak’ objectivity.

These results are in line with the most recent attempt to reform economics teaching through the launch of the Curriculum Open-access Resources in Economics (CORE), which around half of our survey-respondents believed to be an improvement over standard economics curriculum (57 percent in mainstream departments, 52 percent in heterodox departments, 49 percent in non-economics departments). CORE is an educational reform project led by many top economists, which in many ways represents how the mainstream has moved on pedagogy since the global financial crisis. At its centre is an undergraduate e-textbook called *The Economy* (CORE, 2016). In their review of CORE, Mearman et al. (2018b) find that despite being presented as a radical reform effort by the mainstream of the profession, neither is it pluralist nor does it provide an integration of power, politics and society into economics teaching. Furthermore, it mainly allows for deepening of technical knowledge, rather than a critical broadening of the curriculum. While CORE’s use of real-world data and other evidence to allow students to make sense of the world allows students to link theories to their immediate contexts, such empirical analysis, if not placed in their theoretical contexts, suggests that observation is theory-free or value-free. While pluralism and theoretical

openness necessarily involves equipping students with the diverse theoretical apparatus to analyze empirical data, one cannot expect students to identify the theoretical biases of the tools on their own.

This tendency of economists to teach economics as if it's a neutral and objective science is in line with the field's general claim to being apolitical and ahistorical (Kayatekin, 2009). The centrality of methodological individualism likely limits the field's capacity to capture broader structural economic phenomena that are central within a decolonization agenda. For example, within the individualizing paradigm of which *homo economicus* is a part, racism, when studied, is reduced to individual actions and racialized injustices and inequalities to the personal insufficiencies of the non-White, thus hiding structural racism and other forms of oppression (Tilley and Shilliam, 2017). Therefore, without questioning methodological individualism, the mainstream of the economics field remains blind to the historically produced structures of Eurocentric culture, racism and sexism. Indeed, this blindness is *central* for the discipline's ability to 'universalize' such principles to begin with (Blaney and Inayatullah, 2010; Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela, 2004) and for its claim to neutrality and objectivity. Further, given the insistence on the value-free nature of the building blocks of economic theory, the data, and the methodologies, and its inability to recognise the that truths are many and partial, and are being constantly transformed by our actions (Resnick and Wolff, 2012), decolonizing mainstream economic thought is likely an impossibility, unless it radically breaks out of its neoclassical roots.

Heterodox economists' relative openness to the decolonization agenda

The respondents in heterodox or pluralist economics departments fared somewhat better in terms of their openness to the decolonization agenda. Those respondents were less likely to say that efforts to decolonize economics are irrelevant when compared with mainstream economists, and they were more likely to respond that challenging universalism and Eurocentrism is important. Economists in these departments were also the most likely to consider issues such as challenging universalism and Eurocentrism, decolonizing the curriculum and the decolonizing movement more broadly, to be relevant for economics pedagogy. This should perhaps not be surprising, given they focus on structural inequalities between groups and the structural factors in shaping economic outcomes, rather than actively

occluding discriminatory institutions and social structures like the individualizing paradigm dominant of the mainstream of the field does.¹⁴

However, as the results show, even among heterodox economists, decolonizing economics is not a top priority. This may have to do with the Eurocentrism and universality that is embedded in a lot of heterodox theorising as well (Kayatekin, 2009). For example, in much post-Keynesian analysis, there is an underlying assumption of Weberian modernity in its view of how noneconomic spheres work (Danby, 2009). What's more, many Post-Keynesian textbook authors present general 'elements' (e.g. Dow, 2001) or 'propositions' (e.g. Arestis, 1992), similar to the 'principles' of the mainstream of the field. One can even find modernist and ethnocentric foundations of some strands of feminist thinking, such as that of Martha Nussbaum (see Charusheela, 2009 for a critique). This may be why heterodox economists do not fare particularly well when compared with economists in non-economics departments, as the latter are more likely to say that teaching about colonialism and empire, and including more perspectives from the Global South, are central priorities.

Nevertheless, given the centrality of the role of power, structures, and the politics of knowledge creation in heterodox strands, they lend themselves more easily to incorporate the decolonizing insights than what the mainstream economic framework does. In other words, decolonizing heterodox economic theory can be a fruitful process, and is in no way an impossibility in the way that decolonizing mainstream economic theory might be.

The impact of positionality on attitudes to decolonization

Beyond the respondents' departments, the survey reveals interesting differences between economists' attitudes to economics and pedagogy based on both their gender and location. For example, women are much more likely to respond that it is important to challenge the Eurocentrism that prevails in the field, they are less likely to say that bringing in critical pedagogy is not important, and they are more likely to say that challenging universalism is important, than men. This supports the idea that if you have experienced discrimination in

¹⁴ We make a similar argument in Kvangraven and Kesar (2020); Matthaai (1996) also makes a similar argument in terms of a Marxian framework being more conducive to analyzing gendered and racialized inequality, given the active centring of power in the framework.

one domain (e.g. gender), then you may be more open to seeing marginalization and discrimination in others as well.

Meanwhile, respondents from the Global South were more likely to say we need to move away from the textbook approach to economics, that they find it difficult to relate the standard Economics curriculum to the specific country or socioeconomic context in which they teach, and more likely to say their courses allow for an understanding of structural racialized inequalities and/or the role of European colonialism in shaping economic outcomes. This is not unexpected since a lot of texts, contextualised in the Global North setting, are imported, often without any tailoring to recognize the specificity and/or structural differences of the Global South.

However, for many of the responses, there are no significant differences between respondents from the Global North and the South. Indeed, respondents from the Global South were no more likely to say that it is important to challenge Eurocentrism and universalism in the field, for example, and no less likely to say that efforts to decolonize are not relevant. Thus, the drive to decolonize economics pedagogy neither appears to be primarily driven by scholars in the Global South nor the Global North. This probably is not that unexpected an outcome, given that most institutions in the South also work under Global North's hegemony and are often under an even higher pressure to emulate in order to 'prove their worth' (Hountondji, 1997; Kesar, 2020).

Notably, more junior academics fare worse on several parameters in terms of their engagement with the calls to decolonize. While this could be a reflection of the narrowing of the Economics field in recent decades, it may also be partially explained by the fact that more junior academics, on account of having less power in the field, are under much more pressure to conform to set norms and emulate those in power.

5. Concluding remarks

The economics field's historical embeddedness in a Eurocentric worldview has had a dramatic impact on how the field is taught and how socio-economic realities are shaped. The continued dominance of the field by narrow theoretical and methodological approaches that centre methodological individualism, albeit with some variations, and the claim of this partial

view to objectivity and universality, stands in the way of the very possibility for decolonizing economics within the mainstream. The marginalization of heterodox and radical strands that centre social relations, structures, power, subjectivity and relativity - and are, therefore, more amenable to decolonising - makes the task even harder. While there have been important developments in mainstream economic theory in recent decades, their approach to *criticality* is limited to application and extensions *within* an existing theoretical paradigm, as opposed to heterodox/pluralist economists who tend to see critical thinking as associated with the comparison of theories that allows questioning of the very basic building blocks of a theoretical paradigm.

This also bears out in the survey results that demonstrate that mainstream economists appear to neither be particularly knowledgeable about what decolonizing economics means, nor be particularly convinced by the call to decolonize economics. This is disappointing given how much decolonial approaches to teaching have to offer economics, especially at a moment when it is becoming increasingly obvious that the field has trouble explaining key issues such as global racial hierarchies and asymmetrical power relations across a range of axes. We therefore hope these results can contribute to informed debate about how to decolonize economics.

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7. Appendix

Table A1 : Respondents' departments

Your department	Percentage	Number
Economics	60.04%	299
Economics - pluralist or heterodox	16.27%	81
International development / Development Studies	5.42%	27
Political Economy	4.62%	23
Politics / Political Science	4.02%	20
Management / Business	3.41%	17
Interdisciplinary institution	2.81%	14
Public Policy	0.60%	4
Area Studies	0.40%	3
Sociology	0.80%	3
Geography	0.60%	2
Other**	1.00%	5

* Respondents from Mathematics, Education, Economic History, Finance and a cross-disciplinary appointment.

Table A2: Respondents' disciplinary backgrounds

Your disciplinary background	Percentage	Number
Economics	62.45%	311
Economics - pluralist or heterodox	17.47%	87
Political Economy	4.62%	23
Politics / Political Science	3.61%	18
Interdisciplinary	3.41%	17
Management / Business	1.81%	9
International development / Development Studies	0.80%	4
History	0.80%	4
Mathematics	0.80%	4
Sociology	0.80%	4
Anthropology	0.60%	3
Geography	0.60%	3
Economic History	0.60%	3
Other**	1.61%	8

* Respondents from Cognitive Science, Engineering (2), English, Physics and Anthropology, Psychology, Public Policy, Social Welfare

Table A3: Time since PhD of respondents

Time since PhD	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
I don't have a PhD	21	4.22
Less than 5 years	85	17.07
5-15 years	147	29.52
15-30 years	150	30.12
More than 30 years	95	19.08
Total	498	100

Table A4: Country/region in which respondents teach

Region / country in which they teach	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
USA	202	40.56
UK	131	26.31
Australia	21	4.22
Canada	15	3.01
Europe	105	21.08
Global South	24	4.82
Total	498	100

Countries from the Global South include Brazil, India, South Africa, Thailand, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, and Zimbabwe. Countries from Europe included Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland

Table A5: Gender of respondents

Gender	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Man	350	70.28
Woman	128	25.7
Others / Prefer not to say	20	4.02
Total	498	100

Table A6: Ethnicity/race of respondents

Ethnic of racial minority	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
No	392	78.71
Yes	71	14.26
Others / Prefer not to say	35	7.03
Total	498	100