

Africa in Brazilian (São Paulo) and German (Berlin) Geography textbooks

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Abstract

Studies on the representation of spatial units, such as continents, look back on a considerable tradition in Geography. Nevertheless, in many cases, the studies analyze representations without considering the educational and epistemological framework of Geography as a school subject. The ambition of this paper is to explore, mindful of the curricular framework and of Geography's particular position within formal education, how Brazilian and Germany textbook represent Africa. Content analysis served to explore Geography textbooks from Basic Education (São Paulo, Brazil) and lower and upper Secondary (Berlin, Germany). Several iterations led to consolidated categories that helped grasp the representations of Africa. The results show a range of similarities. However, the differences prevail.

Keywords: Africa. Textbooks. Geography. Brazil. Germany. School Geography.

A África nos livros didáticos de Geografia de São Paulo (Brasil) e de Berlim (Alemanha)

Resumo

Estudos baseados na representação de unidades espaciais como continentes remetem a uma considerável tradição na Geografia. No entanto, em muitos casos, tais estudos analisam representações sem considerar as bases educacionais e epistemológicas da Geografia como disciplina escolar. Ciente das bases curriculares e da posição particular da Geografia na educação formal, o presente artigo examina como brasileiros e alemães representam a África em seu conteúdo a partir da análise de livros didáticos de Geografia do Ensino Básico (São Paulo, Brasil) e do Secundário inferior e superior (Berlim, Alemanha). Diversas repetições permitiram consolidar categorias que ajudam a compreender tais representações, mas, embora os resultados revelem uma série de semelhanças, prevalecem as diferenças.

Palavras-chave: África. Livros didáticos. Geografia. Brasil. Alemanha. Geografia escolar.

África en los libros de texto de Geografía en São Paulo (Brasil) y Berlín (Alemania)

Resumen

Los estudios basados en la representación de unidades espaciales, como los continentes, se remontan a una tradición considerable en la Geografía. Sin embargo, en muchos casos, tales estudios analizan las representaciones sin considerar las bases educativas y epistemológicas de la Geografía como materia escolar. Este artículo tiene como objetivo explorar, conscientes de las bases curriculares y de la posición particular de la Geografía en la educación formal, cómo los libros de texto brasileños y alemanes representan a África en sus contenidos, a partir del análisis de los libros de texto de Geografía para la Educación Básica (São Paulo, Brasil) y la Secundaria inferior y superior (Berlín, Alemania). Varias repeticiones permitieron consolidar categorías que ayudaron a comprender tales representaciones, pero si bien los resultados muestran una serie de similitudes, prevalecen las diferencias.

Palabras-clave: África. Libros de texto. Geografía. Brasil. Alemania. Geografía escolar.

Introduction

In different ways, as sociospatial formations with also different trajectories, both Brazil and Germany have been politically engaged in the review of their relations with the African continent since the beginning of the 21st century. In the Brazilian case, a Latin American country with the largest black population outside Africa (and whose social relations are indelibly marked by its violent colonial and slavery history), the rise of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva to the presidency (in 2003) was accompanied by a double movement. On the one hand, the Afro-Brazilian population was the target of historic reparation policies; on the other, there was political and economic reconciliation with the African continent, through several public policies in all spheres of government. In the case of Germany, a European country with a particular colonial history,¹ the heated debate over the acquisition and ownership of African museum artifacts put the continent on the national agenda during the reopening of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin (in 2021). This is an emerging discussion in the country at least since the pioneering work of

1 Unlike the other European colonial powers, Germany lost all of its African possessions as a result of World War I. Even if the old ties were not completely severed, a different kind of relationship (compared to English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Belgians with Africa) was established. In any case, it is noteworthy that, so long as it retained its colonies, Germany was as violent as any other European power; and the genocide of the Herero people (in present-day Namibia) in the early 20th century is a good example of this.

Ayim, Oguntoye and Schultz (1986), on Afro-Germans as a social category and the secular relationship between Germany and Africa. Added to this, both Brazilian and German society have seen, especially in the last two decades, the arrival in their territories of hundreds of thousand of Africans who leave their continent for various reasons (economic, political, academic etc.), driving the need of a better knowledge of Africa in both countries today.

In this sense, one of the main ways to reconcile with the past, better understand the African reality and expand present relationships, is the development of a politically responsible formal education about Africa for children and young people in schools. Within this process, it seems fundamental to adequately address the African continent in textbooks used in the classroom. Based on this, this article is a qualitative and exploratory effort to compare the different ways in which Brazil and Germany, with their also different historical and contemporary relationships with the African continent, address it in their textbooks. For such, a literature review is articulated with content analysis of these textbooks by identifying (through software) common categories in the two selected educational universes. While the description of our results follows the Brazilian and German samples separately, we chose to also discuss the two countries jointly. Some concluding thoughts close the paper.

It can be noted, in the title of the article, the specification of the cities of São Paulo (Brazil) and Berlin (Germany) as the focus of analysis. Although, in the Brazilian case, the selected textbooks have a national scope (without regional and/or local specificities), in the German case, the Geography textbooks have regional scope, so that those selected for our sample were written for students from Berlin-Brandenburg. Since, as in Germany, Brazilian public education policies also have provisions at the state and municipal levels, we chose to delimit our sample in the cities of São Paulo and Berlin to standardize the comparison unities – even though, in practice, the content of textbooks in São Paulo are no different from the rest of the country.

Geography Textbooks and Africa

Over the decades, a wide range of disciplines showed interest in Geography textbooks. While exploring their content, layout, or usage, studies adopt different perspectives. The literature review on work connected to Geography textbooks that looks into Africa revealed two main directions.

The *first group* of studies traditionally comes from outside Geography (Education) and uses Geography textbooks as (part of) its sample. Such studies tend to follow a topical approach and look into matters such as racism, conflict, gender or nation-building. From early on, textbook and educational media studies explored the representation of Africa in Geography textbooks. In her comparative study, Hillers (1984, p. 363) analyzed “non-European peoples and cultures (the case of Africa south of the Sahara) as represented in recent geography textbooks from Belgium, England/Wales, the Federal Republic of Germany, France and the Netherlands”. Both qualitative and quantitative methods served to analyze a total of 250 textbooks “based on a common list of ethnological-geographical problem areas on the topic ‘peoples and cultures’” (Hillers, 1984, p. 364). While the origins of the “problem areas” remain undisclosed, the list entailed 14 entries that served as analytical categories (Figure 1). Contrary to the sources of her

analytical categories, Hillers (1984, p. 363) disclosed the aims of her study, namely “against the background of the idea of promoting international understanding through unbiased textbooks as expressed in the declaration principles of Unesco and the Council of Europe”. Hillers’ (1984) study is, in many way, exemplary of many studies to follow, as it rests on normative goals formulated by international organizations, refrains from questioning origins and consequences of such normative claims, and leaves the very content of Geography as a school subject unconsidered while formulating over-generalized and often inaccurate conclusions. For example, Hillers (1984, p. 369) condemns problem-based learning, comparison (spatial transfer), and personification patterns as “Euro-centred” while exhibiting a surprisingly naïve claim of objectivity: “the books imply a didactical approach that prevents an impartial perception and an appreciation of foreign peoples and cultures rather than promoting it”. Nevertheless, the paper delivers neither any evidence supporting such consequences, nor does it adopt a comparative perspective drawing upon representations of Europe or other continents.

Figure 1 – Problem areas as analytical categories

1	<i>Races</i>
2	<i>Peoples and Tribes</i>
3	<i>Languages</i>
4	<i>Economic Types</i>
4.1	<i>Hunting and Collecting</i>
4.2	<i>Nomadism</i>
4.3	<i>Cultivation (Subsistence Cultivation)</i>
4.4	<i>Plantations</i>
5	<i>Settlements and Housing</i>
5.1	<i>House Forms</i>
5.2	<i>Villages and Cities</i>
6	<i>Religions</i>
7	<i>Social Structures</i>
8	<i>Laws</i>
9	<i>Handicrafts</i>
10	<i>Art</i>
11	<i>History</i>
11.1	<i>The Ancient Empires</i>
11.2	<i>Colonial History</i>
11.3	<i>Modern Times</i>
12	<i>The Cultural Change</i>
13	<i>The Problem of Development</i>
14	<i>The Racial Problem</i>

source: Hillers (1984, p. 364).

Over the decades, a multitude of studies from various fields followed similar paths. One example is Loftsdóttir’s (2007, p. 6) work on nationalism, identity and Africa in Icelandic Geography textbooks, which takes an anthropological approach viewing her objects of study as a “form of media that creates collective imaging of the self and the other”. The findings shed light on practices of racialization and othering by overemphasizing tradition (as opposed to development) and the need of (European) intervention in service of modernization. One of the main tool, the authors found, was the lack of individualism and agency in the ways Geography textbooks portrayed Africa and its inhabitants. Maintaining a post-modern discourse, Loftsdóttir (2007) detaches her explanations from Geography’s educational aims, the school subject’s disciplinary grammar and habitual practices of teaching and learning using textbooks.

In their study on racism and the image of Africa in German textbooks, Marmer et al. (2010) analyzed two textbooks before administering a survey to students of African descent living in Hamburg. Almost three decades later, the paper replicates much of Hillers' (1984) approach as it fails to disclose its clear methodological steps, only using one exemplary text passage from a Geography textbook to argue how History teaching in Germany is Eurocentric and deeply racist.

Overall, these studies remain of limited usefulness to stakeholders involved in Geography textbook design, editing, development, and usage. While the most important reason remains their detachment from Geography as a school subject (with its educational aims, concepts, and teaching practice), these studies also tend to be of questionable methodological quality using quite small samples. Nonetheless, most studies are quite liberal in drawing conclusions claiming universal validity.

Similar to the tradition in other fields, academic interest in Geography textbooks from within Geography and Geography Education – the *second group* of studies discussed here – looks back on a considerable past (Bagoly-Simó, 2021). In contrast to the first group, however, studies from Geography (Education) explore various layers and dimension of geographical concepts, approaches, disciplinary traditions and educational artefacts.

In an early study, Wright (1979, p. 205) explores, in light of Geography being “probably the most visual subject in the school curriculum, apart from art”, how it visually portrays Africa. Following a set of criteria based on geographical topics, the author points out some shortcoming, namely the marginal role of the secondary and tertiary economic activities, the limited attention dedicated to technology, and the “almost total absence of pictures of crafts and of the ‘informal’ sector of the economy” (Wright, 1979, p. 209). The paper also reflects on picture perception and looks into why some pictures might seem staged and less suitable to “naturally” depict Africa.

Cole's (2008) study looks into how undergraduate Geography textbooks regionalized Africa. Using the United States as case study and focusing on half of 20th century (1953-2004), the study identifies Grigg's (1967) three early paradigms of regionalization, namely the Vidalian *pays*, the natural region, and the single feature region approach. Against the background of a detailed historical revision of geographical thought concerning regionalization, the mixed-methods approach revealed the dominance of traditional perspectives and a surprising share of unique single feature regions leading, in Cole's (2008) reading, to learning situation that are yet to better contribute to critical teaching and thinking.

In a similar vein, Myers (2001) mapped how introductory Human Geography college textbooks portrayed Africa. Given their central role in laying the fundamentals, the introductory textbooks used across the United States tended to avoid both ahistorical representations and geographical simplifications. Nonetheless, some stereotypical representation remained, due to the limited attention dedicated to African crises and everyday life.

Finally, Usher's (2021) work on representations of Africa in Irish Primary Geography textbooks, in light of Critical Multicultural Education, explores a cross-curricular objective in light of school Geography's grammar. In doing so, Usher (2021) remains mindful of curricular requirements, textbook design and development, but also the role of Geography textbooks

across Irish primary classrooms. In contrast to work presented above (cf. Marmer et al., 2010), the findings allow scholars and teachers to reflect on the links between cross-disciplinary and geographical educational objectives, in light of results obtained based on a sound methodology and representative sample.

Results from several countries – cf. Usher (2021) for Ireland, Hemmer and Hemmer (2021) for Germany and Bagoly-Simó (2008) for Romania – highlight the central role of Geography textbooks in the teaching-learning process. Nonetheless, scholarship on Africa and its teaching reaches beyond textbooks. Substantial work focusses on students' mental representations of Africa as expressed in mental maps (Harwood; Rawlings, 2001; Scoffham, 2019) or students' personal concept of Africa (Obermaier; Schrüfer, 2009; Blanco, 2017). Additionally, teachers share innovative ways of teaching about Africa by using, for example, Africa novels to teach about cities (Smiley, 2009).

In light of this diverse scholarship, the present paper aims to look at how two countries with sharply different school geographies and epistemologies, and also distinct trajectories and relations within the continent, organize their contents about Africa in their Geography textbooks.

Methodology

Given the nature of the present study – to compare the content about Africa in Geography textbooks from Brazil (São Paulo) and Germany (Berlin) – it is necessary to delimitate our research sample. For such, we sought to understand, based on literature and documentary review, the historical and institutional aspects of African teaching on school Geography of both selected cities, thus subsidizing the definition of our research scope.

Present on scholar discussions since the Imperial Brazil period, the didactic content about Africa was officialized by the Brazilian government as soon as in the 19th century, and more specifically in 1890, through the Benjamin Constant Reform (Ferracini, 2012). Although always relatively “late”, as pointed by Ferracini (2012), the content and theoretical approach about Africa on Brazilian textbooks were constantly updated throughout the 20th century, but the beginning of 21st century marked an inflection on these process – specially since the promulgation of the Law 10.639/2003, which made mandatory the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture on Basic Education. In practical terms, it meant a double movement related to African scholar content in Brazil: on the one hand, these contents were slowly being incorporated on official scholar curriculum at all federative levels of Basic Education (federal, state and municipal); on the other, it was followed by a boom on the design, edition and publication of African-related material throughout the country, including historical textbooks,² youth and infant literature and, most important for this discussion, new content inside Geography's textbooks handled in Brazilian classrooms.

2 It is worth mentioning the Portuguese translation of the General History of Africa Collection, edited by Unesco, which since 2011 is available online and was distributed to public libraries and universities throughout the country (Ministro apresenta..., 2010)

About the incorporation into the official curriculum, and specifically in the city of São Paulo, contents about Africa were included in the last years of each main Basic Education level: for the Elementary School, Africa was meant to be taught on 8th and 9th grade, while in the High School they started to be offered only in the 3rd grade (Table 1). For the Elementary School, the Currículo da Cidade (2019) in São Paulo suggests the study of the African continent in international perspective, both within the American continent and the contemporary world system. This *currículo* – which aligns its learning objectives with UN’s Sustainable Development Goals – determines that Elementary School’s 8th and 9th grade students must acquire not only cartographical knowledge (physical, political, ethnical, etc.) about Africa, but also its environmental diversity and insertion on historical (colonialism) and contemporary (globalization) systemic processes. For the High School, the former Currículo do Estado de São Paulo (2011), at the state level, determined the deepening in the Elementary School content in its Geography’s 3rd grade, but a new Currículo Paulista (2020) diluted these content in small topics on History and Philosophy, signaling a decrease of African teaching in High School Geography for the next years.

Table 1 – The basic education structure in Brazil and Germany, highlighting (in yellow) the years planned for teaching Africa in São Paulo and Berlin-Brandenburg

Brazil		Germany	
school level	year/grade	school level	year/grade
Elementary	1	Elementary	1
	2		2
	3		3
	4		4
	5		5
	6		6
	7		7
	8	Secondary I	8
	9		9
High School	10 (1)	Secondary II	10
	11 (2)		11
	12 (3)		12
		Secondary II (in comprehensive schools)	11, 12 e 13

source: Own elaboration.

To accompany these new curriculum provisions, a myriad of new publications on the African continent have emerged since the enactment of Law 10.639/2003. In this context, two Brazilian textbooks were analyzed in relation to their African content: *Araribá Plus* and *Geoconexões*. Published by Moderna publishing house in 2018 and 2015 (respectively), they are already a concrete and consolidated result of this new provision of the law for teaching on the African continent. Each textbook relates to one of the national levels of Basic Education (Elementary and High School, respectively), both also included in the National Textbook Program (PNLD³). Besides being part of the PNLD, the use of these books in the classroom was confirmed by teachers (and former teachers) of the public and private schools in São Paulo, thus confirming the relevance of our choice. It is also important to point out that, unlike the textbooks analyzed by Ferracini (2012),⁴ with a well-defined authorship pattern restricted to a few authors, these new Brazilian textbooks are published in a new editorial model, where a huge team of professionals divides the work under the supervision of a large multinational publishing group⁵ (Zago, 2012).

In the German case, and specifically in the city of Berlin, school textbooks are based on the Berlin-Brandenburg Geography curriculum, drawn up by the Schools and Media State Institute⁶ and published by the Senate or the Ministry.⁷ The curriculum for Secondary I (from 7th to 10th grade) was published in 2015, while the curriculum for Secondary II (from 11th to 13th grade) is from 2006 (SBJW, 2006, 2015).

For grades 7 and 8 (Secondary I), the curriculum suggests a general thematic approach to natural areas, population development, migration, poverty and inequality. For grades 9 and 10 (still in Secondary I), the curriculum addresses the European continent, climate change, resource use and global connections. To verify the approach to the African continent in a global context, it was decided to use a textbook for the 9th and 10th grade. However, in order to contextualize the students' prior knowledge, references will be made to the contents of the textbooks of previous years (7th and 8th).

The textbook chosen for this level (Secondary I) was the Terra Series,⁸ which, based on statistics and consultations with teachers, is one of the most used in the region. The book has several authors (both school teachers and a university one) and is also designed for the next level (Secondary II). It is based on the official curriculum and, beyond purely thematic discussions, also includes pages with geographic work methods.

3 Acronyme for Portuguese *Programa Nacional do Livro Didático*.

4 Whose time frame ends in 2003.

5 In this case, the Spanish group Santillana, which acquired Moderna publishing house in the early 2000s.

6 In German, *Landesinstitut für Schule und Medien* (Lisum).

7 In Berlin, *Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Wissenschaft Berlin* (SBJWB) (Department of Education, Youth and Science from the Senate of Berlin). In Brandenburg, *Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg* (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports from Brandenburg).

8 Offered for sale by Klett publishing house in 2018.

For Secondary II (11th to 13th grades), the focus will be on a book from the Diercke Series,⁹ which includes Geography textbooks and atlases, also commonly used in the classroom. This book prepares students for the Abitur¹⁰ Central exam given in Berlin-Brandenburg. As it also can be used in other regions, it contains topics for Secondary II in general (with several spatial examples and a regional-thematic approach).

Thus, for the German sample, this article focuses on a textbook for 9th and 10th grades of Secondary I (Terra) and a textbook for Secondary II (*Diercke*). These are the levels where African studies are concentrated in secondary education in the country (Table 1). It is noteworthy that both books are less than six years old, so it was not possible to assess the evolution of political processes since their publication. In addition, it must be borne in mind that nowadays many schools do not regularly use just one textbook, but work simultaneously with several (generally available at school for at least one classroom). Digital teaching resources are also being increasingly used, but in general the textbook remains the main resource – which could be seen even during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown (Bagoly-Simó; Hartmann; Reinke, 2020).

With the textbooks defined (Brazilian and German ones), all the pages with references and discussions about Africa were scanned (in the Brazilian case, entire unities), and after digitalization they were inserted into the MAXQDA ([s.d.]) software for qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Any appearance of iconographic (images, graphs and maps) or didactic (exercises or pedagogical resources) content related to Africa in the chosen books was identified and selected, and all entries were grouped into 6 main geographic and thematic categories: (a) nature, (b) history, (c) population, (d) politics, (e) modernization/development and (f) urbanization. In some cases it was possible to disaggregate these main categories into subcategories, and all entries were counted and summed for statistical purposes. As the comparison between Brazilian and German textbooks is an exploratory study, it should be noted that these categories were initially formed by an inductive method (in-vivo-Codes), being later adjusted to the specificities of both samples to enable a common base of comparison. The categories identified, as well as a summary analysis of each by country, are shown in Table 2.

Finally, information on the scales of the content was also included: continental, regional or national (with specification of the name of the countries). World-scale maps that included Africa were excluded, excepting when dynamics related to the continent were central (as in the case of the enslaved trade).

9 Published by Westermann publishing house in 2017.

10 A degree that allows students to attend universities.

Table 2 – The thematic categories identified in the selected textbooks, with a summary analysis of each one by country (Brazil and Germany)

	Brazil	Germany
(a) nature	Very descriptive, with underrepresentation of climate change discussions	The natural bases for agricultural management in the tropics and savannas are presented; nature as tourist attraction; the threat of climate change
(b) history	Focus on colonialism and the processes of decolonization and independence	Poorly discussed, briefly explains dependency via colonialism and the current situation of former colonies
(c) population	Relatively absent, with some discussion of demographics and underrepresentation of cultural aspects	Very little is addressed; different levels of development in African states (through two examples) are mentioned
(d) politics	Emphasis on conflicts, democratization processes, borders/regions and, to a lesser extent, refugees	The postcolonial context and some governance issues are briefly (and superficially) discussed
(e) modernization/development	More widely discussed, the focus is on the three economic sectors and on the binomial digital inclusion/exclusion, also shedding light on the contradictions of development	Focus on Africa's insertion (as a whole, without distinction) in global markets, highlighting positive and innovative examples of individual projects
(f) urbanization	Accelerated urbanization processes in the continent are presented, opposing a modern urban Africa to the persistence of its conditions of poverty	Almost absent, only generically and referring to a single city model

source: Own elaboration.

Results: São Paulo (Brazil)

Before starting a detailed analysis of the results of the city of São Paulo, it is important to point out that, in addition to small insertions in general unities (chapters), in both selected books the African continent is the subject of entire unities (whereas, in *Araribá Plus*, there are two units on it).¹¹ In any case, and despite this focus on Africa, it is appropriate here to endorse the analysis by Anjos (2005, p. 175) that the continent “is systematically in the final sections” of Brazilian textbooks, and therefore, is not always satisfactorily addressed “due to the limited time to comply with the program”. Still in an overview, and especially with regard to the maps of these units, it is also important to mention an almost always continental representation of Africa in the selected books, with few maps on regional or national scales. However, within the texts, countries are recurrently chosen as the scale of analysis.

¹¹ All continents are studied in detail in at least one unity of each book, as regional analyzes are the methodology chosen to structure these works. Despite this, the fact that Africa is the subject of two unities in one of the books can be directly related to the aforementioned legal provision.

For the first category (*nature*), most of the content introduces the main landscapes and ecosystems of the continent, in a descriptive and succinct way. Surprisingly, discussions of climate change are underrepresented, appearing only occasionally and illustratively (as just examples, or as tasks for students). In the second category (*history*), 80% of the content focuses on colonialism and independence of African nations, and more especially the role of the colonial heritage as an obstacle to the contemporary development of the continent. Residually, the role of Africa in the great migratory movements prior to the 19th century is introduced, going back to the first human migrations 60,000 years ago. For the third category (*population*), relatively absent in both books, there is a predominance of demographic data and few mentions of health and gender issues. As in the case of climate change, cultural aspects are also surprisingly underrepresented, with general emphasis on the ethnic and religious characteristics of African populations (without deepening or problematizing them from a more consolidated theoretical perspective).

Compared to the first three categories (*nature*, *history* and *population*), the next two (*politics* and *modernization/development*) are considerably better covered in both books and are therefore divided into more subcategories. Reinforcing some stereotypes about the African continent, more than half of the records on *politics* are in the subcategory *conflicts*, which includes ethnic and religious issues, as well as geopolitical disputes and terrorism. There is excessive iconographic representation of armed militias and war images. Three African countries are repeatedly chosen as examples in this subcategory: Rwanda, Sierra Leone and South Sudan. In addition to Conflicts, the political content of the books also includes discussions on *democracy* (highlighting the recent elections in countries such as Angola and South Africa, as well as the so-called Arab Spring in North Africa) and *borders/regionalization* (again, drawing attention to the consequences of the African colonial period). Finally, the (no longer so emergent) issue of *refugees* is also mentioned. In general, discussions on the category *politics* are in line with the assumptions of the international political system prescribed by the UN, with the exception of the colonality of African borders and their derived regions – in this case, closer to a critical and theoretical debate from Human Sciences.

The main topic of the selected books, however, is the category *modernization/development*, which could also be called *economy*. In a way, the books discuss and exemplify the so-called economic “sectors” – *agriculture* (in general), *extractivism* (focus on Angola) and *industrialization* (focus on South Africa) –, and also briefly presents processes of *circulation*. Also noteworthy are the debates on *regional integration* and the insertion of Africa in the global economic system, and again reinforcing some stereotypes, there is considerable space to *poverty* and *hungry* issues. In an incipient but important way, both books also address the processes of *innovation* and *digital exclusion*, using the experiences of Ghana (exclusion) and Kenya (innovation) as specific examples. In general, the selected books have a positive view on contemporary African development, aligning themselves more with the so-called Afro-optimism (which embraces the “rise” of African economies in the 21st century) than with its antithesis, the Afro-pessimism.

None of the books clearly recognizes, however, that not all African countries are “on the rise”, as Kauê Santos (2020) argues. Nevertheless, both books ponder the contradictions of African recent growth (not necessarily development), as wealth creation and economic diversification have not necessarily led to poverty eradication or the reduction of continental internal inequality.

The last category identified is *urbanization*, the only one without internal subcategories. The books highlight the continent’s accelerated process of urbanization in recent decades, presenting both a modern Africa (as illustrated by a two-page photo of Luanda, capital of Angola) and the unequal character of this process, in line with discussions on the contradictions of the African growth/development. Besides Luanda, urbanization processes in North Africa (Egypt, Morocco, Algeria) and South Africa are also discussed, which reinforces, despite a generalist view of the continent in both books, the importance of presenting it as a set of 55 countries¹² – or sociospatial formations (Santos, M., 1977) – to Basic Education students in São Paulo.

In short, the contents about Africa in the selected Brazilian textbooks fluctuate between alignment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals – as explicitly included on the Currículo da Cidade (2019) – and academic discussions, by reinforcing the persistent role of colonial History in Africa and somehow referring to concepts like dependency and underdevelopment. Likewise, the iconographic representations and the contents discussed oscillate between the reproduction of certain stereotypes (hungry, poverty, war etc.) and the presentation of a modern, urban and rising Africa. This attempt to update the continent’s reality for Basic Education students is in line with Ferracini’s (2012) finding about Brazilian textbooks in a historical perspective. As explained by this author, textbooks (and especially in the case of Africa) are always the result of a narrative clash between establishment forces and activist/academic discussions, being, therefore, representative of the contradictory historical process and not always aligned to heated theoretical discussions (as one might wish).

Results: Berlin (Germany)

In general, it can be said that German textbooks do not see the African continent in its diversity when it comes to some topics. In particular, textbooks for grades 7/8 and 9/10 often address Africa as a continent, without detailing country specifics (excepting for a few separate chapters on Botswana or Tanzania). It is also possible to find several world maps that include the continent (for example, to illustrate its integration to the global market).

For the first category (*nature and environment*), due to the curricular content planned for the 9th and 10th grades, there are few elements in the selected textbook related to these themes, with just two relevant passages: one on *threats to the natural environment* on the African continent due to climate change (illustrated by a map and markers), and another on increasing *desertification*. Specifically related to the natural environment, there are also two pages in the chapter on Tanzania that focus on the country’s landscape and briefly discuss its climate, vegetation and relief. It should also be noted that this chapter is structured according to the concepts of space (Wardenga, 2002): facts about natural space can be found under the

¹² According to the African Union.

first concept of space, usually called “container space”.¹³ In addition, natural beauty as a factor of attraction is discussed in the following pages, where good conditions for growing coffee are also presented. From the 11th grade onwards (Secondary II), topics related to nature and the environment – such as *climate factors* and *vegetations zones* (tropical and subtropical, savannas and deserts), but also life and economic activities in constantly wet tropics (climate change and desertification, deserts and ecofarming)¹⁴ – are better addressed.

In the 9th and 10th grade textbook there is no content on the second category (*history*). Only in the Secondary II textbook is there a double page referring to *colonialism*, and the contemporary issues derived from it in postcolonial countries: a cartoon portrays Africa as the continent of the enslaved, and shows that, even after colonialism, the dependence on the “West” persists. The same goes with the category *politics*: only the 11th to 13th grade textbook (Secondary II) discusses, very briefly and in the context of development and *postcoloniality*, its political challenges, but without going into detail. In the category *population*, also without much importance, only the Secondary II textbooks provides specific references. There is a passage on population development with case studies, using diagrams with age structures from Ethiopia and Nigeria (and linking them to the fertility rate). Ecological footprints are also discussed in this context. Another reference calls into question the way in which the “sub-Saharan” faces the demographic dividend. The focus of these pages is on different development trends, and is embedded in the sustainability context.

As in Brazilian textbooks, the most explored categories in the German sample are *economy* and/or *modernization/development*. With regards to Economy, the first topic addressed in the 9th and 10th grade textbooks is the *integration of Africa into the global market*, through maps of international flows of goods. There is also a discussion about *energy*, and especially the Desertec project (detailed in two pages). In terms of global energy supply, consumption and emissions, the African continent is situated among the others, but in general the focus on this development trend based on renewable energies is positive. The “Mystery” method (based on a story from Ghana), where students must draw connections between the arable land of small Ghanaian farmers and the use of E10 in Germany, is also introduced in the same book. This category also discusses topics such as *resources* (highlighting the overexploitation of coltan in Congo, Malawi, Rwanda and South Africa), *global players* (approaching global markets through them),¹⁵ the *textile industry* (with the traditional “journey of Jeans”, showing the African countries where these productions takes place in poor working conditions) and *internet use* (with pie charts of high technology usage around the world, including African participation as a whole). In the latter, it is also clear that, despite its low representativeness, *internet* access in general is increasing considerably on the continent, although the internal problems of African states are not discussed in detail.

13 The title of this subchapter is “The space as a spatial object”.

14 This is an ecofarming project as a positive example in Tanzania. Students are also invited to work with atlases to describe relief, climate and agricultural conditions. Some charts show the operation of a biogas industry, which is also related to the theme of development.

15 Including a map illustrating that few global companies are headquartered in an African country.

A double page also covers *exports and imports* more precisely, using the example of Tanzania. Tanzania's trading partners, as well as the volume of that trade, are shown in pie charts, and another chart show the region of origin of tourists entering the country. On the same page, there is a map of the African *transport network* referring to the spatial concept (Wardenga, 2002) "space of relations", but without proposing any specific task for the students. In addition to maps and diagrams, there are two photos on the page: one of a truck, which says "Transport of goods by truck in Tanzania"; and another where a man picks cotton. In this chapter on Tanzania, tourism is also discussed as a development factor, but not very deeply.

In 11th and 12th grades textbooks, the African continent is repeatedly represented in its totality with charts and maps, and some points are better covered during the analysis. The first is *land grabbing*, with a map showing the investors' countries of origin and the amount of areas in hectares. This is complemented with a table also showing the countries most affected by land grabbing, and at the top of the list are Sudan, Congo RD, Mozambique and Congo. Both the texts and the tasks do not openly address African states, but only the general process. The second point is the *world market*, and specifically exports and imports in the context of development (the cases of Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Libya, Rwanda and Nigeria being mentioned). For the third point, on *agrarian states*, two graphs show African states that, it is important to note, are not discussed in detail in the text on "Changing economic structures". The same applies to a global fragmentation map, and tasks for students are generally oriented toward registering export structures. Finally, there is also a case study on Kenya: the textbook contains a short special chapter (at the end) on the country, focusing on technical progress and the conflict area of globalization (title of this special chapter). In addition to export/import data, food security through technical progress and tourism development is also discussed.

With regard to *modernization/development*, it can be said that in both textbooks there are only four references clearly linked to this category. From a positive perspective, it is worth mentioning the reference to Desertec in the 9th/10th grade textbook, as well as the discussion on Tanzania and the future of some industries. In the Secondary II textbook, *ecological farming* and a double page on Kenya can be mentioned as well. There is also an entire chapter dedicated to the *cooperation for development*, which represents the African continent through photos and names it in part. Another point is the references to *gender equality*, with a photo showing an African woman working hard – although no African country is explicitly discussed.

For the last category (*urbanization*), there are no outstanding references in both selected textbooks: no specific urbanization process is discussed, but the Secondary II textbook mention a model of oriental city (using the example of Marrakech) also in a context of colonial transformation.

Discussion

Concerning the overall space dedicated to Africa, there is a significant difference between the Brazilian and the German sample, as a consequence of the methodology chosen to present the continent. While the regional approach in Brazil, which dedicates up to two chapters to the discussion of Africa, allows for a stronger focus on spatial entities, the thematic approach dominating school Geography in Berlin only allows for a cursory and unsystematic consideration of the African continent and its spaces, which in general only appears to illustrate broader processes. These fundamental differences have implications for the distribution of segments according to the categories.

Concerning the category *nature*, the Brazilian textbooks adopt a more extensive and systematic, albeit descriptive approach. In contrast, the German textbooks only address selected aspects, such as desertification or ecofarming. Herein lies the major difference between the two case studies, namely a more integrative approach in Germany as opposed to a strong physical-geographical lens in Brazil. Nonetheless, both textbooks mention the alarming climate change.

The overall limited and generic attention dedicated to *history* is little surprising. The complete absence of any references to Africa's colonial past in the German lower secondary textbooks is worthy of note and reflection. Anyway, given the advanced scholarship on post-colonial Geographies, dealing with the impact of the colonial past could be better represented in the textbooks of both countries.¹⁶

African *population* is a third category with modest segment count across the sample. It is striking that both countries emphasize the demographic dimension looking into quantitative aspects. On the one hand, Brazil looks into demographic data to quantify the population and its development. On the other Germany also looks into demographic dynamics. However, it uses the African case study while introducing geographical methods. In doing so, Africa is an arbitrarily chosen example as population pyramids are at the heart of the content. The category further includes segments describing religion and ethnicity as variables (Brazil) and the demographic dividend African countries might use for (economic) development (Germany). In addition, the issue of population is closely linked to carrying capacity and leads to the ecological footprint. The tasks proposed to students primarily relate to the comparison of population and development. Likewise, challenges and opportunities for young people on the labor market are analyzed.

Despite the dynamic *urbanization* in Africa, similar to the population, the textbooks entail only a cursory representation of humanity's future main settlement type. The Brazilian textbook paint a picture of modern urban Africa in contrast to the challenges linked to economic development. Their German counterparts mainly ignore the urbanization process, except for a few references of urban growth in selected capital cities.¹⁷

16 In the German case, only in the Secondary II textbook, in the chapter on "Developing countries in the world economy - historical and current", there is a caricature depicting "Africa then" and "Africa now" in relation to the West. The caricature brings in particular Africa as the origin of enslaved people. In the accompanying text, the reference to South America (and the exploitation of its goods) is also important. Here, too, the thematization is not very detailed.

17 And the classic model of the oriental city.

One of the main differences between the two countries lies in the importance attributed to the category *politics*. The rather brief addressing of post-colonial aspects in the German sub-sample starkly contrast the elaborate representation of political matters along four sub-categories in the Brazilian sub-sample. One possible explanation is the overall limited sensitivity to matters of post-colonialism in Berlin textbooks along with a transition to a more thematic approach away from looking into details at continental scale, as previously done until 2015.

The category *economy* (or *modernization/development*) enjoys a similarly strong attention, but the differences become visible along the main approach chosen for the school subject. In Brazil, an introduction of the three economic sectors sets the grounds to discuss development challenges, such as hunger, poverty, regional (dis)integration, and digital exclusion. Somehow between Afro-optimism and Afro-pessimism (but closer to the former), Brazilian textbooks contrast the success of economic growth with ongoing challenges tied to hunger and poverty. In contrast, the German textbook following a thematic approach only introduce glimpses into selected dimension tied to development. Such facets are energy production, resource export and infrastructure development. However, most of these topics support an overall perspective on Africa's place in the global market and, ultimately, the continent's role in globalization. Strangely, Secondary II Geography dedicates even less attention to African economy and prefers to address matters of development using other regional case studies. Still, a globalist perspective remains when addressing ecologic industries, clean energy production, and land-grabbing processes.

Conclusions

This study aimed at exploring how two school Geographies with rather different epistemological backgrounds, as well as distinct trajectories and relations with Africa, represented the continent in their textbooks. As opposed to studies using Geography textbooks as sample (Lofsdóttir, 2007), the present study also considers the subject's grammar and educational objectives. In contrast to earlier studies interested in only selected aspects of Africa and its representation (Wright, 1979; Hillers, 1984; Harwood; Rawlings, 2001; Myers, 2001; Cole, 2008; Obermaier; Schrüfer, 2009; Smiley, 2009; Marmer et al., 2010; Scoffham, 2019; Usher, 2021), the ambition of this paper was to map the overall representation of a continent across all grades of Basic (Brazil) and Secondary (Germany) Education.

Overall, the results uncovered main differences along the chosen approach to teach Geography in formal education. Based on the results presented in this papers, it seems highly questionable whether the German decision to return to a thematic approach in lower secondary Geography does justice to representations of Africa. Regardless of the specific regional focus, a school subject abandoning the regional approach should still provide sufficient information to comprehend global structures and their repercussions at regional scale. Students in Berlin have the right to learn about these impact both in Africa and in Europe. Consequently, curriculum makers should evaluate their decision to continue with the thematic approach in its current presentation.

In the Brazilian case, where a deeper regional approach prevails, the positive impact of Law 10.639/2003 on the content of textbooks seems unquestionable.¹⁸ Despite this, the setback in the Currículo Paulista (2020) reinforces the need to do even more to “promote a consistent study on the complexity [...] of the continent” (Santos, K. 2022, p. 19), also to teachers do not to feel constantly distressed by the insufficiency of their knowledge on the subject (Aguiar, 2022). In general, the political mobilization of the Brazilian black population (the majority of the population) and the rise of progressive governments concerned with Africa in recent decades have enabled, albeit belatedly, a more responsible and adequate representation of the continent in Geography textbooks. Still, the recent political turmoil, heir of the Brazilian colonial and slavery-based past, strongly suggests the need for an incessant struggle to maintain the progress achieved, threatened by retrograde political forces recently on the rise.

A second main aspect with practical importance is *time* as a geographical key concept. Certainly, African colonial history can and should be addressed primarily in other subject. Nonetheless, understanding the impact of colonial structures on the post-colonial development (also considering the specific development under a global order) should become a much stronger dimension of geographical education, as it is indispensable to comprehend sustainable development. For Blanco (2017), without a deep understanding of the historical dimension and how it is taught at school (which includes the contents of Geography textbooks), it does not seem possible to overcome students’ formative prejudices and misconceptions about Africa (whose History goes far beyond the colonial period), as well as successfully combating widespread contemporary misinformation about the continent. Furthermore, and particularly looking into Brazil, traditional and emerging South-South relations should find a stronger representation – content that would be essential for the German textbooks as well.

This comparative study uncovered important differences rooted in the different epistemologies of school Geography, as well as distinct trajectories and relations with the African continent, of both analyzed sociospatial formations. Undoubtedly, these differences link back to major differences in the development of Geography as an academic discipline and the ways the Brazilian and German society view development and its importance for education. Despite the limitations of this study, it is our strong belief that having deep knowledge of spatial development, including its multiple facets, prepares students to tackle both contemporary and future challenges. Therefore, future studies should also consider other countries and put an additional emphasis on tasks, skill development, and the overall process of geographical knowledge acquisition through and on Africa.

18 The effort to present an urban and modern Africa to the students is noteworthy, as well as the contradictions of this development.

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Author's contribution

Antonio Gomes de Jesus Neto: Analysis of Brazilian textbooks, literature review and writing of the introduction, methodology, “results from São Paulo” and conclusions.

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