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# History Education in Conflict Contexts: Toward Transitional Justice and Emancipation

**ABSTRACT:** The international education agenda for post-conflict contexts is often focused on Education For All development goals and is influenced by an economic rationale and efficiency, whereas such contexts demand more focus on education for inclusion and reconciliation. Cole (2007) draws attention to an important path of reform: history education, and its relation with the goals of transitional justice and peace. Research (Foster, 2012) shows that in many countries, textbooks continue to adopt a single nationalistic narrative of the past that promotes some perspectives and ignores and silences others. The study critically approaches history education, its implications for identity formation, its potential relation to emancipation and the social aims of education, and the discursive production of official narratives. The case of history textbooks in conflict-ridden Syria is presented to highlight the need for critical history education in the transitional justice and democratization process.

**KEYWORDS:** history education, textbook research, identity, critical education, transitional justice; emancipation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is not neutral, and the notion of education for education's sake “runs counter to a more insidious, more layered educational construct that promotes the prominent while dismissing the marginalized” (Lintner & MacPhee, 2012, p. 259). Pingel (2010) observes that social studies is a sensitive area, since it is almost impossible to avoid value judgments when teaching them. Social studies, particularly history education, have been debated for their role in constructing identity and creating the Other. In history education, considered the most conservative area of education (Cole, 2007) for its association with the collective self, memory, dignity and emotion, both content and pedagogy have the potential to create independent, responsible and critical learners and a just, secure world for all, or for spreading chauvinistic ideals that marginalize, discriminate and cause conflicts.

Reed (1998) stresses the importance of learning history, as it can provide learners with knowledge and understanding of the world and human thinking to help deal with current global challenges. However, it is argued that the “innocuous” purpose of history textbooks is to learn about the past (Lintner & MacPhee, 2012, p.259). Research reveals that history curriculum and textbooks serve as “the principal means to influence, if not control, how children understand their nation's past” (Foster, 2012, p. 51).

Although several sources – family, stories, museums, rituals – provide information about the past and shape the collective memory and identity of the learners, school textbooks are the main focus of this study. Textbooks play a major role in transmitting what Apple and Christian-Smith (1991) refer to as “the official knowl-

edge,” which dictates what to be included and excluded in a way that conforms to the dominant ideology. Although it is difficult to generalize, research (Foster, 2012) has shown that in many countries, especially where textbooks are centrally approved, history textbooks often adopt a nationalistic view and present an official single narrative of the past. Textbooks appear to be contested texts that promote some perspectives and ignore or silence others. Students memorize “facts” about their nations’ past that may be biased or incomplete, and thus harmful.

After World War II, and particularly in the 1960s and ‘70s, there was a controversy regarding the function of history teaching. This debate, according to Carretero et al. (2012), was related to the tension between two perspectives that have influenced the educational systems since the 19th century: the critical rationality of the Enlightenment and the emotionally based individualism of romanticism. Identifying the purpose of history education revives this tension and the issue of whether history teaching should produce “educated citizens of the world or patriotic nationalists” (Carretero et al., 2012, p. 2). Changes and transformations have occurred since then, and history curricula started including objectives related to thinking historically, such as evaluating causes and evidence. Scholars maintain that the transmission of such skills is the main objective of teaching history. However, the traditional objective of teaching history as a means of constructing national identity is still the most prominent objective today (Foster, 2012; Lopez & Carretero, 2012). Textbooks continue to present students with a selective, narrow and uncritical view of themselves, and thus others and the world around them. In this globalized, intercultural and interdependent world, however, such outlooks prove deficient. To counter this deficiency, it is vital to give students a deeper understanding of history and its “interpretive, contested or disciplinary nature” (Foster, 2012, p. 50).

In conflict and post-conflict areas, issues of identity and memory become more sensitive and important in achieving transitional justice. In its original meaning, transitional justice focuses on human rights, accountability and delivering justice for victims of abuses via criminal justice. However, the meaning intended here is the one that has become more common in recent years, which refers to procedures to achieve reconciliation between individuals and groups. Cole and Murphy (2010) see history education as belonging more to this meaning of transitional justice that “serves psychosocial healing and building a new democratic society than to criminal justice and accountability for specific human rights abuses” (p. 5). They argue that it is often difficult to separate education and transitional justice from the needs of and for education in a post-conflict context.

In transitional contexts, history education has been analyzed to deal with the notion of the enemy or the Other with the aim of deconstructing biased and hateful discourses and achieving understanding and reconciliation. Changing certain events portrayed in textbooks can be a form of “psychosocial healing and building a new democratic society” (Cole and Murphy, 2010, p. 5). Conflict states today face critical questions on issues of minority rights, justice, and dehumanizing of the Other based on identity related to religion, sect, ethnicity, and political and ideological affiliation. Such con-

texts demand an education that tackles the notion of identity in a democratic, progressive way and promotes peace and reconciliation as requirements for reconstruction and stability. History education can contribute to the transformation of identities and the way individuals see themselves and the Other through representation, inclusion of new ways of approaching stories about the past (Cole and Murphy, 2010).

The present study aims to critically approach history education and its implications on identity formation, and its potential relation to emancipation and the social aims of education, mainly promoting understanding, social justice and inclusion – urgent needs in conflict and post-conflict contexts. The study focuses on textbooks and is undertaken with the aim of exposing the discursive production of official narratives and the type of fixed and essentialist identity presented. It suggests a new type of historical discourse around the notion of identity and a more disciplinary approach to teaching history that encourages investigation and critical thinking. The study presents findings from a critical discourse analysis of Syrian history textbooks to expose the type of fixed and essentialist identity indoctrinating students and the need for a disciplinary approach to history that encourages multiperspectivity and critical thinking.

The study will build on prominent research on textbook research (Pingel, 2010), and history education and the construction of national identity (Carretero, Rodriguez-Moneo, & Asensio, 2012; Foster, 2012; Voss & Carretero, 1994). Research by Cole (2007) and Cole and Murphy (2010) will support the argument of the relation between history education and transitional justice and healing in post-conflict societies. The work of Anderson (1983/1991) and Smith (1991, 1997) will be used to discuss nationalism and national identities. Research on the concept of identity will draw on the work of Hall (2000) and Sen (2006). Research on critical theory and the theory of critical social or education science (Kemmis, 1991) will provide a framework for the need to challenge issues of authority and phenomena taken for granted. The works of (critical) discourse analysts including Fairclough (1989), Van Dijk (2001), and Philips and Hardey (2002) will be referenced to highlight the relation between language and power.

The paper introduces the study focus in the introduction. An overview of Textbook Research follows, highlighting major contributions in the field. The following sections present the theories and concepts on which this paper relies, such as the nature of social studies disciplines, nationalism, identity, critical theory and the emancipatory traits of critical thinking. The section on history education in contexts of transitional conflict follows, with a case from Syria, to discuss the need for a critical approach to history and identity.

#### **TEXTBOOK RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW**

Questioning the historical accounts presented in textbooks started a long time ago. Pingel (2010) discusses how certain developments and studies on textbook analysis have established a new interdisciplinary scientific discipline called Textbook

Research, whose aim is to present “better insights into the interrelationships that exist between the teaching of history, geography and civics and the prejudices and misconceptions in pupils’ everyday experiences as conveyed by the general political culture, to which mass media makes an increasing contribution” (p. 43).

Educationalists established international textbook comparison and revision to respond to bias and one-sided narrative in textbooks with the aim of promoting peace and international understanding. They targeted mainly history, geography and civics textbooks because of their relevance to education toward democracy, human rights and international awareness. Language textbooks were considered later, as they also contribute to the way individuals think about the others.

Textbook revision started as an international task after World War I and the establishment of the League of Nations, which started to look for ways to deal with the prejudice that dominated most textbooks in countries that had fought against each other. In 1932 the League’s Committee on Intellectual Co-operation started to develop a model for international consultation on textbooks urging national commissions to conduct a comparative analysis to revise biased texts, which would avoid conflicts. This step encouraged further similar efforts between the wars. Considerable progress was made in achieving mutual understanding through the teaching of history. Twenty-six countries signed a Declaration Regarding the Teaching of History, which declared that it was desirable that rival countries assign a place to the history of others that would highlight the interdependence of nations. It also recommended the collaboration of teachers and the guarding of texts against any interpretations that might arouse prejudices against others (Pingel, 2010). However, tensions increased in the 1930s, and the powerful governments then didn’t coordinate, as they did not want any interference in their national matters.

After the destructive World WarII, the United Nations adopted a resolute approach. In 1946 UNESCO established a program for the Improvement of Text-Books and Teaching Materials as Aids in Developing International Understanding and confirmed the importance of comparative textbook studies to international understanding, peace and human rights. Since the Cold War and its aftermath, new challenges have emerged, including dangerous nationalism and xenophobia and international conflicts. Mass immigration and intercultural classrooms have also demanded a new approach.

A cutting-edge approach is said to have been initiated through the Education for All Dakar Framework for Action (2000), which aimed to help governments provide high-quality basic education for all, a quality linked to education for international understanding peace and human rights. The framework considered the need for reconstruction of schools, teacher training and teaching materials as a condition for reconciliation. The Dakar Forum discussed “the destructive role of education,” particularly that of history, geography and religious instruction in conflict areas (Pingel, 2010, p. 22). Some prominent organizations like the Georg Eckert Institute and the Council of Europe are currently working for the improvement of textbooks.

**History: a dynamic social science or a romantic uncontested narrative**

The cognitive revolution in the psychology of learning proved influential in challenging existing theories of how students learn. Constructivist approaches also challenged the common didactic teaching that prevailed before the 1970s, contributing to increasing calls for “a new history” (Foster, 2012; Larsson, 1995) based on enquiry and treating history as a discipline, not a body of knowledge to be memorized. Further, the socio-cultural shifts of society at that time demanded a more critical and inclusive history; they also triggered the questioning of tradition and “inherited thinking” (Foster, 2012).

Reisman and Wineburg (2012) advocate a disciplinary historical reading, which refers to “the ability to read and interpret written text; the ability to evaluate and reconcile competing truth claims; and the ability to temper one’s rush to judgment in the face of competing worldviews” and which represents “the heart of a participatory democracy” (p. 172). The enlightened or disciplinary goals of history education call for “the fostering of critical citizens capable of informed and effective participation in the progress of the nation.” This may include a possible criticism of the own local or national community (Carretero et al., 2012, p. 155). Such goals include:

- » Understanding the past in a complex way according to age and educational level.
- » Distinguishing various periods according to appropriate understanding of history.
- » Understanding the complex multiple causality.

What does it mean for social studies if the reality of history education offered in schools is to reinforce ideologically constructed national identities and to appease social and political agendas under slogans of building critical thinkers and responsible citizens? The primary goal of social studies, according to the U.S. National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), is “to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society and interdependent world” (2010, p. 3, cited in Lintner & MacPhee, 2012, p. 260). Social studies aim “to develop the ability to argue, evaluate and form rational and reasonable opinions, as well as to understand and accept, but also to subject norms to critical examination” (Pingel, 2010, p. 8). However, social studies education currently “often suffers from a perversion of mission, existing as declarative, atomized, disconnected and irrelevant content, with standardized measures of knowledge and value-added assessment movements further undermining any resemblance of social studies” (Misco, 2014, p. 241).

History education, in particular, doesn’t match the aims of history as a social science. Not only the content is problematic but also the structure and presentation of the text. Foster (2012) notes that, in many cases, in-text questions, for example, either don’t exist or, if they do they require just a factual recall of already given “facts.”

Such textbooks fail to provide students with any respect for the disciplinary nature of history, which encourages them to appreciate that history textbooks “offer only one selected version of past events, and that any historical account is, by its very nature, a social construction that requires critical analysis and careful evaluation” (Foster, 2012, p. 54).

Educators and researchers, who acknowledge the subjectivity of many history curricula, continue working to expose political social, and cultural influences integrated in the textbooks’ content and structure, and they suggest ways to resist the hegemony of those texts through critical analyses and pedagogies (Hickman & Porfilio, 2012). This remains a challenging and difficult task in many countries, where history education is a matter of national pride and identity that cannot be questioned. Lopez and Carretero (2012) argue that “educational mechanisms, even if they don’t meet the objective of providing a good education, do appear to meet the objective of instilling ideology – and in the case of the teaching of history, even indoctrination” (p. 140). In dictatorial regimes, identity construction becomes indoctrination, and those who don’t abide by it put themselves at risk.

### **History, nationalism and national identity**

*Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else’s opinions,  
their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.*

Oscar Wilde

In 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, education in general played a major role in the development of states and nation-building. The state started to gain more control over education and curriculum that focused on national identities as well as economic growth (Green, 1995). Thus, the creation of national education systems has been both a cause and an effect of state formation. Likewise, state-controlled history curricula in the 19th century continued to promote concepts of national identities.

Similarly, the centralization of teaching history in schools began in the early 19th century, for nation-building purposes (Lopez & Carretero, 2012). History as a subject entered the curriculum of education systems to establish a nation of people with a common history, thus sharing a sense of belonging to the same imagined community (Anderson, 1983/1991). Historically, national history was an important weapon against feudal and absolutist political power in the 19th century. National histories also contributed to anti-colonial and anti-imperial efforts; they gave a voice to national minorities and opposition movements, such as communism, to present alternative visions of national history and identities. On the other hand, the creation of internal and external enemies “deepened xenophobia,” and national histories were manipulated to legitimate repression of minorities and wars (Berger, 2012, p. 36).

National identities emerging in the 19th century were romanticized and “cloaked in an aura of naturalness and timelessness” (Lopez & Carretero, 2012, p. 145). Each nation was believed to have essential traits that were not only objective and permanent, but also exclusive to that group and distinct from others. Smith (1991) defines

a nation as “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (p. 14). Nationalism, on the other hand, is “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’” (Smith, 1997, p. 73). History education has been used to serve this ideology in different degrees. One rationale is that a return to “a golden age” is an essential component of nationalism to promote what is considered a shared and national legacy to be revived and remembered (Smith, 1997). Smith contends that nationalists rediscovered and exaggerated the heroism of past ages, the glories of ancestral civilizations (often not ‘their own’) and the exploits of their great national heroes, even when these heroes belonged more to the realm of legend than history and, if they lived, knew nothing of the nation which was so busy reclaiming them from obscurity (p. 128).

The notion of the modern nation-state is thereby translated into the past, although it did not exist at that time. As a result, students view conflicts, even before the emergence of the nation states, as conflicts among national groups, which is a simplistic and narrow interpretation of events.

Fulbrook (1997) maintains that there is no such “real entity” as a nation, but only a social reality in which enough people are prepared to believe in the salience of certain characteristics, such as language, descent or ethnicity, as attributes of a nation. These dominant myths “when institutionalized may become a matter of power resources and ritual: a stage may come when people no longer have to believe in the myth, they just live with the consequences” (p. 72). To Anderson (1983/1991), nationality and nationalism are “cultural artefacts of a particular kind” (p. 4).

Research on history education and school textbooks shows that national curricula attempt to instill “symbolic representations” that guarantee a positive image of the group’s present, past and future, a positive assessment of the state’s political development and an identification of past national heroes (Carretro, Lopez, Gonzales, & Rodriquez-Moneo, 2012). This discursive production of the national is achieved through “master narratives” (Lopez and Carretero, 2012) based more on the interests of dominant groups than on the neutral enquiry into past events. Voss and Carretero (1994) identify six common features of historical master narratives in relation to the concept of nation:

- » Exclusion-inclusion as a logical operation contributing to the establishment of the historical subject in a way that positive aspects will always be attributed to the “we” and negative aspects to “the other,” This is very critical because it determines both the main voice and actions for the national subject.
- » Identification processes as both cognitive and affective anchor: the emotional feature will facilitate the formation of the nation as a concept stronger than the cognitive rational ones.
- » Frequent presence of mythical and heroic characters and motives.
- » Search for freedom or territory as a common narrative.

- » Historical school narratives contain basic moral orientations.
- » Romantic and essentialist concept of both the nation and the nationals as eternal entities.

History education continues to romantically trace the formation of a nation that went throughout victimization and awakening, and finally won the struggle of freedom and independence. A disciplined and critical history has the potential of “showing how some of the ‘we’ one may too easily identify with, have sometimes in the past been executioners, and some other times victims” (Rosa, 2012, p. 70). This will eventually and, it is hoped, lead to the questioning of the always positive “we” and the always negative “they” that characterizes many historical texts and affect lives and decisions.

### **History and identity as a social construct**

*Memory, Identity, and History are a trinity impossible to disentangle*  
Rosa (2012, p. 64)

The use of history to create a construct, a national identity, is an issue of debate and continuing argument, not only because of the previous discussion on how education contributes to the construction of individuals’ identities and worldviews, but also because of another side of the argument, which debates how pre-existing identities of the learners shape the way they interpret history. Recent research (Batron, 2012) has investigated the relationship between students’ identities and their understanding of history. Students’ national, ethnic, political and religious backgrounds influence the way they interpret historical narratives in the textbook. This can be an obstacle to interpreting the narratives critically when the students cannot distance themselves emotionally from the material taught, although learners’ backgrounds can be motivational in some cases when it is possible to make sense of the material (Lopez & Carretero, 2012).

Barton (2012) presents three perspectives on the relation between identity and school history. The first contends that learning about the nation’s history provides students with an identity. The second approach contends that attempting to impose identities on students is difficult because they have other identities (ethnic, religious, etc.). In this situation, students can resist the historical identity offered by the curriculum, or their other identities will influence the way they interpret the narrative. The third perspective contends that there is no relation between identity and history education. Barton (2012), however, suggests a fourth perspective, which contends that school history provides “resources for students as they develop historically grounded identities, whether it is the intent of the curriculum to do so or not” (p. 103). In other words, students use the content available, and nobody can impose particular identities upon them. However, when encountering historical facts, learners tend to often interpret them as confrontation between “us” and “them,” and whether we are aware of it or not, history textbooks do not just contain data and stories; they usually reflect traditions and influence the development of individuals in that society, and they

“attempt to explain our roots, how and why we happen to be living in a certain place and how that place can be described and characterized – in other words, who we really are” (Pingel, 2010, p. 7). The intended mission here is not to distance history from learners’ identities and memories, since this is almost impossible, but rather to provide the learners with an enlightened version of the past and who they are, and to invite them to reflect on what is presented to them as “facts.”

#### CRITICAL THEORY AND CRITICAL SOCIAL/EDUCATIONAL SCIENCE

Critical Theory is “a reflective theory which gives agents a kind of knowledge inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation” (Geuss, 1981, p. 2). Critical Theory includes self-reflection in the agents; by reflecting they come to realize that their form of consciousness is ideologically false and that the coercion from which they suffer is self-imposed ... once they have realized this, the coercion loses its ‘power’ or ‘objectivity’ and the agents are emancipated (Guess, 61).

The Frankfurt School of Critical Theorists criticizes positivism, which tends to see problems as technical and reality as objective and out of control. Positivism led to the decline of individuals’ reflecting on their situations and acting to change them. One concern of the Frankfurt School, therefore, is to present a theory whose task was to emancipate individuals from the positivist domination over thought and actions. Although “critical” may imply different meanings, the emphasis here is on what Jürgen Habermas refers to as critical social science, and how it is related to education (Kemmis, 1991).

Kemmis’s critical social or educational science (1991) is oppositional in four senses. First, it is epistemologically oppositional because it rejects empiricism and idealism, positivism and interpretivism, which, more or less, form the base of much of social and educational research today. Second, it is cognitively oppositional in the sense that it highlights the possibility that “our perceptions of the social world are socially constructed and open to distortion” (p. 97). Therefore, it seeks to problematize our understanding of the world and “acknowledges that the rationality of our understandings, the value of our productive activities, and the justice of our social relationships may be ideologically distorted in a first sense (false consciousness)” (p. 97). Third, a critical social or educational science is culturally oppositional, as it exposes aspects of the social order which sustain irrationality and injustice through institutionalized practices and discourses. It refers to an “ideological distortion in a second (hegemonic) sense” in which particular aspects of life are “systematically structured to preserve the self-interests of some at the expense of others” (p. 97). The cognitive and cultural senses of opposition, which are related, create the fourth sense, the political sense. It is in this sense that a critical social or educational science differs most from other forms of science, as it seeks not only to interpret the world but also to change it. Kemmis proceeds to contend that a critical social or educational science in this sense is more than just oppositional, but rather “a form of resistance [...] It resists accepting the actual by systematically awakening a critical sense of the

possible” (98). It organizes action to establish “self-critical communities committed to a rational, productive, satisfying, just and humane way of life in the educational research task” (98). Kemmis argues that the commitment of a critical social science to “organized, active resistance to existing forms of life which perpetuate irrationality and injustice marks a major distinction between the work of ‘critical social and educational science’ and that of much “critical theory in social science and education,” which tend to be passive and interpretive (p. 102).

#### WRITING AND REWRITING HISTORY IN CONFLICT CONTEXTS

Despite the movements that viewed identities as social constructs, shaped by political interest rather than natural traits and the consequent attempts to establish new approaches to national identity in history education, identities continue to pose problems and challenges to peace and security in the world. In *Identity and Violence* (2006), Sen argues that identity has the potential to turn “multidimensional human beings into one-dimensional creatures” (p. 174). She goes on to draw attention to the underlying danger of “the illusion of a unique and choiceless identity” that is responsible for many conflicts in the world. “With suitable instigation,” she contends, “a fostered sense of identity with one group of people can be made into a powerful weapon to brutalize another” (p. xv). She refers to the freedom that should allow us to “question the automatic endorsement of past tradition” and enables people to choose their identities (p. 114). The challenge remains for curricula, textbook authors and teachers to acknowledge and promote this kind of identity in a social studies classroom and emancipate the learners from the shackles of the unchanging positive “we.”

Cole and Murphy (2009) acknowledge that one challenge in identifying changes in history content to promote justice and reconciliation is the existence of essentially two approaches to teaching the history of sensitive recent events. One approach is called the “amnesia” approach to the past, which holds that the events are “too divisive to study or debate” and that it is better to leave them for a long period, maybe several generations. One obvious problem with this approach is that it could be dictated by political leaders who are involved in past atrocities and using national unity to strengthen their own power. An example is Cambodia, where history education is still suspended in post-genocide Cambodia following the philosophy of the prime minister Hun Sen, which contends that “we should dig a deep hole and bury the past” (Cole and Murphy, 2009, p. 22). Cole & Murphy (2009) argue that discussions of past atrocities could be divisive, especially in a state where democratic mechanism of argumentation and disagreement are still weak and developing.

The other approach, closely related to transitional justice, advocates the discussion of past crimes and atrocities to understand the roots of conflicts. Pingel (2008) states that “without recognition of crimes, there can be no reconciliation” (p. 1940). Although there is an agreement among many educators that learners deserve to learn about what actually happened without lies and denial, the actual way this can best be practiced is not yet clear. Cole and Murphy (2010) acknowledge the sensitivity of his-

tory education and the idea that history may be the discipline that is “most inherently conservative, as it has traditionally been the place in which group cohesion and patriotism have been inculcated.” Therefore, “reform of history education to serve the goals of justice, no matter how urgent those goals are, is extremely challenging” (p. 4).

#### **A SYRIAN CASE: WHO DECIDES WHAT TO BE REMEMBERED OR FORGOTTEN DURING A CONFLICT, AND WHEN?**

This section briefly presents some findings from extensive research involving the analysis of history textbooks in war-torn Syria. This study focuses only on the findings related to the current conflict in a ninth grade history textbook mandated by the Ministry of Education in government-controlled Syria, and its counterpart textbook that has been edited by an opposition organization, the Syrian Education Commission, based in Turkey, and is distributed in rebel-controlled areas. Both textbooks cover the development of the various Arab regions from the period of World War I to the present. The ninth grade textbooks fit the current discussion because they contain highly nationalistic discourse and because ninth grade is the last compulsory school year, which means many Syrians ages 14 to 16 have access to it. Younger students in high school are considered “highly impressionable and politically ‘pure’” (Cole, 2007, p. 128), making history education at this stage more sensitive.

The study employs critical discourse analysis as an approach, which rejects “value-free” science and argues that “science, and especially scholarly discourse, are inherently part of and influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352), and such relations should be studied, never denied nor ignored. Critical theories along with discourse analysis seek “enlightenment and emancipation” by creating an awareness in agents. Fairclough (1989) clearly and directly states the two purposes of writing language and power “to help correct a widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance and change of social relations of power” and “to help increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness is the first step toward emancipation” (p. 1).

Within Critical Discourse Analysis, there are no ‘true’ representations of reality from which one can critique other, somehow less real, versions. Although some versions are more legitimate and held in place by more powerful processes, they are all equally products of human interaction and subject to the same dynamics (Philips & Hardy, 2002, p. 84).

Realizing this aspect about our historical accounts and who we are has the potential to produce independent, self-critical individuals, liberated from the “us vs. them” discourse. Students should understand that “history is not the past, but a reconstruction of the past” (Foster, 2012, p. 58).

## MAIN THEMES AND DISCUSSION

Throughout the analysis, and based on literature and theories on identity construction, the study assumes the following to be in the text:

- » Historical narratives attempt to construct a national identity by using discursive and linguistic procedures that include both content and forms.
- » Nations are constructs and imagined communities, and national identities are forms of social identities and thus are produced and reproduced and deconstructed discursively (Anderson, 1983/1991; Hall, 2000).
- » There is no such thing as one national identity, and different identities are “discursively constructed according to audience, setting, topic and substantive content.” National identities are therefore “malleable, fragile and, frequently, ambivalent and diffuse” (Wodak et al., 1999, p. 4; Hall, 2000).

While reading the text, the author took notes of main themes and emerging codes. During the second and third readings, the codes were compared with the categories already developed, based on the six master narrative features identified by Voss and Carretero (1994). The following are the main emerging themes and sub-themes found:

- » Inclusive-exclusive (us vs. them):
  - Arab nationalism and identity.
  - Syrianism.
  - Enemy construction and victimization.
- » Normative and moral orientation.
- » The affective dimension and presence of heroic characters and motives.
- » Absences, biases and silencing of other voices.

The discourse on national identity in the textbooks is closer to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century natural and unaltered identity. Collective identities are often linked to a territory “owned” by the collective. The notion of the modern nation-state is thereby translated into the past, although it did not exist at that time. This narrow perspective results in students’ viewing conflicts, even before the emergence of the nation states, as conflicts among national groups (Lopez & Carretero, 2012). The romantic goals of history are prominent, and they cause an essentialist understanding of the nation and others. The kind of identity presented in the textbooks doesn’t allow for any negotiation and is incompatible with the emancipatory nature of critical thinking and democratic ideals. Thus it hinders peace and reconciliation.

While the original textbook insists on a harmonious essentialist Arabic/Syrian identity and blames imperialism and Zionism for all the conflicts and problems, the edited textbook highlights the internal division by either deleting all the original references to the ruling Baath party and the Assads or by using negative associations to discuss them. For example, the glorified 1970s “corrective movement” in the original text is now called a “military coup led by a person called Hafez Al-Assad, who arrested his colleagues to rule Syria alone for about 30 years with iron and fire” (Syri-

an Education Commission, p. 34). In relation to the current conflict, one outstanding observation about the original textbook is that, although this textbook was published for the 2014-15 school year, the chapter on Syria ends with Bashar Al-Assad's winning the referendum in 2000 and continuing "the correction" path, which "asserts the importance of the rule of law, respect of order, dialogue, transparency, democracy, and good citizenship" (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 35). The textbook briefly refers to some of the Arab Spring uprisings elsewhere but blames them on external conspiracies. The edited textbook, on the other hand, refers to the conflict in Syria as the "Blessed March Revolution," narrating the uprising's direct and indirect causes, which have to do with the government's deficiency and brutality. The textbook also presents an emotional and graphic description of the Syrian regime's violence that turned the streets of Syria into "rivers of blood" (Syrian Education Commission, p. 35).

History textbooks in Syria have gone through constant revisions and editing to suit the demands of political and social realities. The formation of national identities in Syrian history textbooks can be understood only by understanding the historical context. Understanding that "historians impose order on the past for a particular purpose is perhaps the essential insight to understanding history as a human construct, as an imposition of our present understandings on the incomplete – and unbalanced – record of the past. And such an understanding is essential to a critical stance toward historical accounts," which "enables teachers to evaluate the history curriculum" (McDiarmid, 1994, p. 166).

Gilbert (2013) examines the patterns in the use of nationalist symbols by both the regime and the opposition during the conflict in Syria and attributes the increased Syrian nationalist discourse (not Arab, which is the ideology of the ruling party since 1970s) by the regime to the intensified sense of Syrian nationalism used by the opposition. Gilbert discusses "elite imposition" as an important ingredient for the construction of national identities. He maintains that the elite imposition emphasizes nationalism as a social construct that can be reconstructed when the elite change their views "to take advantage of opportunities and then impose the adopted perspective on the masses" (p. 10).

Education in general and history education in particular, though often raised in relation to the topic "never again," have been absent from the transitional justice discourse (Cole, 2007). *Facing History and Ourselves*, a nonprofit organization, is one of the few prominent endeavors maintaining that, along with trials, education has the moral duty to make a change and can help students face a recent history of mass violence by affirming that history is constructed by humans and events are the result of individual human decisions. The aim here is to show that history is not fixed, but is subject to many interpretations. As the conflict is still going on in Syria, it may not be possible to reach an agreement about a common narrative anytime soon. Cole (2007) suggests that in contexts where memories are still traumatized by present violence, short-term peace efforts may require avoiding debate and concentrating on a narrative of "false" harmony. However, ensuing democratization, as Cole argues, would "allow for continued work on the past, both to prevent it from continuing to exist

in subterranean forms that could reappear and poison the present, and to provide structures for deep moral disagreement to occur in a civil way” (p. 125). That is how reforms in history education can be a tool for democracy; to disagree about interpretations of the past and their implications without resorting to violence. Unanimity is rare in a democracy, but there has to be some “baseline degree of public acceptance for serious wrongdoing to be widely presented in the classrooms” (p. 126).

In the process of transitional justice in Syria, an argument is sure to arise about who is eligible to be called a victim and thus deserves healing. In conflict situations, many victims are “complex victims” (Moffett, 2015): those victimized by extreme injustice or crimes can also cause similar violations against others. Politicians usually use one side of the story to advance their own political agendas and legitimize their actions. Moffett (2015) argues that acknowledgment of victims’ suffering can be framed around the dominant narrative of the past, which may undermine some victims. For instance, the group Mothers de Plaza de Mayo, which consisted of mothers whose children were disappeared by the military regime in Argentina, rejected reparations because that meant accepting a “two devils,” discourse, thus legitimizing the state’s use of torture and disappearances of loved ones. Any narrative of reconciliation should acknowledge the complexity of the the situation and go beyond a “one devil” or a “two devils” approach.

One of the greatest challenges facing a society after a violent conflict is the “hardened or polarized identities” that hinder peace-building and trust (Cole & Murphy, 2010, p. 8). The future is still uncertain for Syria, and for the kind of narrative that will emerge and the way the recent conflict will be tackled – a conflict that has broken the false image of one harmonious Syrian nation and raised many questions about identity and belonging. Hall (1992) argues that it is widely accepted that values affect descriptions of the social world, and therefore our statements, no matter how factual, have an ideological dimension. There is a constant war among competing discourses over producing a narrative, and it results from the conflict that decides the “truth” of the situation. Will future history textbooks in Syria depict the current conflict as the “blessed revolution,” or will that revolution be associated with traitors and conspiracies? According to Hall (1992), it is power, rather than the facts about reality, that makes things “true.” But does that mean there is no hope for an ideal dialogue of equal powers? Is the future pessimistic, in that power will always dominate discourse? The aim of this study, as established earlier, is not to suggest that it is possible to demolish power. Power will always be there, but being aware of its existence and influence is one path to emancipation and change. Carretero et al. (1994) see that if history is unavoidably subject to values and ideological directions, its only possible way to objectivity is through the recognition of that subjectivity through critical history education.

One possibility for educationalists and textbook revisionists for the history curriculum after the Syrian conflict is eventually resolved will be is to consider the “broken mirror” image adopted in postwar Germany, which allows the observer to see events from different positions and perspectives. The broken mirror, according

to Berger (2012) would help undermine the works of those who attempt to construct national master narratives to reinforce essentialist and exclusive versions of national identity. Kennedy (2011), on the other hand, suggests a curriculum of forgiveness after atrocities, creating new narratives that allow victims as well as wrongdoers to work through past events with the goal of establishing a better and safer future for all. This forgiveness, however, should not entail giving up justice and accountability.

History education can also emphasize cosmopolitan values (Appiah, 2006; Hansen, 2012). Hansen (2012) presents models of cosmopolitanism from early 20<sup>th</sup>-century American pragmatic thinkers, such as Jane Addams and John Dewey, who viewed the world not in terms of identity but rather “in terms of problems – social, cultural, economic – that called on various levels and degrees of solidarity for solution” (p. 19). Alarmed by the wave of “nationalistic sentiment” and the readiness to resort to force, Dewey (1934) emphasized “the social aim” of education and encouraged the creation of a curriculum that promotes world patriotism and use of social sciences, especially geography and history, to promote peace and understanding (p. 203).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the role teachers and pedagogy play in the classroom. Although these are not the focus of the study, they are as important as the content of the textbook. Cole (2007) argues that the best history curriculum can be wasted if used by passive and untrained teachers. In post-conflict contexts, where creating new curricula and textbooks could be costly and time-consuming, teacher education can play an important role. Teachers can help students critically approach the textbooks available, analyze the bias and injustices, and promote a more enlightened appreciation of history.

## CONCLUSION

Many education systems around the world play a vital role in shaping collective memory and identity. Research reveals that history curriculum aims to construct a discourse on national identities as a way to control young people and how they view themselves and the Other. The study holds that national identities are constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed by discourse that is controlled by the dominant ideology. Focusing on conflict contexts, the study critically approaches discursive practices in textbooks; it presents a discussion of textbook analysis from Syria that problematizes the taken-for-granted realities presented in the textbook and critiques the kind of static, natural, fixed and unquestionable identity in which students are indoctrinated, which stands in the way of peace and justice.

The study advocates a disciplinary approach to history. Instead of working to construct national identity, history education should target the formation of active citizens who are aware of the world's problems and capable of carrying out change. Students should learn history not as a “fixed story underpinned by a vested social and political agenda, but because it provides them with the tools to evaluate the com-

peting stories and evidence they encounter and it instantiates the values of an open democratic society” (Foster, 2012, p. 59).

With the aim of exposing the constructive and manipulative nature of discourse, the study does not claim to offer any single perspective or stand but, rather, opens the door to discussion and contemplation on the subject. After all, the text above is also a “text that can allow many interpretations.

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**EDUKACJA HISTORYCZNA W SYTUACJACH KONFLIKTU.  
KU SPRAWIEDLIWOŚCI OKRESU PRZEJŚCIOWEGO I EMANCYPACJI**

**ABSTRAKT:** Strategie przejściowe stosowane podczas konfliktów często skupiają się na reformach politycznych i gospodarczych. Cole (2007) uwypukla inną ścieżkę reformy, a mianowicie edukację historyczną i jej związek z osiągnięciem takich celów, jak sprawiedliwość okresu przejściowego i pokój. Badania (Foster, 2012) wskazują, że w wielu krajach podręczniki nadal przedstawiają jednotorową, nacjonalistyczną narrację o przeszłości, która propaguje pewne punkty widzenia, tłumiąc przy tym lub ignorując inne. Nasze badania stosują krytyczne podejście do edukacji historycznej, jej wpływów na konstruowanie tożsamości, jej możliwych powiązań z emancypacją i społecznymi celami edukacji oraz dyskursywnego wytwarzania oficjalnych narracji. Przedstawiamy konkretny przypadek podręczników historii w targanej konfliktami Syrii, aby uwypuklić potrzebę krytycznego kształcenia historycznego w procesie wprowadzania sprawiedliwości okresu przejściowego i demokracji.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** edukacja historyczna, badanie podręczników, tożsamość, edukacja krytyczna, sprawiedliwość okresu przejściowego, emancypacja.