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Philipp Bernhard

# A Postcolonial People's History? Teaching (Post-)Colonial History

## Inspired by Howard Zinn's Concept of a People's History

### Introduction: Principal considerations concerning (post-)colonial history and theory in a German high school classroom

For a history teacher at a Bavarian *Gymnasium*<sup>1</sup> it might seem rather unusual to place special emphasis on teaching (post-)colonial history, and even more so when concepts from postcolonial theory are to be incorporated. Colonial and postcolonial history play no crucial role in the history curriculum for *Gymnasium* in Bavaria, especially in the senior years 11 and 12. As far as German colonial history is concerned, it is often argued that it was comparatively short and thus cannot have had a significant impact on the course of German history. In their introduction to postcolonial theory, Castro and Dhawan claim that, on the one hand, it is now well established that Germany was indeed a major colonial power and that the impact of German colonialism on German history can no longer be seen as marginal. Yet on the other hand, conclusions regarding the importance of

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1 In Germany the school system differs from federal state to federal state. Traditionally in Bavaria there have been three school types: *Gymnasium*, *Realschule* and *Hauptschule* (recently renamed to *Mittelschule*). After Year 4 (10-year-olds) the pupils are streamed according to their grade average. The higher achievers attend the *Gymnasium*, which finishes after Year 12 with a university entrance qualification, the *Abitur*. History curricula also differ from state to state, but similar patterns can still be identified. Up to the Middle Ages, the curricula follow a classic 'western civilization' approach, which then changes into a focus on national history. From Year 6 (12-year-olds) to Year 10 (16-year-olds) the Bavarian history curriculum for *Gymnasium* progresses chronologically from prehistory to the world today.

colonialism for the respective nation states cannot be drawn directly from their involvement in direct colonial rule.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the question as to whether postcolonial theory is at all relevant in Germany is superfluous, as such theoretical approaches critically address neo-colonial structures and the expansion of international capitalism. One of the most significant achievements of postcolonial theory is therefore to have pointed out that no region on earth can evade the consequences of colonialism.<sup>3</sup> A similar thought is put forward by the Argentinian postcolonial theorist Walter Mignolo. He claims that the history of modernity cannot be understood without its 'dark' side, the history of coloniality.<sup>4</sup> If the history of modernity, whose starting point for Mignolo is the European conquest of the Americas from 1492 on, cannot be understood without the history of colonialism, then the role of (post-)colonial history in the historical sciences, in history teaching and in curriculum design must be reconsidered.

A similar reasoning can be found in the work of late American historian Howard Zinn. In his 1980 *A People's History of the United States* Zinn offers a U.S. history of coloniality in which he argues convincingly that such a history must be taught from *below*, from the perspective of the colonized. His work has been controversially discussed in the United States because he criticizes the traditional Eurocentric reading of U.S. history, which is based on the narrative of American exceptionalism. While supporters of the left celebrate Zinn like a pop star, proponents of the right condemn him as anti-American.

In this contribution I will argue for an innovative approach to teaching colonial and postcolonial history, combining Howard Zinn's notion of a People's History with ideas and concepts from postcolonial theory. This combination promises valuable tools for teaching (post-)colonial history, which indeed complement one other. Postcolonial theory is often accused

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2 See, for example, a recent anthology about the impact of colonialism on Switzerland, which did not have colonies: Purtschert, Patricia, Barbara Lüthi, and Francesca Falk (eds.) 2013. *Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien*, 2nd edition. Bielefeld.

3 Castro Varela, Maria Do Mar, and Nikita Dhawan. 2005. *Postkoloniale Theorie. Eine kritische Einführung*. Bielefeld: 11, 129.

4 Mignolo, Walter D. 2011. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham and London: 2 f.

of neglecting the power difference in the colonial situation between colonizers and colonized, focusing only on cultural aspects. A People's History approach can be useful in this respect because it takes the perspective of the oppressed as its starting point. Postcolonial theory examines the interplay and exchange processes between the two perspectives *above* and *below*, an aspect which Zinn does not emphasize enough. Here postcolonial theory offers several concepts which reflect the complexity of historical processes, e.g. the concepts of hybridity and mimicry.

In the first part of this chapter I will explain how ideas and concepts from postcolonial theory can be useful for teaching colonial and postcolonial history. The second part will address the figure of Howard Zinn, whose work cannot be understood without his biography. Zinn not only exposed the 'dark' sides of U.S. history; he publically took a stance against war, discrimination and injustice. He thus not only sought to decolonize the U.S. history curriculum through his scholarly work, but as a teacher and activist he also embodied what he taught. Zinn's approach to history is therefore particularly interesting because some of the ideas he promoted were similar to those later developed by postcolonial theorists. That is why in this contribution I try to re-read Zinn's People's History approach against the background of postcolonial theory. In the third part of this chapter I will outline key educational objectives and methodologies for history teaching from a postcolonial People's History perspective, which I tested and evaluated in three teaching units on Spanish Colonial History (Year 7/13-year-olds), German Colonial History (Year 8/14-year-olds) and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Year 10/16-year-olds).<sup>5</sup>

## Postcolonial theory for postcolonial history teaching

Although there has been a boom in postcolonial approaches since the 1980s, there are no universally agreed definitions of the terms 'postcolonial' and 'postcolonial theory'. Castro and Dhawan define postcoloniality as 'a set of discursive practices [...] which resist colonialism, colonialist

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5 For the evaluation I used both informal methods to test students' understanding and progress (e.g. a revision of key aspects covered in the previous lesson) as well as a feedback form at the end of the teaching unit.

ideologies and their legacies'.<sup>6</sup> For Kaltmeier postcoloniality is a way of thinking which sees the global European expansion as the key turning point that changed political, cultural as well as economic developments both in the conquered regions and in the European center. A postcolonial approach emphasizes the reciprocal creation of the colonized and the colonizers through processes of hybridization and transculturation.<sup>7</sup>

A key goal for a history curriculum from a postcolonial perspective must be to achieve a decolonization of knowledge. Rather than assuming that Western knowledge is at the same time universal knowledge, it is important to inquire as to the location of the speaker within the matrix of power. A postcolonial perspective must point out that historiography has always been an instrument of power and that history has always been highly political (cf. Year 10 Lessons 2 and 3). A decolonization of knowledge thus replaces the positivistic idea of one definitive history ('the way it actually was') with the idea of many different histories. However, the goal of a postcolonial historiography cannot be to recover 'true' indigenous perspectives or even to look for an 'original' indigenous culture in an idealized precolonial past. A postcolonial historiography should instead try to retrace the construction of knowledge in the intercultural zone of culture contact as a hybrid, respectively transcultural process (cf. Year 7 Lessons 1, 7, 10 and 11). Here it becomes necessary 'to think from both traditions and, at the same time, from neither of them', as Walter D. Mignolo has put it.<sup>8</sup> Shalini Randeria speaks of 'entangled histories'. She adopts a relational perspective which claims that it is impossible to write a history of the West without the history of its colonies and of colonialism (and vice versa).<sup>9</sup> To that end it is crucial to include voices from historians, teachers and activists from the former colonies. Mignolo's arguments are very

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6 Castro Varela, 25, original quote: 'ein Set diskursiver Praxen [...], die Widerstand leisten gegen Kolonialismus, kolonialistische Ideologien und ihre Hinterlassenschaften.' (Translation Philipp Bernhard)

7 Kaltmeier, Olaf. 2012. 'Postkoloniale Geschichte(n). Repräsentationen, Temporalitäten und Geopolitiken des Wissens'. In Reuter, Julia, and Alexandra Karentzos (eds.). *Schlüsselwerke der Postcolonial Studies*. Wiesbaden: 203–214, here 203.

8 Walter D. Mignolo, quoted as found in Kaltmeier, 210.

9 Castro Varela, 23 f.

similar. In his book *The Idea of Latin America* (2005) he argues that the so-called 'discovery' of the Americas and the genocide of the indigenous population as well as the deportation of African slaves to the Americas mark the beginning of modernity, a historical landmark often attributed to the French or the Industrial Revolution.<sup>10</sup> For this 'dark' and hidden side of modernity he uses the term coloniality, which was introduced by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano. In his latest publication – *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* – Mignolo gives a detailed account of his view on modernity and options as to how its dark side might be overcome. He speaks of decolonial thinking and delinking, which are necessary to create a pluriversal, non-capitalistic world with different decolonial options; a world in which many worlds can coexist.<sup>11</sup> The goal of decolonial education is for Mignolo to render students more deeply aware of and sensitive to the world in which they live unconsciously.<sup>12</sup>

The definitions mentioned above already suggest that a postcolonial perspective is strongly linked with a political impetus. It is about resistance against colonial ideologies and about uncovering instances where colonial and neo-colonial patterns continue to exist (cf. Year 7 Lesson 12; Year 8 Lesson 9). Thus the goal of postcolonial theory is not only to write texts for academia but also to have a political impact. An important point when teaching (post-) colonial history is to consider the students' and teacher's positions in the matrix of power: in a Bavarian *Gymnasium*<sup>13</sup> students study history against the background of their (mostly) privileged position as (mostly) white, (mostly) well-off and well-educated citizens of one of the richest countries in the world.

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10 Mignolo, Walter D. 2005. *The Idea of Latin America*. Malden, xiii.

11 Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, e.g. 9 f., 275.

12 Sachs, Rod: 'Decolonial Voice Lending – Interview with Dr. Walter Mignolo'. <http://vimeo.com/album/2078401/video/35820205> (14.04.2018): 44:10–46:20.

13 The German school system has repeatedly been criticized for reproducing social inequality. Students from a privileged background are much more likely to attend a *Gymnasium* than children from working class or immigrant families. The vast majority of students in the classes where I tested the three teaching units came from white and relatively affluent families. The majority of the teachers at the *Gymnasium* in Germany are also white and middle-class.

The students should be made familiar with the different attempts to justify European superiority by constructing the colonized as the opposite of the Europeans: at first as ‘the infidels’, then as ‘the uncivilized’ and finally as ‘racially inferior subhuman beings’. But postcolonial theorists would point out that in the process of colonization not only the image of ‘the other’ was constructed but also the self-perception of the Europeans (cf. Year 8 Lesson 7). This mutual construction of Europeans and indigenous people in the course of the culture contact in the colonies is linked with processes of hybridization and transculturation. The processes that were thus triggered, however, often eluded the control of the colonial power, which led to developments that upset, unsettled or even scared the Europeans (cf. Year 7 Lesson 11).

### **Howard Zinn (1922–2010): Biography and *‘A People’s History of the United States’***

At first glance Howard Zinn’s biography is reminiscent of a typical example of the American Dream. Zinn was born in New York in 1922 as the son of poor Jewish immigrants. He grew up in a working class environment and started to work in a shipyard, building war ships for the U.S. Navy. In 1943 he joined the Army Air Corps and served as a bombardier in the European theatre of World War II. After the war the G.I. bill allowed him to go to university, complete a PhD in history and become a professor. A closer look reveals that the American Dream did play an important role in Zinn’s biography. But rather in the sense that his experiences as a shipyard worker, soldier and student of history opened his eyes for the ‘dark’ side of the American Dream. The opportunity to expose and denounce this ‘dark’ side of the American experience inspired both his activism and his work as a historian. His working class background made him well aware that the key slogan of the American Dream – that wealth is achieved through hard labor – was a lie. As a young worker he was actively engaged in a labor union and came into contact with Marxist ideas and the Communist Movement. Disappointed by the developments in the Soviet Union, he distanced himself from Communism after the war. As a professor at Spelman College in Atlanta, a college for black women, he experienced the discrimination of African-Americans and the beginning of the Civil

Rights Movement at first hand. Together with his students, Zinn protested against the apartheid regime in the South of the United States, which led to his dismissal. When he started teaching in Boston in 1964, he began to participate in the protests against the Vietnam War. Soon Zinn became one of the leading figures within the American Left. He died in 2010.<sup>14</sup> In 1980 he published his *People's History of the United States*. Zinn writes the story of the U.S. from *below*: from the viewpoint of 'the others', i.e. the marginalized and the oppressed, e.g. Native Americans, slaves, workers, women, socialists or African-Americans. Zinn's starting point is the insight that it is impossible to write an objective history. Traditional historiography, which pretends to be objective, is for him a tool of the elite to control the lives of ordinary citizens; to manipulate people and to control politics. Zinn clarifies for his readers from the outset that a People's History approach is biased;<sup>15</sup> that he sees his work as an academic form of affirmative action.<sup>16</sup> His People's History adds historical perspectives that have long been suppressed in U.S. history classrooms. That ordinary people *make* history is for Zinn a powerful insight that can lead students to think differently about the present and the future, empowering them to act and to ask themselves what they can do to make the world a better place. In Zinn's People's History perspective, history from *below* is not limited to a history of *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life), an approach which was especially popular among German historians in the 1970s/80s; rather, Zinn's history from *below* criticizes the key narratives on which the history of the United States and of Western modernity are founded. Emphasizing the key role of colonialism for understanding U.S. history, Zinn offers an analysis which is in line with what was later postulated by postcolonial theory. His approach to teaching can be seen as decolonial education in the sense of Walter Mignolo, as Zinn tries to make students aware of what all too often remains untold. And this perspective – for which Zinn has

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14 Welch, Ed. 2004. *Reading, Learning, Teaching Howard Zinn*. New York: 9–27.

15 Zinn, Howard. 1990. *Declarations of Independence: Cross-examining American Ideology*. New York: 7.

16 Miner, Barbara. 2008. 'Why Students should Study History. An Interview with Howard Zinn'. In Bigelow, Bill (ed.). *A People's History for the Classroom*. Milwaukee: 8–14, here 13.

been fiercely attacked by conservative historians and politicians – is still not adequately reflected in history teaching.<sup>17</sup>

### **A postcolonial People's History – classroom experiences from three teaching units**

Before presenting my experiences with the three teaching units, I will briefly summarize the most important educational objectives and methodological recommendations which follow from the theoretical considerations. When teaching colonial and postcolonial history, emphasis should be placed on processes of exchange and hybridization (cf. Year 7, Lessons 10 and 11), resistance of the colonized (cf. Year 7, Lesson 1; Year 8 Lesson 5) as well as the repercussions of colonialism on Europe (cf. Year 7 Lesson 9 and 10; Year 8 Lesson 7, 10 and 11). Underlying these themes should be an awareness of the imbalance of power between the colonizers and the colonized, the economic (rise of capitalism) and the physical (forced labor and genocide) exploitation of the colonized as well as attempts to justify European superiority through discourses of civilization or race. The goal should be to open up the Eurocentric perspective of national history curricula for global historical perspectives. Students should learn that history is a construct and that historiography can never be objective and is therefore an instrument of power (cf. Year 10, Lessons 2 and 3). A key component of such an approach is to follow historical processes through different periods and regions (from impacts on the local level up to global effects) and to teach the consequences of colonial history until today (cf. Year 7 Lesson 12; Year 8 Lesson 9). Particularly relevant methodological approaches include use of multiple perspectives, use of fiction and (auto-)biographical writing (cf. Year 8 Lesson 1), use of role plays (cf. Year 7 Lessons 3 and 4; Year 10 Lessons 2 and 3) and other forms of scenic learning, and finally the criticism of traditional narratives (cf. Year 7 Lessons 2–6). The students should have the opportunity to express value judgments and to deal with different opinions (cf. Year 7 Lesson 6; Year 8 Lesson 6; Year 10

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17 Students and supporters of Zinn's People's History approach started the website '*Zinn Education Project*', (accessed June 14, 2017, <http://zinnedproject.org/>), where articles, teaching materials and information about upcoming events can be found.

**Tab. 1:** Teaching unit 'Spanish Colonial History in the Americas', Year 7 (13-year-olds)

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1.	The 'discovery' of the Americas from the point of view of the Taíno: history from <i>below</i>
2.	The 'discovery' of the Americas, the school textbook perspective: history from <i>above</i>
3. and 4.	The People vs. Columbus, et al. – a role play I + II
5.	Critical analysis of the depiction of Columbus in popular history magazines
6.	Columbus – hero or villain?
7.	The Aztecs
8.	The conquest of the Aztec empire
9.	The economic exploitation of the Spanish colonies
10.	Culture contact in New Spain – reciprocity and adjustment processes
11.	Culture contact in New Spain – religion as an example
12.	The impact of European colonization on Latin America until today

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Lessons 2, 3 and 5). They should be encouraged to reflect upon their position in the colonial matrix of power and to confront the consequences of (neo) colonialism in their environment (cf. Year 8 lesson 11).

Teaching unit Spanish Colonial History in the Americas, Year 7 (13-year-olds), 12 lessons

The first teaching unit is on Spanish Colonial History in Year 7 (13-year-olds). In Year 7 students cover a large period from 500 A.D. to 1789. One aspect is the European encounter with foreign civilizations in the course of the 'Europeanization of the earth'. The curriculum here wants students to see this 'Europeanization' of the globe as a precursor of modern globalization.<sup>18</sup> The curriculum does not allot as much time to colonial history as I devoted to it; however, it does allow some flexibility on the part of the teacher. It was thus possible to break out of the strict chronology and teach thematically, covering colonial history in Latin America from Columbus until today. Most of the students had already heard of Columbus and his 'discovery' of America before. But the first lesson told the story of the 'discovery' of the Americas not from the point of view of Columbus, but from

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18 'Bavarian history curriculum for *Gymnasium* Year 7', <http://www.isb-gym8-lehrplan.de/contentserv/3.1.neu/g8.de/index.php?StoryID=26282> (28.06.2017).

the perspective of the Taíno, the first indigenous people Columbus encountered. In this lesson I worked with excerpts from the documentary *500 Nations*.<sup>19</sup> This was also used as an opportunity to discuss historical documentaries as a source of knowledge as well as the fact that there exist only few sources (especially written ones) from the Taíno themselves. A lot of what is known about their civilization stems from Europeans and is thus filtered through a European lense. Having familiarized students with the Taíno civilization, we talked about the first contact, where Columbus was received with generosity as a new trading partner. The students speculated that the Taíno probably expected Columbus to return with a merchant fleet, which would mean the beginning of trade relations with the newcomers. Then the students were confronted with the excerpt from *500 Nations* about the genocide, as well as the desperate resistance of the Taíno, which ensued after Columbus' return. The second lesson presented the classic school textbook perspective on Columbus and the 'discovery' of the Americas from *above*. Both the curriculum and the school textbook present Columbus and the 'discovery' of the Americas as one key element in the narrative of a successful transition from the 'dark' Middle Ages to a 'bright' modernity. At the end of the lesson the students discussed how they think the story of Columbus should be told and if they are happy with how their school textbook tells the story. In the third and fourth lesson I adapted a role play suggested by Bill Bigelow,<sup>20</sup> an American history teacher who regularly offers lesson plans on the website of the Zinn Education Project. The fictive trial confronts students with the question as to who of five accused parties was responsible for the genocide of the Taíno: Columbus, Columbus' men, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, the church or the Taíno themselves. The students were put into six groups, of which one group was the jury at the trial and the five other groups were to defend one of the accused parties. For example, the group defending

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19 *500 Nations – Die Geschichte der Indianer*. Part 3. Directed by Jack Leustig (1994, Warner Home Video, 2004), DVD.

20 Bigelow, Bill. 1998. 'The People vs. Columbus et al. A Class Role Play'. In Bigelow, Bill, and Bob Peterson (eds.). *Rethinking Columbus. The Next 500 Years. Resources for Teaching about the Impact of the Arrival of Columbus in the Americas*. Milwaukee: 87–93.

Columbus was to argue why Columbus was not or was only partially responsible for the genocide. They were allowed to blame others; they could say Columbus just followed the orders of the Catholic Monarchs. The teacher was the prosecutor at the trial. This role-play is intended to convey to the students that simply blaming Columbus for the genocide would be shortsighted; that different players in the game of history were involved. In period five students analyzed the depiction of Columbus in popular history magazines. The focus was here on a critical analysis of paintings used to illustrate an article on Columbus in the German magazine *Geo Epoche*.<sup>21</sup> The picture analysis was conducted in three groups, each of which was assigned a different painting illustrating the article. After a detailed description of *their* painting, the students were to assess from their knowledge of the Columbus story which information was missing in the caption, and whether the painting portrays Columbus as a hero and contributes to the widely held belief that 'great men make history'. As a final step the groups were encouraged to write their own caption for *their* painting. Working with pictures/paintings as sources from popular history magazines in this way can create a critical awareness of such magazines. Period six explicitly asked whether Columbus is a hero or villain, using an article on Columbus published in the British magazine *History today*<sup>22</sup> in 1992 by historian Felipe Fernandez-Armesto as a starting point. Fernandez-Armesto claims that Columbus was neither a hero nor a criminal, but that historians (and in fact anyone relating his story) turned him into both. In contrast, the students were also given a comment by Howard Zinn, which contradicts Fernandez-Armesto's view and claims that Columbus indeed can be judged according to today's moral standards. Both today and in the time of Columbus it was and is a crime to torture and kill people. Even if slavery was widely spread 500 years ago, it was still not morally acceptable to treat slaves so brutally that they died as a result of forced labor.<sup>23</sup> At the end of the lesson the

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21 Rademacher, Cay. 2006. 'Jenseits des Horizontes'. *Geo Epoche* 11: 20–46.

22 Fernandez-Armesto, Felipe. 1992. 'Columbus – Hero or Villain?' *History Today* 42 (5). <http://www.historytoday.com/felipe-armesto/columbus-hero-or-villain> (28.06.2017).

23 Miner, Why Students should Study History, 9 ff.

students were to produce their own responses and arguments to the question as to whether Columbus was a hero or a villain. Periods seven and eight covered the next step of European colonization of the Americas, using the example of the conquest of the Aztec empire. In period seven students were presented a complex picture of the Aztec civilization. Period eight discussed the different reasons as to why the Spanish had been able to conquer the Aztec empire in the first place. Lessons 9–11 dealt with life in the Spanish colony New Spain and the consequences of European colonization into our present. Period nine covered the economic exploitation of the colonies and the beginning of the slave trade. Keeping this perspective in mind, periods ten and eleven focused on cultural phenomena; students were familiarized with the idea of culture contact in the sense of Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Three areas were discussed in which the culture contact changed life in the colonies: population, agriculture and language. The result was something new, something hybrid, something distinctly Latin American. And this result was often very different from what the colonizers had originally intended. Period eleven used the same model, taking religion as an example, to emphasize the ambivalences and frictions that arose in the colonial situation, religion being the area in which Europeans were least willing to accept hybridization with indigenous elements. Nevertheless, in a process which took decades if not centuries, elements of the indigenous religion mixed with Spanish Catholicism, bringing about something new: a Mexican form of Catholicism. The lesson began with a contemporary picture of the Aztec pyramid of Cholula in Mexico, which is surmounted by a Catholic church. The students were encouraged to speculate why the Spanish had built a church exactly on that spot. In order to introduce the students to the worldview of the missionaries who accompanied the establishment of the colony New Spain, they were asked to analyze a text by the Franciscan missionary Bernardino de Sahagún (1499–1590), who spent more than fifty years studying Aztec language, culture and beliefs. Although he developed a positive view of the indigenous people in the course of his studies, this changed nothing about his conviction of the cultural and religious superiority of the Spanish. He never doubted that it was not just the right but even the duty to 'civilize' and evangelize the indigenous people. This attitude is obvious in the excerpt from the source text discussed with the students, 'Medicine

against idolatry', in which Sahagún compares his role to the one of a doctor who has to free the indigenous people from the disease of their heathen beliefs.<sup>24</sup> Then the class was split into two big groups. One group read an informative text on 'Our Lady of Guadalupe' about Juan Diego, an indigenous peasant, who saw in a vision the Virgin Mary with indigenous features. The topic of the second group was *The Day of the Dead* (*El día de los muertos*). Here Aztec traditions mixed with the Catholic traditions of All Saint's Day and All Soul's Day, on which days the souls of the deceased visit the living in accordance with indigenous belief. Students should understand that – contrary to the European tradition – it is a cheerful holiday with flowers, picnics and colorful sugar skulls for the children. At this point Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry comes into play. At the beginning such processes of hybridization irritated and frightened Europeans because the colonized creatively appropriated the religion of the colonizers. They succeeded in questioning the colonizers' claim to cultural purity and cultural superiority, and a long time passed before the Catholic church understood that if they tolerated the inclusion of indigenous elements, this would help them spread Catholicism in Latin America. Ultimately, the indigenous people were more willing to accept this new Latin American version of Catholicism. At the end of the lesson students were shown the relevance of the subject matter for their everyday life in a multicultural Germany. They were asked where they experience culture contact in their lives, in their community and how they experience this culture contact. The last lesson of the unit illustrated the consequences of European colonization until today. The students' feedback of lessons 10 and 11 on culture contact in New Spain showed that if concrete examples are used, even young students (Year 7, 13-year-olds) can understand the ideas behind complex concepts such as culture contact, hybridity and mimicry.

Teaching unit German Colonial History, Year 8 (14-year-olds), 11 lessons

Part of the Year 8 curriculum is the topic 'Imperialism and World War I'. As one of several optional focus themes, the curriculum suggests dealing

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24 Hinz, Felix. 2011. 'Der erste Ethnologe. Bernardino de Sahagún und die Azteken'. *Praxis Geschichte* 6: 35.

**Tab. 2:** Teaching unit ‘German Colonial History’, Year 8 (14-year-olds)

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1. Imperialism from *below* – The arrival of the *Pink Cheeks*: Imperialism as experienced by indigenous people in British East Africa
  2. Introduction: The Age of Imperialism from *above*: definitions and motives
  3. The German colonies – The colonization of German South-West Africa
  4. The German rule over German South-West Africa
  5. The Herero and Nama Genocide
  6. The consequences of the genocide in German South-West Africa until today
  7. The repercussions of colonialism on the German Empire
  8. Critical analysis of colonial photographs
  9. The impact of European colonialism and imperialism on Africa until today
  10. Germany *postkolonial* – the impact of colonialism on Germany until today
  11. Excursion with [*muc*]*münchen postkolonial*: postcolonial city tours in Munich
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with aspects of German colonial history, such as the Herero uprising (from a postcolonial People’s History perspective the phrase ‘anti-colonial resistance of the Herero and Nama’ should be used; the curriculum does not use the word ‘genocide’).<sup>25</sup> The structure of the second teaching unit on German Colonial History in Year 8 is very similar to that of Spanish Colonial History in Year 7. The first lesson used excerpts from an autobiography by a Kikuyu elder to show students the brutal character of imperialism and how the arrival of the British changed the lives of the indigenous people in British East Africa. The second lesson offered an introduction to ‘The Age of Imperialism’ from *above*, discussing key terms, features of imperialism as well as motives for European expansion. Lessons three to six focused on the history of the German colony German South-West Africa. Lesson three was intended to show students that – contrary to the colonial propaganda at the time – the seizure of the colony was a chaotic process. Lesson four on German rule in German South-West Africa sought to emphasize that not only the Germans attempted to take advantage of conflicts among the different indigenous groups in order to establish their rule; the indigenous people themselves equally tried to use the

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25 ‘Bavarian history curriculum for *Gymnasium* Year 8’, <http://www.isb-gym8-lehrplan.de/contentserv/3.1.neu/g8.de/index.php?StoryID=26260> (02.09.2017).

Germans in inner-African conflicts towards their own goals. Here texts of African historians were used who emphasize the agency of the indigenous people in order to prove that they cannot just be seen as passive victims of the colonists. Lesson five covered the colonial war 1904–1908 and the Herero and Nama genocide. The students worked with an adapted excerpt from an essay<sup>26</sup> by the German historian Jürgen Zimmerer. Using the UN-definition of genocide, the students discussed whether what happened in German South-West Africa can legitimately be called genocide.<sup>27</sup> The next lesson dealt with the consequences of the genocide in German South-West Africa until today. The students were confronted with different points of view from both the Namibian and the German side on whether Germany should pay reparations for the genocide. Period seven covered the repercussions of colonialism on the German Empire using the examples of so-called human zoos, pseudo-scientific race theories and the debate on racially mixed marriages. The students were introduced to how racist beliefs were transferred back to Imperial Germany via the colonies, subsequently changing the racist discourse there. In lesson eight students were to critically analyze colonial photographs. Period nine briefly covered the impact of colonialism and imperialism on Africa until today. Period ten discussed consequences of colonialism that can still be seen in Germany, e.g. the persistence of racist colonial stereotypes in contemporary commercials. In preparation for the concluding excursion the students were introduced to the work of the postcolonial initiative [*muc*] *münchen postkolonial*,<sup>28</sup> a project concerned with the traces of colonialism in Munich which seeks, for example, to rename streets in Munich named

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26 Zimmerer, Jürgen. 2004. 'Der Völkermord an den Herero und Nama. Deutschlands erster Genozid'. *der überblick* no. 01: 83. <http://www.derueberblick.de/ueberblick.archiv/one.ueberblick.article/ueberblicke668.html?entry=page.200401.083>. (02.09.2017).

27 The students were rendered aware of the controversy surrounding Zimmerer's 2011 monograph *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust*, in which he discusses the relationship between the Herero Namaqua genocide and the Holocaust.

28 '[muc] münchen postkolonial', <http://muc.postkolonial.net/> and <http://mapping.postkolonial.net/> (14.06.2017).

after German imperialists, German colonial ‘possessions’ and even places where German massacres occurred.

The tours developed by [*muc*] *münchen postkolonial* are designed as rallies, requiring the students to find QR codes and scan them with a smartphone. The participants receive information about the historic site, several tasks they should discuss in the group as well as a map with clues where they find the next QR code. Then they post their solutions on Twitter, using the hashtag #dekolonisieren. The use of modern technology and social media here not only renders the excursion more fashionable and attractive to young people; the use of Twitter in particular is highly innovative because the students post their own decolonial traces and thus contribute themselves to decolonizing the urban space. Some of the colonial traces the students have to look for can be seen at first glance (e.g. a roll of honor at the Old South Cemetery for soldiers who died in the colonial wars). Other traces require more intensive observation (e.g. the history of stolen exhibits in the State Museum for Ethnology in Munich), while many traces remain invisible (e.g. the grave of the two indigenous children Juri and Miranha, which no longer exists. The two children were captured by two Bavarian natural scientists as ‘exhibits’ in South America and abducted to Munich in 1820, where both soon died). This excursion is a good example of decolonial education in the sense of Walter Mignolo, because it heightens the students’ awareness of the world in which they live unconsciously: it shows them the hidden traces of colonialism in their hometown Munich. In the feedback session on the whole teaching unit the students criticized that – because most lessons focused on German imperialism – there were not enough comparisons to other imperial powers. Especially when addressing the Herero Nama genocide or the so-called human zoos it would indeed have been beneficial to point out that other colonial powers also committed genocide and that human zoos were common all over Europe.

Teaching unit: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Year 10 (16-year-olds), 5 lessons

In Year 10 Bavarian secondary school students only have one history lesson a week, rendering the complex topic of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict something of a challenge. The first lesson provided the students with an overview of the conflict, and the subsequent two lessons involved working with the German translation of the Israeli-Palestinian textbook,

**Tab. 3:** Teaching unit 'The Israeli-Palestinian conflict', Year 10 (16-year-olds)

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1.	Overview of the origins and the development of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
2. and 3.	Building bridges – the Israeli-Palestinian school book <i>Learning Each Other's Historical Narrative I + II</i>
4.	The failure of the Oslo Peace Process 1993–2000
5.	Israeli and Palestinian Peace Movements: a peace process from <i>below</i> ?

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*Learning Each Other's Historical Narrative*.<sup>29</sup> This textbook was developed by the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (PRIME) in cooperation with the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (GEI), and is the result of a cooperative project between Israeli and Palestinian history teachers. The textbook contrasts on the same page the Israeli point of view with the Palestinian point of view with blank space in the middle – between the two narratives – for the students to take notes. I chose the chapter on the events of 1947/1948 (for the Israelis the War of Independence; for the Palestinians the Nakba or 'catastrophe') and asked the students to directly contrast the Israeli with the Palestinian view on six events from this period in a role-play. They were astounded by the dramatic differences between the two narratives, recognizing that history is never objective but that it is always constructed from the point of view of the present with all its political implications. It would have been interesting to explore the (post-)colonial nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, using concepts from postcolonial theory. To conclude the teaching unit, however, we focused on the peace process. Our lessons on the peace process contrasted the perspective from *above*, i.e. the political and diplomatic efforts, with the perspective from *below*, i.e. the Israeli and Palestinian peace movements. Lesson four focused on the failure of the Oslo Peace Process between 1993 and 2000. This was the background for lesson five, which inquired as to whether there is such

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29 Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (ed.). (2003). *Das historische Narrativ des Anderen kennen lernen. Palästinenser und Israelis*. (German Translation 2009). <http://friedenspaedagogik.de/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/primetextbuch.pdf> (14.04.2018).

a thing as a peace process from *below*. The students learned about the history of the Peace Movement in Israel and Palestine and analyzed the work of several peace initiatives such as the Israeli-Palestinian group *Parents Circle*. The goal was to demonstrate that there are different groups and perspectives *among* Israelis and Palestinians. The students were then asked to discuss the impact of these grassroots peace initiatives on the stagnating peace process from *above*. They were confronted with two perspectives: A People's historian would claim that pressure from *below* is necessary to break up the stagnation. The opposite view, which could be called political realism, would claim that the conflict can only be solved by politicians and diplomats who do not pay much attention to the Peace Movement. The final discussion focused on this relationship, and the students concluded that progress has to be made on both levels.

### **Conclusion: incorporating a postcolonial People's History perspective in the classroom**

While the three teaching units discussed here should be seen as *one* possible way to teach (post-)colonial history, it is the intention of this chapter to inspire other teachers to use insights from postcolonial theory and from Howard Zinn's People's History approach in their classrooms. When teaching (post-)colonial history under different circumstances than described here (e.g. to ethnically more diverse groups), the educational objectives and methodological recommendations suggested above might have to be adapted. Combining Zinn's People's History approach with insights from postcolonial theory offers a perspective on teaching (post-)colonial history which emphasizes both the material (i.e. political and economic) and the cultural effects of colonialism and postcolonialism. A Postcolonial People's History also leads the way to a decolonization of knowledge and to innovative ways of dealing with colonial and postcolonial history in the history classroom and beyond.

I would like to conclude with two final remarks: It remains to be hoped that in history didactics there will be systematic research on the use of postcolonial theory in the history classroom, which – to my knowledge – has not happened yet (at least not in Germany). Here interdisciplinary collaboration is inevitable. For the specific context of teaching privileged

students, insights from Critical Whiteness Studies, for example, should be incorporated into the research framework.<sup>30</sup>

It would appear that many critics of Howard Zinn underestimate the ability of both historians and history teachers to themselves cast a critical eye on his legacy. Of course history cannot only be taught from *below*, and of course not all historical events were brought about by 'ordinary people'. Yet one key message of Zinn's is that 'ordinary citizens' can make a real change in the world, an inspiring message for both the influential and 'ordinary citizens' of tomorrow who are sitting in our classrooms today.

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30 One goal of my current research project is to develop guiding principles for teaching history from a postcolonial perspective. An important aspect here is the question as to how the experiences and presumptions of the students can influence the approach of the teacher when dealing with (post-)colonial topics in the classroom.

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