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# Is a decolonial vision of terroir possible?

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## Résumé

Although the legal concept of GIs originated in Europe, they have spread throughout the world. Scholars continue to debate, however, whether GIs are a "bottom-up" tool for supporting rural development in the Global South or a way for large producers to further consolidate their power (Mancini 2013; Marie-Vivien et al. 2019; Török et al. 2020). The existing literature focuses on identifying the governance structures (within GI schemes) and state policies needed to "achieve the virtuous cycles of GIs" (Barjolle et al. 2017; Bowen 2010; Marie-Vivien and Biénabe 2017). But as Coombe and Malik (2018) note, in order to address the inequalities that marginalize small producers and laborers in the Global South, we must also look outside, considering how GIs are rooted in broader global histories and power dynamics.

In this paper, I contribute to this gap in the literature by using a decolonial framework to analyze GIs, considering whether a decolonial vision of terroir is possible. Recent scholarship uses the concept of decoloniality to theorize power dynamics in the global food system and articulate a decolonial vision of food sovereignty centered on collective self-determination (Daigle 2019; Whyte 2018). Could GIs be a way for indigenous people and communities to preserve the essential ecosystems, relationships, and traditions that are intertwined with particular foods and agricultural products?

Historians argue that the origins of GIs are fundamentally tied to French colonialism and the racialized project of ensuring that the (White) colonial majority could maintain its foodways and agricultural wealth (Bohling 2018; Cohen 2021; Guy 2010). Coombe and Malik (2018) use the contemporary cases of Rooibos tea and Darjeeling tea to show how GIs often function to "fetishize territories in a fashion that naturalizes rather than challenges the historical social relations of labor which constitutes territory as such" – benefitting, for example, wealthy white landholders in South Africa and excluding the Nepali workers in India whose descendents are responsible for passing down the knowledge of how to cultivate tea.

Is it possible for GIs, particularly in the Global South, to circumvent and resist colonial legacies and inequalities and empower indigenous producers, or are they destined to reproduce racialized and gendered hierarchies? To answer this question, I draw on emergent scholarship on decolonizing the food system and primary research conducted on mezcal and tequila. The histories of mezcal and tequila, Mexico's largest and most successful GIs, are deeply intertwined with the history and legacies of colonialism in Mexico. The goal of this paper is to articulate what a decolonial vision of terroir is possible and what conditions are necessary to support GIs that recognize indigenous knowledge, support collective self-determination, and reduce historically entrenched forms of oppression.

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