Postcolonial history education: Issues, tensions and opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces a journal special issue devoted to an exploration of post-colonial history education with contributions from Ghana, Uganda, New Zealand, Canada, Botswana, Nigeria, Cyprus, Lebanon and London. It provides an overview of key issues, tensions and opportunities around decolonising the history curriculum. Relevant contexts such as the 'History Wars', subaltern studies, the conception of decolonising the mind and the possibilities of de-colonising pedagogies are explored. History education lenses around critical historical literacy, historical consciousness, multidimensional identities and multi-perspectivity are brought to bear upon the question of re-thinking forms of postcolonial history education. Specific political circumstances inform the nature of history education in every national jurisdiction; here the contemporary Black Lives Matter campaign, the fallout from the mismanagement of the fate of the 'Windrush' settlers in the UK and the recent focus of protestors globally upon colonial oppressors memorialised in statues frame the authors' reflections. However, echoing the optimism of most of the special issue contributions, opportunities to build bridges between divided communities, open up more inclusive history curricula to student voices and nuance and complicate homogeneous national narratives are identified and recommended.

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Introduction

How are young people taught about colonisation and experiences of empire? High quality history education which explores prevailing mythologies about the past, while nurturing the qualities of healthy scepticism in relation to the claims of contemporary political leaders, is a compelling civic necessity. Most post-colonial and settler nations have experienced considerable political and professional debates over representations of the national past in recent years, leading to an increasing scholarly focus on history education (see, for example, Bentrovato, Korostelina & Schulze, 2016; Carretero, Berger & Grever, 2017; Chong et al, 2016; Popp, Gorbahn & Grindel, 2019). This can include a revisionist spotlight on what is studied but also a re-thinking of how history is studied and the ultimate purposes of history education. This edition of the *Historical Encounters Journal* [HEJ] brings together case studies of history education practice from around the world which delineate a picture of history educators grappling in different ways with complexity, change, student identities, power, professional practice and the implications of a decolonised history curriculum – or at least an increasing consciousness of the implications of postcolonial history teaching practices.

The mediation of nations' official historical narratives, as engaged with by young people in schools, is highly political – something which is evident in all of the contributions in this special issue. Internationally, the writing of this introduction has coincided with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and protests around memorialising statues devoted to individuals associated with the slave trade or colonial misdeeds. And in the United Kingdom there has been considerable fall-out from the exposure of the Windrush deportations (Gentleman, 2019)[1]. Funded research by universities (for example, Hall et al., 2014; TIDE Project, 2020) and by individual historians (e.g. Olusoga, 2016), often using the supportive medium of television, has revealed not only details about slavery, the slave trade and the colonial history of Caribbean jurisdictions, but also about the extent to which slave-owners were compensated when slavery was abolished. The challenges of existence between 'colony and metropole' have been confirmed (Cooper & Stoler, 1997; Hall, 2002).

In conceptualising this issue of the HEJ we hoped to explore the extent to which active and critical history teaching approaches are being employed in developing former colonies and settler nations and the extent to which classroom history is able to embrace contested narratives (cf. Clark, 2008; Taylor & Guyver, 2012). We shared some common research questions with contributors as prompts such as:

- What is learned about empire and decolonisation across former colonial states?

- To what extent have history curricula broadened in scope to accommodate indigenous voices, experiences and values and more pluralistic histories?

- What can be learned about national identity and citizenship from students and teachers' experiences of history education?

- How is history teaching changing in your context in response to post-colonial or decolonising imperatives?

We were also interested in what the policies of different jurisdictions and their school curricula leave out – what is not taught and learned as part of the history curriculum. We did not expect contributors to address all of the framing questions but the ones which most resonated in their own contexts. All of the contributors to this issue of HEJ see historical thinking skills and conceptual historical understanding as vital for young people's democratic citizenship, wherever they happen to be studying, enabling learners to deconstruct singular truths and stereotypical representations of the 'Other' (cf. Barton & Levstik, 2004; Lévesque, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2013). Nevertheless, as the paper in this issue from New Brunswick demonstrates, even the recent orthodoxies of disciplinary history education are not beyond critique. Participation in more inclusive history lessons, sensitive to indigenous and minority perspectives, might be seen as a starting point in the process of helping young people to find a voice and be represented.

The empires forged by the Ottoman Turks, Britain and other European powers, inimical as they often were for the Indigenous peoples living within their territorial boundaries, provided a variety of contrasting historical contexts within which many contemporary global citizens' identities have been – and are being – forged. The idea of 'empire' operated at the levels of both concrete lived experience and narrative representation, meaning somewhat different things depending upon whether one is treating the legacies of the Ottoman, British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, or Dutch empires. Each had their own variants of what constituted 'civilising missions,' although in many cases the colonial relationship may have started for economic (trading) reasons. Each left behind different institutional, practical, cultural, and educational legacies, settler communities, or degrees of trauma as they retreated from empire.

In truth, history teachers globally – or the policy and curriculum-makers directing their practices – have not often delved too deeply into postcolonial theories and, in most parts of the world, efforts to decolonise school curricula are at a formative, emergent and/or contested stage. The term 'postcolonial' resists any attempt at a singular or definitive definition. New Zealand scholar Giselle Byrnes argued that:

> Postcolonialism does not simply signal an end to colonialism, but rather it suggests a critical engagement with colonisation ... and seeks to undermine the structures, ideologies, and institutions that gave colonisation meaning. Postcolonialism thus engages with ideas of plurality and the co-existence of multiple discourses. (Byrnes, 2007)

Postcolonial theory seeks to explain such issues as privilege, domination, struggle and resistance. These ideas are "all fundamentally related to a critique of the relationship between knowledge and power and an understanding of how representations of the world in words, ideas, images and texts both create and reflect beliefs and produce actions" (Hickling-Hudson et al, 2004, p.2). The relationship between power and different representations of knowledge can be seen in some seminal postcolonial texts (for example, Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1990). It is naturally often hard for teachers to translate these abstract ideas into purposeful historical learning activities to be undertaken by young people.

The critique of traditional history and history education from postcolonial perspectives often includes the ideas that:

- A de-mythicalisation of history (and history education) is required. Calls for curriculum renewal tend to gain traction as a natural upshot of obtaining independence from erstwhile colonial powers;

- There needs to be an acknowledgement of land or liberty taken from Indigenous peoples and support (drawing upon history) for processes of land hand backs (or appropriate compensation);

- Colonial languages have been privileged over local languages and writing privileged over orality;

- Insufficient voice has been given to Indigenous peoples, cultures and perspectives; and

- There is a need for histories which challenge hegemonic, top-down and nationalist discourses and complacent narratives of progress.

These critiques are radical and often represent a significant challenge to established curricula but they are starting to influence history education discourses and practices in some nations. Postcolonial theory can bring a sharp challenge to pragmatic empiricism (Hickling-Hudson, 2011). However, it is also the case that:

> The project of identifying the general discursive forces that held together the imperial enterprise and that operated wherever colonisation occurred is often in conflict with the need to provide detailed accounts of the material effect of those

discourses as they operated in different periods and different localities.
(Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2017, p. 172).

History education research is generally nationally focused (Levstik & Barton, 2008). This journal issue seeks to contribute to the promotion of global and comparative perspectives on decolonising narratives in history education in the context of former colonies, settler nations or nations still affected by the legacy of older empires (such as Cyprus and Lebanon explored in this issue). In order to respond to twenty-first century imperatives around inclusivity, human rights, and education for democratic citizenship, history education has to generate new ways of thinking and new modes of practice which respect the distinctive histories, contexts and conditions of postcolonial developing states as they re-frame and re-articulate their national identities.

History wars, History from below and postcolonial perspectives

From the nineteenth-century and through much of the twentieth-century one of the core purposes of history education in most nation states was as a unifying mechanism to prop up national identity and inculcate a common, shared national story. History has been taught in national school systems in part for socialising purposes and so as to make students love their country (Nussbaum & Cohen, 2002) and the historical narrative to imbibe has tended to be based upon the construct of an 'imagined' homogeneous nation (Anderson, 1991). However, increasingly – and globally from the 1960s onwards – there were overlays (or underlays) of history from below placed upon traditional national narratives. There was an increased emphasis on social history and the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous peoples, minority ethnic groups, immigrants, the working classes and women.

Linked to, but expanding beyond, the discipline of history, the 1980s saw the birth of subaltern studies as a further stage in postcolonial critique especially in South Asia (Prakash, 1994). Securing recognition of minority narratives, as has been seen in the cases of India and Sri Lanka (Pandian, 2008; Wijegoonawardana, 2012), continues to be a struggle. New histories in the late twentieth century tended to break up the previous hegemonic narratives of political and military history: 'great men', 'discovery' of new lands, 'pioneering settlement' and the complacency of contented dominion and linear stories of progress and reform. But the marriage of high politics and new forms of social history is often an awkward union at the point at which it meets history curricula, history syllabuses and textbooks, teachers' decision-making and classroom implementation. Moreover, history from below imperatives tend to set history education on a collision course with conservative historians and politicians who disapprove of critical, negative or so-named black armband (that is seeing the nation's past as negative and overly mournful, failing to see the positive aspects of nationalism and nation building) views of a nation's past

The conservative reaction to history from below pressures was significant. At the core of the History Wars (Peterson, 2016) which played out at different times in different ways in varied national contexts was a concern that the historical consciousness of young people was being hijacked by progressive academics and an educational establishment undesirably influenced by political correctness, cultural studies, literary theory, and postmodernism. In the Australian context, for example, it was Geoffrey Blainey's view (1993) that the 'balance sheet' of the past was firmly in favour of the achievements of 'White society' since 'settlement,' and that any history that had an excessive focus on past wrongs promoted a mournful relationship with the past that harmed the nation. 'New history' approaches brought an unwelcome uncertainty and criticality as far as many conservative politicians and commentators were concerned, as national historical narratives expanded to include the perspectives of the colonised as well as pre-colonial oral histories.

There was a historiographical reaction too. Three influential books seemed to exemplify and promote a conservative (or neo-conservative) western, developed world-centric, hegemonic view of history which projected fluent narratives of western domination, economically, politically and culturally: Francis Fukuyama's *The end of history* (1992), Samuel Huntington's (1997) *Clash of*

civilizations, and Niall Ferguson's (2011) *Civilization: The West and the rest* (2011). Despite considerable criticism (mixed with acclaim for the breadth of the canvas upon which the three historians painted their arguments), these texts cumulatively reinforced a discursive practice that has become popularised in the press and has continued to influence popular conceptions of the world, although they have had limited success in penetrating the professional world of history education. They represent forces that challenged the post-colonial theories of Achebe (1975) and Spivak (1999), also articulated by Prakash (1994).

Cutting across these global narratives, government adviser and public intellectual Simon Schama (2010), recommended an orientation of the English History curriculum towards the history of the British Empire – for inclusive not triumphalist reasons. He argued that the consequences of immigration (and settlement) following decolonisation, were being felt in British cities, and he recommended a recognition of the effect that this was having on the youth of those places in understanding the complexity of their own identities. Paul Gilroy (1987,1992), writing in a postcolonial paradigm, described the migration and settlement after the Second World War as the 'empire coming to Britain.' Similarly, David Olusoga (2016) described his own often traumatic 'theatre of memory' as he experienced his teenage years in Newcastle in the north-east of England as the mixed-race child of a white British mother and a Nigerian father. A paper in this HEJ issue (Guyver, see below) gives voice to the lived experiences of London migrant-settler teenagers talking about their experiences and those of their families, and how these relate to learning about history and empire (see also Haydn, 2014).

Can the subaltern speak?

The power of official historical narratives, according to Stuart Hall (1997), was their capacity to construct the colonised subject as "different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West" (p. 112). It also manifested more profoundly in the capacity of historical narratives to make the colonised see themselves as 'the Other'. For example, Achebe (1975) realized when at school in Nigeria that he was in fact the 'Other' that his textbooks were describing. He made an eloquent plea for the focus to shift from that of the colonisers to that of the colonised, giving them a voice. Spivak's seminal work *Can the subaltern speak?* (1988) articulated a similar message.

It is clear from curriculum developments in Canada and New Zealand, especially around notions of truth and reconciliation further explored in this issue (See Rowinski & Sears, and Davison below) that there is considerable support for restoring the place of the histories of the colonised to history curricula. Moreover, within the former colonies themselves, as can be seen in the Ghana, Uganda, Nigeria and Botswana case studies in this issue, there is a recognition that pre-colonial histories, often existing in the form of oral stories, need to be reclaimed and re-validated, but in a sense also modified to ways of thinking in the twenty-first century through using them as a basis for dialogue, making the teaching and learning more interactive.

According to Young (1990), "the Third World was itself created as a representation, or as a set of representations, not only for the West but also for the culture whose representation was constructed" (p. 159). Young argued that this was absolutely essential for the 'success' of the European colonisation of Asia, Africa, the Americas and the islands of the Pacific, since nineteenth and early twentieth-century "imperialism was not only a territorial and economic but inevitably also a subject-constituting project" (p. 159). Land and territory was colonised by subduing the population through force, oppressive or partially understood treaties, trade agreements and relationships; but minds were also colonised by inscribing the subdued population in the historical record as inferior, primitive or sometimes even sub-human.

The notion of 'colonisation of the mind' presents some significant challenges for the postcolonial historian, and equally a problem for history curricula in a postcolonial society. As John Willinsky (1998) argued in *Learning to divide the world: Education at empire's end*, the legacy of imperialism is ever present within Western educational discourse, having significantly shaped the construction and constitution of school subjects such as History and Geography. Education

itself was deeply implicated in the project of colonialism (as Adu-Gyamfi & Anderson exemplify in the Ghanaian case study below). Spivak (1997) recognised that decolonisation had not resulted in the freedoms in liberated, sovereign nations that one might have expected. She added that the historical discourse often "boringly repeats the rhythms of colonisation with the consolidation of recognisable styles" (p. 202). From Spivak's viewpoint, "independence from the colonial power might free us of our foreign oppressors' armies, but it does not automatically free us of the discourses in which our subjectivities and identities have been inscribed" (p. 202).

Others have pointed to the colonisation of the archive as an obstacle in the pathway of decolonising histories. Writing in the context of document production in the Dutch East Indies, Stoler (2002) argued that scholars should view archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval but of knowledge production; as monuments of states as well as sites of state ethnography – "The archive was the supreme technology of the late nineteenth century imperial state" (p. 97). Moreover, it is important to recognise the primacy of oral history in the culture of Māori, Aboriginal and other Indigenous peoples. Yet oral history only secured academic respectability in European historiography in the second half of the twentieth century, although as Paul Thompson, an early exponent, reminded us, "It was the first kind of history" (Thompson, 1978, p. 19). Some historians and anthropologists in exploring colonial history themes are re-reading the archives and undertaking oral histories with people who lived through archived events to comment on colonial narratives of them being told in the archives (see Price, 1998 for examples in the West Indies).

A number of historians in South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific have also sought to read records against their grain in the archives, recovering the lived experiences of peasants, women and Indigenous resistance leaders from the condescension of previous historic omission (e.g. Guha, 1983; Mar, 2016; Vickers & Jones, 2005). Decolonising imperial history is not easy since it has to avoid the colonisers' words found in the archives and repeated in history textbooks. The stories that nations tell themselves about themselves can quite often contain myths that tend to be self-serving, and dangerously uncritical and uncontested (Guyver, 2016). Indeed, this has been commented on as a challenge to be overcome in Uganda and Botswana (Sebbowa & Pastory Majani, and Mafela, below).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1981) seminal text *Decolonising the Mind* drew attention to internalised forms of imperialism in which education is a primary colonising medium:

> The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. (p. 3)

In Ngugi's terms, 'decolonisation' was a project of 're-centering.' It was about rejecting the assumption that the modern West was the central root of Africa's consciousness and cultural heritage. In Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana and Botswana we see examples of jurisdictions claiming back their histories, sometimes by re-writing and re-claiming that history for themselves (see Dike, 1956), although not without difficulties for those wishing to change the situation.

At the frontier of innovative history education some educators have started to reflect upon how the pedagogical practices of teaching might begin to decolonise (Nakata, 2007; Yunkaporta, 2009). There is an argument that it is in large part through transmissive, assimilative education policies and Western-style schooling that much of the colonisation of minds of Indigenous peoples has taken place (Battiste, 1998). Certainly most history curricula around the world reject ways of knowing which are not western in nature. The fact that Indigenous cultures are still largely oral cultures with a focus on narrative and symbolic and visual representation rather than propositional knowledge and explanation makes the task of creating a history education as anything but learning about others in potentially foreign and text-based ways challenging indeed.

Students being enabled to see themselves as part of the narrative

Postcolonial history education is further complicated by the movement of migrant and diasporic communities linked to – but not in all cases directly emerging from – the colonial experience. The increasing flow of populations, mobility of individuals and crossing of borders and the blurring of the concept of 'home' have created new challenges for history teachers. There is no one-size-fits-all cultural identity for diasporic people, but rather a multiplicity of different cultural identities that share both important similarities and important differences. Examples of the transnational challenges and opportunities afforded to history teachers are shared here in the context of London (see Guyver, below). This is tied to the need to build into history lessons an opportunity to address the historical dimension of identity when there are so many different identities in one class or school. Among students there is a lack of patience with any approach to history education which does not allow for an examination of how 'subaltern voices' and 'silent histories' can help them to understand their own and their families' places in society as part of a colonial legacy. Students with a family experience background of displacement are more likely to identify with the colonised and to want a more three-dimensional, less generalised set of narratives to illustrate this. Thus, their own double-consciousness (Gilroy, 1993) and corresponding life-world experiences of metropole (London) and colony or postcolonial jurisdiction, as core and periphery, are transferred empathetically to the lives of players in past historical events.

History can be used for building social identity, especially if in a postcolonial situation this means deliberately avoiding the sharing of a single uniform identity. This has also been a strong factor in motivating curriculum change across Canada, as migration has put pressure on traditional forms of history education. History lessons should provide identity elements for all groups (see Peck, 2010). Indeed, history lessons are – at their best – open arenas of dialogue for groups with different experiences and orientations, and there are clearly rewards associated with undertaking in the classroom the socio-political experiment of attempting to write everyone into the narrative. Both the Botswana and Uganda papers in this special issue incorporate the idea of 'Mutual Value Theory'(Boyanton, 2015) in suggesting more bottom-up and agentic forms of historical exploration by young people, drawing upon local historical events that may unsettle but at the same time also exemplify national narratives, especially when they are seen 'from below.' To be inclusive, history lessons need at least to attempt to incorporate and recognise the specific and idiosyncratic histories of many groups. In this way contemporary history education might assist in the process of capturing the negotiations between cultures that are taking place, thereby (in contexts such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada) providing a platform upon which to build a rehabilitation of Indigenous knowledge and identity.

Decolonising the curriculum represents an acceptance that education, including history education, needs to enable self-understanding. Seeing ourselves more clearly, whether as citizens or societies, is not only about admiring a reflection in the mirror. The Antiguan author, Jamaica Kincaid, puts it thus:

> And might not knowing why they are the way they are, why they do the things they do, why they live the way they live, why the things that happened to them happened, lead … people to a different relationship with the world, a more demanding relationship? (cited in Gopal, 2017).

To prompt every student in postcolonial nations to articulate and reflect upon his or her sometimes silenced past, a practice of deliberation in a classroom is necessary. This has indeed been seen to be the case in New Brunswick (Canada) and New Zealand explored in this issue.

Deliberation means conversation instead of debate, listening besides talking, and understanding rather than aiming at an agreement of one 'truth.' Instead, such an approach aims at recognition of different legitimate points of view (See Hess and McEvoy, 2014). Indeed, "constructing history for an inclusive nation which seeks understanding – not only across its own component groups but also of its neighbours – can be a force for good" (Guyver, 2016, p. 1). Lively, informed, empathetic debates around the meaning of the past and its linkages to today's affairs

does not signal national disunity and deterioration; rather it is a sign of a vibrant, self-confident democracy. Social inclusiveness is necessary if history education is to prompt reconciliation and the building of bridges between different communities (the Cyprus and Lebanon papers in this issue provide fascinating examples of the bridge-building challenges).

Critical historical literacy and critical citizenship

Not all societies welcome the embedded model of critical historical literacy and the corresponding parallel model of critical citizenship. It can seem threatening or unpatriotic Seminal developments in relation to approaches to history education have included curriculum projects originating in the School History Project (England) feeding into innovative approaches to history education (e.g. Cooper & Chapman, 2009; Davies, 2017). Work on historical thinking undertaken in North America has identified key concepts and components of historical thinking (e.g. Lévesque, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2012; Wineburg, 2001) and approaches founded in notions of historical literacy (Lee, 2005) or 'historical reasoning' (Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008), which for those authors writing in a Dutch context especially includes elements around the contestedness of interpretations of history in heritage, museum, representations and curriculum contexts (Van Boxtel, Grever & Klein, 2016).

Each of these terms associated with the syntactic or procedural aspects of history underscores the importance given to the act of scrutinising below the surface narratives, perspectives, representations or interpretations that are encountered, and involve what Lee and Ashby (2000) delineated as second-order concepts or ideas such as *significance*, *empathy*, *change over time* and *contestation*: "It is these ideas that provide our understanding of history as a discipline or form of knowledge" (p. 199). Historical thinking is thus an overarching term that embraces a range of modes of *doing* history. We take it, in this HEJ special edition, to be co-existent with *historical understanding*, and that it encompasses both acts of *historical reasoning* and engagement in *historical literacy*. We were keen to hear voices from developing countries to explore what epistemological ideas from recent debates most resonated in their contexts (and why), although it has become clear that politics continues to exercise a dominant role in determining whether the nurturing of young people as critical citizens and the creation of more inclusive narratives is resisted or welcomed.

Robert Parkes (2007) argued that:

> In reading [h]istory curriculum as postcolonial text, it becomes clear that what have remained uncontested in the struggle for histories within the … [h]istory curriculum have been the representational practices of history itself, and that redressing the neglect of historical representation opens new possibilities for [h]istory curriculum as critical pedagogical practice. (p. 384)

There are links here to the increasingly influential idea of historical consciousness as both a focus and purpose of history teaching. Raphael Samuel was one of the first to raise the question of how school children acquire historical knowledge. He bemoaned that fact that "so far as pedagogy is concerned, it allows no space for knowledge which creeps in sideways as a by-product of studying something else" (1994, p.8). This could be extended to knowledge which 'creeps in' after being exposed to other elements of history which are to be found in the everyday. History educators have long aimed to shape learners' views, values and understandings of the past by helping them to become more historically conscious in the present.

The core and periphery (or metropole and colony) paradigm can be seen to work at a dynamic level in all of the jurisdictions represented in this collection. This can be seen where double-consciousness (Gilroy, 1993) of both the near and distant fields as experienced in the habituses of the life-worlds of school students (and their families) is in a constant process of interpretive renegotiation in the hands (and corresponding habituses) of their teachers. The students and their families have experienced the political dimensions of power in personal ways, so history from

below becomes personal for them, and they are likely, to use the phrase appropriated by Hall (2002) from Cooper and Stoler (1997), to see the national, transnational and family history in *a single analytic frame*, or scaffolding. The teacher is there as a guide to help them navigate this, to make the links and bring the history to life. This is seen to be particularly relevant for minorities in every jurisdiction where the teacher's role is to enable the mutual valuing of students between themselves (Boyanton, 2015).

Historical consciousness, historical significance and representations of collective memory

Historical consciousness has been delineated as the capacity for learners to connect historical learning to life outside the school and representations of collective memory such as contained in museums and heritage interpretations (Lowenthal, 1996), popular films or on-line games and simulations. According to Rüsen (2004, p. 66-67) "historical consciousness deals with the past as experience; it reveals to us the web of temporal change in which our lives are caught up and (at least indirectly) the future perspectives toward which that change is flowing." For Rüsen the point of history education is to make sense of the past in order to create a perspective or orienting frame for understanding and acting in the present and future (See also Ahonen, 2005; Friedrich, 2010; Seixas, 2006; Van Straaten et al., 2016). Historical consciousness incorporates the development in students of narrative competence. What stories and accounts can I trust and why?

The application of some ideas around historical consciousness and postcolonial theory have been attempted to be applied in South Africa. Gail Weldon in her doctoral study (2009) comparing history education in South Africa and Rwanda, drew on thinking by Linda Chisholm (2004) about the possibility of the co-existence of official and unofficial narratives. Weldon reinforced how this had been working within the 2002-2003 second attempt at a history curriculum in South Africa. Within the new curriculum, there was no attempt to delineate a 'true' history, rather:

> [The] new 'official history', through a commitment to the idea that historical 'truth' can be subjected to rigorous analysis by entering conversations structured by the 'disciplinary traditions' and that there are complex histories within the South African experience, provided potential opportunities for 'border crossing' and for thinking one another's histories. The history curriculum became an 'open' rather than a 'closed' text. (Weldon, 2009, p. 180)

This notion of the history curriculum as an open rather than a closed text inviting border crossing may represent a possible way forward for countries with particularly traumatic and divided recent histories such as in Cyprus and Lebanon whose challenges in crafting history curricula are outlined below (See also Ahonen, 2012).

There are also connections between historical consciousness and the notion of historical significance. A number of influential contributions to debates about history teaching across varying national jurisdictions have argued for a fruitful focus upon the idea of historical significance (e.g. Cercadillo, 2001; Lévesque, 2005; Peck, 2010). In considering the use of historical significance in the classroom, Hunt (2000, p. 52-53) took as his starting point, "How can historical significance be used to answer the question, 'Why are we studying this?'" He argued that history teaching is enlivened when young citizens feel that they can engage with issues that they see as still relevant to their lives today. This would certainly apply to the historical issues and content examined in most of the jurisdictions represented in this special issue. It is interesting that in Cyprus, in a situation of potential conflict where strong differences are defined by the nature of internal and external loyalties (Cyprocentric, Hellenocentric and Turkocentric), a key solution as a kind of curriculum bridge is being offered by allowing different groups to appropriate a shared disciplinary approach to history (Onarkan & Aliusta below). This can be seen in the work of Hedegaard and Chaiklin (2005) describing their experience of enabling children from immigrant communities in New York to contribute their varied experiences to a common theme.

The 'Rhodes Must Fall' movement and memorialisation of Captain Cook

The disruptive resonances of the colonial past have broken through into public consciousness and public contestation in different forms in different places in recent times. Sometimes the debates coalesce around monuments and statues as visible representations of popular memory. In South Africa it was seen in the momentum of the 'Rhodes Must Fall' Movement at the University of Cape Town (Mbembe, 2016) – a decolonising of the university in this case involved a rehabilitation of the campus's public space from legacy statuary. The 250th anniversary of Captain James Cook setting sail from Plymouth on HMS Endeavour in August 1768 to carry out a variety of duties on behalf of the British government, including mapping the fabled Great Southern continent revived debates in both New Zealand and Australia about memorialisation of Cook in statue form. A statue of Cook was removed from a hill on the North Island of New Zealand following protests by the local Māori community and a unanimous council vote to re-locate the statue to a local museum and possibly replace it with a statue of Raikaitane, the Māori chief at the time of Cook's landing. Leaders of the local Ngāti tribe noted that historical records showed that Cook's crew shot nine of their people, killing six (Pearlman, 2018). Ironically, Australia meanwhile announced plans for a new statue of Cook as part of a wider $50million heritage re-development at Botany Bay at the site of first contact between *Endeavour* crew members and Aboriginal peoples. Australia's then Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull and his successor Scott Morrison argued that the monument would be inclusive and an "opportunity to show the view from the ship and the view from the shore," but a leading Aboriginal activist, Pastor Ray Minniecon, was quoted as saying "It's still an invasion and it's still an unwanted invasion" (Bevege, 2018, n.p.). The journalist reporting the plans for the statue added:

> British colonisation brought Australia into the modern world with a successful economy, new technology, an independent judiciary, a democratic parliament and a documented land-ownership system; but it also dispossessed the tribal first Australian people of their sovereignty. (Bevege, 2018, n.p.)

This is a journalistic example of a kind of spuriously balanced but insensitive narrative, in response to which (in order to unpack it or re-balance it) young people would require special skills, particularly in the light of the questionable inclusion of "a documented land-ownership system" (Bevege, 2018, n.p.) which raises further questions about truth and reconciliation, as well as the role of legislatures and the judiciary in settling disputes. It can be helpful for young people to reflect on the political philosophies and underpinning attitudes behind false equivalence and partial arguments in media representations. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that however distasteful it might seem, the roles of Cook and indeed Rhodes, and even the slave-owner and later public benefactor Edward Colston (whose statue was toppled in Bristol in June 2020 (Olusoga, 2020), in the history of their times still need to be examined and evaluated, even if the old hero-worshipping and celebration cannot be justified.

Conclusion

The contributors to this *Historical Encounters Journal* issue comprise a mix of well-established, mid-career and young researchers and academics who study various actors and factors involved in history education ranging across policy-making, school curricula, textbooks, civil society organizations, teachers and teaching practices themselves. The two editors of this special issue, white male academics of Anglo origin, are acting as both insiders and outsiders, and sought to negotiate with project participants paths towards a mutual recognition of shared experiences of postcolonial history and/or how this history with all its depth and range is interpreted by educators in postcolonial societies.

The contributions highlight the reverberation of the colonial past in History classrooms around the world – in Africa, in settler colonial nations, in a cosmopolitan city and in countries (Cyprus and Lebanon) where the scars of recent internecine conflicts are still raw, emotional and ongoing.

Often it would seem that a shared or even negotiated approach to thinking about each other's histories rather than the histories themselves would be the way forward.

Naturally, many important unanswered questions remain which link back to the elements of postcolonial critique of much contemporary history education introduced at the opening of this editorial:

- How is a de-mythicalised history curriculum to be independently negotiated and agreed? (The contributions in this issue from the perspectives of Cyprus and Lebanon are salutary in this area)

- How can acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic groups in curricula be more than token and genuinely acknowledge past dispossession or other effects of colonization or postcolonial displacement? (The Botswana paper in this issue has suggestions on better ways of representing the experiences of minority groups in the country)

- Can new ways be found in history classrooms which respect the insights of the 'decolonising the mind' literature. For example, how can children be helped to think differently about 'Country' (in its Indigenous sense) and oral traditions?

- How can initial teacher education and in-service education around history teaching decolonise its pedagogy and practices and give voice to Indigenous and other ethnic minority peoples, cultures and perspectives? What will this look and feel like?

- How can a professional and independent voice be brought to the sensitive process of re-making history curricula, drawing upon the literature related to historical conceptual understanding and historical consciousness?

- How do countries, peoples and educators find a path to teaching local, national and global history that is sensitive to place and context?

The outcomes that are sought from historical learning include the ability to discuss, listen to and empathise with differing perspectives; consider a range of opinions and values; and come to reasonable conclusions. These qualities and critical attributes operate as a path to the development of a sophisticated historical consciousness, which young people can use as a tool to navigate, understand, and interpret their social world in the present. In an information age where the internet and social media are feeding a world of fake news this has rarely been more important.

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Endnotes

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[1] 'Windrush' here refers to a group of Caribbean migrants who believed wrongly that the UK authorities had kept the original records of their immigration. They had to fight for recognition of their citizenship rights, and this was supported by The Guardian, and in particular by journalist Amelia Gentleman. News of the scandalous and discriminatory treatment of several vulnerable individuals broke at the same time as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London in April 2018. Some of those who could not find the relevant paperwork had lost the right to work, could not afford their accommodation, and were waiting to be deported, despite having families in the UK, and having not lived in their former countries for decades. The Conservative Government at the time had promised a 'hostile environment' for illegal immigrants, even for those who had arrived as children and had worked for the greater part of their lives. The Commonwealth is an organisation of 54 member states, most connected historically as former colonies with the British Empire (except for Rwanda and Mozambique). The Commonwealth since 1965 has had an independent Secretariat, with several Secretaries-General, allowing for the representation of a succession of the different regions. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is Head of the Commonwealth. The scandal of the Windrush discriminations and deportations was that it was one Commonwealth member, in this case the one with most power, doing injustice to others while hypocritically seeking to uphold a set of shared values, including those relating to human rights, as set out in the Commonwealth Charter of 2013.