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Expanding and Improving the Global North / Global South Terminology with Nuances of Post-Colonialism Realities in an Existential Climate Justice Context



Stop Reset Go — Gien · Following

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There are always signs when a current language is inadequate to describe a situation. Writers articulate these limitations when writing on a subject, and speakers do the same when speaking on a subject. When the subject is inequality, a Google search on “criticism of Global South terminology,” it returns a plethora of problems with the term. This use of terminology becomes relevant when dealing with climate justice. The unprecedented transformation civilization must undergo to preserve an inhabitable planet means that the very small remaining carbon budget must be divided equitably between nations and individuals. The carbon budget to stay within the critical 1.5 Deg C global mean temperature is being exhausted rapidly at a rate of approximately 1%/month (Anderson, 2023), leaving us only 100 remaining months (approx. 8 years) before catastrophic planetary tipping points have a very high chance of being triggered. This figure of 8 years varies, however. The Climate Clock is currently reporting a more conservative 5 years plus a few hundred days left before exhausting our 1.5 Deg C carbon budget. The fine print of this target is even worse than we think, however, because it only promises a 50/50 chance of avoiding significant impacts. So the challenge is enormous, to say the least. Regardless, if we accept even these poor chances, and if we are to follow moral imperative, the remaining budget must be fully allocated to decarbonization efforts and help uplift the living standards of the disenfranchised. Instead, it is being squandered by the luxury lifestyles of the elites, who can easily put the 1.5 Deg C target out of reach (Gossling & Humpe, 2023). Communications of climate

justice and equity are therefore critical and the language employed needs to reflect the nuances of colonialism's outsized role in creating the structural inequality of the complex modernity we now inhabit.

The term *Global South* originated in scholars interested in exploring political struggles outside of the Western lens, as well as by non-western communities, peoples and organizations (Clarke, 2018). It gained popularity in 2003 after the launch of the UN Development program. Yet, in subsequent years, its shortcomings as a one-size-fits-all categorization came under increasing critique. In particular, it is noted that "there are Souths in the geographic North and Norths in the geographic South" (Mahler, 2018). In other words, the obvious and salient fact that the Global North possessed many disenfranchised communities and the Global North possessed many pockets of elites was ignored in these umbrella categories. Aside from the fact that rapidly industrializing giants like China and India are in the southern hemisphere, the term has different nuanced meanings (Prys-Hansen, 2023). This gives rise for the need of a more nuanced terminology for discussions of structural wealth inequality within a complex, entangled modernity.

A more accurate descriptive language suggests itself by following the critique of Mahler and others and the entangled spatio-temporal cultural evolution of colonialism. Much of modernity's demographic complexity finds roots in colonialism, and it is by tracing the evolution of colonialism into the post-colonial era where structural inequality is baked into society that more accurate and appropriate descriptive terminology may emerge.

A simpler, crueller and more binary, dualistic world of (western) colonizer and colonized countries existed before widespread decolonization began in the early twentieth century. Once previously colonized peoples entered the pantheon of nation states on the world stage, the long shadow of colonialism remained in place, even though the perpetrators seemed to have disappeared. After decolonization, diasporic communities of now permanently colonized lands such as the United States or Canada also emerged where once slave colonies existed. The advent of low cost international travel made possible by high density (but polluting) fossil fuels brought about further population and cultural mixing on a global scale. In reality, the direct and blatant violence characteristic of colonialism was replaced by policy and economic violence of post colonialism; the violence merely changed into a more subtle, less visible form. The new nation states inherited a legacy of structural inequalities from centuries of colonialism that persist to this day. In parallel, in

permanently colonized lands, diaspora communities were also disenfranchised as their slave ancestors were. The continent of Africa was one of the biggest victims of colonization, with countless millions of lives lost and enslaved due to European ideals of white superiority. The arbitrary carving up of Africa has resulted in constant wars and conflict that also persist to this day and current extractive trade policies involving these manufactured states are a continuation of colonialism in economic form. We are all situated in histories shadows. When we stand in awe and marvel at the great cathedrals of modernity found throughout Europe, we must not forget that many of these architectural marvels were built on the back of violence, exploitation and theft from the Global South. While economic historians try to put a cost to European colonialism, it is impossible to put a price on the historic and ongoing, normative genocide and disenfranchisement of a large percentage of indigenous people around the world.

Globalized capitalism is now practiced in practically all nation states, creating stratified classes within each nation state itself. Since this new form of capitalism and the former economics of colonialism have so much in common, namely the same logic of extractivism, a more nuanced two tier wealth inequality system now exists, one the result of historical euro-centric colonialism, and the other, from post-colonialist capitalism.

This mixture can be represented in a 2x2 matrix called the Global-Local class matrix. It consists of 2 columns: Global North (represented by “North” and Global South (represented by “South”), and 2 rows, elites (represented by “Northern”) and disenfranchised (represented by “Southern”). This yields a more nuanced wealth classification of four couples:

1. *Northern North* — The wealthy class of the Global North countries
2. *Southern North* — The poor class of the Global North countries
3. *Northern South* — The wealthy class of the Global South countries
4. *Southern South* — The poor class of the Global South countries

Another potential terminology is to refer to elites in either the Global North or the Global South as “Local North” and the disenfranchised in either the Global North or the Global South as the “Local South”. In this way, we get an equivalency in these two new terminologies:

1. Northern North belongs to *Local North*
2. Southern North belongs to *Local South*
3. Northern South belongs to *Local North*
4. Southern South belongs to *Local South*

As an example of the application of this new terminology, we look at some major demographics in the Global North and the Global South where the new term provides a much more nuanced categorization.

Not all lands once inhabited predominantly by indigenous peoples have been decolonized. For example, the many indigenous peoples of North America and Australia have never had their land rightfully returned to them. Indigenous people make up a small percentage of the ruling political parties of these and many other modern nation states. Cultural mixing naturally happens in any modern, multicultural, post-colonial nation state. Structural inequalities persist and create an unequal playing field in any such modern nation state touched by colonialism. To this day, the ruling class of many formerly colonized lands consists of a majority whose heritage is Eurocentric colonizers.

In the Global North

Populations of a) indigenous people's who have been permanently dispossessed of their land and forced to live on reservations, b) the diaspora, begun by slave ancestors and c) disenfranchised peoples with colonizer heritage would all be considered to be living in the *Southern North* or equivalently, the *Local South*.

Within the Global North, citizens who have both colonizer heritage as well as citizens who have colonized people's heritage can equally rise through the capitalist ranks to become elites. Both groups belong to the *Northern North* or equivalently, the *Local North*.

In the Global South

Within the Global South, citizens who have both colonizer heritage as well as citizens who have colonized people's heritage can equally rise through the capitalist ranks to become elites. Both groups belong to the *Northern North* or equivalently, the *Local North*.

Within the Global South, disenfranchised citizens tend to be mostly indigenous peoples. However, there are also citizens with colonizer heritage who can also be dispossessed. The all belong to the *Southern South* or equivalently, the *Local South*.

Conclusion

Modernity consists of nation states that possess unique and complex social mixing of citizens who have heritage of former colonizers as well as colonized peoples. The extractive logic of modern, global capitalism, continues the extractive and exploitative traditions honed by centuries of colonialism. Adding further to the complexity, it is now a universally-spoken language. The success of the modern capitalist, rewarded by an extravagant high-carbon-intensity lifestyle of luxury serves as the role model for citizens everywhere, regardless of which side of the historical colonialism divide one is born into. Everyone in every culture is given equal opportunity to participate in the opportunities of the free-market. Its singular focus on one externalizing abstraction, money serves as the myopic societal aspiration that generates the next generation of ecosystem-destroying elites. In this complex world we live in, the terminology developed here enables us to speak about the influence of colonialism in modern context in a much more nuanced, less binary way.

An important example of where this language could be employed is in discussions of climate justice and equity as in this [Democracy Now interview with writer George Monbiot and climate scientist Kevin Anderson](#).

Anderson points out the growing awareness within climate justice of the inequality between and within nation states, and how the 1% bear outsized responsibility and moral obligation for the future of our civilization (Anderson, 2023).

The new terminology provides more accurate classification of peoples that arrived in modernity from a complex historical mixing of culture, lineages of cultural evolution of colonialism, inequality, disenfranchisement and modern capitalism and mitigates oversimplifications emerging from antiquated terminology.

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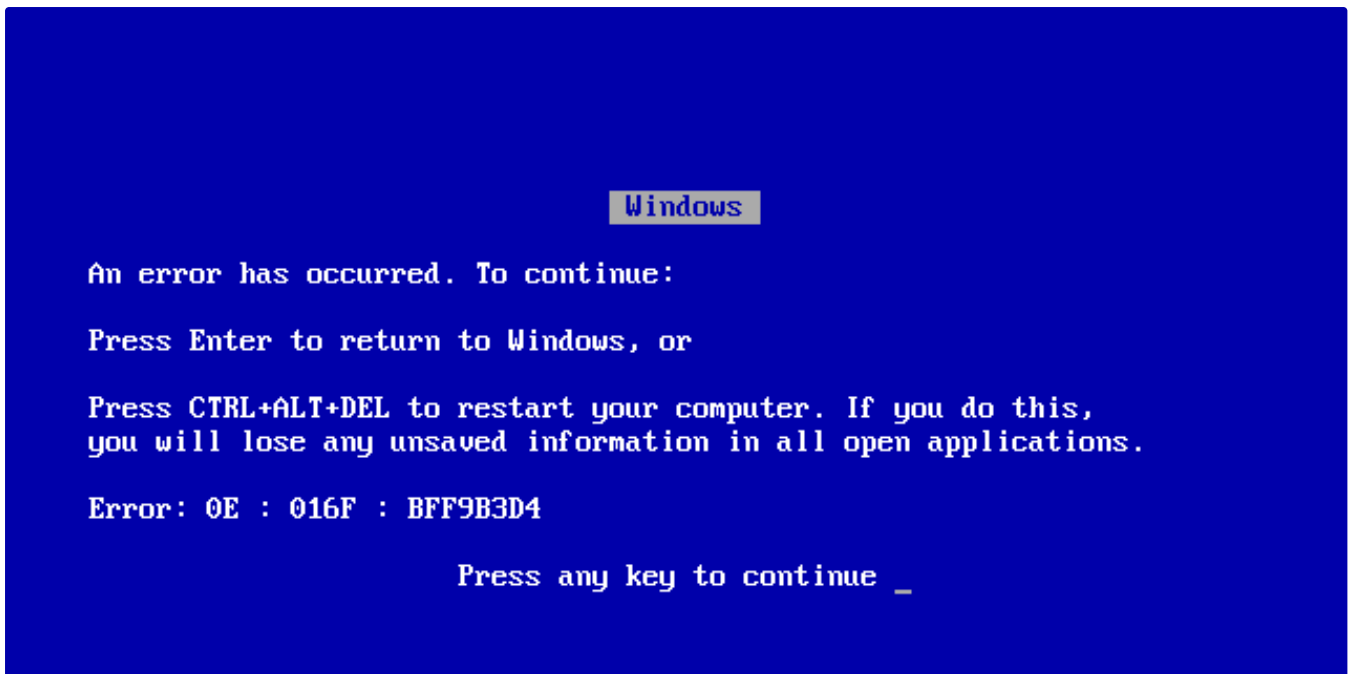
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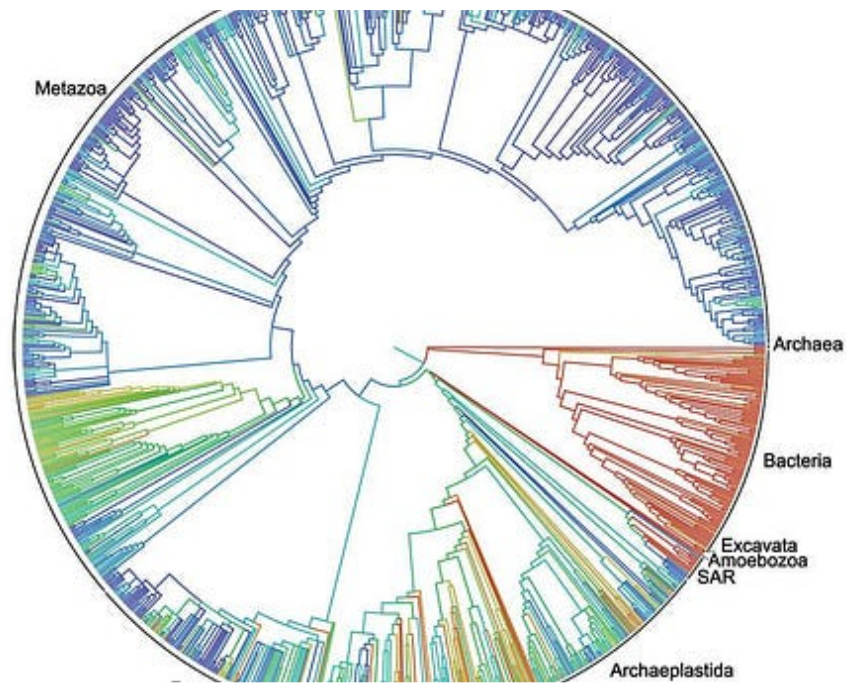


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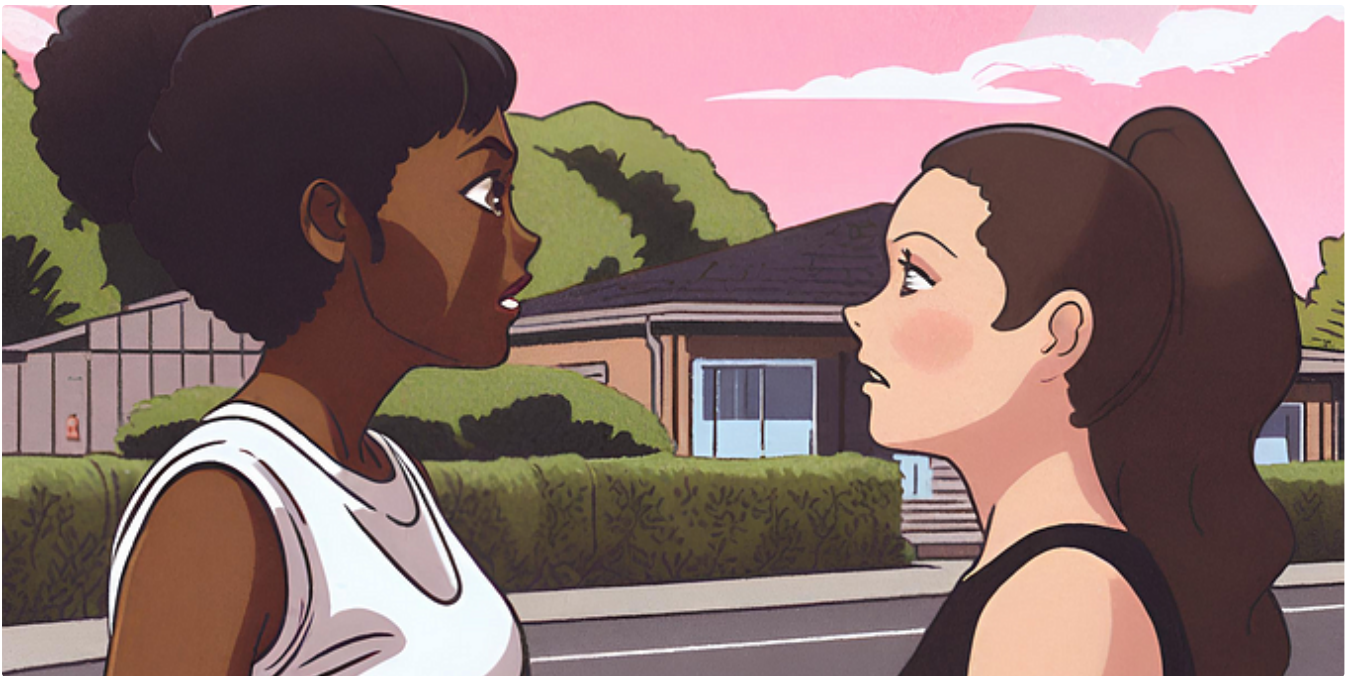


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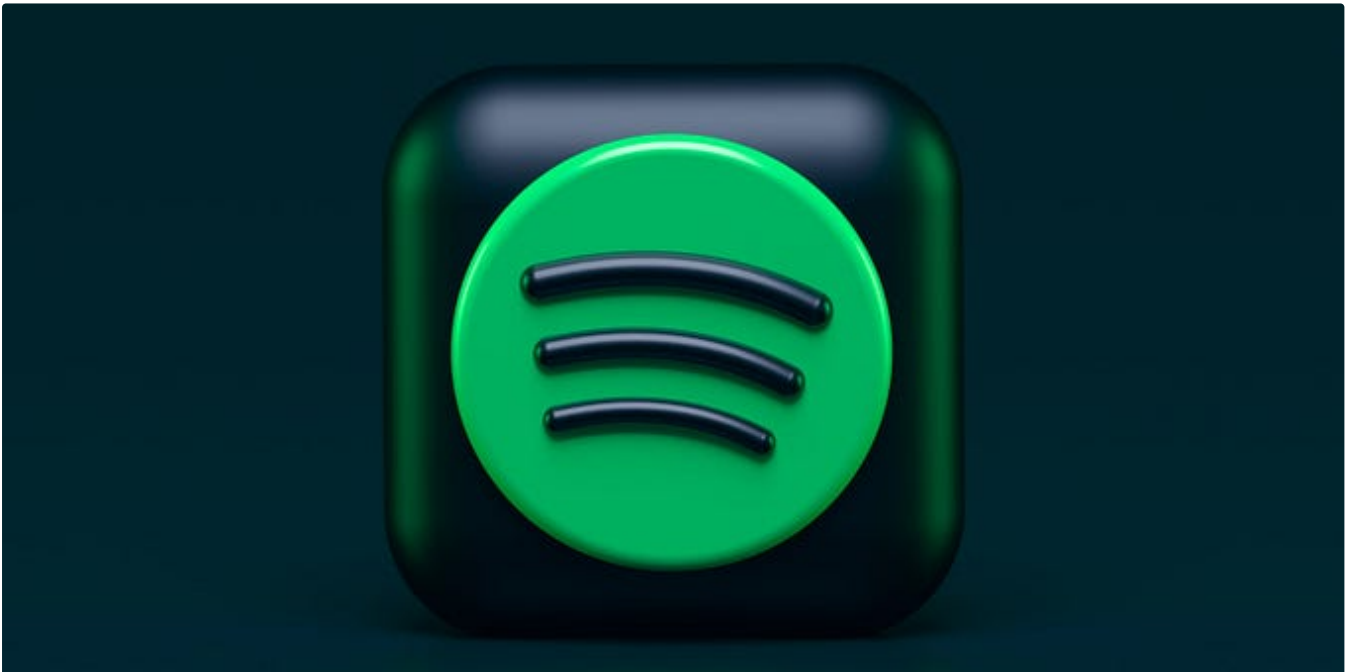
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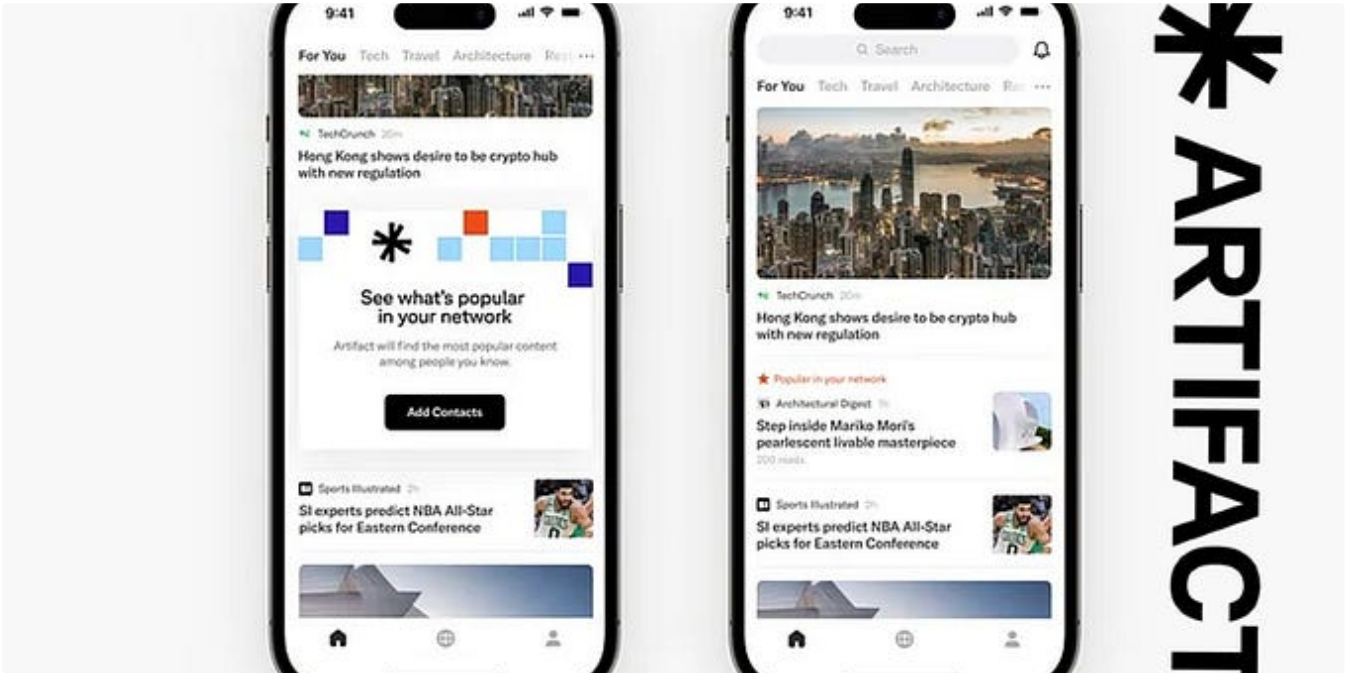
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