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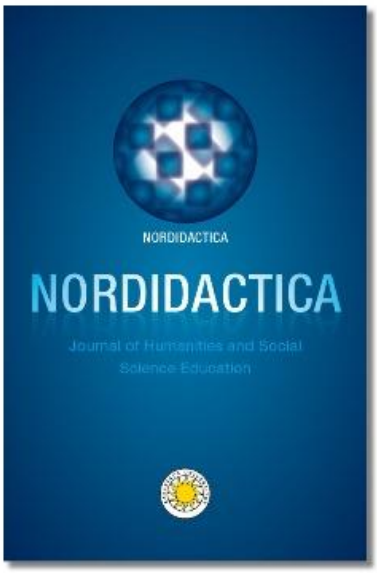
## Pia Mikander



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# Colonialist “discoveries” in Finnish school textbooks

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*Abstract: The article focuses on the descriptions of colonial events in Finnish history textbooks for comprehensive school (basic education). This includes the descriptions of “voyages of discovery” and the treatment of the indigenous people in America. The article analyses articulations in the textbooks and describes three discourses supporting the hegemonic idea that people in the “West” are superior to “others.” The first discourse shows that the images of explorers as heroes and colonized peoples as exotic objects still endure, even though some textbooks include stories written from the point of view of the oppressed people. The second discourse concerns justified violence as part of colonialism, while the third discourse focuses on the textbook lessons that are taught through the study of colonialism. It also portrays Western knowledge as the only relevant knowledge. These representations of colonialism do not necessarily teach students about its horrors as much as about colonial techniques. The article also discusses the role of textbooks regarding education about colonialism and proposes alternative starting points for the study of colonialism and its implications today.*

KEYWORDS: HISTORY EDUCATION, COLONIALISM, TEXTBOOK RESEARCH

**About the author**: Pia Mikander is a PhD student at the University in Helsinki. Her research is focused on the worldviews implicit in school textbooks in history, social science and geography. Her earlier articles include ’Othering and the construction of West: The description of two historical events in Finnish school textbooks’(2012), ’Constructing threats and a need for control: textbook descriptions of a growing, moving world population’ (2014) and ‘Democracy and human rights: A critical look at the concept of Western values in Finnish school textbooks’(2015).

## Introduction

In Finland, the subject of history is introduced in basic education in grade 5 of basic education. History teaching in grade 6 covers amongst other topics colonialism in the beginning of the Modern Era of history. These events in history teaching include the initial curiosity of Europeans towards the surrounding world, the actual voyages, and finally, the results of the meeting between the colonizers and the colonized people. In this article the focus is on the grade 6 history textbooks currently in use in Finnish schools. All textbooks should be based on the core values mentioned in the curriculum for basic education, such as democracy, equality and human rights (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004). The new core curriculum also stresses that basic education is based on values such as respect for human rights and promoting democratic values (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). Values are considered as the guiding lights, not just for teachers but also for textbook authors to follow as their main principles. This means that textbooks are neither ideologically neutral, nor should they be. It also means that textbooks should refrain from echoing ideologies that do not reflect the core values, even though differing values might be dominant in the broader society. Of interest here is to discuss to what extent the core values of democracy, equality and human rights are replaced by the notion of a superior West – of the right of the West to dominate other people, from the times of colonialism to the present day. This article reflects on the descriptions of colonialism in Finnish history textbooks. What can be said about the role of textbooks regarding education about colonialism? How could textbooks be developed in order to provide alternative methods for studying colonialism and its implications in today's world?

## History textbooks and the colonialist legacy

The last decade has seen an increased debate about the role of the Nordic countries in colonialism (Keskinen, Tuori, Irni & Mulinari, 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). The myth of Nordic exceptionalism has been challenged in light of research that shows that the Nordic countries have not only taken part in the construction of a colonial discourse, but also benefitted from colonial trade (Eidsvik, 2012). Vuorela (2009) calls this colonial complicity, meaning that the Nordic countries should not be seen as innocent bystanders but as partners in crime. The epistemic construction of white supremacy during hundreds of years has been as much a part of Finnish culture and politics as it has been of the rest of Europe (Lehtonen & Löytty, 2007). Something that can be seen as typical for the Nordic countries, including Finland (Rastas, 2012), is the reluctance of society to grasp the extent of this legacy. As an example of this, actions to change old racist symbols have been met with public outcry, such as Facebook groups in favor of old racist names (Hübinette, 2012). The antagonism towards changing old symbols and names has persisted even when their racist meaning is evident. A recent Danish example is a bag of sweets called "Skipper Mix," with a white sailor on the bag, holding sweets that consist of things that he has found on his journey, such as golden coins, weapons – and black human faces. In an

interview, Danbolt (2015) notes that this can be sold under the slogan "the happy world of Haribo," and suggests that there are many stories that remain to be told. These stories include details of the Nordic participation in colonialism. The idea of Nordic exceptionalism, meaning that the Nordic countries can be viewed from a different viewpoint than others, has been part of a national narrative of innocence regarding colonialism. However, the events of the last few years, including the massacre in Norway in 2011, and the rise of more or less racist parties in Nordic parliaments, have perhaps made people in the Nordic countries less inclined to see themselves as the exception. On the other hand, as Lundahl (2006) suggests, "we might not be able to tell another story without letting go of our own preconceived self-image first."

What role do school textbooks play in the epistemic construction of the self and the other? Historically, textbooks have often played the role of introducing and strengthening stereotypes. From the 1960s, statements of blatant racism have faded (Marsden, 2001; Graves, 1996). In Finland, a geography textbook in the 1960's encouraged students to see discovery voyages as proof of the superiority of the white man (Isaksson & Jokisalo, 2005) while the first school textbook to dismiss the theory of human races was introduced in 1968 (Paasi, 1998). Yet even without overtly offensive statements, prejudices and stereotypes have harmful effects and several studies have shown that prejudices continue to prevail in school textbooks. As an example, Kamali (2005) shows how textbooks in Sweden tend to take on a perspective of "us" Westerners and portray other people´s selectively as the opposites of progressive, civilized Europeans. In descriptions of what the concept of European means, the focus is on positive elements such as the Renaissance, revolutions and democracy, and not on wars, colonialism, slavery or genocide. Europe is portrayed as the most important continent and the rest of the world is introduced only in relation to Western Europe (Nordgren, 2006). In Finland, the textbooks for an optional upper secondary course in history specializing in cultures outside Europe also focus on the contacts between them and Europe (Löfström, 2014).

Finland has been celebrated for its PISA success in mathematics and science (Kupiainen, Hautamäki & Karjalainen, 2009), but there are also signs showing that there is a sharp increase in the number of young people with a negative attitude towards immigrants, and that these young people are more inclined than others to the use of violence (Suutarinen & Törmäkangas, 2012). In an international study of 38 countries, for example, Finnish boys held the most negative attitudes towards immigrants (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito, 2010). Both the current national core curriculum for basic education and the new one (Finnish National Board of Education 2004, 2014) stress that basic education (and textbooks) should be based on values such as human rights and democracy, values which however are not defined (Lampinen, 2013).

The extent to which school textbooks affect the attitudes of students is not easy to define, but textbooks are in a special position considering that they are often widely distributed and legitimized by the state apparatus (Loftsdóttir, 2010). They can be seen to reveal what narrative society wishes to convey to the next generation, which means

that an analysis of textbooks can be used to capture the social and political parameters of society (Schissler & Soysal, 2005).Textbooks in social studies can be seen to have a particularly important role, since they present history and society as facts, even though the events are often subjected to intense debates among historians and social scientists (Loewen, 2007; Seixas, 2000; Crawford, 2003). As long as teachers pay attention to this in their teaching, and show the conflicted nature of history, textbook texts are of lesser concern. It has been shown, however, that the view of history as something that should be presented as a number of facts is fairly common among Finnish history teacher students (Virta, 2008). Another study shows that Finnish history teachers want history textbooks with a "strong emphasis on facts and a strong historical overview" while they also appreciate that different viewpoints are present on controversial issues (Gullberg, 2010, p. 265).

This article focuses on textbook descriptions of colonialist "voyages of discovery." The widespread use of this concept implies that the colonialist narrative has been the one that matters, not the narrative of the people living in the places that were "discovered." Importantly, the voyagers did other things than just "discover," but when this word is chosen as a heading for the colonial events, other implications are downplayed (Andersson, 2010; Loewen, 2007). Studies from other Nordic countries show that history textbooks tend to mention other parts of the world only in so far as they come into contact with the West. "Their" history becomes important only when it is related to ours (Andersson, 2010; Kamali, 2006; Loftsdóttir, 2010). Additionally, a study from Iceland shows that textbooks include heroic descriptions of individual explorers as successful people, as movers of the wheels of history (Loftsdóttir, 2010).

Christopher Columbus is the one colonialist/discovery voyager who gets the most individual attention in Finnish history textbooks. Ample research about the portrayal of Columbus in school textbooks has been done in an American setting. In time for the quincentenary of Columbus' arrival on the American continent, some critical scholars pointed out how textbooks not only include misleading and poorly proven facts, but also straight-out ideological choices that teach young people to accept the right of white people to rule over people of color (Bigelow, 1998). According to Howard Zinn (2005), Columbus committed genocide, but it is described as an adventure. Choosing this description (discovery voyages), he points out, should be seen as an ideological choice.

In Finland, the core curriculum for basic education lists the coming of the Modern Era as one of its core contents for the grades 5–6. (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004). The content of this theme is specified as the changes in the world view and the values of the European man. The guidelines for teaching about colonialism can therefore be seen as Eurocentric. However, the curriculum also lists criteria for good knowledge at the end of grade 6, mentioning the capacity to empathize with people of past times. In my reading, the word people should be seen as anyone in past times, not just Europeans. Löfström (2014) argues that authors of textbooks can be expected to know their field well enough to take new perspectives such as postcolonial criticism into account at least to some extent when writing the books, even though the curriculum does not call for a postcolonial perspective.

## Laclau's and Mouffe's discourse theory as a method for analyzing textbooks

The aim of schoolbooks is to synthesize and represent information into generally regarded objective and useful pieces of information (Loftsdóttir, 2010). How is this objectivity defined? Whose objectivity is it? There is a need to see textbooks as part of society (Apple, 2004). They are in society, come from society, but also influence society by creating a version of what can be seen as objective knowledge. In Laclau's and Mouffe's (1985/2001) version of discourse analysis, called discourse theory (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), the world should not be seen as a reality existing out there, needing to be uncovered in order to be understood. Instead, they see us as constantly creating an understanding of what is real and true in our talk, text and actions. They call this creating objectivity. Through their portrayal of history, school textbooks can be seen as documents that create legitimate knowledge, or objectivity.

The material for this research project consists of a total of 73 Finnish textbooks in geography, history and social studies for grades 5 to 9 (11–16-year-olds). The analysis covers all the textbooks published in these subjects in Finnish and Swedish by the (then) six major publishing companies in Finland between 2005 and 2010. This article analyzes and quotes passages from ten textbooks that discuss the colonial "discovery journeys" described to mark the beginning of the Modern era. Mainly, this time in history is covered by the grade 6 history textbooks out of which all seven are analyzed for this article, six of which are quoted here. A few other textbooks are quoted, too, since they also include descriptions of "discovery voyagers". One is a grade 5 history textbook, two are grade 7 history textbooks (covering 19th century voyages) and one is a geography book (describing a journey to the North Pole). The quoted passages represent typical as well as extreme cases, however, the attempt has been to make an analysis of the different world-views portrayed in the descriptions of the journeys of "discovery".

Laclau and Mouffe do not offer any model for their discourse analysis, however, researchers can use their concepts in order to analyze their material. This was done by considering the texts, pictures and assignments that involved the relation between the "West" and the surrounding world to be what Laclau and Mouffe call articulations (see Wreder, 2007). Within discourse theory, articulations do not carry any "pure" or authentic meaning; they are all discursively constructed (Torfing, 1999). The articulations in the textbooks were documented and categorized according to topics, or nodal points (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Descriptions of colonial "discovery journeys" were regarded as a nodal point. Even though short and simple texts, such as textbook quotes, can be seen to carry both descriptive and normative claims about the conditions of reality (Wreder, 2007, p. 34), there was a need to re-read the textbook articulations in a context. To some extent, I carried out what Sleeter & Grant (1997) call story-line analysis, focusing on questions such as "which group gets the most attention (whose story is being told), which group(s) resolves problems, how other groups appear, the extent to which these other groups cause or resolve problems, and who the author intends the reader to sympathize with or learn most

about (p. 283)." However, I also kept other questions in mind, such as: What kind of knowledge is portrayed as rational or normal? What is explicit, what is implicit in the descriptions of the relations between the West and the surrounding world? Having identified "discovery journeys" as a nodal point, I went back to all the textbooks that covered the topic and did a more thorough analysis of the discourses that were to be seen, with the above mentioned questions in mind. The three discourses that emerged are presented here.

## Three discourses related to the colonial legacy

### The adventurous heroes and the exotic natives

According to Loewen (2007), his study of US history textbooks shows that chapters about Columbus are "not about teaching the history of Columbus. Their enterprise seems to be Building Character" (2007, p. 60). To some extent, the Finnish textbooks function in the same way. The build-up to the chapter about Columbus and the "discovery of the New World" tends to focus on Columbus the person, his thoughts and his dreams. Some books offer detailed descriptions of what inspired him to set sail, such as the lengthy description of the atmosphere in a smoky sailor's pub where men met and exchanged maps (Historia kertoo 6, 2010, p. 39). The students are encouraged to sympathize with Columbus and his crew. The textbooks feature several extracts of his logbook, and assignments in which students are encouraged to underline parts of his journal entries and to describe the dangers and fears that the crew experienced (Kauan sitten. Lokikirja maailman historiaan, p. 102). Other assignments include maps to trace the journey, and learning about the construction of the ships. This can be seen as an answer to the call in the curriculum to focus on the students' capability to empathize with people of the past. However, only one textbook includes the story of an Aztec child whose family is affected by Columbus, which can be compared to the build-up before the journey.

The word "courageous" is used in several books to describe Columbus. Other voyagers are treated like heroes, too. The following quote is about Vasco da Gama's journey:

> *The journey started in July 1497. At the Cape Verde islands Vasco da Gama steered his fleet consisting of three ships and 150 sailors straight out into the South Atlantic, heading for the Cape of Good Hope. A fantastic sailor's feat!* (Vår historia 2, p. 153) (All the quotes were translated by the author and later language checked by a professional translator).

Bigelow (1998) mentions the use of exclamation marks used to reward Columbus's successful steps in US history textbooks. In Finnish history textbooks, exclamation marks are generally rare. In the above-mentioned quote one is used, though, to emphasize the greatness of the "sailor's feat" made by Vasco da Gama, who is seen as a brave discoverer. The pattern in the textbooks is to present a positive image of the colonizers. Also when the damage done to the colonized people is mentioned in the

following pages of the chapters, there seems to be a reluctance to let go of the hero narrative. There are several textbook examples of this discourse of adhering to the images of heroic colonizers and exotic others. In addition to heroic descriptions of Columbus, the lesser known Nordic explorers are praised in a similar manner; for instance, for their voyages to the Arctic: "During the 19th century, brave explorers started penetrating deeper and deeper into Africa. Several people from the Nordic countries excelled as explorers in the Polar regions" (Vår historia 3, p. 194). Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, a Finnish-born explorer of the Arctic, is also described in a very positive tone:

> *[…] Not even there [Alaska] did Nordenskiöld forget his role as a scientist. He sold the crew's winter wear to the Eskimos and used the money to buy valuable material for his ethnological collections* (Horisont, p. 92).

The explorer Nordenskiöld is described as a true scientist. However, this quote also mentions the people he met, without telling much of their story. There is no description of what the "valuable material" he purchased for his ethnological collections was. The people that the explorers met on their way are described as details in the background, whether they are mentioned in a positive or negative way, such as the following articulation in a grade 5 geography book about the explorer Robert Peary:

> *Finally, Peary succeeded in sailing all the way to the North Pole in 1909. He made the final journey together with three Eskimos, a pack of dogs and a driver leading the dogs* (Biologian ja maantiedon polku 5, p. 125).

Another example is the following text extract accompanying a picture of settlers on the "Oregon Trail":

> *It was a journey full of hardship, particularly if the Indians*[1] *were hostile or if a cholera epidemic broke out* (Horisont, p. 98).

The articulation quoted above shows how the discourse uses exclusion to construct the image of the "Indians." Here, there is no talk about the colonizers' aggressive treatment of them, to which the described "hostility" may be a response. The textbook describes them as aggressive in general, independent of the violence they were met with. Violence, such as kidnapping, that explorers resorted to during their "discoveries" can be described as rational, such as the following:

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[1] All textbooks use the word Indian to describe the people that Columbus and other colonizers encountered in America. Often the origin of the word is described, showing how the fact that Columbus thought that he had reached India made him call the people there Indians (for a discussion, see Jonsson, 2001). However, after this explanation, there is no further discussion about what term to use for the peoples that lived in America prior to colonialism. Although the textbooks generally refrain from more derogatory terms, one exercise book contains an assignment in the form of a board game where the players are Vikings on a sailing trip. When they reach the American coast, they get an extra toss of the dice because "*Friendly redskins give you food and advice*" (Kauan sitten. Matka Suomen historiaan työkirja, p. 30).

> *Vasco da Gama succeeded in selling his goods but was not paid much for them; he could, however, still buy, for instance, cinnamon and jewels to take home to Portugal. Indians were also brought along to Portugal to show that the sea passage to India had indeed been found* (Vår historia 2, p. 154).

Words can greatly influence how students are expected to react to the textbook texts. The suggested rationality, that showing Indians to the Portuguese would be a good way of convincing the Portuguese about the success of his journey, dims the violence of taking people away from their land. The following examples from three different textbooks show how simply the choice of a few words can make a difference. On his return to Europe, Columbus is said to have brought (kidnapped) some of the people he met. Describing this event, the textbooks show how differently people's lives can be valued. The first description shows signs of real exoticism and othering, a diminishing of the human value of the captured indigenous people to that of things:

> *Columbus received a glorious reception on his arrival back to Spain. He brought with him Indians, golden jewelry, plants and even parrots* (Historian tuulet II, p. 93).

Another book's description of the same event reminds the readers that the word Indian was Columbus's invention for the indigenous, but still focuses on the fact that the people were there for the Spaniards to marvel at:

> *Even though Columbus did not bring much gold, the other things he brought home guaranteed him a fantastic reception. The Spaniards were astonished by the Indians, as Columbus called the Natives he had brought, the parrots and the colorful feather head dresses* (Matkalippu historiaan 6, p. 99).

Consider how the following textbook, with the choice of just a few different words, manages to turn the focus of the event:

> *When Columbus returned to Spain, he was received as a hero. He brought with him imprisoned people, gold, tobacco plants, pineapple, turkeys and, for instance, a hammock* (Historia kertoo 6, 2010, p. 41).

The last of the three quotes is a sobering reminder of what really happened, while the first two associate the "Indians" with the other many colorful things Columbus brought back. Beginning the sentence by saying that Columbus was considered a hero upon his return, and then mentioning that he had brought along imprisoned (kidnapped) people, casts a shadow not only on Columbus, but also on the people who greeted him as a hero, even though the imprisoned people could have been worthy of a sentence of their own. The suffering people are still only background figures in the story of Columbus. The three quotes serve as an example of how differently textbooks that are based on the same curriculum can describe the same event.

## Genocide and the justification of colonization

Following the story of Columbus's voyages, the textbooks turn to the violence caused by the colonizers. They recount how the Europeans brought weapons and germs that caused the death of many Native Americans:

> *After Christopher Columbus, more people started coming to the continent. The European conquests were characterized by a lust for gold and religious fanaticism. Both small and big Indian cultures had to surrender to the superior weapons and the unscrupulousness of the Europeans. The arrival of the Europeans in South America brought immense destruction: three fourths of the indigenous population on the continent died within a hundred years. They were subjected to slavery in mines and on fields by the Spaniards. What other consequences came out of the voyages of discovery?* (Historia kertoo 6, p. 42).

Bigelow (1998) is distressed by how US history textbooks seem to be able to mention the violence without making students see it. He asks what it does to the readers when books lay out facts and describe deaths only to move on to the next paragraph. The quote above mentions numbers and facts about the violence caused by the European colonizers. In the following chapter, more explicit descriptions of the horrors that met people being colonized are included, such as the facts that they were being enslaved, had to work hard and starved to death, and that some of them rather took their own lives than subordinated to slavery. These descriptions can be seen to make students see the violence more explicitly. However, the same chapter suggests that defeating the native peoples was seen as necessary in order to secure the conquest (p. 43).

The textbook texts about the violence committed by the colonizers are not seldom accompanied by statements that can be seen to explain, or to justify them. Explaining the reasons for colonial violence can be seen as part of understanding human activity, which is a central aim of the history curriculum. It is not up to history teaching to accept or condemn the actions of people of the past, rather to understand them (Ahonen, 1992, p. 81). However, when the genocide is presented together with a sentence about it being seen as necessary, it can be understood as a justification. Justifying is here seen as downplaying the importance of the violence committed by explanatory mechanisms. The core of the second discourse is portraying violence caused by the colonizers, but adhering to the justification of it. The following quote uses "the lust for gold" as the explanation for colonial violence:

> *In the same way, the Europeans conquered the areas of the Maya and Inca tribes, and destroyed them in their lust for gold. The power, glory and honor of the white man spread to North America, too* (Historian tuulet II, p. 97).

The quote above is from a book chapter titled: "The white man blinded by gold". It can be seen to condemn the actions of the conquerors. On the other hand, it could also be seen to suggest that gold came between these men and their usual moral selves. "The lust for gold" would then be something that dimmed the rationality of the (white European male) voyagers, relieving the colonizers of their responsibility for their actions.

In Bigelow's words, starting with Columbus, the simple explanation for what drove the colonizers is that they wanted to become rich (1998). He suggests that this is downplayed as a reason for the journeys. The Finnish textbooks have interesting articulations that mention this reason without spelling it out, such as alluding to the

need for European rulers to "ensure access" to commodities such as spices and gold. However, who has the right to ensure access, and on what conditions? These questions are not asked. Bigelow (1998, p. 48) goes on to suggest that "In burying these more fundamental material forces, the Columbus books encourage students to misunderstand the roots of today's foreign policy exploits."

The second discourse is most vividly portrayed in the descriptions of the encounters between the colonizing Europeans and the Aztecs. The following descriptions are from two different textbooks:

> *The Aztecs were the most belligerent of all the Indian peoples. They went on warlike expeditions with other peoples, and their Sun God constantly demanded human blood as sacrifice* (Kauan sitten. Matka maailman historiaan, p. 176).

and:

> *The Aztec Gods, of which the most important was the Sun God, demanded a lot of sacrifice: at the inauguration of one temple, up to 20,000 people were sacrificed. In the act of sacrifice, the heart was cut out of the living person's chest. The cruel sacrificial ceremonies, strict compulsory taxes, and the lack of mercy that was shown by the soldiers towards the conquered peoples aroused fear. Thus, when the Spanish conqueror Hernando Cortés arrived with his ships in Mexico in 1519, he was seen by many as a savior. They were mistaken. The meeting between Cortés and the last remaining Aztec king, Montezuma, finally led to the capture of Montezuma. With the help of Indian tribes tired of the tyranny of the Aztecs, Cortés cruelly conquered the whole area of Mexico for Spain within a few years* (Matkalippu historiaan 6, pp. 103-104).

There is much to be said about the articulations above. The cruel habits of the Aztecs are described in graphic detail, something that is not there in the descriptions of the following colonial violence. The sentence: "*The cruel sacrificial ceremonies, strict compulsory taxes, and the lack of mercy that was shown by the soldiers towards the conquered peoples aroused fear"* calls for action; it can be seen as a need for colonizers to come and put a stop to it.

One book (Historian tuulet II, p. 94) includes a story told by an Aztec child, the only indigenous person that is given a story and a name in all of the textbooks about that time. However, that story, too, is followed by a description of the belligerent nature of the Aztecs. Some textbooks seem to refer to the violence of colonialism with terms that bring to mind a war between two equals, such as:

> *Soon, the friendship between the Spaniards and the Aztecs turned to anger. Cortés blamed the Aztecs for their human sacrifices. The Aztecs did not like this criticism. The Spaniards got other Indian tribes over on their side, and the war started* (Historian tuulet II, p. 97).

By explaining the conflict as a situation where both seem equally guilty, the nature of the conflict can be seen as that of two equals. The interpretation of colonial violence, indeed genocide, as a conflict between two parts leaves the nature of colonialism and its power relations obscure. However, two textbooks include texts that

refer to the Aztec resistance to colonization as "rebellion" (Historia kertoo, p. 43) or as "defending themselves bravely" (Vår historia, p. 229), something that can be seen as articulations that contradict the described discourse.

## Western knowledge as the only relevant knowledge

Postcolonial theorists remind us that colonialism should be seen not as a marginal activity but as a fundamental part of the creation of our understanding of ourselves and our culture (Young, 1990). The third discourse sheds light on how the textbooks passages on colonialism portray Western knowledge as the only relevant form of knowledge, something that has been challenged within education (Willinsky, 1998; Smith, 1999; Sleeter, 2010). The connection between the concept of knowledge and the beginning of colonialism is spelled out in several textbooks. Some textbooks quite radically make the assumption that what was understood as true in the West during that time could be considered universal knowledge:

> *The development that started in the 15th and 16th centuries was such a significant phase in world history, that it is called the beginning of the Modern era. The curiosity of people towards the surrounding world increased, and it was shown not only through the voyages of exploration but also in science and the arts. People started questioning the teachings of the church* (Historia kertoo 6, p. 40).

Here, the word "people" is taken for granted to mean "European" even though it refers to world history. Another textbook opens its chapter about Vasco da Gama with the words: "*For long, not much was known about India. It was fantasized to be a wonderful fairytale land*" (Vår historia 2, p. 153). The fact that few *Europeans* knew anything about India is here expressed as a general "*not much was known*." On the topic of colonialism, several textbooks encourage the readers to empathize with the "explorers". Empathizing with people of the past is mentioned in the curriculum as a tool for understanding historical phenomena. However, in the books, the students are taught to feel what it would feel like to be on the side of the colonizers. As textbook readers, they are often assumed to take the colonizer's position, to walk in his shoes, even cheer for him. Some textbooks draw further on the Columbus chapter and more or less suggest that the textbook reader could be a modern explorer. The following questions open the Modern Era chapter:

> *Assignments 1. Imagine that one more unexplored continent has just been found in the world. a) What would you like to know about it? b) To whom would the nature, people and riches of the continent belong? c) What should be done about the continent? Discuss in class* (Historia kertoo 6, 2010, p. 37).

The intention is most likely to problematize the question of colonization and to engage the students in dialogue about moral questions, but it may easily be misunderstood. For instance, asking who the nature, people and riches of a certain area belong to presupposes that this is up for discussion. Adding a question about whether or not the question about who has the right to own nature or people should be

up for debate would open up the epistemic construction of colonialism somewhat more. Also, the last question c) suggests that "something should be done," without introducing an agent "who" should do something; this might be understood by the textbook reader that he or she is in a position of responsibility to act when confronting an "unexplored" continent. The point to be made is that the assumed position of the reader is still that of the colonizers, not of the colonized, even in an educational thought experiment such as this. The following three questions are posed at the end of another textbook's chapter about the colonization of America:

> *4a Why do conflicts often arise between people from two different cultures? 4b How can people from two different cultures promote peace between themselves? 5 If you were to find a new culture, which has been living in isolation from the modern world, what thought or thing would you teach the people?* (Historian tuulet II, p. 101).

After several pages of the journeys of Columbus and the treatment of the people he met, these final questions sum up the lesson. They can be seen as reflecting the knowledge that should be seen as an outcome of the whole chapter. In the first two questions, 4a and 4b, the topic is the presumed difficulty of people from different cultures to get along with each other. They refer to cultural "clashes" between the colonizers and the colonized. The textbook answer to 4b is stated in the preceding text (p. 98): "*When the cultures that meet have been allowed to keep their special cultural traits, there has been no need for war*." This suggests a focus on culture instead of power. In a question such as this, the perspective is that of the colonizers, since they are the ones who decide who can keep their special cultural traits and who cannot. Finally, question 5 explicitly puts the reader in the position of the colonizer, not questioning that he or she is in the position to teach isolated peoples things.

## Educational implications

The textbook texts analyzed here show that descriptions of the voyagers as mostly brave heroes continue overall to characterize textbook pages about the acts of colonialism. As an example of this, the description of Nordenskiöld includes a sentence about him acquiring "*valuable material for his ethnological collections.*" Perhaps this would have been a good place to tell students more about the kind of ethnological collections that were kept and for what purpose, considering that the science of the time was much about finding evidence that would support the idea of Western superiority (see Breidlid, 2013; Smith, 1999). The descriptions of the clashes between the colonizers and the Aztecs, which focus on the cruel rituals of the Aztecs, would also benefit from a more critical analysis. Thirdly, the lessons learned from colonialism could focus more on the negative consequences of one people oppressing another. Instead of asking students what thoughts or things they would teach an isolated people, why not ask what it would feel like if somebody came and "found" the students' country and thought them new thoughts and things. In the textbooks analyzed here, the perspectives are mainly on the side of the colonizers. Lessons

learned from colonization can be referred to as a kind of "intercultural relation," evading questions of power and violence altogether.

Teaching about colonialism could benefit from a more analytical and critical approach (Araújo & Rodriguez Maeso, 2013). Rizvi (2007) points out that globalization in many ways can be seen as continuing colonialism. Columbus and other explorers could alternatively be used in teaching to show that colonialism still exists in the form of globalization, and that trade relations and movement of resources of capital are advantageous for some countries and disadvantageous for others. It would be important to ask questions such as: What kind of knowledge can students get from learning about colonialism? Whose knowledge matters? How has the nature of colonialism, as in Western countries taking advantage of natural resources and labor, changed in 500 years? Willinsky suggests that we "need to learn again how the past centuries of studying, classifying and ordering humanity within an imperial context gave rise to peculiar and powerful ideas of race, culture, and nation that were, in effect, conceptual instruments that the West used to both divide up and educate the world (1998, pp. 2-3)." With the help of a deeper power analysis, such as that suggested by Andreotti and de Souza (2012), students could learn to see the bigger picture of colonialism. In this way the study of colonialism could be meaningful for today's world.

## Conclusions

This article has focused on the descriptions of colonial events in Finnish textbooks. It presents three discourses supporting the hegemonic understanding that people in the "West" are superior to "others." The first discourse shows that the characterizations of explorers as heroes and colonized peoples as exotic objects still exist, even though some stories showing the point of view of the oppressed peoples have been included in the books. Secondly, there is a discourse of justified violence as part of the portrayal of colonialism. The third discourse focuses on knowledge and the lessons taught by the study of colonialism in the textbooks. It portrays Western knowledge as the one that matters. Studying colonialism teaches students about its horrors, but also emphasizes colonial techniques.

School textbooks have the potential to portray a more balanced and analytical view of history, and to work against, rather than to strengthen stereotypes. In the particular case of colonialism, Andersson (2010) sees some progress in this direction. Telling more about the lives of the "Indians" before colonialism, and about how they were exploited is a step towards a postcolonial analysis that can give students the opportunity to develop intercultural competence. However, it is doubtful that stories such as these can coexist with the portrayal of colonizers as heroes.

In today's world, students have the right to not learn to view colonizers as heroes, not to repeat the tales of them as heroic adventurers and the colonialized peoples as objects. Students' own transnational experiences and knowledge about living in a multicultural society would deserve textbooks that take their social realities into

account (Pihl, 2009). In Finland, the core values of the core curriculum include equality and human rights as values that all education should be based upon. If textbooks were to reflect the equal value of all human beings, some chapters about colonialism might need to be rewritten. These findings should be seen as a call for a discussion about the ideological role of textbooks. The discussion around textbooks typically tends to focus more on pedagogy, language and level of difficulty, rather than on their role as ideological, indeed political documents (Apple, 2004). As a rule, textbooks do not attach a power analysis to the teachings of colonialism.

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