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Review Article

Charting New Frontiers: The Need for Decolonial Governance in Post-Human Universities

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Abstract: This theoretical paper examines how decolonial governance frameworks can transform leadership and institutional cultures within post-human universities to promote socially just and sustainable futures. As artificial intelligence (AI) and automation become increasingly integrated into higher education, ranging from decision-making systems to pedagogical design, there is an escalating risk that digital infrastructures will perpetuate colonial hierarchies and marginalise non-dominant epistemologies. Drawing upon critical literature, the paper offers a theory-driven synthesis centred on three interrelated themes: the reproduction of colonial power through algorithmic and data systems; the ethical and relational praxis of decolonial leadership; and the alignment of governance structures with pluralistic, sustainable development goals. Rather than treating AI as ideologically neutral, the analysis positions it as a site of both exclusion and potential, depending on how governance frameworks are conceptualised and enacted. The study argues that transformative leadership must prioritise contextual ethics, epistemic justice, and inclusive participation in both human and digital domains. Thus, by embedding decolonial values into the heart of institutional governance, post-human universities can move beyond compliance-driven models towards more equitable, reflexive, and contextually grounded systems. The paper concludes with a call for deeper theorisation and empirical investigation into how decolonial governance can be realised in digitally mediated academic spaces.

Keywords: Decolonial governance, post-human universities, sustainable development, AI integration, decolonial leadership.

1. Introduction

The contemporary university is undergoing a structural transformation, driven not solely by policy reforms or funding shifts but increasingly by the rise of automation, algorithmic decision-making, and data-driven management systems (Ross et al., 2017). Across many higher education institutions, artificial intelligence and related technologies are shaping how admissions are determined, how students are assessed, and how institutional performance is measured (Knox, 2020). What once depended on human deliberation and collegial consensus is now being gradually supplanted by machine-led systems that claim to offer efficiency, predictive precision, and impartiality. In practice, however, this digital shift often prioritises managerial rationality over pedagogical judgement and operational convenience over critical engagement (Selwyn, 2019). Within this shifting terrain, many universities are adopting performance dashboards, learning analytics, and risk prediction tools that reconfigure students and staff into data subjects, audited, tracked, and sometimes disciplined through opaque algorithmic processes (Slade & Prinsloo, 2013). These developments, while framed as neutral or innovative, reflect deeper shifts in institutional ethos, where governance increasingly orbits around digital infrastructures and techno-centric values.

Yet beneath these technical shifts lies a more enduring structure of governance that has remained largely intact: one that is historically anchored in colonial patterns of administration, decision-making, and knowledge legitimation. Despite rhetorical commitments to transformation, many universities, especially in the Global South, continue to mirror Eurocentric hierarchies in curriculum

content, research priorities, and leadership configurations (Heleta, 2016; Joseph-Mbembe, 2016). Governance practices often concentrate power in executive councils, bureaucratic committees, and external advisory boards that remain disconnected from the lived realities of students, academics, and local communities. These arrangements favour compliance, surveillance, and managerialism over collective deliberation and intellectual plurality (Le Grange et al., 2020). Indigenous knowledge systems, grassroots pedagogies, and relational ethics are frequently relegated to the periphery, if acknowledged at all. Even institutional reform efforts tend to operate within frameworks defined by colonial legacies, reproducing exclusions while appearing progressive on the surface. These dynamics raise questions not only about representation but also about the epistemic and ethical foundations of university governance in the twenty-first century.

As technologies evolve and post-human conditions become increasingly apparent, characterised by the entanglement of human, machine, and ecological actors, the question of governance assumes new urgency. The post-human university is not merely a digitised iteration of its traditional form; it constitutes a complex assemblage wherein decisions are often shaped through networks of code, algorithms, and predictive models that operate beyond the reach of conventional accountability mechanisms (Emejulu & McGregor, 2019). These systems, far from being ideologically neutral, embed assumptions regarding efficiency, control, and order that often align with colonial administrative logics. The risk, therefore, extends beyond the automation of education to encompass the automation of exclusion and inequality. Absent critical intervention, the digital university risks entrenching systemic injustices within its very operations, normalising them under the guise of innovation and progress. In this context, decolonial thought presents more than mere critique; it offers a framework for reconceiving governance as ethical, participatory, and rooted in plural ways of knowing. Leadership, under such a vision, transitions from command and control to care, reciprocity, and shared responsibility (Sundberg, 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

Engaging with these tensions, this work contributes to the discourse not through a technological or policy lens, but through the ethical and political endeavour of rethinking what it means to govern a university amid digital saturation and historical reckoning. The significance lies in resisting the seductive allure of technological determinism and instead prioritising human dignity, epistemic justice, and sustainable transformation at the core of institutional leadership. This necessitates confronting the ways in which technological infrastructures intersect with entrenched colonial modes of power and exploring alternative leadership paradigms that are accountable to both people and place. Rather than positioning automation as an inevitable trajectory, there is a pressing need to interrogate its values, question its metrics, and recover the capacity of universities to function as transformative social institutions. Such a shift requires not merely the addition of decolonial content to curricula but the embedding of decolonial values within the architecture of governance itself, values that honour lived experience, community relevance, and the inseparability of ecological, cultural, and intellectual sustainability. To address this gap, the paper explicitly identifies the issue as the persistence of colonial logics within emerging digital governance systems in universities, despite assertions of innovation and neutrality. Consequently, the aim of the study is to develop a decolonial governance framework for post-human universities that repositions leadership, technology, and sustainability within an ethical, context-responsive, and epistemically just paradigm.

The discussion unfolds across several interconnected sections. The conceptual grounding elucidates key terms and traditions, tracing the evolution of decolonial governance and situating it within the changing context of post-human institutions. A synthesis of interdisciplinary literature constitutes the methodological approach, structured through typologies that illuminate various leadership and governance models. Three thematic concerns follow: the continuity of colonial logics within automated systems; the potential of decolonial leadership to reclaim ethics and participation; and the implications of these shifts for sustainable development in higher education. The concluding section

reflects on the pathways available to universities that endeavour to transcend tokenism and pursue deep, system-wide transformation rooted in justice, care, and collective imagination.

2. Conceptual Framing

The concept of *the post-human university* emerges from the growing recognition that the boundaries between human and non-human actors within higher education are becoming increasingly porous, contested, and technologically entangled (Omodan, 2023). In contrast to the modernist conception of the university as a human-centred institution devoted to rational inquiry and disciplinary autonomy, the post-human university is informed by hybrid relations involving data infrastructures, algorithmic logics, and machine-based agents, which influence core institutional functions (Bayne, 2018; Jandrić et al., 2024). These assemblages are not peripheral but central to academic life, impacting processes such as admissions, performance monitoring, funding allocation, and even pedagogical design (Kitchin, 2014). As Knox (2019) argues, this transformation signals a departure from the Enlightenment university and an evolution towards a form of governance increasingly guided by data imaginaries and algorithmic foresight. In such contexts, humans, whether educators, students, or administrators, are no longer the sole agents of decision-making but function within a complex web of socio-technical influences. The post-human university, therefore, is not merely a futuristic concept but a present and evolving institutional reality that necessitates fresh critical engagement.

Decolonial governance, in contrast to prevailing institutional models, advocates for the dismantling of inherited colonial logics that continue to shape how universities define authority, manage knowledge, and allocate resources. This framework does not merely seek to diversify representation but fundamentally re-evaluates the foundations of governance to incorporate indigenous worldviews, relational accountability, and plural epistemologies (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Zembylas, 2018). Central to decolonial governance is the critique of epistemic dominance: the prioritisation of Eurocentric knowledge systems to the detriment of local, embodied, and communal ways of knowing (Chilisa, 2017). As Naidoo (2021) notes, universities must progress beyond superficial reforms towards an ontological shift that places power and ownership of knowledge in the hands of those historically marginalised. Leadership, through this lens, is no longer about control or hierarchical oversight but instead about enabling collective agency, ethical stewardship, and meaningful dialogue between diverse knowledge systems. This perspective encourages institutional leaders to transcend compliance metrics and consider governance as a domain of restorative justice and historical accountability.

The connection between governance and sustainable development within the university context is not merely strategic but profoundly ethical. Sustainable development, often framed through environmental or economic lenses, must also encompass epistemic and institutional sustainability, ensuring that universities remain sites of inclusive, future-oriented knowledge production (Loorbach & Wittmayer, 2024). As highlighted by Marginson (2016), equitable governance in higher education is essential for fostering innovation, maintaining institutional legitimacy, and strengthening the university's public purpose. Decolonial governance, when aligned with sustainability goals, positions universities to address global challenges in ways that honour local relevance, environmental interdependence, and social justice. In this sense, governance becomes a transformative process, one that confronts the structural conditions enabling inequality and cultivates long-term resilience through pluralistic participation and ethical foresight (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015). This approach necessitates not only new leadership capacities but also institutional designs that are responsive to complexity, cultural diversity, and planetary constraints.

Several critical theories underpin the framework of this paper, offering the conceptual scaffolding to understand how power, knowledge, and technology intersect in university governance. Drawing on several frameworks enables the paper to capture the multidimensional interactions between technology, power, and epistemic justice, dimensions that would remain obscured under a single-

theory model. This plural theoretical base strengthens the conceptual coherence of the analysis and aligns with the decolonial commitment to epistemic plurality. Decoloniality, as conceived by Maldonado-Torres (2007) and expanded through African and Latin American scholarship, serves as the primary theoretical lens, offering a critique of modernity/coloniality and proposing delinking from hegemonic systems of knowledge. Post-humanism, particularly in the work of Braidotti (2013), draws attention to the entanglement of human and non-human agents in contemporary institutions, disrupting anthropocentric assumptions that have historically underpinned academic governance. Meanwhile, critical AI ethics provides tools to examine the values, exclusions, and consequences embedded in algorithmic systems used in higher education (Crawford, 2021). Together, these frameworks allow for a multi-dimensional reading of the university as a site of epistemic struggle, technological mediation, and potential renewal. They also illuminate the urgent need to design governance structures that not only accommodate difference but are constituted through it.

This conceptual framework establishes a foundation for a theoretical inquiry into the potential operation of decolonial governance within post-human universities aimed at supporting sustainable development. Instead of perceiving technology and tradition as opposing forces, this paper posits that the future of higher education hinges on reimagining their relationship through ethical and epistemologically diverse perspectives. The typological methodology employed in the subsequent section builds upon this framework to synthesise theoretical models that exemplify or contest decolonial values in governance. In doing so, the study advances towards a thematic interpretation of emerging leadership paradigms that are adept at navigating the complexities of a digitised, pluralistic, and ecologically constrained academic landscape.

3. Methodology: Theory Synthesis Design

The use of a theoretical methodology is particularly appropriate for a study that interrogates the foundational logics of university governance in the context of decoloniality and post-humanism. The aim of this paper is not to measure variables or test hypotheses but to interrogate frameworks of meaning, power, and leadership in emerging academic formations; thus, an interpretive and critically engaged approach is warranted. Theoretical methodologies allow for the exploration of abstract yet consequential relationships between ideas, ideologies, and practices, especially in fields concerned with historical injustices, epistemic pluralism, and institutional transformation (Slife & Williams, 1995). In particular, the theory synthesis design used in this study facilitates the development of new conceptual insights by assembling diverse perspectives that are often treated in isolation. This becomes especially relevant when considering the convergence of decolonial critique and the post-human condition in higher education, where conventional empirical methods may be insufficient to grasp the complexity of shifting ontological and epistemological terrains (Bernal, 2002). Hence, this paper re-theorises university governance through a decolonial lens by synthesising existing theories to propose a novel conceptual framework appropriate for post-human universities. Instead of prioritising one aim over the others, this study integrates these objectives: it synthesises decolonial, post-human, and critical AI theories to develop a theoretically grounded framework that reimagines governance beyond colonial and technocratic paradigms.

Theory synthesis is not a mechanical exercise in literature review but a generative process that involves identifying, comparing, and integrating theoretical constructs to form a coherent analytical framework. It seeks to clarify assumptions, expand conceptual vocabularies, and map relationships among concepts drawn from multiple disciplines (Jaakkola, 2020). In this study, theory synthesis is used to bridge insights from decolonial governance, post-humanism, and critical AI ethics to explore how leadership can be re-imagined in the university context. This process involves reading across disciplinary boundaries to locate points of convergence and dissonance in how different traditions conceive of power, responsibility, and institutional legitimacy. The objective is to construct a composite understanding of governance that neither privileges Western managerial logics nor

romanticises alternative epistemologies, but rather interrogates how each may inform more sustainable and inclusive futures.

The selection of source texts for synthesis was guided by three criteria. First, the sources had to explicitly engage with theoretical or conceptual issues concerning governance, leadership, or epistemic justice in higher education. Second, preference was given to texts that offered a hybrid of theoretical and empirical insights, particularly those grounded in African, Latin American, or Global South perspectives, where decoloniality has been more richly developed (Connell, 2007). Third, texts were selected for their capacity to speak across disciplinary boundaries, including critical education studies, political philosophy, science and technology studies, and ethics. This interdisciplinary curation reflects the complex nature of the problem under study, which defies narrow disciplinary solutions. Authors such as Grosfoguel (2013), Braidotti (2013), and Sian (2019) were particularly influential in shaping the synthesis due to their work at the intersection of structural critique and institutional renewal.

To provide structure to the analysis, a thematic mode of interpretation was adopted. Themes were not predetermined but emerged inductively through iterative engagement with the literature. This approach is consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, which allows the researcher to trace patterns of meaning across diverse conceptual traditions while remaining attentive to contextual nuance and power asymmetries (Clarke & Braun, 2014). In this paper, three central themes emerged: the continuity of colonial logic in digital governance systems; the ethics and praxis of decolonial leadership; and the alignment of governance with sustainable development goals in post-human institutions. These themes form the basis of the discussion that follows and demonstrate the analytic value of theory synthesis in conceptualising new pathways for university transformation.

4. Thematic Discussion

The three core themes identified and discussed in this section are: the persistence of colonial logic within digital governance systems, the ethics and praxis of decolonial leadership, and the integration of governance with sustainable development goals in post-human institutions.

4.1 Theme 1: Continuity of colonial logic in digital systems

Digital systems in higher education are often presented as tools for progress, promising neutrality, efficiency, and enhanced learning outcomes. Yet beneath these claims lie entrenched colonial logics that are subtly reinscribed through algorithmic governance and data-driven decision-making. As Noble (2018) demonstrates in her foundational work *Algorithms of Oppression*, search engines and digital categorisation tools frequently reproduce racial and gender biases under the guise of objectivity. When these technologies are deployed in university admissions, student tracking, and academic performance analytics, they risk encoding long-standing social hierarchies into institutional operations. In such contexts, exclusion is no longer manually enforced but automatically calculated. This shift marks a dangerous turn in governance: power becomes dispersed across unseen digital systems, masking its origins while amplifying its impact.

The ideological neutrality often attributed to data-driven infrastructures obscures the fact that all technologies are designed, coded, and implemented within particular political and historical contexts. As Kwet (2019) argues, digital colonisation emerges when technological systems designed in the Global North are exported to the Global South, with little regard for local epistemologies, institutional needs, or cultural frameworks. In South African universities, for instance, imported learning management systems (LMSs) and administrative software frequently privilege Western educational norms, rendering indigenous pedagogies invisible or incompatible. The architecture of these platforms becomes a site of epistemic violence, where knowledge is filtered through standardised templates that limit plurality and local adaptation. This dynamic is not incidental but

reflective of broader colonial continuities in the global knowledge economy, where control over digital infrastructures mirrors historic forms of empire.

Empirical studies provide further evidence of how algorithmic decision-making reproduces inequality in academic contexts. A study by Prinsloo and Slade (2015) on learning analytics in distance education revealed how predictive models disproportionately flagged students from disadvantaged backgrounds as high-risk, leading to increased surveillance rather than supportive intervention. Similarly, Eubanks (2018), in her study of automated welfare systems, argued that digital profiling leads to punitive outcomes for already marginalised populations. When such models are transposed to university settings without critical scrutiny, they tend to operationalise deficit narratives around race, class, and ability. As Tufecki (2015) notes, algorithmic systems not only predict but also shape behaviour, narrowing the scope of agency for those on the margins. In effect, these digital tools become gatekeepers, embedding old hierarchies within new architectures of control.

The political economy of educational technology also plays a crucial role in sustaining digital coloniality. As Selwyn (2020) contends, many edtech platforms are owned by multinational corporations whose profit motives drive the commodification of student data. The monetisation of academic interaction, often without transparent consent, reflects a neocolonial mode of accumulation, where institutions in the Global South are data-rich but power-poor. These dynamics raise serious ethical and governance concerns, especially in contexts where the institutional capacity to critically assess and negotiate digital contracts is limited. Moreover, the reliance on black-box algorithms undermines democratic oversight, eroding the possibility of collective decision-making within universities. As Gillborn et al. (2023) observe in the field of education policy, the use of seemingly neutral metrics often legitimises decisions that reproduce systemic inequality.

The continued adoption of standardised digital platforms without local co-design or critical pedagogical reflection is not simply a matter of technical oversight; it is a structural issue rooted in the long history of colonial governance. Therefore, by embedding exclusionary logics in systems that are resistant to scrutiny, post-human universities risk perpetuating forms of epistemic and social control more efficiently than their analogue predecessors. This continuity calls for more than regulatory reform; it demands a radical rethinking of the values that underpin digital governance. Universities must confront the colonial residues within their technological infrastructures and invest in platforms that are co-created, context-sensitive, and open to epistemic multiplicity (Omodan & Marongwe, 2024). Without such shifts, the digital turn in higher education will continue to reproduce the very hierarchies it claims to transcend.

4.2 Theme 2: Ethics and praxis of decolonial leadership

Decolonial leadership in higher education presents a significant ethical challenge to the prevailing models of governance that prioritise hierarchy, efficiency, and bureaucratic rationality. Grounded in principles of relational accountability and collective well-being, this form of leadership acknowledges that knowledge, identity, and authority are both historically situated and culturally mediated (Shay, 2016). Rather than functioning through command-and-control mechanisms, decolonial leadership promotes dialogic engagement and shared decision-making. As Keet (2014) asserts, the university is not merely an administrative space but an ethical and political community that must confront its colonial past in order to lead justly in the present. Consequently, leadership in this context is less about institutional control and more about stewardship of knowledge systems, histories, and communities.

In contrast to the rise of managerialism in universities, particularly under conditions influenced by automation and performance metrics, decolonial leadership challenges the prioritisation of productivity as the primary value. Managerialist models often reduce leadership to technocratic

oversight, frequently valuing standardisation and quantifiable output over care, reflection, and justice (Peters, 2017). Such frameworks typically individualise responsibility while centralising authority in executive leadership, marginalising collective governance and indigenous knowledge holders. In response, decolonial thinkers advocate for leadership rooted in humility and plurality, recognising that no single voice or metric can adequately capture the complexity of academic life. As Joseph-Mbembe (2015) warns, the crisis of the university is also a crisis of its leadership imagination, an inability to transcend colonial structures of governance, even as the institutional language evolves.

Within decolonial practice, leadership is best comprehended not as a position but as praxis: a lived, dynamic process of engagement that unfolds through context, relationship, and reflexivity. This understanding is heavily influenced by Freirean notions of critical consciousness and bell hooks' emphasis on radical love as an educational and ethical principle (Freire, 2000; hooks, 1994). In this model, leadership emerges through how individuals and communities interact with one another, navigate conflict, and honour diverse ways of knowing. It is dialogical rather than prescriptive, grounded in mutual accountability rather than abstract policy. As Chilisa (2017) explains, African indigenous paradigms of leadership frequently prioritise communal wisdom, consensus-building, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge—principles often overlooked in formal university governance. These values counter the tendency of digital governance systems to depersonalise academic life, instead offering a framework for participatory, relational authority.

Examples of participatory governance grounded in decolonial ethics are beginning to emerge in practice, albeit unevenly. In contexts such as South Africa and Latin America, student movements have challenged inherited colonial governance by demanding more inclusive representation and substantive curriculum transformation (Badat, 2016; Hendricks, 2018). Some universities have responded with mechanisms that decentralise decision-making, engage community elders or indigenous councils, or embed traditional knowledge systems in curriculum development. These interventions demonstrate that decolonial leadership is not merely theoretical; it can be translated into institutional practice, though not without resistance. As Sian (2019) observes, institutional transformation often falters when cosmetic diversity initiatives are mistaken for structural change. Genuine decolonial governance requires more than symbolic gestures; it demands sustained engagement with power, history, and epistemology.

The ethical imperative of decolonial leadership lies in its commitment to epistemic justice, the recognition that knowledge is not neutral, and that leadership must be accountable to those whose voices have historically been silenced. This commitment challenges the technocratic drift of the post-human university, which tends to treat governance as a technical issue to be solved through algorithms or managerial strategies. Instead, decolonial leadership repositions governance as a relational and ethical task, rooted in context and guided by principles of justice, care, and plurality. The post-human turn thus becomes an opportunity not for further abstraction but for deeper grounding: a chance to reimagine what it means to lead in an academic community that is diverse, contested, and interconnected. Through this lens, leadership is not about mastering complexity but navigating it with humility and collective wisdom.

4.3 Theme 3: Governance and sustainable development

Universities play a central role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly through research, teaching, and community engagement. Yet many institutions still operate within governance frameworks that are fragmented, instrumentalist, and divorced from the ecological and social realities they claim to address. As Sterling (2013) argues, sustainability in higher education must go beyond environmental management and integrate the transformation of institutional cultures, pedagogies, and power structures. Governance becomes critical in this context, as it determines not only what priorities are set but also who participates in setting them. A university cannot genuinely claim to support sustainability if its decision-making processes remain

exclusionary or unresponsive to the needs of marginalised communities. For post-human universities, the challenge is even greater, as new technologies introduce additional complexities into the management of people, knowledge, and resources.

Digital systems and AI, if ethically integrated, hold the potential to support institutional sustainability efforts. For instance, they can optimise energy use, support predictive modelling for inclusive learning interventions, and facilitate transparent data management. However, without ethical governance, these tools can easily be co-opted into technocratic regimes that prioritise efficiency over equity. Agyeman et al. (2016) caution that sustainability without justice is merely performative, an exercise in optics rather than meaningful transformation. As Gough and Scott (2007) note, real progress depends on how institutions make decisions about the use of technology and whose values those decisions reflect. When sustainability becomes a branding exercise, often referred to as "greenwashing", it loses its emancipatory promise and becomes complicit in maintaining the status quo.

The use of AI in sustainability planning must be evaluated through a justice-oriented lens. Many predictive tools and management platforms used in higher education have been developed in corporate or Northern contexts, carrying assumptions that may not align with the priorities of institutions in the Global South. As Tsing et al. (2019) suggest, the globalisation of sustainability discourses often erases local ways of knowing, privileging solutions that are measurable but not necessarily meaningful. In the university context, this tendency leads to governance models that adopt international standards at the expense of contextually grounded practices. For example, carbon offsetting strategies or digital learning platforms may be promoted as sustainable; yet they may rely on extractive supply chains, outsourced labour, or inaccessible interfaces that exacerbate inequality. The governance of sustainability in universities must therefore grapple with the intersection of technological ambition and historical accountability.

Decolonial governance offers a framework for addressing these contradictions. Unlike managerialist models that treat sustainability as a compliance issue, decolonial approaches recognise it as a relational and ethical process rooted in community, history, and justice. As Smith (2014) notes, this perspective foregrounds epistemic diversity and challenges the colonial hierarchies embedded in mainstream environmental discourse. In practice, this means involving Indigenous leaders in sustainability planning, supporting curricula that link ecological knowledge with social struggle, and creating governance structures that are transparent, participatory, and reflexive. Such approaches not only build more just institutions but also generate locally rooted, globally relevant knowledge about sustainability that can contribute meaningfully to planetary wellbeing.

For sustainability to become more than a slogan in the post-human university, governance structures must be reimagined to include epistemic justice, ecological consciousness, and long-term institutional responsibility. Technological advancement alone cannot realise these goals. As Leal Filho et al. (2019) argue, meaningful progress depends on integrating sustainability into the core identity and governance of the university, not as an add-on but as a guiding ethos. This requires not only tools and metrics but also values, histories, and commitments. The path forward lies in governance that is ethically grounded, historically aware, and capable of embracing the plurality of knowledges that sustainability demands. In the context of the post-human university, this means resisting reductionist narratives and creating spaces where technological, ecological, and human futures are negotiated together, equitably and transparently.

5. Framework: Decolonial Governance in Posthuman Universities

Here is the diagrammatic framework illustrating the three core themes of your paper within the overarching concept of decolonial governance in post-human universities.
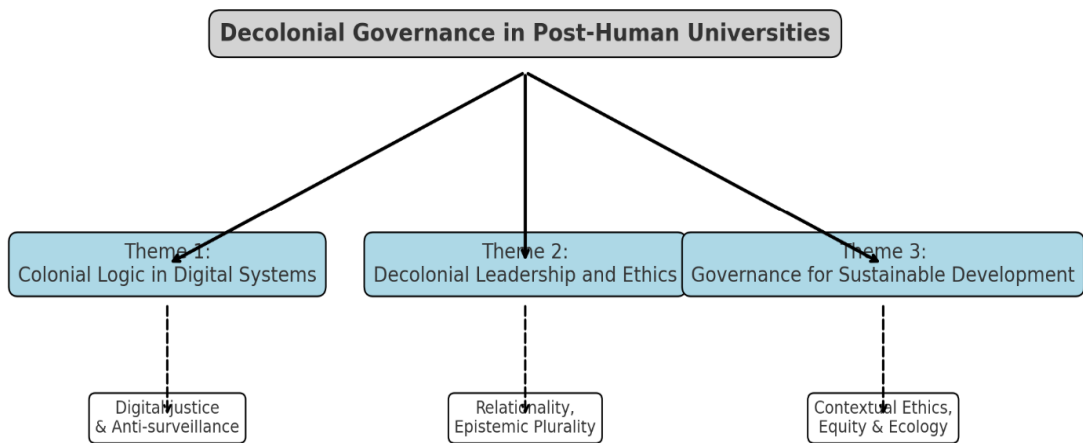
Figure 1: A decolonial governance framework for post-human universities

The framework presented captures the interrelationship among three critical themes: colonial logic in digital systems, decolonial leadership, and governance for sustainable development, all under the overarching vision of decolonial governance in post-human universities. At the centre lies the imperative to reimagine governance structures that are not only responsive to the ethical complexities of technological integration but also historically conscious and socially just. The first thematic strand highlights the reproduction of colonial hierarchies through algorithmic systems and digital infrastructures, cautioning against the unchecked adoption of data technologies that reinforce surveillance, standardisation, and exclusion, particularly in institutions across the Global South. The second theme offers a counter-narrative rooted in decolonial ethics, situating leadership as a relational, dialogic praxis guided by humility, collective wisdom, and epistemic justice—an antidote to the technocratic and managerialist tendencies that dominate university governance. The third theme links these critiques to the broader project of sustainable development, arguing that genuine sustainability must incorporate ecological, social, and epistemic dimensions that go beyond institutional branding or compliance metrics. Together, these themes present a comprehensive and relational model of governance that challenges the dominant paradigms of efficiency and control, advocating instead for institutions that are ethically grounded, culturally plural, and oriented toward long-term social transformation. From this integrated framework, it becomes clear that decolonial governance is not merely an ideological aspiration but a practical necessity for navigating the complex realities of post-human academic life. Building on this foundation, the next section explores the concrete implications of this framework for university governance, outlining strategic recommendations and institutional shifts needed to realise its transformative potential.

5.1 Implications for university governance

The framework developed in this study offers significant implications for university leaders, policymakers, and institutional planners attempting to navigate the intersecting demands of digital transformation, decolonisation, and sustainable development. First, leadership in the post-human university must transcend the narrow metrics of efficiency and accountability by embracing relational, community-based decision-making that centres on ethical responsibility and epistemic plurality. This necessitates investment in governance structures that are inclusive, participatory, and reflexive, thereby allowing for meaningful engagement across diverse knowledge systems. According to De Sousa Santos (2014), the epistemologies of the South must be recognised not as supplementary but as foundational to the reimagining of democratic institutions. University councils, senates, and administrative units should reflect the demographic, intellectual, and cultural diversity of their constituencies, ensuring that governance processes are not monopolised by managerial elites or external corporate stakeholders. This requires the training and re-skilling of

leaders to adopt facilitative rather than hierarchical leadership roles—roles that value listening, accountability, and historical awareness. Policy frameworks should also prioritise mechanisms for sustained dialogue with students, staff, and communities, particularly those historically marginalised in institutional life.

For the ethical integration of artificial intelligence under a decolonial lens, university governance must develop clear guiding principles rooted in justice, transparency, and contextual relevance. While algorithmic tools can enhance operations, their deployment must be critically scrutinised to prevent the replication of systemic bias and digital colonisation. Noble (2018) warns against the myth of algorithmic neutrality, illustrating how even well-intentioned technologies can reinforce racial and gender hierarchies. Universities should consequently establish independent ethical review boards comprising interdisciplinary expertise to oversee the procurement, deployment, and auditing of AI systems. These bodies should incorporate perspectives from indigenous, feminist, and critical race viewpoints to ensure that technologies serve inclusive rather than extractive purposes. Furthermore, AI governance policies should be transparent to all stakeholders, and data practices should be co-developed with affected communities. As Latonero (2018) suggests, ethical governance also entails resisting "data colonialism" by decentralising control over data infrastructures and investing in locally generated technologies. Rather than mimicking commercial educational technology models from the Global North, institutions should co-create digital tools aligned with local pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural needs.

Implementing decolonial governance within contemporary university systems, however, is fraught with significant challenges. One of the most pressing issues is institutional resistance, particularly from entrenched bureaucracies and executive leadership that benefit from the status quo. As Jansen (2017) observes, symbolic gestures towards transformation often conceal deep structural inertia, where superficial inclusion is substituted for genuine power-sharing. Furthermore, the predominance of neoliberal funding models, performance-based funding formulas, and international ranking systems pressures universities to conform to audit cultures that devalue slow, relational, and transformative work. Many institutional leaders lack exposure to decolonial thinking, and governance reforms frequently proceed without adequate consultation or historical contextualisation. Additionally, the complexity of integrating artificial intelligence and digital systems tends to produce a reliance on outsourced solutions that are difficult to adapt, audit, or challenge, limiting universities' capacity to assert digital sovereignty. These pressures are exacerbated in under-resourced institutions, where the urgency of survival often overshadows long-term ethical reflection or structural innovation.

Despite these barriers, there are critical enablers that can facilitate the transition towards decolonial governance in post-human universities. A growing body of critical scholarship and activism both within and beyond academia has exerted pressure on institutions to reconsider their social contract and public responsibilities (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012). Student movements, decolonial research networks, and global discussions on epistemic justice have created space for policy experimentation and intellectual reimagination. Additionally, collaborative technologies, when employed reflectively, can promote horizontal knowledge exchange and decentralised leadership practices. The emergence of transdisciplinary and community-engaged research provides fertile ground for alternative models of governance that are locally responsive and globally relevant. Institutions that successfully embed decolonial values into their governance structures often do so through sustained partnerships with civil society, respect for ancestral knowledge systems, and the cultivation of leadership cultures rooted in ethical care and long-term vision. These enablers serve to remind us that decolonial governance is not only desirable but also achievable, provided that institutions are willing to confront their histories, invest in critical capacities, and adopt governance models grounded in justice rather than mere compliance.

6. Conclusion

This paper has advanced a decolonial governance framework for post-human universities, grounded in ethical leadership, epistemic justice, and sustainable institutional transformation. Through a critical engagement with digital systems, leadership praxis, and sustainability discourses, it has demonstrated that many of the technological innovations currently reshaping higher education risk reinforcing the very colonial hierarchies they purport to disrupt. The first theme underscores how algorithmic governance often reproduces exclusion and renders marginalised knowledge invisible, particularly when digital infrastructures are imported without contextual adaptation. The second theme presents a counter-model rooted in decolonial leadership, emphasising collective agency, relational ethics, and participatory governance as central to institutional renewal. The third theme expands this logic into the realm of sustainable development, positing that meaningful progress cannot be measured solely in environmental or economic terms but must also encompass cultural relevance, local ownership, and long-term social justice. Collectively, these themes contribute to a richer understanding of how decolonial values can be embedded not only in curriculum or discourse but also in the core governance systems that define institutional life.

The framework presented invites further theorisation and empirical testing across diverse contexts. Future research must examine how these ideas manifest in practice: how artificial intelligence and data infrastructures are negotiated within post-colonial university systems, how leadership models rooted in indigenous traditions can be operationalised within formal governance, and how sustainability goals can be localised without succumbing to global technocratic pressures. The vision articulated here is not of a single blueprint but of a higher education landscape characterised by plurality, accountability, and ethical foresight. As universities confront ecological crises, digital acceleration, and calls for reparative justice, governance must evolve beyond mere compliance and towards a model of care. Decolonial governance offers a pathway for this transformation, a model that does not reject technological advancement but situates it within a deeper, historically informed commitment to inclusion, equity, and the dignity of diverse ways of knowing

7. Declaration

Data Availability: This review is based entirely on publicly available data and information sourced from peer-reviewed articles, reports, and other academic publications cited in the manuscript. No new primary data were generated or analysed during this study. Readers may refer to the cited sources for detailed information.

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