Decolonial Embodied Transformative Learning

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Abstract

In response to the challenges presented by polycrisis, there is a need to explore and bring into practice the deep leverage points for societal transformation. The current polycrisis has its roots in colonialism and entangled capitalism with a history of domination over both other human beings and the natural world per se. Drawing inspiration from Fanon's insights (1961) that colonization extends beyond bodies to encompass minds, this exploration prompts a call for an embodied "Epistemic Disobedience," as termed by Mignolo (2009). Our bodyminds subjected to interlocking systems of oppression and colonization and shrivelled into narrow emotional, epistemological and ontological corsets call for a radical, embodied and relational approach to decolonization.

In this paper, we present the development of such an approach, the **DecolonizeBODYMinds** (DBM) method (which draws from transformative learning theory and Movement for Life) and present its application in the form of two workshops on the topic of decolonization as part of the *Deal with It* exhibition exploring the colonial legacy of the city of Basel, Switzerland. The design and approach to these workshops are described in detail alongside an evaluation of participants' experiences collected through a survey.

The approach is then theorised and critically examined. DBM method puts theory into practice through an embodied approach. This approach intentionally triggers emotions like fear, shame, guilt, etc and diminutive states of embodiment such as powerlessness and hopelessness which are present in

bodyminds experiencing internalized oppression and works through them through creative and relational embodied expression and release using dance, partner work, art-making and generative dialogue. In a safe enough space (Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022) it allows us to embrace liminality and have a collective space where new meaning making and shift of action can be catalyzed. It opens up the space to de-link our ways of knowing and allows for onto-epistemological shifts that are deep levers of systems change. It thus puts decoloniality both as a means to an end and an end in itself.

KEYWORDS: Decoloniality, Transformative Learning, Embodiment, Leverage Points

RSD TOPIC(S): Learning & Education, Health & Well-Being, Socioecological Design

Introduction & Framing

In the face of escalating socio-political and environmental challenges and urgencies, such as the genocides in Gaza, West China, Sudan (Genocide Watch, 2024; UN, 2024), and the breaching of six out of nine planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2023), humanity finds itself in a polycrisis. At an individual level, people are experiencing a multitude of emotions, both due to direct and vicarious exposure to these crises, such as rage, fear, anxiety, sadness and feelings of disbelief, injustice, hopelessness, powerlessness, apathy, empathy, loving-kindness and empathy fatigue. This unsustainable and inequitable combination of individual (inner) and systemic states is deeply intertwined with historical (and current) patterns of colonial (and neo-colonial) exploitation. In efforts to transition to a state of inner and systemic wellbeing, discussions and practices of decoloniality are gaining prominence, challenging prevailing knowledge paradigms inherited from colonialism and advocating for a rupture or de-linking from colonial epistemologies (Fanon, 1961; Mbembe, 2021; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Appadurai, 2019). Decoloniality strongly calls for the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems and the recognition of diverse worldviews (Escobar, 2017).

To address this critical need for catalyzing systemic change processes, we are drawing on the leverage points theory by (Meadows, 2008), who differentiated 12 leverage points. Leverage points are strategic areas where interventions can have a

disproportionately large impact on shifting towards sustainability and justice. According to Meadows, the deepest leverage points involve the shifting and transcending of paradigms (or the mindsets which are the sources of systems). Here transformative learning (TL) theory provides a description on how such meaning perspectives shift. TL, originating from Mezirow's seminal work in 1978, has evolved over four decades to extend its relevance beyond educational domains, as demonstrated by Hoggan and Finnegan (2023). Grounded in social practices and receptive to diverse forms of knowledge, TL facilitates epistemological change, as noted by Boström et al. (2018). Transitioning through liminal spaces, highlighted by scholars like Förster et al. (2019) and Kolmar (2021), underscores TL's focus on collective engagement and navigation. Creating "Safe Enough" spaces, as advocated by Singer-Brodowski et al. (2022), is crucial for people to live through their edge emotions (Mälkki, 2019) and allow for the emergence of new meaning perspectives. TL intersects with disciplines like action research and design, reflecting its transdisciplinary nature and is more and more applied also beyond formal learning spaces (Singer-Brodowski, 2023). Anchored in practice, TL embodies transgressive learning, challenging conventional norms (Boström et al., 2018; hooks, 1994). It can integrate a holistic approach, integrating materiality, emotions, spirituality, and diverse ways of knowing (Escobar, 2017).

We believe to have developed a transdisciplinary, decolonial, embodied approach and method to catalyze eco-social transformation processes, by intentionally inviting, working with, expressing and shifting through edge emotions so as to induce inner transformation processes (or in other words paradigm shifts and potentially paradigm transcendence as per Meadows). This approach was designed by drawing from Movement for Life, an expressive healing arts approach and TL theory.

Methods

In the pursuit of societal transformation, we keep in mind Akómoláfé's (2021) reminder: "Times are urgent. Let's slow down." This call to deliberate, intentional action resonates deeply with the ethos of our approach. By creating spaces for embodied TL, we strive to not only address the urgency of the polycrisis but also to slow down and engage with the complexities and entanglements inherent in systemic change.

By providing a safe enough space (Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022) for TL and navigating liminality and challenging established knowledge, the DecolonizeBodyMind (DBM) method aims to catalyze shifts in understanding that are essential for societal transformation. Through a critical examination of this method, this paper looks into its potential to bridge theory with practice, offering a platform for reflective practitioners at the intersection with arts to engage in transformative interventions. As suggested by English (2007), artists possess the unique ability to challenge cultural boundaries and political norms, thereby reshaping societal narratives and structures. Consequently, there is an increasing need for artists to transcend conventional boundaries and actively participate in political discourse, fostering alternative modes of cultural expression. This insight invited us to also share our art practice (performance as well as poetry) with the workshop participants.

This study employs a case study approach, grounded in qualitative research principles and guided by the principles of action research. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within their natural context. Data collection draws upon multiple sources, including facilitator's observation, participant feedback (a post workshop survey was conducted) and researcher reflexivity. These methods provide a comprehensive understanding of the case under investigation.

The study is theoretically grounded in systemic-constructivist theory, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of social systems and the co-construction of knowledge. Additionally, TL theory provides a lens through which to understand how individuals and systems undergo profound shifts in understanding and behavior.

The researchers adopt a reflective practitioner approach, acknowledging their role in shaping the research process and outcomes. Reflexivity involves critically examining personal biases, assumptions, and values that may influence analysis.

Our approach is transdisciplinary and draws upon decoloniality in its design, participation and knowledge building process.

Case Study

DecolonizeBODYMinds (DBM) method was conceived as a TL experience and workshop that intentionally invites strong emotions for the participants so as to catalyze processes of inner transformation. The method integrates performance, poetry and dance, embodiment sessions, art making and generative dialogue, and is an example of decoloniality in design. The workshop was designed to create a space where participants could engage in different and relational modes of expression, challenge conventional (and oppressive) norms, and reimagine their relationship with their bodies and minds. DBM is what we call a tricksteresque method, calling in for dis-disenchantment and messy relational epistemologies and ontologies. It can be used to address various eco-social challenges that we are facing at the moment.

In this case study, Naveen & Anaïs, the workshop facilitators (and researchers), aimed to provide an embodied exploration of decolonization from various systems of oppression. The DBM method was applied in two workshops, which were named similar to the method, "Decolonizing Our BodyMind", that took place in October 2023. The workshops were held in Basel, Switzerland under the aegis of the exhibition Deal with It, which explored the colonial legacy of the artefacts stored in the various archives in the city of Basel in Switzerland. One of the wealthiest countries in the world, Switzerland is not known as a colonial power, has profited from colonialism and continues to profit largely from neocolonial structures, eg. through resource trading. Switzerland has been and continues to be slow in working through its own colonial entanglements (Fässler, 2024). One of the authors, Naveen, himself has experienced several incidents of racism via unprovoked police controls in streets and public transport in Switzerland - something which has never happened to Anaïs, holding white privilege. Switzerland also holds its case - Mike Ben Peter - which is referred to as the George Floyd of Switzerland (SDA, 2023). Mr. Peter had died during a police control (for which the police officers have been released of charges, SDA, 2023). We wish to point to and acknowledge that as concluded by the UN Human Rights Office "Switzerland has a serious problem of racism against people of African descent" (UN 2022). This comes alongside "a spirit of exceptionalism and white innocence" (Fässler, 2024).

The pervasive privileges afforded to white individuals within society, stemming from historical legacies of colonialism and imperialism, often go unacknowledged, perpetuating systemic racism and reinforcing oppressive structures (Williams, 2021). While those with white privilege may not overtly recognize their complicity in racialized systems, the complexities of individual implication in exploitative structures, go beyond simplistic oppressor and oppressed dichotomies (Fanon, 1961), and is key to be able to transform those structures. .

It was our intention for these workshops, that by the terms colonization and decolonization, we take in the widest use of the words, as in the colonization of both the body and mind, the bodymind as we call it, from all forms of oppressive ideas and mental structures, be it settler colonialism, class oppression, gender oppression. "In the colonial world, the colonized's affectivity is kept on edge like a running sore flinching from a caustic agent." (Fanon, 1963). In these very times, digital and social technologies, tools of hypercapitalism, are (deceptively) influencing and have colonized our affect (emotions, feelings and moods) and have captured our attention and diminished our autonomy (Shamsudhin 2022, Dey 2024). More generally and drawing on Mignolo (2009) "decolonial options start from the principle that the regeneration of life shall prevail over primacy of the production and reproduction of goods at the cost of life".

The methodological approach of DBM borrows from Movement for Life (MFL), a syncretic method that brings together dance, theatre, shadow work, somatics and expressive arts practices being continuously developed by Gisela Rocha, a Brazilian-born choreographer and director, and her students. The MFL method attempts to facilitate inner transformation of the experiential participant by bringing awareness to, embodying and expressing emotional states fully within the person. DBM is designed according to descriptions of TL processes with specific focus on the emotional level (Grund et al., 2023). DBM creates a combination of a safe enough space (Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022) and the authentic expression of vulnerability in a relational ontology (Butler, 2021). The performances and facilitation invite both an emotional response and the stepping into vulnerability from the participants. This openness to vulnerability, which essentially refers to opening up for the possibility of being affected, is a preliminary to authentic connection, without adopting roles (Jordan,

2008). Furthermore through generative dialogue, an important method of TL (Gunnlaugson, 2006), DBM ensures the collective meaning making and potential in collective shift of action.
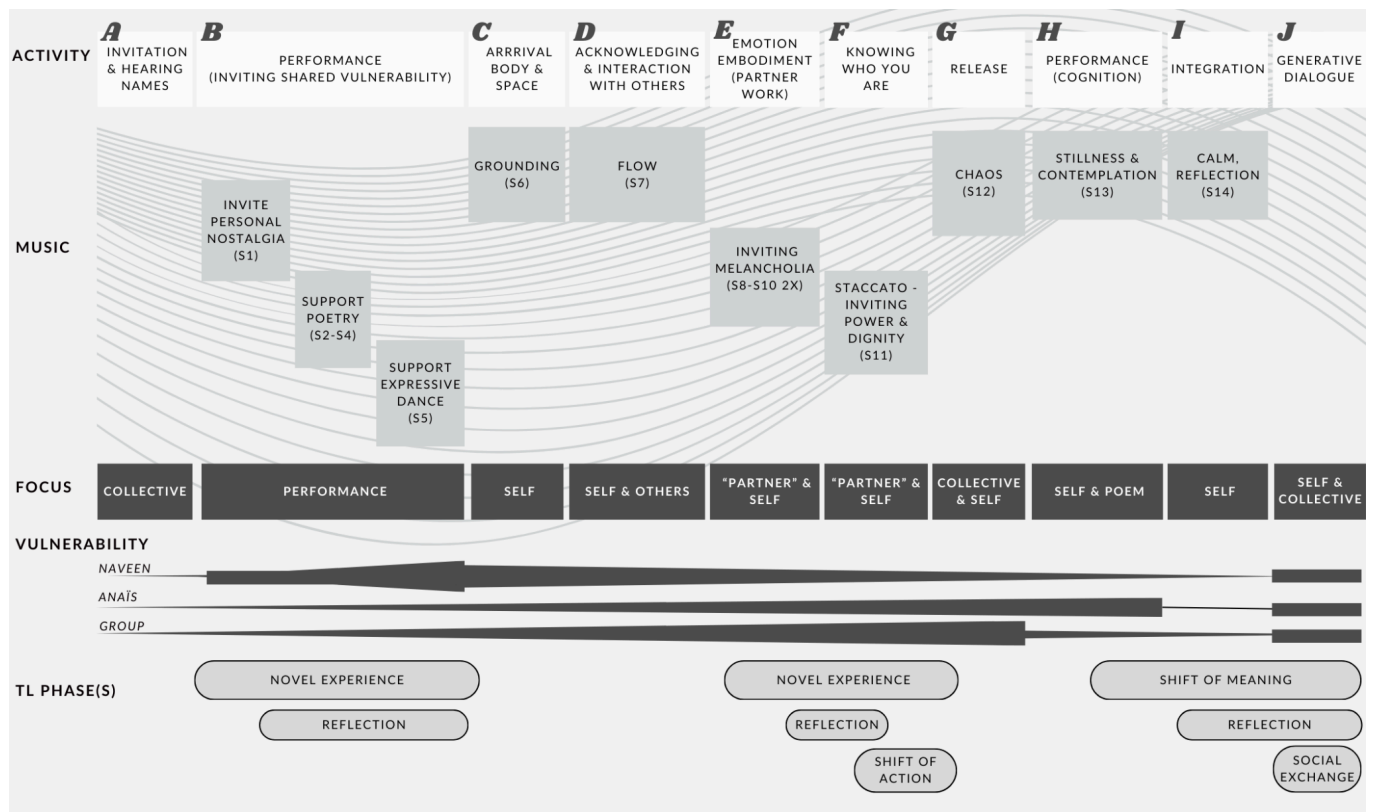
Figure 1: Flow of the DBM Workshop

Session Flow

The overall workshop flow has several distinguishing layers, which are illustrated in Figure 1.

The facilitated **activities** (A-J) moved from joint framing, to performance, to an embodiment session guided by prompts from the facilitators (that including arriving into their body and into the space, gentle interactions amongst the participants, pair work in bringing forth, embodying, witnessing and mirroring emotions and the stories behind it through dance, embodiment of qualities like dignity and power, release into stillness and contemplation), followed by listening to a poem on decolonizing our bodymind, and concluding with integrating the experience with art-making (drawing, sketching, etc) and generative dialogue.

As the BDM method works with the intentional elicitation and expression of emotions, the **music** and soundscape play a very significant role throughout the workshop. The artists, the songs, its placement with respect to the activity, its repetition, and the moments of silence, were carefully and purposefully chosen by Naveen to deepen the embodied experience and the traversal through emotional landscapes for the participants. The music served as a catalyst into vulnerability, for embodiment, and for the arousal, amplification and expression of emotions and the stories behind them. Some of the moods and qualities invited for by the music is illustrated in Figure 1. A complete playlist of the workshop is to be found in Appendix 1.

A) Framing & Establishing A Safe Enough Space.

Both co-facilitators arrived several hours in advance into the room to establish the physical set-up with e.g. a small altar and for energetic preparation. The workshop began with an invitation for participants to arrive as they are, setting the tone for openness and acceptance. They were all greeted by both co-facilitators and invited to take a seat (chair or floor) in the circle. Jointly a check-in on 3 Levels of Awareness (Physical, Emotional, Mind) was done and a framing was given, that this is an experiential format and that it invites us all to sense into our own resources, anyone may at any time choose to discontinue. Everyone present was then asked to share in a first circle round the name by

which they would like to be called in this room tonight, and anything important that needs to be heard or said before we start.

B) The Performance, An Invitation To Vulnerability.

It then transitioned into a three-act performance (designed and performed by Naveen), starting with a call into presence, spoken word poetry, and a final dance to express themes of oppression that he, we, and our collective ancestry have all been subjugated to. Naveen stepped into the center of the circle, lit a candle, and delicately slipped on a dark-gold colored robe, and sat at the center of the circle (Figure 2). He called in for attention and presence, by picking up and sounding two *chilankas* (anklets consisting of a string of small metallic ball bells used in classical Indian dance forms) with his hands and moving them across the floor and his body. Within the context of this performance, it symbolized an act of liberation from the chains of oppression of all forms and of all people. He rose up, walked within the circle, and began an improvised spoken word poem expressing the intolerable silence of being unheard. At the end of every verse, he intuitively chose a participant, and walked up to them and handed them a folded card of black paper. After the recital, and after all the participants had received the cards, Naveen performed a dance to make the emotions he was experiencing at that moment visible. The intention was to invite for vulnerability from the participants by stepping into his own authentic vulnerable expression of his emotional state. See Figure 1 for a qualitative representation of the varying degrees of vulnerability, felt by the two facilitators. The soundscape chosen for the performance had multiple intentions, including calling upon Naveen's nostalgia of his multi-cultural upbringing, and providing support and tension for the spoken word poetry and for the expressive dance (see Figure 1 and Appendix 1).
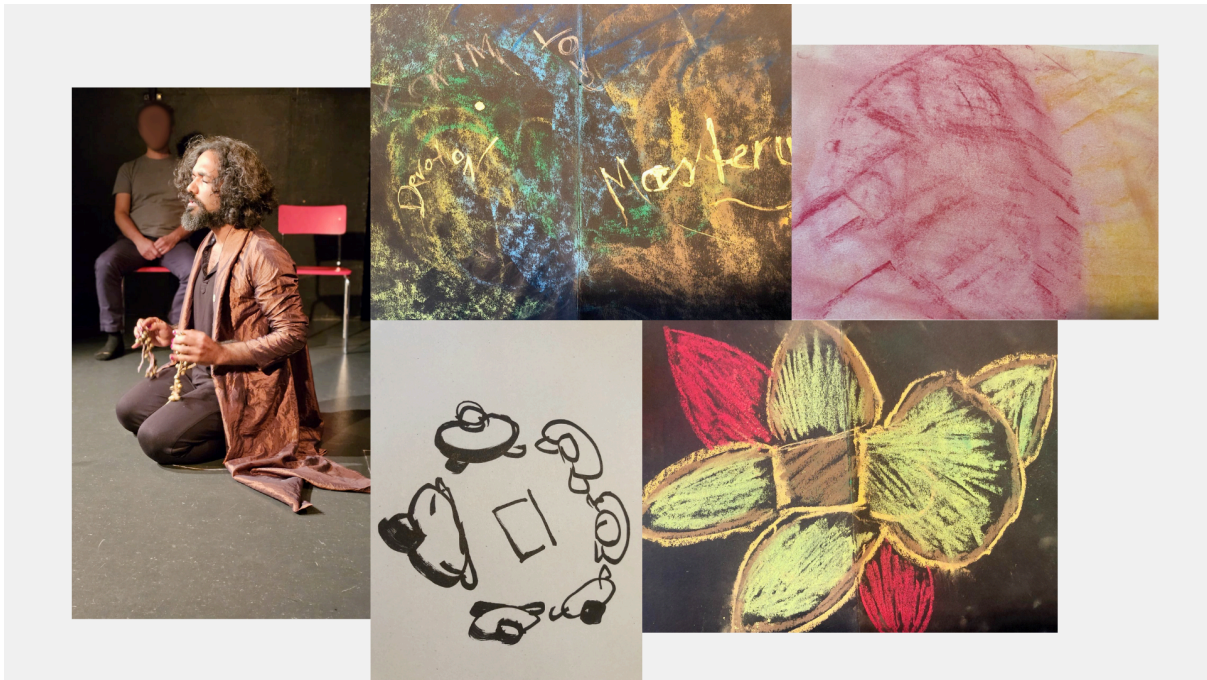
Figure 2: Impressions from the DBM Workshops; Naveen's performance and some of the participant drawings made during integration.

C-G) Embodiment Session - Embracing Edge Emotions.

> The performance was followed by an invitation to enter the embodiment session where participants were guided into various movement exercises, alone and in pairs. As the music transitioned, the chairs were removed, and the participants were guided into an embodied arrival; grounding into their bodies through breathing and gentle movements (C). Naveen stepped out from the role of performer into the role of facilitator, while Anaïs stepped into the role of a participant, shifting the typical facilitator-participant dichotomy. After the grounding activation which was intended to build up one's sense of safety within their own body, they were guided into flow, a dynamic state of fluidity in their bodily movements and in their movement around and through the space. Naveen offered prompts to acknowledge the presence of other bodies in the room through gentle non-contact practices, followed by gentle contact practices in pairs (D) inviting curiosity, humor and joy. Music played a vital role, accompanying and catalyzing participants in their embodied exploration.

Once individual and collective safety had been built up, the participants were asked to pair up with someone (E). A person from each pair was chosen. They were asked to get their card of black paper, open it, and read what was written on it in golden ink, in silence. The questions were intentionally not the same for all participants, however the two-question structure was either:

Qa1. "What is your greatest fear / shame / ..... ?"

Qa2. "Who placed 'it' in you?"

or

Qb1. "When did you feel small / powerless / .... ?"

Qb2. "Who made you feel 'that'?"

The one who read the paper was then asked to express the story or the incident related to those questions, nonverbally, through movement. The second person of the pair was asked to witness, ie, fully watch and feel into the physical expression of the story of their partner, not knowing what question they read, nor what story was being shared. The facilitator provided additional prompts to allow the first person to step deeper and deeper into their story and into their emotions by amplifying their range and variety of movements. After approximately five minutes, timed with respect to the music chosen, they were then asked to gently come into a neutral position. Then the second person was asked to mirror; that is to express in movement, what they had just witnessed. The first person was asked to carefully 'watch their story retold' through their partner's movements. Afterwards, the roles were changed, and the second partner read their card, embodied and performed their story, and their stories were 'played' back by their partner.

This partner work represents a "novel experience" or "disorienting dilemma" in TL, which includes allowing for and intentionally stepping into edge emotions (Mälkki 2019) like shame, fear, powerlessness which would in other settings be not welcome or could lead to a withdrawal of participation. The witnessing of one's own story through another person's expression decenters and can help to reframe the relation to the story behind the difficult emotion. The partners were

then asked to non-verbally thank each other, and to start moving through space, and to come back into their own selves and to the present moment.

In the next segment of the embodiment session (F), the participants were guided into the soundscape of staccato; to step into and embody dignity and power emerging out from the debilitating edge emotions and the associated story and oppression, to physically express their sense of (expanded and renewed) self, their boundaries, their Yes and their No. Powerful African drums resonated through the soundscape to accompany this session. Coming to the end of the embodiment session, to a segment which we call Release (G), a circle was formed with the participants and facilitators, and one by one each person was invited to step into the center of the circle, if they wish to, to "release" through exaggerated physical movement, anything they wish to let go from their minds or bodies. Those who stepped in and released were supported by the other's in circles with encouragement.

H) The Poem, An Invitation To Cognition.

We began the closing of the embodiment session, with the performance by Anaïs of the poem (see Appendix 2) written by herself layered on top of the song Abschied (Farewell) by the German-Turkish ensemble LebiDerya, as if to bid farewell to this alternated state of collective experience and arrive back into the realm of cognition (H) The words of the poem express and emphasise the urgency and magnitude of the decolonization aimed for.

The form of poetry was chosen, since poems leave space for the void, the unknown, the inbetween, the silence and imagination. They allow for each and every person to bear with or fill in the gaps with their own images without prescribing too much and overwhelming them with spelling out each and every thought. This was for Anaïs the first time to perform a self-written poem, thus showing up in authentic vulnerability.

I) Integration.

The integration is a silent space for reflection, drinking water, snacking or simply being. There was an invitation to go outdoors or engage in art making - allowing

for the settling of the remnant contents of the unconscious that came up during the embodiment. Art-making through drawing, sketching, crayoning is the first step towards integrating the embodied experience, yet in a non-verbal manner. We share some of the drawings (with the consent of participants) in Figure 2 below.

J) Generative Dialogue.

The integration continued with generative dialogue, where participants were invited to share their reflections and insights in a safe and inclusive environment. The leading prompt for dialogue was "What needs to be said now and here in the context of decolonizing our bodyminds?" The generative dialogue (inspired by Bohm 1996 and indigenous ways of circling like e.g. by First Nation people in Canada) emphasises the distribution of power and shared responsibility. According to de Geus et al. (2023) in the context of transdisciplinarity for societal transformation, addressing power dynamics is crucial yet underexplored.

Throughout the workshop, the group alterated from **focusing** on the collective, to one individual (performance, partner) to self and finally back to the collective. This acknowledgement of who is here (and who is not here) was purposefully made at the beginning, to start together. In order to even be able to acknowledge others, we started with the Check-in on 3 Levels of Awareness in order to get grounded with oneself. The joint gaze then shifted onto the performance and from there went back to oneself with a gentle start of opening towards the others and then focusing in different elements of partner work on one specific other. It is also important to notice how space was given to integrate by oneself, before social exchange.

In terms of **vulnerability** we are drawing attention to three strands: two for the co-facilitators, whose vulnerability is almost mirror reversed. We believe that the showing up in vulnerability, as demonstrated by Naveen and Anaïs, who individually stepped outside their own comfort zones at different times during the workshop is a key component of the set-up, an invitation to the others to show up in their own vulnerabilities. The third strand depicts the vulnerability of the participants. We believe that for all three parties the vulnerability is similar or at eye level during the Generative Dialogue.

Lastly we depicted the different non-linear **TL phases**, recognising that several phases can be active for different people simultaneously and that people are going through various trajectories of the TL cycle (see also Figure 3).

In a follow-up email to all DBM workshop participants, we sent out a survey. Some of the testimonials shared as part of the survey can be seen in Appendix 3.

Key Elements of DBM

Next to the overall design of the flow described above and in Fig. 1, the following key elements and interventions of Decoloniality were included:

- **Reimagined Spaces:**

  The workshop challenged conventional notions of space, creating an environment where participants felt safe enough to explore, be vulnerable and express themselves authentically.

  - Place: The workshops were conducted in the auditorium of a commercially operating anthroposophic bank and in the former safe of a now reconverted banking building. The rise of banking bears a strong link to capitalism and colonialism. This was explicitly acknowledged.
  - Flexible Seating Options: Upon arrival participants had the freedom to sit on the ground or chairs, providing opportunities for different levels of comfort and connection (to the ground), challenging the dominant norms of use of space by sitting on chairs.
  - Energetic Cleansing: One of the co-facilitators also did some energetic work stemming from spiritual traditions to prepare the room for what was to come. Also room spray was used and the rooms were ventilated as much as possible before the start.

  - Dedication: The co-facilitators made a dedication to universal love and peace in the room, setting a clear intention to the purpose of the work, before the arrival of the participants.

- **Materiality:**

- ○ Altar and Sharing of Food: The altar, a dedicated space marked by some fabrics, included some snacks (like home-dried apple slices and dates) which were later on shared with all participants. It als held a sounding bowl, which was used both to open and close the workshop, a talking stick (piece of wood) which was later used in the generative dialogue and had a burning candle, autumn leaves, branches, rocks and different seeds as well as a note with the name of "Mike Ben Peter" on which there was a burning tea light.

- ○ Use of Black (and White) Paper: For the integration time, when everyone was invited to to express themselves through drawing, rather than traditional white paper, both black and white paper were made available, symbolizing a departure from Eurocentric norms and inviting participants to explore alternative perspectives.

- **Relationality:**
  - ○ Equal Power and Expression: The workshop fostered an ecology and circle of equals, where all participants were encouraged to speak, move, dance and share from their own experiences, non-verbally and verbally, in both the embodiment session and in the generative dialogue.
  - ○ Facilitation-Participation: The facilitators moved through the roles of performing, facilitating and participating, sharing their vulnerabilities and authentic expression, which created a deeper relationality in the system.
  - ○ Generative Dialogue: For the generative dialogue principles (Speak from the "I", Listen with attention, Speak with intention, confidentiality) were introduced. In terms of facilitating the dialogue, the facilitators relinquished control to the group by introducing the rule that the discussion would continue until two rounds of circles were completed in silence. This decision empowered participants to determine the length of the dialogue based on the depth of the conversation and the collective energy of the group.
  - ○ Non-Intervention Of Co-Facilitators: Even in moments where "trickster energies" arose, e.g. letting the circle continue by another round by just

saying anything, the facilitators refrained from intervening, allowing the group to navigate and address any challenges that arose organically. The use of a talking stick further facilitated respectful communication and ensured that everyone had the opportunity to be heard.

- **Working with Emotions:**
  - DBM intentionally invites for emotions that surround challenging themes, and provides conditions (including carefully designed soundscapes, safety building exercises) that allow for embodied ways to express and shift them together with other participants.

- **Reimagined Sense of Time:**
  - Open Endedness: The workshop stayed open beyond the specified time duration, an open-endnesses in being together and sharing stories, food, & drinks.

  - Sensing the Field and Intuitive Guidance of the Embodiment Session: guidance through kairos, the right time, rather than chronos, a fixed schedule. E.g. the timing for mirroring, or release was enhanced adjusting to the participants' needs. This was sensed and felt and intuitively guided. Being open to play with time as well, to go longer or shorter in the segments as needed.

Discussion

Our workshops featuring the DBM method, were intentionally designed as processes of TL. In TL processes, edge emotions arise as a pathway into liminality, where the old meaning perspectives no longer hold, and the next ones are not yet established. Edge Emotion(s) can arise when we experience something novel, a disorienting dilemma. Instead of "just" working with the emotions that come up, in DBM we purposefully call for and go into the emotions related to a *former* experience of the participants and presence this emotion in the jointly held space. This means that to a certain degree through the questions we pose (and how we distribute the cards) we purposefully invoke specific emotions, which we link to colonizing from the oppressive structures that put them there. The emotions and the embodiment states that were asked to be

presenced were all ones that are usually perceived as "unpleasant" (fear, shame, guilt, powerlessness ..), internal states that people typically avoid to give space (consciously or unconsciously) and which may trigger an automated stress-reaction by the nervous system. Yet, these very emotions are dominantly present in bodyminds that hold internalized oppression (Fanon 1967; Williams 2012; TenHouten 2016), as they are used for social control by the systems of oppression and colonization. On the other hand, emotional repression is also common in marginalized and oppressed groups, as it has almost become a skill necessary for their survival in oppressive environments (hooks 2005) . At any moment, each one of us is constrained by the psycho-somatic corset of the multiple social identities that we carry (Dhananjaya 2022). Through our work, by consciously going into those emotions created a disorienting dilemma for at least some of the participants (see also Appendix 3).

The set-up in DBM is so that there is a *witness* as each participant works through their emotions in pairs. The felt experience of having other people in the same room opening up and embodying their own difficult experiences certainly also has a strong effect. In order for people to go into this, they need to feel safe enough. This safety cannot be consciously constructed but rather depends on how each individual comes into the space and whether their nervous system feels it is okay to show up (Singer-Brodowski et al., 2022). From a didactic perspective, this necessitates a gradual approach to opening up, with speech occurring only after a joint experience. As shown in Figure 3 different people go through phases of TL in different order. This is important as also the individual perception of e.g. safety might vary over time - similar as with vulnerability (see Fig.1). The workshop values each participant's lived experiences and perspectives as valuable sources of knowledge and wisdom, ensuring the active interrogation and dismantling of colonial structures within the workshop space.

One recurring theme among participants was the profound sense of liberation experienced through the workshop, shared both at moments of the generative dialogue and through the survey (see Appendix 3). Several described a journey of reclaiming their authentic selves and breaking free from oppressive systems.
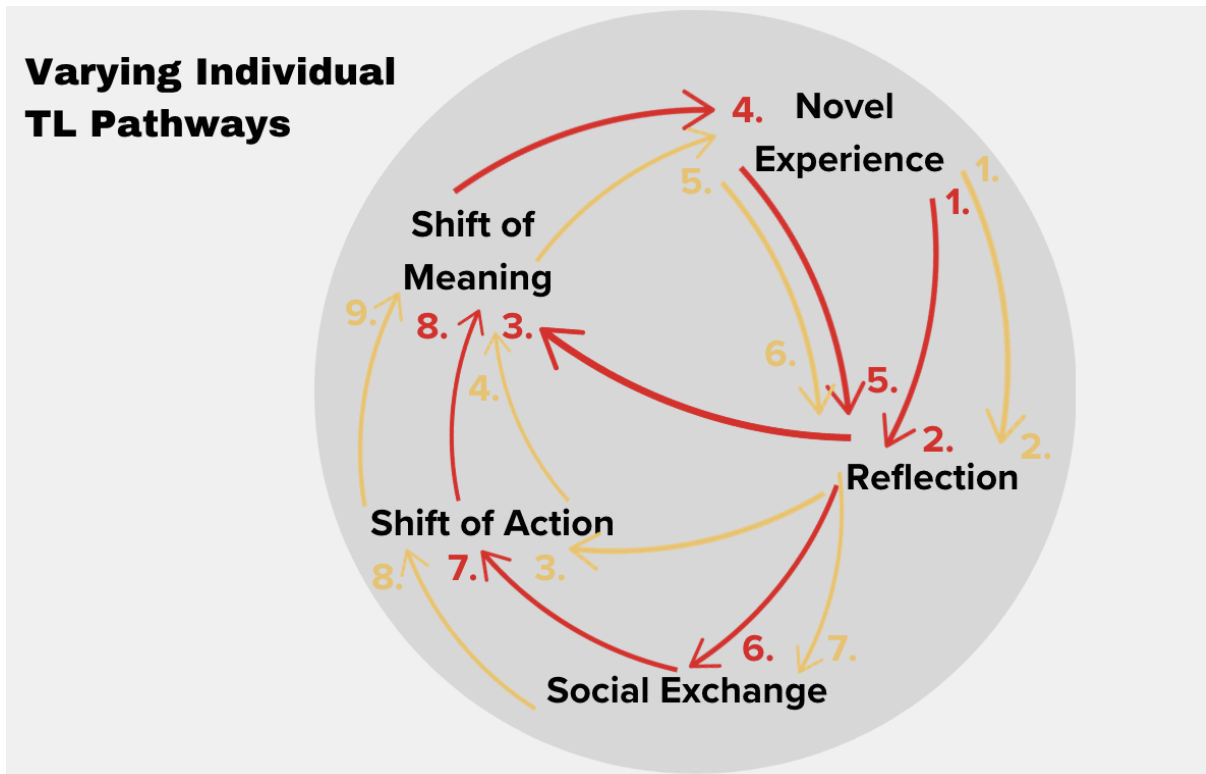
Figure 3: Varying Individual Pathways of TL (based on Grund et al., 2023) in the DBM Workshop

The workshop fostered a sense of collective grief and healing, providing a carefully held space for vulnerability and connection. This emphasizes the importance of community in the process of decolonization, as individuals come together to support one another in their journeys towards liberation.

Dance and music is primordial and is deeply entrained within the evolution of human societies and it provides a powerful means to begin the process of coming back to oneself, to one's power, and stripping away the layers of interlocking systems of oppression from our bodyminds. We strongly believe that unless and until we directly address, express and transform the underlying embodied emotional states that we hold in us due to direct and vicarious trauma, we cannot shift and transcend mindset and paradigms, the deepest levers of change of systemic change. Decolonization is a process and we are very conscious that although some participants experienced a great shift (see Appendix 3), DBM is one small step, yet potent step, in a longer process.

Conclusion & Further Research

In the discourse surrounding sustainability, decolonial perspectives are still too often omitted, although there are some notable recent exceptions (Arora & Stirling, 2023, Förster et al., 2024). The mainstream approach to sustainable development still prioritizes sustaining economic growth over ecological sustainability, driven by rapid capital accumulation needs (Cardoso, 2023). We believe it to be essential to recognize that sustainability efforts deeply intersect with colonial legacies and ongoing power dynamics. To truly embrace regeneration and address the polycrises in a meaningful and inclusive manner, we must embark on the journey of decoloniality (Förster et al., 2024). This is centred on actively delinking from colonial epistemologies. By shedding the constraints of (neo)colonial thought and embracing an extended epistemology that acknowledges diverse ways of knowing (Heron & Reason, 2008) , we open ourselves to the pluriverse of knowledge systems and worldviews. This paradigm shift is about fundamentally reimagining our relationship with the world and each other. It is about acknowledging and dismantling the structures of power and knowledge that perpetuate inequality and ecological devastation. The DBM method introduced in this paper represents one potent pathway for doing so. Further research into the dismantling of systems of oppression and de-linking from dominant epistemology in action is certainly warranted as we seek pathways towards a sustainable and just future for all and have the assumption, that to this end, decolonizing our bodyminds is essential.

We hope to extend the use of the DecolonizeBodyMind method to a diverse range of ultimately entangled challenges, with a forthcoming focus on Peace Processes.

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Reflexivity Statement

The positionality of authors and workshop facilitators, Dr. Naveen Shamsudhin, from a society with a history of colonization, with his paternal grandfather being a freedom fighter in the struggle for independence, and Dr. Anaïs Sägesser, who grew up in a society benefiting from colonialism and holds white privilege, greatly influences the methodology and outcomes. Dr. Shamsudhin's multifaceted background as an artist, embodiment facilitator, and former scientific researcher at ETH Zurich lends a rich interdisciplinary perspective to the workshops. Having traversed diverse cultural landscapes across India, the Middle East, and Europe, his experiences inform his commitment to creating transdisciplinary spaces for holistic and systemic transformation. Conversely, Dr. Sägesser's expertise in learning design, coupled with her ongoing scholarly inquiry into the enduring ramifications of colonial paradigms within the context of African Studies, imbues the workshops with a critical and reflexive dimension. Her experience growing up in a society that profited from colonialism, coupled with the intergenerational trauma stemming from two of her grandparents' status as indentured labor children in Switzerland, underscores the complexities of power, privilege, and trauma. Together, their complementary backgrounds and perspectives contribute to the workshops' overarching objective of fostering transformative learning experiences grounded in both theory and practice.

Acknowledgement

Appendix 1: Soundscape and Playlist (Artist - Song Name)

Performance (B):

S1. Ghalia Benali & Romina Lischka & Vincent Noiret - Raga Bhairav / Awatadhkourou

Silence (30 secs)

S2. Joseph Tawadros - Miss A

S3. Clarissa Bitar & Abby Abdel-Khalek - Leila

S4. Sary Hany - Peaceful Night In Gaza

Silence (30 secs)

S5. Ghalia Benali & Romina Lischka & Monsieur de Sainte-Colombe & Vincent Noiret - Prelude En Sol / Dama Daiman / Raga Bhairavi (2nd half of song)

Silence (60 secs)

Embodiment Session (C-G):

S6. Antologie - Time Travel

S7. Jamie Catto & Alex Forster - Safe Hands

S8. Patrick Watson - Je Te Laisserai Des Mots

S9. Quentin Dujardin - 1977

S10.　Alexis Ffrench - Tomorrow Song

S11.　African Music - African Drums (Autumn Hill Records)

S12.　Drums on Earth - Red Cosmic Earth

Performance Poetry (H):

S13.　LebiDerya - Abschied

Integration (with art-making) (I):

S14.　Maneesh de Moor - Medicine Buddha

The playlist is also available publicly on Spotify at:

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0gXO6o1dqbDRFFrbXMhwu1?si=c9bfe72ac7484d3b

Appendix 2: Poem (Author: Anaïs Sägesser, 2023)

Decolonialization,
	at its best,
		is more than just a removal of the influences of colonialization
			and its hegemonic attitudes on our mind and bodies;

it is a crack

	it is an opening for eco-social regeneration.

				As we

			slowly....

			begin....
		to emancipate from old identities and outdated structures,
			and as our pale, exhausted visions begin

			slowly

			to recede,

		as we drop the veil of illusion
	we enter a state of conscious incubation in which a nascent life can be

			dreamt

					into

						being.

			These multiple acts of deconstruction
					and reconstruction
			and	falling			apart

are what we seek to achieve.

Decolonialization

	is an earthquake,

		shaking us

		to our deepest foundations

wiping

out

   the

edifices of separation

we've so

carefully

constructed

on what we once imagined to be the solid ground of our life.

It hacks us open;

it is the cleaving to end all cleaving.

One by one,

it strips away

all the trappings of Eurocentric patriarchy, capitalism and stories of separation

which we have clung to

- or had foisted upon us – for the whole of our lives.

Decolonialization tell us, above all,

that there are new wisdoms in which we can now immerse ourselves;

new ways of being in the world to be uncovered.

WE ARE INTERRELATIONAL.

WE ARE THE UNIVERSE DANCING WITH ITSELF.

WE HAVE THE POWER TO GRIEF, MOURN, RECONCILE, TO RESTORE AND REGENERATE.

WE HAVE THE POWER TO LOVE

TO BE AT PEACE.

TO BE PEACE.

LIFE IS NOT OVER; IT IS SIMPLY AND IRREVOCABLY CHANGED.[1]

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[1] The structure and some of the wordings are drawn from Blackie (2021). The way it is arranged is inspired by Borgunska (2022)

Appendix 3: Testimonials

These are some of the testimonials participants shared with us through the survey which was sent out as a follow-up to the workshop:

Participant I: *"Decolonization of the body-mind workshop was a transformative journey towards reclaiming my authentic self and breaking free from oppressive systems. Through embracing this process, I could rediscover my inner worth and innate wisdom, breaking away from the colonized ideals and cultivating self-empowerment. Decolonization of the body-mind did bring me liberation, healing, and the opportunity for genuine self-expression. Thank you for creating such a conscious and safe space!"*

Participant II: *"I am definitely feeling a lot better and felt a bag of emotions lifted off my shoulders without much of talking and only expressing through silence and connecting through energy."*

Participant III: *"Excerpt out of my gratitude journal. Grateful for the experience of decolonising my bodymind. Recognising, releasing & relearning with compassion for the colonised and the coloniser. I am both. And today I choose to free myself of both towards collective radical liberation."*

Participant IV: *"The workshop was an unexpected deep immersion into my own body and into the presence of other beautiful people. I was stunning to see how much inner movement is possible within a short time of only one evening workshop."*

Participant V: *"The Workshop Decolonizing Our Bodyminds was an experience of collective grief and healing. A carefully held space for vulnerability and connection through creative expression, an innovative way of dealing with deep wounds."*