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## **Education as a Site of Memory: Developing a Research Agenda**

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## **Education as Site of Memory: developing a research agenda**

The field of memory studies tends to focus attention on the ‘3Ms’ – museums, monuments, memorials – as sites where memories are constructed, communicated, and contested. Where education is identified as a site for memory, the focus is often narrowly on what is or is not communicated within curricula or textbooks, assuming that schools simply pass on messages agreed or struggled over elsewhere. This article explores the possibilities opened when educative processes are not taken as stable and authoritative sites for transmitting historical narratives, but instead as spaces of contestation, negotiation and cultural production. With a focus on ‘difficult histories’ of recent conflict and historical injustice, we develop a research agenda for education as a site of memory and show how this can illuminate struggles over dominant historical narratives at various scales, highlighting agencies that educational actors bring to making sense of the past.

*Keywords:* memory studies, history teaching, difficult histories, education and conflict, historical memory

## **Introduction**

Former history teacher and Director of the Centre for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation in Bogotá, Colombia, Arturo Charria Hernández, encouraged his secondary school students to create what he called a ‘museum of memory.’ He asked his students, teenagers at an elite private school whose parents ran major companies and held political posts, to identify, thanks to conversations with family members, an object that for them and their families symbolized Colombia’s decades long armed conflict. Students returned with quotidian objects: the telephone a grandmother answered to receive demands for a bribe, the hammock that was the only refuge of an uncle while he was kidnapped, the invitation to a wedding not attended due to the dangers of traveling. They collected these into an exhibition, interwoven with fragments from interviews with their family members. Students from a state secondary school, socioeconomically much less privileged and therefore often affected by different types of experiences of Colombia’s conflict, many of whose parents arrived in Bogotá from other parts of the country having been displaced by violence, visited the exhibition. They then invited the students from the private school to tour their own ‘museum of memory,’ which was also filled with poignant and quotidian objects, each with a story to tell about the ways in which the long conflict had touched families.

This example illustrates an active approach to working with education as a site of memory. Here, teachers encourage students to seek out and engage with their families’ memories, connecting these to the historical narratives they receive from elsewhere, - including their school textbooks, the media, and informal educational spaces ranging from museum exhibitions to street art -, to work to understand the dynamics of conflict in Colombia. In this paper, we seek to highlight the promise of actively engaging with memories and memory work in pedagogical practices, in textbooks, in curricula and informal educational spaces. We, also, however, argue that even in the absence of such active, self-aware uptake of memory work by educators, education is still a site where memories are constructed, communicated and struggled over. We work to open a dialogue between scholarly work in the fields of memory studies and education in order to develop this argument and to show the space that it opens for future research.

The idea that education is a site of memory has not been comprehensively developed in either education or memory studies literatures, or in related disciplines of sociology, history or anthropology for reasons we will discuss in this article. By bringing these literatures together into conversation, we explicate two main ideas: first, that educational structures, policies, and practices not only transmit, but also shape memory. Second, that various forms of agency in education, including those enacted by policymakers, those reflected in international agendas and globalizing processes, and, crucially, the agencies of educators and young people, are involved in attempts to stabilize or transform memories and to make them meaningful in the present and for the future.

We organize the paper by first presenting insights from the field of memory studies and its conceptualization of memory as an inherently social process, influenced by spatial relations, place, and technology, that is multiple and shifting, imbued with power and its contestation. These ideas disrupt the more linear and unproblematic ways in which narratives of the past are often understood in educational research. We then present insights from educational research that sheds light on the dynamic practices, processes and relationships at play in formal and informal educational encounters. The educational research highlights the complex, multi-scalar and dynamic processes and relationships involved in teaching and learning and troubles the assumption in much memory studies literature that education's role is confined to simply and effectively transmitting 'official' narratives of the past. In this article we present a conceptual and theoretical basis for a research agenda around education as a site of memory, drawing on our ongoing interdisciplinary work together as part of the Transformative History Education project. While our arguments are informed by our empirical studies, which we will publish separately, here we do not seek to describe in detail the possible pedagogical processes through which memory might be embraced, but rather to highlight the ways that understanding education and educational spaces as sites where memory is struggled over and produced opens new avenues for research.

We focus in this article on 'difficult histories' because these have been the focus of much research related to education and memory in the fields of interest for this paper. Many of the concepts that we work with in this paper have been developed within research that engages with histories of violent conflict, often focused in and on the global south. The challenges arising from engagement with 'difficult histories' should be contextualised with due care. Olick (2007) claims a new willingness of political authorities to disclose, disinter and redress 'difficult histories', representative of a new

‘politics of regret’. Levy and Sznaider (2010) go further, suggesting that memories and legacies of ‘difficult histories’ have reconfigured the governing rationalities of political authorities around principles of contrition, remorse and retrospection; states must now at least be seen to engage with histories of conflict, violence, and historical injustice. The development of transitional justice as a field of international practice and an expectation for (certain) states emerging from periods characterised by human rights violations and violent conflict has contributed towards an entrenched commitment to remembering ‘difficult histories’ as a means of ameliorating the present (Author f, 2017). Educational reform is increasingly conceptualised as a form of transitional justice (e.g. Bellino, 2016; Author a et al. 2017; Davies, 2017; Clarke-Habibi, 2018), drawing attention to the peacebuilding potential of changes to the ways in which the past is presented in schools. Research around education in emergencies has also identified history curriculum as an area ripe for reform in order to harness what it describes as the peacebuilding potential of education (e.g. Berkeman and Zembylas, 2011; Psaltis et al., 2017; Author a, 2015).

Yet we must be attentive to the varying practices and processes through which ‘difficult histories’ are made visible and therefore engaged. These influential global policy agendas in transitional justice and peacebuilding, that include prescriptions for initiatives and interventions in education, make ‘difficult histories’ visible and urgent in some cases but not others. Countries in the global south (are encouraged to) implement comprehensive transitional justice strategies, whereas struggles for transitional justice or other forms of acknowledgement and reparation, for example, for the legacies of slavery and colonialism in western countries find less support and are not framed with the same urgency on global agendas (Burton, 2011; Nagy, 2008). There is an attendant risk that the complex challenges of educational engagement with ‘difficult histories’ is delineated as a problem specific only to those contexts designated as ‘conflict-affected’ when, in contexts of the global north, the role and place of educational engagements with ‘difficult histories’ of war, colonial legacies, and historical responsibility remain deeply contested and politicised, and often silenced. The struggles to decolonise the curriculum in the UK make this clear, though such efforts are rarely conceptualised as relevant to transitional justice or to building peace (Nagy, 2008; Zembylas, 2017). While in this paper we draw upon research focused primarily (though not exclusively) in Southern contexts, where education has often been framed as part of transitional and peacebuilding processes, we

insist upon the pertinence of the research agenda around education as a site of memory for societies in the global north as well as in the global south.

### **Memory studies and memory work**

The growth of ‘Memory Studies’, as a self-identifying disciplinary field, emerged in part due to the tension between ‘objective’ historical knowledge of the past, as a task of academic historians, and an interest in memory as a site of normative and political significance in the present and for the future (Roediger and Wertsch, 2008). The interest in the politicisation of memory generated formative concerns in memory studies including over recovering and dignifying memories of marginal, counter or subaltern experiences elided by dominant or elite groups (CCCS, 2013), on the one hand, and around the anxiety that, in the accelerated experience of late modernity, we live in an age of “too much” memory (Nora, 1989; Huyssen, 2012) on the other. In exploring these two currents, memory studies emerged from and maintains a commitment to exploring the ways that the past is made meaningful in the present, in relationships between subjects and in their relationships to social contexts and institutions.

Scholarship in memory studies tends to approach memory as socially accomplished (Olick, 2007). Rather than considering the individual or subjective accounts of memory, memory is understood as a collective accomplishment, not simply mediated but structured by social arrangements (Halbwachs, 1992). Jelin (2003) develops this idea by considering the labour necessary to construct memory – memory work – as social labour that is always situated and contextualized: ‘Memory is not an object that is simply there to be extracted, but rather it is produced by active subjects that share a culture and an ethos’ (Jelin, 2003: 68). Memory is work and requires work; ongoing interpretation, dialogues and reflection on meanings are important components of the ways we negotiate and make sense of the past in the present. As Hoskins (2011) describes, individual, collective and cultural remembering inhabit ongoing, dynamic and connected sets of relationships, realized through relationships to material artefacts, places and technologies. These approaches to memory that recognize the dynamic and on-going work between agents, memory ‘tools’ and social contexts, are instructive because they do not reproduce naturalized conceptions of memory as extractive or archival, and therefore risk locating the past as an immutable and constant site. Rather, especially in educational contexts where the past is often treated simply as a stable object of transmission, we must

remain empirically attentive to the changing and contingent claims that are made of and about the past.

The active, ‘performative’ and spatial dimensions of memory are critical. Memory is maintained within ‘everyday’ milieus (Tolia-Kelly 2004), as well as seemingly embodied at sites designated as historically significant, such as sites of atrocity (Koonz 1994). Work in memory studies has concentrated, particularly, on sites of heritage such as memorials, museums and monuments as the primary spaces and places at which “what we value” and “what we wish to pass onto future generations” is communicated (Deacon et al., 2004: 7). The duty to remember is often explicitly invoked at proliferating ‘spectacular’ commemorative activity, especially in the service of histories of nation states (Frost and Laing, 2013).

While the formal heritage (e.g. the exhibit at the museum or the memorial) can present the past as a single narrative, there are always multiple, overlapping, conflicting and often unrelated understandings of the events, material and cultural artefacts that are also present, produced and enabled through everyday practices and narrative creation. These alternative narratives can be provoked and facilitated through creative practice; something that can be desirable when dealing with a difficult and contested past. As Author f, (2015, p. 392) has argued “we must therefore pay attention to the practices, forces and contexts that make memories of atrocities either persistent or changing, and the agents that are implicated in attempts to transform or stabilize them”. Memory studies, therefore, offers an illustration of the ways in which researchers can be attuned to and capture the interplay between the desired narrative, the official version, the powerful version of history conveyed in particular sites (and struggles over control of these) and the actual meanings that (different groups of) people make of the past. This includes the memories they bring from other experiences, spaces and places, the silencing processes that value certain memories and not others, and the importance of emotional and embodied practices and responses. This lens on the social production of memory, on the labour or work of memory, we argue, can usefully be turned to education to help make sense of the ways in which the past, present and future are constructed within and beyond classrooms.

### **Education as a site of memory**

Educational spaces as sites of memory production and contestation have not gained the attention that other sites of memory have. In the first edition of Benedict Anderson’s

seminal book on identity, belonging and nationalism, Anderson (1983) identified education as one of the key institutional mechanisms for instilling nationalism. However, as Sobe (2014) notes, the second edition of *Imagined Communities* (1991) abandons its interest in education, focusing instead on the map, the museum, and the census as the three institutions of power through which we can best understand how imagined communities are constituted. Sobe (2014:331) attributes the absence of education in Anderson's work as at least partly to "an erroneous tendency in academic scholarship to treat schools and what happens at schools as derivative of tensions and social compacts that have been worked out in other arenas" (see also, Sobe 2009).

### ***Schools, nationalism and narratives of ethnic conflict***

In much of the scholarship on nationalism, and related work on the origins of ethnic conflict, schools are seen as sites of transmission of ideas rehearsed and clarified in other spaces. Educational spaces, then, are spaces to which ideas are passed down and pumped out to be passively received. While we disagree with the ways in which these understandings locate agency for constructing and struggling over memory far away from classrooms and, often, even from educational policymakers or textbook commissioners and authors, they do effectively capture the sense of education as a locus of power for the transmission of memory, important for its role in ensuring continuity across generations.

For example, in scholarship of nationalism and identity, scholars highlight how political actors often employ memory as an instrument for achieving control, strategically utilising remembrance to legitimize political behaviours (Hayden 1992). Here, education is seen to simply play a strategic role within the politics of memory by institutionalising a collective history so that it can be passed on to generations. In this respect schools are seen to disperse an image of the nation, and promote loyalty (Hobsbawm, 1996). Therefore, the transmission of nationalist propaganda through "common rituals and practices toward iconic images of state and nation" (Gallagher, 2004:23) positions education as a tool used to assimilate populations under a common historical narrative (see Choi Tse, 2007). Commentators on ethnicity and nationalism view these historical narratives as serving to construct a group identity through the creation of a 'long common past' (Weber, 2007:150). In this respect Churchill (1996) suggests that education can help to not only construct, but also impose a shared sense of history that instils a sense of pride in the common past. From a political perspective, history education is seen therefore to aid in the homogenisation of citizens. This argument, and empirical examples in which

divisive and ethno-nationalist narratives in curriculum and textbooks have been identified as contributing towards conflict dynamics (e.g. Blieker and Young-ju, 2000; Kaufman, 1997; Lerch, 2016), has led to the inclusion of the revision of history curriculum and the removal of “divisive content” amid the guidance notes of teaching and learning (2010) widely distributed by the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies.

### ***Beyond transmission***

Sobe (2014) urges scholars to move beyond an understanding of education (and schools) as merely (and unproblematically) transmitters of narratives neatly crafted by the powerful, arguing instead that “schools are less stable and less authoritative sites for disseminating social and political ideals than they are taken to be by some scholars. Schools are sites of contestation, negotiation, and cultural production” (Sobe, 2014: 313). The fact that schools are not stable, guaranteed sites for the transmission of curricular messages is well demonstrated by education scholars, who have explored the multiple meanings taken from, for example history textbooks and lessons (e.g. Bellino, 2016), and whose studies of pedagogical processes highlight the agencies and subjectivities of children and teachers (e.g. Hopkins and Srivakash, 2012; Silova et al., 2018; Yemini, 2018). In some cases, educational researchers have turned their attention to memory, highlighting the importance, for example, of autobiography, oral history and narrative methodologies in challenging dominant constructions of the past and dominant neoliberal educational prescriptions (e.g. Harding and Gabriel, 2011; Aydarova, et al., 2016), or proposing pedagogical interventions that, like the approach outlined in the introduction, actively embrace the construction of memory (e.g. Corredor et al., 2018). However, these engagements with memory are yet to fully conceptualise education as a fourth site for memory production and to apply the theoretical tools of memory studies to understand formal and informal educational practices.

This understanding of education, as a site of memory *work* rather than of passive memory transmission, is one that memory studies has yet to fully embrace. This is evidenced when Roediger and Wertsch’s (2008) call for education to become a key discipline in memory studies; they present sites of education such as schools, curriculum and textbooks along the lines established in the nationalism scholarship, as worthy of study. This is because of the messages that they deliver about the past to students – including by inculcating “almost unconscious attitudes” (Roediger and Wertsch, 2008: 14) – and the inevitable flaws and omissions in the narratives of national history presented

through education. If Anderson's (1991) position that education is not a primary area of analysis because all it does is successfully pass on messages struggled over and determined elsewhere can be seen as starting point for education within memory studies, then Roediger and Wertsch (2008) offer an alternative: education is interesting and worthy of analysis precisely because it is so successful at passing on messages struggled over and determined elsewhere – its curricula and textbooks are useful sites to understand more about the content of those messages, their omissions, and what implications these narratives might have for identity and belonging.

Much educational research has concentrated here – there are impressive volumes focused on textbook analysis, pointing out the struggles to arrive at particular historical narratives as well as the omissions and injustices present in those narratives that do make it into the pages of textbooks (e.g. Williams & Bokhorst-Heng, 2016; Bentrovato et al., 2016). We argue that this kind of research is important for understanding the ways in which memories are socially produced and contested in education but is still insufficient in its scope. Policy, curriculum and textbooks certainly matter, but so too (and perhaps more so) does what happens in classrooms, between teachers and students, including what those teachers and students bring with them into classrooms, thanks to their unique lived experiences with memory in other spaces and places, as well as the outcomes of those classroom encounters in terms of the meanings about the past that teachers and students take away.

Therefore, we offer a third position on the place of education in memory studies. Education remains interesting and worthy of study in agreement with Roediger and Wertsch (2008), but we challenge their assumption that education is a static context where a singular message can be successfully passed onto passive receptacles, a position that education research clearly refutes. Instead, we seek to position education as a fourth site of memory production – alongside the museum, the monument and the memorial – wherein the work and the struggles of memory making might be glimpsed and analysed.

### **Understanding education as a site of memory: structures, policies and identities**

In the following section we introduce areas of educational research that help to build a research agenda around education as a site of memory. We attend to the organizational structures of education, and the roles of nation states and supranational entities and agendas in shaping these structures, drawing attention to the importance of the broader educational landscapes within which narratives of history are conveyed and the ways that

these will vary according to political, social and cultural contexts. We also attend to educational processes, practices and the policy decisions, particularly around curriculum for and pedagogical objectives of history teaching. And, crucially we highlight the agency of actors within education, focusing here on the ways in which the identities, lived experiences, embodiment and affect of teachers and learners are important aspects of a research agenda that aims to take education as a site of memory seriously. These are presented in separate sections. However, it is the relationships between these elements and the ways that they enable and constrain the social production of memory in and beyond education that we highlight as worthy of study.

### ***The state and the structures of education***

Smith and Vaux (2003) offer a helpful starting point for considering the ways that the state and structures of education shape history education within the context of wider political dynamics. They characterise education systems and their institutions as: assimilationist, separatist or integrationist. Assimilationist school structures allow for the reinforcement of collective historical narratives by offering “single institutions operating according to the values of the dominate tradition” (Smith and Vaux 2003: 46). Consequently, alternative historical perspectives are often denied and ethnically and politically exclusive versions of history are enforced. Iraqi education under the Ba’ath party provides a vivid illustration of this form of education system. The space for challenging the dominant historical narrative was aggressively denied and teacher agency was restricted through active policy initiatives; such as ideological surveillance of schools, and teaching appointments that prevented education staff from teaching in schools whose intakes were ethnically affiliated (Author k, 2015).

Alternatively, separatist school systems, which are characterised by “separate institutions each serving relatively homogeneous populations” (Smith and Vaux, 2003: 15) provide minority communities the space to resist the dominant imposed narratives. Separatist schools are usually defined by identity markers, such as faith or ethnicity. Even with an obligation to follow state defined history curriculum, homogenous intakes open avenues to alternative sites of memory production. Such school structures often transmit alternate historical perspectives through wider school activities. For example, the celebration of ethnically specific historical achievements such as battles, or the commemoration of martyrs, poets or artists (Author k, 2018).

Such historical narratives are often ethno-centric and may emphasise a sense of collective victimhood or threat from external actors in times of insecurity (Pingel, 2008). Separatist structures are often found in conflict or post-conflict environments where consensus over history has been impossible to negotiate, for instance in Northern Ireland where the vast majority of young people are educated in faith based (Catholic or Protestant) schools (Gallagher, 2004), in Bosnia Herzegovina where three parallel education systems continue to offer schooling to the three distinct communities who were party to the 1992-1995 conflict (Torsti, 2009), or in Lebanon where a highly privatised educational system segregates students based on identity indicators (Akar, 2017). Less frequently acknowledged are processes of segregation within relatively peaceful states. Separatist education structures can present themselves in a myriad of guises (Davies, 2008), for example, in Canada where indigenous young people and settler Canadians experience very different schools and have limited opportunities to learn together (Ball, 2004), or in South Africa where socioeconomic segregation largely maintains the enforced racialized segregation of apartheid (Staeheli and Hammett, 2013).

Lastly, integrationist systems are defined by “common or shared institutions with diversity represented within the population of each institution” (Smith 2003: 49) This institutional arrangement should technically provide space for diverse understandings of history to be present within the classroom, yet examples of its successful implementation are difficult to find. Smith and Vaux’s institutional classifications provide important conceptual distinctions and demonstrate the need for an attention to educational structures and policies and the ways in which they shape the possibilities for how memory can be explicitly framed within schools. However, we would argue that the typologies need to be further developed to include complexities of education systems increasingly oriented towards the logics of globalised competition and economic productivity, and therefore structuring their policy landscapes accordingly (Verger et al., 2018a; Subramanian, 2018). For example, a growing body of research explores the implications of marketisation and privatisation (e.g. Srivastava and Walford, 2018; Ball and Olmedo, 2011) on education including in contexts affected by conflict (Verger et al., 2018b). But relatively little attention has been paid to how the introduction of the logics of competition and a diversity of new educational providers maps onto the above distinctions in terms of structural organisation of education systems (assimilationist, separatists, integrationist) or, crucially, how these changes affect education’s role in forming citizens and shaping identity. In Liberia, the policy direction is to entirely hand over the delivery of state

education to private providers in part justified by the degree to which the educational system was made vulnerable by the nation's armed conflict (Verger et al., 2017; Quaynor, 2015). The question of how profit motivated, globally sponsored (for example with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation), companies will choose (or not choose) to deliver curricula around Liberia's armed conflict in their schools – which often use scripted pedagogies and unqualified teachers – is an open one and points to the importance of locating a research agenda around education as a site for memory within a wider understanding of the globalized political economy of education.

### ***History education in policy – curriculum and pedagogical objectives***

The ways that policymakers and curriculum developers choose to remember the past in history education has clear implications for the ways that classrooms become sites of memory. Debates focus on the place of history in the overall curriculum; where history starts and ends, how and if the recent past is to be considered, and which events and dynamics need remembering. There are many examples of the ‘difficult histories’ we have concerned ourselves with in this article being excluded from history curriculum – ranging from the well-known Rwandan moratorium on history teaching after the 1994 genocide (recently lifted) (King, 2010), to the Sri Lankan decision to end history at independence (Sanchez Meertens, 2013), to the absence of empire and the dark parts of colonial history in the teaching on British history (Burton, 2011). Research into these contexts where difficult pasts are not formally part of history curricula inevitably shows that young people learn about and engage with these histories in different ways, within and beyond their classrooms (e.g. Sanchez Meertens, 2018; Author a, 2015). These curricular decisions do not negate education as a site of memory production, instead they illustrate the sanctioned production of silences about certain memories and open spaces for researchers to explore how memories of difficult histories are produced and struggled over in the absence of their acknowledgement in educational curricula.

It is also important to note that globalisation also affects decisions about curriculum and how (and if) history is framed within it. Elmersjö's (2014) analysis of history textbooks in European countries between 1919 and 2009 documents a general decline and shift in tone of nationalistic content since the end of the Second World War, and a rise in internationalised or transnational history. These trends are furthered by a move away from history as a taught subject in many parts of the world, particularly across

the Americas and in Africa, in favour of a social studies subject in which history is combined with geography and civics, and delivered thematically, with attention to national as well as regional and global histories (Author a, 2015). Regardless of whether taught as history or social studies or in some other form, the erosion of space and time for humanities subjects under the move to performative, competitive education systems are also likely to affect the space, resources, priority for the teaching of historical narratives in schools, and therefore the space for more creative engagement with memory work.

Curricular decisions and possibilities also have clear implications for pedagogical choices, including at national level where the objectives of history education might be articulated in teaching materials and through the pedagogical choices advocated. Peter Seixas (2004) identifies three pedagogical approaches to history education: ‘the collective memory approach’, the ‘postmodern approach’ and the ‘disciplinary approach’. The collective memory approach focuses on the contents of the curriculum and delivering prescriptive historical ‘fact’, it therefore provides a single narrative of the past that suits wider political aspirations. This approach best describes the traditional nationalistic approach to history teaching detailed above. In this sense elites may have a “vested interest in retaining simple narratives that flatter their own group and promote group unity by emphasising sharp differences between themselves and other groups” (Cole and Barsalou, 2006: 5). A review of teaching about recent violent conflict found this approach still predominates, despite global policy invocations for approaches that do more to promote critical thinking and are therefore thought to do more to contribute towards peacebuilding (Author a, 2015).

Alternatively, the postmodern approach to history education can be defined by multiperspectivity. This necessitates the presentation of narratives of the past formulated by different groups in society and encourages young people to evaluate their various approaches to the past. It tackles family and community narratives of the past and attempts to address the ‘emotional dimensions’ of history (McCully, 2012). The postmodern approach “aims to help students criticise and build on their background knowledge and highlights the dialectical relationship between different communal histories” (Cole, 2007). Critiques of postmodern approaches argue that multiperspectivity can further relativism and the denial of established but politically inconvenient truths (Seixas, 2004). Finally, the ‘disciplinary’ approach to history education aims to convey familiarity with the sources and methods through which historical accounts are constructed. McCully (2012) argues that trust building and reconciliation are best

promoted through a curriculum building skills and values, rather than a content orientated one. This is because a skill –based curriculum would teach that the value and meaning of documents and accounts change over time, that interpretations of the past can be challenged through primary and secondary sources, that diversity can be understood, and empathy can be developed, and that individual choices can affect history.

Seixas' (2004) approaches offer distinct examples of how teacher training and wider curricular decisions influence the ways that history is expected to be taught in the classroom. However, they only point us to what is expected which can only give us part of the picture. In conclusion to a project exploring history teaching about the violent past in Rwanda, Cole (2007) finds that for education about contested and difficult pasts to contribute positively towards peace and co-existence, pedagogy and opportunities for teacher training and support are more important than any curriculum review or new textbook. This reflects growing concerns within the educational literature that there is often limited attention paid to what is actually going on in classrooms and to the learning outcomes that these practices can generate (Schweisfurth, 2014; Alexander, 2015; Author g et al., 2018). This leads to assumptions about the links between educational inputs and outcomes. For example, textbook availability is often used as a proxy for textbook use in classrooms; a flawed assumption revealed in a recent study by Author g et al. (2017) in Rwanda which found that despite being available, textbooks are rarely systematically used in Rwandan classrooms. Similarly, research with teachers tasked with building peace through history, civics, or citizenship education in a range of countries reveals some of the challenges associated with the assumption that changing educational content (and materials, like textbooks) will lead in a straightforward way to more peaceful learners and societies (Horner et al., 2015).

Instead, understanding education as a site for memory requires that we abandon the assumption that a single, state-sanctioned, historical narrative that includes difficult and/or recent histories is necessarily part of a curriculum that all schools within a bounded nation state are required to deliver. We urge researchers to investigate carefully how decisions about history teaching are made and what these enable and obscure, to explore what is and is not included in history curriculum and how this curriculum is (or is not) translated into key learning resources like textbooks. The historical narratives conveyed within history education curricula, we suggest is something to be investigated, with attention to the dynamics highlighted here, rather than assumed as a starting point for a research project. Furthermore, we urge researchers to go beyond what is written in the

textbook and explore the ways that teachers are trained and supported, and how teachers and learners experience history education and the everyday practices of memory that take place in classrooms, through their creative and expansive methods and in dialogue with other spaces of memory work and as part of broader critical reflections on the past in the present.

### **Identities: teachers and students**

Teachers and students are central to transitional justice and education in emergencies initiatives that seek to mobilise history education for reconciliation and the construction of peace. As Horner et al. (2015) explain teachers are often expected to carry significant responsibility in peacebuilding. Research that seeks to interrogate their experiences of, attitudes towards, reasons for teaching (or not teaching) about difficult histories inevitably finds a diversity of accounts, linked to teachers identities and experiences and to the wider social, economic, political and cultural dynamics that shape their interactions and possibilities. Weldon's (2017) research with history teachers in South Africa foregrounds the importance for teachers of professional development opportunities centred around exploring and understanding their own experiences of apartheid and legacies of these on their attitudes and worldviews, before attempting to meaningfully address the apartheid past in their classrooms.

In Cambodia, attempts to introduce a new history textbook and standardize delivery of history education covering the period of the ‘Khmer Rouge’ genocide faced difficulties, especially arising among teachers tasked with the delivery of the new curriculum. The topic of the Khmer Rouge had been absent from the public-school curriculum throughout the 1990s and 2000s until advocacy by the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), seeking to engage young people with Cambodia’s ‘difficult history’ and instigate greater intergenerational dialogue, bore fruit and agreement with the Ministry of Education. The new textbook, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979* (Dy, 2007), broadly reproduces a minimalist, singular, state-preferred reading of the genocide that underpins Cambodia’s longstanding policy of “national reconciliation” – focusing principally on the guilt of the Khmer Rouge leadership while largely exculpating the role of ‘lower-level’ perpetrators – but it also touches on topics of great political sensitivity, including the role of foreign powers in precipitating the genocide. Accompanying the textbook, a training manual was provided for secondary education teachers to assist in the delivery of the curriculum. A survey of teachers highlighted the

importance of taking seriously the agency and experiences of instructors in such contexts: older teachers felt that the new textbook failed to convey the brutality of the regime; some teachers queried whether the topic of genocide should be delivered within the existing history of Cambodia or as a separate subject item; and some younger teachers, who had not themselves experienced the regime, were resistant to delivering the topic at all. The different responses of the teachers illuminate the challenges of implementing standardized history curricula, where competing readings of the past might exist. Moreover, in attempting to promote intergenerational dialogue underpinned by a singular account of genocide, the risk of simplifying and flattening invariably complex and conflicted experiences of difficult histories is exposed, as vernacular, embodied and more granular memories might be suppressed (Author f, 2017: 112-114).

Bellino's (2017) ethnographic work in Guatemala explores varied experiences within the same national system (in its public and private incarnations) and the (again varied) ways that young people make sense of a violent past in a violent and unequal present. She develops the concept of 'wait citizenship' to explain the ways in which young people interpret the implications of past violence on their opportunities for civic engagement in the present in ways that are intimately connected to the memories they hear and help to construct in families and communities marked by past and present violence. Sanchez Meerten's ethnographic work in Sri Lanka (2013) and survey work in Colombia (2018) explores the interplays between young people's in and out of school learning about conflict, and between historical fact and popular understanding. In Colombia, classrooms are just one source of information about the decades long conflict, and the authority and lasting impact of this source is often trumped by popular understandings promoted in media and entertainment.

Hart (2011) highlights the contradictions for young Palestinians of tensely crossing check points where armed Israeli soldiers permit (or don't) their daily journey to school. These encounters inevitably shape young people's understandings of conflict as much (or more?) than the historical narratives and pedagogical approaches that they eventually encounter in their classrooms and, crucially, they form part of these young people's engagement in the construction of memory – the check point is, in effect, a space for learning. As Author i (2018) has shown, young people often have to be enrolled into the 'correct' practices of remembering and remembrance, which are ultimately aligned with the achievement of a particular goal or outcome. Author i (2018) describes how

young people in the UK are engaged in the history of the First World War via the vehicle of battlefield tourism, through the hybrid experience as a ‘student, pilgrim and tourist’. Accompanied by serving military, the tours invoke a relationship with the dead (and living) British soldiers, assuming a connection that may not necessarily exist for the students at all. The sense of duty instilled in these young people to remember, through their immersion in remembrance language, rituals and emblems produces a way of remembering and the reassurance and production of the idea that it is important to do so. That said, it is also worth noting a minority of student participants who, like their counterparts in the New Zealand study (Sheehan and Davison, 2017), sought to ‘push back’ against what they felt was a standardised narrative seeking to promote British national identity in a commemorative context (Author i, 2018).

We argue that an engagement with memory prompts us to pay attention to the ways in which young people learn about, engage with, and come to understand their pasts in their classrooms, as well as beyond them. Young people exert agency in multiple ways – listening to their lessons, being bored during them, pushing back against them, internally questioning the narratives they are hearing, likening (or not) the accounts in textbooks to other in popular culture, making connections (or not) to heritage sites, etc. - and we encourage research with young people that is open and attentive to their roles in shaping, resisting and working over memory. Likewise, their teachers will be agential in relating to students, in bringing (or not) their experiences and politics to their teachings of history, and in their personal responses and decisions to the educational policies and processes that shape the ways in which and spaces for encounters with ‘difficult pasts’ in their classrooms. It is important to acknowledge that the learning and memory making that takes place in family, community, digital, and other spaces may offer alternative narratives of the past for both young people and teachers, which may disrupt or confirm those which are encountered at school and to seek to understand, as authors like Sanchez Meertens (2018) and Bellino (2017) do, the interplay of these various experiences. Therefore, how teachers and young people choose to engage, rupture or ignore state-sanctioned narratives of the past, and the multiple relationships between and among teachers and students in navigating the past, is an essential aspect of exploring the ways that education is a site of memory.

### **A research agenda for education as a site of memory**

In this article, we have argued that there is a need to unsettle the assumption that education actors do not have agency to shape, disrupt, omit or amplify the message that education curricula, textbooks and processes transmit. In other words, we have argued that education and educational processes are sites for memory work. This implies the need to identify and interrogate the processes of curriculum design and delivery while engaging with the ways that teachers teach, challenge and construct memories of the past in the classroom and other learning spaces. Concurrently, and importantly, this approach takes the knowledges of young people as a legitimate starting point for analysing how their multiple histories are shaped by learning processes and engagement with the formal curricula, and how they too challenge and construct memories, rather than simply and passively receiving messages determined elsewhere. We remain interested in the contents of education policies, curricula and textbooks and in the narratives that they seek to transmit, but without any assumption about their straightforward transmission or any illusions that they are the only sources of history and memory for young people. Instead we are interested in how teachers and young people make sense of them (or do not) alongside and within their wider and more complex engagements with the past. All these facets of the delivery and receipt of history are part of the memory work that goes on in formal and informal education encounters and that can be explored empirically as we take this research agenda forward.

We conclude this paper where we began it – flies on the wall as young Colombians from schools on opposite ends of the social spectrum tour each other’s museums of memory. The museums of memory approach, as designed by Arturo Charria Hernández, does the following: 1) it takes the memories and experiences of young people and their families as starting points for a wider discussion about the violent past; 2) it recognises that these starting points will be different; 3) it encourages young people to explore and question these starting points, putting them into conversation and dialogue with other accounts and memories, including, but not limited, to those that they might find in their textbooks and other ‘official’ memories; 4) from this point of dialogue, it encourages meaningful learning across difference, learning that could be valuable for wider processes of transitional justice and peacebuilding.

Arturo is an example of a reflexive practitioner, attuned to the debates and ideas we consider important to understanding education as a site of memory work. The example of his work highlights the pedagogical possibilities of bringing memory into classrooms, as does the research of scholars like Silova and colleagues (2018) and Corredor and

colleagues (2018). Throughout the paper, however, we have highlighted how education is a site of memory even when it is not actively recognised as such. To make sense of this, we need to understand the workings of education and the multiple scales and agencies (of political actors and power, of globalization, of educators, and of young people) that shape and contest education, and we need to understand the social processes by which memories are constructed, discarded, reified and contested.

To conclude, this paper presents a research agenda for education as a site of memory. Firstly, we call for educational research that recognises the understanding - developed in memory studies scholarship - that memories are socially accomplished, multiple and struggled over. We offer an approach that views the social accomplishment of memory in education as multi-scalar with attention paid to (1) the structures and constraints of an education system, its policies around history curriculum, and the pedagogical objectives for learning history; and (2) the relationships, identities and embodied lived experiences of those who enact education in their daily lives, namely educators and young people. Crucially, this approach also explores the relationships between the different scales and so investigates the multiple ways that textbooks and curricular guidance may or may not shape the social construction of memories, rather than assuming singular and linear pathways for these. Finally, the processes of memory construction and contestation that research might illuminate are understood as temporal and contingent, serving, as memory studies research highlights, a purpose in a particular moment for particular actors, and shifting over time. This approach acknowledges the multiplicity of narratives about the past, bringing scope to both explore the authority and production of official histories in a more nuanced way and to attend to the continuity and change within these narratives, as well as being alive to issues of power, control and resistance.

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