

## **Textbook Revisions as Educational Atonement? Possibilities and challenges of history education as a means to historical justice**

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### **Abstract**

Over the past decade there has been a surge in literature investigating the relationship between education and historical and transitional justice. In particular, revision of history textbooks is often presented as a significant component of both peacebuilding and transitional justice mechanisms. However, academic scholarship has largely neglected situations in conflict-affected yet already established democracies, where such attempts unintendedly destabilise and polarise communities. Existing studies prescribing the use of history education reform as atonement also rarely question assumptions and approaches of peace agendas that may contribute to injustices. This chapter fills in these gaps by building on the case of Cyprus where history textbook revisions as educational atonement and historical justice have failed to materialise. Should history textbooks be used for addressing historical injustices, and if yes, what lessons can we learn from Cyprus regarding when and why history textbook revisions fail?

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In her fascinating study on the emergence of accountability for human rights abuses through the global diffusion of human rights norms, Sikkink (2011) puts forward the idea of a 'justice cascade'; an international normative framework that changed world politics by holding individuals, including state officials, accountable for human rights violations. As the rationale behind transitional justice is to deal with past legacies of human rights violations in a way that adequately addresses victims' needs, a lot of the mechanisms adopted in this pursuit of justice, such as truth commissions, exhumations or trials are related to the recovery of *truth*, be it part of 'forensic truth' or a 'broader truth' (Kovras 2017). This includes recovering the fate (and bodies) of missing persons, persecutions of perpetrators, reparations such as financial compensation and apologies, and setting the historical record 'straight'. The latter usually involves mechanisms of establishing the truth about the past – 'historical truth' – and ways to institutionalise this *act of remembering* through various educational means. These could be formal and informal and include revision of history curricula and textbooks, creation of new peace education material and documentation of human rights violations in public archives, memorial sites and museums (Cole 2007a; Ramírez-Barat and Schulze 2018). The focus of this chapter is on arguably the most contested, anxiety-inducing and controversial pedagogical policy for addressing the uncomfortable legacies of a violent past: the revision of history textbooks. There are several reasons that can explain why textbooks seem to be more difficult

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<sup>1</sup> I dedicate this chapter to my late father, Gregorios Christodoulou, who passed away at the end of 2020, shortly before the book was published. As I worked on this chapter by his bedside during his very difficult final stages and he encouraged me to finish it, I know he would have loved to read the book in print.

to change but also cause more controversies than, for example, curricula,<sup>2</sup> but the one characteristic of history textbooks often noted by scholars is their perceived status in society as core state ‘instruments’ for developing content-specific notions of national identity and for reproducing state-approved narratives of the past (Shin and Sneider 2011; Korostelina and Lässig 2013; Cajani, Lässig, Repoussi 2019). As will be discussed later in the chapter, anxiety and resistance to history textbook revisions is related to the presentation of changes to history textbooks as threats to a community’s physical and ontological security. History textbook debates are ‘about power and control’ and often the (problematic) assumption is that whoever controls the current teaching of the past will also control the future, given that textbooks contain knowledge conveyed to future voters (Christodoulou 2018, p.391).

The overarching theme of this chapter is the role of history textbooks as avenues of and for *historical justice*. Can and should history textbook revisions be seen and adopted as a form of atonement – an action that makes amends for past wrongdoings – in divided societies? In other words, can and should they be used for righting wrongs of the past, and so as a form of historical justice? The choice of historical justice over transitional justice here is intentional. Several studies have investigated the relationship between education and transitional justice, offering conceptual frameworks, specific pedagogies and analyses of the ways in which knowledge emerging from truth commissions are being translated into educational material and contexts. Often these relate to post-conflict contexts (where there has been a political settlement) and/or countries *transitioning* to a democracy such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, South Africa and Rwanda, (Cole & Murphy 2009; Davies 2017; Ramírez-Barat and Duthie, 2017; Ramírez-Barat and Schulze 2018; Bellino, Paulson & Worden 2017; Bentrovato & Wassermann 2018). However, academic scholarship has largely neglected conflict-affected yet already established democracies, where ‘official knowledge’ of the past has failed to acknowledge wrongdoings in the absence of the legitimacy, opportunity and momentum usually offered by transitional processes.

This chapter seeks to fill in this gap by bringing in empirical insights from the case of Cyprus, a context where history textbook revisions as part of historical justice have failed to materialise.<sup>3</sup> The case of Cyprus is an excellent illustration of how attempts at history textbook revisions may unintendedly destabilise and polarise communities. Moreover, and related to the gap identified above, Cyprus is a conflict-affected yet already established democracy where the dynamics are related to reclaiming justice vis-à-vis the past, rather than transitional democratic processes as such. It is neither a transitioning, nor a post-conflict country; Cyprus gained its independence from Britain sixty years ago, in 1960, and despite several high-level diplomatic initiatives, including a failed referendum for a bi-zonal federation in 2004 (the plan proposed a federal government with two equal constituent states, the Greek Cypriot State and the Turkish Cypriot State; see Trimikliniotis 2009) many people in the island and outside of it have all but lost hope for a political solution. Arguably, existing literature that fails to make these distinctions – between transitioning and established democracies, and conflict and post-conflict (post-agreement) countries – does so at the expense of a clear presentation of the significant effects that such political changes (or lack thereof) have on the kinds of justice

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<sup>2</sup> There are several explanations as to why textbooks seem to be more difficult to change but also cause more controversies than curricula. For example, the process of textbook authorship, production and revision is a much slower process and usually takes at least a few years where as curricula revisions require less contributions by individual authors and develop faster. Often the creators of one are viewed as curriculum developers (often policy-makers) where as the others are seen as ‘textbook authors’ (often teachers or academics). One is related to educational policy and is usually more abstract and related to objectives whereas the other one includes the actual and specific content of this policy. Finally, school textbooks – referred to by Ingraio (2009, p.180) as ‘weapons of mass instruction’ are teaching tools used in the classroom, and taken home by students (and usually more easily accessible), thus enhancing their perceived power and influence when compared to a curriculum document.

<sup>3</sup> In this chapter I focus on the educational aspects of the Greek-Cypriot community in the Republic of Cyprus.

claims that can be considered legitimate. Transition periods bring with them institutional reforms and restructuring that act as stepping stones for other societal changes. As Arthur has convincingly argued, the transitional agenda of replacing an authoritarian and abusive state apparatus with democratic citizenship strongly influenced ‘what justice entailed, or could become, during a time of transition’ (p.348). Although still under the influence of global norms over education, an established democracy is less likely to accept external interference on matters of education compared to a transitioning one. The latter is also more able to present history reforms as a desired departure from past official histories/propaganda of the authoritarian regime. Similarly, a post-conflict society that has achieved conflict-resolution via a formal political agreement (e.g. the Belfast Agreement of 1998) offers rather different opportunities and dynamics for the development of institutions, policies and reforms related to (history) education than a conflict-society that has failed to reach a political solution (e.g. Cyprus).

In this chapter I argue that although *no* form of history education can ever adequately rectify or compensate for past crimes, there is space and a place for history textbooks to be part of a wider mechanism of offering a minimal form of historical justice: history textbook revisions can have a performative effect as both *a material* and *symbolic* form of justice. I begin by offering a conceptual understanding of the role of history textbooks revisions as avenues of and for historical justice. I then present a short background of the educational and historical context in Cyprus before moving to the four challenges/principles I argue should be carefully considered for history textbook revisions to materialise as forms of historical justice. These four principles or core features should not be seen as a formula for success (or failure), or as essentialized conceptions of what peace or justice could look like; rather they seek to inform future practices through lessons learned from a divided society that has largely failed in conflict-resolution<sup>4</sup> and redressing past injustices.

### **Carving out a place for history textbook revisions in historical/transitional justice**

International and regional organisations such as UNESCO, the Council of Europe and EUROCLIO have produced numerous recommendations and thousands of documents related to the importance of history textbooks in promoting peace, democracy and human rights (a search in UNESCO’s digital library brings up more than 7,000 related outputs). The importance of multi-perspectivity and critical thinking skills is usually emphasised through projects such as ‘learning to live together, ‘learning to disagree’ and so on. Loading history textbooks with such salience and professional historians with such onerous tasks is not something new; textbook commissions, often involving history textbooks, were historically created as institutions promoting peace education and international understanding both before and after the Second World War (Luntinen 1988; Fuchs 2010; Faure 2011; Elmersjö 2014; Kulnazarova and Ydesen 2016). The politicisation of history education in conflict and post-conflict societies has been covered in considerable length by academic literature spanning across disciplines from education, to social psychology, history and political science (See for example, Cole 2007b; Papadakis 2008; Pingel 2008; Korostelina 2012; McCully 2012; Korostelina and Lässig, 2013; Paulson 2015; Bentrovato, Korostelina and Schulze 2016; Fontana 2016; Christodoulou 2018; Cajani, Lässig, Repoussi, 2019).

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<sup>4</sup> Here I am referring to high-level political negotiations and not to bottom-up peacebuilding processes e.g. from bi-communal NGOs that have made some progress in achieving their goals, especially after 2003 and the opening of checkpoints that meant partial lifting of restrictions on movement and more intergroup contact.

Much less has been written in terms of explicitly positioning history textbooks within historical or transitional justice processes (depending on the context). Cole (2007a) has argued that history education, whilst not related to retributive justice, contributes to

‘other major aspects of confronting the past: to truth telling; official acknowledgement of harm; recognition of victims and the preservation of their memory (restorative justice); reconciliation; and to public deliberation, understood as the creation of a more democratic culture.’ (p.123)

In addition to the official acknowledgement of harm, pain and injustices in history textbook discourses, it is also important to add an acknowledgement of the causes, the non-inevitable errors made (counterfactual thinking skills), and the consequences of these choices. Although these revisions can never rectify past wrongdoings, they can be seen as a material and symbolic attempt at restoring the *human dignity* of the victims and their loved ones. Placing emphasis also on non-inevitable errors elucidates the fact that for example, at any point in time, there are different options for political decisions, and particular choices come with certain collective or individual responsibility.

Emphasising the role of acknowledgement as a means to restoring human dignity enables a more nuanced conceptual understanding of history textbook revisions: it opens up the space for viewing textbook revisions as constituting a more powerful performative contribution to historical justice in both a *material* and *symbolic* form. Going beyond discursive changes to historical narratives, the significance of both material and symbolic aspects of textbooks becomes more prominent. The argument usually made is that history education tends to be seen as producing knowledge and narratives in and of itself, and that this knowledge and narratives is what is bringing us closer to the ‘truth’ in either historical or transitional justice processes. There is, however, arguably a larger role for history education to play and we can explore this when we go beyond the use of history textbooks for their epistemological value and view them as *ontological* entities, that is, as objects with material substance and symbolic power. These ontological formations reflect certain realities based on the the dispositions that *choose* to resist or accept revisions. Emphasis on choice allows us to conceptualise history textbook revisions as a performative attempt to make amends for a past harm or crime that has material effects in terms of firstly, a changed ontological nature and status of an object as a tool for justice. On a meta-level, it can be seen as a symbolic action that could not have happened without the prior choice to recognise the wrongdoing and its non-inevitable nature, acceptance of responsibility and a clear intention to address victims’ needs to the extent that is possible within this form of historical justice.

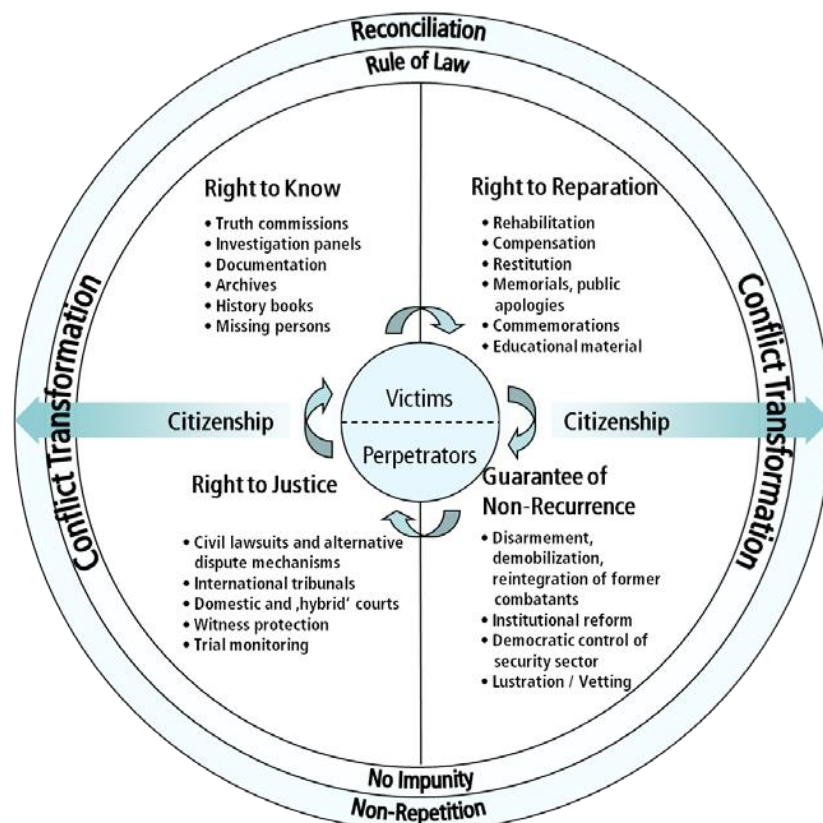
Taken together, material and symbolic changes can be seen as moving closer to the pursuit of not just knowledge, but reparations and justice, when dealing with the violent past. Current dominant paradigms of historical or transitional justice lack such a comprehensive framing of history textbook revisions. Within a well-known four-tiered approach to dealing with the past, there are four fundamental rights that have evolved into international legal norms (Yakinthou 2017, p.5):

1. The right to know;
2. The right to reparations;
3. The right to justice
4. The guarantee of non-recurrence.

Swisspeace and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), have developed a conceptual framework based on these four rights in the form of a circle divided into four quartiles (2016, p.6). Within each quartile they have examples of justice mechanisms (see Figure 1). For example, in ‘the right to reparations’ quartile, ‘educational material’ is listed

whereas for ‘the right to know’, ‘history books’ are listed. Apart from these two references, no further explanation is offered either as to what exactly this educational material should entail (does it include history textbooks?), or whether history books are referring to history school textbooks. In addition, in the rest of the paper where each mechanism is explored in detail, there is a complete absence of a discussion on education apart from as an example of individual reparations. Even here, reparations are likely to refer to provisions securing access to education and education opportunities such as scholarships, similar to what was offered to victims in Chile (González 2018). Moreover, in the FDFA/swisspeace model, there is a very ‘legalistic’ understanding of ‘justice’, currently only including formal judicial measures. To achieve the comprehensive approach I outlined above, history textbooks should be explicitly framed as part of not just a right to know ‘the truth’, but also a right to reparations, and as a right to *justice* more broadly understood.

In the context of Cyprus, although there has been a nascent field of historical (or what some scholars refer to as transitional) justice, it tends to be related to the issue of the people gone missing during the conflict, referred to as ‘Missing Persons’s (Sant Cassia 2005; Yakinthou 2008; Kovras 2017) or attitudes towards cohabitation in a future settlement (Psaltis et al 2019). No study has so far looked at the interplay between education and historical justice in Cyprus, and it is important when doing so to keep in mind the comprehensive framing of history textbooks outlined above.



**Figure 1:** © FDFA/swisspeace 2006, inspired by the Joinet/Orentlicher Principles, cited in swisspeace 2016, p.6

## Historical Context in Cyprus: the birth of injustices

Before offering a window into the educational context in Cyprus it is important to give a brief synopsis of the so-called Cyprus Problem so as to understand the post-colonial legacies that arguably affect Cypriot dispositions to this day. Conflicting positions on the future of the island started in the mid-1950s when the Greek Cypriots (80% of the population) began their liberation guerrilla movement against the British with their end goal being union with Greece. The Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus played an important part not only in the political struggle but also in the educational struggle, vehemently ‘guarding’ schools and educational policy from external colonial influence (Persianis 1978). On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriots (18% of the population) viewed such a possibility of unifying with Greece as a threat to their power and responded by forming their own paramilitary organisation, whose goal was to permanently divide the island with the help of Turkey.

The British, as part of a ‘divide and rule’ strategy, began to use the Turkish-Cypriots through a selected police force to suppress the Greek-Cypriot liberation struggle, thereby placing the two communities in direct conflict and exacerbating grievances, anger and mistrust. When the independence of the island came in 1960, neither community reached its goal, and power-sharing which depended on levels of trust and social cohesion that did not exist, shortly proved a failure. Intra- and inter- communal violence in 1963 and a failed coup by Greek Junta colonels in July 1974 aimed at overthrowing the current Greek-Cypriot president, led to the Turkish military invasion, first by occupying the northern coast, and shortly afterwards by launching a second offensive that extended to over a third of the island’s territory (36%). This led to the *de facto* partition of the island with thousands of casualties, 162,000 internally displaced Greek Cypriots and 48,000 internally displaced Turkish Cypriots (Gürel, Hatay and Yakinthou 2012). To this day, the majority of Turkish Cypriots live in the northern part whilst Greek Cypriots live in the southern part, each side contesting the legitimacy of the other. Since 1983, the self-declaration of the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ effectively means the presence of a *de facto* state that has been rendered legally invalid by the UN, and an isolated Turkish-Cypriot community financially and politically dependent on Turkey.

Although both communities have had slogans of ‘not forgetting’ the past, these refer to different events and different politics of remembering and forgetting (Papadakis 1993). Turkish-Cypriots refer to 1963 as the traumatic event, followed by the ‘happy peace operation’ of 1974 and the desire to ensure the permanency of these changes. On the other hand, Greek-Cypriots refer to 1974 as the traumatic event, and have since then invested in an educational culture of ‘I do not forget and I struggle’, imbuing a duty to the new generation to claim this lost and glorified land back and address the injustices of the 1974 *de facto* partition (Papadakis 2008). The segregated education systems continue to this day, with official historical narratives being taught through an exclusionary ethno-nationalist lens of selected victimhood.<sup>5</sup>

Several events after 1974 have arguably added to the intractability of the conflict and exacerbated the feelings of loss and injustice by the Greek-Cypriots, thereby affecting their willingness to acknowledge their own wrongdoings. One such example is that whereas Turkish-Cypriots had found enough Greek-Cypriot houses to inhabit in the north, thousands of Greek-Cypriots had to remain in refugee camps or seek temporary shelter with friends or relatives as the Turkish-Cypriot houses in the south were not enough. They felt they had to start from scratch, leaving their past lives behind. Feelings of injustice were aggravated by the arrival of tens of thousands<sup>6</sup> of mainland Turkish citizens (usually from poor rural areas),

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<sup>5</sup> The vast majority of pupils are also not able to speak the language of the ‘other’ and participating in such language classes often gets politicised (Charalambous 2014).

<sup>6</sup> The figures tend to be over-estimated from the Greek-Cypriot authorities, sometimes reaching 160,000. According to a report by Mete Hatay (2006) the number of these ‘settlers’ from Turkey who have received citizenship (and hence the right to vote) is around 42,000 or 24% of the population. This number does not include

referred to as ‘settlers’ who after 1975 were encouraged by Turkey to move to the northern part and given Greek-Cypriot properties in the north. This was strongly criticised by the Greek-Cypriot community, viewed as a violation of international law and as part of politically motivated demographic changes to ensure the permanence of division. Another turning point was the 1996 murders of two Greek-Cypriot unarmed men by Turkish extremists and soldiers. Arguably, since then, the insecurity of the Greek-Cypriots in the face of the continued presence of 35,000 soldiers from Turkey has solidified, affecting both the securitisation of history education and the presentation of history textbook revisions as a betrayal to the struggle for redress of injustices (Christodoulou 2018).

Paradoxically, the absence of large-scale violence since 1974 has acted as a disincentivising factor to the peace process, given that there is an absence of ‘urgency’ – what Adamides and Constantinou (2012) call a ‘comfortable peace’. A prevailing sense of comfort with the status quo can be partly attributed to fear of changes leading to further losses, political gains from populist leaders and political parties who have built their careers or success on the Cyprus Conflict. This sense of comfort (or resistance to discomfort) also extends to the education sector given that this too has become a ‘microcosm’ of the wider conflict debate.

### **Educational Context in Cyprus: resistance to history textbook revisions**

Cyprus has had no trials, no truth and reconciliation commissions, nor any reparations. Beyond the lack of a political willingness to acknowledge and address past harms, the divided nature of the island makes it all the more difficult to talk about any kind of justice mechanisms as there are two governments (one internationally recognised and one not) and no central mechanism with which to deploy the institutional structures. This also translates to the history education sector: usually truth and reconciliation commissions call for education to acknowledge historical injustice and for curricular and textbook revision to follow their findings. The absence of such a mechanism in Cyprus means that Greek-Cypriots feel that justice has not been achieved for them, making it difficult for them to actually follow the model outlined above, whereby acknowledgement and inclusion of the other sides’ pain and victimhood can be posited as a claim for justice.

One important exception to this absence of truth recovery mechanisms relates to what has been paradoxically dubbed as a ‘the bright side of a frozen conflict’<sup>7</sup>, a relatively successful bi-communal project related to the search for ‘forensic truth’ – the exhumation and identification of the bodies of the missing persons from both sides (Kovras 2017). This work was done within the framework of the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) which, between 2006 and early 2020, identified 700 Greek-Cypriots (out of a total of 1510 missing) and 274 Turkish-Cypriots (out of a total of 492) and returned their remains to their loved ones (CMP 2020). It is important to note here however, that the CMP is not actually a historical justice mechanism that offers accountability to the victims; it clearly states that it ‘does not attempt to establish the cause of death or attribute responsibility for the death of missing persons’ (CMP 2020). It offers knowledge to families about the fate of their loved ones (though there is little doubt that all the missing are dead), and the ability to bury them.

One overarching question of this book is how historical knowledge generated from official historical justice processes enters the education sector. In the case of Cyprus, the work

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temporary residents from Turkey, for example, students or immigrant workers. Turkish-Cypriots are entitled to citizenship, voting rights and access to welfare of the Republic of Cyprus, but Turkish settlers are not.

<sup>7</sup> Kovras’s point here is that this is a unique case that shows the agency of the families of the disappeared which due to their own mobilisation and determination, were able to break the institutionalised silence of almost 30 years. The wives of the missing persons as well as investigative journalists played an important role in truth recovery. The Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) was established in 1981 but only started work 25 years after.

of CMP has not featured at all in history textbooks. This does not preclude the possibility of the work of CMP having been discussed in classrooms or at home, especially as the evening news tend to show when remains have been identified and there is a religious burial ceremony. However, this gap does provide an untapped opportunity to present difficult and uncomfortable historical truths in history textbooks through the lens of a bicomunal project that was able to break institutionalised silence and disrupt the politicisation of a humanitarian issue.

In terms of history textbook research in Cyprus scholars have already exposed the problematic contents of history education and textbooks (Papadakis 2008; Latif 2019; Karahasan and Beyidoglu Onen 2019). One potential structural change is the reform of history education and in particular history textbook revisions as part of the peace building process. Any attempt to revise them however is often seen with suspicion, anxiety and strongly resisted. As I have argued elsewhere, this resistance is an inevitable and ‘endogenous characteristic of any peace education initiative’ emerging precisely because of the attitudes it seeks to transform in the first place (Christodoulou, 2018, p.5). In the context of the Greek-Cypriot community, history education became a core subject for pursuing the policy of ‘I do not forget’ (Δεν Ξεχνώ/Den Xehno), which focused on keeping alive the collective historical memory of the invasion, the refugees, the human rights abuses and the lost lands in order to be able to claim them back (Christou 2006), thereby historical memory became synonymous with the pursuit of historical justice. Although since the early 2000s, and after the accession of the Republic of Cyprus into the European Union, the policy seems to have undergone various fluctuating periods of lows and highs,<sup>8</sup> both in terms of its content and the discursive space it occupies in educational discourse (e.g., in the current history curricula the phrase is not explicitly mentioned at all), its survival in one form or another for 45 years indicates the backdrop within which history textbook debates occur in Cyprus. Before moving on to the next section which offers four principles that should be considered in future attempts, it is important to refer to more specific educational developments that will help give the reader some further understanding of the issues that will be discussed.

The first time that history textbook revisions occupied formal education discourse was in 2004 when an academic committee appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture - the Education Reform Committee - proposed the ideological reorientation of what was found to be an ethnocentric and culturally monolithic framework towards a multicultural one and in particular, the revision of history textbooks by a joint committee of both Greek and Turkish Cypriot academics (ERC, 2004). Strong criticisms against this radical suggestion emerged from various levels of society including teachers, academics, journalists and the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, the latter regretting that despite their historic contribution towards education, they were completely left out of any consultations (Makriyianni, Psaltis, and Latif, 2011). Unsurprisingly, this proposal never materialised. Thus, since the early 1990s, history textbooks of the secondary school level (that refer to the Cyprus Conflict) remain largely unchanged in the Greek-Cypriot<sup>9</sup> community, despite several changes in curricula (both minor

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<sup>8</sup> A comparative overview of the evolution of the objective of ‘I do not forget’ and the possible causes for this watering down falls outside the scope of this chapter. For a brief overview see Zembylas, Charalambous and Charalambous 2016, pp.60-64 and Christou 2006. For the school year 2019-2020, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth of the Republic of Cyprus (MOECSY henceforth) in a relevant circular (File No. 7.1.05.31) emphasised the importance of the ‘timeless objective’ of ‘I know, I do not forget, I claim’, clarifying that it ‘remains a highest priority’ (MOECSY 2019a). In its more specific school guidelines for the year 2019-2020 (C.1.2.) it referred to the ‘fading away’ of historical memory and called for a resurgence and ‘substantial upgrade’ of this objective in all school subjects (MOECSY 2019b).

<sup>9</sup> Turkish-Cypriot revisions under the left-wing Republican Turkish Party (CTP) in 2004, towards somewhat less ethnocentric and discriminatory content (Papadakis 2008), were withdrawn in 2009 after the election of a right-wing party (National Unity Party) to power (see Vural 2012). New history textbooks have been introduced in the primary school of the Greek-Cypriot community but these do not cover the conflict period.



annual revisions and more extensive ones such as the one in 2010).<sup>10</sup> In other words, unlike other countries, such as Germany, where history textbooks closely mirror the curricula for sensitive issues of the past (Christodoulou and Szakács-Behling, forthcoming) in Cyprus history textbook reforms lag behind history curricula reforms.

Cyprus is an interesting case in that history textbook controversies over the past 15 years have never involved a revised history textbook published in Cyprus; rather resistance has been over firstly a new primary school history textbook imported from Greece in 2006 (and shortly withdrawn) and at various points in time over discussions regarding *potential* revisions. Research with teachers, politicians and religious actors has shown that the so-called ‘Repoussi’ scandal, named after the surname of the Greek academic who led the team of textbook authors of the aforementioned textbook was particularly prominent in discussions of why there was apprehension regarding history textbook revisions in Cyprus (Christodoulou 2018). In other words, this ‘bad’ example was referred to as a justification for the negative attitudes they held towards future revisions. The changes introduced to the primary school textbook, were presented as unethically distorting historical truths for the sake of peace, using inappropriate terminology that legitimised the *de facto* partition of the island in to two states, and belittling traumatic violent events of the past in a way that humiliated the victims’ suffering.

Another fierce debate started in 2008 following an unprecedented school objective that was the first formal peace education attempt initiated at a governmental level. The left-wing party AKEL (Progressive Party of Working People) which was in power at the time, tried to use its power to promote an ideological position long associated with the party: one that supported reconciliation and rapprochement through the promotion of the shared ‘Cypriotness’ of the Greek- and Turkish-Cypriots, often seen by those on the right of the political spectrum as an attempt to de-Hellenicise the island and as a threat to its Greek culture, heritage, history and identity. The Ministry of Education and Culture issued a circular where it announced that the main objective of the school year 2008-2009 was the ‘fostering [of] a culture of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and cooperation’ between the two communities (MOEC 2008, p.1). The Education Minister also proposed the realisation of the recommendations of the 2004 Education Reform Committee, including revisions to history textbooks (Makriyianni, Psaltis, and Latif, 2011). After intense resistance and confusion related to this school year objective, it was at first poorly implemented and later dropped entirely when there was a change in government in 2013 (Perikleous 2015; Zembylas, Charalambous and Charalambous 2016).

It is important to emphasise two points here: firstly, there is a misconception in both public and academic circles that the vast majority of history textbooks are imported from Greece, perhaps due to the fact that this was the policy in the past but also due to the controversy regarding the specific new textbook published in Greece in 2006. In fact, most textbooks that include the Cyprus conflict in a detailed manner, and are currently in use, have been published in Cyprus; these textbook production dynamics matter because they can potentially affect how directly future revisions are enforced. Secondly, debates in 2008 were not over a preliminary draft of a textbook, or an outline, but rather on whether or not the textbooks should be revised. In other words, they were over ‘imagined’ textbook revisions (Christodoulou 2018, p.381).

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<sup>10</sup> The Cyprus conflict is mentioned in history curricula in the last grade of primary school (Grade 6), the last class of gymnasium (lower secondary, Grade 3) and the last class of lyceum (higher secondary, Grade 3). History education is first taught as a separate subject in Grade 3 of primary school. The major history curricula reforms made in (2010) include explicit references to critical thinking and multi-perspectivity, the edification of students for being active democratic citizens, history education devoid of stereotypes and prejudices and the cultivation of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The most updated curricula can be found at the website of the MOEC SY: [http://www.moec.gov.cy/analytika\\_programmata/programmata\\_spoudon.html](http://www.moec.gov.cy/analytika_programmata/programmata_spoudon.html)

## Stillborn fate of history textbook revisions in Cyprus: When and why do they fail?

*They fail when there is a lack of honest and meaningful engagement with local resistance, to understand their discourses and fears*

Merely rejecting negative attitudes to textbook revision can be counter-productive and does not lessen either the fear or anxiety associated with these changes. The agency of local actors, even those of religious leaders who have historically been involved in matters of education (Persianis 1978), needs to be seriously considered and problematized. Scholarship that sometimes arrogantly rejects any calls by religious groups for involvement, often lacks historical context ignoring how strongly the public detested British attempts to 'de-Hellenicise' the island. Regardless of whether a scholar is an atheist or a believer, one cannot dispute the fact that religious leaders 'used their political power to support the schools and protect them from the Colonial Government interference' (Persianis, 1978, Preface; see also Heraclidou 2017). Scholars therefore need to place the remnants of these policies in perspective and appreciate their legacies, adopting a critical lens on liberal peacebuilding norms and exhibit a more meaningful engagement with local resistance (Lekha Sriram 2007; MacGinty 2011; Richmond, 2012; Novelli & Higgins, 2016).

As we have seen, Cyprus is not a post-conflict society with dynamic transitional justice mechanisms. Instead, in Cyprus there is strong and persistent resistance to history education reform with the justification of a *conditionality* argument: that this can only take place *after* there is a political solution, that is, after 'justice' has been given (Zembylas, Charalambous and Charalambous 2016; Christodoulou 2018). Anything else, that does not satisfy this 'condition', is perceived as doing damage to the cause of justice and the 'fighting spirit' of the Greek-Cypriots. This presents a difficult dilemma for academics which is sometimes too easily dismissed. On the one hand, as scholars we are often adamant to point out the politicisation and nationalisation of mourning and loss, and the exploitation of the pain of the displaced, enclaved and the missing persons as a symbol for the Greek-Cypriot struggle against injustice (Yakinthou 2008). Bekerman and Zembylas have discussed how school curricula in Israel and in Cyprus capitalize on mourning in order to 'strengthen the discourse of victimhood and create dehumanized depictions of the other' (2012, p.148). Justice remains an elusive concept and means different things for different groups of society (see Psaltis et al 2019). Certain claims for justice seem to be related to an (understandable) denial to accept that certain reversals, for example to pre-1974 times, may be unrealistic given current political and social realities and that 'times have changed'. Moreover, if nothing can happen until there is a political settlement, how can the community ever be prepared to vote for it if bottom-up peacebuilding is dismissed?

On the other hand, it is imperative 'to examine why some individuals or groups may not necessarily be 'against' peace, when they demand that first there should be justice and then peace' (Zembylas, Charalambous and Charalambous 2016, p.25). Treating them as, 'spoilors' (Newman and Richmond 2006), as 'backward', or as groups with 'problems' (Psaltis et al) arguably risks falling in the essentialist traps of positivist psychologised traditions that suggest the issue lies more in the individual mind that needs to be 'educated properly' after which peace will ensure, thereby underestimating the material and structural injustices (Bekerman and Zembylas 2012, p.26). Studies prescribing the use of history education reform as atonement rarely question assumptions and approaches of peace agendas that may contribute to injustices. This is related to the presentation of essentialist understandings of peace education rather than critical peace education (Bekerman and Zembylas 2012; Zembylas, Charalambous and Charalambous 2016)

As Bevernage (2010) eloquently reminds us, the positionality of wrongdoings as belonging to the past, far from being neutral, is also part of a politicisation, albeit of a different nature:

The turn to modern historical discourse, then, is part of a *politics of time* in which ‘new’ democratic societies try to expel the ghosts of the past by *actively positing* what belongs to their historical present and what does *not*. (p.122, emphasis added)

Bevernage’s work on truth commissions and historiography (2008, 2010, 2016), forms part of a convincing critique on the historicisation of the past whereby historians are essentially asked to delegitimise the present effects of a haunting past on victims. Several questions are raised here regarding the role of the historian and the ethical and political implications of both students and teachers of history education working within a frame of temporality and historicization that cannot recognise persistent injustices (Bevernage, 2010; Keynes 2019) and this should be taken into consideration when making grand claims about history textbook revisions.

I argue these considerations are important, not because I share the positionality of some who put forward the conditionality argument i.e. that nothing can change unless there is a solution, but as part of an attempt to reduce the gap between discursive positions, without imposing an academic frame that positions subjects with different beliefs as backward, right wing or as ‘problems’ to be solved by re-education or further education. Whether these are past victims/survivors, religious actors, women etc. their *inclusion* by way of consultations regarding future changes is a fundamental aspect of any successful historical justice mechanism (Yakinthou 2017). If textbook revisions are to be accepted, they need to be co-constructed from below, and not be seen as sudden top-down governmental or foreign impositions, nor should they be associated with a particular political party. Rather, they should have clear pedagogical, historical and justice-oriented contributions.

### ***They fail when there is a failure to disentangle education from matters of security***

Building on the well-known Securitisation theory of the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998), the framework of the ‘securitisation of history textbooks’ amounts to the presentation of history textbook revisions, as threats to both ontological and physical security (Christodoulou, 2018). Both forms of security are strongly interlinked with survival; the former is about ‘security-as-being’, as a consistent biographical narrative of the Self and the latter is about security as physical survival of the individual and the state (Steele 2008; Odysseos 2002). Historical textbook narratives are part of the everyday discourses, traditions, routines and ways of being which lead to a cohesive and stable understanding of one’s self through a sense of certainty, comfort, continuity and order. Any proposed change of history textbooks is viewed therefore as a disruption to the historical understanding of the Self, to who one essentially *is*, their self-identity. In terms of physical security research has shown both direct and indirect associations: the logic of the implicit argument was that by changing the dominant historical narrative:

‘there would be a loss of patriotism, a loss of determination to fight for one’s country that the future soldiers needed in order to be adequately prepared, and hence a negative impact on the security forces of the island, endangering its protection...There is an underlying anxiety that the citizens should always be prepared for war, given that there has not been a peace settlement yet, but more importantly given the insecurity felt with the presence of the Turkish troops’ (Christodoulou 2018, p.388). There was also the direct argument that by watering down

the historical narratives in the textbooks for the purpose of peace, effectively means abandoning the cause for justice, and for the Greek-Cypriots to feel secure again.

According to Securitisation theory, securitisation occurs successfully when authoritative entities, constructs an ‘existential threat’ which then necessitates urgent action and this construction is accepted by a substantial audience (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998) p.27). Although in Cyprus, this construction of history textbooks as threats to both physical and ontological security is not always top-down (as we saw earlier with suggestions by a minister being rejected) it is successfully achieved through specific sub-themes: revisions to history textbooks are seen as a threat to national identity; to ‘historical truth’; to the cause of justice for the Greek-Cypriots; and as serving foreign interests (Christodoulou 2018). My main argument here, therefore, is that if there are to be history textbook revisions that are accepted by the majority of the people, there needs to be a serious attempt to disentangle the matters of security related to education, engage with peoples’ fears (as mentioned above) and offer concrete and positive visualisations of revised textbooks that are not left at the mercy of imaginations and extreme scenarios. Rather, revisions should offer material and symbolic opportunities for historical justice and improved pedagogical tools for *both* sides concerned. In order to ease fears of textbook changes affecting, for example, the bargaining power of one country vis-à-vis the conflict, then both communities need to acknowledge their past wrongdoings in parallel, concurrent revisions, even if this does not mean teaching using the same textbook. In terms of the issue of ‘national identity’ or ‘serving foreign interests’ for example, revisions can be carefully developed in a way that neither the Greek, nor the Turkish elements of the island are erased, without resorting to either/or scenarios but allowing the construction of multiple and multi-faceted identities. Ensuring bottom-up participation, inclusion and transparency can also further ease fears related to ‘foreign interests’. Dismissing insecurities rather than trying to deconstruct and disentangle them from matters of education, will only further perpetuate the educational impasse.

***They fail when there is no dedicated, politically independent and trusted organisation that is tasked with truth finding and instead there are sporadic actions without preparing the ground***

Both the ‘Repoussi scandal’ in 2006-7 and the debates after the sudden, unexpected announcement of the first formal peace education initiative of 2008-2009 highlighted what could go wrong when there are sporadic actions without preparing the ground adequately or without due care to historical accuracies and terminology. We need to be more realistic about the expectations and possibilities of history education as a discipline and appreciate that teaching controversial issues can also exacerbate conflict identities when not done with caution. This is especially difficult in intractable conflicts like the one in Cyprus where time has not been a healing factor but rather has deeply embedded the conflict in the educational and cultural milieu of the Cypriot people. As discussed earlier in the chapter, with transitioning processes comes momentum, opportunities for change and legitimate frameworks to do so. A vacuum is created that needs to be ‘filled’ and the post-conflict transitioning period is one of ‘action’ through deeper transformative peacebuilding processes. However, these are missing in Cyprus; instead, there is ‘inaction’ in terms of state mechanisms and such initiatives are relegated to the small and marginalised civil society groups which themselves have also been accused of being ‘closed’ and exclusionary or being associated with particular political parties (especially the Left-leaning ones). Therefore, any educational initiatives should firstly be extremely careful with language and terminology, ensuring it does not offend, and with representations of the past ensuring that they do not ignore the needs of victims for adequate

acknowledgement of their suffering without ‘softening’ elements of historical truth for the sake of peace. Secondly, educational initiatives should go beyond political orientations (of the Right or the Left) but rather be focused on improving educational standards and meeting relevant targets, as these are set up by international organisations (for instance, Council of Europe or UNESCO) and locally adapted to the specific needs of the community context.

Thirdly, although one can hardly speak of overwhelming or excessive changes in Cyprus - given that history textbooks have remained largely the same and educational reform has been very slow - sporadic actions by new governments will probably lead to further polarisation, confusion and poor implementation. The point here is two-fold: on the one hand changes need to be well-planned and with scaffolding. For instance, steady incremental steps could involve producing complementary history textbook booklets or digital educational material rather than changing the whole book entirely (this also is a faster process than introducing new textbooks). On the other hand, the Cyprus case has shown that there is a need for a *dedicated, politically independent and trusted institution* that is tasked with historical truth finding. History textbook revisions require ‘a very strong *institutional* component...If the political conflict is not yet resolved...the educational system becomes yet another arena in which different actors and narratives struggle over memory and the meanings of the past’ (Jelin 2003, p.98, emphasis added). As Kovras convincingly points out ‘[i]t was only when the problem of the missing was depoliticised<sup>11</sup> and delinked from political negotiations’ that the CMP had a breakthrough (2017, p.51; 2012). This is important in order to ensure that ‘we are not prematurely closing off the past’; one needs to bear in mind that the logic behind many calls for amnesia and amnesty is one ‘which posits that there will never be a more timely moment to draw a line under the past than the moment when it is still present’ (Bevernage 2016, p.17). But as Bevernage rightly reminds us, *who* draws this line is important: ‘the ‘good historian’, ‘the perpetrator or the politician with less noble intentions’ (2016, p.17)?

A very positive step towards the direction of having a dedicated organisation for bicomunal education initiatives came in early 2016<sup>12</sup> with the operation of the Bi-communal Technical Committee for Education (BTCE). This was established by the two political leaders of the communities, under the auspices of the United Nations. The BTCE has done ground-breaking work in bringing students and teachers together in the buffer zone (over 5000 from 2017 - 2019) through workshops on Education for a Culture of Peace as part of a project called ‘Imagine’,<sup>13</sup> and it has various mandates beyond promoting contact and cooperation, including identification of good practices in education that can contribute to peace and reconciliation and creation of ‘educational materials that promote peacebuilding, intercultural dialogue, human rights education, and anti-racist education’ (UNDP, 2019)<sup>14</sup>. Rather than having a specific mandate for historical truth finding, or history education reforms as part of historical justice, the BTCE has a much more general objective of preparing the ground for a possible future bi-communal and bi-zonal political settlement. Doing so is

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<sup>11</sup> Although I do not agree that such an issue can ever be de-politicised, my suggestion here is to achieve political neutrality in terms of independence from political parties, especially of those educators in high-level positions.

<sup>12</sup> The BTCE was created in December 2015 but had its first ever meeting in February 2016.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Imagine’ takes place under the auspices of the BTCE and is implemented by the NGOs Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR) and the Home for Cooperation (H4C) with the support of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany and the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus. For further details of the project see here: <https://www.ahdr.info/peace-education/58-education-for-a-culture-of-peace-imagine>

<sup>14</sup> This quote is taken from a UNDP job vacancy post. The author applied for this post and has since early 2020 been the Greek-Cypriot education specialist for creating educational material. The first draft of this chapter was sent and presented at a symposium on History Education and Historical Justice at Umeå University, Sweden many months before on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2019. The relevant material used for this part of the chapter is publicly available.

undoubtedly a necessary step. At the same time however, there is still a gap that could potentially be filled in the future by a more institutionalised mechanism, that is not dependent on the current government or political leaders, and is politically neutral and independent. At the moment, the BTCE includes some members that not only belong to political parties but are also political actors themselves. For the reasons discussed above, this could potentially cause conflicting interests and further obstacles, so the suggestion here is for any future organisation dedicated to history education to have consultations with all actors (for instance, political or religious) but for the core members to be educators that are not active politicians. Even if one accepts that political involvement is to an extent inevitable in the partitocratic nature of both communities in Cyprus, there is still an important consideration to be made: asymmetries in terms of political agency can occur when the chair of one side, for instance, is an active politician whereas the other one is not (and is politically neutral). So such seemingly minor issues could potentially be enough to shake up the sensitive waters or disrupt the equilibrium. Involving politicians also includes the risk that arises during election time, when the possibility of a new party replacing the one that had created the committee jeopardises the work done so far.

***They fail when truth-finding and attempts to achieve historical justice are too limited in scope and do not take into account post-colonial legacies***

If the process of historical justice is to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public but also serve an ethical role, then this should not be limited only to the intra- and inter-communal conflict, but also to the horrendous crimes committed by the British imperialist forces in Cyprus (especially during the anti-colonial struggle of 1955-59). Although the island is filled with remnants, memorials and legacies of this colonial period and the struggles against British imperialism, it is rather surprising that British colonial brutalities, including towards unarmed men and women, young people and children, are not discussed in terms of historical justice when it comes to education contexts. In fact, talking about the role of British political manipulation and physical torture against the Greek-Cypriots is sometimes perceived as being aligned with particular political ideologies that supposedly shift the blame away from local, inter-ethnic tensions. Ultimately, historical justice debates, where they exist focus on the two rival ethnic communities, yet largely ignoring colonial legacies and crimes that are largely absent from history textbooks (when they exist they are not discussed in terms of pursuing justice for the victims) of both the colonised and the coloniser *and* discourses about changing these textbooks as a mode of reparation. However, the process of historical justice in and through education, should not be limited to particular groups or time periods if it is to gain the trust, respectability and legitimacy of the public – it should be ethically holistic rather than selective.

The British government was taken to court by 33 such victims of torture in Cyprus and in January 2019 there was an out of court settlement of 1 million in reparations but the government insisted that this was not ‘any admission of liability’ (UK Parliament 2019). As we have seen, acknowledgement of suffering and assuming responsibility is crucial for achieving a comprehensive model of historical justice that includes not just a right to reparations but also a right to the truth and to educational justice. In other words, if officially sanctioned truth telling, apologies and acknowledgement about the past is to provide an alternative form of material and symbolic justice to traditional legal avenues, then focusing only on revising history textbooks in the context of achieving inter-ethnic justice without a form of redress for colonial crimes is not just too limited in scope but also highly problematic.

The fact that Britain has apologized and paid compensation to thousands of veterans of the Mau Mau nationalist uprising in Kenya, brutally suppressed by the British colonial forces in the 1950s (the same decade as the Cypriot one) begs the question of why it has consistently refused to do so for the case of Cyprus. Writing about the British apology to the Mau Mau in 2013, Caroline Elkins wrote: 'British colonial violence was brutal, and systematic. If there is any justice, the Mau Mau's stunning legal victory should be the first of many' (Elkins 2013) and specifically referred to the Cyprus case still awaiting formal acknowledgement and compensation. Elkin's calls for further apologies have not been realised until today and this failure has also meant a missed opportunity for historical justice dynamics. This is because public debates and dedicated commissions related to British colonial crimes, focusing on direct and structural injustices and the sheer racism involved, may provide additional momentum in the future to similar institutions that deal with historical justice on an inter-communal level (like the one proposed above). It is also important when providing meaningful engagement to local current resistance to history textbook revisions, to contextualise it, keeping in mind relevant post-colonial dynamics, for instance, the inter-generational collective trauma that the narrative of education always being under attack by an 'other' has produced.

## **Conclusion**

By building on critical peace education and critical historiography debates this chapter questions some prevailing normative and often romanticised assumptions of 'history education as reparations', showing how it may unintendedly destabilise and exacerbate socio-political tensions if not carefully thought through. It also exposes how selective historical justice debates can be, focusing for example on the two ethnic communities, yet largely ignoring colonial crimes that are largely absent from history textbooks and discourses about changing them as a mode of reparation.

History textbooks can be seen as located at the intersection between peace, justice and history, with each one of these often pulling in opposite directions and having different salience at particular points in time depending on the political context. Academic and practitioners should self-reflect and ask victims' about their needs (Yakinthou 2017) rather than present essentialist understandings of human rights, peace and justice. As many scholars have noted, the distinction between victim and perpetrator is not always so clear and one can occupy both identities at the same time. Nesiah (2016) reminds us of both the need to be sensitive to past grievances but also 'ensure that the process of determining the guilt and innocence in the proximate conflict will not be experienced as another round of victimization that exacerbates the conflict and deepens marginalization'(p.26). This is in practice as complex as it is complicating, and I have made the case above for four principles to be considered if future history textbook revision failures are to be avoided: honest, respectful and meaningful engagement with local resistance; a disentanglement of security with matters of education; a politically independent and neutral institution dedicated to historical truth finding and an adequate conversation and consideration on justice matters related to past colonial abuses. The positioning of a crime in the past (distant or not) does not absolve one of responsibility and accountability for their actions and for the victims to receive even some belated form of historical justice.

In response to one of the overarching questions of this book, 'What is the role of history education in processes of historical justice, and what should it be?', I also critique the prevailing limited understanding of historical justice and argue for a comprehensive model that puts emphasis on the 'right to justice'. I posit that although no form of history education can ever adequately rectify or compensate for past crimes, history textbooks can form part of a wider mechanism of offering some minimal form of material and symbolic historical justice.

The conceptual framework for historical justice also is a step towards a more specific understanding of the word justice. The word ‘justice’ is a vague noun that can be used to project utopian or even unrealistic demands for an idealistic future. It also can mean different things depending who you ask. In Greek there are also variations of the word that turn it into a verb, enabling in this case a more abstract and ongoing process that makes it even more difficult to identify, locate, measure and therefore pronounce it as a goal that has been ‘achieved’.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, associating the word ‘justice’ with ‘patriots’, ‘conservatives’, ‘old-fashioned’ and those who are against progress, risks a Western-infused arrogance – exhibited at times by scholars who regard themselves as guardians of ‘progress’ – that denies victims and their loved ones the ability to claim what they are ethically or even legally entitled to. Ultimately, perhaps the word ‘justice’ itself is too weak to sufficiently capture the powerful expectations often attributed to it. Nevertheless, the ‘cascade’ of justice does not seem to be going away anytime soon, and as scholars we ought to be more cautious when and how we add adjectives, be it ‘transitional’, ‘historical’ or other, to it. Until a possible shift in discourse occurs, more nuanced and comprehensive understandings of what justice could possibly entail vis-à-vis history education are useful in ensuring not only clearer possible end-points but also a more honest and inclusive debate on what is achievable, and which are the most appropriate contexts and principles for reaching the best possible scenario.

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<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, ‘rights’ as in, for example, ‘human rights’ are also a variation of the same word.



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