

Timm Gerd Hellmanzik

“The West” from a Postcolonial Perspective of History of Education: The Construct “Europe” as a Conceptual Boarder

1 Introduction

In recent years, the discussion surrounding “the West” has significantly intensified in both the public sphere, including the media, and academic circles, in response to historical events.¹ The interpretation of this concept is diverse, but it can be broadly categorized into two opposing perspectives: In the first, “the West”² is understood and propagated as a normative project representing “Western values.” In the second, a critical understanding emerges, pointing to contradictions and inconsistencies related to colonialism and imperialism.³

Within the German-speaking context, Jürgen Osterhammel emphasizes that “the West” has never solely functioned as a geographical term, but is intricately intertwined with a discourse on “civilization.”⁴ Jasper M. Trautsch provides an extensive analysis of the historical genesis and linguistic implications.⁵ This reveals close semantic connections to adjacent terms such as “Europeanization” and “modernization,” which have sometimes acted as synonyms for “the West,” merging conceptually with it. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall contributes a powerful analysis in his essay “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” (1992), in which he unveils the discursive construction of “the West” in contrast to “the Rest” and eluci-

1 In the feuilleton, there is currently a debate underway regarding the historical reappraisal of the German Democratic Republic, with a focus on the ongoing construction of “West” and “East” identities. Various publications contribute to this discussion, and criticisms argue a tendency to downplay historical circumstances. Katja Hoyer, *Beyond the Wall: East Germany, 1949–1990* (Dublin: Allen Lane, 2023); Dirk Oschmann, *Der Osten eine westdeutsche Erfindung* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2023).

2 By employing quotation marks, the subsequent analysis aims to highlight a critical perspective. The term “The West” lacks a fixed semantic definition.

3 The scholarly examination of the concept as an analytical entity is still unfolding and has experienced renewed momentum within various historical disciplines through the *spatial turn* and *linguistic turn*. Christopher Gogwilt et al., *Westernness. Critical Reflections on the Spatio-temporal Construction of the West* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2022).

4 Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2015) 143.

5 Jasper M. Trautsch, “‘Der Westen’: Theoretisch-methodische Überlegungen zu einer Begriffsgeschichte,” *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 60–61 (2018–2019): 409–440.

dates its enduring consequences.⁶ Embracing a critical understanding of this concept proves fruitful in transnational and postcolonial analyses of the history of education, which will be further explored in this article.⁷

A particular focal point at the intersection of “East” and “West,” “Asia” and “Europe,” “Orient” and “Occident,” lies in German-Turkish relations. These transnational relations have recently garnered attention in the history of education.⁸ While contemporary historical reference points tend to revolve around the *Gastarbeiter* (‘guest worker’) agreements of the 1960s, close educational and cultural policy entanglements can be traced back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this time, the German Empire sought to expand its (cultural) imperialist influence towards “semi-colonial entanglements” in “the Orient.”⁹ Similarly, the long nineteenth century of the Ottoman Empire, with its reform phases, is often described in historiography as a period of *modernleşme* (‘modernization’) and *batılaşma* (‘westernization’).¹⁰ A multifaceted discourse on “Turks” and “Turkey” also exerted its influence within German pedagogy. It encompassed educational knowledge bases that depicted the Ottoman Empire and its population in certain ways, perpetuating stereotypical notions that have lasting effects. It also involved a debate within educational policy regarding the transformation and reform processes of the Ottoman educational system and its compatibility with “European education.”¹¹

This article delves into the transnational German-Turkish history of education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a specific focus on the construction of “the West.” First, it discusses approaches within the historical and theoretical discourse on determining the concept of “the West.” Various positions are juxtaposed, taking a postcolonial perspective as the theoretical basis for the subse-

6 Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *The Formations of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (Oxford and Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 184–227.

7 Marcelo Caruso and Daniel Maul’s edited volume *Decolonization(s) and Education: New Policies and New Men* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020) provides a noteworthy example of engaging with (post-) colonial entanglement and decolonization in the field of history of education.

8 On the transnational, entangled, and postcolonial history from the perspective of the history of education, see: Ingrid Lohmann, Julika Böttcher, Sylvia Kesper-Biermann, and Christine Mayer, eds., *Wie die Türken in unsere Köpfe kamen* (Bad Heilbrunn: Julius Klinkhardt, 2021–2025).

9 Malte Fuhrmann, “Deutschlands Abenteuer im Orient. Eine Geschichte semi-kolonialer Verstrickungen,” in *Türkisch-Deutsche Beziehungen: Perspektiven aus Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. Claus Schöning et al. (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2012), 10–33.

10 Cengiz Günay, *Geschichte der Türkei. Von den Anfängen der Moderne bis heute* (Wien: Böhlau 2012), 11.

11 Mustafa Gencer, *Bildungspolitik, Modernisierung und kulturelle Interaktion. Deutsch-türkische Beziehungen (1908–1918)* (Münster: LIT, 2002).

quent historical analysis. Building upon this, a discourse-analytical investigation¹² of historical textbooks is conducted, providing insights into the educational knowledge of the time. The aim is to examine the relationship between the Ottoman Empire or “Turkey”¹³ and conceptions of “Europe,” which can be understood as a precursor to “the West.” The study aims to unravel the complex web of self-perceptions and perceptions of others that emerged during this period, shedding light on the associated semantics and their implications. Finally, the article concludes by summarizing the key findings and situating them within a broader context.

2 “The West” as a Contentious Concept – a Postcolonial Approach to the Term

The interpretations of the concept of “the West” vary significantly, showcasing divergent perspectives. Highlighting the notion that contemporary (self-)perceptions are also challenged when examining historical spaces, global historian Jürgen Osterhammel sheds light on the subject. The emergence of “the West” as a category is a relatively recent phenomenon, dating back to the late nineteenth century. Often framed as a community of “Christian values,” it is consistently positioned against other constructs, initially the “Muslim Orient,” later Soviet communism, and subsequently Islam.¹⁴ It is worth noting the potential for shifts and updates in the concept today, particularly in relation to Russia, China, and the “Global South.” Osterhammel elucidates this concept while the dichotomy between the “Orient” and the “Occident” has ancient cosmological origins, the category of “the West” took shape with a transatlantic vision of a comprehensive civilization. In the late nineteenth century, “the West” and its synonyms, such as the “civilized world,” were not confined to spatial terms but functioned as evaluative and descriptive categories applied to states and regions.¹⁵

From the point of *Begriffsgeschichte* (‘conceptual history’) historian Jasper M. Trautsch conducts a comprehensive study on the historical development of the concept of “the West.” He delves into its multifaceted nature and recognizes it

¹² The analysis is based on a discourse-theoretical perspective that builds upon Michel Foucault’s ideas and has been further developed for discourse-historical analyses by Achim Landwehr, in *Historische Diskursanalyse* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2018).

¹³ In the source material, the references are used interchangeably as synonyms.

¹⁴ Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 143.

¹⁵ Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 144.

as a fundamental political concept of the modern era. He examines how the meaning of the term has evolved over time in relation to factual historical events. However, it is important to acknowledge that the retrospective use of the term does not always align with how people from that period described themselves or others. Researchers must therefore be mindful of their own perspectives and provide an explanation of their positionality.¹⁶ In contrast to Jan Ifversen,¹⁷ Trautsch names four different definitions: Firstly, “the West” is seen as a political community, as it was formulated during the World Wars or the Cold War, representing the “democratic West” in opposition to ideologies like fascism and communism.¹⁸ Secondly, “the West” can refer to the “modern world,” comprising economically and technologically developed countries, particularly against the backdrop of colonialism and imperialism.¹⁹ Thirdly, “the West” existed as a racial category, shaped during the resistance against colonialism, but has largely diminished in contemporary times. And finally, “the West” serves as a reference to a cultural community that has evolved over time, forming a religious unity and sharing common values.²⁰

Furthermore, Trautsch explains that these understandings not only coexist but also overlap with each other. This is particularly evident when considering the notion of a political community and a cultural and value community, as exemplified by the imperialist powers of the nineteenth century such as Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the USA. In addition, it is explained that semantic peculiarities exist in different languages such as English, German, and French, as the terms sometimes have different connotations.²¹ Trautsch’s insights emphasize the potential, relevance, and complexity of examining the historical development of these concepts, which must be considered as foundational aspects of an analysis in the history of education.

Concepts of a political community of “the West,” as a shared cultural space and community of values, are also conveyed in contemporary historiography. Historian Heinrich August Winkler plays a crucial role in shaping the perspective of parts of German academia and public discourse. In numerous publications, Winkler comprehensively elucidates his understanding of “the West” in history. His highly factual historical accounts primarily aim to explain contemporary crises

16 Trautsch, “Der Westen,” 427.

17 Jan Ifversen, “Who are the Westerners?” *International Politics* 45 (2008): 236–253.

18 Trautsch, “Der Westen,” 430.

19 Trautsch, “Der Westen,” 431.

20 Trautsch, “Der Westen,” 432.

21 Trautsch, “Der Westen,” 434.

faced by “the West.”²² Historical representation and normative assignments thus go hand in hand. In his works, Winkler describes the global genesis and historical transformation of “the West,” highlighting the historical events and trends that have favored and accompanied the emergence of “Western values.” According to Winkler, these “Western values” constitute “a historically unique ensemble of achievements.”²³ The historical narrative takes the form of a continuous narrative of progress and development, beginning in antiquity and leading through the medieval “West” to the historical cornerstones of the “modern West”: The Declaration of Independence in North America and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen by the French National Constituent Assembly in 1789. Following Winkler, these documents have developed their “own logic” and laid the foundation for the “project of the West,” marking a watershed moment for “humanity.”²⁴ Initially “the West” is seen within the context of Western Christianity, that is, Latin Europe. It encompasses fundamental attributes such as freedom, checks and balances, the rule of law, popular sovereignty, democracy, individualism, and pluralism. According to Winkler, these values could *only* emerge within their particular historical context. He also acknowledges that violations of these “core values” have occurred within the “normative project” of “the West,” which explains why it is considered an ongoing endeavor.²⁵ Nonetheless, Winkler points out the “ability to adapt” and the “will to learn.”²⁶ Hence, “the West” is viewed as a dynamic entity with an organic and vibrant nature. German history is also placed in this “Western” framework. Referring to the words of President Richard von Weizsäcker, Winkler argues that Germany found its “permanent place among the circle of Western democracies” in 1990.²⁷ NATO and the EU are identified as the supporting pillars of recent history, with the “commitment” to “Western values” being decisive in each case.²⁸ Winkler’s position exemplifies one facet of the historiographical discourse surrounding the concept. It can be demonstrated that the historical argumentation, including the arrangement of historical narrative and its interpretation, un-

22 The crisis of the West is addressed, for example, in Jürgen Habermas’s essay collection *Der gespaltene Westen* (‘The divided West’) from 2004. The central concern of this work is the examination of how violations of international law are handled. His analysis shows that by “the West” he primarily means the USA and Europe, which invokes the ideals of the Enlightenment.

23 Heinrich August Winkler, *Werte und Mächte. Eine Geschichte der westlichen Welt* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2019), 895.

24 Winkler, *Werte und Mächte*, 56.

25 Winkler, *Werte und Mächte*, 897.

26 NZZ, Standpunkte 2015. Der Westen, mächtig und angreifbar. Interview with Heinrich August Winkler, accessed April 24, 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2x6bdDSRQM.

27 Heinrich August Winkler, *Wie wir wurden, was wir sind* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2021), 9.

28 NZZ, Standpunkte 2015.

folds a powerful narrative that extends beyond a mere understanding of the concept and descriptive analysis. In *Werte und Mächte* ('Values and powers') Winkler concludes by stating, "the present history of the West does *not* place its subject in quotation marks because it sees more in the West than the construct it *also* was."²⁹ In doing so, he provides a clear positioning of his understanding of the concept while also pointing out contrasting interpretations of "the West," some of which will now be presented in opposition.

The sociologist and historian Immanuel Wallerstein raises critical concerns in his works regarding an uncritical approach to the notion of "Western civilization":

The concepts of human rights and democracy, the superiority of Western civilization because it is based on universal values and truths, and the inescapability of submission to the 'market' are all offered to us as self-evident ideas. But they are not at all self-evident. They are complex ideas that need to be analyzed carefully, and stripped of their noxious and nonessential parameters, in order to be evaluated soberly and put at the service of everyone rather than a few.³⁰

He argues against the idea of inherent superiority and instead attributes the historical dominance of "the West" to specific processes and systemic dynamics. The rise of "the West" to global hegemony is seen as a result of factors such as economic strength, colonial expansion, and the exploitation of resources from other regions. He calls for a critical examination of "Western hegemony," highlighting the internal divisions and contradictions within "the West" itself.³¹ These perspectives align with postcolonial viewpoints that scrutinize the political, economic, and cultural effects of colonialism. Already in his key work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward W. Said elaborates on the dualism of "Orient" and "Occident," critiquing the hegemonic production of knowledge and its strategies of representation. In this discourse, the idea prevails that ontological differences exist between both poles, which determine the perspective of comparison: the identification of differences instead of commonalities. "Western" notions often generate both implicitly and explicitly a sweeping image of, on the one hand, a dynamic and animated "Occident" with a changing history, and on the other, a passive and merely reactive "Orient."³² In "The West and the Rest," Hall offers a global perspective on colonial relations and provides an analysis of the concept of "the West." He argues that the identity of "the West" only emerges through its comparison with "the Rest," the other, and

²⁹ Winkler, *Werte und Mächte*, 884.

³⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York: The New Press, 2006), XV.

³¹ Wallerstein, *European Universalism*, xv.

³² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 2003).

peripheral regions. According to Hall, these two poles, “the West” and “the Rest,” are interconnected and represent “two sides of a single coin.”³³ Rather than being defined geographically, “the West” is seen as a historical construct characterized by attributes such as industrialization, urbanization, capitalism, secularism, and modernity.³⁴ On the other hand, “the Rest” has opposing and often pejorative attributes ascribed to it. Hall emphasizes that European societies were constructed through the depiction of the foreign and the acknowledgment of difference.³⁵ The discursive construction of “the West” since the Enlightenment, along with its self-perceived superiority, has served to legitimize and propel European expansion, exploitation, and domination. It is important to note that neither “the West” nor “the Rest” can be considered homogenous, and the imaginary boundaries of these constructs remain unclear. Hall decries the uncritical usage of the term “the West,” as it perpetuates powerful dichotomies beyond its historical context and into the present. Alongside the critical examination of the historical formation of “the West,” a serious critique of knowledge production is expressed, which must be taken seriously when dealing with the topic.³⁶

The various approaches to the concept demonstrate that “the West” is a complex and constantly evolving construct. The theoretical assumptions and research approaches, whether global-historical, conceptual-historical, European or national-historical, or postcolonial, determine how the concept of “the West” is dealt with in historical investigations. It has been shown that the results of the analyses presented are similar, but the conclusions and interpretations differ significantly. Winkler uses his analysis to draw attention to contemporary issues involving “the West” emphasizing its “achievements” as a still valid normative project. Postcolonial theorists focus on the flip side of “the West,” which presents itself as “universal” and connected to the imaginations of a “European civilization.” The “success story” is massively questioned, and instead, the (colonial) history of entanglement and systems of representation become subjects of analysis.

In the context of (educational) historical research, clarifying the understanding of the concept is crucial. Instead of examining public, political, or media discourse on “the West,” I now turn to the history of education and analyze educational media as a valuable source. Adopting a postcolonial understanding of the

33 Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” 187.

34 Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” 184–227.

35 Andrea Polaschegg argues that this is not exclusively a Western practice, pointing out that the West has also been misrepresented in “Oriental” sources, highlighting the distortion in its portrayal. Andrea Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus. Regeln deutsch-morgenländischer Imagination im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 39.

36 Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” 225.

concept, “the West” is seen as a discursive construct constantly intertwined with “the Rest.” Without completely denying the value of “Western achievements” as Winkler calls them, postcolonial approaches to “the West” focus on its constructed nature. The continuous demarcation from everything “non-Western” is seen as its distinctive feature and subsequently examined in relation to the Ottoman Empire.

3 The Relation Between “Europe” and the Ottoman Empire in German History Textbooks

Since 1949, Turkey has been a member of the Council of Europe, joining NATO in 1952 and the OECD in 1961. However, its affiliation with “the West” and “Europe” is a subject of continuously heated debate, with both discussions seamlessly merging into one another. One notable example is the contentious debate surrounding its potential EU membership since 2005. This even prompted the influential German historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler to take a clear and unequivocal stance against it in an article titled “Turkey’s accession destroys the European Union” (2006). Wehler cited various factors for his opposition, including perceived economic weaknesses, concerns about “Islam,” the notion of a distinct “cultural sphere,” and the argument that Turkey, fundamentally, is a “non-European country.”³⁷ More recently, there has been even a discussion about whether Turkey still belongs to “the West.”³⁸ Given these circumstances, I believe it is essential to examine the historicity of these debates within the previously not considered educational discourse, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on theoretical perspectives, I interpret the construction of “Europe” as a direct precursor to and, at times, synonymous with “the West.” Consequently, I aim to explore the impact of the concept of “Europe” on historical textbooks’ portrayal of the Ottoman Empire. By analyzing the language, semantics, and the presence of “othering”³⁹ in

³⁷ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Der Türkei-Beitritt zerstört die Europäische Union,” in *Soziale Ungleichheit, kulturelle Unterschiede: Verhandlungen des 32. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in München*, ed. Karl-Siegberg Rehberg (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2006), 1140–1150.

³⁸ Gehört die Türkei noch zum Westen. Perspektiven mit Andreas Nick und Taha Özhan. Körber Stiftung 2018, accessed April 28, 2023, koerber-stiftung.de/site/assets/files/19396/koerber_globals_gehoert_die_tuerkei_noch_zum_westen.pdf.

³⁹ In line with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the concept of “othering” refers to the process of constructing identity and power dynamics by defining a group as “the Other.” It involves the creation of boundaries that distinguish and marginalize certain groups, reinforcing notions of difference and hierarchies of power. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives,” *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (1985): 247–272.

educational knowledge, we can gain insights into the prevailing attitudes and perspectives.

It is worth noting that textbooks have undergone significant transformations during the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, evolving from precious individual books to mass-produced educational tools that have become indispensable in the process of nation-state formation. By examining textbooks, we can reconstruct the “perception patterns, interpretations, values, and norms” associated with historical events, shedding light on the identity formation processes.⁴⁰

When examining German history textbooks from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, specifically in relation to their narratives about the Ottoman Empire, we often encounter the recurring construction of “Europe.”⁴¹ Although the explicit mention of “the West” may be absent,⁴² there are notable references to “Europe” that closely align with the conceptual framework of what we now partly understand as “the West.” These references arise when discussing the Ottoman Empire, and they introduce a certain tension.

Initially, “Europe” is often constructed in the textbooks as an observing entity – a unified perspective that follows the historical events concerning the Ottoman Empire from a certain vantage point. One prominent event that receives significant attention in the books’ historiography is the Greek War of Independence (1821–1832). In this war, “the Turks” assume the role of antagonists in contrast to “the Greeks.” Retrospectively, the events are described as the “revival of Europe”⁴³ and thus, the authors of the textbooks construct a notion of “Europe” being newly discovered in recent history, distinguished from the ancient era. With the establishment of modern Greece, the authors explain how the War of Independence “captured the attention of Europe.”⁴⁴ In other instances, it is mentioned

40 Eckhardt Fuchs, Inga Niehaus, and Almut Stoletzki, eds., *Das Schulbuch in der Forschung. Analysen und Empfehlungen für die Bildungspraxis* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2014), 34.

41 The examined textbooks were sourced from the collection of the Leibniz Institute for Educational Media – Georg Eckert Institute (GEI), located in Braunschweig, Germany. The selection included textbooks on world and national history used in higher education institutions and prestigious girls’ schools, providing insights into the educational practices of privileged bourgeois groups. This contribution partially draws upon my monograph, Timm Gerd Hellmanzik, *Vom “Türkenjoch” zu “Deutschlands Freundschaft für die Türkei” – Der Wandel des Wissens über das Osmanische Reich in deutschen Geschichtsschulbüchern 1839–1918* (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2023).

42 The concept was not yet widespread and, moreover, the German authors probably did not see themselves as “Western.”

43 Theodor Bernhard Welter, *Lehrbuch der Weltgeschichte für Gymnasien und höhere Bürgerschulen* (Münster: Coppenrath, 1840), 358.

44 Friedrich Nösselt, *Lehrbuch der Weltgeschichte für Bürger- und Gelehrtschulen. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschen Geschichte. Teil 3* (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1839), 551.

that “the educated Europe was keenly observing the conflicts.”⁴⁵ Similar dynamics can be observed in later military conflicts, such as the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, where “astonished Europe”⁴⁶ pondered the fate of the Ottoman Empire.

By personifying “Europe” as a rhetorical device, the narrative gains impact, becomes more accessible to the readers, and potentially piques their interest.⁴⁷ This storytelling technique creates a dichotomy where the respective events position the Ottoman Empire as the object of observation while elevating “Europe” to the role of the observing subject. The descriptions are also infused with emotional elements, depicting how “celebrations echoed throughout Europe”⁴⁸ or how the “Balkan troubles” “kept Europe in suspense.”⁴⁹ Even in the first half of the nineteenth century, the textbooks mention that “Europe’s attention was anxiously directed towards the Orient.”⁵⁰ Through this vibrant style, the history textbooks construct “Europe” as a living entity, enabling readers to identify with. Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire is linguistically separated and perceived as outside the realm of “Europe” although the textbooks do not explicitly define what or who is exactly meant by the term in these contexts.

Another concept of “Europe” in the descriptions of the Ottoman Empire within the textbooks is related to geographical and cultural determinations and delineations. Even at a broader level, evident from the table of contents and organization of the textbooks, “Europe” occupies a distinct position within the historical narrative. While it serves the purpose of structuring the content, it also establishes a clear demarcation. Headings such as “European events,” “The peoples and states of Europe” or simply “Europe” are employed, providing a framework to discuss individual states or events and underline their historical significance.⁵¹ Interestingly,

45 Jakob Carl Andrä and Richard Seehausen, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte für höhere Mädchenschulen. Viertes Teil* (Leipzig: R. Voigtländer, 1910), 117.

46 Georg Weber, *Die Weltgeschichte in übersichtlicher Darstellung* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1879), 567.

47 Christoph Huber, “Personifikation,” in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft. Neubearbeitung des Reallexikons der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 3, ed. Klaus Weimar (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 53–55.

48 Johannes Bumüller, *Die Weltgeschichte. Ein Lehrbuch für Mittelschulen und zum Selbstunterricht. Dritter Theil* (Freiburg: Herder, 1862), 423.

49 Karl Dageförde and Wilhelm Heinze, *Die Geschichte in tabellarischer Übersicht. Ein Hilfsbuch für den Geschichtsunterricht* (Hannover: Helwing, 1917), 233.

50 Welter, *Lehrbuch der Weltgeschichte*, 360.

51 Friedrich Mürdter, *Leitfaden der Weltgeschichte; für untere Gymnasialklassen oder lateinische Schulen, Real- und Bürgerschulen, Pädagogien und Töchteranstalten* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1855), 178; Georg Weber, *Lehrbuch der Weltgeschichte: mit Rücksicht auf Cultur, Literatur und Religionswesen, und einem Abriss der deutschen Literaturgeschichte als Anhang für höhere Schulanstalten und zur Selbstbelehrung* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1847), 774; Wilhelm Pütz, *Grundriß der Geographie*

the Ottoman Empire is often included within these discussions, located within the geographical boundaries of “Europe,” sometimes divided into “European Turkey” and “Asian Turkey.” In Wilhelm Pütz’s⁵² widely used *Outline of Geography and History of Ancient, Middle, and Modern Times* (1855), which aims to integrate historical and geographical knowledge, each era commences with a “Geographical Overview of Europe.” While the introduction presents “the Turks” as “Europe’s dangerous neighbors,”⁵³ the geographical descriptions within the “Overview of Europe” place “The Ottoman Empire” within specific time periods, such as “during the Reformation,” thereby positioning it *within* “Europe.”⁵⁴ Consequently, certain texts create dualisms wherein the Ottoman Empire is considered part of the European state order while excluding “the Turks” as an ethnic group. Both these perspectives can coexist within the textbooks. A significant recognition of the Ottoman Empire within the “European state order” occurs in discussions surrounding “The Treaty of Paris.”⁵⁵ Through the formal acceptance in the peace treaty, the Ottoman Empire is included in the “concert of European powers” yet contradictions persist within the texts. Adjacent passages continue to use phrases like “the Turks in Europe”⁵⁶ or “conquests of the Turks in Europe,” emphasizing the continued portrayal of “the Turks” as outsiders. Consequently, certain medieval perceptions are revived, depicting “the Turks” as the “Terror of the World” and antagonistic to a “Christian Europe.”⁵⁷

In contrast to everything non-European, other passages highlight aspects that provide more clarity to the concept of “Europe” and attribute it with the adjective “European.” These passages provide insight into a corresponding (self-)understanding and create a fictional common cultural space. Once again, Pütz can be considered:

und Geschichte der alten, mittleren und neuern Zeit für die mittleren Klassen der Gymnasien und für höhere Bürgerschulen. Erste Abtheilung (Koblenz: Karl Bädcker, 1860), 51.

52 Wilhelm Pütz (1806–1877) was a teacher at Catholic grammar schools in Cologne, Trier and Düren. In 1862 he was appointed professor. He went on study trips to numerous European countries and his works are widely read and have also been translated into Swedish, English, Dutch, Hungarian, and French. Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, *Das deutsche Schulgeschichtsbuch 1700–1945: Die erste Epoche seiner Gattungsgeschichte im Spiegel der Vorworte* (Berlin: LIT 2011), 610.

53 Pütz, *Grundriß der Geographie und Geschichte*, 1.

54 Pütz, *Grundriß der Geographie und Geschichte*, 4.

55 Bumüller, *Die Weltgeschichte*, 692.

56 Wilhelm Pfeifer and Cramer Franz, *Pfeifers Lehrbuch der Geschichte für höhere Lehranstalten. Fünfter Theil* (Breslau: Hirt, 1918), 153.

57 Ash Çırakman, *From the “Terror of the World” to the “Sick Man of Europe”: European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

Europe is indeed the smallest but the most powerful, most educated, relatively populated, and, in every aspect, farthest removed from all extremes of the continents. [...] Moreover, it surpasses the other continents in everything that is a product of the mind. While the formation of states, sciences, mechanical and fine arts, industry, and trade originally belong to the East, they have achieved their highest development and perfection on European soil, first in the South and later in the North.⁵⁸

Rather than defining “Europe” based on physical-topological characteristics, he presents “Europe” as the culmination of a progressive civilization just as it was described in the notion of “the West” as a normative project. While acknowledging the ancient Orient as the origin of cultural achievements and civilization, Pütz argues that they have only fully come into bloom in Europe. By highlighting education, arts, economic productivity, and political order as crucial distinguishing features, Pütz’s remarks bear a resemblance to descriptions of “the West.” Other texts expand on this idea, emphasizing the ongoing but unsuccessful efforts of “the Rest” to reach this level:

They seek strength, they seek defense against impending decline through European institutions, through European means, through the spirit of Europe that they strive to instill in themselves and their own. But the spirit of Europe, incompatible with Islam, will not come to them. Their downfall is certain, even if they manage to prolong their existence for a few more decades. And over them, Europe will eventually extend its influence to Persia and China, where other paths have already been prepared. For no matter how Europe itself emerges from the turmoil it still faces, one thing seems certain: its immense superiority will increasingly assert itself against the foreign world.⁵⁹

In the discussion of political developments in the Ottoman Empire, the attempt at “Europeanization” and “Westernization” is declared a failure. A fundamental opposition is seen in the religion of “Islam.” This perspective categorically excludes the Ottoman Empire and aligns with a widespread narrative of decline in the nineteenth century. Imperialist ambitions and conquest plans are considered justified in light of the comprehensive “superiority of Europe.” “Spirit” (*Geist*), including “intellectual development,” serves as a decisive concept of distinction, marking an insurmountable difference. Where it prevails, the world is guided by enlightenment, reason, institutions, and achievements of humanity.

Later texts, after the turn of the century and especially during the so-called “Young Turk Revolution” of 1908 adopt a different perspective and attribute a certain participation in “Europe” to “the Turks”: “Turkey, which had been predicted to

58 Pütz, *Grundriß der Geographie und Geschichte*, 51.

59 Ludwig Flathe, *Lehrbuch der allgemeinen Geschichte für höhere Unterrichtsanstalten und zum Selbstunterrichte Gebildeter* (Leipzig: Gebhardt & Reisland, 1839), 418.

perish several times before, should gain the character of a modern European state through internal reforms at the turn of the century.”⁶⁰ The crucial factor is the Young Turk Party, which “aimed to make their country accessible to Western European influences and modern civilization.”⁶¹ The Ottoman Empire turned to modernity, thus its preservation and cultural and political revival can be predicted. While it may not be inherently “European” it is capable of “Europeanization.” Rarely, even euphemistic expressions can be found, in which the reforms in the Ottoman Empire are directly linked to “European history”: “Thus, it was destined for the Ottoman Empire to complete the work that France began in 1789 in Europe.”⁶² These remarkable statements reflect historical change and shifting evaluations. They can be explained by improved political relations between the German Empire and the Ottoman Empire in the pre-war period and tendencies towards the formation of a new nation-state that met European standards.

Overall, it becomes clear that in places of demarcation, textbooks associate “Europe” and “European values” with specific characteristics: state formation, science, “intellectual development” and trade. Walking through history, the Ottoman Empire is long denied participation in these aspects and even accused of incompatibility. However, gradually, in the early twentieth century, isolated positions emerge that incorporate the Ottoman Empire into the civilizational history of “Europe.” In a remarkable way, criteria employed to delineate and characterize “Europe” in this context exhibit noteworthy parallels with those observed in historiographical discourse concerning “the West.”

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has provided insights into the theoretical and historical construction of the concept of “the West” and its manifestation in the educational discourse regarding the Ottoman Empire. The analysis has explored the complex and heterogeneous portrayal of the relationship between “Europe” and the Ottoman Empire in history textbooks, and the ways in which these textbooks encompass various historical periods and events, resulting in the construction of multiple “Europe” concepts and perceptions of the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, underlying these varied representations, one can discern a progression from a categorical

⁶⁰ Ella Mensch, *Leitfaden für den Unterricht in der Weltgeschichte: an höheren Mädchenschulen sowie an Studienanstalten* (Berlin: Otto Salle, 1910), 204.

⁶¹ Mensch, *Leitfaden für den Unterricht in der Weltgeschichte*, 204.

⁶² Heinrich Christensen, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte für höhere Mädchenschulen* (Leipzig: Hirt, 1909), 70.

rejection and exclusion of the Ottoman Empire to a partial “inclusion” within the concept of “Europe.” Despite the absence of formal colonial relations, the descriptions are permeated by a sense of (colonial) superiority. It is not until later, when the political exigency of an alliance becomes more apparent in light of the World War, that the descriptions take on a more positive tone.

The analysis of the textbooks has identified three levels of discourse: “Europe” as an observing entity, “Europe” in relation to geographical-cultural determinations and boundary delineations, and “Europe” as a shared cultural space, distinguished from non-European entities. The latter level aligns with the normative project of “the West” and can be considered a precursor to it. These findings resonate with analyses based on other source materials; as Peter Burke aptly noted, “Europe is not so much a place as an idea.”⁶³ Despite the absence of explicit references to the “West” in German perspectives during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the analysis demonstrates that the concepts of “Europe” in relation to the Ottoman Empire employ mechanisms of differentiation and similar attributions. “Europe” functions as a conceptual boarder, a term that creates a distinction between different entities.

In light of these insights, it is clear that the use of the terms “the West” and “Europe” as analytical categories is not straightforward. It calls for further discussion and critical examination within the field of pedagogical historiography. Additionally, the postcolonial understanding employed in this empirical investigation highlights the need to re-evaluate other related terms critically. By delving deeper into these dimensions, future research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the construction of “the West” and its relation to “Europe” in educational contexts.

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⁶³ Peter Burke, “Did Europe Exist Before 1700?” *History of European Ideas* 1, no. 1 (1980): 21.

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