

Islamic banking and finance: postcolonial political economy and the decentring of economic geography

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Abstract

A significant trend in global finance over the last 15 years has been the rapid growth of Islamic banking and finance (IBF), which has gathered momentum to become a significant feature of the financial landscape in the twenty-first century. This paper explores the increasingly 'Western' character of IBF and has two key aims. First, we address the remarkably under-theorized status of IBF by considering how various economic geographical and social theories might conceptualize its development. Second, and emerging from our reservations with these literatures, we argue that IBF exposes some of the limits of Western-centred readings of economic geographies and we chart a path towards a postcolonial political-economic geography. Postcolonial critiques are useful in two senses. First they provide a different set of lenses for understanding IBF as a self-consciously 'other' set of economic and social practices and second, they push us to reconsider or 'provincialize' our understandings of normative, hegemonic economic practices and knowledges, including 'conventional' banking and finance. In essence, the growth of IBF is a stimulus for economic geographers to consider how, for what purposes and from where they theorize – a task that is long overdue.

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