CHAPTER 22

What to Teach in History Education When the Social Pact Shakes?

Alberto Rosa and Ignacio Brescó

"History Education. What for?" To ask what is the purpose of teaching and learning history is to put into question the role of history within the current educational context, as well as a way of showing a discomfort that does not so easily appear when looking at other school subjects such as mathematics or language. There is some feeling of a crisis affecting history as a discipline (Jenkins, 1991) and also as a content in the school curriculum (Henry, 1993), at a time in which nation-states and the social pact endorsing them are under question. The goals and contents of history teaching have to be rethought in a context very different to that of 200 years ago when history became a compulsory school subject.

It could hardly be disputed that general education aims to provide competence, skills and knowledge for students to understand their community life and to increase their autonomy and agency when acting and participating in society. What will be addressed here is what the contribution of history education could be to these purposes.

History Teaching and Identity

Since history appeared in school curricula in the nineteenth century, its contents tend to be tailored to the political project of each time, centred mainly in transmitting narratives of a shared past in order to cultivate the identification of pupils with an imagined community (Anderson, 1983). History teaching

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M. Carretero et al. (eds.), *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-52908-4_22

was from the beginning—and often still is—a strong instrument of indoctrination to legitimise the nation-state and instil loyalty into its subjects (Carretero, 2011). This way of teaching history relied on the distribution of a unified version of the national past, typically presented through a series of stories with a strong emotional and moral content, aiming at encouraging national feelings (patriotism, sacrifice, honour to heroes, etc.) and, above anything else, creating a social representation of a more or less unified *we* separated from *other* different groups—if not enemies—of *our* nation.

It seems then that the original goal of the teaching of history was inextricably linked to the project of *nationalisation of the masses* (Mosse, 1975). A project of the elites that Massimo d'Azeglio (member of the first parliament of the Kingdom of Italy) synthesised by saying: *E fatta la Italia, ancora da fare gli italiani* (quoted by Hobsbawm, 1990: 44). Nationalism was a product of modernity and a response to the crisis of identity that followed the decline of absolute monarchies, legitimised by tradition and religion, and their replacement by the new "Scientific State" based on reason. This required the top-down elaboration of a new kind of political legitimacy, which claimed the congruence or continuity between state and nation (Gellner, 1983). Nationalist ideology and history fed each other for this purpose. As Hedetoft (1995: 11) says:

> History is no doubt the main repository of necessary conditions for nationalism, but it would seem that we cannot, without landing ourselves in an impossible and untenable circularity, simultaneously posit that it also provides us with all the necessary reasons, let alone all its forms, substances and arguments. If, as Renan argued, a nation's existence is indeed a daily plebiscite, then it is the nature of the volition of the underlying people's affirmative vote that ultimately makes the nation "the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion." (Renan, 1882)

If nationalism were a verb, it could be declined in three modes: *imperative* (we have to be a—better—nation), *indicative* (we are a nation) and *subjunctive* (we ought to be a nation) (Hedetoft, 1995). The production of interpretations on a supposed collective past, the deployment of endless symbols, rituals, and commemorations devoted to the nation (Gillis, 1994) are tools uttering the *imperative modality* of nationalism. When successful in instilling nationalist ideology as a form of common sense (Billig, 1993, 1995), the *indicative modality* (Renan's daily plebiscite) can be pronounced, with the effect of taking for granted that everything and everybody belongs to a nation, thus giving way to what Billig (1995) calls *banal nationalism*. Such plebiscite is an endorsement of a social pact according to which the nation-state is a community with a shared past (*ethnos*), whose members are the holders of sovereignty (*demos*) administered by a state (*polis*), that exercises its power (*potestas*) upon a *territory* applying the Rule of Law (*reason*), with the effect that by trading *duties* towards the state for the benefits and *rights* of citizenship (*cives*) some kind of *solidarity* develops. As Barton and Levstik (2004) say, "the legitimacy of the

state's demands and befits in a democratic nation, rests on a shared sense of identity, anchored in history, among its citizens, which is a precondition for a participatory citizenship" (p. 22).

Identity and the Nation-State: A Delicate Relationship

This ideal (and idyllic) picture of the democratic nation-state balancing itself on a social pact is becoming increasingly blurred. The current acceleration of the process of globalisation and the unfolding of successive waves of economic crisis are rapidly changing the economical and political landscape and shaking the basis upon which the social pact legitimises modern states. Nation-states are suffering a serious erosion of what is left of their sovereignty, to the extent that it makes one wonder whether this concept still retains some meaning—or so substantial parts of their population feel.

The state is losing grip of the affairs within its own territory. Ecological issues and globalisation are putting the state sovereignty in jeopardy (Touraine, 1995). Instrumental practices (economics, the media) now follow rules operating across national borders, so that they are beyond the control of any particular state (globalisation). When this happens, states get deprived of some of their means to mediate between the natural and the social orders, so that its operational role for the governance of social systems of solidarity diminishes. When this happens, there is no guarantee that a rational *Rule of Law* will be applied. As a consequence, individuals start to withdraw from participating in political and civil life. Ethnic belonging and cultural identities (e.g. old or new—religion, sects, gender, gangs) come then to the forefront in public life, particularly among those who are left in the margins of society and have no way of defining themselves by their social role.

If one wants *polis*, *cives* and *demos* to hold together, cultural, ethnic and instrumental values have to reach some kind of *status quo*, so that they are able to appear together in the vital experience of individuals in such a way that the ends of one's own identity (culture) are not at odds with the rationality of means (society). Touraine (1995) suggests that this is possible by being very careful not to impose some cultural values upon others, and thus keeping civic rationality restricted to the means and not the ends, as it is the case in the secular and democratic state. For individual citizens to feel a commitment to the state, the latter has to be felt as a resource rather than an obstacle for reaching their ends. This requires formulae for civic solidarity to be devised so that the social pact does not become ineffective for some, because a part of the population becomes instrumentally unequal. One key issue is making different kinds of cultural identity compatible within one particular *polis*. Citizenship is precisely the kind of identity that deals with a commitment to instrumental values and to the agencies for their exercise—the state laws and institutions.

But this does not seem to be an easy task. We are now witnessing how the capability of *polis* for exercising its *potestas* is shrinking. Even the state monopoly of violence within its territory is now being contested. Transnational organisa-

tions such as NATO, and also mercenary subcontractors, are substituting the classical republican notion of the people in arms. Citizenry cannot feel securely protected by their *state* in a time of economic protectorates, drone attacks, electronic surveillance and selective murders in the name of somebody else's *raison d'État*. Even the offended parties respond with little more than perfunctory lamentations, always accompanied by the counterpoint of a chorus of media justifying these actions and accusing the victims of hypocrisy and naivety.

All this makes it increasingly difficult to view the nation-state as the kind of imagined community capable of upholding the social pact within its territory. It could hardly be a surprise that the citizenry gets increasingly disengaged from political institutions. This sometimes takes the form of a retreat to ethnicity or religion as a basis upon which to imagine a different community, or even as the ground on which the nation should be rebuild, rejecting political structures perceived as foreign, not representative or plainly illegitimate. This is no other thing than what Hedetoft (1995) calls the *subjunctive modality* of nationalism, which could be applied as much to secessionist movements within European countries (e.g. Spain, Italy, UK), as to extreme right nationalists struggling for the restoration of a mythical union of a culturally homogenous nation, or to the political revival of religious fundamentalism.

As Rosa and González (2012) pointed out, the delicate equilibrium between *polis* (political institutions), *cives* (the space for the exercise of citizenship), *demos* (the political agent) and *ethnos* (cultural community) is getting imbalanced. After decolonisation, the collapse of the Soviet Block and the triggering of the current crisis of globalisation, a new scenario appears in which the goals of history in general education, and the contents of the history to teach, are becoming a matter worthy of discussion (Carretero, Asensio, & Rodríguez-Moneo, 2012; Carretero, Rosa, & González, 2006; Symcox & Wilschut, 2009a). We are currently witnessing how different collectives struggle to voice a view of the past they claim to have been hidden behind the uniformity of official narratives. Some of these collectives surpass national borders (NGOs, human rights and ecological activists) or challenge the supposed uniformity of the existing nation-states (ethnic minorities, nationalist movements). In addition, there are supranational structures which sometimes seem to create new spaces for the exercise of citizenship; some support universal human rights (such as the United Nations), while others, growing to the leeward of the globalisation process, such as the European Union, search for a political legitimation overarching that of the nation-states (see Shore, 2004). Rights and citizenship—like drones and electronic surveillance, but with different success—struggle to overflow political borders.

What Kind of History to Teach in Fluid Times?

When witnessing the decline of the nation-state as the only legitimate holder of sovereignty, one cannot but wonder whether the historical myths the nationalist ideology has favoured in order to justify its legitimacy do still play a conve-

nient social role, or rather are turning into an obstacle for appraising present and future challenges. It cannot be disputed that national myths, as social representations (Bossche, 2003), are firmly anchored in the mind of the public, and so they retain—as all myths do—a strong capability as a symbolic resource for collective mobilisation. The question is whether it is still worthy to keep feeding this myth. As Grever (2012) points out there are epistemological, social and political arguments to doubt the suitability of continuing to interpret the past, the present and the future in purely nationalist keys.

When facing a time in which things are so drastically changing, and the future appears so fluid and uncertain, the events of the past to be consulted for understanding the present cannot remain unchanged. One may wonder whether themes, actors and events different from those presented in the customarily received national histories could be more relevant for audiences in need of resources for negotiating uncertain times. The contents and the goals of history teaching have to adapt to these new circumstances, or otherwise take the risk of falling into irrelevance.

This view challenges the adequacy of current canonical historical narratives and call for their deconstruction. New criteria of relevance are needed for the reconstruction of the past, the understanding of the present and the orientation for the future (Rosa, 2012). Many questions arise when reflecting on history education. History of what? For what purpose? Whose history? Should the nation be kept as the main actor of historical stories, or should new political actors be added, such as the EU, NU, IMF, G20, WTO or the Davos Forum? Should the past of minorities and/or migrants be incorporated into the curriculum? Should history focus on the past of political entities such as the state, or should it also focus on social movements? Should values be taken into account when choosing what to teach? What kind of values? Should patriotism be prioritised or diluted, or even replaced for other kind of values? The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to essay some answers to some of these questions.

What Skills to Teach in History Education?

Several proposals have been produced in current debates about history education in the new global scenario (Symcox & Wilschut, 2009b). There are voices claiming the pertinence of traditional narratives in order to keep national identity and values alive and so play a counterpoint at a time in which societies are turning increasingly multicultural, sceptic and relativist (Cheney, 1987). Conversely, we find authors (Rorty, 1989; Turner, 2002) who defend irony as a way to foster a sceptical attitude towards traditional national histories with the aim of encouraging a more open and cosmopolitan view (see Smith, 2007 for a discussion on this matter). Others regard history teaching as an opportunity for conveying values referring to the democratic participation and commitment of citizens in the public affairs of plural societies (Barton & Levstik, 2004), at a local, national and global level (Symcox, 2009). Finally, some others argue that history should be taught as an intellectual discipline addressed to

inculcate concepts and reasoning skills particular to its subject matter (Shemilt, 2009). Whatever the case, the last two stances are not in opposition (Bellino & Selman, 2012; Bermúdez, 2012); they are also compatible with a progressive *denationalisation* of history text books (Berger, 2012; Foster, 2012) and with a denaturalisation of historical narratives, viewing them not as reproduction of "real" events, but as resulting from constructions elaborated from a particular position (Brescó, 2009).

It seems that there are three main kinds of skills history education aims to develop in students: (1) some kind of identity and sense of belonging to a community; (2) democratic values and moral civic commitment; and (3) conceptual, rational, interpretative and argumentative tools suited for the understanding of social, economic, political and cultural transformations throughout time and space. This view on what to teach begs a new set of questions: Which belongings and identities, what values are to be promoted and for what purpose? These are the matters we will address next.

History, For Whom?

History education is addressed to the general population of the future. If history is for interpreting the past to understand the present and to orient for the future, it cannot refrain from addressing issues suitable for these purposes. If history education wants to be useful, and also appeal to its audience, it should focus on matters people are concerned about, and also provide them with tools of knowledge needed for making them understandable. This is why political concerns cannot be extrinsic to history teaching for, as Southgate (1996) points out, it would be contradictory to assert the educational importance of historical study, and ignoring at the same time the effect that study has on the way people perceive political issues in society.

It is not by chance that history teaching has always been linked to the political contexts of each time, starting at the time of the constitution of nation-states, when the legitimacy of the new *polis* demanded an ideal supposed unity between *cives*, *ethnos* and *demos*. History teaching was then addressed to the future members of a national imagined community in order to instil in them the memories of a common past. Such kind of school history aimed at linking students to the state through a chain of narratives, conjugated in first person plural, in which *our* heroic deeds, defeats or affronts were plotted in opposition to those of *others*, chosen as necessary alterities for a suitable identity to hold together.

This sort of imagined identity of *cives*, *ethnos* and *demos* is becoming increasingly disengaged as a consequence of globalisation and migrations, when new ethnic communities get inserted into *cives*, even if sometimes their members are prevented from enjoying social or civic rights, and kept away from joining *demos* (no right to vote). The presence of members of these communities within schools forces to rethink not only who are the addressees of history teaching, but also how the *others* are presented within the historical narratives

conveyed—if it is the case that minorities are wanted to be included into a multicultural "we," too often still conceived in national terms (Létourneau, this volume).

In addition, the exercise of citizenship is not only affected by events occurring within the national borders. Nation-states are increasingly unable to guarantee rights to the citizens, at the same time that some rights are claimed to be universal (human rights), even if no institution is able to effectively protect them. In this respect, when considering the audience of history teaching, we think that it should be imagined as the future members of a transnational *cives* belonging to a set of multilayared and overlapping *demoi* struggling for rights and participation within a scenario in which different *polis* of many shapes and levels would only be one of the kinds of the actors operating in social and cultural change.

History of What, History of Whom?

Envisaging a history education committed with its time and the current society requires, first, to identify and select what issues to address; second, to focus on the relevant agents and agencies, their aims and means; third, to go into the presentation of the kind of explanations relevant for their understanding; and fourth, to choose what events of the past may be useful for the study of a historical dynamics that would shed some light on the current state of affairs; and last, but not least, to catch the interest of the intended audience not only by arousing some curiosity, but also some kind of identification.

There is little doubt that identification cannot happen without affects, that there is no identity without *eros* (see Shore, 2004, in relation to the process of European construction). *Polis* gets the loyalty of *demos* by granting rights and securing solidarity, but could *demos* accept duties of loyalty when *polis* loses its capabilities for securing rights? If history teaching conflates *polis* with *ethnos,* surely its identitarian goals will be achieved, but only in part of the population and at the expense of alienating co-citizens who then are turned into *others* in some respect. If history education cannot afford forgetting *eros* for fostering identity, what kind of entity should then be privileged as an object for identification, an excluding *ethnos*, an increasingly weakened *polis*, or a *cives* struggling for rights or resisting their trimming by powers beyond the state? If the teaching of history has fostering citizenship as one of its primary goals, perhaps it should be more committed to the examination of the historical development of civic values, rights and duties. If it manages to do so, it will not only be instrumental in putting thinking historically into practice, but also become an added resource for a civic education devoted to strengthening the skills of individuals for their committed exercise of citizenship.

This way of approaching history education would deconstruct canonical official narratives and, when so doing, would also break the mirror that allows one to play what Foucault (1977) calls the comforting game of recognition.

As Berger (ibid) states, the image of the broken mirror applied to official versions of the past not only implies dealing with different reflections—beyond the national one—but also gaining consciousness that historical accounts are constructed from different perspectives. This forces one to reflect on history making, since the student would not be before a closed script (Blanco & Rosa, 1997), but would have to go into the composition of a plot, and so feel urged to go into the examination of the pieces and processes operating behind the scene. This approach, close to Nietzsche's (1873–76/1957) critical history, would also incorporate what Collingwood (1946) called the historical dimension of history, and so help to become aware of history not only as a way of interpreting the past, but also as a cultural artefact susceptible of many uses.

In short, this perspective would imply learning to think historically (Holt, 1990; Lee, 2004; Wineburg, 2001), what means training students on cognitive skills for *historical literacy* (Perfetti et al., 1994), and so to go beyond a *substantive knowledge of history*—that is, the content historical narratives convey—in order to emphasise the procedural knowledge of history—namely, how such content is constructed (Lévesque, 2008). This aims to empower students by making some of the conceptual tools of professional historians available to them. The assumption is that by knowing how the fabric of historical events is knitted, students get enriched with a critical and reflective knowledge in order to deal with the diverse accounts of the past conveyed through the globalising historical cultures (Grever & Adriaansen, this volume). This would empower the citizenry by supplying tools to be aware that any interpretation of the past is always the result of how an interested point of view chooses some criteria of relevance for the selection and interpretation of some documents (Reisman & Wineburg, 2012). The outcome produced is a narrative that puts together a theme, some actors and a plot, and always conveys a moral (White, 1986).

The *narrative turn* in human sciences (Polkinghorne, 1988) did not leave history aside (Roberts, 2001; White, 1978). Narratives are a privileged tool for the communication of interpretations of the past (Wertsch, 2002), and are also able to induce actuations of identification (Rosa & Blanco, 2007). The repertoire of narratives and beliefs one has available is a resource for understanding what kind of social situation one is living, what kind of roles there could be played, and what rights and duties the characters would have appearing in the narrative (Harré, 2005; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). The position one chooses to take within the situation would then depend on those beliefs, but also on the extent to which one feels committed to them. This takes us to the realm of ethics and civic commitment (see Haste, this volume), to how beliefs, sentimental education (Broncano, 2001), personal virtues (Camps, 2005) and the cultivation of a sense of the self (Blasi, 2004; Hardy & Carlo, 2005) are instrumental for fostering civic participation (see Rosa & González, 2012, 2013a, 2013b).

Goals and Contents of History Education When the Social Pact Shakes

The arguments developed throughout this chapter picture a heterogeneous and fluid landscape in a world where the idea of state sovereignty fades away as new actors come into the stage and the notion of social pact—usually conceived as bounded within national borders—is felt shaking. The consequence is that the socio-political and civic function of history education cannot be left untouched. This made us to wonder whether the relevance given to the role of nations in the history taught in schools is still functional to understand current affairs and prepare students for active participation in the life of communities where diversity and the number of actors playing will only increase.

We believe that the current scenario demands to foster new kinds of identities rooted on values beyond that of loyalty to the nation, and go towards the development of civic identity. As Rosa and González (2014) say, civic identity is committed to the development of conditions and resources for the exercise of autonomy and the opening of spaces of liberty, rather than setting final values as ethnicity (and sometimes national identity) does. In their own words:

> …the concept of citizenship leaves room for each individual to choose what kind of good to be taken as superior within his or her scale of values. But it also sets limits to how this good can be pursued. The instrumental character of the values of citizenship shows in the limits they set to the clashes between value systems, and in the determination to negotiate differences in aesthetic and moral values, customs, beliefs, duties, desires and behaviours. (ibid: 44, our translation)

Citizenship then is a commitment to managing diversity and conflicts in order to further rights and liberty. History education could also be instrumental for civic education in societies under transformation in which identities and civic values are being renegotiated.

History education can contribute to civic education by paying attention to events in which different actors participated in opening (or closing) spaces relevant to the acquisition (or loss) of civic rights and liberties, instead of taking nations or ethnic groups as the only historical agents. When so doing, in addition to highlighting civic values, history education will also offer a glimpse to the complexities of historical processes, avoiding a monological view of past and opening the way towards multivocal views (Luczynski, 1997) stimulating reflective and critical skills, and also minimise what Frenkel-Brunswik (1949) called *intolerance to ambiguity*. In sum, rather than presenting narratives conveying an ethnic or national moral, picturing individuals as actors playing a script, its purpose would be to provide tools to negotiate among different versions of the past, and so empower students to become authors of their own narratives.

Behind this view of history teaching, there is the intent to encourage historical thinking as a resource for civic life. Our assumption is that a history educa-

tion that avoids accounting for how rights and duties develop and fade away runs the risk of becoming meaningless (Barton, 2009) to an audience who cannot refrain from shopping in a symbolic market (Bourdieu, 1991) where alternative views of the past, the present and the future abound.

This is a view of history education committed to a democratic education in a *polis* caring for fostering *cives*. A history for times in which *demos* becomes polyhedral within and among overlapping political institutions, not always bounded within the same territory, and where different *ethnos* coexist within the civic space. A history devoted to study of the transformation of social agents and Statehood and concerned for the rights and the empowerment of citizenship, rather than a national narrative of the expansion and shrinking of the size of each Estate and the number and wealth of the livestock (human or not) belonging to each of them. A story about what people cares about rather than an epic story of the development of *polis* as one of the names under which power is exercised.

The decision on what history to teach in schools is one of the political privileges of the holders of *potestas* in each *polis*. But it is no less true that the decision taken will demonstrate the values and aims exercised, as well as the kind of citizenship desired for the futures to come.

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