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Article abstract

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ACME An International Journal for Critical Geographies

Geography's 'Decolonial Turn'? A Conversation between Lindsay Naylor and Tariq Jazeel

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Abstract

This piece is an edited transcript of a conversation on decolonizing Geography that took place between Lindsay Naylor and Tariq Jazeel in February 2024 in response to the *ACME* 20+ year anniversary celebrations. As decolonial theory and efforts around decolonizing geography continue to gain momentum, this conversation – between two differently located geographers – reflects on the trajectories, geographies, meanings and (institutional) politics of decoloniality as it has taken shape across the discipline. From their own experience and vantage points, Naylor and Jazeel consider the past, the promise, and the potential of decoloniality for Geography.

Keywords

decolonial, decolonize, modernity, coloniality, knowledge production

Introduction

In the last decade a proliferation of the use of decolonial theory and calls to decolonize the discipline of Geography have emerged. Indeed, in the recent book *Decolonizing Geography*, Sarah Radcliffe notes that "arguments for decolonizing currently have widespread acceptance in geography," and suggests that a "decolonial turn" is underway in the discipline (2022: 78). At the same time, we sense that many critical and radical geographers experience a pervasive sense of the radical incompleteness of decoloniality within the discipline, as well as in the broader context of the university today. Equally, this is often accompanied by a niggling unease at the symbolic institutionalization of 'decoloniality' in the institutional contexts within which many geographers work, study, and navigate their intellectual and political pre-occupations.

If the decolonial has become something of a mainstay within the intellectual landscapes (and infrastructures) of radical and critical geography, it seems like the right moment for conversations around its value, politics, and not least its precise character within the discipline and beyond. Indeed, pinning the decolonial down right now would seem a tricky, but necessary, task given its proliferation in the academy and other institutional contexts more broadly. Any such conversations would, of course, necessarily examine and generate a number of questions and tensions. For example, what are the different and located historical and political contexts in which the decolonial has taken root across and between settler colonial, colonial (external *de jure* and *de facto* rule), imperial, and post-imperial contexts? What demands do those different historical and political genealogies of the decolonial, as both theory and praxis, make on political present(s)? What then are the stakes of the decolonial impulse now, and for whom? And how do these differ across the discipline's different intellectual and political problem spaces?

In the edited transcript below, using a set of pre-determined questions, we held one such conversation about decolonial theory and practice in geography from our own perspectives. We did so in response to the call by *ACME* for the "Critical Geography Conversations: ACME's 20+ Year Anniversary CFP," which solicited edited interviews from critical geographers reflecting on the state of critical geography (ACME Editorial Collective, 2023). We approached this CFP as two differently situated, different stage of career geographers who have been amongst those who wrote about decoloniality and/or decolonial theory in geography early on (cf. Jazeel and McFarlane 2007; Jazeel 2017; Naylor 2017). We discuss the trajectories, promises and pitfalls of this ongoing but imperative project in Geography. Again, to emphasize, in this conversation we speak from our own perspectives, locations and experiences. The conversation was framed as an informal 'taking stock' of decolonial work in anglophone Geography, not with any aim at, or conceit of, comprehensive or synoptic overview, but instead as a generative and generous exchange between two geographers from differently positioned institutional and regional contexts. Jazeel is based at University College London in the U.K., and Naylor at the University of Delaware in the U.S. We perceived our locatedness on either side of the Atlantic, in Anglophone academic contexts, to be important here insofar as we work in differently inflected institutional and geographical contexts, and thus in different ways with respect to the legacies of colonialism: Jazeel in London, the post-Imperial metropolis and broadly on the legacies of British colonialism in social, cultural and spatial formations and their effects on racialization, racism, culture and 'identity'; Naylor in the North American settler colonial context and on the

complicated desire to 'decolonize all the things' while working on and from stolen lands forcibly worked by stolen peoples (see Naylor 2025). In part, our conversation sought to examine and parse some of the differences we have experienced with respect to our negotiations of anglophone approaches to the decolonial (and, as it transpired in the conversation, postcolonialism). Though we agreed on the radical incompleteness of decolonial work within anglophone Geography and the necessity for holding to the mantra that the work of decoloniality can never be complete, our conversation also gestured to moments of hope and potential that we have seen with respect to decolonizing the discipline over the last decade.

If conversations like these are by necessity framed by questions (the pre-determined questions we used are embedded in the transcript below), they invariably generate more questions (some of which are outlined above). And indeed, in tandem with *ACME*'s aim to make "a public record of the labour and complicated, multiple, and sometimes conflicting emergent visions of what critical geography is and might yet still become" (ACME Editorial Collective, 2023, n.p), we hope that at least some of the issues we touch upon below will generate further conversations to come. Following our conversation on Zoom, we prepared and tidied a transcript. In this process we were careful to retain as much of the feel of our original conversation as was possible. Later on, we added footnotes to expand on various points in the light of editorial and reviewer comments, however, in so doing we made the decision to leave the transcript of our original conversation as close as possible to the first copy edit. Our initial conversation was held in late February 2024, across an ocean, and between Eastern Standard Time and Greenwich Mean Time, using Zoom technology.

A conversation on decolonizing and geography

Naylor: I wanted to start by thinking about our entry points into decolonial thinking as geographers. How were you introduced to the theory and the practice of the decolonial as a geographer?

Jazeel: Well, for me it's actually through postcolonial theory, through postcolonial literary theory. I think I've described myself as a 'postcolonial geographer' from my graduate student days. Essentially, I think my work has been a kind of critical engagement with the worlds that colonialism has built. That's what I think I do. And over the years this has become the conduit to my interest in the decolonial, which seemed to be proliferating in British University life, actually in institutional life more generally. So, what with 'Rhodes Must Fall' in Oxford (2015), and other student led campaigns including 'Why is My Curriculum White?', for example, I think the decolonial began to gain more traction as a lodestone, particularly for student movements, but also for others in the University who were working towards change. I think that's what then precipitated my own kind of reading in and around decolonial theory as it emerged in Latin American studies, particularly. So, I think my origin story is really through, and via an interest in, postcolonial theory. I'm interested in your way into these issues as well?

Naylor: I was always interested in Latin America, and as an undergraduate student, it was my development classes that were the light bulb for me in terms of 'this is what I want to study!' and then I became acquainted with the Zapatista movement and wrote a thesis about it and carried that interest forward. When I started my PhD I had the great fortune to encounter Thomas Nail, who learned that I was working on research with the Zapatistas and was writing a dissertation on revolution and Zapatismo (2012). And so, we went out to coffee, and he

recruited me into this decolonial theory class taught by Allejandro Vallega in the Philosophy Department and there I was introduced to the Latin American decolonial thinkers, and that was it for me, I knew this would be the foundational component of my work. It became a really important pursuit of mine, the process of trying to understand and explain knowledges—plural—it remains a crucial component of training myself and thinking about how there is this larger project that is about decolonizing and land back and indigenous futurity. And there is another project of decolonizing knowledge production, and things of that character. And it's been really important for me to think about those distinctions.

Jazeel: This is what I was, I think, hinting at in our email correspondence prior to this conversation: that is, some of those differences between the ways that the decolonial is mobilized in an American university context, and how it's mobilized in British universities. I think these differences are interesting, and important, to think about, because my sense is that in the British context a lot of this kind of work, and the movement (if you can call it a decolonial movement, or imperative), I think comes out of student led movements around specific political moments, like Rhodes Must Fall, or a little later, Black Lives Matter, or 'Why is my Curriculum White?' And then it gets spun back into some of the more theoretical literatures coming out of Latin America, or Francophone anti-colonial writers, etc.

Naylor: Absolutely. And I mean, I don't know if this is a thing in the U.K. But decolonizing the syllabus has become a really big thing in the United States that could be questioned, yes, let's think about how we can diversify our syllabi. But are you doing the work? Are you doing the decolonial work through changing what's in your syllabus? And so, there's been push back, I would say.

Jazeel: I think that's right. And you know this hints at a certain institutionalization of the decolonial in British universities. Here at UCL, for example, we've had a funding call out recently, a small grant within the university on 'Furthering Cultures of Decolonization in Research', for example (which, incidentally, I've been involved in). So, there's an embedding and institutionalization of the decolonial, which is interesting to think carefully about in terms of the political implications of that embedding. And I also think it's worth having a conversation about what exactly is it that we mean when we talk about 'the decolonial', because it is a word that I think now is mobilized and used in so many different contexts. Which is great on the one hand, but it begs the question of what exactly are we talking about when we mobilize the decolonial? What's the political work and effort that we're actually talking about via that now easy-at-hand term? And maybe it's more important to actually just talk about what that work is; to name that work instead.[1]

[1] In this and the preceding passage of conversation, we refrain from defining decolonialism in the knowledge that it is a term that has been mobilized differently in different geographical and historical contexts, and that the decolonial also has varied historical origins that are differently located both politically and intellectually. For example, the critical engagement with coloniality conceived *as* modernity in the programme of Latin American Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (see Dussel 1998; Mignolo 2007; and for an excellent review with respect to Geography, see Asher 2013), influenced yet had a different set of political preoccupations to the call from the 'Rhodes Must Fall' student movement for Higher Education institutions to take their own colonial histories seriously (see Bhambra, Nisancioglu and Gebrial 2018). Likewise, when Tuck and Yang (2012) write that 'decolonization is not a metaphor', their clarion reminder is directed toward the land question in the North American settler colonial context. Amidst this diversity of inflections and origins with respect to decolonization, as well as its institutional embedding to which we refer here, the decolonial means no one thing; it is a cry toward no

Naylor: There's that navel gazing component. And there's the metaphor component, too. And I, being in the United States as a settler colonial scholar, we do talk about it. 'We are on the unceded territories of'…in Canada and the United States, I think that there was a lot of momentum to have that conversation. But now it feels performative. What are you doing about that, though? And so, these conversations are happening, I think, but where is the activism? Where is the concrete manifestation of these things? For example, my university is a land grant university, which is basically synonymous with land theft, which raises questions about what does a land acknowledgment actually accomplish? That's a discomfort I have to sit with as a scholar thinking about decolonial work.

Jazeel: The question of how colonial power manifests itself in Britain and in the British University is different, I think. It is a deeply imperial historical context. And it leads to a different set of answers that I think need thinking through. I think what we're saying is that there's a geography to decolonizing geography.[2]

Naylor: Absolutely. I hadn't really thought about the Commonwealth versus the settler colonial context when thinking about these questions and our chat—it's messy. But getting back to thinking about how it entered our geographic imaginations, because decolonial thinking doesn't really make its way into geography until after the 2000s, why do you think geographers have been so late to the conversation?

Jazeel: I don't know. There were geographers writing about the necessity to open up geographical thinking to a broader, more cosmopolitan, set of intellectual influences in the 1990s. I'm thinking particularly of David Slater's (1992;1993;1994) very inspirational writings in the early nineties, you know. There's also that period in the nineties, in the British tradition, where there's the beginnings of a critical reflection on the discipline's history. So, you know Felix Driver's (1992; 2000) early work on the military and imperial history of geography. Also, David Livingstone's (1992) book on the geographical tradition. So, there are some of these early disciplinary gestures towards introspection on the ways that we produce knowledge. I think you're absolutely right though that they weren't, you know, framed as decolonial interventions, or perhaps even postcolonial interventions. But some of those conversations were happening. As to your question, if you think about the history of radical geography, it is very tied up with Marxist thinking in our discipline. And there's been some interesting work done recently on histories of radical geography in the history of *Antipode* (Peake and Sheppard 2014; Barnes and Sheppard 2019; Theodore et al. 2019; Berg et al. 2021), for example, and that reminds us that the intellectual history of radical geography is very tied up with a particular kind of leftist, historical materialist, and Marxist turn in the discipline. Those

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one political imperative. Indeed taking account of this diversification with respect to the decolonial was central to this conversation. Likewise, we are aware of the proximate relationships these diverse decolonial intellectual and political histories have to both Francophone histories of anti-colonial writing (see Fanon 2001 [1963]; Cesaire 2000 [1955]), and postcolonial literary theory (see Said 1978; Spivak 1988; Bhabha 1994). None of these intellectual histories can be collapsed into one another, yet they are all informed by the imperative to work in the wake of colonialism. All have also informed the different inflections of disciplinary geography's decolonial uptake, though it was not our intention to account for the varied intellectual and political histories of this multiply inflected moment.

[2] Our conversation reflected mostly on the differences and relationships between decoloniality in North American geography and in British geography. Though we did not talk about them, we are also aware that decoloniality has been and is differently inflected in other national and regional contexts within the discipline.

kinds of debates, and that kind of work was particularly strong in the late-1960s going into the seventies. There were other debates happening in the discipline, including a push toward 'theory from the south' via Milton Santos' work in the 1970s (1978 [2021]). But none of this is an answer to your question. It's actually just a reflection on the history, the intellectual history, of our discipline. I think that kind of work is important in this respect.

Naylor: Right and for example, 'decolonial geographies' is an entry in "Keywords in Radical Geography" (Daigle and Ramírez 2019) and that is part of what we're asking geography to face—its colonial/imperial designs. Sarah Radcliffe (2022) had the opportunity to write an introductory book on decolonizing geography and suggests that we're already always immersed in colonial/imperial designs because of the character of the discipline. Perhaps it's one of those things that we can't necessarily carve our way out of. But it's maybe a deeper introspective thing that needs to happen potentially.

Jazeel: I've also made the point in my book on postcolonial geography (2019) that some of the conversations going on in literary theory, early conversations that I think were instrumental to the foundation of postcolonial literary theory, were inherently geographical. They were inherently geographical conversations, but they weren't really being taken up in our discipline until much later. I mean Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is where we first get that idea of imaginative geographies, right? That's a phrase that emerges in *Orientalism* in 1978. It's not until the mid-nineties that Derek Gregory then writes *Geographical Imaginations* (1994), and the phrase works its way into our discipline.[3] So, I think early postcolonial literary theory is an inherently geographical set of preoccupations. And these pre-occupations are just not being framed as such at the time, and they don't really work their way into the discipline of geography until quite a bit later, actually. That's interesting to me with respect also to the new cultural geography, the cultural and representational turn in landscape studies and all that stuff, in the mid-1980s. I've always thought that work was actually very close theoretically to Said's project insofar as it was concerned with the representational production of space. I just find it interesting that geography's own disciplinary preoccupations were quite wrapped in and around themselves in ways that made it have a slightly different political trajectory…, a parallel trajectory to that concern in work from the seventies onwards with the world that colonialism built.

Naylor: I would agree. I also think that it's okay for us to have an ellipsis on this question, because it's an ongoing conversation in geography, and I think as decolonial theory gets picked up more and more there's—you may have experienced this as a reviewer—but I see people just kind of dropping it into things without much discussion. And so, in returning to our thoughts about how the term is being used in the academy, again, where it seems that there's this tendency to 'decolonize all of the things' that's emerged. However, we know from reading Tuck and Yang (2012) and others that we've been warned against that, and urged not to oversimplify or ignore the political projects of decolonization. I think an important point that we've already addressed is thinking about the foundational bodies of literature that we draw on as scholars using this theory and I've talked about the messiness of discussing the decolonial by making that distinction between capital D, which is really about land back and

[3] Though both Hugh Prince (1962) and David Harvey (1973) had also used the phrase 'geographical imaginations' before Gregory (1994).

indigenous futurity, and *de jure* and *de facto* independence.[4] And then that lower case d that grapples with the geopolitics of knowledge production, universalized thinking, and colonial/imperial legacies. But you wrote (2017) already about the need to decolonize geographical knowledge as something that's not only imperative, but that needs to be mainstreamed in the discipline. And I was wondering if you want to speak more about this ongoing project? For example, what do you think has changed or not since that 2017 meeting of the Royal Geographical Society that was specifically focused on decolonizing our discipline?[5]

Jazeel: It's mad, isn't it? That was 7 years ago now. I think when I wrote that little piece and talked about mainstreaming decolonization in the discipline and this idea of thinking about decoloniality as an imperative, what I was trying to say is that this needs to be every geographer's preoccupation. It needs to be something that we're all animated by, rather than it being something that's just left up to the people who call themselves postcolonial geographers or radical geographers. This needs to be something that economic geographers and population geographers, physical geographers as well are thinking about, or are aware of. So, it's that sense of it being on the forefront of all geographer's minds. And back in 2017, I don't think we were there. I think we're probably a little bit more there now than we were back in 2017 in some interesting ways. But as you've already hinted at, there's a sense that it's just woven into the fabric of the way that we speak now, or the way that we build our curriculum health check procedures and all that kind of stuff. I'm not sure what's happened in that process to the political question and requisite structural changes. The political imperative for me is still about opening, about the pluralization of our institutions, of the knowledges that we teach, of the voices in our classrooms, and I think that imperative is always still there, that imperative still remains to always do more. I certainly think that the very fact that we're having this conversation shows the decolonial imperative is at the forefront of more people's minds in the discipline, whether or not that means that the political work is getting done is perhaps another question.

Naylor: One of the ways that was highlighted for me recently is actually with the American Association of Geographers in their response to the Hawai'i meeting with their interaction

[4] There is a rich body of work on the decolonial authored by indigenous geographers and with collaborators that we did not dive into during our conversation; however, we agree with our reviewers that we would be remiss in not acknowledging this scholarship. For example, de Leeuw and Hunt (2018) took care to shine a critical light on efforts to decolonize geography in what remains a rather colonial discipline; Daigle (2019) offers a critique of settler colonial institutions in Canada and the missteps of reconciliation; Curley et al. (2022) question the inclusivity of a decolonizing project and cast a wide net of ontologies and epistemologies that should be taken into account.

[5] The theme of the 2017 Annual Conference of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers was 'Decolonizing Geographical Knowledges: opening geography out to the world', and the conference was chaired by Professor Sarah Radcliffe. As well as commentaries on the theme, solicited by the Chair, which were published in *Transactions of the Instiute of British Geographers* (see Radcliffe 2017; Jazeel 2017; Daigle and Sundberg 2017; Noxolo 2017a; Legg 2017), a series of parallel interventions authored by members of RGS-IBG's RACE Working Group were published in *Area* that levelled significant critiques at the ongoing whiteness of the discipline in its Anglophone context (see Noxolo 2017b; Desai 2017; Tolia-Kelly 2017; Baldwin 2017; Elliot-Cooper 2017). In the commentary from Esson et al., the authors argue that the theme of 'decolonising Geographical *knowledge*' runs the risk of doing more harm than good insofar as it runs the risk of diluting "decolonisation and decoloniality's transformative potential, while concealing oppressive structures in the discipline and recentring non-Indigenous, white and otherwise privileged groups in the global architecture of knowledge production" (2017, p.385).

with Native Hawaiians, and how they want to approach the conference, and it's my understanding that they are never going to hold the meeting without first engaging the community that we're going to. While this might seem small I still think that's an important part, if, when our flagship organizations are asking these questions and making it visible then yes it is on the forefront, and I do think that there is a sea change in our intellectual lineages and training of early career scholars where there is a deep desire for the discipline to be different and to be a space that is reckoning with these things.

Jazeel: Yeah, absolutely. I think that obviously one of the big questions here--and I imagine there in the U.S. as well at the moment--is Palestine, and what role the discipline has to play in thinking and working through some of these deeply distressing and urgent geopolitical issues with respect to Gaza at the moment. Also, what role our professional bodies play in articulating forms of dissent in the midst of this kind of political terrain that we find ourselves in now, you know, how do we create space to be able to speak out against the manifestation of a longer narrative, an imperial narrative, with respect to the Middle East.

Naylor: Yes, and one of the things that I find is the profound forgetting that has taken place. I talk about this a little bit in some of my previous work (2014; 2019); that, as you know, there's this cognitive disconnect between colonial and imperial in our political discourses. So, some of the conversations that are being had, at least here in the U.S., are problematically raising a question mark around colonialism and Palestine. I'm glad that you brought it up. I think it's important that we discuss that as part of this conversation, especially in this critical moment.

Jazeel: I've been a trustee of the RGS for a year or so now, and something that happened recently was that the society canceled a booking for a Palestinian literature festival. The organization booked the RGS to hold an event that was due to take place in October, and in the wake of October 7th, the Society cancelled the booking because of safety concerns. It's a complicated situation, because there's an understandably big, and very essential, voice amongst the critical geography forum and the critical geography community asking, "What does it mean when the discipline itself can't provide space to bring marginalized voices into representation at a time like this?" And those, I think, are deeply important institutional questions that we need to grapple with, and get better with. So, whereas I think we have made progress in 7 years, since 2017, I think that there is a broader sense that thinking and reckoning with the debris and the remains of imperialism and colonialism is still massively important for us as a broad constituency of geographers. I think there's so much more work to do, and I don't think that work is going to end, and I think it's important we confront it as work without end. I think there's always more to do. But I am also slightly optimistic about the distance we have come in the last 7 years.

Naylor: I feel the same way, too. We can see the messy and the terrible, and we have to point to it, we can't not, and with Nathan Thayer I've written about that recently (Naylor and Thayer 2022). We can't have these conversations without first discussing the foundational elements of power dynamics and violence that exist.

Jazeel: That's really important. Because I think that raises the question of politics and strategy. How are we going to change things in our discipline, and in the academy, and in the university? I do think there's an interesting conversation to be had here. I mean, I'm interested in your own opinions, but part of the politics around deep colonialities necessitates the question about how to articulate with power? Or when not to? Mignolo (2000) would argue

that we can't place ourselves outside of coloniality. But I think that there are real pragmatic and political questions about how you approach powerful and historically sedimented institutions when you work in the university or with professional societies, which are more often than not precisely those kinds of institutions. We're in this space.

Naylor: What do you do? How do you get the institution to turn and move in the direction that we want it to? Exactly. We're both situated at institutions in the global core, drawing from theories both postcolonial and decolonial, that originated largely in the multi-scalar periphery—meaning what remains of the postcolonial world and the peripheries created by settler colonialism. But what does this mean for us as scholars situated in these institutions with a lot of privilege? Having these conversations, I think, is part of that. But what does this mean for us as scholars? What is the work we need to be doing?

Jazeel: Since I've been working in the Sarah Parker Remond Centre, I've been thinking a lot about discipline and disciplinary knowledge production. We are a multidisciplinary research center. And what that means is that we work critically around race, racism, racialization, racial hierarchies, and their manifestation today, but from a range of different disciplinary perspectives. We all come from different disciplines. Our students come from different disciplines as well. It's made me more aware than ever, I think, of how disciplinary knowledge production can, if it's not checked, if we're not careful, how it can encourage us to specialize in ways that have an abstract relationship to political concerns. So, something that has been really important for me over the years is actually how my disciplinary work intersects with my area studies work. I think this is really important. You know I work on Sri Lanka, I work in South Asia, and I think I am aware of what political concerns and questions touch down in that context and also what disciplinary concerns and debates just don't really have any political import in those grounded geographical contexts in which I work. So, I think there's an important sense that politics must always be grounded somehow in some way.

Naylor: I agree. I feel that is the foundation of my research program, because I largely work with folks who are deeply immersed in political struggles that are localized, in-place, but which also reverberate across scale. Situating most of my work in Latin America, it becomes essential to raise these geopolitical dynamics within this work. And it is part of the knowledge production. It is a part of the places where we produce that knowledge and who we produce that knowledge with. And you've given comment on this before when you were interviewed about your book (Clayton and Jazeel 2019). But I think it's worth revisiting, because the decolonial is starting to be dropped into geographic work. In thinking of these bodies of thought as both ontological and epistemological projects, can postcolonialism and decolonial thinking be productively combined towards the project of disrupting colonial/imperial designs?

Jazeel: I think, I said in that interview, and I would say something similar here, that what I'm always wary about when confronted with this kind of question is getting drawn into definitional debates, and I'm not really interested in those kinds of discussions. I also said earlier in this interview, it's important for us to maybe think about what it is we're referring to when we mobilize the term the decolonial, so I wouldn't want to draw rigid distinctions between the postcolonial and the decolonial. They're not necessarily that important for me, politically and intellectually. But I think what's interesting is that I would observe that the postcolonial in the British university context would seem to denote a set of theoretical debates, genealogies, and preoccupations, mostly coming out of literary studies as we've

already spoken about, whereas it seems that the decolonial, in the British university context, has emerged out of a set of political and activist preoccupations and mobilizations. And it seems to me that the decolonial is something that student and activist movements in and around the university have really been able to get their teeth into in some really interesting and valuable ways; maybe slightly less theoretically preoccupied and more about the urgent imperative to enact change in particular institutional contexts, and that's something I guess I've observed as an intuitive distinction that people might draw between the post- and the decolonial. But I wouldn't want to police those boundaries because I think they overlap in all kinds of interesting ways.

Naylor: Agreed, I don't see the theories in opposition, and I think that they both can be very fruitful. Parts of the discussion where I get flustered is when—and again I agree with you entirely on that—I don't have any desire to define and to say that there's set boundaries. But I do think that there is some conflation that happens in the use of these terms that can be less productive for the project. So, I am getting at the question of how we are using them as a lens to better understand difference across space and how they can be productively used. I also posed the question because one of the things that you wrote is that you were suspicious of postcolonial geography's professionalization, and that we might become prescriptive (ibid: 335); and so how do we either creatively combine these theories or use them strategically in ways that don't fall into that trap? That is really what I'm trying to puzzle through.

Jazeel: A constant through my work is trying to think about how to more humanely inhabit the world that colonial histories built. I think that's the kind of animating challenge through much of my work, trying to think through the legacies of colonialism. One of the things that I think is maybe potentially slightly dangerous with the implications of the decolonial is the subtractive logic of it. That, you know, the aim is to strip away what colonialism has built, and hopefully then get back to some kind of pre-colonial purity or something like that. And I just worry that that sometimes that's the implication. Actually, what I think we're trying to do is to work out how to go on in the world, in the worlds that colonialism built, and how to build more just worlds going forward. I think that's really important. I mentioned earlier about the dangers of disciplinary or discipline bound theoretical abstraction. I perhaps worry that decolonial geography, or postcolonial geography, becomes a set of theoretical skills that our students feel they need to learn in order to be able to develop some kind of theoretical and/or cultural capital. But, what I'm much more keen for us and our students to think about is the postcolonial, or the decolonial, as a set of methodologies; methodologies towards unlocking particular ways of intervening in the world around us, intervening in that world that colonialism has built around us, intervening in order to build better worlds.

Naylor: I really love that because one of the things you just made me think of was how we look at certain institutions, and we think, oh, well, everybody's trained as a Marxist there, right? And there's that danger and that risk of romanticization that may eschew praxis or even inward-looking critique. Maybe a sense of because I'm a decolonial theorist and if I use this particular term or terminology that it absolves us of actually having to grapple with those things.

Jazeel: Yeah.

Naylor: I've written elsewhere (Naylor 2025) that geographers are well placed to undertake this work because we have tools to decenter hegemonic knowledge production and work

towards these pluriversal practices, because we study difference across space and scale. So even though we're late to the game, is there productive work that that we want to maybe point to or potential paths that we might—without being prescriptive—consider going forward? I think we've already crossed this path in our discussion. But I am reminded that it is about doing, about that underlying political project. Is that something that we suggest is what's needed to carry us through on this path productively/destructively?

Jazeel: I think, maybe, this connects to your previous question about what's changed since 2017. I think a lot more geographers now are preoccupied with the challenge of, or their sense checking if you like, whether their work is as open as it could be, you know, and how they're doing and going about their research. And I like the fact that this kind of sense checking has become a little bit more common and routine in our discipline. It seems to me that this is to open oneself a little bit more, to influences beyond what we might refer to informally as the 'canon,' though we don't really have a canon in geography. But what I mean is that geographers are looking elsewhere for theory. They're looking elsewhere for inspiration. They're looking elsewhere for ways of engaging with the places, peoples and communities on which, and with whom, we're working and I think that's really interesting stuff that's going on. I mean, *Transactions* recently have been doing these 'Geography in the World' commentaries (see: McFarlane 2022), focused on how the discipline is taking shape in different countries beyond the kind of Euro/American heartland. Also, one of the differences over the maybe last 10 years or so, is that if you look at our major disciplinary journals, most of them, maybe not all, but most of them have core editorial teams that are a little bit more global now and spread throughout the world in terms of their institutional locatedness. They don't just have editors working in, you know, North American and European Anglophone contexts. So, there's a little bit more… I think, there is an opening I think that's really key too. For me, at least, the decolonial imperative in geography is a source for pluralization and opening.

Naylor: Well, I remember I was a graduate student when the American Association of Geographers did the name change with the realization that we were a global group of folks. I was not yet embedded enough in our societies and our discipline to speak to whether that was a contentious move or not, but I think it was an important one and was signaling that we do need to be more conscientious about this. And I think you're right that editors are, definitely, part of that and editorial boards are reflecting that difference at times as well and we're starting to have conversations about how we can support a more global authorship and trying to suggest how we can better support scholars who are not writing from an Anglophone foundation, as part of the project of 'worlding of geography' (see: Müller 2021).

Jazeel: Yeah, and there's some really interesting work going on around translation as well, which I think is really important. You're asking about particular areas within geography, and the other thing that I think is really important that I've noticed happening really in the last 2 or 3 years, in what we might call the post-George Floyd context is, in this country at least, geography teachers, high school teachers, so what we here in the U.K. would refer to as secondary and Sixth Form teachers, who are really interested in the decolonial turn in the discipline. So, there's a big group of geography teachers in the U.K. called the Decolonizing Geography Educators Group, which is 200 plus teachers strong, who are very connected to

what's going on in post and decolonial geography. They're trying to think about that work in the classroom with their students, you know?[6]

Naylor: I don't, because I am in a country that is actively stripping away our ability to teach diversity, equity, inclusion right now, not in my state, but you've seen what's happening in Texas and in Florida and elsewhere, what we are fighting at all levels in education. It's the 'anti-woke' groups fueled by hatred and white supremacy.

Jazeel: We have a right wing government that are also trying to crack down on what they refer to as the 'Wokerati', and this is another thing that I think it's important to have a discussion about, which is the signifying work that the word decolonial does in the current political climate.[7] A lot of the teachers I'm working with, one of the conversations they're having now, is how can we do decolonial work in our classrooms without using that particular term? And this is a discussion about not scaring school governors and parents, etc., in a public culture where many have become more afraid of the term decolonial over the last 7 or 8 years. I think that raises again the set of questions which I've hinted at earlier, which is, what exactly are we talking about when we talk about the decolonial? And actually, what these teachers are doing is simply thinking, and trying to think, about opening, a kind of pluralization of curricula, of perspectives, of voices in the classroom, of students that feel able to speak and participate. And the word decolonial, in the context of these quite modest challenges actually, the word decolonial is something that a lot of politicians, and a lot of people are scared of.

Naylor: Oh, yeah.

Jazeel: And that's an important thing, I think, for us to think about in this moment.

Naylor: Absolutely. I'm thinking about how it's being taken up in different areas in geography and you know the conversation about how geography functions in our school systems is a whole different story—we are still struggling upstream to promote geography never mind decolonial geographies. One of the things that I am seeing, as you know, trying to bring this work into my classrooms, but also continuing to thread it through the writing that I'm doing is that a lot of these conversations are grounded in the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality and matrix of power discussions (cf. Quijano 2007), the work that's coming out of Latin America. And I'm increasingly, I'm seeing coloniality actually just being pulled out of that paradigmatic space and I see this as a productive discussion as a way to widen, perhaps deepen what the paradigm offers in terms of deconstructing universalizing narratives. I say this, because in tandem, I am thinking about the why of where in this production of knowledge and how steeped we need to be in Latin Americanist approaches, especially when we're talking about, for example, Southeast Asian or Sub-Saharan African contexts.

Jazeel: Do you mean how deeply or how pinned the decolonial turn needs to be to Latin America?

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[6] For more on the Decolonizing Geography Educator's Group, see: https://decolonisegeography.com/

[7] Since this interview took place, the right wing Conservative government in the U.K. lost the 2024 General Election and have been replaced by a centre left Labour government. In the U.S. the Democrats were replaced by the former 45th President's Republican Party in power and the 47th president is enacting a hateful and violent agenda via executive order that threatens to roll back civil rights and scientific discovery in the U.S. We expect the 'culture wars' will carry on.

Naylor: In essence, how much it needs to be tied to it. Because I think about what scholars working outside of a Latin Americanist position/space might bring anew to the discussions on the decolonial and coloniality.

Jazeel: It's such a good question. I'm not sure I have an adequate answer to it. But we touched on this when you asked about the professionalization of postcolonial and decolonial theory. I think if we're not careful, we can end up pre-scribing, by which I mean teaching a set of theoretical skills that become de-contextualized, and I think a lot of what we're trying to argue, those of us who are thinking with and through some of those Latin American writings and writings from elsewhere, is actually about the importance of always historicizing, always contextualizing, always engaging with and opening yourself as a scholar to approaches that will be germane and relevant to the context in which you're working. So that you, as a scholar, can intervene. And I don't think there's necessarily a map for this. Likewise, I don't think that anyone should turn around and say: you can't possibly use Latin American decolonial theory to engage productively with your particular set of issues around, for example, climate migration in Bangladesh. If they are helpful for you, if they provide a methodology for you to be able to effectively engage and intervene in that context, then, yeah, why not? But I think it's also important to recognize that in that particular context there will be people thinking through these problems on the ground with really important things to say, and they need to be in your conversations. Those debates need to be foundational to your conversations.

Naylor: I think that there has to be that dialogic moment. We are co-creating knowledge and so if we think about the 'small d' decolonial, it is about the how—how we are producing knowledge, and how we're disseminating that knowledge, from where and the geopolitics of knowledge production.

Jazeel: This is a question for you, really. But there's been a lot of talk in geography and writing, in geography about theory and there have been some recent publications, like Henry Yueng's book (2023) on *Theory and Explanation and Geography*, and other writings as well. And what really interests me about this is, I think, this disciplinary preoccupation with theory as something that we can cleave from what we notionally hold and imagine as empirical work or data collection that is, by virtue of the fact that theory is elsewhere, you know, it's not theory. We work in a discipline I think that is actually quite strongly influenced by the scientific method. Even when we're working in the social sciences or the humanities end of the discipline, there's this sense that theory is done here and data collection over here, and I think if you go to other parts of the university, say an English department, or a comp lit department, there are other words and other approaches and ways of thinking about knowledge production that don't fall into this theory/empirics binary. So, the idea of critical reading: How are you reading? What's your reading technique going to be? How are you going to engage with this text? You know, what's your intervention going to be? So that's something I've been thinking about recently; our disciplinary predilection to cleave theory from data collection. It's become an almost naturalized epistemology in our discipline I sense, and I wonder about our creative potential to think and work otherwise.

Naylor: I've also been thinking about the same quite a bit, even if from a different line of inquiry. And you know, maybe quite by accident, that we're thinking about that in tandem, because I've always considered the theoretical approaches that we use as part of our critical thinking as geographers and I'm not trying to say anything untoward about GIS, or physical geography, but that theory could be productively used in these more hard science spaces.

It's actually an argument I'm making in my new book (Naylor 2025) that there's nothing that wouldn't allow us to have that kind of critical thinking threaded throughout each strand of our discipline that allows us to be a part of this political project that I agree that there is a danger, and that, yeah, if we set theory over here and say, okay, well, these are the people that do this critical work. And then we set data collection over here, I find that mind boggling, because many of us do both—depending on our training.

Jazeel: Early on in this conversation I referred to the word methodology in thinking through postcolonial or decolonial approaches. And I think that's really important word in this context, you know, like these are neither theoretical prescriptions, nor are we talking about data collection, by which I mean methods. But actually grappling with decolonial writing, or postcolonial writing, it for me is methodologically productive, it should be a methodologically productive task to help you get to where you want to go with the political questions you want to ask, and political interventions you need to make.

Naylor: I completely agree and I think, that we have touched on this, especially as you talked about activism in U.K. universities, but I am working on another writing project right now that is concerned with decolonial intersectional feminism, and particularly thinking about how we can dismantle the neoliberal university with attention to a feminist ethic of care (Naylor 2023) and one of the messiest pieces I'm finding in puzzling through geography's decolonial imperative here is how to approach it within that structure. I am writing from the space of the neoliberal university, and it is a space that also needs to be decolonized (see: Bhambra et al. 2017). So, I wonder what you think about this conundrum, and if you feel this connects to other work you've published, for example, about the "profound" experience of being able to bring colonial and imperial histories to the geography classroom as a potential starting place (Jazeel et al. 2022: 517). Do you think that the classroom is where we start this political project in the university, alongside our research?

Jazeel: I think you're absolutely right that the university is a colonial institution. It's a neoliberal institution. It's an institution which has a long history in imperial projects. And you know the knowledge production that goes on in the university today, and historically, has been key to developing the kind of arms technologies that are being used in Gaza at the moment right, and in other places in the world.

Naylor: Ukraine.

Jazeel: Exactly. We work in very problematic institutions and I think a lot of us feel that quite intensely. On the other hand, we also work in institutions that somehow afford the space for critical conversations that we think are worth holding on to and from which we think we can generate something—seeds of hope, or seeds of change, whatever they might be. I think that teaching is a really important part of that, as well as the research and the writing we do. I do think there's a vital connection to what, for me, is our shop floor, which is the classroom. I think it's really important, and I think that the potential impacts that we can have as scholars is also, it's not just about the kind of articles we write, and all that stuff, it's about those moments in the classroom, isn't it? And about maybe encouraging one or two students, more hopefully, to think differently and critically about the world around them. And those are the people who, I think, potentially, go out into the world and change things and help build a better world.

Naylor: That's the hope. That's why I came back to university. Actually, I was trained to go out and be an international development practitioner. And I'll put it very shortly: I didn't like that

work very much, and so I thought I'll go back to the university and talk with folks that are going to go out there to do the work. Maybe that's where the change happens, and I think it's a positive note to end on. But perhaps one additional provocation: Radcliffe says we're experiencing a "decolonial turn" (2022: 78) in geography, what thoughts would you register in that regard, do you agree?

Jazeel: I'm not sure I do, because I just wouldn't want to characterize it as a turn, you know, because a turn implies that there's a turn in direction, and then we're on the right road kind of thing. I just think it's a constant process actually. So, if it's a turn, it should be dizzying because we need to keep on turning. We need to keep on turning into it, into the trouble, into the problems that endure. I don't think we should get complacent. I think it's work without end. There's always more to do.

Naylor: I love the idea of it being dizzying; what a note to end on.

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