

Afterword

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In the early years of the twenty-first century, few, if any, states do not confront serious and recurrent problems related to the character of intergroup relationships and the promotion of a common national identity and sense of national purpose. The traditional paradigm of the nation-state, predicated on a convergence between ethnic or cultural with political boundaries, currently applies to very few countries. Instead, contemporary states, even some that once appeared to be relatively homogenous, tend to be ethnically, culturally, and linguistically pluralistic. In some cases the change has occurred through extensive immigration, in others through the recovery of the history and identity of suppressed minorities, and in still others through the deepening or increasing political relevance of long-standing ethnic, cultural, religious, social, economic, and political cleavages. Changes in political boundaries—sometimes dividing groups across national frontiers and at other points reuniting them—and the displacement of long-standing political institutions and cultures can raise similar issues. No wonder, then, that the question of how to shape and teach a history able to promote national integration and identity formation has become a significant issue across many different types of political systems.

Despite or perhaps because of globalization, substate nationalisms have reemerged in many parts of the globe with claims that are sometimes difficult for established states to meet. In addition, the heightening of group identities, leading to what is sometimes termed the “politics of recognition” or “identity politics,” has become more prevalent in many contemporary pluralistic societies, including some with long-established representative

political systems and sense of common national identity. The politics of recognition involves groups, defined by their ethnicity, their religion, their gender, or their sexual orientation, entering the political arena to make demands for symbolic recognition, political representation, and sometimes for resources.¹ Identity politics can reflect a legitimate quest for inclusion and for a share in the tangible benefits that come with citizenship rights in a common political system.² However, the resulting dynamics can be problematic, even in a well-established state whose members have an interwoven history. Because the logic of the politics of difference encourages groups to emphasize their distinctiveness at the expense of a shared national identity, the implications may be even more problematic for a fragile, divided society.

In “deeply divided” societies, those countries that have experienced politically inspired violence, systemic human rights abuses, and/or state repression, the challenges are far greater. In their case, there is a need for multiple levels and types of healing and reconciliation. Here the national task is to accommodate former enemies, rather than just political opponents, and to reestablish decent and functioning social institutions and political systems inclusive of all communities. Countries that have experienced cycles of violence confront a need to overcome dehumanization and deep distrust among their constituent communities, and not just to balance political power among contending groups. Moreover, the process of healing and transformation is typically complicated by the legacy of trauma and the fragility of social infrastructures and political institutions. Typically, violence fractures societies, taking a severe toll on both the physical and institutional infrastructures and requiring various types of reconstruction. Severe oppression and/or governmental complicity in the violence can alienate the people from their government and undermine the legitimacy of political institutions. Most deeply divided societies also suffer from a legacy of severe trauma from violence and loss, requiring societal as well as individual healing. Moreover, before a deeply divided society can move forward, it must come to terms with the past. Doing so satisfactorily often entails initiating some form of transitional justice process able to determine the scope and causes of the violence and to assign responsibility and accountability.

There are many types of divided societies, with both shared and distinctive challenges related to shaping a common or “usable” history and teaching it to future generations. The case studies in this volume are from countries with very different types of experience of violence—repression, atrocities, civil conflict, and suppression of minorities. They differ in the nature and depth of the social divisions in the past and present; the character—whether with internal or external foes—as well as the scale, duration, and intensity of the conflict; the role of the government/state in the violence, abuses, and repression; the time that has elapsed since the events being in-

terpreted; and the extent of continuing controversy over their interpretation. Often the major fault lines are between members of different communities, some of whom have long histories of distrust. The sources of these divisions also vary widely. In a number of deeply divided societies, the government or institutions therein have been the primary perpetrator of, or at least complicit in, the violence or maltreatment, leaving a legacy of alienation from and distrust of the political system. In a few cases, the violence stems from, or was aggravated by, a breakdown in the political system. And still other deeply divided societies are trying to cope with various combinations of these problems. In addition, the political regimes, resources, and stability of the current regimes vary.

All of the above pose issues for the development of history curricula and the preparation of history texts. Although the nature, sources, severity, and character of divisions and abuses and the historical distance from them influence the willingness to confront a violent past and its contemporary interpretation, there does not appear to be a consistent pattern in how they do so. Moreover, the succession of revisions in the textbooks in several of these countries indicates that the openness to dealing with a problematic past and the approach to history may vary considerably over time.

In assessing the range of potential strategies available to societies to promote reconciliation and integration of diverse populations, utilizing public education stands out as an important option. Historically, schooling has played a key role in the development of nation-states. According to some analysts, the nation is an "imagined political community" formed in part by using compulsory public schooling as a mechanism of integration.³ As Jon Dorschner and Thomas Sherlock observe in their chapter in this volume, a resilient national identity relies on the telling and retelling of the past to impart meaning, direction, and cohesion. Virtually all countries have public education systems in which the curriculum is prescribed. Many governments also play a role in guiding the writing of the textbooks used by the schools or in selecting which best meet requirements. This means, at least in theory, that the history curriculum can be used for social and civic reconstruction, as a means to bridge national divisions, and to redefine and reinforce national identities.

Surprisingly, there have been relatively few studies of the manner in which curriculum policy and the teaching of history have been used as part of a broader process of social and political reconciliation in order to promote national integration across ethnic boundaries and political changes or to seek to achieve other types of political objectives. It is therefore significant to explore what kind of insights can be drawn from the case studies in this volume.

Along with the important question of the content of the history curriculum, and in particular its treatment of problematic events and historical

periods, there is also the issue of what kind of history can best promote national integration and reconciliation. In his chapter on Russia, Sherlock discusses the importance of myths for societies to enhance group solidarity and social cohesion. According to Sherlock, myth, in contrast with historical analysis, does not seek to present history objectively or to analyze the problems of historical change but instead to select events and facts to fit the integrity of a narrative able to legitimate the state and the leadership and programs of ruling elites. The case studies in this volume suggest that history teaching and the content of history textbooks partake of both efforts, to present objective history, albeit a history that is likely to be reinterpreted over time, and to shape a myth that can help to instill national pride and integrate diverse populations. The curricula and texts of the various countries covered in this volume fall at different points along the spectrum between historical analysis and myth.

In contrast with Sherlock's emphasis on myth, one theme in Julian Dierkes's chapter on postunification Germany is that the paradigm shift from grand national narratives to more social-scientific historiographies in the Federal Republic of (West) Germany beginning in the early 1960s facilitated reconciliation with Germany's wartime victims, such as Jews and Israel, France and Poland. He argues that the discussions of the Holocaust and rapprochement with Poland in the history texts gradually reinforced a historiographical paradigm shift that allowed for more reconciliatory perspectives. The involvement of the history teachers themselves played a role in this change. It should be noted though that the paradigm shift also had some negative repercussions. As the portrayal in teaching materials of the atrocities committed during the National Socialist regime went through revisions from the grand national narratives approach in the early postwar history texts to the later versions, the treatment became more historically accurate but also more complex and nuanced. In the process they lost some of the moral clarity of the earlier, starker accounts.

Roland Bleiker and Hoang Young-Ju's chapter offers a third perspective on what type of history best contributes to reconciliation, in this case between two countries, North and South Korea, that are united by culture and geography but divided by political ideologies, the experience of war, and continuing tensions. Complicating the situation, in both countries history teaching has been part of a comprehensive and highly politicized process of nation building. Moreover, the narratives presented in the two countries offer fundamentally different views of the past. They disagree on even "the barest of facts"—who did what to whom. Each side has used its own interpretations of the Korean War to legitimize its own government while demonizing the archrival. Thus the teaching of history has both reflected and contributed to an ongoing climate of confrontation and fear between the states. Bleiker and Hoang argue that a more tolerant and peaceful future therefore depends on

replacing the notion of a single historical narrative with multiple visions of the past and future. According to them, the promotion of a more tolerant historical consciousness on both sides must begin by the creation of space for dissent and acceptance of alternative perspectives. This is occurring in the South to a limited extent, but not in the North.

An important overarching theme that can be discerned in the case studies in this volume is just how complex and difficult it is to interpret, represent, and teach a contested or controversial past, whether it involves the fundamental reinterpretation of a period in history or the recovery of embarrassing or painful memories. There are very few societies that lack at least some events that the government or specific groups would prefer to relegate to the trash heap of national amnesia. Painful memories that history textbooks have sought to write about include the poor treatment of minorities, such as Canada's efforts at the forced assimilation of its Aboriginal people or First Nations, and the far more ignominious heritage of National Socialism as the architect of the Holocaust in Germany.

Here I would like to note that I come to the question of the role of public education in promoting national identity, reconciliation, and a sense of national purpose from the perspective of work in the transitional justice rather than the educational field. The term transitional justice refers to the processes and mechanisms in which many postconflict societies engage as they seek to come to terms with a divisive and violent past. As someone who has worked primarily on issues of historical interpretation through the prism of transitional justice, I have been struck by how unsettled the interpretation of history can be in some countries even generations after the events. Many in the transitional justice field have assumed that it is possible for a truth commission or other transitional justice mechanism working over a relatively brief period of time to recover the past, present its findings about responsibility for past human rights violations, utilize this information as the basis for a new interpretation of a history of the period covered, and gain support for this history across social and political divisions. Some analysts writing on truth commissions initially portrayed the task of truth finding as primarily confirming widely held beliefs about the past.⁴ Subsequent experience and studies of transitional justice mechanisms have shown, however, that truth recovery is a very difficult task, especially in a society in which different sectors of the population have widely different views of what happened and why it occurred.⁵ It is affected by a wide range of factors, including conceptions of what constitutes social truth, the mandate of the body undertaking the truth finding, its methodology, the time and level of resources available, and social and political receptivity to the process.

In much the same way, but over a longer time frame, the revision of the history curriculum intersects with many factors. The case studies in this

volume document the extent to which the interpretation of the past is constantly evolving as national needs change and political control shifts between political leaders and parties with differing perspectives on the past and agendas for the future. Major changes in the interpretation offered in history texts were documented in virtually all of the chapters. The impetus to do so was sometimes occasioned by major political events, such as the reunification of the two Germanys across former Cold War boundaries. Other times it resulted from changes in the orientation and goals of the regime in power, as occurred in several of the countries, for example the South Korean government's decision to move from confrontation to accommodation with a historical enemy. In other countries, such as West Germany and Spain, the orientation evolved gradually over time as there was greater distance from the events portrayed and the societies democratized. In still others, with Russia the most conspicuous example, there have been politically motivated sharp reversals in the reinterpretation of the past.

Thomas Sherlock's chapter on Russia relates how the onset of perestroika gave space to voices that challenged the orthodox and self-justifying representations of Soviet history condemnation. Then in 1988, the removal of the orthodox history textbooks foretold the demise of the Soviet Union. Under the Yeltsin regime, texts were published that were critical of the Soviet period. Shortly after Putin took office, however, he began incremental attempts to rehabilitate the past by removing history texts with a negative treatment of the Communist period and by promoting texts with patriotic themes that linked the tsarist, Communist, and post-Communist periods with the Russian state.

In the case of Guatemala, the end of a prolonged civil conflict and the issuance of the report of Guatemala's Commission for Historical Clarification, *Memory of Silence*, opened space and provided an important new resource that could be introduced into the country's school system. As Elizabeth Oglesby's examination of Guatemala relates, in 1999 the Historical Clarification Commission (known by its Spanish acronym CEH) presented a twelve-volume report that drew on eight thousand testimonies of victims, historical documents, and archival evidence. Many of the findings, particularly the historical roots of the armed conflict, the disproportionate responsibility of the military for the violence, and the scale of the abuses inflicted on the indigenous Mayan population, were controversial. According to Oglesby, there is no national project to address the teaching of "historical memory" in Guatemala, possibly because the state does not have a serious commitment to public education and because history has been largely removed from school texts in favor of social studies and civics. Nevertheless, all of the leading textbooks now address the conflict to some degree. There are also efforts to incorporate some of the Guatemala Historical Commission's findings in school programs through supplemental resources, and

thereby to open up space for teachers and schools to be able to address the recent past.

The case studies illuminate the kinds of dilemmas countries face and the trade-offs in which they engage in the teaching of history, both in terms of the impact on relationships among the constituent groups within the society and the implications across national borders. The interpretation of history presented to secondary-school students has both reflected and influenced the state of relationships with neighboring states with which there were legacies of war and mistrust. In several instances, India and Pakistan being prime examples, domestic needs and political considerations have trumped efforts to utilize the teaching of history to diffuse tensions with other countries. Jon Dorschner and Thomas Sherlock analyze how Pakistani textbooks have relied on what they term a “negative nationalism” to instill a sense of national identity and patriotism despite the problematic implications for reconciliation with India. Takashi Yoshida’s chapter on Japan analyzes the role that the recent revisions of Japan’s middle school textbooks have played in retarding Japan’s progress toward reconciliation with the neighboring states it occupied during World War II. The effort to rehabilitate the portrayal of Japan’s involvement in the Asia-Pacific War was denounced by critics in Japan, and both the Chinese and South Korean governments issued formal protests over the Japanese government’s approval of one particularly problematic volume.

The important role of teachers was a shared theme in several of the case studies. While the content of the history textbooks obviously matters, so does the manner in which teachers use them. The teacher’s interpretation plays an important role in the understanding that the students derive from their courses. As Alison Kitson’s Northern Ireland chapter indicates, teachers tend to “play safe” both in terms of what they teach and how they teach it. Thus many teachers there and elsewhere are reluctant to discuss controversial periods, events, and issues and prefer to skip them. They also fail to ask challenging questions. Since the most contentious periods tend to be more recent, it is not difficult to give them short shrift and dwell on earlier events. Rafael Valls’s chapter on Spain documents the scanty knowledge of the many university students about controversial periods of history because their teachers apparently had chosen not to cover them.

It is important to note that the attitude of teachers may change over time. Julian Dierkes cites anecdotal evidence that, despite the coverage in the textbooks and the state-mandated curricula on which they were based, most teachers in West Germany in the 1950s did not cover the textbook sections dealing with National Socialism and World War II. Teachers there became more willing to address the recent period in history once a historiographical paradigm shift from grand narratives to a more social-scientific approach took place. Significantly, teachers played a major role in initiating

this change in orientation. Yet another factor encouraging the teachers was the greater public willingness to engage in discussions of historical guilt for the atrocities of the Nazi period.

Another factor covered in several of the chapters is the importance of pedagogy. The manner in which history is taught can be as important as its content, especially when the teaching is linked with efforts to promote democratic values and a human rights culture. The rote learning techniques and emphasis on memorization traditional in many school systems are antithetical to the development of a capacity for critical thinking and true learning competence. It is particularly important, when teaching controversial topics on which there is a variety of perspectives, to be willing to represent the range of interpretations and to encourage students to assess and debate them. As Valls points out, students are not passive actors in the reception of historical knowledge. If they are to develop a historical consciousness with the ability to understand and interpret the experiences and conditions of life in the past and link them to the present and future, they need to become active participants in the process of learning. But as Valls's data show, this appears not to be happening, even in a now democratic country like Spain.

Another issue is the tension between the use of history education to promote national integration and support patriotism on the one hand, and the presentation of a fuller and more critical history that covers negative and unflattering policies and assesses the factors giving rise to such on the other. A society as stable and democratic as Canada may be open to confronting painful legacies, albeit with difficulty. Yet Japan, another democratic and stable society, has gone in the opposite direction. Some of its recently approved history textbooks are less candid and critical about the atrocities the country committed during the Asia-Pacific War than earlier ones.

Penney Clark's chapter documents the changing portrayal of Canada's First Nation in English-language history textbooks. Early textbooks depicted Aboriginals in a negative light as savage and warlike. Over time they were given a greater presence and a more positive treatment. In addition, Canadian textbooks now discuss life on reserves, treaty rights, land claims negotiations, and other topics of importance to Canadian Indians. Nevertheless, Clark observes that this transformation has yet to deal fully with the abuses inflicted on Aboriginals through institutional practices. Nor do textbooks represent the voices of Aboriginal people through materials they have developed.

Societies that are demoralized or divided may be less inclined to represent the past critically. Thomas Sherlock's chapter on Russia provides an example. As the Putin regime became concerned with the growing demoralization in the society, it saw a need to use the teaching of history to instill national pride and dignity. One result was that the government became less tolerant of the critical assessment of the Soviet period in Yeltsin-era history

textbooks. Instead, it encouraged incremental attempts to rehabilitate the past as an instrument of nation building and the government's desire to restore its status as a great power.

Another important insight that can be drawn from these cases is the limitations of using the history curriculum to promote national reconciliation. Given the dearth of strategies available to states, there is a temptation to vest unrealistic hopes in the efficacy of education, particularly the teaching of history, as an instrument for change. But at best, history education is likely to play a contributing role. As Alison Kitson notes in her chapter, much of a pupil's knowledge of history comes from outside the classroom and school. In Northern Ireland, all students are exposed to the same history curriculum in schools, but children are surrounded by "versions" of the past in the home and local community that seek to legitimize the perspectives of their own religious tradition. Interpretations of history that are ahead of an elite consensus or national understanding are vulnerable to being rejected. The chapter on Germany, for example, indicated that the willingness of teachers to deal with National Socialism and responsibility for the Holocaust in the official history curriculum followed, rather than preceded, greater public discussion of the topic. Moreover, even when well-intentioned, efforts to use the secondary school curriculum to instill constructive values and beliefs may not be successful. According to the chapter on India and Pakistan, India's long-term efforts to promote a secular and inclusive society as one way to integrate religious minorities apparently has not countered the views of orthodox Hindus or their children on these issues. Moreover, themes of reconciliation offered by the school system can have little influence in a society in which the leadership, political parties, civil society organizations, and/or media preach messages that deepen social divisions and intolerance.

Additionally, just as the efforts of truth commissions to recover the past may be hostage to continuing ethnic and political conflicts, education may be informed by, rather than represent a force for, changes taking place in society. The growing political power of conservative groups and elites under Putin, such as the military veterans, who favor a strong state and seek the restoration of a great-power status, has played an important role in reshaping the narratives offered in the Russian textbooks toward more positive assessments of the Soviet past. Even when the government does not exert state control over or censorship of textbooks, as is the case in Spain, textbook writers and editors may exercise self-censorship so as to ensure they are in keeping with, rather than ahead of, the prevailing national sentiment.

Studies have shown that just as history may be a contributing factor in enduring conflicts, curriculum and textbooks may even be catalysts of violent conflict. A thematic assessment study prepared for the World Education Forum in Dakar dealing with education in situations of emergency and

crisis, for example, recognized that in some situations educational structure and content may have contributed to civil conflict. It also warned that “an educational system that reinforces social fissures can represent a dangerous source of conflict.”⁶ Going one step further, a paper prepared for the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) recommends that the linkages between education and conflict be a routine ingredient of thinking within the mainstream educational sector.⁷ The chapter on Korea in this volume is one such example of the manner in which the history curriculum in both states has exacerbated tensions on the Korean peninsula.

In some situations, historical reinterpretation to portray painful and problematic events and assess responsibility for them may be a reflection of growing reconciliation and the strengthening of civic bonds, rather than a catalyst. The chapters on Spain and Germany indicate that the incorporation of narratives dealing with painful and controversial events and periods of history into the curriculum may depend on the passage of time, perhaps generations, affording distance and the opportunity for healing. Rafael Valls describes how Spanish political actors agreed to a “pact of silence” about the civil war during the initial post-Franco period of transition, which persisted for nearly thirty years. The history textbooks of this period also largely avoided addressing the severe persecution that occurred under the Franco dictatorship. Only the recent textbooks written in the past fifteen years offer a fuller discussion of the violence and repression of the civil war years and the Franco regime, and even these rarely deal with the processes of amnesty and legal reconciliation, partly because they are very complex and sensitive themes and most likely because none of the major political parties have yet addressed them.

In conclusion, far from being some kind of insulated process shaped by education professionals, curriculum policy and the content of history texts touch on some of the most sensitive societal and political nerves. The interpretation of history in national educational systems reflects the perceived needs and orientations of those societies. History texts represent one component of the larger process of negotiation and social dialogue regarding a society’s symbolic representation of its divided past and common future.⁸

NOTES

1. David Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 62.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
3. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edition, (London: Verso, 1991), cited in Sobhi Tawil and Alexandra Harley, “Education and Identity-based Conflict: Assessing Curricula

lum Policy for Social and Civic Reconstruction," in Sobhi Tawil and Alexandra Harley, eds., *Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion* (Geneva: UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2004), p. 11.

4. Priscilla P. Hayner, "Fifteen Truth Commissions—1974 to 1994: A Comparative Study," in *Human Rights Quarterly* 16 (1994), p. 597.

5. See, for example, Audrey R. Chapman and Patrick Ball, "The Truth of Truth Commissions: Comparative Lessons from Haiti, South Africa, and Guatemala," *Human Rights Quarterly* 23 (February 2001), pp. 1–43; and the chapters on truth finding in Audrey R. Chapman and Hugo van der Merwe, *Truth and Reconciliation: Did the TRC Deliver?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

6. UNESCO, *Education in Situations of Emergency and Crisis*, thematic assessment study prepared for the World Education Forum in Dakar (Paris: UNESCO, 2000).

7. A. Smith and T. Vaux, *Education, Conflict, and International Development*, DFID issues paper, London, 2003, cited in Tawil and Harley, "Education and Identity-based Conflict," p. 6.

8. M. Rosenmund, "Approaches to International Comparative Research on Curricula and Curriculum-making Process," in *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 32, no. 5, pp. 599–606.

