



# History, Memory and National Narratives as Barriers to Reconciliation



# Introduction

- ▶ Previous research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict got me interested in the role of National Narratives in conflict---- in that work I looked at how those narratives both cause conflict and prevent resolution.
- ▶ This paper is part of a larger project looking at how those National Narratives can prevent reconciliation.
- ▶ Focus is on post-conflict states--- look at how the memories of the conflict, which get incorporated into a National Narrative, can be a barrier to reconciliation.
- ▶ These Memories and National Narratives are found in the textbooks, particularly the history textbooks, so in this paper I examine Philippine history textbooks' treatment of the Filipino Muslims and the conflict in Mindanao



# Reconciliation

- Rebuilding of a relationship that had broken down.
- Fuzzy concept, “re” of reconciliation not always accurate as the 2 adversaries might not have had a relationship before the conflict.
- Various components to reconciliation but argue key component is “acknowledging and dealing with the past”
- Reconciliation will require a reassessment of the Other, as well as of oneself and one’s role in the conflict
- Reconciliation won’t mean everyone agrees on a single narrative about the conflict, but that they will be at least willing to hear other stories or memories about the conflict



# Memories of the conflict--- individual and societal memories

- ▶ In order to integrate these memories into a national narrative, some memories are forgotten, some are sanitized, and some go unspoken.
- ▶ Amnesia in post-conflict state: The state weaves the different memories into a national narrative, selectively choosing which memories to highlight and which to exclude
- ▶ Amnesia can be coerced---- state forces the people to forget certain memories by leaving them out of the national narrative, but amnesia can also be chosen as a way to keep the peace after the fighting ends.
- ▶ Problem with amnesia--- privileges the memories of the dominant group at the expense of “the other” —heightens the other’s sense of marginalization and “otherness,” preventing reconciliation, it also prevents any closure.



# Memories of the conflict--- individual and societal memories, Cont.

- ▶ Memories are also sanitized--- Quote from Nietzsche :
  - ▶ “I did this’ my memory tells me, ‘I cannot have done this,’ says my pride and remains inexorable. In the end--- memory yields.”
  - ▶ Rather than acknowledge the past, it is cleaned up to make it more palatable.
  - ▶ Final group of memories go unspoken--- memories that don’t fit with the national narrative, they are the “inconvenient truths” which call into question the accepted story about the past.



# Transcending the Past?

- ▶ Past can be used to perpetuate the status quo, but the more “promising, more productive way of looking at the past or relating to it, involves *overcoming* or *transcending* the past; it involves looking at the past from the perspective of a liberating and redeeming vision of a different future.”
- ▶ Look at History textbooks to see whether transcend the past



# Goals of History textbooks in post-conflict states

- ▶ Goal is to explain why the conflict happened and deliver a new narrative that consolidates the rifts of past and strengthens cohesion
- ▶ Could say there are 2 aims in writing about the in-group's past: create a sense of belonging and unity b) teach students to be critical about the past transgressions by the in-group so they can manage the present---- I'm arguing textbooks do 1<sup>st</sup> but not 2<sup>nd</sup>



# Textbook Analysis

- ▶ Study of Bosnian textbooks found 4 trends: vilification, exclusion, amnesia, and conciliation
  - ▶ Except for conciliation, in the other 3 the other is blamed for the conflict, and his/her memories are excised from the narrative
- ▶ My hypotheses:
  - ▶ *Hypothesis One*: How the conflict “ends” will have a big impact on how the history is written, and thereby on the prospects for reconciliation
  - ▶ *Hypothesis Two*: An asymmetry of power between the in-group and out-group will also have a big impact on how the history is written, and thereby on the prospects for reconciliation. Where there is a wider gap in power between the two sides, the more powerful side will be less willing to include their weaker adversary’s memories and stories in the national narrative



		EQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF POWER	UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF POWER
NEGOTIATED END OF CONFLICT		Ireland	Philippines
IMPOSED END OF CONFLICT		Bosnia	Rwanda

INDICATOR	1: LOW	2: MEDIUM	3: HIGH
<b>HISTORICAL MEMORY</b>	Little or no effort to examine "inconvenient truths," manuscript omits or sanitizes the history.	Some effort to examine "inconvenient truths," manuscript includes some but not other aspects of the history.	Manuscript includes "inconvenient truths" and does not attempt to censor or sanitize the past.
<b>TREATMENT OF THE "OTHER"</b>	"The Other" is depicted negatively or stereotypically, blamed for conflict	Mixed representation of "The Other" with some negativity and stereotyping but also some effort to present in a more positive light	"The Other" is presented positively, without the use of stereotypes and is not blamed for the conflict.
<b>TREATMENT OF SELF</b>	Little or no effort to acknowledge own role in the conflict, and own side always presented in positive light.	Some willingness to recognize own role in the conflict and to examine negative actions in past	Effort to reassess own role in the origins of the conflict and to examine past actions that contributed to the conflict.
<b>MULTIPLE NARRATIVES</b>	Single narrative used to tell story	Some effort to include alternative narrative but it is minimal and inconsistent throughout manuscript.	Manuscript makes use of multiple narratives to tell the story
<b>EQUAL TREATMENT</b>	Sections on "The Other" are rare or non-existent	Sections on "The Other" are found throughout the text but tend to be shorter and given less emphasis	"The Other" figures prominently throughout the text and is given equal treatment and significance.
<b>USAGE OF THE PAST</b>	No effort made to use the past to explain the present or try to change future	Some effort made to use the past to explain the present or try to change future	Manuscript uses the past to try to explain the present and potentially change the future.
<b>Total (X/18)</b>			



# Philippine Case Study

- ▶ *Analyzed 4 Filipino textbooks (treat as 3 since 2 were by same authors and were part of same series. Two texts treated as one outlier)*
- ▶ *Findings:*
  - ▶ Historical Memory---- Two of the texts ignored “inconvenient truths.” Never question the past record. For example, in treatment of Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines they discuss the union of Church and State but never consider what that meant for non-Christina Filipinos.
  - ▶ Treatment of the Other: Two of the texts were characterized by a lot of vilification, stereotyping, and ethnocentrism.
  - ▶ *Vilification:* one text discussed how attempts to make peace with the Muslims always failed because the Muslims “treated the agreements as mere scraps of paper.”
  - ▶ *Ethnocentrism:* Could substitute the word Christian for Filipinos—authors write: “As Christians we believe...”



# Philippine Case Study, Cont.

- ▶ Treatment of Self: Idealization, no effort to reassess the history or Christian Filipinos' role in the conflict
- ▶ Multiple Narratives: Christian and Filipinos interchangeable:
  - ▶ “What makes the Philippines a unique nation, and its divine destiny to be a Christian missionary country for the end times, constitute the main themes of this college history textbook.”
  - ▶ Equal Treatment: Mindanao and Muslim Filipinos as after-thought, very focused on Manila and surrounding provinces
  - ▶ Usage of the Past—no attempt to use past to gain greater understanding of the present, or to relate current events to past.



# Conclusions

- ▶ For reconciliation the post-conflict state must transcend its past, must create a new national narrative that is inclusive and acknowledges the inconvenient truths
- ▶ It could be argued that “when school history teaching and textbooks incorporate social injustices of the recent past, we can take this as a signal that the society has moved ahead significantly in accepting pieces of the past that have lingered in the shadows.”-----
  - ▶ Unfortunately, by looking at Philippine textbooks there isn't any indication that the post-conflict Filipino state is yet ready to move out of the shadows.