The meaning of teaching history

El sentido de enseñar historia

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History has been a principal component of school curriculum. Historically, the main mission of school History was to provide an epic account of a community struggling for its existence since the dawn of time. It thus responded to the nationalising aim of the 19th century national education systems and their desire to create Frenchmen, Italians or Spanish people. Each student received in the school a geographical imaginary construct delimited by political borders, a collective path that gave meaning to the political community, and one language and literature. A territory, a language and a past were the pillars on which the nation was built upon the school.

The evolution of historiography and the societies that produce it have changed the position and function of History in the school curriculum. On the one hand, History has lost at least part of its influence in schools with the strengthening of states and the consolidation of their borders, which have been central to the promotion of globalisation and supranational organisations where former enemies became partners with common interests. We will see whether the various factions of reactionary populisms and nationalisms and the economic oligarchies that are taking power will resurrect national histories or choose to bury History as a critical and multidimensional instrument. In this special issue, the article by Sébastien Ledoux's presents the nationalist reaction to the cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust proposed by the European Union as a basis for building a pan-European citizenship based on human rights and respect for minorities.

On the other hand, the way of doing History that underlay school political History was questioned from the mid- twentieth century onwards and was finally displaced from the disciplinary field by Social History. The arrival of Social History in schools would have pushed aside the old political History of foreign grievances and great men, their successions, laws, and battles, in favour of an approach centred on the social structure. The extent to which this shift has been implemented, needs to be assessed. Even in those countries where a progressive history based on social problems and linked to the social sciences was articulately proposed, as in the United States of the interwar period, it seems that it never reached the classroom or was displaced by other social knowledge, as Daniel Berman shows in his article. Two problems are intermingled here; on the one hand, as we know from Antonio Viñao or Agustín Escolano, school culture maintains an inertia that makes it quite resistant to the transformation of curriculum and of teaching practices. On the other hand, the degree of simplification and modelling required by school history seem to be at odds with the complexity of historiographical debates, sources, methods and products of Social History. This resistance to the transformation of contents and practices explains the interest of Jorge Ortuño, Ilaria Bellatti and Sebastián Molina, in teacher's and trainee teachers' representations that mould the contents and ways of dealing with the subject studied.

However, before Social History had time to move into the school, the postmodern challenge

shook the foundations of the discipline itself. New voices from new collectives now make up a challenging polyphony of accounts of the past which, far removed from the unidirectional order of the national epic, is emerging as an evanescent mass of confusing profiles in continuous transformation. This plurality of voices in the social debate on History and Memory makes it difficult to establish academic agreements to guide History in schools and hinders a desirable synthesis of Social and Cultural History. This lack of agreement and intellectual direction could have resulted in a reinforcement of the more traditional forms of school History based on political History.

The third element that explains the precarious position of History is that Memory seems to have taken over much of the vindicatory, critical and citizenship-building role traditionally assigned to History. Although Memory, because of its high emotionality, might influence students more deeply than History, it is not exempt from the problems of routinisation when used in school or social education programmes, as the recent electoral results in Germany reveal, while it is more prone to manipulation, as shown for instance by the Hungarian case. David Rieff, Michal Bodeman and Pankaj Mishra warns that memory can become as complicated to handle with, counterproductive and concealing as History.

These transformations raise the question of the reasons for teaching History in our schools. Does History still play a role in shaping our societies and the way they function? Are we going to replace the old contested national narrative with an axiological archaeology that guarantees the moral solvency of those people or collectives that we consider worthy of being included in the Olympus of Memory? Does it still make any sense to transmit a vision of the past based on grey social processes that have led to the present? Would it not be more democratic and plural to provide the new generations with rhetorical resources to challenge and participate on equal terms in the battle for the narration of a *felt* past in accordance with their political agenda at any given moment? This special issue aims to offer a range of positions on all these questions.

Agustí García Larios, Andrea Tappi and Javier Tébar address the relationship between History as a discipline and the teaching of History from the premise that a disciplinary renewal is necessary to respond to the demands of society. They start, therefore, from a crisis of History, illustrate the social changes that have led to the expiry of a way of working with the past and explore the, in Fontana's terms, needed 'repairs' that the discipline should carry on. They point out that, paradoxically, social interest in the past has not diminished. But this interest is being satisfied by untrained people that produce and disseminate masses of uncontrolled information on social networks, carpet-bombing politically biased messages without academic validation. The authors' proposal is to recompose the link between History, political planning and public debate about the future basing upon a Global History that goes beyond Comparative History. These repositions foreground questioning, criticising and reasoning. The prioritisation of these skills leads to a proposal for teaching History that combines factual knowledge with cognitive strategies, along the lines of authors such as Lévesque, Seixas and Morton. They thus conclude a journey from the discipline to its didactics.

The vindication of the didactics of History is precisely the main conclusion of the article by Elena Riva. Riva maintains that didactics of History is barely developed in Italy, despite the recent inclusion of new requirements in teacher recruitment processes. The author takes as starting point the challenge that the Internet and social networks has posed to the humanities. The proliferation of unverified information, also discussed in the previous article, leads Riva to defend the training of digital humanists, capable of developing the potential of the networks while preserving the rigour and epistemological status of the humanities, including History. This line of reflection leads her to advocate the training of a new teaching staff that faces the challenge of overcoming ethnocentrism. The role of the new teaching staff would also include producing new digital narratives on heritage, including new historical agents, and moderating social demands on knowledge, as in the case of the culture of cancellation. All of this brings us back to the didactics of History.

The article by Antonio Fco. Canales develops the idea of preserving rigour and epistemological status to make a sharp distinction between the teaching of History as a discipline and its applications for the formation of citizenship. For doing so, he makes an objectivist and realist characterisation of the discipline based on the academic established craft's operations. This restricted conception allows him to distinguish History from other discourses and forms of knowledge of the past and from its uses,

including historical memory. From this perspective, he argues that the purpose of school History is to develop the historian's gaze, and the type of knowledge associated with it, namely historical thought. In this way he positions himself along the proposals of the authors of the first article, and he considers that the insistence on the purpose of forming citizens is nothing more than a reminiscence of the old History lessons, paradoxically rejected from the outset by all the authors. The author maintains that the formation of citizens is a collective educational mission and, if we insist on a disciplinary affiliation, it should be assigned rather to Philosophy.

The text by Sébastien Ledoux, as indicated above, goes fully into this mission of citizenship education by History and gives an overview of the evolution of the prevailing approaches over the last four decades. He notes the emergence in the eighties of a new educational project centred on the memory of crimes and victims of the past as the basis for an education for tolerance and democracy. In Western Europe, this approach involved placing the victims of the Holocaust in the foreground. The model included an emotional dimension for which visits to memorial sites were key. The author argues that this model based on multiperspectivity and interactivity was extended in the nineties to post-communists Eastern European countries. Ultimately, it was an attempt to address the conflictive and traumatic relations between states and between states and their minorities in a new educational grammar that focused on recognising and overcoming these conflicts in a reconciliatory perspective. However, this model was soon challenged. In 21rst century, dissatisfaction grew towards these narratives that broke with temporal horizons centred on progress putting contingency and uncertainty instead. Nationalistic forces considered that these narratives were running against national building. The author shows these changes in different settings as Japan, Russia, Poland. For France, he studies the 2005 law that proposed the recognition of the contribution to the nation of French settlers in colonial Algeria.

Nurit Peled-Elhanan brings together in her work both this dual dimension of nationalisation and concern for the victims. Specifically, she develops an analysis of the representation of the victims of the Holocaust in Israeli textbooks, based on an analysis of social semiotics. The author argues that the role of these victims in the construction of the Israeli identity was not central until the setback of the 1973 war, after which the Holocaust became one of those 'chosen traumas' that shape the identity of a community. From this perspective, the author analyses the selection of photographs in the textbooks and their meanings. She criticises their decontextualization and cropping to produce highly loaded emotional icons. She examines dehumanised narratives pretending to be historically objective and illustrates them in the analysis of the phases that led from gun execution to mass gassing. Finally, the article moves on to the second key element in the shaping of Israeli identity, which is based on a stereotypically racist representation of Palestinians that promotes their dehumanisation, objectification and Nazification with a clear political intentionality. In general, the author underlines the victimisation that underlies Israeli identity in the face of other political and ideological components of Israeli society such as Zionism. Peled-Elhanan stresses the impossibility for the Israeli society to reach the political maturity of a truly democratic citizenship because of a mental and emotional training to live in fear.

The article by Daniel Berman introduces a welcome twist, exploring how History can shed light on itself by examining the teaching of History from a historical point of view, specifically in the interwar period in the United States. The author explores the common dissatisfaction with the way History was taught in the rapidly expanding new High Schools and the wide-ranging debate that ensued. His article shows that the questions we are asking today are not, in fact, new. But it also points to a second, much more worrying feature, if parallels can be drawn with the present times: the limited impact of this wide-ranging debate on teaching practice. All this discussion turned out to be tangential because History continued to be taught as a succession of political events to be memorised from textbooks. In his attempt to explain this sterility, the author considers two issues that hindered change, the lack of disciplinary training for teachers, which made them dependent on textbooks, and the ideological or cultural battles over the contents. The article constitutes a warning for of the current renovation.

Finally, the issue includes two empirical studies on didactics of History in Spanish schools. If, as Daniel Berman points out in the previous article, teacher training was one of the obstacles for implementing the social History proposed by the progressive movement into the classroom, it

is necessary to analyse, for critically reviewing them, the social representations of teachers. This is what Jorge Ortuño, Ilaria Bellatti and Sebastián Molina do in their article, in which they study the social representation that future primary school teachers have of events and historical characters for identifying their emotions and values. As the main result of their research, the authors point out the maintenance of the traditional androcentric, political, and socio-centric view of the past among training teachers. To change this situation, the authors propose rethinking strategies for the teaching of History by emphasising multiple perspectives, the contextualisation of historical characters and events, and the inclusion of traditionally silenced characters.

Enrique Javier Díez and Mauro Rafael Jarquín conducted a study on secondary school students' knowledge of the Civil War, Franco's repression and the anti-Franco struggle. Questioning the forgetting policies of the Spanish Transición, the authors empirically illustrate the existence of a broad ignorance of these issues among students, either because these issues are placed at the end of the syllabus and there is no time left to teach them or, rather, because of the position of teachers regarding these traumatic events. The authors add that teachers share an equidistant and equalising view of the Spanish Civil War, the best known of the three above mentioned issues. In line with the didactic memorialist movement, the authors call for the recovery of historical memory to counteract a distorted narrative and, furthermore, to transmit a collective imaginary in defence of truth, justice, and reparation as the basis of democracy.

All these critical approaches and perspectives are difficult to synthesise. It is even more difficult to offer answers for the questions posed by the articles. In general, the articles share the idea that historians must address the crisis of History as discipline before discussing its teaching. There seems to be a consensus on the need to give a voice to traditionally silenced groups, to overcome the ethnocentric character of traditional History, and to address the great challenge posed by the Internet and social networks. Facing these issues, authors tend to opt for the rigour in the treatment of information guaranteed by the discipline. It is not surprising, then, that the three articles by García Larios, Tappi and Tébar, Canales and Ortuño, Bellatti and Molina explicitly opt for the didactic proposal of teaching how to think historically, a position in which Elena Riva also finds herself. All of them seem reluctant to abandon disciplinary values, while Diaz and Jarquín, on the other hand, seem to align themselves explicitly with the openly formative positions of citizenship, a position shared also by Ledoux. All authors call for putting attention to the training of future History teachers.

If there does not seem to be a consensus on the discipline, it is even less likely that any significant progress will be made in answering the questions initially raised. Rather than answers, the articles raise new questions. The way out of the History crisis seems to be Social History, but to what extent does this mean ignoring other more political, social or emotional proposals and failing to assess their impact on the teaching of History? In the same vein, let us give voice, no doubt, to the silenced collectives, but what role do we give to the once abominable anachronism? In other words, how can we teach how to think historically from premises previously considered an attack on the discipline itself? Finally, what is the ultimate meaning of the unanimously claimed overcoming of ethnocentrism? Are we defending a global vision of World History with the consequent shift of its leadership, or is it a matter of democratically giving everyone a stake even though they play no significant role? Why is it important for a Spanish student of Senegalese origin to include Senegal in this global vision if his or her conditions of existence no longer depend on what happens or has happened in that country? And worse, to what extent does this good intention of inclusion not imply the crudest exclusion by making it clear that, regardless documents and citizenships, he or she is *not from here*? Ultimately, are we not writing the death of the nation-state too soon, when in practice it remains the determining agent for people's life or death, prosperity or ruin, happiness or misfortune?

Regardless of the relevance we bestow to these new questions, and to many others that arise from reading the articles, what this issue makes clear is the need to continue reflecting and discussing questions to which we will probably never find a definitive answer. But what else is education if not a continuous reassessment of acquired certainties?