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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a significant amount of scholarly interest has been devoted to history teaching across and beyond borders (see, for example, Gasanabo, 2006; Dierkes, 2010; Carretero, 2011; Ahonen, 2012; Han, Kondo, Yang & Pingel, 2012; Korostelina & Lässig, 2013; Elmersjö, 2014). The purpose of such teaching is to transcend national boundaries in order to enhance understanding of different cultures and even encourage a sense of global identity and unity with the ultimate ambition of paving the way for peace and global prosperity. However, it has been pointed out that the teaching of history, as well as the societal use of history, is often permeated with the grand national narrative, and by the time pupils learn to deconstruct this narrative and grasp the complexity of the past they have already developed an emotional bond to this grand national story (Carretero, 2011).

In both older and newer literature the idea of a history education focused on global issues that can transcend boundaries and ultimately be the source of peace and global awareness is salient (Carlgren, 1928; International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, 1933; Lauwerys, 1953; Gasanabo, 2006; Pingel, 2010; Korostelina & Lässig, 2013). This chapter will focus on assessing the underlying assumption, that history education is capable of playing a pivotal role in creating peaceful relations. This issue is also related to the much larger question of whether education can change society, which implies a strong connection between education and society (Apple, 2013).

Utilising the concept of historical culture and earlier research – mainly on Scandinavian debates over history and history education – this chapter discusses the interrelationship of history and culture and the implications of this relationship for peace-oriented history education as a means to promote global awareness.

History, Historical Culture, and History Education

History and the past are different things. As Jenkins (1991, p. 6) has written: ‘history is a discourse about, but categorically different from, the past’. To bring forth some part of the past through historical narrative is always a matter of selection, and it is, therefore, a political and moral act that (re)produces inclusion and exclusion (White, 1980).

History is told and taught to and by specific groups. A group of people—or representatives of that group—is the protagonist of any historical narrative, and in the process of narrating its story this group is also (re)produced. In school-based history curricula this group is often the state or nation, but in other contexts it could be an ethnic group, a political party, a social class, or any other type of group. In the context of identity politics, history is one of the more important instruments in negotiating and maintaining a common ground for a group of people who are understood to share an identity that may be
seen as a basis for political action (Alfred, 1999; Ahonen, 2012). Therefore, inclusion and exclusion lie at the heart of any historical narrative; who is it about, and who is it not about (Shore, 2000; Dunn, 2000; Challand, 2009).

Historical culture is a term sometimes used to describe the set of narratives about the past that is embraced and communicated within a group of people. A historical culture is both the process and the structure of making sense of the past within a specific society; it covers both how history is communicated and which history is communicated (Rüsen, 2002). The concept of historical culture is important in order to understand how history—the ‘sense-making’ of the past—is interdependent on the cultural context that it is intended to make sense of.

The narratives within the historical culture of a large cultural group are the products of intense negotiations and conflicts between different smaller groups – each with their own overlapping historical cultures. Powerful groups often use their positions to incorporate the narratives and experiences of less powerful groups into their own discourses (Apple, 1993). Hence, when minority or aboriginal history is made visible, it is often these groups’ contributions to the national project (as envisioned by the hegemonic majority) that is highlighted and not the minority’s historical experience in its own right (Foster, 1999; VanSledright 2008). This indicates that historical culture is also a matter of power and hegemony in both the negotiation of which history is to be communicated as well as in the communication of that history through established channels that are often controlled by powerful groups.

Historical cultures typically change from within; they are, in a sense, ‘owned’ by the people who embrace and co-create them. It could be argued that changes in a specific historical culture come about because some conditions for the people who embrace the culture have changed. Therefore, their questions about the past also change, and this makes way for new historical narratives. These new narratives could be more overarching and universal than previous narratives, but they could also be more limited.

Much of the research concerning changes in historical cultures points to times of crisis— and subsequent orientation problems for groups of people trying to understand how their situation is connected to where they came from and where they are going—as the most obvious times when historical cultures change (Rüsen, 2001; Karlsson, 2003; Sjöberg, 2011). However, historical cultures also have the ability to undergo changes at a slow pace over very long periods, without being driven by immediate crisis (Elmersjö, 2013).

Many scholars have noted a decline in nationalistic historiography and history education during the 20th century (Dierkes, 2005; Nygren, 2011; Iriye, 2013). It is argued that focus has shifted—in historiography as well as in history teaching—to narratives of international non-governmental organisations, migration, and global cultural encounters. However, in schools such trends have also been met with resistance in some cases, by not incorporating such perspectives in classrooms (Dierkes, 2005; Barton 2012), and even putative global perspectives are infused with cultural inclusion and exclusion (Dunn, 2000).

It is also possible to perceive a distinction between public history (sometimes referred to as memory) and the professional study of the past by historians where the historians conducting the latter are more interested in critically examining historical narratives than in simply learning or evoking them (Bender, 2009). However, historiography is not only about critical thinking. It is entangled in the national project through its origins as the nation-state’s means of creating national cohesion through the study of the nation’s history, which is still evident today (Berger & Lorenz, 2010). It is also infused with so-called methodological nationalism where scientific studies are imbued with the idea of the nation as the terminal unit of social inquiry through the framing of scientific studies within or between national contexts (Martins, 1974; Thelen, 1999).
History teaching may increasingly be about something other than the nation, and it is increasingly based on critical thinking. However, because students tend to interpret what they learn into the narrative they already know (Wertsch, 2000; Porat, 2004; Malmros, 2012), the teaching of history cannot be separated from the historical culture within society at large of which schools and education are integral parts.

**APPROACHES TO HISTORY AS PEACE EDUCATION**

There is important work, currently being conducted, which aims to move history education in a less nationalistic and/or ethnic direction, especially in conflict-ridden parts of the world (e.g., Han et al., 2012; Korostelina & Lässig, 2013). This work underlines very important issues about history teaching and its role in the construction of identities. It also highlights the negotiated structure of historical narratives. This work is vital in trying to combat prejudice, but it is not necessarily a prerequisite for conflict resolution. It might even have the unintended effect of focusing too much on the boundaries between different groups instead of transcending them.

It is my contention that the study and teaching of history does not create divisions between people. However, history is a tool that is often used to accentuate such divisions where they already exist. By the reverse logic, history cannot create peace between peoples in a society with perceived oppression or injustices. However, it can be used to highlight oppression and urge people to take action. At times this could be considered problematic because it creates even greater division, but it could also be considered necessary as it empowers oppressed peoples. The desired outcomes of history education need to be better elaborated in peace processes, and perhaps history has attracted a disproportionate amount of attention in different efforts for reconciliation.

When trying to say anything general about the so-called ‘history wars’, i.e., the highly politicised debate over how history in a certain context is to be written and understood (Macintyre & Clark, 2003), it is important to pay attention to the fundamental differences between different history wars. Because all celebrated and/or remembered events in a historical culture are connected to other events in a narrativistic chain, the problems of coming to terms with history in each case are dependent not only on the disputed events themselves, but on how they fit into a larger and much more complex series of events. There are different ways of coming to terms with history where competing narratives are at stake. I will elaborate further upon some of the most used approaches in discussions on history education.

*Compromising Corrective Narratives or Embracing Differences?*

‘How about just forgetting the past?’ someone might ask. Is it possible to achieve reconciliation by just forgetting? This Nietzschean approach to history has been deemed morally insufficient because it has been affiliated with historical denial (Höpken, 2008; Parkes, 2013), and I will not explore this option for reconciliation any further in this text because I think it is neither achievable nor desirable. Compromising corrective narratives—which allegedly hold true no matter where they are taught—was the basic idea behind early projects of reconciliatory history education (Korostelina & Lässig, 2013). For professional reasons, positivistic historians might have been confident in this line of action for reconciliation by arguing that as long as we teach how things really happened, all sides in a conflict will have to come to terms with the truth. Although many historians nowadays might have a different attitude towards historical truth, this is probably still an integral part of peace education processes because there might be a lingering desire to write singular narratives even in multilateral textbook projects.
Historians are engaged in reconciliatory history projects in order to set the record straight in a sense (Pingel, 2008; Lässig & Strobel, 2013). A problem that can be tied to historians’ engagement with these intentions is that it puts historians outside historical cultures and into an exceptional and superior professional box where politics, ideology, and other societal features are non-existent. It is as if historians live outside the rest of society. However, historians are, of course, part of society and are affected by the historical culture of which they are a part. Because history is a negotiated discourse, it is still theoretically possible to negotiate compromising narratives, but these narratives would have to be the product of immense debates on all levels of society, and more importantly, they would require a corresponding universal culture.

One of the problems in establishing true correctives is that when international organisations (e.g., The Council of Europe, the EU, or UNESCO) engage in mediating conflicts about history, this often leads to Western European and American historians’ involvement in history projects or truth commissions in Africa, Eastern Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. Their engagement, while sometimes partly successful, has shown how difficult it is to approach a so-called post-conflict society from the outside. These historians are not part of the historical cultures that they are trying to transform, and even if this is in the service of peace, it can lead to accusations of Western paternalism (Ahonen, 2012). However, in societies where physical hostilities have not ceased, and where divisions between belligerent groups are still very deep, the only way to change education is to let someone else, someone from outside the particular historical cultures, force the change, but the impact of their suggestions on educational practices are often very limited (Höpken, 2008).

In Scandinavia, serious efforts to promote peace through transformed, improved, and less nationalistic history education have transpired since at least the 1880s (Elmersjö & Lindmark, 2010). One of the examples often referred to when discussing successful projects on history teaching that presumably has had an impact on peaceful relations is the Scandinavian history textbook revision under the auspices of the Norden Associations from 1919 to the 1970s. The revision was an effort in line with the Norden Associations’ overarching goal of promoting cooperation among the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden).

This textbook revision, while successful in part, also highlighted immense differences in the way history was interpreted and written in the different countries. The fact that professional historians were engaged to make sure that history was conveyed to pupils without national prejudice—and with sound scientific research as its only guide—only highlighted the cultural aspects of history. Heated discussions on overlapping history that were incorporated in the grand national narrative of the different countries in different ways were very common during the 50 years of continuous textbook revision. For example, Finnish historians and Swedish historians had immense difficulty coming to terms with each other’s views on the nationality of the Finns. Swedish historians were reluctant to admit the existence of any Finnish nation during the centuries of Swedish rule. The same problem emerged between Norwegian and Icelandic historians on the nature of the Icelandic nation (Elmersjö, 2013). This could be considered a consequence of projecting today’s identities onto history. In an area of close physical proximity, if you go back far enough, the histories of any two national identities will overlap.

The Nordic textbook revisions never accomplished a Nordic narrative because there was no subject matter that was unspoken for on which to build such a narrative. Almost all efforts to claim particular past events as part of an overarching Nordic history were refuted by historians in at least one national context through their claims on that particular event as part of their own national history (Elmersjö, 2013).
The efforts of the Norden Associations might have had some impact on the history textbooks and the history education conducted in schools in Scandinavia (Elmersjö, 2013; Hovland, 2013). However, it is difficult to assess the causality between efforts made by different organisations to change textbooks and the actual changes in the textbooks because both the efforts to change textbooks and the changes themselves are dependent on changes in historical culture. More importantly, in the Scandinavian case peaceful relations between the nations were already established when efforts to change history education were made. This was also the case with successful Franco-German history textbook projects that flourished in the wake of political and economic rapprochement after the Second World War, in contrast to similar Sino-Korean-Japanese projects that have not been as successful in getting a common history accepted. Successful changes in education in order to promote peace between former combatants (in both internal and bilateral conflicts) have been recognised as ‘only one part of a more general policy of reconciliation’ (Höpken, 2008, p. 379). Overall, currently friendly relations between nations or other groups seem to be a prerequisite for agreeing on historical interpretations of perceived wrongdoings. In her study on the different problems of history and history education in South Africa, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Finland, Sirkka Ahonen has shown that even though the contexts are very different, there are also very clear similarities in the mythical motifs portrayed in these different societies. For example, in all of these societies the perception of history revolved around the mythical notions of guilt, victimhood, heroes, betrayal, and redemption. Ahonen’s study also shows that coming to terms with the past after a civil war is very much dependent on the former warring groups’ perceived degree of contemporary social inclusion within society (Ahonen, 2012). Despite the fact that many projects have focused on making history more overarching and inclusive, agreeing on interpretations of the past does not seem to be a reasonable instrument for establishing friendly relations between groups that are in conflict. Rather, agreements on historical matters have often been a consequence of already established friendly relations between nations or at least somewhat equal opportunities within them (Ahonen, 2012; Elmersjö, 2013). However, because nationalism, history education and historiography are strongly interlinked, it is hard to agree on overarching narratives between nations even when relations are exceptionally good. Embracing difference by teaching different narratives—sometimes referred to as ‘multi-perspectivity’—is a line of pedagogy that addresses the consequences of post-modern thought and teaches multiple perspectives on history. This approach is probably a prerequisite in multicultural classrooms where all students cannot be expected to feel included in the same narrative (Cannadine, Keating, & Sheldon, 2011). However, depending on how it is executed, this way of teaching can also be problematic because it delineates which history is ours, and which history is theirs, and this could lead to more focus on the boundaries between groups. It has been argued that societies have differences and that these differences are something that should be nurtured and celebrated in a democracy. Emphasising such differences in history education would likely unveil the cultural dimension of making sense of the past by not only teaching different narratives, but by providing insights into the way history is culturally embedded. This would, therefore, explicitly discuss and nurture the friction between different conceptions of history (Park, 2012). The focus in such history teaching would hopefully not be on differences between groups, but instead on differences between the narratives these groups produce and hold true. Thus it would be imperative not to compare these narratives to a corrective narrative. It could be argued that this line of teaching, without true correctives, says more about the discursiveness of history than about
supposedly fundamental differences between people of different cultures. Therefore, it might do more to provide favourable conditions for peaceful relations than merely teaching different perspectives without drawing attention to the concept of historical culture. This would mean that the dichotomising of history and memory needs to be reconsidered.

Regret Policy – Historical Apologies, Recognition, and Inclusion

In the wake of less nationalistic, more reconciliatory, and more inclusive history, the struggle for acknowledgement and reparation for past oppression of minorities has been coupled with a need to show moral excellence in liberal democracies. This win-win situation has led to a series of apologies that can be seen as both a recognition of minorities in the wake of the decline of the nation-state and at the same time a moral victory for the governments extending the apology (Olick, 2007; Barkan, 2003; 2009; Höpken, 2008). As a consequence of friendlier and/or more intense economic relations between nations formerly at war, claims for bilateral apologies have also been made with the overarching goal of reparation, acknowledgement, and reconciliation. This trend will become more visible in history education as the apologies are included in curriculum and become part of the historical narrative.

One of the ideas behind such apologies could be to recognise and express respect for a particular group of people as being different (Kruks, 2001). However, in most cases the idea behind government apologies is probably more related to the liberal notion of inclusive recognition where groups that have been treated as different are recognised for their part of something universal rather than for their uniqueness.

The basic idea behind this latter form of apology is that it could provide an inclusive environment where both victims and perpetrators can begin to discuss a joint experience, and from that to also see a potential future together. However, these inclusive apologies also (re)produce both the group that is apologising and the group they are apologising to. If a government’s apology on behalf of ‘the nation’ is extended to a national minority that also considers themselves part of the same nation, the ambiguity of the apology’s inclusive potential is especially visible. It could even be interpreted as effectively excluding the minority from the nation despite the inclusive intention behind the apology (Löfström, 2011).

It has been argued that an institution such as the state, its government, or some part of that government, can indeed be held responsible for wrongdoings across generations. The political community of a state is a political agent, and it is, therefore, responsible for past wrongs in its name in the same sense that individuals are responsible for things they did in the past when they were essentially different persons (Thompson, 2002).

It has also been argued, however, that nations are not only political communities, but also cultural communities. These two types of communities, while overlapping, are often treated as interchangeable when it comes to the nation-state, and this leads to the reproduction of cultural hegemony within the state. As Jan Löfström has shown, the act of taking responsibility for historical wrongdoings can be considered an act of exclusion and a reproduction of the nation as a culturally exclusive entity. The rhetoric of apologies often refers to a common history, not as a political community, but as a historically established cultural community (Löfström, 2011).

Apologies, and the implied transgenerational guilt that accompanies them, are the product of good intentions, but they can have quite far-reaching implications. Taking responsibility as a cultural community in the name of a state might lead to the ethnification of citizenship. This is not exclusive to apologies and is a consequence of the cultural features of history in general. History is taught and told to groups, and apologising for
history in the name of a group is, of course, a group-making project in that it clarifies the historical bond between its imagined members. Even if pride and prejudice is taken out of this history, it is still part of a process that conveys the group in question as perennial and in effect says: ‘This is our history, even if we are not proud of it’.

Even if apologies for historical wrongdoings make way for the recognition of suffering, and are effectively inclusive in that sense, there is an imminent risk of closing the cultural community even further, and it is not certain, or even likely, that this will bring about the kind of reconciliation that was intended.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have examined how culture and history are intertwined in a way that perhaps makes it futile to fight nationalism and ethnocentric attitudes with global perspectives on history. Making sense of the past could be considered very much dependent on the context of what you want to make sense. The different contexts produce diverse historical cultures that are overlapping and are part of the process of creating and maintaining identities. One of the major issues for history education lies in the problematic relation between facts and truth in the understanding of the past. A historical fact, and one that might even be undisputed, can be the source of multiple interpretations depending on which culture’s history it is supposed to explain and which narrative it is incorporated into.

If truth is relative to given conceptual systems (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), then the act of incorporating an undisputed fact in different narratives (i.e., different conceptual systems) will ultimately give rise to multiple, and possibly competing, truths. History education cannot create new identities because identity and history are interrelated; identities produce history as much as history produces identity. The narrative that would have to be formed if history was to produce a new, not yet established, identity would not make sense because the historical questions such a narrative would answer have not been asked.

The cultural aspect of history is not limited to narratives of superiority or national pride. When people of different groups have reached agreements—and in the spirit of fellowship and affinity have apologised for past wrongful deeds—they still need the instruments of cultural inclusion and exclusion to determine exactly who is apologising to whom. The process of de-nationalising the world in general, and history in particular, has not only given rise to more overarching narratives on Europe, East Asia, and the world in general, but also a more diverse set of narratives when minorities and oppressed groups are demanding recognition for their particular experience of history. The historical experience seems to become more particular, and this means that more people become recognised for a particular experience and that conflicts between different groups in society are acknowledged.

Education in general is both a site of, and a tool for, social transformation. However, it responds in a dialectic relation to changes within its society. When it comes to so-called ‘post-conflict societies’, history education cannot be expected to both explain historical conflicts within society and at the same time present an inclusive narrative. An inclusive narrative could even limit the ability to make conflicts within society visible and understandable.

When successful steps have been taken to come to terms with the past—within or between nations—it has been as a consequence of already established friendlier, more equal, and more inclusive relations. Thus global history might not be the means by which global awareness can be accomplished, but it might instead be the outcome of such global awareness. What history education can contribute with in order to promote peace and reconciliation is to provide insights into how history is culturally embedded, not by
depriving history of culture. Such an approach could help to create a societal atmosphere in which conflicts are visible and different narratives are not only tolerated, but where the friction between them is also valued as an important feature of a democratic and dynamic society.

NOTES

1 When I use the term ‘group’, I am not referring to essentially distinguishable groups but instead to imagined groups (or perhaps, more accurately, categories) where the members are presumed to feel associated even if they are not. History and history teaching are in this sense ‘group-making projects’ (Brubaker, 2002).

2 Perhaps the idea of forgetting the past in order to promote peaceful relations deserves some more attention from scholars of history education. However, in the global media landscape of today it is increasingly difficult for entire societies to just forget. Also, the repudiation of such ideas in the context of peace education has been voiced for a long time. In 1937, as a response to ideas of forgetting conflicts between the Norwegian and Swedish governments during the union between the two states, some Swedish historians wrote: From a Nordic perspective it is obvious that earlier generations’ perceptions of the political problems on our peninsula are of interest for contemporary youth. Neither historical truth nor our contemporary cooperation would benefit if former friction between us was essentially avoided in history education (Herlitz, Agvald, Grauers, & Carlgren, 1937, p. 216). It was not only the denial of historical truth that was seen as problematic; the consequences of such denials for the contemporary and future cooperation between the nations were also addressed.

3 I am sceptical about the term ‘post-conflict society’ because it suggests—to some extent—that there are societies without conflicts.
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