Decolonizing IDN Pedagogy *From* and *with* Global South: A Cross-Cultural Case Study

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Abstract. This paper presents a pedagogical activity with 120 students from two higher education institutions, one in the Global South and the other in the Global North. The objective was to incorporate decolonial thinking into analysing IDN artifacts through cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration. To achieve this, students were randomly divided into 20 groups comprising individuals from both countries and were assigned to work together across different time zones and geography. Students were prepared with an introduction to decolonial thinking and interactive digital narratives (IDNs). For the cross-cultural analysis, students used a methodology that merges the SPP model, the transformation aspect of IDN user experience, and the decoding position to reflect on how the artifacts perpetuate coloniality. Our results indicate that cross-cultural dialogue enabled students to counter colonial norms of universalism and Eurocentrism in IDNs through collaboration and interaction across the globe.

Keywords: Decoloniality · Decolonial Framework · Interactive Digital Narrative (IDN) · Cross-culturality · Cross-cultural Dialogue · Decolonial Pedagogy

1 Introduction

Media artifacts exist within cultural and societal situations. Simultaneously, the creation process of any such artifacts, and their design is deeply rooted in and influenced by this cultural context. During the past half century, our understanding of these mechanisms has increased considerably through scholarly work under headings such as decolonial and postcolonial theories, gender studies, critical race theory, and intersectionality. Consequently, awareness of structural oppression in artifacts such as Interactive Digital Narratives (IDNs) has increased considerably, and consequently, changes in the design have occurred, for example by adding women or racialized people as playable characters in some video games. Yet, these steps can only be the beginning of an ongoing process of decolonial thinking, a critical awareness of colonial elements and their effects which need to include both audiences and creators. Audiences need to be sensitized to

these issues and be enabled to identify them, voice criticism, and act - for example by protesting stereotypical depictions and by withdrawing support from works that contain "coloniality," - reproduction of hierarchies of race, gender, and geopolitics [24] and embedded in structures, depictions, and perspectives continuing the colonial legacy of oppression. On the other hand, creators should approach their work with a sensibility that does not exist yet - an awareness of how 'deep' coloniality runs and that it is by no means enough to simply replace visual appearances. For example, a Black character in an IDN work can be the digital equivalent of the problematic practice of "blackface" if it is just a white character masquerading as a black one if nothing has changed but the appearance. Hence, in this research endeavor, we intend to bring coloniality to the forefront to confront it, and hopefully complicate its perpetuating cycle. In this direction, our contribution has two aspects - the development of a workshop for students in higher education, implemented in a cross-cultural setting to enable a decolonial reflection by students and the insights we gained from this experiment.

This paper will first discuss motivation and context before providing a theoretical framing for decolonization and analyzing IDN works. Then, we will describe the workshop we conducted in the first semester of 2023 and report on its results. Finally, we will reflect on the experiment and lay out future steps.

2   Motivation, Context, and Theoretical Framing

This paper is aligned with a growing number of studies [28, 35, 47] calling for the decolonization of media There is no alternative to decolonization if we want to create a global dialogue and end the practice of oppression that hinders shared solutions to global challenges such as climate change, migration, armed conflict, and poverty. As simple as it sounds, communication is key here, but many levels of coloniality and problematic power structures in media representations are a considerable hindrance that needs to be addressed urgently.

An important related concept targeting education is *Critical Media Literacy* (*CML),* [19] offering "a critique of mainstream approaches to literacy and a political project for democratic social change" (p.61). CML goes beyond traditional notions of media literacy to involve a multi-perspectival critical inquiry of popular culture and the cultural industries that address issues of class, race, gender, and power and promote the production of alternative counter hegemonic media" [19]. This concept is key for us, because it grounds our work in the politics of representation, avoiding apolitical notions of media education. Besides, it feeds into our cross-cultural approach, engaging students in the Global South and Global North, lending us a conceptual tool that facilitates a dialogue with the decolonial framework for IDN [41].

The premise of the CML-related studies [28, 35, 47] is that the classrooms and pedagogy are overwhelmingly defined by whiteness, upper/middle class, and male bodies, and no perspectives from outside this narrow scope are included in teaching. This educational setting and content shape the understanding and expectation of media representations and messages. To be more precise, "dominant white perspectives" in media classrooms may be translated into "tendencies to normalize white culture, advocate colourblind ideology, and promote individualistic values" evoking oftentimes a neoliberal education

[1]. To counter this problematic situation, and to establish an anti-racist and decolonial educational environment, Romero Walker argues that "educators must reevaluate their personal teaching philosophies by being reflexive per their chosen classroom material and the formed classroom rules and expectations" [35]. Our pedagogical activity is an attempt to establish such a decolonial environment.

2.1 Decolonizing Media

In this paper, we use the term "decolonial" as opposed to "postcolonial". Although related, these terms emerged in different geographical/historical contexts and time periods. In addition, we want to draw attention to the distinction between decolonization and decoloniality. While decolonization gained prominence in the 1950s, decoloniality emerged in Latin America during the 1990s [12]. South American scholars focusing on decoloniality address European incursions on American territories from the 15th century onwards. They draw upon world-systems theory and conceptual frameworks such as the modernity/coloniality dichotomy proposed by Anibal Quijano and María Lugones [5]. On the other hand, postcolonial approaches have their roots in South Asian and Middle Eastern diasporic scholarship, with a focus on European colonialism and its cultural impact. Considering this background, we align ourselves theoretically mostly with decoloniality. Yet, we position ourselves more broadly with efforts for decolonizing IDN recently emerging from South America, e.g., by the Brazilian researcher Bettocchi and colleagues [4], but also with collaborations between South scholars and North scholars [see 43], and with efforts by the South-Asian diaspora [see the talk 17 or 31] who both use the term postcolonial.

Bettocchi et al. [4] have proposed a decolonial pedagogy to teach students in Brazil to counter-hegemonic narratives, particularly in game design. The authors involved 10 game design students and introduced them to ludo narrative and decolonial concepts to identify problematic colonial aspects within games. In their study, they identified how Eurocentric perspectives shape narrative structures and visual representations in many popular games (1. Minecraft and the metaphor of colonization; 2. The Hero Journey and the archetypal point of view by Carl Jung; 3. Messianism and Dualism cosmology; 4. The Fibonacci Number, the Vitruvian Man, and the Golden Ratio).

The most interesting result from Bettocchi et al.'s work [4] is that students were asked to offer an alternative for those Eurocentric perspectives, challenging students to decolonize their minds, which is the first step towards decolonization [44] for those who were colonized. Those who resisted colonial practices such as enslavement, practice counter-colonization, as proposed by the Brazilian author Antonio Bispo (2015) when talking about *quilombolas* (enslaved Africans who resisted and escaped enslavement).

To counter the Eurocentric paradigm of colonization, Bettocchi and her students [4] proposed "Terra Nova" as an alternative, a fantasy setting where the colonizer was defeated by the colonized. As a contraposition to the Eurocentric paradigm of the Hero's Journey, they developed the Incorporeal Cardgame, a cooperative card game where characters must develop their relationships with other characters. As an alternative to the Messianic perspective of Good vs Evil for plots, they explored "Living Colors: what ship is This?" a point-and-click game composed of 16 mini-games that allow the exploration of different points of view in a plot that deals with conspiracy. Characters are

created with basis on their deities of West Africa and religions of the African diaspora as an alternative to the Judeo-Christian model.

Despite the call for decolonizing IDN being recent [4, 43], other IDN-related fields such as media studies had related discussions at least since the 1980s [10, 25, 26]. In Latin America, liberation processes started in the 1960's with the works of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire [40], or the Argentinian-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel [8]. More recently, in media and communication studies, Moyo [28] has advocated for a decolonial pedagogy that "foregrounds race, culture, and colonial difference without ignoring class where and when class matters".

Considering decolonization as "a process and context" [12], we need to acknowledge some factors in the literature that informed the design of our study. First, we agree that there is an unequal intellectual dominance of USA and European academics that need to be challenged, understanding that the ideas and theories originating from these regions do not necessarily reflect or apply to the current debates and issues in the Global South. Therefore, there is a pressing need for an epistemic shift to incorporate a greater diversity of academic perspectives, which also applies to the IDN field [43]. Second, we draw upon Wasserman [46], who presents three major approaches to media studies: about, from, and with a region. The approach of researching "about" a region questions the tendency to treat Africa, for instance, as "just another" case study based on inherently biased Northern theory models, resulting in unethical and coloniality practices such as ethics dumping [28] or helicopter research [32]. The approach of researching "from" a region engages with diverse and inclusive scholarship. However, Global South may not offer innovative perspectives as well, as the author points out. Wasserman proposes that the most effective approach lies in researching "with" a region. We adapt Wasserman's [46] approach by decolonizing IDNs primarily from the Global South to challenge and disrupt power relations between South and North and then, with the Global North, as the title of this paper suggests.

Finally, our work has been also influenced by Moyo's proposition of a planetary curriculum, as a product of cross-cultural dialogue between knowledge archives, an epistemic dialogue. By drawing on Parek [33], Moyo emphasizes how important it is to counter our tendency to universalize our respective cultural values through dialogue. This is exactly what we tried to do in this study, by fostering connections, friendships, and collegiality between students from different sides of the globe.

2.2 Analyzing IDNs - SPP Model and Decolonial Thinking

As a basis for the analysis, the students were introduced to the SPP model [Koenitz 2023]. This framework is inspired by cybernetics and system theory and takes IDN works as consisting of *system* (the digital artifact), *process* (the interactive experience of the work by the audience), and *product* (the result as in recorded form - *objective product* - or as retellings [9] - *subjective products*). The audience assumes the role of "interactor" reflecting and acting at the same time in a double hermeneutic circle which becomes a triple hermeneutic circle during replay with the added reflection of previous playthroughs. SPP framework is built on earlier insights about the specificity of the digital medium by Brenda Laurel [23] as well as Janet Murray's fundamental insight about the medium's affordances (procedural, participatory, encyclopedic, spatial), and

experiential qualities of immersion, agency, transformation [31] and the meta quality of the kaleidoscopic.

The SPP framework has three important advantages for our project. First, it is free of obvious legacy narrative perspectives (e.g. particular narrative structures). Second, it facilitates the granular separation and analysis of the different elements of an IDN, meaning that for example, particular computational rule systems can be analyzed for coloniality separately from narrative structures. Third, this framework enables an analysis of the audience's influence on the experience (as interactors) and the output in its tripartite separation of artifact, experience, and output. The framework allows the use of decolonial thinking in the analysis on several levels - in the construction of the artifact, its experience by interactors bringing in their respective cultural background and resulting objective/subjective products. On all these levels, hegemonic and oppressive aspects can be detected and analyzed, for example, visual representations, societal rule systems, and narrative structures in the protostory (the content of the system), but also aspects of the experience (e.g., subversive, and transgressive approaches countering oppressive aspects during the experience).

The quality of transformation is particularly relevant to our project. It has a dual meaning as it refers to changes in the IDN work which is transformed by the actions of the interactor, but also refers to changes in the interactor due to their experience. In that sense, IDN works can be deeply transformative for interactors and can change who we are [31]. In 2016, Roth and Koenitz [37] mapped Murray's initial three qualities of immersion, agency, and transformation to Roth's evaluation toolbox [36]. Enjoyment as the simple aspect, positive and negative affect (the overall feeling in the interactor created by the experience, either sad or happy which also lingers after the experience ends), and eudaimonic appreciation (a deep emotional and aesthetic appreciation of an IDN tied to personal experience). Based on Schoenau Fog [40], we can explicitly add the continuation desire to the transformation category [34].

In the past years, the concept of "transformative games" or "transformative play", defined by Rusch as "games that contribute to a meaningful life" [38] has gained attention from the academic community [3, 42], acknowledging the potential interactive narratives to have a deep impact on their interactors, after the interactive experience is over.

To further improve the understanding of the experience of IDN works, it is illustrative to consider basic tenets from communication and cultural studies, such as positionality and the encoding/decoding of power structures [14]. Interactive media complicates the status of both creators as system builders [22] and audiences as interactors and thus the linear relationships between sender and receptor as well as their status are changed. Yet, the questions of positionality and of power structures embedded into a *work*, and subsequently processed and reflected by audiences, remain. In mainstream non-interactive media, artifacts often embed hegemonic and oppressive structures. In principle, IDNs are no exception in this regard.

Interactors, therefore, can fully accept embedded hegemonic structures; they can negotiate with it, accept/reject some of their elements; or have a completely oppositional posture toward it. Understanding their own social position can help interactors understand where they stand when confronted with oppressive structures. Once we are aware of our own position (in society, versus the IDN work) we can also be aware of

how we embed structures into our own communication. The transformational aspect of experience complicates the process in contrast to non-interactive reception but does not invalidate the overarching question of power structures and positionality. Insights into these aspects are an important step toward a developed IDN literacy and crucial in improving the creation of IDN works.

To make this theoretical framework practical, the students were given an introduction to the framework and were provided with a five-step analysis approach and examples detailed in Koenitz's book [20]:

Step 1. Identify the material.
Step 2. Categorize the material.
Step 3. Identify Narrative Design.
Step 4. Add Developer Information.
Step 5. Apply System, Process, and Product Progression.

The students were then asked to put their insights into slides and present these during a seminar.

3 Working Together Across the Globe - A Cross-Cultural Workshop

To integrate decolonial thinking in analyzing interactive digital narrative in a higher education setting, the study employed a cross-cultural activity approach, bringing together Global South and Global North BA students in a week-long workshop to analyze interactive digital narrative artifacts. Participants engaged in an introductory session where the educators (and authors of this contribution) presented the activity. The assignment for the students was to work together in groups that contained students from both institutions. Their assignment was to work together in analyzing an IDN artifact, to prepare a slide deck and present it during a final seminar at the end of the workshop.

To assess the perception of young audiences on how coloniality exists in IDNs and the impact of this activity on their way of analyzing interactive artifacts, we designed a dual-set survey to capture data both before and after the activity. An entry survey assessed initial perceptions, while a post-survey gathered feedback on the collaborative experience, decolonial media literacy growth, and cultural awareness.

3.1 Setup

120 students joined the workshop:

Global South (GS). 40 students enrolled in the second semester of the Communication and Journalism BA-level program at Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla, Colombia. The activity was developed in their "Communication Theory II" class.

Global North (GN). 80 students, enrolled in the second year of a Digital Media Design BA-level program at Södertörn University in Stockholm, Sweden. The activity was framed within their "Media Design Research" class.

Students were organized into 20 groups of six participants each: two from GS University and four from GN University. Students were assigned randomly to the 20 groups in Discord and were given the freedom to choose any other collaboration tool to work together, schedule their own meetings, and agree on the best workflow for all the members of the team. The activity was carried out in English. Between the introductory class and the final seminar, participants had three days to interact with the artifact, meet, discuss, and prepare a 5-slide presentation. Figure 1 shows an overview of the methodology of the workshop.

Introductory Seminar
- Lecture on Decolonial Thinking and Interactive Digital Narratives
- Cross-Cultural Activity kickstart
- Pre-Survey

Mixed Workgroups
- Meet the team
- Choose Perspective
- SPP-based Analysis of IDNs
- Transformation Aspect
- Improvemenets Aspect
- Discussion and preparation of the presentation

Final Seminar
- 5-minutes Presentation of the 20 mixed Workgroups.
- Post-Survey
- Conclusions

Fig. 1. Methodology overview of the workshop.

The goals and learning outcomes of the workshop were shared with the students during the introductory seminar:

- To analyze an interactive digital narrative from a decolonial point of view.
- To reflect on the media we consume and how they perpetuate or not oppressive structures.
- To cross borders in academia from a learning, teaching, and research perspective.
- To work together with students from another continent to create a shared experience.

Learning outcomes:

- Applying research methods.
- Recognizing oppressive structures in media artifacts.
- Comprehend our positionality.

3.2 Selected IDNs

We selected five IDN works for the students to analyze, considering the following factors: 1. Accessibility: all artifacts needed to be free or easily accessible through the web browser 2. Language: all artifacts needed to be (at least) available in English and 3 variety of form: the selected works include interactive documentaries, an interactive movie, a game, and a gamified training simulation. The selection also took the topic of power structures into account: while three of them address social issues, the other two propose altered hero's journeys, a narrative structure that has been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes [15]. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the selected IDNs, and the criteria applied for their selection.

Table 1. Breakdown of the selected IDNs criteria

Title	Produced by	Criteria
How to create a financial crisis	Created by Charles Trahan, Léon Courville, and Folklore (Canada, 2017)	The project was selected because of its topic, and the ironic way in which the information is presented
Bandersnatch	Produced by Netflix (USA, 2018)	This project introduced IDNs to the large audience of the Netflix streaming service. It presents a choose-your-own-adventure structure in the form of an interactive film, with a male character as protagonist
Save the date	Produced by Paper Dino	This project provides a satirical perspective of the hero's journey, a male hero in general and the expectation of winning a game
Mission Zhobia	Developed by &RANJ. (Netherlands, 2020)	This serious game is billed as a training simulation for a Global North aid worker to be sent to an African country
Last Hijack Interactive	Mirka Duijn (Interactive director) using material from Femke Wolting - Tommy Pallotta's Last Hijack. (Netherlands, 2014)	This work's narrative is driven by the complex social issues of a Global South country and their violent encounter with the Global North. It presents different perspective, including the pirate's and a hijacked captain

3.3   Analyzing IDNs From a Decolonial Standpoint

The analysis of the selected artifacts was developed in five moments: (1) Creation of the mixed workgroups and assignment; (2) Choosing the angle; (3) IDN analysis using SPP, and (4) Transformation aspect; and (5) Design Improvements.

Creation of Mixed Workgroups and Assignments. The mixed groups were set up on Discord and worked together to create a 5-slide presentation using the following structure: 1. Insights from Global South students; 2. Insights by Global North students; 3. 4. What did you learn in your discussion regarding the transformational aspect; and 5. What does the whole group think needs to be changed or improved in the IDN?

Choose an Analysis Perspective. Students could choose one of the following perspectives from which to analyze the artifact: (1) narrative content (NC), (2) aesthetic/mechanics (A/M), or (3) social context (SC). For each one of these perspectives, students were provided with guiding questions as shown in Table 2. But were free to develop their own questions.

Table 2. Analysis perspectives' guiding questions

Narrative Content (NC)	• Identify who are the characters, their socioeconomic status, gender, and stereotypes • Identify the narrative structure (how the story unfolds, what triggers the narrative, what are the narrative vectors?) • How do characters interact with each other? • Where does the story take place (location, period, cultural context, societal rules)?
Social Context (SC)	• Who are the story's creators, and how does that affect the narrative? • Is it a fictional or a real story? • To whom is the story told? • Can this IDN have an effect in real life?
Aesthetics/ Mechanics (A/M)	• How do I interact with the narrative? • How do my interactions affect the story? • How do the visuals, colors, text, and sounds affect the story?

Analyze the IDN Using the SPP Model. Students analyzed the artifact before and during the interaction and used the SPP model to isolate specific aspects with the aim of focusing on how colonial oppressive structures are embedded in that specific aspect of the artifact. The students were asked to reflect on their own position and approach in the experience of the artifact.

Transformation. Students were asked to identify their reception position and the transformational aspects. They reflected on whether they found themselves in a dominant, negotiation, or oppositional position. They should also reflect on whether the IDN affected them in a positive or negative way, and whether they found it enjoyable.

Design Improvements. Finally, the student groups discussed what could be improved in each IDN from a decolonial point of view, and how these insights can inform the design.

3.4 Surveys

Taking a step back from our theoretical framing, we want to understand to what extent the aspects we aim to address with our decolonization approach resonate with audiences outside the circle of academic researchers. To achieve this, we designed two surveys: one to establish a baseline prior to our activity, and the other to evaluate potential changes

after the workshop. The surveys were anonymous and developed and distributed via Google Forms. Participants were asked to create a unique identifier for both surveys to contrast the before and after of the cross-cultural activity.

In the baseline survey, we asked questions such as: Where were you born, where were your parents born? Did you grow up in the place where you were born? Where do you currently study? Do you self-identify as a member of a historically marginalized group? What is your gender identity? In what languages are the media artifacts you consume on a regular basis originally produced? Which kind of digital media artifacts do you use regularly? What kind of devices do you use regularly? Furthermore, we asked questions related to media representation using five-point Likert scales, such as: 'How well do the depictions/representation in the digital media artifacts you use match your own experiences?'; 'Are the characters, habits, and societal structures in digital media artifacts similar to your own environment?' and 'If you feel that there is a misrepresentation of your environment in digital media artifacts, where do you perceive it? Be aware the misrepresentation can be both positive and negative (e.g., a nation presented in too positive light is also a misrepresentation).'

The post-survey considered aspects related to the media (mis)representation; decolonial thinking; the assigned IDN artifact appreciation; and their thoughts on the workshop. For the scope of this paper, we are presenting the profiles of the students and the results from the Media (mis)Representation section to analyze whether their perspectives evolved after the workshop. The questions of the Media (mis)Representation section were the same in the pre- and post-survey.

4   Results

4.1   Students' IDN Analysis

The cross-cultural workshop allowed the researchers to explore how students from different cultural backgrounds understand and interpret IDNs. In this section, we will analyze relevant insights from the presentations developed by the workgroups. The artifacts were randomly assigned to the groups. Table 3 shows the breakdown of the perspectives that the WGs chose.

Table 3. Breakdown of analysis perspectives (Narrative Content, Societal Context, Aesthetics/Mechanics) per workgroup

	Save the Date (StD)	Bandersnatch (B)	Financial Crisis (FC)	Mission Zhobia (MZ)	Last Hijack (LH)	Total
NC	4	1	2	1	0	8
SC	0	2	1	3	2	8
A/M	1	1	1	0	1	4

Table 4 shows the main reflections of the WGs for each IDN, according to the topics given by the instructors. For each category, we summarized the most relevant comments

made by the WGs who chose the same perspective. The analysis from their slides and the presentations during the final seminar were considered. For this analysis, we video-recorded the presentations on Zoom. Although it is worth noticing that the GS reflections were undertaken by only half as many students as the GN perspectives, we believe that it does not affect the depth of the analysis.

4.2   Initial Results of the Pre- and Post-Survey

The surveys provided quantitative data on the students' social identities, digital media usage, and perceptions of coloniality in IDN work and the impact of the activity on their decolonial media literacy.

Social Positions. 71 BA-level students responded to our initial survey, 47 from GN aged between 19 and 22, and 26 from GS, aged between 17 and 19. 80,30% (n = 57) were raised in the place they were born, while 19, 7% were not (n = 14). When asked if they self-identified as a member of a historically marginalized group, 71,8% (n = 51) responded negatively, while 28,2% said yes (n = 20). As for the latter, the LGBTQA + group is the most represented minority community in our sample, considering that 8 out of 20 (33,3%) self-identified as part of such a group, while 3 identified as a person of African descent, 2 as a person of Asian descent, and one as Middle Eastern. Some of those social identities overlap Afro-descendant + LGBT or migrant + Afro-descendant. As for gender identity, one person self-identified as non-binary, 43 as females, and 29 as males.

Language of Media Artifacts. Language is an important aspect of coloniality in media consumption. We asked the students in what languages the media artifacts are produced they consume on a regular basis. As a result, not surprisingly we found that the five most represented languages and their variations are:

– 95,8% of students said American English (n = 68)
– 69% said British English (n = 49)
– 38% said Spanish from Latin America (n = 27),
– 25,4% said Spanish from Spain (n = 18)
– 62% said Swedish (n = 44)

Besides those, Japanese appeared four times, Russian, and French appeared three times (4,2%) Mandarin Chinese and German appeared twice (2,8%), and several other languages appeared only once (Arabic, Brazilian Portuguese, Japanese, Thai, Norwegian, Syrian, Italian, Serbian).

Digital Media Use. Regarding the type of digital media artifacts, the students use regularly, most of our respondents are heavy social media users, considering that 98,6% (n = 70) said that this is the medium they mostly use. 64, 8% of them also consume online news either on desktop or mobile devices (n = 46), while 46,5% play video games (on computers or consoles) and 45, 1% (n = 32) play casual games (on mobile phones). What it is interesting to highlight here is that emerging media formats such as VR/AR/XR are used only by 4,2% of our respondents (n = 3), interactive documentaries

Table 4. Work groups' reflections on IDN artifacts from a decolonial point of view

		Global South	Global North	Transformation	Improvements
NC	FC	The characters in the artifact are mostly stereotypes and lack diversity, such as the bald overweight banker... The focus is the American economic model. The narrative is boring for some people,	The characters are mostly white and middle class. The setting is modern, but it could be more diverse. The narrative is eurocentric and could be more critical of colonialism.	The IDN can more educational and could teach players about the effects of colonialism. The artifact could incorporate more diverse characters and perspectives. The artifact could be more challenging and could offer players more choices.	More inclusive representation when it comes to characters, different ethnicities, social and economic statuses should be in charge. The IDN could benefit from better visuals and music, a clearer conclusion, and it could be more inclusive and diverse.
	B	The interactor makes the decisions for the main character. From decolonial point of view, making the decisions for him, is an analogy of how oppressed people follow the decisions that others make for them. The setting shows the growing trend of consumerism, gender roles are traditional. Social issues related to drug abuse, criminality and immigration are presented.	Characters are predominately white and upper-middle class. Main character has access to a big house and a therapist. All programmers are male. Receptionist was portrayed by a woman, where women were excluded from leadership roles. The role of the mentor was not the traditional old man, but a young-rich man.	Making more immoral and extreme decisions as the movie played out. If you make moral/good decisions the movie rewinds. The work promotes bad decision-making.	Have actors from various background. Remove all the stereotypes. There was a time with a lot of immigration in the UK, they could have had a bigger role.
	StD	Experimental game that allows players to explore different emotions, such as tragedy and mortality. Unpredictable plot that can be triggering for some players. Different choices throughout the game determine the progression of the narrative and lead to different outcomes. Various unexpected events and challenges occur as the game progresses.	Stereotypical representations in the game.	The game does not show a Western perspective. The game does not guarantee a happy ending. The game allows players to explore different paths and outcomes. Players learn more about the character's emotions and characteristics as they try different paths. Players form an understanding of how the character views them based on their choices.	The game could provide more context to the story by explaining what happened before the events of the game as well provide more information about the main characters (backgrounds, personalities, and goals). The game could have a clearer conclusion that helps players understand the impact of their choices. It could use more visuals and better music.
	MZ	It is an experiment, and it is not known if it will work. One person is sent to an unsafe place, and you don't know how that will turn out. f the experiment goes wrong, there could be a revolution on the part of the citizens or the government itself. Seeks the justice of Zhobia. Seeks to change the government for the country to evolve. Seeks to give citizens more freedom.	False sense of inclusivity and choice. White saviorism rooted in western ideals Continuation of narrative where Africa is poor, when in fact the continent is rich. Encouraged to learn the culture and the history. It attempts to portray reality. Shows the diversity within the country of Zhobia, which may act as a realistic depiction of other African countries and the issues they face	Appreciative of contribution to rule of law, but critical of white savior narrative. Shift in perspectives: Reflected on post-conflict complexities, questioned imposition of Western concepts and maintained open-minded perspective, acknowledged micro problems. Expressed concerns about neocolonial tendencies, questioned perpetuation of harmful narratives. Nuanced and culturally sensitive approach, avoided power dynamics.	More features and better performance will make the experience better. Some bugs and glitches need to be fixed. Critically examine and eliminate the white saviorism phenomenon. Counteract stereotypes by highlighting diversity. Celebrate the wealth and diversity of African cultures.
SC	FC	Students found stereotypes such as unequal pay for women, the typical white figure of power and emigrants occupying lower positions on the process.	Targets Western/North European audiences with higher education. Primarily uses English, with limited representation of other languages. Women in leading political roles, but less representation in economic roles. Highlights the importance of regulations for stability. It raises awareness of financial complexities	Seeing our artifact, we decided to assume the negotiating positionality, the game is educational, it teaches us how life works in many economic aspects. However, we did not agree with the stereotypes and the difference in pay gap between genders.	Diverse characters and non-Western visuals. Alternative viewpoints and beyond win/lose. Cultural influences and empathy. Decolonial storytelling and understanding. Active exploration and decolonial learning.

**Table 4.** (*continued*)

	B	Small decisions can lead to different outcomes and invites replay, so audiences can see outcomes from different choices. Each interactor can have a different interpretation of the ending. The production team made each ending feel different, to motivated continuous exploration. Some audience members prefer the conspiracy ending, while others prefer the action-packed ending.	choices affect the outcome. The work is set in the 1980s UK and features a predominantly white male cast. The work explores themes of free will, determinism, and the nature of reality. Bandersnatch has been praised for its innovative storytelling and its exploration of complex themes. The work has issues in its lack of diversity and representation.	Our social backgrounds and personal contexts can affect our choices and interpretations. The work uses implicit meaning about freedom and destiny. Ultimately, interactors don't really have free will if there are only two choices. The artifact gives viewers the opportunity to reflect on important themes. The work's exploration of authorship can be seen through a decolonial lens.	Increase interactor agency by giving them more options. Use AI and extended reality to create interactive films with multiple story paths. Remove irrelevant paths and keep the narrative towards a clear ending. Challenge the Western narrative by including a more diverse cast and crew. Engage with artists, writers, and consultants from diverse backgrounds.
	MZ	IDNs can be used to study ethnicities, tribes, culture, history as well as develop peacemaking and conversation skills. The game's social context has similarities to our Global South country. International intervention is a sensitive topic that should be handled with care, but the portrayal of Zhobia and Africa is one-sided and reinforces stereotypes.	IDN can be used to practice peacemaking. The game imitates reality but is not completely realistic. It is unclear whether the game could make a difference in the real world. The game could be helpful for human rights studies. The game has a good concept but its execution is flawed.	The game can help players understand different perspectives and the nuances of language. The game can help players understand the complexities of social struggle. The game can help players connect with each other through shared experiences. The game perpetuates colonial thinking by presenting the Western journalist as the hero.	Instead of being a foreigner you could be a Zhobian peace maker which would rid the game of its white saviour complex issues. Avoid perpetuating colonial stereotypes and power dynamics and offer translations. Use multiple model options of justice. The game could add more playable characters and give players more freedom in their decision-making.
	LHI	unsatisfied with the narrative presentation. The interface was a bit confusing at first. No info about the social contexts by which they ended up being pirates. There should be an intervention of both cultures in the way the story is told.	Mixing animation and interviews. Interesting to watch different views on the story. Autoplay mode. We recognize the narrative and the dramatic curve. Good vs bad story.	Not having context can be confusing and affects the experience and understanding. Can't make direct changes to the artifact but still learn through engagement. Personal growth, increased awareness, and advocacy for change in the real world.	Draw attention to the Somali perspective. Address- and delve deeper into underlying causes/issues. Let the above points play a bigger role in the documentary
A/M	FC	The interactions with the game were very simple and easy to understand. The interactions are needed for the progression of the IDN but they don't have a big impact, the outcomes are always the same. The written text prevails.	Neverending story. The graphical background was constantly moving, increasing with cursor interaction. Annoying sound effects. Informal language is useful.	The interactor gains knowledge, but it is too limited for the interactor, because they don't have a role.	Timeline to show start, current position, ending would be helpful. Simplify the graphical design to minimize distraction for the user. No sound effects during dialog
	B	Ending spoilt from the beginning. The artifact makes you self-conscious and guilty of having a sense of control. The work tricks you into a false sense of control, tension through colored lights and shadows.	Your decisions can lead to different paths and outcomes. My choice making you become active. Music and photography can influence the interactor's decisions.	We should be mindful of the choices we make and their potential consequences. We should be aware of the ways in which technology can influence and even manipulate our decision-making. We assumed a Negotiation approach.	The character choose to work in isolation. It delivers a powerful message about team-work. When the main character chooses to work in a team the outcomes are better.
	LHI	The narrative is enriching and thoughtful and is a reminder of the human cost of poverty and conflict. The work shows how lack of opportunities in Somalia as causes and consequences of maritime piracy. The story highlights the difference in socioeconomic status between the kidnappers and the kidnapped.	The story follows a three-act structure. The mix of animated frames and live footage affects the story's interpretation. The story allows users to explore different aspects of the story using maps and timelines. The autoplay function suggests that there is a "correct" way to watch the interactive narrative. The possibility to choose whose perspective to take first affects how the content is perceived.	The solidarity aspect in wanting to raise awareness among Somali youth as well as outsiders of the dangers of piracy. Hijacking gives Mohamed visibility and respect when he returns home, after getting all that money, and this is why he used to do it again. We choose paths in the documentary based on different interests and choices. This has given us in the group different perspectives on the story.	Create and persuade alternative jobs to encourage young people and keep them from becoming pirates. Establish a constant and concerned government for these new generations. Remove autoplay to further encourage choices. Highlight colonial traces. Amplify voices of marginalized communities.

are used by 7% (n = 5), while eBooks are more often consumed, as 33,8% marked that option in the survey (n = 24). Hypertext fiction is a format only four students (5,6%) have engaged with.

Device Use. The most used device among our respondents is the smartphone (100%), while the laptop is the second one (88, 7%), desktop computer the third (35, 2%), the fourth video game consoles (22,5%), the fifth computer tablets (16, 9%) followed by mobile game consoles (14, 1%). As for emerging media devices such as VR headsets, only one respondent reported regular usage.

4.3   Pre- and Post-Survey on Media Representation

Figures 2, 3, and 4 illustrate changes in students' conceptions after the workshop, displaying both pre- and post-survey results on identical questions. It focuses on three questions related to how media portray or distort their environments and experiences, as well as the elements through which these representations can be uncovered.
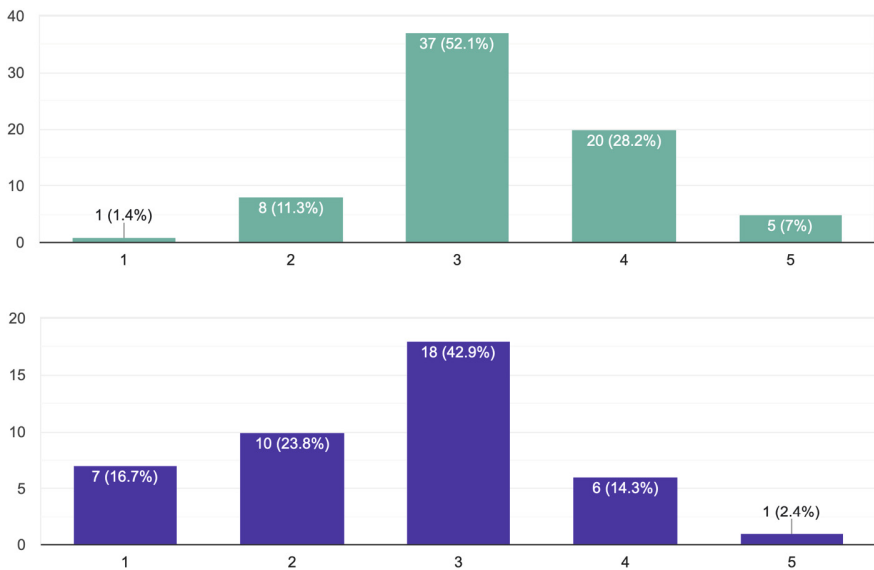

Fig. 2. How well do the depictions/representation in the digital media, you consume match your own experiences? (On the Likert scale 5 is "very alike" and 1 is "very different")

In general, we can see how the students became more critical of the media artifacts they consume. The responses from the pre- and post-survey in questions 1 and 2 show a significant change in recognizing colonial elements portrayed in the media and how media artifacts can portray environments that are distant from students' real environments and experiences. Question 3 shows another change of perspective in identifying colonial elements in the media artifacts. There is a significant increase in recognizing the misrepresentation of societal structures followed by how characters are built and
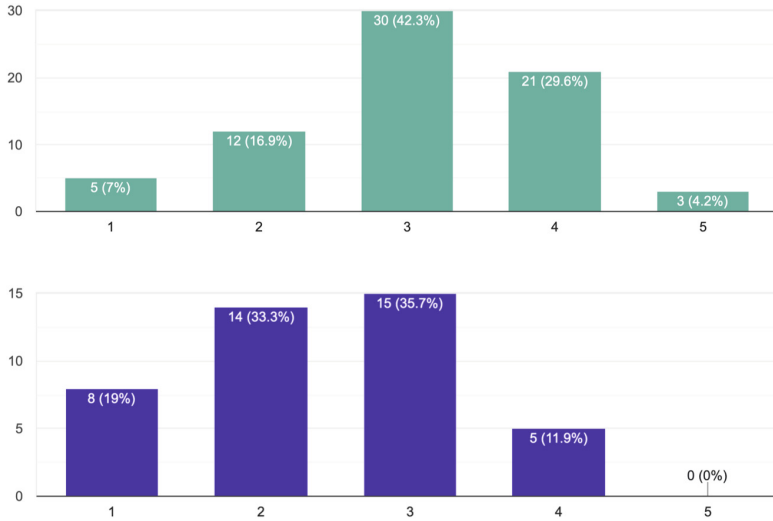
Fig. 3. The characters, habits, societal structures in the digital media that you consume are similar to your own environment? (On the Likert scale 5 is "very much" so and 1 is "not at all")
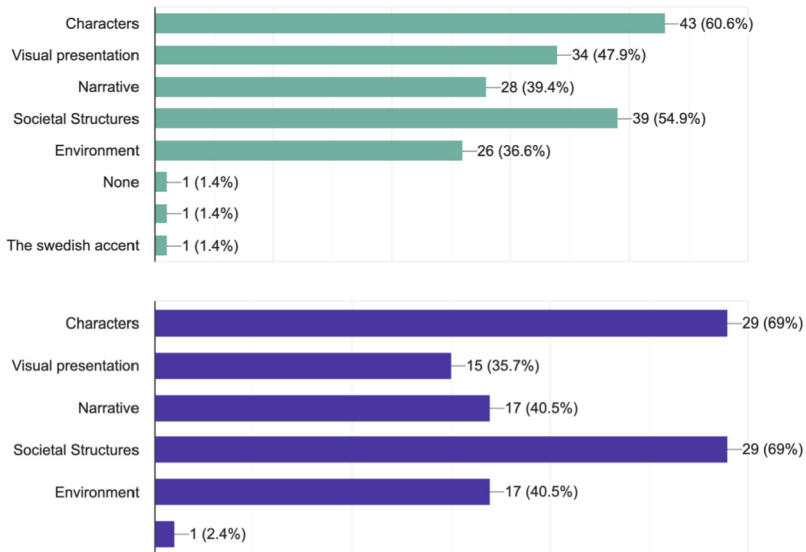
Fig. 4. If you feel that there is a misrepresentation of your environment in interactive narratives, where do you perceive it? Be aware that the misrepresentation can be both positive and negative (e.g., a nation presented in a too positive light is also a misrepresentation)

portrayed. Awareness of misrepresentation of narrative and environment also show an increase, although minor, both aspects are considered relevant in perpetuating coloniality. Misrepresentation of visual representation has decreased in significance. We take

this as evidence that the students' increased understanding led them to detect misrepresentation beyond the visual surface e.g., in oppressive narrative structures which are embedded in IDN works.

5   Discussion

Our experimental workshop aimed to incorporate a decolonial framework into the practice of teaching IDN. We achieved this by facilitating collaboration between a GS and a GN institution, with the aim of creating a cross-cultural dialogue between the respective students, encouraging collaboration across the two nations. This approach aligns with Last Moyo's concept of a "planetary curriculum" [28] providing students with opportunities to engage with different knowledge sources and cultural perspectives, even across different time zones.

In general, we found that the respondents feel misrepresented in media, especially in terms of characters, and that they are aligned with Generation Z media consumption habits and the centrality of social media [48]. In addition, the main takeaway is the value of the cross-cultural dialogue that was fostered among the students. This dialogue is an important element of a decolonial pedagogy [28] and highlights the potential benefits of this cross-cultural dynamic, by enabling students to get out of their comfort zone and negotiate with the differences to achieve a common goal: their assignment. Here, the difference may be translated into struggles with finding a common schedule to work together despite a time difference of seven hours, to share and debate different views regarding the IDNs they chose, and cultural differences.

It is important to offer a reflection on the fact that this dialogue took place in the English language. This is a particularly problematic aspect since the language in the media reflects coloniality, with English remaining dominant in terms of media consumption among the students. It is deeply ironic that English, one of the main languages of colonialism in the past, has become the facilitator of cross-cultural dialogue in the 21st century. The cross-cultural dialogue resulted in a positive experience for GS students, who reported increased confidence in exchanging knowledge and proving their English proficiency with GN students. This outcome highlights a deeply ingrained colonial trait within GS culture, driven by the perception that everything in the GN is superior. Additionally, the students' spontaneous use of memes revealed another form of language that transcends cultural boundaries and encompasses shared global cultural references.

Another notable result is the set of students' suggestions for decolonizing IDN. One proposal is to incorporate a wider range of actors, art, and music into IDNs. Moreover, students stressed the importance of including artists, writers, and consultants from diverse cultural backgrounds, who possess direct experiences with colonialism/coloniality. Ensuring authentic representation is paramount, and this involves avoiding cultural appropriation and depicting characters from diverse backgrounds with respect and fairness. It is crucial to steer clear of stereotypical and exotic portrayals when representing non-Western cultures and characters (the most misrepresented aspects, according to the pre-survey results).

Beyond these highlighted results, below we also summarize some key insights based on the analysis elaborated by the students and presented in Table 4a:

- GS students arrived at the activity with a higher level of knowledge and sensibilization towards decolonial thinking. This might be explained by the nature of their careers and specifically, the course in which this activity took place that focuses on Critical Theory, Cultural Studies, and Decolonial Thinking.
- As Colombians, a country that has lived through a very complex internal war for decades, GS students found similarities between the depicted countries and their own, particularly regarding armed conflict, peace, and violence. Even though they do not share the same ethnicity with Africans, the Colombian participants in the study share a history of colonization, and as a result, coloniality with African countries. They criticized the portrayal of these aspects and noted a lack of depth in representing local citizens in *Mission Zhobia* and *The Last Hijack*. In the same way, they can recognize harmful stereotypes about Colombia, they perceived that these artifacts were reinforcing stereotypes about Africa.
- GS students demonstrated familiarity with the 'white savior' trope. Despite discussing this topic in class, they already had prior knowledge of the concept and were adept at identifying it in movies and video games.
- GN students displayed greater interest and expertise in media-related aspects, including interactive mechanics, bugs, usability, and narrative structure. Their proficiency in these areas can be attributed to their BA program in Interactive Media Design.
- Irony and satire proved to be challenging for both groups. Their mostly negative assessments of *How to Create a Financial Crisis* and *Save the Date* were based on a surface-level understanding that overlooked the satirical and ironic stances of these works.
- The messaging app Discord proved to be very efficient for exchanging written text and meeting in voice channels. Some groups chose ZOOM for their meetings. Google Slides and Canva were the most used apps for asynchronous collaboration. The shared knowledge of these tools by GS and GN students shows the availability of these platforms for this type of intercultural exercise.
- The environment was friendly and engaged. Students shared knowledge from the areas they felt most confident in and exchanged personal preferences (i.e., their favorite football team), or their personal social media accounts.

The data we collected through pre- and post-surveys permitted us to grasp that most of the students are native to their country and that the most represented minority community in our group of participants is LGBTQA+. The surveys provided interesting insights into the conceptions of media representation before and after the activity (Figs. 2, 3, and 4). In the first question, which assessed the alignment between digital media depictions and their own experiences, there was a noticeable decrease in the number of responses indicating a high level of agreement. Similarly, in the questions about the similarity between characters, habits, and societal structures in digital media artifacts and their environment, there was a shift towards lower agreement ratings in the post-survey. These changes in perception, whether perceiving media representations as similar or not, indicate that students developed a new or improved understanding of how coloniality is embedded in media artifacts. Regarding the specific elements where coloniality is detected in media artifacts, interesting shifts occurred: characters, narrative, societal

structures, and environment gained more significance, while the importance of visual representation decreased.

6   Conclusions and Future Work

This paper presents a collaborative pedagogical endeavor involving two higher education institutions, courses, and student cohorts situated in diverse cultural geographies and time zones. It serves as an initial step in introducing decolonial thinking into IDN pedagogy, aiming to analyze the coloniality embedded within IDNs, as documented by [41]. Results show a successful cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration between GS and GN students, fostering the ability to negotiate differences and work towards a common goal. The overall activity proved to be a good strategy to raise awareness about how colonialism and coloniality permeate media artifacts, including IDNs.

After the activity, students were able to recognize elements related to the narrative, the social context, as well as the aesthetics and mechanics which embed harmful stereotypes and oppressive preconceptions. They were more critical of the representation gap between what the media shows and their own reality. Students also provided valuable suggestions for decolonizing IDN drawing attention to how the characters, narrative, and societal structures are portrayed in the media.

We are encouraged by these results and invite colleagues to join in the decolonization effort. Our own further work includes (1) a deeper analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected during the experiment and both surveys; (2) an improved methodology for future cross-cultural activities with an increased time span, as students felt that one week was very little time; (3) make the insights gained from this experience productive for the design of IDNs; and (4) to build bridges between IDN scholarship and Communication theories, with a focus on schools of thoughts from the Global South.

7   Positionality of the Authors

Positionality refers to an individual's worldview and the stance they take regarding a research task and its social and political context [16]. We recognize our positionality and the impossibility of complete objectivity in research. Our unique backgrounds provide us with a specific perspective through which we perceive the world. Therefore, this paper is a result of the first two authors' personal struggles and experiences stemming from the underrepresentation of their identities. Both first authors were born and raised in former colonized territories, are racialized early-career females, speak languages inherited from the colonizers, who developed their graduate studies as migrants in the Global North, and as such, belong to an often-marginalized minority in academia and society. While some may view the discussion of decolonial theories as a passing trend, for the first two authors, it is an essential pursuit rooted in the need to challenge power imbalances, historical and structural inequalities, and strive for visibility of historically marginalized groups in the world, and more specifically in academia in the related fields of digital media, IDN, and computing. This marginalization is exemplified by the authors' passports. European passports facilitate easy travel mobility and even the acquisition of a second citizenship [11]. Conversely, passports from countries in the Global South restrict

individuals' freedom to travel globally. Academics from the Global South often face obstacles in attending international conferences due to visa restrictions, non-affordable registration fees, and the predominant location of such conferences in the Global North.

The third author is a privileged white male mid-career scholar who grew up and studied in the Global North. His awareness of marginalization started with his father, who was turned into a refugee by war and had to start his adult life from scratch in a foreign environment and as a dishwasher. The third author is a first-generation college graduate, he experienced age discrimination and topic-related marginalization and had to leave his home country to pursue a PhD. He is aware that these experiences do not compare to what many Global South citizens and his co-authors have experienced, yet his own trajectory has changed his awareness of oppression. An expat in his fourth country for professional reasons, he has had many experiences as a "foreigner" and understands himself as an ally to marginalized groups, he attempts to use his position to improve equality, foster dialogue and collaboration between Global North and Global South with decolonialization as an important vehicle.

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