

strong
social
work



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DECOLONIZATION OF SOCIAL WORK

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BIOGRAPHY LIEVEN MIGUEL KANDOLO

Hand in Hand



AN ANTI-RACIST MOVEMENT



HAND IN HAND – CORE POINTS:

- A. *Human rights and civil rights (and no discrimination)*
- B. *Agency of those targeted by structural racism*
- C. *Local actions but never losing sight of structures/policy*
- D. *Solidarity & connection: with awareness of existing power dynamics in our context*

CURRENT CAMPAIGN





Current campaign

- ▶ **Decolonization 2.0**
- ▶ **Traces of coloniality shape today**
- ▶ **We are all impacted, different, but all!**
- ▶ **Fighting structural racism = Referencing to colonial past**
- ▶ **Core themes: labour market, heritage, international solidarity, climate justice**

CURRENT CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK IN FLANDERS

- ▶ **Social context: the uprising of far-right**
- ▶ **Framing far-right adopted by centrist parties -> Elections in 2024**
- ▶ **Different types crises (Coronacrisis, energy crisis, different wars on differ...)**
- ▶ **Consequence: social work and realizing human rights social justice under pressure**



CURRENT CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK IN FLANDERS

- ▶ **Flemish Department Welfare,
Public Health and Family**
 - ▶ **Platform “Strong Social Work”**
 - ▶ **Action plan: 17 concrete actions
and 8 societal challenges**
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CURRENT CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK IN FLANDERS

- ▶ 8 societal challenges
- ▶ Socialisation
- ▶ Digitalisation
- ▶ Superdiverse context
- ▶ Linking ecology and social policy



CURRENT CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK IN FLANDERS

- ▶ Working in/with confidence
- ▶ Multidisciplinary context
- ▶ Hybridisation
- ▶ Underprotection



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: EXCLUSIVE REALITY

- ▶ **1) No equitable access to labor market**
- ▶ **2) No medical research aimed to POC**
- ▶ **3) Racism in education: No equitable access to opportunities**
- ▶ **4) No documenting of history: No equitable access to own intergenerational trauma/healing**
- ▶ **5) No protection and security provided by the pillars of the state/legal structures**



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: EXCLUSIVE REALITY

- ▶ **Institutional: History of Social welfare system in Belgium**

→ Acknowledgement + Paradox of the modernization and links to colonial past

- ▶ **1) Social workers need to understand colonial HISTORY because it continues to impact upon the mindset of ALL people living TODAY* = context & self-awareness**



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: EXCLUSIVE REALITY

- 2) Social workers need better insight in **STRUGGLES** of previously colonized people:
- Loss of family, communities and cultures -> Legacy of death, pain and devastation -> Multi-generational trauma
- Past flows in the present: micro-aggressions & discrimination force people to carry the past
- Far greater & encompassing problematic than individual/one community
- Better critical reflection of **CONTEXT + YOURSELF + OTHERS = Better social work (inter-relational & intersectional!)**



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: MULTIPERSPECTIVES

- ▶ **Tackle misconceptions: the world has changed, not only the 'target group'. : Living in the world, versus working in the world.**
- ▶ **No one-stop-shop diversity class: Look at the curriculum as a whole**
 - Multiperspectives in all courses needed
 - Eurocentric curriculum does not offer tools to handle the real world that is full of multi perspectives.



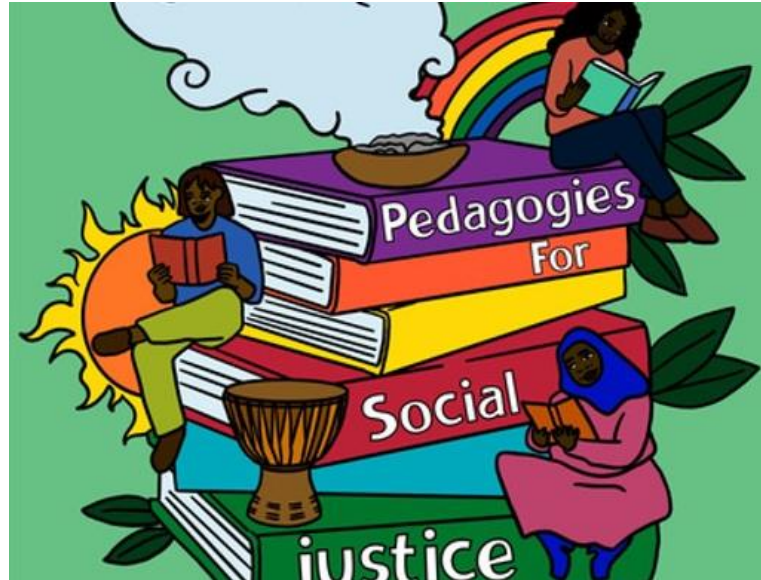
DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: MULTIPERSPECTIVES

- ▶ Multiperspective knowledge sharing is important.
- ▶ Can lead to: Less stigmatizing way of delivering social services



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: SHARED NARRATIVES

- ▶ Colonial, Post-colonial, Decolonial discourse provides space: peer to peer learning
- ▶ Inclusion personal stories & shared narratives (also about paralyzation): sensibilisation



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: LANGUAGE & FRAMES

- ▶ **Unmuting taboos: De-colonial speaks what is unspoken**
- ▶ **Unframing the context: Shared experiences are shared in a safe environment, terminology**



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: LANGUAGE & FRAMES

► **Social work supports on: Need for self-determination and self-governance /// utilizing non-Western worldviews**

► **Lack of:**

→ research about the 'loss experience'

× Trauma is not individual or family related (fe. Nagy) BUT on a bigger, genocidal scale and timeframe

→ The power for agency: vacuum through many years of exploitation

× There was no time to heal, there is no time to heal.

× There is no time for re-memembering

→ Your problem is not recognized, your re-memembering is not valued, hidden or worse: is seen as threatening

→ At the same time: You are being 'puzzled' into remembering events where your being is erased

→ What does this mean?

→ **Agency: you get the same tools as a Western individual to save yourself as that same individual, but your own communal tools have been taken, generations ago.**



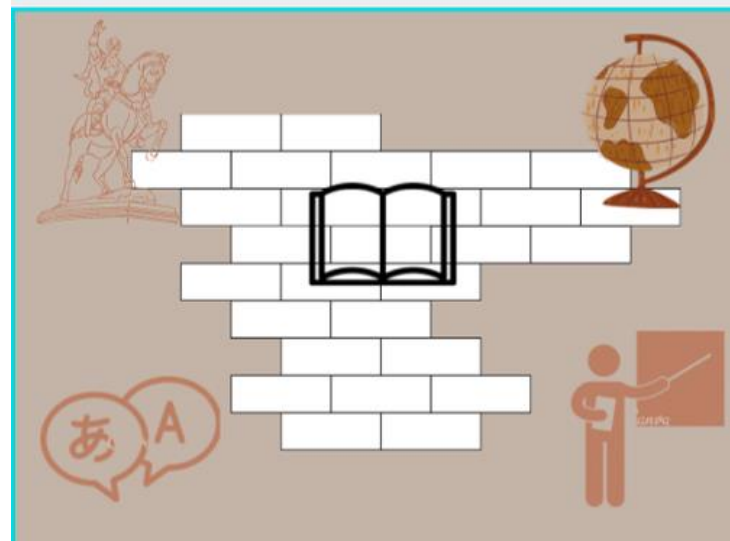
DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: FRAMEWORK

DECOLONIAL LEARNING

► **LEARN:** Why do we act/think in a certain way? What narratives link back to colonial/post-colonial inequalities?

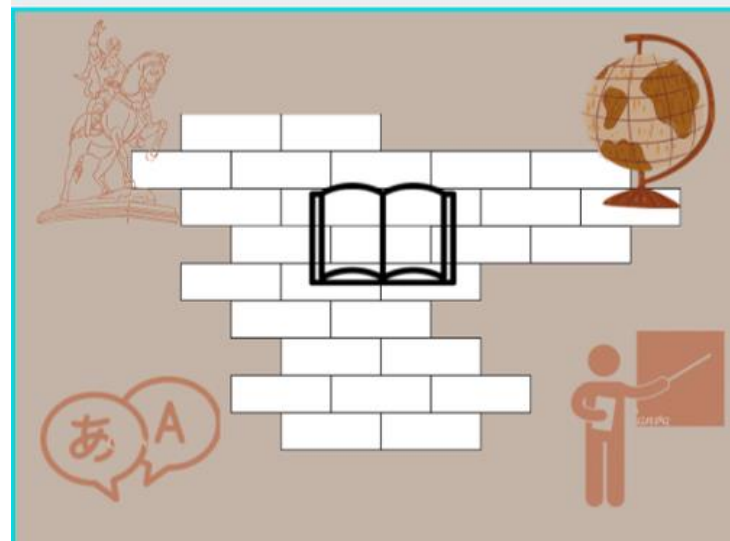
► **UNLEARN:** How do we stop ourselves acting/thinking in this certain way? What questions and false/untrue certainties are hidden in the present?

► **RELEARN:** How do we start acting/thinking in a new and (better) co-created way?



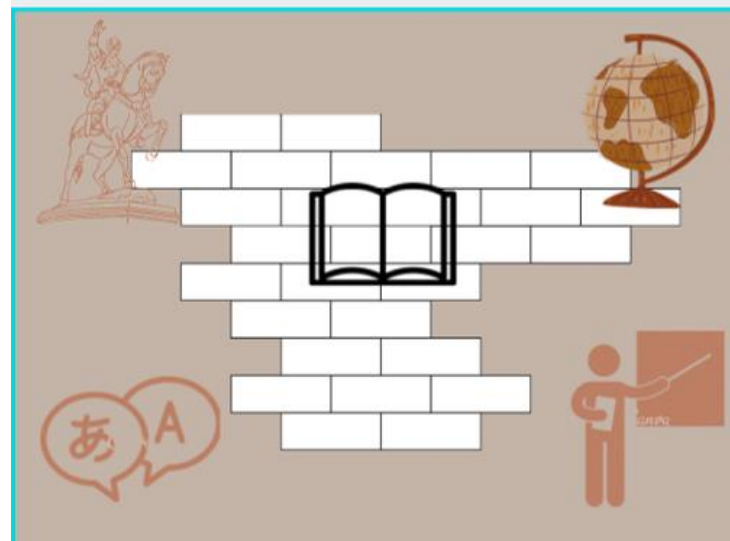
DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: FRAMEWORK EPISTEMIC SHIFT

- ▶ **DEMYSTIFY THE CURRENT DISCOURSE**
- ▶ **From historic and symbolic conversations**
- ▶ **That keep us confined to the past**



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: FRAMEWORK EPISTEMIC SHIFT

- ▶ **TOWARDS A PROCESS OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING, UNLEARNING AND RELEARNING**
- ▶ **Where the historic/symbolic changes serve to applying**
- ▶ **Shifts in - decolonized/more complete - thinking**
- ▶ **ON CURRENT EVENTS**

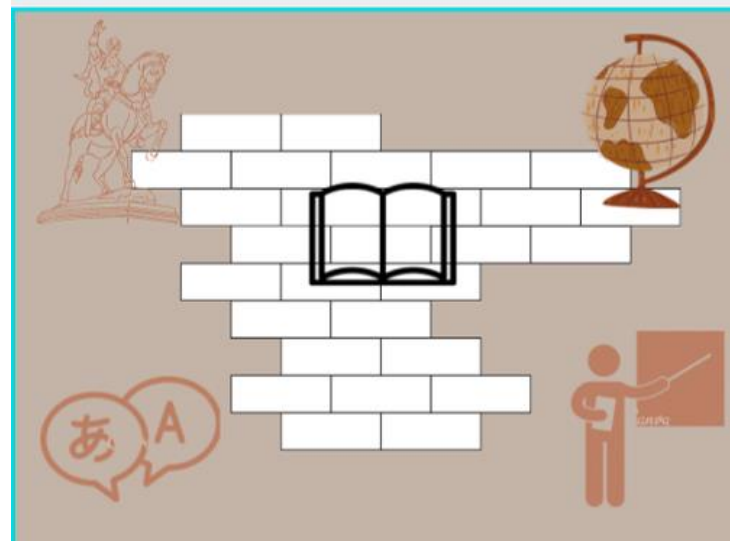


DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: FRAMEWORK

DECOLONIAL LEARNING: APPLIED

► **LEARN: YOUR INSTITUTION, YOU, only then: OTHER**

- 1) Critical Reflection-Awareness of historical context of social work
- 2) Hegemonic process -> Poor self-esteem
- 3) Social work -> Current emphasis on *charity & possible white saviorhood*
- 4) Social work -> amplifies WE / THEM discourse



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: FRAMEWORK

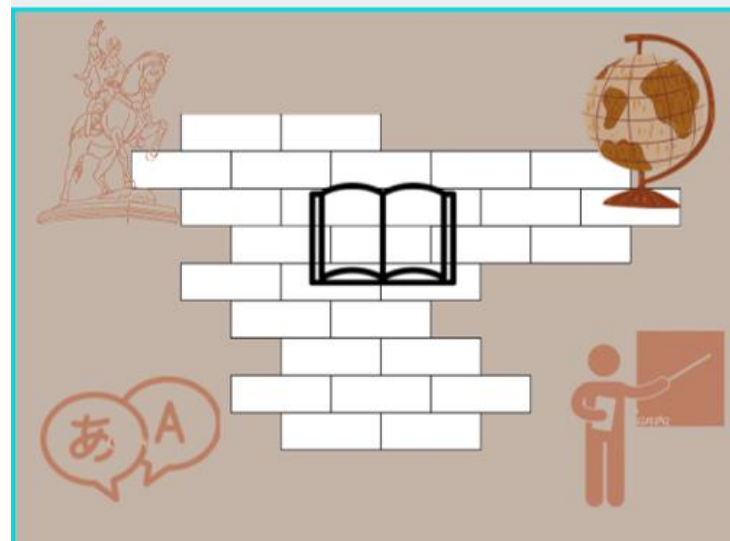
DECOLONIAL LEARNING: APPLIED

► UNLEARN: EPISTEMIC SHIFT

- Post-colonial theory foregrounds common concerns, themes and approaches to recovery from colonization
- Unravels the historical entanglements of exploitations differentially shared by western & non-western people

► RELEARN: SOCIAL WORK PROVIDES SUPPORT

- *Re-mem-ber-ing*: Reconnection to what happened in the past and can help restore cultures and languages



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: DECOLONIAL UNLEARNING PHASE: APPLIED

- ▶ **Post-colonial writers have examined the issues of colonization, exploitation, resistance, healing, recovery and transformation -> important themes for social workers**
- ▶ **Post-colonial lens -> Useful insights on how to create social justice**



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: DECOLONIAL UNLEARNING PHASE: APPLIED

- ▶ To explore ways for *re-member* the history of colonizers and reclaim their self-determination
- ▶ Post-colonial theory addresses transformation of colonized people as providing insights into ending oppression for oppressors



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: DECOLONIAL RELEARNING PHASE: APPLIED

Policy makers: No dialogue possible without learning/wanting (!) to learn what is obstructing the dialogue.

“It is in looking at our past with our eyes wide open that we can appreciate our present and focus upon what we want to do, where we would want to invest in for our future.”

DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: DECOLONIAL RELEARNING PHASE: APPLIED

“Decolonizing is really an issue that is open to discussion where everyone is entitled to articulate their own opinion. But if the players of this discussion are still finding themselves in a position of superiority and inferiority. Then the inferior person will always be made to shut up.” N. Okemwa

Source: https://soundcloud.com/ahmed-al-massouf/stella-nyanchama-okemwa-power-and-the-publicf...1lwAR2DGxslUWbSU-kAZ3vxu-ZvHHkZWWboRcZ43_RrPMi8CGvOO-D3UpZr3AM

DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: DECOLONIAL RELEARNING PHASE: APPLIED

- ▶ Colonies or former colonies inherited constructed system of colonization -> Unaware of these influences in everyday life
- ▶ To create an equitable and fair society -> colonizers and their descendants must work together with targets of racism to find solutions to decolonize society and to address inequities brought by colonial system



DECOLONIZING THE SOCIAL WORK: DECOLONIAL RELEARNING PHASE: APPLIED

- ▶ Decolonized community-determined approaches focusing on community goals, values and strategies
- ▶ To provide guidance and control in the development and provision of social services in partnership with social worker allies who aid in the recovery
- ▶ From a social service perspective, self-governance as self-determination is important for the mental health of the communities



CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ **Social workers should understand and be committed to develop methods that support BIPOC communities in their cultural recovery and self-determination efforts**
 - ▶ **Worldviews, cosmovisions, epistemologies, knowledges and dialogues of BIPOC communities should be represented in Social Work practice and educational curriculum**
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CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ Dialogue between Western and Non-western social workers should take place -> To better understand consequences of colonization, including the current cultures and issues of BIPOC
 - ▶ Ability of local control of social services, self-governance and self-determination
 - ▶ Social Work faculties and programs should be consisted of the voices of BIPOC
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CONCLUSIONS

Which questions are in this room?

SOURCES

- ▶ TAMBURRO, A. (2013). Including Decolonization in Social Work Education and Practice. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development*, 2 (1), 1-16.
- ▶ <https://handinhandtegenracisme.be/>
- ▶ https://soundcloud.com/ahmed-al-massouf/stella-nyanchama-okemwa-power-and-the-publicf...?l=AR2DGxslUWbSU-kAZ3vxu-ZvHHkZWWboRcZ43_RrPMi8CGvOO-D3UpZr3AM