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Chapter title

Decolonising Regional Perspectives for Implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

Contemporary experiences of colonialism include:

1. the erasure of community culture integrity,
2. global corporate power structures and systems (particularly the carbon industries)
3. regional exclusion and isolation (particularly between the global North and South)
4. disciplinary dogma in university learning, teaching and research, globally.
5. The nexus of climate, species and cultural crises

The colonial paradigm is possibly the key factor for the nexus of climate, species and cultural crises, existing in the first place and it continues to hinder UN SDG implementation. Regionalising these issues trivialises the inherent complexities of historic power structures that have crippled humanity's ways of thinking and acting. However, regionalising the issues may, also, highlight the disparities of power and the consequences of the nexus of crises, thereby emphasising the need for 'global citizens, otherwise'. As previously accepted and relatively stable (for some) regional structures fragment and morph into new alliances and patterns of human migration, the very concept of regionality may represent an absurdist tragedy that renders the SDGs obsolete. The process of decolonizing university systems of education may offer novel, transdisciplinary ecological patterns of thinking and doing to emerge, beyond the confines of the SDGs and regions.

1. Introduction

Given the current lack of progress in implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there are concerns that the 2030 deadline will not be met. At this time (June 2022), the COVID-19 is offered as the main reason for many of the delays to implementation. However, competing priorities, restricted financial

resources and other issues, suggest that there are deeper systemic issues to be considered that the pandemic revealed. Calls for innovative approaches to the problem have led to support for delivery across geographical regions and this structural shift requires further documentation and promotion through studies, research, projects and good practice that illustrate how this approach will implement the SDGs. Mobilising the academic community, industry and civil society, to generate information and communicate experiences about this strategy, is deemed to be most important for the world's regions to accelerate implementation. To this end, four separate volumes, each looking at issues related to the geographical regions, will be published.

This chapter is a contribution to the European Regional volume and it focuses on identifying some of the embedded barriers to implementing the SDGs and offers possible processes for addressing these issues in practice. It will specifically consider:

- Integral Critical Systems to question the regional strategy (Haley et al 2021)
- The SDGs in relation to the nexus of climate, species and cultural crises (Haley 2022)
- The inherent colonial paradigm represented by the SDGs
- The proposed regional implementation of the SDGs
- The potential for decolonial futures (Andreotti, 2021)

To begin any of their ecological art projects, the ecological artists, Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, insisted on asking, "How big is here?" (Mayer Harrison and Harrison 2008). This deceptively simple question may, however, generate initial insights into the regional approach. Written from the perspective of the author, who lives in the United Kingdom, off the coast of mainland Europe, the concept of world regions immediately evokes the legacy of the British Empire and European colonialism. Europe, the smallest of the proposed regional designations is, therefore, much larger in power, influence and particular resonances, like language and finance, than its actual size. Indeed, an insight of the English artist, David Hockney, brings further colonial considerations to the important historical shift from traditional Chinese perspective to European Renaissance perspective in terms of values: 'The way we depict space, determines what we do with it' (Hockney 1988). And when we consider Rene Descartes' mathematical perspective, we see the Cartesian Grid as a philosophical means of controlling the globe as a whole. Such perspectives initiate a critical dialogue on the validity of a regional approach to implementing the SDGs and this may be facilitated through a systems approach.

2. Integral Critical Systems

In considering a systems approach to the underlying issues concerning the early responses to COVID-19 in Britain and Brazil, the term, Integral Critical Systems (ICS), emerged as a dynamic process of embedding criticality into systems thinking ((Haley et al 2021). This enhancement of systemic approaches questions the way in which systems need to respond to change and continually question the system itself, over time, as an integral part of the system. As many reactions to perceived problems meet the cry of 'the system is broken', ICS starts with the question:'

‘... what if the current systems are designed to do what they are doing? Endemic institutional poverty, racism, ecocide, and retention of power by the few have been well maintained, if not enhanced’... ‘the introduction of criticality into systems perception, design, and practice beyond abstract problem solving and the belief in the concern of states for the common good.’ (ibid 2021)

While COVID-19 continues to be blamed for many health and wellbeing, social and economic problems, it may also be seen as an event to reveal and highlight many underlying issues that were long overdue for attention. The journal article, mentioned above, identified the pandemic as a catalyst that disrupted business as usual, thereby exposing the values of existing systems for critical review. However; ‘ICS specifically questions the intentions, the relevance, and the values embedded in the systems of foresight planning that have been adopted by global industrial corporate interests.’ (ibid 2021)

Adopting a different perspective, we may need to reconsider the perceived transformative challenges of our time, as represented by the UN SDGs. Are the seventeen SDGs fit for purpose? Who’s values do they sustain and what is the power balance represented by them? What developments are considered acceptable and who profits from them? Will reorganising implementation to regional structures address any of these questions, represent the worldviews people within and across the regions, or will it be a costly distraction? Applying an Integral Critical Systems approach would enable a more holistic and meaningful approach, wider consensus, greater participation and bottom-up, self-determined implementation.

3. Contexts and the Nexus of Crises

3.1. What is the purpose and intention of the SDGs as a whole?

A plethora of literature has been generated about the United Nations ‘Sustainable Development Goals since they were launched in 2015 by the UN General Assembly (UN-GA), superseding the UN Millennium Development Goals. The UN-GA Resolution, 2030 Agenda, established the seventeen SDGs to be a “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all”.and intended to be achieved by 2030. (United Nations 2017).

In 2017, a further UN-GA Resolution was designed to make the goals more actionable by providing specific targets and indicators to be met by 2020 or 2030, although some SDGs still have no set date. From 2018, with the intention of being more easily understood, the online SDG Tracker presents data across all indicators, with the SDGs acknowledging multiple cross-cutting issues, like gender equality, education and culture. At each stage the literature expounds the new development as being the panacea for attainment. Returning to what Agenda 2030 was designed to be, one might question the language. While ‘a better and more sustainable future for all’ expresses general goodwill and the detail of most of the SDGs address some of the barriers to such a state of becoming, simply providing a ‘blueprint’ lacks the urgency and the necessary focus for achievement. Integrating and mobilising the seventeen UN specialized agencies (e.g. UNESCO, WHO, FAOUN, IMF, etc.) in such an endeavour represents tremendous, administrative, cumbersome and costly

exercise in itself. It, also, presents the UN as a very large, bureaucratic and largely introspective organisation.

3.2. The SDGs and their Effectiveness

As a snapshot of the progress made by the SDGs since 2015, let us consider the following:

1. No Poverty

Increase in the disparity between the world's richest and poorest.

2. Zero Hunger

Greater vulnerability as monocultural agroindustry increases system fragility and the war in the Ukraine.

3. Good Health

Increases in obesity, plastic particulates and cancers see life expectancies starting to decrease. Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the widening rich-poor divide, in terms of healthcare provision internationally and within nations, including developed nations (Haley et al 2021).

4. Quality Education

Controlled by multi-national corporations, neo-colonial epistemologies and disciplinary academic dogma continue to undermine the values of local cultures and their means of self-determined survival.

5. Gender Equality

Me Too = white women in the global north, but the US Supreme Court's overturning of Wade versus Roe has undermined 30 years of progress. Afghan women returning to oppression.

6. Clean Water & Sanitation

As some countries remove dams, others are receiving global investment to build new ones. Pollution from sewage and industrial discharges continue to pollute rivers, lakes, seas and oceans.

7. Affordable Clean Energy

'Carbon Bombs' perpetuated by global financial entities and governments invest with impunity, while cognitive dissonance distracts from 'greenwashed' lies about nuclear energy and waste!!!

8. Decent Work & Economic Growth

Less unemployment equals greater underpaid workforce and economic growth generates most of the other problems.

9. Industry Innovation

Problem-based, solution-driven, hi tech, digital devices dependency created the greatest observable new wealth and social upheaval in the world (Apple, Google, social media).

10. Reduced Inequalities

Inequalities have increased - Black Lives Matter, refugees refused refuge, unless they are white Europeans. Increased poverty. Patriarchy, racism, gender-based intolerances remain embedded in many cultures.

11. Sustainable Cities & Communities

Accelerating urbanisation continues to reduce habitat, making humans further dependent upon fragile infrastructures.

12. Responsible Consumption

Consumption has increased exponentially.

13. Climate Action

Promises without action and vast increases in carbon emissions, oil and gas futures.

14. Life Below Water

Plastics, pollution, acidification, increase in underwater oil and gas exploration continue to degrade sea ecosystems and ocean biomes.

15. Life on Land

Monocultural Agroindustry, forest fires, deforestation, loss of wetlands, toxic soils and increasing urban development are exponentially reducing biodiversity to ecosystem collapse.

16. Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions

UN Security Council has been rendered incapable – e.g. Syria, Ukraine, Sudan, China, Brazil, etc.

17. Partnerships for the Goals

“Blah, blah, blah” (Carrington 2021)

3.3. Climate, Species and Culture

The original impetus for the SDGs was the concept of Sustainable Development (Brudtland 1987), devised as a deflection from the realisation of climate change and its potential impact on global economics. Despite the definition provided by Gro Harlem Brudtland, sustainable development is an oxymoron, driven by neoliberal philosophy (Haley 2017). As Donella Meadows pointed out, quoting Jay Forester:

‘Asked by the Club of Rome to show how major global problems, poverty and hunger, environmental destruction, resource depletion, urban deterioration, unemployment, are related and how they might be solved, Forester came out with a clear leverage point:

Growth. Both population and economic growth. Growth has costs, among which are poverty and hunger, environmental destruction, the whole list of problems we are trying to solve with growth.

The world’s leaders are correctly fixated on economic growth as the answer to virtually all problems, but they’re pushing with all their might in the wrong direction.’ (Meadows 1999)

Individually and collectively the issues identified by the SDGs may be seen as a collection of good causes, but the primary means of solving them, 'Sustainable Development', is indeed fueling them. We may, therefore, consider other values and approaches to what may be termed, 'the nexus of climate, species and cultural crises' (ibid 2021). Setting aside economics as a self-determining value and regarding it as a tool, releases culture from the constraints of fiscal accountability and debt as an ethical issue (Graeber 2014). Instead, we may think of culture as diverse systems of evolutionary, intergenerational adaptation, emerging in human and other than human populations as an embodied, fundamental, ecological process (Williams 1988, Morin 2005, Capra 1997, Lakoff and Johnson 1999).

3.4. The Question of Cultural Values

The SDGs represent a set of seventeen, interconnected, interdependent hubs within a system; a complex convergence of intersecting concepts that represent the UN's idea of what is wrong with the world, what needs to be fixed and how to fix it. In this, the SDGs themselves **represent** a set of narratives that are strongly biased to the worldviews of developed/first/north/colonial nations, albeit for the proposed good of developing/second/south/colonised nations. The dominant culture, thereby, retains its dominance in deciding what is good and bad, right and wrong, what is to be done and how things are done. It retains its values, even when acknowledging the existence of other values as an additional exercise. This is where we find the basis of continued colonialism or 'white man's science' in response to the climate and ecological crises, contained within the cultural crisis.

Raymond Williams, wrote that 'culture is the most difficult word in the English language' (Williams 1988). His insight elucidated the assertion that culture and nature continue to be considered by modern western, neo-colonial society as binary opposites (Koram 2022). Despite calls from academia and industry for interdisciplinarity and even claims of transdisciplinarity (Nicolescu 2008), like the ubiquity of 'greenwashing' (Laufer 2003), systematic, atomized, reductionist thinking persists in institutional practice (Escobar 2017). And these are the values that underpin the reporting, analysis and recommendations to and from the UN.

4. Mapping Histories: The Colonial Paradigm

4.1. Slavery and Global Economics

From the European Renaissance (approx. 13th to 16th Centuries) to the European Age of Enlightenment, or Age of Reason (approx. 15th to 17th Centuries, or Age of Discovery (approx. 15th to 18th Centuries), the map of the Eurocentric world changed radically. Art, Politics, Economics, Trade, Culture and Education dramatically changed too.

While the European Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions (approx. 18th and 19th Centuries) also saw further shifts in national and corporate colonisation. One example is the British East India Company's promotion of opium production in Afghanistan for distribution in China as a means of subduing the Chinese people and undermining the authority of their Emperor. Another example is the Royal Niger Company's (now Unilever) sale of Nigeria to Britain in 1900 for £865,000. In other

words, colonisation was a process of resources extraction, human exploitation and cultural erasure for economic profit and political control as the expression of power and hubris (Koram 2022).

Slavery was by no means a new phenomenon and European enslavement of African people was widely practiced by Portugal, France, Netherlands and Spain from the 16th Century as part of the triangulation of goods across the Atlantic to the Americas. Meanwhile, Queen Elizabeth I sanctioned English privateers to plunder the ships of their European rivals, leading to the establishment of the Royal Africa Company by James II (1672) within the British Empire and slavery became the world's first global economy. As slavery became less profitable than other goods, European nations could afford to adopt an ethical position on such trade and set about abolishing the slave trade. Then, in 1865 the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery and by 1870, the world's first incorporation, Standard Oil Inc., embarked on the world's second global economy.

4.2. Colonial Education

Today's world map continues to resemble much of the colonial past, with arbitrarily defined nations drawn on maps that continue to erase local cultures and inflame conflicts that are sponsored by the arms industries of the major world powers. As this chapter is written, examples would include, Yemen, Afganistan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine/Israel, Iraq and Ukraine. To the mid-20th Century, assimilation education systems for Australian Aboriginal children, New Zealand Maori children and First Nations Canadian children were designed to remove people's right to self-determination and replace their cultures with those of Europeans. Colonial founded school systems in parts of India, Africa and Latin America continue such education as normal practice (Andreotti 2015).

Indeed, some of UNESCO's initiatives to implement SDG (Goal 4 Quality Education) are delivered on behalf of multi-national corporations to train indigenous people as cheap labour for the mining industries. One example of this narrative playing out is that of Mozambique and the UNESCO delivery of education to alleviate poverty (Haley 2020).

The scenarios of international aid and disaster relief from climate induced catastrophes perpetuate a similar power relationship, in maintaining the imbalance of capacity, capability and expectation (Cornejo-Rodriguez et al 2020). Controlled and determined by wealthy regions of the Global North, local cultures of the Global South succumb to the 'developed' worldviews of the North; again, sustaining the colonial attitude of parent/child relationship. 'Thus, in order to interrupt and unravel enduring colonial patterns of education, we will need to consider how coloniality shapes not just mainstream ways of doing (methodology) and knowing (epistemology), but also ways of being (ontology)' (Andreotti 2006).

While recent literature sometimes over romanticises indigenous cultures and their perceived oneness with ecological providence, there are lessons to be learned. Appropriation of indigenous culture and mimicking nature, again, enforces colonial myths of the 'noble savage' and nature as 'natural capital', 'ecosystem service', or extractable resources. The global economic language determines the

anthropocentric belief systems and values of the Northern Regions to exploit those of the South.

4.3. Impunity and the Myths of Democracy

“Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.” — (George Orwell, 2008)

Materially and philosophically, it may be argued that all the SDGs address problems caused by trade, commerce and industry that are governed by economic belief systems and values tied to colonialism (Escobar 2017). Given the global nature of colonial practices and belief systems, how could regionalising delivery of the SDGs improve their implementation? Will the regions decolonize oppressive paradigms?

As oil replaced slavery as the global economy, the metastases of carbon industries grew through the 20th Century, to exert power and influence beyond national politics and deeper than international politics (Marriott and Macalister 2021), despite being the root cause of climate, species and cultural crises. The Guardian Newspaper's recent research revealed the extent of 'carbon bombs' (Carrington and Taylor 2022). These investments are planned to action future oil and gas developments, beyond current projects that will already exceed predictions of 2°C. These neocolonial, neoliberal manifestations operate between, across and beyond national governments and industries as trans-global, meta-financial rhizomes of power representing 'foresight planning' on physical and temporal scales beyond Descartes imagination. Given this reality, it is difficult to see how regionalising the implementation of the SDGs will make a difference, as the global financial systems seem to be achieving their values and goals of monocultural world domination.

The scale of the carbon industries' momentous trajectory has to some extent been driven as an unintended consequence of the well-intentioned work of the UN, the IPCC and the SDGs. As governments and industries declare zero carbon targets, the carbon industries and indeed governments have ramped up extraction now to compensate for reduction later. This almost puts the callous ecocide of hedge funds and bitcoins into insignificance, or maybe it reveals the trajectory of cognitive dissonance emerging from 'post-truth denial'; otherwise known as 'don't give a damn' (Mcintyre 2019).

There are seven geophysical continents – South America, North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, Antarctica, Africa - and two hemispheres - North and South. But East (Orient) and West (Occident) are European colonial constructs.

However, all systems eventually collapse and therein lies the potential new states of becoming (Gundersen and Holling 2002). In this case, a paradoxical situation of hope born out of a grim and seemingly inevitable process of collapse. Given the urgency of the situation, the question then shifts, from how can the SDGs be better implemented through research at regional level, to how may the postcolonial legacy and contemporary barriers of the colonial paradigm be removed (Memmi 2021).

Contemporary experiences of colonialism include:

1. the erasure of community culture integrity,

2. global corporate power structures and systems (particularly the carbon industries)
3. regional exclusion and isolation (particularly between the global North and South) and
4. disciplinary dogma in university learning, teaching and research, globally.

The colonial paradigm is possibly the key factor for the nexus of climate, species and cultural crises, existing in the first place and then hindering UN SDG implementation. Regionalising these issues may trivialise the inherent complexities of historic power structures that have crippled humanity's ways of thinking and acting. However, regionalising the issues may, also, highlight the disparities of power and the consequences of the nexus of crises, thereby emphasising the need for 'global citizenship, otherwise '(Stein & Andreotti 2021). As previously accepted and relatively stable (for some) regional structures fragment and morph into new alliances and patterns of human migration, the very concept of regionality may represent an absurdist tragedy that renders the SDGs obsolete. The process of decolonising university systems of education may offer novel, transdisciplinary ecological patterns of thinking and doing to emerge (Nicolescu 2008, Bateson 2000), beyond the confines of the SDGs and regions.

5. Regional Perspectives

5.1. Concepts of Regionality : Why Four Regions?

Returning to cartography, Hockney's insight – 'The way we depict space, determines what we do with' – may apply not just to space, but to geophysical, geopolitical and cultural depictions at different times in history, as successive dominant cultures place themselves at the centre of mapping their world, or Empire (Hardt and Negri 2003). Such perceptions then give way to cognitive belief systems of stereotyping and even hierarchical hubris (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).



Figure 1. Set of porcelain figures, German, c. 1775, from left: Asia, Europe, Africa, America. Gift of the Estate of James Hazen Hyde. Photo Johnbod.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Africa,_America,_Europe_and_Asia,_and_Africa_Figure,_possibly_ca._1775_\(CH_18429549-7\)_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Africa,_America,_Europe_and_Asia,_and_Africa_Figure,_possibly_ca._1775_(CH_18429549-7)_cropped.jpg)

To fit the Renaissance sensibilities, 16th century Europeans divided the world into four continents, each representing a conceptual quadrant of the world - Africa in the south, America in the west, Asia in the east and Europe in the north. Furthermore, the world was divided into four seasons, classical elements, cardinal directions and classical virtues. This convention of four was also attributed to the iconography of popular porcelain female figures - Europe depicted as queenly, Asia as exotic, Africa and America as half-dressed, baring exotic props. Of course, to Europeans of that time, Australasia did not exist and Asia stretched as far as their imaginations of the exotic Orient would permit.

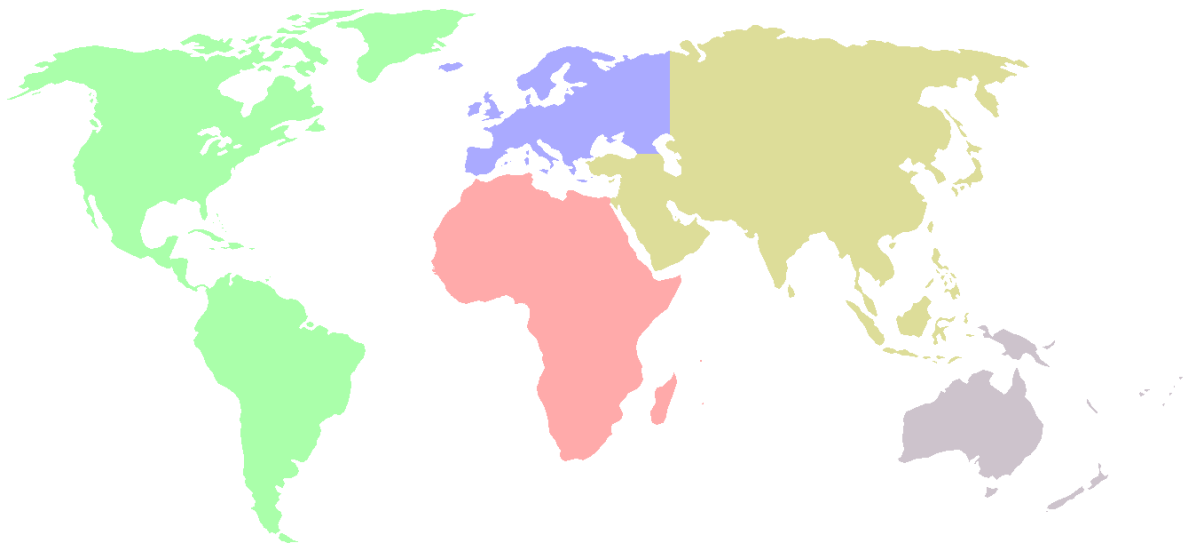


Figure 2. The four continents highlighted are: Africa, The Americas, Asia, and Europe
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Four_continents.png
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

Contemporary conceptualisations of a Four Regions world may include the distribution of human populations and density. This example lumps together, 1. the Americas with West and Central Africa; 2. Europe, East Africa, Middle East and Northern Asia; 3. South Asia; 4. Most of South Asia, China and Oceania.

However, population, like many other factors, is dynamic. While the present world population of 7bn is distributed - Americas 1bn, Europe 1bn, Africa 1bn, Asia 4bn - and by 2100, some predict 9bn people to be distributed - Americas 1bn, Europe 1bn, Africa 3bn, Asia 4bn. This prediction is based on life expectancy, births and deaths, but does not account for other predictions of mass migrations, based on climate change, wars and other unknown unknowns. Significantly, it does not consider cultural distribution and affinities.

Other map-based ponderings choose further arbitrary configurations of equal absurdity, including political affiliations, wealth and landmass.

The United Nations geoscheme divides 249 countries and territories into six regional and seventeen sub-regional groupings. These macro-geographical regional

assignments were created for statistical analysis. Countries are non-geographically grouped into economic and other sets. Countries can shift from one region to another, depending on the intention of any particular intention or usage. In other words, regional depiction is a completely arbitrary concept, so how are the SDGs to be better implemented by regions and what criteria apply?

5.2. Comparing the Proposed Four Regions

	% of world population
Volume 2- the Asia and Pacific Region	60% *
Volume 3- the Africa and the Middle East Region	17%
Volume 1- the Americas and Caribbean Region	13%
Volume 4- the European Region	10%**

*Including the most and the least densely populated continents (excluding Antarctica).

**Assuming that Russia is in Europe and the Russian Federation is in Asia

	% of world wealth
Asia and Pacific Region	39%
Americas and Caribbean Region	35% (N, America – 32.6%)
European Region	25%
Africa and the Middle East Region	1%

(Credit Suisse 2021)

	N/S Equator	Million Km2
Asia and Pacific	North, South	39.5
Americas and Caribbean	North, South	39
Africa and the Middle East	North, South	29.5
European	North	22

The above, initial, analysis of Regional disparity has so far not considered the internal disparities within Regions. The breakdown of statistics within each Region would employ another set of parameters and demand far more complex analysis than this chapter is able to pursue.

5.3. Mapping Realities and Imaginaries

The Question is, how will regionalisation improve each Region's situation and the situation as a whole world set of issues? This section very broadly considers some issues that may indicate how each Region perceives itself and how each Region perceives the other Regions. The issues selected, relate to different SDGs as an indication of some of the greatest concerns, rather than a detailed study.

The Americas and Caribbean Region contains the North/South contradiction that privileges the USA and Canada over South/Latin America and the Caribbean. The colonial legacy and present influence are present in the dominance of European languages - English in the north, Spanish and Portuguese in the south.

The Pacific coast of Ecuador and Peru, like many other coastal areas, is already experiencing the effects of sea level rise, with the increasing frequency of storms and their severity. Disastrous flooding is no longer a 'freak' event, but experienced by residents as a regular, ongoing situation (Cornejo-Rodriguez, M. P. et al 2020). By contrast, the experience of similar climatic effects on wealthy within this and other Regions is met with billion-dollar defensive remediation, as seen in New York, Boston and the Netherlands (Gosh 2016). Meanwhile, those Regions in the global South are expected to receive aid in return for political allegiance and economic dependence to those in the North.

Africa and the Middle East Region have been ravaged by the colonial slave trade, the opium trade and the extraction of oil. Following WWI, the Middle East was carved up on a map, that decimated nomadic cultures, to maintain British domination of oil production. Africa continues to finance the West through the extraction of oil, diamonds, uranium and other precious minerals, while receiving the West's waste and carbon offsets.

By far the most impoverished Region, contained in sub-Saharan Africa is contrasted by some of the world's wealthiest oil states in the Middle East. From the Slave Trade to the dumping of toxic waste and resource extraction, this Region continues to bear the brunt of the legacy of colonialism that benefits Europe and the Americas.

Asia and the Pacific Region contains disparate, diverse cultures, all of whom at one time or other were subordinate to persistent European colonial domination. English being the second language of China and the Indian sub-continent, and the first language of Australia and New Zealand.

As the largest landmass, this Region is the highest and most densely populated of the Four Regions, but it also, contains the least populated sub-region - the Pacific islands and Australasia. Such stark contrasts assert very different perspectives of SDGs like #8 Decent Work and Economic Growth and #11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, given the disparities between China and Japan as major world economic powers and the rest of the Region.

The Great Green Wall of China, initiated in 1978, to contain the advancing Gobi Desert, has had very mixed success. While, afforestation of the northern regions of China represent the largest tree planting scheme in the world, their monocultural fast-growing species strategy has paradoxically failed. This strategy was designed largely to offset China's carbon budget, as fast-growing trees sequester more carbon, more quickly than diverse, mature forests. However, such planting regimes have rendered the tree-cover vulnerable to disease, with loss of one billion poplar trees in 2000, and provide virtually no biodiversity (Rechtschaffen 2017). Also, the chosen species over-extract groundwater, rather than retaining it.

Such a top-down, engineered approach to forestry overrode local, traditional, Feng Shui cultural knowledge of forestry management. Perhaps, the only real gain from this immense project is for other regions to learn from its mistakes. Meanwhile, China's adoption of North America's former approach to water management, applying 'problem-based', solution-led, finance-driven, engineering technology to

ecological situations assured further disaster to flood management and biodiversity. While, North America is reversing the work of the Corps of Engineers, by removing dams, China continues to build them. Again, historically the world's preeminent nation of hydrology erased its cultural knowledge to compete in the world of global economics and power, affecting the whole of South East Asia and failing to halt the accelerating melt of the world's largest glacier in Tibet.

Within the same Region, Australasia, a geophysical continent in its own right, and the Pacific Islands have little in common with each other. As the fate of many Pacific Island and atolls are soon to disappear under sea level rise from global warming, Australia experiences catastrophic wildfires; something it has in common with North America, Amazonia and southern Europe.

The European Region: here colonialism was designed through the philosophies of the Age of Enlightenment and even celebrated as the distribution of European civilisation, from the Age of Reason to uneducated, uncivilised lands and 'primitive' people around the world. It may, also represent the Golden Age of discovery and wealth of empires that continues to support 'developing countries' to be more like us.

Europe is the smallest of the four Regions and while contemporary power has shifted somewhat to the USA and China, Europe retains three of the world's wealthiest eight nations - Germany, France and the UK. It is, also the base for two of the world's largest contemporary oil producers, based on its continuing colonialist oil excavation extraction in the Americas, Africa and the Middle East - Shell and BP.

Russia, the largest single country in the world, is split between the Russian State in Europe and much of the Russian Federation in Asia. Politically, Europe is largely split between Russia and the Council of Europe, although Russia's war with Ukraine has revealed the dependence of Europe on Russian gas and oil, and the world's dependence on Ukraine for wheat.

The European Region contains large financial and climate disparities played out between North and South.

Regional Interdependencies

While each region is attempting to reverse climate, species and cultural crises, the projects have mixed rates success. Perhaps their least effectiveness is in their ability to dissuade the carbon/fossil fuel industries, commerce and governments from accelerating their emissions, destroying habitats and erasing diverse cultures.

What is evident from almost every perspective, is regional interdependence, rather than separate identities at a regional scale. Global economics, mass migratory routes, climate species and cultural crises retain colonial patterns that have become more complex and universal.

Within the proposed regions, sub-regions and nations make regional identities difficult to comprehend, so other scales of magnitudes, cultural associations, fiscal allegiances, economic philosophies and religion seem to present themselves as greater unifying factors.

Given the focus of the four regions on landmass, who will be responsible for the oceans, arguably the most important planetary areas of biodiversity and carbon sinks? Even the Asia and Pacific Region portrays the planet's largest ocean as the backdrop to its human inhabitants. Again, such a development is not only anthropocentric, but is based on economic values and power structures.

6. Decolonial Futures: 'global citizenship, otherwise'

6.1 Creating Capacity for Change

The particular construction of place and capital' is the crisis of cultural erasure, as capital undermines the intrinsic value of place/culture. The specific question and challenge, therefore, is how to think otherwise (Stein and Andreotti 2021). Without indulging in optimistic positivism, the concept of regionalism may provoke disruptive questions to challenge institutional stasis and impotence of the United Nations. Emancipation can be ignited in known and unknown ways. The crucial element is to create the environment/situation for change to move into. Some refer to this as 'regenerative design' (Wahl 2016), others consider 'global citizens, otherwise' to be the way to 'decolonial futures' (Andreotti et al 2018).

Identifying Regional differences with a view to decolonisation could, also, provide a system for decolonising the UN SDGs. Such a critical structure and process could assess the validity of the SDGs and the UN itself, establishing the dynamic pattern of an 'integral critical system' that responds to change (Haley et al 2021). It may start with the 'nexus of climate, species and cultural crises' (Haley 2022), ensuring that the interdependence of all elements adhere to ethical values, acknowledgement of and emancipation from inherent power contradictions (Freire 2017). Therefore, regionalisation may expose existing rigidity, stasis and dogma; corruption, cognitive dissonance and mendacity; oppression, universality and ecocide. Business will no longer be as usual and diverse, self-determination could emerge as 'critical recovery' for genuine hope (Haley 2020). And to secure such an approach;

'...integral critical systems provides a whole systems approach that integrates dynamic, critical dialogue to maintain relevance and adaptability by facilitating flexible epistemic systems of co-learning. The integration of criticality throughout such a process may be understood as a dynamic method of checks and balances between stakeholders and stacked and networked systems affecting a situation. Such an approach does not necessarily challenge hierarchical systems so much as disperse them through transparency and constant inquiry (Haley et al 2021).

6.2 Words and Worlds Apart

The concept of regionalisation, also, highlights the colonial-neo-colonial ubiquity of language as means of oppression. While Latinisation of plant names initiated the trend for the physical sciences to universalise the observable world for analysis, it denied understanding and values that exist in local cultures. Indeed, the imposition of European languages on the other three regions has indelibly stained the world map. And in recent times, this trend has been intensified through academia in the

globalisation of culture through global economics' adoption of US English through Microsoft, IBM and Apple ITC systems to align markets. This standardisation language has had immense cognitive impact to reduce diversity of thought, to 'word the world' rather than 'world the world' (Machado De Oliveira 2021). In other words, it is not just local languages that have suffered erasure, but UK English as it has been adopted locally, has become an homogenised approximation of meaning. While languages need to change and emerge to live, the lingua franca of social media has refocused human attention from the natural world to the virtual world of digital automata and fiscal values. Despite good intentions, the adoption of terms, such as 'Ecosystems Services', 'Natural Capital' and even 'ecology' have imposed an Anglicised-anthropocentric-neoliberal-neocolonial-economic lens on our perceptions of and relationship with Earth and all that inhabit it. It is unlikely that a regional approach to delivering the SDGs will enrich such loss.

6.3. Decolonising The Education Sector

As the UN General Secretary, António Guterres, to students at seton Hall University, New Jersey:

“You hold the cards. Your talent is in demand from multinational companies and big financial institutions. You will have plenty of opportunities to choose from. My message to you is simple: don't work for climate wreckers. Use your talents to drive us towards a renewable future.” (Carrington 2022).

However, Nora Bateson resists the idea of placing responsibility for the future in the hands of children (Bateson 2016), identifying the deeper cultural need for intergeneration collaboration. Co-learning between students and tutors, communities and researchers then dissolves systemic academic hierarchies.

The **world ranking of universities** and their adoption of the UN SDGs within their curricula reveals another example of Regional disparity. Of the top 25 universities the Regions again show great disparity within the Regions and between the Regions (Times Higher Education 2022).

Americas and Caribbean 18 (USA 17, Canada 1, Caribbean 0)

Asia and Pacific 4 (China 3, Singapore 1, Australasia & Pacific Island 0)

European 3 (UK 2, Switzerland 1)

Africa and the Middle East 0

Such disparity in education and research between the regions demonstrates past colonial pedagogic systems of Eurocentric knowledge values and neocolonial, neoliberal economics (Freire 2021).

6.3. Decolonising Universities

As academia moves from scholarly pursuits to entrepreneurial development, the growth and constraints of neoliberalism and neocolonialism converge. In this era of predatory publishing, we are witnessing the industrialisation of Higher Education

through the globalisation of the university system. In other words, the concept of universal knowledge upon which universities were founded has become the means to exploit and undermine their capacity for free thinking. Such control and management of universities further enforces disciplinary silos that restrict genuine interdisciplinary and prevent the possibility of emergent Transdisciplinary Knowledge (Nicolescu 2008).

The potential development and delivery of curricula of Education for Sustainable Development is, therefore, most often the purview of the environmental sciences, or the SDGs are 'cherry-picked' across social, environmental sciences and business schools. This process of cognitive fragmentation further undermines the possibility of ecological, 'joined-up', thinking. The conditions and thought processes that have brought about the current emergencies, are thereby reinforced as a positive feedback loop, or vicious circle towards whole systems ecological collapse.

To think otherwise, to be critical, to speak out, is regarded as an assault on the values of Modernity that places academics in a 'double-bind' (Bateson, et al 1956). To break this cycle of abuse, nothing less than a cognitive revolution is required. This has nothing to do with partisan politics, per se, as this academic disease represents a pandemic far greater and deeper than COVID-19 affecting human psyche.

7. Conclusion: Another Western Concept

It would seem that from the 2019 Bond Report that poor countries, those who have most to gain from the SDGs, have adopted and complied with Agenda 2030. However, rich countries, those who need to contribute most to the SDGs, continue to lack commitment unless they are able to find new avenues for further profit. To this extent, colonial legacies continue and neo-colonial domination undermines cultures to extract and exploit other lands and other people for profit (Koram 2022). Born out of neoliberal economics, Sustainable Development was designed to serve international financial systems and institutions (Haley 2017). Again, the question is, how will regionalizing SDG efforts make a difference? Perhaps, a structural transformation of global economics, waiving development loan debt and intellectual property rights could make such a difference (Koram 2022)?

To address this situation and contribute directly to critical recovery and transformation, we must value people's lived experiences and insights. This could be systemically developed and adopted by applying integrated critical systems for the re-enchantment of cultures to regenerate societal resilience to survive accelerating disasters. In other words, enabling people to learn for themselves how to be self-determined and adapt critically to their diverse futures, thereby enabling each level of government to understand, work with, and value the populace (Haley 2021).

Western culture insists that stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. The stories of many indigenous cultures are not structured in this way; most often they are circular. In other words the concept of a 'Conclusion' is not necessarily useful. Indeed, we may consider the notions of solutions or 'Goals' as being absurd in our aim to achieve the SDGs. In previous texts, I have offered 'capable future' as an alternative strategy to Sustainable Development (Haley 2008), others have

suggested 'sustainable living'. Such process-based approaches engage with life as a continuum, even beyond climate and ecosystemic collapse, and they generate different questions; questions that encourage others to ask the questions.

Rather than sustaining a social order of prescribed, market economics into the future, we need to take stock of the present and address the realities of now, asking 'how may things be made better now and what values should we adopt to decolonise the SDGs?' Given this potential scenario, the need to create regional administrations to implement the SDGs seems somewhat arbitrary, if not absurd in a globalised world.

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