

Post-Conflict History Education Moratoria: A Balance

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Abstract

This article deals with post-conflict history education moratoria: the temporary suspension of history education or its recent history segment, including its textbooks, with the aim of aligning it to the goals of a transition to peace and democracy. I present fifteen cases arranged under four types: moratoria after the defeat of the Axis powers in international war (the successor states of Nazi Germany, *Anschluss* Austria, Fascist Italy, and Imperialist Japan), moratoria after the implosion of communist regimes (USSR, Moldova, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina), moratoria after genocides (Cambodia, Rwanda, and Guatemala), and moratoria after racial, ethnic and religious conflicts (South Africa, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Iraq). The analytical part starts with the basic question of whether the period of recent violence should be taught at all: I argue that this is a state duty, any suspension of which cannot but be temporary. After a brief exploration of the distribution over time of the moratoria, I discuss the moratoria brokers (the executive and legislative branches of government) as well as the pressures from below (civil society) and above (international intervention). Seven types of reasons typically used to justify moratoria are then weighed: politics, didactics, legacy, practice, safety, reconciliation and the passage of time. Next, the crucial question is tackled of how long moratoria lasted and how long they ought to last: I argue that wholesale moratoria should last no longer than five years and that meanwhile sound interim materials should be prepared. By way of conclusion, the relationship between moratoria, forgetting and democracy is explored. Truly democratic moratoria are part of mediation-induced, not censorship-induced strategies of social forgetting. Five conditions decide this: a legal framework, an explicit and short time span, a public debate, the effective preparation of new materials, and unimpeded academic historical research. They help define under which regime of restrictions post-conflict history education moratoria are justified in a democratic society.

Keywords: democracy; history education; history textbooks; human rights; moratoria; peace agreements; post-conflict; reconciliation; social forgetting; transitional justice.

Introduction

Societies emerging from dictatorships or armed conflicts and choosing the path of democracy feverishly ask themselves how to come to terms with the recent past. These new or restored democracies want to unearth the facts about past human rights violations, bring to justice the perpetrators of these violations, and launch initiatives to prevent the repetition of the recent violence. One of the problems they have to resolve – and not a minor one given the controversial nature and past-orientedness of much of this work – is how to present to younger generations the different interpretations of this violence and its causes. By and large, two strategies have been chosen to tackle this challenge.

The most common was to proactively deal with the ramifications of the violent past in the educational field. This strategy approaches two problems: whether history education has encouraged the very human rights violations committed in the past and how new and more reliable teaching materials can be developed. This primary strategy reserves a central role for public debate and is relatively well documented (De Baets, 2011, pp. 60–66; De Baets, 2001).¹ The alternative strategy, however, largely remained unstudied: in order to effectuate a transition toward peace and democracy, some countries chose *not* to deal with the violent past at the educational level and to instead impose moratoria on history teaching.

My purpose here is to throw more light on this surprising alternative strategy. I will define a post-conflict history education moratorium as the temporary suspension of history education or its recent history segment, including its textbooks, with the aim of aligning it to the goals of a transition to peace and democracy. Not only moratoria in the formal sense are scrutinized here, but also closely resembling phenomena with different names, such as bans of history courses or embargoes on history education – as long as they take place in a generally recognized framework of transitional justice. The scope will be international but limited to post-1945 moratoria.

Three types of confusion should be eliminated from the start. The presence of history education moratoria (the second strategy) does not necessarily mean that no public debate about history education (the first strategy) takes place. On the contrary, the establishment of moratoria is often accompanied by fierce public debates about the justifica-

tion of such measures. The fact that debates about moratoria are held, is in itself a sign of a transitional context; a moratorium without a debate is a bad omen. Furthermore, although at first sight such moratoria seem to be a unique property of new or emerging democracies, traces reminiscent of them are also found in consolidated democracies. At the 1989 bicentennial celebration of the French Revolution, for example, the political right and left in France openly differed in their interpretations of the revolution and its causes, effects and significance. As a result, the education ministry felt obliged to delete questions about the French Revolution from the secondary school examinations that year (Appleby, Hunt & Jacob, 1994, p. 291; for another example [Arkansas]: Harris, 2007).

Finally, dictatorships sometimes rearrange the history education field to the extent that it superficially resembles a history textbook moratorium rather than a self-created textbook shortage. Examples come from Belarus and Uzbekistan. President Aleksandr Lukashenka's policy of integrating Belarus and Russia was translated into an official directive in 1995 to remove all post-Soviet nationalist history textbooks and replace them by Soviet editions. In anticipation of new textbooks, old pre-1991 Soviet texts had to be used. In practice, an outright ban was not imposed, though, owing to textbook shortage (Human Rights Watch, 1999, pp. 12–18; Lindner, 1999, pp. 441–444). The same happened in Uzbekistan under the regime of Islam Karimov, although the latter's purpose, in contrast to Lukashenka's, was to *de-sovietize* history education. By 2000, schools were ordered to destroy all history textbooks printed before 1995 because they still employed a teaching methodology developed by Soviet academics. This measure led to textbook shortage as well (Plyuto & Khaidarov, 2000; Samari, Ashurov & Ibragimov, 2002).

In total, fifteen cases of post-conflict moratoria have been gathered here. The documentation available for each case, however, is widely unequal. The emphasis of my analysis will be on one element of history education – the history textbook. The textbook is without doubt a crucial tool of history education everywhere in the world, but I recognize that it only gives an indirect glimpse of classroom practices. This is the price to be paid for a broad, internationally comparative, approach. It is not a major obstacle for my purpose which is to analyze the range of arguments surrounding post-conflict history education moratoria. With these important caveats in mind, the first task is to bring some order in the collection of cases. After much tentative grouping and regrouping of cases, I arrived at the following types:

- *Moratoria after the defeat of the Axis powers in international war*
Successor states of Nazi Germany, *Anschluss* Austria, Fascist Italy, Imperialist Japan (1945–).
- *Moratoria after the implosion of communist regimes*
USSR (1988–), Moldova (1994– and 2002–), Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (1995–).
- *Moratoria after genocides*
Cambodia (1979–), Rwanda (1994–), Guatemala (1996–).
- *Moratoria after racial, ethnic and religious conflicts*
South Africa (1994–), Lebanon (1989–), Afghanistan (2001–), Iraq (2003–).

I am keenly aware that any typology inevitably produces overlap – and provokes lots of critical questions. To begin with, my typology has a certain hybridity: the first two groups each refer to sets of regimes that, bound by a similar ideology, collapsed more or less together, while the last two groups refer to separate regimes. The first group of moratoria was established after an international war, whereas the last two groups did so after what were mainly internal conflicts. The second group displays both possibilities. In addition, the third and fourth groups overlap since genocide, which is the focus of the third group, is directed at national, ethnical, racial or religious communities, thus encompassing dimensions of the fourth group.

Four cases which at first sight seemed eligible, were not included in the end: Macedonia, Serbia, the DDR and Burundi.² One eligible case was excluded because too little was known about it: Zimbabwe.³ I will now present thumbnail sketches of the four groups. This will enable me to analyze the range of arguments surrounding post-conflict history education moratoria.

Moratoria after the defeat of the Axis powers in international war

The first four cases occurred during the wrap-up of World War II. After their victory in May 1945, the Allied Powers occupied *Germany* and started a process of denazification. The Potsdam agreement that these powers concluded in August 1945 stipulated: ‘German education shall be so controlled as completely to eliminate Nazi and militarist doctrines and to make possible the successful development of democratic ideas.’ (Potsdam Agreement, 1945, article II.A 7). This was further elaborated in the instructions of the Military Government: ‘Attention of authors and publishers will be called to...the Potsdam Agreement...and they will be advised that it is not enough to eradicate from school texts Nazism or Prussianism, but that German authors of events of definitely democratic trend should be included.’ (UNESCO,

1949, p. 44). The Allied Powers massively destroyed or banned all history textbooks that had been in use in the Third Reich. Full of Nazi propaganda, these textbooks had given priority to the triumph of Nazism and the depiction of periods in which Germany had been a dominant power in Europe. For some time, no history lessons were given in the reopened schools. Textbooks from earlier periods (like the Weimar Republic) were used instead but they were not found to be satisfactory either. All new 'emergency' books were subjected to Allied censorship (Dance, 1964, pp. 31, 62; Schüddekopf, 1967, pp. 22–25).

In *Austria*, where many thought that they had been Hitler's first victims, the post-1945 moratorium on teaching the history of the Nazi era was an unofficial compromise between the political elite and civil society. Most teachers only taught history up to 1918, a situation that reportedly lasted until the 1970s in some parts of the country – the time of a generation (Marko-Stöckl, 2008, pp. 10–11).

In *Italy*, the measures taken were similar to the approach in Germany. The Allied Control Commission examined secondary history textbooks used under Mussolini and divided them into three categories: books that could be used without change; books that could be used if modified (that is, excising sections dealing with post-World War I history, particularly fascism); and books that could not be used at all. When from 1947 the Christian Democrats ruled Italy alone, they continued this arrangement in order to avoid a debate in schools about fascism and the anti-fascist resistance (the communists and socialists had played a major role in the latter). This changed only in 1960, when the Christian Democrats formed an alliance with the Italian Socialist Party and the history programs began to include more recent history (Cajani, 2006, p. 38; UNESCO, 1949, pp. 46–47).

In *Japan*, the education ministry started issuing orders to amend wartime textbooks just days after the surrender in August 1945: teachers and students had to delete ultra-nationalistic passages from the wartime textbooks with ink and scissors. From late October 1945, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), who ruled the country until 1952, gradually asserted control over the textbooks, which culminated in December 1945 in a total suspension of wartime textbooks and courses about Japanese history. SCAP ordered the textbooks and teachers instructions to be pulped. The ban lasted until September 1946, when, first, 'stop-gap' history textbooks and, then, more permanent ones were published by the education ministry: they carefully avoided all glorification of militarism, ultra-nationalism or the state religion Shintoism. Sensitive topics included the emperor and the

armed forces atrocities during the Pacific War (1931–1945). After the adoption of a new Fundamental Law of Education in 1947, the education ministry introduced a screening and authorization system for history textbook manuscripts at primary and secondary school levels, which was gradually tightened over the years (among many sources: Caiger, 1969; Thakur, 1995; UNESCO, 1949, pp. 47–48).

Moratoria after the implosion of communist regimes

The next four cases are tied together by the transition from communism to post-communism. In the *USSR*, the calls for *glasnost* (openness) issued since 1986–1987 had eased or lifted restrictions from many formerly proscribed historical subjects. Several aspects of USSR history began to be publicly reexamined. Developments accelerated at a staggering rhythm between 1988 and 1990. In May 1988, the State Committee for Education canceled the June final examination in history and social science for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds and the annual examinations in the history of the Soviet period for other age groups. The general perception was that the old history textbooks were full of lies, which completely undermined their credibility. The history examinations were again canceled in 1989. New textbooks for the ninth and tenth grades appeared in 1989 and 1990 (Davies, 1989, pp. 180–184; Davies, 1997, pp. 119–126; Vaillant, 1994, pp. 141–168).

Although *Moldova* had close cultural and historical links with Romania, its history was russified when it was part of the USSR. After independence arrived in 1991, this trend was briefly reversed: the history of the Romanians was taught rather than the history of the Moldovans. In 1994, however, the preamble of the new constitution postulated a Moldovan identity. The new government attempted to align the curricula to this postulate by creating ‘Moldovan’ history courses. University students, school children and teachers perceived this substitution attempt as a reintroduction of Soviet-style moldovanism and organized a demonstration in front of the parliament. The demonstration turned into a permanent strike and continued to grow in size. Soviet history textbooks were publicly burned (the protesters chanted ‘Read them yourselves’). After a two-months strike, the project was abandoned and the government ended the demonstrations with a moratorium on history teaching.

In 2001, under a newly elected communist-led government, tensions about the past erupted again. In July, some five hundred teachers demonstrated in the capital Chişinău against a government plan to replace the textbook *History of Romanians* with a new one, *History of Moldova*, thus again replacing traces of ‘romanianism’ with

‘moldovanism’. According to the new book, the peoples of the two countries, Romania and Moldova, were historically different, as were their languages. Some critics spoke of a ‘deromanization’ and ‘resovietization’ of Moldovan identity. During the first four months of 2002, daily demonstrations were held against the official history textbook plan. Under pressure, the education minister eventually imposed a moratorium. He was dismissed but after mediation of the Council of Europe (of which Moldova had been a member state since 1995) in April 2002, the moratorium was prolonged. A new but controversial subject called ‘integrated history’ was gradually introduced from the fall of 2004—critics said that it would be biased toward moldovanism. According to textbook expert Stefan Ihrig, the intervention by foreign actors to seek a compromise was used as a pretext to pursue a *de facto* policy of moldovanism (Amnesty International, 2003, p. 176; Council of Europe, 2002; Höpken, 2003, pp. 14–15; Ihrig, 2004, pp. 9–11; Ihrig, 2009, pp. 357–358, 366 [quote], 372–373, 380–386; Van der Leeuw-Roord & Crijns, 2002; Shafir, 2001).

The countries of the former Yugoslavia underwent not one but three transitions: from communism to post-communism in 1989, from war to peace in 1995 (and, for Kosovo, in 2000), and, generally, from federation to fragmentation. Hence, the situation was complex. In *Croatia*, the war ended in 1995 with a United Nations-mediated peace settlement, called the Erdut agreement, regulating the reintegration of formerly Serb-occupied territories in Eastern Slavonia. In 1997, a letter of agreement was signed as an addendum to this settlement, which ensured the educational rights of the Serbian minority. It included a moratorium on teaching the recent history of former Yugoslavia in classes of Serbian pupils for six years. On expiry of the moratorium in 2003, the Serbian community, fearing to be depicted exclusively as culprits, found none of the existing textbooks acceptable. A government-appointed commission decided to fill the curricular gap with a temporary supplement to the existing textbooks. In 2005 three Croatian historians eventually presented such a supplement covering the time span from the 1980s to 1995. When in the public uproar that followed, the authors were accused of ‘sacrificing’ the sufferings of Croats in the war for the sake of reconciliation, the supplement was eventually withdrawn. In 2007, five new history textbooks were published in Croatia for the eighth grade; they dealt with the time of the war and also with the ethnic cleansing committed by Croats against the Serb population (see also Koren, 2009, pp. 124–130; Marko-Stöckl, 2008, pp. 14–17; Freedom House, 2006).⁴

In *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, the war ended with the Dayton agreement in 1995. The war practice that each of the three regions in this in-

tensely divided country had its own curricula—Bosnian Serbs using Serbian curricula, Bosnian Croats Croatian ones and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) a newly developed one—was continued until 2000. In that year, a new law prohibited the import of textbooks from abroad, but the new books for the Bosnian Croat and Serb areas were still modeled after Croatian and Serbian books although with new covers and Bosnian authors. Meanwhile, in 1998, a working group supported by the Office of the High Representative (an office appointed by the international community to oversee civilian aspects of the peace agreement) had recommended to reform the history textbooks. This caused a furor: the international community was accused of ‘seeking to take away Bosnia’s history, teach children lies and prepare the ground for further genocide.’

Despite this, the Council of Europe stipulated in 1999 that the removal of potentially offensive material from textbooks was a precondition to Bosnia-Herzegovina’s accession to the Council. An agreement stated that offensive material, as identified by an international team of experts, was either to be blackened or annotated with a stamp saying ‘The following passage contains material of which the truth has not been established, or that may be offensive or misleading; the material is currently under review.’ Compliance with these instructions was to be monitored by international ‘verifiers’. Members of these textbook verification committees requested that their identities be kept secret. The Council of Europe noted that the history textbooks were too ‘ethnic,’ blaming the others and causing offense to them. It also reported that the war of 1992–1995 was called ‘aggression’ in Bosniak history textbooks, ‘civil war’ in Serb ones, and ‘war of liberation’ in Croat ones. It would also press for acceptance of a moratorium on teaching about the war so as to enable historians from all the communities to develop an approach and new materials based on common guidelines.

The Bosniak member of the joint presidency, Alija Izetbegović, opposed such a moratorium as ‘an attack on the truth’ and the response of other politicians was also negative. The moratorium was seen as a call for ‘lies and silence.’ In April 2000, nevertheless, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recommended the moratorium to the Committee of Ministers, which a year later reported on which passages in history textbooks had to be deleted or temporarily marked as ‘containing material whose authenticity has not been verified.’ After several failed attempts, a commission eventually published guidelines for writing and evaluating history textbooks in 2005. Later, the education ministry renewed attempts to reduce the teaching of recent history—that is, the history after the 1975 constitutional reform—to a

mere chronology. In 2007, five years after Bosnia-Herzegovina acceded to the Council of Europe, the moratorium was still in place (Council of Europe, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Hammarberg, 2010; Low-Beer, 2001, pp. 215–223; Marko-Stöckl, 2008, pp. 17–20; Pavlowitch, 2004; Pingel, 2004, pp. 11–12, 14, 16; Pingel, 2009, 272, 296–297; Torsti, 2009, pp. 65–82).

Moratoria after genocides

According to the international tribunal dealing with the Bosnian case, several municipalities, including Srebrenica, suffered genocide. In this respect, this case could also have been discussed in the present group, consisting of Rwanda, Guatemala and Cambodia. In Rwanda, like in Bosnia-Herzegovina, an international tribunal issued verdicts for genocide. In Guatemala the genocide judgment was the main conclusion of a United Nations-assisted truth commission.

In *Cambodia*, it was more complicated. Most characterized the crimes perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979 as a ‘genocide,’ but some questioned the use of this label for most of the victims who belonged to same national community – the Khmer – as the culprits. Be that as it may, in the decade following the crimes, there was a textbook shortage due to the massive destruction of textbooks by the Khmer Rouge. Hence, the schools offered no history subjects after 1979, only classes in ‘political morality’ and folk tales. Moreover, the introduction of a new history syllabus planned by Vietnamese advisers at the education ministry met with much resistance because many feared a vietnamization of Cambodian history. In 1985–1987, the government labeled a new 584-page Khmer-language history of Cambodia, published in the USSR, as ‘incorrect’ and banned it. In 1986, the education ministry published a new fifth-grade history textbook but withheld it from schools until 1988. The government claimed that the absence of Khmer Rouge history was necessary ‘for the sake of national reconciliation.’ New social studies textbooks focused exclusively on Cambodia before and after the twelfth century and, in the modern period, on Cambodia during the 1950s and 1960s.

The peace agreement of 1991 leading to the withdrawal of the Vietnamese stipulated that ‘Cambodia’s tragic recent history requires special measures to assure protection of human rights, and the non-return to the policies and practices of the past’ (United Nations, 1991). But no such measures were applied in the education field. In 2000–2001, following demands by civil society, the education ministry revised the existing curriculum and published new social studies textbooks for grades nine and twelve, which included, for the first time, a concise account of

Cambodian modern history up to the 1998 elections. The change was symbolic, however, because the ninth-grade textbook devoted only five sentences to the Khmer Rouge era and the twelfth-grade one contained a three-page chapter on Khmer Rouge history (about 1.5 pages in English). In 2002, the chairman of the committee for curriculum development said that the texts did not discuss the killings in detail because 'we don't want Khmer children to repeat the bitter history,' a comment reportedly echoing Prime Minister Hun Sen's remark that 'it is time to dig a hole and bury the past even when we consider that the past is an unbearable burden for thousands of Cambodians.' Critics said that as a former Khmer Rouge commander until 1977, Hun Sen had a personal interest in pleading to let bygones be bygones. Following protests, the education ministry promised a few weeks later to review the textbooks. But discussions led to even more omissions: Hun Sen eventually ordered the withdrawal of all twelfth-grade social studies textbooks. This situation continued until 2009, when the education ministry at last launched the first secondary-school history textbook that treated the genocide and crimes against humanity for the third form of the secondary school. Based on *A History of Democratic Kampuchea, 1975–1979*, written by Khamboly Dy of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, more than 500,000 copies of the new textbook were distributed. Dy's book was the first scientific study produced by a Cambodian about the genocide; but even this study evaded the questions of who was responsible for the genocide and whether Vietnam 'liberated' or 'occupied' Cambodia in January 1979 (Dy, 2007; Dy, [2008], pp. 7–12; Kiernan, 2004, pp. 16–17; UNESCO, 2011, p. 244 [box 5.8]).

The genocide which erupted in *Rwanda* between April and July 1994 cost the lives of an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus. A few months later, in 1995, the new Tutsi-led government banned the old history curricula and textbooks and suspended the teaching of recent national history in public schools for (what later appeared to be) the next fifteen years, on the grounds that the previous Hutu-centered teaching materials had been biased and divisive and contributed to the hate propaganda accompanying the genocide. No approach was deemed acceptable to teach the genocides and massacres of preceding decades. Those calling the 1959 massacre (in which at least 20,000 Tutsis were killed and at least 100,000 fled into exile) a 'revolution' or a 'liberation,' for example, were associated with a Hutu version of history; those calling it 'the first genocide against the Tutsi,' with a Tutsi version of history. Most history teachers were reluctant to teach such sensitive historical issues without guidelines or materials, although several commissions and reports made proposals to that effect. In 2003 the education ministry, the National University of Rwanda, the NGO Facing

History and Ourselves and the Human Rights Center of the University of Berkeley, California, undertook a joint project for secondary schools leading to the production of a resource book in 2008. Meanwhile, a new official 'one nation discourse,' emphasizing national unity and reconciliation, was imposed as the single narrative of recent history. Simultaneously, the political climate had become more intimidating and participants in the resource book project were increasingly unwilling to contemplate teaching anything about the origins of ethnicity, for fear of being arrested or charged with promoting 'divisionism' or 'genocide ideology.' In 2010, history teaching finally resumed with a new curriculum and a teachers' guide (Bijlsma, 2009, pp. 218, 222–224; Cole & Barsalou, 2006, pp. 2, 7–8; McLean Hilker, 2011, pp. 2, 7–8, 12–15, 17; Hironnelle News Agency, 2010; Hodgkin, 2006; Sinclair, 2010, p. 293n52). The official one-nation approach was timidly criticized for underlining historical episodes without ethnic tensions and neglecting the study of those in which ethnic conflict was paramount.

In *Guatemala*, an official United Nations-assisted truth commission, which investigated the human rights violations during the civil war of 1960–1996, concluded in 1999 that the Guatemalan state had been responsible for acts of genocide against indigenous Maya communities. This civil war inspired so much fear that history textbooks prior to 1986—the year that Guatemala initiated a hesitant transition to civilian rule—made no mention of recent history at all. The history of the persecution of Mayans since 1960 remained a sensitive topic until long after the 1996 peace accords (which spoke of a 'painful era in our history'). In 2002, the education ministry produced a textbook and a teacher development guide, entitled *Socio-Historical Context of Guatemala and Educational Reality*. It followed the structure of the truth-commission report and included a section on racism called 'Mayans as Enemies of the State.' After a sector of the Guatemalan Congress vehemently reacted against the books, however, they were withdrawn. Thousands of copies had already been printed (Oglesby, 2007, pp. 184–185).

Moratoria after racial, ethnic and religious conflicts

Apartheid was labeled a crime against humanity by the United Nations in 1973, a qualification later incorporated into the International Criminal Court statute. In August 1994, a few months after the first post-apartheid elections were held in *South Africa*, Minister of Education Sibusiso Bengu launched an operation to purge the history textbooks of the apartheid era (1948–1994) of their racially biased content. This operation of interim revision of school syllabuses and textbooks had in fact been prepared since 1992 with three conferences for his-

tory teachers and three colloquia on history textbooks and with the establishment of a National Education and Training Forum. Meeting with resistance from conservative administrators and sometimes leading to minimalist reforms, the operation lasted until well into 1995. The resulting 'interim core syllabuses' were in use until 1997–1998, when new curricula were gradually introduced. In the process, European history was de-emphasized and the topic of African nationalism expanded. In 1996, more fundamental reforms (named 'Curriculum 2005') were initiated leading to new curricula in 1998 (Jansen, 1999; Siebörger, no year).

If race was the main characteristic in South Africa, the civil war in *Lebanon* (1975–1990) revolved around the manifold tensions between ethnic and religious groups. The Taif peace agreement of 1989 that eventually concluded the war recommended that 'The curricula shall be reviewed and developed in a manner that strengthens national belonging, fusion, spiritual and cultural openness, and that unifies textbooks on the subjects of history and national education.' The old textbooks, which did not treat recent history—that is, history after the 1943 independence—at all, had not been revised for decades. From 1996 a committee of historians representing seventeen religious and ethnic communities discussed questions such as whether there existed a Lebanese identity, when exactly the country and state of Lebanon originated and what the causes for the civil war were. Although the Council of Ministers finally approved a new textbook curriculum in 2000, the minister of education suspended it in 2001 because he objected to a lesson title in the third-grade textbook about the nature of the Arab conquest in 636 of what is now Lebanon, and because he thought that a timeline in the lesson showing the arrival of different peoples discredited the Arabs as invaders. Other sensitive subjects were the corruption of warlords and the assassinations of Druze leader Kamal Joumblatt in 1977 and Phalange leader Bashir Gemayel in 1982. At the last moment, the history textbook series, although already printed, was not distributed. Meanwhile, no history education was offered to children in public schools. Other committees were later formed to revise the texts—with no results as of 2015 (Taif accords, 1989, article III.F.5; History lessons, 2009; Touma, 2003; Williams, 2004, pp. 30–31; Zakharia, 2011, p. 54).

The presence of *Afghanistan* in this group could be questioned as many will doubt that any post-conflict transition has already taken root in that country. The long post-1973 period of political instability seemed to end in 2001, when the Taliban were chased and a pro-American government was installed. A new series of United States-funded

obligatory high school history textbooks was prepared from 2002. This series, eventually launched in 2012, did not cover the history after the ouster of King Mohammad Zahir Shah (1973–1979), the Soviet occupation (1979–1989), the civil wars (1989–1996), Taliban rule (1996–2001) and the United States military presence (2001–2012). In order to promote unity and a single national identity, a depoliticized approach was chosen as there was no agreement on how to interpret recent Afghan history. Even mention of such key figures as the Northern Alliance commander Ahmad Shah Massoud or the Taliban's Mohammad Omar was controversial. Despite broad consensus about the approach, some criticized the omissions (Sarwary, 2012; Sieff, 2012).

In *Iraq*, a United States-led coalition of armed forces ousted Saddam Hoessein's baathist regime in April 2003. The debaathification of history textbooks started in 2005 when the education ministry formed a committee to re-examine the existing history curricula and textbooks characterized by their biased treatment of the Saddam era (1979–2003). The committee proposed substantial changes with the aim of abolishing the glorification of Saddam and eliminating undue emphasis on the Baath Party and Iraq's army. This included a new narrative about the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), with Iraq, not Iran, in the role of aggressor, and avoidance of a negative attitude toward the Persians who would not be portrayed as the eternal enemies of the Arabs or as those who sowed internal discord in Islam and coveted the lands of Iraq and the Gulf states. Important British personalities, such as Gertrude Bell or Lawrence of Arabia, were rehabilitated. The textbooks would also restore traditional district names. For example, the Baath regime had replaced the name al-Diwaniya with al-Qadissiya to commemorate the 636 battle of Qadissiya in which the Arab Muslims had vanquished the Persian army; the former name was restored.

When in 2008 the religious authority in Najaf renewed its objections to the textbooks of the Saddam era that were still in use and demanded a right to study shi'ite history, the Director of Education in Najaf said that he had consulted Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the senior shi'ite cleric in Iraq, to that effect. Al-Sistani had declared that he was against sectarian curricula and in favor of a unified curriculum for all religions. In June 2010, Khazi Mutlaq, a government official in charge of 'democratizing' the curricula, noted that the 2003 overthrow and its aftermath were variously called 'invasion,' 'occupation,' 'liberation' and 'Operation Freedom,' and that therefore the government did not wish to address the subject in the history textbooks. He feared that sectarian disagreement would interfere with the official goal to 'make the history curriculum an instrument to unify the Iraqi people' (al-Kaabi,

2008; Middle East Media Research Institute, 2005; Arango, 2010).

Starting point of the analysis

The basic question, determining all others, is whether a recent history of violence, war, conflict, and oppression should be taught at all. The answer is an unreserved Yes. The United Nations have expressed themselves unambiguously in this respect. In 2006, the General Assembly approved the *Reparation Principles* (detailing measures to repair harm done to victims of past human rights violations), which prescribe that:

Satisfaction [a symbolic form of reparation, *adb*] should include, where applicable, any or all of the following: [...] Inclusion of an accurate account of the violations that occurred in international human rights law and international humanitarian law training and in educational material at all levels (United Nations General Assembly, 2006, principle 22[h]).

This clear rule is backed by another leading United Nations transitional justice instrument, the *Impunity Principles* of 2005 (detailing measures to investigate past human rights violations and punish their perpetrators), which stipulate that States, in their fight to punish perpetrators of human rights violations, have a ‘duty to preserve memory’:

A people’s knowledge of the history of its oppression is part of its heritage and, as such, must be ensured by appropriate measures in fulfilment of the State’s duty to preserve archives and other evidence concerning violations of human rights and humanitarian law and to facilitate knowledge of those violations. Such measures shall be aimed at preserving the collective memory from extinction and, in particular, at guarding against the development of revisionist and negationist arguments (United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 2005, principle 3).

And this in its turn was echoed in 2011 by the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights in a report about the cultural heritage of humanity:

The independent expert notes that cultural heritage is not restricted to objects and manifestations about which individuals and communities may be proud. In some instances, heritage recalls errors made in the past and actions reflecting the darker side of humanity, the memory of which also needs to be transmitted to future generations, albeit in a different manner (Special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, 2011, paragraph 8).

There is no room for doubt: the recent history of violence should be

taught in the schools. Any suspension of that duty cannot but be temporary. Let us therefore evaluate the cases seen as a whole from this premise.

The distribution of the moratoria over time

Although the establishment of moratoria is certainly not the average situation on the post-conflict educational scene, it is still surprising that fifteen examples, coming from all continents and geo-political areas, could be collected. Four cases unfolded around 1945, but the eleven remaining moratoria were established after 1980. Although it is possible that I did not spot some of the pre-1980 moratoria, the post-conflict openness about the past is a relatively recent phenomenon. In retrospect, the openness of 1945 (with four cases) was an exception. Before the 1970s, most post-conflict transitions were not characterized by exceptional moments of historical awareness: forgetting was the rule. Since the 1970s, however, the thinking about how to deal with impunity and reparation after gross injustice has markedly evolved under the impetus of the United Nations (De Baets, 2009, pp. 144–172, for reasons for this development). Hence, the sudden proliferation of instances of transitional justice with their tribunals, truth commissions, administrative purges, and in some cases, textbook moratoria. In three cases, the ‘educational problem’ was deemed so important that it was incorporated into, or appended to, the peace agreements: explicitly in the Taif agreement (1989) for Lebanon, implicitly in the Potsdam Agreement (1945) for Germany, and as an addendum to the Erdut agreement (1995) for Croatia.⁵

Pressures on the moratoria brokers

When one asks who has the power to establish moratoria, one probes the deeper question of who can act in the name of society in making basic decisions about history education. As a rule, governments, by way of their education ministries, are *de facto* mostly in charge and decide whether to establish history education moratoria. In a democracy, however, it would be preferable if parliament debated and decided about the establishment of moratoria, given their widespread impact.

Pressures on the government can come from below and above. Civil society groups may lobby in favor or against moratoria. The latter was the case in Moldova where daily demonstrations were held for months both in 1994 and 2002. The problem, in Moldova as elsewhere, was that as the period of violence destroyed much of the community networks, only a weak civil society survived in the post-conflict era. Once moratoria were imposed, they could never be assumed to be total. Alternative vehicles for history teaching often emerged. On the one hand,

civil society groups could develop didactic tools (Guatemala, Cambodia, Rwanda). On the other hand, such diverse groups as the media, politicians, veterans and pseudo-historians might try to occupy the vacuum: the situation in the education field is partly determined by how history politics is being waged in the society at large. The question then also becomes whether, on balance, a situation in which a moratorium activates alternative channels is worse than one without a moratorium.

Remarkably, international actors were involved in all cases except the USSR and South Africa. In the four post-1945 cases, the allied countries and SCAP took the lead. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Office of the High Representative brokered the moratorium despite much resistance; and the Council of Europe stipulated that the blackening out or removal of potentially offensive material from textbooks was a precondition to Bosnia-Herzegovina's accession to the Council. The Council of Europe also played a role in Moldova. In Cambodia, unwelcome intervention from Vietnam (and the USSR) was noted. In Rwanda, an American university helped prepare a new resource book. In Guatemala, the United Nations-assisted truth commission exerted indirect influence. In Lebanon, the peace agreement, which explicitly referred to history textbooks, was mediated by Saudi Arabia. In Afghanistan, the United States intervened; in Iraq, it was a United States-led coalition of armed forces. It should be admitted that international assistance can be both recommended and necessary as a gesture of international solidarity, especially when consensus is difficult to reach locally. But the price is high. The sovereignty of the new state is affected. Measures taken in far-away offices rarely contribute to the build-up of social consensus. They may even be counterproductive: blackening out offensive passages (as happened in Japan and Bosnia-Herzegovina) arouses rather than lessens curiosity.

Governments often short-circuited these pressures by neglecting (Rwanda) or boycotting (Lebanon) new initiatives, or by using outside approval as a pretext to pursue internal political goals (Moldova). In Guatemala, it was parliamentary intervention which obstructed the innovation. All sides – governments, civil society and foreign actors – tabled claims which could clash with each other. Education ministries required that history education helped build a unified national identity; history textbook experts required that history education stimulated multiperspectivity and the promotion of the values of democracy, human rights and peace; foreign actors required negotiation and diplomacy. These claims, in themselves reasonable, are all contingent on the basic premise that the honest and critical search for historical truth at the level of facts about the recent violence is respected.

In contrast, we saw that at the level of interpretation, evaluations differed wildly: a revolution or liberation versus a genocide (for the 1959 massacres in Rwanda), a liberation versus an occupation (for the 1979 takeover of Cambodia), an aggression versus a civil war versus a liberation war (for the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina), an invasion versus a liberation (for the 2003 overthrow in Iraq). The divergent interpretations are impressive. But the elimination of erratic interpretations and unfounded speculations on the one hand and the acceptance of legitimate differences of opinion on the other take time. It is not strange that a case can be made in defense of moratoria. The question is: for what good reasons?

Reasons for moratoria

Appropriate reasons to justify or support moratoria should be distinguished from inappropriate ones. The latter, of which I distinguish two types, often remain unstated because of their controversial character.

- *Political factors*: politicians who survived the transition may have an interest in obscuring their own roles under the previous regime (Cambodia, Guatemala).
- *Didactic reasons*: here the argument is that children should not be burdened with the weight of the past (Cambodia), or in a variant version, children should not be burdened with the history of violence as long as academic historians do not agree on what happened. As we saw, these specific reasons (but not necessarily other didactic reasons) are contrary to the spirit of international thinking about the question.

Appropriate reasons to support moratoria are available at several levels.

- First are what I call *reasons of legacy*. These reasons are not easy to disentangle, because, basically, two opposite backgrounds and, therefore, legacies, exist, depending on the position of recent history in the period of violence *before* the transition. In some countries (for example, Cambodia, Guatemala, Lebanon), recent history was not taught at all before the transition, for a variety of reasons: it was considered too sensitive; it did not fit in the overloaded curricula; or it was seen as an extension of journalism and therefore not recognized as a part of the discipline of history that could be studied with the necessary objectivity. In other countries (Nazi Germany, USSR and many more), recent history *was* treated before the transition but generally characterized by censorship and falsification of historical content. Both the avoidance or omission of recent history *and* its abuse are liable, in principle, to contributing to the violence and, later, during the transition, to the decision of establishing a moratorium. The legacy factor can be at play in yet another respect. Whereas the standard situation is that moratoria support the introduction of *new* historical content, sometimes they were the result of protests

against attempts to re-introduce *old* historical content (as in Moldova). The bleaker the legacy, the stronger the support for moratoria.

- *Practical reasons* join in: the abolition of distorted content could result in history textbook shortage (most clearly in Germany and Cambodia), while the production of new texts takes time. These practical problems often accelerate the need for moratoria.
- *Safety reasons*: history textbook authors and teachers may be hesitant to teach sensitive recent history out of fear of running into trouble (Rwanda, Cambodia, Guatemala).
- In spite of the importance of legacy issues, *reconciliation reasons* are frequently cited as the strongest, especially after genocides and racial, ethnic and religious conflicts (the third and fourth groups). After the period of violence, society needs to rebuild itself and choose the path of reconciliation and unity. And this path presupposes minimum agreement about the recent past. I deliberately say 'minimum agreement' rather than 'consensus' as the latter is unrealistic most of the time. If such agreement is unavailable, time to think and reflect is needed. This aspiration is often accompanied by the didactic reasons, expounded above.
- *The passage of time*. The arguments, finally, that it is 'too early' to resume history lessons, that the passage of time should do its work or that there is 'not enough historical distance' also have a certain, though limited validity. It brings us to the crucial question of the time span of the moratorium.

Effective and ideal duration of moratoria

The duration of moratoria is a crucial variable in any evaluation of their justification. The first question is: *how long did the moratoria last?* We are talking here about the duration *after* the transition started. This is problematic in itself if we remember the legacy issue discussed above. Iconoclastic regimes may have abolished or distorted history education long before the transition started. If we talk about duration, this abusive treatment before the transition should be added to the moratorium period after the transition to calculate the entire duration that a population is deprived of responsible history education. Another observation is that many post-conflict moratoria do not have clear beginnings and endings. They may be installed immediately after the end of the violence or after some months or even years (Moldova is an example of the latter). In some cases it is not clear when exactly a transition of some impact started or ended; in other cases the moratorium is not a formal initiative but an informal compromise (as in Austria). The end is usually marked by the introduction of new curricula and history textbooks, but with drawn-out or informal moratoria this is difficult to see, not only for somebody who does not regularly watch the situation (as for this author) but even for seasoned observers who often, it is suspected, forget to report a return to normalcy.

On average, primary and secondary education goes through five- or six-year cycles. I therefore distinguish short duration (1-5 years) from long (6 or more years) and look how they apply to the cases for which duration estimates are reasonably reliable. Five out of ten cases were of short duration (Italy, Japan, USSR, South Africa, Moldova in 2002), but sometimes with important reservations: in Italy, for example, the situation was *de facto* prolonged for thirteen years after 1947 because it was politically convenient; in Japan, the content of history textbooks remained an almost permanently burning issue until today. In the remaining five cases, the moratoria lasted longer: six to twelve years (Croatia), sixteen (Rwanda), twenty-five (Lebanon), thirty (Cambodia), and about fifty (Afghanistan). In the remaining countries the exact duration of the moratoria was unclear but they all seemed to tilt toward the longer term. Prolonged moratoria strongly suggest that only the arrival of a new generation of citizens, less directly involved in the conflict, is able to unlock the impasse. In the cases of Austria and Cambodia, recent history was avoided during one generation; the Afghan case points to two generations; the Lebanese case, if we also calculate the decade-long avoidance of recent history, to three. No wonder that, after two generations without recent history education, the Taif agreement explicitly mentioned history education; now that three generations have passed, we notice how unsuccessful this was.

The complementary question is: *how long should moratoria last?* It is not clear what the ideal duration of justified moratoria is. They should be integrated into the larger framework of transitional justice and fluctuate together with other transitional instruments, particularly truth commissions (if any). Why truth commissions? After the collapse of a dictatorship or the end of a conflict, truth commissions are often established within weeks with the purpose of giving a voice to the victims of past repression. Like journalists, truth commissions elaborate a first rough draft of recent history. They create a 'protohistorical' arena. Experts estimate that these commissions need six months (as a minimum) to two years (as a maximum) to study and report about past human rights violations (Hayner, 1994, pp. 640–641, Hayner, 1996, pp. 178–179). Even if we allow for the fact that the writing of history textbooks typically needs more time, the period *without any history education at all* should be as short as possible. A short duration (up to five years) is preferable. In this period, sound preliminary teaching materials ('emergency textbooks,' 'stop-gap textbooks,' 'temporary supplements,' 'interim core syllabuses') could be produced.

One idea is that in countries where truth commissions were at work, summaries of their findings could be used as a start. This has been at-

tempted in at least three countries: Guatemala (which is part of our sample), Peru,⁶ and Sierra Leone (Young, 2012). The experience was not reassuring. In Guatemala and Peru the project was canceled due to political interference. In Sierra Leone, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission attempted to teach children about the civil war (1991–2002) through video and pictorial versions of its report; it was criticized for being too difficult. The requirement that moratoria should not last longer than five years is not insensitive to the grandeur or long-term mission of history education; it is mandatory to prepare a new, solid start and to block delaying tactics.

Conclusion: moratoria, forgetting and democracy

Moratoria are forms of social forgetting. Indicating a process during which specific historical facts or opinions are *or seem* generally (but not individually) forgotten or avoided, social forgetting comes in two versions. The first form is the result of political mediation in post-conflict or post-repression situations and it is often part of peace agreements and cautious transitional strategies for the future. The second is the result of suppression and censorship. The boundary between mediation-induced and censorship-induced versions is often thin but the main difference is that the censorship strategy aims at making forgetting irreversible and at mastering a monopoly of memory. Here, 'repressed memory,' 'selective amnesia' and 'historical taboo' are often more correct labels than 'social forgetting'. Censorship-induced taboos may eventually result in actual social forgetting (De Baets, 2012, pp. 223–234). History education moratoria in new or restored democracies are part of the mediation-induced, not the censorship-induced strategy.

Five conditions help detect whether such a strategy is followed. The first is that the moratoria are defined within a solid legal framework of transitional justice. The second that they clearly stipulate start and end dates within a short time span (five years or less). The third, that the moratoria are based on a broadly shared minimum agreement that the painful past has to be tackled in vigorous parliamentary and public debate and in the schools. The fourth, that these moratoria are effectively used to produce new materials. The last condition is the state of academic historical research: if research into the conflict is not hampered or silenced but freely undertaken and published, and the input of these findings into the new materials is guaranteed, a final important condition for a mediation-induced moratorium is fulfilled. These conditions should ideally be fulfilled together. They do not guarantee the successful application of moratoria, only their democratic character. They help us define under which regime of restrictions post-conflict history education moratoria are justified in a democratic society.

Notes

- ¹ All websites mentioned in this essay were last consulted on 12 December 2014. I am grateful to Jan Blaauw and Niké Wentholt for their comments. The author acknowledges the support of NWO (The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) in facilitating this study.
- ² *Macedonia*: Edith Marko-Stöckl (2008, p. 20) referred to a ‘practically applied’ moratorium on teaching recent history, but no other authors diagnosed the history textbook situation after the 2001 armed conflict in Macedonia as such. *Serbia*: the 2002 edition of the officially approved history textbooks discussed the wars of 1991–1995 in only two paragraphs. Croats and Bosniaks were portrayed as those responsible for the wars, but mention of the role of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia’s history between 1987 and 2000 was omitted. The Srebrenica genocide of 1995 was not mentioned either. See Crawford, 2003, pp. 43–52; Poolos, 2002. *DDR*: the old history textbooks were withdrawn from the schools in December 1989. *Burundi*: the civil war lasted from 1993 until 2005. The *Arusha peace and reconciliation agreement for Burundi* (2000) included protocol I, articles 1–4 and 8c (‘Nature and historical causes of the conflict’ and ‘Principles and measures relating to national reconciliation’—Clarification of history’), and protocol III, article 2 (‘Causes of the violence and insecurity in Burundi’). During the early talks leading to this agreement, UNESCO convened a Conference on the history of Burundi in 1997. Likewise, the *Dar-es-Salaam agreement on principles towards lasting peace, security and stability in Burundi* (2006) devoted article 1 and chapter 1 of annexure A to ‘The history of Burundi and the ethnic question’ and foresaw the creation of a commission of experts with the mandate to rewrite the history of Burundi.
- ³ After independence in 1980, no history was taught at schools in Zimbabwe for two years due to the absence of history textbooks without racist contents. The first new textbook was *Zimbabwe: a new history* (Harare 1982), by Gay Seidman, David Martin, & Phyllis Johnson. See Stromberg, 2003.
- ⁴ The text [not consulted by this author] is: ‘Odluka o moratoriju na predavanje sadržaja povijesti koji se odnose na bivšu Jugoslaviju’ [Decision on the Moratorium on Teaching the Contemporary History of Former Yugoslavia], *Vjesnik Ministarstva prosvjete i športa*, no. 8 (1997).
- ⁵ Burundi’s peace agreements (2000, 2006) should be added, but they did not establish moratoria.
- ⁶ In Peru, the Truth and Reconciliation Report was summarized in a book called *Recordándonos* (Remembering) (first edn., 2005; second edn., 2006 on compact disc), intended as an educational resource for teachers. The pilot edition, published in 2005, was partially revised from late 2005. During the revision, the education ministry suggested substantial changes. In addition, sectors of the Alejandro Toledo administration expressed reservations about the *Recordándonos* resource. In a 2006 letter from the defense minister to the education ministry, the resource was called insulting to the armed forces and therefore not acceptable as national curriculum content. When Alan García was elected president in June 2006, resistance to the materials intensified. The new Vice President, Luis Giampietri, himself accused of human rights violations in 1986, ordered to stop distribution of the materials, which meant the *de facto* end for the project (Paulson, 2010, pp. 352–357).

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