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Localising decolonisation: Insights from LAC critical theory

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I offer my gratitude to the Argentine public education system, including Buenos Aires University, where I first learned most of the ideas you are about to read.

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Abstract

In the region commonly referred to as Latin American and Caribbean, Abya Yala or Améfrica, progress in advancing nationally or locally led decolonisation agendas in the international aid system has been challenged by insufficient dialogue about what decolonisation would look like in our region, countries, and communities. Drawing on contributions from Latin American and Caribbean decolonial theory, including Black feminist theory, decoloniality, and critical geopolitics, this article contributes to the critical discussions necessary for effectively operationalising the decolonisation agenda. Such alternative and innovative analyses can offer a nuanced, historically informed analysis of the root causes of the human rights issues we address, challenging the dominant view that portrays them as crises' that humanitarian aid can resolve. A deep understanding of the cultural, socioeconomic, and historical factors influencing social justice and human rights issues, as defined by national, sub-national, and sub-regional movements, is essential to ensuring our efforts are relevant and responsive to specific contexts.

Leadership relevance

This article explores challenges and opportunities in advancing locally led decolonisation in Latin America and the Caribbean. It highlights the need for novel knowledge processes that foster dialogue and diverse views. The humanitarian sector too often perceives the human rights issues it addresses as unanticipated or exceptional, labeling them as 'crises', with solutions reflecting this ahistoric perspective. In contrast, Latin American and Caribbean critical theories offer deeper, context-specific analyses. Given that coloniality is historically rooted and manifests across individual, organisational, and societal levels, I encourage readers to promote these marginalised perspectives and foster locally- and nationally led dialogue on decolonising aid in our own terms.

Decolonising knowledge production

In recent years, several transnational movements within international aid[1] have emerged, advocating for decolonisation as a pathway to systemic change, including more democratic, just, and equal relationships among international donors, INGOs, national or local civil society organisations and communities. For those initiatives that are part of globalised, transnational efforts offering worldwide solutions, there is a risk that they may inadvertently replicate the colonial patterns they seek to challenge and overturn. However, far from criticising current decolonisation initiatives as a new form of colonialism, this article contributes to the critical discussions and analysis necessary for the effective operationalisation of the decolonisation agenda, emphasising the need for culturally specific, contextualised, and localised implementation. For this, it is crucial that decolonisation actions are informed by a deep understanding of the cultural, social, and historical factors influencing social justice and human rights, and led by national, sub-national, and sub-regional movements so they are relevant to specific contexts. This study seeks to contribute to critical discussions and analyses related to the operationalisation of the decolonisation agenda by advocating for the culturally specific, contextualised, and localised conceptualisation and practical implementation of the decolonisation agenda.

This article contributes to the critical discussions and analysis necessary for the effective operationalisation of the decolonisation agenda, emphasising the need for culturally specific, contextualised, and localised implementation.

Drawing solely on contributions from Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) decolonial theory,[2] including Latin American and Caribbean Black feminist theory, decoloniality, and critical geopolitics, I want to underscore critical perspectives from our region that can help shed light on the construction of authority, expertise, and knowledge within the aid sector as a way to advance localised decolonisation agendas. Because of its emphasis on power dynamics in knowledge production and agenda setting,[3] the analysis presented here inevitably challenges a major fallacy within modern international aid systems: that these systems are historically and geographically neutral, and that they are somehow disconnected from the colonial, neocolonial, and imperial histories of donor countries (Peace Direct et al., 2021).

The humanitarian aid field too often perceives the issues it addresses as unanticipated, novel, or exceptional, labeling them as 'crises,' 'situations,' or 'emergencies'. Often, solutions reflect this short-term perspective. On the contrary, LAC critical theories allow us to develop more comprehensive analyses of current 'crises'. Critical analyses involve considering these 'crises' in the context of their root causes, specifically the long-term historical and political processes contributing to their emergence. Using the example of regional migration policies to address large-scale displacement across the region in the past two decades, conceptualising displacement from the region as an 'emergency' or 'humanitarian crisis' is limiting. This perspective obscures the reality that forced displacement is a complex, multi-faceted, constant, and structural process that cannot be resolved through isolated, narrowly defined policies or interventions. Instead, by employing LAC critical theories, we focus on developing contextually relevant, system-wide solutions that prioritise social justice and human rights for people on the move and address the actual 'root causes' in each context.

The central theme of this article is that, in our region, decolonisation requires reevaluating and reconstructing knowledge-production processes to develop alternative perspectives and solutions that extend beyond Global North epistemologies (ways of interpreting and explaining the world). The first section offers a brief account of the contemporary history of international aid in our region from the perspective of decoloniality and critical geopolitics. With this analysis, I intend to showcase that LAC critical theory provides tools to reinterpret international aid history using perspectives of coloniality, economic dependency, and imperialism, developing more context-specific solutions. The second section explores LAC Black feminist theory as an alternative knowledge production framework to understand international aid and social resistance. Finally, this article encourages readers to consider the importance of establishing locally led, nationally led, and regionally led movements to foster dialogues for the decolonisation of international aid.

[1] In this article, I use the term 'international aid' for the sake of brevity and clarity. While recognising and acknowledging the problematic nature of 'aid', this article does not focus on providing a critical analysis of the terminology surrounding humanitarian aid or international development.

[2] Latin American and Caribbean critical theories are sometimes called 'critical thought' or 'critical thinking', depending on the author and publication. In this article, I deliberately use the term 'theory' or 'theories' to contest the prevailing stereotype that only academics, activists, and researchers from the Global North can produce legitimate social 'theory', while the rest of the world merely produces devaluated forms of knowledge ('thinking' or 'thoughts').

[3] For clarity and brevity, this article uses the term 'knowledge production' to encompass both formal and informal processes in international aid that involve creating and disseminating knowledge. This includes policy-oriented research and knowledge production processes involved in setting national, regional, and international policy and advocacy agendas, global operational standards, handbooks, technical guidance, MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning), needs assessments, meeting agendas and minutes or summaries, audiovisual materials, fundraising campaigns, etc.

Reflexivity and dialogue

In anthropology, reflexivity is the process of critically reflecting on one's own cultural, academic, and social background, and examining how these elements influence interactions with research participants and the research process itself. A lack of reflexivity can impede a researcher's capacity to analyse and interpret social realities because anthropological research consists of a continuous dialogue between the observed reality and the researcher's theoretical framework (Guber, 2001, p. 50).

I was first introduced to Latin American decolonial theory fifteen years ago as a young anthropology student, working an entry-level job at a Buenos Aires-based regional network focused on children's rights in Latin America. I was fortunate to work at a small, understaffed NGO where my role involved not only operational tasks—such as making photocopies and calling technical support to fix the AC during Buenos Aires' 40°C summers—but also engaging with global advocacy networks specialising in child care. In these, we helped highlight the excellent work of Latin American national NGOs that champion children's rights. I was completely unfamiliar with the intricacies of international advocacy at first, but I gradually understood how it worked thanks to the support of my colleagues and our kind INGO collaborators working from cities like New York, London, and Geneva.

As someone fascinated by the power of the so-called 'useless majors' in helping us make sense of the reality around us, it didn't take long for me to approach the events, documents, speeches, and conversations I witnessed and in which I was involved from an analytical viewpoint. This perspective led me to undertake three years of anthropological research at Buenos Aires University, focusing on the North-South divide within global advocacy networks. These formative experiences, along with further studies in Latin American and Afro-Latin American and Caribbean studies, and research in protection in international aid in the region, have deepened my appreciation for the frameworks and concepts I discuss here.

LAC decolonial theory can also help protection professionals see the protection issues we try to address as stemming from broader systems—such as racism, colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism.

Besides giving us a lens through which we can examine our sectoral practices and learn from them, LAC decolonial theory can also help protection professionals see the protection issues we try to address as stemming from broader systems—such as racism, colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism—that have resulted in unjust social, economic, and political hierarchies, even if they're not always framed as such.

I thank the readers for their interest in this article and encourage them to contact me to further the discussion. Decolonising aid is not an intellectual exercise or an isolated area of action but a continuous process of reflection and dialogue on the ways in which we do aid and how to improve them. Dialogue plays a crucial role in social change, transforming participants through their interactions because, as differences are shared, participants can unite to create change (Martín & Madroñal, 2018, p. 222). I hope this article will encourage the reader to share your perspectives on international aid and initiate discussions on decolonisation within your own communities, cities, countries, and sub-regions.

Alternative definitions and perspectives

> *"There's an epistemic subversion (...). The very notion of the coloniality of power and its epistemic foundations, the idea of decoloniality of power, are of Latin America in origin. It is no historical accident, of course; quite the contrary"* (Quijano, 2024: 6).

In the absence of a universal definition, this article sees decolonisation in international aid as "the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies regarding the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches", and that involves critical analyses of the sector's current and past practices (Peace Direct at al., 2021, p. 13). It is also "a movement that has to be developed from the bottom up rather than theorised and imposed as an academic or policy recommendation" (Mihlar, 2024, p. 4). LAC critical theory is also a widely diverse and plural area of thought, not limited to academic or political spaces, that provides a framework for understanding colonial power. It informs diverse knowledge (*saberes*) that are both local and universal (Márquez Duarte & Espinoza Valle, pp. 5, 11). I refer to LAC critical theory as "alternative" and "innovative" epistemologies because these approaches to interpreting and explaining the world are new to the humanitarian aid field. LAC critical theory is rooted in the century-old field of Latin American political economy theories. These have been applied to understand the social, economic, and racial inequalities in our individual countries since the early 1920s (see Mariátegui, 1928) and in our region as a whole since the post-World War II period.

This article diverges from the commonly used definition of 'localisation' in international aid sources and conversations (see McGeary, 2024 for these definitions). Instead, it conceptualises localisation as the process of reimagining and rebuilding our approach to knowledge production and decolonisation in aid without adhering to a universal model. Localisation and decolonisation are linked through the 'decoloniality' of power, which serves as a connector among various local realities that require

decolonising. 'Coloniality' refers to a historical process that is far more complex than colonisation or colonialism and continues into the present. It is a "pattern of power", facilitated by the normalisation of racial hierarchies, which perpetuates relationships characterised by territorial and epistemic domination (Restrepo, 2007, p. 292). Specifically, 'decoloniality' has a role as the "general grammar that connects specific local works of decolonisation (...) the connector among diverse and specific localities that have been disrupted by coloniality" (Quijano, 2024, p. 11). From this perspective, decolonisation rooted in specific local histories requires we carry out the task of epistemological decolonisation. This involves reevaluating and reconstructing knowledge production processes that are rooted in coloniality. Therefore, decolonisation in aid must arise from the local histories that have been disrupted by the coloniality of power.

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In this analysis, I also argue that several concepts developed by LAC Black feminist scholars, such as 'intersectionality' and 'place of speech', serve as a starting point for thinking about how to fight coloniality and develop localised, contextualised approaches to decolonisation in aid. The focus on LAC Black decolonial theory stems from its emphasis on methods of knowledge production, learning and teaching that prioritise local experiences, particularly those emerging from marginalised contexts, social movements, and building of bridges. In its extremely summarised definition, intersectional feminism is a framework that analyses 'systems of domination' such as patriarchy, colonialism, racism, militarism, capitalism, sexism, and ableism, which, over time, have generated oppression, inequality, and unjust social, economic, and political hierarchies that disproportionally oppress certain groups of individuals, such as Black women (Curiel, 2007). This framework's ultimate goal is to understand these unfair structural power dynamics and use this knowledge as a tool to challenge racism, sexism, classism, and achieve liberation for all, based on freedom, equality, social justice, and participatory democracy (Ibarra & Domenech, 2021; Viveros Vigoya, 2016).

A tiny history of international aid in the LAC region

Critical geopolitics and decoloniality

Decoloniality requires a process of reevaluating and reconstructing knowledge-production processes to develop alternative ways of knowing that go beyond epistemologies from the Global North. LAC critical theory offers tools to question the status quo by reinterpreting the history of international aid in the region through the perspectives of coloniality, economic dependency, and imperialism. Such alternative analyses, like the one presented in this section, can help develop more context-specific solutions. They offer a nuanced, historically informed analysis of the root causes of the human rights issues we aim to address, challenging the dominant view that portrays them simply as 'emergencies' or 'humanitarian crises' that humanitarian aid can resolve.

LAC critical geopolitics posits that geopolitics is "a discourse about power relations and a practice that attempts to steer them"; critical geopolitics is not only concerned with the analysis of influence and power over space and territory in international relations, but also with how those holding power create and promote a representation of the world (Montoya-Arango, 2010, p. 103). Dependency theory and the theory of the contemporary capitalist world-system argue that it is impossible to understand the structural conditions of deep economic inequality and racial and cultural hierarchies without considering the subordinate manner in which LAC countries were incorporated into the global economy, and the processes of "primitive accumulation" that enabled the expansion of the Global North at the expense of the exploitation of the Global South. Dependency theory establishes that underdevelopment in our region is directly linked to the political structures and processes that facilitated the expansion of industrialised countries, as these are two aspects of the same process. Neither the concepts of Europe nor Latin America or the Caribbean pre-existed the conquest and colonisation of the 15th century, as Europe was simultaneously constituted through the production of the colonial "other" (Mignolo, 2000, in Restrepo: 2007).

Imposing the "colonial matrix of power" required the simultaneous dismantling of existing social organisations and traditional ways of life, including the "control of the economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education); and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity)" (Mignolo, 2007, p. 156). Colonial pillage, oppression, and the genocide of native peoples, the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade and its enduring legacies of structural racism, later imperialism and direct US interventions, settler colonial states, and the subsequent imposition of international structural adjustment programs have constituted a totalising experience that violently disrupted the histories of subjugated peoples.

For decolonial theory, the analysis of racial discrimination (the hierarchy of human beings that justified economic and political subordination of Indigenous and Black peoples since the colony), discrimination against women, and class oppression are foundational elements (Mignolo, 2007). The concept of "coloniality of power" (Quijano,

2000, 2007; in Gonzalez, 2020, p. 5) allows us to apply this definition of racism to the relations marked by coloniality, economic dependency, and imperialism, as "in an imperial/capitalist/colonial world, race constitutes the transversal dividing line that runs through multiple power relations, such as class, sex, and gender, on a global scale" (Grosfoguel, Oso, Christou, 2015). To this day, dependency is expressed in the internal structure of each country through "internal colonialism", manifesting in the exploitation of, and racism and discrimination against Indigenous, rural, and Black populations (Casanova González, 2006, p. 200).

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Based on Franz Fanon's definition of racism, Ramón Grosfoguel defines it as "a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human that has been politically produced and reproduced as a structure of domination for centuries by the imperialist system" (2012, p. 93), in which "the people who are above the line of the human are socially recognised in their humanity as human beings with subjectivity and access to human/citizen/civil/labor rights. People below the line of the human are considered sub-human or non-human, i.e., their humanity is questioned and therefore denied" (Fanon, 2010; in Grosfoguel, 2012, p. 93).

Geopolitics in our region involved the hierarchisation by, first, the colonial metropolises and later the USA, of beings, places, and objects in binary terms (advanced/backward; civilised/savage; educated/ignorant, or modern/primitive), which justified the domination of the conquered/defeated, deemed underdeveloped and dangerous, by the conquerors/victors (Montoya-Arango, 2010, pp. 105-107). Although it is not its primary goal or intention, international aid has historically risked creating, reproducing, and reinforcing relations of superiority and inferiority between the Global North and the Global South. As Lander explains (2000, p.31), "based on a strictly economic and quantitative definition, two-thirds of humanity were transformed into the poor (and thus beings lacking and in need of intervention) when in 1948 the World Bank defined as poor those countries whose annual per capita income was less than 100 USD a year", thereby legitimising intervention by 'developed' Western countries. These countries were seen as "the image of the future for the rest of the world, the way of life to which it would naturally arrive were it not for the obstacles represented by their inadequate racial composition, their archaic or traditional culture, their magical-religious prejudices, or more recently, by populism and excessively interventionist States, which do not respect the spontaneous freedom of the market" (Lander, 2000, p. 26). In this context, there was a shift in the relationship between the richest and poorest countries, where the full sovereignty and autonomy of the latter began to be challenged, no longer by the states of the central countries as had been the case in the past, but by private transnational entities, with which they establish relationships either of discipline and regulation (such as those of the World Trade Organisation or the IMF) or of alliance and cooperation, such as with humanitarian aid agencies.

International aid under the neoliberal paradigm

Progressive human rights agendas in our region, particularly those concerning the human rights of sociological minorities (i.e., children's rights, women's rights, Indigenous rights), were consolidated alongside the establishment of neoliberal states. The establishment of this system of "transnational governance", directly linked with the development of neoliberal states, was made possible through profound political transformations, moving towards the "de-satiation" of government practices (Ferreira & Schuch, 2010). This shift involved replacing the Welfare State model, which was responsible for regulating all aspects of the social and economic life of nations, with a broader conception of governance. National and international organisations began to fill the gaps left by the advance of austerity policies and to assume the functions previously attributed to the Welfare State. In this context, the expansion of INGOs was facilitated, as Hoffman (2008) explains, by the rise of a negative conception of Third World States as "repressive", "corrupt", and "inefficient", where "civil society became synonymous with everything that opposed the dictatorial State" (2008, p. 47). In this view, "everything coming from civil society was seen in a positive light, while everything related to the State was marked as negative" (ibid.). In the context of the Washington Consensus from the 1980s, this Manichean view was appropriated by neoliberal ideology to demonise everything associated with the rule of law and "uncritically glorify a 'depoliticised civil society'" (Coutinho, n.d.; in Hoffman, 2008, p. 47). During the rise of the neoliberal state in the 1990s, many LAC nation-states adopted progressive human rights agendas focusing on historically marginalised social groups, which resulted in the dilution of the more critical, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist elements of these agendas. For instance, the concept of 'interculturality' was incorporated into the politics and discourse of then neoliberal states like Bolivia and Ecuador, as well as into the policies and discourse

of multilateral institutions. According to Walsh (2006, p. 55), this incorporation weakened its fundamental transformative potential as envisioned by indigenous movements, by stripping it of its political, anti-colonial, and epistemic opposition.

When analysing the characteristics of the initiatives of large international NGOs at the national level, one aspect that stands out is that they are backed by concepts of legitimacy that claim to be apolitical, as opposed to those of the Welfare State and of the social and human rights movements that characterise the region.

When analysing the characteristics of the initiatives of large international NGOs at the national level, one aspect that stands out is that they are backed by concepts of legitimacy that claim to be apolitical, as opposed to those of the Welfare State and of the social and human rights movements that characterise the region. Because of their emphasis on the principle of neutrality, humanitarian aid initiatives often seem to rely on apolitical definitions of the human rights issues they address. Frequently, international aid is "far from questioning the economic system that subordinates large segments of the world population, [and] portrays the Global South as primitive, backward, and in need of rescue" (Gonzalez, 2020, p. 22). In parallel, civil society organisations underwent a process of bureaucratisation and professionalisation, sometimes referred to as the 'NGO-isation' (i.e., the professionalisation, bureaucratisation, and institutionalisation) of social movements. Brazilian anthropologist Alcida Ramos describes how the ideals of social transformation held by Indigenous activism groups in the 1970s and 1980s gradually gave way to a focus on maintaining their NGOs' bureaucratic structures. These activist groups have progressively adapted their activities to the requirements of international donors (fundraising, institutional development, proposal and report writing, etc.), often at the expense of their original goals of defending the rights of Indigenous peoples (Ramos, 1994). The 'NGO-isation' further contributed to the exclusion of alternative worldviews, knowledge and of Indigenous teaching and learning methods beyond traditional writing, such as conversations and storytelling.[4] The complexity of these bureaucratic processes has also resulted in a concentration of authority in knowledge production methods developed in Northern institutions and the subsequent devaluation of local, Indigenous, or alternative knowledge production and expertise. In addition, the adoption of external methods on everyday activities severely limits opportunities for dissent, innovation, and creativity, all of which are essential for achieving systemic, radical change.

As seen here, LAC critical theory provides a framework for challenging the status quo by applying historical analysis through the perspectives of coloniality, economic dependency, and imperialism. It is concerned with integrating theory with practice to address social, political, and cultural inequalities in the region, guided by an "ethical commitment to provide theoretical, methodological, epistemological, and political tools to both understand and address these realities" (Curiel, 2017, p. 2). Furthermore, it encompasses a broad ideological commitment to supporting popular movements that strive for autonomy, independence, liberation, and resistance against imperialism, patriarchy, and colonialism (Yohanka León del Río, 2017, p. 4). This union of theory and action defines LAC critical theory, underscoring its relevance and application in ongoing struggles for systemic change.

Towards localised, contextualised, definitions of decolonisation

Colonial legacies in knowledge-production

In the region commonly referred to as Latin America and Caribbean, which Indigenous Peoples reclaim as Abya Yala[5] and Afro-feminists as Améfrica,[6] progress in advancing the decolonisation agenda in a way that is nationally or locally led has been challenged by insufficient autonomous dialogue and discussions that focus on what decolonisation would look like in our region and countries. This can partly be explained by the fact that creating local, sub-regional, or national plans for the effective operationalisation of the decolonisation agenda would first require subverting Global North-led knowledge production paradigms that are deeply rooted due to our colonial past. In simple terms, from the beginning of our formal education, most of us don't read critical Latin American theory, and don't learn from each other's diverse cultures, histories of colonialism, and resistance. We often finish formal education knowing more about the history of a few European countries or the US than about our neighbours. In addition, because of our position in the global geopolitical landscape of knowledge production, the work of LAC intellectuals, particularly those from marginalised identities like Black feminists, is often less widely disseminated, read and

[4] Indigenous learning and teaching methods include oral narratives that recount human histories, ritual practice, dance, music, and art, among many others.

[5] Abya Yala is the name in the Kuna language (Indigenous peoples inhabiting the territory now known as Panama and Colombia) for the continent that Spanish colonisers named "America." It means "land in full maturity" or "land of vital blood" (Espinosa, Gómez Correal, & Ochoa Muñoz, 2014: p.13).

[6] Coined by Brazilian Black feminist scholar Léila González, Améfrica (*Amefricanity*) emphasises that understanding today's Latin American societies requires an intersectional perspective that holistically analyses the consequences of the transatlantic slave trade, the European invasion of Abya Yala, and the colonial process, on today's configuration of domination around sexism, racism, classism, imperialism, and power (Gómez Correal, 2019).

cited than research originating in the Global North and written by typically White Euro-American researchers and scholars. All these factors and many more have challenged the formation of autonomous national, regional, and sub-regional debates around decolonisation that could otherwise be more advanced, especially compared to the significant institutionalisation of transnational activist, human rights, social, and intellectual movements in our region.

As previously mentioned, coloniality legitimises unequal knowledge production practices, wherein Eurocentric definitions and narratives are imposed by the North. Following the conquest and colonisation starting in 1492, Europe gained a comparative advantage, positioning itself at the centre of the first and only global system to date (Dussel, 1998, as cited in Garcés, 2007, p. 220). What was initially a localised worldview from a few countries became universally applied, overshadowing all other unique ways of being and forms of knowledge. Consequently, knowledge and the social sciences were developed to support Europe's goals of domination, conquest, and control over the world. Eurocentrism and modernity are historical processes and a project of political, epistemic, and economic dominance, which continues to shape our worldview to this day (Garcés, 2007, p. 221). As a result, the perspectives of very narrowly defined social groups—typically white, Euro-American, educated men—have been deemed legitimate and considered the 'universal truth' (Ribeiro, 2020, p. 24). Conversely, commonly marginalised groups, such as Black women and Indigenous peoples, have often been relegated to the status of 'others,' their knowledge perceived as illegitimate, biased, and unscientific, or completely erased in what is known as "epistemicide" (Carneiro, 2005, as cited in Ribeiro, 2016, p. 24). The populations most affected by the consequences of 'systems of domination'—such as patriarchy, colonialism, racism, capitalism, sexism, militarism, classism, and ableism—have long been deprived of the right to narrate their own history and set their priorities.

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Resistance and decolonising knowledge production

> *"In terms of the Black movement and the women's movement, there's a lot of talk about being the subject of one's own history; (...) I am more Lacanian, let's be the subjects of our own discourse. The rest will follow as a result of this"*—Lélia Gonzalez, Brazilian philosopher, sociologist, anthropologist and activist (Gonzalez, n.d.).

Over the past five centuries, exploitation, colonialism, slavery and epistemicide have always been met by resistance in the form of anti-colonialism, anti-slavery, and the struggle for people's freedom. Slavery, poverty, violence, foreign interventions, and sanctions have always been accompanied by the struggle for freedom, equality, and universal democratic rights by Indigenous, Black, and people's (popular) groups. One of these forms of resistance has been articulated by Black feminist scholars and activists. Since the 1980s, the voices and political actions of Black feminists have emerged in our region, building on earlier social and political struggles. They problematised their conditions of race, ethnicity, class, and sex-gender and challenged ethnocentric, racist, misogynistic, heteronormative, and colonial discourses (Espinosa, Gómez Correal, & Ochoa Muñoz, 2014, p. 13). Black feminist decolonial theory emphasises methods of knowledge production, learning and teaching that prioritise local experiences, particularly those emerging from marginalised contexts (Spinosa et al., 2014), on knowledge that arises from political and social movements, the building of bridges, and dialogue among movements, as well as the recognition of intersecting and overlapping modes of oppression (de Souza Lima, 2023, p. 107). For these two reasons, Black feminist decolonial theory can provide theoretical and practical contributions to establishing regional, sub-regional, national, and sub-national movements to foster dialogues for the decolonisation of international aid.

Latin American and Caribbean decolonial Black scholars have significantly contributed to the development of intersectional feminism by adding a decolonial perspective. Even before Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality'—highlighting the unique position of black women in the United States, situated at the intersection of two oppressed groups: the African-American community and women, and noting that neither identity alone sufficiently explains this exclusion (Crenshaw, 1991)—Brazilian Black feminists such as Sueli Carneiro, Beatriz Nascimento, and Lélia González were already emphasising the thesis of 'triple oppression' in Brazil (Frateschi, October 22). They posited that slavery was the origin of the interconnected oppressions of gender and race. Lélia González emphasised that identity differences are not inherently natural or essential but are instead the result of historical events, power dynamics, and domination relations linked to Latin America's economic dependence, colonialism, and the transatlantic slave trade (Viveros Vigoya, 2016). González also highlighted the strategies of resistance deployed by racialised women against racism, patriarchy, colonialism, imperialism, and whitening processes, noting that these marginalised groups have historically shown innovative agency in resisting domination. Her work underscores the importance of learning from the diverse political and cultural resistances employed by Indigenous and Black communities in both large-scale revolutions and daily acts of resistance (Gómez Correal, 2019). Additionally,

Dominican scholars and activists Yuderkys Espinosa and Ochy Curiel have been promoting a 'decolonial feminism' that challenges the predominant Eurocentric feminist views.

Intersectional feminist analysis, as shaped by Latin American decolonial and Afro-feminist scholars, offers a powerful framework for understanding how interlocking systems of oppression—such as patriarchy, capitalism, racism, classism, and colonialism—disproportionately impact marginalised individuals. This approach to knowledge creation has helped shed light on how specific individuals and social groups, due to their simultaneous membership in multiple marginalised categories like age, race, class, sex, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, disability, religion, caste, and others, experience compounded oppression. These social categories intersect and overlap in complex ways within each historical, social, and cultural context. For this reason, understanding and responding to this oppression requires recognising the interconnections between these social categories in each community or society, rather than viewing each category in isolation (Viveros Vigoya, 2016). Another key contribution of LAC Black feminism relevant to knowledge-creation processes in aid has been their emphasis on prioritising the lived experiences, knowledge, and perspectives of historically marginalised groups. This is the 'place of speech', the unique standpoint from which individuals and social groups that share common experiences and identities speak and write and its influences (Ribeiro, 2020). In brief, knowledge isn't 'neutral' or 'universal' because everyone views the world and writes based on their specific cultural, social, and individual baggage (Ribeiro, 2020).

Knowledge isn't 'neutral' or 'universal' because everyone views the world and writes based on their specific cultural, social, and individual baggage.

Lastly, LAC Black feminism can contribute to reimagining and rebuilding our approach to knowledge production and decolonisation in aid as it focuses on providing a frame of action to end multiple systems of oppression based on the values of freedom, equality, and social justice. Although diverse schools exist within LAC intersectional decolonial feminism and Afro-feminism, they all share a concern for social change and the struggle for liberation and justice for all (Curiel, 2007). They are not merely concerned with generating theoretical or conceptual frameworks for the sake of knowledge; instead, they use this knowledge as a tool to combat racism, sexism, classism, and other unjust social hierarchies (Ibarra & Domenech, 2021).

Conclusion

> *"A man of the town of Neguá, on the coast of Colombia, managed to climb to the high heaven. On his return, he told a story. He said he had contemplated, from above, human life. The world, he revealed, 'is a heap of people, a sea of tiny flames.'*
>
> *Each person shines with his or her own light. No two flames are alike. There are big flames and little flames, flames of every colour. Some flames are so still they don't even flicker in the wind, while others have wild flames that fill the air with sparks. Some (...) blaze with life so fiercely that you can't look at them without blinking and if you approach them, you shine in fire"*—Eduardo Galeano (1940-2015), from *The Book of Embraces* (1989).

Efforts toward decolonisation within the Latin American and Caribbean context, as explored in this article, underscore the imperative of reevaluating and reconstructing knowledge-production processes and encouraging locally led organising. Decolonisation requires transcending traditional Global North epistemologies to foster perspectives emerging from historical and contextual analyses, and solutions that are rooted in local, national, and sub-regional realities. Drawing upon Latin American decolonial and Black feminist theories, critical geopolitics, coloniality, and economic dependency, this analysis sought to illuminate the extensive colonial underpinnings that continue to inform contemporary structures and practices within the international aid sector in our region. It challenges the prevailing notions that consider aid as neutral and ahistorical, that is, disconnected from its colonial, neocolonial, and imperial history. Recognising this history and its legacy is crucial for moving toward equitable and just relationships between international donors, INGOs, and both national and community-led organisations.

Considering that coloniality is historically established, socially perpetuated, and experienced at individual, community, and social levels, decolonisation will require concerted efforts across these dimensions. Decolonising aid is not merely a theoretical exercise but a practice involving continuous dialogue and reflexivity. It requires the active involvement of diverse regional, sub-regional, national, and sub-national movements, as varied as the "tiny fires" Eduardo Galeano describes in the excerpt above. These movements are essential for ensuring that decolonisation efforts are contextually relevant and challenge entrenched power dynamics to reimagine how aid is conceptualised and delivered to the peoples for whom we work. By embracing the principles of decoloniality and engaging with the diversity of theories, worldviews, and practices from Latin American and Caribbean contexts, we can begin to dismantle the colonial legacies that persist in international aid.

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