

AFRICAN HISTORY TEACHING IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN TEXTBOOKS: FROM BIASED KNOWLEDGE TO DUTY OF REMEMBRANCE¹

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Abstract

In early colonial times, European scientists explained and justified the aggressive and devastating expansion of Europe into nearly every corner of the world. Africans, for example, had been dehumanized, infantilized and bereft of history. The legacy of this manipulative enterprise can still be observed in various discourses of Africa in Western media and education. Induced into the Western cannon by Hegel, the notion of unhistorical Africa persists to the present day. Which role does contemporary education play in the manifestation of this ignorance? This paper analyses the role Africa occupies in German history textbook narratives. In only one of four textbook series, the existence of African history before the European “discovery” (the term is literally used by the books) is merely acknowledged. Others would not even explicitly (by text or maps) place Ancient Egypt in Africa, in accordance with Hegel. Pre-colonial Africa is absent from text, it can be sometimes found on the maps as a passive receiver of conquest or trade. The post-colonial history is largely reduced to the explanations of why Africa is “poor”. African sources and history archives are rarely used, priority is given to German or other Western sources. We argue that this persistent marginalization of Africa and Africans throughout the history curriculum in Germany needs to be urgently addressed by history educators and policy makers.

Keywords: German history textbooks; Racism; Representation of Africa; Critical Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

In his lecture on the Philosophy of History in 1830-1831 in Berlin, Hegel postulated that Africa, as a continent “without movement and development”,

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had no place in the human history (Hegel, 1956:99). To understand the reasoning behind this claim we must put it in the historical context. In the desperate need of land, food, natural resources and cheap labour, Europe began its expansion towards other continents as early as the 15th century. This expansion resulted in a tremendous crime against humanity - the transatlantic slave trade that continued for 400 years and the brutal colonization (associated with forced labour, torture, concentration camps, massacres, even genocide) of African people. When the spirit of Enlightenment with its egalitarian values gained importance in the early 18th century Europe, this inhuman treatment of Africans needed justification. European scientists and philosophers established what nowadays is termed “scientific” racism – an ideology of domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion.

This ideology disguised as science (UNHR, 1965), distinguished groups of people mainly by the colour of their skin, assigned them intellectual and psychological properties and decided about their role in humanity. In this process, Africans had been bereft of their humanity, culture, development and consequently, their history. Thus the construction of unhistorical Africa must be viewed as an essential part of racist knowledge that was used to legitimate¹ unlawful and immoral appropriation of Africa and crimes committed against its people. This activity culminated in the infamous Congo Conference in Berlin 1884-1885, when nearly the entire continent of Africa was partitioned among eight European powers. The *Lagos Observer* commented on the conclusion of the conference: “The world has, perhaps never witnessed until now such highhanded a robbery on so large a scale. Africa is helpless to prevent it. It is on the cards that this ‘Christian’ business can only end, at no distant date, in the annihilation of the natives”.²

Diallo (2001) traced the history of African studies in Germany, its institutionalization and its current direction. He showed, for example, that ethnology and *Völkerkunde* are in fact closely related to colonization, the development of their research and accumulation of knowledge were concomitant with colonial expeditions. And beyond, some Africanists have contributed their work to the concept of “race” as a “scientific” basis for National Socialism.

In 1964, the newly independent African Member States of the UN expressed the urgent desire to reclaim Africa’s role in history resulting in the launch of the General History of Africa project (GHA) by UNESCO. In 2009, a second phase of the project was put in place, which was concerned with

adaptation of the GHA content to history school teaching.³ Until today, this development has not been reflected in most of European textbooks, particularly in German history books. Ironically, the history of Europe is widely taught in most African countries and is still over-represented in many African textbooks.⁴ In 1982, a German history textbook analysis revealed, that Africa only occurred in the context of European expansion, in chapters termed “Discovery”, “Imperialism” and “Decolonization”, presented in a form of short and superficial summaries (Tiemann, 1982). Two topics had been added some twenty years later (Poenicke, 2001): Africa as the origin of humanity and medieval African kingdoms; the latter, however, only appeared as a half-page long prequel in the “Discovery” chapters. Poenicke’s re-assessment some years later determined that African medieval kingdoms again vanished from the history telling (Poenicke, 2008). In both studies, Poenicke lamented the absence of Africa in world history, a paternalistic approach to Africa, an uncritical use of colonial racist terminology and the lack of authentic African and other well-researched scientific sources. Instead all too often abstracts from the German mass media were used as a source. Mueller (2013) looked at the presentation of German colonial history in textbooks and found that textbooks were fast in responding to the German political debate. Following the media debate on the Herero genocide, analyzed textbooks had now included this previously silenced gruesome event. It seems that in handling Africa, textbooks tend to reproduce commercial knowledge shaped by the media rather than actively intervene by engaging in the process of “decolonization of history” (Depelchin, 2005).

We believe that simply filling void spaces with historical content is not enough. It is the duty of history educators to actively deconstruct racist ideology by engaging with its origins, motives and impacts. To restore Africa’s role in human history, educators need to emphasize on how and why it got excluded in the first place.

Methods

Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) of texts and imagery was our method of choice (Wodak & Meyer 2001). CDA is a multidisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that is mainly concerned with how the use of language (and imagery) is related to issues of power, its use and abuse. CDA challenges

the way in which hegemonic discourses produce knowledge and establish it as universal and “common-sense” by silencing any alternative knowledge and discourses. The main assumption of this approach is that social practices constitute as well as are constituted by the discourse, in other words, once produced, the discourse becomes “productive in its turn” (Hall, 1996:187). Hence this method analyzes not only the usage of language but also how this usage reflects and reinforces social practices (Haig, 2008:52). Critical discourse analysts do not consider their work as value-neutral; their aim is to go beyond the mere description of the discursive practices by “contributing to the contestation and even transformation of those practices” (ibid).

Data

For the purposes of this paper, we only analysed four textbook series by the main German publishing houses: Cornelsen, Klett, Schroedel and Westermann. Each series are comprised of three to four books for grades 6 to 10 (ages 11 to 16), making it fourteen textbooks altogether. Education in Germany is governed at the *Bundesland* (provincial) level; the sixteen respective ministries of education issue their own curricula. Textbook publishing in Germany is privately owned. Publishing houses adapt the textbooks to suit the curricula of the *Bundesländer* and they have to be approved by the respective ministries. All major publishing houses therefore issue parallel textbooks for different *Bundesländer* and it is up to the individual school to decide, which textbook to choose.

This study is a part of a larger project located in the city and province of Hamburg⁵ that is concerned with the portrayal of Africa in textbooks and its impact on racism. The textbooks analysed here are the latest issues found at the Hamburg teachers’ library.⁶ Some series are meant to simultaneously suit curricula of more than one *Bundesland* (see Table 1). Therefore, our analysis covers history textbooks from eight out of sixteen *Bundesländer* in the North, West and East but textbooks from the South are not considered. We compared our findings with those of Poenicke (2008), who thoroughly examined the presentation of Africa in a larger sample of history textbooks, which also included books from *Bundesländer* not considered here as well as some less prominent publishing houses.

Table 1: List of history textbook series

| Publisher | Year | Title | Series | Bundesland (province) |
|------------|------|--------------------------|------------|---|
| Westermann | 2011 | Horizonte Geschichte | 1, 2, 3 | Hamburg (North) |
| Cornelsen | 2010 | Forum Geschichte | 1, 2, 3 | Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Bremen (North) |
| Schroedel | 2000 | Zeit für Geschichte | 1, 2, 3, 4 | Hamburg (North); North Rhine-Westphalia (West) |
| Klett | 2000 | Geschichte und Geschehen | 1, 2, 3, 4 | Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Bremen (North); North Rhine-Westphalia, Hessen (West); Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (East) |

Guiding questions

The analyzed series are organized chronologically, beginning with the origin of men. Following the chronology of the books, our analysis is guided by three research questions:

1. *What is being told?*

We analyse, in which historical context is Africa represented, which role is assigned to Africans at given historical events and in relation to Europeans.

2. *What is being omitted?*

The portrayal of Africa in German context is characterized not only by the content that is present but also by what is extensively absent (Weicker & Jacobs, 2011). This is particularly true in regard to history, therefore close attention is paid to content that is left out from the textbooks.

3. *How is it being told?*

The “how” is concerned with language and imagery that is used to describe Africa and Africans in historical contexts. Language, as a powerful tool of oppression, was widely abused to dehumanize African people during colonialism. According to Arndt & Hornscheidt (2004), specific terminology was created in German and other European languages to describe the colonized people, their spaces and narratives: it consisted partly of new linguistic

formations (e.g. the N-word, “*Hottentotte*”, “*Buschmann*”), complemented by expressions borrowed from flora and fauna (e.g. *Mischling* - crossbreed, a term used for domestic animals; *Mulatte* - mulatto, from Spanisch “mulo” - mule) as well as terms used to describe bygone times (e.g. *Stamm* – tribe, a term used to classify Europeans during the age of Roman Empire). These expressions became internalized in our language to the point that “White”⁷ people are often no longer aware of their racist intentions. On the contrary, “Black” German students, interviewed about the portrayal of Africa in their Geography textbooks (Marmer, 2013), were able to point out such expressions used by the books. Irrespective of the author’s intention, such terms continue to construct and re-construct the differences between “Black” and “White”, naturalize and evaluate them, thus legitimating “White” hegemony, violence and privileges (Arndt & Hornscheidt, 2004). Visual images are powerful transmitters of messages, they can be used to decorate, illustrate and interpret the context (Marsh & White, 2003). “Textbook creators employ images as shorthand metonyms to encapsulate and illustrate whole events, eras, or ideas” and by doing so they “manufacture visions of society” (Perlmutter, 1997:78). Images often only “allude [to] things” implicitly, the critical discourse analysis serves to uncover the meaning and “make these allusions explicit” (Van Leeuwen, 2000:335).

Use of the term “racism”

As elaborated in the introduction, we understand racism as an ideology that is systematically implemented in the fabric of Western society since the colonial times. Therefore by describing content as “racist” we neither imply authors’ racist intentions nor their sympathizing with the extreme right neo-Nazi groups. Overt expressions of racism are rarely found in contemporary German textbooks. We are rather concerned with the covert and subtle expressions of racist ideology through the uncritical reproduction of hegemonic knowledge, which, irrespective of authors’ intentions discriminates, marginalizes and objectifies Africa and African people in the textbook narratives.

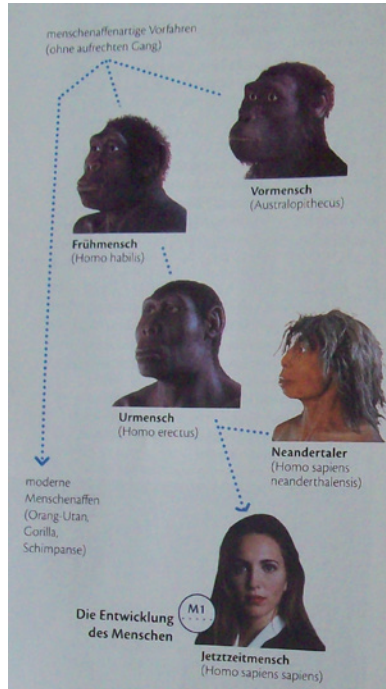
Findings

Out of Africa – The Palaeolithic Age

In two of the four series, Africa is covered at the very beginning when introducing the “Out of Africa” – theory of human origin. It is in this context

that we first encounter a racist representation: Both series, Cornelsen (1:40) and Schroedel (1:25), display images of the evolution of the Homo sapiens sapiens. While all prehistoric human species are depicted as black, the Homo sapiens sapiens appears as white (Image 1).

Image 1: *Stationen in der Entwicklung des Menschen* (Stages of the human development)



Source: Cornelsen (2010), Forum Geschichte 1, p. 40.

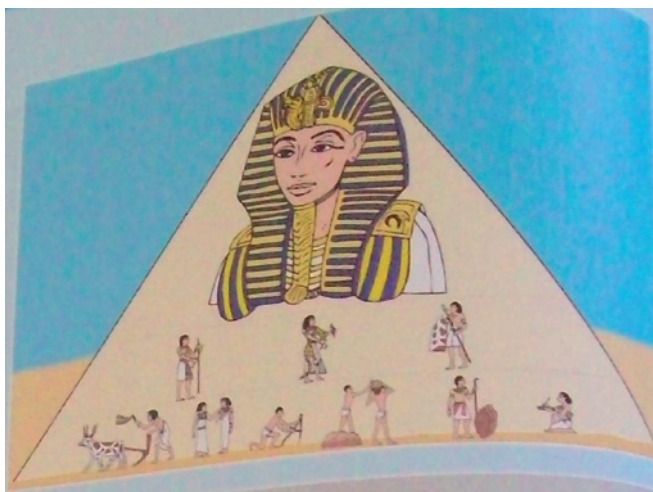
In the summary of the chapter on “Early cultures” (Cornelsen 1:73), a table assigns to each of the historical ages (Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Metal) a corresponding time period, geographical region, type of humans and their life style: the regions assigned to the Palaeolithic Age are Africa, Asia and Europe; to the Neolithic Age - Near East and Central Europe; to the Metal Age - Central Europe only. Thus the impression is created that Africans had never left the Palaeolithic age.

Advanced Civilisations (Hochkulturen)

Ancient Egypt as the first “advanced civilisation”, the so-called *Hochkultur* (German: high culture), is extensively treated in all the four series. In accordance

with the modernization theory, a civilisation is established as “high” whenever it is suitable to describe the pre-stage of Western modernity: “Advanced civilisation... is characterized by a state with a central administration and government, religion, division of labour, literacy, calculation of times, art, architecture, onset of science and technology” (Cornelsen 1:79). In short, those are societies “in which wealth and political power were monopolized by the few” (Ehret, 2002:6). Since “high” can not exist without “low”, a hierarchy of human societies and their organizations is created here, whereby their historical achievements and contributions are implicitly evaluated in order to permanently decide about their role in or exclusion from history. As Ehret (2002:6) argues, “[t]he fact that many key technological innovations in human history began, and much great art was produced, in other, less stratified, non-urban societies is glossed over”. But not only societies, which chose a different path than the so-called “advanced societies” – for example the Khoisan civilisation, are excluded from history. In the textbooks, the world maps of “ancient advanced civilisations” (Cornelsen 1:76; Schroedel 1:67, Klett 1:67) do not indicate Nubia, Askum, Cush or the Nok Cultures even if the organization of these societies would satisfy the given definition of ‘advanced’. In Westermann, there are neither maps in the chapter nor other references to Africa. Here (1:42, 48) and in Cornelsen (1:86) the view of Ancient Egypt as being detached from the “African spirit” (Hegel, 1956:99) is visualized by portraying Egyptians as “Whites” (Image 2).

Image 2: *Schaubilder – ein Versuch, Zusammenhänge darzustellen* (Charts – an attempt to present contexts)



Source: Westermann (2011), *Horizonte Geschichte 1*, p. 48.

The next time period discussed in the books is ancient Greece followed by the Roman Empire. A map in Westermann (1:96) shows the extent of the Hellenic trade with trade routes to Somaliland and Abyssinia but there is no text accompanying the map from which we could learn about the lives and culture of people living in those regions. The only reference to the African continent is given through Roman conquests and colonies. In Klett (1:136) we read that Ancient Rome became “the greatest power in the *by then known* world” (emphasis added). The world known by whom? This is a strong example of Eurocentric history telling, subtle and yet so powerful. Without making explicit, “who” knew “which” world, the sentence transmits the view that the Roman Empire was all that mattered in human history.

The Middle Ages

The chapters that follow cover the Middle Ages and exclusively focus on Europe; Africa is completely absent from these chapters. There is however one exception: Klett (4:275) is trying to fill this grandiose gap chronologically elsewhere, when discussing contemporary Africa after independence. Here, a page-long excursus on medieval Africa is introduced under the title “Has the poor world always been poor? Black kingdoms”. The page consists of accounts from Arabic and Portuguese travellers emphasizing the great wealth and organization of some African kingdoms (Ghana, Mali) and cities (Gao, Timbuktu, Kilwa and Great Zimbabwe). A map showing medieval African kingdoms illustrates these accounts. The editorial text describes that these kingdoms practised an extensive trade, among others with Europe, which led to enormous wealth. Neither in Klett nor in the other series is this trade (or any other contact between Europe and Africa) mentioned in the chronologically suitable chapters on the Middle Ages. This excursus is followed by an explanation of what caused the downfall of the medieval African societies leading to poverty of contemporary African countries, extracted from an outdated booklet (1988): “The main reason for their poverty, *those days* and to a certain degree even today, is the lack of any noteworthy surplus production. It is explained by the barrenness of their soil...” (Klett 4:275, emphasis added). In the assignment after this narrative text, the students are asked to “Find information in the text explaining why the African kingdoms did not last”. It is not only simplistic, to wrongfully assign barren soil to all of Africa (!) but also obviously contradicts with the previous accounts of the mainly trade based economies. If there was no surplus production, where did the

commodities for trade come from to provide for such exclusive wealth?

Some of the books discuss at some length the expansion of the Islam, in this context Africa appears on the maps of “the Islamic expansion up to 1500” (Schroedel 2:95f), which indicate the “extended regions in Asia and Africa” that were conquered by “the Muslim armies [...] in a short time”. The maps show cities like Marrakesh, Kairouan, Cairo, Timbuktu, Mogadishu and Zanzibar. A map titled “Islam as cultural agent” (Westermann 2:23) refers to the “transfer of cultural assets, know-how and knowledge from the ‘Orient’ to Southern Europe”. Even though Africa is on the map it does not seem to be involved in this transfer. While Bagdad and Toledo are marked as “Centres of Science”, Timbuktu for example is not even specified on the map. During the age of Renaissance (13th-17th century CE) there is yet no note on Africa in any of the series, except for a map showing trade routes of Venice around 1500 (Alexandria, Tripoli, Alger) (Cornelsen 2:11). Africa’s marginal appearance on maps implies that she was a passive receiver of conquest, trade or whatever activity carried out by non-Africans.

The Age of “Discovery”

The following chronological chapter which begins with the momentous year 1492, is introduced under titles such as “The Europeans discover the world” (Westermann 2:132ff), “Columbus discovers the New World” (Klett 2:182ff), “By the compass and by the sword – The age of the discoveries” (Schroedel 2:152ff) and “Research, discovery and conquest” (Cornelsen 2:29ff). Unlike Poenicke (2008) who found that only some of the analyzed textbooks use “discovery” without quotation marks, in our sample it concerns all four series. The use of the term “discovery” in this context seems problematic (Danielzik & Bendix, 2011). First, the concept distinguishes between the subjects (“discoverers”), and the objects of “discovery”, thus objectifying the “discovered” people. Secondly, the term “discovery” connotes progress and development thereby concealing violent conquest and colonial crimes committed by the “discoverers” towards the “discovered” populations. In each of the series there are world maps indicating the “discovery” voyages; only in Klett (2:183) they are marked as “European’ discovery voyages”. It is typical of the Eurocentric approach not to mark European activities, events, ways of thinking etc. as “European” but to represent them as universal. This becomes apparent in the titles of the series: “History”, not “European history”, even if that is what they are actually about.

The Atlantic Slave Trade

The Atlantic slave trade is treated as mainly caused by Bartolomé de Las Casas, who introduced the idea of substituting Native American slaves by Africans (Schroedel 2:173; Cornelsen 2:42; Klett 2:224) which he “later regretted” (Klett 2:224). This chapter of European, African and American history, described by Davidson (1994) as “300 years of organized and systematic cruelty”, is mostly reduced to few sentences, for example: “Beside the merchandise, they also brought back home African inhabitants – the slave trade with black Africans began” (Schroedel 2:179). Klett (2:224; 3:103) is insistently using the racist colonial term *Negersklaven* in this context. While this is unacceptable, also the term “slave” needs to be revised. “Slave” reduces an individual to a commodity and permanently attributes to him dependency and compliance; therefore the term “enslaved” is suggested which expresses that slavery is a forced condition.

Only in Klett (3:102) an image of a slave ship is reprinted, which gives an idea under what cruel conditions the enslaved people had been transported overseas. In Westermann, the transatlantic slave trade is omitted, enslaved Africans just happen to appear in America and slavery is discussed as the “catalyser of the conflict” during the American Civil war 1861-1865 (3:101). It is only in the context of this war, that the “degrading conditions” under which the enslaved people lived and worked are discussed. Instead of taking advantage of the extensive body of African-American historical work and novels (foremost *Roots* by Alex Haley) to vividly illustrate life histories of enslaved Africans, “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” by Beecher-Stowe is used as a source (Klett 3:103). This novel has been largely criticized for its racist portrayal of African-American characters assigning them characteristics such as passive, lazy, submissive and eager to please “White” people (e.g. Smith, 1988). Only Klett (3:103) includes an eyewitness account of formerly enslaved J Henson and Schroedel (3:76) briefly comments on the “very high profits” that were obtained from the slave work on tobacco plantations in the Caribbean in one exemplified case.

There are no accounts on the tens millions of victims of the Atlantic slave trade anywhere in the books. The human losses for Africa and economical benefits for the USA and Europe of this crime of humanity are not even mentioned. Most books do not inform the readers about any resistance against enslavement in Africa, on the way or in America, so the enslaved are made to be passive victims without their own agency. Indeed, by doing so the

books degrade the enslaved Africans to “slaves”. There is only one exception in Schroedel (3:84) where we learn about Harriet Tubman, who was involved in the “Underground Railroad”, a network supporting fugitives’ escape from slavery. Everywhere else in the books the end of slavery is credited to the “White” abolitionists. The history of the Haitian revolution lead by Toussaint Louverture, Haiti’s independence from France and the creation of the first state to abolish slavery, is completely omitted (see for example teaching materials by Richter).⁸ By putting it this way, “the moral superiority of the [‘White’] abolitionists is reaffirmed by their being capable of seeing how morally wrong slavery was” (Depelchin, 2005:12).

Imperialism and World War I

The books offer different explanations for the phenomenon of imperialism. In this context, it is interesting to observe how the topic of racism as an ideology is treated. The definitions of imperialism range from “[...] the strive for extensive control over foreign territories” (Westermann 3:73) to a “further developed industrialized state ruling over less developed countries” (Cornelsen 2:240). While the focus of the first definition is on the “foreign”, the second one emphasizes the state of “development” with a hidden justification in the manner of Social Darwinism.

Schroedel (3:235) suggests that technical innovations, economical interests and internal political problems in Europe only partly explain imperialism. Rather a “particular spirit” that emerged around 1880s in the Western countries and Japan enabled imperialistic politics. How this spirit suddenly “emerged” is not explained further. According to Westermann (3:96) “National sense of mission plays here [for the development of imperialism] a decisive role as well as the feeling of cultural, civilizatory and technical superiority”. Both, Schroedel and Westermann, treat the “particular spirit” or “sense of mission” as something that came from nowhere and happened to cause European nations to conquer the world.

Only Klett (3:258) brings in a different perspective by putting “sense of mission” in quotation marks and revealing, that “for many politicians, industrialists and merchants it served as a justification for their own tangible economical interests”. But even here we are not provided with any hint as where this “sense of mission” suddenly came from. All the series miss the central point that it was not racism, disguised here as a “sense of mission”, that

lead to colonialism, slave trade and imperialism but rather that the inhuman treatment of the exploited people, motivated by purely economical interests needed justification, which was then delivered by European philosophy and science in form of racist ideology.

Schroedel (3:235) describes the contest for the colonies between the European nations as “the contest for the last white spots on the map”. As Poenike (2008) points out, the white spots (*terra incognita*) suggest empty unoccupied places further trivializing the brutality of Europe’s expansion. It is this contest between the European nations all these chapters focus on and how it lead to the World War I. The war is presented in the books as a purely European event, during which Africa once again ceases to exist.

Although imperialism as such is being criticized by the books, colonial enterprises are nevertheless presented as “partly modernizing the affected regions” (Schroedel 3:235). What remains unmentioned is that such “modernizations” were achieved at the cost of forced labour and only served the interests of the colonizers. In a German textbook, it would be unthinkable to apply a similar presentation to National Socialism praising its benefits such as construction of highways. However, “such discursive limits do not seem to exist regarding the victims of colonialism” (Marmer & Ziai, 2013:16).

When talking about the colonisation of Africa, Schroedel and Westermann exclusively rely on European sources whereby African perspectives remain unconsidered. Though Africa occupies relatively much space in this chapter as compared to the previous ones, the narrative remains strictly Eurocentric. The persistence of the colonial perspective is also reflected in the language, e.g. the use of the term “motherland” without quotation marks when addressing the colonizers (Westermann, 3:72, 80, 288 and Cornelsen, 3:162).

Two African sources are quoted by Klett (3:261), an oral account of the Bapende people of DRC (the book uses Zaire, though the country was renamed nearly a decade before the book was issued) of the arrival of the Whites and of the Nigerian historian Jacob Ajayi,⁹ explaining the loss of sovereignty of African people due to colonialism. African sources quoted by Cornelsen are even better suited to highlight African perspectives. In the first account (2:245) Rwandan historian C elestin Muyombano¹⁰ discusses the devastating consequences of colonialism for his country. The second, a quote of a Burkinabe historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo,¹² is unprecedented in German history teaching, for it describes African resistance in the colonies (Cornelsen 2:249), a topic otherwise completely ignored. This account is illustrated by a map of

the European colonies and anti-colonial resistances in Africa before 1914. Treating anti-colonial resistance removes Africans from the purely passive and victim positions usually assigned to them by textbooks, giving them agency and letting them, if only shortly, participate in this part of common history.

The use of illustrations of this chapter seems very problematic: both, Cornelsen (2:237) and Klett (3:255) present a colonial post card depicting enslaved and tortured African women most disgracefully tied to each other with a chain on their necks (Image 3). And it is Klett again that uses the N-word in the caption. These images are not accompanied by an editorial or any other text and are used purely decoratively. Decorative use of such illustrations was found to trigger racist jokes and assaults in the classroom against students of African descent (Marmer, 2013). These kind of representations of colonial or any other human cruelty have to be treated with much more sensitivity and need to be embedded in a profound debate on racism, dehumanization and ethics.

Image 3: *Postkarte, Negerweiber an der Kette; die handschriftlichen Grüße lauten: Daressalam, 1.8.06. Die schönsten Grüße aus dem schwarzen Erdteil. ergebendst, Unterschrift (Postcard, Chained N.-women; the handwritten greetings says: Daressalam, 1/8/06. Best regards from the black continent. sincerely, Signature')*



Source: Klett (2000), *Geschichte und Geschehen* 3, p. 255.

German Colonial History

Until recently, the German colonial past was completely silenced in the history teaching and public discourse. Colonialism is seen here as less relevant compared to the crimes committed by the NS-regime. “This collective amnesia in respect to colonialism has a double effect: it declares German colonial history as irrelevant and at the same time it fails to recognize the role of the continuation of colonial practices under the National Socialism” (Messerschmidt, 2009:63; translated by authors).

It was only since independence of Namibia in 1990 that the Herero genocide, though officially not accepted as such, gained some public awareness (Mueller, 2013). Three of the four series discuss German colonial history, however, Cornelsen is an exception. Mueller (2013) shows, that different Cornelsen series, following the trend of the German public debate, do explicitly engage with this inglorious chapter of the German history, and in particular with the German-Herero war and the Herero genocide. This is not the case in the Cornelsen series analysed in this study. We find this particularly problematic since the series in question is issued for the Northern *Bundesländer* including Hamburg, a city with the second largest port in Europe, which played a leading role in and highly benefitted from slavery and colonialism. Hamburg is also historically known to be the city with the largest African Diaspora community in Germany.

Westermann (3:80ff), which is a Hamburg edition, seizes the opportunity to bring colonial history into the local context by introducing Adolph Woermann, a Hamburg ship company owner who has played a major role in the politics of colonisation and drew tremendous benefits from it. Images of colonial sites in Hamburg like the Africa-House and the Speicherstadt are also presented.

Klett (3:265) reduces the conflict caused by colonialism to the discrepancy between “old traditions” and “forced civilisation”. Two photographs are supposed to illustrate this context: The first one shows a Congolese chief (in German translated as *Häuptling*, a colonial term with exotic and primitive connotations (Arndt & Hornscheidt, 2004)) with his twenty naked wives. This kind of representation is termed “ethnic pornography” (Poenicke, 2008) especially because a similar presentation of “White” bodies is unthinkable in a textbook - it would be considered inappropriate and undecent. The photo is contrasted with a wedding picture of a nameless teacher in Cameroon, married in “European” attire. The couple looks visibly uncomfortable suggesting the

unfamiliarity with the “civilisation” expressed by monogamy and outfit. In both images, the colonial racist gaze of the photographer is reproduced uncommented and is thus implicitly confirmed.

The Klett series (3:262ff) do not term the German-Herero war as genocide, using “almost total annihilation” and “great brutality” instead, which are illustrated by a photograph of starving Hereros. An account of Hendrik Witbok, a *Nama-Häuptling* is supposed to represent the African perspective. He addresses his speech to the chiefs of Nama, calling them “captains”, however, the authors decided to add the word *Häuptling* in brackets as supposedly the correct German wording. So even if an African account is used, it has to be corrected to correspond to the colonial language. Schroedel (3:242ff) speaks explicitly of genocide, quoting German general Trotta’s proclamation of the annihilation of the Herero people and a nameless Herero survivor describing the rape of Herero women by Germans as the main cause of the uprising. Here we also read about how today in Namibia the genocide is remembered.

Westermann (3:80ff) engages with the German debate on the term “genocide” and the question of reparations. It is only here that we read of another anti-colonial uprising - that of the Maji-Maji in today’s Tanzania. But this is only in the context of “bloody repressions” of these uprisings being “extremely costly” for Germany making the colonies unprofitable. To mention the high costs of genocide is simply unethical and it is unimaginable to find such an approach in the context of Shoah in German textbooks.

Between the two World Wars

An election poster of the right wing German party – *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* – from the year 1928 is reproduced in two of the series (Schroedel 4:55 and Cornelsen 3:66). It shows a monster-like caricature of a Black soldier (Image 4).

Image 4: Plakat der Deutschnationalen Volkspartei (DNVP) aus dem Jahr 1928. Das Plakat nimmt auf eine Äußerung Stresemanns, der den Vertrag von Locarno als ‚einen Silberstreifen am Horizont‘ bezeichnete (The German National Peoples Party (DNVP) poster from 1928. The poster refers to Stresemann’s statement describing the contract of Locarno as a silver strip on the horizon)



Source: Schroedel (2000), *Zeit fuer Geschichte* 4, p. 55 and Cornelsen (2011), *Forum Geschichte* 3, p. 66.

The poster refers to the treaty of Locarno, which is discussed in the text, but no reference is made to the threatening caricature. “The fear of the Black man” was the racist propaganda of that time referring to African soldiers, serving as troops under the colonial French Empire, occupying the Rhineland after Germany lost the World War I. The African soldiers were psychologically used by the French to physically humiliate Germans. Germans felt humiliated that Africans, considered by them and by the French as inferior, were occupying their soil but even more so by romantic relationships between some of these soldiers and German women. Hitler described the children fathered by these soldiers as “contamination of the white race by Negro blood” (Hitler, 1943:357). When he came to power in 1933, some 400 of these children called the “Rhineland Bastards” were sterilized under the “Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring” (Samples, 1996). This gruesome chapter

of the Black German history however is not part of the history curriculum. It remains unclear why this particular poster was nevertheless chosen by the authors and how the teachers are expected to refer to it in the class.

References to the history of African German Diaspora can be found in Westermann (3:34), once again in the local context of the city of Hamburg. Here we learn about the so-called *Völkerschauen* (human zoo) by Carl Hagenbeck in the famous Hagenbeck Zoo in Hamburg: “For Carl Hagenbeck it was a good business but the people who were degraded to human exhibits often fell ill because of the insufficient accommodation, some death cases have been reported”. In France, this tragedy (Human zoo or exhibitions of Africans) has been documented and denounced thanks to the works of Bancel et al. (2002). A quote by the German historian H Moehle¹³ describes how “Africans had to present themselves as ‘noble savages’ [and] ‘primitives’ [...] – characteristics which coined the image of the African continent”. From our point of view what is missing here is the discussion of the racist nature of such images, their historical origins, prevalence and implications to the present day. Cornelsen (3:97), quotes from the autobiography of Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi,¹⁴ an African German born in Hamburg in 1926, on his disappointment as a little boy about not being able to participate in the Hitler Youth because he was not considered “Aryan”. However, the discrimination of African descendants beyond the exclusion from Nazi organizations is missing also here.

World War II

In the chapters dealing with World War II Africa is once again absent from history. All series show arrows on the maps of military campaigns from 1939 to 1945 which also run through North Africa (Westermann 3:207, Klett 4:117, Cornelsen 3:113, Schroedel 4:88) but there is no reference in the editorial texts and/or quotes about these activities on African ground let alone the participation of African soldiers in the war.

In Schroedel (4:107) and Klett (4:98) we find a Nazi-caricature of *Entartete Musik* (degenerated music) showing a black monkey with a Star of David playing saxophone (Image 5). In Klett, the editorial text explains, “Many world famous German scientists and artists sought asylum abroad [...] Their music was prohibited in Germany”. In Schroedel, we find a quote about the Hamburg “Swing Youth”, a youth counter-culture to the Hitler Youth, and

their admiration of the “English and American movies and [...] life style”. In both cases we miss the reference to Black musicians and Black music – the expression of this resistance - to which the NS-propaganda poster actually refers.

Image 5: *Plakat zu der Ausstellung, Entartete Musik, 1938 in Düsseldorf* (Exhibition poster, Degenerate Music, 1938 in Düsseldorf)



Source: Schroedel (2000) *Zeit fuer Geschichte* 4, p. 107 and Klett (2000) *Geschichte und Geschehen* 4, p. 98.

Decolonization vs. Independence

Though African anti-colonial resistance is shortly mentioned by some of the series, the active role of African people in the liberation of their countries is largely marginalised. Instead of “independence” as an active liberation process, this historical era is termed by the textbooks as “de-colonization” - as an opposite of colonisation - assigning all the agency to the colonial powers.

Cornelsen, the very same series, which stands out for introducing the anti-colonial resistance as early as the 19th century (see *Imperialism and World War I*), states, that “educated social groups in the colonies adapted the human-rights-ideals of their motherlands” which in turn lead to their liberation (Cornelsen 3:162). Following this argument the very same colonisers seem to have awakened the striving for freedom of the colonized (Poenicke, 2008). We are made to believe that ideals of liberty and self-determination are absent from the indigenous African philosophies and cultures – a racist argument once used to justify colonialism and enslavement (Césaire, 1972).

Also in Klett (4:281) the achievements of the anti-colonial resistance are diminished by saying that it was led by the “predominantly western educated elites”, lacked the backing of the “millions of peasants” and could only succeed because the colonial powers got debilitated by the WW2. Schroedel (4:272) explains, that colonial powers “withdrew” from Africa only because they recognized that the colonies became unprofitable.

Westermann (3:289) emphasizes the role of the USA and the Soviet Union in the process of decolonization supported by “their ideologies of national self-determination”. The post-colonial states are said to have “blackmailed” the super-powers for financial and military aid by threatening them to work with the opposite party. There is no mention of the neo-colonial approach of the super-powers which resulted in proxy wars on African territory and strongly contributed to the weakening of African states. The term “neo-colonialism” is absent from the sampled history books.

In the context of “decolonisation”, two African independence leaders are quoted: Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah (Westermann 3:192) and Senegal’s Leopold Sedar Senghor (Cornelsen 3:163). In Westermann, also two photographs of Nkrumah are reprinted and the students are given an assignment to research the biographies of Senghor, Nyerere, Kaunda and Touré. In Cornelsen, Senghor’s speech on the “African socialism” (1961) however is discredited right away: it is followed by an assignment to compare “the perspectives the author drafts for his continent” with the “contemporary situation” expressed by a diagram presenting the 2007 GNP of the ten world poorest countries (all African) with the GNP of Germany. One could argue that this assignment is meant to train a multi-perspective view. This could well be the author’s intention. However, because of the marginalized presentation of one (African) of the perspectives we consider this approach as failed in this case. Due to lack of information on the connections between historically developed global

power relations and inequality the reader is made to see “poverty” as a failure of those affected by it.

The “Poor” World

Cornelsen (3:162f) and Westermann (3:289) handle the impacts of post-colonial inequalities on the African continent in a short manner by listing a brief summary of problems and shortcomings – poverty, illiteracy, dependency, ethnic conflict and refugees. This list serves to determine Africa’s status quo by degrading it to an international welfare case.

Klett and Schroedel do further elaborate on this topic. Klett repeatedly uses the term *Schwarzafrika* (Black Africa) in this chapter. Following Fanon (1965:138) “Africa is divided into Black and White, and the names that are substituted – Africa south of the Sahara, Africa north of the Sahara – do not manage to hide this latent racism. Here, it is affirmed that White Africa has a thousand-year-old tradition of culture; that she is Mediterranean, that she is a continuation of Europe and that she shares in Graeco-Latin civilization. Black Africa is looked on as a region that is inert, brutal, uncivilized - in a word, savage”.

According to Klett, “the persistent village and tribal ties” and “deep rooted tribal hostilities” impeded the creation of African nations (4:294) as if nation depends on tribes and cleavages. The term “tribe” is another colonial expression that “Europeans have reserved for non-European ethnic groups and nationalities and most especially those of Africa” (Ehret, 2002:7). In Europe, speaking of Celtic or Germanic tribes is only appropriate in the context of the Roman Empire. In the course of history, “tribes” became “people”, “ethnic groups” or “nationalities”. Thus the term “tribe” connotes wild, uncivilised and backward. Such simplistic explanations and devaluating assumptions about dichotomies of “primitive traditions” vs. “enlightened modernity” teach nothing about the crises that the young African states were facing and the historical and political implications of the former colonial powers.

Some effort is undertaken to shed light on global power relations: in the case study of Ghana (Klett 4:281ff) we read about the negative impacts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment programs on the educational system and the food supply. Unfortunately, all the sources presented here once again originate from Western authors. In the chapter on contemporary wars Klett places its final remark on Africa (4:294): the

Rwandan genocide is introduced in one single sentence as an example for typical African “gruesome killing orgies”. In 1994, the Rwandan genocide was reported by the Western media in a similar manner, however, the debate moved on and an extensive body of international research has been since established. Such careless and ignoble handling of historical events without any sources, facts and cause analysis is only possible in the context of internalized racist perception of everything African.

Also in Schroedel, Africa is present when it comes to armed conflict: on the map of the UN peace missions (4:165) and the foreign assignments of the German *Bundeswehr* but without any further explanation about these conflicts. The third contemporary map that includes Africa is the one of the “World of Islam” (Schroedel 4:255). The “Islamic societies” are characterized by the accompanying text as “patriarchic regimes with traditional role allocation [...] Nearly everywhere veiling for women is mandatory – with exceptions: Turkey for example has lifted the mandatory veiling in the 20s”. The authors should have done their research: North Sudan is the only African country where veiling is obligatory, and Saudi-Arabia and Iran are the only other countries worldwide. In Senegal for example, where over 90 % of the total population are Muslims, veiling is not obligatory. In view of the heated debate about veiling of women in Germany and hostility towards Islam such misinformation only confirms and amplifies negative stereotypes.

Schroedel dedicates a whole chapter to “Africa in the process of globalization” (4:272ff) including one sentence on the negative images of Africa in the German media. “Such media reports conceal the diversity of African circumstances and internal problem” (4:272). Having said that, the authors partly reproduce the very same images on several successive pages through articles called “Population growth”, “Bloody war in Northern Ghana”, “Corruption in Congo” or the photograph of drugged and violent militia in Sierra Leone (Image 6). The three case studies analyse respective countries but this analysis overlooks historical (post)colonial relationships. Contrasted by a report on co-development initiative by Ghanaian-German immigrants, abundance at a market scene in Tanzania and a travel article on “Africanness – the new African self-esteem”, the presentation of contemporary Africa in Schroedel is definitely more diverse than in all the other series. But also here a serious engagement with historically developed racism, “White” supremacy, global power relations and inequality is absent from the discourse.

Image 6: *Bürgerkrieg auch in Sierra Leone: Kämpfer der Milizen, die auf Seiten der Regierung gegen die Rebellen kämpfen. Foto, 2000* (Civil war also in Sierra Leone: Militia combatants fighting on the side of the government against the rebels. Photo, 2000)



Source: Schroedel (2000) *Zeit fuer Geschichte* 4, p. 277.

Conclusions

The analysis of four history textbooks series showed that Africa is extremely marginalized in German history teaching. The approach of the books is Eurocentric, i.e. Africa, but also Asia and the Americas (with the exception of the US) are strongly underrepresented.

1. What is being told?

In summary, the textbooks construct following narrative of Africa's role in history: All humans originate from Africa, but the advanced humans left so the continent appears somehow left behind in the Stone Age. Though Egypt is an exception, by portraying Egyptians as "White" some series place it outside of Africa. African societies that matched the attributes of "advanced civilizations"

either did not exist or failed and vanished along the way because of the barren soil. If anything, it was North Africa (as Mediterranean continuation of Europe, in accordance with Fanon (1965:138) that appeared in historical contexts (Roman provinces, Islam), but even here its role remained strictly passive. Africa was discovered (all series) and colonized by Europeans and Africans became slaves (*Negersklaven*), racist term used by Klett). The colonizers were sometimes brutal and oppressive but made some progress towards modernization. Once the colonies became unprofitable, Europe decolonised Africa. New African leaders learned about liberty and self-determination from European universities but failed to put it into practice because of barren soil and the backwardness of the peasants. Ethnic conflicts and overpopulation resulted in bloody orgies. Corruption and mismanagement prevailed. The former colonisers also played a part by discriminating African countries in the world market.

2. What is being omitted?

First and foremost, in all four series, Africa is absent from the largest part of the history. Africa is not credited with developments, innovations or anything historically significant. A history of the entire continent told by its own historians is mostly missing here and thus the textbooks confirm the Hegelian view.

3. How is it being told?

Whenever Africa is present, its portrayal is characterized by a racist language, degrading images, careless narrations and the dominance of Western sources.

There are some exceptions: Klett at least acknowledges the existence of African medieval kingdoms (though this introduction is rather used to portray why they failed). Westermann brings colonial history in the local context by emphasizing the involvement of Hamburg; it is also the only one to introduce the “Black” German history. Cornelsen engages with the anti-colonial resistance and the colonial legacy on Rwanda quoting African historians. Westermann, Klett and Schroedel report on the Herero genocide and Schroedel makes an attempt to correct the biased media image of the contemporary Africa. However, these patchy attempts lack consistency, remain superficial and therefore do probably nothing to change the general perception of Africa’s negligible role in history. These attempts rather serve

as an exception of the rule. The portrayal of Africa in history textbooks, sadly, confirms the Hegelian view that Africa “as far as History goes back, has remained - for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World - shut up; it is [...] the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night” (Hegel, 1956:91).

From the very beginning, developed humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) are portrayed as “White”, similarly, “advanced civilisations” are conceived and promoted by “Whites” and the world is “discovered” by “Whites”. “Whites” introduce Human Rights and abolish slavery. “Whites” are not always portrayed as positive, for they too had caused wars and destruction. However, while “White” wars have historical meanings, African wars are rooted in backward “ethnic” traditions and are meaningless “killing orgies”.

Unless textbooks seriously engage with historically rooted racism and “White” supremacy, unless modernization theory is questioned and alternative forms of civilisation are equally recognized, unless Eurocentrism is contested and African voices are heard with equal attention, these attempts will remain ineffective. On the contrary, by randomly including this or that fact of African history in a narrative which otherwise serves to glorify European “advanced civilisation”, racism of such narratives becomes more difficult to uncover and to challenge for teachers and students and therefore more effective.

Notes

E.g. Cecil J Rhodes: “I contend that we are the finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race. Just fancy those parts that are at present inhabited by the most despicable specimens of human beings what an alteration there would be if they were brought under Anglo-Saxon influence [...]” (Confession of Faith, 1902). This quote illustrates well how racist knowledge was used as a legitimization to conquer, divide and control Africa.

Lagos Observer, February 19, 1885 cited in Adebajo (2010:16).

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Informal exchange with teachers from Senegal, Cameroon, Ghana and Uganda.

IMAFREDU – Image of Africa in Education, University of Hamburg. Available at: <http://elina-marmer.com>. Accessed on 10 December 2013.

After completing our analysis and the paper, we have discovered a more recent issue of Klett, Geschichte und Geschehen. Our next step will be to analyze it and to compare with the one presented here.

The terms “Black” and “White” define historically and politically constructed groups, distinguished by their participation in political power and access to resources.

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