Decolonial Hacking of Academia: The Classroom as a (Non-)Transformational Space

Le piratage décolonial de l'université: la salle de classe comme espace de (non-)transformation

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Abstract

The demand for the decolonization of academia witnessed an upsurge in the last few years. In Belgium, this is especially true after the Black Lives Matter protests, in which students and faculty called on their universities to take decolonizing measures, from redesigning the curriculum to eradicating colonial symbols from university buildings. One of the academic realms in which faculty can exercise their power to effect transformation is the classroom. In this paper, I introduce a decolonial hacking approach to explain how we can(not) use the classroom realm to reconfigure the colonial machinery of academia. From an auto-ethnographic perspective, I discuss both the opportunities and challenges experienced as a non-white racialized woman academic aiming to navigate and deconstruct the colonial academic space. In particular, I discuss how I 'hack' the classroom to achieve the decolonial dream by focusing on a) hacking the curriculum, b) hacking the student-teacher relationship and the culmination of both. Thus, I hope to contribute to the conversation of bringing decolonial praxis inside the colonial machinery of academia.

Résumé

Depuis plusieurs années, on constate la montée en puissance de la revendication de décolonisation de l'université. En Belgique, cela est particulièrement vrai après les manifestations de Black Lives Matter*, au cours desquelles les étudiant·e·s et les professeur·e·s ont appelé leurs universités à prendre des mesures de décolonisation, allant de la refonte du programme d'études à l'éradication des symboles coloniaux des bâtiments universitaires. L'un des espaces universitaires dans lesquels les enseignant·e·s peuvent exercer leur pouvoir de transformation est la salle de classe. Dans cet article, j'introduis une approche décoloniale du piratage (*hacking*) pour expliquer comment nous pouvons (ne pas) utiliser l'espace de la classe pour reconfigurer la « machinerie » coloniale de l'université. Dans une perspective auto-ethnographique, je discute à la fois des opportunités et des défis rencontrés en tant que femme universitaire racialisée comme non-blanche cherchant à naviguer et à déconstruire l'espace académique colonial. J'explique en particulier comment je « pirate » la salle de classe pour réaliser le rêve décolonial en me concentrant sur a) le piratage du programme, b) le piratage de la relation étudiant·e-enseignant·e, et l'aboutissement des deux. J'espère ainsi contribuer à la conversation sur l'introduction d'une pratique décoloniale dans la machinerie coloniale de l'université.*

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The call for the decolonization of higher education (HE) has become widespread across both the Global North and South criticizing higher education institutions (HEI) for their key role in perpetuating coloniality materially, culturally and intellectually. Decolonial student movements in particular sparked the debate on what decolonization means for HEI and how it should be enacted (Ahmed 2020; Kwoba, Chantiluke, and Nkopo 2018; Monaville 2022; Bathily 2018). Since the 1960s, students have been key players in anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements, raising awareness of the need for both material and intellectual decolonization within HEI. In South-Africa, the National Union of South African Students and the South African Students' Organization, led by figures like Steve Biko, demanded an end to apartheid, racial segregation, and the establishment of a non-racial, democratic South-Africa. Also, in countries like Ghana, Vietnam and Cuba were students heavily involved in national liberation with the aim to establish governments that represented the interests of the Indigenous population. These anti- and decolonial struggles were supported by student movements in the Global North, in particular connected with the Civil Rights Movements in the late sixties in the United States as well as the May 1968 student movements in Europe (Choudry and Vally 2020).

These student movements have aimed at tackling the colonial legacies in HE in several ways. One dimension has been the opposition of HE's involvement in military research and specifically their financial support to corporations and states that supported colonial or imperialist agendas. A common collaboration has been and is still with the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions movement calling their HEI to divest from companies involved in the Israeli occupation and to sever ties with Israeli academic institutions (Abdulhadi and Shehadeh 2020). Another dimension was the push for more democratic governance structures within HE, with demands for student representation in decision-making bodies, but also the demand for ethno-racial representation at the top of the university hierarchy (Hendrickson 2022). However, one of the most highlighted dimensions has been education with the demand for 'intellectual decolonization.' This has, amongst others, supported the establishment of departments and programs like African Studies, Latin American Studies, Asian Studies and Native American Studies, which would explore indigenous cultures on their own terms, rather than through a colonial lens (Alkalimat 2021).

Over the past decade, the discourse on decolonization has gained significant momentum, largely driven by the #RhodesMustFall movement initiated at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. This movement, spearheaded by students advocation for removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes, a British colonialist, highlighted the importance of addressing material decolonization. These efforts included the removal of colonial iconography on campus that commemorate key figures of the colonial era (Heleta 2016; Mbembe 2016; Stein and De Andreotti 2016). This advocacy extended to calls for reparations related to the expropriation of resources, land, and the exploitation of indigenous communities, which have historically contributed to the establishment and ongoing prosperity of HEI based on these appropriated resources. In light of the recent escalation of violence in Palestine since 2023 and the horrific genocide, student movements have once again mobilized to advocate for Palestinian rights, and demand an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Facing the active occupy movement in their campuses, Global North HEI are experiencing pressures to take a definitive stance on this matter.

Alongside material decolonization, both students and scholars requestioned the core "business" of the university, i.e. knowledge production (de Oliveira Andreotti et al. 2015). Reviving the idea of 'decolonizing the mind' in HE, the aim is to challenge and transform how knowledge and education are produced, validated, and transmitted (wa Thiongo 1993). The demand for intellectual decolonization has become increasingly translated into the demand to transform the curriculum that continues to centralize Western epistemologies and ways of knowing while being presented as universal and decontextualized. Students, scholars and practitioners are advocating for the incorporation of pluriversal knowledge systems that acknowledge the existence of epistemologies, ontologies and worldviews from marginalized and Indigenous communities (Bhambra, Nissancioglu, and Gebrial 2018; Mbembe 2016; Shahjahan et al. 2022). These perspectives should not be treated as peripheral or optional but are central to producing and disseminating knowledge within academic settings.

In this paper, I will particularly focus on the challenges of intellectual decolonization, which I understand as decentering, contextualizing and de-universalizing Western onto-epistemologies. Race and racism are rooted in historical processes of colonization, where imperial powers justified subjugation

and exploitation through the construction of racial hierarchies. The legacies of colonialism persist in contemporary society, perpetuating systemic racism. Decolonization seeks to challenge and dismantle these structures in various domains of life, among which the educational domain. Addressing racism is thus an integral part of the broader decolonization process.

I expand on Andreotti et al.'s (2015) notion of 'hacking' to explain the potential ways in which we could use the classroom as a micro-realm for introducing decolonial praxis and achieving intellectual decolonization. While there is an increasing popularization of intellectual decolonization in higher education, the discussions remain at the theoretical-conceptual level. A large gap can be observed when it comes to operationalizing intellectual decolonization and, thus, which practices can be implemented (Noroozi 2016). Inspired by la paperson's (2017) and Andreotti et al.'s work (2015) defining academic organizations as 'machineries' that always subvert to decolonizing purposes, I employ the concept of 'decolonial hacking' to explain how the decolonial aim of introducing pluriversal knowledge can be structurally embedded within the classroom. I develop the idea of decolonial hacking by providing insight into how intellectual decolonization is a collaborative and multidimensional effort of various knowledge holders. This effort is essential to overturn the colonial episteme that impacts the organization, structuring and modes of our work as educators in HE. These practices can be diverse and are contextually situated, meaning that they can work within the particular context of Belgium but can be refined to contexts across borders. I am aware of the critique on the praxis of decolonizing the curriculum as too 'soft' and subtle (Tuck and Yang 2012) having the potential to be coopted by the institution while its colonial foundations remain to exist. However, I argue that as educators and faculty, we should not waste the (limited) power we have in (independently) developing our classrooms into sites of radical transformation.

From an auto-ethnographic approach, I do not only aim to share the opportunities but also the challenges that I experience when aiming to 'move the center' within the (cultural) constraints imposed by the universities' field of power. I specifically depend on my own experiences and hacking tactics I have tried (and sometimes failed) at introducing within the first-year undergraduate course of sociology. I first provide an overview of the current debate on intellectual decolonization. I then explain the notion of 'decolonial hacking' as my strategy to push forward the decolonial project within the realm of the classroom. Finally, I share my hope that decolonial hacking can be an effective tactic to break the colonial boundaries by imagining alternative ways of intellectual work in academia.

On Intellectual Decolonization in Higher Education

Since the early twenty-first century, scholars have increasingly recognized a 'decolonial' turn (Grosfoguel 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2011). Some view this as a new orientation within postcolonial studies, while others regard it as an entirely distinct field (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). It is crucial, however, to distinguish decolonization from postcolonialism, as they are not synonymous. A postcolonial approach is generally invested in the impact of the colonial legacy on both European nations and formerly colonized nations focusing on the experiences of subalterns and the ongoing effects of colonialism. In contrast, decolonization, as conceptualized in this paper, aligns with Mignolo's notion of 'undoing' or 'delinking' from the structures of knowledge imposed by the West. Especially within the context of the Global North where HEI have historically played a critical role in legitimizing European colonial projects through pseudo-scientific practices and other means, the colonial legacy embedded in contemporary knowledge production urgently requires critical examination and intervention. Mignolo (2018) argues that this process of delinking must be followed by "epistemic reconstitution" as a step toward the liberation of the mind. This approach frames decolonization as inherently tied to praxis, emphasizing its role in "trans-local struggles, movements, and actions to resist and refuse the legacies of ongoing relations and patterns of power" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 16). They, furthermore, consider decolonization as an ongoing process, one that did not conclude with the formal end of colonialism but continues to challenge the reproduction of colonial legacies in our ontologies and epistemologies.

Still, decolonization remains a contested term as it is defined and interpreted in a multitude of ways. According to Bhambra (2018, 2), this multitude of approaches, perspectives, but also strategies and responses is not necessarily a weakness nor an issue as it is the simple result of the heterogeneity of "historical and political sites of decolonization that span both the globe and 500 years of history". Therefore, decolonization has been given different meanings

across geographical contexts. Within settler-colonial contexts in the Global North, like the US and Canada, decolonization is considered to be a political project of repatriating dispossessed indigenous land (Tuck and Yang 2012). Other scholars like Bhambra (2018), however, argue that this notion of decolonization does not work for most other countries in the Global North. As most European countries are not settler-colonial states as their colonial project took place outside of the metropole, it is rather necessary to focus on an intellectual form of decolonization (Grosfoguel 2015; Mignolo 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; 2020).

Global South scholars such as Quijano (2000), Maldonado-Torres (2007), Grosfoguel (2015) and Mignolo (2009) demonstrated how the coloniality[1] of knowledge shapes our contemporary societies. They argue that "coloniality survives colonialism" in the sense that it is "maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and many other aspects of our modern experience" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243). Therefore, intellectual decolonization is to interrogate the structures of knowledge and knowing (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). This entails 'epistemic disobedience' of the so-called 'zero-point' epistemology, or the resistance to modern Western epistemology that dominates the global knowledge structure across HEI. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) accurately defines HEI as one of the key institutions of the cognitive empire. The cognitive empire entails the way in which the colonial legacy of HEI is a form of imperialism that operates through the control and manipulation of knowledge and information (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; 2021). The cognitive empire uses knowledge as a tool of domination, shaping and controlling the way people think, perceive, and interact with the world. In this sense, a cognitive empire goes beyond traditional notions of imperialism, which focus on territorial domination, and instead seeks to dominate the minds and consciousness of people. He argues that the cognitive empire perpetuates a global epistemic injustice by marginalizing and silencing alternative knowledges and worldviews that challenge its dominant paradigm. Therefore, he calls for a decolonization of knowledge production and a recognition of the plurality of epistemologies and ways of knowing (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Msila 2021).

On a theoretical level, decolonial scholars provide revolutionary prescriptions and definitions of intellectual decolonization. However, as Morreira (2020, 2), among others, argues, "there is a gap between high-level decolonial theory and its practices of implementation". As such, on the level of praxis, scholars and practitioners are still trying to grasp the operationalization and direct application of intellectual decolonization in contexts in which coloniality is still deeply entrenched. Over the past two decades, two trajectories have been developed in operationalizing intellectual decolonization (Shahjahan et al. 2022). First, scholars called for the decolonization of disciplines mostly focusing on interrogating the dominant disciplinary theories and research methods. This first trajectory quickly shifted to a second one in which student movements, scholars, and civil society actors raised concerns about the knowledge offered within their curriculum. This shift caused the understanding of intellectual decolonization to emphasize the micro-realm of the classroom and in particular the role of the curriculum.

Decolonizing the curriculum generally aims at 'moving the centre' of knowledge (wa Thiongo 1993). That centre within HE has always been assumed to be the 'West' in which Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies are considered superior to all other forms of knowledge and knowing. A decolonized curriculum thus entails questioning a "set of knowledge/power relations that privileges a certain gaze or representation of the world deemed universal, delocalized, and applied unquestioningly" (Shahjahan et al. 2022, 76). It is about questioning the "who is doing it, where, why and how" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 108). Again, depending on the geographical context, decentring Eurocentric modes of knowledge production materializes in a variety of ways. For European HEI, a common notion of what decolonization of the curriculum means has yet to be developed. Currently, most of the institutional-level debates have taken place in the United Kingdom compared to a relative silence on decolonization in HEI in the European mainland. In the UK, the fundamental work of Bhambra (2018, 2) emphasizes that besides offering alternative ways of knowledge and knowing in the curriculum, colonialism, empire, and racism should be introduced as "empirical and discursive objects of study" as they are "key shaping

1 The concept of coloniality was developed by Aníbal Quijano, a Peruvian sociologist and decolonial theorist, in the late 20th century as a way to understand how the legacy of colonialism continues to shape global power structures on micro and macro level. Quijano argued that colonialism established a global power system that persists through economic, political, and cultural dominance of the Global North over the Global South. This coloniality encompasses three key dimensions: the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being.

forces of the contemporary world". She argues that by ignoring forces like colonialism in the curriculum students only develop a partial understanding of our contemporary world.

In this paper, I particularly look at the context of the social sciences. The colonial origins of the social sciences have received increasing attention in scholarly work. In his famous essay *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire (2000, 11) speaks about how not only "sadistic governors" and "greedy bankers" are the enemy of the colonized people, but also the "goitrous academicians", the "ethnographers", and the "agrarian sociologist". He exposes the role of social scientists in supporting colonialism and racism through "rigged investigations, their self-serving generalizations, their tendentious speculations, their insistence on the marginal, 'separate' character of the non-whites" claimed to be based on "the firmest rationalism" (Césaire 2000, 12).

Focusing on sociology, this academic discipline was built in the midst of the colonial projects. Even more, sociology has been used as a (nation) tool to legitimize, produce and reproduce the inferiority of colonized subjects and the superiority of the former colonizers. Therefore, sociology consists of colonial episteme, and the foundation of the ways of knowledge and the 'knowledge body' are directly based on a colonial differentiation of the colonizer and the colonized. In addition, the sociological canon in Europe mostly exists of 'classical' texts of the supposed 'founding fathers'. As Grosfoguel (2015) demonstrates, these 'founding fathers' originate from five European countries, which consist of only 12% of the world's population. Still, their body of work are universally applied to every society. Meanwhile, it is important to note that these founding fathers who aimed to create a "workable theory of progress" constructed the idea of progress on a colonial divide (Todd, 1918: as cited by Connell, 1997). They studied the historical transformations of European societies and directly linked this progress to not only material (economic), but moral (cultural) improvement. The concept of progress rested on the differentiation between the metropole, where all sociologists were based, and the colonial Other in colonized territories. At the same time, they did not shy away from supporting colonialism as Marx considered it a "necessary evil" for "primitive" societies to evolve[2].

2 Marx' standpoint became more nuanced at the end of his life as he saw the destructive consequences of colonialism, read more (Budgen 1994).

While one needs to contextualize scholars' work and point of view within their time and context, scholars agree that this colonial differentiation and the Eurocentric standpoint of sociology remains to be reproduced. According to Meghji (2021), this is continuously reproduced in two ways. First, through an Orientalist lens in which the binary of the East versus the West, the developed and underdeveloped, serves as a foundation for sociological theory. Secondly, bifurcation is the belief that the West can be separated from the rest of the world as if the West is not influenced by global dynamics, international ties, and in particular colonial ties. The presence of this coloniality of knowledge demands a decolonial sociology and social sciences in general, where such Orientalist lens and bifurcation are tackled. In Europe, social scientists also call for a 'post-western sociology' (Rouleau-Berger and Peilin 2018) or a 'non-hegemonic globalized sociology' (Dufoix and Macé 2019). They all demand the same thing: to decenter Eurocentric episteme, denouncing Western epistemic hegemony, to look beyond the knowledge boundaries, and allow space for a plurality of knowledge systems.

Decolonial hacking as a transformative approach

The overview demonstrates that while, on a theoretical level, decolonization aims at deconstructing systems of power and oppression within HE, on the level of praxis, questions remain unanswered on how to introduce decolonial praxis within the academe, and specifically, within the micro-realm of the classroom. In this paper, I start with la paperson's (2017) conceptualization of academic organizations as complex "machineries" composed of "technologies" that keep the colonial foundations intact. To decolonize this machinery, we need "system interference" in which various individuals at different levels of the hierarchy come together in dynamic and contingent ways.

Andreotti and colleagues (2015) introduced the notion of "system hacking" which I argue is more fitting when perceiving the academic organization as a machinery. They (2015, 27) define system hacking as "creating spaces within the system, using its resources, where people can be educated about the violences of the system and have their desires re-oriented away from it. This requires 'playing the game' of institutions at the same time that rules are bent to generate alternative outcomes. This strategy can also be remarkably creative and generative". I argue that this decolonial hacking is essential using the

"bits and pieces" of the machinery to "reassemble" the centre in such a way that it no longer privileges Western Eurocentric epistemes (la 2017). I expand their brief description of system hacking by looking into the genealogy of hacking to inform my decolonial praxis.

In popular culture, hacking is often misrepresented as a criminal practice. Hacking, however, did not always have this negative connotation. The original practice of hacking was considered a means of intellectual exploration. Hackers are driven by knowledge seeking and knowledge creation with the aim of finding shortcomings in the system to improve the system (Cohen and Scheinfeldt 2013; Jordan 2017). With hacking, technologies are manipulated to make them do things they were not designed for nor were expected to do (Jordan 2017, 532). The hacker uses knowledge that is not mainstream and are therefore often autodidacts that look at systemic knowledge structures and learn about them from making and doing. It requires the willingness to experiment with new approaches and techniques, and accepting the process of trial and error. More recently, hacking has been studied in a new light, understanding it as a new kind of work (Himanen 2001). It's a type of work that is driven by an ethical duty to create systems that are accessible and valuable to a larger community which goes against hyper individualism and instead centers on collaboration. Genealogically, hackers have always been a subculture who have common interests where hacking is "a self-conscious and widely noticed community of practice" and potentially develop "as a political community" (Jordan 2017, 534; Kollock and Smith 1998). As such, in the context of hacking as a decolonial praxis, to re-assemble, re-configure, or dismantle this machinery requires the structural agency of a collective of 'hackers' who are knowledge holders each introducing alternative forms of knowledge through their distinct socio-professional position.

A final key characteristic of hacking is the continuous power dynamics and tensions between those who aim to hack the system and those who aim to keep the status quo. As hacking can be debilitating to the system, maintainers of the status quo try to quickly shut off any risks to the stability and security of the system. As a result, the sabotaging potential of hacking increases the risk of hacking becoming criminalized as members of the system are unwilling to pay the costs that hacking caused to their system nor are they interested in the (unwanted) advice. A similar tendency can be observed with decolonization movements in HE that are highly surveilled and to some extent criminalized as they are unwanted within the Eurocentric Western HE system (Shain et al. 2021). More recently, the criminalization of decolonization movements is largely connected to the attack on left-wing academics for being "woke" or "Islamo-leftists" (Dawes 2023; Cammaerts 2022). This brings us back to the common negative perception of hacking as a criminal activity since this strongly aligns with Harney and Moten's analysis (2013) that the only relationship minoritized members can or should have with the university is a "criminal one". This notion of criminality is not necessarily perceived as negative, but rather as the essential need to have subversive intellectuals within the university for change to become possible. This, therefore, also means that subversive intellectuals or hackers put themselves at risk for working towards a decolonial university space.

I acknowledge that within this debate some anti-racist and decolonial scholars argue that we "cannot change the master's house with the master's tools" (lorde 1984), and that working towards decolonization within the existing modern universities is only a "settler move to innocence" (Tuck and Yang 2012). We also need to remain cognizant about whether "one is 'hacking' the system or 'being hacked' by it" (de Oliveira Andreotti et al. 2015, 27). However, I remain hopeful that decolonial hackers who work within the machinery of the current university model aim to use "specific machined privileges that may be put to work in the service of decolonization" (la 2017, xii). Therefore, there is not one ideal way of decolonizing the university, but several pathways combined can work towards achieving the same decolonial dream by working differently within the machine.

Furthermore, I consider the classroom to be the entry point for decolonial hacking within academia. This is because the classroom is not only a pedagogical space, but a personal, political and performative space (hooks 1989). This micro-realm's main purpose is to be a space of 'critical' reflection, knowledge production, transfer and absorption. In addition, it is one of the sole spaces in the university in which we as faculty and educators have a certain level of power and autonomy to hack the colonial boundaries of academia. I, therefore, argue that decolonial hacking in the classroom is the manipulation of colonial technologies to achieve decolonial dreams. To make it more practical, the colonial technologies are the primary tools of pedagogy in the classroom, which are 1) the development and use of the curriculum,

and 2) the relationship and interaction between students and teachers. These colonial technologies are within our contemporary HEI built around three colonial binary divides: a) 'inside / outside', often considering the classroom to be a vacuum looking at the 'real outside' world and studying it as if they are not part of it; b) 'non-knower / knower' defining the student-teacher relationship, considering students to be passive in the production of knowledge and expected to absorb the knowledge of the educator, often uncritically; c) 'objective / subjective' concerning the divide between theory and lifeworlds or experiences, with the former being considered superior to the latter in academic pedagogy (Freire 1970). All these binary divisions eventually sustain the prime divide between the oppressor and the oppressed upon which contemporary pedagogy in our institutions is built.

The Belgian Higher Education Landscape: Decolonization a faraway dream?

Belgian decolonial scholar Withaeckx (2019) attributes the prevailing "silence" concerning the topic of decolonization in HEI to the autonomy these institutions possess in resource allocation. The absence of institutionalized programs, such as Africana Studies, Black Studies, Decolonial, and Critical Race Studies, is indicative of their perceived lack of worthiness for investment. This phenomenon is closely linked to the comparatively limited engagement in student and staff activism within Belgium when compared to counterparts in the Global North, where scholarly communities emerged from student-led revolts and academic allies (Chigudu 2020; Peters 2015; Winter, Webb, and Turner 2024). However, a noteworthy shift has occurred in the past five years, marked by the emergence of student organizations within Belgian HEI dedicated to decolonization, such as WeDecolonizeVUB (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), UnDividedKUL (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), and BINABI (Université libre de Bruxelles). Despite their endeavors, these groups frequently encounter resistance from institutional leadership, facing systematic dismissal and neglect in discussions regarding inclusion within the academic setting. A recent instance exemplifying this resistance is the defunding of a KUL decolonial student organization, justified by the university's rector citing concerns about the infiltration of "wokeness" (Van Fleteren 2021).

In HE across both the Walloon and Flemish regions, institutions have introduced diversity policies akin to practices in many Global North countries (Bourabain and Verhaeghe 2022). These policies serve as mechanisms for institutions to demonstrate their commitment to fostering diversity and equal opportunities among students and faculty, irrespective of background. Although the Flemish and Walloon Education Councils acknowledge the importance of aligning student demographics with the superdiverse society, diversity initiatives primarily adopt an economic-instrumental rationale. The perceived benefits of diversity for universities lie in enhancing excellence and competitivity within the global educational landscape. Furthermore, diversity initiatives are predominantly gender-focused, a trend influenced by the European Commission on imposing sanctions on institutions failing to address gender imbalances in academic leadership (Bhopal and Henderson 2021; Bourabain 2020; Henderson and Bhopal 2022; Rees 2001).

Consequently, faculty members face limited resources and tools to actively engage with 'diversity', let alone addressing issues of racism and decolonization. Dissatisfied with superficial diversity campaigns, student organizations are advocating for more direct decolonization strategies (Sonck 2021; WeDecolonizeVUB 2022). Ethnic student organizations initially pioneered decolonization efforts to create inclusive spaces for racialized students, particularly in response to exclusionary practices in traditional student organizations. Some universities have witnessed the emergence of student organizations centered on decolonization as a primary focus, aiming to raise awareness of institutional colonial legacies and fostering 'safe(r)' and 'brave(r)' spaces. Notably, recent initiatives have built Palestinian solidarity movements within and across Belgian universities (WeDecolonizeVUB 2023).

In the absence of robust top-down support and amidst failing diversity policies, decolonization remains elusive within Belgian universities. Despite this, faculty members are individually and collectively incorporating decolonial perspectives into their programs, by organizing faculty-wide classes on topics of decolonization and decolonial perspectives, but also by working together with external partners to develop decolonial knowledge within their regions (VLIR-CREF 2021).

Method

This paper adopts an auto-ethnographic approach to extend our understanding of decolonial hacking in

the university. Auto-ethnography scrutinizes "dominant narratives, suggest alternatives and proffer viewpoints previously discarded as unhelpfully subjective" (Turner 2013, 225). Given the existing struggle in decolonial scholarship to bridge the gap between theory and praxis, this approach provides a means to delve into the practical aspects, addressing the question of 'how' and challenging "Western philosophy's privileging of abstract thought" (Morreira et al. 2020, 9). In order to share hacking approaches, I argue that it is essential to start from personal experiences and center my experiential knowledge to develop praxis. As I commence from my personal experiences as an educator in HEI, it is crucial to discuss my positionality and the context I aim(ed) to hack.

I am an assistant professor at the School of Social Sciences at Hasselt University, the youngest university in the Flemish region of Belgium. Despite its relatively recent establishment, Hasselt University has a long history of striving for recognition within the region. The School of Social Sciences is currently in its third year, as the university has traditionally focused on fields such as medicine, engineering, and the natural sciences. Our School of Social Sciences revolves around three 'grand challenges' or three D's – Digitalisation, Diversity and Democracy – using case-based education to bring theory into the lifeworlds of students. Being in a young starting school has given me various opportunities and even freedoms to bring in my approaches to teaching, develop my courses, and gain a large autonomy in deciding the content and curriculum of my courses. When referring to 'freedoms', I am addressing the increasing challenges associated with integrating decolonial approaches within the Eurocentric epistemic hegemony. These challenges are particularly pronounced in the context of the rising influence of so-called 'anti-woke' movements, which often resist and undermine efforts to diversify and decolonize academic discourses and curricula. This resistance further entrenches the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives, making it increasingly difficult for decolonial epistemologies to gain legitimacy within educational programs. One of the courses I teach, which I will use as the main example for this paper, is the first-year undergraduate course in sociology. Despite the relative freedom, I perceive a sense of discomfort, akin to being a 'space invader' within the predominantly white university space, as described by Puwar (2004). This discomfort arises from subtle and explicit confirmations of 'normative bodies' that do not perceive me as belonging to the same space, manifesting in student comments about 'women wearing a headscarf' being 'radical' or 'extremely religious' when discussing topics of equality. Or students asking me about 'terrorist attacks' and 'Muslim bombers' in the first class, confirming how they categorize me based on my appearance.

Being racialized as non-white navigating through a predominantly white university environment, I am a space invader that experienced misidentification, exclusionary encounters, and a palpable awareness of whiteness in the institutional corridors (Puwar 2004). This heightened awareness is particularly pronounced after transitioning from a more diverse institution in terms of student population to one characterized by significant racial underrepresentation among both students and staff. In terms of the student composition of the program, women are overrepresented, but the cohort lacks ethno-racial diversity. Approximately less than 10% could be identified as non-white racialized students. Religious diversity is also limited, with a small number of Muslim students compared to a larger representation of Christians. Reflecting the region's historical context, a significant proportion of students come from labour-class backgrounds. However, I am grateful for my space invader perspective and double consciousness as it informs my understanding of the inner workings of the university, revealing its dynamics that are invisible to others. My position motivates my ongoing questioning of how this machinery can be transformed to defy oppressive conditions, exclusion, and marginalization faced by space invaders.

The case of this study is the sociology course I have taught for the past two years, which is a course that was built from scratch as I became a faculty in the first year of our program. This rare opportunity has allowed for the development of a space conducive to a radical curriculum and pedagogy (Badat 2017). To discuss my implementation of decolonial hacking within this course, I focus on two interrelated topics: 1) the curriculum, addressing how and what content is included (*epistemic relations*); and 2) student-teacher interactions, exploring how social power relations are negotiated and impacting how knowledge is taught (*social relations*) (Maton 2014; Morreira et al. 2020).

Hacking the curriculum: to hack what we know and how we see

The sociological imagination, a foundational concept in the introductory sociology courses, serves to

acquaint students with the notion that the personal is intricately interconnected with the structural. It posits that personal troubles are not idiosyncratic and isolated experiences but must be comprehended within their broader social and historical contexts. Despite the sociological imagination being presented as a neutral and objective lens, critical scholars contend that the sociological imagination has historically perpetuated a Eurocentric colonial gaze in the practice of sociology within our contexts (Bhambra 2007; Connell 1997; Meghji 2021). Consequently, engaging in decolonial praxis within the sociology classroom necessitates a (re)examination of what and how we 'see'.

To hack the sociological imagination, a critical awareness must be cultivated regarding the knowledge deemed valuable for recognizing societal issues, understanding challenges, and comprehending the fabric of society. My approach to determine the relevance and indispensability of knowledge for training students as sociologists draws inspiration from an interview between Aimé Césaire and Haitian poet René Depestre at the Cultural Congress of Havana in 1967 (Césaire 2000). Césaire's assertion (2000, 86), "Marx is alright, but we need to complete Marx", reflected his apprehension that he and other Martinican students might assimilate French communist worldviews, neglecting their historical peculiarities. This concern persists today when applied to the Eurocentric curriculum prevalent in Global North universities. Critics have raised concerns about decolonization, fearing the replacement and even abolishment of European thought with Indigenous or Global South scholarship. However, decolonizing the curriculum, in the understanding of myself and numerous decolonial scholars, is not about erasure and complete replacement. Rather, it involves nuanced adjustment or tweaking bits and pieces that, collectively, alter the aim and trajectory of the entire educational machinery. In this context, sharing knowledge with students to foster their sociological imagination entails redefining the canon. This includes the inclusion of works by European sociologists commonly studied across Global North universities, coupled with discussions on their theoretical relevance. Simultaneously, it involves incorporating the contributions of sociologists who have been historically marginalized both within and outside the Global North. Moreover, a critical aspect of this process is consistently 'provincializing' the works of 'canonical' figures (Mbembe 2016).

As I was and still am dissatisfied with the existing Dutch introductory readers for sociology, I initiated a discussion with fellow sociologists from diverse institutions who share a commitment to challenging the Eurocentric orientation prevalent in sociological curricula. I realized that they too are experiencing the same struggle, not finding suitable Dutch-written sociological texts (as it is a requirement by the Flemish government to teach the majority of the course in Dutch). Consequently, I decided to create a personalized reader comprising a diverse selection of texts aimed at introducing plurivocal perspectives and knowledges, while deliberately decentering whiteness. This means for example that discussing 'foundational' theories of sociology is not Eurocentric by only speaking of the 'threesome' Karl Marx, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, but at an equal footing discussing the work of W. E. B. DuBois, Jose Rizal, and Ibn Khaldun among others.

However, hacking the canon does not mean to merely 'add' those names to the curriculum. What it means is to actively reveal the whiteness and Eurocentric context in which the sociological canon is constructed. So, in the second class of the course, we do not only discuss what these sociologists are known for, but we discuss why the works of DuBois, for example, have not been recognized in the past and are still not considered to be part of the canon (Morris 2017). In this way, students do not only learn what is part of the canon, but how the canon is constructed and reproduced within sociology. To hack is thus to contextualize. I still use this idea of the 'canon' to develop the curriculum, but I rearrange the bits and pieces so that students are aware of how the 'sociological imagination' is not neutral to implicitly and explicitly transfer a decolonial way of how to 'imagine' sociologically.

Another example that is a main subject of sociology is modernity (Connell 1997). European social scientists were keen to develop the discipline of sociology during grand societal upheavals and transformations in Europe. Today, the developments and stages of the modernization process are a fundamental subject in sociology courses in Europe. However, the modernity story presented to students downplays the colonialist foundation (Mignolo 2007). I am a product of the Belgian education system where modernity has been the core topic of my sociology university program for four years. How modernity has been presented to me, and how I initially internalized the idea, is that of the development and progress of Western European societies without any connection with the rest of the world. I studied the various dynamics that led to

modernization, which was the progress in terms of the economy, such as industrialization, but also the progress made on the social level, referring to the secularization of 'modern' societies and the rise of scientific knowledge 'thanks' to the Enlightenment. Having studied at a university that considers itself 'free', mostly referring to free from any religious indictments, the emphasis on the modernization of European societies was put on the human progress shackling one away from religion and becoming the 'free' man.

Again, in my course, it is not a matter of ignoring the topic of modernity, but it is to contextualize and reveal the power dynamics at play for the development of modern societies in Europe. Therefore, the two classes on modernity immediately start from Mignolo's concept of 'modernity/coloniality' indicating how modernity cannot be understood without discussing the 'dark side' of the Enlightenment, and therefore, discuss the global power dynamics of colonization and coloniality. To ensure that, again, they are aware of the power dynamics at play within the field of sociology, and to develop our sociological imagination, these different notions of modernity already come back in one of the first classes where we discuss the roots of sociology as a discipline. In addition, my experience of learning about modernity has always had an impact on my religious identity. I always felt very visible as a Muslim student in class when we talked about modernity, because it was always linked with the transformation of back-wards religious people to freed intellectuals. This transformation allowed to develop the field of sociology that only uses observation and reason to produce knowledge. As such, there was the direct understanding that if one aims to be a sociologist, one cannot believe in a higher entity. Therefore, it was also important for me to make students critically examine how modernization impacted the definition of a science generally, but sociology more specifically.

One example is the discussion of one of the European 'pioneers', August Comte (1830), who developed the 'Loi des trois états' arguing that societies evolve through three distinct stages of intellectual development: 1) the theological stage where people explain phenomena through religious or other supernatural beliefs; 2) the metaphysical stage which is a transitional stage where individuals begin to move away from purely religious explanations and attribute events to abstract forces; and 3) the scientific or positive stage which is, according to Comte, the final and most advanced stage of societal development where individuals base their understanding of the world on empirical evidence, scientific observation and scientific method. While I introduce Comte's theory, I discuss with students how they would interpret it. And it is remarkable to see that students are aware of how this notion of societal progress creates tensions between one's religious background and the ability to produce scientific knowledge. So again, while I keep 'in' the theories such as those of Comte that have been influential in understanding societal progress, we deconstruct this theory from a decolonial lens. This allows us to question and criticize the Eurocentric and anti-religious understandings of societal progress and science production.

The question, however, remains what the best praxis is to complete the curriculum and avoid the reproduction of the knowledge hierarchy. This required a high investment of time and trial and error to challenge my own mind which is the product of Eurocentric sociology. One example of this trial-and-error experience is the following:

> I had a conversation with a colleague who was developing their course taking place in the second semester. We were discussing how challenging it is sometimes to resist our own minds that have been a product of a colonial education system. We were brainstorming about the best way to 'include' feminist, decolonial and critical race scholarship into our curricula. Thus, we questioned whether it would be structurally more appealing if we prepare several classes that focus on the work of 'prominent' European scholars in the first couple of classes and in the second part introduce the work of Global South scholars separately. While this structure could help students to become aware of the different contexts and types of epistemologies, I felt that I was more in favor of a second option, which is to 'mix' different scholars and epistemologies around the course's main themes. Separating scholars based on their global context may reinforce and legitimize the racial hierarchy that considers European episteme to be (superiorly) distinct from 'Other' knowledges. Through discussing these matters with one another, we agreed that it is best to opt for the second strategy for students not to make a distinction between Global South and North scholars.

What this example, furthermore, demonstrates is the fear that is still instilled within us that we might do our students short when they will graduate and eventually arrive in a labor market where Eurocentric knowledge remains dominant and is, thus, rewarded. This idea that we would disfavor them by decolonizing the mind shows the trickiness of coloniality. Therefore, hacking requires to focus on these 'details' that have a substantial impact on what knowledge is transferred, shared and produced.

At the same time, it is crucial to recognize the cautionary insights of Tuck and Yang (2012), who remind us that initiatives such as diversifying the curriculum, while valuable, do not in themselves constitute intellectual decolonization. Although curriculum diversification is a necessary initial step, it should not be regarded as a sufficient or isolated measure. Decolonization requires a fundamental disruption of colonial structures, necessitating a broader examination that extends beyond curriculum content to encompass the everyday pedagogical practices that perpetuate coloniality. Consequently, in the following section, I examine faculty-student interactions and the material spaces in which learning occurs, as these are integral to understanding and addressing the deeper entrenchment of colonial legacies in educational environments.

Hacking the Faculty-Student interaction

According to scholars like Paolo Freire (1970), bell hooks (1989), and Jamal Richardson (2018, 231), the classroom is the key site in which "the colonial nature of universities manifests itself". This means that while it is quintessential to challenge Eurocentric knowledge systems and epistemologies in the (hidden) curriculum, it simultaneously requires extending the decolonizing project to the structural and physical space in which the curriculum is taught. Knowledge transmission not only happens discursively but also materially. This means that Eurocentrism in books or texts is reproduced across time and space through the interactions of individuals. Therefore, it is essential to look into the interactions that take place, especially between students and faculty as well as the place itself, meaning the material space around us and in which we teach.

One of the major challenges I experience in interacting with my students is the restrictions defined by the physical space we are supposed to teach in. Our typical lecture halls and classrooms consist of rows of chairs facing the front where a large chalkboard and other material tools for teaching are situated. This physical design of a classroom originates from the colonial era (1750s onwards), which materially demonstrates the coloniality of knowledge and power in the classroom (Darian-Smith and Willis 2017). The architecture of the lecture hall is built around the idea that within the process of knowledge transfer you have the 'knower' standing in front of the classroom (sometimes even on a step) with ample space to move around and the 'non-knowers' sit together all looking into the direction of the 'knower' having limited space to move and look around. This environment completely disrupts the opportunity to build a climate of back-and-forth discussion and conversation. It is also something that I commonly hear from faculty that students are not reacting to questions, or they are struggling with starting a discussion or conversation amongst the students. The knowledge hierarchy is thus reproduced by the physical space in which we teach.

To deconstruct this hierarchy, I have aimed to expand the ways of teaching by, for example, having outings with the students to spaces outside the 'lecture hall'. This is inspired by the emphasis on relationality within Other knowledges (Freire 1970), referring to the relationships among actors (students-teachers), but also the artifacts (i.e. the concrete tools we use to teach) and especially the spaces in which knowledge is constructed. In 2023, I organized an excursion to an arts center that was holding an exhibition on identity with artists from various disciplines but also racialized backgrounds. In 2024, we visited a Sikh temple as a way to understand how institutions are key to the reproduction of culture and religion. In both excursions, students had the opportunity to interact with one another, with the art, and with members of religious communities. Going to an arts center or a religious center validates that knowledge is rooted in a specific location and the history of that location (Sefa Dei 2012). It (hopefully) makes students aware that we can learn by being 'elsewhere', and that knowledge can be found in art but also a spiritual-religious space.

In addition, moving away from the classroom also facilitated the interaction between students as well as with the teachers present. To make the interaction as smooth as possible, we divided our students into smaller groups of a maximum of 20 people. By moving outside of the classroom space, there is no longer a fixed space for the teacher nor the student making the discussion less hierarchical. It allowed students to open up about their lifeworlds, also realizing the importance of experiential knowledge. Students talked about their religion (which remains a highly sensitive issue in Belgian education and society in general), asking us whether they could be of any help in organizing such an excursion next year in their religious center. This contrasted starkly with conversations in the classroom, where students feel like they have to erase their identity, and in particular, students racialized as non-white. They feel the weight of the room in which sharing their lifeworlds is considered irrelevant, even when asking

about it explicitly. By moving outside the classroom, and bringing in the experiential knowledge of students, we not only delink from the normative ways of thinking and learning, but we also reconstitute, as Mignolo would argue, as we validate and tackle the erasure of different knowledges. Taking their knowledge seriously opens up the possibility of interrogating the traditional Eurocentric ways of knowing.

Another difficulty of bringing in students' lifeworlds to develop and transfer knowledge, is the confrontation with the 'racial illiteracy' among students (Brown, Kelada, and Jones 2021). Both students racialized as white and non-white have little to no prior experience with a learning environment in which topics of discrimination, inequality, colonialism, Eurocentrism, and so on are discussed. This is a common experience in the Dutch-speaking education system in Belgium where little attention is provided to topics like colonialism beyond a historical approach. Thus, I have seen how students racialized as non-white tend to (physically) tense up when I speak about discrimination against people racialized as non-white. Even when I try to introduce their lifeworlds more, trying to show that their knowledge matters too, it sometimes fails.

To give an example, when I use concepts that have been developed outside the Anglophone world, and use the concept in their original language before translating it, I ask if someone might know what it means. One essential concept in Ibn Khaldun's work is عصبيّة or *'assabiyah* and I asked in the classroom if anyone speaks Arabic and wants to try translating it. When I looked around in the classroom, I felt that I created a moment of discomfort among students racialized as non-white. First of all, because students racialized as white started looking around the classroom targeting those who they might perceive as 'Arab'. And second, because I can imagine that students may have received these questions before in an education system that has been hostile to them and in which this question was not to value them, but rather punish them. This is especially the case in Flanders in which language is used as a marker of academic excellence, another common form of reproducing the coloniality of power where language is used as a tool of control. Language diversity is not considered to be a characteristic of academic excellence, especially languages from the Global South (Agirdag 2017). This experience has helped me to recalibrate how I want to bring in students' lifeworlds while still maintaining a safe environment, in particular for students racialized as non-white. One practice is having students write an essay in which theoretical concepts seen in class are linked to experiences in their own lives. By considering the essay as an assignment that is evaluated and graded, we value their own knowledges and experiences to develop their sociological imagination. At the same time, however, it is important to highlight that the use of essays as an assignment can reproduce inequality as it only considers the written form of knowledge production as a skill. Therefore, throughout the course, students were evaluated on both oral, written and creative assignments.

Furthermore, I experience that my racialized position as non-white tends to make it questionable whether topics of racism and colonialism are academic enough. I particularly felt this during one of my classes that was about discrimination. At one point we were discussing the difference between 'freedom of speech' and 'discriminatory speech acts'. In order to introduce a real-life example that could make the point come across, I showed a short clip of a documentary on the extreme right-wing (student) movement "Schild & Vrienden" who are sued for racism and discrimination. As I clicked on the link and the clip appeared, I noticed that one student rolled her eyes. While some students gasped at the racist discourse of the group's president, she held a straight face with arms crossed. Throughout the class, she refused to take any notes, and looked around the classroom actively showing her disinterest. At the same time, other students were much more engaged with the topic than in previous classes. Three students that usually sit in the last row, two students racialized as non-white and one white racialized student, switched to sit in one of the front rows during the break. During the second part of the class, they were actively discussing the cases I presented and dared to share their thoughts much more compared to previous classes.

These contradictory reactions of students demonstrate how the increasingly diverse student population that brings along different positionalities and political worldviews, makes talking about topics of race, racism and colonialism more challenging. Even more, scholars have shown time and again how students are more or less accepting towards discussions on such topics depending on who is standing in front of the classroom (Gutiérrez y Muhs 2012). Therefore, it is essential that decolonial pedagogies recognize the possibility of the teacher being the oppressed and the student being the privileged, which challenges traditional power dynamics and assumptions about

authority in the classroom (Gatwiri, Anderson, and Townsend-Cross 2021; Schick 2000; Sonn 2008). Talking about decolonial topics and being a non-white racialized teacher can cause friction with (white racialized) students. As the non-white racialized teacher already has to prove their legitimacy to be a 'knower', it is not an easy task to also centralize non-white racialized life experiences and worldviews within their teaching. Working in a constant state of 'suspicion' and 'doubt' makes it challenging to introduce decolonial classroom practices. How to deal with these frictions in white-dominant spaces therefore requires more attention.

I share these experiences to show that sometimes hacking may not have the expected outcome. And that is because hacking is about trying out what works and doesn't work, like autodidacts through trial and error to eventually 'crack the code'. In this instance, explicit efforts to incorporate students' life-worlds in the classroom with the intention of de-hierarchizing the learning environment proved ineffective. This outcome would most likely be similar in other first-year courses across Belgian HE, where the majority of students have not developed racial literacy within their past educational trajectory.

Hacking it all: when epistemic hacking and social relations collide

In the last months of 2023, colonization and coloniality became more visible than ever. The heightened violence against Palestinians after October 7th raised renewed awareness that colonization is not a matter of the past and continues to marginalize and erase cultures and people. This has caused a chain reaction within universities, mostly from student organizations and collectives of academics to pressure their institutions to use their power in ending the occupation of the Palestinians. Student organizations, like UAntwerpforPalestine, kul4Palestine, ulb4palestine, Occupation étudiante Uliege Palestine and Occupy UGent, have been organizing various activities to demand their universities to cut ties with institutions and companies that support the settler-colonial project of Israel and to pressure the government in taking political sanctions against Israel. At the KUL, for example, students have kept their occupation alive over the summer holidays, but have been threatened by the university to be evicted. Students at UGent, UAntwerp, VUB and ULB have organized several protests against the institution's demand to terminate the encampments. The encampments were frequently accompanied by weekly sit-ins, during which students and faculty collaborated on activities such as collective reading sessions (e.g., at UGent). Faculty members have also supported students' demands by writing open letters to their rectors and the interuniversity council, with the first letter garnering over 700 signatures (Martin 2023).

Belgian universities have had mixed responses, going from complete silence to vague stances on the genocide in Palestine. My university remained silent for over seven months, only recently issuing a brief statement indicating that they are currently evaluating their research collaborations with Israeli partners. This prolonged silence has not gone unnoticed by our students, some of whom have personally approached me to inquire why the topic of Palestine had yet to be addressed in class. During a class on the topic of power in November 2023, as the genocide was publicly broadcasted, a student approached me during the break to ask whether we would address the ongoing situation in Palestine. He expressed his frustration at struggling to find the right words to describe the current events and his difficulty in using 'scientific evidence' to support his views. When I inquired whether other students were interested in discussing the topic, he confirmed that it was a subject of discussion and had even sparked heated debates among his peers. He then quietly asked whether this topic was "censored" at our university.

The notion of censorship struck me deeply, as it underscored the awareness among non-white racialized students that not all forms of knowledge receive equal attention within academic institutions. I assured him that there was no censorship at our university and emphasized that if students expressed a desire to explore these topics, the faculty would consider incorporating them into the curriculum. Despite several pro-Palestinian initiatives across Belgian universities, the student's perception of censorship highlights the silencing tactics often employed by Global North institutions to avoid engaging with topics such as colonialism. In that moment, I chose not to delve into these complexities with the student, wanting to protect a first-year student still finding his place within the university. This brief exchange, however, prompted significant reflection on my decolonial praxis. Why had I not considered addressing the situation in Palestine in my classes? Does this render me complicit in the broader silence surrounding the issue? Can I afford to take time to thoughtfully consider how to integrate this topic into my teaching?

This conversation illustrates how students bring 'the outside' in, actively shaping the knowledge that should be prioritized in the curriculum in response to current events and how they are affected by them. It shows the multitude of ways in which hacking is possible. On the one hand, students themselves become hackers within the classroom by making visible issues that remain overlooked within this machinery. These conversations represent active negotiations on how new knowledges can be brought into the traditional classroom setting. On the other hand, hacking also involved leveraging the institutional power vested in faculty, including myself and our team, to support students' demands. Again, the significance of context cannot be overstated; as it was fairly easy to set things in motion, which is not a given. Combined with the increasing need for a Palestine solidarity network in our university, our school eventually organized the first panel discussion at the university with experts in the field to talk about the occupation and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people by Israel. In doing so, we expanded the classroom by defying the inside/outside binary by incorporating professional and personal insights of speakers who have lived in Palestine, thereby creating a transformative learning environment where students could actively engage.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I aimed to portray the challenging task of intellectual decolonization. As Fanon (1963, 36) describes "decolonization never takes place unnoticed" so are we as faculty aware of the field of power in which we 'play'. The coloniality of power perpetuated in HEI challenges me to find ways to play within the machinery. This playing can manifest in various forms, ranging from 'playing by the rules of the game' via minor hacking tactics, such as tweaking the sociological imagination by reframing the canon, to more radical hacking tactics in which we collectively break the rules of the game, such as redefining the inside-outside boundaries of the classroom. These various ways of playing position us as hackers, those "who have picked up colonial technologies and reassembled them to decolonizing purposes" (la 2017, xiv). As hackers, the objective is to translate our decolonial dreams into practical work, a process that is fraught with challenges. Instead, our decolonial journey is one of learning, failing and learning out of our failures. It is about weighing out our accountability towards different actors and, in particular, making the decolonial dream a collective one.

This paper provided insight into how intellectual decolonization is a collective process in which pockets of power are sought to transform the micro-realm of the classroom. It is the power we create ourselves within the synergy of student-teacher interactions, power that the institution may (not) give us, and which we take (un)noticeably. This demonstrates how decoloniality is "not a condition of illumination or enlightenment that some possess and others do not" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 94). In the pursuit of advancing decolonial praxis within academia, it is imperative to transcend the individual level and embrace a collective approach to decolonial praxis. As elucidated earlier, the concept of hackers as a network underscores the collaborative nature inherent in transformative educational practices. However, the current landscape remains marked by isolated efforts, with researchers and educators working independently, both within and across institutions. To overcome this, a communal and collective effort is essential, one that encourages the dissemination of successes and failures alike. By fostering a community-centric ethos, educators can build upon each other's praxis, thereby circumventing the need for individuals to initiate educational endeavours from scratch.

Therefore, we must extend our knowledge beyond theoretical frameworks and encompass the sharing of practical experiences, a form of knowledge that possesses the potential for true transformation. I currently practice this by sharing my own work in conferences with like-minded people. I take part in networks of scholars working on decolonizing and anti-racist education, and have been spending my time developing such a network with colleagues, who are now friends and comrades. Fostering intellectual decolonization through the documentation and dissemination of on-the-ground experiences is a responsibility of the entire academic community, including academic journals who play a pivotal role in the advancement of academic knowledge and often act as gatekeepers deciding what form of knowledge is valued. This inclusive approach advocates for a re-evaluation of what constitutes valuable contributions to academic discourse.

Finally, this paper aimed to show the relevance of hacking as a tool to dismantle entrenched structures that perpetuate colonial ideologies. I do not claim that my hacking tactics are universal, and that this form of hacking will entirely solve the persistent intellectual coloniality in HE, but I hope this offers some guidance in the colonial machinery that HE is. It is important to remember, as Thiong'o argues,

that "the decolonial is always already amid the colonial" (2010, 166), and this is especially true for HEI that have always served as spaces of resistance and radical imagination. Therefore, I hope this paper has shown that making 'tiny' cracks through decolonial hacking in the colonial machinery allows us to get one step closer to achieving the decolonial dream.

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