the Humanitarian Leader

Coloniality and the inadequacy of localisation

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CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP

APRIL 2024

THE HUMANITARIAN LEADER:
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WORKING PAPER 044
APRIL 2024

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rakesh Karna for inspiring me to write this article, Dr Brigitte Piquard for reading and commenting on a draft, Zoe Jordan for suggesting the publication and Tim Fawcett for his support with copy editing.

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Co-editors-in-Chief (English edition): Phoebe Downing and Marian Abouzeid
Editor-in-Chief (French edition): Justine de Rouck
Production Editor: Cara Schultz
Translation: Benoit Glayre and Isaline Doucot
Layout: Diana De León
ISSN: 2653-1011 (Online)

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Abstract

This article uses coloniality as an analytical framework to critique the concept of localisation. It argues that localisation is inadequate to respond to the asymmetrical power dynamic that it seeks to dislodge. Fundamentally, this is because localisation does not account for coloniality, which is the underlying logic of colonialism embedded within the humanitarian sector. Positionality and funding are two factors that enable organisations in the 'Global North' to remain powerful even through localisation, but this article goes further to interrogate how epistemic and methodological coloniality reinforces and maintains subordination of organisations in the 'Global South.' Ironically, localisation seeks to recognise knowledge and experience from the 'local', but largely, this knowledge and experience must be produced through the methods and systems of the 'Global North'. This is self-defeating because institutions in the 'Global North' gatekeep methods and practices and perpetuate a capacity gap that prevents effective localisation.

Leadership relevance

This paper problematises the conceptualisation of localisation, an influential theory within the humanitarian sector. It does so by arguing that the power-hierarchy that localisation seeks to dislocate cannot shift until coloniality, the underlying logic of colonialism, is acknowledged and dealt with. The paper challenges the structural and foundational basis upon which humanitarian knowledge production and ways of being are founded and exposes the dominance of the 'Global North' within these systems. Using decolonial theory it disrupts dominant and mainstream positioning within the sector, debunks popular notions and raises critical questions for humanitarian leaders to confront in terms of 'international' - 'local' power relations.

Introduction

Localisation, though conceptually vague and contentious, remains influential within the international humanitarian agenda. Having gained new momentum following commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, it appeared to offer radical possibilities for addressing the power imbalance between organisations and institutions at the international level, and the local contexts where interventions take place. Localisation has been promoted for other reasons too, such as being more cost effective, but reconfiguring the power-hierarchy within the humanitarian sector remains at its core. The commitment by international donors at the WHS to divert at least 25% of direct funding towards local actors in a 'Grand Bargain' provided impetus and strengthened the prospect of localisation. Yet while there are few evaluations of localisation measures, concerns are emerging regarding its definitional ambiguity and the lack of clarity in its scope (Barbelet, 2018). Regardless, localisation continues to be presented and promoted as transformational, with limitations that are resolvable through greater clarification, commitment and implementation (Brabant and Patel, 2018; Spandler et al, 2022).

Localisation remains conceptually problematic and inadequate to shift the concentration of power from international to local.

I argue in this article that localisation remains conceptually problematic and inadequate to shift the concentration of power from international to local. This is because localisation does not address coloniality, the underlying logic of colonialism, which is embedded in the humanitarian sector and integral to the very power imbalance that localisation seeks to address. I will define coloniality and use it as an analytical framework to explain the limitations of localisation. This article is largely conceptual and theoretical with examples drawn only from existing literature to pursue the line of argument. Nonetheless, this conceptual analysis is important. Firstly, it exposes structural barriers to localisation that have been insufficiently considered in the literature and thereby advances from problematising the concept to understanding underlying factors stymieing it. Secondly, it points to its self-defeating nature of purporting to shift power while in effect maintaining and reinforcing a hierarchy. Recognising that the humanitarian sector is vast, my analysis here will mainly focus on the role of INGOs in localisation.

Decolonisation, which involves de-linking from coloniality and re-existence, should be the obvious recommendation to address the issues I raise here. However, I am hesitant to simplistically advocate for it because decolonisation goes far beyond the elimination of coloniality, and what that means for the international humanitarian and development sector requires substantial further thought. Moreover, decolonisation is a process, a movement that has to be developed from the bottom up rather than theorised and imposed as an academic or policy recommendation. I will argue that recognising and removing coloniality is a critical starting point to realise even the most basic outcomes of localisation.

Positionality is a crucial concept in decoloniality and mine is one tainted by coloniality. I am Sri Lankan in origin from a marginalised community, but I have been educated in the language and institutions of my former coloniser and I work in the academy, which was complicit in the colonial project (Bhambra et al, 2018). I have spent close to two decades working for and with INGOs, including in humanitarian crises, and even though hesitant to identify as an international actor, I could not claim to be part of the local or national contexts. This is partly the contention of being a migrant and reflecting 'hybridity' in both country of origin and residence. My background is primarily in human rights, though now as part of an academic centre specialising in humanitarian action, I am engaging and teaching on it. This positioning allows me to identify and recognise coloniality within the sector and I see this article as an intervention into the many conversations on decolonisation taking place within this space.

I am conscious of the immense challenges facing the humanitarian sector at the time of writing. The undermining of international humanitarian law in relation to the war on Gaza, the brazen targeting of aid workers, and the withdrawal of humanitarian funds from the UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) is straining the sector like never before. Coloniality is arguably also one of the major factors contributing to the present challenges in the humanitarian sector, especially to claims of 'double-standards' (Callaghan et al, 2023) and my hope is that the issues raised here can help to strengthen the sector rather than attempt to destabilise it.

I begin the article with a brief clarification on language, I proceed to assess limitations of localisation and then develop a conceptual framework on coloniality. I then use this framework to critique localisation before concluding with some analysis on what de-linking, if not decolonising, can offer the sector.

Terminology

Though seen as a considerable improvement from the language of 'first world' and 'third world;' 'Global North' and 'Global South' are still hugely problematic categories that I wish to deconstruct before having to use them in this article. Marnia Tlostanova (2011) provides a powerful critique of this binary categorisation, which she states essentialises and is racially, religiously and culturally

reductionist. She argues the divide is "produced by the north" and presents the south as "poor, suffering, and downtrodden, fixing its essentialised place as a victim which can be destroyed if its resistance becomes too violent and dangerous" (Tlostanova, 2011, p7). As I will explain below, the humanitarian sector has been complicit in maintaining this negative and vulnerable image of the Global South without sufficiently challenging the position of the Global North in constructing, naming and framing the 'other'.

Similar criticism on the grounds of binary framing has been applied to the terms 'international' and 'local' (Roepstorff, 2022). The naming of 'local' itself stems from within this power-hierarchy and questions have been raised as to who defines or frames the local (Baguios et al, 2022). Not only does this framing fail to sufficiently account for categories in between, such as national level actors, it also misses the crossovers between and within categories. In my own research on post-conflict justice in Sri Lanka, I have noted the hazy boundaries between local, national and international—where some international actors were involved in local projects; locals and nationals worked within the international, and diaspora groups based outside of the country had immense influence on local politics. Additionally, the 'local' does not operate with the sense of homogeneity that the framing suggests and the vagueness of the role of national vis-à-vis local can be damaging, especially in repressive contexts and where 'local' may constitute a minority population set against a national majority.

Scholars grappling with these issues have suggested some alternative interpretations. McGinty (2015) urges local to be thought of as a "system of beliefs and practices" that expand beyond geographical categorisation and can be loosely adopted by networks and communities. According to Baguios et al (2022), movements in the Global South see local primarily as being within the community level and extending to civil society at the national level, whereas organisations in the Global North see multiple stakeholders from national government actors to community-based organisations as local. While this may help to demystify and explain the local, the issues discussed above in relation to binary categorisation in particular, remain challenging.

In this article I use 'international' interchangeably with the 'Global North' and 'local' to denote all else, while acknowledging the discussed issues with this framing. International or 'Global North' is not necessarily a geographically or racially fixed category, it may include representation of the local, but it must be recognised for its particular historical, cultural and racial hegemonic situatedness.

Understanding and identifying coloniality

Coloniality is the underlying logic of colonialism (Quijano, 2007) that is continued through "colonial systems and technologies of domination into the present" (Rutazibwa, 2018). Anibal Quijano exceptionalises 15th century Eurocentric colonialism from other forms of colonialism because it was defined by the privileging of race through capitalism and modernity. According to Quijano (2000), with this Eurocentric, capitalist, colonial world power structure came a specific historical experience of modernity founded on European ideals of rationality. "The logic of coloniality is deep-seated and always masked by the rhetoric of modernity, whether that rhetoric claims to civilize the barbarians or spread democracy when the barbarians didn't elect nor ask" (Mignolo, 2020, p6). Decolonial scholars then suggest that despite not acting as coloniser anymore, Eurocentric/Western powers maintain hierarchical relations of "exploitation and domination" over the 'other', who are primarily colonised peoples, through racial and capital hegemony (Grosfoguel, 2007).

Like colonialism, coloniality presents the world in binaries: 'coloniser – colonised', 'civilised – savage', 'enlightened – barbaric', 'light – dark', 'saviour – victim.' As colonial powers did previously, coloniality now also masquerades as necessary, beneficial, well-intentioned, and transformative—when in fact it is disempowering, damaging and destructive.

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That coloniality exists and thrives within the humanitarian sector is no surprise considering its own historical association with colonialism. That the logic of development or human progress was derived from the civilisation mission (Aspergren, 2009; Williams and Young, 2009) and the vision of what this progress, growth and advancement entails in relation to modernity (the "other side of the coin" of coloniality (Quijano, 2009)), is now well established in scholarly work (Duffield and Hewitt, 2009). In exploring the work of Williams and Young, Duffield and Hewitt illustrate the continuities in the language of the civilisation mission reconfigured "into contemporary ideas on managing and imposing development and social change, 'at a distance' through conditionality and the role and intervention of outside agencies, professional bodies and non-state actors" (2009, p6). The development of humanitarian action through colonialism and its failure to critique or protect from colonial atrocities is also well documented (Pringle, 2017). Increasingly synonymous

with 'white saviourism' and accused of producing and securing 'whiteness' (Pallister and Wilkins, 2021), the humanitarian field also enables the Global North to maintain domination and exclusion under the pretext of ethics of care (Reopstorff, 2020).

INGOs working in this field have not been spared this critique. They stand accused of perpetuating colonial legacies and western dominance through the guise of independence and neutrality. Wright (2012, p123) quotes Wallace (2014), who refers to NGOs as "trojan horses for global neo-liberalism" questioning their legitimacy and accountability due to their dependence on donor funding, much of which is from states and "propagators of western hegemony" through bureaucratisation, technocratisation, homogenisation, and corporatisation.

Coloniality offers a vital critical lens, but must not be seen as 'perfected'. Scholars have pointed to its own essentialising capacity in its reference to Eurocentrism or the West, which includes settler-colonial states such as the United States, Australia and New Zealand. The historical experience from which coloniality as a concept has been derived is not synonymous with all colonised countries. Additionally, though decolonial scholars have discussed in some detail the positioning of Russia and China, they remain limited considering the more recent political and economic prowess of both countries. In spite of these arguments, coloniality offers a framework to understand imbalance in global power-dynamics, particularly the difficulty in dislocating or shifting this power. As Meera Sabratnam (2017, p4) states, coloniality explains how failings reoccur "because they are constituted through structural relations of colonial differences which intimately shape their conception, operation and effect". This is especially important in relation to knowledge production, which I will focus on in more detail in relation to the humanitarian sector.

Localisation

Though conceptualised in relation to culture, the work of Homi Bhabha is useful to understanding localisation. Bhaba (1994) refers to the 'third-space' as 'in-between' sites of negotiation and contestation where new forms of identity are produced in colonised contexts. Such 'hybrid' 'third-spaces', where identity and cultures become mixed, are very familiar in the international humanitarian and development sector in which INGOs operate. These have increasingly become sites where locals and nationals traverse into international, at times returning to the local; or where internationals spend long enough to immerse into the local; 'mimicry' of internationals is also visible in some locals and nationals.

Localisation is in part a response to the sector's association with the legacy of colonialism. In extending power, autonomy, funding, responses, etc, to the 'local', the hope has been to thin out the asymmetrical power structure and destabilise the centre-periphery dichotomy. I posit that localisation is a product of the 'third-space' and the 'hybridity' that has developed within INGOs in the humanitarian and development field, which is important to recognise as it acknowledges that 'locals' were never simply passive recipients of international aid but 'resisted' their hegemony and attempted to shape outcomes for themselves.

Existing critiques of localisation centre around the following arguments: its lack of clear definition; its binary framing; problems in the categorisation of local and international; and concerns regarding its scope, implementation and evaluation (Barbelet, 2018; Baguios et al, 2021; Fast, 2017). There is also important work uncovering the power-imbalance within it (Baguios et al, 2021; Barbelet, 2018; Fast, 2017; Piquard, 2021; Roepstorff, 2019), including discussing colonial legacies and coloniality (Roepstorff, 2019; Zadeh-Cummins, 2022). I want to expand and build upon Roepstorff's (2019) analysis of coloniality within the binary framing of international versus local in the conceptualisation of localisation. Through a broader coloniality lens I will explore beyond the binary and posit that localisation is inadequate to significantly shift the power dynamics within the humanitarian sector because it is fundamentally tainted in coloniality. It is not simply at "risk" of "perpetuating the very issues it wants to address", (Roepstorff, 2019, p1) but is in fact self-defeating.

Positionality: power and finance

My starting point is with what decolonial scholars like Walter Mignolo refer to as the "locus of enunciation", or the position from which one speaks. Mignolo (2009) argues that while this positioning from which edicts are made may be presented as neutral or independent, it is often culturally and geo-politically situated. Even if we are to see localisation as emerging out of a 'third space', its locus of enunciation is in the Global North. There is an underlying and overt power structure that comes with this positioning.

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The historical and structural link between the humanitarian sector, colonialism and coloniality is what underlies localisation. This includes issues such as the missionary zeal of humanitarians that extended to 'saving' natives in colonised contexts from their own 'barbaric,' 'savage' beliefs, practices and forms of existence, while failing to critique the exploitations, pillaging, dehumanisation, and destruction of the coloniser, including when countries

sought and gained independence (Baughan, 2020). What is the role of colonialism in the conflicts and crises that humanitarian actors from the Global North intervene and assist in? Inherent is also the role of aid; the coloniality and politics of it. What is the relationship between humanitarian aid and the foreign policy of 'western' states? What is the politics of this 'humanitarianism' of aid and assistance, especially when it corresponds with the failure by some international actors to uphold the basic laws and norms that protect lives? These are conversations that take place at different levels within the humanitarian sector but not necessarily in relation to localisation. To conceive of localisation as removed from these questions, without dealing with the foundational factors that produced the unequal power structure it seeks to address, is superficial and problematic.

The more overt consequences of localisation's locus of enunciation being in the Global North is that internationals then set the terms and define and dictate the concept. This is reflected in the varying definitions of localisation. Though fundamentally aiming to centre local actors in the humanitarian process (Geoffroy, Grunewald and Ní Chéilleachair, 2017), the lack of a uniform definition is a clear problem with localisation.

The definitions of localisation by major donors vary significantly. USAID, for example, defines it as "internal reforms, actions, and behavior changes" that seek to put local actors "in the lead, strengthens local systems, and is responsive to local communities" (USAID, n.d.). Europe aid refers to "empowering local responders in affected countries to lead and deliver humanitarian aid" (European Commission, n.d.). They stress strengthening capacity and resources to meet this aim sustainably. The global network of humanitarian NGOs, ICVA, defines localisation as the "process through which a diverse range of humanitarian actors are attempting, each in their own way, to ensure local and national actors are better engaged in the planning, delivery and accountability of humanitarian action, while still ensuring humanitarian needs can be met swiftly, effectively and in a principled manner" (ICVA, 2019).

Whether it be "empowering", "putting in the lead" or "better engaging" local actors, these definitions clearly connote who is in control of the process. While it may be demanded from the bottom-up, its framing is very much as an offering from the top-down, with actors in the Global North setting the criteria and deciding on how and when to enable. Pardy et al (2022) alludes to this in their references to the "grand silencing" which occurred with the onset of the Grand Bargain, signed by 30 participants, all from the Global North, after a large and effective consultation at the World Humanitarian Summit of around 23,000 participants, many from the Global South.

Though some have argued that the Global North needs to take the initiative to account for their historic role in causing the power imbalance, in its current shape localisation is at the mercy of actors in the Global North, who with the same logic of the colonial masters, can continue to maintain the subjugation or selectively empower local actors within the humanitarian sector.

The power of finance is another critical factor. The early momentum on commitments by international donors and organisations, including in funding, appears to be declining. According to the 2023 Global Humanitarian Assistance report, international assistance directly provided to national and local actors was a paltry 1.6%, which is less than the 2.3% it was in 2016, when the Grand Bargain was made. On the other hand, funding channelled to multilateral organisations rose from 52% to 61% in 2023. This regression in funding commitment suggests that localisation is at threat of offering little more than empty promises, but even if the funding commitment is met, actors in the Global North will still be in a dominant position over those of the South.

Decolonial scholars have successfully established the link between capital and race within coloniality. Quijano (2000) demonstrated this link is the logic that enabled exploitation and pillage to operate through racism and slavery in an unprecedented way to allow for European colonial dominance (Quijano, 2000). Even a 25% shift in funds to local actors cannot sufficiently reconfigure structures and flows of funding within the humanitarian sector, resulting in the preservation of coloniality.

Coloniality of being and knowledge

Ontological coloniality explains how colonial damage to ways of being continues in the present day (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). This includes, but is not limited to, forms of identity, cultures, traditions, ways of life, world views and spirituality. Native and indigenous ways of existence were destroyed while colonial ways of being were presented, imposed and made attractive as 'civilised,' 'superior' or 'enlightened'. Decolonial thinkers argue that this logic remains in place through ontological coloniality that is proliferated by modernity, globalisation and development. This puts into question what constitutes a dignified, progressive, secure existence; is it based on dominant perspectives from one part of the world, rather than having been developed through a plurality of ways of being. Within the humanitarian sector, this becomes evident in what scholars refer to as "industrial white saviourism" and the ethics of how suffering is portrayed, often in formerly colonised countries (Calain, 2013; Kherbaoui & Aronson, 2022). Sylvia Wynter (1996) and Mignolo (2009) both question the racial, gender, cultural and historical construction of the term 'human', which purports to be universal, but originated to protect only specific groups. Pallister-Wilkins (2021, p98) state that this not only allows white supremacy in humanitarianism to go "unchallenged but also to thrive". Though not specifically using the language, more recently media articles have alluded to ontological coloniality within the humanitarian sector in how 'victims' or 'beneficiaries' are portrayed and fostered through the humanitarian responses of international actors (Jayawickrama, 2018; Gathara, 2020).

Interestingly, the reported reasons for hesitation on the part of internationals to implement localisation exemplifies coloniality. These include perceptions of local actors as lacking in accountability and unable to reliably uphold humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality (Baguios et al, 2021). This is despite internationals having been criticised for lacking accountability to local communities and their own categories of beneficiaries (Baguios et al, 2021). Similarly, assertions that locals are unable to be neutral or impartial could also be made against internationals who depend on and are swayed by the politics of governmental aid. However, through framing locals as 'lacking' (as colonisers once did), internationals are able to provide continuing justification to 'civilise' 'modernise' and 'develop' them.

In response to this, 'ways of being' are construed by some as an important dimension of localisation, which argues for humanitarian responses to be true to local forms of existence rather than represent an outsider, imposed version (Baguios et al, 2021). There is, however, very limited reference to this aspect of localisation within the literature in the humanitarian sector. Additionally, it is questionable how local ways of being can develop and flourish in the sector when the foundational structures, systems, and processes remain not only partial to, but prioritise western, modern, colonial ways of being.

It is questionable how local ways of being can develop and flourish in the sector when the foundational structures, systems, and processes remain not only partial to, but prioritise western, modern, colonial ways of being.

These ways of being stem from what we believe and know about our existence and are closely tied with knowledge production. Quijano (2007) illustrates how former colonial powers systematically evaluated native knowledge and forms of knowing, appropriated what they found useful and then successively derided, discarded or destroyed that which could not advance their colonial project. Mignolo (2009) refers to a duality of "destitution" of local knowledge and "constitution" of external, western, European, rational thought and knowledge, which Quijano (2007) explains was presented with a sense of "totality", as perfect or complete.

Grosfoguel (2011, p5) summarises the coloniality of knowledge as "the hegemonic Eurocentric paradigms that have informed western philosophy and sciences in the 'modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system' for the last 500 hundred years assume a universalistic, neutral, objective point of view". In the humanitarian sector this is (re)produced through emphasis on 'authoritative', 'credible', 'acceptable', 'reliable' or even 'universal' knowledge and methods which INGOs often stake claim to over local organisations.

Let me explore this further on two accounts: what constitutes knowledge and how it is produced. Knowledge within the humanitarian sector becomes necessary to understand, plan, prepare and respond to crisis, and to review, assess and evaluate these responses.

Academics and researchers have already raised the political, cultural and power positioning in what can be construed as knowledge within the humanitarian sector (Piquard, 2021; Baguios et al, 2021). Piquard (2021, p87) argues that local knowledge in humanitarian contexts is mainly seen as "'tacit': non-formalised and practical, intuitive, resident within behaviours and perceptions of individuals or local organisations". Consequently, local knowledge is often "put aside or confined to specific roles" (Humanitarian Action Group et al, 2021). This could, for example be to provide contextual, situational knowledge. Even so, the interpretation, sense making and utilisation of this knowledge in the humanitarian context, relies on internationally dominant systems, tools and frameworks. Information derived from the local often gets interpreted and packaged into terminology and frameworks used within the international that are less familiar to the local.

Additionally, international actors often maintain their prominence as 'experts,' 'specialists' and providers of 'technical' knowledge that is derived from their particular international perspective and understanding of laws and norms. Such positionality, which commands specialised knowledge that is seen to be beyond the reach of locals, in addition to the control of the coding, framing and interpretation of knowledge produced at the local level, enables internationals to stay on top of the knowledge hierarchy.

This superiority relies on colonial binary constructs of 'civilised' and 'enlightened' as against 'primitive' and 'savage', as well as on the linear presentation of time—with Europe seen to 'progress' from the 'dark ages' to 'enlightenment', therefore necessitating the civilisation mission through colonialism (Quijano, 2007).

Moreover, this power-hierarchy is validated through claims that the methods of knowledge production of the Global North are superior, or even perfected. The standards, norms, principles, practices, tools, and processes within the humanitarian sector are purportedly derived through 'globally' tried and tested methods that provide for their credibility, reliability, and authority. That these research and standard producing methods largely originate from the Global North, with the particular cultural, historical, and ideological positioning that entails, are veiled in claims of their neutrality, universality and internationally acceptability. Alternative methods, such as, for example, forms of oral transmission or interpretations of natural or other phenomenon that have acted as early warning triggers and saved communities from disasters, remain sidelined by organisations within the Global North (HAG

et al, 2021)—often seen as unreliable or failing to meet the necessary evidence base. HAG et al (2021) record numerous examples of local knowledge that is of critical value to the humanitarian sector, but which at best is seen as 'an object' that may be used in an advisory capacity but not beyond.

Although some progress is being made towards documenting and utilising local knowledge there is little discussion within the debates on the need to localise modes of interpretation and analysis and methods of knowing. Even as participatory forms of research, monitoring and evaluation gain ground they continue to operate within the methods, systems, tools and approaches that are western and Eurocentric but which are presented as 'global' and 'authoritative'.

Coloniality of knowledge and the perpetual capacity gap

One of the reasons organisations in the Global North provide for the delays in advancing localisation is the lack of preparedness of local actors to meet 'global standards'. In a global system there is no doubt that common principles and standards are necessary, and this article does not deny that. Rather it challenges the neutral/universal derivation of 'global/international' and questions the political, economic, and cultural power that underlines the setting of these standards. It is possible to argue that a few locals (representationally and ideationally) were part of the principle setting through third spaces. However, a coloniality framework enables us to understand how the underlying power imbalance and control of systems and methods by the Global North eventually maintains its superiority and domination of knowledge, standards and processes, even where they may be produced or influenced by the local.

The idea of localisation can then be seen as dependent on standards derived from, produced by and developed with the knowledge and understanding of the dominant power, creating a system (akin to the civilisation mission), that allows the Global South to aspire to localised control and influence that can never be fully attained.

This produces and maintains a capacity gap that again reinforces the dominance of actors in the Global North. Barbelet (2018) explains that in spite of the lack of clear definition of 'local' and 'capacity', the latter has become a central issue. While she argues that capacity must be understood as an actor's contribution to alleviating suffering rather than their ability to manage resources and report on actions, international humanitarian organisations still consider it a technical exercise (Barbelet, 2018). This is partly because international actors prioritise certain capacities, without questioning the assumptions and criteria needed for alleviating suffering rather than managing resources, which Barbelet (2018) attributes to the "power-dynamics and neo-colonial undertones" that current capacity assessment processes entail. This, I would contend relates to my argument that coloniality within localisation provides for a perpetual capacity gap that self-defeats its aim of shifting power to the local. This supposed knowledge gap has to be filled by 'trainings', 'took-kits' and 'technical capacity development' by INGOs which enable them to cement a position of authority and indispensability in knowledge production.

Even though evidence suggests that local actors are often first at the scene of a crisis and respond adequately to meet people's needs, INGOs see locals, as colonisers did, to be lacking.

'Capacity building' has for decades been a central component of INGO programs in the Global South, which involves 'developing', 'building' and 'strengthening' the capacity of local actors. Even though evidence suggests that local actors are often first at the scene of a crisis and respond adequately to meet people's needs, INGOs see locals, as colonisers did, to be lacking. Local actors' capacity is deemed poor and needing strengthening purely to meet criteria set by the Global North—be it complying with international norms and standards or reporting to international donors. Indeed, even actors in the Global North have to adhere to these standards, but my argument is that both the standards and criteria measuring how they are met are largely top-down. OXFAM (2023) has recently attempted to rebalance this relationship by referring to capacity sharing, nevertheless, as long as local actors have to work within the epistemic and methodological tools and approaches of the Global North, they will always be wanting. As long as knowledge and methods of knowledge production remain within the control of Global North, those in the south will be permanently 'catching-up' and unable to gain genuine equality.

Conclusion

Without identifying and removing coloniality, localisation can only become another tool by which international actors can scrutinise, measure, limit, restrain, and control local actors and maintain their hegemony within the humanitarian sector. De-linking, dis-obeying and re-existence or decoloniality is critical for the humanitarian sector before and above localisation. This would involve firstly, identifying the sector's historical association with colonialism and present day coloniality and systematically removing them. It also involves shifting the locus of enunciation away from the Global North and enabling

re-existence and ways of being to develop and flourish. Decoloniality has a very particular interpretation, it is not a euphemism for diversity or inclusivity. It encompasses gender, racism and varying forms of discrimination. Decoloniality is not a program or a policy that international organisations can create and commit to, it is a process that has to be driven from the local. However, by its very nature coloniality is intangible and less visible. Moreover, colonialism, coloniality and modernity have for centuries implanted their superiority in our thinking and assumptions in ways that many of us may not even be aware of and will find difficult to disentangle. Nevertheless, decoloniality is occurring through acts of resistance, including the push by local actors to localise, which can be encouraged, supported and built-on.

De-linking, dis-obeying and re-existence or decoloniality is critical for the humanitarian sector before and above localisation.

Genuine decoloniality would result in a recentring of power, which would require a re-existence for international actors as well. As international institutions and organisations have been built and exist on coloniality, removing it would disrupt their very being. This is a major predicament for international actors and possibly why there is such reluctance to consider decoloniality. It exceeds having to transfer control, management, and decision making to the Global South and includes having to fundamentally develop new ways of knowing and being; including methods, systems, processes and tools that don't fit into their 'global', 'international' accepted models. In practice, this would mean unlearning and relearning, where the capacity building of the Global North is firstly built with knowledge and methods from the South so sharing can take place. Decoloniality does not require discarding the methods, tools, and practices of the Global North but dislocating the powerful position they hold and reconfiguring them with 'othered' 'marginalised' knowledge and ways of being.

This is a seismic shift for the humanitarian sector and one that would require significant internal introspection and commitment to deep structural changes that are above and beyond localisation. Unless radical and transformative change that addresses and redresses the inequality and injustice within the humanitarian sector occurs, this shift is only likely to take place at a superficial level.

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This publication is made possible with the generous support of the American people through
the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility
of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.