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Article

Toward a decolonial shift in citizenship education: Empirical insights into German classrooms

Malte Kleinschmidt

Leibniz University Hannover, Germany

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Highlights:
– Empirical insights into students' ideas on globalisation in Germany.
– Colonial and decolonial ideas in their ambivalences as the starting point for decolonial education processes.
– (De-)coloniality is not only about the past but also about the present and the future.
– (De-)coloniality is already in the classrooms but is rarely conceptualised in educational processes.

Purpose: This paper highlights some insights into the results of the study on decolonial citizenship education (Kleinschmidt, 2021) to contribute to the decolonisation of citizenship education in Germany.

Design/methodology/approach: The research is built on a sample of 44 interviews with students from the 9th grade in German schools, Hauptschule and Gymnasium. The interviews are interpreted using qualitative content analysis.

Findings: In the students' concepts of globalisation, migration, and culture, several different and entangled colonial and decolonial patterns were found.

Research limitations/implications: The study is a solid starting point for discussions of citizenship education and provides fruitful insights. Nonetheless, at least in Germany, the research on this topic is at a very early stage.

Practical implications: The findings are a starting point for discussing decolonial approaches to citizenship education, aiming for both a radical re-invention of the concept of the disciplinary field of citizenship education and contributing to the conceptualisation of citizenship educational practices advocating for a more just and less colonial world.

Corresponding author:
Malte Kleinschmidt, Callinstraße 20, 30167 Hannover, Germany.
E-Mail: malte.kleinschmidt@idd.uni-hannover.de

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1 INTRODUCTION

> Because all think: 'Today everything is okay. There are no slaves. There are no colonies anymore. Everything's fine.' But actually, that's not true. Everyone knows that there is racism. Or something like that. (Lara; Kleinschmidt, 2021, p. 206)[1]

Lara[2] is one of the 44 9th-grade students at grammar schools (*Gymnasium*) and secondary modern schools (*Hauptschule*) who are interviewed as part of the study on decolonial perspectives in citizenship education (Kleinschmidt, 2021). These semi-structured interviews form the starting point for the conception of the subject-oriented decolonial citizenship education developed in the study. Here, Lara points to the crucial point of the persistence of the colonial past in the presence. In this sense, I do not understand coloniality as a 'remnant' of the past, of the bygone era of colonialism, which will disappear quasi-automatically, possibly through transgenerational transformations. From the perspective of decoloniality approaches, coloniality appears to be constitutive of the project of modernity itself (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). From a decolonial perspective, an examination of the past of slavery and colonialism is particularly necessary to understand the inequality and power structures of the present. Accordingly, decoloniality – as it is so often misunderstood, especially in Germany – does not primarily mean dealing with colonial pasts as completed but rather as questioning, undermining, or transforming colonial structures of the present.

Lara's astute remark is in line with the decolonial approach. Her explanation opens up a possible spectrum of what decoloniality could mean for her: (a) global inequality and the injustice of the international division of labour, (b) the violence of the EU border regime, and (c) racialised differences. First, in the interview, Lara articulates the situation of global inequality and the international division of labour, which is perceived as an unsustainable injustice, using child labour in Bangladesh as an example. Children there work for "very, very little" money, so it is "usually not enough to live on". They "don't have a life which is as good, a life [like] we do have here", and they produce goods "for us … from which they can't have anything". In Lara's view, this situation is "almost like slavery". Second, Lara addresses the border regime and reports that people flee to the EU from war or poverty and are "usually sent straight back". She reports a case in which refugees were "put on a plane" after a while and "abandoned somewhere in the middle of Africa in the desert or something, where they starved to death or died of thirst". Third, Lara talks about her struggles with racialised differences, which she has to fight against to realise her dream of becoming a writer as a Black girl. Everyone would expect black people to do "sports, music, or singing". At the same time, her mother also tells her that "precisely because she is not white" – and therefore "not completely [seen as] German" – she should take a "better" or "really normal" job, as sometimes "you just don't get certain jobs… even though you're more qualified than others". But Lara counters this and thinks that she "doesn't have to do that", that she wants to realise her "dreams" contrary to these ideas and "influence the world in that sense".

What becomes clear here is that the topic of postcoloniality or decoloniality does not have to be implemented additionally and out of an abstract political conviction in education in Germany. Decoloniality is already in the German classroom. In a globalised, postcolonial society shaped by migration, the students' ideas are already shaped by it – the only question is whether there are the

[1] All German quotes appear in the English translation by the author.
[2] All students' names are anonymised and replaced by fictional names.

settings and the frameworks that allow them to reflect on this and to conceptualise the experiences made in this sense. This article will first voice some of the students' ideas. Then, it will explore the possibilities for a decolonial citizenship education. Therefore, I will start with reflections on the school institution based on my experiences during the research. In Section 3, the concept of subject orientation from a decolonial perspective will be discussed briefly. In Section 4, some empirical findings will show how colonial narratives serve as hegemonic frameworks that decolonial citizenship education has to challenge. In Section 5, by presenting some findings, the concept of learning to unlearn will be developed, which addresses the colonial patterns of colonial difference and sanctioned ignorance by proposing a decolonial horizon, as you find, for example, in the idea of post-communitarian solidarity.

2 SOME REMARKS ON THE INSTITUTION OF THE SCHOOL

The research process was created so that ideas about globalisation were initially collected in a very short questionnaire in several 9th-grade secondary and grammar school classes. The 44 single interview partners were selected from the 210 questionnaires. The questionnaires were analysed in the first step but, in the framework of this article, will just be considered as a tool for selecting the interview partners. Due to the highly socially stratified school system in Germany, the difference between the two school types can be seen as an indication of the different socioeconomic family backgrounds of the students. In 9th grade, the students are around 15 years old. In the narrative interviews, they were asked what they understood by globalisation and then kept them going reflecting on their ideas – the interviews took between 15 and 70 minutes. All real names were anonymised and replaced with fictional names (Kleinschmidt, 2021).

Before presenting the results of the evaluation of the interviews using qualitative content analysis, I would like to briefly tell a story from the survey process. This story is more than just an anecdote. I was in the teachers' room at a secondary school and discussed the implementation of the selection of interview partners with the teachers. They advised me to reconsider the selection. According to the teachers, the selected students were not able to "even formulate a complete sentence", spoke "hardly any German", and had "absolutely no idea about the topics, especially not about such an abstract topic" (Kleinschmidt, 2021, p. 31). These statements were accompanied by approving exclamations and laughter from the other teachers. They seemed to expect my approval as an expression of the feeling of belonging to the dominant group, based on the othering of these students, without explicitly expressing the normalising and powerful but still invisible marker of whiteness. Probably, these teachers were unembarrassedly voicing their biases based on their perceiving me as one of them. In these kinds of situations, my position in the field as white and privileged and at the same time advocating for decolonial change comes to the forefront, which always accompanied me during the interview process but also in the process of analysis without being able to resolve these contradictions but instead trying to make these contradictions productive (Kleinschmidt, 2021).

Despite this devaluation of the students, the interviews with the three secondary school students lasted around one hour each. After solving some trust issues at the beginning by being associated with the school where the interviews took place and probably due to my positionality as white and academic – the interviews were very productive and exciting regarding several topics. Memnun, for example, reported on his own experiences of being discriminated against by teachers and his observation of how a classmate suffered from discrimination. From his point of view, he was often seen as a troublemaker because he had black hair. About his classmate, he reported how the

teacher asked her after the summer vacation why she was now wearing a hijab, whether her parents had forced her to do so, and that she did not have to and that she could help her. Memnun reflected on these observations in the interview and analysed them as racial discrimination.

In her discussion of postcolonial-informed education, María do Mar Castro Varela (2018) emphasises that the reflection on and transformation of the institution of learning must be part of a postcolonial-motivated epistemic change. If education wants to create spaces to enable transformative, decolonial practices, the complicity of education with the production of hegemonic relations must be recognised following Spivak: "In order to find a way out of this double bind, those who teach will have to develop (…) 'an itinerary of agency in complicity'" (Dhawan & Castro Varela, 2009, p. 327). Decolonial didactics must take a reflexive look at the entanglement of educational processes with the (neo)colonial project. The subjectivising function of educational processes and the role of the school as an institution producing hegemony must also be considered. "If we read education as subjectivation, then it is empowering and subjugating at the same time. It produces and subjugates the subjects" (Castro Varela & Heinemann, 2016, p. 19). Thus, to put it in another framework, Memnun, as a student of colour, does not match the role model of a 'good citizen' in his school. Seen as morally and culturally lacking and backward behaviour, he is considered an anti-citizen. In this – decolonial – sense, Kevin Clay (2024) aims for anti-citizenship, addressing the potential "acts of subversion" which force the "legitimized citizen to bear witness to the oppression that has been normalized and institutionalized in zero-sum favour of his class" (p. 9).

Castro Varela and Heinemann (2016) formulate the goal of "consciously dealing with the violence" that emanates from educational processes at school. As an example, Castro Varela (2017) cites the fact that schools often reinforce the habit of "perceiving people as belonging and not belonging", which corresponds to an "internalized border regime" that "often unconsciously governs people who are located in the Global North in particular". However, this also applies more generally. Education can be used to engage the (limited) power of action that educational processes open up to "rebel against one's own subjectification".

This is what James Baldwin (1963) meant by the paradox of education: "The paradox of education is precisely this – that as one begins to become conscious, one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated" (para. 2). Following the rules would all too often mean "unapologetically accepting the hierarchical social relations" (Castro Varela, 2017). For decolonial citizenship education, this can be understood in such a way that breaking the rules poses the question of the political by raising the question of (non-)belonging to challenge the colonial difference by bringing up the unfulfilled promise of democratic equality. In addition to the decolonial tradition, such an approach is also inspired by radical democratic theory. Jacques Rancière (1995), for example, formulated a concept of the political that is opposed to politics and is understood as a break with order, as the moment when subjects leave the place assigned to them.

3 DECOLONIZE SUBJECT ORIENTATION

Many years ago now, the pedagogue Paulo Freire (1968/2000) emphasised that libertarian education must begin with the "solution of the teacher-student contradiction" so that "both are simultaneously students and teachers" (p. 72). Freire criticises an understanding of education as a banking concept, according to which it is assumed that the teachers have the decisive knowledge while the learners do not, and they then accumulate the knowledge to be imparted as if in a previously empty bank deposit. He contrasts this form with problem-oriented learning, in which the learners are seen as subjects who, together with the teachers, become learners and deal with the socially structured

world in which they live. According to Freire, problem orientation in citizenship education aims at a "process of critical awareness (*conscientização*) of social conditions and one's own involvement in them with the perspective of change toward less violent conditions" (Linnemann et al., 2013, p. 10). Therefore, in Freire's sense, problem orientation is always linked to a "change towards less violent conditions" (p. 10). Such an idea of transformational education can also be found in bell hooks (1994), for example: "I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom" (p. 12).

Traces of this thinking can certainly be found in the didactic discussion of citizenship education, for example, in the fundamental concepts of problem or subject orientation. As the *Fachdidaktik* authors' group has pointed out, a distinction can be made here between "instrumental and subject-related student orientation" (Autorengruppe Fachdidaktik, 2017, p. 62). The instrumental "student orientation" ultimately represents a "methodological bag of tricks" (p. 63) to convey content that is already known and considered correct. The students and their existing ideas are thus denied any value. One form of subject-oriented citizenship education is the approach of civic awareness (*Bürgerbewusstsein*; Lange, 2008), which makes the students' subject-related ideas not only the starting point but also the subject of citizenship education. This means that it is assumed that all students already have functioning concepts with which they orient themselves in society. Citizenship education can then create opportunities to deepen and systematise these concepts, bring them into conversation, or even irritate them with academic perspectives. However, the question remains – especially in the context of coloniality/decoloniality – how can this kind of subject-related student orientation work?

From a perspective based on radical democracy theory, the proposal was developed to use the political as an orientation – as a didactic compass, so to speak – for this form of subject orientation (Kleinschmidt & Lange, 2022). For teacher education, this would mean that future teachers should learn to look for precisely these moments of the political or to perceive their absence and to be able to deal with it didactically. Concerning coloniality, the question arises of how teachers can recognise this when colonial patterns permeate their own ideas. This requires a fundamental sensitisation and knowledge of decolonial practices and perspectives to deal with the tensions between decolonial and colonial student ideas. However, this knowledge is not new; in this case, decolonial "truth" would then have to be communicated. Rather, in addition to knowledge of decolonial theories and practices, an openness toward joint exploration and decolonisation with the students is required.

In his article "Pedagogy of and Towards Decoloniality", G. T. Reyes (2019) summarises decoloniality as follows:

> Decoloniality is an ongoing, agentive process that happens alongside coloniality. As long as coloniality exists, so will decoloniality. In education, despite how coloniality manifests in how power, knowledge, and humans are controlled, movements and people still demonstrate the agency to refuse, reject, rethink, reimagine, and recreate. As such, a pedagogy that visibilizes, questions, and dismantles colonial processes paves the way to reassemble approaches that map decoloniality. (p. 4)

Reyes (2019) makes it very clear that coloniality always goes hand in hand with decoloniality. However, these decolonial practices are indeterminate; to respond didactically to colonial or decolonial ideas, therefore, does not simply follow a stringent curriculum but is rather itself an indeterminate decolonial practice in the sense of the political of Rancière or Freire's open dialogue.

4 DECONSTRUCT COLONIAL NARRATIVES

In the analysis, the tension between coloniality and decoloniality is the central analytical tool to analyse the students' concepts. I follow traces of the tension between colonial and neocolonial ideas, on the one hand, and decolonial ideas, on the other. Do they reproduce colonial/neocolonial ideas, or do they transform, undermine, resist, and 'decolonise' them? Mostly, these two different perspectives of the binary scheme cannot be clearly separated but appear interwoven. My aim is not to label one specific student as colonial or decolonial but to analyse colonial and decolonial ideas as such and in their entanglements. By colonial or neocolonial heritage, I mean the reproduction of still-existing colonial concepts and the invention of new ones passed on to future generations, creating colonial differences and identity positions. In contrast to this, decolonial heritage would consist of ideas that put coloniality into question. Of course, since I look at tensions and not at clear-cut contradictions, these dimensions are entangled and full of ambivalences, and, at least from a didactical point of view that looks for ways to confuse colonial ideas, these entanglements and tensions provide the richest insights.

As mentioned, the dividing lines between colonial and decolonial student perceptions were by no means clear in the study. Rather, it was found that almost all students expressed great empathy or a feeling of injustice concerning colonial inequality and, at the same time, reproduced colonial patterns and thus justified these colonial inequalities. All students expressed – sometimes more and sometimes less – ideas about the international division of labour and the associated value chains, the neocolonial causes and consequences of climate change, the extreme wealth or poverty gap between the Global South and the Global North, the deadly routes of migration to the EU, or racism in the migration society. However, this knowledge and the fundamentally empathetic attitude did not necessarily lead the students to critical, decolonial perspectives or even the ability to act that way. Rather, it was found that these ideas were often framed by colonial ideas so that colonial inequality was reproduced and naturalised rather than questioned. The potentially critical knowledge and empathy with the "wretched of the earth" (Fanon, 1961) in neocolonial inequality relations is quasi-overwritten by these colonial narratives. For example, poverty is interpreted as a development deficit, deaths in the Mediterranean as collateral damage of a necessary protection policy of the richer nation-states in the postcolonial order, and racism is understood as a problem externalised to the past or the margins of society. Thus, despite the knowledge of many humanitarian crises, the empathic and critical impulses are, to a certain extent, overwritten by colonial narratives and thus depoliticised and naturalised.

4.1 Teleology of history

We can take as an example a student whom we call David in the study. David reflects on how to explain poverty in the Global South to think about ways to diminish it. His humanitarian and empathic trial ends in framing the reason for global social inequalities in colonial terms:

> Interviewer: And, um, how did progress come about in the first place? So Europe ...
>
> David: Well, Europe was ... Well, actually, ancient Rome was, together with Greece, the first great ancient civilisation. We don't know exactly why it emerged there.
>
> I: Yes.
>
> David: But that's just the way it was. And since then, because Rome and Greece had a big impact, the whole culture has developed. The Arab culture progressed a lot because of its

> proximity to Europe. (…) But in Africa, there was almost nothing. Until the colonial masters went to Africa, and in this way, a progressive culture came to Africa, at least partially.
>
> I: So, was progress, in general, brought to Africa by the colonisers?
>
> David: Precisely, yes. This way of life. (…) This idea of life beyond, to not live only from hand to mouth, but to build houses and stuff like that and not to wander around. This came from Europe, I think, a little bit. (Kleinschmidt, 2021, p. 110)

In this short dialogue, many colonial concepts are invoked: the idea that progress and development are genuinely European; that Africa was not part of history or civilisation at all until the colonisers brought it to the continent; that there is a legacy of civilisation and progress from Greece to Europe (or the West) that is at the top of the civilisational scale; that there is something like the civilising process with Europeans at the top; that African people have another, inferior mentality; and so on. The interviews I conducted are filled with colonial and neocolonial concepts, like the ones uttered by David. Not all the interviews sounded like quotes from Hegel's colonial writings about history, and not all students declared the superiority of the West so overtly. In general, there were some colonial or neocolonial aspects in all the interviews, but from time to time, they were broken up by decolonial ideas. For instance, when I discussed global inequalities with the students, all of them were quite aware of the injustices of the international division of labour and formulated the idea that all people should have equal opportunities. Also, David's declared purpose was to explain global inequalities, which he sees as unjust, and find a way to change them. By doing so, however, he reproduces several neocolonial ideas.

4.2 Paradigm of development and the colonial space-time matrix

In contrast to many other students, David expresses some basic premises for the colonial historical narrative. The majority of students use references to development paradigms without explicitly naming them. The desire for more equality is framed as 'they shall get to where we are'. These are central characteristics of the development paradigm: (1) 'they' are not yet ready, and (2) 'they' should become like 'us'. Following Escobar, Aram Ziai (2010, 2013) has characterised the development paradigm through the following three points: (a) Eurocentrism, (b) depoliticisation, and (c) trusteeship. I will briefly outline Ziai's model below.

(a) *Eurocentrism*: The development discourse is Eurocentric, as it declares real or imagined processes in Europe and the European settlement colonies in North America to be the universal standard. These particular processes are thus glorified as progress in the history of mankind. Their 'own' society is presented as the ideal and the 'others' as deficient versions of the same. The students also express this in attributions such as 'underdeveloped', 'not yet so far', and 'backward', but also, for example, within the application of the colonial space-time matrix through the imagined lack of order and statehood or culturalist attributions of stagnation (Kleinschmidt, 2021). The violence of colonial expansion and the effects of the coloniality of power on a political, cultural, economic, and social level are lost from view in favour of an idealised image of 'development'. On the one hand, 'development' here stands in the colonial tradition of 'civilisation' and the colonial space-time matrix, and, on the other hand, it continues in the currently hegemonic discourse on the development policy of 'good governance'.

(b) *Depoliticization*: As an interpretative grid, the development paradigm conveys the feeling that 'we' believe we know about impoverished regions of the world. It suggests explanations for a multitude of everyday observations and images. Instead of focusing on concrete social conditions

and (neocolonial) production mechanisms of global inequality, images of poverty in the Global South, for example, can be read as a symptom of a different historical stage of development. Around a quarter of the students interviewed included colonial or other forms of domination in their explanatory patterns; the rest did not. Overall, however, an effect that gives the development paradigm universal explanatory power can be observed. In the development paradigm, it seems self-evident that "indebted Third World countries and starving peasants share a common 'problem', that both lack a single 'thing': 'development'" (Ferguson, 1990, p. XIII). Extremely heterogeneous phenomena are characterised as a 'development deficit', making other explanations, processes, and actors invisible. This depoliticises poverty and presents it as a technical problem (Ziai, 2013).

(c) *Trusteeship*: These technical problems, framed as nonpolitical, are accordingly to be solved by experts who, according to the principle of trusteeship, have the necessary knowledge about socio-technological interventions ('development projects'). In the supposed distribution of this knowledge, there is an imbalance to the detriment of the Global South, often presented as "passive and incapable of escaping from its miserable state" (Ziai, 2013, p. 18). Despite all the rhetoric of 'helping people to help themselves', the colonial, paternalistic motif of the "helping hand from the North" (Ziai, 2013, p. 18) persists. Historically, such benevolent interventions in the name of development have often taken place against the will of those affected (Ziai, 2010). Instead of a change in power relations, such a depoliticised approach focuses on a solution that essentially consists of "greater charity on the part of the relative beneficiaries of the system" (Ziai, 2013, p. 18). The principle of trusteeship, in continuity with the 'civilising mission' of the colonisers, still determines the understanding and practice of 'development aid' today. Most students used the logic of trusteeship in their reflections on how poverty in the Global South could be changed.

4.3 Citizenship education against colonial aphasia

The development paradigm functions here as one example among many in which colonial narrativisation enables turning empathy and the diffuse feeling that something is wrong in this world into colonial patterns and, thus, the justification of colonial inequality in the present. It thus becomes the justification of colonial inequality in the present. The verbalisation of experience plays a major role in Freire's thinking because as long as experience remains speechless, language is meaningless, and experience has no consequences. Accordingly, he understands the concept of *conscientização* as follows: The term *conscientização* refers to the "learning process to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 35). In this context, Ann Laura Stoler (2016) proposes the concept of colonial aphasia, which can be translated from ancient Greek as *speechlessness*. She thus goes beyond the criticism of colonial amnesia. In her view, this term seems more appropriate than *forgetting* or *amnesia*. It is better suited to capturing the problematic and complex relationship between the colonial past and the coloniality of the present, as aphasia addresses both the active blockade and the lack of access at the same time:

> Rather, calling the phenomenon colonial aphasia emphasises both the loss of access and active dissociation. In aphasia, an occlusion of knowledge is the issue. It is not a matter of ignorance or absence. Aphasia is a dismembering, a difficulty in speaking, a difficulty in generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and concepts to appropriate things. (p. 128)

Decolonial citizenship education should, therefore, aim to question and problematise speechlessness in collective learning processes, on the one hand, and to overcome speechlessness and promote the development of a way of speaking and a language about coloniality and one's own involvement in power relations, on the other. This corresponds to a concept of education that understands education as the subjective "appropriation and transformation of self and world relations" (Broden & Mecheril, 2010, p. 11).

One conclusion could be that citizenship education must replace colonial framing with a different narrative. However, education does not work this way, as students are not a tabula rasa. Another conclusion that I would like to make strongly here is that the task of decolonial citizenship education is not only to introduce a new narrative, which would thus have the status of truth to be conveyed, but rather to enable processes of reflection, deconstruction, irritation of existing narratives, and to make colonial concepts themselves visible as part of a history of domination by making them the object themselves. We could also understand this as a process of decolonial unlearning.

5 LEARN TO UNLEARN: ABOUT PRIVILEGES, SANCTIONED IGNORANCE, AND POST-COMMUNITARIAN SOLIDARITY

5.1 Externalization and privilege

Deconstructing colonial and neocolonial framings is an important part of decolonial citizenship education. It is a necessity, but it is not sufficient. Coloniality is not simply false consciousness but is a constitutive part of the social order in which we live. Thus, it is this order that is at stake here. For citizenship education, settings are needed in which a different, less colonial order becomes conceivable. To achieve this, the first step is to make colonial structures of power and domination discussable. In the students' ideas, there were numerous examples of how domination was seen as natural and how one's own privileges were denied. Let us take one of these examples: colour blindness. In the group studied, it was obvious that the vast majority of white students claimed that there was no discrimination or disadvantage in Germany based on colour. I used this category to include statements on both skin and hair colour (Kleinschmidt, 2021). On the other hand, there are detailed descriptions of their own experiences of racial discrimination in Germany – mostly articulated by BIPOC persons such as Memnun and Lara (see above). Here, Lara reflects on the issue of this dethematisation and the role of education:

> I: Mmm. And do you have the impression that slavery or the history of colonialism doesn't come up at all in school?
>
> Lara: Well, it does happen. But it doesn't really interest anyone because no one realises its extent. Because everyone thinks: 'Everything is fine again today. There are no more slaves. There are no more colonies. Everything is fine.' But that's not actually true. So, everyone knows that racism exists. Or something like that. But somehow, no one sees that it's still pretty bad. And that it was actually very difficult to get away from it and all that. And that's somehow... Most people perhaps don't realise that history really happened. (p. 206)

In fact, the majority of interviewees did not mention historical colonialism or contemporary racism in the interviews. When it was mentioned, it was usually in a sense that localised it far from their own social standpoint. Concerning racism, externalisation usually works in such a way that racism is (a) located elsewhere (for example, in the USA or 'Africa'), (b) pushed into the past

(National Socialism), or (c) limited to the margins of society, e.g., reduced to 'uneducated' Nazi skinheads (Fischer, 2013). In this way, racism is externalised and denied as a present social reality.

5.2 German colonialism: "We didn't; the others too."

About historical colonialism, externalisation often works in the way that Andreas Eckert and Albert Wirz (2010) have pointedly described in the title of their article "We didn't, the others too". The other colonial powers are seen as the guilty parties, and the significance of German colonialism is downplayed concerning its short duration and supposedly small scale. This largely corresponds to the state's attitude toward the issue. There were three exceptions where students explicitly mentioned German colonialism, although they were unable to specifically name a German colony.

> I: You mentioned a few examples of poorer countries. So Vietnam or African countries. And why are there a few poor countries and then a few superpowers?
>
> Alexander: Yes, I think that's partly due to earlier times. With the world wars and so on. The fact that countries repeatedly failed to free themselves. So, France built colonies in Africa and things like that. And I think these colonies are not very strong. They are very weak. Because they were, so to speak, subject to France and had to hand over their things to France back then, they had to work. They had to hand things over again. And so on. And that was just an eternal cycle. And I think that's what created these poorer countries in the first place. (Kleinschmidt, 2021, p. 129)

As mentioned, Alexander is an exception here, as he drew a direct link between historical colonialism and current global inequality – and also named the role of German colonialism. David also pointed out: "But France, Portugal, and Spain had the majority. And England a little, too. But Germany already had a few" (Kleinschmidt, 2021, p. 114). In these interview sequences, the prevailing idea that Germany was, in principle, not significantly involved in the colonial project and that this history has not significantly shaped the present is at least partially broken. Only the German colonies in Africa are mentioned by the students – and then only by very few of them without mentioning the specific colonies – as well as the participation in the colonisation of North America by some. For historical-political didactics, it would be important to deepen and broaden the picture here to include, for example, Germany's participation in the colonisation and genocide in Central and South America (especially in Brazil), German involvement in the slave trade, and German colonies in China and the Pacific Islands. Overall, it would be expedient not to use the continuity of a specific colonial rule to understand current conditions but rather to understand colonialism as "a European project" (Conrad, 2016, p. 16), the understanding of which is necessary to explain the socioeconomic, political, and epistemic conditions of the present in their coloniality.

In addition, for a postcolonial-informed citizenship education, it would make a lot of sense to broaden or change the view of German colonial history about two further aspects. First, there is what Canadian historian Robert Nelson (2009) calls the saltwater model, which criticises a model of colonial historiography in which internal or adjacent colonialism is ignored by assuming that it is necessary to overcome oceans to think of a relationship as colonial. In contrast, some approaches emphasise the colonial and imperial dimension of Germany's relationship with the East (Conrad, 2010; Ha, 2003; Terkessidis, 2019). The students ' conceptions of the relationship made no explicit reference to a postcolonial perspective on Eastern or Southeastern European states. However, numerous implicit references exist to an assumed coloniality referring to East Europe (Kleinschmidt, 2021). From a postcolonial perspective, there is much to say about looking to the East (Boatcă &

Pârvulescu, 2020). A centuries-long tradition of colonial German policies and narratives toward the East – especially Poland – not only significantly shaped economic developments and was central to the construction of German identity, but it also culminated in the National Socialists' "General Plan East" (Panagiotidis & Petersen, 2024). Although rarely framed in this way in educational materials, the National Socialists themselves explicitly formulated this as a colonial project: "What India was for England, the eastern space will be for us" (Hitler, quoted in Terkessidis, 2019, p. 125). Second, the National Socialists' "General Plan East", the concept of "*Lebensraum im Osten*", and the associated war of extermination in the East – with 27 million dead on the Soviet side alone – are not only worth mentioning because of the extent of the catastrophe caused but also because of the added value of entangled history, with which the National Socialist and colonial past are remembered in their intertwining. For instance, the first German concentration camps were built in the German colony *Deutsch-Südwestafrika* (today's Namibia), and anti-Semitism also developed along the colonial difference that was constructed between Germans and Poles (Kleinschmidt, 2021).

Thinking of history and the present as entangled also means establishing a culture of remembrance that does not consider competing victims, as Michael Rothberg (2009) proposed with his concept of multidirectional memory. However, a strong imbalance can be seen in the current educational landscape in Germany. While the history of National Socialism has become a central element of national identity construction – sometimes in a very problematic and instrumental way (Czollek, 2021) – the colonial past hardly plays a role. This leads to what Aram Ziai (2016) calls double standards. He demonstrates this using the example of a current German textbook in which students are tasked with discussing the advantages and disadvantages of colonialism – in this case, using India as an example. He demonstrates that an analogous task for National Socialism would (rightly) trigger an outcry. As Aimé Césaire (2000) has already shown, these double standards can be traced back to colonial difference, which not least ascribes different values to human lives, becoming visible in the face of death.

5.3 Border regime: on the colonial difference and the metrics of dying

This metric of dying is also evident in another topic: the EU's migration regime. This topic has a definite presence in the students' perceptions. All of the students interviewed addressed the humanitarian situation of refugees in and around the Mediterranean. In their illustrations, many students painted detailed pictures of overloaded and unseaworthy boats and thirsty and suffering passengers. Almost without exception, the students judged this situation morally wrong from a humanistic perspective. At the same time, however, many students did not address any aspects of the border regime (Kleinschmidt, 2021). For example, some students think that a passport or money for a ticket is enough to enter the EU. They emphasised the supposedly open borders of the EU. What was not mentioned is that the EU's external borders are only open to people with certain passports or large financial resources. In this way, people's own privileges through possessing a German passport and the associated global freedom of movement are unquestioningly generalised by assuming that these privileges are a reality for all people. This way, the social contexts associated with power structures and the prevailing migration policy are ignored. Instead of these sociopolitical causes, the situation of refugees appears to be caused by a force of nature.

A second group of students recognised the context of the migration policy in the humanitarian situation and justified it. There was significantly less positive reference to the migration policy by secondary school students than among grammar school students. The latter legitimised the migration policies and saw themselves as representatives of the German state or the EU, with whom they

largely identified. In both of these groups, the refugees essentially appeared as victims, as having no agency. These two types of conception were contrasted by a third, in which the European migration regime was criticised in various ways, and the underlying colonial difference was questioned (Kleinschmidt, 2021). Before I turn to this third group, here are a few thoughts on the first two.

While the first group simply ignores the social relations of violence, the second justifies them. Quite a few explicitly accept the deaths caused by the border regime to legitimise it – despite the richly illustrated knowledge of the humanitarian situation and the explicitly formulated empathy. Although the deaths were presented as regrettable, they appeared to be unavoidable. In the reflections, those previously presented as people suddenly became numbers. According to Fatima El-Tayeb (2016), ignorance and indifference toward the mass deaths caused by the EU's border regime are only made possible by two assumptions: "The lives that were lost are worth less than those of European people, and those who died do not belong in Europe" (p. 55). This unequal value of life, or this coloniality of life, is most evident in the face of its extinction. I refer to this difference as the colonial metric of dying, which is a form of epistemic violence with very real consequences. Ghassan Hage (2016) understands this as a kind of imperial, affective morass, which is characterised by the difference in the exterminability and mournability of the dead, in which the lives of the colonial other – in Hage's case Muslim people – appear to be unequal. This affective morass encompasses us all and consists of a culture of selective indifference to the murder and death of some.

Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018) has developed the concept of the coloniality of migration in her examination of this complex. She uses this analytical tool to relate racialised capitalism to the migration and asylum regime. By racialised capitalism, she understands the constitutive connection between racialising and capitalist structures, which was elaborated in the decoloniality approach:

> Relations of global trade, the organization of waged and unwaged labour, the division of work, in short, the modes of production and social reproduction of global capitalism continue to be organised by the racial matrix sustaining the coloniality of power. (p. 20)

In doing this, she places the practice of differentiating between citizens as members of a nation-state and migrants as those excluded from this membership in the context of coloniality:

> Migration within the emergence of the modern nation-state in the nineteenth century in former European colonies illustrates the divide created between the insider and outsider of the nation. This divide evokes the logic of coloniality, as it creates a racial difference between the insiders, considered members of the nation, and the outsiders, considered 'migrants'. Thus, the dichotomy between citizens and migrants is embedded in a racializing logic produced within social relations shaped by the enduring effects of colonial epistemic power. (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018, p. 25)

With this concept of the coloniality of migration by Gutiérrez Rodríguez, the structural context of colonial difference can be thought of as having a momentum that is not simply a lack of knowledge. Rather, this "sanctioned ignorance" (Spivak, 1999a, p. 2) is rooted in an epistemic and social order:

> The coloniality of migration draws attention to this fact by addressing the links between labour, capitalism, and racism. Thus, the asylum-migration nexus needs to be interrogated as an object of governance through racial/ethnic and gender differentiation, as a cultural script for understanding society and as another grammar of thinking through capital. (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018, p. 25)

The third group of students has a different story about migration. For example, Max first talked at length about possible reasons for flight and migration (Kleinschmidt, 2021). In particular, he mentioned the lack of a state welfare system and political persecution. He brought his father's story of flight into play. First, Max highlighted the difficulties that refugees face when confronted with the EU's European border regime. At the same time, however, Max also cited the determination and creativity with which refugees pursue their goals. His father tried three times to flee from Iran to Germany and succeeded after two failed attempts. However, Max's account of the failed attempts also highlighted the variability of refugees' strategies. His first attempt was a journey – "as you know it" – on a boat to Greece. For his second attempt, he tried to cross the border between the Netherlands and Germany using a fake passport and a disguise of blue contact lenses and blond hair. On his third, successful, attempt, he took the land route and went on foot and by bicycle from Turkey to Germany. Max found that to be "really cool". This expresses a form of admiration for his father's escape story. Through this portrayal of the flight and the emphasis on the special strategies of circumventing the border regime, his father appears as an exemplary figure of the fugitive, and neither as part of a faceless mass nor as a sufferer who merely reacts to push-and-pull factors, but as a subject who takes his life into his own hands by circumventing the border regime. Despite detailing the suffering caused by the persecution, the gruelling escape routes, the failures, and the subsequent deportations, his father has agency; he is a subject. Max had derived a political and ethical judgment about the border regime from his father's story.

> I: And what do you think when you hear your father's story? That someone flees political persecution and then experiences something like this, so that he is sent back from the Netherlands. What do you think of that?
>
> Max: It really sucks, no. Because you can just let him into the country, it's not that difficult.
>
> I: Yes.
>
> Max: I mean, the world, the earth, isn't property or anything like that. Because if ... I mean, where is he supposed to go? He has to do something because otherwise, he'd die in Iran. And, um, in Germany, they don't seem to want to help him. So they didn't want to help him. (p. 286)

Max thus fundamentally questions the limitation of people's freedom of movement and border regimes in general. He undermines the seemingly natural right of sovereignty of the nation-state over the movement of people and implicitly argues for global freedom of movement for all. His reasoning is as simple as it is radical: the "earth" is "not property" for Max. He contrasts the injustice resulting from the restriction of freedom of movement with the hopeless situation of his father. Based on the assumption of equality of all people, he creates a decolonial horizon that undermines colonial difference by declaring the earth to be a common phenomenon that is not subject to ownership. With a handful of other students from the sample, he shows how a rupture in the colonial order can be the starting point for decolonial educational processes.

5.4 Learn to unlearn

Initiating or moderating such an educational process is no easy task. First of all, this must be learned in teacher training itself. The difficulty here lies not least in the fact that the subjects of the educational processes – including the future teachers — are not on the outside but are part of the colonial order. These considerations must also consider that the composition of teachers (including future teachers) does not come close to representing the diversity of the migrant society. Karim Fereidooni (2016) has produced a very revealing study on racism in the teachers' lounge, in which

he highlights this situation and its consequences for educational processes in schools in a migration society. Against this backdrop, it is crucial to reflect on one's own privileges, as these do not determine one's own perspectives but have a strong influence on them.

Regina Richter (2007) addresses how differently positioned students are affected by colonially structured lesson content. She asks what it does to a Black student if this student encounters racist presentations of history everywhere in which Black people are not portrayed at all or are only portrayed in a one-sided and negative way; thus, if this student is repeatedly told to be different and not belonging properly?

To stay with the example: As white-read people, this does not happen. The white subject position is naturalised in such a way that 'we' learn to internalise whiteness as such a matter of course that it is possible – and the rule rather than the exception – not to even notice that "in a racist society, it is an incredible privilege to be white" (Castro Varela, 2017, n.p.). The white subject position protects against countless painful experiences, such as "being marginalised; being rudely questioned and interrogated; being afraid in spaces that others would describe as neutral; being shamed and ridiculed; not being served". As a quasi-transparent experience, privilege is initially not perceptible to the privileged in everyday life. It is only in the actively created contrast to the everyday experiences of Black people and people of colour that it becomes clear that "whiteness is not the normal position, but the privileged one" (n.p.).

Spivak (1999a) describes this attitude of the privileged toward colonial power relations as "sanctioned ignorance" (p. 2) in the sense of hegemonically approved ignorance concerning colonial inequality. The invisibility of privilege goes hand in hand with racialised demarcation and racist practices of differentiation – "without reading this as a violent practice" (Castro Varela, 2017). Since racist knowledge must be learned, these subjectifications of subjugated subjects, as well as "imperialist subject[s]", can be seen as the result of learning processes.

The concept of unlearning was developed against this background. Castro Varela (2017) sees education as a process that should see "learning and unlearning in one context". She defines unlearning as the critical-reflexive reappraisal of one's own history, prejudices, and epistemes, which are learned but now appear as instinctive and natural. "If we can learn racism, we can unlearn it, and unlearn it precisely because our assumptions about race represent a closing down of creative possibility, a loss of other options, other knowledge" (Landry & Maclean, 1996, p. 4). Decolonial education, therefore, does not simply close a gap in information or knowledge; it also addresses sanctioned ignorance. Sanctioned ignorance consists of ignoring the powerful effects of coloniality and the resulting privileges. From the perspective of citizenship education, sanctioned ignorance appears to be the depoliticisation of relations of domination and inequality. Making the political visible would thus be the goal of decolonial citizenship education.

In their introduction to *The Spivak Reader*, Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (1996) paraphrase one of Spivak's ideas in these words: "unlearning one's privilege as one's loss" (p. 4). Unlearning privilege is often experienced as a loss, a kind of charitable relinquishment of privilege due to a moral obligation. Spivak's argument about experiencing one's own privileges as a loss is not intended to minimise the inequality and injustice underlying privilege. However, she reverses the perspective of charity, which implicitly constructs the privileged as superior. She points out that – whatever our privilege is based on, "race, class, nationality, gender, and the like" (p. 4) – it always implies an epistemic limitation by blocking other knowledge and perspectives: "not simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand

by reason of our social positions" (p. 4). At the same time, and related to this, the privileged positioning prevents dialogical relationships with other, unprivileged or less privileged subjects.

Despite all the processes of reflection that must be part of a decolonial teacher education, these contradictions do not simply dissolve. Rather, it is important to learn to work with and within these contradictions. In the poem "For the White Person Who Wants to Know How to Be My Friend", African American feminist Pat Parker (2016) reflects on the dilemma of friendship with white people. Her poem begins with the following two lines: "The first thing you do is to forget that I'm black. / Second, you must never forget that I'm black" (p. 76). This conundrum also applies to educational contexts. Neither the colour-blind approach, which denies difference and racism in equal measure, nor the approach that acknowledges and codifies differences is acceptable from a perspective that is critical of racism. From such a perspective, pedagogical knowledge about racist structures and reflexive practices are required to test how to deal with contradictions – or, as Spivak (2012) puts it, "double binds" (p. 11). This would be the prerequisite for opening up a racism-sensitive educational space in which the subjective preconditions of all students – and not just white ones – can be adequately taken into account and racialised inequalities can be discussed and reflected upon.

6 CLOSING REMARKS: TOWARD A DECOLONIAL IMAGINARY

With decolonial citizenship education, the colonial epistemes have to be challenged. To do this, a decolonial horizon, an Other, must be developed from everyday life's ruptures. As Max told us, we cannot accept the violence of the border regime since the earth is not a property, and this is already opening up such a horizon. This horizon can be understood as the democratic in Derrida's (1993) concept of *démocratie à venir*. In this understanding, democracy is not a system, not even a regulative idea whose horizon would already be fixed, but rather the non-contemporaneity of the present with itself, which refers to an Other. In this sense, the coming democracy is the turn of the democratic "promise" (p. 37) that carries an "opening to what is coming" (p. 82), which consists of an openness to the Other, both to another as the future of an event and a singularity, an *unanticipable* otherness and to the "*arrivant* from whom or from which one will not ask anything in return and who or which will not be asked to commit to the domestic contracts of any welcoming power [family, State, nation, territory, native soil or blood, language, culture in general, even humanity]" (p. 82).

To challenge the racial, colonial difference and to transform the epistemic desires, Paul Mecheril and David Füllekruss (2023) argue for a post-communitarian solidarity. They formulate the educational goal of "not being so attached to one's own natio-ethno-culturally coded identities" and thereby "widen the implied 'we' to the maximum extent possible" (p. 159). To do so, citizenship education must address the horizon of a different order. In order to match its democratic goals, citizenship education should "create spaces, settings and arrangements in which not only knowledge is acquired, for example about racism, colonialism, decolonialism, the coloniality (…) of today's world order". Such spaces, settings and arrangements are to include offers to advocate for a different order yet-to-come in which a "post-communitarian solidarity" (p. 159) is becoming conceivable.

There are no fixed truths about decolonial futures. Decolonial education thus tries to create settings in which we are not governed to that extent by coloniality and imagine an order beyond coloniality. Decolonial analyses like this one will not tell us exactly where the journey will end, but a decolonial approach to citizenship education is sure about the attitude of feeling discontent regarding neocolonial inequalities. Perhaps this attitude is better expressed by Lara: "Cause all think:

‘Today everything is okay. There are no slaves. There are no colonies anymore. Everything’s fine.’ But, actually, that’s not true.”

Instead of a ‘readymade horizon’, Madina Tlostanova and Walther Mignolo (2012) conceive this perspective as ‘learning to unlearn’.

> The decolonial option is not a new universal, a convenient project for the future but, on the contrary, a starting point where the future has to be made in the process of learning to unlearn. This is precisely what the Zapatistas meant in their dictum: a world in which many worlds will coexist. (p. 222)

In this sense, Spivak (1999b) pleads for a decolonial imaginary for which she confronts the logic of globality and the planetarian. The globe marks the imaginary of financialised, neocolonial capitalism, which is questioned and challenged by the planet: “I am therefore suggesting that both the dominant and the subordinate must jointly rethink themselves as intended or interpellated by planetary alterity, albeit articulating the task of thinking and doing from different ‘cultural’ angles” (p. 78). Spivak’s call for an “education into the planetary imperative” (p. 74) could very well see the light once Lara, Max, Memnun, and David jointly engage in the process of rethinking and collectively imagining a decolonial horizon that can open up possibilities of creating a radically open and plural alterity.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Malte Kleinschmidt teaches and researches in the area of citizenship education at the Leibniz University Hannover. His research topics are racism, decoloniality and radical democracy.