

# Postcolonial and Decolonial Perspectives on Democratic Citizenship Education

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## ABSTRACT

In this theoretical article, I argue that postcolonial and decolonial theories offer critical conceptualizations and important insights for democratic citizenship education. Starting with the concept of agonism, I explore how postcolonial and decolonial perspectives both build upon and challenge notions of radical democracy. I argue that both perspectives provide interesting starting points for critical thinking, an essential part of democratic citizenship education. The perspectives point toward a profound problematization and historicization of democracy as a concept, as a system of governance through questioning the nation-state, and as an ideal to valorize societies. Despite their similarities, the two perspectives suggest slightly different approaches to education. The postcolonial perspective presents a critical and constructive approach that aims to deconstruct Enlightenment ideas while using them as a foundation for promoting social justice. The decolonial perspective highlights the inherent connection between coloniality and democracy and emphasizes the need for politics and practices of refusal.

**Keywords:** *postcolonial; decolonial; democratic citizenship education; critical thinking*

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## Introduction

In recent years, public debates on decolonization (SAIH, 2021) have actualized questions of decolonizing education as a contribution to democratic citizenship education. Among the reasons cited for engaging in decolonization are the importance of diversifying history (Chakrabarty, 2008), of highlighting minority and Indigenous histories and their ongoing fight for justice (Eriksen, 2021), and of creating acceptance for different knowledge ecologies (Santos, 2018) and different knowledge subjects in education (Jore, 2022). Scholars argue that decolonizing education using

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both postcolonial and decolonial theoretical lenses is fundamental for creating a democratic and socially just education. However, few studies have examined the contributions of postcolonial and decolonial perspectives to democratic citizenship education in schools.

In this article, I explore how postcolonial and decolonial perspectives can enhance democratic citizenship education in schools.<sup>1</sup> Postcolonial and decolonial perspectives refer to theories enabling the *analysis of colonial discourse* (Said, 1979) or *coloniality* (Quijano, 2000). These theories build upon similar analyses of colonial power relations and address epistemological, political, and ethical concerns (Sandset & Bangstad, 2019). However, they have slightly different focuses, which results in different educational projects they point towards. This study explores the potential of postcolonial and decolonial perspectives in broadening students' comprehension of democratic citizenship education in the Norwegian educational system. While the discussions primarily focus on the Norwegian context, they may also hold relevance for other national contexts, particularly those in the Nordic region.

Research conversations on democratic citizenship education are abundant (Sant, 2019). In line with Sant (2019, p. 658), I understand democratic citizenship education as floating signifiers (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) or "signs that different discourses struggle to invest with meaning in their own particular way" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999, p. 28). In this study, my understanding of democratic citizenship education is based on the radical democracy theories of Chantal Mouffe. I focus on their usage in democratic citizenship education in Nordic and North European contexts. (Iversen, 2014; Ruitenberg, 2009; Tryggvason, 2018). Postcolonial and decolonial theories develop and challenge radical understandings of democracy (Mouffe, 2005; Singh, 2019). I argue that postcolonial and decolonial perspectives offer interesting starting points for critical thinking (Eriksen & Jore, 2023), an essential part of democratic citizenship education. Both perspectives point toward a profound problematization and historicization of democracy as a concept, as a system of governance, through questioning the nation-state as a frame of citizenship and participation (Chakrabarty, 2008) and as a normative ideal to valorize societies (Güven, 2015; Isin & Nyers, 2014).

This paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, I briefly provide an overview of the scholarly debate on democratic citizenship education. Before elaborating on radical democracy theory, I offer an account of postcolonial and decolonial theories and their relevance to the Norwegian and Nordic contexts. The following section examines postcolonial and decolonial perspectives on democratic citizenship education. In the concluding section, I argue that postcolonial and decolonial perspectives provide valuable insights for democratic citizenship education, but that they imply different strategies. The postcolonial perspective presents a critical and

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<sup>1</sup> The article builds upon my trial lecture held prior to my PhD defense 28 October 2022.

constructive approach that aims to deconstructs Enlightenment ideas while using them as a foundation for promoting social justice (Chakrabarty, 2008). The decolonial perspective emphasizes the constitutive relationship between coloniality and democracy and calls for politics and practices of refusal (Zembylas, 2022).

### **Democratic citizenship education**

At the heart of education's social mandate lies a mission to foster democratic citizens (Erdal et al., 2021; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Solhaug, 2021). Citizenship can be defined as: "*an 'institution' mediating the rights between the subjects of the politics and the polity to which these subjects belong*" (Isin & Nyer, 2014, p. 1, original cursive). According to Stokke (2017, p. 194) modern citizenship can be understood as four interconnected dimensions: membership, legal status, rights, and participation. He emphasizes that membership and legal status involve cultural and juridical inclusion, while rights and participation are entitlements and responsibilities that follow from such inclusion. Politics and democracy are intertwined with citizenship, encompassing both legal, social, and political aspects of identity, trust, belonging, and relations with fellow citizens. According to Keet and Zembylas, citizenship education refers to: "education that aims promoting citizens playing an active part in democratic life through the exercise of rights and responsibilities" (2018, p. 9). Encouraging students' active participation in both the social and political aspects of democracy is a crucial component of citizenship education. To foster active engagement, students must adhere to societal values and critically evaluate them. Thus, democratic citizenship education has a dual mission: to transmit fundamental societal values to students while encouraging independent judgment and positioning. Therefore, education for democratic citizenship holds a paradox; pupils are educated to be democratic citizens with the freedom to formulate their own opinions, yet they are also expected to embrace specific values conveyed by their schools (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). This contradiction highlights a fundamental tension in democratic citizenship education between legitimization and critical thinking (Børhaug & Christophersen, 2012; Lorentzen, 2005).

The legitimizing aspects of democratic citizenship education must be viewed in relation to the rise of the nation-state, as education has played a crucial role in legitimizing democratic institutions and fostering nation-building. In Norway, national education has increased prosperity and equality, providing greater freedom for many people (Slagstad, 2015). However, the creation of nation-states has historically been based on ideas of unity and purity, which have often led to the exclusion of minorities. In the case of Norway, this has been particularly evident in the treatment of the Indigenous Sami populations, the national minorities, as well as more recent groups of immigrants. According to Gullestad (2002), the notion of equality is often constructed through the idea of sameness, which implies the integration of all members of society into a national community without cultural, racial, or social inequalities. The notion

of a culturally homogeneous nation-state has been used to promote social cohesion, belonging, and equality (Eriksen, 2021, p. 20). In democratic citizenship education, it is essential to critically examine and problematize the nation-state. In Norway, critical thinking about national culture and society has gradually gained ground in democratic citizenship education since the 1970s (Børhaug & Christophersen, 2012). Studies have shown that problematization and critical thinking around Norwegian history and society can be characterized as selective critical thinking, meaning that criticism is often directed toward institutions in other countries or toward less powerful groups, rather than being directed toward Norway's institutions and power structures (Børhaug, 2014). Exploring the coloniality of democratic citizenship education in Norway, Eriksen (2021) argues that colonial frameworks of knowledge can limit the potential for critical thinking by reproducing racialization and othering in educational discourse. The lack of acknowledgment of colonial complicity in Norwegian democratic citizenship education results in lost opportunities for critical thinking (Eriksen & Jore, 2023).

### **Postcolonial and decolonial perspectives**

Postcolonial and decolonial perspectives are collective terms for theories that enable the *analysis of colonial discourse* (Said, 1979) and *coloniality* (Quijano, 2000). The concepts of postcolonial and decolonial are not mutually exclusive and are often used to describe the same scholars, theories, and analyses (Teasley & Butler, 2020). However, some differences make operating with them as ideal types necessary.

Postcolonial theory relates to works in the tradition after Edward Said's (1979) *Orientalism* and Subaltern Studies (Chakrabarty, 2008; Guha, 1983; Spivak, 1988). Postcolonial studies have mainly focused on exploring the consequences of the colonization of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries. These studies illuminate how Western superiority is reproduced discursively, othering non-White people as exotic.

Decolonial theory draws from the works of the South American Modernity/Coloniality School (e.g., Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2000) and Indigenous Studies (Smith, 2010). Decolonial perspectives emphasize the constitutive relationship between modernity and coloniality. Coloniality was constituted by power relations and modes of knowing created during the European colonial period continue to shape knowledge production and material realities today (Quijano, 2000). From a decolonial perspective, Western civilization is based on liberalism, capitalism, and racism. Coloniality refers to how liberalism and capitalism are presented as the only means of achieving societal development and how these systems perpetuate racial power relations. Both postcolonial and decolonial theories promote decolonization but with slightly different foci. Postcolonial theory tends to focus more on the cultural and discursive aspects of decolonization, while decolonial studies often focus

more on the material aspects, especially by examining issues related to land and resource access (Teasley & Butler, 2020, pp. 190–91).

An often-raised criticism against postcolonial and decolonial perspectives is that they may undermine the notion of objective knowledge (Eriksen & Jore, 2023). How can we determine validity if we acknowledge a diversity of perspectives on knowledge? Simplistically applying postcolonial and decolonial perspectives can result in naive relativism. This challenge is particularly relevant to decolonial perspectives, which offer fewer tools for self-criticism than postcolonial ones (Andreotti, 2011). It is important to note that all these traditions accept establishing criteria for good knowledge. What is rejected is the alleged monopoly of objectivity by Western European science (Santos, 2018, p. 45). Criteria for understanding social conditions are linked to the intersection between pragmatics and human dignity. The quality of this knowledge must be evaluated in the context of its applicability and relevance. Decolonial perspectives argue that recognizing the limitations of Western epistemologies is necessary to acknowledge fundamentally different perspectives – including what we can gain knowledge about and how we can acquire this knowledge (Gressgård, 2022, p. 134).

Nordic exceptionalism refers to how Nordic countries have often portrayed themselves as separate from European colonialism and contemporary globalization processes (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). Despite research in recent decades documenting the colonial complicity (Keskinen et al., 2009) of Nordic countries in both historical colonial endeavors (Eidsvik, 2012; Kjerland & Bertelsen, 2015) and present-day globalization (Mikander, 2016), exceptional accounts of colonial innocence continue to structure the narratives of Nordic nation-states' (Jore, 2018; Loftsdóttir, 2019). Nordic exceptionalism also involves a self-understanding that is constructed as intrinsically different from the rest of Europe and portrays the Nordic countries as inherently good (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012, p. 2).

In a national context, exceptionalism involves selectively highlighting the positive aspects of the nation-state, while excluding or concealing its problematic sides. Gullestad (2002) demonstrates how Norway is often portrayed as a victim of war and colonialism rather than acknowledging its complicity in these events. Gullestad (2005) was one of the first to highlight how racism in the Norwegian context is often externalized and viewed as a historical phenomenon. This has later been confirmed by analyses of national curriculums (Røthing, 2015), teaching materials (Midtbøen et al., 2014), and observations of teaching (Eriksen, 2020). These exceptional narratives can be conceptualized as sanctioned ignorance (Spivak, 1999, p. 2), referring to the institutionalized ways of knowing that strategically uphold colonial power relations, highlighting how these exclusions are intentional. Sanctioned ignorance is often reproduced in educational narratives (Eriksen, 2021; Eriksen & Jore, 2023; Jore, 2022), underscoring the importance of emphasizing colonial complicity both historically and in present-day society. It highlights the need to decolonize Norwegian democratic citizenship education.

### ***Radical democracy***

Different democracy theories are associated with distinct political projects and philosophical foundations (Sant, 2019, p. 658), leading to different educational goals for democratic citizenship education. Agonism, a radical democracy theory advanced amongst others by Mouffe (2005), posits that no conversation can be free of social and economic interests. According to agonism, power dynamics determines the solutions agreed upon. Mouffe (2005) highlights the value of dissent as a constructive force in democracies. A central insight in Mouffe's political theory is that any political order in society is constructed around groups with different interests and opinions regarding the best solutions to political questions. This creates a perishable hegemony around the solutions that are continuously renegotiated. Renegotiation processes are led by demands articulated by social agents (Mårdh & Tryggvason, 2017), based on unfulfilled needs at the individual level, which are joined together over time to represent collective social demands (Laclau, 2005). Nevertheless, those who engage in political dissent belong to the same political association (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20). Collective identities, constituted by joint social demands, are constructed through the borders between "us" and "the Other" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 11). Emotions are fundamental in creating identity because *what we feel* is inseparable from *who we are* (Ahmed, 2004). In pluralistic democracies, debate and confrontation between groups with different alternative solutions to political matters are ontological characteristics (Mårdh & Tryggvason, 2017). For these communities of disagreement to function, the interlocutors must identify with the fundamental values of freedom and equality. This recognition is essential to ensure that all actors are treated as equal participants in the conversation and political decision-making process.

Within democratic citizenship education, Ruitenberg (2009) and Tryggvason (2017), amongst others, have applied insights from Mouffe's radical democracy theory. Ruitenberg (2010) argues that students need an understanding of social demands to acknowledge ethical injustices and inequalities in democratic citizenship education. According to Mårdh and Tryggvason (2017, p. 605), students should also act upon them collectively. Hence, democratic citizenship education should train students to articulate social demands (Ruitenberg, 2010).

Postcolonial and decolonial perspectives both draw upon and challenge radical understandings of democracy (Singh, 2019). By analyzing colonial power relations, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives offer tools for addressing the uneven power dynamics between minorities and majorities. These perspectives differ slightly in their approaches. The following section will explore some of these differences.

### **Postcolonial and decolonial perspectives on democratic education**

The analysis of colonial discourse and coloniality provides a foundation for critically examining understandings of democracy and its connections to European Enlightenment ideals. Although postcolonial and decolonial perspectives share similar

critical analyses, they differ in their approaches to these ideals and how they should be addressed. In the coming discussion, I first introduce the postcolonial perspective by focusing on Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2008) project of provincializing Europe. I will then present decolonial perspectives inspired by scholars such as Nelson Maldonado Torres and Walter D. Mignolo.

***Postcolonial perspectives: Democratic education through provincialization***

Postcolonial perspectives raise questions about one of the underlying assumptions upon which Western democracy is built: humanism. The Enlightenment ideal of man as universal and secular is essential to developing the forms of political modernity that emerged in Europe after the Enlightenment. The belief that all human beings are free and equal is a foundational principle in practices of participation in the nation-state, citizenship, civil society, and human rights (Chakrabarty, 2008, p. 1). These characteristics are often used to analyze and praise democratic societies. During the colonial period, Europeans maintained this belief about human beings, while the rest of the world was believed to require civilization before enjoying humanism's privileges. The notion that the colonized were not developed or human enough to govern themselves legitimized colonial violence (Chakrabarty, 2008, p. 4). These distinctions continue to be reproduced today and are used to justify global social inequality.

At the same time, Chakrabarty (2008, p. 2) emphasizes that the Enlightenment ideals of humanism, freedom, and equality offer potent foundations for scrutinizing social injustice. Whether in the context of women's oppression, workers' lack of rights, social class repression, or in the criticism of colonialism's racial and material structures, Enlightenment ideals serve as benchmarks. Chakrabarty (2008) claims that postcolonial scholars are obliged to utilize "the universals – such as the abstract figure of the human or that of Reason – that were forged in eighteenth-century Europe and that underlie human sciences" (Chakrabarty, 2008, s. 2). By examining the interplay between humanism, Enlightenment ideals, and postcolonial theory, Chakrabarty brings to light the complex and often contradictory relationships between them. While he critiques Enlightenment ideals by revealing their origins in Europe and the repressive tactics they are used to justify, he also acknowledges that these ideals provide a framework for addressing global social inequality (Chakrabarty, 2008, p. 20).

Drawing on these insights, Chakrabarty proposes a vision for the study of history that acknowledges power dynamics and repression while emphasizing the importance of human solidarity:

I ask for a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizenship in assimilating to the projects of the modern state all other possibilities of human solidarity. (Chakrabarty, 2008, s. 45)

Chakrabarty (2008, s. 45) calls this the tragedy and irony of the history of modernity and claims that this vision opens for pluralistic understandings of political modernity. Chakrabarty (2008, p. 10) emphasizes the need for a thorough examination of historical factors that led to the development of political modernity in local contexts and argues that we must examine how local versions of institutions like citizenship, democracy, and nation-states are modeled in different contexts.

*Transformative, critical–constructive entrances to democratic education*

In democratic citizenship education, Chakrabarty's insights point toward a transformative, critical, constructive project in which European enlightenment ideals are deconstructed and criticized while simultaneously serving as focal points for human dignity, solidarity, and pluralistic understandings of political modernity. This way, Chakrabarty's theory aligns with Mouffe's (2005) notion of radical democracy. While Chakrabarty's analysis is more explicit in critiquing the Enlightenment ideals underlying our conception of democracy, they both focus on human dignity, freedom, and equality as fundamental values, aligning the projects. Mouffe (2005, p. 31) articulates the importance of shared values in democratic interactions, while Chakrabarty (2008, p. 2) highlights the contradictory and ambivalent relationship between post-colonial theory and Enlightenment ideals. In addition, both Mouffe (2005, p. 115) and Chakrabarty (2008, p. 10) argue for a pluralized and contextualized understanding of democracy and modernity. Mouffe (2005, p. 115) argues that modern liberal democracy cannot be a universal solution for all societies—Chakrabarty advocates for comprehensive research on local developments of various versions of modern societies and institutions. By emphasizing these local variations, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in developing, interpreting, and practicing democracies and citizenship as modern institutions in different contexts. Also, Mouffe (2013, p. 35–36) recognizes Chakrabarty's critique of the imperial tendencies of presenting the Western form of democracy as the “modern” one and points towards how this has been a powerful rhetorical weapon used by liberal democratic theorists to establish its superior form of rationality and its universal validity.

Chakrabarty's (2008) transformative project has significant implications for democratic citizenship education, particularly through provincializing. To provincialize Europe, Norway, and the other Nordic countries (Jensen, 2010) must not be seen as a means to an end, but as a continuing process in which pupils can participate. This can be related to how we construct knowledge about and comprehend nation-states' participation frames for citizenship, civil society, and democracy. Thus, Chakrabarty's insights suggest that we should pay more attention to discursive acts of representation as crucial elements in the decolonization of education (Teasly & Butler, 2020, p. 190). In line with Chakrabarty, democratic citizenship education must emphasize how knowledge relates to power and how knowledge is created from different positions. Prioritizing multiple perspectives can provide valuable opportunities to embrace the various forms of knowledge. Students, teachers, and teacher educators



can ask critical questions regarding which views are included and excluded in the learning process. Conducting a critical analysis of how the imaginaries and narratives of democratic citizenship education always privilege certain groups while excluding others can be a valuable exercise. By doing so, we can identify oppressive imaginaries, strategies, and narratives that are present in education (Jore, 2022).

To construct complex and nuanced narratives of democratic citizenship and human solidarity that question and go beyond the nation-state, it is crucial to include ambivalence, contradictions, and power dynamics (Jore, 2022). One way to approach this is by critically examining national imaginaries and narratives that depart from democratic ideals. For example, one of the cases analyzed in my dissertation shows how *the Jews clause* was deemed irrelevant to understanding the Norwegian Constitution of 1814. Instead, the emphases of the narrative were on the Enlightenment ideals of people's sovereignty, separation of power, and freedom of speech (Jore, 2018). While the Norwegian Constitution of 1814 emphasized democratic principles, it also contained a clause that excluded Jews, monastic orders, and Jesuits, and proclaimed the Evangelical-Lutheran church the state church, making it one of Europe's most intolerant and excluding constitutions. To avoid uncritically reproducing exceptional narratives of how democratization led to the creation of the Norwegian nation-state, we must include the Jews clause in the narrative of the Norwegian Constitution of 1814 (Jore, 2018, p. 84).

### ***Decolonial perspectives: Modernity|coloniality|democracy***

Decolonial perspectives argue that modernity and coloniality cannot be understood as separate entities. Maldonado-Torres (2007) describes the modernity–coloniality relationship as follows: “Modernity as a discourse and practice would not be possible without coloniality, and coloniality continues to be an inevitable outcome of modern discourses” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 244). However, what is the relationship between modernity, coloniality, and democracy?

Recently, interesting discussions have emerged about the relationship between democracy and coloniality (Brown, 2010; Singh, 2019; Zembylas, 2019, 2022). The key argument is that democracy is deeply entrenched in coloniality. In line with Gordon (2010), Zembylas (2022, p. 159) departs from the notion that colonialism has served as a crucial vehicle through which modern democracies were established and sustained. According to Gordon (2010), colonialism has historically utilized violence to exploit resources and subjugate Indigenous communities. Such heinous acts have been justified by invoking the spread of democratic values, but this has led to the exclusion and repression of certain groups. Therefore, democracy's claim of universal freedom is inextricably linked to colonial practices of exclusion. He highlights an inherent paradox between democracy and colonialism, arising from the fact that democracies have historically engaged in colonialism and continue to do so.

According to Zembylas (2022, p. 160), comprehending the paradox between democracy and colonialism necessitates understanding the interplay between democracy, modernity, capitalism, and colonization. He brings attention to the significant

problem of democracy today—hardly any critique of it considers its inherent paradoxes or recognizes the ethical and political dilemmas that arise from its neocolonial tendencies. As Güven (2015) argues, global democratization is a new phase of colonialism rather than its end. Global democratization's claim of universality has turned democracy into a dogma and a tyranny (Güven, 2015, p. 2). Thus, a radical rethinking of democracy is imperative because democracy today functions as a global, political, and intellectual form of colonization (Güven, 2015, p. 3).

How, then, are we to decolonize democracy? Decolonial perspectives can be seen as both a critique of modernity/coloniality and a praxis that acknowledges radically different ways of being within the world. As Mignolo and Walsh (2018) articulate, decoloniality can be conceptualized as an option that is

not a static condition, an individual attribute, or a lineal point of arrival and enlightenment. Instead, decoloniality seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought. (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 17)

This way, decoloniality provides opportunities to think beyond the confines of Western modernity and envision alternative possibilities.

*Decolonial democratic citizenship education: Practices of refusal and moving toward the decolonial otherwise*

How, then, can decolonial perspectives inform democratic citizenship education? Decolonial perspectives emphasize the significance of developing strategies of practices and politics of refusal (Zembylas, 2022). This can create spaces for moving toward and rearticulating other perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Decolonial perspectives seek to break with and move beyond Western modernity. To break with modernity, it is necessary to refuse the hegemonic position and practices of democracy, as they are built upon and reproduce a racial hierarchy that excludes equal democratic participation. Decolonial theory implies a departure from the fundamental assumptions in Mouffe's theory of radical democracy. Sing (2019) argues in a decolonial critique of agonism that the theory emphasizes the principles of liberal democracy as they have developed as part of European political modernity. Standing in dialogue with decolonial critiques, Mouffe (2005, p. 115) has been challenged to present worldviews that acknowledge the limitations of modern liberal democracy as a universal solution for all societies through incorporating non-Western thinking and traditions. Despite this, Singh argues that Mouffe advocates for improving liberal democracy from within through critique and transformation. By not breaking with the idea of liberal democracy, the West continues to serve as an implicit reference and a normative comparison standard.

The politics and practices of refusal could manifest as a disinvestment from the liberal rules, norms, and relationships currently serving as the only available ethical and political framework of democracy. Zembylas argues that this approach could be considered part of a pedagogy of refusal (Tuck & Yang, 2014), which seeks to reject the hegemonic power structures of liberal democracy. This pedagogy would enable students to acknowledge the limitations of liberal democracy due to its colonial origins and challenge, reject, and replace liberal democratic principles with alternative practices that uphold decolonizing imaginaries (Mignolo, 2000). Zembylas suggests that education can engage learners in community initiatives that exemplify the challenges of liberal democracy and demonstrate how Indigenous traditions offer practical solutions.

The challenge for democratic citizenship education, as Zembylas (2022) argues, is to develop politics and practices of refusal that challenge the dominant interpretations of liberal democracy. This notion builds on a twofold analysis. First, one should analyze and confront the modernist/colonial roots of democracy and then advance an argument for decolonizing democratic citizenship education that rehabilitates the radical potential of democracy by inspiring politics and the practice of refusal that challenges colonial power (Zembylas, 2022, p. 166). In line with the decolonial focus on materiality, directing the politics and practices of refusal toward students' articulation of calls for action to redistribute land and resources is essential. One starting point for decolonizing democratic citizenship education is through Indigenous perspectives and knowledge (Eriksen, 2021; Smith, 2010; Zembylas, 2022). Singh (2019, p. 346) highlights that many Indigenous scholars view the assertion of Indigenous practices and traditions as a form of resurgence, which is seen as closely coupled with the refusal or turning away from the liberal–democratic politics of recognition and inclusion. This points toward practices that deny, resist, and reframe colonial, liberal, and neo-liberal logic while asserting Indigenous practices, traditions, and lifeworlds. According to Zembylas (2022, p. 166), this allows us not only to focus on “making demands on the state or other hegemonic institutions asserting liberal democratic rights such as representation, recognition and inclusion” but also to “enact a different way of life” both in the classroom and beyond (p. 166).

The decolonial perspectives can inspire critical and creative thinking about alternative ways of organizing societies and human relationships. Thus, decolonial perspectives involve imagining new possibilities and dismantling oppressive systems. Mignolo and Walsh (2018) refer to this as the decolonial otherwise. Although the decolonial critique may appear all-encompassing, its central point is that it does not offer prefabricated, comprehensive solutions, but rather encourages critical and creative thinking. One way of facilitating this type of creative thinking is by inviting students to be knowledge producers and participate in critical and imaginative thinking about questions such as: Can we imagine a world and ways of co-existing that radically differ from today? How can students' creative thinking offer valuable suggestions to teachers, politicians, and society leaders (Eriksen & Jore, 2023, p. 152)? In an

educational setting, it is essential to encourage discussions about pressing issues like land and resource redistribution. By encouraging students to think about big-picture questions, such as how to build sustainable and equitable societies, we can foster critical thinking and social change. Examples from Eriksen's (2021) dissertation show how students questioned the representation of Norway as a sustainable oil nation and challenged flawed and stereotypical teaching about the Global North and South. However, the conversation did not allow for further development of critical initiatives because the framing of the discussion was built on competence aims, teaching materials, and teaching that did not acknowledge these critiques. Eriksen (2021) argues that the students were unlearning critical thinking by learning dominant frameworks and discourses.

The shift to Indigenous perspectives and knowledge for decolonizing education is a complex endeavor with epistemological, social, and political implications. Engaging with Indigenous perspectives involves democratizing knowledge and knowledge production and supporting Indigenous and other minorities' struggles for land and resources (Zembylas, 2022).

### **Concluding remarks**

In this article, I argue that postcolonial and decolonial perspectives are relevant to critical thinking, a central component of democratic citizenship education. Both perspectives stem from analyzing democracy as part of European political modernity and reproduce Enlightenment ideals, thus implying a profound problematization and historicization of how we understand democracy as a concept. Postcolonial perspectives argue for a transformative, critically constructive approach (Chakrabarty, 2008), while decolonial perspectives encourage seeking ways of breaking with modernity (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Second, the perspectives also problematize how the nation-state creates participation frames in democratic institutions. Here, postcolonial perspectives accentuate the importance of building participation structures based on human solidarity, not the nation-state's borders. By contrast, decolonial perspectives tend to emphasize the modern/colonial politics of erasure and seek ways of rehabilitating the radical potential of democracy (Zembylas, 2022, p. 166). Third, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives criticize how democracy tends to be seen as a normative ideal to valorize societies and how the West figures as an implicit frame of interpretation and valuation. Accentuating colonial complicity is particularly relevant to a Nordic and Norwegian context because the Nordic self-understanding builds upon exceptional narratives of colonial innocence (Jensen & Loftsdóttir, 2021).

In addition to this, both postcolonial and decolonial perspectives call for including more pluralistic forms of knowledge, particularly local and Indigenous forms of knowledge. This is especially relevant given the limited knowledge base the liberal democratic hegemony constitutes for democratic citizenship education. A critical approach to this hegemony might involve promoting a broader range of perspectives

(Chakrabarty, 2008; Eriksen & Jore, 2023). This could be achieved by expanding the definition of who is considered valid knowledge producers and subjects in democratic citizenship education and questioning what type of knowledge is accepted as valid in concrete political issues. For example, when teaching democratic citizenship education from a decolonial perspective, incorporating Sami experience-based knowledge of *árbediehtu*<sup>2</sup> is imperative when discussing conflicts over land resource management. As this knowledge cannot be measured within Western scientific frameworks, it is not recognized by the Norwegian state administration as knowledge but instead presented as culture or tradition (Eriksen & Jore, 2023, p. 43). Challenging the Norwegian state administration's knowledge base used for land acquisition in the name of the Green Shift can enhance democratic citizenship education.

Postcolonial perspectives point toward transformative, critical, and constructive perspectives on democratic citizenship education. These perspectives deconstruct the emergence and prerequisites of democracy and use humanism to argue for social justice. For students, using a postcolonial perspective in democratic citizenship education could imply being invited to participate as knowledge producers and ask critical questions about the borders constructed by the nation-states through citizenship (Chakrabarty, 2008). At the same time, human dignity and solidarity are used as starting points for creating equal terms for belonging and participation beyond the nation-state borders.

The decolonial perspective on democratic citizenship education seeks to focus significantly on the constitutive relationship between coloniality and democracy and argue for politics and practices of refusal in a radical democratic education (Zembylas, 2022). This facilitates exploring and thinking creatively about other ways of being in the world, among others, based on Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. However, the creative potential in decolonial perspectives might be challenging to spot, as decolonial critiques might seem all-encompassing. If we are to break with what we know, where should we start to build new visions for society? Is this even possible within today's educational system (Andreotti, 2011)?

I argue that the postcolonial and decolonial perspectives offer critical conceptualizations and insights into democratic citizenship education. The complex question of whether we should continue to promote democratic citizenship education that builds on principles that promise liberation for all but contributes to a highly oppressive system requires several answers. We might need both transformations and breaks. Neither postcolonial nor decolonial perspectives offer ready-made solutions, but they allow different problematizations of democracy and power relations through analysis of colonial discourse and coloniality. These perspectives clarify the connections

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<sup>2</sup> *Árbediehtu* is the northern Sami name of experience-based knowledge that contains practical skills and theoretical knowledge. This type of knowledge had been developed and processed by the Sami people for centuries, and is transferred between generations through words, actions, and experience.

between critical thinking and social justice, thus pointing toward societal change. By creating and protecting space for asking new and critical questions that challenge dominant understandings of democracy, we open the possibility for the valuable contributions from postcolonial and decolonial perspectives that offer to enhance critical thinking and democratic citizenship education.

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