

Beyond Decoloniality: Toward a Framework of Global Equity

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Abstract

Background: The concept of decoloniality has gained prominence in academic and socio-political discourse, addressing issues of global power imbalances and persistent inequities. While decoloniality is essential for understanding structural inequalities, its discussion often leads to confusion, defensiveness, and moral discomfort, especially when viewed through a binary framework of victims and perpetrators. This binary framing tends to overlook the nuanced interplay of human agency and historical contexts. **Aim:** This study explores decoloniality as a means to challenge and dismantle colonial legacies embedded in knowledge, governance, and socio-economic structures. The aim is to move beyond simplistic dichotomies and foster global equity through mutual respect, indigenous perspective inclusion, and cooperative frameworks. **Methods:** A narrative review was conducted to examine literature and theoretical frameworks surrounding decoloniality, focusing on the implications of reframing the Global North-South relationship. The study emphasizes an adaptive, participatory process of “*re-visioning*,” encouraging the development of equitable frameworks rather than attempting to reset or undo the past. **Discussion:** Decoloniality calls for a shift away from Eurocentric dominance toward the validation of indigenous perspectives. Progress requires confronting the core beliefs that uphold systemic hierarchies: the Global North must move beyond entrenched superiority, while the Global South should cultivate self-sufficiency and affirm marginalized knowledge systems. “*Re-visioning*” encourages re-shaping perspectives collectively rather than through prescriptive approaches. Focusing on an adaptive, participatory process for evolving identity and theory, rooted in collective insight rather than top-down constructs. **Conclusion:** To reach beyond academia, embracing “global equity” as a guiding concept emphasizes shared global progress and equal partnerships among nations. By building on mutual acknowledgment of historical experiences, this approach aims to foster a just, interconnected future rooted in shared humanity and collective growth.

Keywords

Decoloniality, Decolonization, Global Equity, Global South, Global North

1. Introduction

The concept of decoloniality is increasingly at the forefront of academic discourse, especially in discussions about global power imbalances and inequities (Koum Besson et al., 2022; Gu, 2023). Yet, it may evoke feelings of confusion, frustration, and moral conflict. From the vantage point of those who feel marginalized by existing global systems, decoloniality appears as an overwhelming challenge. It raises uncomfortable questions not just about history, but about current societal structures and personal gains. For those at the “bottom of the food chain,” decoloniality can feel like a Shakespearean tragedy, with the same tragic cycle of systemic inequality persisting across generations. As we delve deeper into decolonial theory, the more bewildering and complex it becomes, especially when we contemplate what a truly equitable global society might look like.

The term “decolonization” often evokes a sense of emotional and intellectual weight associated with confronting ingrained injustices ingrained in society today. The realization that privilege comes with an inherent responsibility to understand and dismantle these imbalances can trigger unease. There is a complexity to decolonization not only in its academic discourse, but also in how it challenges people to reconsider their roles within a larger narrative that has often prioritized certain voices while silencing others (Koum Besson et al., 2022; Gu, 2023).

Decolonial discourse may resonate both as a validation of lived experiences and as a call to action for individuals who have experienced generational marginalization. The daunting question is where to begin addressing such profound inequities. As a result, communities can struggle to apply the theories in concrete ways that result in real change (Gu, 2023; Mignolo, 2007; Mignolo, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Gu, 2020). In order to avoid perpetuating new forms of imbalance, decolonization efforts must be multifaceted and rooted in cooperation and solidarity due to the complexities of power structures.

This article challenges the idea that equity can be achieved solely by redistributing power without fundamentally altering the systems that support it. Exploring what a truly equitable global society entails leads to further complexity. To achieve this, societies must rethink how they perceive development, governance, and cooperation, prioritizing inclusive, collaborative, rather than extractive and hierarchical policies and practices. It is not enough that societies recognize past and present inequities to move toward global equity; they must also commit to systemic shifts that prioritize justice, mutual respect, and shared progress.

2. Decoloniality and Its Implications

Decoloniality, as it is framed in literature, is both a theoretical framework and a

social movement aimed at challenging colonial structures, ideologies, and power systems that continue to shape global relations, despite the formal end of colonial rule. This process involves rejecting the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems and restoring value to indigenous perspectives. The ultimate goal of decoloniality is to dismantle enduring inequalities in education, governance, economics, health, and identity (Affun-Adegbulu & Adegbulu, 2020; Hirsch, 2021; Kwete et al., 2022; Hawks et al., 2023). However, for those unfamiliar with its theoretical underpinnings, “decoloniality” can be misleading, suggesting an impossible task of undoing history. Often, people react to the term with a sense of blame, suggesting victims and perpetrators, and triggering defensiveness among those who believe they are implicated by association, even if they did not directly benefit from colonialism (Lencucha, 2024).

Ta-Nehisi Coates aptly illustrates the dangers of framing complex socio-political conflicts solely through a victim-perpetrator lens. In his reflections on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Coates reminds us that oppression and victimization are not inherently ennobling, nor do they automatically confer moral high ground. Instead, individuals and societies entangled in such dynamics may perpetuate cycles of harm. Similarly, the binary lens of decoloniality as a victim-perpetrator dichotomy overlooks the intricacies of human agency, historical contingency, and the moral complexities of the present (Gross, 2024).

In order to understand decoloniality, we must move beyond simplistic categorizations of victimhood and blame. Although colonialism’s legacies continue to influence contemporary power dynamics, we must not reduce the response to blaming, but instead foster collaborative solutions to address structural inequities. The decolonial philosophy calls for a transformation of curricula, a dismantling of exclusionary practices, and the adoption of diverse epistemologies to create a more equitable society. Scholars, policymakers, and communities must engage actively to deconstruct entrenched biases and rebuild spaces that celebrate pluralism and inclusivity (PLOS, 2021; Wispelwey et al., 2023; Bhakuni & Abimbola, 2021; Chaudhuri et al., 2021).

Furthermore, decoloniality examines how global institutions propagate “universal” knowledge. Eurocentric frameworks have historically tended to elevate Western knowledge to the level of the standard, whereas non-Western philosophies and practices have been marginalized. As part of this paradigm shift, it is crucial to acknowledge diverse intellectual traditions as well as to take tangible steps to integrate them into mainstream education and policy. Decolonial approaches challenge the hegemony of singular narratives by empowering indigenous and local knowledge systems, thus enriching collective understanding and problem solving (Bhakuni & Abimbola, 2021; Asea, 2022; Matolino, 2020).

Policies rooted in colonial legacies continue to reinforce inequities in health, economics, and governance. In the health sector, for example, colonial-era infrastructure and resource distribution left lasting disparities, especially in marginalized areas. The process of decolonizing health requires rethinking strategies that

go beyond surface-level reforms and address structural barriers as well as systemic biases. Community-based approaches and traditional health practices that have been marginalized but hold considerable value must be prioritized (Kwete et al., 2022; Hawks et al., 2023; Lencucha, 2024; McCoy et al., 2024). A decolonial approach to economics encourages re-evaluating global trade policies, wealth distribution, and natural resource flows so that more balanced relationships can foster mutual benefit for historically exploited and exploiting nations (Kvangraven & Kesar, 2022). The aim is to create systems which are not only just in their outcomes but also fair in their premises.

3. Global North vs. Global South, Deconstructing False Dichotomies

One of the central dilemmas of decoloniality is how to address the wrongs of the past without perpetuating a new cycle of inequality. The challenge lies in creating equitable global systems where resources, knowledge, and power are shared without stripping others of their achievements or forcing one group to bear the blame for historical injustices. The global north and global south dichotomy, which has historically framed much of the decolonial discourse, itself requires deconstruction (PLOS, 2021).

For meaningful progress, we must confront the belief system in the global north that perpetuates a sense of superiority based on race, culture, social class, or nationality. This superiority complex sustains entitlement and a hierarchical global order, wherein certain nations, peoples, and knowledge systems are deemed more valuable than others. Simultaneously, the global south must confront and overcome its ingrained dependency on Western systems, resources, and ideologies. This requires validating the knowledge systems and cultural practices that have been marginalized and fostering a belief in self-sufficiency.

In order to deconstruct the global north versus global south dichotomy, we need to acknowledge that while there are historical and economic disparities between these regions, the binary system can be reductive and overly simplistic. In this view, we often overlook the diversity within each region, where some parts of the “global south” may have more in common with certain areas of the “global north” than with their neighbours. In addition, it ignores the inequities and power structures within countries themselves. The urban centres of many countries in the global south can mirror their northern counterparts when it comes to technological and economic advancements, while the rural areas within the global north may face challenges that are not dissimilar to those in the global south. By breaking down this binary, we are able to move beyond a monolithic view that prevents customized solutions and collaborative progress (Khan et al., 2022; Sims, 2024; Policy Center for the New South, 2023; Pike et al., 2014).

A dichotomy such as this, risks reinforcing a “us versus them” mentality, which stifles the development of shared goals and cooperation between nations. Genuine decolonial efforts should seek to identify and leverage common ground—bridging

knowledge systems and experiences to foster mutual growth. The key to this is to create partnerships that allow for co-creation of knowledge, by allowing each region to contribute insights and strategies based on the strengths that each region has to offer. Several parts of the global south demonstrate resilience, sustainability practices, and community-based approaches that could be studied by the north. While retaining cultural integrity and agency, southern regions can adopt certain technological and infrastructure advancements from the north (Lencucha, 2024; Khan et al., 2022; Sims, 2024; Policy Center for the New South, 2023; Pike et al., 2014; Bain et al., 2024; Sharma & Sam-Agudu, 2023).

Global north-south dialogue needs to be reframed to emphasize interdependence rather than dominance or isolation. This approach recognizes that while wealth and power have historically been concentrated in the global north, solutions to present challenges—such as climate change, pandemics, and economic volatility—must come from a collective effort that transcends borders. A paradigm shift from top-down models that reinforce historical hierarchies must be implemented so that participatory decision-making, capacity-building, and local leadership are encouraged. Ultimately, this process promotes a more just and balanced world by shifting from conditional aid and dependence to mutually beneficial partnerships and empowerment.

4. A Re-Visioning, Not an Undoing

We propose the term re-*visioning*, which embodies a collaborative, context-sensitive reimagining of identity and purpose that respects local contexts and diverse perspectives. This concept promotes an adaptive, participatory process for evolving identity and theory, grounded in collective insight rather than imposed, top-down frameworks. The idea of re-*visioning*—rather than attempting to undo colonial legacies—offers a more pragmatic approach to advancing global equity. Colonization distorted not only the colonized but also the colonizers, warping their worldviews and moral compasses. While we cannot undo the past, *re-*visioning** our systems based on equity and justice is both necessary and achievable. This approach involves not merely rejecting colonial histories but actively reshaping our understanding of them and applying their lessons to build a more just world.

Practical examples of this *re-*visioning** include equitable responses to global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In a truly equitable system, vaccines would be allocated based on need, without hesitation or geopolitical calculation. Similarly, leadership positions would be filled based on merit, free from racial or social quotas. While quotas may be a necessary interim measure, they are not a long-term solution. Equitable systems would eliminate the need for quotas by creating genuinely fair opportunities for all.

A *re-*visioning** acknowledges that while colonial legacies cannot be undone, the power structures and ingrained inequalities they left behind can be transformed. In order to achieve this transformation, policies, institutions, and practices that perpetuate imbalance must be critically examined and reconstructed. In a *re-*

visioning, history is not denied; it is incorporated into current structures so that economic, educational, and political gaps are bridged rather than widened. It means rethinking curricula to include diverse perspectives, reforming international trade to be more equitable, and establishing global governance models that allow voices from marginalized regions to be heard fairly.

Furthermore, it provides opportunities for local and indigenous communities to take control of their future. In this approach, development assistance is not tied to conditions that reinforce a subordination cycle. By supporting grassroots entrepreneurship, integrating traditional ecological knowledge into conservation efforts, and promoting public health strategies rooted in community engagement, it champions investments that respect local contexts. Through *re-visioning*, societies can progress collaboratively, grounded in shared respect and responsibility, by co-creating systems that honour historical contexts and actively work to dismantle present-day inequities in a way that is sensitive to diverse cultural perspectives.

5. Toward Global Equity

While the term “decoloniality” may serve as a useful academic construct, it can alienate or confuse those outside its theoretical scope. A more human and actionable term—global equity—better captures the essence of what this movement seeks to achieve. Global equity calls for a reimagined world order where the global north abandons its belief in inherent superiority and embraces its role within a larger, interconnected global unit. Similarly, the global south must be provided the opportunity to thrive on its own terms, free from the historical dependencies that have constrained it. Global equity refers to a fair and just balance across nations, where all countries can equally access resources, pursue development opportunities, and participate in global decision-making (Plamondon & Shahram, 2024; Kapiriri & Razavi, 2022).

Global equity aims to dismantle not just visible remnants of colonialism, but also subtle, systemic biases that perpetuate inequality. The vision goes beyond reparative justice; it focuses on balancing resources, power, and opportunities across nations. In order to achieve true global equity, economies must be designed to benefit both the affluent and those historically marginalized. Resources-rich but economically disadvantaged countries should be allowed to develop industries and infrastructure without being exploited by unfair trade practices. This shift would involve redefining development assistance, focusing on partnerships that encourage self-reliance rather than dependency, and fostering economic ecosystems that prioritize local value creation and capacity building.

The role of education in achieving global equity is also crucial. Education must be reimagined to represent a more inclusive world narrative. In order to provide students with a holistic understanding of the world, curriculums should emphasize the contributions and histories of diverse cultures. The bridging of this educational gap can help dissolve the mental and cultural hierarchies that underlie a divided global system. Creating networks that span the global north and south can

be made possible by programs that support student and scholar exchanges across continents. Developing empathy and a shared sense of purpose through mutual learning will pave the way for future cooperative global leadership.

Rethinking global governance structures, such as those of the United Nations and international financial institutions, is also necessary to achieve global equity. These bodies must evolve to reflect a multipolar world in which the voices of the global south are not only heard, but influential as well. It implies shifting power in decision-making processes and establishing frameworks that ensure nations from around the world contribute to shaping policies that affect everyone. True equity cannot emerge until global systems operate on fairness and shared stewardship, enabling both north and south to pursue prosperity and well-being.

Progress toward global equity can be assessed through specific indicators across key domains. Economic equity involves reducing income disparities between countries, ensuring fair trade practices, and managing sustainable debt through indicators like income parity, trade balance, and debt-to-GDP ratios (Gupta et al., 1999; Summers, 1999). Health equity requires equitable access to healthcare, reflected in metrics such as healthcare coverage, disease burden, and health infrastructure availability (Maani et al., 2023; World Health Organization, n.d.; August et al., 2022; Abdalla et al., 2021; Chandanabhumma & Narasimhan, 2020; Braveman & Gruskin, 2003). In education, universal access, quality learning resources, and digital accessibility are critical measures, captured through school enrolment, literacy rates, and internet access indicators (Levinson et al., 2022; Alam & Mohanty, 2023; Ainscow, 2020; Jurado de los Santos et al., 2020; DeCamp et al., 2023; Rashid, Ali, & Dharanipragada, 2023; Eichbaum et al., 2021). Environmental sustainability also plays a role, ensuring fair access to natural resources, equitable sharing of climate responsibility, and conservation efforts (Bell et al., 2019; Ofori et al., 2024; Yanou et al., 2023; Bresnihan & Milner, 2022). Key indicators include access to clean water, pollution levels, and biodiversity conservation.

Social and political equity emphasize representation in global institutions, protection of human rights, and access to social protection, measured by voting rights in international organizations, freedom indices, and social protection coverage (Guy & McCandless, 2012; Beramendi et al., 2024). Technology and innovation equity involve equal access to modern technology, collaboration in scientific research, and fair intellectual property practices, which can be tracked through metrics like technology adoption rates, international research funding, and technology licensing agreements (Meighan, 2021; Venkateswaran et al., 2023). These indicators, collectively assessed through a potential Global Equity Index, provide a framework for monitoring and promoting equity worldwide. This comprehensive approach enables nations to evaluate and address disparities across sectors, fostering an interconnected and just future through shared responsibility and growth.

6. Case Studies

Here are case studies from diverse regions and sectors that illustrate varied approaches

and outcomes in decolonization efforts, each progressing along unique paths and often contending with structural, financial, social and political challenges.

South Africa's Land Reform Post-Apartheid: The Land Reform program aimed to address the injustices of colonialism and apartheid by redistributing land to those dispossessed, providing restitution or compensation for land lost under apartheid, and implementing land tenure reform to secure land access for communities in former Bantustans (Cousins, 2016; Kloppers & Pienaar, 2014). However, progress has been slow due to legal and financial challenges, with only about 25% of land redistributed (Kirsten & Sihlobo, 2024). This case illustrates the complexities of decolonization within a modern legal system and highlights the tension between redressing historical injustices and economic stability.

Decolonizing Higher Education in Latin America: Universities in countries such as Bolivia and Ecuador have introduced curricula that integrate Indigenous knowledge and languages, challenging Eurocentric frameworks in education. In Bolivia, the 2009 constitution established the concept of *Vivir Bien* ("Living Well"), rooted in Indigenous philosophies and linked to environmental and community well-being. This principle is now part of the curriculum, aligning educational goals with indigenous cultural values (Cardozo, 2012; Chamorro-Pinchao et al., 2021). These reforms represent a shift toward a more inclusive and culturally relevant education system that respects Indigenous identities and knowledge.

Local Manufacturing of Vaccines and Medicines in Africa: In response to vaccine inequities highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, African nations have focused on strengthening local manufacturing capabilities. Partnerships such as the African Vaccine Manufacturing Initiative (AVMI) and support from the African Union's Partnership for African Vaccine Manufacturing have led to initiatives for producing vaccines within Africa. Senegal, Rwanda, and South Africa, for example, have begun setting up vaccine production facilities, reducing dependence on Western nations and fostering regional self-sufficiency (Saied et al., 2022; Joi, 2024; Saied, 2023; Dhali, 2023; Kana et al., 2023). This shift represents a critical move toward decolonizing health by ensuring Africa's access to life-saving vaccines without being subject to supply constraints from external manufacturers.

7. Conclusion

Achieving global equity requires translating decolonial theory into practical reforms that address colonial legacies across education, economics, governance, and health. This entails a paradigm shift that not only recognizes historical inequities but actively restructures systems to foster inclusivity and fairness. Moving beyond "global north" and "global south" binaries, the focus should shift toward building interdependent frameworks that harness diverse strengths for collective progress. Future research should explore actionable strategies for restructuring institutions, developing shared solutions, and crafting policies that promote a fair, interconnected future guided by the lessons of history.

Conflicts of Interest

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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