

Imperial Aftershocks: Deficient Decolonization and the Political Origins of the Climate Crisis

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Abstract:

My presentation argues that the climate crisis is not simply the unintended consequence of industrial modernity, but the outcome of a global order forged through conquest, colonialism, and imperial capitalism — a geopolitical tradition that remains structurally embedded in today's global institutions. Drawing on critical environmental history, world-systems theory, and contemporary climate justice scholarship, it traces how the failure of mid-20th century decolonization to fundamentally restructure global economic and political relations laid the groundwork for today's ecological breakdown.

Decolonization in the 1950s–1970s promised not only national independence but a just, egalitarian international order — a promise embodied in projects like the Non-Aligned Movement, the New International Economic Order (NIEO), and the demand for permanent sovereignty over natural resources. Yet these efforts were systematically undermined by Cold War geopolitics, U.S. hegemony, and neoliberal restructuring via institutions like the IMF and World Bank.

Today, the consequences are visible in the grossly unequal distribution of emissions, environmental degradation, and climate vulnerability between the Global North and South — patterns that mirror colonial extraction and ecological dispossession. The paper argues that the climate crisis cannot be addressed through technocratic fixes or carbon accounting alone, but requires a revival of worldmaking projects rooted in anti-colonial solidarity, material reparations, and the democratization of global governance.

Drawing lessons from past struggles and recent openings, including the emergence of BRICS+ and renewed debates over climate reparations, this study positions the climate crisis within a longer history of imperial domination and collective resistance. It calls for a critical reckoning with the unfinished project of decolonization as an indispensable pathway toward climate justice and global ecological repair.