
Focus

Common Challenges for All? A Critical Engagement with the Emerging Vision for Post-pandemic Development Studies

Jörg Wiegratz, Pritish Behuria, Christina Laskaridis, Lebohang Liepollo Pheko, Ben Radley and Sara Stevano

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic motivated calls for the field of development studies to be recast. This article analyses two prominent, future-gazing ‘pandemic papers’ to illustrate salient features of the ascendant trend towards a new ‘global development’ paradigm. By unpacking and interpreting major lines of reasoning put forward by two agenda-setting articles, this contribution appraises how these texts make the case for the future of development studies. Through this analysis, the article questions the core arguments that seek to shift the contours of the discipline, and thus the study of development generally. In making their call to adopt a universalist or global development framework that includes a focus on Europe and North America, the authors of the ‘pandemic papers’ overlook the Southern origins of and justifications for the North–South framework they seek to overturn. The present article acknowledges the importance of and supports returning to and advancing — rather than jettisoning — the intellectual lineage anchored in non-Truman understandings of development, including as a popular project of Southern emancipation from colonial, imperial and structural subordination. Rather than de-centring the global North–South framework, it suggests that the analytically more useful way forward is for development studies to (re)centre the global South and use global South theories and lenses to better understand the world economy and the majority world.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic provided fertile ground for seeking a new paradigm in the field of development studies, as leading academic journals in the discipline called *en masse* for future-gazing articles and special issues. The published work to date presents an important source of fresh academic interventions attempting to shape or ‘get ahead’ of the field, including through positioning for new funding streams from some of the most influential and well-resourced development studies institutes globally. This article seeks to provide a critical appraisal of the ascendant vision for post-pandemic development studies emerging out of this body of work. We do so through a focus on two highly cited ‘pandemic papers’ published in one of the discipline’s leading journals, *World Development*. The articles emanate from two of the largest and leading development studies departments in the United Kingdom (UK) and globally — the Global Development Institute (GDI) at the University of Manchester and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex.¹

The first paper by Oldekop et al. (2020) was co-authored by over 40 scholars at GDI and had been cited 290 times as of July 2023. It makes the case for a new paradigm of ‘global development’ based on a universalistic vision that rejects the global North–South delineation that has been the traditional hallmark of development studies.² Although only 3,000 words, the authors highlight that their position draws upon lengthier pieces from senior scholars within the same department (Horner, 2020; Horner and Hulme, 2019). The second article, by Leach et al. (2021a), was co-authored by four scholars at IDS and, as of July 2023, had been cited 341 times. At approximately

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1. The University of Sussex/IDS ranked best in the world for development studies in the 2022 QS World University Rankings, for the sixth year in a row. In an accompanying opinion piece by IDS academic leadership reflecting on the institute’s world ranking, Harrison and Leach (2022) explain what it takes to be a top-ranking development studies institution: ‘It is about asking difficult questions, staying relevant to changing contexts, sustaining our teaching and research networks and partnerships, and always adapting and reflecting’. GDI is positioned seventh in the 2022 ranking. Six of the top 10 institutions in the 2022 ranking are based in the UK (Sussex, SOAS, Oxford, LSE, Cambridge, Manchester); see www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2022/development-studies (accessed 24 June 2022).
 2. Our understanding of the term global South broadly aligns with the definition recently offered by Sylla (2023: xvii), ‘as a geo-historical concept ... [that] occupies in the age of neoliberal globalization the intellectual space opened up during the Cold War by the concept of the Third World’. This connects Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania through common characteristics related to ‘history (former European colonies/victims of imperialism), international law (countries that are international norm-takers rather than international norm-producers), economic status (non-industrialized or late industrialized countries), knowledge production (marginalized and distorted subjectivities of Western-centric epistemology), geopolitics (dominated countries that try to challenge the world system)’ (ibid.).

10,000 words, the paper makes the case for building development studies back better.³

The discussion on global development gained traction following the Debate in the Forum 2019 issue of *Development and Change*, which centred on the argument of Horner and Hulme (2019) — co-authors of the Oldekop et al. (2020) pandemic paper — that a shift from an ‘international’ to a ‘global development’ framing was necessary. In this article, Horner and Hulme (ibid.) make the case that global inequalities can be characterized by ‘converging divergence’, the idea that there is increasing convergence between the North and South while there is increased evidence of sustained within-country inequalities (divergence). While these calls for reframing development studies were not necessarily new (see, for example, Mawdsley, 2017), Horner and Hulme’s (2019) arguments formalized some of these claims by arguing that convergence had occurred between ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries. Critics questioned Horner and Hulme’s minimalist definition of development (linked to poverty and inequality, with no analysis of structural transformation), data and categories used, neglect of the salience of neoliberalism in shaping outcomes, and the failure of their analysis to transcend orthodox approaches to development theory (Büscher, 2019; Fischer, 2019; Ghosh, 2019; Ziai, 2019). Notably, Fischer (2019: 440–41) argued that Horner and Hulme’s intervention — particularly their attempt at ‘relabelling’ development — does ‘a disservice to the legacy of our field by encouraging amnesia’.

Despite these concerns, global development framings have since gathered steam within some segments of UK and European development studies departments. Sumner’s recent (2022) overview of the field, published in the Working Paper series of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI), highlights four approaches in development studies, with ‘global Development Studies’ recognized as one of those four.⁴ A range of scholarship — such as Gillespie and Mitlin (2023), Mawdsley and Taggart (2022), Schindler et al. (2020) and Sims et al. (2022)

3. For discussions related to the *World Development* article, see IDS (2020a) and IDS (2021a). For comparison, see the *World Development* piece by a group of scholars based in The Netherlands titled ‘Planning for a World beyond COVID-19: Five Pillars for Post-neoliberal Development’ (Büscher et al., 2021). As of May 2023, the citation count for the latter intervention was 42, a fraction of the citations of the pandemic papers from GDI and IDS.

4. Sumner summarizes the global development approach as seeking ‘to move beyond the focus on developing countries to *consider development in all countries*, in the South and North, and the impact of global trends such as climate change The scope encompasses all countries and the interconnectedness of development, poverty, wealth, and wellbeing in the North/West and South/East. Furthermore, it posits that *all countries are developing in some sense* and that there is wealth and poverty in both the North/West and South/East. Many development problems and their solutions are neither the preserve of the North/West nor the South/East alone and wellbeing in the North/West and South/East is increasingly connected. Thus, according to this approach, the *demarcation between developed/North and developing/South* has become blurred since the Cold War to the point of being

— has begun to accept the argument that the Truman-based, aid-oriented ‘international development’ has been replaced by ‘global development’. The selected two articles are thus part of a broader trend that pre-dated the pandemic, but which has gained significant ground since, warranting critical appraisal.

We focus on what we consider to be two highly influential and agenda-setting pieces, illustrative of broader trends, because of the importance, historically, of influential academic scholarship in development studies with respect to broader policy prerogatives. Development studies has always been vulnerable to the most pernicious aspects of what Jessop (2018) refers to as ‘academic capitalism’. In the UK, with the increased marketization of higher education since the 1990s, academic departments have been set in competition with one another to access sources of revenue. This is the case in terms of publications, reputation, students, research and, increasingly, consultancy grants. The increased emphasis on grants with a global outlook has put UK-based development studies departments and centres in an advantageous position in comparison to other disciplines. Traditionally home to interdisciplinary scholars committed to globally oriented research, development studies departments have been well placed to compete for and secure grants funded by the UK government and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, such as the Global Challenges Research Fund. Thus, development studies departments — though often working closely with one another — are incentivized to present themselves as being ahead of the curve or leading the latest academic trend.

Consequently, development studies departments often respond to development fads both within the UK and globally, to refashion themselves in line with donor preferences. One obvious example of this was the rapid increase in the establishment of ‘International Development’ departments within UK universities, when the UK’s Department of International Development was established in 1997 (Fischer, 2019: 427). It is through such funding that the diagnoses take on a global significance, as recipient governments and other partners from the global South become enmeshed within the new frames and paradigms put forward.⁵

Illustrative of the desire of the ‘pandemic papers’ to shape the agenda for the future of development studies, the IDS announcement accompanying the paper by Leach et al. (2021a) reads: ‘As leaders look ahead to rebuild from COVID-19 and to occasions for global collaboration on universal development challenges, including COP26 and the G7 summit, there is

meaningless. Hence, the defining dichotomy in Development Studies — that of developed vs developing countries — has *lost validity*’ (Sumner, 2022: 8–9, emphasis added).

5. More than five decades ago, Hirschman (1970) criticized the tendency within some parts of Anglo-American social sciences to obsessively seek to develop comprehensive paradigms that prioritized parsimonious global understandings above valuing context-specific analyses that emphasize the diversity of human experience.

a clear opportunity to reset outdated approaches that the pandemic has shown are no longer fit for purpose' (Leach et al. 2021b). It continues: 'a case is made [in the article] for six principles that development researchers and practitioners *must apply* in order for there to be lasting positive post-pandemic transformations globally' (ibid., emphasis added).⁶ In the case of GDI, Horner and Hulme have elsewhere referred to the 'global development' trend as a new paradigm (Horner, 2020; Hulme and Horner, 2020).

Against this background, our text aims to contribute to the ongoing collegial discussion about the future of development studies. Our analysis is not exhaustive but aims to raise a number of questions and concerns related to the global development framing. Our contribution is to explore how two influential articles — which are illustrative of wider and increasingly common 'global development' framings — interpret the pandemic in the context of capitalism. To do this, we examine what they identify as the new relevant topics, concepts, analytical lenses, and policy issues for the future of the study and practice of development, and what 'old' ones they neglect. We contend that exploring the articles' positions on the relation between capitalism and development is vital given the significance of the relationship between the pandemic and capitalism (Sathyamala, 2022; Stevano et al., 2021a; Wallace, 2020), and that for decades now, development has been unquestioningly understood as *capitalist* development (Harrison, 2020, 2022).

In what follows below, we unpack the major lines of reasoning put forward by the two articles. While we align with several sentiments expressed in both pieces, such as Leach et al.'s (2021a: 10) call for development studies to be 'supported by continuous challenging of historically embedded power dynamics', we question the concepts, lenses and frameworks put forward. Our main argument is that at the core of the 'pandemic papers' and the 'global development' agenda is a universalistic framing that crowds out analytical perspectives, including from the global South, that remain highly relevant and useful for the study of contemporary capitalist development. Building on the earlier work of Behuria (2021), we show how, by playing down hierarchies within the global political economy that function to impose immense, although not insurmountable, barriers to development for most former colonies, universalistic framings are unable to adequately speak to or address North–South asymmetries and inequalities. The remaining sections are structured as follows. First, we interrogate the issue

6. For video discussions from IDS, see, for example, 'Post-pandemic Transformations: How and Why COVID-19 Requires us to Rethink' (IDS, 2021a) and 'COVID-19 and Development — Building Back Better?' (IDS, 2020a). Another example of texts that articulate a need to recast development is ODI's 'Delivering the Global Reset' (ODI, 2021). Its opening lines stress the need for systemic and radical change, noting that 'ODI argued at the outset of the pandemic that we cannot go back to normal, because normal was the problem. So we must seize this opportunity to reset before old habits re-establish themselves' (ibid.).

of universalism. Second, we discuss and analyse the ‘pandemic papers’ with respect to their takes on global production, financial integration and social reproduction. Third and finally, we analyse a major development issue within this emergent reframing of the field: uncertainty. We question the prioritization, conceptualization and outlined political economy of ‘uncertainty’, and raise for discussion the potential political and policy implications of global development scholarship.

UNIVERSALISTIC FRAMINGS

Central to the two articles is the reframing of the future agenda of the study of development, through a call to adopt a universalistic or global development framework.⁷ For Leach et al. (2021a: 9), development studies has long been beset by ‘colonial assumptions and power relations’, and its practice narrowly focused on a set ‘of projects and programmes delivered through aid flows’ from North to South. Similarly, Oldekop et al. (2020: 2) present development studies as having had a limited focus ‘on inter-state relations, often via aid, and on problems of and in the global South’, to the exclusion of Southern sources of knowledge and expertise. Given this troubled past, ‘a broader global development approach’ is needed to ‘consider processes and problems that cover all countries, including those in the global North’ (ibid.). The case for a global development framework — that is, for building development studies back better on universal terms — has been heightened by ‘emerging patterns of global inequality’ over the last quarter century that ‘generate challenges *common to all countries*’ such as climate change, sustainable development and COVID-19 (ibid., emphasis added). ‘Global development should thus focus on *collective and shared challenges*, with attention to their uneven nature and impacts’ (ibid., emphasis added).⁸ In a similar vein, Leach et al. (2021a: 9) note that the development crisis generated by COVID-19 ‘has been felt as much in New York as it has in Nairobi’, and urge development studies to move away from its traditional focus on the global South to ‘a much more universal concern’.

In positing a universalist framework, the articles are aligned with post-colonial and decolonial narratives which have critiqued North–South comparisons for painting development as a division between the progressive North and the backward South. Postcolonial and decolonial scholarship

7. Historiographically, in other disciplinary fields, such as history, the ‘global turn’ was received with enthusiasm as well as broad critique, sparking much debate over the meaning and position of global vis-à-vis world or international history (see for instance, Byrne, 2018; Conrad, 2017).

8. Further examples of this framing are evident when Oldekop et al. (2020: 2) observe that ‘Climate change and sustainable development are key challenges facing the whole world’, and ‘COVID-19 adds even more immediacy to using a global development approach to the analysis of problems and processes’.

has been right to question such depictions. Consider for instance the practice whereby, for more than two decades, neoclassical economists placed a dummy variable into cross-country regressions to explain African growth failures that combined questionable data and homogenization (Cramer et al., 2020, Jerven, 2011). This practice, common beyond economics, is guilty of levelling African political and economic landscapes by assuming all African cultures to be ‘neopatrimonial’ or corrupt (Mkandawire, 2001, 2015).

Reflecting their alignment with post-development scholarship, the articles offer a valuable critique of the Truman version of development, which envisions the global North as developing the South through aid projects, and we would agree with Oldekop et al. (2020: 2) that this Truman form of international development has been overly focused ‘on problems *of* and *in* the global South’ (emphasis in original).⁹ Under this Truman version, development was understood as a useful mechanism to entrench American ascendancy after 1945. The aid that flowed from North to South, the Northern development practitioners that flowed with it, and the training of experts from the South have been action oriented and results driven, where success is based on an international power to frame and control outcomes. This is often in isolation of concrete conditions and potentially reinforces notions of development voyeurism and objectification of ‘others’. The ‘need to help’ Truman model of development is also closely linked to a problematic deficit model, where those ‘in need’ are recognized for what they lack, rather than valued for what they have and who they are beyond ‘the poor and the helpless’ (Pheko, 2019).

We would also agree with Leach et al.’s (2021a: 10) call that going forward, development studies should be ‘grounded in more equitable sharing of knowledge and resources’. Challenges of representation remain, with knowledge divides continuing to marginalize the scholarship of those based in the countries that Euro-American literature tends to investigate (particularly in African countries, see Chelwa, 2021). With the so-called open access initiatives promoted by corporate academic publishers favouring scholars at European and North American institutions that can cover the associated costs — unlike many of their Southern counterparts — the inequalities of knowledge production and influence may end up widening (Meagher, 2021).

Yet in making their call to adopt a universalist or global development framework, the articles present a problematic obfuscation of existing power and regional imbalances that fits into an ascendant trend within development policy circles to view problems once confined to the global South as ‘common to all’ problems. This is most evident in the succession of the Sustainable Development Goals over the Millennium Development Goals, which, while useful in its ambition, blurs the reality that the global political economy is heavily uneven and hierarchical. Hidden from view here is that

9. Similarly, Ziai (2013) has argued that trusteeship as a colonial residue has shifted directly from colonial administrators to development ‘experts’.

the global economy remains largely Northern dominated and heavily shaped by imperialism (and related rivalries), predominantly of Northern powers, with the US as the leading and most militaristic country in the global system (Arrighi et al., 2003; Ayeb and Bush, 2019; Capasso, 2020; Smith, 2016).

By way of example, the international financial subordination of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is ‘not only a phenomenal expression of the crisis-ridden dynamics of accumulation — it is also a function of relations of empire and imperialism’ (Alami, et al., 2022: 1370, see also Alami 2019b; Kaltenbrunner and Powell, 2019; Koddenbrock et al., 2022; Narsey, 2016). Subordination here ‘denotes the need for actors in the global South to react and adapt to actors, practices, and financial flows originating in the global North’ (Kvangraven et al., 2021: 121), with the literature on financial subordination relying on ‘the theory of imperialism, dependency theory, and post-Keynesian debates on currency hierarchies and liquidity premia’ (ibid.). Alami (2019a) and Norfield (2016), for instance, point to the prolonged importance of imperial centres like the City of London in shaping financial and monetary relations that keep LMICs in a subordinate position. Relatedly, the way sovereign debt crises are addressed leads to excessive social, economic and political costs, and the extant procedures are the direct result of the explicit refusal of creditor countries — overwhelmingly in the North — to accept or adopt any of the numerous proposals and positions put forward by debtor countries largely in the South that would have enabled better international debt architecture (Laskaridis, 2023). ‘Common to all’ notions are analytically and politically misleading against these realities.

Similarly concealed by a universalist framing is the reality of bio-imperialism and vaccine racism.¹⁰ Rather than being felt as much in New York as in Nairobi, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the North–South

10. The earlier terminology of race and civilization was replaced by more coded terms like underdeveloped and the politically condescending ‘poor’ (Pheko, 2019). For instance, early ethnographical and anthropological research missions were deployed to collect data to support colonial administrations, described as an agenda to ‘manipulate and control the non-Western world’ (Lewis, 1973). Yet as recent critiques of the ‘white gaze’ and ongoing manifestations of racist development policy by Olusoga (2019), de Sousa Santos and Menezes (2019) and Tamale (2020) illustrate, such practices have lived on beyond the colonial period. Further, while Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant, Smith and Diderot supposedly critiqued the brutality of colonialism and opposed the notion of Europeans’ obligation to ‘civilize’ the rest of the world, they did not move beyond a universalistic ethic of shared humanity, nor did they eschew white supremacy (Pheko, 2021). These scholars were also speaking from the positionality of racist and race determination even though it has been argued that Kant’s views changed later in his life (Kleingeld, 2007). Indeed, decolonial scholars like Césaire and Senghor salvaged some value in some of the ideas that Hegel and Kant produced, including dialectical philosophy. It is here that apparent opposites like ‘universal’ (in relation to European subjectivity), and ‘particular’ (in relation to colonized ‘peripheries’) find their common ground through a new synthesis (Alpert, 2022). However, these standpoints also find resonance in the white racial subjectivities that are pervasive in many development theories, as illustrated in the coloniality of early ethnographical and anthropological research missions.

inequalities reproduced by a global capitalist economy. In reference to this, Fassin (2008) explains that ‘to make live’ — which is how biopower is typically understood — is accompanied by a rejection into death. This consignment to death can occur either as a consequence of neglectful policy makers and their impervious posture towards certain social groups, or intellectually as the result of not measuring the malevolent impact of these policies. Fassin (*ibid.*) further asserts that racist discrimination embedded in social and legal systems profoundly influences every dimension of life, including biological life. When viewed through a Foucauldian lens, elements of sovereignty, discipline, biopower, biopolitics and governmentality are combined in uneven, unpredictable ways in addition to being geographically situated (Foucault, 2007). One result of this is potentially the reproduction and deployment of geographically determined power plays as illustrated during the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. In August 2021, around the height of the pandemic globally, high-income countries (HICs) reached 100 COVID-19 vaccine doses administered per 100 people. Low-income countries (LICs) and lower-middle-income countries, meanwhile, had administered just one dose and 22 doses per 100 people respectively.¹¹ As Hassan et al. (2021: 1) commented at the time, ‘In early 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread across the world, warm words of global solidarity claimed that “we are all in this together”’. But these were little more than platitudes. From vaccine inequity, to blocking the TRIPS waiver, and selective travel bans — the global South has consistently been treated in a paternalistic and racist way’. This sits at odds with the form of universalism conveyed by the articles that flatten difference and imply that the global South and the global North have a common thread and experience of COVID-19 despite its explicit manifestations of biopower and bioracism.

The call for a new global development paradigm could indicate that development studies is now increasingly embracing the universal principles that have been typical of neoclassical development economics. As structuralist understandings of development were being marginalized by the increased prominence of neoclassical economics in the 1980s, Hirschman (1981) warned against universalist approaches to development policy. He argued that countries in the global South had specific economic characteristics (such as undiversified economic structures) that meant that the role of state intervention for industrial policy was more urgent than in already industrialized countries. Since the neoliberal counterrevolution in the 1970s, ‘institutional monocropping’ has resulted from the dominance of neoclassical economics, with ‘idealized versions of Anglo-American institutions

11. See Our World in Data for COVID-19 vaccine doses administered per 100 people, by income group: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/cumulative-covid-vaccinations-income-group?country=High+income~Low+income~Lower+middle+income~Upper+middle+income>.

being imposed on developing countries on the assumption that they would transcend national circumstances and cultures' (Mkandawire, 2009: 3). The World Bank has long played a critical role in marking the shift towards universal principles and technicism in development economics and, to some extent, development studies too (Fine, 2009). Development studies had, for many years, avoided such universalistic framings, yet the emerging global development vision might risk undermining the discipline's appreciation of trajectories of difference.

In an intervention titled 'We Are All Developing Countries Now. Are We?', Harrison (2015) warned about abandoning established categories and moving towards a 'universal development problematic', a move that would suggest 'differences between states are of degree rather than type [and order]'.¹² He elaborates:

If every state is facing global development challenges, it is surely noteworthy that the articulation and institutionalisation of those same challenges are themselves defined by quite small numbers of states, governing/managerial elites and epistemic communities, and/or small groups of economically powerful capitalists [A]lthough rigid polarised categorisations and certainly notions of a developed state are now arcane, it is not straightforward that we should move from this realisation to a 'sliding scale' approach within which differences between countries are seen in the context of a universal development problematic. (ibid.)

Lastly, in urging that development studies embrace a universal development framework, neither of the articles engages with the Southern origins of and justifications for the North–South framework they seek to overturn (see Sud and Sánchez-Ancochea, 2022). Rather than the origin story of 'international development' as Truman's inaugural address in 1949, in which he highlighted his programme for intervention in countries in the global South, Southern-based visions of development have their own origin stories, often associated with a similarly significant event. One such example

12. Moore (2015) and Horner (2019) are examples of blogs that answer that question in the affirmative. In her piece titled 'The Sustainable Development Goals: We're All Developing Countries Now', Moore reasons as follows: 'Unlike their predecessors, the millennium development goals (MDGs), which only applied to those countries deemed to be "developing", the SDGs will require all nations to work towards them. So, in a sense, we are all developing nations from now on. That's a refreshing and positive message. It says to the global North: you may have much higher GDP per capita, but that doesn't mean your societies are immune to problems that affect everyone in our interconnected globe. It's a reminder that the pursuit of prosperity isn't just something for people far away to worry about'. In a blog titled 'Are We All Developing Countries Now?', Horner (2019) writes 'If we're serious about confronting the threat of climate change, setting economies and societies on a sustainable footing and confronting inequality, then we are "all developing countries now"'. A senior World Bank economist reportedly reasoned in 2016: 'MDGs were meant to be for the developing countries There were the helpers, and the ones that needed help The SDG views every country as needing development, and it's universal' (Fernholz, 2016). There is legitimate merit in the view that sees issues like poverty and inequality as common features of capitalism, yet one would wonder why this is development studies rather than capitalism studies.

held up by many anti-colonial scholars and Southern liberation leaders is the 5th Pan African Congress that took place in Manchester, UK, in 1945. Shortly after the end of World War II, Africans, Asians, Caribbeans and African-Americans gathered at the Congress to discuss and demand prospects for independence, condemning imperialism, capitalism and racial discrimination (Adi and Sherwood, 1995; Mazrui, 2005). The event was among the first concerted attempts to develop an analytical political framework for Pan-Africanism and its idea of non-alignment, while also bringing political activists based in Africa, like Nkrumah, into intellectual conversations with activists working in the North American Black Radical tradition, like Du Bois (Afari-Gyan, 1991; Legum, 1964). The goal of the Congress was to build on Southern solidarities and embark on emancipatory African development projects, acknowledging the inequities and difficulties that may accompany such projects within an unfavourable global economy.

Another such origin story for Southern visions of development is the Bandung Conference, held in Indonesia in 1955, where 29 Asian and African states met to oppose colonialism and neo-colonialism, eventually leading to the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. Within Bandung framings, development is understood as ‘catching up, emancipation, and the right to development’ (Mkandawire, 2011: 7).¹³ The Bandung Conference saw self-determination as a necessary but insufficient route to emancipation, acutely aware of both the dangers that nationalism posed and the contradictory and damaging effects nationalism could have, and recognizing that capitalist accumulation was always violent, unequal and contradictory (Cramer et al., 2020; Harrison, 2020, 2022). The list of Southern development origin stories goes on. As Thornton (2023: 37) has recently observed:

Bandung was just one moment in which Global South leaders sought to change the rules of the international system in which their domestic economies were embedded. There is a longer history of attempts to theorize, create, and reform the institutions and organizations of the international development project — attempts that were, in fact, frequently stymied, rather than imposed, by Northern actors.

Southern development efforts in this Bandung tradition conceived development not as a foreign imposition but as an internally driven project

13. Here, ‘catching up’ aligns with developmentalist and structuralist perspectives that equate development with structural transformation as diversification which enables countries to have more policy autonomy and to sustain growth, as compared to undiversified economies that may experience rapid growth but may not sustain it as commodity prices fluctuate and demands for produce reduce. Wade (2018) recently argued that despite the optimism regarding a ‘Rising South’ that has accompanied analysis of East Asian growth, less than 10 countries (outside Europe and North America) have successfully caught up, in terms of industrialization or structural transformation, in the past two centuries (see also Weber et al., 2021). Analysing how the global majority can embrace catch-up, emancipation and the right to development requires analysis of changing global economic hierarchies and the aid, debt and trade regimes through which development is regulated (Cheru, 2022).

of: (i) Southern emancipation from colonial and imperial subordination to Northern capitalist logics and exploitation (Mkandawire, 2011: 7; see also Nkrumah, 1965); (ii) ‘reclaiming social and economic sovereignty after colonialism’ (Adesina et al., 2021: 51); and (iii) structural transformation, which inevitably brings about political-economic conflicts with certain Northern actors (Harrison, 2022). Such Southern development imperatives remain as salient as ever as the economies of former colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America remain largely undiversified (UNCTAD, 2021) and thus highly vulnerable to external shocks and constraints such as commodity price fluctuations. The recent work of Temin (2022) on Rodney and Third World developmentalism — or what Temin terms ‘popular anticolonial developmentalism’ (ibid.: 235) — is relevant here:

The conceptual field of developmentalism is not intrinsically bound to Eurocentric origins or Eurocentric frames of analysis developmentalism became one of the primary languages through which actors contested and reimagined anticolonial futures The freezing of developmental discourse into just another Eurocentric, racialized specter actually does a disservice to many of the intellectual inheritances that attempted to bring out these alternative notions of progress and to what might be made of them today. (ibid.: 245)

By failing to acknowledge or engage with these intellectual inheritances and reducing development to the Truman version of Northern aid to and intervention in the global South, the authors erase Southern visions and imaginings of development from sight.

Engaging precisely with these Southern development histories, the Argentine economist Prebisch (1950) elaborated the centre–periphery framework, a framing prefigured by the work of earlier scholars in the Black Radical Tradition such as Du Bois (Edwards, 2020: 160) and 19th century thinkers such as Luxemburg, and one which has motivated and influenced much subsequent development studies and economics scholarship. Concerned with the specificity of the development process in non-industrialized Latin America, as distinct from its historical unfolding in the industrialized North, the work of Prebisch and his colleagues at the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) highlighted how development in formerly colonized countries of the global South is conditioned by a set of structural constraints that are distinct from but linked to those faced in the global North and that risk undermining Southern development through continued exposure to macroeconomic instability and the marginalization of local populations (Calcagno, 2021; Fischer, 2015: 705). In particular, the framework elucidated how Western imperialism and colonization created a system of dependency and unequal exchange whereby cheap or enslaved labour in Southern countries provided the North with raw materials and primary commodities, while the same Southern countries remained dependent upon the import of ever more expensive manufactured goods from the North (relative to the price of their primary commodity exports).

The continued impoverishment of the periphery and the enrichment of the centre are part of the origins of today's structural inequalities that are rooted in the international division of labour. Most countries in the global South face structural barriers to socio-economic transformation in that their productive capabilities are remarkably similar to what they were a century ago and, even when they experienced rapid growth, this was overwhelmingly driven by commodity prices and not by structural transformation (Sylla, 2014; Weber et al., 2021). The polarizing force of capitalist development constantly re-creates structural barriers that place the global South on the losing side of unequal exchange and development. Price differentials that do not reflect differences in labour productivity but rather the fact that workers in the global South are more intensely exploited underpin the contemporary manifestation of unequal exchange and, on this basis, Hickel et al. (2022) estimate that the global North was a net appropriator of resources and labour from the global South to the value of US\$ 242 trillion between 1990 and 2015.

In this context, the concern and contribution of leading development scholars during the second half of the 20th century — notably, predominantly from and/or based in the global South — was to shed light on how these constraints manifested themselves and how Southern actors were responding, or might best respond, to forge emancipatory processes of transformative structural and social change (Ake, 1981; Amin, 1990; Cardoso, 1973; Furtado, 1983; Lewis, 1954; Mkandawire, 2001; Rodney, 1972; Sunkel, 1972). That Oldekop et al. (2020) and Leach et al. (2021a) seek to reframe development studies for the 21st century without engaging with, or acknowledging, these lineages of development scholarship is deeply problematic. As Fischer (2019) has argued — and as recent contributions from scholars continuing this line of enquiry have demonstrated (Ghosh, 2019; Ndikumana, 2015; Sylla, 2014) — ‘with some adaptation to fit the changing contemporary context, these traditions not only remain relevant but also recover vital insights that have been obscured in the various fashionable re-imaginings of development’ (Fischer, 2019: 426). If heeded, the call to move towards a universalist, ‘global development’ framework risks concealing how development aspirations in the South continue to be disrupted and stifled, and development processes shaped, by the neocolonial and imperial ambitions and actions of the North, while undermining the ability of future development scholars to engage with and interpret these processes or examine alternative development paths forged.¹⁴ To illustrate these dangers

14. A memorable example of how industrialized countries have actively discouraged and disapproved of alternative, Southern visions of development or global economic governance is their active burial of the 1974 General Assembly declaration on ‘A New International Economic Order’ that condemned neocolonialism as a deterrent to development and aimed to build a new form of international economic relations based on equity. Since the inception of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Group of 77

of universalizing approaches to development studies in more detail, in the sections that follow we draw on three examples from the articles regarding their treatment of global production, financial integration and social reproduction.

THE DANGER OF ‘UNIVERSALIZING’ DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Global Value Chains and COVID-19

Oldekop et al. (2020: 2) observe that ‘[t]he future of value chains, post-COVID-19, has consequences for all countries’ and discuss how countries will need to contend with growing protectionism and nationalism, while noting that the post-pandemic restructuring of global value chains (GVCs) ‘will have crucial implications for inclusion, quantity and quality of jobs, as well as sustainability transitions’. The article presents a global framework in which all countries confront the same issues in a similar order of magnitude, with little differentiation between them in terms of location within and across GVCs. This runs contrary to a body of GVC scholarship which highlights how processes of financialization and the dramatic rise of transnational corporate power since the 1970s have led to increased profits in the global North and downward pressures in the global South on real accumulation (Behuria, 2020; Elsby, 2020; Newman, 2009; Radley, forthcoming; Suwandi, 2015; Tausch, 2011). This has taken place alongside the ‘adverse incorporation’ of Southern workers labouring, and being extracted from, at the bottom of GVCs (Du Toit, 2004; Meagher, 2019). These processes have led to expanded labour informality and low or poverty wages (Meagher, 2016; Mezzadri and Fan, 2018; Newsome et al., 2015; Radley, 2020a, 2020b; Selwyn, 2019; Stevano, 2023). Highly uneven effects across the North–South divide function to sustain and reproduce inequities and inequalities in global trade and development. Yet these effects are obscured by the global development framework illustrated in the articles, and as such appear to be analytically disconnected.

The writing around GVCs also conceals matters of corporate agency in global production and trade. The insights that corporate agendas and power advantages are at the heart of political-economic conflict and inequality, and that lobbying has played a role in shaping global economic governance, are absent. Throughout both articles, references to power, violence, or social harm produced by corporations are minimized or entirely absent in favour of a list of ‘common challenges’.¹⁵ In the ‘future of value chains’ scenario, one

countries used UNCTAD as a means through which to fight for ‘a new and just world economic order’ to address ‘the injustice and neglect of centuries’ (UNCTAD, 1964: 159–60).

15. For instance: ‘Indeed, thinking globally holds enormous potential for a more insightful and effective engagement with issues that are relevant for both the global North and South — be

may wonder, therefore: where did all the transnational corporations (TNCs), as imperialist actors and oligopolists — and associated state–corporate collusion, fraud and tax evasion and avoidance — go (Selwyn and Leyden, 2022; Smith, 2016; Suwandi, 2019; Wiegartz, 2019)?

TNCs are brought into the analytical frame with reference to the gig economy in a way that conceals the dark underbelly of corporate power: ‘Digital technology and platform economy firms continue to *grow in importance*: companies such as Amazon, Alibaba and Google are *moving to centre stage in organising* key infrastructure; gig economy platforms have been essential in the COVID-19 response but they *present challenges to worker wellbeing*’ (Oldekop et al., 2020: 3, emphasis added). This is a great understatement, given the empirical realities of corporate control, monopoly, rent, super-profits, human rights abuses and extraction in platform capitalism. As explored in Tucker (2021) and Perrigo (2022) there is a manifest coloniality of digital economies embodied by the new corporate explorers that combine the predatory and extractive practices of historical colonialism with the abstract and outsourced work processes largely performed by faceless and exploited employees in the majority world. New forms of appropriation and surplus extraction are emerging with the rise of big data, where the D4D (Data for Development) agenda furthers data collection on the basis of humanitarian aims while at the same time encouraging the commercial use of data by multinational corporations (Mann, 2018). Instead of an acknowledgement and engagement with the shifting nature of corporate power exercised in a global capitalist economy, Oldekop et al. deliver amorphous phrasing such as ‘challenges to worker wellbeing’.

Financial Integration and Policy Sovereignty

When discussing state responses to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Leach et al. (2021a: 7) note, ‘national governments around the world have been scrambling to make up economic policy on the spot, rapidly jettisoning long-established rules about government spending limits, debt caps and fiscal austerity’. This picture largely flattens any distinction between North and South. The reality, however, has been different. Some HICs in the global North have had the policy space and autonomy to abandon ‘long-established rules’ (at least as an immediate response to the pandemic), aided by more diversified and domestically oriented economies, reducing their exposure and vulnerability to external shocks. In part, they have been structurally enabled to act by virtue of their dominant positions in the global economy, indicated through, for instance, access to liquidity in

they relative poverty, social protection, sustainability transitions, migration, human rights, urbanism, affordable housing, precarious work and livelihoods, food security, and effective states’ (Oldekop et al., 2020: 3).

hard currency in a time of crisis (Stubbs et al., 2021). This enabled many Northern governments to act quickly to stem the socio-economic fallout, with broad programmes of direct and indirect support for workers and small- and medium-sized businesses.

Low- and middle-income countries in the global South, by contrast, have been forced to seek emergency International Monetary Fund (IMF) assistance to support strained balance of payments positions because of a structural lack of condition-free, debt-free liquidity in times of crisis. The divergent responses separated Northern countries, which spent up to 24 per cent of GDP in fiscal measures to deal with the fallout from COVID-19, and low-income countries which were able to spend less than 2 per cent of GDP (IMF, 2021). The record capital outflows (which in turn helped prop up several HIC responses), a steep fall in demand for primary commodity exports, and heightened expenditure needs to finance pandemic policies, have left LMICs with few options. As highlighted by recent reviews of IMF staff reports for LMICs (Laskaridis, 2021; Munevar, 2020), as well as thorough analysis of austerity (Ortiz and Cummins, 2021), reduced expenditures in public infrastructure and forecasted budget cuts are on the horizon across the global South. Thus, despite the public messaging by the World Bank and the IMF favouring fiscal expansion, their own commitments have fallen far short of promises and needs (Stubbs et al., 2021). This has left fiscally constrained, highly indebted LMICs with no choice but to belt-tighten or borrow expensively to respond to urgent needs and avert economic collapse. Debt servicing in the global South is fast crowding out social expenditures. Some of the world's lowest-income countries such as Chad, the Gambia, Haiti and South Sudan are facing the highest levels of debt service, spending multiple times more on debt than they do on essential social expenditure. In 2020, five Southern countries defaulted, and sovereign downgrades tripled. In 2021, two further countries defaulted and according to the estimates of debt justice NGOs, 135 out of 148 countries in the global South are critically indebted (see Ellmers et al., 2022).

LMICs pay more for their financing simply because they are poor and structurally disadvantaged. The inability to borrow abroad in one's own currency at affordable cost (so called 'original sin') is part of a process leading to the build-up of unsustainable debt-traps, and bears consequences for exchange rate, interest rate and legal risks (Bonizzi et al., 2020: 7–8). How the global financial crisis was addressed generated tides of global liquidity that enabled LMICs to tap international bond markets, often for the first time, exposing developing countries to a raft of new legal and financial vulnerabilities (ibid.). As inflation starts to bite, and North American/European countries raise interest rates, the tightening of global liquidity is leading to soaring refinancing costs threatening a tide of austerity and defaults. As explored in Bonizzi et al. (2019) and Kvangraven et al. (2021), these are constraints faced by countries in the global South that arise from their financially subordinate position. Monetary subordination results from

a hierarchy in the international monetary and financial system that is fundamentally consequential for macroeconomic conduct and financial stability (e.g. Alami et al., 2022). Leach et al.'s (2021a) analysis, however, does not pay sufficient attention to such distinctions between countries, leaving the impression once again that such dynamics are analytically unimportant, and that national governments across the world have been responding with the same policy space and autonomy, from similar starting points, and with the same effects.

Social Reproduction and Decolonial Feminism

The idea of convergence between the global North and the global South that underpins the two articles' call to adopt a universalistic, global development framework is premised on a narrow, income-centric understanding of poverty and inequality. This is best exemplified by the foundational study of Horner and Hulme (2019), discussed in the introduction, who are two of the leading co-authors of the Oldekop et al. (2020) article. In one of the first studies on global income inequality during the pandemic, Deaton (2021) finds that income inequality between countries — if China is excluded — decreased. The main reason put forward is that richer countries were less effective at managing the health crisis, which resulted in both higher deaths and lower incomes. The ways countries responded to the pandemic, especially in the pre-vaccine phase, often escaped clear-cut South–North and 'poor–rich' divides. An alternative view, however, suggests that responses to COVID-19 seen so far generally do not alter pre-crisis configurations of power (Stevano et al., 2021a). In fact, the structural divides in terms of uneven trade relations, the transfer of costs onto the most vulnerable workers, and the global financial architecture that put the global South in overall conditions of material fragility and subordination are all intact, if not exacerbated with the COVID-19 crisis turning into a debt pandemic (Munevar, 2021).

From a feminist perspective, it is more evident than ever that an exclusive focus on income inequality is insufficient to capture how multiple and intersecting inequalities have been reproduced and reconfigured during the COVID-19 pandemic, at both local and global scales. Oldekop et al. (2020: 2) mention in passing that '[t]he crisis is also highly gendered in its impacts' but do not spend any time to highlight how the unequal experiences and impacts of the COVID-19 crisis have been structurally shaped by gendered forms of oppression, let alone by race and class inequalities. Leach et al. (2021a) are more attentive to this aspect and address how 'structural violence' (Farmer, 2001 cited in Leach et al., 2021a: 4) is at the root of the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the poor and marginalized, as documented for previous epidemics. However, the articles give little attention to intersecting inequalities and the crises of

social reproduction as key lenses for reframing the study of development in a post-COVID world. The neglect of social reproduction as a fundamental dimension of development processes is by no means unique to these two articles, or the global development paradigm to which they seek to contribute (see Sumner, 2022). Despite the existence of a well-established feminist scholarship on development, the integration of gender concerns into the analysis and practice of development has been at best superficial and at worst harmful to the well-being of women from deprived socio-economic backgrounds in the global South (Wilson, 2015).

The squeeze of social reproduction is endemic to capitalism because the capitalist system has a tendency to ‘free ride’ on the practices of care and social provisioning that are necessary to reproduce human life and society (Fraser, 2017). However, the modalities, temporalities and magnitudes of such a squeeze depend on context, both socially and geographically. Through directly increasing the burden of disease and the loss of human life, the COVID-19 crisis put further strain on social reproduction. Moreover, the responses to the pandemic created disruption in health, childcare and education provisioning through the imposition of lockdown policies and school closures in many contexts. The means by which households and families could mitigate these impacts vary depending on socio-economic status, household composition and care needs, housing and living conditions, occupational status of family members, underlying health conditions, access to means of transport, and so forth. These factors are shaped by class, race, gender and migration status among other axes of power. If we take employment as an example of a channel of reproduction of inequalities during the pandemic, it is immediately evident that stay-at-home policies affected people differently. First, some people could not stay at home — in some cases, these workers were classified as essential, which meant they got some social recognition and praise but, in fact, often nothing more in material terms and, to add to this, they have also been more exposed to the disease. Other workers became unemployed, while the privileged ones could work from home. Crucially, working-class people, Black and Brown people, women and migrants are over-represented among both the essential workers and those who became unemployed (Kabeer et al., 2021; Reid et al., 2021; Stevano et al., 2021b).

As gender, race and class inequalities became more visible within countries, South–North divides were re-affirmed and deepened on grounds of social reproduction. In keeping with our employment example, the transition to work-from-home arrangements was available to some white-collar workers in the global North and much less so to workers in the global South (Islam, 2022). In addition, essential worker designations excluded some of the most marginalized forms of work, such as unpaid reproductive work, informal and migrant labour (Stevano et al., 2021b). In contexts where the informal economy is large and work takes place at the bottom of global supply chains — predominantly across the global South — the essential work

classifications put in place by national governments were often inconsequential for workers in that they were not sufficient to ensure that workers could continue to perform their work and earn an income (ibid.). For instance, informal workers in India were disproportionately affected by the loss of employment, decline in earnings and food insecurity (Kesar et al., 2021). In this sense, the gendered and racialized labouring classes of the global South that were already in a structural position of marginalization prior to the pandemic saw the precarity of work and life heightened during the pandemic.

Widespread informality and the concentration of a high number of people in the production of food as well as other basic — or, in fact, essential — goods is itself the result of a global division of labour that is rooted in the hierarchies created by colonialism, where the production and reproduction of colonized people — especially women — was controlled and disciplined by the colonizer (e.g. Federici, 2004; Reddock, 1984). The colonization of Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean imposed a hierarchical distinction on the colonized subjects to advance the interests of Western settlers and invaders. The distinction included the difference between men and women (Reddock, 1984; Tamale, 2020). In the colonial narrative, only the civilized, advanced by modernity, are human. In the COVID-19 narrative, this perverse line of reasoning continues while the writings of current ‘global development’ advocates try to construct a world where humanity resides in deprivation, pain, poverty and exclusion from similar standpoints.

The multiple pathways through which colonial capitalism is diffused across global economies is a necessary area of investigation. This is particularly to acknowledge the systemic disadvantage and differentiated impact of the labour that women undertake. Historically acknowledging the extractive and exploitative nature of women’s work can enable researchers to calculate and recover far more equitable and appropriate economic value of this work. Anti-colonial and decolonial feminism, using intersectionality, expose the various impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on different social actors including individuals, families, communities, health systems and economies in the majority world while highlighting pre-existing inequalities. Al-Ali (2020) discusses the particular risks and vulnerabilities that accompany these pre-existing structural inequities and their profound and violent manifestations in the majority world.¹⁶

Further, a point on scale: while the texts recognize the uneven impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the analytical tools to determine the causes and scale of such unevenness remain elusive. For example, to push back against ‘we are all in this together’ narratives, the two contributions emphasize how pre-existing structural inequalities are reproduced through the social determinants of health and disease. Yet, while the texts highlight that the

16. This includes explicating the fundamental, structural obstacles that are the lived experience of cultural minorities, domestic workers, migrants and sex workers and other peripheralized or ‘subaltern’ groups.

poorest and most vulnerable people are disproportionately affected by the health and socio-economic crisis, they obscure two important dimensions of these processes. Oldekop et al. (2020: 2) report that extreme poverty is likely to increase substantially, citing an earlier study by Sumner et al. (2020), but omit the detail — present in the same study — that such increases in extreme poverty would be overwhelmingly concentrated in Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. Leach et al. (2021a: 5) are more attentive to the ‘world ... becoming a more unequal place economically’ alongside within-country inequality. However, we are left with no guidance on how to relate economic inequalities on global and local scales — as if inequalities at different scales co-exist but remain causally, conceptually and empirically distinct.

ANALYTICAL UNCERTAINTY

Leach et al. (2021a) present their article as a critique of the mainstream but offer little substantive commentary on the state of capitalist development in the global South. Underpinning the two articles are notions of vulnerabilities, fragilities, complexities, unruliness, shocks, risk and uncertainty. For example, Leach et al. (2021a: 2) formulate ‘unruliness’ in politics, economy, society and nature in the following way: ‘This structural-unruly duality in the conditions and processes of pandemic emergence, progression and impact in turn inflects how post-pandemic transformations are thought about and enacted’. The meaning and analytical use of this and other similar phrases is often difficult to comprehend,¹⁷ despite having a central place in the prescriptive parts of the text. Future change ‘must embrace uncertainty, complexity and unruliness in politics, as in economy, ecology and society’ (ibid.: 9).¹⁸

We do not disagree with an analytical focus on uncertainty, given, for example, the fundamental position of the notion of radical uncertainty in a post-Keynesian understanding of economic processes, which we are sympathetic to. However, we are concerned with how uncertainty is presented as a central development priority at the expense of, for example, corporate

17. Take for example, from the abstract to Leach et al. (2021a: 1): ‘we argue that the origins, unfolding and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic require analysis that addresses both structural political-economic conditions alongside far less ordered, “unruly” processes reflecting complexity, uncertainty, contingency and context-specificity’.

18. The full recommendation reads as follows: ‘What the future will hold remains uncertain, but major challenges, such as COVID-19, do both expose fractures and contradictions and offer opportunities for change, which ultimately will depend on political choice and mobilisation. This must address both the structural dimensions, challenging incumbent power, while accepting that change is not linear, and must embrace uncertainty, complexity and unruliness in politics, as in economy, ecology and society — vital to forging and moving forward with a politics not of authoritarianism but of solidarity and care’ (Leach et al., 2021a: 9).

power and destruction of the planet. Additionally, it is not clear how Leach et al. (2021a) position their work regarding the politics of responding to uncertainty. Capitalist transformation can be understood as always unequal, violent, turbulent and uncertain (see Harrison, 2020, 2022; also Cramer et al., 2020). However, the analysis of uncertainty, shocks and turbulence in Leach et al. (2021a) does not seem to be adequately tied to an appreciation of the political economy of capitalist development whereby much uncertainty is internal to the system, created by powerful actors including in the periphery. The theorization of uncertainty in the article is not developed in dialogue with critical political economy analysis, i.e. ‘older’ development studies traditions including some ‘developmentalist’ ones. This raises the question of why uncertainty and unruliness, rather than other phenomena, are selected as prime concerns, and how they are theorized.

Looking to future politics and development in the light of lessons from the pandemic, Leach et al. (2021a) emphasize the importance of dealing with turbulence, shocks, uncertainty and unruliness, and restoring citizens–state relations: ‘The lessons centre on the need to embrace fundamental, transformative change, to navigate uncertainty and prepare for turbulence as a central requirement of development, North and South. For these are universal challenges, precipitated by shocks and stresses that have global reach, whether disease pandemics, climate change or the reverberations of economic volatility through an interconnected globalized economy’ (ibid.: 9). Uncertainty is one of the core concepts that is promoted, and managing and dealing with ‘shocks’ is declared the new core development problematic: ‘COVID-19 should be a reminder that we face an uncertain future, where anticipation of, resilience to and rebuilding from shocks in a highly unequal world will be *the* core problematic of development studies and practice’ (ibid.: 2, emphasis added).¹⁹ The universal outlook stands in stark contrast to the earlier cited development notions around sovereignty, emancipation and structural transformation, and respective political and analytical foci.

Concerning the future of the state, a different political economy is in sight: ‘Trust, inclusive collaboration, collective action and mutuality are the

19. The authors suggest development studies evolves: ‘Our analysis is informed by several broader bodies of literature that also, in different ways, address the relationships between structural conditions and specific, contingent, often unruly, contexts. For example, we are influenced by science and technology studies, and ideas about the role of expertise in policy and the importance of risk and uncertainty in framing decisions ...; by studies of “reliability management” and the practices of professionals and functioning of administrative systems in critical infrastructures ...; by political ecology, and how human–environment relations are influenced by politics and vice versa ...; by feminist approaches, with their emphasis on unruly politics, co-operation, networks, social reproduction, care and humility ... and by perspectives on alternative economies, “degrowth” and the politics of green and just transformations None of these perspectives currently provide the mainstream foundations of development studies, although they increasingly appear at the margins. We believe this *must* change’ (Leach et al., 2021a: 2, emphasis added). While these elements are important, they miss broader issues at stake.

watchwords, complemented by ethics of care, respect and empathy ... This points to the potential for a new style of politics, embedded in communities and egalitarian norms, yet supported by a trusted, accountable state' (ibid.: 9). Singling out trust as a core theme (for analysis, policy, etc.) is a highly political choice that deserves discussion that is beyond this article. While compelling, the empirical or theoretical foundations on which this future vision is based remain wanting. Class antagonisms are analytically removed in a future in which humanity — facing a set of unruly, complex and turbulent challenges common to all — must form cross-class unity and cooperation, with a significant leadership role for elites and experts. This becomes clear when one consults a key reference book for the Leach et al. (2021a) writing on the politics of uncertainty; an edited collection by Scoones and Stirling (2020a) on *The Politics of Uncertainty: Challenges of Transformation*.²⁰ In the introduction to that book — which offers an analysis of capitalist social order and uncertainty — one can find illustrations under the broad heading of a politics of care and conviviality:

knowledge intermediaries and brokers become crucial for such initiatives, facilitating deliberation and negotiation, and offsetting rumour, speculation and concealment, which often result in expert-led systems being rejected. Who such intermediaries are would depend on the context, but *trust across social differences and hierarchies is essential*. Such an approach would move beyond assignations of risk and cultures of blame to a common, *shared goal of navigating uncertainty together* ... This suggests a very different type of approach, centred on shared understandings, negotiation of outcomes and collective solidarity and mobilisation. It must be rooted in what we have earlier identified as a politics of care and conviviality ... [T]his creates a momentum for a fundamental rethinking of existing relationships between state protection, technical expertise and deliberative citizenship under uncertainty. And this, in turn, requires a newly pluralised, inclusive politics of responsibility, where states, corporations, legal systems and science all have different, new roles. In moving from control to care and conviviality, the only meaningful ways to achieve robustness and reconciliation in the face of burgeoning uncertainties involve justice, equality and plurality. (Scoones and Stirling, 2020a:18, 20, emphasis added)

The depiction here of a world of extensive social harmony and cross-class 'shared' goals and solidarities is unrealistic. Further, Leach et al. (2021a), as well as Hulme and Horner (2020), make suggestions towards post-capitalist alternatives, futures and states, and socialism. Yet, the political economy of and shifts in social relations underlying these transitions, such as the politics of anti-capitalism (Wright, 2021), are unexplored. This is a significant weakness given that across much of the global South, the idea that there are signs of a move towards a post-capitalist future is at odds with and

20. See Scoones and Stirling's (2020b) piece, 'COVID-19 and the Futility of Control in the Modern World' for a blog version of their intervention. See Scoones (2022) for a recent application of the uncertainty concept. See IDS (2020d, 2021b) for video material containing interventions by the authors. See Nelson's (2022) blog, 'Generating Relationships of Trust in Distrustful Times', for more insight into the focus on trust. Finally, see also IDS videos on 'Governance and Trust in COVID-19' (IDS, 2020b) and 'State-Citizen Dynamics of Trust through COVID-19' (IDS, 2020c).

detached from the reality of an expansion, deepening and intensification of capitalism, i.e. a highly institutionalized, locked-in neoliberal and often neocolonial capitalism (Cahill and Konings, 2017; Chitonge, 2018; McMichael, 2017; Wiegatz et al., 2018).²¹ In this context, we would instead urge the importance of returning to and advancing — rather than jettisoning — intellectual lineages anchored in the non-Truman understanding of development as a project of Southern emancipation from colonial, imperial and structural subordination to Northern capitalist logics and exploitation. This would better enable social, economic, cultural and epistemic sovereignty to be reclaimed. In a recent formulation of the ‘recasting’ rationale, from Leach and Taylor (2022), we see a commitment to universality and a liberal approach to development with alternative frames sidelined:

Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has sharply highlighted existing (and sometimes deepening) inequalities, inequities and injustices, reinforcing what had already been a growing realisation of the inevitability and centrality of uncertainty and complexity to all forms of development the time seems right for a ‘recasting’ of development and development studies that is underpinned by the centrality of universality (development as progressive change for all), plurality, justice, equity and resilience. (ibid.)

Accordingly, the building blocks of development studies within this framing are as follows:

In our view, development, recast, can become a key catalyst for engagement with citizens around justice, empowerment and accountability ... Development studies can help ... counter these authoritarian, polarizing tendencies, and identify and inform potential policy and action directions. It can explore the drivers of change that promote more effective, accountable and inclusive governance institutions and mechanisms that can help re-establish trust with citizens. (ibid.)

The outlined analytical agenda and tool set are likely to result in a significant distancing and decoupling of this framing from cutting-edge and development-relevant scholarship on capitalist development and global political economy — strands of literature that traditionally have contributed much to the interdisciplinary field of development studies by way of theoretical and empirical contributions. Global development might become increasingly incompatible with, and incapable of dialoguing with and benefiting from, these other strands.

21. See also the series on ‘Capitalism in Africa’ on the *Review of African Political Economy* blog; <https://roape.net/reviews-briefings-debates/capitalism-in-africa/>. See also the related debate pieces in the *Review of African Political Economy* (e.g. Chitonge 2018; Ouma, 2017), and the Nairobi-based intervention ‘Capitalism in my City’ on the blog ‘Africa is a Country’; <https://africasacountry.com/series/capitalism-in-my-city>.

CONCLUSION: (RE)CENTRING THE GLOBAL SOUTH IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

In this article, we examined two influential ‘pandemic papers’, Oldekop et al. (2020) and Leach et al. (2021a), that exemplify the rise of a universalistic vision to build development studies back better. Implicitly or explicitly, these articles align their vision of universalizing development to decolonial discourses. However, while both state that the North–South framing has limits and is outdated, they ignore the range of decolonial, postcolonial and anti-colonial scholarship that preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, including older Southern ‘developmentalist’ framings and Bandung traditions, as well as the Southern origins of and justifications for the North–South framework they seek to overturn. Whether inadvertently or through some degree of ‘strategic ignorance’ (McGoey, 2012), we are left to agree with Fischer’s (2019: 440–41) point in relation to the pre-pandemic contribution from Horner and Hulme (2019), that these ‘pandemic papers’ encourage a degree of amnesia regarding the multiple histories of development thought, instead simply casting the origins of development as beginning and ending with the Truman, aid-oriented vision of international development. With little engagement with the analytical use of older development studies framings and associated theories and concepts, global development framings suggest that there remains little to no relevance in this ‘old’ analytical toolkit. By effacing colonial and imperial histories of Southern subordination to Northern capitalist exploitation as irrelevant for analysis, the ‘reset’ put forward in these two texts appears to be a misdirection. Rather than prioritizing analysis of historical inequities and structural divides, the proposition to build development studies back on universal terms ignores the international division of labour that persists between industrialized and non-industrialized countries and within the global South. Even where ‘building back better’ or ‘universalistic’ propositions hold some traction, such as addressing climate change, there are important questions of historical responsibilities and uneven impacts (Perry, 2021).

Through their universalist framings, the two articles mirror the claims of Western governments to ‘global’ solutions which relegate the continued reproduction of North–South structural inequalities and inequities to the margins. The universalistic analytics and propositions of ‘bringing development studies back better’ does not, in our view, map well onto the political economy of capitalism, wealth, poverty and crisis. Problematizing the asymmetrical experiences across the North–South divide is sidelined, as are investigations into the political-economic origins and drivers of material lack and socio-political exclusion in the majority world. Chossudovsky (2002: 37) explains the phenomenon at work here in pithy terms:

The ‘official’ neoliberal dogma also creates its own ‘counter-paradigm’ embodying a highly moral and ethical discourse. The latter focuses on ‘sustainable development’ while distorting and stylizing the policy issues pertaining to poverty, the protection of the environment

and the social rights of women. This ‘counter-ideology’ rarely challenges neoliberal policy prescriptions. It develops alongside and in harmony rather than in opposition to the official neoliberal dogma.

By affecting a posture of ‘false sameness’ and inscribing a uniform experience of deprivation, these texts contribute to an erasure of centuries of violence on the majority world of predominantly Black and Brown people, and their historic and current positioning in the matrix of global power and subordination. Although Oldekop et al. (2020) and Leach et al. (2021a) have called on development studies scholars to refocus their attention on the global North, it is difficult to see how re-entering the study of North America and Europe can reverse tensions, and how Europeans studying Europe becomes a route to decolonizing development studies. It is worth remembering that nearly every discipline or field of study continues to be based on Eurocentric theories, dominated by the study of North America and Europe. Development studies has centred the study of the global South, but a large share of scholarship has done so through a Eurocentric lens.

Rather than de-centring the global North–South framework, the analytically more useful way forward, in our view, is for development studies to seek to (re)centre the global South and use global South lenses to understand the global political economy. The process of (re)centring the global South does not mean setting the remit of development studies as being exclusively about the study of contexts considered to be a part of the global South. It rather entails recognizing that global South experiences, theories and lenses are necessary to understand capitalist development globally, foregrounding historical and contemporary hierarchies. Structural imbalances that function to reproduce the North–South divide, and their historical origins, must remain in the foreground. While the world no longer consists, for the most part, of explicit colonies and colonial powers, multiple aspects of the global economy reproduce similar geographies of power, influence and subordination. It is thus vital to rethink and recognize capitalist development as historically constituted, politically implicated and culturally calibrated (Pheko, 2021). Rather than seeking to wish away these histories and divides, development studies can strive to show that what goes on in the global South is not only important and distinct from specific contexts of the global North, but that it is a vital viewpoint for understanding the structure and dynamics of the world economy and the majority world.

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Jörg Wiegratz (corresponding author; j.wiegratz@leeds.ac.uk) is Lecturer in Political Economy of Global Development at the University of Leeds, UK, and Senior Research Associate in the Faculty of Humanities, Department of Sociology, at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He specializes in neoliberalism, fraud and anti-fraud measures, commercialization

and economic pressure and related aspects of moral and political economy, with a focus on Uganda and Kenya. He is a member of the Editorial Working Group for the *Review of African Political Economy* (ROAPE) and Research Associate at the Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IPPIA), United States International University-Africa, Nairobi.

Prithish Behuria (prithish.behuria@manchester.ac.uk) is a Senior Lecturer in the University of Manchester's Global Development Institute, UK. He primarily researches the politics of economic transformation in East Africa. He has previously worked at the London School of Economics and Political Science and SOAS, University of London, UK.

Christina Laskaridis (christina.laskaridis@open.ac.uk) is Lecturer in Economics at the Open University, Milton Keynes, UK, and Associate Fellow and Lecturer at Saïd Business School and St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford, UK. She works on the political economy of sovereign debt, international organizations and monetary and debt debates. Her work examines the nature of economic expertise from a historical perspective. She is the 2022 recipient of the Joseph Dorfman Best Dissertation Prize by the History of Economics Society.

Lebohlang Liepollo Pheko (liepollo@4-rivers.co.za) is an activist scholar who is currently a Senior Research Fellow at Trade Collective, Johannesburg, South Africa. She has taught at the University of South Africa, University of Johannesburg, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute for Technology and Linköping University. Her key scholarly interests are international trade, international development, decolonial feminism, feminist economics and globalization. Her work uses an intersectional approach to explore race, gender and class oppressions, and is rooted in social movement struggles.

Ben Radley (borr20@bath.ac.uk) is a Lecturer in International Development for the Department of Social and Policy Sciences at the University of Bath, UK. His research centres on the interplay between so-called green transitions and processes of economic transformation in Central Africa, with a focus on labour dynamics and the role played by Northern corporations. He is a member of the Editorial Working Group for ROAPE, and an affiliated member of the Centre of Mining Research at the Catholic University of Bukavu, DRC.

Sara Stevano (ss129@soas.ac.uk) is a development and feminist political economist. She is a Senior Lecturer in Economics at SOAS University of London, UK, having held teaching and research positions at the University of the West of England, Bristol, and King's College London, UK. Her areas of study are the political economy of work, food and nutrition, inequalities and social reproduction. Her work focuses on Africa, with primary research experience in Mozambique and Ghana.