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Dialogues on Decoloniality Through Critical Future Studies

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ABSTRACT: Decolonial scholarship offers crucial resources for rethinking emancipation, yet the collective construction and legitimation of decolonial futures remains insufficiently examined. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with twelve scholars engaged in decolonial praxis, this paper investigates how future imaginaries are articulated, justified, and contested under conditions shaped by coloniality and neoliberal crisis. Framed through dialogical futurity as an integration of Critical Futures Studies and Social Representations Theory, the analysis shows how participants unsettle colonial temporalities, mobilise memory and affect, and position their visions in relation to contemporary Left politics. Three recurrent orientations emerge: unsettling, creating, and reworlding. These orientations reveal decolonial futures as contested fields of temporal legitimacy in which plural worlds are imagined against extractivism, epistemic hierarchy, and state violence. The paper contributes a psychosocial account of futurity as a socially mediated political practice and argues that resonance, rather than assimilation, offers a more productive relation between decolonial thought and the contemporary Left.

KEYWORDS: Decolonisation; Futures Studies; Social Representations; Futurity

Introduction

Despite formal decolonisation, coloniality continues to organise global governance, epistemic hierarchies, racialisation, and extractivist economies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Mbembe, 2001; Quijano, 2000). Its persistence is not only material but temporal, as colonialism installs a linear model of history that positions Europe as the present of humanity while relegating others to a condition of perpetual anteriority (Fabian, 1983). As such, Western temporality is fundamentally finite and antifuturist, foreclosing the historical openness of non-Western worlds by subordinating their trajectories to a singular developmental arc (Espinosa-Miñoso & Fúnez-Flores, 2025). The future, therefore, is not a neutral horizon but a politically structured and differentially distributed terrain produced through colonial power.

Existing scholarship has responded through ontological, material, and epistemological critiques: challenging who counts as human (Wynter, 2003), insisting on land restitution over symbolic recognition (Tuck & Yang, 2012), and demanding reconstruction of knowledge practices from multiple geo-historical locations (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Yet these interventions reveal important internal tensions, particularly in relation to leftist traditions. While both oppose domination (Fanon, 1963), classical socialist and Marxist frameworks organise emancipation around a universal teleology of class struggle that decolonial scholars argue carries colonial residues erasing racial, epistemic, and ontological difference (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano,

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2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). Projects oriented toward alternative futures may therefore inadvertently reproduce colonial assumptions when their underlying ontologies remain intact (Chipato & Chandler, 2023). The question of which structures must be transformed, and who holds the authority to define what a post-colonial world should become, thus remains deeply contested.

What the literature has not adequately addressed is how decolonial futures become collectively meaningful and politically operative rather than merely normatively articulated (Feukeu, 2024; Tuck & Yang, 2012). The psychosocial and affective dynamics through which competing futures are negotiated and endowed with legitimacy remain underexplored (Haro, 2010; Couto et al., 2021; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), despite being constitutive dimension of colonial and political struggles (Fanon, 1963; Coulthard, 2014). Also undertheorized are the conditions under which decolonial epistemologies and political imaginaries can enter into productive relationship with leftist traditions without being epistemically subordinated to them: a question that existing scholarship tends to address either at the level of theoretical compatibility (Bhambra, 2014) or through historically specific cases of convergence and divergence (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021), but rarely in terms of the institutional or organizational dynamics that shape how that relationship is actually negotiated in practice.

This study addresses these limitations by investigating how decolonial scholars construct, negotiate, and contest future imaginaries under conditions shaped by coloniality, inhabiting institutions while critiquing them. To address these questions, the paper introduces the concept of dialogical futurity, integrating Critical Futures Studies (Inayatullah, 2005) and Social Representations Theory (Moscovici, 1961; Marková, 2003). This integration is necessary because Critical Futures Studies effectively interrogates how futures are politically produced and delimited (Inayatullah, 2005) but does not fully account for how they become collectively recognised and sustained; Social Representations Theory addresses this gap by explaining how meaning becomes shared, credible, and actionable as shared symbolic systems rather than isolated beliefs, with consequences on social groups' political positioning (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Doise & Staerklé, 2002). Building on twelve interviews, we argue that the relation between decolonial thought and the contemporary Left is most productively understood as a politics of resonance rather than assimilation, allowing solidarities to form without subordinating decolonial epistemologies to universalist emancipatory scripts.

Aims and Context

The relationship between decolonial movements and leftist politics is one of productive but asymmetrical tension. Both traditions share a foundational critique of exploitation, inequality, and systemic domination produced through the entanglement of colonialism and capitalism (Fanon, 1963; Quijano, 2000; Bhambra, 2014). Yet they rest on different diagnoses of what emancipation requires. While anti-colonial and postcolonial struggles have drawn substantially on socialist and Marxist analyses, they have consistently challenged the universalising assumptions of linear progress and development embedded in many leftist traditions, insisting instead on historically and geographically situated epistemologies that cannot be subsumed within a class-based teleology (Couto et al., 2021; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Decolonial thought extends critiques of economic exploitation by foregrounding the enduring effects of racial hierarchy, cultural marginalisation, and epistemic exclusion, showing how inequality is produced across intersecting axes of race, class, gender, geography, and knowledge rather than class alone (Mignolo, 2020; Crenshaw, 1991; Tamale, 2020). Therefore, coloniality names a distinct logic of power whose persistence cannot be dissolved by redistributive

politics alone, because it operates at the level of who counts as a legitimate knower, whose histories count as history, and whose futures count as possible.

Decolonial futures scholars such as Sardar (1993), Nandy (1996), and more recently Feukeu et al. (2021) have argued that the future itself has been itself colonised, as dominant explorations of future imaginaries naturalise Western trajectories and foreclose alternative temporal imaginaries, a tendency Appadurai (2013) terms *trajectorism*. Instead, decolonial futures -from Afrofuturism to feminist futures (Feukeu, 2024)- position imagination as an act of liberation, insisting that the future is a public good and a contested power space (Bourgeois et al., 2022).

The articulation of alternative temporal horizons is, however, systematically constrained. Neocolonial dependency, state repression of land and epistemic justice struggles, and the commodification of decolonial language narrow the political space in which transformative imaginaries can be expressed and sustained (Amin, 1989; Coulthard, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Under these conditions, affect and emotions function not merely as a psychological byproduct of political struggle but as a constitutive dimension of how alternative futures are sustained and transmitted across social contexts (Ahmed, 2004; Haro, 2010; Cvetkovich, 2012).

Finally, a further dimension of these tensions concerns collective memory and its relationship to futurity. For decolonial thinkers, memory is not simply retrospective but constitutive of political imagination: histories of colonisation actively shape how present inequalities are interpreted and how transformative futures are envisioned (Mbembe, 2001; de Saint-Laurent, 2018). Unfinished struggles -for land, for epistemic recognition, for the restoration of suppressed knowledge systems- are carried forward as anticipatory horizons that orient movements toward alternatives exceeding inherited trajectories (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Debates over inequality, governance, and development are therefore simultaneously struggles over political power and over temporal imagination: over whose visions of the future come to appear universal, progressive, or legitimate, and whose are consigned to the past or to utopian unreality (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Escobar, 2018; Fraser, 2013).

Building on these premises, this study examines how decolonial scholars construct and negotiate future imaginaries under conditions shaped by coloniality and neoliberal crisis, analysing how possible, desirable, and accountable futures are articulated within a fractured emancipatory landscape. Specifically, it investigates: (1) the narratives, metaphors, and anticipatory frameworks through which decolonial futures are constructed; (2) the affective orientations embedded in these imaginaries; and (3) how these future horizons are positioned in relation to contemporary leftist political projects. Scholars constitute the analytic focus because they occupy a distinctive discursive position within this field, mediating between theory and praxis, inhabiting institutions while critiquing them. This position makes their imaginaries particularly revealing of the tensions between decolonial and leftist traditions.

Critical Futures Studies and Social Representations Theory

This paper conceptualises futurity as a socially mediated and politically contested field in which power, knowledge, and collective imagination intersect. From a psychosocial perspective, emancipatory politics can be understood as a struggle over which aspects of the present should be preserved and which should be transformed, a process inherently oriented toward the future (Pedersen, 2011; Liu & Hilton, 2005). Classical leftist traditions frame this struggle within a linear and universal temporality, where historical contradictions drive progressive transformation (Marx, 1852/1978). However, in contexts shaped by coloniality, such teleological assumptions become

themselves objects of contestation. Decolonial scholarship has demonstrated that futures are not neutral horizons but are structured by asymmetries of epistemic authority, historical memory, and power, raising the question of whose temporal frameworks define what counts as possible, desirable, and legitimate.

To analyse these dynamics, this paper integrates Critical Futures Studies (CFS) and Social Representations Theory (SRT) through a dialogical perspective. This integration is grounded in a complementary asymmetry: CFS interrogates how futures are produced, delimited, and politicised, while SRT explains how such futures become collectively meaningful, credible, and actionable within specific social contexts. Together, they enable an analysis of futurity not as an abstract projection but as a situated process of meaning-making and political negotiation.

From a CFS perspective, futurity is fundamentally shaped by relations of power that organise anticipation. Dominant approaches to the future (particularly predictive and technocratic models) tend to naturalise existing trajectories, presenting them as inevitable and thereby foreclosing alternatives (Inayatullah, 2005). In this sense, anticipation is not neutral but operates as a mechanism of governance. Critical futures approaches seek to "undefine" the present by exposing its contingency and opening space for alternative possibilities. This intervention is particularly salient in contexts characterised by what Fisher (2022) terms “capitalist realism”, where the imagination of alternatives is structurally constrained, and the future appears closed. Under such conditions, emancipation entails a struggle over the boundaries what can be recognised as realistic, desirable, or politically viable (Levitas, 2013).

However, while CFS effectively expands the horizon of imaginable futures, it does not fully account for how these alternatives become socially recognised and collectively sustained. This limitation can be addressed through SRT, which conceptualises knowledge as socially shared, relational, and embedded in systems of power. Social representations can be understood as common-sense theories comprising opinions, practices, values and ideas (Moscovici, 1988), acting as world-making frameworks that define what is intelligible, legitimate, and actionable (Elcheroth et al., 2011), and enabling communication while structuring differences in positioning across groups (Doise & Staerklé, 2002). From this perspective, politics can be understood as a struggle over meaning, where competing actors seek to stabilise particular interpretations of key concepts and, in doing so, delimit the horizons of collective action.

A dialogical perspective (Marková, 2003) allows these insights to be integrated by foregrounding the relational processes through which futures are constructed. Meaning emerges through positioning and counter-positioning between social actors, such that imaginaries of the future are always articulated in relation to others -whether dominant institutions, political traditions, or competing movements. In this sense, futurity is not an autonomous projection but a dialogical accomplishment, shaped through ongoing interactions within historically structured fields of power.

This perspective is further refined by Moscovici’s distinction between hegemonic, emancipated, and polemical representations (Moscovici, 1988). Hegemonic representations stabilise dominant narratives and naturalise futures as inevitable; emancipated representations emerge when subgroups reinterpret these narratives from situated perspectives; polemical representations arise in contexts of open conflict and are structured by antagonistic relations. This typology enables a differentiated analysis of decolonial futurity: alternative futures may operate either as reconfigurations within dominant frameworks or as challenges seeking to displace them, with distinct implications for collective mobilisation and political transformation.

This integrated framework conceptualises futurity as: Politically produced through power-laden anticipatory regimes; Collectively mediated through shared systems of representation; Dialogically constructed through interaction between positioned actors; Temporally structured through the articulation of past, present, and future; Contested in legitimacy through struggles over what counts as realistic and possible.

Within this framework, the analysis moves beyond identifying alternative futures to examining how such futures are constructed, negotiated, and legitimised as part of ongoing struggles over meaning and power.

This paper emerges from a collaboration between two scholars situated within Social Representations Theory, whose respective locations – South Asian and Europe – introduce constitutive asymmetries into the analysis. The first author brings direct experience of displacement and epistemic marginality, orienting the analysis toward the uneven distribution of futures and the persistence of colonial hierarchies. The second author occupies a position of relative institutional and epistemic security within European academia, requiring sustained reflexive attention to the asymmetries structuring global knowledge production. Rather than reconciling these positions, the paper treats their tension as analytically productive: a dialogical practice that seeks to foreground the risks of appropriating decolonial concepts within academic research while contributing to critical debates on futurity, power, and emancipatory politics.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative design, drawing on semi-structured interviews to explore how decolonial scholars understand and navigate the temporal trajectories of decolonial thought and practice. The analysis explores how participants situate themselves historically, engage with contemporary dynamics, and articulate imaginaries of decolonial futures. Building on earlier work (Ali et al., 2025) with the same participants, the present study shifts the lens toward future-oriented representations, examining how decolonial futures are narrated, felt, and contested.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, beginning with established academics in decolonial theory who referred additional colleagues within their networks. The final sample comprised twelve scholars with recognised expertise in decoloniality, spanning career stages from doctoral researchers to Professors Emeriti and representing diverse geopolitical contexts, including South Africa, Pakistan, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and the United States. All were based in the social sciences (particularly psychology, education, and cultural studies) and were selected for their combined academic and activist engagement in decolonial practice.

The use of expert interviews reflects the epistemological aims of the study, which examines how decolonial futures are conceptually articulated and contested within scholarly discourse. Participants were selected for their sustained engagement with decolonial theory as both conceptual and political practice, occupying positions that shape the vocabularies through which alternative futures become thinkable. Rather than assuming universal authority, this approach allows analysis of how futurity is produced and negotiated within institutional knowledge structures. Including scholar-activists further situates these accounts within ongoing decolonial praxis, linking theory and political engagement.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom between 2023 and 2024, lasting between 90 and 120 minutes. Prior to each session, participants received detailed information about the study's aims and procedures and gave informed consent both verbally and in writing. To ensure confidentiality, all data were anonymized, securely stored, and pseudonyms assigned in reporting. The interview

guide was organized around a temporal framework, inviting participants to reflect across three dimensions: (1) Past: Entry points into decolonial scholarship, formative influences, and reflections on colonialism, coloniality, and decolonisation as historical categories; (2) Present: Theoretical and epistemological work of decoloniality in contemporary institutions, including critiques of dominant knowledge systems and reflections on the impact of their practice within and beyond academia. (3) Future: Imaginaries of decolonial futures, including possible transformations in knowledge systems, political struggles, and everyday life; and pathways for dismantling colonial paradigms while creating alternatives grounded in epistemic plurality.

This temporal design surfaced how scholars navigate uncertainty, possibility, and ideological tension, revealing futurity not as prediction but as a dialogical process. It enabled an exploration of the affective, intellectual, and political dimensions of imagining otherwise, consistent with the study's CFS and SRT framework. It is to be noted that the temporal sequencing of the interviews was not intended merely as a chronological narrative scaffold, but as a futures-oriented elicitation strategy aligned with the study's dialogical conception of temporality; by inviting participants to move reflexively between past experiences, present institutional conditions, and imagined future horizons, the design was intended to generate cross-temporal reasoning within single narrative sequences. This allowed futures to emerge not as abstract projections, but as positions negotiated in dialogue with remembered histories and perceived structural constraints. In this sense, the interview structure operationalised dialogical futurity methodologically, enabling the study to capture how anticipatory imaginaries are socially mediated and historically situated rather than independently formulated.

Findings

The analysis followed a theoretically informed, iterative coding process. Transcripts were first open-coded to identify segments referring to past trajectories, present institutional dynamics, and future imaginaries. These were then temporally indexed to trace how participants moved dialogically across time. Codes were subsequently grouped into higher-order thematic clusters reflecting shared representational patterns, including epistemic violence which denotes the systematic marginalization, erasure, or distortion of subaltern knowledges through dominant regimes of truth that render certain ways of knowing illegitimate or unintelligible (Spivak, 1988), disciplinary crisis, critical survival, and pluriversal horizon-building. Particular attention was given to metaphors as symbolic resources anchoring abstract temporal concerns in lived imagery. Analytic synthesis examined how these representations interacted to constitute dialogical futurity as a collective and contested field. Coding disagreements were resolved through reflexive discussion to ensure transparency and theoretical alignment.

The temporal organisation of the findings reflects the dialogical logic of the interview design, which invited participants to move across past trajectories, present constraints, and imagined future horizons. Rather than treating past, present, and future as discrete chronological stages, the analysis examines how participants connected them within narrative sequences. Futurity emerged not as prediction, but as a socially mediated and affectively invested representational process. The findings are organised around four analytic layers. First, the past appears as a site of anchoring, where coloniality is narrated as unfinished and biographically internalised. Second, the present appears as a field of representational struggle, structured by epistemic violence, disciplinary crisis, and critical survival. Third, the future appears as anticipatory positioning, articulated through unsettling, creating, and reworlding. Finally,

metaphors operate as symbolic mediators that condense these temporal tensions into shared images of struggle, survival, and possibility.

*Past as Anchoring: Unfinished Coloniality and Epistemic Loss***.** Participants recounted their intellectual and political itineraries as inseparable from the intimate histories of colonial inheritances and the lived condition of epistemic marginality. What emerged was a layered account of entanglement: anti-colonial independence, neo-colonial continuity, epistemic loss, and institutional complicity coexisted in their narratives. Their testimonies foregrounded how personal and collective histories became constitutive of decolonial commitment and they reveal a shared representational field organised around the contested question of what counts as legitimate knowledge and who produces it, inhabited differently according to each participant's historical and biographical positioning within it.

For many, entry into decolonial thought was staged against the initial embrace of Western academic training, where Eurocentric knowledge appeared naturalised as universal. This is a process of objectification in the SRT sense: the contingent and historically situated is rendered self-evident and concrete, its constructed character rendered invisible. Several described early encounters with psychology as being steeped in quantitative formalism, statistical abstraction, and U.S. or European paradigms, formations that presented themselves as universal precisely because their colonial conditions of production had been successfully obscured. These were later reframed as both a "gift" and a "constraint," offering intellectual tools yet foreclosing other ways of knowing. One participant narrated the disorientation of encountering qualitative inquiry after years of statistical discipline, while another spoke of disillusionment with cultural psychology, which promised critique yet remained tethered to colonial notions of universality. As Participant A reflected: "I preach a lot about Indigenous discourses, but once I get into that, that's something new for me as well. It's like we've lost our own voices". These tensions, gratitude entangled with alienation, were recurrent motifs.

Over time, these formations were re-signified as historically situated. Participant N reflected on this shift explicitly: "I conflated anti-colonialism with decoloniality at one stage… anti-colonial efforts were enacted in the mid-twentieth century… but coloniality now is what has emerged after that". He further clarified the epistemic dimension of that distinction: "The degradation of people's knowledge systems is at the same time a way to erase the people who created those knowledge systems". The re-signification of this objectified universal was experienced differently depending on participants' prior positioning. Participant L described an initial understanding in which decolonisation meant national independence, "we regain independence from the colonizers", before arriving at a more processual sense: "decoloniality… is a process in which people actively unpack and deconstruct this idea". Participant I narrated a parallel shift: "Before I had a very physical, geographical understanding… But now I see it more as like, okay, this is the system we're in, it's ideologies, anyone can embody". These trajectories illustrate how positionings within a shared representational field can shift: what was once organised around a hegemonic representation of coloniality as completed or external becomes reorganised around a recognition of its ongoing, internalised force.

Others situated their trajectories in explicitly political histories: teaching in Pakistan under post 9/11 securitization, inhabiting the contradictions of Puerto Rico's colonial condition, participating in anti-war activism during Vietnam, or practicing psychology amid the highly politicised climate of late-apartheid South Africa. For them, coloniality was not an abstraction but an embodied condition, woven into life histories and struggles for visibility. One participant, recalling her upbringing in Hong Kong and alienation in British academia, narrated her intellectual

path through the legacies of empire, migration, and the fragile labour of recognition. For these participants, coloniality was never experienced as a historical rupture.

Participant U refused the temporal frame of post-coloniality entirely: “We're living in a colonial era. There is no post-colonial era… everything I do or everything I am somehow a reaction to that”. Participant S echoed this refusal in the South African context: “I will not talk about South Africa as post-apartheid… there really isn't a post as such”. These positionings reflect different anchorings of decolonial commitments in specific social experiences of conflict, occupation, and structural violence: where Participant L and Participant I narrate a movement toward recognising coloniality as a system, both Participant U and S narrate the impossibility of having ever not known it. The representational field is shared, but the principles organising individual positioning within it differ according to the lived histories through which coloniality has been encountered.

Family genealogies and community inheritances also surfaced as significant. One participant invoked her Indigenous and Spanish heritage as a reminder of colonial hybridity; another reflected on descent from French settlers in South Africa to foreground the dualities of complicity and critique. As Participant B noted: “once you try to explore the Indigenous perspectives, you think that they've never been taught to you. So, you're just as alien as any Western person would be”. This points to how the objectification of colonial knowledge has operated across generations, producing the systematic non-transmission of Indigenous epistemic tradition, and how this absence itself becomes a form of positioning: one is marked by what was withheld as much as by what was received. Ancestry here functions not as anecdotal detail but as epistemological positioning, a biographical marker of how privilege, marginality, and complicity coexist within the same life.

These narratives refuse a developmentalist arc of intellectual growth. They reveal a representational field organised around the contested legitimacy of colonial knowledge, one in which participants occupy different, systematically organised positions shaped by the intersections of geography, generation, language, and political history. The past is narrated as unfinished continuity rather than completed liberation, and this historicised sensibility is what orientates decolonial commitments in the present. Participants positioned themselves not merely as scholars but as interlocutors in traditions of resistance, their lives already marked by the very questions that decolonial thought asks of knowledge and power. Coloniality appears, from this vantage point, as an ongoing structuring force actively reproduced through institutions, disciplines, and internalised norms: the terrain the Present section turns to examine directly.

When speaking of the present, participants converged on a shared claim: coloniality persists not as historical residue but as active institutional logic, shaping what counts as knowledge, who is recognised as a knower, and which struggles are rendered visible or erased. Three subthemes structured their reflections: epistemic violence, disciplinary crisis, and critical survival. Together, these subthemes map a field of constraint and agency, in which participants are neither simply oppressed by colonial structures nor simply free to contest them, but positioned ambivalently within both.

Epistemic Violence. Epistemic violence names the processes through which coloniality regulates knowledge validation, credibility, and voice. Fatima gave this dynamic its sharpest formulation: “We are a product of coloniality ourselves…the education that we receive, the way we live, the way we think about the world and even our aspirations have been in the framework of coloniality”. Coloniality here is not external imposition but internalised structure, a hegemonic representation so thoroughly naturalised that it shapes desire itself. This internalisation extends to the conditions of scholarly legitimacy: “Our work is valid only when we get that approval from

the West… we are acknowledged for our work if we get some endorsement from Western scholars or if we are published there". Western standards therefore become anchoring point of reference for those who hold the power to assign legitimacy to decolonial scholars' work.

Language was identified as a primary medium of this violence. Participant U reflected: "The language I'm using right now is of course English…my Kashmiri is really bad…my English is better than both of those languages. That should tell you what happens when you live under colonial occupation". English is not merely a practical tool but a colonial objectification, a concrete embodiment of the epistemic hierarchy that renders other languages, and the knowledge systems they carry, subordinate. Participant N extended this analysis to its structural consequence: "The degradation of people's knowledge systems is at the same time a way to erase the people who created those knowledge systems". Epistemic violence, for participants, is therefore not a metaphor for discomfort but a mechanism of ontological erasure. Participant L captured how this operates across generations: "decoloniality… is a process in which people actively unpack and deconstruct this idea", implying that the violence is not a single event but a sedimented condition requiring ongoing, active labour to contest.

Disciplinary Crisis. Disciplinary crisis concerns the specific implication of psychology in these colonial logics, and the contested question of whether the discipline can be reformed from within or must be more fundamentally abandoned. Participants did not speak of psychology as merely imperfect; they named it as structurally complicit. Participant N framed this as epistemicide: the systematic destruction of non-Western knowledge is not incidental to the discipline's history but constitutive of its authority. Participant U extended the critique to the discipline's normative commitments: "The Western world is obsessed with making everybody peaceful without really taking justice and liberation into consideration". Here, psychology's aspiration toward universality is re-read as a colonial gesture, peace without justice, inclusion without transformation.

This critique of surface diversification was developed by Participant I: "We might look different on the surface… increasingly diverse staff and students… but the reality is it's the same systems". The discipline performs inclusion while reproducing the epistemic hierarchies that make genuine pluralism impossible. This is what hegemonic representation accomplishes at the institutional level: changing faces without changing the symbolic order. Against this, participants distinguished two possible responses. Some articulated emancipatory positions, working within psychology to denaturalise its universalist claims, opening its methods to situated and community-accountable practices. Others adopted what Participant N called a polemical stance: "Combativity…is intolerance towards coloniality, intolerance towards racism… rage and love for each other". Here, tolerance itself is refused. The disciplinary crisis is not resolvable through gradual reform; it demands antagonism as an ethical and political commitment. The coexistence of these two orientations within the same community of scholars signals that the crisis is not merely intellectual but strategic, a disagreement about what kind of struggle the present moment requires.

Critical Survival. Critical survival addresses how participants inhabit these structures in practice, neither withdrawing from institutions nor surrendering to them, but developing what Participant R described as "thriving at the margins£. This formulation refuses the deficit logic that positions marginality as lack and re-signifies the margin as a site of epistemic creativity and strategic possibility. Yet participants were clear-eyed about the contradictions this entails. Many acknowledged benefiting from the very structures they contest mobility, institutional affiliation, publishing platforms, and the academic capital conferred by Western-validated credentials. Rather

than treating this as hypocrisy, they framed it as the unavoidable condition of decolonial praxis, one that demands reflexivity rather than purity.

The question Participant I posed, “How do you decolonize yourself in order to understand what 'decolonizing anything else' means?”, captures the recursive difficulty of this position. Decolonisation cannot begin externally if the scholar's own intellectual formation has been shaped by colonial epistemologies. Critical survival therefore involves not only institutional navigation but interior work: the ongoing labour of recognising, naming, and partially dismantling one's own colonised subjectivity. Participants described this as uncomfortable, never complete, and necessarily collective, sustained through solidarity, shared language, and the symbolic repertoires they developed together.

These three subthemes reveal the present as an ambivalent terrain rather than a stable ground. Epistemic violence establishes the structural conditions that constrain what can be known and said. Disciplinary crisis names the specific site, psychology, where those conditions are most visibly contested. Critical survival describes the range of practices through which scholars navigate, resist, and partially rework those conditions from within. What connects all three is a refusal of the binary between complicity and resistance: participants do not occupy one position or the other but move between and across them, sustaining decolonial commitments under conditions that are never fully on their terms. This tension, between structural constraint and agentic possibility, is precisely what the Future section takes up: if the present is a field of ambivalence, what kinds of transformation do participants imagine as liveable and accountable within it?

Future as Unsettling, Creating and Reworlding. Participants constructed decolonial futurity as a contested symbolic terrain: one in which possible, desirable, and accountable futures are negotiated against the ongoing presence of coloniality. Across interviews, three anticipatory orientations emerged, unsettling, creating, and re-worlding, each corresponding to a distinct mode of positioning within a fractured emancipatory landscape.

The first anticipatory orientation involved disruption, not only of institutions, but of the temporal legitimacy that sustains them. Participants repeatedly refused closure. Participant S framed liberation as structurally unfinished: “The pursuit of liberation remains an open-ended ongoing project”. Here, futurity is not imagined as culmination but as persistence. Liberation is re-signified as a process rather than an endpoint. This unsettles linear emancipatory narratives often associated with classical leftist teleologies.

Similarly, Participant U described decolonial awakening as an affective rupture: “It was heartbreaking… to realize that my mind was colonized”. The future begins not with institutional reform but with recognition of interior colonization. Anticipation here is anchored in reflexive disidentification. The “heartbreak” marks a turning point where the hegemonic representation of coloniality becomes visible and therefore contestable. Other participants extended this destabilization outward. Participant I connected futurity to confronting institutional amnesia and superficial reform: “We might look different on the surface…but the reality is it’s the same system.” Futures, in this sense, target not only marginalization but the symbolic stabilization of dominance itself. Unsettling is directed toward power, not merely toward inclusion. Analytically, unsettling corresponds to the production of polemical representations: futures constructed explicitly against hegemonic frames, refusing reconciliation without structural transformation.

If unsettling destabilizes, creating constructs. Participants did not limit futurity to dismantling colonial structures; they articulated projects of building new relational, methodological, and temporal forms. Participant J proposed an alternative temporal orientation:

"It's about being in time rather than being on time." This statement does not merely critique capitalist productivity; it anchors decolonial futurity in relational temporality. Colonial time, linear, extractive, quantifiable, is objectified as mechanical discipline. In contrast, "being in time" anticipates community-accountable scholarship grounded in presence and rhythm.

Participant N envisioned "co-combatants" who build solidaristic epistemic communities grounded in rage and love. Here, futurity is relationally constructed. It emerges not from isolated reform but from dialogical alignment across activism, scholarship, and art. Other participants imagined creating new epistemic infrastructures: participatory methods, grassroots alliances, precolonial epistemologies as living resources, and pedagogies that embed reflexivity within classrooms. These projects do not abandon psychology wholesale; they rework its boundaries. Analytically, creating corresponds to emancipated representations: partial re-significations within and against dominant frameworks.

The third orientation which we term reworlding extended beyond reform or disciplinary critique toward pluriversality. Participants rejected universal emancipation in favor of relational plurality. Several emphasized humility and knowledge otherwise; others stressed alignment between activism and scholarship rather than academic abstraction. Participant I also cautioned against symbolic reparations that reproduce exploitation: "Accountability was repeatedly foregrounded, not to institutions but to communities and those risking their lives in struggle". One participant noted that dominant frameworks now appear "outdated" in light of visible global injustices, including Palestine. In such moments, global solidarities become anticipatory signals of shifting hegemonic stability.

Across accounts, futurity is enacted in the present. Rage, grief, hope, and relational commitment operate as mobilizing affects. Participants do not imagine a single future; they negotiate multiple situated horizons in dialogue with dominant interlocutors (the state, the academy, Western leftist traditions, global institutions). These future imaginaries are dialogical achievements: constructed relationally against hegemonic coloniality, collectively mediated through shared symbolic repertoires, politically contested through polemical and emancipated representations, and anticipatory in mobilising action in the present. Participants' accounts implicitly challenge universalist teleologies of progress, foregrounding instead political strategies capable of sustaining collective transformation without erasing epistemic difference — a politics of resonance rather than assimilation.

Metaphors

The language employed by participants was profoundly metaphorical, functioning as a semiotic practice through which contradictions of decolonial praxis were sustained, navigated, and made intelligible. Metaphors here became more than figures of speech: they were interpretive tools, affective anchors, and epistemic gestures that condensed complexity into images of struggle and survival. Participant D's invocation of being *"born on third base and thinking you hit a triple"* crystallized the unacknowledged inheritances of privilege, exposing how structural advantage is misperceived as individual achievement. This metaphor of sport and competition reframed inequality in starkly accessible terms: the illusion of meritocracy rests on forgetting the conditions of one's starting point.

Similarly, Participant D's imagery of *"hacking the system"* articulated a tactical mode of inhabiting institutions, using their resources without surrendering to their logics. It signaled a guerrilla relationship to power: working from within yet refusing capture. In turn, Participant G's image of *"thriving at the margins"* inverted the deficit discourse of exclusion. Margins, typically

associated with lack and vulnerability, were re-imagined as spaces of creativity and possibility, where exclusion itself became a resource for invention. Participant A's call to *"think otherwise"* carried the weight of epistemic rupture, echoing decolonial demands to unlearn and to imagine worlds beyond the epistemologies of empire.

Other metaphors moved from the personal to the collective, gesturing toward the shared terrain of struggle. Participant F's *"combativity2*, resonant with Fanonian language, conjoined rage and love as dual affects of decolonial resistance: anger at oppression inseparable from the desire for liberation. Participant E's description of psychology as an *"embarrassing discipline"* refused the discipline's self-image as neutral science, recasting it as a source of shame that nonetheless holds potential for radical transformation. Participant C's metaphor of *"selective amnesia"* named the wilful erasures of academic institutions, the forgetting of colonial complicities, and her counter-commitment to memory as an ethical obligation. Participant B's proposal to be *"in time rather than on time"* unsettled capitalist temporalities that discipline bodies and knowledges, reorienting attention to rhythm, presence, and relational temporality as decolonial temporal practices.

Collectively, these metaphors did not exist in isolation. They formed what might be called a shared symbolic economy of decolonial praxis, a repertoire of images and concepts circulating among scholars to give meaning to their struggles. Through them, coping was not reduced to an individual psychological mechanism of adaptation but reframed as collective symbolic labor, a practice of sustaining hope, forging solidarity, and maintaining political commitments in hostile structures. Metaphor became a way of naming the unspeakable, of holding contradictions without resolving them, and of re-imagining margins, amnesia, and embarrassment as sites of generativity. In this sense, coping and resistance were rendered inseparable. To "cope" was already to resist, for survival itself required invention and defiance. Yet resistance was fragile, improvised, and precarious, enacted through the very cracks of the colonial university. What participants achieved through metaphor was not only a description of their condition but the construction of a shared language for inhabiting it otherwise: a language of refusal, irony, creativity, and collective endurance that animated their decolonial imaginaries.

Interpreted through Social Representations Theory, these metaphors function as processes of anchoring and objectification. They anchor abstract and complex experiences of coloniality and uncertainty within familiar symbolic domains, such as struggle, survival, or navigation, thereby making them intelligible within shared cultural repertoires. Simultaneously, they objectify diffuse structural constraints by rendering them as concrete, affectively resonant images that stabilize collective meaning and enable coping. In this sense, metaphorical language operates not merely as rhetorical flourish but as a representational mechanism through which participants symbolically negotiate the legitimacy and plausibility of alternative futures. Interpreting metaphors in this way allowed us to move beyond treating them as evocative illustrations and instead analyse them as representational mechanisms through which participants anchored abstract temporal concerns and objectified the constraints and possibilities shaping decolonial futures.

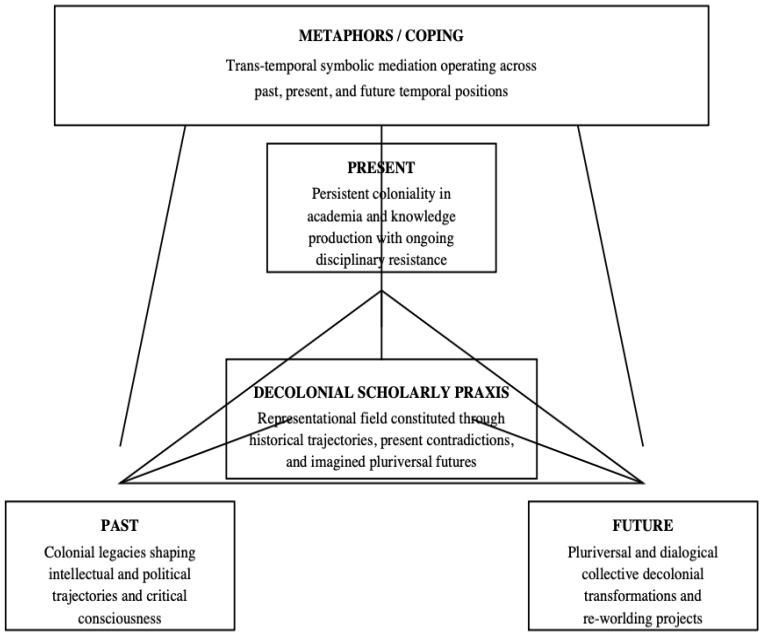
Discussion

This study examined how decolonial scholars construct and negotiate future imaginaries under conditions shaped by coloniality and contemporary crisis. Rather than projecting a unified horizon, participants articulated decolonial futurity as a contested field in which multiple imaginaries coexist. The analysis identified three recurrent orientations, unsettling, creating, and re-worlding, which together form a structured representational configuration. The Windrose model

(Figure 1) synthesizes this field by mapping how these orientations cluster along two tensions: the mode of transformation privileged, and the ontology of emancipation presupposed. In doing so, the model clarifies how decolonial projects intersect with, extend, or challenge leftist traditions.

More specifically, the findings address the gap identified in the literature by showing that decolonial futures do not become politically operative simply through critique or normative articulation, but through processes of collective mediation. Participants' accounts illustrate how alternative futures acquire legitimacy through shared symbolic repertoires, affective investments, and dialogical positioning vis-à-vis dominant institutions and traditions. In this sense, futurity operates not only as a space of possibility, but as a field of temporal legitimacy, in which actors negotiate what can be recognised as realistic, desirable, and accountable within given historical conditions. From a Critical Futures Studies perspective, these dynamics also reflect struggles over anticipation: participants not only propose alternative futures but actively contest the boundaries of what can be imagined, disrupting the "present futures" that extend colonial modernity and opening space for "future presents" grounded in transformative practice.

Figure 1: Trans-Temporal Dynamics of Decolonial Scholarly Praxis Across Past, Present and Future



Note*:* The model illustrates how decolonial scholarly praxis operates as a representational field constituted through the interplay of colonial pasts, persistent coloniality in the present, and pluriversal future imaginaries. Metaphors function as trans-temporal symbolic mediators enabling coping and meaning-making across these temporal positions.

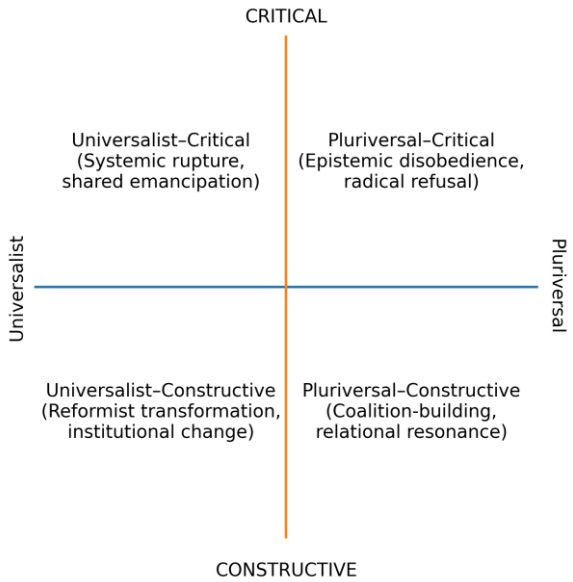
Read through this lens, participants' narratives show that aspirations for redistribution and structural change are inseparable from struggles over epistemic recognition and ontological legitimacy. Emancipation cannot rely solely on universalist progress narratives without reproducing colonial frames that determine whose futures appear credible. Participants repeatedly identified colonial modernity's linear and developmental temporality as a primary obstacle to imagining otherwise. As Participant N observed, erasing knowledge systems erases the people

who created them, illustrating how hegemonic representations of progress naturalise historically situated orders.

Participants did not converge on a single trajectory but positioned themselves within a dynamic field structured by antagonism, institutional engagement, and epistemic pluralism. From a Social Representations Theory perspective, this reflects the coexistence of polemical and emancipated representations. Unsettling narratives took polemical form, confronting stabilised authorities. Creating narratives resembled emancipated representations, reworking frameworks through participatory experimentation. Re-worlding orientations extended toward pluriversal horizons grounded in coexistence and humility. In this sense, the distinction between hegemonic, emancipated, and polemical representations can be reinterpreted as a struggle over temporal legitimacy. Hegemonic representations stabilise futures as inevitable; emancipated representations reopen them through situated reinterpretation; polemical representations challenge their authority altogether. Decolonial futurity, as observed in this study, unfolds through the dynamic interplay of these representational forms.

Importantly, these orientations rarely appeared in isolation. Scholars moved dialogically across them, revealing futurity as co-constructed within contested representational fields. Expressions such as "combativity" and "hacking the system" functioned as symbolic tools for negotiating institutional survival while sustaining alternative commitments. A central thread was temporal disobedience: rejection of linear progress in favour of cyclical or ruptural temporalities. Rage, grief, cautious hope, and relational commitment operated as anticipatory resources, demonstrating that decolonial futurity is affectively charged and politically mediated rather than merely speculative. Dialogical futurity therefore shifts the analysis of futures from content to process. Rather than asking what decolonial futures consist of, it enables examination of how they are constructed, negotiated, and legitimised across social positions. This shift reveals futurity as a relational accomplishment: futures emerge not as isolated visions, but through positioning and counter-positioning within fields structured by power, memory, and institutional constraint.

Figure 2 Dialogical Futurity: Mapping of Ontological and Strategic Orientations



Note. The figure illustrates dialogical futurity as an analytic mapping across two intersecting dimensions: ontological orientation (universalist–pluriversal) and strategic orientation (critical–constructive). The four configurations

represent analytically distinct but porous orientations through which decolonial futures are articulated, negotiated and contested in relation to dominant political and epistemic horizons.

To clarify the political implications of dialogical futurity, we introduce a heuristic mapping (Figure 2) that synthesizes the empirical findings across two intersecting dimensions: ontological orientation (universalist to pluriversal) and strategic orientation (critical to constructive). This mapping is not a rigid typology nor an attempt to fix participants within ideological camps. Rather, it is an analytic device that illuminates how articulations of decolonial futurity negotiate tensions between transformation, coalition, and epistemic legitimacy.

The first axis concerns ontological assumptions about emancipation. At one end lie universalist imaginaries of justice and equality, even when critically reframed. At the other are pluriversal orientations foregrounding coexistence among multiple epistemologies and political horizons without subsumption into a single narrative. Participants frequently destabilized universalist temporal schemas yet did not uniformly abandon them. Universalist and pluriversal imaginaries often coexisted within the same account, reflecting ongoing negotiations over whether transformation requires shared horizons or sustained heterogeneity.

The second axis concerns strategic posture toward dominant institutions. Critical orientations emphasize rupture, refusal, and structural confrontation, framing futures as emerging through disobedience or systemic overhaul. Constructive orientations emphasize dialogical engagement, institutional reconfiguration, and incremental re-worlding within or alongside existing structures. These postures appeared less as opposites than as oscillations, suggesting that decolonial praxis involves shifting calibrations between critique and construction.

Together, the axes reveal four porous configurations. The critical–universalist quadrant combines universal emancipation with revolutionary strategy. Classical socialism and communism exemplify this orientation: Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky envisioned worldwide liberation grounded in class struggle. Anti-imperial movements such as Maoist China and the Cuban Revolution similarly linked structural rupture to universal emancipation. Participants' unsettling narratives occasionally echoed this orientation when psychology was framed as structurally complicit and combativity articulated as ethical necessity. Yet they rarely remained fully within it, often questioning the universal categories historically embedded in revolutionary discourse.

The constructive–universalist quadrant aligns with reformist and social-democratic traditions. Welfare-state models, civil rights movements, and labor reforms share commitments to equality and human rights pursued through institutional transformation. Participants' creating narratives resonated with this orientation through participatory redesign and methodological pluralisation. However, these accounts destabilized assumptions of institutional neutrality, revealing conditional alignment: commitments to equity coexisted with skepticism toward Western-derived infrastructures of change.

The critical-pluriversal quadrant links radical rupture with ontological plurality. Decolonial thinkers argue that even Marxist universals carry colonial residues. Movements such as the Zapatistas exemplify refusal of both capitalist and standard socialist scripts in favor of autonomous lifeworlds. Participants advocating epistemic delinking or abandonment of disciplinary psychology articulated futures grounded in situated histories and epistemic sovereignty. This configuration insists liberation must be defined by those experiencing oppression, though it may complicate coalition-building across differences.

The constructive–pluriversal quadrant emphasizes building alternative worlds through relational practices rather than singular blueprints. Examples include Buen Vivir, intercultural education, cooperatives, and participatory pedagogies. Many re-worlding narratives clustered

here, foregrounding humility, coexistence, and artistic experimentation. Methodologically, these imaginaries shift from research on to research with. Participatory action research, visual storytelling, multilingual dissemination, and community accountability become ontological commitments rather than techniques. Method thus becomes the site where futures are rehearsed and rendered credible.

Across quadrants, redistribution alone appeared insufficient without epistemic and ontological repair. Participants highlighted restoration of languages, land relations, and narrative traditions fractured by colonialism. Anti-extractivism extended beyond material resources to epistemic extraction. Democracy was reconceived as relational accountability measured by solidarity and risk redistribution. What emerged was a politics of resonance: decolonial imaginaries dialogued with progressive traditions without assimilation. Dialogical futurity therefore reframes relations between decolonial and leftist projects as ongoing negotiation over ontology and strategy rather than fixed alignment. It does not prescribe a singular pathway but illuminates conditions under which coalitions remain both critical and generative. Futures appear not as neutral endpoints but as contested terrains shaped by power and affective investment.

The conceptual depth of this discussion responds to the richness of the qualitative material. Participants' narratives engaged historical legacies, institutional constraints, and aspirational horizons simultaneously. The elaborated synthesis integrates these textures into a coherent interpretive framework, drawing empirical reflections on temporality, epistemic marginality, and imagination into an account of dialogical futurity that captures critique, aspiration, and constraint as interwoven dimensions of emancipatory politics.

Conclusion

This study illustrates how decolonial futures are a dialogically structured, affectively charged representational field in which universalist and pluriversal orientations coexist in tension. By integrating SRT and CFS, the study moves beyond normative calls for "alternative futures" and provides an analytic framework for examining how such futures become socially negotiated, legitimized, and contested. Dialogical futurity therefore reframes relations between decolonial and leftist projects as ongoing struggles over temporal legitimacy rather than fixed ideological alignments. It shows that emancipatory politics is not only a question of redistribution or recognition, but of whose futures are rendered thinkable, credible, and actionable. By foregrounding futurity as a socially mediated and contested field, the framework developed here provides tools for analysing how alternative horizons emerge, gain traction, and sustain collective commitment under conditions of structural constraint.

The findings also foreground affect. Grief, rage, and love function as epistemic drivers, suggesting foresight methodologies should legitimize emotional expression as data. Politically, further research must examine how redistribution and epistemic repair can be held together without reproducing extractive logics. A limitation remains: centering academic actors leaves other movements' imaginaries underexplored, underscoring that decolonial futures are place-specific and struggle-bound. Future research could extend this framework to grassroots movements, mutual aid networks, land defenders, youth collectives, and other sites where decolonial imaginaries are enacted outside academic institutions. Such work would enable comparison between institutionalized and insurgent articulations of futurity, further testing how dialogical tensions operate across distinct political contexts.

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