

After empire: the politics of history education in a post-colonial world

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### *Introduction*

Clark (2006) suggests that politicised debates over the content and delivery of history education in many states are indicative of wider concerns over the saliency and future health of the nation and its national story. Anxieties about how 'our history' is taught to 'our children' draw on a range of debates concerning the role of national historiography and its impact on curriculum content and textbook production, pedagogical development, and the politics of identity and memory.

In many states, an influential driver of the 'history wars' has proven the multiple legacies of colonialism and the complex challenges of the post-colonial world. For those states emancipated from the colonial 'yoke', the post-colonial period has encouraged critical revisionism with regards to the historical past in the wake of decolonisation. This has typically involved the simultaneous rejection of transnational historical narratives imposed by the colonisers in favour of post-colonial forms of national history and the adoption of critical foci regarding the experience and legacies of the colonial period. In states where widespread colonial settlement was an important feature of colonisation, public debates have also been motivated in part by the critical re-evaluation of settler nationalism, particularly the treatment of indigenous peoples. A crucial element in this post-colonial reimagining of the colonial past has been the critical reassessment of ethno-racial and socio-political ideologies that informed and sought to legitimate empire.

The post-colonial world also presents significant challenges for former colonising states in reimagining national and transnational history. Post-colonial transition necessitates former colonisers to accept they are no longer able dictate the previously hegemonic terms of colonial relationships. They are also required to not only revise the transnational parameters of colonial citizenship and identity but also the historical narratives established during the period of empire that underpinned them. Many of the challenges of this transition are evidenced through the fractious and divisive 'history wars' about how post-colonising states should teach colonial past in schools. The following chapter will explore the conceptual and empirical complexities facing post-colonising states in teaching the colonial past, considering whether they adopt celebratory or critical perspectives or seek to erase empire from national narrative after empire.

### *The Politics of the 'history wars'*

The content of state-sponsored history curricula has emerged as one of the most contentious and contested elements of debates about the colonial past, thus indicating many protagonists share a belief in the enduring power of historical education to shape national and other identities (Haydn 2012). Those seeking to influence history education are drawn from across civil society and include representatives from politics, academia, and the media as well as educationalists and sectional interest groups. Phillips (1999) argues that the drivers for the 'history wars' originated during the 1960s as a product of and response to multiple social, political, economic and cultural phenomena connected to the end of European colonial hegemony, the emergence of new supranational forms of political union, post-colonial migration to Europe, and the Cold War.

A number of key 'frontlines' were established during this period and have since proven fundamental in shaping on-going debates about history education. The first 'frontline' acknowledges the emergence in many states of new pedagogical approaches to history education that sought to develop critical and interpretive skills amongst young people and also challenge the established rote teaching of a monochrome national canon (Rüsen 2007). The critical historiographies that 'new history' drew on often questioned established nation-building historical narratives and offered alternative interpretations prioritising class, gender and race/ethnicity.

A second interconnected 'frontline' focused on the purpose of state-sponsored history education in schools - namely should it primarily seek to inculcate collective patriotism founded on a homogenous national story or should it encourage interpretative analysis of a plurality of national and other discourses (Lévesque 2005). For a growing number of professional historians and educators, the teaching of school history should now focus on balancing core national historical knowledge and the development of 'historical literacy' amongst young people (Clark, 2007). By developing critical skills, it has been argued that young people will develop greater sensitivity to the history of groups who have been consistently omitted or portrayed negatively within orthodox historical narratives (Arthur et al., 2001).

These revisionist approaches have been portrayed by critics of 'new history' as a premeditated attack by 'politically correct' liberals who seek to ensure the teaching of history is divorced from 'historical facts'. Ideologically-driven politicians and history educators have thus sought to deliberately estrange future generations from their national historical past (see

Windschuttle, 2007). Some have sought to typify the deliberate dilution and liberalisation of organic national historical narratives through the articulation in schools of overly-critical or negative narratives as 'Black Armband' history (Blainey, 1993). They have persistently argued for a return to an (usually unspecified) 'golden age of history education' where largely celebratory and uncritical 'three cheers' historical narratives informed a positive sense of national identity amongst young people.

Debates about school history typically focus on the content of curricula and textbooks without acknowledging the impact of pedagogic practice or the importance of historical learning. Protagonists do however share strong assumptions about the ability of history lessons to act as a conduit in the transmission of a national identity as school children have the capacity to absorb and understand key historical facts about a state's historical past which allows them to take their place in a national community with other similarly educated citizens (Haydn, 2004). School history is therefore understood to have a direct impact on how young people view personal and collective identities, encouraging greater political and cultural understanding and affiliation (Phillips, 1999).

There is though little conclusive evidence to confirm whether state-sponsored history teaching is particularly effective in inculcating a sense of national belonging or particularistic identity (Grever, Haydn, and Ribbens, 2008). 'Banal' influences such as familial or community ties can also challenge and potentially undermine state-sponsored history education that seeks to inculcate a common national identity (Andrews, McGlynn and Mycock, 2009). It is curious then, that in light of such uncertainty, debates about history education are so divisive and fractious.

### *Teaching the nation-state after empire*

The ongoing politicisation of debates about national history and its teaching in schools provides critical insights into both the nation and the state. Nationally-orientated histories would appear to be more influential than other forms of history writing in shaping how politicians and educational policy-makers design history curricula and/or textbooks. These national narratives seek to achieve at least two primary objectives. First, they legitimise the nation by teleologically connecting the past with the present to sustain contemporary political goals. Second, national narratives are constructed to support national identities that bind citizens to historically-justified national communities. As such, the nation and its accordant history provides reference points for competing spatial conceptions of the past; local, regional and global histories may contradict or overlap but always relate to the national paradigm. This is due to the intimate relationship of the nation-state and national history, and its institutional and discursive ability to suppress or integrate (and subsume) rival discourses (Berger and Lorenz, 2006).

The critical, analytical ordering and articulation of the past by historians seeking to elevate the nation through the production of 'grand' national narratives has however become increasingly fraught and contentious. This is, according to Winter (2006), because history has been gradually superseded by a 'memory boom' widely embraced by nation-states and their citizens. Assmann (2006) argues that history has been transformed into socially constructed memory cultures through public discourse about how past events are remembered, interpreted and articulated. This has meant historical narratives have been reconfigured into 'emotionally charged' versions of 'our history', thus providing reference points for

complementary or contradictory forms of memory and identity which highlight difference between individuals and groups.

The role of the nation-state has proven crucial in facilitating this conceptual shift from history towards memory, fulfilling a vanguard role in mediating the 'official' memories of its citizens. However history and memory operate at individual and group levels. This can mean that personalised forms of analysis of the history can come into conflict with state-authorised versions of the national past. As neither is politically neutral, they are thus susceptible to instrumentalisation and manipulation. Deliberative public exchanges associated with the 'history wars' therefore often reflect dynamic and unequal power relationships between elites and groups within nation-states, how seek to politically-orientate the propagation of official interpretations of the past via state propaganda or educative projects such as school history. According to Nora (2011), this indicates that politics, which covers both memory and ideology, is engaged in an on-going conflict with history.

The 'memory boom' on which collective national identities are now founded has left historians and history behind, their work now increasingly subordinate to memory or even overlooked completely. Whilst history was once a political activity in support of the nation, it is now politicized in support of divergent ideological constructions of the present. Popular historical knowledge or consciousness of a national past are thus a product of formal and informal interactions between ideology, collective memory, history and historiography, and the lived experiences of citizens. If, as Rüsen (2004, 66) argues, identity is a product of this historical consciousness, it is a specific mode of orientation which is clearly founded on evaluative interpretations of a nation's past that are defined and contextualised by the

present and future. Individual and collective understandings of history are therefore influenced by cognitive and cultural factors that correlate with the temporal socio-political and ethnic circumstances of a nation's citizenry (Seixas, 2004, 10). The temporal element of historical consciousness in shaping forms of identity are underpinned by narrative competencies that require citizens to develop capacities to learn about how to understand the past, interpret it with regards to the present, and to integrate individual and collective forms of identity with historical knowledge.

Historical consciousness can however prove a variable factor in identity formation and is open to influence by contemporary socio-political circumstances. If, as Halbwachs (1992) has argued, the relationship between memory and history is defined by the social and political dimensions of remembering and forgetting, selectivity also characterises historical consciousness. This raises questions about the possible displacement or elimination of negative elements of the national past and a concurrent rewriting of a biased or simplistic historical narrative of a nation. The emphasis on presentism may also limit the development of a critical and objective historical approach toward understanding the national past (Wineburg, 2001). This, as Christou (2007, p.711) notes, can have implications for how the nation is taught in schools, as 'national history curricula tend to propagate a nation's desirable vision of itself and minimize any references to its 'dark pages in history''.

In nation-states that established empires, the transnational extension of statehood and nationhood within colonial contexts ensured the political, cultural and spatial borders of imperial and national citizenship were intertwined, overlapping and ambiguous. The national identities of colonising states were underpinned by a 'missionary nationalism' which drew on

key ethno-racial ideologies that sought to elevate the language, history and culture of the colonisers whose responsibility it was to 'civilise' colonial territories and peoples (Kumar 2000). History and historiography could not and did not remain immune to these ideological currents and colonial narratives often lauded the nationally-framed attributes and values of colonisers. The settlement of colonial peoples encouraged some historians however to extend the parameters of national history beyond the imperial metropole to include parts of the colonial periphery in order to promote greater transnational historical commonality (Mycock 2013).

The development of mass education systems saw colonial history taught to the children of imperial subjects within the colonial metropole and also across parts of some empires. These including settlers and some colonized peoples, particularly indigenous elites who supported and maintained colonial rule. Colonial history education programmes typically sought to inculcate a shared imperial identity by drawing on an informal consensus whereby history curricula and textbooks drew heavily on the national history of the colonialists. The centrifugal dissemination of national history across transnational empires primarily sought to laud the key events and historical figures of the colonizing nation with little sensitivity for the history of colonized peoples.

For example, Yeandle (2008) notes that, in the case of the British Empire, the professed achievements of the colonisers were represented as not only the collective achievement of the English or British people but of all imperial subjects. Aldrich (1988) argues that the formal education systems of Britain and its imperial possessions were strongly influenced by a common informal history curriculum that was linked to wider efforts of imperial patriotic

socialisation. This, according to Heathorn (1995), meant that through the teaching of history, British colonial education systems offered morality lessons that sought to transmit the racial, socio-economic, and gender values and norms of the colonisers.

Historical narratives expounded within colonial education systems simultaneously encouraged transnational commonality and national differentiation between the imperial metropole and colonial peripheries. This meant the depth of penetration of transnational history narratives disseminated through history education and wider school-based socialisation to inform a common imperial identity was variable, being largely defined by the extent of ethno-cultural proximity and shared ascription to the political, social and cultural values and history of the imperial metropole. The emergence of anti-colonialist nationalist narratives that underpinned independence movements across many empires, together with critical voices from within the imperial metropole, increasingly challenged and undermined 'missionary nationalist' ideologies expounded in terms of their moral legitimacy and universal appeal.

The end of the formal period of empire not only entailed the redefinition of colonial citizenship, sovereignty, and identity within national rather than transnational contexts, it necessitated the simultaneous acceptance of claims of national self-determination in former colonial territories and renouncement of pretensions of colonial statehood and associated missionary civilising ideologies. It also raised questions about many of the national political, socio-cultural and economic institutions, symbols, rituals, and actors that proved instrumental in shaping colonial citizenship and identity. Decolonisation also raised complex questions about the parameters and content of post-colonial history and how it was taught

to generations of young people born after empire. Furthermore, the end of empire compromised the capacity of state-sponsored history education programmes delivered in schools across the imperial metropole and colonies to draw on transnational historical narratives to sustain collective national-imperial forms of citizenship and identity. Post-colonising states were thus faced with profound dilemmas regarding the resonance of the national-imperial historical past within history education curricula.

### *Amnesia, melancholia and the legacies of empire*

The trauma and impact of decolonisation on post-colonising states has been relatively overlooked when compared with the experiences of post-colonised states. This in part is due to a lack of academic sympathy and an enduring negative stigma associated with modern colonialism. This noted, the legacies of empire are closely intertwined with those of post-colonial national identity, and politicians, academics and other interested parties have proven increasingly prepared to debate in public about how the colonial past influences the present and future of post-colonising nation-states. The immediate period after decolonisation has though been typically associated with a post-colonial 'amnesia' whereby the spatial and psychological disjuncture experienced by post-colonising states negated significant post-colonial scrutiny or critical re-evaluation of the colonial mission and its inherent values, ideologies and identities.

This post-colonial 'amnesia' is understood to manifest in a diminishment of the resonance and celebration of empire in political discourse and public life. As with newly-emancipated post-colonised states who undertook anti-imperialist nation-building to justify their new-found stateness, many post-colonising states also sought to focus on synchronised and

interconnected nation- and state-building projects in the wake of empire. The cauterisation of imperial statehood thus encouraged a shift from colonial transnationalism to post-colonial nationalism, this being reflected in the refocusing of academic and public debate about the relationship between national identity and national past.

This process necessitated a centripetal shift in the historical lens of the post-colonising state to emphasise the nation in the framing of historical past and a concurrent peripheralising of centrifugal transnationalism associated with the state's colonial period. This was often reflected in a marked decline in the production of academic colonial history in universities and elsewhere. Approaches to designing and teaching history education programmes would appear to be also redefined in response to this post-colonising 'amnesia', with history curricula and textbooks similarly prioritising national history while also avoiding sustained critical re-evaluation of colonial past.

Grindel (2013) suggests an 'imperial amnesia' persisted in British school history curricula and textbooks until the late 1980s that segregated and relegated (still largely nostalgic) colonial history in favour of its national counterpart. Haydn (2014) notes that the celebration of Empire Day, together with banal visual representations of empire such as maps, flags, and other symbols, also quickly disappeared during and after decolonisation in British schools. In France, a lack of focus on empire and post-colonial immigration within the French school history curriculum and textbooks was part of an 'amnésie collective' (Noiriél, 1988). This, according to Ait-Mehdi (2012, 192), meant that the teaching of the history of colonisation and decolonisation were 'abandoned' between 1960 and 1980. Van Nieuwenhuysse (2014) notes that 'colonial amnesia' proved a prevalent feature in post-colonial Belgium, with historians,

politicians and broader society largely overlooking the history and legacies of empire after decolonisation. This, in part, was attributable to the rise of Flemish nationalism and growing concerns about the potential division of the Belgian state, and the relatively small numbers of post-colonial migrants settling in Belgium. Spanish school textbooks also omitted essential issues on colonisation of the Americas, particularly the subjugation of indigenous people or slavery (Carretero, Jacott and López- Manjón, 2002).

In some states, the so-called post-colonial 'amnesia' was a product of enforced decolonisation due to external interventions. Cajani (2013) notes there was little attempt to maintain transnational links or encourage significant migration from Italy's former colonies after decolonisation was imposed in the aftermath of the Second World War. As such, a post-colonial 'silence' on empire in school history persisted in post-war Italy due to its connections with inter-war fascism, this reflected in a lack of widespread nostalgia for the colonial period. In Germany and Japan, defeat and occupation deferred post-colonial reflection and the nationalising of history education curricula or textbooks (Semmet, 2012; Taylor, 2012). In post-Soviet Russia, the early period of post-communist transition saw a refocusing of the state history curriculum and many textbooks to focus on Russian nation- and state-building with little attention given to the former Russian or Soviet empires (Zajda and Zajda, 2003).

Rothermund (2015, 5) argues however that 'amnesia' is a convenient but imprecise metaphor as while humans usually seek to recover loss of memory, post-colonising states have instead engaged in a 'conspiracy of silence' that has determined their collective memories of empire. This 'conspiracy' is often informed by post-colonial guilt and an unwillingness to repent for the colonial sins of the past. Gilroy (2004) agrees that post-colonising states are not amnesiac

but instead adopt a 'post-colonial melancholia' in response to the profound change in circumstances realised during the experiences of decolonisation and the consequent loss of colonial prestige. This brooding reluctance to accept the end of empire retards (but does not obviate) the potential for post-colonial mourning of its loss or critical reflection of its contemporary legacies. Where metropolitan histories of empire were often a source of pride, ensuing post-colonial shame appears to limit proactive exploration of its complex and plural historical or contemporary manifestations.

The post-colonising experience has thus proven for many states to be one defined by a 'selective myopia' whereby collective acts of 'temporal forgetting' involves the deliberate relegation of transnational colonial history as part of the process of reimagining post-colonial national identity and citizenship (Mycock, 2009). This would indicate that although the history and memories of empire may fade in the public imagination after decolonisation, they are not eradicated completely – a phenomena that Bessinger (2008) defines as the 'persistence of empire' within post-colonising societies. He notes that colonial state institutions, traditions, rituals, and symbols continue to resonate across metropolitan societies, implicitly and explicitly informing and sustaining revised post-colonial constructions of national identity and citizenship. Continued (and sometimes intensified) patterns of population migration within the former imperial space and the establishment of post-colonial political, military, economic, and/or socio-cultural networks, such as the (British) Commonwealth or the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), also maintain transnational relationships between former colonisers and colonised in the post-colonial period. Population exchange and emergent supranational organisations provide historical and contemporary reference points

that extend elements of transnational colonial identities and citizenship into the post-colonial age.

The 'persistence of empire' is also evident in the content of state-sponsored history education curricula and textbooks in post-colonising states. For example, while history curricula and textbooks in the United Kingdom often segregated British colonial history from its domestic counterpart, students had significant opportunities to study various aspects of the empire still largely depicted as benevolent, paternalistic, and civilizing (Grindel, 2013, 40). Similarly, although Waldman (2009, 208) notes that French school history's pivotal role in the consolidation of the post-colonial republican nation-state, this provided students with opportunities to study some aspects of colonial history and decolonisation. In Belgium, the regionalisation of national history curricula meant that diverse approaches were adopted but that various aspects of colonial rule and decolonisation were still studied by young people (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2014). Belgian historical textbooks in immediate post-colonial period sought however to prioritise the liberal origins and values of the colonial state without seeking to critically explore its complex history or legacies (Vanhulle, 2009).

German history education after 1945 was as divided as the state itself. West German curricula and textbooks continued to project largely positive narratives that emphasises the civilising modernism of colonisation. Conversely their East German counterparts sought to frame the West German state as economically colonialist and displayed their sympathy for independence movements (Dierkes, 2005). Taylor (2012) notes that although state-sponsored Japanese school history often sought to explore the less positive aspects of colonial expansion and rule, particularly in Korea and China, representations of the imperial period

were a continuous and often-controversial element of the history curriculum and textbooks. Attempts to renew Russian nationalism saw politicians increasingly utilise history education to provide positive affirmation of the 'historical greatness' of the imperial Russian and Soviet colonial past (Zajda, 2012). This highlighted the enduring resonance of transnationalism in framing Russia's post-Soviet and post-colonial transitions which overlapped and informed a complex response to decolonisation whereby history textbooks and curricula continued to draw on the colonial histories of the Imperial Russian and Soviet empires.

A common theme amongst post-colonising states in the immediate period after decolonisation was the reductive national focus of history which typically overlooked critical exploration of the end and perceived failure of the colonial mission and also its coercive and exploitative motivations and practices. This nationalising of the historical lens after empire was reflected in the revision of the content and structure of historical narratives informing school history, with scant recognition of the implications of post-colonial critiques either across the former colonial space or within the post-colonising state. This situation may well reflect a lack of significant political or public dispute about the historical past or what should be taught in schools. But while the resonance of empire may well have diminished, the proposition that some form of 'colonial amnesia' materialised during and the immediate period after decolonisation is misleading. Empire continued to influence school history curricula and textbooks, ensuring the colonial past was not eradicated entirely.

#### *Post-colonial 'anamnesis' and the challenges of revisionism*

In describing post-colonial responses to decolonisation, Stoler (2011) has argued that France suffered from an inability to address the topic due to a widespread 'colonial aphasia'. French

society, she suggests, had had difficulty in speaking about empire or indeed generating an appropriate vocabulary of words and concepts to be able to discuss its lifespan and contemporary legacies. Drawing on Stoler's thesis in his study of Dutch colonial memory, Bijl (2012) notes that the apparent lack of language has inhibited the production of a memorable past in post-colonising nation-states, meaning the selection, convergence, and repetition of historical narratives have appeared to suggest aspects of the colonial past are 'forgotten'. He concludes however that there is a distinction between post-colonising societies lacking the appropriate vocabulary to articulate their memories of empire and the conscious decision to not utilise a vocabulary that might be unpalatable to some.

Assmann (2015) argues that the diminishment of resonance of empire within the national consciousness of post-colonising nation-states in Europe was both a post-Second World War and latterly a post-communist phenomenon. She notes that rather than explore the history, ideology and morality of empire, the Holocaust and the Cold War instead dominated nation-building historical narratives and memory culture in post-colonising states. The association of progressive political and social modernisation with the post-war – as opposed to the post-colonial – period provided historical reference points that nourished positive national self-esteem. It also deflected political and intellectual foci away from the addressing the often violent nature of decolonisation or the lack of positive legacy of empire in many former colonies. History education curricula and textbooks often replicated this bias, offering national historical perspectives that sought to avoid substantial post-colonial critiques of empire.

Rothermund (2015) argues that a form of post-colonial 'self-consciousness' emerged during the 1980s in many post-colonising states which can be linked to the perceived failure of post-war modernisation. This reflected the enduring resonance of empires and the ineffaceable global imprint they have left, encouraging greater engagement with the colonial era and creating a new post-colonial vocabulary. In particular, migration from former colonies brought the 'empire home', meaning its legacies were now visible within national as well as transnational contexts. The reversal of population exchange across the former colonial space provoked urgent questions about how the colonial past continues to inform contemporary constructions of national identity and citizenship, particularly the extent that racial, religious and ethno-cultural ideologies and practices closely associated with the colonial era resonate in post-colonising societies.

Indeed, the presence of migrants from the former colonies has encouraged a 'post-colonial anamnesis'. This has encouraged a new generation of post-colonial scholars, including a growing number who originated from former colonies, whose research has highlighted porosity and interconnected nature of debates about colonialism and post-colonialism (Cooper, 2005). For example, a new generation of scholars of the British Empire adopted a post-colonial focus which emphasised its culture rather than politics or economics, engaging in ground-breaking research exploring the literature, arts, and history of colonised peoples and their migratory descendants. This has been complemented by the emergence of 'new imperial history', which has seen significant growth in the scale and scope of research about empire by intellectuals both within post-colonising states and elsewhere. The often agonized or tempestuous reappraisal of the colonial record and its legacies is now a major feature of both the historiographical and the public-cultural landscape in post-colonising states (Howe,

2009). A notable feature has been the preparedness to undertake critical explorations of the 'dark pages' of empire, particularly colonial violence, bigotry, and exploitation, while also revealing the multiplicity of forms of colonial rule, networks and experiences within and between empires (Ballantyne, 2010).

In most cases, national and colonial history has remained largely segregated though. This compartmentalisation continues to fracture the resonance of colonial past while also reproducing racialized exceptionalism that excludes many post-colonial migrants (Bijl, 2012). Some politicians, academics and other public intellectuals have however interpreted shifts in the historiographical foci and criticality of the colonial era as a deliberate and ideologically-driven undermining of the positive legacies of empire. A common theme has been that post-colonial revisionism has proven overly-apologetic and distorting in terms of its objective analysis of the progressive contribution of colonialism across the globe. Political leaders from diverse colonial backgrounds, such as Britain, France, and Russia, have thus revived 'missionary nationalist' narratives established during the colonial period, expressing pride in the values and legacies of empire and even regret in its passing (Mycock, 2010). As such, many post-colonising states have witnessed a nascent 'politics of empire' which has drawn some imperial historians and other post-colonial scholars into increasingly politically contentious and confrontational public disputes which have reflected differing intellectual and ideological positions (Ghosh, 2012).

Debates about how and why the colonial past should be disseminated to current and future generations has emerged as one of the critical public arenas for post-colonising societies. The 'politics of empire' have thus proven closely intertwined with debates over national identity

and citizenship, particularly the integration of post-colonial and other migrants. Central to these political machinations is the extent to which the promotion of historically-embedded national frameworks of political and socio-cultural values are complemented or compromised by the colonial era and its post-colonial legacies. These debates have mapped explicitly onto the structural parameters of the 'history wars' outlined earlier in this chapter in terms of politicised disputation regarding the content and purpose of state-sponsored history education. A range of responses have emerged though which reflect the diverse metropolitan experiences of empire and its contemporary influence on post-colonial nation- and state-building which suggests a correlation between the extent of migration from the colonial periphery to the post-colonial metropole and the intensity of the 'politics of empire' and history education (see also Oostindie, 2015).

In states where there has been extensive migration, such as France, the Netherlands, and the UK, the post-colonial 'history wars' are particularly pronounced and contested. In the UK, criticism about the narrow and fragmented nature of the history curriculum and its excessive focus on the Second World War has encouraged calls from across the political spectrum for the history of the British Empire to be taught in greater depth (Mycock, 2010). However the election of a Conservative-led right-wing coalition UK government in 2010 intensified debate about the reform of the content of the National Curriculum in England, with draft proposals seeking to increase the time devoted to a largely celebratory history of the British Empire to underpin a progressive British national identity (Haydn, 2014). The UK government found support for its proposals from sympathetic, mainly right-wing historians who also saw history education as a vehicle to promote the positive global political, economic and cultural contribution of the British Empire (Guyver, 2014).

In response, a wide-range of historians and left-wing commentators derided the preparedness to overlook the coercive and often violent history of British Empire and its contentious legacies both within the UK and across the former imperial space (see, for example Evans, 2011). They implored the UK government to develop critical awareness amongst young people of plurality of historical experiences within an increasingly multicultural society. But although final National Curriculum guidelines published in 2013 took note of some of these concerns, the on-going discourse about the historical and contemporary implications of empire for British society is far from resolved.

In France, debates about empire and its historical legacies have highlighted that French post-colonial nation-building has proven an unstable product of specific historical forces in which certain events have been consciously forgotten and others are deliberately remembered (Conklin, 2000). As Dubois (2000, 15) notes, French colonial history, particularly the struggles around slave emancipation and political equality in the Caribbean that developed during the French Revolution, simultaneously continued to underpin a Republican tradition of anti-racist egalitarianism, and 'Republican racism'. The revision of the history curriculum, triggered by extensive post-colonial immigration, has thus gradually challenged the 'public forgetfulness' of French society and provoked intense and often divisive debates about its potential implications for contemporary French national identity and citizenship (Hargreaves, 2005).

Aldrich (2006) notes the passing of a law, in February 2005, mandating the teaching of the 'positive role' of colonialism provoked great controversy involving historians, politicians and the public in France and its former empire, especially Algeria. The ensuing debate saw a

significant majority of French historians unified and influential in their opposition to political manoeuvring to teach a largely celebratory view of the French Empire. Although the law was subsequently quashed in 2006, the polemic surrounding the interference of politicians in history teaching highlighted the contentious and ongoing incendiary capacity of France's colonial past (Dwyer, 2008).

In post-colonising states where comparatively few colonial migrants have settled, the resonance of debates about empire and its legacies appear less pronounced or politically-contested within the public realm. Although there has been growing interest in states such as Belgium, Germany and Italy in the colonial past, the lack of sizeable post-colonial migrant diaspora would appear to diminish engagement with the colonial past when discussing questions of citizenship and national identity. Moreover, although scholarly investigations into the colonial past have increased, this work does not appear to have stimulated interest in reviewing the content of history education curricula or textbooks.

In Belgium, a number of anniversaries have provoked greater interest in the colonial period and Belgium has formally acknowledged mistakes and post-colonial contrition. However Belgian politicians remain reluctant to publically criticise Belgium's imperial past and continue to present an overly-positive portrait of its distinction as idealist colonizers (Goddeeris, 2015). The growth in new imperial history or domestic post-colonial studies exploring Belgium's colonial past has not yet influenced the content or design of Belgian history curricula or textbooks (van Nieuwenhuysse, 2015). Indeed where Belgian history textbooks do address the colonial past, it is the Catholic mission and the Belgian monarchy that continue symbolize a

redemptive liberation from savagery, barbarism, and primitivism (van den Braembussche, 2002).

In Italy and Germany, the colonial past has proven a peripheral factor in shaping public debate about migration and post-colonial identity. Pinkus (2003) notes that empire and decolonisation remains a 'non-event' for many in Italy, with politicians and other public figures displaying little interest in engaging with the colonial past. While some history textbooks now address selected aspects of Italy's colonial period, the 'myth of the good Italian' endures presenting a positive self-image of progressive Italian colonialism (Leone and Mastrovito, 2010; Cajani, 2013). Indeed De Michele (2011) argues that the failure of history education to address the roots of Italian colonialism and or assess its contemporary impact on Italian politics and culture, as well as on the populations directly affected, has ensured that racist attitudes to migrants continue to be overlooked.

Schilling (2014) notes that public and academic debate about Germany's colonial past have intensified in the period after reunification. But although large numbers of migrants have settled in Germany over the past 40 years or so, very few have come from former colonial territories. German history curricula across its federated education system have instead sought to enhance post-reunification nation re-building while maintaining a strong focus Nazism and the Holocaust (Langenbacher, 2010). Recent growth in post-colonial and imperial studies has not yet had a significant impact on the federal curricula. Lassig and Pohl (2009) note that when German colonialism is addressed within history curricula, there is little evidence of any sustained critical post-colonial perspectives.

Japan and the Russian Federation offer interesting case studies that highlight the conflict between revisionists and counter-revisionists which further emphasise the importance of ideological aspects of history education. Controversies about the content and focus of history textbooks have emerged as a marked feature of post-colonial Japanese domestic politics, with successive conservative governments seeking to revise history textbooks to adopt a more strident nationalist tone (Beal et al., 2001). Disputes over the colonial past not only reveal tensions between conservative (political and bureaucratic) authorities and progressive academia but also highlight the centrality of history education in public debates concerning Japan's conduct before and during the Second World War (particularly in Korea and China) (Nozaki, 2008). The preparedness of the Japanese government to intervene and initiate the editing of textbooks to present a more positive view of Japan's colonial period are a part of a domestic struggle over national identity. Such actions are however motivated by the disjuncture caused by defeat and occupation after the Second World War and the challenges of linking Japan's national and transnational past rather than in response to post-colonial migration (Algarra, 2013). Bukh (2007) notes depictions of Japan's national victimhood have often underpinned historical narratives presented in many textbooks, thus limiting the extent of critical post-colonial revisionism of its colonial past. Debates about the content of history education textbooks in Japan have though emerged as an increasingly integral part of regional politics among states in East Asia, particularly in the context of the recent decline in Sino-Japanese relations (Vickers, 2014).

The complexities of the challenges of post-colonial and post-communist transition have seen have seen school history texts emerge as a key instrument in the post-Soviet Russian government's process of ideological transformation and nation-building and are thus closely

monitored by the state (Zajda, 2007). In part this has been a response to the challenges of post-colonial migration and multi-ethnic diversity within an explicitly multi-national state. Although initially reformed to promote an inclusive civic Russian state nationalism that embraced pluralistic, interpretative and analytical approaches, history education under Putin has increasingly been utilised as part of a wider attempt to inculcate a particularistic ethno-national Russian identity and citizenship amongst young people (Linan 2010).

School history textbooks thus emphasise the historical greatness of the Russian state from its professed origins within the ancient Rus, through Imperial Russia, to the Soviet Union as a super power (Zajda, 2012). Historians and textbook authors who have sought to encourage a more critical approach to Russian colonial past have found themselves isolated and their publications publically denigrated or even banned by the state. Moreover, the presentation of a largely celebratory revisionist history of the Russian state is therefore framed within national and transnational contexts, and has initiated various 'curriculum wars' with other former states of the Soviet Union, such as Moldova (Worden, 2014) and Ukraine (Korostelina, 2010), while also encouraging a more strident anti-Westernism.

It is evident that teaching the colonial past can prompt various approaches which are driven by a range of internal and external challenges that are reflective of the distinctive historical and contemporary circumstances within each post-colonising state. However Rothermund (2015) notes that the 'challenge of repentance' is a common phenomenon to all post-colonising states and this has implications for how the colonial past is perceived and articulated within history education curricula and textbooks. Although some post-colonial states, drawing on greater intellectual and public scrutiny, have displayed contrition for

aspects of the colonial past, these apologies are often fused with reticence regarding culpability, applicability and the concerns over the potential of claims for material compensation. One area of particular difficulty would appear to be engagement with the history and legacies of colonial violence, exploitation, and coercion in the expansion, maintenance, and decline of empire. Howe (2009, 16) notes that stories of colonial violence and genocide provide an ever-present challenge to the formulation of a progressive national narratives which universally incorporate the colonial past and thus leads to 'selective amnesia'.

Bijl (2012) suggests that violence linked to major national and transnational conflicts, such as the two World Wars, are significant elements of the histories of most nation-states. However colonial violence, often informed by racialized ideologies and superior technology, is typically exceptionalised from nationalised historical narratives which seek to sustain liberal forms of citizenship and nationalism through compartmentalisation of colonial history in the Netherlands and other post-colonising states. While the growth in Dutch post-colonial studies has seen colonial history permeate the Dutch national canon (Oostindie, 2015), Dutch history textbooks continue to draw on a Eurocentric master narrative framed by social forgetting of slavery and scientific colonialism (Weiner, 2014).

The Dutch experience is not unique. Lassig and Pohl (2009) highlight that German colonisation rarely addresses history of exploitation or colonial violence within history textbooks. In the UK, colonial violence and the bloody 'wars of decolonisation' are largely overlooked in school history curricula, thus extending the myth of a peaceful and dignified transfer of power (Haydn, 2014). Carretero et al. (2002) note that while Spanish history textbooks engage with

themes of colonial expansion and cultural imposition, colonial violence is a peripheral theme and the empire is framed in predominantly positive terms. The history of colonial violence is therefore segregated from national narratives, with responsibility associated with colonialists and settlers whose place within the increasingly nationalised historical narratives of the post-colonial state is typically overlooked.

Indeed history education in post-colonising states often focuses on slavery rather than colonial violence, as responsibility for the slave trade is typically framed in transnational rather than national terms meaning culpability is more ambiguous. For example, Grindel (2013, 38) notes that current approaches to teaching empire in the UK 'stops short of claiming a specifically national responsibility for the collective remembrance of slavery'. Conversely, the notion that colonialism and decolonisation were transnational ventures defined by mutually-constitutive interconnections, interactions, and entanglements continues to be almost completely overlooked in most post-colonising state textbooks.

### *Conclusions*

This chapter has argued that the 'politics of empire' have proven an integral and often divisive component in the re-imagining of national identity and citizenship in post-colonising states, influencing how the colonial past is understood and taught to current and future generations. Approaches to teaching the colonial past are reflective of the distinctive historical and contemporary circumstances within each post-colonising state. However post-colonial debates about the content and purpose of curricula and textbooks clearly connect with and map onto the structural and thematic 'frontlines' of the 'history wars' that are more typically national in focus.

Moreover, post-colonising states typically reject the centrifugal framing of transnational colonial history education in favour of reductive centripetal national approaches. While claims of 'imperial amnesia' cannot be sustained, a 'selective myopia' continues to allow post-colonising states to disseminate nostalgic and largely uncritical versions of the colonial past. As such, the 'dark pages' of colonial history, such as colonial violence and the origins of slavery, are overlooked in favour of perspectives that seek to nourish the proposition of civilising, progressive colonialism and, where possible, peaceful decolonisation.

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