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The Normalization of Political Violence in History Textbooks:
Ten Narrative Keys

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THE NORMALIZATION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS: TEN NARRATIVE KEYS.

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Short bio

Angela Bermudez is a researcher at the Center for Applied Ethics in the University of Deusto (Bilbao, Spain). She investigates how history education in different countries fosters or hinders a critical understanding of political violence. She holds a doctorate from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Prior to it, she worked in Colombia where she conducted research and developed curriculum guidelines and teaching resources for history and civic education.

Abstract

This paper synthesizes the findings of an international study on the role of history education in fostering or hindering a critical understanding of political violence. The study conducted thematic and discursive analyses of history textbook narratives in Colombia, Spain, and the United States. Analysis focused on how textbook narratives represented the violence intrinsic to nine different episodes of the violent past of these societies. The findings of the study revealed a persistent pattern: despite the abundant references to violent events, violence as such is rarely discussed or made the object of explicit analysis. Quite the contrary, violence is normalized through discursive processes that define what is emphasized and what is marginalized, what is connected and disconnected, and what is silenced. The author identifies ten narrative features that describe interlocking mechanisms by which historical accounts manage to describe violent events and processes while precluding any reflection about its roots, causes, consequences and alternatives. These features are conceptualized as *ten narrative keys that normalize violence*. The author draws on Galtung's concept of cultural violence to discuss the role of these narrative keys in making violence acceptable. The paper concludes with the proposition that a critical examination of how school history normalizes violence can also shed light on how to revert this process, opening opportunities for critical reflection about the violent past that helps to de-normalize violence.

INRODUCTION

In 1692 John Locke finished compiling a collection of letters that were later published as *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. In Thought 116 he talks about how to "Prevent Cruelty and Mischief" and warns us about the adverse effects of learning history.

> *One thing I have frequently observed in children, that when they have got possession of any poor creature, they are apt to use it ill: They often torment, and treat very roughly, young birds, butterflies, and such other poor animals which fall into their hands, and that with a seeming kind of pleasure. (…) This delight they take in doing mischief, whereby I mean spoiling of any thing to no purpose, but more especially the pleasure they take to put any thing in pain that is capable of it; I cannot persuade my self to be any other than a foreign and introduced disposition, a habit borrowed from custom and conversation. (…) And they have the examples of most about them, to confirm them in it. All the entertainment and talk of History is of nothing almost but fighting and killing: And the honour and renown that is bestowed on conquerors (who for the most part are but the great butchers of mankind) farther mislead growing youth, who by this means come to think slaughter the laudable business of mankind, and the most heroic of virtues. By these steps unnatural cruelty is planted in us; and what humanity abhors, custom reconciles and recommends to us (…)*(Locke, 1889,101-102)

A cursory look at school history textbooks suggests that Locke's concern still holds today, "All talk of History" is indeed of "nothing almost but fighting and killing." A high proportion of the contents included in textbooks across the world refer, in a self-evident way, to violent events and processes. Students are bombarded with the names, dates and sites of innumerable battles, coups d'état, conquests, and civilizing enterprises. Wars and revolutions provide easy turning points in memorizing history, and violence is often valorized as a "laudable business" or a "heroic virtue". The national narratives that dominate history textbooks almost invariably justify the violence inflicted upon others (Carretero, 2011; Cole, 2007; Epstein & Peck, 2018). Yet the sharpest of Locke's observations is that in representing the past in such way, custom reconciles and recommends the cruelty that humanity abhors.

Johan Galtung (1996) provides an elaborate model to explain this phenomenon. Because conflict involves both constructive and destructive energies it has the potential to generate creative transformations of underlying contradictions and is not necessarily a source of violent destruction. Violence is only one way in which people relate to each other around situations of conflict. Human nature contains both the disposition to aggression and the disposition to cooperation, solidarity and care that allow for non-violent transformation of conflict. What distinguishes violence is the instrumentalization of an "other" that is treated as a disposable means to achieve disputed goods. Violence is therefore a purposeful strategy to obtain desired goals through the domination or annihilation of others who are rendered as obstacles to one's self-satisfaction. What does it take for human beings to opt for a violent resolution of conflict? Galtung, like Locke, points out that fundamental dynamics in this matter are settled through social practice, custom, and conversation. Violence is socially constructed, not simply a natural and inevitable trait of human interactions. He identifies three kinds of violence that are distinct although interdependent. "Direct violence" is physical and intended; war is its most typical form. Direct violence rests on and perpetuates "structural violence" and "cultural violence." The former refers to built-in patterns of social organization marked by exclusion and inequality, and the later to the range of normative beliefs and social practices that dehumanize certain people and legitimize the use of violence on them. Law, religion, science, language and education are possible conduits of cultural violence through which instrumental, destructive and unfair practices are rendered acceptable (Galtung, 1990).

In this paper I draw on Galtung's concept of *cultural violence* to explore the role of history education in sanitizing violence and making it acceptable. I present a study that examined how history textbook represent the violence intrinsic to different episodes from the violent past of Spain, Colombia and the United States. The findings show that despite the abundant references to events and processes of direct and structural violence, the phenomenon of violence as an instrumental practice used to obtain desired goals is rarely discussed or made the object of explicit analysis. On the contrary, textbooks treat violence as a natural trait of human affairs, an inevitable feature of historical processes that requires no explanation. A paradox becomes apparent: while violence appears repeatedly as a dominant motif of history education, its purpose, significance and implications remain hidden to the learner. How does this happen? How is ubiquitous violence made invisible? The analysis of textbooks led me to identify ten narrative features that describe interlocking mechanisms by which historical accounts manage to describe violent events and processes while precluding any reflection about its roots, causes, consequences and alternatives. I conceptualize these features as *ten narrative keys that normalize violence.*

The social and ethical implications of such normalization of violence are serious. As Barash and Webel (2002) note, "[i]t may well be that the greatest barrier to peace is less the intractability of the world problems than the fact that those problems are psychologically, and thus politically, invisible" (p. 539). Galtung, too, underscores the importance of peoples' understanding in peace building (2008). This research aims to contribute in this direction. A critical examination of how school history normalizes violence can shed light on how to revert this process.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study investigates the social messaging communicated through historical narratives about the violent past, specifically, the ways in which textbook accounts contribute to the normalization of violence. This implies that history education comprises much more than the teaching of historical facts or the development of historical concepts and thinking skills in youth. It also involves an ethical and civic dimension that is inevitable because the past is present in how we define ourselves, in how we understand our communities and our responsibilities in them, and in how we envision the future and the actions and transformations that will lead us there. Drawing upon scholarship in the field of "Historical Culture", history education is understood as a sociocultural practice that integrates a variety of academic, educational and public uses of the past (Carretero, Berger, & Grever, 2017). Conducting research, teaching history, visiting museums, and reading historical novels are different manifestations of this practice, all of which serve social functions related to the construction of meaning, social reproduction or transformation, the negotiation of personal and collective identities, and the orientation of agency (De Groot, 2016; Rüsen, 2004; Seixas, 2004). History education is therefore a socially situated practice, inescapably tied to social goals and functions. Two core concepts in 'Historical Culture' research guide this study: '*Uses of the past*' and '*narrative representation*'.

Uses of the past

Historical accounts offer interpretative reconstructions of the past that respond to questions and needs that we have in the present (Ricoeur, 2004; Rüsen, 2004). The dialog between present concerns and interpretations of the past may be more or less rigorous, but it defines the uses and social functions of historical knowledge.

Abundant research has shown that the history taught in schools is determined not simply by the historiographic knowledge available, but by dominant or emerging socio-political agendas (Ferro, 2003; Foster & Nicholls, 2005; Taylor & Guyver, 2012). We know, for instance, that 'official' and 'unofficial' versions of the past are redefined following major socio-political changes (Ahonen, 1997; Terra, 2014;

Wertsch & Rozin, 1998) and that accounts of historical conflicts tend to rely on a dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them' that generates biased explanations of their causes, development and consequences (Adwan, Bar-Tal, & Wexler, 2016; Chhabra, 2017; Yogev, 2010). According to Carretero (2011) these uses of the past correspond to a 'Romantic tradition' that ties history education to the goal of nation building and hence strives to make citizens love their country. Indeed, textbooks of different countries provide different versions of one same historical event that align with their own national histories, and a careful selection of events ensures that a positive light is cast on the nation and its nationals (Firer & Adwan, 2004; Foster & Nicholls, 2005; Valls, 2013).

Most of the research on history textbooks investigates the representation of specific historical events and conflicts, focusing on issues like the alignment between the selection of events and the dominant national narratives; the inclusion, exclusion and stereotyped portrayal of historical actors; or the biased account of causes of conflict. But interestingly, while violence is a defining feature of many of these events, scholars have not focused their analysis on the representation of violence in itself. This study makes this its core research question: How is violence represented in textbook accounts of the violent past? The analysis of textbook accounts of nine historical topics in three countries, led the research team to look beyond the representation of particular events to identify salient patterns in how these narratives portray the violence inherent to the different events. Focusing attention on the representation of violence in this way allowed us to identify a more complex and subtle phenomena than what has been previously described. Earlier studies identify overt and tacit justifications of violence in history textbooks (Bellino, 2014; Bickmore, Kaderi, & Guerra-Sua, 2017; Cole, 2007; Fine-Meyer, 2013). However, textbook narratives do not always, and not simply, justify violence. The analysis of the *narrative normalization of violence* reveals multiples aspects involved in the representation of violence, and their relation to the uses and abuses of the past in educational contexts.

Importantly, the concept of 'uses of the past' is not confined to nationalistic or partisan abuses of history. In a positive light, Rüsen (2004) and Seixas (2016) argue that academic history builds upon and develops methodically the social needs for interpretation and orientation, and then, in a circular motion, goes back to contribute to build public memory. In this process, a chief function of historical culture is the development of "historical consciousness," a social-cognitive function that, connecting accounts of the past, experiences in the present, and imaginations of the future, provides a sense of continuity and/or rupture that allows individuals to recognize themselves as social-historical beings, contextualize their identities, and orient themselves in time. For Körber (2014) the competence of historical consciousness involves generating historical questions from life situations, working with historical methods to answer them, and developing representations that are useful for life orientation. Such an approach to the past corresponds with an 'enlightened tradition' in history education that aims to develop in students a disciplined understanding of the past that prepares them to participate as critical members of local, national, or global communities (Carretero & Bermudez, 2012). As such, the concept of 'uses of the past' can also denote critical and transformative social functions, such as contributing to conflict transformation and reconciliation processes by fostering a sophisticated understanding of the conflictual past (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Cole, 2007; Psaltis, Carretero, & Cehajic-Clancy, 2017). This is consistent with Galtung's call for transforming the understanding that people have of the relationship between conflict and violence (2000; 2008).

Narrative representation

Research on historical culture has paid great attention to the narrative representation of the past and the effect it has on historical consciousness. It is precisely the narrative structure of historical accounts that allows individuals to see themselves as historical creatures, orient in time, contextualize their identities (Rüsen, 2004; Seixas, 2004). This idea builds off Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner's (1986; 2010) claim that

individuals construct their sense of self and reality through 'narrative thinking,' using narratives as 'cultural tools' that provide systems of representation and meaning-making particular to their socio-historical contexts. Discourse theorists, too, regard narratives as 'action-oriented productions' that serve a chief social function of facilitating the negotiation of identities and of the contested meaning of social events and practices (Billig, 1996; Gee, 2011; Haste, 2004; 2014).

Both notions of narrative as a *cultural tool* or an *action-oriented production* support the characterization of history as a sociocultural practice in which different uses of the past serve different functions for people in the present. The narrative structure of an account creates meaning; it offers a particular representation that frames the meaning that individuals can make of events. We know, for instance, that master narratives organize historical accounts around dominant motifs that provide a sense of purpose and direction to historical processes (i.e. quest for freedom, national building, progress) (VanSledright, 2008; Wertsch, 2004). Narratives include and exclude certain events and actors and arrange them in storylines that imply causation and define the role of individual and collective agency in these processes. Likewise, historical actors, characterized by their intentions, beliefs, and values, imply normative claims about how one ought to act; and make available different identity categories that allow the reader to position themselves and others in relation to them (Bermudez, 2012). In these ways, historical narratives establish how we understand the past, our own reality in the present, and our role in it (Andrews, 2007; Haste & Bermudez, 2017; Wertsch, 1997). For this reason, narratives of historical conflicts can aggravate polarization, stir violence, and block reconciliation processes (Bar-Tal, 2000; Oren, Nets-Zehngut, & Bar-Tal, 2015; Psaltis et al., 2017). Bar-Tal notes that these narratives provide youth with collective memories and a "collectively held ethos" that explain the nature and history of the conflict and each side's role in it, justifying one's own position and denigrating that of the other.

The notion of narrative representation has an important conceptual implication for this study. As Haste & Bermudez explain (2017), narratives become 'lay social theories' through which people learn what to take for granted and what to question, what to regard as 'natural' and 'normal,' and what to regard as 'problematic'. Thus, from a narrative perspective, the normalization of violence means that historical narratives take violence for granted, they treat it as something that is normal, not problematic or in need of explanation. A second implication is methodological. In order to shed light on how historical accounts represent violence, we must analyze not only 'what is said,' but also pay special attention to the narrative structure and the dynamic features of narratives, such as how different elements are connected and disconnected from each other and from a wider context of meaning, how some elements are placed in the foreground of the story while others are moved to the background, how silences are interspersed throughout the story, how actors and readers are positioned in particular ways, or how the narrative explicitly or implicitly assumes rhetorical stances that indicate what an account argues for and against.

THE STUDY

The study conducted an in-depth analysis of history textbook narratives in Colombia, Spain, and the United States—three countries that have had distinct experiences of political violence, both current and historically. Two research questions guided the study: a) How is political violence represented in textbook accounts pertaining to different episodes of the violent past? b) In what ways may these representations foster or hinder a critical understanding of violence?

Data was collected from history textbooks currently used in each country. Analysis focused on the textbook accounts pertaining to three watershed historical events that are prominent in the national narratives of each country, and which involved different kinds of conflict.

Table 1. Selected Historical Episodes

	Spain	Colombia	United States
Territorial expansion	Spanish Conquest (1492-1550)		The Forced Migration of Indigenous people. (1830-1840). The Trail of Tears.
Civil War	Civil War (1936-1939)	Liberal-Conservative Violence (1940-50's)	Civil War Era: (1860-65). The Abolitionist Movement
Current armed conflicts/ terrorism	ETA & the "Basque Conflict". 1960 onward	Guerilla-Paramilitary Armed Conflict 1960 onward	9-11 & the War on Terrorism. 2001 onward

The sample included thirty-six textbook accounts, four per topic, and twelve per country (see Appendix 1). Accounts consisted of the chapters or chapter sections that dealt with the given topics, which could range from a full chapter of up to 40 pages to sub-sections of as little as 2 pages. Textbooks were selected following purposeful criteria: a) At least two of the four textbooks per topic were produced by large publishing houses, and were thus broadly used; b) At least two textbooks offered some degree of ideological, historiographical or pedagogical diversity, based on how textbooks presented themselves. This allowed us to capture a larger variety of narratives, even if some were not new or had a more restricted circulation; c) For topics covered in different school-grades, the highest grades were chosen to capture the more complete and complex accounts possible.

Data analysis involved two steps: a) thematic analysis and b) narrative-discursive analysis. Thematic analysis (Saldana, 2012) used inductive coding to identify salient or recurrent themes in the representation of historical events. Themes were used to reconstruct the accounts provided for each topic, affording a synthetic view of the historical process, its main actors and events, and the social, economic, political and/or cultural factors that explained its development. Themes then formed the basis of the narrative-discourse analysis.

Narrative-discursive analysis (Bermudez, 2014; Billig, 1996; Daniels, 2014; Gee, 2011) was used to capture the more dynamic aspects of narratives that frame the meaning of events. For instance, how texts draw the attention of the reader to certain elements and displaces it from other events, how relationships among themes are established, broken or mitigated, how some perspectives are subordinated or marginalized, or how silences are built into the story. These discursive features can be as eloquent and effective in communicating social messages as what is explicitly said through the themes and information of an account. Drawing on narrative and discursive theory, we devised a set of analytic questions to examine the representation of violence in the different historical accounts.

Table 2 – Narrative-Discursive Analytic Questions

Analytic question	Shed light on how narratives…
What events and actors are included/excluded?	Define 'what happened' and who made it happen.
What events are placed in the foreground/background of the story?	Establish what is more or less important.
What historical actors are given more/less voice?	Emphasize or marginalize perspectives.

How are different actors positioned in relation to one another, and in relation to the conflict and the use of violence?	Define who is insider/outsider, active/passive, or victim/perpetrator.
What qualities, motives, actions are attributed to the different historical actors?	Grant or remove agency and responsibility for violence.
How are events located in or dislocated from long-term processes and larger scenarios?	Imply necessity, purpose and consequences of violence.
How are different themes/events connected and disconnected?	Imply causation.
What events, actors and practices are regarded as violent, and which are not?	Establish how the reader should regard them.
What rhetorical stances does the text adopt regarding the different uses of violence?	Establish the claims and assumptions regarding violence that are taken-for- granted, justified, questioned, challenged, resisted, or advocated.

Data was collected and analyzed in Spanish and English by an international bilingual team. Seven researchers worked independently and in small groups to arrive at acceptable inter-rater reliability in the development of codes and categorizations for each topic, and later on they met on ground and online to compare and contrast the findings obtained for each topic in each location.

FINDINGS

The analysis of 36 textbook accounts revealed interesting particularities of specific countries, topics and resources (Bermudez & Argumero, 2018; Padilla & Bermudez, 2016; Stoskopf & Bermudez, 2016), but also striking patterns that appeared recurrently across them. These patterns reveal the core mechanisms by which textbook narratives manage to talk about episodes of the violent past while keeping the purpose, experience and consequences of violence invisible to the reader. I synthesize them here as *ten narrative keys that normalize violence in history textbooks.*

1. Conflation of conflict and violence

This first and fundamental narrative key refers to the extent to which historical accounts differentiate between explaining the causes and consequences of a historical event, and explaining the causes and consequences of violence.

In explaining historical events, textbooks often describe social, economic and political conflicts that led to, or resulted from these events. However, they rarely distinguish between explaining the underlying conflict and explaining the violence employed by different actors to deal with it, for instance, by asking separate questions about why that episode turned (so) violent, how violence evolved, or what were the consequences, not simply of the historical events, but of the use of violence in them. A typical manifestation of this conflation is the way in which textbook accounts of episodes of war use terms like 'conflict', 'violent conflict' and 'fighting' interchangeably, as if they were synonymous. In other instances, textbooks describe antecedent contexts of social, economic or political conflict and then state that the tensions between contending parties grew to the point in with "violence erupted" or "war broke out," skipping specific explanations of the motivations that led historical actors to resort to violence, or of the role that violence played in the unfolding of events from then onwards.

Very few instances of explicit differentiation were found in the textbook accounts analyzed for the nine episodes of the violent past. As a result of this narrative feature, conflict and violence are rendered inseparable; if there is conflict, violence follows. Thus, violence is taken for granted rather than explained;

it appears as a natural feature of human affairs that begs no questions, a ubiquitous and inevitable trait of historical processes that requires no explanation.

2. Narrative framing of violence

Despite the lack of explicit discussion of violence, a lot of information and value judgments about it are conveyed to the reader, chiefly through the narrative framing of historical events. Narratives frame the meaning and value of specific events by locating them within larger historical processes that define the event as being a part of something bigger than itself.

Most of the textbooks analyzed portrayed violence as an unfortunate but necessary means to valued social ends, such as attaining progress, gaining independence, maintaining order, or building a nation. Consider the following example.

The Trail of Tears was a process of forced migration in which close to 100,000 Indigenous people of five Indian nations (Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Seminole Nations) were uprooted from their homelands in the southeastern United States during the first half of the 19th century and displaced to current Oklahoma territory. Textbooks referred to these forced migrations as a 'tragic episode' for the Indian nations. However, they appear as a sad story of hardship of a people outside of the emerging American nation, an unfortunate but inevitable episode in the larger story of American nation building. There is no suggestion that these events had any important impact on the political culture, the social fabric, or the ethos of American society then or today. Chapter titles provide a first indication of what takes priority in these narratives. In one textbook *(PTP)* the half-a-page section on 'Indian Relocation,' is subsumed in the 46-page chapter entitled 'An Emerging New Nation (1783-1861).' In another textbook (OOM) one-page on 'Indian Removal' fits in a 24-page chapter on 'The Growth of Democracy (1824-1840).' A third textbook (TAP) includes two-pages on 'The Trail of Tears' within a 30-page chapter on 'The Rise of Mass Democracy (1824-1840).' *Rise, growth,* and *emergence*, all denote a story of forward movement, progress and development. In different ways, all three textbooks prompt the reader to bypass the tragedy of the forced migration of the Indian nations and to focus on the most important process of nation building. The question of "democracy for whom?" is never posed. Nothing in these textbooks encourages reflection on the potential contradiction between the 'rise of democracy' and the disenfranchisement of more than 100,000 Indigenous inhabitants.

Narrative frames establish what the story told is really about, and in doing so they open or close what can be said about the violence inherent to historical events.

3. Lack of coordination of different narratives

This narrative key refers to the extent to which textbook accounts include different narratives, and to how they are put in relation to one another. In most cases, the textbook accounts analyzed relied on one single and dominant narrative and marginalized alternative viewpoints. Facts, events, or perspectives that went against the dominant storyline were reframed to make them fit, or were entirely suppressed. The dominant narrative of The Trail of Tears as inevitable collateral damage of the expansion of the American nation, and the absence of counter-narratives coming from Indigenous communities or from activists that opposed the Indian Removal Act illustrates this well.

In other cases, textbooks included different social or academic narratives, but their coordination was weak or non-existent. In the analysis of Spanish and Colombian teaching resources (Bermudez & Argumero, 2018) we found elements of four different narratives of the Conquest of America: a) A

narrative of encounter between Indigenous and European cultures, b) a narrative of expansion of European modernity, c) a narrative of European imperialist domination, and d) a narrative of the devastation of Indigenous cultures. In the four narratives the Conquest of America entailed some degree of violence, but they emphasized different themes and represented violence differently; the tone of the commentaries ranging from soft regret to strong indignation. The 'narrative of encounter' and the 'narrative of modernity' represented violence as circumstantial, sporadic and interpersonal occurrences, casting a shadow over its pervasive, systemic, and instrumental nature. In turn, the 'narrative of domination' and the 'narrative of devastation' exposed the interaction between the economic furnace that fed it, the sociopolitical institutions that made it viable, and the social and religious discourses that justified it. However, the 'narrative of domination' stressed so much the structural dynamics that generate violence independently of individuals' awareness and volition, that concrete historical actors were stripped of agency, obscuring the many instances in which they faced dilemmas, controversies, and alternatives, but still opted for the expedience of violent means.

Of the four, the narratives of modernity and cultural encounter were dominant in both countries, while the narratives of domination and devastation were marginal in Colombian textbooks and totally absent in three of the four Spanish textbooks. The narrative of devastation, the only one to represent the traumatic experience of Indigenous communities, was the most marginalized. Several of these textbooks contained elements of more than one narrative, but they were separate aspects of the historical process. Their differing perspectives were not contrasted, nor did they build off each other to offer a more sophisticated representation of violence, which would be useful to understand that violence entailed much more than killing.

4. Marginalization of the perspective and voice of the victims

The victims of political violence are virtually absent or silenced in history textbooks, especially if they belonged to an "out-group". In many textbooks the word 'victim' does not even appear, and in the few cases when they are mentioned, events are not described from their perspective.

Textbook accounts of the Colombian Armed Conflict dedicate little attention to the victims of a five-decade process that has left nearly 220,000 dead and 10% of the population displaced from their territories (GMH, Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2013; Wills, 2015). In one textbook we read,

> "The war against drugs [Plan Colombia] has generated forced and massive displacement of peasants and indigenous people toward the country's main cities. Threatened by guerrillas and paramilitaries, their homes and lands are plundered; they are left with no option but to migrate to other places, where they generally have to start a new life. Due to the presence of AUC in the armed conflict, violence was exacerbated; the methods used by these groups reached unthinkable extremes in the violation of human rights" (Norma, 2012: 192,193).

Interestingly, even though the textbook mentions violent practices like the violation of human rights, displacement, extortion and kidnapping, the description is so general that it gently displaces the attention of the reader from what the victims experienced and what it meant for their lives. Expressions like "numerous and incalculable effects" or "methods that reached unthinkable extremes in the violation of human rights" denote the gravity of the situation, but they do not reflect forcefully enough the drama of the irreparable losses, estrangement and trauma; they don't bring the reader closer to the texture of the human experience, through which he or she might empathize with the victims or fathom the magnitude of the damage caused (Padilla & Bermudez, 2016).

The accounts of the Spanish Civil War included the most explicit information about victims. Textbooks provide detailed counts of the people victimized in different ways in the Nationalist and Republican battlefields and rearguards, as can be seen in the following table extracted from one of the textbooks.

War Victims		
	According to Ramón Salas	According to Hugo Thomas
Total	620.000	600.000
Killed in battle	296.000	200.000
Killed in the rearguard	342.000	400.000
Reprisals in the Francoist zone	61.000	175.000
Reprisals in the Republican zone	76.000	70.000
Other (malnutrition, bombardments)	187.000	155.000

(Erein, p. 324)

Further, chapters on the Civil War typically include pictures of political opponents jailed, rows of prisoners marching, hordes of people walking towards exile, and cold and starving women and children after the war. But this is the furthest we get: they mention that victims exist, they count them, and they provide timid glimpses of their plight. Photographs are not accompanied by any textual development, nor are students asked to reflect on them. And while these textbooks include abundant source material, there are hardly any historical testimonies that give voice to these actors.

In this way, textbook narratives understate the extent and depth of violence leveled against particular sectors of the population. The accounts of a violent past come across as cold and dispassionate, as *stories of violence with no hurt* that avoid raising ethical questions or mobilizing the readers' emotions.

5. Disjointed discussion of the social structures that propel and sustain violence

In most history textbooks, events and practices of direct violence (physical violence, war, etc.) are described in a social vacuum, disconnected from the complex interaction of social structures that generate conflict and trigger the use of violence. Of the four textbook accounts of the Trail of Tears only one made a brief reference to the cotton economy and the international markets that pushed for the removal of Indigenous peoples of their lands.

In the narratives about the Colombian Armed Conflict, all four textbooks date its beginning in the mid 1960s, and locate its causes in the Frente Nacional (National Front) (1958-1974), a 16-year pact between the two traditional political parties (Liberal and Conservative) to alternate in Government and to distribute all bureaucratic posts. The rise of guerillas was the response of social groups that felt excluded from political life by this pact. From this point on, a narrative plot organized around presidents' terms in office describes the history of the armed conflict as a sequence of offensive actions by different illegal armed groups and the corresponding counter-actions by the successive governments, whether to contain the threat or to seek peace.

> "Turbay Ayala [1978-1982] established the National Security Statute, a decree seeking to strengthen the defense of the national territory vis-à-vis the increasing offensive by the guerrillas and organized crime. The Statute restricted personal liberties such as the right to assembly, increased sentences for offenses related to subversion, and granted the Armed Forces additional judicial attributions" (Santillana, 2013, p.263).
> "The M-19 exhausted by the struggle and weakened militarily, accepted the government's pacifist policies. Between January 1989 and March 1990, after several conversations, Barco's

government managed to demobilize and dissolve the armed organization" (Santillana, 2013, p.277).

"Having demobilized the self-defense troops, the Uribe-Vélez administration [2006-2010] maintained a combative attitude toward the guerrilla. As a result, the army struck and eliminated guerrilla commanders Martín Caballero and Raúl Reyes" (Santillana, 2013, p.279).

Throughout these chronologies there is very little explanation of the complex interaction of economic, social, and political structures that sustain this conflict. Aside from the explicit reference to the origin of guerilla groups in the elitist party system in the 1960s, one finds only fragmentary references to the recurrent exclusion and extermination of alternative social and political movements, the enduring and increasing concentration of land property, or the struggle to access strategic resources (Padilla & Bermudez, 2016).

6. Removal of human agency behind violence

The sixth narrative key refers to the extent to which textbook accounts discuss the human agency behind violence. It is crucial to understand that, as discussed earlier in the theoretical framework, violence is an instrument, not simply a natural response to conflict, but a deliberate practice, socially constructed, driven by interests, beliefs and motives that can be identified, and transformed. Yet, textbooks tended to displace or dilute agency, obscuring authorship and responsibility, especially when the story is told from the perspective of the perpetrators of violence.

Little is explained about the death of nearly a quarter of the Indigenous people forced to march in the Trail of Tears:

"One out of every four Cherokees died of cold or disease" (PTP, 2009, p. 124).

"Freezing weather and inadequate food supplies led to unspeakable suffering" (TAP, 2009, p.257).

"Nearly one quarter of them died of disease and exhaustion" (APAN, 2011, p.256).

The ordeal of forced displacements appears more as a brutal act of nature (bad weather, scarcity of food, sickness) than as a catastrophe set in motion by social and political forces, and by the purposeful action of historical actors who gained from the losses of Indigenous peoples. Why were people forced to march precisely during winter? Why were they not provided with food and medications when sick? One finds no answers to such questions. In fact, no questions are asked. The responsibility of European Americans for the death and suffering of Indigenous people is thus concealed. If the silencing of the perspective of victims generates stories of violence with no hurt, the removal of agency generates stories of hurt with no blame.

7. Silence about non-violent alternatives

Textbook accounts rarely represent the historical actors and social movements that at the time of the historical event opposed the use of violence or advocated for non-violent means to deal with the conflicts. This silence suggests that there was no alternative to violence.

Scholarship on the Abolition Movement prior to the US Civil War has recognized that many abolitionists emphasized a peaceful approach to the ending of slavery (Curti, 1929; Demos, 1964; Ziegler, 1992).

Women and men who actively participated in the struggle against slavery spent a great deal of energy both condemning institutionalized violence inherent in slavery and warning of the dehumanizing effects violent resistance had on those who engaged in it (Mabee, 1970; Sklar, 2000). This scholarship has been largely ignored in the textbook accounts that to varying degrees position the Abolition Movement as contributing to a climate of violence that led to the Civil War (Stoskopf & Bermudez, 2016). For instance, in one textbook, well-known European-American and African-American figures such as William Lloyd Garrison, David Walker, and Frederick Douglass fall under the category of 'radical' abolitionists. The term radical is not explained, nor is any distinctions made between the views of different historical actors who are assigned this label. Instead, the narrative employs personality traits to characterize these figures. The chapter devotes most of its attention to Garrison, who is depicted as 'the emotionally high strung son of a drunken father' who then grew up to be 'stern and uncompromising' (TAP, p.350). Hardly a sentence goes by in the chapter where there is not a negative adjective attributed to his character and actions. Missing in the account are his many statements and exchanges with other national abolitionist figures and grass root activists who articulated stances of non-violence struggle to end slavery. Garrison is positioned as a dangerous and unpopular menace to reasoned discourse and political unity.

8. Disconnection of violence from its costs and consequences

Beyond the number of human casualties, textbooks provide little discussion of the costs of violence. Violence is disconnected from the effects it has on civilian populations, such as psychosocial trauma, the destruction of cultural heritage, the waste of economic resources and the destruction of infrastructure, environmental devastation, the pressing social needs that are displaced from public agendas, or the polarization of political processes and public opinion.

The information provided is often scarce, and the statements too vague and general. For instance, textbook accounts of the Colombian armed Conflict say as little as: "The effects of the conflict are manifold and imponderable, not only in material terms, but also – and most severely – because of the destruction of the social fabric in entire regions" (Santillana, 2013, pg. 222).

As a result of this disconnection, violence is sanitized. If violence has no cost for common people or for the majority of citizens it becomes a minor price to pay in exchange for the greater goods obtained through it; a sad but necessary and efficient means of reestablishing order, achieving progress, gaining independence, disseminating democracy or building a nation of which we can be proud.

9. Omission of the benefits of violence

Why is violence so persistent throughout history? Is it our inescapable evil nature? Or is something gained from it that overrides what is lost? Textbooks provided virtually no discussion of the "benefits" that violence yields to certain social sectors, for example, access to strategic resources, profits from the arms industry or post-war reconstruction businesses, protection or advancing of dogmas, or the control of divergent public opinion.

From the 36 textbook accounts analyzed regarding 9 historical processes that entailed extensive, profound and systemic violence in 3 different countries, there were only two cases in which textbooks made timid statements about the benefits derived from violence. One case pertained to the Conquest of America, and the other, the Spanish Civil War. In the latter, one textbook noted that,

> The first decades of the postwar period generated immense inequality in the distribution of wealth. While the bourgeoisie obtained enormous profits from the control that the

> system exerted over social relations, totally militarized and strongly restricted, ordinary people lived in a situation of misery due to the meager salaries, the lack of basic products, rationing, the constant increase in prices, etc. (EREIN, p.385). (…) From the mid-fifties onward (…) these conflicts show clearly the level of organization and strength that the workers had achieved in their struggle to confront a business-class that, since the end of the war, had been enriched at the expense of low wages and painful working conditions, and thanks to the control and repression that the system exerted on society and workers (p.389).

What is gained with violence? Who gains from it? Who pays for it? What public resources are used to pay the costs? What are the long-term costs for what is seen as a benefit in the short term? These kinds of questions are rarely addressed in textbook accounts, and as a result, the social interests and dynamics that sustain violence are concealed. The problem is that unless narratives reveal the interests that mobilize and benefit from violence, it is impossible to understand that violence is an instrument, a means to obtaining goods.

10. Disconnected Past

The last key refers to the extent to which textbook narratives make or invite connections between the past and the present, between societal processes and individual experiences, or between the 'academic' knowledge of the past delivered by schools and the social representations of the past captured in collective memory.

The vast majority of the textbook accounts analyzed in this study were oblivious of these connections. Chapters provided accounts of past events divorced from the present, as if they were gone and had left no legacies for today. In some cases, learning activities asked students to interview family or community members to collect their memories of recent events, but the narrative accounts provided to students did not include questions or connections that indicated why these historical events were relevant and significant for them in the present. These recurrent disconnections between the past and the present and between historical processes and the experience of students casts a shadow over the purposes of historical inquiry, hindering the possibility that young people engage in reflective explorations of the violent past.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study lead me to conclude that Locke was right. By normalizing violence, history textbooks make palatable something that we would otherwise abhor. In this way, history education becomes a form of *cultural violence* (Galtung, 1990).

The analysis shows how violence is normalized through discursive processes in which narrative accounts talk about the violent past while taking for granted key aspects that are regarded as not-problematic, and thus not in need of explanation. The ten narrative keys identify the mechanisms of such normalization, pointing to what is emphasized and what is marginalized, what is connected and disconnected, and what is silenced. Despite the particularities of different historical topics, narrative forms, and orientations found in the textbooks, the analysis of 36 accounts of the violent past reveals a persistent pattern: As a result of these narrative features, violence tends to be represented as an unfortunate but inevitable and uncontested trait of historical processes, an effective and not-so-costly means to achieve valued social goals. To that end, suffering is sanitized or made invisible, and agency and responsibility are diffused or concealed.

How should we respond to this? Scholars of historical culture acknowledge an ethical dimension of history education. Seixas (2017) includes in it the coming to terms with past injustices and their legacies in the present. More broadly, the ethical dimension relates to the development of "historical consciousness" in youth, and with it, the awareness of the historical character of human behavior, knowledge, institutions; the capacity to negotiate one's identity and agency in social contexts that are diverse and constantly in flux. This ethical dimension establishes an inescapable link between history and civic education (Haste & Bermudez, 2017), a link that foregrounds the question of what history education can do to foster a critical understanding of violence that contributes to peace building. Galtung's concept of *conflict transformation* (Galtung, 2000; 2008) stresses the importance of promoting a critical understanding of the socio-historical contexts and processes that give rise to violence or are conducive to non-violent management of conflict. This implies undoing the work of history education as a conduit of *cultural violence:* If the normalization of violence makes the violent past palatable, what a critical approach to history education ought to do is to turn sanitized stories into *troubling histories.*

The findings of this study suggest that if history education is to foster a critical understanding of violence, it must help to de-normalize it; in order to do so, it must make violence the object of reflective inquiry and discussion. This implies confronting the violent past, representing the complexity of the historical processes involved and acknowledging the multidimensional impact on people, past and present. It means that we must think through violence in order to build peace, or as Bastida (1994) puts it, that we must reflect about violence in order to un-learn war.

Perhaps if the *narrative keys* are turned upside down, making them work in the opposite direction of the patterns described earlier, they could make violence visible in ways that invite critical reflection about it. In this scenario, historical narratives of the violent past would explicitly:

- Differentiate the explanation of social conflicts underlying historical events and the explanation of the use of violence in them.
- Reframe the meaning of historical processes, attending to the consequences of violence.
- Coordinate different narratives, particularly marginalized ones.
- Represent the experience and perspective of the victims of violence.
- Expose the underlying social structures that propel and sustain violence.
- Examine the agency and responsibility of different actors.
- Portray non-violent positions and alternatives available at the time.
- Discuss the costs of violence at different levels.
- Expose the gains obtained through violence by specific interest groups.
- Connect past and present, and societal processes and individual experiences.

Different strands of research and innovative practice in history and peace education lend support to the idea of overturning four of the narrative keys, particularly work on the adoption of multi-perspective approaches and the coordination of contested narratives (Adwan, Bar-On, & Naveh, 2012; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2012; Salomon, 2004; Shaheed, 2013); the inclusion of the testimonies of victims of violence (Bilbao & Etxeberria, 2005; Oianguren & Soliño, 2010); and the significance of history for young people of different contexts (Epstein, 2009; Létouneau & Chapman, 2017). However, the other narrative keys are largely unexplored, and further research is necessary to understand how different dimensions of the de-normalization of violence function, both separately and together.

To be sure, overturning the narrative keys to transform sanitized stories into troubling histories of the violent past raises profound pedagogical challenges. Since Britzsman's (1998) conceptualization of "difficult knowledge" as the representation of social-historical trauma in pedagogical situations, a vibrant

field of research has elaborated on the complexities of teaching youth about the "difficult histories" of their communities, many of which are histories of a violent past (Bentrovato, 2017; Cole, 2007; Epstein & Peck, 2018; Herrera & Pertuz, 2016; Paulson, 2015; van Boxtel, Grever, & Klein, 2016). This research has documented the challenges that arise when teaching and learning about a troubling past. The concept of "difficult histories" denotes troubling topics that awake in people feelings of dissonance, discomfort, and vulnerability. As competing narratives are brought to the classroom, school history becomes a prime site of controversy and negotiation that opens up various ethical, emotional and intellectual challenges (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2012; Goldberg, 2018). Depending on the positioning of historical actors as victims or perpetrators, these topics can awaken in students moral sentiments of indignation, guilt or shame that are difficult to handle.

Further, a reflective approach to the past can question or even undermine founding national myths and established identities, making historical knowledge a sort of taboo (McCully, 2012). Yet, these same scholars argue that despite all challenges, learning from/about difficult histories can have a transformative potential, and that avoiding or mystifying the violent past only serves to sustain its oppressive effects (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2012; Korostelina, 2013; Korostelina & Lässig, 2013; McCully, 2009; 2010; Psaltis et al., 2017; Vélez & Herrera, 2014). This transformative potential depends partly on the extent to which history teaching opens up the past to the consideration of different perspectives and renewed interpretations that, grounded on a critical and reasoned debate, provides young people with insight and agency into a historical conflict without compromising the rigor of historical explanation (Goldberg & Yiftach, 2014; 2012; McCully, 2017). Yet, rigorous inquiry alone is not effective in transforming the social discourses that sustain violence. In order for history education to contribute to conflict transformation it must go beyond a rational approach to historical contents to involve students' emotions and their own social experience (Barton & McCully, 2005; McCully, Pilgrim, & Sutherland, 2002; Stoskopf & Bermudez, 2017).

Not all researchers of the teaching and learning of difficult histories situate themselves in the field of historical culture, but the conceptual overlap is evident in the approach to history education as a socio-cultural practice, the emphasis on the emotions, identities and social relationships that difficult histories mobilize in the process of meaning making, and in the conviction that history education can play a valuable role in conflict transformation and peace building. While this paper does not look into how teachers or students deal with the narratives of a difficult past that they encounter in textbooks, the concept of "difficult history" and the recognition of its transformative potential is important to foresee the pedagogical implications of the findings of this study.

The idea of connecting history and civic/peace education generates a heated controversy among researchers. Within the frame of historical culture, the connection is appealing because it enhances the relevance and purpose of historical knowledge. However, researchers of the development of historical thinking warn about the risk of treating the past as "something to plunder for whatever political or social ends we have in mind" (Foster, Ashby, & Lee, 2008; Lee & Shemilt, 2007; Lee, 2011). They worry that if "extrinsic" social objectives (e.g. valuing democratic institutions, defying racism, or de-normalizing violence) override the "intrinsic" disciplinary objective of developing a rational understanding of the past, history education becomes an instrument to make people arrive at a pre-determined conclusion without engaging in rigorous historical analysis. As Lee explains, "the point of history is to be able to say something valid about the past, often in thinking about the present and future, but not in such a way that our present interests and future desires determine how we organize and understand the past" (2011, p.64). The risk is that subordinating history to the goals of civic education can deform the integrity of the discipline, turning it into "fodder for politicians' (rival) conceptions of what it might mean to be a good citizen" (p. 64).

The controversy is not easily dissolved. The risk of plundering the past is indeed real and problematic. However, as this study shows, history teaching, even if not explicitly linked with goals of civic education, has powerful and often unexamined ways of constructing social representations (including representations about violence) that have political value in the present. This can happen inadvertently, without reflection, in the manner of indoctrination, or openly, through explicit critical reflection that corrects the attempts to misuse the past. In the framework of historical culture, the so-called "extrinsic goals" are seen as uses of the past that are intrinsic to history-doing. Rigorous analysis is of course fundamental, but the critical nature of historical understanding is tied, from beginning to end, to the satisfaction of its social and ethical functions. The warning against plundering the past should not be overlooked. However, it should not lead us to dismiss the potential merits of connecting the goals of history, civic and peace education. Rather, it should be taken as a forceful invitation to consider the terms, conditions and tools that afford a reflective, rigorous and critical dialog among these fields of knowledge and education.

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