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Beyond Hybridity: Reconfiguring Postcolonial Theory through Decoloniality, Digital Capitalism, and Global South Solidarities

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Abstract: This article critically revisits the theoretical foundations of postcolonial studies in light of the profound changes characterising the twenty-first century. While foundational thinkers like Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha established key frameworks around representation, subalternity, and hybridity, contemporary global conditions call for a significant theoretical reorientation. The persistence of coloniality within neoliberal globalization, digital capitalism, and ecological crisis exposes the limitations of approaches that focus on discourse while underattending to material structures of power. Drawing on Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Bill Ashcroft, and decolonial thinkers such as Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo, this study argues for a move from hybridity toward a decolonial framework that takes seriously structural inequalities, epistemic violence, and global power asymmetries. The paper extends postcolonial inquiry into environmental crisis, digital colonialism, and algorithmic governance, showing how colonial logics persist in new technological and ecological forms. It also foregrounds epistemic plurality, indigenous knowledge systems, and South–South intellectual solidarities as vital resources for challenging Eurocentric dominance. The article contends that postcolonial studies must evolve into a decolonial, globally engaged, and praxis-oriented field.

Keywords: Postcolonial Theory; Decoloniality; Hybridity; Coloniality Of Power; Digital Colonialism; Algorithmic Governance; Environmental Justice; Epistemic Violence; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Global South; South–South Solidarities.

Introduction

Postcolonial theory emerged in the late twentieth century as a critical engagement with the cultural, political, and epistemological legacies of European imperialism. It was never merely a historical exercise; its deeper ambition was to interrogate the structures of knowledge and power that enabled and justified colonial rule. Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism showed how representation functions as an instrument of domination. Spivak's work on subalternity revealed the epistemic silencing embedded in both colonial and nationalist discourse. Bhabha's theorisation of hybridity illuminated the ambivalence and instability at the heart of colonial authority. Together, these frameworks established postcolonial theory as a vital field within the humanities, attentive to questions of power, identity, and resistance.

Yet the world that gave rise to these frameworks has changed considerably. Colonialism has not simply receded into the past; it has been reconfigured into new modalities of domination operating through transnational capital, digital technology, and ecological crisis. Anibal Quijano's notion of the "coloniality of power" captures this well: coloniality is not merely an aftereffect of empire but a constitutive dimension of global modernity itself, persisting through racial, labour, and knowledge hierarchies that were established under colonial rule and continue to shape the present.

In this context, the concept of hybridity once central to postcolonial analysisrequires critical re-evaluation. Bhabha's formulation remains valuable for understanding cultural ambivalence, but it risks being insufficient when addressing the systemic and material dimensions of contemporary global power. Hybridity is often absorbed into neoliberal cosmopolitanism, celebrated as a marker of cultural mixing while the deeper inequalities rooted in colonial histories remain intact.

This article therefore argues that postcolonial theory must move beyond an overreliance on hybridity and engage a decolonial framework that foregrounds structural inequalities, epistemic violence, and transnational solidarities across the Global South. This is not a rejection of earlier insights but an extension and recontextualization of them in light of present conditions. The sections that follow trace this argument through revisiting foundational texts, engaging the material turn in postcolonial thought, examining environmental and digital colonialism, and exploring the possibilities opened by epistemic plurality and South–South solidarities.

Revisiting the Canon: Representation, Subalternity, and the Limits of Hybridity

Said's Orientalism remains a foundational text for understanding the entanglement of knowledge and imperial power. The "Orient," Said demonstrates, is not a neutral geographical category but a discursive construction produced through Western scholarship, literature, and institutional practices. Representation, in this framework, is never innocent it is constitutive of domination, shaping how subjects are known, governed, and imagined. This insight acquires renewed urgency in the digital age, where global media platforms, search engines, and artificial intelligence systems reproduce racialized and geopolitical hierarchies embedded in their training data. What might be called algorithmic orientalism extends Said's thesis into the digital realm: cultural stereotypes are now encoded into computational systems that shape visibility, access, and legitimacy.

Spivak's question “Can the Subaltern Speak?" remains equally pressing. Her argument is not simply that marginalised subjects lack voice, but that the structural conditions of dominant knowledge systems render such voices inaudible or appropriated. In digital contexts, this problem intensifies: marginalised communities are simultaneously hyper-visible as data and invisible as political agents. Data extraction practices convert lived experience into commodifiable information, often without consent or benefit to those communities. Spivak's concept of epistemic violence thus remains crucial for interrogating how digital systems reproduce older hierarchies under new technological forms.

The critique of hybridity as a central analytical category is more complex. Bhabha's formulation is genuinely important for understanding how colonial authority is never absolute, how identities are formed in ambivalent, negotiated spaces. But critics like Aijaz Ahmad have argued that an exclusive focus on discursive ambivalence risks obscuring the material conditions of exploitation that structure postcolonial realities. In neoliberal contexts, hybridity is often appropriated as a celebration of cultural mixing, transforming difference into a marketable aesthetic while leaving structural inequalities intact. This does not make hybridity obsolete, but it does require that the concept be situated within a broader analytical framework attentive to political economy, ecological crisis, and technological power.

Fanon, Ngũgĩ, and the Material Turn

Any serious move beyond hybridity as a dominant paradigm must engage with the radical materialism of Frantz Fanon. Writing in the immediate aftermath of colonial domination, Fanon insists that colonialism is not merely a system of representation, but a totalizing structure sustained through violence military, economic, and psychological. In The Wretched of the Earth, he describes colonial space as fundamentally divided into zones of privilege and deprivation, where the colonized subject is systematically dehumanised. Decolonisation, for Fanon, is not a metaphorical or symbolic process. It requires a transformative rupture: the dismantling of colonial institutions and the reorganisation of social, economic, and political life.

Fanon's insight that material and epistemic forms of domination are deeply intertwined remains indispensable today. The colonized subject is produced not only through economic exploitation but through affective and cognitive regimes that sustain colonial power, what Fanon calls, in Black Skin, White Masks, the "epidermalization" of inferiority. This dual focus bridges structural critique and lived experience. Extending Fanon into the present allows us to interpret phenomena such as environmental degradation, economic dispossession, and digital exploitation as continuations of colonial violence in new registers.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's work complements and deepens this materialism by foregrounding language as a site of colonial control and resistance. In Decolonising the Mind, Ngugi argues that linguistic imperialism, the privileging of European languages through colonial education, does not merely marginalise indigenous languages. It reshapes consciousness, alienating individuals from their cultural histories and epistemological frameworks. Language, for Ngugi, carries culture, memory, and identity. His call for the reclamation of indigenous languages is therefore a radical epistemic intervention, challenging the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems and proposing a model of cultural production grounded in local realities.

Together, Fanon and Ngugi mark a decisive shift from the discursive emphasis of earlier postcolonial theory toward a more materially grounded and politically engaged framework. While cultural negotiation matters, it cannot substitute for structural transformation. In an era defined by widening economic disparities, ecological crisis, and digital capitalism, their insights provide critical tools for analysing how colonial logics continue to shape the distribution of resources, the organisation of knowledge, and the formation of subjectivities.

The Convergence of Postcolonial and Decolonial Thought

Postcolonial theory and decolonial thought are often treated as parallel but distinct traditions. Postcolonial studies, emerging largely within Anglo-American academia, has focused on representation, identity, and discourse following formal independence. Decolonial theory, developing primarily in Latin America through thinkers like Quijano and Mignolo, insists that colonialism is not a historical event that ended with independence but a structure that continues to organise global modernity. The distinction matters: where postcolonial approaches often work within the frameworks of Western theory, decolonial thought calls for what Mignolo terms "epistemic disobedience", a refusal to accept Eurocentric frameworks as the sole arbiters of knowledge.

The convergence of these two traditions requires a critical self-reflection within postcolonial studies itself. As a field institutionalised within Western universities, postcolonial theory risks reproducing the very hierarchies it seeks to critique. The circulation of theory through academic publishing and curricula often privileges Euro-American institutions as sites of intellectual authority, even when the subject matter concerns the Global South. Bill Ashcroft's warning against the depoliticization of postcolonial studies is pertinent here: the vitality of the field depends on its capacity to remain responsive to ongoing forms of inequality, resistance, and transformation, not to become a purely academic discourse detached from the material struggles it originally sought to address.

What the convergence of postcolonial and decolonial thought offers is both a critique and a reconstruction. It extends the analytical tools of postcolonial theory, discourse analysis, hybridity, subaltern studies, into a broader framework that accounts for structural and systemic domination. It also repositions the Global South as an active site of theoretical production rather than a passive object of study. Intellectual traditions from Africa, Latin America, and Asia contribute not only empirical insights but conceptual frameworks that challenge dominant paradigms. This disrupts the hierarchical flow of knowledge from "centre" to "periphery" and fosters more reciprocal forms of intellectual exchange.

Environmental Crisis and Colonial Extractives

The contemporary climate crisis cannot be understood without situating it within the longer history of colonial extraction and imperial expansion. From plantation economies and mineral exploitation to fossil-fuel dependency, colonialism established a global system predicated on the large-scale appropriation of land, labour, and natural resources. These extractive logics persist in what may be described as neo-extractives regimes driven by multinational corporations and neoliberal development policies. The uneven distribution of environmental harm, whereby the Global South bears the brunt of ecological degradation despite contributing least to its causes reflects the enduring imprint of colonial power structures.

Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence is particularly useful here. Nixon defines slow violence as a form of environmental harm that is gradual, dispersed, and often invisible, unfolding across extended temporal scales. Unlike spectacular forms of violence, slow violence manifest in toxic waste exposure, deforestation, desertification, and climate change disproportionately affects marginalised populations who lack the political and economic power to make their suffering visible. This idea demands new narrative and critical strategies within postcolonial studies, attentive to forms of harm that resist easy representation.

From a Fanonian perspective, ecological destruction is not incidental to the colonial project but integral to it. The colonised landscape, like the colonised subject, is rendered expendable within imperial economies. Contemporary forms of land dispossession and ecological degradation thus reproduce the structural inequalities Fanon identified, now operating through the language of development and globalization. Dipesh Chakrabarty's work on the Anthropocene complicates this further: while human activity has become a geological force, a postcolonial perspective insists on differentiating responsibility along lines of colonial history and industrial development, resisting narratives that homogenise humanity as a single agent of environmental destruction. Indigenous epistemologies offer vital resources for reimagining ecological relations. Many indigenous knowledge systems emphasise relationality, reciprocity, and stewardship, challenging the anthropocentric and capitalist assumptions that underpin Western modernity. However, their incorporation into global discourse must be approached carefully, since the commodification of indigenous knowledge risks reproducing the very dynamics of extraction it seeks to contest. Addressing the climate crisis is not merely a matter of technological innovation; it is inseparable from the project of decolonisation itself.

Digital Colonialism and Algorithmic Power

In the digital age, coloniality takes new but recognisable forms. What a growing body of scholarship terms "digital colonialism" names a regime in which the Global South is incorporated into global circuits of value primarily as a source of data, attention, and low-cost labour, while ownership of platforms, standards, and intellectual property remains concentrated in a handful of multinational corporations. This asymmetry echoes earlier imperial formations: territories once mined for raw materials are now mined for behavioural data, biometric identifiers, and social interaction patterns that can be monetised at scale.

Data functions as a new extractive resource. Platform ecosystems convert everyday activities into datasets that are aggregated and commodified, with benefits accruing disproportionately to firms headquartered in the Global North. Meanwhile, communities in the Global South confront precarious forms of digital labour, surveillance, and dependency on proprietary infrastructures. Content moderation and app-based gig work are fragmented, underpaid, and frequently invisible, even as they sustain the profitability of global tech industries. Digitality does not transcend colonial relations; it reorganises them.

Spivak's insights on epistemic silencing apply with force here. Platform architectures decide what counts as speech, whose speech circulates, and under what conditions it is amplified or suppressed. Automated moderation systems and ranking algorithms frequently encode linguistic, cultural, and racial biases, producing forms of epistemic filtering that determine intelligibility and credibility. The subaltern speaks within systems that pre-structure audibility; their utterances are captured and repurposed for profit while their capacity to intervene in decision-making remains constrained.

Algorithmic decision-making also increasingly shapes access to credit, employment, welfare, and migration control. Predictive analytics and biometric systems promise efficiency but frequently reproduce historical inequalities embedded in training data and institutional practices. This constitutes a form of algorithmic governmentality in which power operates through classification, scoring, and continuous monitoring. Extending Fanon's analysis of the psychological dimensions of colonial domination, the internalisation of algorithmic judgements, likes, scores, reputational indices can produce new modalities of self-surveillance and discipline.

Resistance is not absent. Grassroots movements, feminist tech collectives, and indigenous data governance initiatives articulate alternative models grounded in consent, reciprocity, and community control. These practices reframe digital rights as inseparable from broader struggles for labour justice, environmental sustainability, and democratic accountability. Theorising digital colonialism requires postcolonial studies to attend to infrastructures and institutions as much as texts and representations, tracing how coloniality is encoded in code, protocols, and business models, and how it is contested through collective action.

Epistemic Plurality and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Ngugi's call for epistemic decolonisation extends beyond language to a broader critique of how knowledge is produced, authorised, and circulated. Colonial domination is sustained not only through political and economic control but through the imposition of epistemological frameworks that marginalise indigenous ways of knowing. The privileging of European languages, canons, and methodologies within educational systems produces a form of cognitive alienation, severing communities from their histories and cultural imaginaries. Decolonising knowledge requires both linguistic reclamation and a restructuring of epistemic authority.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos conceptualises this as an "ecology of knowledges", the recognition that diverse epistemologies can coexist without being subsumed under a dominant paradigm. This challenges the epistemological monoculture that has historically underpinned colonialism, opening space for multiple forms of rationality, including oral traditions, experiential knowledge, spiritual cosmologies, and community-based practices. Indigenous knowledge systems are central to this reconfiguration, often emphasising the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds and principles of reciprocity and collective responsibility that offer critical resources for addressing ecological crises.

However, incorporating indigenous knowledge into academic and policy frameworks raises complex ethical questions. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in Decolonizing Methodologies, cautions that research practices have historically functioned as instruments of colonial extraction, appropriating indigenous knowledge without accountability or reciprocity. Decolonial scholarship must move beyond mere inclusion toward genuine collaboration, consent, and community engagement, rethinking research methodologies, authorship, and the ownership of knowledge itself. Sylvia Wynter's critique of the Western subject as the universal model of the human deepens this project, calling for a redefinition of the human beyond Eurocentric parameters and opening the possibility for alternative epistemologies that recognise diverse modes of being and knowing.Epistemic plurality must also be understood as a contested and dynamic process. Power differentials continue to shape which knowledges are recognised, institutionalised, or marginalised. Global academic structures, funding mechanisms, and publication practices often privilege Western frameworks. Addressing these inequalities requires not only theoretical intervention but institutional transformation. Ultimately, the integration of indigenous knowledge systems is not simply an additive gesture; it challenges the foundational assumptions of Western epistemology and reimagines knowledge as a plural, relational, and situated practice.

South–South Solidarities and Theoretical Reorientation

A significant development within contemporary postcolonial studies is the emergence of South–South intellectual networks that challenge long-standing hierarchies in the production and circulation of knowledge. These networks, spanning Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean foster exchanges that are not mediated through Euro-American academic centres, disrupting the asymmetrical flow of theory from "centre" to "periphery." Samir Amin's analysis of global inequality and his critique of capitalist world-systems remain foundational here. His call for "delinking" from neoliberal globalization underscores the necessity of building autonomous intellectual and economic frameworks within the Global South. South–South solidarities operate not only as geopolitical alignments but as epistemic interventions, repositioning the Global South as a generative site of knowledge production. Achille Mbembe's work on the post colony and necro politics offers conceptual tools for analysing power, sovereignty, and violence in contexts shaped by colonial legacies. Raewyn Connell's notion of "Southern theory" highlights the intellectual contributions of scholars from marginalised regions, challenging the dominance of Northern epistemologies. These perspectives collectively enable a more plural and decentralised epistemic landscape, fostering comparative frameworks that illuminate shared histories of colonialism and resistance without subsuming them under Western paradigms.

South–South collaborations also have a political dimension, intersecting with movements for economic justice, cultural sovereignty, and environmental sustainability. Transnational alliances among activists, scholars, and communities enable collective resistance to global inequalities, from trade imbalances and debt regimes to climate injustice and digital exploitation. These solidarities extend theory toward praxis in ways that resonate with the foundational commitments of postcolonial thought. However, the project is not without challenges: power asymmetries persist within the Global South itself, shaped by regional hegemonies, linguistic hierarchies, and unequal access to resources. Building genuine solidarities requires sustained attention to these internal differentials, alongside efforts to create alternative institutional frameworks including regional journals, open-access platforms, and collaborative research initiatives that prioritise equitable participation.

Beyond Hybridity: Toward a Decolonial Framework

Moving beyond hybridity does not mean discarding it. Bhabha's formulation of ambivalence, mimicry, and the third space of enunciation remains valuable for understanding how identities are produced in the interstices of colonial and postcolonial encounters. The task is to embed hybridity within a more expansive decolonial framework that is attentive to political economy, epistemic hierarchies, and technological power. Hybridity must be situated within the broader matrices of power that structure contemporary global relations, not allowed to float free as an abstract celebration of cultural fluidity.

A decolonial framework synthesises several distinct but complementary theoretical moves. Fanon's materialist critique of colonial violence provides a foundation for understanding domination as systemic, extending into environmental degradation, economic dispossession, and digital exploitation. Spivak's interrogation of epistemic silencing compels scholars to examine not only who speaks but also the conditions under which speech becomes intelligible, foregrounding the ethical responsibility of intellectual work. Ngũgĩ's emphasis on linguistic decolonisation underscores language as a site of resistance and cultural reclamation, enabling alternative knowledge production rooted in local histories. Ashcroft's focus on global transformations of postcoloniality insists on situating cultural analysis within transnational networks of power. The synthesis of these perspectives enables a multidimensional approach that integrates cultural, material, and epistemic analyses. It recognises that coloniality persists not only in overt forms of domination but in normalised practices embedded in institutions, technologies, and everyday life. Engaging with digital capitalism, environmental crisis, and transnational migration within this framework means acknowledging that identities remain hybrid, but they are also shaped by algorithmic governance, ecological precarity, and economic displacement. A purely cultural reading of hybridity is insufficient in this context.

A decolonial framework also reorients the ethical and political stakes of postcolonial theory. It calls for a shift from critique to praxis, positioning scholarship as contributing to social transformation, supporting movements for epistemic justice, advocating for equitable resource distribution, and fostering solidarities across the Global South. This requires critical vigilance too: there is a genuine risk that "decolonial" becomes a rhetorical gesture detached from substantive engagement with structural inequalities. Scholars must remain attentive to the material conditions of knowledge production and resist the co-optation of decolonial language by institutions that leave power relations unchanged.

Conclusion

Postcolonial theory stands at a critical juncture. The climate crisis, digital capitalism, and shifting geopolitical formations expose both the enduring relevance and the limitations of earlier postcolonial frameworks. The foundational insights of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha remain indispensable, but the contemporary moment demands a theoretical expansion capable of addressing the structural dimensions of coloniality that persist in new forms. Moving beyond hybridity does not mean abandoning it; it means resituating it within a decolonial framework that foregrounds material inequalities, epistemic violence, and global power asymmetries.

The arguments developed across this article converge on a common point: postcolonial studies must evolve from a discipline primarily concerned with the critique of representation into a dynamic, interdisciplinary field that integrates cultural analysis with political economy, environmental studies, and technological critique. This requires drawing on Fanon's revolutionary humanism, Ngũgĩ's epistemic decolonisation, Spivak's ethics of the subaltern, and Ashcroft's globally attentive postcolonialism, alongside decolonial thinkers like Quijano and Mignolo, environmental critics like Nixon and Chakrabarty, and Global South theorists like Mbembe and Connell. Such a transformation also entails rethinking the role of the scholar. Intellectual work must move beyond interpretation toward engagement, aligning itself with struggles for epistemic justice, social equity, and ecological sustainability. The institutionalisation of postcolonial theory within global academia risks diluting its political urgency, reducing it to a set of theoretical abstractions detached from lived realities. To remain relevant, the field must continually interrogate its own conditions of production and maintain a commitment to transformative praxis.

Reimagined in this way, postcolonial theory is no longer confined to the critique of imperial pasts. It becomes a vital intellectual framework for understanding and contesting the complex, interconnected injustices of the present from ecological devastation and economic inequality to digital surveillance and epistemic exclusion. In doing so, it affirms its continued relevance as a critical practice oriented toward more just, equitable, and sustainable futures.

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