


Colonialism and imperialism in Austrian history curricula and textbooks (1945–2023)

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Abstract

The article considers the depiction of colonialism and imperialism in Austrian textbooks (n = 61) and curricula issued since the commencement of the Second Republic in 1945. The analysis indicates that textbooks made use of the freedom afforded them by state stipulations, which, while evidently taking a distinctly Eurocentric point of view, give textbook authors scope for taking decisions on the inclusion or exclusion of particular topics. The textbooks studied covered various aspects of this area of history that curricula did not list expressly, such as the impact of European colonial aggression on Indigenous populations. Simultaneously, the analysis showed a long absence from textbooks of colonialism's implications throughout history to the present day, and demonstrated that textbooks reproduced racist ideas well into the 2000s, with corresponding effects on perceptions of history among Austrian population today.

Keywords

postcolonial discourse, othering, eurocentrism, textbook analysis, European conquests

1. Introduction and current state of research

The teaching of history in schools, as Kühberger (2020, p. 83) rightly observes, has always found itself instrumentalised for political ends. History education emerged alongside, and in close interconnection with, the building of nation states during the nineteenth century; analogously, in numerous European countries, the concept of national histories to be taught in schools came into being in parallel with the establishment of history as an academic discipline (Popp, 2002). The way in which scholars and educators studied and taught the history of their own state endowed that history with political legitimisation and, at the same time, created distinctions between that state and other states. Today, various historians continue to consider that history education should communicate to learners some form of national historical canon (Mayer, 2010). History didacticians have increasingly begun to critique ethnocentric approaches to school history and the centring of a state's national past, advocating instead for an emphasis on global history (see, for example, Grewe, 2016a; Bernhard et al., 2021). In so doing, they make particular reference to the issue of colonialism, noting its continued coverage in schools, despite general references to the European context, from the viewpoint of national commemorative cultures (Grindel, 2008), and the fact that, alongside this, "not insignificant numbers of students with non-European or

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non-Western backgrounds find themselves confronted with diverse racial stereotypes, many of which are reminiscent of colonialist patterns of thinking” (Popp et al., 2019, p. 10). It is evident that textbooks produced in Europe are, realistically, never going to completely renounce a Eurocentric view (Koselleck, 1977). Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to expect, at least, that European textbooks will reflect critically, and self-critically, on the perspectives they take (Eberth & Röhl, 2021). Various researchers therefore consider that, in this spirit, history textbooks should move from a colonial representation of the world to a representation of the colonial world, which would entail an increasing focus on the history of colonialism and its recognition as a central challenge of and to commemorative cultures (Macgilchrist & Otto, 2014).

The arguments put forward by history educationalists correspond with those advanced within postcolonial theories and societal discourse (Grewé, 2016b). These made an impact somewhat later in Austria than in other European countries, likely due to the persistence, after 1945, of the myth that colonialism had not been an Austrian affair. This served both to distance Austria from National Socialism and the positioning of the neutral republic towards the colonies which had become independent. It is not until approximately twenty to twenty-five years ago that substantial research on the colonial history of Austria, or Austria-Hungary, commenced (Sauer, 2017, p. 420). The effectiveness of colonial, racist and orientalist patterns of thinking, which persisted into the Second Republic (Burton, 2021, p. 332), thus found little attention in research. Recent years, however, have seen a shift in sociopolitical discourses in Austria (Sauer, 2022), in interaction with more general political debates on racism, such as those sparked by the negligent homicide of the asylum seeker Marcus Omofuma by three Austrian policemen (Spanbauer, 2022). One strand of discourse in this area refers to the act of scrutinising the language of colonialism and its replacement with anti-racist language use (Kunz, 2021). The “N-word” (Dell, 2015) now carries strongly racist, pejorative connotations; and the term “Indians” (“Indianer” in German) similarly attracts a highly critical view (AntiDiskriminierungsBüro Köln, 2013) despite its current use by members of indigenous cultures, such as the American Indian Movement. Mounting attention to and critique around Austria’s colonial heritage is evident, for instance, in the current (2023) government’s agenda for its tenure, which defined that research into the provenance of artefacts collected during colonial times as an area of work and action; this led to the initiation of a first academic reappraisal of Austrian museums’ colonial heritage (Schölnberger, 2021). In 2022, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport appointed a committee of experts to draw up recommendations for the management of artefacts from colonial acquisitions currently held by Austria’s federal museums (Bundesministerium für Kunst, Kultur, öffentlichen Dienst und Sport, 2022). The production of postcolonial maps of Vienna (Hacker, 2018) and Innsbruck (Burton & Kuhn, 2023) likewise testify to the discursive currency of the colonial past.

In contrast, the latest annual report by the campaigning association ZARA (2023) indicates that racism remains a serious issue in various contexts of Austrian life. Societal critiques identifying the persistence of colonial discourse in Austria also point out its ongoing traces in the materials used to teach the nation’s children history; a “petition for a referendum” issued in 2022 and entitled “Black Voices”, called for “[t]extbooks, teaching and learning materials [...] [to] be reviewed for discriminatory, racist, colonial and [E]urocentric continuities and, if necessary, modified. The diversity of the population and the inclusion of Black people and people of colour as equal must be portrayed and represented in all educational media, teaching and learning objectives” (Verein Black Voices Austria, 2022, p. 2).

The initiators’ attention to textbooks in this regard is logical; these media provide a channel for the incorporation of current academic discourses and new research findings into what is taught in the classroom (Popp, 2008, 112) and for the exertion of influence on societal historical consciousness, given the most widely used teaching media in the teaching of history (Foster, 2012, p. 50), as studies have evidenced textbooks’ central value to and regular use in Austrian history teaching (cf., inter alia, Bernhard, 2018, p. 50; Kipman & Kühberger, 2019, p. 61–63). Although the content of textbooks is subject to curricular stipulations, they generally enjoy freedom of their interpretation, to a greater or lesser degree, which involve reflection of the prevailing social and political discourses (Hellmuth, 2021, p. 42). A number of studies, pertaining to various nation states, have explored representations of colonialism in textbooks, with a notable preponderance of work on history textbooks published in Europe. This research (an international overview appears, inter alia, in Müller, 2018; Popp et al., 2019) has found tendencies, in numerous nation states, for textbooks to initially ignore the history of colonialism, and long periods of time during which critical reflection on the topic was absent from these publications. Notwithstanding the emergence in more recent years of narratives that have begun to engage

with these issues, the depiction of particular historical events and the attribution of agency to various groups involved in them remain closely intertwined with specific national point of view. The extent to which textbooks have considered current postcolonial discourses likewise varies from nation state to nation state. In France, for example, textbooks have featured in sociopolitical discourses around appropriate postcolonial politics of memory (Otto, 2013). In Austria, by contrast, neither sociopolitical debates nor research in history didactics pay particular attention to this subject: some studies, however, have taken place on selected textbooks and aspects of these issues. A quantitative comparison of the content of three textbooks published in the period 2001–2004 (Kühberger, 2015) found strongly Eurocentric representations of historical events and limited coverage of the history of areas outside Europe. Analysing six Austrian textbooks for upper secondary school students published between 2004 and 2008, alongside books from Germany and the US, Bernhard (2013) identified numerous subject-specific errors in accounts of the history of Hispanic America, alongside popular historical myths such as the one on the flat Earth. The textbooks' narratives on the conquest of Mexico depict the Spanish as heroic and as superior to the Indigenous Mexicans, frequently figured as passive. A Master's thesis on Austrian history textbooks (Haaf, 2017) noted divergencies among representations in a sample of six textbooks for upper secondary schools issued between 2006 and 2013: a Eurocentric perspective clearly predominated in one of the books, while another reflected critically on Eurocentric terms and stereotypes, centring postcolonial discourses and those relating to global history. A linguistic analysis of textbooks for Austrian lower secondary schools approved under the curriculum of 2008 ($n = 14$) illuminated representations of the colonised world as a generalisable entity, as if individual pre-colonial histories and cultures had never existed in these areas (Porstner, 2020). Another Master's dissertation, by Martin Spechtenhauser (2023), analysed representations of colonialism appearing in a significantly larger sample of textbooks, with dates of publication ranging from 1960 to 2019, used at various times in South Tyrol, whose German schools draw their textbooks from both Germany and, significantly for our context, Austria. Spechtenhauser's work demonstrated the dominance of a European perspective – as manifest in the preeminent depiction of European figures, sources, and so on – throughout the sample, with the addition, from the 1970s onward, of a critical consideration of Europeans' actions, and the advent of contextualisation with reference to the present day around the turn of the millennium. Textbooks in use until and into the 1970s frequently "othered" Indigenous people, stereotyping them as, for instance, "savages" or "barbarians"; the research noted instances of the use of racist terms, albeit without conducting a systematic analysis of this point.

However, an extensive historical-didactic study on Austrian textbooks has not been conducted yet. Moreover, it can be noted that the state guidelines, which are the basis of the books, are rarely taken into consideration. The lack of engagement with textbook narratives is surprising, as students express major interest in the thematic field (Ammerer, 2022, p. 269 f.) and textbooks are considered objects of the postcolonial politics of memory by research (Fuchs & Otto, 2013).

Considering the fact that even states which were not "colonial powers" per se still have a colonial heritage that encompasses, yet extends beyond, artefacts of material culture in institutions, such as museums, that collect such objects an analysis of the transmission of colonial narratives and mindsets is also relevant for Austria. The study set out in this article attempted to reduce this research gap by examining (1) which guidelines on colonialism and imperialism can be found in Austria's history curricula (1945–2016), (2) how textbooks currently in use deal with these topics¹, and (3) which differences can be observed between these books and textbooks² published during Austria's Second Republic (commencing in 1945)³. To this end, I combined a synchronic, categorical textbook analysis of textbooks whose state approval was in place during the 2022/23 academic year ($n = 12$) with a diachronic analysis of textbooks issued during the period 1945–2015 ($n = 49$). I intend the analysis that follows as a contribution to a process of reflection with the aim of uncovering the structures that have emerged from colonial logic and that manifest in various spheres of societal life, including in schools and the teaching of history.

1 As section 3 below details, the current Austrian curriculum schedules the topic for year 7 of schooling; I therefore limited the analysis of current textbooks to works for use in this year.

2 Section 3 below likewise sets out how earlier curricula scheduled the topic. I analysed textbooks for the school years in which the topic was treated at the time the textbook in question was issued.

3 I chose this period because of the continuity of the political system and due to the existence of publications on the development of history teaching during this period (Brait, 2022).

2. Sources and methods

The Austrian state school system came into being through the reforms instituted by Maria Theresia at the end of the eighteenth century and has traditionally featured a centralistic organisational structure. Curricula, and their stipulations on the knowledge and skills learners are to acquire (Schönemann, 2014, p. 119–122), therefore cover the entire Austrian state; I identified them using the federal legal information system (RIS). Chapter 3 provides a descriptive overview of the legal framework which is the context for the treatment of colonialism and imperialism in Austrian textbooks and thus for the analysis that follows.

State approval issued to textbooks is valid for the entire country of Austria. On the basis of an agreement between the Ministry of Education and the Austrian professional association of the book and media industry, textbooks, once they have received state approval, spend ten years on the list of approved textbooks which doubles as a system for the ordering of class sets provided to students free of charge. I used this list, which is reissued and published online annually, to identify the Year 7 textbooks with current approval at the time of the research ($n = 12$). To find the textbooks which held approval for use at some point 1945 and 2015 ($n = 49$), I referred to the collection of textbooks put together by the Austrian Ministry of Education and handed over to the University of Vienna's library in 2016 (Jahresbericht 2017). Some series of books treat the topic of colonialism and imperialism across multiple volumes, as one volume always covers one specific school year and curricula may stipulate the topic's teaching in more than one year. In these cases, I counted these volumes together, as a single work. I selected a textbook for analysis either if it was a completely new publication, issued after 1945, or if it was a new edition of an existing publication whose text and/or graphics differed from previous editions. I did not include workbooks issued as companion volumes to some textbooks, be these current or older books. To limit the volume of data included and to restrict the analysis to those topics that appear in all books from 1945–2015, I analysed only chapters that explored colonialism or imperialism in the modern period. Chapters or passages in the books on topics such as the American War of Independence, colonial wars, and twentieth-century processes of decolonisation did not occur in all books, so I did not include them in the analysis.

I used MAXQDA to conduct a categorical analysis of scanned textbook chapters on the topic of colonialism and imperialism (on the methodology used, cf., *inter alia*, Schreiber, 2016); where a topic appeared in more than one volume of a textbook, I incorporated these chapters or passages into a single PDF file. Following the criteria for analysis proposed by Hinz und Meyer-Hamme (2016, 137), I included in the analysis the text written by the textbooks' authors, historical sources, representations of historical content, and tasks set for learners, in all cases where these referred to the topics of colonialism or imperialism. The length and number of the relevant passages in the textbooks varied greatly, as is evident from the codings; the lowest quantity is 23, the highest 128. The system of categories I created, using an inductive process, ultimately encompassed 110 codes, emerging from two rounds of coding; the exceptions were seven principal codes, which I defined in advance of the coding process on the basis of the inclusion criteria set out above, of my knowledge of Austrian curricula in this area, and of the findings of previous work (Spechtenhauser, 2023). These categories were: 1: Eurocentrism and "othering"; 2: the direct impact of colonialism and imperialism; 3: the present-day impact of colonialism and imperialism; 4: the depiction of Indigenous cultures; 5: historical sources; 6: representations of historical content; 7: tasks for learners. Categories 1 to 4 refer to text written by the books' authors.

I excluded from the analysis any text, representations of historical content⁴, historical sources and tasks for learners which made reference to the so-called "discovery" ("Entdeckung") of non-European territories, or to their "discoverers" or European nations' policies relating to voyages of "discovery". This exclusion covered, for example, all images and information about Columbus' voyages to the Americas and his arrival in the Bahamas; all maps only showing various voyages of "discovery" (Columbus, da Gama, Magellan, etc.); details of later expeditions to non-European places and the people who undertook them; and the impact of imperialism on the global geopolitical situation, including such issues as nationalism and the outbreak of the First World War. A further criterion for exclusion was the impossibility of allocating a passage of text, a task, a historical source or representation of historical content to any of the categories,

4 Like sources, these representations of historical content are distinguishable from authorial text by their distinct graphic design.

either because they appeared only sporadically in the textbooks or because no particular category unambiguously matched the data. One example of such an instance occurs in *Zeitbilder 3* (2018, p. 35), which sets learners the task of composing a talk about Columbus in which they “describe [their] feelings” (“Schreibe eine Rede über Kolumbus, in der du deine Gefühle beschreibst.”), but does not stipulate whether they should refer to his voyages, to Indigenous people, to his return home, and/or to other aspects of his life. There were similar difficulties in categorising images that, due to missing captions or descriptions, I was unable to identify as either a historical source or a representation of historical content. An instance of this is an illustration showing Hernán Cortés with Indigenous people in *Unsere Vergangenheit 3* (2020, p. 47).

I permitted the double coding of data, provided the codes were not mutually exclusive with regard to the excerpts’ content. Content was the determining criterion for coding; instances of content related to one another were recorded under one code. The smallest coding unit was one sentence. For example, I coded the sentence “Imperialistische Staaten machten fremde Länder zu politisch und wirtschaftlich abhängigen Kolonien.” (“Imperialist states turned foreign countries into politically and economically dependent colonies.”) in the textbook *Zeiten Völker Kulturen 2* (1987, p. 125) under the categories “Aufteilung der Welt” (“Dividing up the world”) and “Wirtschaftliche Ausbeutung” (“Economic exploitation”). I allocated a total of 3710 codes to excerpts of data; this count includes some passages of text which I had to code in two parts due to layout issues, such as the text extending across two columns or a double-page spread. For some topics, I coded textual and visual sources separately, one example being 38 images relating to the category “Dividing up the world” (37 cartoons and one drawing on the Berlin Conference of 1884/85).

I made particular use of the MAXQDA functions “Code Matrix Browser”, “Crosstabulation” and “Interactive Segment Matrix”, as they enabled me to compare, quantitatively and qualitatively, textbooks produced in line with various different curricula (Brait, 2022). As an example of the analysis made possible by these functionalities, the code matrix browser for the code “AT Rassismus 20./21. Jh.” (“Text on racism, 20th/21st centuries”), categorised under the principal code “Folgen bis heute” (“Consequences to the present day”), the code Q “Rassismus 20./21. Jh.” (“Sources on racism, 20th/21st centuries”), under the principal code “Quellen” (“Sources”), and the code AA “Rassismus 20./21. Jh.” (“tasks for learners on racism, 20th/21st centuries”), under the principal code “Arbeitsaufträge” (“tasks for learners”), shows that the only works to raise issues of present-day racism in text written by the books’ authors and in historical sources were those published following the issuance of the 2008 curriculum, whereas learners’ tasks on present-day racism appeared in a textbook approved for use under the 1985/86 curriculum. Due to the large variety of textbook content, only the codes which occurred the most frequently were taken into account in the following analysis.

3. Curricular stipulations

This section discusses only those curricula for the years of schooling in which colonialism and imperialism occur. Austria’s first post-Second World War curricula for lower secondary schools, attended by learners aged 10 to 14, were provisionally passed in 1946 (Zl. 28.520-IV/12). The content stipulated for the teaching and learning of history consisted in a chronological sequence of historical events and developments, listed using keywords. The list for Year 7 contains the term “discoveries” (“Entdeckungen”); the Year 8 list includes the “aspiration of Great Powers for international standing” (“Streben der Großmächte nach Weltgeltung”). These words and phrases bear witness to a distinctly Eurocentric perspective in this curriculum, which additionally appears to limit its consideration of colonialism’s impact to competition among the European Great Powers’, omitting any reference to slavery or to the acts of destruction committed against Indigenous cultures. This, however, would not necessarily have prevented textbooks from addressing such facets of the issues, given the brevity of the wording in the lists.

The curriculum issued in 1963 (BGBl. 134/1963) for a particular, non-academically selective type of lower secondary school (Hauptschule) stipulates the treatment of “discoveries and their consequences” (“Entdeckungen und ihre Folgen”) in Year 7, albeit without following up on this apparent introduction of nuance by providing a more detailed definition of these “consequences”; the use of the term “discoveries” demonstrates the persistence of a Eurocentric point of view. The Year 8 syllabus incorporates the topic of “imperialism, colonialism and global trade”, similarly expanding to a degree on the coverage of this area stipulated in 1946, yet re-

fraining, like the Year 7 list, from expressly specifying aspects of the topic, such as the impact on Indigenous cultures. This lack of detail gives the textbooks room for interpretation as to the topic's teaching. The Year 7 curriculum for academically selective lower secondary schools (Allgemeinbildende höhere Schulen), issued one year subsequently (BGBl. 163/1964), offered still greater freedom of interpretation, referring only, and distinctly Eurocentrically, to "conquests of new continents" ("Entdeckung neuer Kontinente"). The impact and implications of the so-called discoveries, then, were not explicitly prescribed as a topic for academically selective schools (Allgemeinbildende höhere Schule, AHS). As in 1946, the Year 8 AHS curriculum references "the aspiration of Great Powers for international standing".

The curricula issued in 1985/86 for both types of lower secondary school referenced above (BGBl. 78/1985, BGBl. 88/1985, BGBl. 441/1986, BGBl. 591/1986) called for history lessons to "awaken historical and political consciousness" in learners, drawing on the fundamental tenets of democracy. These curricula are the first to incorporate principles for the teaching of history which have retained their validity to the present day, including the pointing out of correspondences between past events and the present. The curricula require, for the first time, the use of historical sources, selected visual material, audio-visual resources and eyewitness accounts in Austrian history classrooms. They remain chronologically structured, and evince some changes in the years of schooling in which particular periods or topics are treated. The Year 6 syllabus includes the topic of "discoveries and their political, economic and social consequences" ("Entdeckungen und ihre politischen, wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Folgen"), in a fashion somewhat more specific than in previous curricula, albeit maintaining a Eurocentric angle on the matter. The list of topics for Year 7 features "colonialism at the beginning of the modern period – mercantilist colonial policy" ("Kolonialismus am Beginn der Neuzeit – merkantilistische Kolonialpolitik"); "causes and types of imperialistic colonial policy" ("Ursachen und Formen imperialistischer Kolonialpolitik"), "consequences of European rule for the colonised people" ("Folgen der europäischen Herrschaft für die Kolonialvölker"), "the Europeanisation of the Earth" ("Die Europäisierung der Erde"), and "imperialistic power policies and national tensions as causes of World War I" ("Imperialistische Machtpolitik und nationale Spannungen als Ursachen des Ersten Weltkrieges"). This is the first explicit reference, in Austrian lower secondary school curricula, to the impact on Indigenous cultures of the European appropriation of lands. This curriculum is readable as a response to calls, first raised in Europe-based academic discourses in the 1970s (Conrad, 2015, p. 14). for a renunciation of Eurocentrism and for the dedication of equal coverage, in history education, to the history of all cultures.

Curricular reforms undertaken in the year 2000 (BGBl. II 133/2000, BGBl. II 134/2000) assigned the study of an extensive period, commencing in the early modern age and concluding at the end of the First World War, to the seventh year of schooling, which is year 3 of lower secondary school. One topic scheduled for this school year was "encounter and confrontation – Europe and the world from discoveries to the European expansion in the Age of Imperialism" ("Begegnung und Konfrontation – Europa und die Welt von den Entdeckungen bis zur europäischen Expansion im Zeitalter des Imperialismus"). This curriculum contains, in comparison to the curricula of the 1980s, significantly fewer prescribed topics related to the European "discoveries". A new curriculum for all lower secondary schools, which came into effect in 2008 (BGBl. II 290/2008), expanded the subject of history and social studies to incorporate civic education. It was also the first curriculum to set out stipulations for the subject-specific skills learners are to acquire, in line with the advent of competency-based education. In a manner similar to the curricula of the 1960s, these curricula do not delineate the topics to be covered in detail. The list of topics scheduled for Year 7, for instance, features the phrase "discoveries that have changed the world" ("Entdeckungen, die die Welt verändert haben"); the word "discoveries", as previously, entails a clear Eurocentric perspective. This curriculum differs from previous iterations in that it does not require the treatment of imperialism during the study of the later modern period – which of course, does not mean that textbooks were not permitted to cover the topic.

The lower secondary school curriculum which became effective at the commencement of the 2016/2017 academic year (BGBl. 113/2016) departs from the chronological structure of prior curricula, setting out its content by topic, and going into greater detail on this content than did previous curricula. The topics included likewise underwent changes, notably including a shift of emphasis from Austrian history towards European and global history (Brait, 2022). One of the nine topic areas scheduled for Year 7 is dedicated to "encounters between us and the Other", literally "[our] own and the foreign" ("Begegnungen zwischen dem Eigenen und dem Fremden"); one of the stipulations pertaining to this topic is that learners discuss the impact of colonialism and imperialism on the present time, while another stipulation calls for students to learn to per-

ceive and critique racist conceptions stemming from the age of imperialism. Distinguishing itself from the broad space for interpretation that previous curricula supplied, this curriculum requires teachers and learners more unambiguously to address, in detail, the impact of modern European colonial aggression, and makes the first express stipulation that students engage with the issue of racism in the present day and its connection to the colonial past. The curriculum's wording further indicates clearly an expectation that students engage actively with the topics listed.

4. Colonialism and imperialism in Austrian textbooks

The sections that follow explore the depiction of colonialism and imperialism in current textbooks (4.1) and compare it with depictions in books from the period 1945–2015 (4.2). Both of these sections follow the same structure, commencing with exploration of how the books depict Indigenous cultures and following this with examination of the immediate and then the longer-term impacts of colonialism; this pattern corresponds to the arrangement of these themes in some textbooks, one example being *GO! Geschichte 3* (2021). In other words, most of the excerpts coded under the overarching topic of Indigenous cultures tend to occur towards the beginning of the relevant narratives, while most of those categorizable as relating to long-term impacts appear towards their end. These sections conclude with considerations of the extent to which the textbooks in question can be considered Eurocentric, referring back to concepts that were central to prior studies (Spechtenhauser, 2023). I cover the findings in relation to their themes on the basis of the codings, discussing – where they supply examples of the phenomena under analysis – text written by the books' authors, historical sources and representations of historical content, and tasks for learners. I supply charts to supplement to the textual analysis. Before discussing the findings of the analysis, it is useful at this juncture to note the marked changes, over time, in the design of textbooks; while books published until the mid-1970s were in black and white, largely consisting of text supplemented by some historical sources and representations of historical content, subsequent publications successively increased the proportions of the latter and significantly expanded the tasks intended for learners, that had previously been more isolated and very brief.

4.1 Colonialism and imperialism in current textbooks

Textbooks in current use, in line with curricular stipulations, give extensive coverage to the issue of colonialism and imperialism. All the textbooks currently in use discuss what discourse frequently terms “advanced civilisations” (“Hochkulturen”) and the immediate and long-term impacts of the European policies implemented subsequent to Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Bahamas in 1492. Pertaining to each theme, I found text written by textbook authors, historical sources, representations of historical content, and tasks for learners.

4.1.1 Depictions of Indigenous cultures

Six textbooks contain text written by their authors that describes Indigenous cultures; some of these books do so in brief summary pieces. *Genial Duo 3* (2020, p.1) is one instance of such a summary treatment; it states that in Central and South America, the foremost civilisations were the Aztecs, the Incas, and the Maya, who grew corn, potatoes and cocoa, used irrigation systems and built large cities, although the wheel was unknown to them. Other textbooks consider Indigenous cultures in more detail, with the largest number referenced in *Meine Geschichte 3* (2018, p. 16), which lists the Incas, Maya, Native Americans (of the North American regions), the Himba and Herero. The books always mention these civilisations' technical achievements and distinctive characteristics; *Geschichte für alle 3* (2018, p. 13), to name an example, tells learners that the Aztecs used pictography, lived in large cities and venerated many gods. Six textbooks use reconstructive drawings for the purpose of illustrating particular Indigenous cultures; five of these feature Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital city. Eight textbooks include a map showing the settlements that existed on the American continent prior to European colonisation.

Historical sources in the textbooks provide additional material from which pupils can learn about Indigenous cultures. Two books incorporate contemporary pictorial sources as examples of the Aztec codices: an excerpt from the illuminated manuscript Codex Magliabechiano appears in *Unsere Vergangenheit 3* (2020, p. 47), and excerpts from the Codex Mendoza in

GO! Geschichte 3 (2021, p. 16f.). Both of them are historical sources which came into being with the involvement of Indigenous people or are based on pre-Columbian illuminated manuscripts. Other sources used in the books on the lives and customs of Indigenous peoples are more evidently European in their points of view, originating from European creators; the authors chose sources that had a lasting impact on Europeans' image of Indigenous cultures. An example here is a woodcut appearing in *querdenken 2* (2023, p. 28), taken from the travelogue of Hans Staden and showing an act of cannibalism; learners are set a task on this source that asks them to evaluate the long-term impact of its depiction of this scene. The extremely controversial discussion taking place in academic research around the extent and significance of cannibalism among the Aztecs (Wilkoosz, 2015) would undoubtedly go beyond the scope of the task for 10- to 14-year-old pupils.

Nine textbooks publish textual sources written by European authors on life in Indigenous culture; *GO! Geschichte 3* (2021, p. 19), for instance, cites three passages from a report by Amerigo Vespucci, with accompanying tasks, one of which prompts learners to identify the author's stance on Indigenous people. Indigenous textual sources occur in seven textbooks. One of these sources, in *überall Geschichte 3* (2018, p. 64), is an account by an Indigenous African man ("Afrikaner") of the construction of transport routes in nineteenth-century Tanzania. Eight books reproduce illustrations showing Indigenous works of art. Four of these feature an Aztec feather headdress, considered the only existing artefact of its type in the world and currently on display in Vienna's Weltmuseum, having arrived in Austria by a route and means as yet unidentified by researchers. Yet just two of these books reference the artefact's history (Weltmuseum 2023). Eight textbooks incorporate pictorial sources which focus on Indigenous people's appearance.

4.1.2 Direct or immediate impacts of European colonial policies

All textbooks that are approved for current use (at the time of writing) cover the immediate implications of colonialism for Indigenous cultures and detail the subjugation and forced migration of Indigenous peoples and the devastation inflicted on their cultures. Eight textbooks detail the destruction of the Aztec empire, and six do the same in relation to the Inca empire. Only one textbook speaks of a "tribal genocide"; two books apply the term "genocide" ("Völkermord") exclusively to the violent suppression of the Herero uprising, and these are indeed the only two books to refer to this event at all. Likewise, the Boxer uprising features in only two textbooks. Four textbooks in total provide a general discussion of resistance to colonialism offered by Indigenous people. *Unsere Vergangenheit 3* (2020, p. 57) states that, during the "conquest" ("Eroberung") of Africa, British troops repeatedly faced opposition, and that "several wars arose" ("[e]s kam zu mehreren Kriegen"). All textbooks supply tasks on the direct impact of colonial policies on Indigenous people.

All twelve textbooks include pictorial sources showing the peaceful or conflictual encounter between Europeans and the Indigenous population. Ten of them feature the well-known copper engraving by Theodore de Bry, which purports to depict the landing of Columbus; not all of these ten, however, provide learners with all the information they would require to be able to interpret and analyse the source. While *Geschichte für alle 3* (2018, p. 11) notes the source's date (1594), it does not tell readers that the artist did not experience the event at first hand; *Unsere Vergangenheit 3* (2020, p. 46) does give this key information. Seven textbooks provide contemporary pictorial sources, created in the colonised territories, on the encounter of the Aztecs with the Spanish; one example, appearing in *querdenken 3* (2021, p. 18), is a detail of an illustration from *The History of the Indies of New Spain* by Diego Durán, a Dominican monk who emigrated to Mexico as a child. I note here that only two textbooks contextualise the use of sources created by Europeans by telling learners that the colonised societies had largely maintained oral cultures and traditions and that most of the Indigenous sources that did exist had suffered destruction in the course of European colonial activities.

Textual sources included in four textbooks include justifications for European policies of land appropriation. *Geschichte für alle 3* (2018, p. 22) incorporates a source by the British imperialist icon Cecil Rhodes in 1877 to the effect that the British were "the finest race in the world and that the more of the world [they] inhabit the better it is for the human race". To accompany this source, the textbook offers a task which asks students to identify the arguments the text makes and create their own counter-arguments. Alongside this evidence of European policies of appropriation and "conquest", four textbooks contain textual sources which express criticism of colonialism, imperialism and the treatment of Indigenous people. One of these, given in *Zeitbilder 3* (2018, p. 36), is a report by Bartolomé de Las Casas, an emigrant who belonged to

the Dominican order and became one of the Conquista's foremost critics, which describes and deplores the treatment of Indigenous people. In omitting to supply details of how Las Casas' writing was received, however, the textbook contributes to the reproduction of myths (Bernhard, 2013, p. 210) around the Conquista.

As well as discussing the violent subjugation of Indigenous peoples and the suppression of their cultures by colonial aggressors, all textbooks explain that numerous Indigenous people died from diseases imported from Europe. Ten textbooks additionally reference the forced Europeanisation and conversion to Christianity of Indigenous populations. *Was? Wann? Warum? 3* (2019, p. 19), mentions the banning of Indigenous traditions, customs and rites and the coercive imposition on Indigenous people – via methods such as the establishment of schools – of the Christian religion and European cultural practices.

Economic factors related to colonialism make various appearances in the textbooks, with ten books discussing the economic exploitation of the colonies and eight the transfer of goods between the colonies and Europe and the triangular trade. Five textbooks feature maps and tasks on this aspect of the topic. All books make reference to forced labour and slavery or the slave trade. Nine of these feature pictorial sources. *Zentrum 3* (2022, p. 22) contains a photograph from 1900 showing a man from South Africa pulling a carriage with two young women in it, and sets learners an extensive task on this image, asking them to describe the picture, to think about the purpose for which the photograph might have been taken and what it might intend to communicate to the viewer, to set out the grounds upon which the image can be considered racist, and to draw up some questions to ask the people that appear in the photograph. In total, eight textbooks provide tasks on the themes of slavery, the slave trade, or forced labour.

With one exception (*Unsere Vergangenheit 3*), the main text of all textbooks addresses the roots of racism in the colonial period and the contribution made by science and research to racist notions. Two textbooks advise learners that schools taught racist theories up until, and in the early years of, the twentieth century. The text of four textbooks incorporates explicit refutations of racist assumptions. Seven books supply sources on various forms of racism; *Bausteine 3* (2018, p. 55) prints a racist poster from Frankfurt Zoo, produced in 1885 and advertising “Male and Female Australian Cannibals” as an attraction. In relation to the zoo poster, the book asks learners to discuss the reasons why such forms of advertising were possible at this time, consider the poster from a present-day perspective, identify whether such advertisements would still be permissible today, and – in an instance of what we might call meta-reflection on the authors' part – judge whether such sources should appear in textbooks. In total, nine textbooks contain tasks on the thematic field of racism during the colonial period.

The implications of European colonial policies, such as the transformation of power relations in Europe, are covered in six textbooks. All books discuss competition among European states to build colonial empires, mostly titling this content “division of the world” (“Aufteilung der Welt”; as in, for example, *Genial Duo 3* (2020, p. 13)). Eight textbooks contain pictorial sources on this topic, including twelve caricatures. The Rhodes Colossus, originally published in the British satirical magazine *Punch* in 1892 and depicting Cecil Rhodes as a towering figure standing astride the entire continent of Africa, occurs in five books, making it the most frequently depicted pictorial source on this subject. Eight textbooks set tasks pertaining to these issues, and all books show maps to make learners aware of the colonial empires' locations and extent.

4.1.3 Long-term impact of European colonial policies

All textbooks refer, in one form or another, to the long-term implications, into the present time, of European colonial policies. The general political and economic situation in former colonies is a topic in nine books. *Genial Duo 3* (2020, p. 20) explains that many erstwhile colonial territories are now developing countries, that significant proportions of their populations live in great poverty, and that their economies frequently depend on a small number of products or sectors. Nine textbooks supply tasks on these long-term impacts. Seven make specific reference to the linguistic situation in previously colonised states; *Zeitbilder 3* (2018, p. 48), for instance, notes that, in most cases, the language of the former colonial powers has remained the official language of these countries as independent states. Two textbooks additionally show maps of the languages spoken in present-day Africa, accompanying them with tasks for learners. Tasks on the lives of Indigenous peoples today appear in four books; *Zeitbilder 3* (2018, p. 3), for example, asks pupils to compose an article for a youth magazine on the circumstances in which Native Americans currently live and the problems they face.

Six textbooks engage with the persistence of racism in the present day. *querdenken 3* (2018, p. 22) tells readers that the racist Ku Klux Klan still has thousands of members. *GO Geschichte 3* (2021, p. 23) includes a strikingly recent instance of modern-day racism, the killing of George Floyd by a policeman, and the consequent rise of the Black Lives Matter protest movement. Two textbooks contain textual sources on current events motivated by racism. Eight textbooks set tasks on present-day racism; one of them, *überall Geschichte 3* (2018, p. 66), prompts learners to cite racist statements they have seen or read and to discuss why they are racist and how they might be responded to.

The traces of colonial heritage in Europe feature less prominently in the textbooks than does the enduring impact in once-colonised countries, appearing in the text of only two books in connection to the Aztec feather headdress on display in the Weltmuseum in Vienna, with one book providing a task on this subject. Three books show monuments in Europe which refer to the colonial period and set tasks on them to aid learners' engagement with cultures of commemoration. Only one book covers modern forms of slavery; this may be due to the fact that the year 6 history curriculum schedules a module on this topic.

4.1.4 Eurocentrism and "othering"

As present-day textbooks draw substantially on existing and known (or translated) sources, a European perspective on historical events tends to permeate them. Few of the textbooks point out that the process of European colonial aggression destroyed most Indigenous sources that had existed; the books do not communicate to their readers that their presentation of the events they discuss takes an almost exclusively European view. Tasks repeatedly occur that aim at encouraging students to critically scrutinise historical sources or to write about the points of view they transmit; the analysis suggests that it may be of use for textbooks to emphasise the issue of Eurocentricity more clearly, by means, for instance, of explanations in the text, appropriate descriptions of images, and additional tasks. This said, the books do make various attempts to illuminate their Eurocentricity or call it into question. These endeavours manifest in two forms: drawing attention to Indigenous cultures, the direct impacts of colonial policies on Indigenous populations, and longterm effects such as racism, or, instead, critiquing the Eurocentricity that works its way into the books' narrative style and vocabulary; one instance of this latter method appears in the five textbooks that use, on occasion, distancing quotation marks for the term "discoveries" (Entdeckungen). *querdenken 3* (2023, p. 17) and *Zentrum Geschichte 3* (2022, p. 16) explain that the use of "discovery" ("Entdeckung") in this context necessarily implies a Eurocentric view of events.

Textbooks currently approved contain very few terms considered racist today, aside from their occurrence in textual sources and explanations of their offensive usage. Two instances of potentially racist language are evident: *Zentrum Geschichte 3* (2022, p. 16) includes a map referring to "North American Indian cultures" and "South American Indian cultures". *Genial Duo 3* (2020, p. 16) contains a textual source from 1878 alongside an explanation stating that it is a letter from an "Indian chief" to the US government; the purpose or utility of this term's inclusion is unclear, despite its presentation in "scare quotes" and given the explanation, appearing on the same page, that the term "Native American" is now in common use. Two textbooks give explanations of the term "Indian" as racist language, and two do the same with the "N-word".

4.2 Colonialism and imperialism in history textbooks from the period 1945–2015

4.2.1 Depictions of Indigenous cultures

The sections that follow include a number of graphs illustrating changes in the materials and depictions included in the various generations of textbooks this part of the study encompasses. I define a "generation" of textbooks as those textbooks approved in accordance with a particular curriculum. The number of textbooks relating to each curriculum is different in each case; three textbooks were approved according to the 1945 curriculum, nine according to the 1963/64 curriculum and so on.

Austrian textbooks' treatment of colonialism and imperialism has long included depictions Indigenous cultures. Until, and including, the curriculum of 2008, this material appeared in 80 % or more of all history textbooks approved; this figure fell to 50 % with the curriculum of 2016, likely due to new requirements to cover a multiplicity of other topics.

These depictions, in history textbooks of previous decades, were not free from value judgements. The practice of human sacrifice among the Aztecs made an appearance in all textbooks published at the beginning of the Second Republic and in about half of those issued subsequently; these works did not discuss the religious faith that formed the context to these actions. The first Austri-

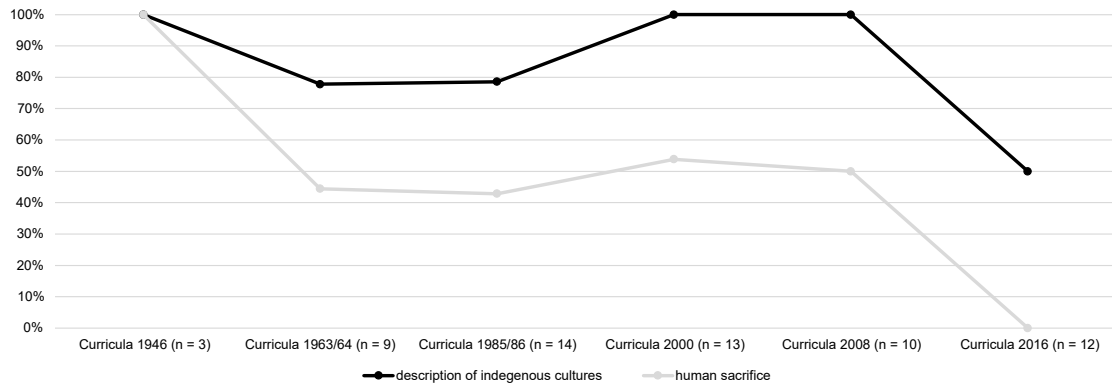


Figure 1: Depictions of Indigenous cultures

an textbook not to make mention of human sacrifice has a publication date of 1967; the topic still continued to appear in half of the textbooks approved in accordance with the curriculum of 2008. There is no similarly clear trend in evidence with regard to the sources on Indigenous cultures. In general, early post-war textbooks made sparser use of sources than more recent ones. Images of Indigenous art, buildings and artefacts appear throughout the textbooks; textual sources written about Indigenous cultures from a European perspective, by, for example, Columbus or Cortés, also feature. Textual sources produced by Indigenous people – or claimed to be such by the books – have made increasing numbers of appearances, but remain less frequent

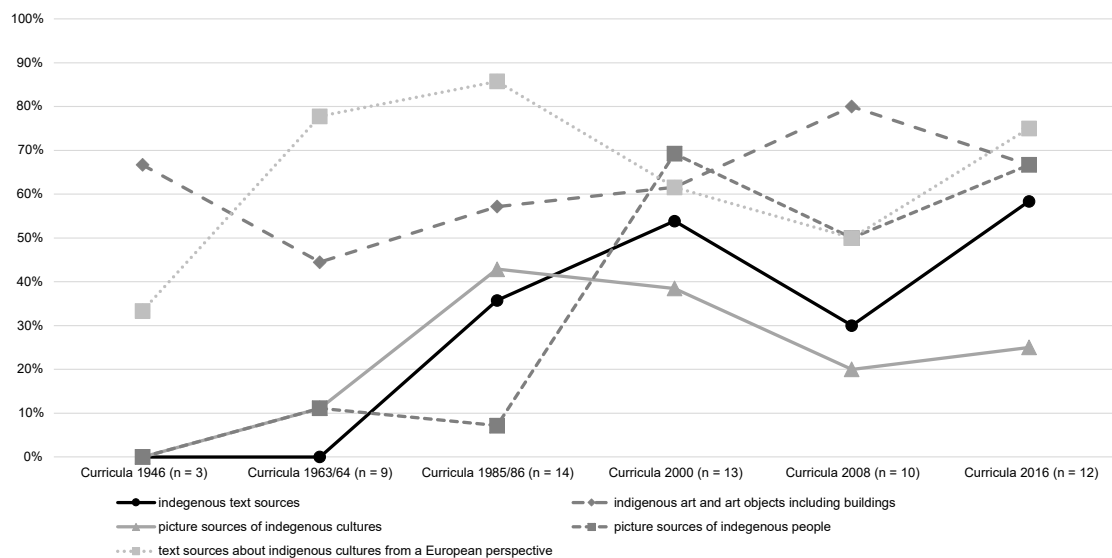


Figure 2: Sources on Indigenous cultures

than European sources, even in current books; the same is true for pictorial sources focusing on Indigenous people. Most of the pictorial sources in the textbooks that purport to illustrate the lives or customs of Indigenous people take a European point of view. In total, only four textbooks include contemporary pictorial sources categorised among the Aztec codices.

Maps showing the regions in which Indigenous peoples lived prior to colonial aggression appear in one-third of current textbooks. The first map of this kind is in *Lehrbuch der Geschichte 2* (1967, p. 58); like most others, it detailed various seafaring activities conducted by Europeans. Reconstruction drawings rose in popularity in textbooks until 2000, after which their use declined.

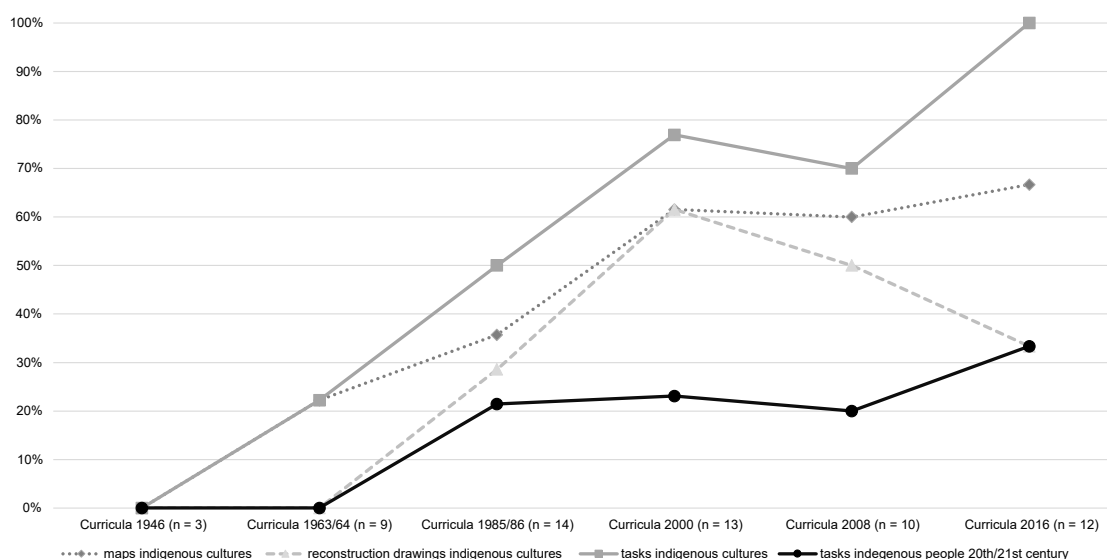


Figure 3: Representations of historical content (maps and drawings) and tasks on Indigenous cultures

The number of tasks set for learners increased over time, with a particularly notable rise in those asking pupils to explore aspects of Indigenous cultures. Tasks on how people in Indigenous cultures lived at the time of the books' writing, that is, in the present as referenced by the books, never occur in more than one-third of these textbooks across all the generations analysed.

4.2.2 Immediate impact of European colonial policies

Notwithstanding the omission of this aspect of the topic from curricula, all textbooks cover the subjugation and displacement of Indigenous people by European colonisers; approximately 79 % of all textbooks discuss the destruction of the Aztec empire in detail, as do 70 % with regard to the Inca empire, although only a small number of textbooks refer to these acts as genocides. Some books provide distorted accounts of the motivations behind the colonial invasions and

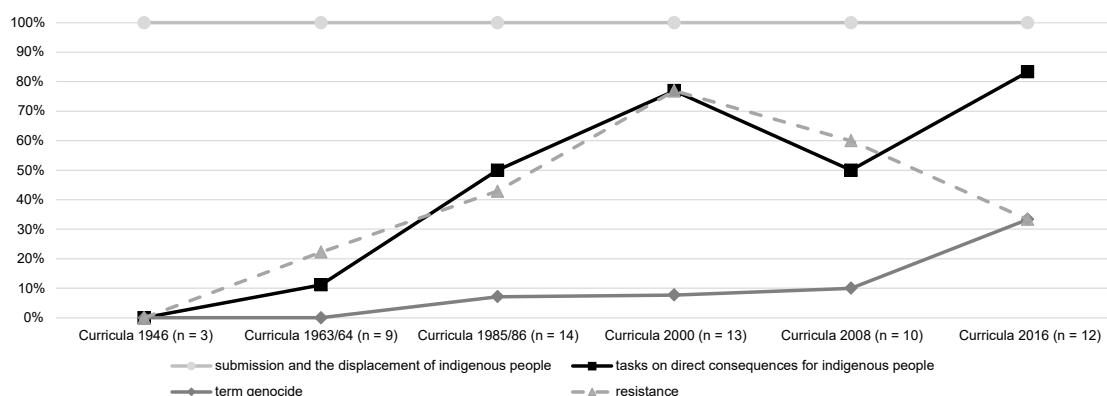


Figure 4: Immediate impact of European conquests on Indigenous populations

the destruction of Indigenous cultures. *Wie? Woher? Warum? 1* (1986, p. 145) asserts that hostilities broke out between the Spanish and the Aztecs because the latter did not want to renounce their religious beliefs. The increasing tendency of textbooks to set learners tasks on these issues reflects the general trend towards more tasks in textbooks and the increasing focus on competency-based learning in Austria. Indigenous resistance to European conquests and the destruction of Indigenous ways of life found increasing numbers of mentions up until the generation of textbooks approved under the curriculum issued in 2000; references to this aspect of the topic have declined in number since then.

Rising numbers of textbooks have engaged with the various impacts of European colonial policies on Indigenous populations over the decades. The slave trade and the subjection of In-

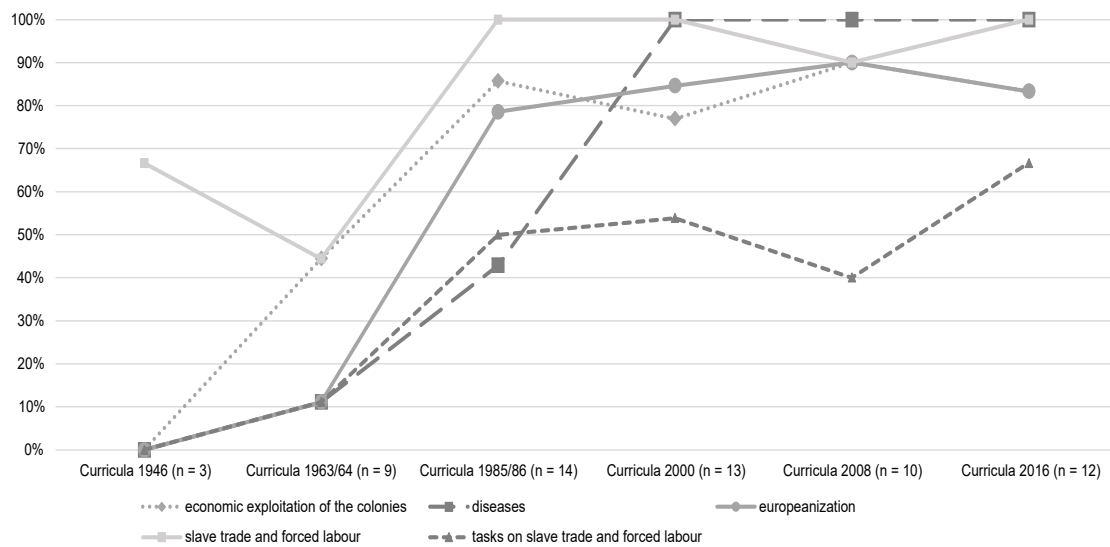


Figure 5: Impacts on Indigenous populations

igenous people to forced labour occurred as topics in two-thirds of the textbooks approved at the beginning of the Second Republic. A total of 36 textbooks issued at this time include pictorial sources relating to this subject; the first of these appears in *Geschichte und Sozialkunde 2* (1986, p. 154). Reconstruction drawings appear in seven books, and tasks requiring learners to work on this topic can be found in a total of 27 textbooks.

Pictorial sources on the encounter between Europeans and Indigenous peoples occur relatively frequently in textbooks throughout the whole time, with a generally rising trend. Textual sources legitimising European policies of colonial conquest occur in a total of 31 textbooks; in contrast to the current textbooks, tasks on this topic that call on pupils to critically reflect

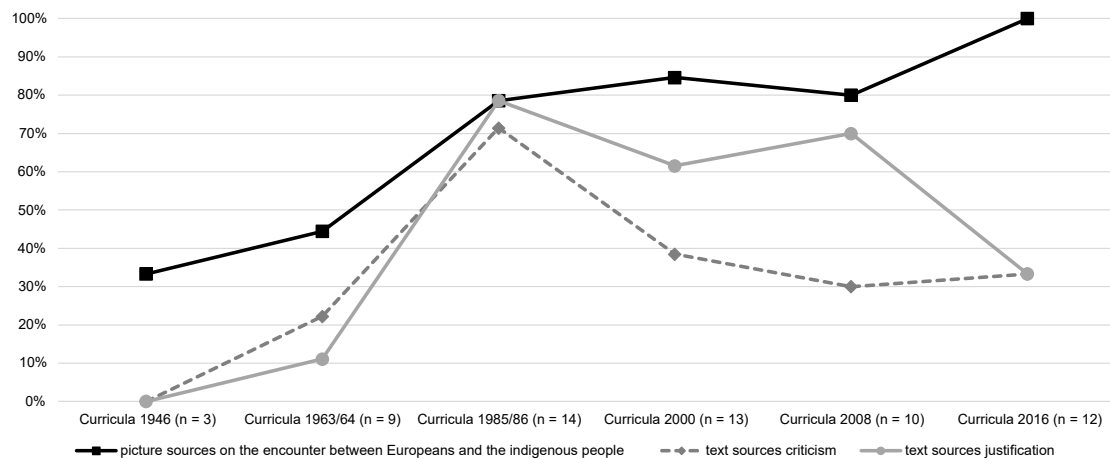


Figure 6: Sources on the impacts of European colonial policies

rarely appear in earlier textbooks. *Zeitbilder 2* (1995, p. 100 f.), for example, carries two textual sources that justify imperialism on the grounds of the Europeans' supposed racial superiority, but does not accompany them with a task requiring critique of the sources, instead asking learners to identify the text's reasoning in each case. The same is true of the textual sources, appearing in 24 of the textbooks, that are critical of colonialism, imperialism or the treatment of Indigenous peoples. The most frequently used source in this regard consists in excerpts from a report by the Dominican monk Bartolomé de Las Casas denouncing the treatment of Indigenous populations. Most textbooks that include this source fail to note that Las Casas suggested using people from Africa to carry out hard labour in the colonies. None of the books mention the problematic reception of the text.

More than half of textbooks address the impact of colonialism on Europe. Tasks on this topic occur in increasing numbers over time. At least two-thirds of textbooks issued from the mid-1980s

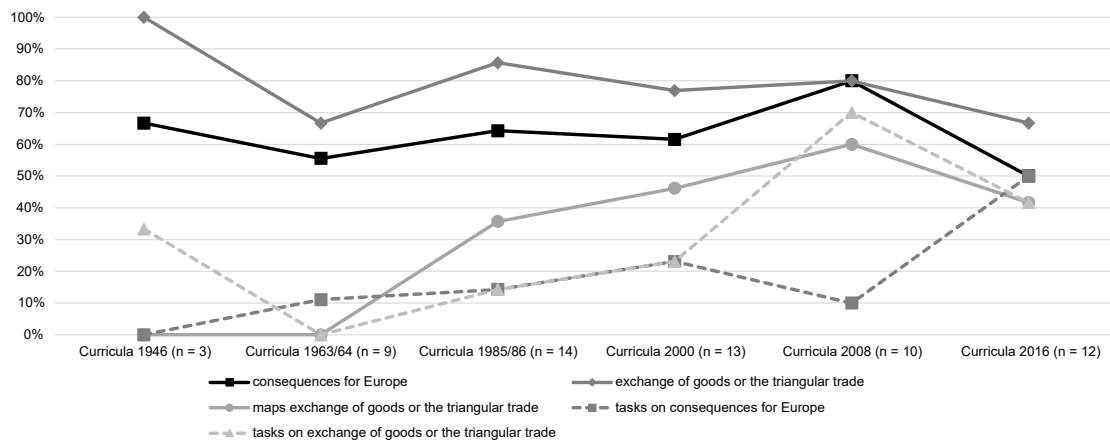


Figure 7: Implications of European colonial policies for Europe

onward include details of the exchange of goods between Europe and the colonies or the triangular trade, and maps and tasks on this aspect of colonialism have become more popular. The drop in coverage of the implications of colonialism for Europe (with the exception of tasks), and in the use of maps and assignments on the transfer of goods and triangular trade, between the 2008 and 2016 curricula is presumably linked to textbooks' increasing concern with the impacts on Indigenous populations. 28 of them use pictorial sources, mostly caricatures, with the first book to do so being *Geschichte miterlebt 3* (1987, p. 125). 58 of the books include maps depict colonial possessions, and 23 set tasks on this topic.

Racism resulting from the colonial era emerged as a theme as the period progressed. Early textbooks make very little mention of it, while almost all current textbooks discuss this phenomenon. From the mid-1980s onward, sources begin to occur in the books; one example is an image

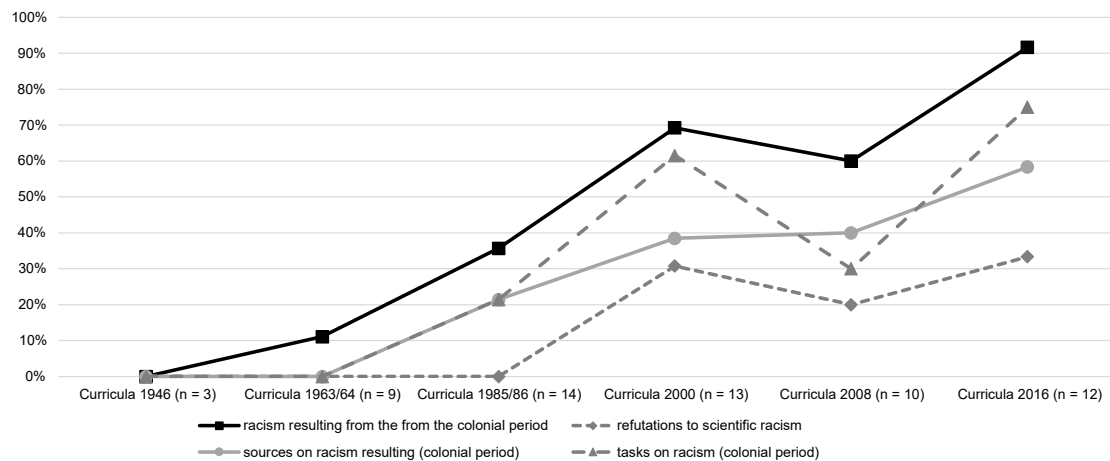


Figure 8: Racism

used in a school to teach “scientific racism” that features in *einst und heute 3* (2002, p. 30). However, tasks and/or more detailed explanations of sources cannot always be found in textbooks. Explicit refutations to “scientific racism” appear in *Geschichte live 3* (2001, p. 117).

4.2.3 Long-term impacts of European colonial policies

The older the textbooks are, the more markedly their presentation of the long-term implications of European colonial policies differs from that in textbooks currently in use. Two-thirds of the textbooks with current approval supply textual explanations of long-term political and economic impacts of colonialism on previously colonised territories and tasks on this for learners to complete. In early Second Republic textbooks, by contrast, the topic made effectively no appearances, only entering these publications as time passed. It is not until after the year 2000

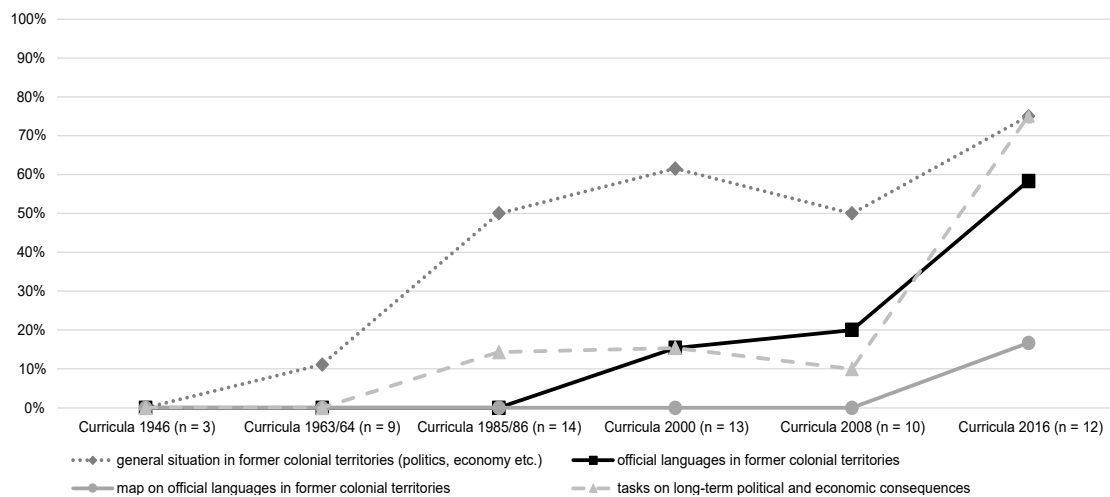


Figure 9: Long-term political and economic impacts of colonialism

that textbooks begin to inform pupils about the influence of European colonialism on the official languages of numerous formerly colonised states across the world; half of books currently

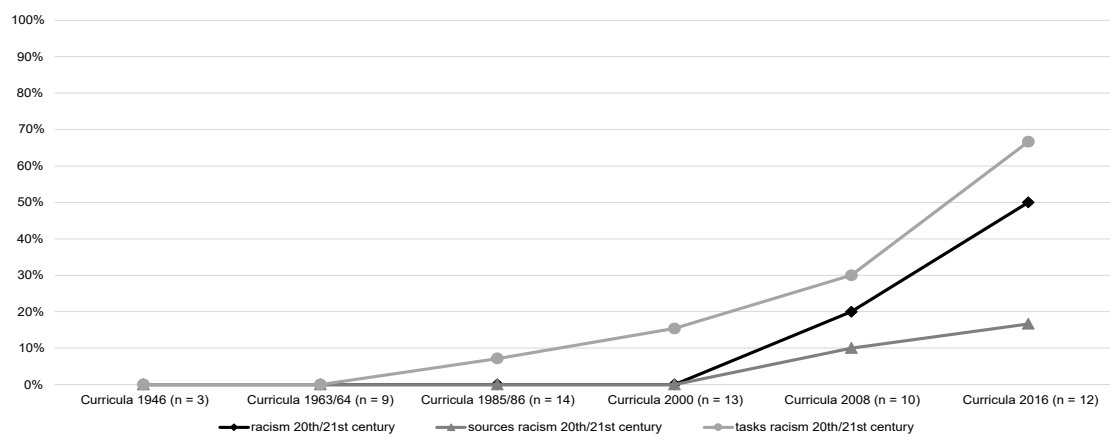


Figure 10: Twentieth- and twenty first-century racism

in use reference this impact of colonial appropriation, and two of them use maps to illustrate the point.

The situation with regard to the coverage of present-day racism in consequence of colonial policies is highly illustrative. Prior to the year 2000, only tasks for learners engaged with this issue; it is not until the curriculum issued at the turn of the millennium that the corresponding textbooks began to include main text and sources that did likewise.

Even present-day textbooks show little to no engagement with academic discourses on post-colonialism; this is still more the case in older books. Only four textbooks in the study, two each approved under the curricula of 2008 and 2016 respectively, cover the heritage of the colonial era in museums. While images relating to cultures of commemoration find entry into textbooks at a relatively early stage, appearing in publications of the 1960s onward, only two textbooks considered in this study, each approved under the 2008 curriculum, include tasks to prompt critical reflection on the part of learners.

It is noteworthy in this context of long-term impacts that, until the 2000s – and indeed, in some instances, to this day –, textbooks dismissed the issue of colonialism as not affecting or concerning the Austrian population; where these works did address long-term and ongoing impacts of the colonial era, they tended to frame them as problems pertaining to other regions of the world. Five textbooks assert expressly that Austria took no part in imperialism; one example of this occurs in the text of *Zeitfenster 3 Duo* (2015, p. 113), which claims that Austria-Hungary “did not participate in the dividing up of the world”.

4.2.4 Eurocentrism and othering

The predominance of a European point of view is evident in both current and past textbooks, from early Second Republic books to those approved for use today. Whereas two present-day textbooks explain that the reconstruction of events from the colonial era can take place only on the basis of European sources due to the destruction of many Indigenous sources, just two earlier textbooks mention the destruction of Indigenous sources at all, and they provide no detail on the resulting implications for historiography. A critical reflection of sources created from a European perspective is missing, due mostly to the emphatic focus on content – as opposed to competencies – which predominated in Austrian history education for a long period. The textbooks contain tasks that ask pupils to summarise, yet not critique, depictions of Indigenous cultures from a European perspective or accounts that seek to legitimise European colonial policies. *Zeitbilder 3* (1982, p. 53) directs learners to read a report by Cortés on the royal court of Moctezuma and reproduce what they learn from it about the wealth and the culture of the “Aztec emperor” – transferring the European term for a ruler to an Indigenous culture. Similar terminological Eurocentrism emerges in the use – as in the curricula – of the word “discoveries” (“Entdeckungen”). The term appears without quotation marks in all textbooks; seventeen of them place quotation marks around the word in some instances, the first to do so being *Geschichte kompakt 3* (1995, p. 90). Twenty books make an attempt to qualify the myth of Columbus’ “discovery” of America, noting that the Vikings had also reached the American continent. *Lehrbuch der Geschichte 3* (1961, p. 70) is the first publication to raise this issue.

Terms now considered racist made frequent appearances in past Austrian textbooks. All books approved under the curriculum of 1946 included the word “Indians” and the German equivalent of the “N-word”. The latter word occurred in a heading – that is, a particularly prominent place – in *Meilensteine 2* (1992, p. 184). As late as 1995, it was still making appearances in text written by textbook authors, as in *Zeiten, Völker und Kulturen 3* (1995, p. 148) and *Zeitbilder 3* (1995, p. 49); its last use occurs after the turn of the millennium, in the caption of a map in *einst und heute 3* (2002, p. 24). Because textbooks hold state approval in Austria for a period of ten years, learners were confronted with this word in textbooks until well into the

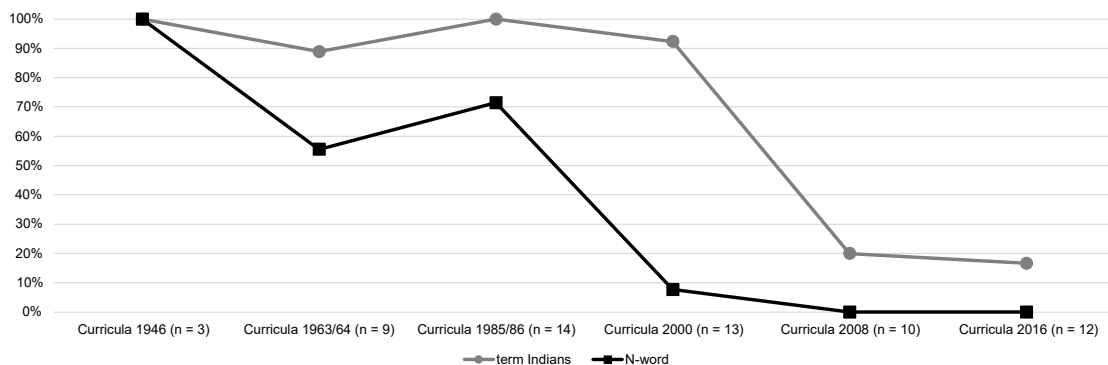


Figure 11: Use of racist terms in textbooks

2000s and may well have assumed, on this basis, that its use was legitimate. This generation of pupils is now, in the mid-2020s, active in the workplace, with the corresponding capacity to influence societal discourses. The term “Indians” has persisted longer still, appearing, as noted above, even in textbooks in current use. It is notable here that, in some instances, textbooks’ content raises learners’ awareness of discrimination through language while simultaneously using some discriminatory terms. Some books, with one example being *ganz klar Geschichte 3* (2007, p. 89), use the term “Indians” multiple times while also stating that the term “indigenous populations” is the correct one.

Racism emerges in the textbooks in areas beyond the use of specific language; seven textbooks from the earlier periods incorporate concepts extrapolated from “scientific racism”. *Geschichte in Tafelbildern und Zusammenfassungen* (1961, p. 184) refers to the “yellow race”, whose members came to America. All seven of these textbooks, explaining that various races live in America due to emigration from Europe and the slave trade, speak of the emergence of what they call “half-castes” (“Mischlinge”). The most recently published book with a corresponding explanation – in the form of an infographic – is *Genial Geschichte 3* (2014, p. 57), which could, theoretically, still be in current use.

5. Conclusion: a look ahead

The analysis of the topics of colonialism and imperialism in history curricula for lower secondary schools in Austria, and their realisation in textbooks, has retraced evident developments and trends over time, with specificity of curricular stipulations increasing while Eurocentrism, albeit persisting, found itself called somewhat more into question. While the first post-war curricula provided relatively ample scope for interpretation, yet proceeded from a clearly Eurocentric perspective, the curricula of the 1980s called explicitly for pupils to learn about the impacts of European conquests on Indigenous people. Strikingly, the curricula issued in the years 2000 and 2008 appear to represent a backward step, as they only required students to engage with the so-called discoveries; this stipulation did not exclude consideration of the perspective of Indigenous peoples and cultures, but did not explicitly include it either. This apparent regression may be attributable to the fundamentally more general wording of these curricula. The 2016 curriculum, placing a greater emphasis on global history and evidently engaging with recent research, requires history teachers to address the consequences of colonialism and imperialism, to make references to the present, and to encourage students to reflect critically on racist notions.

A further finding of the analysis relates to the persistence within Austrian textbooks, as apparent from the first works approved after 1945 onward, of themes and topics which curricula do not expressly prescribe, such as depictions of Indigenous cultures and the impact of European conquests. I also observed that, for a long period, textbooks in Austria, as in other states (Popp et al., 2019, p. 13), focused on immediate impacts of colonialism, framing European colonial policies as issues of the past and omitting to explore their reverberations into the present time. Notwithstanding the gradual change in this respect in the 2000s, current topics of postcolonial academic discourse only occur sporadically, in past and current books alike, while myths about European conquests persist on occasion. The long-standing and, to a degree, ongoing predominance of the European point of view, encompassing the inclusion of racist terms and elements of “scientific racism” in textbooks until well into the 2000s, encounters only intermittent attempts, in the books’ text or in tasks for learners, at encouraging pupils to critical reflection. It is evident, then, that research findings may take a very long time to find their way into textbooks.

This study could provide only an initial overview of depictions of colonialism and imperialism in Austrian textbooks; this notwithstanding, the findings may serve to guide textbook authors and others who face the challenge, as is frequently the case in Austria, of covering topics in textbooks on which they do not necessarily have the specific expertise. Further, they may prompt the inclusion of academic expertise in textbook production, thus aiding the process of overcoming historical conceptions which have long been under the influence of “othering” and of perspectives centred on individual nation states.

As a closing note, I would wish to emphasise that the scope of this analysis has limited it to only those chapters or passages of textbooks that revolved around colonialism and imperialism; I was unable to additionally take issues such as political or formal decolonisation into account. Future work might usefully pay attention to such aspects of the topic, alongside considering textbooks’ setting out of historical interconnections among events, such as the links between imperialism and the First World War. Work in this area going forward that makes particular reference to Austria might also wish to study the manifestation in future textbooks of the stipulations given in the new history curriculum that will take effect from the commencement of the 2024/25 academic year.

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