

Beyond (Ethno)linguistic Determinism: Diverse Approaches to Nationalism in Habsburg-Austrian Schools

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Abstract

Research on the nexus between education and nationalism in the Habsburg Empire has often focused on the role that language may have played in top-down nationalization processes and the popular dissemination of national thought. According to contemporary nationalist logic, undergoing education in a certain language of instruction also entailed the internalization of nationalist values inherent to its corresponding nationalist movement. The present article argues that the Habsburg educational experience was much more contingent, and draws attention to the diversity of pedagogical approaches towards nationalism and nationality that could be encountered in Austrian schools during the last five decades of Habsburg rule. By using examples from German- and Slovene-language textbooks, it shows that sociopolitical, temporal, as well as institutional factors played an important role in determining the practical values and attitudes towards the nationalism that students encountered during their school years. With systematic empirical studies remaining rare, further research will be necessary to gain a fuller insight into the complexities of the Habsburg education system and its potential effects on popular collective identity formation.

Keywords: Central Europe; Austria-Hungary; nationalism; nation-building; language policy

Scholars working on the history of nationalism and nationalist mobilization have long taken interest in the late Habsburg Empire's fascinating multilingual education system. Not unlike their colleagues working on other imperial and/or national contexts, researchers of both imperial halves of the Habsburg Empire have been interested in determining the extent to which schools contributed to the development of collective identities among the state's linguistically and religiously diverse population. Since nationalist conflict remains one of the traditional focal points of scholarly interest within Habsburg studies, it comes as no surprise that so many researchers have been particularly eager to explore the role that language – in more concrete terms, the language of instruction (*Unterrichtssprache*) – had played in a student's top-down ideological formation. After all, the former had been one of the main points of contention between contemporary nationalist activists. To quote Tara Zahra's seminal study on the politics of education in the Bohemian lands, they “feared that children ‘born’ to their nation could literally be ‘exchanged,’ ‘lost,’ or ‘kidnapped’ from the national community through education in the wrong national milieu or by nationally indifferent parents” (2011, 3).

If nationally minded contemporaries tended to take the correlation between a child's language of instruction and their subsequent nationalization for granted, historians have painted a more nuanced picture. On the one hand, researchers working on the Habsburg-Austrian education system demonstrated the existence of a unifying set of myths and core values that shaped civic

education across linguistic lines. At the same time, however, they also proved that undergoing education in a certain language of instruction also increasingly entailed exposure to a set of myths and educational content that was tailored to the presumed needs of a given (ethno)linguistic group (Almasy 2018; Bruckmüller 2007; Jelavich 1990; Meissner 2009; Moore 2020). And, while studies comparing the ideological content of different linguistically defined subsystems within the Habsburg Empire's school network have certainly been productive, the traditional focus on the "horizontal"—that is, linguistically defined ideological divergences—oftentimes leads to the neglect of the "vertical" ideological heterogeneity that had characterized schools working with the same language of instruction.

In effect, our knowledge of the ideological inner workings of education in both halves of the Habsburg Empire has remained unsatisfactorily blurry and imprecise. While historians may convincingly claim that children visiting German-language schools experienced a qualitatively different form of civic education than their peers in Czech- or Slovene-language schools, it remains difficult to assess the ideological outcomes of a German-, Czech-, or Slovene-language educational experience at an abstract level. Doing so would mean engaging in a form of essentialism that may be called "(ethno)linguistic determinism." Limiting its scope of inquiry to the empire's Austrian half, the goal of the present article is to caution against oversimplified interpretations by drawing attention to ideological divergences within the Habsburg-Austrian education system that went *beyond* linguistic divides. By examining what select German- and Slovene-language textbook series had taught children about nationality and national identity, the article shows that one could encounter a surprising variety of possible pedagogical approaches and value systems in the late empire's schools. While certain ideological macro trends are certainly discernible within individual linguistically defined textbook corpora, undergoing education in a certain language of instruction could have had diverse outcomes for a pupil's top-down ideological formation. Further meticulous comparative work is therefore needed if we wish to avoid essentializing conclusions and grasp the late Habsburg education system in its full complexity.

The Habsburg-Austrian Textbook Industry: Legal Frameworks and Practices of Selection

Researchers have long acknowledged the usefulness of textbooks as a source for the study of nationalism and top-down ideological dissemination in a wider sense. To quote Annkatrin Bock and Eckhardt Fuchs, textbooks "always contain and enshrine underlying norms and values; they transmit constructions of identity; and they generate specific patterns of perceiving the world. All this means that textbooks are frequently contested, within and between societies, among political, social, religious, and ethnic groups" (2018, 1). These observations are certainly also valid for the extensive and linguistically diverse textbook industry of the late Habsburg Empire. Before the discussion moves on to practical cases, the present section will offer a brief outline of the legal frameworks that determined the maneuvering space for textbook production and selection in Austria during the last fifty years of Habsburg rule.

Like so many other state institutions, the organization of education in the Austrian and Hungarian halves of the Habsburg Empire took separate paths following the 1867 Austrian-Hungarian Compromise.¹ In Habsburg Austria, the relationship between language and education was already touched upon in the new Austrian constitution of 1867. Article 19, concerned with equality between nationalities (*Volksstämme*), contained a paragraph stipulating that "in the crown lands inhabited by several ethnic groups, public schools shall be set up in such a way that, without compelling that a second provincial language be learned, each of these national groups will receive the necessary resources for education in its language of instruction" (Zvánovec 2020, 176). Included in the constitution, at the insistence of Bohemian-German deputies who wanted to prevent the obligatory study of Czech in the crownland's gymnasiums, it was popularly known as the *Sprachenzwangsverbot*; that is, the "prohibition of language coercion" (Stourzh 1980, 1011–15).

Subsequent educational reform efforts in the province eventually resulted in the 1869 State Primary School Law (*Reichsvolksschulgesetz*), which remained the legal basis for the organization of primary education until the end of the Monarchy. Pronouncedly liberal in its ideological framing, it introduced a modern, interconfessional, and public system of elementary education (Engelbrecht 1986, Vol. 4, 111–14).² In line with the principles of the Austrian constitution, the new law also formally recognized multilingualism in primary education. Article 6 thus determined that “provincial school authorities decide upon the language of instruction as well as upon instruction in a second provincial language after consulting those who maintain the school, within the boundaries established by the laws.”³ Unlike in neighboring Hungary, where legislation increasingly enforced the teaching of Hungarian as the kingdom’s “state language” (Berecz 2013; Puttkamer 2003), Austrian educational laws did not formally recognize a dominant “state” language. Instead, they left decision-making in matters of the language of instruction to the local authorities.

When it comes to the inner workings of the local textbook industry, the Austrian State Primary School law made two important interventions. On the one hand, it subjected the primary school textbook industry to the free market by taking away the monopoly from the state schoolbook publishing house, the Kaiserlicher-königlicher Schulbücherverlag. At the same time, the law also thoroughly systematized and regulated the mechanisms of oversight over the textbook industry. While new textbooks first underwent review by the provincial school authorities, it was the Ministry of Religion and Instruction (*Ministerium für Cultus und Unterricht*) that made final decisions regarding their approval or rejection (Almasy 2018, 327–31; Meissner 2009, 271). If the ministry was thus able to define the widest range of textbooks permitted for use in Austria’s schools, there were also lower levels of authority responsible for narrowing down this selection for local needs.

According to article 6 of the 1869 educational law, district school authorities (*Bezirksschulaufsicht*) were to decide on textbook selection after consulting the district teacher’s assembly (*Bezirkslehrerconferenz*). Already, at this point, the law also provided an exception for Austria’s civic schools, the *Bürgerschulen*. Typically found in more urbanized areas and intended for students who would later pursue a higher education, their district teachers’ assemblies were allowed to choose textbooks independently of the district school authorities. Importantly for the topic at hand, the law provided this exception to prevent political conflict. Teachers in *Bürgerschulen* were overwhelmingly liberal and did not want their autonomy overridden by the typically more conservatively inclined boards of the local school authorities (Meissner 2009, 268–69). A new and, once again, ideologically driven change in the legislation determining textbook selection took place some 15 years later. An 1883 amendment to the State Primary School Law during Eduard von Taaffe’s conservative government transferred the right to select textbooks from district- to provincial-level school authorities. This decision, too, was a concession to political Catholicism within the context of the contemporary *Kulturkampf*. Crownlands with conservative majorities were thus able to impose a conservative educational policy on the more liberal districts within their jurisdiction (Meissner 2009, 267–69).⁴

Finally, one last amendment to the state educational law in 1905 would transfer the right to choose textbooks directly to the district teachers’ assemblies (Meissner 2009, 269). While decision-making in textbook matters thus ultimately passed to the hands of teachers, it was subject to the will of district- and provincial-level school boards throughout the preceding three decades. Since the practical workings of school oversight were to be defined in more detail by provincial legalization, the specific composition of school authorities could vary considerably from crownland to crownland. In all cases, however, these boards were made up of representatives from the clergy, appointed and elected political authorities, and teaching staff. In an 1880 handbook for Austrian civil servants, the typical district school board was described as consisting of the district head, representatives of the local religious communities, representatives of the teaching staff, and elected representatives from the local political authorities. Conversely, provincial schoolboards usually included the provincial governor, delegates from the provincial committee (*Landesausschuß*), representatives from the provincial capital, one or more referees for administrative and economic educational

matters, provincial school inspectors, representatives of the clergy, and representatives of the teaching staff (Mayrhofer 1880, 547–48, 551–52).

The previously discussed legislative frameworks show that a diverse range of actors had a stake in textbook selection at the local level. The most important ideological clash that had interested contemporaries was related to the contested role of religion in the education system. However, as nationalist politics came to play an ever-stronger role in Austrian life, it appears justified to expect that the district- and provincial-level schoolboards would also pay attention to educational materials that could be used for the purposes of nationalist activism. This dynamic should be particularly evident in multilingual crownlands troubled by mutually antagonistic nationalist movements. If the provincial school board was unsympathetic to a certain national camp, it also likely made sure that the schools teaching that movement's corresponding language would not use the most aggressively nationalist textbooks available on the market. Further case studies could offer interesting insight into the workings of textbook selection on the local level.

Teaching about the Nation in Diverse Sociopolitical Contexts

While the array of different textbook series available for a given language of instruction partly reflected the demographic strength of its speaker base, it was also dependent on the sociopolitical differentiation of the societies in which it was taught and spoken. Within the Habsburg Austrian context, the language of instruction that could boast the largest and most internally diverse textbook industry was undoubtedly German. According to Viktor Fadrus's calculation, private publishing houses released as many as 1563 German-language textbooks between the years 1880 and 1914 (1949, 197). This number certainly would have been much larger if it had included textbooks published by the k.u.k. Schulbücherverlag. An impression of the scope of the textbook industry may also be gained by looking at the yearly lists of approved textbooks published in the bulletin of the Ministry of Religion and Education. As calculated by Karin Almasy (2018), the ministry's 1904 bulletin listed 1151 German, 531 Czech, and 115 Slovene-language titles. In proportional terms, this means that for every Slovene textbook, the Ministry approved 4.6 Czech, and 10 German titles (97, f. 26).

The immense breadth of the German-language textbook industry is also to blame for the fact that few, if any, researchers have attempted to synthetically tackle German-language textbook corpora. Among existing studies, the work that has offered the most comprehensive insight into the internal ideological heterogeneity of Habsburg Austria's German-language textbook industry has been Andrea Meissner's detailed comparative analysis of the historical narratives transmitted by Austria and Prussia's elementary schools between 1866 and 1933/38 (2009). While primarily interested in history and by no means all-encompassing, her study was based on a wide source base and revealed meaningful differences in the ideological framing of Austrian-German textbooks published in the k.u.k. Schulbücherverlag on the one hand and in private publishing houses on the other.

According to Meissner, state-published textbooks were most ideologically aligned with the traditional educational ideals of the central Austrian bureaucracy. While they did not deny the existence of national groups, they were primarily interested in teaching students about the Austrian state's political and administrative structures and cultivating loyalty towards the ruling dynasty (2009, 274–350). For the sake of illustration, it is worth taking a closer look at one such textbook series in order to establish a point of comparison with other works available on the German-language textbook market. A representative example of a state-published textbook series from the late Habsburg period is offered by primary school readers written by Karl Kummer, Franz Branky, and Raimund Hofbauer, which were widely used during the last three decades of Habsburg rule.

A detailed analysis of the forms of loyalty suggested in these textbooks shows that their framing of identity could have had limited use for the pursuit of German nationalist educational goals. When their texts implied a certain form of intimate identification or loyalty, they were usually talking about the ruler; that is, *unser geliebter Kaiser* (Kummer et al. 1912, 72) or the abstractly

defined homeland; that is, *unser Vaterland* (1912, 127). It is impossible to encounter a single case within the entire textbook corpus in which personal pronouns such as *we* or *our* would refer to a national group. At the same time, if the textbooks refrained from speaking about national groups in value-loaded terms, they did not deny their existence. Texts describing individual territories under Habsburg rule thus routinely contained information on the latter's national structure.⁵ By all means, the exposure to such categories and national taxonomies also contributed to normalizing the impression that humanity was divided into discrete national groups (Stergar and Scheer 2018).

If we analyze the overall share of Habsburg territories that were mentioned in Kummer's readers, we may notice a relative emphasis on the core Habsburg hereditary lands. Out of 119 texts that had some form of geographical localization, the largest number were set in Lower Austria (27%), followed by Bohemia (13.5%), Tyrol (12.5%), Styria and Hungary (7.5%), and Carinthia, Carniola, and Upper Austria (6%). If the textbooks were thematically marginalizing a certain part of the empire, it was its more recently adjoined and peripheral provinces such as Dalmatia (2.5%), Galicia (1.5%), and Bukovina (0.5%). Finally, the textbook series in question also portrayed individual national groups (*Volksstämme/Nationen*) or "peoples" (*Völker*) in relatively neutral and unbiased terms. They may have contained stereotypical Herderian descriptions of ancient Germans and Slavs,⁶ but in both cases these texts were positive and focused on virtues. Children thus read about tall, blonde, blue-eyed Germans who were kept strong and healthy by living in austere conditions.⁷ Slavs, on the other hand, were esteemed for their "persevering diligence, their high respect for elders, and their hospitality. In addition, they have since forever stood out by their sociability and their love for song, music, and dance" (Kummer et al. 1912, 216).

No matter whether they were describing ancient Germans or Slavs, the prose in these textbooks never suggested to their readers that they might share a special genetic or cultural bond with either of the two communities by using expressions such as "our ancestors" or "our forefathers." However, despite their relative lack of national bias, it is interesting to note that not even Kummer's textbooks could elude certain implicit forms of contemporary civilizational prejudice. One description of the Sudeten Mountains in Bohemia thus emphasized that "Germans are the main carriers of industry, while Slavs predominantly work in agriculture" (Kummer et al. 1912, 183). Descriptions of the purportedly German character of Lemberg/Lwów/L'viv's old town made references to the civilizing role of German burgher culture.⁸ Finally, it is likewise possible to encounter exoticizing and essentially Orientalist descriptions of inhabitants from the Empire's more peripheral crownlands, such as the "Wallachians" of Bukovina.⁹

While Kummer's textbook series was first published in the early 1890s, it was being reissued as late as 1912. One year earlier, however, the state publishing house also published the first issue of a primary-school textbook series that approached nationhood from a radically different position. Written by Erhard Lipka, Eduard Wagner, and Theodor Knaute, these textbooks were primarily used in the German-language schools of Bohemia and Moravia and espoused a radically *völkisch* vision of German history and identity. Unlike the Kummer series, they contained texts that spoke of nationality in strongly value-loaded terms, discussing "German honor" and bearing titles such as "You are a German! [*Du bist ein Deutscher!*]" (Meissner 2009, 304, f. 236). A poem by Felix Dahn, addressing the "Germans of Asutria" (*An die Deutschen in Österreich*), taught children that German should be their spirit, their song, their word, their folk, their pride, and their highest treasure.¹⁰ Even more surprisingly, a further poem by the same author (*An Deutsch-Österreich*) explicitly framed "German Austria" as a centuries-old vanguard against the "Turkish and Slavic incursions" (*Türken- und Slawendrang*).¹¹

With such openly chauvinistic and confrontational messages, it appears all the more surprising that Lipka, Wagner, and Knaute's textbook series was published by the state publishing house. The fact that a state institution could tolerate such discourse is arguably indicative of the extent to which even the central Habsburg bureaucracy itself came to see radical nationalism as normal and unavoidable by the early 20th century (Meissner 2009, 305). But while the previously mentioned textbook series may have served the educational needs of radicalized German-nationalist society in

the Bohemian lands (Křen 1996; Judson 2006; Zahra 2011), other local German-speaking contexts demanded a different pedagogical approach towards nationhood. A mix of Catholic and German nationalist points of emphasis characterized the historical narrative in a primary school textbook series written by Franz Wiesenberger. Published between 1907 and 1908, it was primarily employed in the schools of linguistically relatively uniform Upper Austria (Meissner 2009, 305). However, a relative lack of nationalist discourse continued to set the tone of textbooks intended for schools in politically Catholic areas. Examples of the latter include readers for “simple” (*einfache*) primary schools, written by Franz Frisch and Franz Rudolf (1908), as well as the readers that Franz Zeller had prepared for Tyrolian schools (1909). According to Meissner, these two textbook series show an “abstinence of references to German history” and offer a religion-centric historical narrative that is not unlike the one that we encounter in the traditional textbooks that predate the liberal school reforms of the 1860s (Meissner 2009, 320).

While they were specifically written for conservative rural crownlands such as Tyrol, it is interesting to note that the previously mentioned “Catholic” textbooks also came to be used outside of territories dominated by political Catholicism. Just to name one example, annual school reports from the Carniolan provincial capital of Ljubljana/Laibach show that a local German-language boy’s school had been consistently using Kummer’s textbooks between 1890 and 1909. After that point, however, it gradually switched to Frisch and Rudolf’s readers.¹² Ljubljana had been under the rule of a liberal Slovene-nationalist municipal government since 1896, and its German-identifying minority population likewise primarily voted for German liberal-nationalist candidates (Matić 2002). The decision to use politically Catholic textbooks in the local German schools was thus hardly motivated by local sympathies towards political Catholicism. While a more definite insight into this local dynamic would require a detailed case study, it appears likely that the responsible authorities routinely selected a conservative German-language textbook series because the latter was much less fit for the pursuit of German-nationalist activism in the classroom.

Changes in Ideological Framing Over Time

The previous section has offered some practical examples of how a different textbook series within a single linguistic corpus displayed diverse relationships towards nationalist values, all the while reinforcing the notion that humanity consists of discrete national groups. While the textbook series by Kummer et al. had already been in use for several decades and largely reflects the traditional value system of the k.u.k. Schulbücherverlag’s German-language publications, it may be noticed that more radically nationalist textbooks only appeared after the turn of the century. A relatively late appearance of more profoundly nationalist educational content was also characteristic of some of Habsburg Austria’s numerically weaker textbook corpora. With 1,252,940 people, or 4.9% of all Austrians, reporting that Slovene was their language of daily use (*Umgangssprache*)¹³ in 1910, the Slovene-language textbook industry was considerably smaller when compared to its German or Czech counterparts. However, by the last decade of Habsburg rule, Slovene teachers were able to choose between three distinct primary school textbook series. As the following pages will show, some of them also showed divergent characteristics when it comes to their attitudes towards nationalism.¹⁴

Within the Slovene-language textbook industry, it was Peter Končnik’s primary school textbook series that undoubtedly reached the widest reading public during the last decades of Habsburg rule. With their first editions published in the late 1870s and early 1880s, they saw almost forty years of reissues up until the last years of the Great War.¹⁵ An in-depth analysis of the forms of identity and allegiance implied in these textbooks shows an overall ideological profile that was rather similar to the one characterizing Kummer’s German-language textbooks. Personal pronouns in the texts were never used to imply national allegiance. Instead, they typically expressed allegiance to administrative units such as individual crownlands, to the Austrian and/or Habsburg states as a whole, and to the ruling dynasty.¹⁶ The textbooks taught children that humankind was divided into peoples

(*ljudstva*) and that “the key difference between Europeans as well as between various peoples in a wider sense is the language that they speak” (1901, 55). The population of the Habsburg Monarchy was likewise “divided into multiple nationalities [*narodnosti*], which again differ in their religion and language, but also in their customs, clothing and traditional dress” (1901, 63–4). Much like in Kummer’s schoolbooks, one could encounter Herderian texts detailing the lives of ancient Slavs (1897, 201–3), but without any implications to the readers that they share a special genetic or cultural bond with these people.

Conversely, one way in which Končnik’s textbooks did, nevertheless, integrate the discursive practices of contemporary Slovene nationalism was in their relatively recurrent use of the adjective “Slovene” (*slovenski*) in spatial or geographic contexts. A short story referred to the Drava/Drau, Sava/Sau, and Soča/Isonzo as the “three main Slovene rivers” (1897, 111–12). The Kras/Karst/Carso plateau was a “section of Slovene land [*oddelek slovenske zemlje*]” (1897, 112), a text on the history of Ljubljana spoke of “Slovene provinces” (1901, 42), and a historical description of the 1593 Habsburg–Ottoman Battle of Sisak also included the term *Slovensko* (“Slovene lands”) as a spatial category. Such terminology is worth noting—while there had been no official Slovene administrative unit in the Habsburg Empire, the term *Slovensko* as used to refer to the Slovene-inhabited territories of the Empire had been in circulation since the pre-March period. A separate United Slovenia (*Zedinjena Slovenija*) had also been part of the Slovene-nationalist political program since 1848 (Höslér 2006; Kosi 2013).

Two additional textbook series for Slovene primary schools appeared in the late 1890s and early 1900s. The first was written by Maks Josin and Engelbert Gangl but saw limited use due to the almost concurrent appearance of a new textbook series by Henrik Schreiner and Franc Hubad. When comparing their respective numbers of reissues, we see that the Hubad–Schreiner series saw wider dissemination during the last decade of Habsburg rule (Almasy 2018, 392–93). Researchers who have analyzed the latter textbooks have noted a prominent presence of both Slovene nationalist discursive points as well as a South Slavic; that is, “Yugoslavist” orientation in their content (Bruckmüller 2007, 21–23; Jelavich 1990, 244–62). Unlike in Končnik’s textbooks, we encounter numerous texts where the Slovene nation is discussed from a first-person perspective. Children thus read about how “Slovenes never forgot their loyalty to the Habsburg family. In 1883 [during the emperor’s visit] we renewed, each in his own heart, our oath to Franz Joseph I and his heirs” (Jelavich 1990, 251). A different text referred to Croats as “our brothers” (Bruckmüller 2007, 22). In the words of Ernst Bruckmüller, Slovene textbooks experienced a “definite shift in tone around the first decade of the twentieth century” when it comes to the presence of nationally relevant content (2007, 21). A comparison with Končnik’s older textbooks is telling—the latter only contained fragmental and positivist references to other South Slavic nations and never spoke about them in value-loaded terms. Indeed, the spotlight that Schreiner’s textbooks gave to fellow Slavic peoples was so prominent that it earned him a denunciation from German nationalist circles in 1915. In line with the socially tense atmosphere of the war years, Schreiner’s works were accused of pan-Slavic agitation and deficient patriotism. However, after a detailed investigation, the Ministry of Religion and Instruction decided to allow the further use of these textbooks without any modifications to their content (Almasy 2018, 343–51).

For most of the textbooks used in Habsburg Austria’s linguistically heterogeneous schools, it appears that a more radically nationalist ideological framing may only be detected after the turn of the century. This process coincided with an increasing politicization of the Austrian masses in a wider sense. In practical terms, this meant that it was hardly unimportant for a pupil’s educational experience and top-down national development if they had visited schools with a certain language of instruction in the 1870s, the 1890s, or the 1910s. At the same time, even if more explicitly nationalist textbooks did appear during the last two decades of Habsburg rule, we must recall that, in many cases, they coexisted with earlier textbook series that continued to have new reissues. Even relatively small textbook corpora, such as Slovene, gave teachers and educational authorities a choice between several textbook series, and it would certainly be worthwhile to

engage in a bottom-up study of the factors shaping decision-making processes behind textbook selection during this period.

Nationalism and Institutional Differences

It has already been mentioned that the 1869 State Primary School Law provided autonomy in textbook selection for the teachers of Austria's *Bürgerschulen*. According to Meissner's observations, the textbooks produced for these schools stood out by their critical stance towards absolutism and religious conservatism. Taking Anton Gindely's history textbook as an example, she noted that its successive reissues contained an increasingly liberal emphasis on values. The textbooks celebrated Joseph II's enlightened reforms, criticized Metternich's restoration, and framed the gradual replacement of absolutism by constitutionalism as a civilizational achievement (Meissner 2009, 320–28). In line with the specific strand of German-Austrian liberal politics (Judson 1996; Kwan 2013), however, these textbooks also reflected a liberalism that had integrated a nationalist framing of culture. They regularly spoke of the purported civilizing role that German culture had played in Austria, claiming, for example, that German colonists brought “better habits and traditions [*bessere Sitten und Gewohnheiten*]” to territories settled by Slavs. At the same time, their culture-oriented framing of nationality also set these textbooks apart from the more organicist and *völkisch* textbooks that had been discussed earlier (Meissner 2009, 327–28).

Therefore, while the type of primary school that children visited played a role in determining the kind of ideological upbringing they would experience, a further factor to consider is also the level of education that pupils attain during their school years. Secondary school textbooks fulfilled a qualitatively different and much more ambitious educational goal, meaning that undergoing secondary education resulted in a very different educational experience compared to merely finishing primary school (Cohen 1996). The latter life trajectory was certainly the one experienced by the great majority of Habsburg Austria's pupils. The number of Austrians per 1000 in the total population who were enrolled in secondary schools rose from 2.15 in 1869/70 to 5.03 in 1909/10 (Cohen 1996, 56). Secondary education was thus largely reserved for a narrow elite, and nationalist forms of socialization played a strong role in the accompanying social experience. In the words of Gary Cohen, “[t]here can be no doubt that students and professors in Czech secondary schools and higher education articulated Czech national allegiances and helped propagate nationalist political beliefs. German-speaking students and professors did much the same, particularly in Bohemia, Moravia, and Styria, as did their Polish counterparts in Galicia” (1996, 241).

When it comes to the question of textbooks, it is worth noting that the Austrian secondary school textbook industry had already been liberalized in 1850. Private publishers thus competed with the state publishing house in supplying gymnasiums and other secondary schools with the necessary schoolbooks (Almasy 2018, 94). If we look at the presence of nationally relevant educational content in Slovene-language secondary school textbooks, we see a rather stark contrast when comparing it to contemporary primary school textbook series such as Končnik's. Due to the relatively modest number of gymnasiums with Slovene as their (partial) language of instruction, there had not been a strong impetus to print several secondary school-level textbook series in the Slovene language.¹⁷ Ever since the late 1880s, Jakob Sket's secondary school readers dominated the Slovene-language textbook market as the single available textbook series until the end of Habsburg rule (Almasy 2018, 389).

Unlike Končnik's relatively indifferent primary school textbooks, Sket's works made ample use of the opportunities that individual topics offered for the purposes of nationalist education. The expression “Slovene lands” functioned as a completely legitimate geographic term, to the extent that some texts even spoke about “non-Slovene lands” in the Habsburg Monarchy (1892, 122). Personal pronouns regularly referred to the national collective; the students could read descriptions of old Slavic pagan traditions that were practised by “our ancestors” (1892, 69) and “our fathers” (1892, 166). Indeed, the author employed the first person as if the fact that he shared a common nationality

with his readers was something self-explanatory. The introduction to one of his textbooks thus claimed that it “offers only that which is native and our authentic [literary] property. Epic poetry, in particular, makes clear how valuable is our traditional literature. This section traces the spiritual development of our people; it paints its views on the natural world and its tales, as well as showing the impressions that events have made upon our nation throughout the centuries” (1886, n. p.).

Even more importantly, the textbooks taught children that they should have a strong emotional bond with their mother tongue. Exemplary in this sense is a text originally written by Anton Martin Slomšek, a bishop and prominent Slovene “awakener” from the pre-March period. The text was included in Sket’s textbooks and claimed that “[a]s long as the mother’s speech [*materina beseda*] is celebrated, the nation is venerated and revived; but when the mother’s speech perishes, so does the nation’s power and glory. ... He who therefore respects his nation, must also respect his mother’s speech and care for its honor” (1896: 18). Such views were a classic example of Herderian ethnolinguistic nationalism, which was and remains a typical trait of Slovene nationalist activism. Like so many of their peers who were supporting nationalist movements construed upon ethno-linguistic grounds (Kamusella 2009), Slovene nationalists, too, were gravely concerned with the marginalization and non-dominant social standing of their national language. With languages such as German or Italian popularly understood as sources of social mobility, nationalists often encountered difficulties when trying to convince their purported co-nationals that education in their mother tongue was worth pursuing at all.

Much like Henrik Schreiner, Sket would also experience denunciation from German nationalists during his career. In his case, however, the accusations had already come in 1901 and led to practical changes in the content of his textbooks. The author of the denunciation was Edwin Ambrositsch, a lawyer and German-nationalist politician in the Styrian town of Pettau/Ptuj. His letter to the authorities is worth quoting at length—he observed that the educational authorities had been making a “strict effort to exclude everything from textbooks ... that could invigorate the national spirit of the studying youth and thus increase their opposition to their peers belonging to other nationalities” (Almasy 2018, 352–53). He claimed that this has led to the exclusion of every reference to Germanism, to the extent that “one may barely find the word ‘German’ in German textbooks anymore” (Almasy 2018, 353). Conversely, Sket’s Slovene-language textbooks supposedly contained “not only simplistic glorifications of the Slovene people, but also excessive portrayals of history that come at the cost of truth and show Slovenes being oppressed by their German countrymen (*Landsleute*), indeed, even unambiguous slander against Germans, which naturally should arouse in the studying pupil an automatic sense of disdain against the Germans” (Almasy 2018, 353).

The ensuing investigation into Sket’s textbooks involved none other than Peter Končnik himself. At the time, appointed as a school inspector for Carniola’s Slovene-language schools, he was asked by the ministry to offer an assessment of Sket’s works. He observed that the great majority of Carniolan-Slovene students stood on an “exclusively national standpoint” and concurred that a malevolent teacher could use these textbooks for inculcating “national intolerance and arrogance [*nationale Unduldsamkeit und Ueberhebung*]” (Almasy 2018, 356). The fact that a fellow textbook author had criticized a colleague’s work for its supposedly excessive nationalist radicalism is in itself a clear illustration of ideological disagreements and divergences within a single linguistically defined subsystem. At least in the Slovene case, students who managed to enrol in Slovene-language secondary schools were exposed to a noticeably different ideological package compared to their peers who had finished their education at the primary school level.

Conclusion

Since the legislative framework traditionally gave provincial and district political authorities a strong say in textbook selection on the ground, the diverse sociopolitical contexts of the Habsburg Austrian political landscape gave birth to a considerable range of textbooks that were ideologically

tailored to local needs. As the relevant examples have shown, textbooks written for different local contexts could have had very diverse attitudes towards nationality. While the main contemporary source of conflict over ideology had been the struggle between liberal and religious-conservative values, it is evident that individual textbook series also showed certain nuances when it comes to their pedagogical approaches towards nationhood and national identity as a value. At the same time, it is worth noting that this internal diversity increased with time, and was also very much dependent on the relative size and social diversification of a given language's speaker base.

Aside from *where* children were educated, a further important question to ask is *when* their education took place. With the primary school textbook market only undergoing liberalization in 1869, it is understandable that a stronger diversification of the available array of textbooks only happened gradually, and in later decades. As time passed, however, textbooks increasingly came to reflect changing societal attitudes within the Habsburg Empire itself. When it comes to nationalism, researchers have noted that a more explicitly nationalist framing of educational content became increasingly normalized during the last decade of Habsburg rule. But while more radically nationalist textbooks were being published, even by the state publishing house, it is still important to note that they coexisted with a textbook series that offered very limited opportunities for educating children in a nationalist spirit.

Finally, the level of education attained with a given language of instruction also played an important role in determining a student's exposure to nationally relevant content during their educational experience. As the Slovene-language examples have shown, secondary school textbooks in a given language could have provided a much more explicit form of nationalist indoctrination compared to textbooks used at the primary school level. At the same time, it is important to note that the number of pupils who had visited gymnasiums and other secondary schools in Habsburg Austria remained low throughout this entire period. To a large extent, this fact also hints towards the extent to which canonical nationalist concerns and worldviews typically remained the domain of an educated elite, one that was often disappointed by the lukewarm reception of nationalist ideals by its own presumed co-nationals.

The primary intent of the present article has been to use textbooks as an illustrative example of the internal divergences and ideological discrepancies within the Habsburg Austrian education system that were not related to a given language of instruction. With systematic and exhaustive studies of individual textbook corpora still being rare, further research on textbooks and their selection practices could contribute to a fuller understanding of the ideological implications of education in both imperial halves of the Habsburg Empire. That said, it is important to note that textbooks and their contested status in society were ultimately only part of the top-down story of Habsburg education. The latter's bottom-up aspects—that is, the ambiguous practical reception of educational content and its transmission in the less-than-ideal conditions of real classrooms—remain an even more neglected subject within Habsburg studies, which is just as deserving of researchers' attention.

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Notes

- 1 As is evident from its title, the present article limits its discussion to developments within the Empire's Cisleithanian; i.e., the Austrian half. Schools in the Kingdom of Hungary were organized according to separate laws and institutions (Puttkammer 2003).
- 2 No equivalent wide-reaching educational reform had been prepared for Habsburg Austria's secondary schools. The latter continued to function according to the principles laid out in the 1854 *Entwurf der Organisation der Gymnasien und Realschulen in Oesterreich* by Franz Seraphin Exner and Heinrich Bonitz (Engelbrecht 1986, 4: 151–52).

- 3 “62. Gesetz vom 14. Mai 1869”, in *Reichs-Gesetz-Blatt für das Kaiserthum Oesterreich* 29 (20 May 1869): 278. Translation mine.
- 4 In Habsburg Austria, the crownland in which this ideological struggle manifested itself most clearly was arguably Tyrol. In 1870, its inhabitants heeded the call of the local Catholic clergy and forcibly resisted the arrival of the new “liberal” school inspectors. Its provincial diet was also among the last to implement a reformed law on school oversight in line with the new liberal legislation, ratifying it as late as 1892 (Judson 2016, 302–11).
- 5 “Die Bewohner der österreichischen Alpenlandes sind vorwiegend deutschen Stammes. ... Im südlichen Teile des Alpengebietes sind die Bewohner zumeist romanischen, im südöstlichen slawischen Stammes” (Kummer et al. 1912: 158–9).
- 6 “Man rühmte an den Slawen den ausdauernden Fleiß, die hohe Achtung vor dem Alter und die Gastfreundschaft. Geselligkeit, Liebe zu Gesang, Musik und Tanz zeichneten sie zudem von jeher aus” (Kummer et al. 1912: 216).
- 7 “Aber trotz der Schrecknisse, die das Land in sich barg, gefiel es dem kernhaften Volke; der Wald erhielt es gesund an Leib und Seele und gewährte ihm Schutz vor den Angriffen feindlicher Nachbarn. Wie Riesen rahten die Germanen hoch über andre Menschen; die helle Farbe der Haut, das goldgelbe oder rötliche Haar und die großen, blauen Augen unterschieden sie von ihren südlichen Nachbarn” (Kummer et al. 1912: 208–10).
- 8 “Die Häuser, die Kirchen, die Straßen, dies alles hat sehr viel Ähnlichkeit mit alten deutschen Städten. Das erklärt sich leicht aus dem frühzeitigen Verkehr der Polen mit den Deutschen” (Kummer et al. 1912: 188).
- 9 “Der walachische Hirtenknecht (Tschoban) aber, ..., läßt sich in seiner Ruhe nicht stören. Wir können ihn also bequem in seinem Anzuge, dem schmutzigen, fettgetränkten Hemde, den weiten Tuchhosen, den Bundschuhen, der runden Pelzmütze und dem zottigen Wollmantel, betrachten” (Kummer et al. 1912: 196).
- 10 “Deutsch sei dein Geist, dein Lied, dein Wort, / dein Volk dein Stolz und höchster Hort / und deutsch, was drohn und kommen mag, / dein Herz bis zu dem letzten Schlag” (Meissner 2009, 304, f. 237).
- 11 “Du hast jahrhundertlang / Türken- und Slawendrang sieghaft entschart. / Was du mit Heldenmut, / was du mit edlem Blut / schufest zu deutschem Gut, / halt es bewahrt.” (Meissner 2009, 301).
- 12 The prescribed textbooks for each year may be discerned from the annual reports published by the German Boy’s Primary School (Deutsche Knaben-Volksschule/Nemška deška ljudska šola) and are digitally accessible on the Slovene Digital Library’s website (Slovenska digitalna knjižnica, <https://www.dlib.si/>) under the keyword “Nemška deška ljudska šola – Ljubljana”.
- 13 “Language of daily use” was the linguistic category recorded in Habsburg Austria’s decennial population censuses. Unlike mother tongue, it was supposed to refer to the language that people most often used in their daily lives (Brix 1982).
- 14 For a tabular overview of the entire Slovene textbook industry under late Habsburg rule, see (Almasy 2018, 388–93).
- 15 The second reader (*Drugo berilo*) in this series was first published in 1878 and had its last reprint as late as 1917 (Almasy 2018, 392).
- 16 “Dežela, v katerej je naš rojstveni kraj, imenuje se tudi naša materina dežela. Kranjcem je materina dežela Kranjsko, Koroščem Koroško. Katera dežela je Štajercem materina dežela? Naše avstrijsko cesarstvo sestoji iz mnogih večjih in manjših dežel. Vsaka dežela ima svoje posebno ime, svoj posebni grb; vsem pa vlada isti vladar” (Končnik 1897: 105).
- 17 The task of determining the language of instruction on Austrian secondary schools was delegated to the Ministry of Religion and Education. In the case of traditionally non-dominant languages such as Slovene, they would typically be introduced as a language of instruction gradually, in the form of parallel classes. The first secondary school to offer Slovene as its language of instruction throughout all eight grades was the private Škofijska gimnazija

(Bishopric Gymnasium) in Šentvid near Ljubljana/Laibach as late as 1905 (Ciperle and Vovko 1987, 58).

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