



UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven was formed in 2017 by Eva Sverin, a student at KU Leuven. It was formed out of the necessity for spaces within KU Leuven where students from minority backgrounds can elevate and amplify their voices and critique on policy measures within the university that involve them, but where they are often left out of the narrative or ignored. On 14 February 2018 we officially started our work as a student-led platform. Intersectionality was and is at the core of our work. The students we worked with gave input on where our focus should be, and they chose to focus on the topics of gender within academia, LGBTQ+ students and the decolonisation of academia.

#DECOLONIZEKULEUVEN MANIFESTO

WHEN WE SPEAK OF DECOLONIZING ACADEMIA, THIS IS WHAT WE MEAN.

UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven

30 March 2021

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OPENING WORDS

UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven was formed in 2017. It was formed out of the necessity for spaces within KU Leuven where students from racial-ethnic minority backgrounds can elevate and amplify their voices and critique on policy measures within the university that involve them, but where they are often left out of the narrative or ignored.

On 14 February 2018 we officially launched our work as a student-led platform. Intersectionality was and is at the core of our work. The students we worked with gave input on where our focus should be, and they chose to focus on the topics of gender within academia, LGBTQ+ students and the decolonisation of curricula.

The movement for the decolonisation of academia has its roots in the University of Cape Town in South Africa. On 9 March 2015, the protest movement #RhodesMustFall, called for the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the university. Further than the removal of statues of colonials who were also responsible for the deaths of countless Africans, the movement also called for the decolonization of South African education. This movement gained global attention, with many students across different universities (eg. Cambridge University and Oxford University) calling for the decolonization of their respective academic institution and their curricula. It is in this light that we as UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven were inspired to call for the decolonization of KU Leuven as well.

The last three years we have been working on the decolonisation of academia in different ways. We have a seat within the Diversity Council of KU Leuven in which we follow the policy decisions the university makes. Here we have talked extensively to the members of the council (professors, the vice-rector responsible for diversity, other personnel in the different services within KU,Leuven) about the meaning and the necessity of decolonisation within academia at large, and within KU Leuven specifically. We have also written opinion pieces about this in

Veto (the KU Leuven student magazine) and on our own blog as well. We have appeared on television shows such as *De Afspraak* to elaborate on our work on decolonisation of academia. This also portrays the national and regional relevance of our work as a student-led initiative.

On 25 May 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was killed in Minneapolis (United States of America) due to police brutality. This death was filmed on a phone and shared on social media. The footage spread like wildfire on the internet, and was the culmination of the deaths of many other Black people such as Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery who died at the hands of police brutality in the space of a few weeks in the country. #BlackLivesMatter protests erupted as a response to the systematic police brutality of Black people in the United States of America. These resonated with many Black people and people of colour in Europe too, who are also no stranger to systemic and institutional racism in Europe. Names such as Lamine Bangoura, Mawda Shawri, Ibrahima, Semira Adamu, Mehdi and many others come to mind with regard to police violence in Belgium. On Sunday 7 June 2020, ten thousand protestors took to the streets in Brussels to voice their anger over the institutional and structural racism in Belgium.

This, and the decennia long activist work by various people of African descent and their respective organisations, brought the legacy of Belgium's colonialism in today's society back to the fore of the societal debate. Institutions, from the government to schools and tertiary education institutions were the centre of the debate in how they have functioned in upholding institutional racism by not actively and critically teaching the colonial history of this country and how this still impacts race relations in every fibre of society today.

The rector of KU Leuven, Luc Sels, received an open letter from several professors, students and student organisations requesting him to remove a bust of King Leopold II from the Central Library of KU Leuven. The rector responded by deciding to temporarily remove the bust from the library, stating that he plans to reflect on what place the bust has within the university.¹ He left the possibility to bring the bust back out of storage if 'the committee for academic heritage, historians and the relevant experts' decide otherwise. Just after this, vice-rector appointed a commission to come up with recommendations on what should happen with colonial heritage within KU Leuven. UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven was asked to be part of this commission, and offered its cooperation in the making of the nota on colonial heritage within the university. This nota was handed over to the vice-rector in February 2021.

We followed the developments of these events with much interest. As UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven, we have been calling for the decolonisation of KU Leuven and the curricula across all disciplines for the past three years. This was (and sometimes still is) met with staunch resistance and lack of understanding from some university actors (ranging from professors, students and other personnel within the university). It is thus interesting for us to see how recent global events changed the discourse of policy makers in the university. Although the (temporary) removal of King Leopold II's bust from the KU Leuven Central Library is a symbolic sign, it's merely the beginning of the long decolonisation process KU Leuven should undergo. There is still a lot of work to be done to truly decolonize KU Leuven and the curricula of this university.

This manifesto is an attempt to communicate in a clear and concise manner what we envisage under the decolonization of KU Leuven.

When we call for the decolonization of KU Leuven, this is what we mean:

Decolonisation of academia calls for the end to epistemologies and knowledge systems within KU Leuven that remain rooted in colonial and exclusively Western worldviews and epistemological traditions.² Decolonisation of academia calls for an end to curricula that reinforce Western dominance. We call for the abolition of these exclusively Eurocentric and Western dominant epistemological traditions within curricula. We demand a radically transformed and decolonized curricula that incorporates global perspectives and epistemologies as the central tenets of curricula and research within KU Leuven.³ We demand curricula with different bodies and traditions of knowledge that have systemically been shut out of tertiary education institutions due to institutional racism that only sees Western and Eurocentric knowledge as the only valid form of education.

Universities were places where colonial and imperialist narratives were researched and resuscitated. This, in turn, made colonization and other imperialist ideologies possible in the world. The institutional racism that was borne from many university institutions, is still reflected in the discourses of knowledge⁴ that students within KU Leuven learn about within their studies. While universities, including KU Leuven, have new policies and frameworks that work towards equality, equity and change; the institutional culture and epistemological traditions of KU Leuven have not changed.⁵ This allows the propagation of Eurocentric curricula that reproduce hegemonic modes of knowledge production, instead of eliminating these.⁶ In many disciplines, curricula that were designed to meet the needs of colonialism continue to be taught with no little to no modification today.⁷ This

1 L. SELS, *Zichtbaar gemaakte waarden: KULeuven bergt beeld Leopold II op*, 10 June 2020, <https://kuleuvenblogt.be/2020/06/10/zichtbaar-gemaakte-waarden-ku-leuven-bergt-beeld-leopold-2-op/> (consulted on 27 March 2021)

2 S. HELETA, *Decolonisation of higher education: dismantling epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa*, *Transformation in Higher Education* 2016, 5

3 T. LETSEKHA, 'Revisiting the debate on the Africanisation of higher education: An appeal for a conceptual shift', *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 2013, 9

4 Z. SARDAR, 'Foreword to the 2008 edition. I think it would be good if certain things were said: Fanon and the epidemiology of oppression', in F. Fanon 1967, *Black skins, white masks*, 2008 edn., pp. vi–xx, Pluto Books, London, 2008, xv.

5 R. SHILLIAM, "Black academia: the doors have been opened but the architecture remains the same" in C. ALEXANDER, J. ARDAY, (eds.), *Aiming higher: race, inequality and diversity in the academy*, Runnymede Trust 2015, 32–34

6 E. MCKAISER, 'Epistemic injustices: The dark side of academic freedom', 2016 DCS Oosthuizen Academic Freedom Memorial Lecture, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 30 May 2016 from <http://www.iol.co.za/news/epistemic-injustices-the-dark-side-of-academic-freedom-2029747>, (consulted on 29 March 2021)

7 A. MBEMBE, 'Decolonizing the university: new directions', *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15(1) 2016, 36

leads to anachronistic curricula that still contain colonial prejudices and paternalistic views about Black people and people of colour in Belgium and the world at large. This institutional racism, in turn, leads to the significant absence of Black students and students of colour, researchers and professors within KU Leuven. When we speak of Black people and people of colour in Belgium, we are not merely referring to those who come to KU Leuven to study for a short period of time or to conduct research temporarily. We are also speaking of Black students and students of colour, researchers and professors who were/are born and/or raised in Belgium. When we speak of racial and ethnic diversity, we encourage the university to move away from solely referring to international diversity within the university, and in this manner ignore the Belgian racial diversity that is severely lacking and underrepresented within KU Leuven.

As UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven, we therefore call on the rector, professors and researchers to decolonize the curricula. If students, and thus the wider society are to truly understand why a bust of King Leopold II has no place in university buildings, then we need to interrogate eurocentrism and the uncritiqued reproduction of white supremacy in our curricula.

When we speak of decolonization of curricula, that is what we mean. If we are, per KU Leuven's often used slogan, are to discover ourselves; then KU Leuven should start by decolonising its libraries, curricula and institution.

Indeed, the decolonization of KU Leuven goes further than critically interrogating the curricula. It's also about eradicating the institutional racism within the structures of the university, that function to exclude Black students and students of colour, researchers, professors and other personnel. Decolonisation also means that the university has to interrogate the absence of Black professors and professors of colour and researchers within the University. It's no longer enough to point to Black international professors and international professors of colour, and researchers as the diversity within KU Leuven. Where are the Black professors and professors of colour, and researchers born and/or raised in Belgium?

Decolonisation also means interrogating the institutional racism within KU Leuven itself. It means working out an extensive anti-racism policy

that assures that Black people and people of colour have cooperative avenues to address structural racism within the university. Decolonisation means that all levels of the university are involved in this work: from student associations to the vast boards of the university.

It is not only UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven that is calling for the decolonisation of our curricula and institution at large. We conducted a questionnaire on the decolonisation of curricula at KU Leuven for current students and alumni at KU Leuven during March 2021 that was filled in by 144 students and alumni of KU Leuven. We will be sharing the results and analysis of this in the subsequent weeks.

We, as UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven, are always ready to engage in a constructive dialogue with the respective policy makers within the university to make this happen. We anticipate a response from the rector and vice-rectors of KU Leuven regarding the ten demands we have formulated in this manifesto.

Leuven, 30 March 2021

UNDIVIDED
For KU Leuven

OUR DEMANDS

As UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven, we demand the following from KU Leuven.

01

We demand that KU Leuven ensures that curricula of all faculties are decolonized in a thorough manner. This is not limited to curricula of electives, but also includes mandatory curricula followed by all students in each discipline.

Decolonisation entails several facets.

Colonialism involved the occupation of land and the killing of many Black people and people of colour all over the world in order to gain access to their lands. Epistemic colonialism⁸ was also a vital aspect of this, in which Western academic institutions played a very pivotal role. KU Leuven included. Epistemic colonialism consisted of the demonization and calculated eradication of non-Western knowledge systems by universities and academics who demonized Black people and people of colour and their respective knowledge systems and perspectives. To ensure the longevity of epistemic colonialism, non-Western knowledge systems were and still are branded as 'non-scientific' as an entity, or are only deemed scientific when Western and/or white scholars write on them. Epistemic colonialism

also manifests itself through minimizing theories from Black scholars and scholars of colour to experiential writing,⁹ instead of seeing these as academic theories that should constitute a core part of curricula in academia. This persists till today, hence the need for the decolonization of curricula at this very moment.

Another facet of colonialism within academia manifests itself through Eurocentrism. Our academic canon is Eurocentric because it portrays European knowledge systems as universal, objective and neutral; giving them a hegemonic character. This hegemonic character¹⁰ represses non-Western knowledge systems that surpass Eurocentrism by keeping them out of the academe. Eurocentrism falsely portrays European knowledge systems as the sole or sole legitimate knowledge producers.¹¹

⁸ W. MIGNOLO, "Globalization and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: The Role of the Humanities in the Corporate University", *Nepantla: Views from South* 2003, (97) 104; K. B. MOTSHABI, "Decolonising the university: a law perspective", *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 2018, 104; S. NDLOVU-GATSHENI, "Coloniality of power in development studies and the impact of global imperial designs on Africa", *Australian Review of African Studies* 2012, 48.

⁹ S. ALMEIDA, "Race-based epistemologies: The role of Race and Dominance in Knowledge Production", Wagadu 2015, (79) 80; b. hooks, *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*, New York, Routledge, 1994, 87

¹⁰ R. GROSFOGUEL, "The epistemic decolonial turn: Beyond political-economy paradigms", *Cultural Studies* 2007, (211) 214; J. OLOKA-ONYANGO, S. TAMALE, "The Personal is political, or Why Women's Rights Are Indeed Human Rights: An African Perspective on International Feminism", *Human Rights Quarterly* 1995, (691) 697.

¹¹ BOGUES, "The University in Africa: Reflections on Epistemic Decolonisation. Social Dynamics", *A Journal of African Studies* 2007, 206

This Eurocentric pattern is also visible when core, mandatory curricula offer a dated, Eurocentric perspective that is often only confronted in electives that are only followed by a select number of students who make the choice to do so. We thus demand that decolonisation of curricula also happens in general, mandatory courses that all students in their respective faculties take.

It encompasses issues of race, gender, land ownership, ways of knowing, reparations, resource extraction, human rights, and more.”¹²

“Decolonisation is a social movement and academic project that seeks to empower knowledge, cultures, and peoples marginalized by the legacy of colonialism and its power structures. This movement also reflects critically on the historical role of universities and Western knowledge production in relation to colonialism.

Decolonisation of curricula is about epistemology. It interrogates the *what*, the *who* and *how* we are taught in our university.¹³

- *What* – or rather *what is not* – being taught within our curricula? The decision of the materials for our curricula is not an innocent one, nor one that is made within a vacuum. KU Leuven offers Eurocentric curricula in several disciplines. Eurocentric curricula cause a hierarchy in knowledge systems by according European and Western knowledge systems a pole position above other non-Western knowledge systems by virtue of the perception of the neutrality and universality of European knowledge systems.

- It also interrogates the *who*. *Who* are we being taught about in our curricula? *Who* is being researched on? *Who* are the professors in our university that ultimately determine the *what* and

how of our curricula?

Who are the philosophers we are taught about in compulsory curricula? When compulsory philosophy curricula only teach Western philosophers, and only teach about Black philosophers and philosophers of colour as electives; this is an example of Eurocentrism.

Who is perceived as the default in medical curricula? When medical students are taught about skin diseases, are they also being taught about what the symptoms of skin diseases look like on Black and Brown skin? Or are they only taught about the symptoms on white skin? Why is white skin seen as the default?

Who is being researched on: often when research on racism is conducted, the focus is put on Black people and people of colour and their experiences. But is it not now time to research whiteness,¹⁴ that is the basis for the institutional discrimination that Black people and people of colour face?

Who is cited and is seen as an authority on Black people and people of colour and their respective cultures? Why is it that it is mostly white people that are seen as the authority on Black people and people of colour, but we never see Black people or people of colour as authorities on white people and their cultures?

Who the professors are also determines what lands up in our curricula. A white professor body means we learn primarily, if not exclusively, of Eurocentric perspectives. There is a need for plurality and a pluriversal curriculum¹⁵. Pluriversality acknowledges the coexistence of different knowledge systems and traditions, and how these influence each other. It does not take one homogenic knowledge system (the Eurocentric one), as the default starting point of knowledge. An ethnically diverse professor body in all faculties can offer a starting point for this pluriversal curriculum. It is certainly not all that needs to be done.

- It interrogates the *how*: *how* is the research conducted? Is it done ethically, and with respect for

12 R. VÁZQUEZ MELKEN, “Decolonising Knowledge: What is decolonization?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CUKW2h4Dtg> (consulted on 29 March 2021)

13 R. VÁZQUEZ MELKEN, “A move towards plurality”, 3 February 2021, <https://www.uu.nl/en/publication/a-move-towards-plurality> (consulted on 29 March 2021)

14 P. ESSED, S. TRIENEKENS, “Who wants to feel white?” Race, Dutch culture and contested identities”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2008, 52

15 A. J. MBEMBE, “Decolonizing the university: New directions”, *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 2016, 37.

the humanity of Black people and people of colour? With respect for their cultures and perspectives? For example: where is the focus on oral sources within academia on the hierarchy of sources? Oral sources are of vital importance to Black people and people of colour, whose cultures are infused with extensive oral aspects as a mode of transmission of knowledge and culture.

The manner in which curricula are decolonized is important. It is not enough to add the perspectives of Black scholars and scholars of colour in the electives, while keeping the mandatory courses Eurocentric. Decolonization is not a metaphor and must thus be done properly and thoroughly or not at all.¹⁶

Each faculty has to decolonise in an appropriate manner that aligns with the colonial patterns of each respective academic discipline. We will list a few examples as a mode of inspiration.

- HISTORY: Belgian colonial history being described as a ‘necessary and good project’ in curricula or by professors. Sometimes, debates are conducted on the ‘good sides and the benefits of colonialism’ alongside the disadvantages of it.¹⁷ This, as NDLOVU-GATSHENI writes, whitewashes the sins of colonialism and disregards the humanity of Black people and people of colour that died or suffered immensely under colonialism.
- MEDICINE: Medical courses that only teach about diseases and symptoms of these diseases on white skin. This is dangerous because when deadly, yet curable skin diseases and skin conditions affect Black people and people of colour, they are not

identified by medical professionals due to the lack of knowledge on their part. This results in the death of Black patients and patients of colour from preventable and/or curable diseases.

Malone Mukwende, a Black Medicine student from the UK, wrote a clinical handbook of signs and symptoms in Black and Brown skin because he did not learn about this in his own curriculum.¹⁸ While we commend his hard work, it should not be up to Black students and students of colour to do this additional work next to their course work. This should be information all students learn from their professors.

- MEDICINE: A medical textbook that claims that Black people have a high threshold for pain, and thus don’t need medication as patients of other races. This dangerous stereotype regarding Black people has led to many Black patients in pain not being taken seriously, resulting in their death that could have been avoided had they been listened to.¹⁹ It is also important to show the dangers of scientific racism.²⁰
- GYNAECOLOGY: Curricula that refer to ‘the father of modern gynaecology’, J. Marion Sims, without mentioning that he conducted his research on enslaved Black women. He subjected many of them to unethical treatments and experiments without their informed consent.²¹ While academic disciplines such as medicine are seen as strictly scientific, it is also important to teach how race, gender and class intersect with medicine. Teaching this history is very important.
- PHILOSOPHY: A course on Global Philosophy or Fundamental Philosophy solely dealing with Western philosophers. Only teaching Western philosophers is, per definition, not a global perspective. Non-Western philosophers also have

16 E. TUCK, K. WAYNE YANG, “Decolonization is not a metaphor”, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2012, 1 – 40.

17 S. J. NDLOVU-GATSHENI, “Moral evil, economic good? Whitewashing the sins of colonialism”, 26 February 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/2/26/colonialism-in-africa-empire-was-not-ethical?fbclid=IwAR1A66HxKMsKG9RUxK-ZItKJBeHCFH9-r7vCdSTIelzaGd1u2d_5Braz5fio (consulted on 29 March 2021)

18 M. MUKWENDE, P. TAMONY, M. TURNER, MIND THE GAP: A handbook of clinical signs in Black and Brown Skin, St. Georges University of London, <https://www.blackandbrownskin.co.uk/mindthegap> (consulted on 26 March 2021)

19 M. B. FLANDERS-STEPHANS, “Alarming racial differences in maternal mortality”, *The Journal of Perinatal Education* 2000, 50 – 51

20 P. JACKSON, N. M WEIDMAN, “The Origins of Scientific Racism”, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 2005, 66 – 79.

21 M. CRONIN, “Anarcha, Betsey, Lucy and the women whose names were not recorded: The legacy of J Marion Sims”, *Anaesthesia and intensive care* 2020, 6

fundamental philosophic theories.²²

- PHILOSOPHY: Teaching about Enlightenment philosophers as progressive thinkers based on their work arguing for the rights of mainly white men. This is usually done with the omission of their work portraying their racism and sexism.
- ANTHROPOLOGY: Given anthropology's colonial roots, anthropologists persistently call for the decolonisation of the discipline. However, Western scholars like Foucault continue to dominate the curricula, reflecting an incongruence between what is said and what is done to decolonize the discipline.
- LAW: A Comparative Law course that refers to African, Latin-American and Indigenous peoples' legal systems as 'primitive'.
- LAW: Anti-discrimination law or constitutional law courses not teaching intersectionality.²³
- ARCHITECTURE: An Architecture class that refers to the architecture of African, Latin-American and Indigenous' peoples' architecture as 'primitive'.
- ARCHITECTURE: A class on the 'Universal history of architecture' only handling Western architecture.
- BIOLOGY: Biology courses that omit how white supremacist theories influenced the work of people such as Charles Darwin.
In his 1859 and 1871 books (*On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle For Life*²⁴ and *The Descent of Man* respectively), Darwin introduces the idea of natural selection and applies it to humans. Over the course of the books, Darwin describes Indigenous Australians, Mongolians, Africans, Indians, South Americans, Polynesians, and Eskimos as "savages". He also refers to a 'favoured race' in his work. The purpose of highlighting this is not to undermine the evolutionary theory. Instead, it serves to show and teach how science can be wielded for reasons that are not 'neutral' and lead to eugenic ideologies.
- DEVELOPMENT STUDIES: Instead of referring to this field as development studies, which is a continuation of the colonial idea of the 'civilisation of Black people and people of colour', the field should be referred to as 'Global Justice and Restitution'²⁵ for example . This puts the emphasis on the origins of global inequality and asymmetrical global relations that are defined by imperialism and colonialism.²⁶
- LANGUAGE STUDIES: Western language studies courses that only give books to read that were written by white European people, when many Western languages are spoken by Black people and people of colour precisely due to colonialism. Yet, these authors are not taught or offered the same amount of attention as their white counterparts.
- COMPUTER SCIENCES: Curricula that do not tackle and portray the dangers of racism within Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- DISSERTATION: Some Black students or students of colour are told that their thesis or research handling a topic that centres or involves Black people or people of colour is not neutral because of their race and/or ethnicity.²⁷ However, when white people conduct research on white people, their neutrality is never questioned.
- LIBRARIES: Books by major Black scholars and scholars of colour not physically being available

22 Eg. I. KANT, 1777. "Of the Different Races of Human Beings", translation by Holly Wilson, Günter Zöller, in Kant: *Anthropology, History, and Education*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 82 – 97; D. HONDIUS, *Blackness in Western Europe: Racial Patterns of Paternalism and Exclusion*, Taylor and Francis, 2017, 163.

23 K. CRENSHAW, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, (139) 149; K. CRENSHAW, "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color", *Stanford Law Review* 1991, (1241) 1252.

24 C. DARWIN, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, London, Murray, 1859, 502p.

25 O. U. RUTAZIBWA, "On babies and bathwater: Decolonizing International Development Studies" in S. DE JONG, R. ICAZA, O. U. RUTAZIBWA, *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2018, 162

26 S. NDLOVU-GATSHENI, Coloniality of power in development studies and the impact of global imperial designs on Africa, *Australian Review of African Studies* 2012, (48) 51.

27 D. BOURABAIN, "Waarom wordt mijn onderzoek in twijfel getrokken door mijn origine?", Knack 8 September 2017, <https://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/waarom-wordt-mijn-onderzoek-in-twijfel-getrokken-door-mijn-origine/article-opinion-897711.html> (consulted on 26 March 2021)

within the KU Leuven libraries, while books by major white scholars within the same field are available within physical KU Leuven libraries.

• ...

Many Black students and students of colour have stated that the Eurocentrism in curricula is a major reason why they decide not to study certain disciplines or even not to study at certain universities. Many white students have also stated that they feel they have inadequate knowledge to understand the world today as the knowledge they are taught is geared towards the white and European/Western default.²⁸

We recently conducted a questionnaire survey on the experience of KU Leuven students and alumni with Eurocentric curricula at KU Leuven. An analysis of the responses and results of this will be published shortly. This will be part of our online #DECOLONIZEKULEUVEN campaign that you can follow on our social media during the next couple of weeks.

Decolonised curricula are necessary because they have positive effects on the performance and school belonging of ethnic minority students. Decolonised curricula are vital because they simply offer students the truth: a pluriversal perspective of the world.²⁹

28 N. PUWAR, *Space invaders: Race, gender and bodies out of place*, Oxford, Berg Publishers, 2004, 8; C. W. MILLS, “Theorizing White Supremacy” in *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1998, 97; M. L. DEVAULT, *Liberating method: Feminism and social research*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1999, 59; J. MAFFIE, “In the end, we have the gatling gun, and they have not”: Future prospects of indigenous knowledges, *Futures* 2009, (53) 60; M. HUNTER, “Rethinking epistemology, methodology, and racism: or, is White sociology really dead?”, *Race & Society* 2002, (119) 120; A. L. STOLER, *Race and the education of desire: Foucault’s history of sexuality and the colonial order of things*, London, Duke University Press, 1995, 205.

29 A. J. MBEMBE, “Decolonizing the university: New directions”, *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 2016, 37.

02

We demand that KU Leuven makes an extensive and structural policy plan to employ Black professors and professors of colour within the university. We simultaneously demand that KU Leuven makes a commitment to enact policy to engage more Black researchers and researchers of colour within the different university faculties.

KU Leuven can only be a true reflection of society when Black people and people of colour also make up part of the professor body of an actively anti-racist university. This is not the case at the moment. KU Leuven has a body of almost exclusively white professors that in no way reflect the society we live in today. Even in disciplines that focus on the cultures, histories or knowledge systems of Black people and people of colour, there is a noted absence of Black people and people of colour as professors in these departments.³⁰

A prevalent racist misconception in academic circles such as KU Leuven is that the presence of Black people and people of colour - be it as students, researchers or professors - is equated with a lack of high academic quality.³¹ Thus, implying that a white student and professor body is indicative of high academic standards that are not attainable for Black people and people of colour. This is false.

The reality is that Black people and people of colour are not present at the KU Leuven, especially as professors, due to the institutional and systemic racism that is present within this university and within society at large. The first necessary step is to enact an anti-racism policy that is effective and is actually used in cases of discrimination. This policy must not only tackle individual incidents of racism, but should also combat the racism present in the institution and its bodies. This policy must be enacted towards students, professors and other personnel within the university.

KU Leuven, as all other universities, is an institution that functions on the basis of strict hierarchies. These hierarchies are one of the main reasons why it is incredibly difficult for people who have been discriminated against to speak out against this abuse.

The risk of retaliation is rife when individuals speak out against the discrimination they face or witnessed from other individuals who are high on the academic hierarchy. Any anti-discrimination policy the KU Leuven enacts, must offer adequate protection from retaliation, such as is the case in EU anti-discrimination

30 An example of such a department is Anthropology.

31 VETO, "Waarom de KU Leuven opeens 'woke' is", 8 March 2021, www.veto.be/artikel/waarom-de-ku-leuven-opeens-woke-is (consulted on 26 March 2021)

directives regarding gender discrimination.³²

Alongside anti-racism policy, other structural measures are needed. KU Leuven has previously enacted a structural gender equity policy in the form of gender vanguards.³³ The gender vanguards proved to be a success, with 50% of senior academic staff that was appointed during the period of 2015-2016 being women. While the current gender vanguard policy was effective, it lacks an intersectional lens. This results in most, if not all, female professors appointed being white. While we may not have official statistics to prove this due to the legal restrictions that are imposed on us by the laws and policies of KU Leuven and Belgium, we can see as students that Black women and female professors of colour are not adequately present within the university. Together with the intersectional lens within gender policy, we find it imperative that there are policies that are aimed towards ensuring that the university is also a place where Black male professors and professors of colour are employed and not subjected to racism.

In order to have more black professors and professors of colour, it is also necessary to ensure that Black people and people of colour are also present as researchers within the university. It is imperative that assessment committees and other important bodies that come in contact with researchers throughout their academic career are anti-racist. The anti-racism policy mentioned above is very important to ensure that Black researchers and researchers of colour are not subjected to racism within the university as it has an immensely negative toll on their mental health and wellbeing, thus impacting their work. The recruiting and interviewing of Black people and people of colour for professor positions should evidently not be done in committees with racist individuals. An effective anti-racism policy whereby racist individuals also receive consequences for their racism is essential to ensure this.

The university speaks often of trying to diversify its student population. This can only be achieved when the university acknowledges its shortcomings as it upholds ethnic and cultural homogeneity among professors. The administration should proactively

take structural steps to increase the presence and variety of professors and researchers from ethnic-cultural minorities within the university.

While the current gender vanguard policy was effective, it lacks an intersectional lens.

³² Art. 24 Recast Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation, *OJ L* 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23–36

³³ “A gender vanguard is a full professor and member of the assessment committee who guards, in particular, equal opportunities for men and women in the appointment and promotion policies, but also gender neutrality of the assessment committee. All assessment committees now have their own gender vanguard.” Source: https://www.kuleuven.be/diversiteit/pdf/KU%20Leuven%20Genderrapport_interim_FINAL_with%20lay%20out%20edit.pdf (page 4)

03

We demand that Black personnel and personnel of colour within the university, mainly present in manual jobs, are not outsourced in order to ensure they receive adequate payment for their essential work.

The KU Leuven professor body is white, in stark contrast to the broader personnel such as cleaning staff and Alma restaurant personnel for example. As students, we see that there are a significant number of people employed in these positions who are Black people or people of colour. This observation is very concerning to us as the university participates in ethnic stratification by having a personnel body that is structured in this manner. This observation illustrates the importance of structural anti-discrimination policy even more.

KU Leuven is not exempt from institutional racism. This means that racism is present at all levels of this university: from students, researchers, professors to the highest decision-making bodies. This is also the case for cleaning personnel and those who do technical work within the university. As we mentioned above, this group of personnel is essential. They must therefore not be an afterthought when it comes to the implementation of the KU Leuven anti-racism policy. An anti-racism policy is very important for them, as the most Black people and people of colour can be found among this group of personnel. This policy must also offer protection from retaliation, as we argued in the demand above.³⁴

Additionally, universities are institutions that function

on the basis of hierarchy. This means that often, more respect is accorded to people within the university depending on their rank on this academic hierarchy. As UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven, we do not wish to follow this form of thinking and want to accord the same amount of respect to cleaning and technical personnel that conduct very essential work within our university, as we do to anyone else within the university. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen how the work done by this group of personnel has been vital for us as students to take our exams safely.

Black people and people of colour in KU Leuven are mainly present in manual and essential jobs within the university (ie cleaning staff, ALMA restaurant staff, etc). We demand that they do not get outsourced by KU Leuven, as has been the case in other Belgian universities recently.³⁵ They perform jobs that are essential for the university, the students and other personnel. They must be appropriately remunerated for this work. This is put at risk by outsourcing.

The KU Leuven professor body is white, in stark contrast to the broader personnel such as cleaning staff and Alma restaurant personnel for example.

³⁴ Art. 24 Recast Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation, OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23–36

³⁵ DE STANDAARD, “Universiteit Antwerpen geeft schoonmakers duw richting armoede”, 5 March 2021, https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20210305_92538209

04

We demand that KU Leuven makes physical space within all libraries (faculty libraries and the Central Library) for books from academics that challenge the Eurocentric status quo that is predominant in our university.

For the most part, students who want to read more from non-Western scholars are limited to online sources. Our libraries are missing important works from eminent scholars that challenge the Eurocentric status quo. The absence of such materials is a barrier to research at this university. A decolonized university should make room for academic expertise that addresses other worldly views to students.

In this demand, we recognise the crucial relationship between a university and its libraries. Libraries are spaces that through the collection, production and consumption of knowledge validate and perpetuate a particular viewpoint at the expense of others. We contest the mainstream assumption in library sciences literature that the university library is somehow ‘neutral’ for the precise reason that the university library is situated within a particular political, social and economic context – a Eurocentric context, in short. However, we see great potential in our libraries as a site of resistance, transformation and recontextualization.

Decolonizing our libraries does not simply mean diversifying reading lists and collections to include Black scholars and scholars of colour. These would be reformist, tokenistic measures. It is rather a process of recontextualizing the Eurocentric knowledge overwhelmingly found in our libraries and thereby, countering the bias towards Eurocentric knowledge as uncontested fact and bias against other knowledge systems as marginal viewpoints. We do

not advocate for eradicating the knowledge currently archived in our library system, but rather for it to be acknowledged that Eurocentric knowledge is a limited viewpoint. Criticization of that limited viewpoint is crucial for the academic growth and improvement of the university as a whole.

We have some suggestions for how all our libraries can begin the process of recontextualizing the current Eurocentric bias.

- Assess the classification system used by the library systems, looking for biased keywords under Subject Headings (e.g. ‘illegal aliens’) and including new Subject Headings that make space for titles relating to decolonisation.
- Prioritise collection development from diverse cultural and geographical sources as well as explicitly decolonial authors. This assists in the production of counter-narratives, counter-knowledges and counter-practices to the Eurocentric norm.
- Collaborate with other sections and partners in the university to forward the decolonial project. This includes assessing and providing feedback on departments and lecturers’ reading lists, and openly discussing the implicit biases in and colonial roots of collected knowledge with all library users. It also includes discussions to changes in university and library policy with regard to decolonization.
- Carve out physical space in the library that uplifts multiculturalism and enables the showcasing of decolonial works via book launches, exhibitions, panel discussions, seminars and workshops.

05

We demand that KU Leuven stimulates and funds research based on decolonial perspectives that are missing in our curricula.

Decolonized curricula can only be achieved when time and resources are offered to researchers and professors to embark upon this task. If the university acknowledges that there is a need to decolonize curricula, we demand that the university shows its commitment by supporting this goal financially.

Decolonial perspectives such as intersectionality, critical race theory and queer theory are not, or at least not adequately present, in our curricula at KU Leuven. While this is the case on societal level, KU Leuven has a responsibility as a higher education institution to stimulate the knowledge production of these theories and subsequently offer them to students. At this moment, we are in a vicious circle whereby these decolonial perspectives specifically pertaining to the Belgian context are not sufficiently researched to offer decolonial curricula. But at the same time, the necessity thereof is emphasized by students. KU Leuven should fill in this void by actively stimulating the research based on these theories and not demonise it.

KU Leuven should defend and protect academics who conduct research based on these decolonial perspectives in our university.

During the last couple of months, there have been efforts from politicians in Belgium and Europe at large to demonise academics who conduct research based on these theories.³⁶ Conducting research within a university will always be political. KU Leuven should therefore defend and protect academics who conduct research based on these decolonial perspectives in our university. Often, higher education institutions perceive silence in these situations as a neutral response. However, keeping silent while these academics and their vital research is attacked is not neutral. Silence chooses the side of those attacking your respective academics. We also want to warn for coercive diversity³⁷: when universities make use of one's body and research to make the university look diverse while it undermines that person's work, experiences and humanity.

Another reason why this research is often attacked is precisely because it is perceived as unnecessary for the Belgian or European context at large. However, Belgium and several countries in Europe participated in colonisation and we still see how the wealth of a country such as Belgium was built on the backs of the death and inhumane treatment of Congolese, Rwandan and Burundi people. This inherently means that such research is very important for our specific context, but not enough is being done to conduct the research based on these perspectives in a manner that is applicable to our reality in Belgium and/or Flanders.

36 N. FADIL, "Radical free speech", <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/global-currents/radical-free-speech/> (consulted on 26 March 2021)

37 S. AHMED, "Slammed Doors: Diversity and/as Harassment", Paper presented for Thinking of Leaving: Racism and

When this research is conducted and there is enough of this knowledge to create a curriculum, it should be offered in mandatory curricula for all students who follow a certain discipline. It should not be kept in electives that are only followed by a select number of students who consciously choose to do so.

We also want to warn for coercive diversity: when universities make use of one's body and research to make the university look diverse while it undermines that person's work, experiences and humanity.

06

We demand that KU Leuven reflects critically on its international projects with non-Western countries in order to ensure that the university is not reproducing colonial practices in international cooperation.

The KU Leuven prides itself in many partnerships with different universities from all over the world. However, there is a tendency to fall into paternalistic and colonial platitudes when referring to work done with universities from non-Western countries. These paternalistic patterns stem from colonialism, where it was believed that Black people and people of colour needed to be 'civilised' and taught European knowledge systems or follow Western models in order to be perceived as civilised and an equal partner.³⁸

The problem commences with the language that is used. When KU Leuven works together with a university such as Cambridge University for example,

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this is referred to as a partnership with a university on equal footing. However, when KU Leuven is working with non-Western universities this is referred to as development work (*ontwikkelingssamenwerking*).

Discrimination in British Universities Panel, March 6 2020, University of York,
<https://feministkilljoys.com/2020/03/17/slammed-doors/> (consulted on 27 March 2021)

38 D. TRICOIRE, "The Enlightenments and the Politics of Civilization: Self-Colonization, Catholicism, and Assimilationism in Eighteenth-Century France" in *Enlightened Colonialism: Civilization Narratives and Imperial Politics in the Age of Reason*, Cham, Springer, 2017, 32

Non-Western countries do not need to be developed, they need reparations and justice for the human rights violations they were subjected to and that still leave their marks in the world today. We thus demand that this outdated terminology is no longer used as it stems from colonial patterns. Alternatives for 'Development work' are terminology such as 'Global Justice and Reparations', as coined by Prof. RUTAZIBWA. This puts the focus on the principle factors contributing to global inequality, namely colonialism, chattel slave trade and violent imperialism fuelled by capitalist interests of former colonising countries.³⁹

Another example of a term that is rooted in colonial rhetoric is 'third world countries' (*derdewereldlanden*). A conscious choice of language and terminology challenges the academic world to view this as a manner to right historical and structural wrongs inflicted on former colonised countries and their peoples.

The colonial patterns are also visible in work with non-Western universities when KU Leuven sees these partnerships as a one-way street in which KU Leuven is 'teaching' or 'guiding' the other university to follow a Western model or mode of thinking. If anything, KU Leuven and other Western universities should be learning from non-Western universities for many societal and global challenges: racial justice, global inequality, climate change, etc. Universities located in non-Western countries have been facing these challenges longer due to the effects of colonialism and they are and have been leading the quest for solutions to these challenges. However, Western universities do not view these universities as experts on these topics. We demand the respective policy changes from KU Leuven in order to move in an actively anti-racist and equitable direction as a university.

"An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." - M. Luther King

KU Leuven also encourages students to engage in 'development work' for their studies or research on non-Western people and their cultures. The university should ensure that adequately qualified participants for these collaborations or projects are selected. They must view their partners and people in non-Western countries as equal participants in such

projects. Students and professors from KU Leuven should be taught about the origins of pertinent power imbalances that to this day persist in the field of 'development work'. Omitting teaching this undermines the wellbeing of non-Western people that will potentially come in contact with KU Leuven students and professors that repeat and reproduce colonial platitudes. External professionals, preferably non-Western, that are well-versed with this problem should teach and guide KU Leuven students and professors the dangers of a white saviourism mindset that is prevalent in former colonising countries such as Belgium and its academic institutions. An example of such an external expert is *No White Saviours*⁴⁰, an advocacy campaign led by a majority female and majority African team of professionals based in Kampala, Uganda. KU Leuven, as a university with a colonial past itself, should ensure it does not reproduce the colonial practices it did in the past. This is extremely harmful for the people and societies in non-Western countries. KU Leuven students and professors should be aware of this before embarking on projects in former colonised countries. KU Leuven should accord enough funds to this objective.

KU Leuven should also ensure that it does not embark on international or national cooperation with institutions and companies that violate human rights. If the university is currently working with institutions and/or companies that are violating human rights now, these contracts should be rescinded. An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.⁴¹ Human rights violations far from Belgium should still be cause for the university to take a staunch stance against them.

39 A. ESCOBAR, *Encountering development: the making and unmaking of the third world*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995, 55

40 <https://nowhitesaviors.org>

41 M. LUTHER KING JR., *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, 16 April 1963

07

We demand that KU Leuven actively acknowledges its own ties to and participation in Belgium's colonial history. It must make the appropriate amends for human rights violations it or its personnel participated in.

The Belgian colonial mission involved controlling the economy of its colonies that was driven on the exploitation of subjugated people, power over the Black people and mixed-race people in the colonies and imposing the 'civilisation mission' upon them.⁴² Colonialism was possible due to the underlying ideology of white supremacy. This ideology was propagated in universities as well.⁴³ KU Leuven was also, be it directly or indirectly, involved in these domains and ultimately in the colonial history of Belgium. Several academics at KU Leuven aided King Leopold II's oppressive policies in Congo Free State. Some prominent names are Edouard

Descamps⁴⁴, Edmond Leplae⁴⁵, Édouard De Jonghe⁴⁶ and Pierre Ryckmans⁴⁷. These ties between KU Leuven and Belgium's colonial history span the entire period of colonisation and are not just limited to a specific period of it.

KU Leuven's participation in Belgium's colonial period was very broad and in no way passive. While there have been efforts to set up a commission on Belgium's colonial past on a political level, we still find it important that KU Leuven conducts research on its own specific contribution to Belgium's colonial history as an institution itself. This is necessary to

⁴² I. GODDEERIS, A. LAURO, G. VANTHEEMSCHE, *Koloniaal Congo. Een Geschiedenis in Vragen*, Kalmthout, Polis 2020, 432p.

⁴³ H. A. BULHAN, "Stages of Colonialism in Africa: From Occupation of Land to Occupation of Being", *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 2015, (239) 240; R. G. MAZZOLONI, "Colonialism and the Emergence of Racial Theories" in *Reproduction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, 362.

⁴⁴ E. DESCAMPS was an eminent Catholic lecturer at KU Leuven. He was specialised in international public law. His portrait hangs in the walls of the Law Library of KU Leuven. He gave legal advice to King Leopold II. See: M. PONCELET, "Colonial ideology, colonial sciences and colonial sociology in Belgium", *The American Sociologist* 2020, (148) 151.

⁴⁵ EDMOND LEPLAE was an agronomist and professor at KU Leuven. LEPLAE was part of the colonial officials and technical experts who had set themselves the goal of bringing 'modern civilisation and western agricultural practices to the colonies'. He was a proponent of 'modernisation through white settlement'. He also became a director at the Ministry of the Colonies. See: M. PONCELET, "Colonial ideology, colonial sciences and colonial sociology in Belgium", *The American Sociologist* 2020, (148) 151; C. VEKEMANS, Y. SEGERS, "Settler farming, agricultural colonization and development in Katanga (Belgian Congo), 1910-1920", *Historia agraria* 2020, 195 – 226; <https://ghum.kuleuven.be/icag/english/farming-in-tropical-africa-migration-colonisation-belgian-farmers-in-congo>

⁴⁶ EDOUARD DE JONGHE was a professor at the Hogere Handelinstiutut, the precursor of faculty of Economy at KU Leuven. Here they educated the future colonials at the beginning of the twentieth century. DE JONGHE taught 'General Ethnography' and 'The Ethnography of Congo'. He was also a director of the Ministry of Colonies. See: M. PONCELET, "Colonial ideology, colonial sciences and colonial sociology in Belgium", *The American Sociologist* 2020, (148) 157; <https://www.kuleuven.be/ahp/kunstpatrimonium/collecties/afrikaanse-collectie>; <https://nieuws.kuleuven.be/nl/campuskrant/0910/04/erfgoed--rituele-objecten-uit-mayombe--de-congocollectie>

⁴⁷ PIERRE RYCKMANS was the governor-general of Belgian-Congo and specialized in Colonial Law at KU Leuven. His portrait is hung on the walls of the Law Library of KU Leuven.



identify the colonial remnants within KU Leuven today, magnitude thereof and how the same colonial ideologies still exist today within KU Leuven.⁴⁸

KU Leuven's participation in Belgium's colonial period was very broad and in no way passive.

Here a more colonial ties of KU Leuven that require further research and transparency from KU Leuven:

- In 1954, KU Leuven founded a department in Congo: Lovanium. This department participated in a paternalistic colonial civil project.⁴⁹ This is an example of KU Leuven's participation in colonisation that should be adequately researched and communicated about. How did Congolese students react to this paternalistic education? Did they protest? How did Lovanium react to this protest?
- The first Congolese students came to KU Leuven in 1951.⁵⁰ This is before the decolonisation of Congo. What was their experience at KU Leuven?
- Home Vesalius⁵¹ (in Leuven) accommodated students from the colonies. On the floor at the entrance of Home Vesalius, there is a mosaic of the colonial flag of Belgian-Congo that we can still see today. This

building was called the 'Maison Congolaise'.⁵²

In June 2020, in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests worldwide, rector Luc Sels decided to temporarily remove the bust of King Leopold II that was present in the Central Library of the university. There are several colonial cultural goods that are in the hands of the university.⁵³ It is not always clear how this cultural property was acquired. With the knowledge we have of Belgium's colonial history, plunder is a possible mode of acquisition.



This short illustration already shows the extent to which KU Leuven was invested in the colonial project and how KU Leuven still has to come to terms with its own participation in it. However, KU Leuven itself is not transparent enough about this history. Much of this history is not adequately researched either. This does not aid the progress in the quest for decolonisation and racial justice within the university and the society

48 G. VERBEECK, "Legacies of an imperial past in a small nation. Patterns of postcolonialism in Belgium", *European Politics and Society* 2020, (292) 293; A. LOOMBA, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, London, Routledge, 1998, 12.

49 B. VERHAEGEN, *L'Enseignement universitaire au Zaïre. De Lovanium à L'unaza 1958-1978*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1978, 199p.

50 Z. A. ETAMBALA, "De Leuvense Alma Mater en Congo: 1885-1914" *Onze Alma Mater* 3 (1986) 188-209; R MANTELS, *Geleerd in de Tropen. Leuven, Congo en de wetenschap, 1885-1960*, Leuven, 2007; J.-L.; VELLUT, "Afrika aan de horizon van de Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (19e - 20e eeuw)", in J. ROEGIERS en I. VANDEVIVERE (red.), Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, Kennis maken, Leuven 2001, 205-224

51 VETO, "Studying at Campus Congo", 27 May 2020, <https://www.veto.be/artikel/studying-at-campus-congo>

52 KU Leuven, "Nieuwe tijden, nieuwe noden", <https://soc.kuleuven.be/fsw/geschiedenis/nieuwetijden> (consulted on 29 March 2021)

53 The Mayombe collection is often referenced on KU Leuven websites. Though it is written in neutral terms that 'KU Leuven collected hundreds of ethnographic objects from Congo at the beginning of the last century', this still begs the question how this acquisition took place. See: <https://www.kuleuven.be/ci/29/ci29mayombe.html>; <https://www.kuleuven.be/ahp/kunstpatrimonium/collecties/afrikaanse-collectie>; <https://nieuws.kuleuven.be/nl/campuskrant/0910/04/erfgoed--rituele-objecten-uit-mayombe--de-congocollectie>

at large. KU Leuven can never be a moral authority on anti-racism if it does not come to terms with its own participation in Belgium's colonial history. All efforts for anti-racism that the university may have taken to date will always remain insufficient, for as long as this history is kept veiled, not adequately researched and the necessary amends are not done.

KU Leuven cannot engage in performative activism by feigning change through communicating to its students and personnel that there is a commission working on recommendations regarding the colonial heritage of KU Leuven, to then not take these recommendations seriously.

We thus demand that KU Leuven does extensive research regarding how it was involved in all facets of Belgium's colonisation of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi: economically, religiously, pedagogically, legally, etc. This requires adequate funds and personnel that are allocated for this task. It is also vital that this research is public and KU Leuven remains transparent regarding the results that will come out of this research.

With regard to the colonial cultural goods in the hands of KU Leuven, it is vital that the mode of acquisition of these cultural goods is determined. In the case that these cultural goods were acquired through plunder or in unethical ways (this is possible in the context of colonisation), these cultural goods must be returned to their rightful owners or the descendants thereof in Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. KU Leuven should take the necessary steps in order to make this possible.

KU Leuven vice-rector Bart Raeymakers (responsible for cultural heritage) and rector Luc Sels, assigned a commission to give recommendations on what to do with colonial heritage within the university. UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven was asked to be a part of this commission and worked with a team of academics to write recommendations for the university.⁵⁴ However, at the date this is written⁵⁵, the recommendations we gave have not been discussed

nor has the nota with our recommendations been put on the agenda of the upcoming Executive Board or Academic Council of KU Leuven to our knowledge. We want to remind the university that it is very important that the labour of this commission does not go to waste. KU Leuven cannot engage in performative activism by feigning change through communicating to its students and personnel that there is a commission working on recommendations regarding the colonial heritage of KU Leuven, to then not take these recommendations seriously. We demand that this nota is put on the agenda of the Executive Board and the Academic Council by the end of this academic year. We also expect KU Leuven to take a clear stance on which recommendations it will implement and to communicate this to the entire university in a transparent manner.

We believe that it is important to understand how academic institutions like KU Leuven are not absolved from global injustices that take place in society.

KU Leuven regularly states that it wants to steer societal debates. While it does manage to do this for many topics, this is not the case for anti-racism and racial justice. If KU Leuven wants to authentically display its engagement towards racial justice, it has to confront its own racist past first in order to understand how this racism still manifests itself today within the institution and how this negatively impacts the lives of Black people and people of colour.

We believe that it is important to understand how academic institutions like KU Leuven are not absolved from global injustices that take place in society. By acknowledging its ties with colonial history and making the appropriate amends, the university will show to (future) students from ethnic-cultural minorities that it is actively trying to make amends with this history and doing the necessary work to confront structural racism at the university.

⁵⁴ VETO, "KU Leuven richt commissie Koloniaal Erfgoed op", 7 August 2020, <https://www.veto.be/artikel/ku-leuven-richt-commissie-koloniaal-erfgoed-op>

⁵⁵ 22 March 2021
20

08

We demand that KU Leuven accommodates Black students and students of colour within the university adequately.

As discussed in the introduction, decolonisation requires an interrogation of the institutional racism at KU Leuven and concrete policies to address it. However, the current Diversity Plan⁵⁶ makes almost no reference to racism and does not provide any concrete policies to address the issue. Therefore, we demand an anti-racism policy that provides cooperative avenues through which Black students and professors and students and professors of colour can address structural racism and instances of more targeted racism at the university. There should be a dedicated member of staff at the diversity office to coordinate these efforts.

We demand more support for the mental health and well-being of Black students and students of colour

In concert with this anti-racism policy, the university must take proactive measures to ensure the needs of Black students and students of colour are accommodated. KU Leuven must demonstrate its consideration for Black students and students of colour in a way that goes beyond internationalisation discourse or diversity campaigns. It should be noted that when we say 'Black students and students of colour', we mean Black students and students of colour from Western Europe as well as Black students and students of colour who are international students. As a first step, we demand more support for the mental health and well-being of Black students and students of colour. Specifically, while we recommend the training

of existing (white) psychologists for intercultural competences, we emphasise that white mental health professionals cannot always comprehensively aid Black students and students of colour students. We therefore demand that, in addition to training for existing personnel, the university hires Black psychologists and psychologists of colour, who are better equipped to address the specific needs of Black students and students of colour. This also ties in to the recommendation to have ethnic-cultural minorities present in the wider personnel body of the university. At the moment, the mental health care professionals of the university do not have enough Black people and people of colour among them.

We demand measures that provide Black people and people of colour among students and staff with the opportunity to come in contact with each other more and create spaces that celebrate their cultures

To further provide support for the mental health of Black students and students of colour at the university, we demand measures that provide Black people and people of colour among students and staff with the opportunity to come in contact with each other more and create spaces that celebrate their cultures. Examples of these initiatives are student associations such as Karibu African Circle Leuven and Asian Student Association. These and other similar student

⁵⁶ KU Leuven Diversity Policy Office, Diversity policy and action plan 2018, <https://admin.kuleuven.be/beleidstekst/diversity-policy-kuleuven.pdf> (consulted on 26 March 2021)

associations should continue to be supported by KU Leuven and not be seen as associations that ‘segregate’.⁵⁷ KU Leuven should not follow this dangerous and false argument. Faculty student associations that are predominantly, if not exclusively white, should be actively anti-racist in order to be associations that are welcoming to Black students and students of colour that do not yet feel welcome there. Such actions could help foster a more inclusive environment at KU Leuven.

Structural racism is a permanent feature of life at KU Leuven for these communities and therefore must be addressed systematically

As Achille Mbembe articulates, “colonialism rimes with mono-lingualism”. Therefore, to further the university’s stated aim for decolonization, KU Leuven must take measures to accommodate personnel and students who speak different languages. This might mean the introduction of a new programme in which students can study in non-European languages, for example.⁵⁸ Another example is a Black studies or Afro-European studies department. New staff with the necessary expertise should be hired to accommodate this policy. Such departments, in the case they are introduced in KU Leuven, cannot have solely white professors.

Finally, we demand mechanisms that assure more regular dialogue between Black students and students of colour and the university. It cannot be exclusively in times of tragedy that KU Leuven takes an active interest in their well-being. Structural racism is a permanent feature of life at KU Leuven for these communities and therefore must be addressed systematically.

⁵⁷ S. D. MUSEUS, “The role of ethnic student organizations in fostering African American and Asian American Students’ cultural adjustment and membership at predominantly white institutions”, *Journal of College Student Development* 2008, 568

⁵⁸ Another example is an Ethnic studies department at KU Leuven. Such departments cannot be entirely staffed with white professors, as is the case in some KU Leuven departments that educate on the cultures of non-white peoples. See: T ADEFIOYE, “Ethnic Studies Major(s) and Archiving Initiatives as Crucial Tools of Liberation” in *Migration, Equality and Racism: 44 opinions*, Brussels, VUB Press, 214 – 219

09

We demand that KU Leuven conducts and publishes independent and thorough research on racism at KU Leuven. We demand the publication of the findings from this research.

In the words of the late James Baldwin, nothing can be changed until it is faced. This is why KU Leuven needs to face the situation of racism, both institutional as interpersonal, head on and fund independent research from a critical race theory perspective on how white supremacy manifests itself in and outside the walls of our university. Universities might see themselves as liberal and therefore not prone to a racism⁵⁹, however this does not reflect the experiences of many Black people and people of colour at KU Leuven. That is why we demand that KU Leuven puts in a serious effort to thoroughly uncover the issue on all levels. The sole goal of the research must be racial justice, not image and branding - though the transparency of the results is crucial.

Disclosing research conclusions (if appropriate to do so) in university promotional materials lets prospective students know that racism is taken seriously. This is helpful to many students and staff, especially those who may eventually need to use the Harrassment Help Desk. What Black people and people of colour need is the tangible proof that KU Leuven puts in a sincere effort to fight racial injustice.

Most incidents of racist harassment are usually not reported.⁶⁰ This indicates the importance to not merely rely on the data from the Harassment Help Desk. The research can't be limited to individual cases of racial harassment, which would frame the issue as bad individuals engaging in racial harassment. Instead, it should include an emphasis on the root cause (namely institutional racism), that we can see through the attainment gap, higher dropout rates, and a lack of Black professors and professors of colour. Furthermore, Dr. Kehinde Andrews warns that "Reports won't rescue you from racism, they might even do the opposite". That is to say, uncovering the problem is merely a first step and KU Leuven must be aware that this step is worthless if it is not followed up by concrete actions to combat the deeper-rooted issues.⁶¹ If KU Leuven takes racism seriously, the university should support the victims, and take a clear stance and strong measures to make sure the victims are a priority. So, then the question arises, is racial justice a priority for KU Leuven?

KU Leuven has to avoid producing trauma porn by

59 Rollock, N. (2018). The Heart of Whiteness: Racial Gesture Politics, Equity and Higher Education. In Dismantling Race in Higher Education (pp. 313-330). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

60 p.10 in: Unia. (2018). Diversiteitsbarometer onderwijs. https://www.unia.be/files/Documenten/Publicaties_docs/1210_UNIA_Barometer_2017_-_NL_AS.pdf

and p. 44 in:

Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2019). Tackling racial harassment: Universities challenged. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/tackling-racial-harassment-universities-challenged.pdf>

61 In 'Declarations of Whiteness' Sara Ahmed warns us of "the co-opting of critical work: race equality policies. institutions

continuously asking Black people and people of colour, Black students and staff, students and staff of colour to recall and share explicit stories of their experiences for the sake of research that does not result in structural change. Therefore, focus should also be directed on the racial attitudes, behaviours and racial literacy of all students and staff, including specific items measuring anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, anti-Asian racism and anti-Semitism for example. The methodology of this research could be a combination of focus groups⁶², individual interviews, racial attitude surveys and racial literacy surveys.

Examples of possible research topics:

- How can KU Leuven be decolonized? (overarching research question)
- What does a decolonial (insert course) curriculum look like?
- Does the lack of school-belonging among Black students and students of colour explain the ethnic gap in study efficiency (CSE), and the ethnic gap in the drop-out rate?⁶³
- Do Black people and people of colour feel that they belong at KU Leuven?
- What are the racial attitudes of KU Leuven students and faculty? (Be cautious of social desirability bias in the survey).
- In the US and the UK, research proves racism drives Black academics and academics of colour out of academia, or lead them to universities in other countries hoping they might get a better treatment there.⁶⁴ Is this the case in KU Leuven as well?
- Can Racial-ethnic Vanguards, in analogy with Gender Vanguards, effectively combat racial injustice at the university?⁶⁵
- What policies must be in place to create a culture wherein “(1) white people are cognizant of the ways in which they have facilitated racial injustice; (2)

low expectations of faculty and students of colour are challenged and penalized; and (3) whistle-blowing policies exist to root out and eradicate racism”?⁶⁶

- How can policy make sure that racial justice becomes a named, embedded and enacted normality of institutional life?
- Does KU Leuven need to edit the way they survey students’ ethnic background to be able to conduct more accurate research on institutional racism within the university?⁶⁷
- ...

Furthermore, Dr. Kehinde Andrews warns that “Reports won’t rescue you from racism, they might even do the opposite”. That is to say, uncovering the problem is merely a first step and KU Leuven must be aware that this step is worthless if it is not followed up by concrete actions to combat the deeper-rooted issues. If KU Leuven takes racism seriously, the university should support the victims, and take a clear stance and strong measures to make sure the victims are a priority.

that document their own racism critically(!) are congratulated for it.”

62 Note: The term ‘racial-ethnic’ was suggested by Essed (1996).

Essed, P. (1996). *Diversity: Gender, Color, and Culture*. University of Massachusetts Press.

63 KU Leuven has no accurate data to determine whether these are merely ethnic gaps or also racial gaps.

64 Rollock, N. (2018). The Heart of Whiteness: Racial Gesture Politics, Equity and Higher Education. In *Dismantling Race in Higher Education* (pp. 313-330). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

65 “A gender vanguard is a full professor and member of the assessment committee who guards, in particular, equal opportunities for men and women in the appointment and promotion policies, but also gender neutrality of the assessment committee. All assessment committees now have their own gender vanguard.” Source: https://www.kuleuven.be/diversiteit/pdf/KU%20Leuven%20Genderrapport_interim_FINAL_with%20lay%20out%20edit.pdf (page 4)

66 Based on the definition of a decolonized institution by Rollock (2018), https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-60261-5_18

67 The current definition of students with a migration background does not account for Black students and students of colour who have lived in Western Europe for four or more generations. Nor does it consider the racial diversity of many countries. Thus, the concept of migration background makes it impossible to accurately measure race and racism. Additionally, this question is not obligatory, so not all students answer this question. Even less is known about the racial-ethnic background of KU Leuven staff.

10

We demand a diversity policy focussing on actions and measures, and not solely on ideals.

“Safety, respect and inclusion”. These three concepts were emphasized during the opening speech of this academic year (2020-2021). This statement might seem like a step in the right direction, but how important have these values been to KU Leuven in the past?

One remarkable shortcoming in the diversity plan throughout the years is the failure to actively prevent structural discrimination and racism in KU Leuven.

The diversity plan of 2014 to 2017 included ten guidelines to achieve a more inclusive and diverse university. A number of initiatives were developed as a contribution to these guidelines, one of those initiatives being the creation of the Harassment Help Desk for reporting unacceptable behaviour of all sorts. According to the overall vision described in the diversity policy plan, KU Leuven intends to play an exemplary and inspirational role for society at large. One guideline also proclaimed that ‘collecting accurate statistical data for policy would be a priority.

In 2018, a new diversity plan was published. Most of the initiatives, developed in the context of the previous diversity plan, were continued and some of them were adjusted. Three new guidelines were formulated as the general focus of the diversity plan for the next three years: “more customisation to attract a more diverse

range of students, more coaching aimed at the effective handling of diversity in the student population and diversity-friendly administrative processes”⁶⁸.

One remarkable shortcoming in the diversity plan throughout the years is the failure to actively prevent structural discrimination and racism in KU Leuven. The prevalence of structural discrimination and racism in KU Leuven negatively impacts the well-being of Black students and students of colour within the university. This lack of policy and practice is especially concerning since KU Leuven does acknowledge its important role in an increasingly diverse society, yet still doesn’t make the right adjustments to fully answer to these changes. Being a diverse and inclusive university does not only require providing help for those who might significantly benefit from it, it also includes creating and maintaining a learning-environment in which Black students and students of colour, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students and students from working-class backgrounds should feel at ease. Furthermore, it should be an environment where discrimination and racism are not tolerated from students, professors, staff or any other actors involved. Clearly established actions should follow for those who violate these values.

The Harassment Help Desk might be the only current initiative that seems to be a concrete and structural action that aims to improve the well-being of minority groups at KU Leuven. However, there’s a lack of transparency regarding the functionality and

⁶⁸ KU Leuven Diversity Policy Office, Diversity policy and action plan 2018, <https://admin.kuleuven.be/beleidstekst/diversity-policy-kuleuven.pdf> (consulted on 26 March 2021)

effectiveness of this initiative. Creating a general help desk is one thing but regular monitoring and reporting is necessary to assure its effectiveness. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the current Harassment Help Desk is efficient in combatting complex issues that require a more specific approach as it is mostly known for combatting sexual harassment specifically in the university.

We also want to warn for the limits of diversity policy focused on individual change in order to address institutional discrimination within the university. Implicit bias trainings are an example of policy measures that simply do not do enough to weigh up against institutional discrimination.

We demand a general Anti-discrimination Help Desk that caters to discrimination on different grounds such as anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, anti-Asian racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. These specialised desks should be interconnected to ensure that victims of discrimination on several grounds can contact different desks simultaneously. For example, Black women experience discrimination due to their Blackness and their being women as well. Both the Blackness and womanhood are often a source of discrimination at the same time. This new Anti-discrimination Help Desk must therefore be built on intersectional and culture sensitive frameworks. These help desks should be staffed with the appropriate experts for each discrimination ground. We demand adequate funds for the help desks to ensure maximum effectiveness and enough staff.

Another concern regarding the diversity plan is transparency when it comes to putting the diversity plan into practice. In the 2018 diversity plan, a survey is mentioned in which 3000 participants were questioned to find out how KU Leuven is perceived by its students with regards to diversity. However, the results of this survey cannot be found publicly nor is there any reporting on how this information was used to optimise the current diversity policy. The same goes for almost every other guideline in the diversity plan. There seems to be an overall lack of intermediate monitoring and reporting of the diversity policy to the wider students despite one of the objectives in the diversity plan of 2014 to 2017 being the collecting of

accurate statistical data and using this for policy. We demand a restructuring of the evaluation frameworks of the university. These frameworks should be shared with everyone within the university, as well as the results of the evaluation processes. This is necessary to ensure transparency.

KU Leuven must have a diversity policy focussing on actions and measures, not ideals.

We also want to warn for the limits of diversity policy focused on individual change in order to address institutional discrimination within the university. Implicit bias trainings are an example of policy measures that simply do not do enough to weigh up against institutional discrimination. A diversity policy focused on presenting role models is also insufficient because the presence of role models from minoritized communities does not negate the existence of institutional discrimination within the university. In a similar vein, a diversity policy that focuses on 'helping' minoritized students overcome imposter syndrome is harmful and does not tackle institutional discrimination. Focusing on imposter syndrome directs our views toward fixing minoritized individuals in university instead of fixing the university structures and policies themselves that cause it. In short, it puts the blame on individuals without accounting for the historical and institutional contexts that are foundational for the exclusion of these minoritized students in the first place.

KU Leuven must have a diversity policy focussing on actions and measures, not ideals. It should also commit to fulfilling the promises it makes in its diversity policy. Paying lip service to minority students creates an environment of distrust towards the university.

If KU Leuven wants to portray itself as a university where everyone feels at home, it should practice what it preaches by taking measures to actively and structurally change the dynamics in its community. More importantly, it should dare to critically self-reflect and be more transparent about its own actions when it comes to the implementation of the diversity policy. Only then KU Leuven can call itself and can it also be perceived as a university that values safety, respect and inclusion.

CLOSING WORDS

Decolonisation is a demand that comes from grassroots initiatives and primarily from the work of Black people and people of colour. Effective decolonisation should thus happen in a bottom-up manner. Decolonisation within KU Leuven cannot happen solely according to KU Leuven's terms. If KU Leuven sincerely wants to make efforts to commence the long process of decolonisation, this cannot be happening in the Academic Council, the Executive Board or other higher and inaccessible decision-making bodies. These policy- and decision-making bodies are also exclusively, if not predominantly, white. Decolonisation in such spaces is per definition impossible. This is work that should centre Black people and people of colour. Decolonisation should happen on their terms.

Universities tend to resort to 'decolonial whiteness'⁶⁹ in their efforts to decolonise. Decolonial whiteness is when institutions claim they are working to be decolonial, but in reality, decolonization occurs on the university's terms and on white people's terms. Thus, the systemic oppression exerted by the institution continues. Whiteness is ever present, visible and subsuming the everyday life of us as Black students and students of colour. Yet it will not and cannot name itself for what it is and what it perpetrates: institutional racism.⁷⁰

We also want to warn for the dilution of the concept of decolonisation by tertiary education institutions. Often, decolonisation is perceived as inclusion work. Inclusion is not necessarily and is very rarely anti-colonial. Inclusion, in many cases, results in the preservation of the status quo.⁷¹ Decolonisation calls for the abolition of institutional racism and all the other -isms that often accompany it. It calls for the abolition of hierarchies that serve to oppress others. It calls

for the overhaul of the unworkable systems by which academia functions by at this very moment. Adding a select number of Black people and people of colour to bodies and structures that are built on principles that inherently exclude others like them does not decolonize the university. Decolonisation cannot be achieved by policy that works on a solely individual level either. Implicit bias trainings and diversity workshops alone are severely insufficient to curb institutional racism within KU Leuven.

Decolonisation is intricately linked to other societal challenges such as the fight against sexism, homophobia, transphobia, islamophobia, Anti-Asian racism, anti-Semitism, ableism, etc. Decolonising our curricula and KU Leuven in extension means tackling this too. The quest to decolonise the university and our curricula should not be divorced from the fight to abolish these forms of exclusion. Many of these forms of exclusion have their own origins in colonialism, or gained a strong foothold precisely during colonisation. The university should not see or portray the quest to decolonise curricula or the institution as a danger to the fight against other forms of exclusion. Many Black students and students of colour are also women, LGBTQIA+ etc, proving the importance of an intersectional approach to diversity policy.

Often, the quest for decolonisation is argued as unnecessary because we would supposedly be critiquing academics from other time periods with current societal and moral standards. This is a false argument. Colonised peoples also strongly protested and fought against colonialism during colonialism itself. This signals that their colonisation was against their own moral standards at the time. Not taking formerly colonised peoples' protest to their subjugation at the time of colonisation into account is a Eurocentric argument.⁷²

69 See tweet by S. AHMED, "Decolonial whiteness is no less occupying of space as colonial whiteness" (@feministkilljoy), <https://twitter.com/saranahmed/status/1275350086734811139?s=21> (consulted on 27 March 2021)

70 A. R. MEMON, S. JIVRAJ, "Trust, courage and silence: carving out decolonial spaces in higher education through student-staff partnerships", *The Law Teacher* 2020, 480; S. A. TATE, P. BAGGULEY, "Building the anti-racist university: next steps", *Race Ethnicity and Education* 2017, 289; A. TATE, D. PAGE, "Whiteness and institutional racism: hiding behind (un)conscious bias", *Ethics and Education* 2018, 141;

71 O. U. RUTAZIBWA, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Coloniality, Capitalism and Race/ism as Far as the Eye Can See", *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 2020, (221) 228.

72 P. GOPAL, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*, London, Verso, 2019, 607p; D. L. LEWIS, *The race to Fashoda: European colonialism and African resistance in the scramble for Africa*, New York, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1998,

It is not because colonialism was not (greatly) protested or disputed in Europe at the time, that this protest did not happen elsewhere.⁷³

Lastly, decolonisation is not a short process that the university can tick off a check list. It is a process that will encompass a long period of time. We expect the university to invest enough (financially, time wise, etc) into this process.

UNDIVIDED for KU Leuven is always available to discuss the implementation of these demands. We anticipate a response from the rector.

Leuven, 30 March 2021

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304p.

73 N. DUBE, "#LeopoldIIMustFall: De dekolonisering van Belgische universiteiten", Tijdschrift voor Mensenrechten 2020, 26. 28