



## Challenging Silences: Democratic Citizenship Education and Historical Memory in Poland and Guatemala

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*This paper draws upon data from two youth-focused, ethnographically informed inquiries—one in Poland, the other in Guatemala—to describe how historical memory can conflict with both state historical narratives and with globalized approaches to democratic citizenship education. This analysis helps us to better understand the ways that, in post-conflict societies, schools function as spaces in which overlapping claims of community, nation, and world frame the development of youth citizenship and belonging.*

*Este análisis, basado en dos investigaciones etnográficas, una en Polonia y la otra en Guatemala describe cómo la memoria histórica puede entrar en conflicto con las narrativas históricas estatales y con los enfoques globalizados de la educación para la ciudadanía democrática. Este análisis nos ayuda a comprender mejor las formas en que, en las sociedades posconflicto, las escuelas funcionan como espacios en los que los reclamos superpuestos de comunidad, nación y mundo enmarcan el desarrollo de la ciudadanía y pertenencia a los jóvenes. [citizenship, democratic education, Guatemala, historical memory, Poland]*

“Today’s government is trying to change and hide facts from that historical time. They are trying to change history.”

- Student, Private High<sup>1</sup>, a private city high-school in Poland, focus group

“The history, it is painful but important...Historical memory is knowing the historical truth. State sponsored education never gives it.”

- Co-founder, Nuestro Futuro, a rural public school serving Indigenous<sup>2</sup> students in Guatemala, interview

Young people’s sense of themselves as citizens draws upon and is deeply connected to the ways that they learn about, remember, and interpret the histories of their families, communities, and countries. Yet the process of “producing” educated persons and citizens within schools (Levinson, Foley, and Holland 1996) is traditionally framed as a straight-forward, curricular transmission of an official state version of history and patriotic values or, more recently, the inculcation of an internationally validated set of liberal democratic norms and practices (DeLugan 2012; Levinson 2011). The confrontation of *history in person*—the personal or “intimate formations result[ing] from the practice of identification in historically specific times and places” (Holland and Lave 2001, 18)—with official historical and civic narratives has deep implications for youth civic identity and belonging,

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*Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol. 51, Issue 2, pp. 178–194, ISSN 0161-7761, online ISSN 1548-1492.

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DOI: 10.1111/aeq.12329

particularly when local memories exist in conflict with state narratives (Abu El-Haj 2015; Bellino and Williams 2017; Rubin 2007, 2016; Whitman 2007).

This paper draws upon data from two youth-focused, ethnographically informed inquiries—one in Poland, the other in Guatemala—to explore how historical memory can complicate the use of history and civics instruction for nationalist and democracy-building purposes. We describe how historical memory—the ways in which “groups, collectivities, and nations construct and identify with particular narratives about historical periods or events” (Hite 2011)—can conflict with both state historical narratives and the global “policyscapes” (Carney 2009) of liberal multiculturalism and political participation dominating contemporary approaches to democratic citizenship education (DCE).

As the epigraphs indicate, the relationship between official curricula, and the historical memories of students and educators, is complex. The high school student and the educator quoted above both voiced a sense that the state was intentionally duplicitous in its presentation of history. Poland and Guatemala, where these two participants were situated, are, quite obviously, geographically, linguistically, culturally, politically, economically, and historically distinct. One is an ethnically and religiously overwhelmingly homogeneous post-socialist East-Central European state with a legacy of military occupations, totalitarian rule, ethnic cleansings, and struggle for national independence; the other is a post-colonial Central American country with an enduring history of deterritorialization, economic exploitation, and violence against its Indigenous citizens. Yet, the contemporary educational systems of both of these post-conflict states are shaped by a global democratization project in which schools are envisioned as “primary sites for the creation of new political dispositions and identities, and for the consolidation of particular meanings about democracy” (Levinson 2011, 290). As hinted in the double-entendre of the title, memory challenges these renderings of the past. Through a focus on historical memory, the analysis offered in this paper helps us to better understand the ways that, in post-conflict societies, schools function as spaces in which overlapping claims of community, nation, and world frame the development of youth citizenship and belonging.

## Background

### *History, Memory, and Education*

History, as Matos notes, is “an exercise in taking distance in relation to the objects of study” (2015, 430). Despite the discipline’s “requirements of documentary evidence and heuristic and hermeneutic rigor” (430), official versions of history found in school curricula can be used to construct or reinforce a national narrative that legitimates the power status quo (Connerton 1989). The role of school-based historical education is especially salient during times of political transition and in post-conflict societies (Wang 2018). In the Rwandan national curriculum, for example, the country’s history was rewritten to avoid any discussion of ethnicity and to promote the notion of a collective identity based on the “civic identity of all as citizens” (Buckley-Zistel 2009, 31). In Putin’s Russia, after a period of critical educational reforms deconstructing Soviet history, history textbooks have restored patriotic notions tied to the history of both Russia and the Soviet Union, focusing on “positive historical examples stressing Russia’s power and significance both nationally and globally” (Zajda 2013). In this article, we refer to these official versions of the past as state historical narratives.

Memory “is simultaneously, more or less what history is and vice-versa.” As Lacapra describes, “History might not ever capture some elements of memory: the feeling of an experience, the intensity of happiness or of suffering” (Lacapra 2008, 34). Halbwachs

argues that memories are socially grounded, asserting “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs 1992, 38). These socially constructed memories are diverse and polyvocal. As Rodino points out, “Given the social nature of memory, the events evoked do not generally converge into one single memory but into a multiplicity of memories, often conflicting and frequently in opposition” (Rodino 2017, 31). Memory, then, with its varied and multiple connections to emotion and community, is malleable. It can both silence and evoke; memory affirms, contests, and complicates the historical narratives that are promoted at state and global levels.

*History and Memory in Poland.* In post-socialist Europe, the contemporary national imaginaries of these culturally and historically differentiated countries are undergirded by common memories of 20th century violence and foreign occupation, most prominently Nazi German and Soviet Communist rule. The dominant state discourse found in school curricula depicts a heroic national victimhood vis-a-vis foreign occupiers and internal collaborators that silences issues of local participation in the Holocaust during WWII as well as post-WWII domestic support for the Communist regime (Michlic and Melchior 2013; Stevick 2015). This tendency toward patriotic silencing is currently especially strong in countries such as Poland and Hungary that are governed by conservative nationalist factions (Kirchik 2017). A recently passed amendment to the Polish Law on the Institute of National Remembrance, for example, attempted to impose sanctions of up to three years of imprisonment onto anyone who attributed “responsibility or co-responsibility to the Polish nation or state for crimes committed by the German Third Reich,” effectively silencing debate over Polish participation in the killing of Jews and Ukrainians during WWII (Belavusau and Wójcik 2018). These silences, however, do not go uncontested by individual victims, their families, and the international community. Occasionally conflicts over historical memory become a breaking point for diplomatic relations, as was the case between Poland and its international allies—Israel and the US—after this law was enacted, forcing the Polish authorities to finally withdraw criminal penalization from the amendment (PAP 2018).

*History and Memory in Guatemala.* In Guatemala, “historical memory” has been invoked by Indigenous rights activists and their allies as essential to the pursuit of justice in the wake of state sponsored violence. As Rodino notes, in reference to Argentina,

[in countries that have experienced state terrorism]...the work of memory does not refer to keeping alive the memory of the glorious deeds of the past—which was the traditional approach to the history... Rather, the collective memory in these countries is understood as the memory of egregious crimes that should never again (“nunca más”) be repeated. It is a memory not centered on heroes but on victims. (2017, 31-2)

Although the 1996 Peace Accords that ended the country’s 36-year long internal armed conflict were the central impetus for a revised national curriculum—the Currículo Nacional Básico (CNB)—historical memory of state violence is not part of this new approach. The political struggle to introduce *Memory of Silence*, the report of Guatemala’s Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) on the abuses committed during the conflict, into classrooms ended in the recall of the textbook and teacher development guide

based on the report (Oglesby 2007). The Currículo Nacional Básico shifted social studies away from the study of history and toward multicultural and human rights education, with a focus on the development of “a culture of peace;” scant attention was given to the historical memory of state violence documented in the CEH report (Bellino 2017; Oglesby 2007).

Historical memory is “a fluid set of ideas often reshaped by time, emotion, and the politically savvy, not something solid, immutable, or truly measurable” (Wang 2018, 2). Because of its changeable and affective character, historical memory is often sidelined in academic research (Markovits and Reich 1997), but its impact is undeniable within the educational systems that are the focus of this inquiry.

#### *Democratic Citizenship Education (DCE)*

Democratic citizenship education (DCE) has become a common prescription for the civic reconstruction of post-conflict societies as varied as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Germany, Guatemala, Japan, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Iraq, Sudan, Lebanon, Lebanon, Indonesia, Laos, Argentina, Peru, Columbia, Cyprus, Mozambique, and Sri Lanka (Freedman et al. 2008; Levine and Bishai 2010; Quaynor 2011; Tawil and Harley 2004). Promoted by intergovernmental organizations such as the U.N. and the World Bank, educational change has been seen as fundamental to the creation of peaceful, tolerant, and democratic civic identities. The international footprint of this approach is recognizable through the similar language found in the civic education documents of various nations (Cole and Barsalou 2006; Quaynor, 2011). Indeed, DeLugan (2012) argues that these initiatives rest on “a universal template based on selected principles and human values... seemingly intended to be interchangeable from one postconflict nationstate to the next” (21–22). For this reason, a comparison between two such seemingly unlike states—Poland and Guatemala—both grappling with contemporary discourses of democratic citizenship education, is particularly illuminating.

In his research on democratic citizenship education, Levinson (2011) brings attention to its global reach and role as a means of political and social restructuring, writing, “When we bring Latin America together with Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and other regions, what we are witnessing is an unprecedented and concerted effort to use formal education to form democratic citizens on a global scale.” (292). The adaptation of the transnational political scheme of DCE to national curricula, however, happens through the prism of the state political agenda, which builds on historical master narratives to mobilize a collective sense of belonging to the national community (Anderson 1991). As with memory, DCE is contested and variable within the case studies featured in this article, indicating that attention must be paid to how it becomes instantiated in different contexts.

*DCE in Poland.* Contemporary democratic civic education in Poland began to take shape in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the nonviolent change of the political system in Central Europe (Zahorska 2016). The rewriting of civics was strongly influenced by the 2004 inclusion of Poland in the European Union, the member states of which must implement educational policies that adhere to the goals and principles of European integration. The centralized Polish Curriculum Framework issued in 2008 emphasizes the universalist knowledge of human rights, democratic values, equity and justice, cultural diversity, tolerance, anti-discrimination, national identity and belonging, and European identity (Eurydice 2012; Ministry 2008/2017). This detached policyscape of liberal, democratic civic education clashes with the discourse of patriotic

national tradition permeating history education (Jaskulowski, Majewski and Surmiak 2018; Popow and Sáez-Rosenkranz 2016), a militarized and gendered portrayal of Polish history as a centuries-long struggle for the independence of a heroic and victimized nation. This version of history is imbued with Catholic imagery (Skórzyńska, Głowacka-Sobiech, Chmura-Rutkowska 2017) and racialized (Ambrosiewicz-Jacobs and Szuchta 2014), stressing the heroism and suffering of Catholic Poles and downplaying the heroism and suffering of various minorities who have historically lived on the Polish territory (close to 30 percent of the country's population before the Holocaust and post-WWII ethnic cleansings). Nationalism in history education has deepened since the 2015 elections; the new conservative official political discourse draws lines of national belonging over issues related to the Communist past and problematic moments in Polish history that potentially scar the image of the victimized and heroic Polish nation (Cervinkova and Rudnicki 2019; Piotrowski 2016; Snyder 2016). A new set of expressions has taken hold—"pedagogy of shame" or "politics of shame" to refer to post-1989 efforts at reconciliation by opening up discussions about dark chapters in Polish history—which, according to the ruling camp, have led to the destruction of national pride and the weakening of the strength of the Polish nation (Grabowski 2016).

*DCE in Guatemala.* In 1996, over six thousand miles away from a recently post-communist Poland, the internationally brokered Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace brought to a close the decades long armed conflict between the army and guerrilla groups in Guatemala, a conflict marked by targeted violence toward the country's large Indigenous population. Central to the Accords was a mandate for the educational system to "affirm and disseminate the moral and cultural values and the concepts and behavior patterns which are the foundations of democratic coexistence" (United Nations General Assembly 1997, 10). These included "respect for human rights, for the cultural diversity of Guatemala" and other qualities that "constitute the basis of a culture of peace" (10). The Accords specified that the state was to "adjust educational curricula in accordance" with these objectives, creating a national civic education program designed to inculcate "democracy and peace...[and the] protection of human rights, the renewal of political culture and the peaceful resolution of conflicts" (11). The resulting national curriculum—the CNB—was centered on broad ideas, such as "democratic life and culture of peace, unity in diversity, sustainable development, and science and technology (Ministerio de Educación 2013). Influenced by the United Nations and the Organization of American States, the language of human rights permeated the curriculum, and was accompanied by international investment in human rights training (Burrell 2013). Treading a precarious path, curriculum reformers attempted to build a unified national identity without digging too deeply into the past while, at the same time, fulfilling promises to Indigenous participants in the peace process to use education for linguistic and cultural preservation. The resulting curriculum presented a rather mythologized picture of the country's Indigenous communities, a sanitized version of the country's colonial past, and a depiction of the armed conflict that, in aiming for "balance," glossed over issues of responsibility and consequence (Bellino 2014).

State historical narratives, DCE, and historical memory are framing contexts for youth civic development. In the two case studies that follow the methods section below, we consider how, in these quite distinct national contexts, these overlapping claims and silences were engaged and contested by youth and educators.

## Methods

This paper draws on ethnographic data from two cases of how young people, the targets of educational policy reforms, made sense of civic past and present amid the memory-shaped educational practices of their schools. While the authors began their field research in Guatemala and Poland independently, as they listened to each other's research results during conference panel presentations they noticed a persistent common theme of historical memory as it impacted their participants. This led Cervinkova to supplement her ethnographic work with an additional activity using civic images to collect data that could speak directly to issues of civic learning and historical memory, similar to a method employed by Rubin in her study of civic learning in Guatemalan schools.

Cervinkova collected data over the period of one school year in Poland (October 2016—June 2017) in three urban high schools: an affluent private institution with students of predominantly professional and business class family background ("Private High"), high-ranking public high school with rather diverse student family background ("City High"), and another lower-ranked public high school with students of mainly working-class family background ("Urban High"). She observed civic and history education classes (40), interviewed teachers (5), and talked to students (105) in focus groups (7). Cervinkova is a Czech woman who speaks Polish and has lived in Poland for fifteen years. She was granted permission to conduct ethnographic research in schools by school principals as a part of academic-school partnership.

Rubin collected data in six school settings over the course of six months in 2013 in Guatemala: two private schools serving a middle and upper middle class, largely Ladino<sup>3</sup> student population; three public schools serving lower income, Indigenous students; and one public school serving an ethnically integrated, lower and middle income student body. Depth of data collection varied between sites. Rubin and her research assistant conducted interviews with students (36) and teachers (12), classroom observations (52), and facilitated focus groups (15). This analysis draws mainly upon data from two of the school sites: *Nuestro Futuro*, a rural public school serving Indigenous students, and *El Colegio*, an urban private school serving middle and upper income Ladino students. Rubin is a white woman from the United States who speaks Spanish as a second language. As part of a Fulbright Scholar award, she lived in Guatemala, taught at a university there, and conducted research; she was invited to collect data in these sites after connecting with local teachers and school administrators.

Focus groups using images are an "elicitation technique," which can help participants "connect core definitions of the self to society, culture and history" (Harper 2010, 13). In these studies, civic images were used to spark discussion among students on the abstract topics of civic belonging, national identity, and historical understanding, as in other research on history education and identity (e.g. Barton and Levstik 1998; Barton and McCully 2010; Epstein 1998). The images were drawn from political, cultural, economic, historical, and symbolic themes within each country; developed in consultation with local youth and academics; and piloted before use.<sup>4</sup> Discussion questions included: "which five images represent what makes you most proud to be Guatemalan/Polish," "which five represent the biggest challenges facing the country," "select all of the images of things you have studied in school." The civic images activity provided a generative framework for discussions with youth. The researchers analyzed the data inductively, coding across data type and writing analytical memos to explore emerging themes and findings.



## Challenging Silences

### *Ethnographies of DCE in Poland and Guatemala*

In this section, case studies of historical memory and civic learning in Poland and Guatemala illustrate how youth citizenship and belonging is developed, enacted, and negotiated at the intersection of transnational, national and community-based claims.

#### *Public Conflict/Classroom Silence: Polish Youth Tackling the Politics of History*

Within the Polish schools in which Cervinkova conducted her research, discussion of political events was both framed and silenced by the confluence of renewed conservative nationalism and DCE policies. During the politically heated moment in which data collection took place, Polish schools were an important battlefield in the struggle over historical memory, with a new curriculum pushing away from the universalist global policyscape and toward a solidification of the traditional-national conception of civics and history (Buckley and Huber 2017). As the government-implemented policies restricted civil liberties, the streets of large Polish cities filled with thousands of protesters, oppositional parties occupied Parliament, and there were open clashes between government sympathizers and oppositionists.

While many of these public conflicts directly involved struggles over historical memory, neither these nor other critical political events were discussed in the history and civics classes observed by Cervinkova; sometimes educators actively evaded discussion. “This is not a moment to discuss politics. We need to move on if you want to pass the final test,” said a history and civics teacher at the City High School on the morning following Donald Trump’s election victory in response to agitated discussions among his students. In a follow-up interview, he explained,

I have very liberal views, but my student body is very diverse—they have very different political opinions. Some are very much on the right, some are very much on the left, and sometimes they want to play this out in class. I always tell them that they have to stick to historical facts and that is where I see my role, to teach them the historical facts.

While there was little grappling with ongoing political conflicts during class, in focus groups, students expressed that politics, both past and present, was a deeply divisive topic among their student community and increasingly frequent subject in out-of-class discussions. A City High student explained during the focus group, “We talk more and more about politics. There are deep differences between us—there always were, but never like this—we now argue so much about the conflicts out there.” One example of a conflict over historical memory that students reported was never discussed in class but that they considered an important and divisive issue for Poland was the Smoleńsk Monthly (*Miesięcznica Smoleńska*): commemorative events/political rallies organized every month in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw by Jaroslav Kaczyński, leader of the ruling political party, to commemorate the death of his twin brother Lech, president at the time, who died in a plane crash along with ninety-four members of the Polish government on April 10, 2010. The historical paradox is that the plane carrying the Polish delegation was headed to pay respects to the more than 22,000 victims of the Katyń Massacre—mass execution of Polish officers, soldiers, and other elites by the Soviets during the German and Soviet occupation of Poland in 1940. This landmark event in the history of antagonism between the Poles and the Russians, a symbol of heroic Polish victimhood at the hands of Soviet perpetrators and Polish opposition to Stalinism, was a moment of great

significance in Polish historical memory. Although multiple tests confirm the 2010 plane crash was caused by human error, Kaczyński and his populist, nationalist Law and Justice Party have used this tragedy as a cornerstone of the nationalist narrative, claiming it was the result of Russian sabotage against Poland.

Students in Private High brought up the Smoleńsk Monthly as one of the greatest problems facing Poland. During the focus group, one student expressed his peer group's opinion on the matter, explaining, "We do not like the government changing history, creating an ideological conflict by concentrating on historical moments, which are important, but not that important in the scope of things." Students at City High called the Smoleńsk Monthly a "provocation, symbolic and typical of our political scene," while those at Urban High referred to the event's persistent presence in the media as "a sad thing." Disturbed by the government's incursion into state history for nationalist purposes, these students critiqued what they saw as a misuse of historical memory.

Students both contested and confirmed state historical narratives in their descriptions of what made them proud as Polish citizens. In a focus group, a City High student explained:

We are proud of our athletes, of our constitution, of Marie Curie Skłodowska, of our beautiful countryside and ancient cities, our food and flag. And we are proud how we as Poles are able to unite in defense of a good cause. Such as the Solidarity and Lech Wałęsa who overthrew the Communist Regime, and the demonstrations that are happening now...And also the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, when we were able to unite and go to battle. And we are proud of the Cursed Soldiers because they were brave and fought the Communist regime. And also the Round Table, even though it is now a contested issue, it is an important symbol that we are proud of, because it was a peaceful overthrow of the Communist regime. And that is exceptional, because revolutions in other countries have been usually bloody.

In this and other accounts, in addition to historically and politically neutral issues, students included politically charged historical moments. In the new state narrative, Lech Wałęsa is depicted as a traitor who negotiated the peaceful transition with the Communists at the Round Table, making reconciliatory concessions instead of a radical break with the Communist past. Students contested this official state historical narrative, expressing continued pride in the Solidarity movement and crediting its leader with the downfall of the Communist regime.

Students were also proud of the Warsaw Uprising, the highly contested moment in WWII when the Polish underground resistance unsuccessfully attempted to liberate Warsaw from the German occupation before the Soviet advance. This tragic defeat, in which approximately 200,000 civilians died and 85 percent of Warsaw was razed, has been gradually turned into a source of national pride—a symbol of heroic resistance against occupants (Soviet and German), and of the martyrdom of the Polish nation. The Polish flag with an "anchor," an emblem of the resistance, is now the leading symbol of newly resurgent Polish nationalism, appearing in the media and on buildings, T-shirts, and tattoos. As a City High student explained during focus group, "I personally do not think it was necessary, and it was not a good idea, but it is very important for our national memory." An Urban High student concurred, saying, "We chose the Warsaw Uprising as the most famous moment in our history, even though it did not work, because we cherish the courage of those who fell there. It shows our courage and our will to freedom."

Similarly, in being proud of the Cursed Soldiers "because they were brave and fought the Communist regime," some students positioned themselves on the side of the newly revised state historical narrative. This narrative, according to which the Cursed Soldiers,



members of anti-Soviet and anti-Stalinist guerilla resistance were Polish heroes, directly silences their participation in the killing of other Polish citizens, including members of the Polish left and ethnic minorities. These student accounts point to the complex ways in which changing versions of the official historical narrative at schools and in the public realm interplay with the historical memories of youth, silencing some aspects of history while bringing others to the fore.

The affective power of historical memory was mobilized through nationalist historical narratives, which constructed a vision of an ethnically and religiously homogeneous nation, excluding the memories of marginalized groups such as the Roma and the Jews (Cervinkova 2016). This lack of a diverse and inclusive civic imaginary was evident in the focus groups, in which one of the most striking themes was the unanimous agreement among students in all three schools that immigrants, refugees, and Roma were among the greatest problems of Poland today. Students at Urban High claimed that refugees were “the biggest problem for Poland,” explaining “they are everywhere, in every European country, and we are afraid that they are going to be here too.” These students also saw the Roma as a problem, “because they are also migrants or refugees or whatever you want, and we are also afraid of them, we are afraid of meeting different culture—it’s that simple.” This fear of the Other exists at the nexus of Poland’s lack of diversity (it is an overwhelmingly ethnically homogeneous, white and Catholic country) and the pervasiveness of anti-immigrant and anti-Other discourses throughout contemporary Europe. Poland has refused to accept refugees fleeing the war in Syria, and the country’s Roma community is negligibly small. The phantasmal nature of this fear of the Other was confirmed when students stated that they had never met a refugee or a Roma. DCE did not seem to have penetrated the curriculum enough to mitigate these fears.

Participating youth experienced politics in general and historical politics in particular as deeply divisive topics that, while largely ignored in the classroom, were a subject of discussion among peers. Formed at the intersection of competing claims and differing versions of historical memory, young people were active agents in the process of making sense of civic life. However, their face-value acceptance of recent historical narratives grounded in nationalistic readings of history, as well as fears of a nonexistent “Other,” indicates the limits to which they could form more balanced and open civic attitudes without the engagement of educators and more participatory forms of civic curriculum and learning.

#### *Divided Histories/Silenced Conflict: Memory in Guatemalan Schools*

Historical memories voiced by students and teachers in Rubin’s study varied starkly by community and were, albeit distinctly, in conflict with the internationally influenced DCE curriculum. Students and teachers in the Indigenous schools in the study reinterpreted this curriculum against the backdrop of past and present repression, refashioning the study of history, through preservation of memory, to include what had befallen their community, forming counternarratives to the national curriculum. Within the study schools serving affluent, Ladino students, young people, spurred by an image of the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords, spoke nostalgically of the conflict era as a time of security, expressing identification with the class benefiting from the repressive conditions of the armed conflict. The new national curriculum, focused on building a new national imaginary of a depoliticized, multicultural society, did little to engage either group authentically in consideration of the historical and contemporary conflicts facing Guatemala’s citizenry. As in the Polish study, students and educators in this case, guided by divergent historical memory, filled the silences left by the official curriculum.

Nuestro Futuro, a rural public secondary institute serving low income Indigenous students, was located in an area that had been deeply impacted by the armed conflict, as will be described below. The school, with its outdoor toilets, dusty playing field, and bare, cinder block classrooms, was unusual, one of the few secondary schools in this largely agrarian country offering a specialization in "rural well-being" and "community development." Lead teacher Profe Rolando explained in an interview that the school offered this curriculum "because this can help the villages." While "the State" was interested in the training of "experts, administrators for the big companies," instantiated in the abundance of training programs available for secretarial, accounting, and computing, those were jobs that would lead students "outside of their community" without any benefit to it.

Nuestro Futuro focused explicitly on teaching "memoria historica" (historical memory) of the Guatemalan armed conflict and Indigenous culture. In focus groups, students shared that they were learning about their ancestors' ways of caring for the earth, the longstanding exploitation of their community, and what happened during "los ochentas" (the 1980s). An image of Rigoberta Menchú Tum, a K'iche' human and political rights activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her Indigenous rights work during and after the armed conflict, sparked discussion of the impact of the conflict on their community. Sonia, the director of the nonprofit organization that created and ran the school, explained in an interview that they taught the students "about the political situation, about how people in power used mechanisms to pacify the population from early on, making their grandparents work on farms and indebting them so they had to continue working." "This year," she continued, "they used two texts, one in the Indigenous language, about the Mayan community, the history of the community." They do not want the kids to forget "the history. It is painful but important." Historical memory, she explained is "knowing the historical truth. State sponsored education never gives it."

Profe Rolando saw the lingering effects of the war on the community, explaining to me, "The armed conflict left a lot of open wounds, there are still young people here who lost their grandparents, some their brothers, older brothers.... [our community] is a people that have suffered a lot." In focus groups, students recounted learning from their parents and grandparents "that there was a lot of violence," "a lot of deaths," that "people lived with fear," that "you couldn't go out because you were killed," that "many soldiers killed a lot of people because they thought they were guerillas." "Many in [our community] died," a student said. "My grandfather died," contributed another. "My uncle too," echoed a third. "Our grandparents told us everything that happened." In interviews and focus groups, students reaffirmed their school's commitment to historical memory. "Here we study it a lot; there are books and readings where we can read everything that the massacre victims have narrated," a student explained. Student Linda spoke of her desire to keep these memories alive. "We remember this so that a scar doesn't remain; by narrating it from generation to generation, everyone understands what happened to other people."

This historical memory was rooted in an anti-colonial and anti-imperial analysis that was deeply critical and attuned to historical patterns and connections. Students chose an image of Spanish conquistador Pedro Alvarado, for example, as "one of the worst parts of Guatemalan history because he invaded Guatemalan lands." The school's self-produced textbook outlined how the state controlled power company, with support from foreign investors, spurred an army massacre of protesters and the subsequent flooding of a local community for the development of a hydroelectric plant. Field trips and commemorative ceremonies round out a curriculum designed to honor and recall the past while connecting it to the present day circumstances of their community. With scant access to resources, Nuestro Futuro crafted a curriculum that went far beyond the state approach in its analysis

of power, apportionment of historical responsibility, and critique of current conditions for the country's predominantly poor populace, drawing upon and consciously preserving historical memory of systemic violence against their community.

At El Colegio, a private academy serving 600 middle class and affluent Ladino students, silences left by the official curriculum were filled in a completely different manner. A little over 100 kilometers in distance from *Nuestro Futuro*, the schools were worlds apart in resources. A college preparatory school, students enjoyed small classes, an intensive English as a second language program, ample technology, new textbooks, and a well-manicured, guarded campus. Building from the state approved textbook's brief account of Spanish conquest and colonialism, Profe Diaz explained to his class that Spanish colonialism to his small class of high schoolers,

The issue was this. It was the thinking of the time. First of all, the Spanish came with the understanding that they were "chosen by god" to Catholicize the Indigenous, so the Spaniard truly believed in his divine right to do what he did. For them it wasn't bad... They had the firm idea that god had designated them conquistadors and converters of the Indigenous. So with this thinking you are obviously not going to go down a different path, you are really stuck in the Catholic faith. This was the problem.

This calmly delivered explanation, rooted in the ahistorical and depoliticized premise that we are all merely and excusably products of our times, was left uncontested in a setting devoid of differing versions of both history and historical memory.

At El Colegio, students took the Indigenous language class, which was mandated for all Guatemalan students by the Accord's Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in the form of a "workshop" on culture given "every other month or so." When asked in an interview why the school did not teach the local Indigenous language, as stipulated by the national curriculum, the director responded,

Why don't we teach Kaqchikel? It is a good question. But our students come from various places; the majority of them don't have an ethnic origin, so we think it isn't necessary to learn the language. They are Ladinos, so it is better to give them a general vision of Mayan culture than to make them learn a language that perhaps isn't their own and isn't going to be very useful.

The school director's claim of distance between his students and both their Kaqchikel peers and their own possible Indigenous heritage was perpetuated through classroom practice. In a primary grades Kaqchikel class, the teacher stood before the large group of children and asked, "Who are the Maya?" "They are the people who lived before," a student answered. "Yes!" she confirmed enthusiastically, turning on a cartoon version of the "Men of Corn" Mayan origin myth. El Colegio's youngest students fulfilled their Indigenous language requirement through practices positioning the Maya as part of a mythic past, while the living Indigenous language of the region, spoken by over 400,000 people, was deemed irrelevant to the school's older students.

Historical memory of the armed conflict in this setting was distinct from that held by educators and students in the Indigenous schools in this study. "The armed conflict doesn't interest them because it is something that happened in Guatemala, but it is very distant for them," Profe Diaz explained in an interview. "It didn't affect us directly, including me as a teacher, it didn't affect me either." In this setting, as one student put it, the armed conflict was understood as a battle "between two cultural groups...the guerillas and the government." The renarration of this undeniably, brutally imbalanced conflict<sup>5</sup> as a struggle between two equal sides, also reported by Bellino (2017), was the official stance

of the school. "It is good that the student has the two versions [of the armed conflict], really," the director explained. "For example, now we have the genocide case of Rios Montt, well we have to know that the army carried out crimes but also the guerillas did the same, so we have to have the two points of view." Students reflected this notion of "both sides" being guilty for the armed conflict when they talked in a focus group about an image of General Rios Montt, who, at the time of this study, was on trial for genocide of the Ixil Mayan people in the western highlands of Guatemala during in the early 1980s. As one student explained, in his view,

It was both sides, because it was the army fighting with the guerilla then, and everything the army did they are blaming him for, that he permitted it all to happen, but what he wanted to do was stop the guerilla.

El Colegio students interpreted the genocide charges against Rios Montt as a means of continuing a conflict they felt should have been put to rest with the signing of the Accords. "When they signed the Peace Accords" a student explained, "they said that it [the armed conflict] was erased and a new story, that this [questions of responsibility] wouldn't be touched so that Guatemala could continue improving." Another added,

It [the Peace Accords] supposedly ended the guerillas, there was an erasure and a new beginning, supposedly...but here in Guatemala we continue not to forget or not to notice the change...that is the guerilla is finished, but the people keep saying that we must find the guilty.

Students were frustrated that despite the Accords, which were supposed to be "like a new beginning for Guatemala," there continued to be public attention to crimes committed during the armed conflict. "The war is over already," said a student, angry about the ongoing trial. "They are trying to make us remember." Resisting the impingement of Indigenous historical memory in favor of a discourse of forgetting, these students voiced nostalgic memories of the war years through which state and elites were held blameless for past wrongs.

### **Discussion and Implications**

In both of these cases, overlapping claims of community, nation, and world framed young people's civic learning and identity. In the Polish case, teachers and youth struggled to navigate the pro-European discourse of transnational integration and a deepening nationalism permeating both curriculum and public sphere. In the Guatemalan case, attempts to submerge a conflictual past within a curriculum emphasizing the construction of a democratic, peaceful, multicultural present were transformed by the very social, economic, cultural, and historical gulfs that the new curriculum was intended to mend.

Considering these geographically distant cases together illuminates the complexities of history and citizenship education as tools for civic reconstruction in fractured states. In both countries, processes of democratic reconstruction involved the reconceptualization of school-based citizenship education through the universalist lens of global policyscapes. However, these global attempts "to retool schools away from their authoritarian roots and refunctionalize them as spaces of democratic conviviality" (Levinson 2011, 292) did not involve engagement with difficult issues in the countries' past, sources of divergent and conflictual historical memories of local communities. As Connorton notes, "Our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past.... And we will

experience our present differently in accordance with the different pasts to which we are able to connect that present" (1989, 2).

Historical memory, both persistent and malleable, was also instrumental in both settings. In Guatemala, inclusion of Indigenous historical memory at *Nuestro Futuro* provided an opportunity for students to grapple with the past, circumventing the silence created by an official curriculum that, in its focus on reconstructing the state as a liberal, multicultural democracy, occluded the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) impacting Indigenous communities over time. Historical memory, however, also means contending with the nostalgic counter memories, held by these affluent Ladino students, of the era of the armed conflict as a time of security. In Poland, historical memory reinforced exclusionary nationalist discourses as the country veered to the right. Neither Poland nor Guatemala has officially used the opportunity of post-conflict reconstruction to engage young people in critical reimagining of belonging and citizenship through the historical prism.

Recent emphasis on a multicultural or cosmopolitan approach to global citizenship education that foregrounds human rights (e.g. Banks 2017) still must contend with how historical memory—protean, variable, and deeply affective—persists and resists attempts to mandate inclusivity. This is neither wholly bad nor wholly good. Historical memory, as in Guatemala, prods us to attend to past injustices that can be elided as powerful interests renarrate even democratically oriented versions of the national story. But just as it highlights underrepresented views, its very partiality can also promote enduring nostalgia for less conflictual versions of the past, as evidenced by the *El Colegio* students' self-interested version of national history and by the Polish students' ethnically exclusive notions of national belonging. Contending with the persistence of memory, its usefulness, and its difficulties will need to be part of any effort to build an engaged and informed democratic citizenry whose identity is not rooted in exclusionary imaginaries.

These cases raise questions about the role of citizenship education both within the ongoing European integration and in fractured, post-colonial states. They indicate that this turbulent moment calls for more dynamic and inclusive forms of citizenship education that draw upon the historical memories of disparate communities to critically engage longstanding questions of justice and equality. Accelerated globalization is spurring crises of local identities around the world, which are exploited to perpetuate fear of the Other (Eriksen 2016). In the current moment, as these cases attest, approaches to civic and historical education that do not guide youth in critical discussion of varied interpretations of national history leave space to be filled by increasingly populist, nationalistic voices.

The risks are great. Poland's nationalism, fueled by this uncritical approach to the country's past, is annihilating hard-won progress toward international, interethnic, and interreligious reconciliation made since 1989, threatening the country's future as a democratic state (Buchowski 2017). In Guatemala, avoidance of a critical analysis of the past widens the gulf between its diverse citizenry. The disempowerment and division of marginalized groups slows the country's already difficult evolution toward a more inclusive and vibrant democratic culture, contributing to the continued election of leaders who are accused of corruption and of representing elite rather than public interests. Citizenship education has an important role to play in the nurturing of the participatory competencies and historical understandings needed to interpret and act within these complex realities.

Approaches that challenge young people to confront their own places within the structure of the society, foster critical analysis and communication across difference, and help students to contextualize, investigate, and take action on issues of concern to them are critical in this time of global democratic uncertainty. Engaging students in discussion,

inquiry, and analysis of the civic problems they encounter in their daily lives, supporting them to express themselves and take action, can foster more aware and empowered civic identities (Abu El-Haj 2007; Fine et.al. 2007; Kahne and Westheimer 2003; Rubin and Hayes, 2010). In *Nuestro Futuro*, the locally constructed curriculum engaged students in direct consideration of the historical and economic forces shaping their community. Polish youth civic action research shows the potential of creating spaces for encounters with complex histories of violence and displacement (Cervinkova and Golden 2014; Napiontek 2013). Engaging directly with difficult histories is not easy, but it provides young people with a chance to grapple with the realities of the past in order to develop deeper understandings of the present that can foster more just and inclusive versions of democracy.

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## Notes

*Acknowledgments.* The authors are deeply indebted to the students and educators who participated in our studies, from whom we learned so much. We also gratefully acknowledge the efforts of the *AEQ* editors, the guest editors of this special issue, and the anonymous peer reviewers who generously shared their feedback to help us improve this manuscript.

1. Pseudonyms were used for names of all people and places in this manuscript.

2. "Indigenous" (indígena) is commonly used in Guatemala to refer to people of Maya ancestry. Between 40% and 60% of Guatemalans consider themselves to be Indigenous, many speaking one of the twenty-one different languages that evolved from a common language spoken about 4,000 years ago (French 2010).

3. The term "Ladino" is commonly used in Guatemala to refer to Spanish-speaking people with European (mainly Spanish) or mixed ancestry. Unlike "mestizo" (commonly used in Mexico), it references linguistic assimilation rather than ethnic mixing. Hale (2006) notes, "Ladinos are heterogeneous but generally dominant in relation to the indigenous [sic] majority" (3).

4. Examples of images used in Polish focus groups include Lech Wałęsa, the first democratically elected Polish President; traditional Polish food; Ukrainian migrants; the Polish born Nobel Prize Laureate Marie Skłodowska Curie and composer Fryderyk Chopin; Polish ski jumpers; a shopping center; photos of concentration camps and destroyed cities from WWII; recent protests; War in Syria; political campaign billboards. Examples of images used in Guatemalan focus groups included the country's current president, a Maya archeological site, political graffiti, a garbage dump, police, Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu, a luxury shopping center, the Peace Accords, a family, a statue of Jesus, a woman weaving on a backstrap loom.

5. Guatemala's Truth Commission documented the state's overwhelming responsibility for death, destruction, and human rights abuses during the armed conflict (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico 1999).

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