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ORIGINAL PAPER

A pioneering framework for decolonizing higher education

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Abstract

Colonization and coloniality have affected society in different dimensions: axiological (values), epistemological (knowledge), and ontological (understanding of one's own reality); these dimensions can be seen from different perspectives (a dominant or non-dominant perspective) and reveal power relations among individuals. These dimensions, perspectives and power relations form in this paper the coloniality diagram which provides the basis for initiating a decolonization/decoloniality process in higher education in Flanders, Belgium. Together with the coloniality diagram, a series of steps/stages are presented in the Decolonizing the Academic Framework (DtAF): (1) Unlearning/Relearning, (2) Mourning and Acceptance, (3) Recentering Voices and Addressing Race, Gender and Class, (4) Reviewing Coloniality, (5) Imagining, (6) Committing, (7) Acting and (8) Reviewing Decoloniality. These stages are iterative, ongoing and adaptive. The DtAF aims to address the needs of decolonizing higher education through a structured model. It is a proposal based on empirical knowledge and available literature. In conclusion, this framework which has yet to be tested aims to generate 'transclusive' dialogue (transclusive: from the Latin prefix trans—meaning across plus the word inclusive) and consequently 'transclusive education'. The latter is a pioneering concept that challenges the concept of inclusive education and aims to go beyond the concept of inclusivity.

Keywords (De)coloniality · (De)colonialization · Higher education · European context · Inclusive vs transclusive · Flanders, Belgium

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Introduction

> If we are truly committed to the work of decolonizing, we must listen to the silences, that which is not written, and pay attention to the internal dynamics of communities and how we label their experiences.
> (Rodriguez 2018, p. 33)

Colonization began more than 500 years ago as large-scale population movements (Howe 2002) from Europe to other nations. From this colonization process, there were the colonizers who stayed in the invaded land and assumed a dominant position, and there were the colonizers who conquered and returned to their homeland while still maintaining some form of control (Parson and Weise 2020). The control gained through colonization practices often involved settlers dispossessing indigenous people altogether or establishing legal or other institutions that systematically disadvantaged them (Howe 2002).

Once the explicit political order of colonization was destroyed/abolished, the general form of domination that followed was coloniality (Quijano 2007, p. 170). Coloniality survives colonization and refers to the logic, culture and structure of the modern world system (Maldonado-Torres 2017; Marya 2020). Coloniality affects socio-political institutions. In this line, Mignolo (2011) and Mignolo and Walsh (2018) identify the "colonial matrix of power" and show that coloniality is intertwined with systems of governance and knowledge creation, identifying four areas of power: economy, governance, and the concept of humanity and knowledge (Mignolo 2011; Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Similarly, Quijano (2000) identifies four areas of control in which coloniality is entrenched: control of the economy, control of authority, control of gender and sexuality, and control of subjectivity and knowledge. These domains are held together by the two pillars of coloniality: racism and patriarchy (Marya 2020; Mignolo 2014, p. 35) and are rooted in the discourse of modernity (Mignolo 2011; Mignolo and Walsh 2018).

It is clear that coloniality affects, transforms and shapes us and our surroundings. In this line, Mignolo (2014) mentions three domains (economy, authority and knowledge/being). On the other hand, Stein and Andreotti (2016) address epistemological effects. Similarly, Carson (2017) and Rangel (2019) explore three different dimensions: the axiological, the epistemological and the ontological one. In this paper, we will further explore these three dimensions.

The *axiological dimension* refers to axiology or theory of value. It relates to the philosophical study of values, in short, how we get value and how something gets value. The *epistemological dimension* is related to epistemology or theory of knowledge. This means that how we study, how knowledge is generated and what conditions we give—implicitly or not—to knowledge are placed in the epistemological dimension (Carson 2017; Rangel 2019). The last dimension is the *ontological* one. Ontology, or theory of being, creates the framework for how we, as individuals, understand the reality in which we live. The power of ontology is that it gives us the keys to unlock the way reality is understood (Edelheim 2014). To sum up, these dimensions affect our values, knowledge and being.

To give some examples, Carson (2017) addresses the axiological dimension explaining that when colonization processes took place, the colonizers back then gave value to the land, the people, the resources that were available (see also: Rangel 2019). Based on this value given by the colonizers—dominant perspective-, the worth of things shifted and remained (coloniality). Another example of coloniality regarding the epistemological dimension can be seen in medical knowledge: in medical schools, indigenous knowledge about health and disease treatment is seldom addressed because the dominant perspective imposes what is worth learning. An example of the ontological dimension could be seen in religion. In the case of Latin America, for instance, Christianism was imposed in the Indigenous cultures. These dimensions are interconnected and interact with each other (see other contexts: Brown and Dueñas 2020; Chesky 2013; Rangel 2019; Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth 2020) and can be seen in the coloniality diagram (Fig. 1).

The coloniality diagram shows how these dimensions relate to each other. In addition, the overlapping region of these dimensions in the coloniality diagram is presented as perspectives. The perspectives represent the view in which these dimensions are seen (e.g., from the colonizer—dominant viewpoint or the colonized—non-dominant viewpoint). These perspectives are not fixed, and one individual can move within the spectrum of dominance in each dimension which in turn will influence the relations of power among individuals.

Based on this rationale, it can be assumed that coloniality includes disciplinary formations where education has a basic role (Mignolo 2014), more specifically, higher education. This is because higher education plays a central role in social reproduction, and the creation and legitimation of knowledge (Stein and Andreotti 2016). However, institutions as such are not necessarily challenged, and it is important to tackle these issues by decolonizing institutions, decolonizing education. In order to decolonize education, the starting point and core should be the coloniality diagram. Understanding this diagram would raise awareness and help to understand the process of decoloniality.

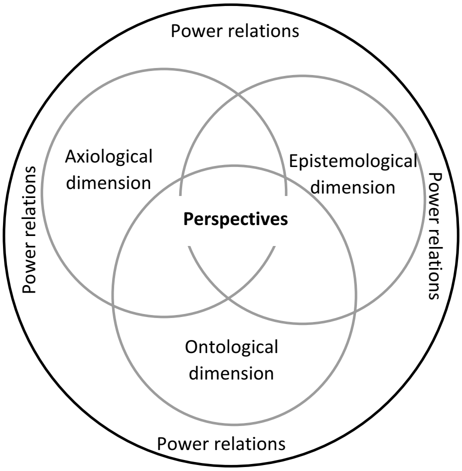


Fig. 1 Coloniality diagram. This diagram illustrates the different dimensions of coloniality. The overlapping area represents the perspectives present in all dimensions: the dominant and non-dominant perspectives. Outside the diagram, power relations are shown as elements present in this dynamic

Decoloniality would be then understood as ‘the fundamental reasons for the undoing of coloniality’ (Gu 2020). Decoloniality would question the global universality of education and what is considered as legitimate (Mignolo 2011; Mignolo and Walsh 2018). The knowledge production system of the West known as academically institutionalized would then be critically confronted to Indigenous knowledge systems.

This paper aims to initiate a decoloniality process of higher education in Flanders, Belgium. There is an increasing need to decolonize the curriculum (e.g., Asamoah 2021) but there is a lack of clearly outlined frameworks to decolonize education (White 2014) let alone in Flanders. In addition, literature on transformative concrete points concerning decoloniality in higher education seems scarce. Therefore, we propose a framework with the coloniality diagram at its core. It is based on available literature and experiential learning using a philosophical design rather than an experimental one. This framework is iterative and is presented as a pioneering model that could be tested in future research.

This article is structured as follows. First, we provide an overview of how colonial ideas have permeated higher education in Europe, specifically in Flanders. Then, we present the theoretical framework that proposes in eight stages how to initiate decoloniality in higher education. Finally, we open the door to initiate what is proposed as a “transclusive” (from the Latin prefix trans—meaning across plus the word inclusive) education through this decolonizing process.

Context of higher education in Flanders

Belgium is a country divided into three autonomous regions: the Flemish Region (Flanders) in the north, the Walloon Region (Wallonia) in the south, and the Brussels-Capital Region. At the same time, there are three linguistic communities: Flanders with Dutch as its official language, Wallonia with French as its official language, and a small German-speaking community in the northeast (about one percent of the population). The Brussels-Capital Region has French and Dutch as its official languages. As a result, education in Belgium is politically a subnational Flemish issue. However, it is important to consider Belgium’s colonial history in order to understand the relevance and importance of decolonizing higher education curricula in Flanders. Belgium would fit the colonization “type” of those who conquered/invaded and returned to their homeland while maintaining control (Parson and Weise 2020), and this colonial past has only just begun to be recognized after decades of (documented) ignorance and denial (Withaeckx 2019).

In 2021, the Parliamentary Commission of Experts published its comprehensive report ‘Special Commission Charged with the Research on Congo-Free State and the Belgian Colonial Past in Congo, Rwanda and Burundi’. The report offers an in-depth understanding of Belgium’s colonial past and its connection to racism in today’s Belgian-Flemish society. It deals with issues such as dehumanization processes, the history of cultural and scientific imperialism, and the impact of colonialization on social realities such as race, ethnic identities, gender and sexuality in Congolese, Rwandan and Burundian societies, as well as in Belgian society. In the same line, the commission questions the neutrality of knowledge in the context of colonization and coloniality.

First, the report elaborates extensively on the myths created about the Congo, the colonial propaganda and violence, the "justifying" narratives that continue to this day, the lack of attention to the agency and resistance of the colonized people and some prominent Belgian figures, and, most relevant to this work, the construction of the inferiority of black people who needed to be civilized according to Belgian standards. It shows the relevance of this colonialization for postcolonial violence and the way we think about cultures, societies and people today (coloniality). Through human zoos, schoolbooks, children's songs, comic books, films, postcolonial literature and everyday life, the "colonial" image of Afro-descendants was consolidated in Belgian society (Parliamentary Expert Commission Report 2021).

Drawing on research by Demar et al. (2017), the statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2019) to Belgium on Afro-descendants in Belgium, and UNIA (2020), an independent federal public institution that fights discrimination and promotes equal opportunities, the report addresses new, more subtle forms of racism and institutional racism in contemporary Belgian society that are rooted in its colonial past. It examines the consequences of these deep-rooted biases for Afro-descendants in Belgium. Discrimination in education in general and in higher education in particular is identified as one of the consequences.

Finally, critical scholars with postcolonial roots are not common within higher education institutions in Belgium. Firstly, the immigration of people from former colonies is a relatively recent phenomenon. On the other hand, there are hardly any research centers that focus on the coloniality issue. Migration studies tend to focus on Moroccan and Turkish labor migrants and mostly avoid questions of colonial studies or the impact of racism. "Moreover, the structural integration of disciplines like gender, queer and critical race theory—which are usually at the forefront of developing critical analyses on the convergence of gender, race and sexuality in explaining power and privilege—has been a difficult and uneven process in Belgium (Withaeckx 2019, p. 28)". There is a lack of critical and systemic perspective in addressing and researching the underrepresentation of minority students. Rather, the focus is on individual characteristics or values and norms or other "gaps" in the profiles of these groups (Withaeckx 2019).

The question is to what extent these biases are deeply structured, reflected upon and deconstructed over decades in higher education. The report of the Parliamentary Expert Commission Report (2021) notes that the study of history in secondary and higher education is poorly developed from a critical point of view, for example, in relation to the racist literature and major Western philosophers, which is often part of higher education curricula.

At the policy level, higher education is developing a tradition and know-how on diversity policies and implementation processes. However, with regard to the commitment of Flemish higher education institutions to inclusive education, decolonizing is a prerequisite for establishing curricula that educate a diverse student population. Flemish scholars and higher education practitioners call for decolonizing processes, especially to establish a thorough diversity approach to higher education teaching and learning Asamoah 2021; Azabar et al. 2021; Kanobana 2021;

Withaeckx 2021). In recent years, decolonizing higher education has been intensively driven by student activism at Flemish universities (e.g., Umoja at UGent and We Decolonize VUB at VUB), and there are scholars who are bringing this work to the core of teaching and learning processes.

This paper highlights issues relevant to the Belgian context in order to understand why and how decolonizing the higher education context is meaningful and necessary. It explicitly calls for decolonizing processes in Belgian society, more specifically in higher education in Flanders. This article aims to support these important actions. In what follows, we elaborate on the key processes that should be triggered in the process of decolonizing higher education curricula in the Flemish context.

The key processes in a proposed framework

We believe that in order to initiate a process of decoloniality, the coloniality diagram shown in Fig. 1 should be at the core. In addition, several steps should be considered. The framework presented in this article as the Decolonizing the Academic Framework (DtAF) shown in Fig. 5 aims to address these aspects.

The DtAF is mainly based on international literature, especially from the contexts of the Americas and Australia. Although this is quite different from the European and specifically Belgian context, these understandings and expertise in decolonizing higher education tap into a longer and deeper tradition of decoloniality that informs our understanding of decolonizing Flemish higher education. The DtAF (Fig. 5) takes as its starting point the coloniality diagram (Fig. 1), which represents dominant and non-dominant perspectives, the dimensions of colonization, and power relations. Additionally, the DtAF model builds on three models found in the literature on decolonization processes that integrate aspects relevant to the Flemish context.

The first model, shown in Fig. 2, is the one recognized by Torres (2019), who created this framework based on Darder's (2019) decolonizing interpretive methodology, which "fundamentally seeks to provide subaltern researchers, educators, and leaders with a research lens capable of implicating and countering colonizing formations in education, politics, and society at large; her structural approach contributes

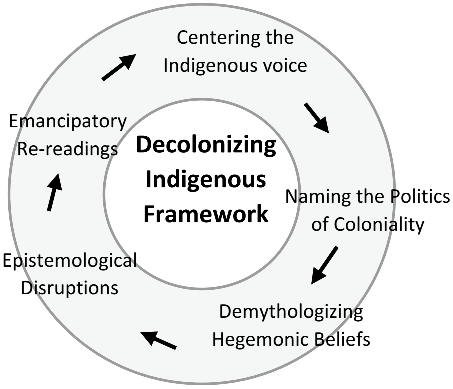

Centering the Indigenous voice
Naming the Politics of Coloniality
Demythologizing Hegemonic Beliefs
Epistemological Disruptions
Emancipatory Re-readings
Decolonizing Indigenous Framework

Fig. 2 Depiction of the principles of the decolonizing Indigenous framework (Torres 2019, p. 188). Adapted by Torres (2019) from "The Decolonizing Interpretive Research Methodology" in Decolonizing Interpretive Research: A Subaltern Methodology for Social Change, by Darder (2019)

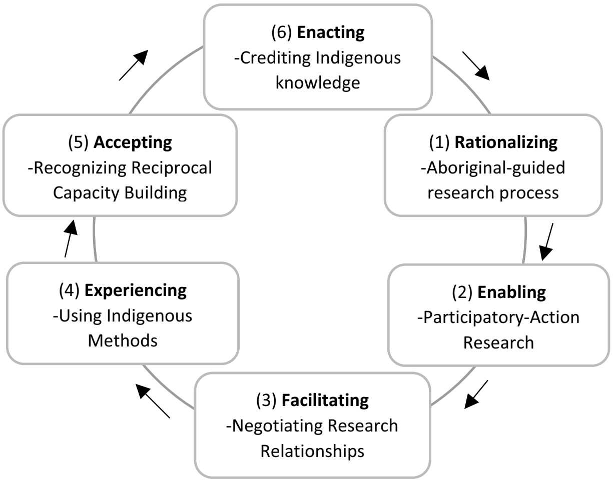

(6) **Enacting**
-Crediting Indigenous knowledge
(1) **Rationalizing**
-Aboriginal-guided research process
(2) **Enabling**
-Participatory-Action Research
(3) **Facilitating**
-Negotiating Research Relationships
(4) **Experiencing**
-Using Indigenous Methods
(5) **Accepting**
-Recognizing Reciprocal Capacity Building

Fig. 3 Depiction of framework for Aboriginal-guided decolonizing research (Bartlett et al. 2007)

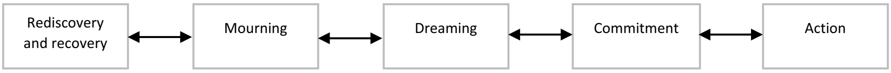

Rediscovery and recovery
Mourning
Dreaming
Commitment
Action

Fig. 4 Representation of Laenuis' stages. This figure is the authors' interpretation of Laenui's stages of the decolonization process

a powerful set of principles by which a decolonizing Indigenous education curricular framework can be comprehensively contextualized (Torres 2019, p. 187)." This model seeks to rethink the moral issues of the world from the perspective of the historically oppressed and aims to interrogate and disrupt our dimensions.

The second framework (Fig. 3) is an Aboriginal-focused approach/methodology for examining the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in Canada for decolonizing research. It includes, in order of application, the six processes of rationalizing, enabling, facilitating, experiencing, accepting, and enacting decolonizing research (Bartlett et al. 2007). Of particular interest here is the process of enacting an Aboriginal-led research approach to challenge traditional Western ways of doing research in order to reformulate underlying assumptions and methods.

Thirdly, Laenui's stages (2000) in Fig. 4 are probably the most influential ones in the DtAF. Laenui (2000) identifies five stages of the decoloniality process in general: rediscovery and recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action. In this process, it is indicated that each stage can be experienced at the same time or in various combinations and the phases have no clear demarcations. In general, this framework has been used for social and political processes. The stages of Laenui are a counterpart to the stages of colonization stated by Professor Virgilio Enriques mentioned by Laenui (2000).

The DtAF presented in Fig. 5 shows, as in the first model (Fig. 2), that there are notions of deconstructing history and beliefs, and of disruptions that can be expected to involve uncomfortable feelings and resistance. The first and second

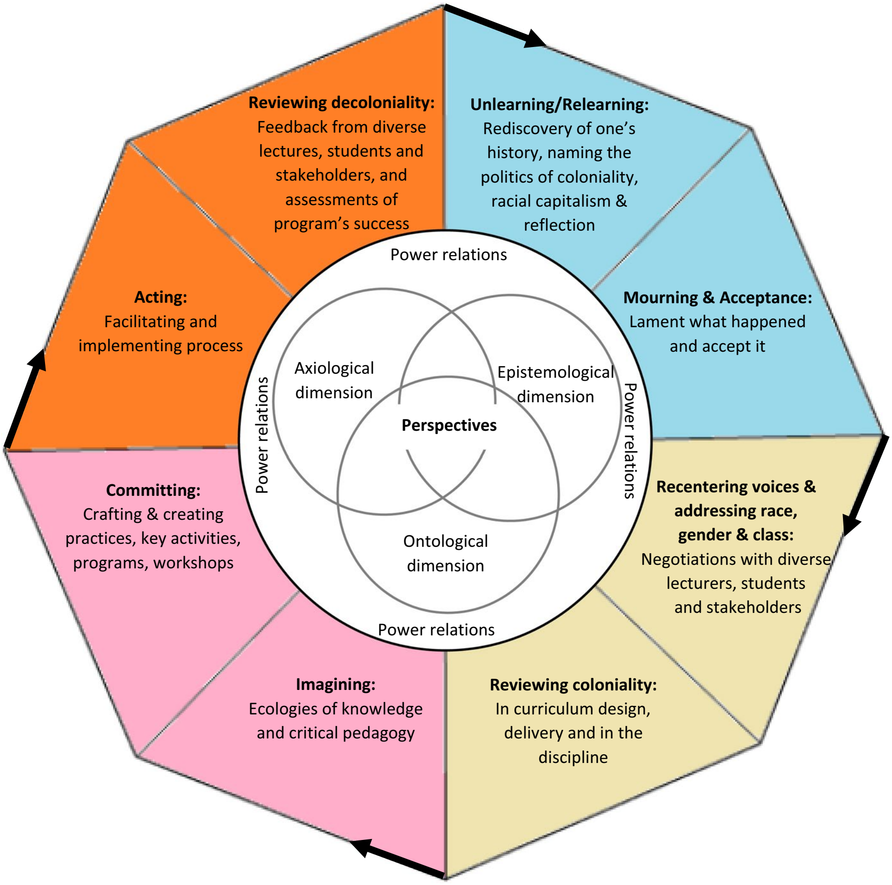

Reviewing decoloniality:
Feedback from diverse lectures, students and stakeholders, and assessments of program's success
Unlearning/Relearning:
Rediscovery of one's history, naming the politics of coloniality, racial capitalism & reflection
Mourning & Acceptance:
Lament what happened and accept it
Recentering voices & addressing race, gender & class:
Negotiations with diverse lecturers, students and stakeholders
Reviewing coloniality:
In curriculum design, delivery and in the discipline
Imagining:
Ecologies of knowledge and critical pedagogy
Committing:
Crafting & creating practices, key activities, programs, workshops
Acting:
Facilitating and implementing process
Power relations
Power relations
Power relations
Power relations
Axiological dimension
Epistemological dimension
Perspectives
Ontological dimension

Fig. 5 Decolonizing the Academic Framework (DtAF). This framework is composed by the coloniality diagram which forms the basis for the decoloniality process along with eight different stages subclassified in four different colors. The arrows on the outside indicate that this process is iterative, can be continuous and may be stopped

models (Figs. 2, 3) also emphasize the engagement of different voices, recentering and negotiation. A third aspect extracted from the second and third models (Figs. 3, 4) is the creation and action phase.

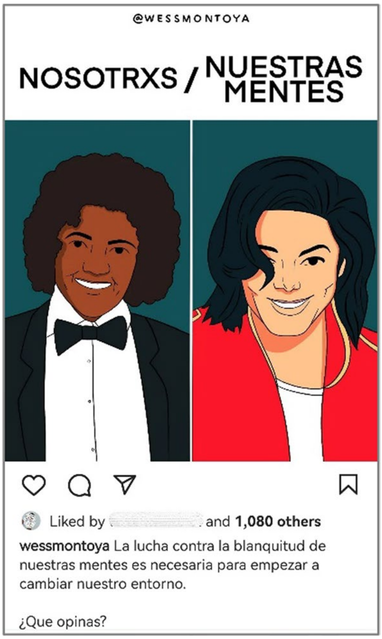
The core of the DtAF

As previously mentioned, the core of this model is represented by the coloniality diagram initially presented in Fig. 1. The coloniality diagram is fundamental for the process of decoloniality because it deals with three dimensions that affect our values, our knowledge and our being. The dominant and non-dominant perspectives, on the other hand, are related to the position that we take in society in different contexts. One can have a dominant or a non-dominant perspective with respect to different aspects of life: relations of power, interactions, hierarchies, to name a few.

The model shown in Fig. 2 (Bartlett et al. 2007) already mentions how important it is for researchers with a privileged status (dominant) to develop the ability to immerse themselves in indigenous knowledge (non-dominant), for example. However, it is not necessary to go that far and simply begin to understand the perspectives that lie within us. The dominant and non-dominant perspectives are not defined by the way we look, but rather by the way we behave and react to different situations that have arisen because of colonialization and coloniality, such as cheap labor, cultural appropriation, patriarchy, feminicide, child abuse, ecocide, and resource exploitation (Marya 2020). Our perspectives are defined by the dimensions within.

The purpose is to identify which perspective is dominant in certain situations: the dominant or non-dominant perspective. To give an example, memes from activist accounts can represent our view of perspectives. @poderprieto (dark skin power) is one of the many social justice activist accounts in Latin America that have addressed these issues through memes. Figure 6 shows an example. This example, posted by @poderprieto (2022) and designed by @wessmontoya (Montoya 2022), sets the point of discussion in relation to perspectives. On the left, a person with dark skin represents how people might look, and on the right, the same person with much lighter skin and European features represents how they might actually think/behave.

This means that our position on different aspects of coloniality may vary. For example, a person may have a non-dominant perspective on patriarchy. This means that they do not agree with patriarchal practices; however, the same person could have a dominant perspective on cheap labor, which means that they agree with these



Liked by [redacted] and **1,080 others**

wessmontoya La lucha contra la blanquitud de nuestras mentes es necesaria para empezar a cambiar nuestro entorno.

¿Que opinas?

Fig. 6 Illustration by @wessmontoya (Montoya 2022). On the left, an image of a person of color is shown with the caption in Spanish Nosotrxs (gender-neutral written from of us). The image on the right shows the same person with lighter skin and more European features with the caption Nuestras Mentes (Our Minds). Then as a comment below we can read (translated): the fight against the whiteness of our minds is necessary to begin to change our surroundings. What do you think?

practices. These perspectives can change over time and are not fixed or stable. More specifically and given the focus of this paper, in school, these perspectives are therefore relevant to both the teacher and the student. How the teacher presents their lessons and how the student interprets their content. This also shows the power relations that play an important role in the DtAF.

With the core of the DtAF in mind and as a basis for this framework, the stages for decolonizing the curriculum follow. These stages have been designed with the Flemish context in mind; however, this does not necessarily mean that this model cannot be applied in other contexts or cultures. Furthermore, while we believe this model is theoretically robust and makes use of relevant literature, it is important to mention that this model has not yet been tested in formal research settings.

The stages explained

Unlearning/relearning

The first stage of the DtAF model is the unlearning/relearning stage. In this stage, we learn about coloniality and its effects on our way of living. It is about our history of colonization, the violence and propaganda that accompanied it. During this unlearning process, the narratives around our history are deconstructed. It is in this period that many contemporary biases have their structural, imperialist roots. Second, in this phase, higher education actors examine how coloniality is linked to the idea of "modernity" and how colonial control has permeated various areas of modern civilization.

As mentioned above, both Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2011) explain how coloniality has permeated an entire system through basic institutions such as governance, knowledge institutions, health care, and the economy. Educators need to examine how they relate to the system, how they are socially and historically situated, how they relate to governance, subjectivity and knowledge systems in order to develop an awareness that one cannot take a neutral position (Andreotti 2011). They need to critically examine the universality of Western institutions and ideas such as modernity.

Our dimensions have to be unlearned in order to learn again. 'Unlearning' is a concept that is presented as more appropriate to understand this process, following Bell Hooks (1984): she points out that acknowledging that there are traces of coloniality does not initiate change, because it can also remain the same. It is only when this acknowledgment leads to transformation that it leads to change.

Acknowledging can be quite uncomfortable: awareness of the dark side of histories, institutions and projects that are assumed to be neutral, universal and "normal" can be destabilizing for all involved. This stage is also related to the steps of naming the politics of coloniality and demythologizing hegemonic beliefs by Torres (2019), which involves stating and questioning the central problem and disrupting the axiological, epistemological and ontological dimensions of coloniality (Darder 2015).

Unlearning/relearning is also in line with the rationalization of the model of Bartlett et al. (2007), which implies to understand the concept of colonialization and coloniality, and with the stage of rediscovery and recovery of Laenui (2000), who mentions that the reasons for entering this stage can be curiosity, accident, desperation, escape, chance or fate. This understanding through reflection on the relationship between oneself and the system, one's history and institutions is an intrapersonal stage. In this stage and in the educational context, it is important to ask ourselves who we are as lecturers (Sathorar and Geduld 2019) and what power relations we have perpetuated in the classroom; it is important to analyze our perspectives on what we teach.

In the Belgian/Flemish higher education context, this stage could involve, for example, an analysis of global colonial imperialism in general and Belgian colonial history in particular and its consequences in our contemporary society, as well as a critical examination and reflection on concepts such as modernity and the universality of rationality, institutions and knowledge. This reflection is necessary in order to understand racism and its mechanisms. Diversity in higher education requires going beyond 'happy' work and initiating uncomfortable dialogues and reflections (Azabar et al. 2021; Withaeckx 2021).

Mourning and acceptance

This is an essential part of healing (Laenui 2000) and deals with the loss that comes with unlearning: the posthuman subject, the relationship of the self to other selves (du Preez 2018). Long-held understandings and beliefs are challenged and areas of ignorance surface. It is not primarily about persons and individuals, but about the structure of the system in which we function, it questions one's roots, position and privileges. If higher education staff do not enter this stage, it may be because of anger at the guilt that is perceived to have been imposed on them and/or resistance to the anger of differently positioned stakeholders. This is understandable, since we can assume that most colleagues are hard-working, dedicated, well-intentioned, and open-minded faculty and staff. Nevertheless, such reactions channel the decoloniality process and its debates back into the perspective of the dominantly positioned. This does not mean turning off one's critical thinking, which is necessary for dialogues and work in the next stage.

In this sense, Said (1993) mentions the "cultural archive" that provided European colonialists with rationales and language for their subjugation of other peoples; this concept was later taken up by Wekker (2016), who indicated that her book was guided by it, in her words: "The cultural archive has influenced historical cultural configurations and current dominant and valued self-representations and culture" (Wekker 2016, p. 1). This last point is particularly important because Wekker (2016) focuses on the cultural archive in Belgium's neighboring country, the Netherlands, because it is through this idea that colonialist ideas are excused and ignored. The risk of ignoring the cultural archive can lead to epistemic violence, or better said, has led to epistemic violence (Spivak 1988), which is the violence exercised through knowledge to constitute the colonized as 'other' and thus establish power relations. Therefore, knowledge should be centered, which means accepting that there is no single voice that speaks for all of us (Dennis 2018). For this reason, the next stage is about centering voices and addressing race, gender, and class.

Recentering voices and addressing race, gender and class

The next stage is Recentering Voices and Addressing Race, Gender, and Class. While the first two stages can be used in both intrapersonal and educational settings, this stage is more specifically tailored to the educational process. This stage is in line with the ideas of Torres' (2019) article "Centering the Indigenous voice" and Muller's (2017) article "Healing and forgiveness".

This calls for a deliberate recentering of voices here, breaking with the discourse of 'diversity' in academia, which has failed to achieve the effects its work aims to achieve. Ahmed (2012) has elaborated on the relationship between diversity and racism, mediated by the mechanisms of power that reproduce the whiteness of the institution. The Recentering of Voices goes beyond the host whiteness that engages the "Other" (Spivak 1988) as an embodiment of diversity. It goes beyond an institution's statements and commitments against racism, which could interfere with the actual, difficult work of decolonization/decoloniality and social equality. This is only possible if the institution creates spaces for dialogues about race, gender and class issues with and in our higher education institutions (Ahmed 2012). It requires (intersectionally) differently situated voices in decision-making positions and processes, for example, in defining criteria for employment, quality advising, curriculum design, student counseling, etc. These subaltern voices do not occupy key decision-making positions in higher education institutions, which are crucial for opening up valuable insights and spaces of recentering.

Reviewing coloniality

Within the politics of coloniality (Quijano 2000), epistemic violence is present and creates an abyssal divide (Santos 2007) that this stage seeks to challenge in order to allow subaltern voices to emerge. Bartlett et al. (2007) enabling stage is related to this stage. Here, the views and insights of colonized voices, subaltern voices as Spivak (1988) would put it, are the fundamental driving forces that will lead to change. These voices can shed light on colonial practices that may be invisible to many. Through subaltern voices, these practices can be reviewed.

In the same line, Thielsch (2020) talks about a postcolonial/decoloniality approach to teaching in higher education, which she defines as "an inductive approach (…) that aims to better understand the power relations inherent in different modes of academic knowledge production; it changes the student–teacher relationship by valuing subjectivity, openly discussing contradictory perceptions (and per-auditives), and critically reflecting on presumptive expert knowledge (Thielsch 2020, p. 13)".

However, when reviewing coloniality, one should be careful not to fall into the "decolonization hype," and various dangers have been identified when engaging in intellectual decoloniality (Moosavi 2020). These dangers include reducing intellectual decoloniality to a simple task, essentializing and appropriating the Global South, overlooking the multifaceted nature of marginalization in academia, nativism, and tokenism.

Imagining

This phase is not about imagining new educational and working practices as a reaction or as a complement to what exists: it is rather about creating new alternatives, new future spaces that validate the values of social justice and equality in the processes of learning, teaching and creating knowledge (Aziz 2021). In Laenui's model (2000), it is addressed as a dream, as "the flooring for the creation of a new social order". Santos (2007) formulates it not as thinking about alternatives, but as "alternative thinking about alternatives".

Dennis (2018) goes so far as to put it in an educational context, addressing concepts such as epistemic (disobedience, global justice…); critical pedagogy; the relationship between who produces knowledge and what is produced as knowledge; and multiplicity pedagogy. Ecologies of knowledge (Santos 2007) are also central to this phase. This means that "non-scientific knowledges", or rather knowledges that are based on experience or that belong to the "other", to the colonized, should be heard. Mignolo (2021) even speaks of a resetting modernity.

This stage is also in line with the processes of facilitation in the model of Bartlett et al. (2007), where this stage is seen more as a negotiation to establish a relevant and meaningful research process. Torres (2019), on the other hand, sees it as an epistemological disruption, which implies finding ways to disrupt the "oppressive logic" and expand the possibility of a liberatory practice. In the process of imagining (dreaming in Laenui 2000), people will have the opportunity to express their thoughts without restrictions. The imagining stage can then begin to shape the thoughts and desires into a concrete form of work, eventually leading to the committing stage (Laenui 2000).

Committing

The imagining stage and the committing stage may merge at some point. Laenui (2000) pointed out that it is difficult to distinguish the end of the imagining stage. Between imagining and committing there is an aspect that should be taken into account: the hidden academic curriculum (Wimpenny et al. 2021). Put simply, the language, style and structure of academic tasks and communication about them (Kozlowski 2021). These are aspects that may be easy to grasp and understand in a homogeneous society, but as society becomes more socially and culturally diverse; the hidden processes can become a struggle and the role of institutions is to understand the mechanisms that complicate the engagement of students and staff. These mechanisms are mostly hidden from the dominant institutional group and accessible through the experiences and reflections of marginalized participants.

Another difficulty that compromises commitment in this process is the phenomenon of becoming a problem when addressing issues of racism and sexism in institutions (Ahmed 2012). Ahmed (2012) shows us in her study that beyond diversity policy and commitment, the real work of diversity implies discomfort and difficult work and profound questioning of discriminatory mechanisms, which is not always easy, let alone welcomed in institutions.

Acting

The acting stage comes as a dream come true. This stage is the action according to Laenui (2000), who suggests that this stage can truly be reached if there is enough commitment. Bartlett et al. (2007) see it as experiencing and accepting decolonizing research that is part of a collective analysis that privileges Indigenous ways of knowing and learning; they see the outcome as mutual capacity building (Bartlett 2003; Tuhiwai Smith 1999 as cited in Bartlett et al. 2007).

Within this stage, Torres (2019) identifies emancipatory re-readings. The term re-readings is used because it involves re-reading which stories are chosen to be discussed and how they are discussed. Torres (2019) suggests the development of hybrid knowledges anchored in the ways of knowing of the subaltern voices, accompanied by a modern context, in order to achieve intercultural translation.

Reviewing decoloniality

This stage can only be achieved if the action is executed. Once the changes have been implemented, it is time to sit down and review the entire process. This process is reviewed with thorough feedback from stakeholders, faculty members, students, and with an assessment of the program's success. There is little mention of evaluation in the above models. Bartlett et al. (2007) try to address it through the enacting stage, which basically emphasizes the fact that all knowledge should be properly credited.

On the other hand, Parson and Weise (2020) address a two-stage postcolonial/decoloniality approach to competency-based curriculum design in higher education. The last two steps of the first stage of this approach focus on program evaluation and summative assessment. Program evaluation consists of collecting data that can reveal any challenges and barriers that persist in the redesigned curriculum. In addition, any barriers should be identified at this stage. Qualitative measures of student and faculty perceptions are recommended, along with assessment of student work, qualitative interviews, and focus groups with students. This assessment should be scheduled on a regular basis so that it can be summative, leading to a program evaluation. Parson and Weise (2020) suggest 3–8 years for program evaluation and 1–2 years for summative assessment. Therefore, in the DtAF, we follow the same line of thinking as Parson and Weise (2020) and believe that this is a long-term process.

About the design of the DtAF

The DtAF is presented in the shape of an octagon, with a step in each part of the octagon and a different color in every two steps. Therefore, four different colors can be seen. An arrow appears after each color transition. The different colors suggest a transition between each set of two stages given that after each set of two stages there is a different focus in the process of decoloniality. Consequently, after each color transition there is an arrow indicating that the process may continue.

Although it is suggested to begin in the Unlearning/Relearning stage, it is possible to begin in different stages, since the stages are not finite nor fixed. The stages can be intertwined and interact with other stages in either an extrinsic or intrinsic way. This depends on where the curriculum designers are positioned. What is certain is that the process is iterative, ongoing, and should be reviewed repeatedly (Bartlett et al. 2007; Parson and Weise 2020; Torres 2019). The decoloniality process is not something that can be implemented in a few years. Just as colonization and coloniality took and has taken hundreds of years to take deep root in our society, so will the process of decoloniality.

Transclusive education: beyond inclusive

The aim of repeatedly going through the process of assessing the decoloniality of teaching and learning in the higher education curriculum is to arrive at what could be called “transclusive education”, this is a combination of the Latin prefix trans—meaning “across”, “beyond”, or “on the other side of” plus the word inclusive and is not related to the transgender community. Decolonizing the curriculum on the basis of the proposed model involves different stakeholders in different crucial moments of decision-making. It places the value and necessity of multiple perspectives at the center of dialogues and decisions.

Systemic considerations concerning race, gender, and class for the “inclusion” of a diverse body of students and staff are still more absent than present. *Transclusive education* focuses on negotiating the margins of how we educate and interact. It *transgresses barriers* (Hooks 1994) Who decides what? Where are the systemic barriers? What are the decision-making mechanisms and/or criteria for what is appropriate for having and exercising power and participation? Who helps to engage whom or not? Who supports whom to include and what (silent) norms are at play? Who defines them? Who sets the criteria, ways of working and valid perspectives?

This is work that needs to be done continuously as our DtAF. Critical thinkers and influencers are increasingly expressing disappointment with diversity: it has not changed enough, and structural barriers are not being challenged or removed (see: 10 D’s of Disillusionment with Inclusion by the collective Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures (GTDF), 2020; or the concept of ‘diversity fatigue’ by Flemish activists Pandzou and Kandolo 2021).

Transclusive education deals with power and challenges the very criteria of decision-making and who decides what in terms of institutional boundaries. It goes beyond “including someone in a defined space” and pushes for crossing boundaries and barriers, bringing everyone together to create new educational spaces beyond the existing ones. It calls for “alternative thinking about alternatives” (Santos 2007) in terms of teaching and learning spaces in Flemish higher education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, colonization and coloniality have taken root in many aspects of our lives, from the external to the internal: The external is the dispossession of land, nature, and people to build wealth; the internal is the structure of our institutions, economy, politics, and ecosystems that affect the way we think, behave, value, learn, live, and perceive the world. In particular, these views have affected our axiological, epistemological, and ontological dimensions, perspectives of dominance or non-dominance in certain aspects of life, and power relations around us. These dimensions, perspectives and power relations have become the basis of coloniality—represented in the Coloniality Diagram (Fig. 1)—which in turn is the starting point for the Decolonizing the Academic Framework (DtAF) (Fig. 5).

The DtAF aims to fill the need for a model that can be applied to begin the process of decoloniality in higher education. This framework consists of eight stages presented in an octagon and are (1) Unlearning/Relearning, (2) Mourning and Acceptance, (3) Recentering Voices and Addressing Race, Gender and Class, (4) Reviewing Coloniality, (5) Imagining, (6) Committing, (7) Acting and (8) Reviewing Decoloniality. The goal is to follow this framework to begin the process of decoloniality that we believe can lead to a dialogue and education beyond, across and on the other side of inclusivity: a transclusive (beyond inclusive) dialogue and education. Concepts that imply being inclusive at another level and challenge the concept of inclusivity. The generation of transclusive dialogue and education could create a movement in the politics of diversity and social justice.

The goal of this paper has been to propose a framework that can be applied in higher education and for which the literature remains scarce. While one of the limitations is that the DtAF has not been tested yet, it is certain that this can be a promising start for researchers and educators in higher education. In addition, this article challenges concepts such as “inclusive” that are commonly used as part of the decoloniality process and may be harmful in the long run.

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Data availability All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest and no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Research involving human participants This research does not involve human participants; therefore, no informed consent was needed.

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