

(Re)Constructing Memory: School Textbooks and the Imagination of the Nation

James H. Williams (Ed.)



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Edited by

James H. Williams

The George Washington University, Washington D.C., USA



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FOREWORD TO THE SERIES

(RE)CONSTRUCTING MEMORY

School Textbooks, Identity, and the Pedagogies and Politics of Imagining Community

Official school textbooks provide a rich source of material for those seeking to understand the greater social effects of schooling and the larger social and political contexts of education. Textbooks provide official knowledge a society wants its children to acquire—facts, figures, dates, seminal events. Textbooks also frame the facts, figures, dates, and events in a larger, though generally implicit, narrative that describes how things were, what happened, and how they came to be the way they are now. A group’s representation of its past is often intimately connected with its identity—who “we” are (and who we are not) as well as who “they” are.

Analysis of textbooks provides a lens through which to examine what might be called a nation’s deeper or hidden social and political curriculum. Comparative and longitudinal analyses provide a better understanding of variations and continuities in these “curricula” over time and across national contexts. Moreover, analysis of the implicit “pedagogy” of teaching and learning in textbooks provides insight into the relationship envisioned between the student and history. Is history presented as an interpretation of events that are socially understood, constructed, and contested, and in which the individual has both individual and social agency, or as a set of fixed, unitary, and unassailable historical and social facts to be memorized? Do students have a role in constructing history, or is it external to them? How is history presented when that history is recent and contested?

These volumes propose a series of comparative investigations of the deeper social and political “curricula” of school textbooks, in contexts where

- The identity or legitimacy of the state has become problematic
- Membership or the relationship among members of the state has been challenged
- Conflict, or some aspect of conflict, remains unresolved

Throughout, the books seek to better understand the processes by which the implicit social and historical lessons in textbooks are taught and learned, or ignored.

Ultimately, the books are intended to promote a culture of mutual understanding and peace. To do this in a context of complex, often conflicting identities and ways of seeing the world requires a sophisticated understanding of the actual social and political uses and functions of textbooks. In particular, we highlight for further research four interrelated issues: the identity and legitimacy of the state,

membership and relationships among groups comprising and outside the state, approaches to unresolved conflict, and modes of teaching about these matters.

The state occupies an important role in the conception of these books, not to further privilege it but in acknowledgment of its central role in the provision of schooling, the organization of the curriculum, and the preparation of citizens. It is increasingly clear that the state is not the only salient actor in questions of collective, even national, identity—subnational and supranational influences play important, often primary, roles. Still, in the matter of school textbooks, the state is always at the table, even if silent and unacknowledged.

We hope to come away from these books with a better understanding of the ways school textbooks construct and are constructed by political collectives, how they inform group identity, conflict, and the collective memory. We hope to see what can be learned from a deep analysis of cases facing similar issues in quite different geographic and cultural circumstances. We hope to gain insight into nations, movements, social forces, and conflicts that have shaped the current era, the countries themselves, and the circumstances and decisions that led to particular outcomes.

The first volume, *(Re)constructing Memory: School Textbooks and the Imagination of the Nation*, considers the relationship between school textbooks and the state. Schooling is one of the core institutions of the nation-state. The histories of mass schooling and the rise of the nation-state are closely intertwined. Textbooks offer official or semiofficial narratives of the founding and development of a state, and their stories play a formative role in helping construct the collective memory of a people. This volume is premised on the idea that changes in textbooks often reflect attempts by the state to deal with challenges to its identity or legitimacy. We look at ways textbooks are used to legitimize the state—to help consolidate its identity and maintain continuity in times of rapid change and external threat. This volume also considers the challenges of maintaining national identities in a global context and of retaining legitimacy by reimagining national identity.

(Re)constructing Memory: Textbooks, Identity, Nation, and State, the second volume, looks more deeply at textbooks' role in portraying the composition and identity of nation and state. In contrast to many founding myths, most states are multiethnic, comprising multiple groups identified ethnically, in religious terms, as immigrants, indigenous, and the like. Volume II considers the changing portrayal of diversity and membership in multiethnic societies where previously invisible or marginalized minority groups have sought a greater national role. It considers the changing portrayals of past injustices by some groups in multiethnic states and the shifting boundaries of insider and outsider. The book looks at "who we are" not only demographically, but also in terms of the past, especially how we teach the discredited past. Finally, the book looks at changes in who we are—ways the state seeks to incorporate, or ignore, emergent groups in the national portraiture and in the stories it tells its children about themselves.

Conflict and wars play a critical role in defining most countries, through the portrayal of past victories, explanations of defeat, and identification of self and

other. The third volume, *(Re)constructing Memory: Textbooks and Conflict*, focuses on these issues, especially in the context of unresolved conflict and issues derived from conflict. Beginning with a series of cases that examine shifts in the portrayal of self and other by historical antagonists, the volume then turns to the representation of conflict, both internal and external, and the representation of the nation's role in that conflict. Recent war is particularly difficult to teach, especially in cases of internal conflict. A series of cases considers the changing role of curriculum after discredited political regimes, civil war, and genocide. A final series of cases looks at curriculum used to promote peace, tolerance, and resolution of conflict. As a cumulative result, we develop a richer understanding of the intimate and contradictory connections between schools and war.

Throughout, the books consider the teaching and learning processes by which the explicit and implicit lessons of school textbooks are taught and acquired. Textbooks provide information and narrative, and in many ways they can be said to represent the intent of the state. Yet students do not ingest this intended curriculum whole. Instead, the intended curriculum is conveyed, and in the process interpreted, by teachers. It is then acquired by students, but in the process reinterpreted. All of these processes take place in a larger cultural and political environment that is, also, instructive. We consider the pedagogies of collective memory, of belonging and unbelonging, of historical thinking, and of the possibilities for individual and group agency as historic and civic actors. Efforts are made to avoid essentializing groups of people and to highlight individual and collective agency, while remaining aware of the powerful shaping forces of culture, tradition, and collective memory.

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JAMES H. WILLIAMS

1. NATION, STATE, SCHOOL, TEXTBOOK

Formally, a medium for the transmission of educational content, the school textbook is also an instrument of the state, a national project, as it were. This is particularly so of textbooks of history and social studies—civics, geography, and the like. This volume considers the school textbook in the (re)defining of the nation in 14 national contexts.

The “nation-state,” or more colloquially “country,” is deployed here as the primary unit of analysis, on the rationale that most curricula and textbooks are decided nationally. The policy frameworks for curricular decisions are generally set at the national level, even if decision-making is delegated to states or local school boards, as in the United States, or even as larger supranational processes underlie the entire modern project, of which schooling and textbooks are a part (Popkewitz, 2008). The intimacy between nation and state, school and textbook suggests that school textbooks play a critical role in the ongoing (re)defining of nation and state, the linking of the state with the nation, the inculcation of the nation and membership in it in the minds of the young, and the creation of citizens, “a particular kind of person whose mode of living embodies norms and values that link the individual with the collective belonging and ‘home’” (Popkewitz, 2013, p. xv).

Individuals’ identification with nation and state is not automatic, as Anderson (2006) and others have asserted, but rather must be carefully cultivated, in a variety of ways including schooling. Though powerful in many ways, governments and less directly, the state, often find themselves in a condition of fragile and contested legitimacy, sensitive to challenges and bad press. Changes in the external or internal environment can easily threaten a tense legitimacy. One of the premises underlying this volume is that governments often respond to such threats—real or imagined—by revising school textbooks and often the stories of history told by them. The nature of these revisions, seen in the context of the changes that appear to have sparked them, provides indirect insight into the dilemmas a particular nation faces as it seeks to deal with some of its primary contradictions, but also more general patterns in the behavior of nations as they respond to changing circumstances and perceived threats.

It seems obvious, for example, that a new nation would, on gaining independence, revise its textbooks to reflect its own understanding of history rather than that of the colonizers. Even if the new textbooks agreed with those of the former colonizer on all facts, the selection and presentation of such facts and their meaning to textbook authors, teachers, students, parents and government officials would surely differ. As the state works to teach its children their civic place, their

rights and responsibilities as citizens, appropriate values and norms, textbooks are likely to present the nation (and often the current government) in a good light, drawing on the noblest of national aspirations worthy of loyalty and respect. Less noble aspects of history are likely to be minimized. A government seeking to mobilize popular support in the face of potential political opposition (see Korostelina, this volume) or even complacency (see Chia, this volume) might emphasize external threat or perhaps the importance of strong national leadership to drum up loyalty and enthusiasm.

The intent is to surface patterns by which school textbooks are used to help carry out what might be called the “core civic work of schools.” One of the key aspects of this work is response to threats to state legitimacy. Of course, one must be cautious in assigning too direct and intentional a role for the state in “using” school textbooks for various undocumented purposes. Nonetheless, each of the country examples presented here makes a strong, if circumstantial, case that school textbooks are frequently used for such national purposes. Surfacing such patterns provides a perspective on options available for official response and insight into conditions that lead to different responses.

Textbook researchers are often surprised at first to discover that official textbooks present a romanticized and inaccurate or at least selective portrait of a nation. It *is* appalling, especially if one is a member of a group that is badly portrayed. Uncovering mistakes in history textbooks, for example, or deconstructing the portrayal of marginalized groups is important work, and a number of very good books do this. But the purpose here is less to highlight the shortcomings of particular countries’ politics and curricula than to understand more deeply what happened during a certain period in Cambodia, Russia, or the United States of America, for example, and why and how it might happen again sometime somewhere else.

We take the position that patterns of objectionable (or laudable) behavior are a consequence of particular groups of people acting in particular ways during a particular time and place, even if deeply informed by the past. Bad (or good) national behavior is not, we would argue, an essentialized, permanent trait of Cambodians, Russians, or Americans.

That schools serve a political function in the formation of citizens is well established. Ramirez, Bromley, and Russell (2009) discussed schooling as part of a series of global trends valorizing European Enlightenment values of rationality and individual human rights (as well as, more recently, group rights such as gender or ethnicity) in the context of a global order made up of individuals belonging to nation-states. The development of the Westfalian state closely parallels the emergence of systems of formal schooling. Prussia established primary schools in the 19th century to prepare citizens for service and loyalty to the state. The emergence of standardized textbooks tracks the systematization of schooling that took place in parallel with industrialization in the latter 19th century, as schooling was expanded to enroll greater proportions and segments of the population (Cummings & McGinn, 1997).

Usefully, Carretero (2011) and others have classified history, one of the core disciplines of civic formation, into three types—academic history, school history, and everyday history:

There are three presentations of the past, situated in different ways in individuals' and institutions' social experience. First, the record of history as it appears in school. Second, everyday history: an element of collective memory that, in one way or another, is permanently inscribed—through experience and formation—in the minds and bodies of each society's members, articulating shared narratives about identity, value systems and common beliefs. Lastly, there is academic history or historiography, cultivated by historians and social scientists, according to the disciplinary logic of a knowledge instituted under specific social and institutional conditions. (2011, p. 3)

In discussing school history, Carretero continued:

History teaching tends to focus on intimate emotional adherence to national identity symbols and narratives—in detriment to critical thinking. ... School-taught history is both much more, and much less, than academic history. ... It is much more because it includes a large array of values that are linked in a weft of historical narratives, whose primary objective is the formation of a positive image—a triumphant, progress-oriented one, even messianic in some cases—of their nation's identity. ... When students start comprehending historical concepts with some level of complexity, they already have learned very well the master narrative of their own motherland, and above all, they have developed a strong and unique emotional bond to it. (2011, p. 5)

The case might be made that Carretero overstated the national dimension, particularly in ethnically or socially complex societies containing significant groups whose collective “national” narratives differ substantially from the dominant narrative. Nonetheless, students will have learned and developed an emotional bond to the master “national narrative” of the meaningful social communities in which they were raised, even if that conflicts with what is taught in school and the larger society.

School-based narratives generally mirror the storyline of the dominant community. (How children and school textbooks deal with situations in which the master national narrative does not square with the narratives of subdominant groups within society is the subject of Volume II in this series.) Nonetheless, the dual charge of schooling—rational knowledge versus bond with the collective—complicates the instructional task, when critical thinking undermines attachment to the “national” or, probably more commonly, when the imagined national community overrides or slants the pursuit of academic knowledge and understanding.

Yet for the enterprise to work, in an Enlightenment world of scientific cause and effect, school history must be presented as true, not metaphorically, but scientifically and historiographically true. And this requirement—that school history with its dual purposes be portrayed and defended as academic history—coupled

with the emotional attachment to national identity narratives noted earlier, is exactly what makes true academic history difficult to achieve in schools, which are generally uncritical in their loyalty to the state, with its potentially overriding interest in cultivating loyal members.

Moreover, while getting the idea right, Carretero had the order wrong, I think, at least from the perspective of child development. Children first learn their history (and other everyday social studies) from the everyday history of their communities. A grandfather who speaks of his experiences in a war is conveying to a child information about a particular conflict but also, surely, a sense of who “we” and “they” are (or were), what kind of people we are, how we are now and how we got to be this way, as well as a normative sense of the role the child ought to play as a member of “us.” Children encounter school history or social studies with the master narratives of their people well in place. Hegemony being what it is, school history (or social science) and everyday history resonate more often than they conflict, and academic history is less often taught that we might want.

An open and democratically critical view of the state can be taught in schools, I would argue, only when the state is quite secure and then primarily in relation to issues of nonexistential importance. In most cases, the hidden social and political curricula of schooling are invisible. To break through the mutually reinforcing seal that school hegemonically tends to form with everyday history, students need to find contradictions and see that history, however fact-based it is, is interpreted and constructed. Once the fact of interpretation and its structure are visible, its sources of power clear, the student can learn to do history rather than memorize it.

Thus, another related purpose of the book is to identify some of the curricular patterns in cases of a hidden political and social curriculum, not only to see them in the places found, but to identify the patterns, likely to be found elsewhere—“there,” of course, but also “here,” wherever here may be.

CORE NATIONAL TASKS FOR THE SCHOOL: SCHOOLS’ CIVIC WORK

Arguably, schools carry out at least seven core civic tasks in support of the nation. Schools need to:

- Transmit knowledge (what students/citizens should know)
- Promote social cohesion (so people within a nation who lack personal connections will cooperate with each other)
- Teach attitudes, values, and norms appropriate for citizens
- Teach students to think (to think critically, or more frequently perhaps, to think correctly)
- Legitimate the social and political order (possibly the current government, but certainly the larger order)
- Explain who “we” are (also, often, who “they” are)
- Explain “where we are,” how we got here, and “where” we are going

In carrying out these tasks, schools also teach students, usually implicitly, about the nature of social knowledge: Is it fixed, known in advance, and unassailably true, or interpreted, subject to revision as better “data” become available? Schools

also convey messages, more or less explicit, about the role of the student as learner: Is the learner to inscribe the truths transmitted by authority, or is his/her role to help in revising the collective understanding of the world?

In carrying out these tasks, schools often run into national contradictions, creating dilemmas for schools' civic work. All nations have high aspirations, and all nations have failed, at one time or another, to live up to their ideals. How does an education system deal with periods of history when the nation failed to act according to the values by which it defined itself? How it does so says a great deal, potentially, about the country and how it understands itself. We argue here that approaches to such national tasks and responses to such dilemmas fall into certain patterns, patterns which are themselves patterned, probabilistically, according to (theoretically) predictable conditions.

Under normal conditions, schools' civic work is straightforward and mostly invisible. However, during periods of rapid social, political, and economic change, schools' civic work—especially that documented in school history and social studies textbooks—is likely to change, and in changing, to become visible, reflecting the role that schools and textbooks play in “supporting” the nation.

This volume considers three types of somewhat overlapping change. The first section considers challenges to the legitimacy of the state, when textbooks are likely to be used, among other purposes, to shore up the state. Daniel Friedrich looks at Argentinian textbooks' explanations of the “dirty wars” of the late 1970s and early 1980s. His textbooks ask, “How could we, a democratic people, condone, much less carry out, such irrational barbarity? This is completely unlike us. We were deceived, and we must teach our children this shameful history, so that it never happens again!” In his analysis, Friedrich suggests that the impulse to produce citizens who will never allow such irrationality to happen again works against the rationality that looks at how it could (and did) happen (thus allowing the possibility of taking steps to prevent it).

Shoko Yamada looks at the development and content of a secondary civics curriculum over the last decade in Ethiopia. She notes the government's commitment to democratic governance as well as the challenges of realizing democracy as an ethnic, minority-based government in a multiethnic country with no history of democratic rule. The government's claims to legitimacy are based, Yamada interprets the textbooks as saying, in the process of consultation that led to development of the Constitution under which the government was elected. The current government governs according to the rule of law in contrast to previous governments. Yamada notes how seriously the government takes civic education, as suggested by revision of civics education curricula around the time of each major post-1991 election and by the fact that, in contrast to curriculum revisions in other subjects, Ethiopians retained tight control of the civics curriculum revision process. National elections were held soon after implementation of the first civic education curriculum. The government's claims to legitimacy were challenged by questions about irregularities and violence surrounding those elections. Subsequent curricular revisions emphasized the values and formation of democratic citizens, who pursued equality and justice, were patriotic, tolerant, responsible, industrious,

self-reliant (and who saved money). Yet a careful balancing act on the part of government was demonstrated by nuance—by the insistence, for example, on a federal patriotism to the national state rather than a parochial patriotism to regional ethnically based identities (which the government had partially promoted through regional decentralization). In the final analysis, the textbooks appealed to the “moral integrity” of students to become good citizens of a democratic multiethnic state.

Yeow Tong Chia examines the “National Education” program in Singapore, a government-led educational campaign initiated in the late 1990s. The program was one of several campaigns the Singaporean government used to socialize Singaporean students into their roles as citizens. National Education emphasized the *Singapore Story*, a triumph over adversity and external danger of a small, diverse, but cohesive society under the dynamic leadership of an enlightened technocratic government. The chapter details ways the program sought to increase awareness on the part of young people and to strengthen their commitment to the nation, challenging the threat of complacency in light of the challenges Singapore overcame in retaining its independence and achieving economic well-being as a small multicultural island country with no natural resources and surrounded by large neighbors. The presentation of existential danger, however real, is a common means, it seems, of mobilizing citizens’ commitment to the nation, recognition on their part of the necessity of obligations to the state, and cohesion in the face of internal differences.

Caroline Dolive examines the *Rukhnama*, a book written by Turkmenistan’s Saparmyrat Niyazov in the years following independence and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Though not an official school textbook, the *Rukhnama* was required reading for all Turkmen citizens for a number of years following the break-up of the Soviet Union. All schools had to display a copy along with a photograph of the president and other national symbols. The book explicitly aimed at providing Turkmen citizens with a national history, given their historical lack of a state and fluid sense of nationality. The book contained legends, folk tales, and considerable exposition on the part of Niyazov, conveying, as part of the nation-building project, “the history, customs, and struggles” of a valorous people who had not traditionally thought of themselves as a nation. The case provides a clear illustration of the political imperative to draw on national history for legitimacy, even when the history is cobbled together for that purpose.

One of the core requirements and functions of a state is the definition of its territory. Iveta Silova, Michael Mead Yaqub, and Garine Palandjian explore the “pedagogies of space” and the relationship with national identity in early reading primers of three post-Soviet states—Latvia, Armenia, and the Ukraine. Looking beyond traditional sources of national stories such as history, civics, or geography textbooks, the authors detail ways in which the national spaces are imagined in the primers, the primordial homeland “metaphysically wedded to blood, sweat, and soil,” the natural beauty of place and the rootedness of the people to place, the boundaries and variable meanings of inside and outside in newly (re)constituted states.

The first section of the book looks at threats to the legitimacy of the state. The second section examines the national challenge of war. Wars are often defining national events, whether they result in victory, loss, or stalemate. The ways nations explain their wars are revealing.

Michelle Bellino's research in Guatemala examines how students, parents, and teachers from different sides of the 1960–1996 civil war understand and talk—or don't talk—about the conflict. She finds a considerable silence about the war, with virtually no public opportunities, within or outside of school, for critical and collective reflection on the war. As a result, historical memory of the war “has been relegated ... to the realm of unofficial spaces, where local memory communities” tell different stories, and preexisting social divisions, presumably of the kind that led to the war in the first place, are preserved.

Federick Ngo looks at the presentation of the auto-genocide in Cambodian textbooks from three historical periods. In each case, he finds the discussion of the genocide to be strongly directed to then current political purposes. In the post-genocide period, he finds a strong anti-Pol Pot/Khmer Rouge message, which could be seen as justifying the Vietnamese invasion. With the arrival of the United Nations and the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, mentions of the genocide decrease dramatically, in an effort, Ngo surmises, to downplay controversy in the interest of peace and development. In the final current period, with the trial of Khmer Rouge officials just ended, the government has permitted creation of a genocide curriculum, which is to be taught in all Cambodian schools. The curriculum emphasizes human rights, suggesting Cambodia's broader integration into global human rights discourses. At the same time, Ngo finds a strong government role in the writing and presentation of textbooks, and a strong government interest in tight message control of the information the children of Cambodia are taught.

Esther Yogev analyzes portrayal of the 1967 Six-Day War in Israeli textbooks. In contrast to treatment of other wars, as well as extensive academic scholarship and vigorous public debate about the 1967 war, its causes and consequences, Yogev finds the textbook treatment of the 1967 war to be simplistic. She asks: Why do curricula planners and textbook writers find it so difficult to bridge the gap between what is so widely known about this war and the circumscribed, one-dimensional teaching of it in the schools? She develops the notion of an “active past,” a past representing existentially unresolved national issues, ongoing salience coupled with lack of resolution. The 1967 war is not past, “caught between memory and history”; there is no shared understanding of the conditions that led to the war and its consequences, no consensus on what the war means for Israel and its neighbors. And so, in Israel, where critical debate is highly valued, one of the country's defining moments is presented in ways that do not promote students' critical reflection.

Lisa Faden contrasts stories of citizenship in the United States and Canada in the context of textbooks' historical discussions of World War II and then-current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. She examines history textbooks and supplements textbook analysis with classroom observations and teacher interviews. She finds, counter-

intuitively, that despite a widespread perception of Canada as a peaceful country, textbooks spend considerable time on military aspects of Canadian history. In the United States, despite a heavy political emphasis in citizenship and history textbooks, teachers are much more circumspect in discussing the country's role in war. Faden utilizes Wertsch's notion of "schematic narrative template" to examine the underlying narratives that shape historical understanding. She characterizes the Canadian narrative template as "Canada proves itself on the world stage." The United States she describes as "reluctant hegemon." Classroom instruction and textbook presentation work together to organize historical information in ways that "teach" these deeper narratives.

The third major pattern examined in this volume involves the thoroughgoing re-imagining of the nation after a dramatic political change—*independence and a new ideological order*.

Michael Mead Yaqub continues his research on reading primers, with a chapter on language and national identity in the Ukraine. In a somewhat ethnically ambiguous Ukraine after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, language assumes a greatly heightened significance as a marker of national identity.

Garine Palandjian examines Armenian readers both during and after the Soviet period. She finds evocative national symbolism permeating readers in both periods. Young students are presented as heirs to a rich, primordial national heritage, to a beautiful natural landscape and a language of expressiveness, rich with meaning and collective identity.

Christine Beresniová considers Holocaust education in Lithuania. Lithuania, in applying for membership in the European Union, had to develop a Holocaust curriculum. Rejoicing in its recent independence from the Soviet Union, Lithuania had sought to build a valorous Lithuanian national story. Yet an accurate rendering of World War II involves recognition of atrocities committed by some non-Jewish Lithuanians against the Lithuanian Jewish population during and in many cases before the Nazi Occupation. Like those in other countries which have felt victimized by both the German invasion of World War II and the Soviet occupation, many in the country have found it difficult to reconcile the valorous narrative of Lithuanian suffering with the record of crimes against Jewish Lithuanians.

The cases end with a paper by Karina Korostelina, who traces recent trends in history education in Russia in three different post-Soviet periods. Initially, textbooks provided a critical perspective on the role of government vis-a-vis citizens' rights and government power. More recent curricular initiatives have narrowed the breadth of earlier history textbooks, tending in the portrayal of 20th century events toward legitimizing the importance of authoritarian rule and weakening the need for independent critical voices in the country.

The volume ends with two critical commentaries, by Noah Sobe and William Brehm. It then presents a discussion of some of the "games" countries "play" with their textbooks, their troublesome pasts, problematic presents, and nervous futures.

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Section 1.
Shoring up the State

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2. THE MOBILIZATION OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE NARRATIVES ABOUT THE LAST ARGENTINE DICTATORSHIP

Facing sociohistorical trauma, societies around the world have embraced the frameworks that emerged from German didactics in the 1970s as ways of dealing with a past (in that particular case, the *Shoah*) in need of working through (Laville, 2004). As different nations attempted to (re)build a citizenry in ways that would prevent the past from repeating itself, history and civics lessons came to the forefront. However, as will become evident through the analysis of the Argentine case, even the most “progressive” attempts and the best of intentions have been embedded in them dangers in need of exploration. This piece troubles the mobilization of history as a moral narrative, in which what can be said and thought has to be consensualized in the name of a particular understanding of democracy. The process of turning the problematic aspects of the past into an Other to the democratic progress of the nation is exposed as a strategy that binds the *responsible* citizen to specific ways of being, acting, and thinking.

In this chapter I analyze some of the recent Argentine textbooks that include the last dictatorship (1976–1983) as a content to be taught, focusing on the narratives they attempt to construct as they intervene in the production of a particular kind of Argentine citizen, one that follows the rules of what it means to act and think *responsibly*. These narratives mobilize the notion of *historical consciousness* (Friedrich, 2010) to link memory, responsibility, and pedagogy to the building of the Argentine democratic citizenry. By re-presenting the recent past to students and teachers, the didactic materials I analyze insert themselves in between memory, history, and schooling, positing narratives that embody understandings of not only the nation’s past sins, but also its future promise.

HISTORICAL/PERSONAL CONTEXT¹

I was born in 1978, in the middle of the most violent dictatorial regime in Argentina’s 20th-century history. March 24, 1976, had inaugurated the last dictatorship with a violent coup, and the regime that lasted until 1983 left between 10,000 and 30,000 *desaparecidos* (individuals kidnapped, tortured, and killed by state forces, who almost never returned the bodies to the families). I do not have memories of that time, with its exterminating efforts towards anything that seemed to be coming from a vague left or anything perceived as threatening to the Western, Christian values that the regime claimed to represent. Anecdotes about the

Malvinas/Falkland War that the dictators embarked upon in 1982 as a last attempt to (re)gain popular support circulate in my family, but they are mostly stories about other people.

My whole primary and secondary education took place in the longest democratic period in Argentine history yet. My primary schooling experience (1985–1990) practically coincided with the *primavera alfonsinista*,ⁱⁱ or democratic spring, and its following fall from grace in the midst of hyperinflation and chaos. My high school experience (1991–1996), on the other hand, was marked by Carlos Menem’s apogee, a time of neoliberal policies and reforms of all aspects of social and political life, including, of course, education. Like most middle-class children in Buenos Aires, I attended a private school, which in my case turned out to be a lay, German, and quite “liberal” one. From an early age, the Holocaust had always been present: Relatively contemporary German literature, discussion sessions, analyses of the sociohistorical background, and even a certain study of the Argentine policies vis-à-vis the war managed to provide a relatively deep understanding of the period. However, by the end of high school I had noticed that every course covering Argentine history ended at the beginning of the 20th century at the latest. The comment, “Too bad there is no time left; the school year is so short!” seemed to simulate a real concern that few—students or teachers—shared. But during my last year, as I officially came of age, words such as *Peronismo*, *anarchism*, *left*, and *the people* were introduced in our vocabulary. We had managed to break the barrier of Yrigoyen and, if I remember correctly, we finished the year with Onganía’s dictatorship (1966–1970). The last 26 years of Argentine history were left for personal discovery and/or the university.ⁱⁱⁱ

Most people in my generation probably share this memory (most likely without the last year’s discoveries). Nevertheless, in the new millennium, things seem to have changed. The 20th anniversary of the coup seems to have marked a turning point in the country’s relationship to its recent past. Since then, a plethora of discursive practices^{iv} have emerged, related to efforts to memorialize and deal with the traumatic events of the dictatorship in different spaces: memorial spaces have been inaugurated, laws have been passed, and reports have been issued. All of these efforts have repositioned the military regime at the center of political and social discourses. Schools have not remained untouched by this push towards memory work. In fact, schools are central to this process, as evidenced by the massive entrance of the last dictatorship into the curriculum since the mid 1990s. In response, the state, as well as various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) linked with human rights causes, have produced materials aimed at supporting the teaching of the period of state terrorism at different levels. Private publishers have started including this period in textbooks as well.

METHODOLOGY

The current chapter does not pretend to present a fully comprehensive analysis of all available textbooks, as that task alone would probably require a book by itself. Instead, I have selected textbooks that (a) have a national reach, and (b) were

published by the major publishers in the country. These textbooks were located either at the Biblioteca del Maestro [teacher's library], situated inside the National Ministry of Education, or the Biblioteca del Docente [another wording for teacher's library], dependent on the City of Buenos Aires' education ministry. I have also included materials (both on paper and online) that were designed by the state and several NGOs to teach only about the dictatorship. All texts were published or posted between 1987 (the earliest mentions of the dictatorship I was able to find) and 2008. A complete list of the texts that I have analyzed can be found at the end of the chapter.

For the analysis, the texts were coded, looking for ways to understand how certain narratives become reasonable in different historical contexts. The type of discourse analysis utilized is problematically labeled a "method," since it does not imply a predetermined set of rules that would dictate the actions of the researcher. The focus is on what is (im)possible to say, how these texts are produced, and the effects of power that they generate. In this sense, the approach to the analysis of the narratives about the recent past in Argentina is grounded in *Foucauldian* notions of power and discourse. Power is conceived here mainly as a positive force,^v as producing knowledge and desire, bodies and dispositions, rather than repressing them (Foucault, 1980). The notion of discourse refers to practices that, as they consolidate into regimes of truth, bring into being objects that did not previously exist (Foucault, 2008). The analysis of the grid of discursive practices serves as a vehicle to illuminate the ways of thinking that found these discourses, that is, what allows those discourses to seem "reasonable" and/or "truthful" to different people in different moments in time.

This approach makes it impossible to separate a section about the "theoretical framework" from the analysis, as theory and practice, discourse and reality, speech and act are not understood as separate entities but as constructs that are part of the narratives being produced.

NARRATING THE LESSON

Earlier approaches. As indicated, the 20th anniversary of the 1976 coup marked the beginning of a reemergence of discursive practices linked to the last dictatorship. With this event came the inclusion of the dictatorship in official curricula and textbooks. However, a few publishers had already begun including this period in textbooks. Some of the earliest examples can be found in two social studies textbooks for seventh grade from 1987, published by Hyspamérica and Kapelusz. In regard to these textbooks' treatment of the recent past, some differences should be highlighted. The text by Kapelusz still contained many of the narrative elements that the dictatorship presented about itself: calling itself the "Process of National Reorganization"; justifying its own existence by explaining the need to repress the terrorist guerrillas; and counting the "numerous" highways, schools, and hospitals built during that period. While there was an abstract condemnation of the "excesses" of the regime, there was no mention of the disappeared or of any number of victims. The text by Hyspamérica, on the other hand, talked about coups

in general (within the 4-page section on “Argentina in the Last Fifty Years”), distinguishing between constitutional and nonconstitutional regimes, but did not reference any coup in particular. Only a hint of criticism was found in the following sentences:

In the coup d'états of 1930, 1955, 1962, 1966 and 1976, the military victory was assured by the general apathy of the population. That is, by the meager participation of the citizens during the constitutional governments, which contributed greatly to making the de facto regimes possible. (Mazzi, 1987, p. 133)

Even beyond what may seem to be ideological differences, the similarities between these two earlier textbooks are indicative of features that would be common in latter texts, as well as of some of the major changes that would take place. First of all, both texts dedicated very little space to everything “recent,” that is, to everything that took place since the second quarter of the 20th century. Since seventh grade was the last year of compulsory schooling in 1987, when the books were published, this tendency to reduce 60 years to a few pages basically excluded the relatively recent past from teaching. Second, the focus of both textbooks was put in largely mechanical exercises. Both books presented timelines of presidencies and types of regimes, with activities that asked students nothing more than to convert said timelines into other formats (graphs, lists). In other words, no activities or questions were aimed at any type of reflection about the dictatorship, as all activities were about form not content. The timeline could be about the Middle Ages in Rome, and the activity would be the same. One thing that stood out here was that both texts presented much more complex activities related to other historical periods. Leaving out any kind of discussion about the dictatorship and its causes and consequences was a strategy reserved for dealing with the recent past.

Streamlining the narrative. Throughout the 1990s, more and more social studies textbooks incorporated the period of state terrorism as a didactic unit. In sync with the broader society, the narratives about the dictatorship in schools were revamped by strength in numbers by the 20th anniversary of the coup in 1996. Not only did most publishers dedicate a section of their textbooks to that period, but many books and didactic materials specifically designed to teach about the last dictatorship appeared on the bookshelves.

The ideological differences pointed to in the earlier textbooks were still present up to the mid 1990s: some publishers still explicitly or implicitly supported the dictatorship, while others began to take a more critical approach. From a few textbooks that showed direct support of the dictatorship by still talking about the “revolution of 1976” and the “clash between two lifestyles: the Christian and Western one, and the Communist one,” quoting directly from dictatorial pamphlets (Etchart, Douzon, & Rabini, 1992), to slightly updated new editions of older books (*Ciencias Sociales 7*, 1994), textbooks were still available that presented the dictatorship as part of the “evolution” of Argentine society. This perspective on recent events, while common merely a decade and a half earlier, vanished completely from the educational discourses by the second half of the 1990s. The

20th anniversary of the coup marked the moment in which support or justification of the military regime became taboo in narratives produced for schools.

Paradoxically, the movement that sought to articulate a critical approach towards the dictatorship in order to support the mandate of *Never Again!* may have carried with it a limitation in understanding conditions that made the authoritarian regime possible. In other words, efforts to generate a historical narrative that would mobilize historical consciousness towards production of a responsible citizen may have set limits to that very historical narrative by establishing what could and could not be said and thought about the recent past. If the critique of the military regime is accompanied by a moral mandate that establishes taboos on some of the elements necessary to understand its conditions of possibility, then, even if the goal is to avoid it from ever happening again, these efforts will always be misguided. In order to grasp this paradox, it is necessary to analyze the distinctive elements of the various narratives about the recent past that were and are being deployed.

Historical Consciousness and the Reasoning Behind Telling the Story

If there was one element common to all the sources analyzed, it was the justification given for studying the recent past. Two quotes serve as examples for a generalized reasoning:

Today Argentine society maintains a difficult relationship with its recent past: it needs to appropriate it in order not to repeat it. (Raggio & Bejar, n.d.)

It is necessary to tell [the story of the dictatorship] so that it never happens again. (Montes, 1996, p. 4)

This idea, so much part of pedagogical common sense, is founded on the notion of *historical consciousness*, that is, the idea that learning about the past, gaining consciousness about the lineage that led to the present, is inherently moralizing and needed to build “society” and its citizens. Through the pedagogization of historical consciousness, history is turned into a moralizing narrative that is to guide the actions of the citizen (Friedrich, 2010). In other words, when the history that is produced by historians is translated into curricular content, a moralizing component is added.^{vi} Since schools assume the responsibility of developing in students the skills needed to look back at that past and extract from it the correct lessons, history is made into a source that any student who possesses the right skills (i.e., a historical consciousness) can draw on. In order to do that, the history that is being taught must be part of a consensus. The critical interrogation of the self becomes bounded by a way of ordering thought and action according to the consensualized lessons learned from a straightforward narrative of the past.

Furthermore, the notion that learning about the past is the key to avoid repeating it carries two assumptions. First, reason and knowledge are deployed as salvation narratives. The horror took place because the population was ignorant or did not know better. A good dose of education is at once what was missing then and what can save us today. As long as the individuals know and reason, they will act

“rightfully.” Inversely, this way of thinking implies irrationality on the side of the people responsible for genocide and the society of that period as a whole, positioning all actors within a certain exceptionality from a progressive narrative of the nation. This disconnection between reason and the genocidal episodes of the 20th century has been seriously contested by the work of Benjamin (2007) and Agamben (1998, 2000, 2005), among others, who have argued that it is precisely the logic and reason of the modern state that made those horrors possible. Both Agamben and Benjamin posited that genocide (on in their cases, more specifically the Holocaust) was not an exceptional event in the history of a humanity that is progressing and becoming more and more rational. Instead, the very possibility of this kind of horror was always already embedded in the foundations of the modern nation-state, which is built around the exclusionary practices of nationalism and the need to distinguish those who belong from those who do not.

By placing a particular historical period within the sphere of irrationality, textbooks contribute to a different kind of reason, one that governs through the categorization of events and subjects under the labels of ir/rationality, according to whether or not those events and subjects are commensurable with the moralistic lining of the narrative being constructed. In other words, as long as an event or the reading of that event contests the idea of progress, it is deemed irrational or exceptional, and with it, all those participating in it. This form of governmentality (Foucault, 1997) aims at conducting conduct and thus circumscribing reason and knowledge to only the *acceptable* reason and knowledge, thus casting whatever does not fit into the sphere of the irrational Other. In this case it is knowledge about the dictatorship that can save us from repeating it, as long as the lessons learned point to the *lack* of reason and knowledge during that period.

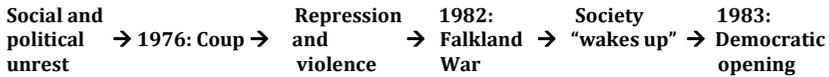
The second assumption presented in the common sense idea of learning about the past in order not to repeat it relates to the notion of “repetition” and the very possibility of a historical fact repeating itself. Without going into much detail, assuming that a historical event can be repeated—an assumption that finds its symbolic zenith in the phrase that represents human rights struggles all over the world—*Nunca Más*, or Never Again—implies a reading of the event as an element that can be isolated from its context and generalized. Strictly speaking, even if there were another dictatorship in Argentina, one could not be talking about repetition, since the only thing that returns is the category used to read that reality: the category of “dictatorship.” Calling this a “repetition” presents the danger of ignoring the historical, social, and political differences between distinct events in the name of protecting democracy in ways that overlook the specificities of history.

These two assumptions, that of irrationality and that of repetition, run through the whole pedagogical enterprise of teaching history and seem integral to it. We tend to teach history, any history, in the hopes that knowledge and reason will make people better. Progress is unthinkable outside modern historical understandings, and modern historical understandings, I would argue, are extremely hard to grasp without any hint of progressivism. In order to educate the responsible citizen and form a historical consciousness in society, that which contests the progressive narrative of the nation must fall into an otherness, or the risk of history

repeating itself might become a reality. However, it is necessary to rethink not only these presuppositions but also their consequences if we are to enact a different present, by reconceptualizing the role of history in the education of the citizen. Any narrative, including the most progressive ones, sets limits to what the subjects being narrated can think, say, and do, and those limits need to be challenged if we are to open up possibilities that up to this point have been foreclosed.

Plot Points and Demarcation of Eras

Another striking feature brought up by the analysis of all the materials is the high level of homogeneity in the general plotting of the narrative. Summarizing the story being told, one finds the following sequence in most sources:



The linear progression represents the linear quality of the narratives presented in the textbooks. Most narratives started with the coup, giving it a brief context of social and political unrest. In social studies textbooks (Alonso, Elisalde, & Vazquez, 1997; Di Tella, 1993; Iaies & Segal, 1992; Mérega, 2005; Pasel, 1992), the demarcation of this era was highlighted by a new unit or chapter. This tended to be the last chapter of the book, usually titled something like “Dictatorship and Democracy in Argentina.” Other materials specifically designed to teach about this period directly opened with the coup (*Argentina: Una Herida Abierta*, 2004; *Puerto de Partida*, n.d.), referencing briefly the social movements of 1975. Thus, the coup was the origin, the beginning, a happening that appeared with little to no explanation as to the conditions that made it possible or intelligible for the people living in that period. While the regime tended to be characterized as “the worst thing that ever happened to us in all of our history” (Montes, 1996), it appeared unrelated to anything that came before. It seems as if it were an exception to an otherwise progressive *history-becoming* of Argentine democracy, a view connected to the common reference to the dictatorship as the period of “interruption of democracy.” The description of the regime per se varied according to the source. A few textbooks focused only on the repressive activity by the military (see, e.g., *Ciencias Sociales 7*, 1994), while most mentioned the economic model based on imports and the following destruction of the national industry (see, e.g., Alonso et al., 1997), yet what was a constant among all textbooks was the idea that the coup changed it all.

To signal the change that this period presented for the population, many texts referenced the spreading of a particular *culture*, be it a culture of violence (Bustinza & Grieco y Bavio, 1997) or a culture of fear (Montes, 1996; *Puerto de Partida*, n.d.). Under this blanket concept, the rules of the game for the general population changed, and mentions of the inaction, or even the complicity, of the people in relation to the regime were “understood” as part of the cultural change. If

people *suddenly* started denouncing their neighbors as leftists, this was not because of a historically constructed mindset, but because of the newly spread culture of fear. This point is developed in more depth below in discussing the inscription of the population in narratives about the recent past.

The Falkland/Malvinas War appeared in the analyzed materials unequivocally as the beginning of the end for the regime, the moment in which, after deceiving the people into an impossible battle (even if for the “right reasons”), the dictators lost their grip on the population and Argentines woke up from their slumber. In fact, even in texts that presented the war with little more than a photo and a paragraph, it was always used as a gateway to the democratic opening. The military defeat against Britain went hand in hand with the retreat in the political arena, the increase in external pressures, and the circulation of objective, nonmanipulated information. By this time, “no one could feign ignorance anymore” [*Ya nadie podía hacerse el desentendido*] (Montes, 1996).

Alonso (2004) argued that by linking the failure of the Falkland/Malvinas War to the trials of the dictators and the following debate about what had taken place during the period of state terrorism, the pathways to redemocratization were always posed as conditioned by the inherent decay of the dictatorship. Instead of looking at the tensions and historical conditions of the military regime, the dictatorship emerged from the textbooks as something that was always already predisposed to fail, in a process of decay since its inception. As such, the process of redemocratization was always an undercurrent of the decaying military regime, as democracy was once again posed as the organizing principle for the progress of the nation.

Alonso’s argument is important, especially if one is to understand how the dictatorship is so commonly understood as an “interruption of the democratic order.” Interpreting democracy as conditioned by the dictatorship and vice versa contributes only to a binary opposition between authoritarianism and democracy that essentializes both terms and the relationship between them, limiting the sort of questions that can be posed. For instance, questions about the conditions of possibility for the dictatorship become much harder to ask; if *we* were always inherently democratic, then how can the military regime be explained? And if the dictatorship was always already in decay, why did it take 7 years and 30,000 disappeared for it to fall?

However, Alonso’s analysis does not account for a key element. The translation that transforms history into a school subject by inserting the goal of developing a historical consciousness in students has excluded significant pieces of the historical puzzle from the textbooks. I do not mean to imply that there is one single puzzle to put together, one totalizing history that could include it all. Accounts by historians of some of the social, historical, and political conditions that gave rise to the dictatorship are diverse and often conflictive (see, e.g., the debates presented in Belzagui, 2008), yet the ongoing conversations about these conditions are a fundamental part of whatever knowledge historians are producing. The pedagogical project and implications of that knowledge being mobilized in schools in the name of production of a historical consciousness, on the other hand, found themselves on different principles. The notion of history as the progress of

democracy only allows for students to understand the dictatorship as a hiccup, a bump or an interruption of an otherwise essentially democratic growth of a people. By extirpating part of the conversations—i.e., anything that may contest the idea of a uniform progress, such as, for example, the support of a significant sector of the population towards the dictatorship—the military regime becomes a part of history that is not a part of *our* history, something that happened to an *us* that is not *us*, and that is therefore an ungraspable Other.

Therefore, if history is nothing more than the progress of democracy, democracy itself becomes more tied to efforts to conserve than to create, as the education of the “responsible” citizen is now linked to protecting those inherent democratic qualities present in the true Argentines so that they do not get tarnished again by corruptors.

Now the analysis that shows how the dictatorship is turned into the Other comes full circle. In order to preserve the purity of the democratic spirit in children, it appears to be necessary to cut all ties to the possibility of linking the self to authoritarianism, as if learning about the potential for horror present in modern (state) reason would open the doors for the repetition of trauma. The risks and potential, the fears and hopes, the dangers and possibilities embedded in democracy are impossible to separate, as they are part of the same processes.

The Binary Opposition Between Authoritarianism and Democracy

Another common element was found in all the analyzed sources. Within the general rejection of the dictatorship, the main pillar for this positioning was the binary opposition between authoritarianism and democracy. Democracy was rarely defined; it was usually assumed as a formal system of government in which the people elect their rulers (see, e.g., Farina & Klainer, 2004; Mérega, 2005). On other occasions, democracy was seen more as a continuously evolving system:

History teaches us that democracy does not guarantee the success of a government, but it is the only system that allows for a progressive correction. Critique, reflection on errors and successes, makes possible for the people to have better elections, allows for the renovation of rulers and facilitates the search for better solutions for a country’s problems. (Pasel, 1992, p. 129)

While not phrased as a definition, Pasel’s words point in the same direction as one of the most successful books about the dictatorship written specifically for children: Graciela Montes’s *El Golpe y los Chicos* [The coup and the children] (1996). This book, by one of Argentina’s best known writers, talked about the military regime as the triumph of “non-change,” crushing those who wanted change. In the same spirit of this “definition,” many other texts described authoritarianism as everything that democracy is not. A dictatorship, then, is a time when “the constitutional principles that guarantee the rights of the people are not respected” (Iaies & Segal, 1992).

This binary opposition has one particular ramification that is of special interest for this chapter: the inference of the opposition between *us* (the democratic

Argentines, the responsible citizens, the ones who care) and *them* (the dictators and their supporters, the fascists, the ones who do not care). An analysis of the books and textbooks that included narratives about the dictatorship showed a correspondence that at first sight might not be surprising: the more “critical” a text was about the regime, the more it emphasized this dichotomy between us and them. Graciela Montes (1996), for instance, claimed that with the return of democracy, “we were back at being ourselves.” A comic book published by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (*Argentina: Una Herida Abierta*, 2004) “explained” that the doctrine leading the military regime consisted of “planning, organizing, and executing terror” since democracy and the people’s participation were obstacles in the dictators’ quest for power. A final example can be found in the first issue of the *Dossier: Educación y Memoria*, published both on paper and online by Buenos Aires’ *Comisión Provincial por la Memoria* [Provincial Commission on Memory]. It described the period as one where “state and society were subjected to the armed forces, which concentrated total power.” The regime was clearly opposed by society and was carried out by *them*.^{vii}

The paradox I had mentioned above—that the most critical perspectives end up setting boundaries on the narratives about what made the military regime possible—becomes more visible when one analyzes these dichotomies. The perspectives presented in the texts that position the self (the Argentine self, the citizen self, the critical self) as essentially democratic and distinguished from the *them* of the dictators, the armed forces, the regime, the power-hungry, inscribe two sides on a battle that not only had no reasoning beyond the essential and contrasting qualities of each party, but also had no way of explaining how just a few (the three generals and their accomplices) managed to impose such horror on so many. Using the quote by Montes, one is tempted to ask: If with the return of democracy we “were back at being ourselves,” who were we during the dictatorship? Once again, we encounter the process of turning the authoritarian regime into an Other, reflecting the pedagogical fears of understanding that recent past as part of the self. Essentializing democracy or the democratic people (and authoritarianism or the military rulers) can be understood, once again, as a strategy of governance, in that it aims at guiding the conduct of people. The morals to be extracted from the past are the morals of a struggle between inherently good and bad people, making it fairly easy for students to take part and generate an identity as part of the *us* and *act accordingly*.

Interestingly enough, the establishment of this clear dichotomy between us and them, between the inherently good and the enemies of the nation, is not very different from the mechanisms through which the dictators spread terror among the population. During the dictatorship, everyone deemed an enemy of the nation was set for extermination, and gray areas were not an option: either for or against *us*. However, pointing to this continuity between the times of the dictatorship and now would force one to question the clear-cut division between authoritarianism and democracy. I would argue that, under current conditions, such questioning is impossible, since to do so would question one of the main foundations of pedagogy: the redemptive power of reason. In other words, if the barrier between then and now, between the dictatorship and democracy, between the time of irrationality

or ignorance and the time of reason and progress becomes porous, where is the hopeful narrative of schooling to be located? If knowledge and more education can't save us, what can?

Population: Between Victimhood and Resistance

The ways in which the population, civil society, or the *people* are positioned in all these narratives is related to the previous point, yet it is distinct enough that it merits a separate analysis. While there is a founding binary supporting the description of the role of the general population (recounted as either passive victims or active resistance fighters), this section interrupts that binary by addressing the issue of supporters of the regime.

According to Alonso (2004), there is a dualism in terms of how the population is seen in textbooks about the dictatorship: the people are shown either as passive—implying a certain amount of support for the regime—or as mobilized or active in opposition to the dictators. This dichotomy, argued the author, broke down after the Falkland/Malvinas War, when the textbooks signaled the whole population turning against the regime. My own analysis supports Alonso's, but provides an extra layer in terms of the categorizations, and in one particular case, it complicates this dichotomy. What Alonso saw as a passive population can also be understood as a population of victims. The category of "victim" allows for some subtlety that goes beyond mere passivity. For instance, one type of victimhood was referenced in the materials that accompanied the video *Puerto de Partida*.^{viii}

The disappearances were many, but the plan aimed at terrorizing the whole society. *Defenseless* before the terrorizing state, a culture of fear was imposed upon it. (p. 9, my emphasis)

The whole of society appeared here as victimized by the few that imposed a culture of fear and left society defenseless. The terrorizing state was the active party positioned against a passive society that had nothing to do with the regime. Another related form of victimhood that appeared in some narratives, sometimes in conjunction with this completely passive role, was the *deceived* society: a well-intentioned population that wanted nothing but peace but was misled by the military.

For some sectors of society the military appeared as the only chance of guaranteeing peace and order. However, the military Junta exercised power violating numerous individual rights. (Iaies & Segal, 1992, p. 171)

Perhaps the most pervasive form of victimhood or passiveness was the complete exclusion of society from the narrative being presented. Most of the textbooks used as sources for this analysis did not make any references to how the population reacted (or not) to the regime (see, e.g., Bustinza & Grieco y Bavio, 1997; Di Tella, 1993; Mérega, 2005; Pasel, 1992). The ways in which the story was told in these texts relied on particular actors (generals, NGOs, prosecuted/kidnapped individuals, torturers, foreigners) without talking about the majority of the

population, the unnamed individuals who did not have any specific roles during the regime, yet were an integral part of it.

On the other hand, almost unequivocally the figure of the resistance fighter was found to have a predominant role in narratives about the dictatorship. Especially after the 20th anniversary of the coup in 1996, all textbooks dedicated a significant portion of the units or chapters about the recent past to talk about the actors and events that symbolized resistance to the regime. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo appeared here at the core of the issue. As an organization that started spontaneously, founded by the mothers of the disappeared who asked about the whereabouts of their children, growing slowly but steadily while gaining international recognition, the Madres were the epitome of victims turned into resistance fighters. Together with the appearance of other human rights NGOs, the emergence of the Madres was credited in textbooks with triggering the awakening and mobilization of society as a whole (see, e.g., Mérega, 2005; Montes, 1996). Since their role was linked to the beginning of the end for the military regime, they tended to appear towards the end of the narratives—even though the Madres began protesting as early as April 1977. Other figures of resistance, not as prominent as the Madres but still mentioned in some textbooks were individual actors, such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and other exiles who helped build international pressure that would contribute to removal of the dictators in the early 1980s.^{ix}

As mentioned above, the formation of a historical consciousness serves to generate particular identification processes that guide the action and thought of future citizens. Students are supposed to think of a particular past as *their* past. Thus, following analysis of the ways in which the population is presented, it would seem that students would see themselves as reflections of the population, as either victims or resistance fighters. In narratives that privilege the idea of the population as victims of the regime, the prevailing lesson is the need to permanently guard against any slippage into authoritarianism, so that *we* are *Never Again* deceived by *them*. Participation, seen as the antidote to victimhood, is reinscribed as a state of vigilance and denunciation, of protection of something that is never to be broken under *our* watch again. When the narratives privilege the resistance aspect, there is a heroic component aimed at teaching students that even under the hardest conditions, faced with the most difficult challenges, *we* are capable of acting and resisting. As a tour guide for the Museum of Memory once told me, if people like the Mothers were able to do what they did during those dangerous times, *we* in the present have no excuse not to (Friedrich, 2011).

This separation between victimhood and resistance or, in terms of Alonso, between passive and active roles attributed to the population is challenged by one key category: the supporters of the regime. These individuals supported the regime by denouncing their neighbors, cheering for the new regime, sending postcards to the United Nations with the legend: “*Los argentinos somos derechos y humanos*” [We Argentines are human and right/straight, against denunciations for human rights violations], or justifying terror with the pretense of the need for order. They were neither passive victims nor resistant to the regime. They constituted, however, if not the majority, at least a significant sector of the population (never of *el*

pueblo!) that founded the regime and made it possible for the horror to reach every corner of social life. Yet it is quite difficult to find references to this group in textbooks and other didactic materials. A few texts did mention some kind of social responsibility, with neighbors denouncing each other and people ignoring certain violent situations.

In some cases, [the clandestine concentration camps] were located in the middle of the cities, and the neighbors around them could hear piercing screams from the tortured, sobbing and shots ... yet they tended to justify it with phrases like: “There must be a reason” [por algo será]. ... (Montes, 1996, p. 17)

Explanations about people’s attitudes towards the regime and the social-political conditions, when they implied support of the dictatorship, were rare in the texts surveyed. These attitudes, when made explicit, tended to be justified by the “culture of fear” that corrupted what Argentines are all about:

For part of the population, fear displaces from the forefront any other feeling and generates individualist behaviors and indifference towards what is happening to others, placing one’s own life and safety above any other value. In this way, the subjective conditions of possibility for an authoritarian state are generated. (*Puerto de Partida*, n.d., p. 13)

Sometimes we are not capable of looking up to look around and we stay gazing at our own navel. And many Argentines did that; they could not see or think beyond their navels. (Montes, 1996, p. 23)

A question that emerges from this way of presenting (or not) the supporters of the regime relates to the ways in which talking about civic support to the military would challenge the clear dichotomies established between *us* and *them* and between authoritarianism and democracy. The use of blanket concepts such as “culture of fear” or “culture of violence” aims at turning the supporters back into victims of a cultural change that was out of their reach. So, schools could avoid the danger of having students identify with a population that willingly allowed the horror to happen. Franco and Levin, two Argentine historians of education, reflected on what they considered to be a limit of education:

Even though it is true that working with multiple perspectives from different actors ... is a necessary entry point to denaturalize stagnated versions, it is also true that one cannot (and should not) leave the decision on which are the “right” narratives to students. (Franco & Levin, 2007, p. 5)

In other words, the multiplicity of perspectives runs against the limit presented by mistrust in students’ capacity to draw their own conclusions. The formation of a responsible citizen endowed with historical consciousness demands that certain elements of the story be tailored to the moral goals of pedagogy. Anything that presents the possibility of students constructing undesired narratives about the past has to be filtered out. This is not to say that there is a history that is absolute and

neutral and that includes everything there is to include. My goal is not to advocate for an all-inclusive history, as there is no such thing, but to point at the limitations embedded in the efforts to mobilize history as a moralistic tale aimed at producing a particular ideal of responsible citizen.

Activating the Mind

Finally, I turn to the instructional activities and worksheets proposed by the textbooks. Such activities were part of the analysis because they played an important role in highlighting not only the main points students should focus their attention on, according to the authors of each text, but also how the recent past was to be “used” in learning about the present.

In one set of textbooks and materials, no activities were presented for students to engage in. For the authors of these books, the information they present is sufficient and it may be the teacher’s task to formulate the corresponding activities. Most of these texts work as regular books, presenting the narratives in chronological order (Alonso et al., 1997; Di Tella, 1993) or within a graphic form (*Argentina: Una Herida Abierta*, 2004).

The book by Graciela Montes (1996) approached the issue of activities differently. After the history section, the second part of the book included narratives from the children of the disappeared written in first person. There were no questions, bullet points, or activities, yet there was a separation between the information presented in a historical narrative and the personal stories of the victims.

The first set of actual activities found in other textbooks can be termed *mechanical*, since they focused not so much on the content being studied as in the methods of that study. Students are asked to work on ways of organizing knowledge and displaying content in different ways, more than engaging the content itself. As I mentioned before, this type of activity could refer to any time period and location. Methodological activities were usually found in textbooks that assumed a less critical approach (if not full support) of the dictatorship. Some examples of methodological activities were completing a timeline and generating questions to given answers (Mérega, 2005); writing down on a table, after a given timeline, how many years of democracy and how many years of dictatorship Argentina experienced since 1928 (Bustinza & Grieco y Bavio, 1997); or writing down a list of proper names to be classified into people, places, and institutions (*Ciencias Sociales 7*, 1987). This type of activity that focuses on distributions and categorizations has a somewhat ironic effect. It could be argued that such activities tend to make history ahistorical, by having students engage in activities that separate the specificities of the period being studied from the ways of studying it and focusing only on methodology. Yet the emphasis on timelines and distributions into familiar categories (people, places, institutions) makes sure that the period of the dictatorship is integrated into a narrative of continuity and development of the nation, that is, that it is included as part of *our* history. By making sure that there is no difference between what can be done with the history of the dictatorship and

that of previous times—all of it can be categorized into people, places, and institutions—all of it is located within the same story, that of the development of the Argentine nation.

A second set of activities could be categorized as *elaborative*, as they aim at having students elaborate their own frameworks and positioning. This type of activity tends to require students to enter into dialogues with older people who participated or were alive in the times being studied and can be found in some of the textbooks that present more critical approaches to the recent past, especially those published by *Aique*, one of the first publishers to produce textbooks guided by the historical perspectives of some of Argentina's most respected historians.

Two good examples of elaborative activities can be found in *Laboratorio de Ciencias Sociales 7*, by Iaies and Segal (1992). At the beginning of the chapter on the dictatorship, there was a box with the following text: "In March of 1976, the national situation was chaotic. Some used this argument to justify the coup d'état. Do you agree with this argument? Why?" By the end of the chapter, there was another box asking students to inquire with their parents and Falkland/Malvinas war veterans what they remember and think about the use of violence in that period. Here, the answers were not pre-given in the narratives—at least not superficially, although obviously since the textbooks were critical of that period, there were hints as to what the "correct" answers were. The questions were specific to, not only that period, but the concept of *recent* past itself, given that they relied on the lived experience of the community members involved. They tended to try to make connections between that recent past and the present students live in.

However, even though they present a higher complexity than the *methodological* activities, *elaborative* activities are at the center of my analysis and critique, especially vis-à-vis the relationships they attempt to establish between past and present. This relationship can be illustrated by an example found in Issue 18 of the *Dossier: Educación y Memoria* (Raggio & Bejar, n.d.), dedicated to the effects of the dictatorship in schools. In it, some documents of that period were reproduced, such as pamphlets warning about the dangers of subversion, legislative measures to discipline teachers and administrators, and curricular interventions. Next to them, under the title "Towards a Democratic School," there was a reproduction of a document from 2005 providing democratic guidelines for the constitution of statutes for student unions. Following that, the textbook asked students to compare both periods through these documents, establishing continuities and shifts. It was quite evident, for anyone completing this task, that *we* are different now, that *we* have left that past behind and have redeemed ourselves, and that democratic progress has taken place.

Here, I bring back the axis of my analysis in the notion of historical consciousness. If one understands historical consciousness as a pedagogical device—that is, as a project of schooling to develop in students a sense of belonging to a particular historical narrative from which to extract moral lessons that will guide their actions and thoughts—then this type of comparison between the traumatic recent past and the democratic present plays a key role. In reinforcing the dichotomy between authoritarian and democratic regimes through a comparative activity, all that is left

for students is to “realize” the necessary differences between *us* and *them*. Students’ agency in constructing their own narratives and positioning is part of what is now considered “participation.” Yet, students’ narratives are never merely theirs, and participation counts as such as long as it contributes to the bounded notion of citizenship at stake. In other words, students are free to participate in this identification process only as long as they identify with the *correct* side of the story, and with the moral lessons that pedagogues want them to draw.

SUMMARY

The analysis of the textbooks and other didactic materials designed to teach about the last dictatorship reveals specific ways in which the production of responsible citizens in schools is tied to the development of a historical consciousness that allows students to extract moral lessons and a sense of national belonging from the (recent) past that will guide their thought and action.

The reasoning for telling the story in the first place is replicated from text to text: students are to learn history in order not to repeat it. Through the notion of historical consciousness, history is turned into a moralizing narrative linking memory, responsibility, and participation to a salvation narrative anchored in knowledge and reason. If students know, they will think “the right way,” and horror will never happen again.

The plot points presented in the narratives about the recent past tend to be founded on a common story and foundational understanding. The common story is that of an event (the coup) that was used by a few to deceive the majority towards their own ends, a deception that ended after a failed war and the awakening of the population. The foundational understanding is that of history as a progressive development of the essential qualities of Argentines as democratic people. An education for democracy is grounded, thus, in the effort to preserve that democratic essence from events and individuals that could corrupt it. What counts as responsible action, as participation, or as a good history education is what agrees with that preset conclusion: *we* were always inherently democratic.

The general stance against the dictatorship that can be found in the great majority of textbooks after 1996 stands on a binary opposition between authoritarianism and democracy, in which one is basically defined as everything the other is not. Therefore, there cannot be any kind of dialogue about the continuities or connections that make the transition from one to the other possible. A significant consequence of this division is the separation between *them* and *us*, between those who embody authoritarianism and the military regime and those who are inherently democratic. As the students identify themselves with that clear *us*, the dictatorship is treated as an ungraspable Other, and the defense of democracy and its principles is essentialized in ways that limit the possibilities of questioning it or seeing the Other as part of us.

The role of the population is also portrayed mostly in between two categories: the population as victims and the people as resistance fighters. Victimhood is understood either as being absent from that historical period, being present as a

passive object enveloped in a corrupted culture of fear and/or violence, or as well-intentioned yet deceived by those in power. Within these narratives, participation in the present is inscribed as a perpetual vigilance against hints of authoritarianism that should never be left to flourish again. Meanwhile, a small group of named agents and the conscious people (*el pueblo*) shape the aspect of resistance, necessary maybe for the redemptive progression of the nation to be intelligible. Here, the responsible citizen of today follows the example of the great heroes of the past who found spaces to resist even in the most dangerous of situations. A significant sector of society, that of the supporters of the regime, is excluded from most of the narratives presented, yet it lurks as a threat to the very categorization between victims and resistance fighters.

Finally, many of the sources analyzed proposed activities for students to think about the consequences of the recent past, linking it to their own present situation. Yet all these efforts to generate reflection and involvement with the country's history are set as continuous reminders of the idea of progress and of a past that has been left behind, founded in the binary opposition between dictatorial and democratic regimes mentioned above. In every instance in which an appropriation of the recent past is sought, the limitations to that very process are reinscribed.

Historical Consciousness, Progress, and Democratic Knowledge

My analysis of textbooks brings to the fore some of the limitations not only of those specific narratives, but some of the very foundations of schooling itself. Schooling is founded on the idea of progress and on the notion that reason and knowledge are the pathways to salvation and social reconstruction (Hunter, 1994; Popkewitz, 1998). As this chapter shows, while there are values that one might not want to give up in that idea of progress, when the narratives about the past are shaped around the intentional construction of progress, what can be said, thought, and acted upon becomes bounded to the particular understanding of how we want our citizens to be.

But returning to this discussion, I would like to highlight the fact that this analysis does not seek to invalidate the efforts to teach such an important content in schools. On the contrary, the point is to understand how some of the efforts to bring about democracy in schools end up reinscribing the very principles of exclusion and privileging of certain voices over others that they are trying to displace. Here, I agree with Marcelo Mariño:

Anyway, it is not insignificant that, even with its deficiencies, the dictatorship enters the school's agenda. In general, a stripping is produced that ends up constructing a poor version [vulgate] of the period, turning it into a dead past from which one can only extract moral lessons. In this way, history is flattened, and even though the remembrance of horror and the homage to the victims are charged with good intentions, a memorialism [*memorialismo*] is strengthened, which finds in the celebration of

anniversaries a place to settle the fulfillment of the forms that constitute the exercise of “good citizenship.” (Mariño, 2006, p. 155)

In other words, we cannot settle with the mere fact that content previously excluded from the curriculum has now found a place in it. Most people, myself included, would agree on the importance of teaching about the traumatic recent past, of involving students in their own histories and that of their families and national, regional, and global identifications, of strengthening democracy by historicizing it. It is precisely in the spirit of that strengthening that this critique seeks to understand the limitations embedded in the narratives presented in textbooks and their pedagogical assumptions.

The narratives that guide the teaching of the traumatic recent past, as I have highlighted above, are grounded on a progressive understanding of history and of the individual, of the evolution of society and the power of knowledge and reason. Educating children in the ways of democracy appears then both as a cause (of the fulfillment of the imperative *Never Again!*) and as an effect (of the development of a democratic society and spirit) and has embedded in it an optimism towards the future and the efficacy of knowing about the past, together with a fear for what would happen without that knowledge or reason. This essay is not about optimism or pessimism, about good or bad textbooks and narratives. Instead, it deals with the boundaries of the pedagogical mobilization of history in the name of a moral construction of the subject, and how the resulting principles define what counts as *agency*. As teachers and pedagogues become concerned with producing responsible citizens, history is reshaped (I repeat, not from a pure, untouched state, but from previous shapings and inscriptions) and translated into an educational language that sets limits on what is possible to say and think, according to how students are expected to think and act after learning the “right” lessons. The taboo around the people’s participation and support of the military regime, for instance, is indicative of the things that these progressive narratives do not allow readers to perceive. The shattering of the categorization of society into victims and resistance fighters that the collaborators embody signals the need to understand how even the most “critical” approaches to the recent past can also sometimes be the most dangerous, as long as that critique does not bend upon itself. In other words, in order to be truly critical, one needs to go beyond the common efforts to bring about a responsible citizenry by turning history into a source of morals, and use that same critical gaze to look into the limits of this very practice.

Finally, the progressive undertone of all these efforts, and the assumption of an essential democratic quality to the people whose history is being narrated, presents the danger of turning the openness and creative force of the notion of democracy into the struggle to preserve and protect that quality from all possible sources of corruption, including the fear (or hatred, in terms of Rancière) of the uncertainty embedded in democratic life. Democracy might mean having to live with the risk of people (including students) drawing conclusions that go against our ideals and trusting everyone’s capacities. Otherwise, the goal of schooling would merely be to protect democracy from the excesses ... of democracy. Or, as Clinton Rossiter

crudely put it, “No sacrifice is too great for our democracy, least of all the temporary sacrifice of democracy itself” (quoted in Agamben, 2005). Now, when the protection of democracy slowly starts to become a protection against those who would disagree with a particular understanding of democracy, the line between democracy and authoritarianism becomes quite blurry.

NOTES

- ⁱ Since one of the main goals of this chapter was to analyze the narratives about the recent past that are posited by textbooks, to simply propose another narrative would be problematic. By intertwining a sort of historical chronology with a personal account, some background is provided for unfamiliar readers, while all attempts at objectivity and definite truth are left aside.
- ⁱⁱ Raul Alfonsín was the first democratically elected president after the last dictatorship in Argentina. A significant portion of his administration (1983–1989) was labeled *primavera alfonsinista* [Alfon-sinista spring] for the optimistic atmosphere that prevailed.
- ⁱⁱⁱ To provide readers unfamiliar with Argentine history with some guidance, I list all modern Argentine presidents in chronological order, starting in 1916, the first year in which free elections were conducted. Names in italics indicate military rulers, and “(c)” indicates coup. This way of presenting history is entirely arbitrary.
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| • 1916–1922, H. Yrigoyen | • 1958–1962, A. Frondizi | • (c)1976–1981, <i>J. R. Videla</i> |
| • 1922–1928, M. T. de Alvear | • (c)1962–1963, J. M. Guido | • 1981, <i>R. E. Viola</i> |
| • 1928–1930, H. Yrigoyen | • 1963–1966, A. U. Illia | • 1981–1982, <i>L. Galtieri</i> |
| • (c)1930–1932, <i>J. F. Uriburu</i> | • (c)1966–1970, <i>J. C. Onganía</i> | • 1982–1983, <i>R. Bignone</i> |
| • 1932–1938, A. P. Justo | • (c)1970–1971, <i>R. M. Levingston</i> | • 1983–1989, R. Alfonsín |
| • 1938–1942, R. M. Ortiz | • (c)1971–1973, <i>A. Lanusse</i> | • 1989–1999, C.S. Menem |
| • 1942–1943, R. Castillo | • 1973, H. J. Cámpora | • 1999–2001, F. de la Rúa |
| • (c)1943, <i>A. Rawson</i> | • 1973, R. A. Lastiri | • 2001, A. Rodríguez Saa |
| • (c)1943–1944, <i>P. P. Ramírez</i> | • 1973–1974, J. D. Perón | • 2002–2003, E. Duhalde |
| • (c)1944–1946, <i>E. J. Farrell</i> | • 1974–1976, I. Martínez de Perón | • 2003–2007, N. Kirchner |
| • 1946–1955, J. D. Perón | | • 2007–present, C. Fernández de Kirchner |
| • (c)1955, <i>E. Leonardi</i> | | |
| • (c)1955–1958, <i>P. E. Aramburu</i> | | |
- ^{iv} “Discursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories. Thus, each discursive practice implies a play of prescriptions that designate its exclusions and choices. ... Discursive practices are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse. They are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behavior, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once, impose and maintain them” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 199–200).
- ^v “Positive” not in terms of “good,” but as related to its creative capabilities, as opposed to a negative notion of power that would prioritize the repressive aspect.
- ^{vi} Popkewitz (2008) discussed this translation as an alchemical process, in that the results of the translation are something entirely different from the original *substance*.
- ^{vii} The inscription of this dichotomy can be found even in academic productions. Alonso (2004), for instance, used the third person to describe the period of the dictatorship, but switched to first person for the following democratic opening.
- ^{viii} *Puerto de Partida* [Port of Departure] is a video produced and distributed by the Association *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*. In it, the story of a young man who discovers, with the help of the *Abuelas*, that he is the child of a disappeared couple is used to discuss issues of identity and responsibility and to study the period of the dictatorship as well as the role of the major human

rights NGOs. The accompanying materials can be found at <http://www.me.gov.ar/curriform/publica/puertodepartida.df>.

- ^{ix} In talking about events (such as protests) or more general movements towards democratization, one can note a tendency towards replacing population with *el pueblo* [the people]. The concept of *el pueblo* carries with it in Latin American contexts a particular double quality: on the one hand it represents the essential qualities of a people, those that define that group as unique and self-conscious of its own qualities, while on the other hand it presents a fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies (Agamben, 2000).

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