DECOLONIAL EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE: REIMAGINING A BUSINESS SCHOOL IN DUBAI

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Global business education remains engulfed in Eurocentric epistemologies that prioritize Western paradigms, often at the expense of alternative indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies. This paper interrogates the coloniality of knowledge within business education, where campuses manage pressures from international accreditation that prescribe Western pedagogy.

The dominance of Western ways in business education denies the legitimacy of other (traditionally non-Western) practices of knowledge by exclusion leaving institutions in a liminal space—between questioning approved pedagogy and creating actionable change. The need to contest the status quo gets overridden by pressures to stay legitimate steering conversations towards recognized Western ways.

Drawing on decolonial theory and critical pedagogy, this study examines the possibilities of decolonizing the business school. Through a qualitative method of community conversations with faculty in a business school in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, the article shows the difficulties of creating spaces to discuss decoloniality by highlighting the need to move beyond traditional Western pedagogies currently adopted in business schools. Pedagogies in place focus on teaching business within the current power structures and fail to challenge the structures.

We present our findings in a non-traditional format in a reflective, conversational style that is accessible. The article argues for continuous cycles of action and reflection to decolonize higher education systems while acknowledging the role that discomfort, fear and silence play when engaging in the work. Implications include understanding the epistemic complexity of viewing decoloniality as a collective responsibility while acknowledging our own entanglement in the reproduction of colonial histories.

Keywords: *decoloniality, business school, community conversations, pedagogy, reflexivity, script*

1. Setting the stage (introduction)

On a hot day, in an air-conditioned open plan classroom at an accredited Business School in Dubai, a professor of Leadership and Sustainability and the Campus Dean ran a couple of

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community conversations to engage voices in how they could possibly decolonize the business school curriculum. A combination of a call for papers for this journal, multiple conversations between the two authors over their working relationship and a dream to host "decolonial coffees" - a space for interested folks to talk about the concepts of colonialism, neo-colonialism and decoloniality, served as the impetus for these community conversations.

We, the enthusiastic and hopeful professor and Dean respectively, lean on voices of Quijano (2021), Mignolo & Walsh (2018), Wynter (2003), Freire (2000), and Gilroy (2005) for meaning making. Quijano (2021) explains that patterns of power come from two different axes - the first is the construction of race by conquerors as a way of dominating and of creating epistemic control and the second one was the new structure of control of labor through the accumulation of capital. Mignolo & Walsh (2018) recommends an affirmative focus of praxis: affirmative and prospective thought-actions-reflections-actions. Inspired by Freire (2000) and Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (1979), we use conversation as a tool to think critically. We deduced that our first step should be prospective thought by engaging multi-disciplinary faculty, with varying years of experience, most resident expatriates of Dubai except for one who lives in Europe.

For the community conversations, we provided markers, flipcharts and color pencils to encourage some playfulness and creativity. The room was spacious to allow for movement. We also lured participants in with coffee, cakes and crisps, should the conversations get difficult, we would have a treat to lean on to mask discomfort.

We chose Dubai because the city represents what Mignolo & Walsh (2018) would call a "border space" where the city is in a geographical position between West and East. Moreover, while Arabic is the formal language, English is a dominant language used in businesses and business schools. Multiple global companies have their regional headquarters in Dubai, making the city an attractive destination for professionals. The Ministry of Education has also launched a national campaign titled "We the UAE 2031" with a goal of embedding UAE values of ethics, sustainability, global citizenship, innovation and social responsibility into accreditation criteria (Ministry of Education, 2024). While Emiratization (a national policy in the UAE aimed at increasing employment of Emiratis in the public and private sector) is the national agenda, most of the workforce consists of expatriates as Dubai has a predominantly expatriate population, of up to 80 to 90% (Dubai Statistics Center, 2023). Dubai is a place for 'border thinking' - while there are multiple perspectives, Western business education remains a preferred option.

In face of competition to appear in Global Rankings and Accreditation lists, business schools operate under significant pressure. We started the community conversations wondering how much faculty are bound by accreditation parameters and how these parameters might impact engaging with decoloniality. Moreover, some scholars have highlighted how business schools are agents of colonial capitalist ideologies (Hanlon, 2015; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021). These scholars explain how business schools are far from neutral and rather, schools operate in a manner to discipline labor and reproduce capitalist systems.

Naivety played a role in our assumptions that accreditations played a part in the faculty's inability to instill change and bring in conversations of decoloniality into the classroom. We found through the community conversations that the concept of decoloniality is misinterpreted. There further is discomfort around being the villain in anyone's story. We felt that discomfort and fear when engaging with the concept of decoloniality and furthermore, the duality of embodiment of both oppressor and oppressed magnified moments of silence and desire to move the

conversation forward. We analyzed these moments of silence, courage and agency while reflecting on our positionality.

We wrote this paper as our way of decolonizing the page by presenting our findings as a script to showcase our dialogue in an accessible manner. A script mirrors how people talk, interact and reflect. Our attempt is to bring decolonial work towards individual expression rather than only focusing on systemic transformation. This choice allows for non-specialist audiences to engage concepts of decoloniality by witnessing the reflexive process of the authors in a relatable manner as there is humor and questioning. The script format removes the authoritative voice of a traditional academic article. With two main characters, *the enthusiast* and *the hopeful*, we are using transcripts from our conversations as data, combined with our own reflections through an iterative reflective process (Berger, 2015). We chose this form of reimagination as per Freire (2000) and Boal (1979). If this were to be staged, who would be watching? Who would we inspire? How would we bring to light the voices that are missing both inside and outside the classroom?

2.   Act 1: Design & Positionality

The two co-authors of this paper, the *enthusiast* and the *hopeful* talk through the design and positionality of their method.

<u>SCENE 1</u>: Circles of knowing

FLASHBACK – FLEX CLASSROOM IN A BUSINESS SCHOOL – APRIL (2025)

The participants, all either full-time or adjunct faculty of the business school, were invited to the community conversations regardless of area of expertise or research, years of experience teaching or qualification levels. Faculty teach within the areas of Leadership, Strategy, Finance, Marketing, Sales, Sustainability and Entrepreneurship. The faculty were expatriates from different parts of the world invited to participate in two community conversations. Twenty-four faculty were first invited to participate during a faculty meeting. Later, over email, another invitation was sent and eight faculty responded and attended the community conversations. We held two sessions with four participants each, making us six people in the room. We emphasized participation was voluntary. The faculty in the room were UAE residents hailing from four continents carrying hybrid-ethnic and diasporic identities. We found that this is representative of the classrooms on our campus. We placed chairs in a circle to remove any sense of hierarchy in the room and cater to a seamless flow of dialogue.

During the first conversation, all participants were faculty who resided locally and were in-person while the second group had local residents except for one faculty member who dialed in from Europe via zoom. All participants signed a consent form and agreed to the conversation being recorded. We also documented the artifacts created during the sessions, such as the maps, the movement within the rooms and the silences. Our notes captured when the community discussed dominant epistemic frameworks and when we moved away from them and why.

The community conversations were designed to allow all participants including the co-authors to be both researchers and subjects. This participatory method also invigorates relationships within the community (Tomai et al., 2025). There was an empty chair placed in the circle to account for "missing voices" that couldn't be present in the room. The ask was for participants to sit in the chair should they want to speak through the lens of voices that were missing in the room.

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. DINER – DAY

The enthusiast and the hopeful are sitting in a diner, where they have access to bottomless coffee to reflect on the two community conversations they hosted in the previous weeks.

Enthusiast:
The goal of the community conversations was to create a space for faculty to engage with the concepts of decoloniality within the context of the business school. We refer to 'community' as an epistemic community of educators of the business school. There was familiarity and camaraderie within this faculty group, including that of the Dean who often hosts faculty meetings with the group quarterly. Within this community, we expected power relations to be negotiated through an ongoing, fluid, reflective process of listening, speaking and contesting multiple perspectives. We designed, what we thought was a creative guide of questions and activities. With the intent of exploring decoloniality, the guide centered around missing voices and knowledge from teaching practices. For example, participants could draw a map of where their classroom materials come from.

Hopeful:
Do you think we should have handed the guide out to everyone during the conversation? We made the choice to not share the guide. The guide was for you and me and when I think back to our design, if only two people out of six in a room have a guide, are we equal participants when we know "more" than the rest of the participants? We could have also co-created the guide with the participants.

Enthusiast:
I agree that keeping the guide to ourselves unintentionally reestablished the power dynamics we were aiming to remove. Who gets to ask the questions? Why were we the legitimate questioners and whose voices were we silencing by pre-deciding our own legitimacy which is at the center of Spivak's (1988) work where she questions who gets to speak and ask questions.

SCENE 2: We brought the chair too!

Enthusiast:
    How do you think the conversations went?

Hopeful:

[pauses to think]

I think we had some rich conversations. In terms of us hoping that we were going to see some exquisite forms of art, dance, movement, creativity or imagination, we didn't get much, did we?

[laughs]

It was the most awkward moment when we encouraged movement and art and other ways of doing. I remember one of the participants paused in the middle of trying to get creative, to ask: "how is this even research?" While I think we got some robust moments of passionate conversation, any other way of presenting knowledge or experience was definitely limited.

[sips coffee]

Even when offering anonymity, safety, the opportunity to create, they were so structured in their responses, I wonder if it's because they work with you as a colleague, and even though I said I was present as a researcher and fellow participant, I am still the Dean.

Enthusiast:

While you carry the title of the Dean, participants looked comfortable speaking up and questioning points they thought were provocative. They even defended their points strongly. This shows me that the environment was not impacted because the Dean was in the room but rather the topic of conversation was one of discomfort. But of course, if you hadn't invited the faculty to discuss decoloniality, I bet they would not have engaged with the concept with this context of their teaching practices- especially in Dubai. Remember? A participant even said they had never thought of how decoloniality impacts their teaching.

For me, as a Brazilian but having immigrated to other countries such as the US and you as, third culture Indian from Dubai, we have our own experience of what decoloniality would mean. Both of us experience tension between our embodied knowledge of coloniality and the expectation to speak through Western academic frameworks. My immigrant experience in the US, Europe and the UAE and my degrees in Political Science pushed me to question colonial practices and power structures. I also find that for most of my career as an immigrant, I have been classified as a minority. What about you?

Hopeful:

For me, the most difficult part of reimagining stems from being part of the Indian community in Dubai. A community, I believe, that does not do enough to question or recognize the role neo-colonialism plays in our own perpetuating of structures that were bestowed upon us. I want to imagine a world where I can make a difference through dialogue and be in a room where voicing my experience matters. Decoloniality is a responsibility that is shared and not just fought for by some.

Enthusiast:

We are in a tough situation. While we are part of communities that were once colonized, we now sit in a border space and benefit from neo-colonial hierarchies.

Hopeful:

Exactly! I am part of structures of neo-colonialism from which I also benefit. How can we unlearn not only our colonial histories but also move away from our entanglement in its reproduction?

Given my current role as Dean and the power of the title, I have to also consider the part I may play as oppressor and not just the oppressed. It is also interesting that we spend so much time thinking about our positionality. De Los Rios & Patel (2023) remind us that it is mainly women of color who do engage most with positionality in academic work. We aren't that original, are we? So it's truly not surprising that we are the ones doing the work.

Enthusiast:

[laughs]

I agree and while we draw from our own experiences, the faculty might also have a different lens on the concepts of coloniality and decoloniality given their experiences and their own positionality. For example, what I observed was that when you as an Indian woman spoke about decoloniality, there was a strong response in the room by a white man who voiced discomfort with the use of the word decoloniality. It felt like they took on the assumption that you were referring to them as the oppressor.

Another time in the second community conversation, I was speaking thinking I represented the voice of the minority and I was informed by a participant that they would view me as privileged because I am white presenting. This duality of oppressor and oppressed came in the way of discussing how we can adapt our teaching practices and we remained in trying to resolve the discomfort of those moments.

Hopeful:

Isn't this the discomfort that even using the word decoloniality brings especially in a business school in Dubai? We don't have access to spaces for debate in civil society which I believe is impacted by Mignolo & Walsh's (2018) 'border thinking'. At least we haven't encountered many spaces where decoloniality is debated or conversations around decoloniality are encouraged.

Enthusiast:

The faculty were mostly UAE residents and non-Emirati. How would the conversation have changed had there been Emirati voices present?

Hopeful:

Emirati voices could have complemented the conversation by bringing in local perspectives however, we don't have access to those voices. Next time, how about we work harder to get these voices in the room?

The diner goes quiet as both authors stop talking to each reflect on the outcomes of their design choices and positionality]

[Light fades to black]

3.   ACT 2: RE-ENCOUNTERING COLONIALITY

Same diner a little while later, the authors have to move because
their choice to sit by the window turned out to be the wrong one given
the Dubai heat.

SCENE 1: Epistemic Boundaries and Limits of Imagination

Coffee cups are refilled and both authors reflect on decolonial
possibilities in the business school.

Enthusiast:

We went into the community conversations assuming we were going to leave with action-items on how to address decolonial pedagogy in a business school. But it was difficult for all of us in the sessions to fantasize of what decolonial practices would entail.

Hopeful:

One of the most difficult aspects of the sessions was that people defaulted to what they were trained to believe and think, without critical examination.

Enthusiast:

Yes - we asked participants to draw a map showing where their assigned readings come from and we thought that would solely translate to geographical locations in hope of highlighting the over-representation of Western readings. The unexpected outcome was that we saw mostly boxes and mind maps with reading "coming from" what faculty justified as scientifically-backed materials, grounded in valid methodologies.

Hopeful:

This was one of the most eye-opening moments during the conversation. The over-representation of Western thought was not a big consideration when choosing literature for courses. This echoes Sylvia Wynter's (2003) overrepresentation of the Western man and universal standard arguing that the West is grounded in clarity, order, objectivity and rationality. This justification of the objective truth is a manifestation of a Eurocentric model that legitimizes the erasure of alternative ways of knowing such as indigenous, Asian, African and other non-Western ways of knowing. This would mean any other ways of knowing might come across as irrational, disordered and inferior. This would explain why the faculty defaulted to clarity, order, objectivity and rationality without critical examination. In business schools, as faculty, assume that the right thing to do is to bring in science!

Enthusiast:

[beat]

Do you think we were too focused on geographical representation rather than discursive representation? Maybe it is our fault for expecting that maps, or sums of countries as the best representation of the world. This experience reflects that there is a coloniality of power and that

Western knowledge is structurally embedded as default (Quijano, 2021). The genealogy of words as Foucault (1977) explains has a long history of embedded meaning. The unhelpfulness of words! The ambiguity of words leads to confusion. We meant the globe; their thoughts went to mind maps.

Hopeful:

Let's also talk about the lack of imagination when we discussed accreditation and curriculum development. If we are going to ask faculty to be part of decolonizing the curriculum of the business school, do we have to take a step back to encourage alternative, non-traditional, ways of learning, knowing and doing? This could create a collision of thought with the current, ongoing narrative that in order for us to be good, we have to be objective.

Enthusiast:

There were opposing voices in the room around what constitutes valid knowledge. One faculty stated "I am very careful about citing opinions vs. valid research." This again represents the overrepresentation of the Western rational man- as valid research is positivist and rational. Rational, very much like the white man is represented.

Hopeful:

Much of the discussion was about how research brings truth. Quijano (2021) would say this reflects Eurocentric norms are the norms that define what counts as knowledge. For our context, any conversation about any change is always going to be challenged by the question "But is this scientific? Is it replicable and generalizable?"

Enthusiast:

Wynter (2003) would call this systemic absence of alternative ontologies as the main problem. One participant, who was white and male said: "Our knowledge of how everything works is infinitely greater today - 100%"

I wonder, what does great mean? Great for whom? What is so great? And what knowledge are we even valuing? What are we excluding in this quest for 'greatness'? In response to this question, we heard "I don't see how pre-colonial knowledge could possibly be relevant because time has moved on".

Hopeful:

A sentence like this while upsetting to hear, when broken down sounds like an attempt to shut down the conversation to me. We then ended up in a space of you and I trying to convince him otherwise. And while his comment was a very blatant shutdown of including pre-colonial ways, we also saw what we thought was a less direct attempt of shutting down conversations. For example, here is a good quote from the second session:

[flips through transcripts]

"Business processes are universal - no matter where you work in the world there is a way business is done. If you are teaching business processes - you don't need to give them 30 perspectives of business processes. What you need to give them is that 'this is how it's largely

done'"? This is what Quijano (2021) would explain is the coloniality of power where the preference for Western knowledge is not only individual but also a reflection of institutional thinking. Since our conversations were taking place in a business school with faculty, how else do we expect making use of alternative epistemologies? It doesn't feel like it belongs.

Hopeful:

And how about the empty chair that remained empty? Even when prompted and reminded to take the seat to represent the missing voices in a business school, participants did not take a seat. The chair sat there, quite ignored. Upon reflection maybe decoloniality was a new concept to many and they were trying to figure out their positions.

Enthusiast:

These conversations can also be so uncomfortable! Some participants spoke much more, with more confidence than others.

Hopeful:

Do you think participants put themselves in the oppressor or oppressed category when discussing decoloniality? That would be a pity because we are all oppressors and oppressed depending on context!

But, if people feel like this is the oppressed meeting the oppressor to discuss the oppression, this sounds very difficult. Imagine! We are trying to liberate ourselves through dialogue, as Freire (2000) would recommend, but instead we could be setting up a trap where people do not feel comfortable to speak up. So, this isn't a case of rigidity or close-mindedness, it could just be fear - fear of not being prepared, fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of not being an expert on this subject, and fear of discomfort that arise during these conversations.

Enthusiast:

I agree but isn't this the work that can move the needle? I expected that participants would say which indigenous voices are missing and which parts of the world have been ignored when we collect materials for class, however we were met with conversations about what good or robust teaching practices '*should*' be like.

SCENE 2: Postcolonial Melancholia and the Urge to Turn the Page

Later that afternoon, the conversation heightens.

Hopeful:

The word "decoloniality" was extremely polarizing. Several participants in both sessions wondered if the word decoloniality itself was divisive and an outdated concept. Some rushed to find a replacement for the word. A few recommended "inclusion" in place of "decoloniality" and explained that the latter is about a time in the past. Both sessions had participants strongly calling for us to "turn the page."

Enthusiast:

A participant said "it feels like we are being told to reject how far we have come. People are considerably better-off now than they have ever been". Gilroy (2005) would identify this as a manic celebration of progress and a compulsive defense of colonial achievements while refusing to recognize the violence to enable those achievements.

Hopeful:

Yes, and, Gilroy (2005) refers to postcolonial melancholia, a social pathology of neo-imperialism and explains that the West suffers from a melancholia since the loss of colonies and tends to romanticize the past and to over celebrate moments of strength. Gilroy (2005) says there has not been an honest confrontation to the violence, exploitation and racism inherent in colonial rule but rather, one imagines the Empire as benevolent and civilizing in turn, developing elaborate justifications for maintaining colonial structures rather than simply admitting their attachment to power structures. During the conversation, we heard a strong voice in the room echoing Gilroy's (2005) points saying "the reason that marginalized voices aren't included in narratives are because they aren't efficient" and when we look to legacies that came in from the West, it made things better.

[pauses to take a breath from speaking too quickly]

Can I ask, how did you feel when you heard this comment?

Enthusiast:

This comment showed me how far we are from practices of decoloniality. Many make sense of the world by justifying historical linear progress. How did you feel?

Hopeful:

[take a deep breath out of frustration]

I couldn't respond in the room but I was affected at that moment. I find it hard to remove all aspects of the historical impact of colonization. Should there be an argument for progress because of the colonizer's presence, we cannot discount the pain of erasure and dehumanizing that came from these so-called "efficiencies." Why should those means such as erasure justify efficiencies that mostly benefited some while taking from others?

Enthusiast:

Why didn't you voice your discomfort in the room? This could have been a moment of that fluid power negotiation especially given some voices in the room were louder than others. Do you think we were too affected by the voices that were against the word decoloniality?

Hopeful:

I have often struggled with being viewed as an activist. If someone were to say "hey! You sound like a real activist", I would go out of my way to explain why I am not one. This is an even more strange reaction because I believe in activism. What leaving the room did teach me was that if it is acceptable to be in the system and perpetuate colonial thought, it must be acceptable to be an activist. In hindsight, this would have been the perfect moment to negotiate and I should have

voiced my discomfort. As we analyze these conversations, I am realizing discomfort sits at the center of them for me.

Enthusiast:

Yes and fear! I understand because I often have sleepless nights about what I might have said in classrooms when questioning power structures. And with the labels - I have one too: sellout! If you have a social science PhD, you are afraid of being called a sellout because you work at a Business School.

Hopeful:

So we are sellout activists.

[laughs]

Well, this sellout activist is not a person who can rationalize colonial history objectively and I am definitely not a fan of the concept of "turning the page". *[looks away]*

Enthusiast:

Turning the page can be as hostile and violent as confronting colonial history.

[speaks a little louder]

That is the problem with moments that mark transitions such as independence or the arrival of democracy or the revolution. These moments tend to signal transformation, yet we forget that the structures in place did not necessarily bring reparations nor redistributive justice.

SCENE 3: Excuses, Excuses!

The co-authors move on to share a salad instead.

Enthusiast:

[chewing thoughtfully]

Dubai also gives us a neutral, somewhat elevated space to tackle these issues from a detached perspective. Not that we are detached, but we might ignore our responsibility in creating and recreating power structures in Dubai. This emotional detachment can be a symptom of Gilroy's postcolonial melancholia (2005) as all of us together are unable to acknowledge how the colonial past shapes the present. This makes these community conversations in Dubai even more difficult. We thought accreditation constrained us when we started but the constraints sit within the fear, discomfort and silences around acknowledging the need for decoloniality.

Hopeful:

To our surprise, faculty did not mention any institutional barriers to engaging with decoloniality nor did they take responsibility to move this forward.

[pauses to think]

Looks like the barriers are in our fears of engaging with decoloniality.

Enthusiast:

Yes - I see my role as a facilitator of discussion in the classroom. If it is fear that stalling the conversations on decoloniality, who should be the brave one in the classroom? At first glance, one might say that this is the professor. At the same time, we have course evaluations and we must protect the safety of our students. Should I be brave to conquer my fears? How do we acknowledge students' discomfort and fear to engage?

Hopeful:

We have a topic that is potentially foreign because of our physical geographical position. Participants did mention that they bring examples and philosophies from other parts of the world to the classroom. Again, thinking about decolonial practices, participants seemed eager to go down the road of "*what can we add to what we do to make this bette*r" versus really engaging with the question of coloniality.

[twirling spoon thoughtfully]

If we want to engage in concepts such as decoloniality we have to create a space that encourages debate. If people come to these conversations with the intention of listening, there can truly be moments of pause and reflection. For example, during the conversation, I spoke about how I don't see myself represented in a lot of the literature as a brown woman. I explained how power intersects with vulnerability not taking into account the Indian experience in that vulnerability and shame manifest differently. A participant reflected that they "had never thought about the impact of representative literature in that light".

[smiles and sounds hopeful]

This gave me hope that the dialogue taking place in the room was actually creating a space for consideration of the impact of decoloniality. This can be a critique of Wynter's (2003) overrepresentation of the Western man as a call for epistemic rupture. The quote by the participant shows genuine curiosity to understand and change. Dialogue must be used to avoid totalizing any epistemic system.

Enthusiast:

We also know that everyone in that room had some engagement with, let's call them "barriers" - the guardrails of policy, of accreditation because at some point they've been pushed back by administrators about their teaching practice, their syllabi, assignments and rubrics. This is how Quijano (2021) explains how coloniality perpetuates through institutional structures that keep naturalizing Western epistemologies as the only reliable options. Despite academic freedom, faculty might feel the guardrails are confining, rather than allowing for creativity.

4.   Act 3: Messy Findings, Tangled Futures

SCENE 1: So what now?

The co-authors move on to sodas with a lot of ice. They are still trying to beat the heat on an especially humid day as the conversation turns to action and future possibilities.

Enthusiast:

What do we do next?

[there's no response from hopeful but only a pensive look…]

After the community conversations we understand more about what some of the barriers might be to decolonizing the business school. In the face of epistemic boundaries, with hesitation to imagine let alone reimagine, and the excuses we might unintentionally be making, how do we move forward?

Hopeful:

[sighing…not in defeat but as a form of realization]

Most of the conversations attempted to move away from the concept of decoloniality which Gilroy (2005) would argue is a classic symptom of postcolonial melancholia and the avoidance of facing the realities of the power structures presently at play. Wynter (2003) also highlights the quest for objective and rational reasoning, without recognizing alternative ways of knowing that have been absent.

Enthusiast:

We now recognize that having community conversations around decoloniality are very difficult because we choose to censor ourselves, stay silent in the face of discomfort. We also need to own labels such as "activists" or "sell-outs" if that means that we are doing the work.

Hopeful:

The world may continue to see that conversations around decoloniality do not belong to the business school arguing that business schools are apathetic and does not address power imbalances as it potentially could. We need to reinforce that critical thinking does have a place in the business school.

Enthusiast:

Asking for conversations of oppression to take place requires review of current notions of ethics and empathy due to the difficulty and discomfort of such conversations. Some might silence themselves or be silenced in this dialogue.

Hopeful:

[hopeful nods in agreement]

We started community conversations expecting the epistemic boundaries would be very much shaped by the guardrails of accreditation. What we found however, was that there was little knowledge in the room of what accreditation guidelines actually entail. International

accreditation bodies have been pushing for more inclusive and diverse business schools as a way of questioning and dismantling global inequalities (Everett, 2023). These bodies recognize that racism and empire have shaped management and business practices globally.

Enthusiast:

Whose responsibility is it then to bring decoloniality into the business school? If accreditation bodies allow us as faculty to decolonize our practices, what is stopping us from taking action? Because we are in an international business school in a diverse city, we run the risk of being blind to the importance of decolonizing the business school because we might assume that words such as 'international', 'diverse', 'Dubai' are sufficient.

Hopeful:

Being diverse and international should not be a checkbox exercise to perpetuate legacies of colonialism. Multiple participants shared that they *"include different voices in the reading list for courses".* Wynter (2003) reminds us to move away from descriptive statements of recognition of multiple ways of being human and we must rethink the concept of being human. We need to reimagine what counts as business knowledge. In place of adding extra non-Western voices to Western frameworks, we must delink from colonial systems (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Enthusiast:

You say "business knowledge" and I think we should ask a deeper question. Future research should even address the question - should a business school even exist?

Hopeful:

[laughs]

Well, that's a thought because we would have to take up this philosophizing in a diner as our full-time jobs, because we wouldn't have jobs.

Jokes apart - let's think about this! Should we be able to have these discussions about decoloniality in an air-conditioned diner in the middle of the summer, in a city located in a desert, drinking coffee that has been imported from Colombia or Ethiopia, wouldn't that be the most impressive display of our privilege?

Enthusiast:

[laughing at everything being said]

Okay - so let's unpack this. We are saying we don't want to lose our jobs that we actually enjoy which means we want the business school to exist. At the same time, we want to transform power structures and instill second order change. We are in quite the dilemma!

Hopeful:

But what about first-order change? Can individuals make small changes with support and encouragement as a first step? As a Dean, I am able to engage with students around the concept

of decoloniality at a micro-level in classrooms. Should even five of those students experience an epistemological shift through those conversations, that's my win!

Enthusiast:

We, as faculty can also take the classroom as an opportunity to address oppression, imbalances, inequalities of the current power structures. In doing so, we can find that some students might have a desire to debate decoloniality and faculty need to acknowledge that every topic in the classroom is up for contestation including decoloniality. While these first-order changes might not unsettle the system's foundations, it's a great place to start. These debates will at least introduce language that has been foreign or out of place in a business school.

Hopeful:

Yes, and, there would also be students who are not contesting decoloniality. Wouldn't it be great if they were able to bring alternative world views that have been systematically ignored and excluded back into the classroom. For example, the Cartesian mind and body divide and the commitment to science might reproduce the colonial inheritance. In Dubai, a Muslim or Arab epistemology, which is not so one-track minded as it integrates the metaphysical and intuition and is multi-disciplinary, could complement all of our thinking and business education.

Enthusiast:

A decolonial process asks "whose knowledge counts and at what cost"? The inclusion of oral, visual and embodied epistemologies is essential for decolonial reform.

[As lights fade to black, the hopeful and enthusiast shake hands in agreement]

5.   Exiting the stage and imagining

The transformation towards decoloniality should be co-designed with administrators, faculty, students, accreditors, business practitioners, local communities and governments. These collaborations should pay attention to the hierarchical contexts.

As a starting point, we should create spaces in classrooms that address current power structures that tacitly shape our thinking. These classroom conversations can help business schools become a place where explicit conversations about decoloniality can take place. We caution not to project our own discomfort or courage in the participants and allow for the group to co-create the limits of the conversation. While difficult conversations could be spaces for transformation, we cannot ignore the inherited trauma or resurfaced pain that might come with bringing up colonial histories.

Furthermore, inclusion and decoloniality need to be detangled ensuring that we aren't just adding missing voices and instead we are truly questioning power structures that sustain business. While inclusion asks to add missing voices, decoloniality goes further and questions who speaks for whom. We mustn't run the risk of doing exactly what Spivak (1988) cautions us

about - if we have those missing voices speak through our microphones, those voices will emerge through our privilege.

Dubai's border space is ideal to move these conversations forward and put the possibilities into practice, especially as these conversations aren't very loudly present in the city. We hope to continue these community conversations and next time co-create them with decoloniality researchers. We learnt that the space really matters - how would our conversations have gone if we hadn't been at the business school that all participants worked at? What if students were in the room? What if there were white men leading the conversation? What if we were sitting in a majlis in the desert? We believe these conversations might have gone very differently. Immersive experiences are integral to meaning making which would be central to produce change (Boas, as cited in Pountney & Marić, 2021).

We must remember, decoloniality is a collective responsibility but it is not evenly distributed. Those who hold institutional, racial or epistemic privilege bear a qualitatively different responsibility than those whose lives and knowledge systems have been historically marginalized. The importance of understanding and recognizing our privilege is central to this work. An epistemic complexity arises as we try to unlearn not only colonial histories but also our own entanglement in its reproduction. A reckoning of when we might be the oppressor and when we might be the oppressed requires constant cycles of action and reflection.

The last (reflexive) breath…

This paper was a little scary to write - we felt like we were over curating the words, a carefulness because documents are long lasting and act as monuments. It feels like our in-person conversations are more daring, raw and can pick at the root of the problem. The moment it came to putting those conversations to page, we sat in fear of being misunderstood because our names are on this paper and it takes courage. This is our first step towards trying to embody some of that courage.

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