

Social Representations of the Past and Competences in History Education

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Chapter Overview

Research on social representations (SR) of history within the field of social psychology may provide guidelines for strengthening meta-cognitive competences in history education. This chapter will review existing literature and empirical research on SR of history in order to enrich the discussion on history education and the formation of political culture. First, we explain how SR of the past may be a result of history education (e.g. historical narratives presented in textbooks) and vice versa, and we identify a possible gap between social representations of the past and history education. Next, we define three basic processes relevant for emergence of social representations (Jodelet, 2006, 2011; Moscovici, 1976): anchoring, objectification, and cognitive polyphasia, which may also be useful for strengthening competences in historical thinking (see Páez & Liu, 2012; Liu & Hilton, 2005 for overviews). Then, we review theoretical and empirical evidence that may serve as guidelines for strengthening three core areas of competence in history education: 1) we start with a presentation of biases that may exist in determining what is historically significant; 2) we follow with explanations of the importance of understanding historical continuity and change when learning history; 3) lastly, we present tools that may enhance learning to identify multiple causes and consequences in history through historical consciousness and perspective-taking. We close our chapter with practical guidelines for history teachers and editors of textbooks and general conclusion.

Social Representations of the Past and History Education: Is There a Gap?

Changes in history education (and social context) influence how people remember historical events. Research has shown that whereas older Russians, educated under post-Soviet systems of education emphasize the positive military role of Stalin in WWII and state that the German aggression was unexpected, younger Russians are critical towards Stalin and blame his leadership for the early failures against the German Army (Emelyanova, 2002). In a similar way, the abandonment of heroic views of colonial history and a relative acknowledgement of the atrocities of the “Discovery of America” in French, Spanish, Portuguese and German textbooks are reproduced in critical, anti-colonial, and non apologetic representations of “the encounters of civilizations” prevailing among secondary school and university European students (Perez-Siller, 1995; Von Borries, 1995). This correlational evidence suggests that historical teaching is somehow associated with generational changes in what ordinary people believe about history, but it

is important to be aware that historiography and history textbooks are only one of many sources for learning about the past. For instance, research in Germany has revealed that historical novels and movies were evaluated as more important for learning about the past compared to history textbooks, although not as more important compared to history classes and history teachers' statements (Von Borries, 1995).

On the other hand, societal case studies suggest that *changes in historiography shape the content of history textbooks* although in a delayed manner. For instance, in the seventies historians in Israel paid attention to the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 and elaborated a social catastrophe narrative that offered some competition with the dominant Zionist narrative at least in academia. However this historiographical perspective was included in history textbooks twenty years later and not without a strong resistance (Bar-Tal, 2013). As concerns historical events and figures, a recent survey shows that among the North American public there now prevails a rather neutral image of Columbus as a discoverer (85%), whereas only 6.2% share a dominant in the past image of Columbus as a moral icon, which together reflects the fact that current history textbooks are less heroic (Schuman, Schwartz, & D'Arcy, 2005). However, criticism of Columbus as initiator of indigenous social and cultural catastrophe has not been incorporated into SR: only a minority (3.6%) associates Columbus with negative traits. This is despite both history books and mass media have increased their criticism of Columbus and the "Discovery" in recent years. Whereas in the 1940-60s, only 20-30% of North American history texts mentioned negative aspects of the discovery, it became 50% in the 1980s and 90s (Schuman et al., 2005). So there is not a one to one correspondence between historical textbook lessons and popular representations of the histories taught in these texts.

Social Representations and Education: Anchoring, Objectification, and Cognitive Polyphasia as Basic Processes

SR of history embrace shared images and knowledge about the past, elaborated, transmitted, and conserved by a group through interpersonal (e.g. family transmission), mass media (e.g. films, novels) and institutional communication (e.g. history education). These representations serve to preserve a sense of ingroup continuity and to cultivate values and norms that prescribe behavior within the group (Pennebaker, Páez & Rimé, 1997; Liu & Hilton, 2005). Importantly, SR imply a process where lay beliefs assimilate more elaborated, frequently scientific or philosophical discourses (Jodelet,

2006). In consequence, both historiographical traditions (although in a biased manner) and national narratives transmitted by history textbooks and teachers are reflected in a shared image of the world's past. Furthermore, understanding of what is relevant in the emergence of SR through processes such as anchoring, objectification, and cognitive polyphasia (Lautier, 2001; Jodelet, 2011; Moscovici, 1976; Tutiaux-Guillon, 2012) may also be useful for strengthening competences in historical thinking.

First, the process of *anchoring* is to ascribe meaning to new information by means of integrating it into existing worldviews, so it can be interpreted and compared to the "already known". For instance, students learning history may anchor the information they receive in their experience, group membership, and values. For instance, confirming the importance of anchoring processes, empirical evidence shows that young migrants are less interested in European nations' history than majority youth, and Muslim young migrants are more critical about Holocaust issues compared to non Muslims (Grever, 2012; Lautier, 2001). In the present chapter we describe the processes of anchoring social representations of the past in the history of Europe and West, warfare, nationally or ethnically relevant past, social change, the recent past involving personal and communicative memory, and socially relevant norms and attitudes, among other factors.

In turn, the process of *objectification* turns something abstract into something almost concrete. These processes are present in historical understanding: historical events are reified in figures (e.g. Hitler representing the Nazi evil in Second World War (WWII)) and images (e.g. Columbus's three ships as a figurative image of the "Discovery") (Lautier, 2001). The examples of biases based on objectification processes in this review could be ascribing special importance and positive characteristics to national historical figures (idolization) or commemoration of specific historical events marking social change. They can take the form of monuments or rituals celebrating events like VE (WWII Victory in Europe) day, or the Battle of Gallipoli (WWI).

Finally, *cognitive polyphasia* implies a dynamic co-existence of distinct modalities of knowledge. That is, cognitive polyphasia permits the coexistence of logical and a pre-logical thinking, or causal/scientific and "magical" thinking (Moscovici, 1976). Cognitive polyphasia could be involved in overcoming barriers to historical consciousness and perspective-taking in history education.

Below we will examine the relationship between specific examples of the three above mentioned processes for competences in history education and learning.

Identifying Biases in the Perceptions of History

Next, we will describe diverse patterns of possible biases in perceptions of history that have arisen in research based on survey samples of non-expert participants. Below we highlight the way these perceptions may affect learning history, and particularly three core areas of competence in history reasoning: 1) understanding historical significance, 2) understanding historical continuity and change (Seixas, 2012; Grever, 2012), and 3) historical consciousness and perspective-taking. Figure 1 with a conceptual map of this chapter summarizes biases we have identified in the perception of history.

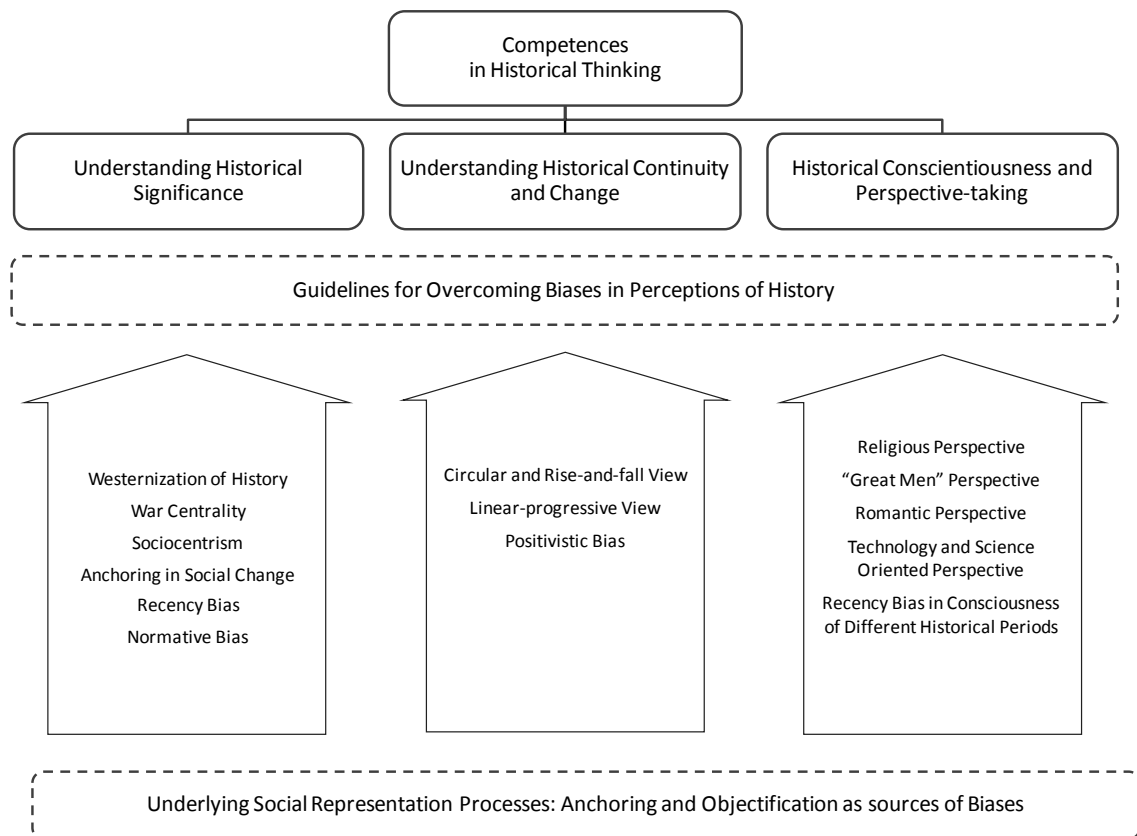


Figure 1. Conceptual Map of the Chapter

Biases in Understanding Historical Significance

The competence of assessing historical significance requires identifying past historical events and figures whose outcomes have important and long-term

consequences. This competence addresses the matter of why we care about historical events and issues. Below we review diverse factors that may determine what is historically significant among students across different contexts.

Westernization of History

Studies have found that across diverse cultures *European history and Western events are considered to be most historically significant* (Glowsky, Ellerman, Kromeier, & Andorfer, 2007; Liu et al., 2009; Pennebaker, Páez, & Deschamps, 2006). Events recalled as important for world history are predominantly related to Europe and North America (e.g. world wars) (Pennebaker et al., 2006), even in Asian countries (Liu et al., 2005). Noticeably, European and Western historical events and figures are also generally rated more positively compared to other events and figures (Liu et al., 2005; Pennebaker et al., 2006; Glowsky et al., 2008). In the same vein, history education scholars claim that the content of history books in America and Europe is focused on the ingroup and mainly on Western history (Tutiaux-Guillon, 2012; Lopez & Carretero, 2012). Together, such findings reflect the representational power of the West.

War Centrality

Wars and political and military leaders are also cross-culturally perceived as historically significant. Revolutions and wars are mentioned in the world history (Liu et al., 2009; 2005) or in the last millennium (Pennebaker et al., 2006) as the most important events, whereas science and technology (e.g. industrial revolution), are secondary in importance. In 24 nations from America, Europe, and Asia collective violence accounted for 48% of events nominated as important, whereas 45% of leaders named were known for their roles in violent acts (Liu et al., 2009; 2005). Even though wars produced only 2% of the 20th century premature death toll (Layard, 2005), people tend to overvalue the role of political violence in world history because of the catastrophic impact extreme and negative events like wars have.

Furthermore, being emotionally loaded, traumatic events are especially narratable, forming a plot that tells a people the story of themselves, often in relation to an outgroup and current challenges facing the ingroup (Liu & László, 2007). Political assassinations, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, or financial crisis provoke intense shared emotions as surprise, anger, sadness, fear, and anxiety and subsequently induce mass media rehearsal (De Rivera & Páez, 2007; Rimé, Páez, Basabe, & Martínez, 2009). These events are largely socially shared, by means of commemorative rituals, of mass media

and interpersonal rehearsal. Importantly, research has shown that nations victorious in wars tend to legitimize past collective violence and reject critical views of war (Bobowik et al., 2014). This was found to facilitate more positive attitudes towards potential future collective violence. History teachers in countries with a heroic national narrative of past wars should be especially aware of those processes. Finally, the warfare centrality in SR of the past is congruent with the dominance of violence and drama historical textbooks where wartime periods usually receive more space (Pingel, 2000; Zerubavel, 2003).

Sociocentrism

Research has also revealed a *partial tendency towards sociocentrism in defining what is historically significant*. Opposed to a global Western historiography, the “sublimely local” indigenous view of the past is widely prevalent (Seixas, 2012). A nationalistic perspective on historical events adopted in textbooks is largely reflected in the responses of nonexperts in different nations (Foster, 2012). Indeed, respondents across nations display a “local orientation” in their perception of important events and figures in world’s history (e.g. Bobowik et al., 2010). That is, most nations consider national historical events as more important than events unrelated to their own history. As for Western countries, for instance, participants in Spain rate the Spanish Civil War as the most important event of the century while participants in the U.S. list the American Civil War as one of the most important events of the last millennium. Similarly, participants from non-Western countries exhibit ethnocentrism in mentioning as important in the world history events which are related to the creation of their own state (e.g. decolonization) and devaluing events linked to the history of neighboring states that did not affect their own historical trajectory (Liu et al., 2009). This tendency is exacerbated in countries where statehood was established only recently and where formal education may have been disrupted for young people during the process, as in East Timor, where World War II was the only Eurocentric among top ten most important events, consisting mainly of recent events directly affecting East Timor’s short history according to young people (Liu et al., 2009). Still, even if globally people exhibit some ethnocentrism in their view of universal history, the sociocentric bias does not hold for all nations. For instance in the case of Switzerland, with the partial exception of Lutheran reform, no national event is mentioned as relevant for the world history probably because Swiss are aware of their relative “weakness” in terms of

historical capital (Pennebaker et al, 2006). Similar findings were reported among some other Asian and Latino countries (see Liu et al., 2005, 2009), particularly where events are concerned.

Importantly, *sociocentrism is especially evident in nominations of important historical figures*. For instance, Nelson Mandela was evaluated as a more positive and important leader in Africa than in the rest of the continents (although generally being considered a historical hero). Among the most important figures, Ukrainians mention Victor Yushchenko and Julia Timoshenko and Poles indicate Lech Walesa and Joseph Pilsudski (Liu et al., 2009). People therefore tend to worship the ingroup's heroes more than universal or outgroups' heroes. Interestingly, to some extent the same rule applies to villains. For instance, young Spaniards mentioned Francisco Franco and Portuguese Antonio Salazar among top ten important figures of world's history while rating them very negatively. However, data did not support socio-centrism for the Latin American icon Che Guevara who was rated less positively in Latin America than in Europe and Africa, suggesting that the image of Guevara is as a worldwide symbol of the fight against social injustice more than as an ethnocentric Latin American historical leader. This tendency is particularly clear for Argentina and Peru where collective violence and experience with the political and military failure of Guevarist guerrillas (ERP in Argentina or MRTA in Peru) against regular armies may have eroded the image of the "Heroic Guerrillero" that prevails in more distant nations.

Anchoring in Social Change

If SR of history are indeed partially socio-centric, *historical significance will be defined by ingroup collective memories*. Collective memories are formed and successfully maintained through commemoration of historical events that are 1) relevant for social identities, 2) provoking social change or threat to group identity, 3) and therefore emotion-laden, and 4) frequently supported by rituals and institutions. Collective memory therefore retains extreme negative or positive events that affect a large number of members of a national group or another important social group. Importantly, *historical events included in collective memory are usually related to important changes in the social fabric* or to substantial threats to social cohesion and values, such as the end of American "political innocence" in the case of the assassination of John F. Kennedy (Pennebaker, Páez & Rimé, 1997), or more prototypically, the foundation of political system or a state (Hilton & Liu, 2008). Showing the importance of social

change, in the history of United States not all wars are remembered at the same level. WWII and Vietnam War, associated with high impact on institutions, are largely recalled as important events whereas Korean War is largely forgotten, even though casualties were similar to those suffered in Vietnam or in the entire Pacific during the Second World War (Neal, 2005). Importantly, *SR* of the past are mobilized to serve current attitudes and needs. In 1985 30% of USA citizens mentioned WWII as an important historical event; this dropped to 20% in 2000, but following the September 11 bombing, the percentage rose to 28%, in a “resurrection” of WWII as historical event in the context of international terrorist violence (Schuman & Rodgers, 2004). This suggests that collective memory is instrumental for the functioning of the nation.

Augmenting this perspective, social identity focused research (Jetten & Wohl, 2012) has found that perceived continuity between a group's past and present can be a psychological resource that provides confidence in the group's future vitality and therefore allows for more openness to change (in the form of new migrants): particularly among high identifiers, perceived discontinuity of the national group's past can undermine the perceived vitality of the future, and thereby increase the need to preserve current collective identity in a defensive manner. Perceived continuity can be a resource that mobilizes resistance to change (Jetten & Hutchinson, 2011) because discontinuity is seen to involve an identity-threatening break with the past and its identity-preserving traditions. Preserving continuity with the past seems to be an important part of social identity, especially for high identifiers, who appear to be more attached to *SRs* anchored in national traditions and values. Therefore, articulating a narrative of nationhood as anchored to the past in a manner that maintains collective continuity amidst historical change is important means by which history teachers and historians can contribute to the process of managing social change for a nation (see Ward & Liu, 2012, for an illustration of New Zealand as a successful example).

Recency Bias: Anchoring in Personal and Communicative Memory

Overall, *people remember recent history better*. For instance, recent and direct historical experience will be usually activated to shape attitudes and needs because *people have more accessible in their memories “fresh events” that are anchored in personal memory*. For example, Britons were more likely to remember WWII than were Americans by a margin of 16%, probably because the British experienced the war much more directly and personally (Scott & Zac, 1993). As Manheim (1925 quoted in Schuman &

Rodgers, 2004) posits, collective memories are also cohort-dependent: *people remember better historical events experienced during adolescence or early adulthood*, a formative period in one's social identity. Confirming this phenomenon, in 1989 older Americans mentioned the Great Depression and WWII more as an important historical event, whereas younger participants mentioned more frequently JFK's assassination and the Vietnam War, in both cases being events that had occurred during participants' early adulthood (Schuman, Belli & Bischoff, 1997). Confirming anchoring representations of history in personal memory and interests, African nations rate decolonization more positively and as more important compared to other nations, probably because these countries were involved in more recent decolonization.

Also, the recency bias is reflected in the idea of *communicative history* (Assman, 1992, quoted in Moller, 2012), which has antecedents in the classic ancient writers: Aeschylus posits in his play "The Persians" that a war or an episode of collective violence transmits a lesson for three generations. The span of communicative memory is about 80-100 years (three or four generations). Empirical research has confirmed that people indeed usually recall relatively recent historical events from the last century such as WWII (Liu et al., 2005; 2009). In a similar way, studies have shown that when asked about important political events lived by relatives (Pennebaker, Páez, & Rimé, 1997), or about genealogical knowledge and relatives' information, most people provide information about the experience of two or three generations (Candau, 2005).

Normative Bias

Collective memories or *SR of past are also related to general norms and meaning structures prevalent in a societal context*. For instance, a representative survey found that Spaniards who name Che Guevara as an important Latin-American historical figure are not only young, but also highly educated, left-wing, espouse post-materialist and post-traditionalist values, and identify more with Basque and Catalan nationalism than with Spain (Larson & Lizardo, 2007). Similarly, surveys have confirmed that the view of WWII as a just and necessary war was more shared in materialistic, collectivistic and hierarchical cultures, while the representation of WWII as a social catastrophe was more supported in developed, individualistic, and post-materialistic cultures. That is, the shift from an industrial and materialistic to a post-materialist society (Inglehart, Basáñez, Díez-Medrano, Halman, & Luijckx 2004) appears to be reflected in a shift from a relatively positive and romantic social representation of war focused on heroes and

martyrs towards a more critical SR of war emphasizing suffering of the victims (i.e. innocent civilians) and the meaninglessness of war (Páez & Liu, 2012). Post-materialistic values probably erode “heroic war” narratives and attenuate positive attitudes towards collective violence.

Understanding of Historical Continuity and Change

Beside historical significance, another meta-cognitive competence meaningful for learning history is the concept of *historical continuity and change, including the idea of progress and decline*. Doubts are raised if a progressive-linear view of history could be reconciled with a belief in a circular nature of time, supposed to be characteristic of first nation in the America’s or more traditional cultures (Seixas, 2012).

Circular and Rise-and-fall View

Effectively, most ancient cultures held a conception of history that was *circular*, with a pattern of rise and fall of alternating Dark and Golden Ages. Examples could be Indian religions (Indian thought of Vedas), cyclical theories of history developed in the Islamic world by Ibn Khaldun, or a rise and fall of dynasties view of history in China, or Covenant, Betrayal, and Redemptions as master cyclical narratives in the Muslim culture (Fontana, 2000; Iggers et al., 2008). However, cyclical beliefs about history are not absent in Western culture (Iggers et al., 2008). As for the ancient Western cultures, Greeks defined time in a threefold fashion, where beside *chronos*, the perception of time was defined by means of *aion* and *kairos*. *Aion* is continually rooted in the past and our memories, thereby giving life cyclical nature. A cyclical view of history could be also related to Vico’s conception of the “spiral of history” (1744/1973) or to Marx’s assertion that history always is repeated twice, once as tragedy and the second time as comedy (Fontana, 2000). These cyclical views also appear in the Western culture around First World War (WWI), developed mainly by Toynbee in his descriptions of the rise and decline of civilizations (Fontana, 2000) and by Spengler with his negative view of an inexorable rise and fall of all civilizations (Hobsbawm, 1995). Confirming the existence of circular view of history both in East and West, according to unpublished data from World History Survey, *the view of history as a cycle or rise and fall was supported both among Eastern and Western cultures*, being somewhat less accepted in Latin American countries. The cyclical view of history as the rise and fall of nation was strongly endorsed in Anglo-Saxon, European, and Asian nations probably reflecting the experience of World Wars and Stalinism (Pingel, 200) as well as cultural

traditions. Also, the support for conceptions of history as based on rise and fall dynamics characterizes developed and individualistic nations, probably reflecting modern worries about the ecological and social limits of economic growth (Inglehart et al, 2004).

Linear-progressive View

Still, Western historical understanding derived from Greek and Roman period, particularly from Middle Age and based on Christian heritage, is predominantly a linear one. Westerners believe that events unfold in a relative linear fashion, with stable forces producing a predictable future (Nisbett, 2003). In the opposition to cyclical views, numerous thinkers (e.g. Kant) supported the idea that humanity is moving towards better future and continuously advancing. This linear sense of time is apparent in the 18th century *philosophes'* idea of human progress, 19th century concepts of social evolution, and in the contemporary ideas of developed and developing nations (Needham, 1966). The so called Whig interpretation of history conceived human history as progress from savagery and ignorance toward peace, freedom, and prosperity. This view of history as narrating progress is dominant across nations (Páez et al., 2013). This is congruent with history textbooks in the Americas, Ireland, New Zealand, France and another nations that usually narrate a secular teleological history of victimization and heroism, courage, duty, and sacrifice, and instill a view of progress of the nation from oppression towards freedom, creation, conquest or reconquest of national territory, and continual socioeconomic progress (Barton, 2012; Foster, 2012; Tutiaux-Guillon, 2012; Wertsch, 2002). “Whiggish” histories continue to influence popular understandings of political and social development. Still, this view of time is outdated and the unresolved issue is how it could be reconciled with the belief in a circular nature of history (Seixas, 2012). Yet, studies with close-ended questions about the meaning of history also found *a large cross-cultural agreement with the idea that progress is dominant in world history*. Also, the *less developed, more collectivist, hierarchical and materialist nations emphasize more such a progressive and lawful view of history* (Páez, Bobowik, Liu, & Basabe, in press). This is similarly to the counterintuitive fact that agreement with the “Protestant work ethic” or more attitudinal support for the value of effort and work is now more important in developing than in more expressive, individualistic, and hedonic developed nations (Inglehart et al, 2004).

Positive Bias

Confirming the *hegemony of a naive retrospective positive view of history among lay people*, studies show that old or long-term events were better evaluated than similar recent ones. Research has shown that university age Europeans and Latin Americans overemphasize positive aspects of long-term events, such as the New World Discovery, French and Industrial Revolutions, and overlooked less positive events, such as the Thirty Years' War (Bobowik et al., 2010; Techio et al., 2010). For instance, positive evaluations of French Revolution suggest that either respondents of above mentioned studies “forgot” about the terror, Napoleonic Wars and massacres, or that ample time had passed allowing individuals to reinterpret the events of those wars. This is congruent with the psychological long-term tendency to minimize negative stimuli. People remember a higher proportion of positive events than negative events in the long-term and tend to reinterpret negative events to be at least neutral or even positive (Taylor, 1991). Genghis Khan is rated as neutral by a worldwide sample of young people, compared to very negative rating for the younger Bush (Hanke et al., in press). Studies that compare autobiographical memories of younger and elder people or analyze within subject's comparisons between recent and more distant events also confirm a positivistic bias: increased age or longer periods of recalling are associated to more positive appraisal of events (Laurens, 2002).

Also, the above mentioned finding that the less developed, materialistic, collectivistic, and hierarchical nations report a more positive view of history is congruent with an existing empirical evidence concerning visions of the future prevailing in different nations. Whereas in more developed nations there was scepticism about science, in the less developed nations scientific development in any field was generally appreciated (Ornauer, Wiberg, Sicinski, & Galtung, 1976). Also, the agreement with history as related to *social progress is associated with a more positive view of wars, a stronger attitude in favour of fighting for the nation in a new war and a less negative evaluation of social catastrophes* (Bobowik et al., 2010; Páez et al., 2013). Indeed, the idea of progress was used to justify historical violence against indigenous people by 19-century Argentinean thinkers and by students discussing this issue at the end of 20th century (Lopez & Carretero, 2012) reinforcing the idea that a narrative of progress legitimizes instances of collective violence.

Biases in Identifying Causes and Consequences in History vs Historical Conscientiousness and Perspective-taking

Another competence in learning history is an ability to *identify multiple structural causes* (Seixas, 2012). This competence involves *historical perspective-taking* or the recognition that change may have diverse causes and consequences for different areas of social life, and that in different eras existed different cultural worlds. The ability to historical perspective-taking may be facilitated by the processes of cognitive polyphasia present in formation of a social representation. We now introduce a number of perspectives, each with its own perspective on the structural causes of history.

Religious Perspective

Currently, secular teaching of history has supplanted “holy” or religious history (at least in most part of the world) and historians cannot invoke the will of a superior power (or God) as a causal explanation for historical events (Seixas, 2012). However, the older attempts of explaining history reflected the theological approach to history which asserted that the will and plans of god(s) were the ultimate causes of events (Bujarin, 1974/1925). Interestingly, research has shown that one third of young students with a migrant background in France as well as 13% of students with French descent share this view of history (Tutiaux-Guillon, 2012). In turn, this view was rejected in general surveys with university students (Paéz et al., 2013). Cultures emphasizing religion and traditional authority probably stress more such a view of history (Inglehart et al., 2004; Páez et al., in press).

“Great Men” Perspective

Others relevant pre-modern historiographical views are based on history focused on kingdoms and the dominance of *state elite*. The “Great Men theory” is the belief that unusually influential and able individuals determine the main direction of history (Moscovici, 1985). This “romantic” conception of history can be also linked to the ideas by Hegel who argued that history was analogical to a biography of great leaders such as Frederick the Great (Fontana, 2000). This idea is associated most often with 19th-century historian Carlyle who commented that “The history of the world is but the biography of great men,” reflecting his belief that heroes shape history through their personal attributes (Hobsbawm, 1997). Great men and heroes play a central role in 19th and 20th century nationalist narratives in Europe and America (Carretero, 2009). Even if 20th century historians rejected this theory of history, mass media usually emphasize the central role of important personalities in social life and transmit an implicit version

of this theory in lay beliefs (Moscovici, 1985). In the same vein, a review of history and fiction books for young on Columbus and the Discovery concludes that “the majority of narratives focused on characters with explicit leadership roles guides young students to construct the misperception that only traditional leaders strongly shaped historical events” (Bickford, 2013, pp. 10).

Importantly, episodic framing is the predominant mode of presentation in news stories, because it tends to be more engaging. The episodic news framing consists of event-oriented reports that depict social issues in terms of particular instances and dramatic individual narratives, and does not provide much background information on the subject. This leads the receiver of news to assume that the individual is responsible and discourages viewers from attributing causality of events to social factors (Iyengar, 2005). This view of history resulting from episodic framing is widespread: *there is common agreement with the idea of history as a product of “great men” or transformational leaders*. Even if it is reasonable to think that traditional and / or authoritarian cultures share beliefs about history as the product of great leaders (Hofstede, 2001; Páez et al., in press), this view is actually more prevalent in developed nations and related to post-materialist values. This could reflect the endorsement of individualistic values, emphasizing the role of subject will power (Inglehart et al., 2004). In fact, in a recent global survey of university students’ views of history (Hanke et al., in press), war leaders were rated significantly lower than humanitarian leaders and scientists. Evaluations of the top-rated leaders in history (Einstein, Mother Theresa, Gandhi, M.L. King, Newton) tended to be shared much more across cultures than evaluations of the bottom-rated leaders (Hitler, bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, George W. Bush., and Stalin). Also, there is a strong tendency for young people in Muslim and Asian countries to have a view of historical leaders that is distinct from the perspectives shared by people from Western and Latin American cultures (see Hanke et al., in press). They were much less condemning of war leaders viewed as “evil” (e.g., terrorists and dictators) by Western and Latin American societies, whereas in Western and Latin American societies, there was considerable internal variability among people about how to view religious leaders.

Romantic Perspective

In opposition to the progressive view of history, 19th-century academic historians shared a romantic approach to history, with idiographic descriptions of elite

political and military history, war, and great leaders determining the course of history. For instance, the German historian von Ranke perceived wars as main agents for change, arguing that only in war a nation becomes a nation (Iggers, Wang, & Mukherjee 2008). However, war as a main factor of history was not only limited to the idealistic great men theory. Also, social Darwinism appears in 19th century in parallel to Marxism and social evolutionism. Spencer and others used Darwin's biological ideas to support their argument that a struggle among races of people and differing nations led the strongest and most able nations to rule the world. The idea of history as a result of violence was relevant in the 19th century, and social conflict and revolution were central features of Marxism. A classic example of the implicit theory of history as a product of violence is Marx and Engel's statement that "force is the midwife of history".

Surveys on recall of important historical events show that revolutions and war-related events were more salient than other historical events (Liu et al, 2005; 2009), suggesting that *people share view of history as a product of violence* (Moscovici, 1985). However, in studies based on closed-ended ratings *war and politics as factors defining history were not perceived as more important than socioeconomic trends but at least as equally or even less important than progress-related events* (Bobowik et al., 2010). Even if wars are more vivid in free recall, social-structural factors are recognized as important and prevail in more reflexive and less spontaneous thinking about history.

Technology and Science Oriented Perspective

When considering multiple causes and consequences of historical events, *another significant factor to take into account when learning history is technology as the basis of progress*. Rooted in Enlightenment and paradoxically Marxism, the technological-scientific perspective proposes a general modernization trend in history. Scientific and technological development, secularization, industrialization and urbanization, economical growth, capitalism and democracy constitute a linear modeled from the West - modernization was identical to westernization. These beliefs became dominant in Asia, the Islamic world and globally from the turn of 20th century to the sixties (Iggers et al., 2008). After WWII, theoreticians emphasized the idea of scientific modernization and technological development as a main factor of history. In the same vein, Toffler (1980) described the three "waves" or technological revolutions in human beings' history, which were or are determinants of global society's progression. Confirming the prevalence of these beliefs, 54% of respondents from 85 nations in the

WVS agreed that scientific advances we are making help mankind (Inglehart et al., 2004). Some authors propose that trust in technology characterizes only Western values (Braithwaite & Scott, 1991). However, in disagreement with this nonscientific view of Eastern culture, stress on technological progress and a linear view of history are not typical of Western culture. In fact, both West and East (and also Africa and Latin America) agree with the development of science and technology as the main factor of history, confirming Iggers et al.'s (2008) assertion that beliefs on technology and linear time are modern and widely shared in all cultures.

Recency Bias in Consciousness of Different Historical Periods

Finally, it is necessary to point out that the competence of historical perspective-taking also implies understanding the past of a foreign country and consciousness of different historical periods and eras with different infra- and superstructures (Seixas, 2012). For instance, an already mentioned *recency bias reflects an existing tendency to focus on recent events and historical periods* (see Pennebaker et al., 2006 or Liu et al., 2009). People emphasize recent events and historical periods because cohorts usually feel that “they are living during the most important and innovative period of world history”. This profile is congruent with the well-known positive-negative asymmetry effect: negative events are easily detected and influence more perception, evaluation and judgment and are better retained at short term. This tendency is supposed to be adaptive because negative events are more informative and require more rapid reactions than positive ones. In the same vein, mass media and journalists focus more on negative news (Bar-Tal, 2013).

Finally, persons share different types of reasoning and thinking: they can share and use a structural view of history, and at the same time they can use more heuristic and individualistic “theories of history” explaining events by great men theory, violence and Divine will. Learning historical competences should take into account that different “theories about history” could coexist and that development of historical learning is unequal and learning a “more advance” understanding did not delete more simple approaches, that could be reactivated

Conclusions and Implications: SR of History Influence Political Attitudes and Culture

Importantly, previously described SR of history have psychosocial consequences, especially in terms of intergroup relations (Kus, 2013; Smeekes,

Verkuyten, & Poppe, 2011). The way history is taught and framed may shape the relations between different national, religious, or ethnic groups. Therefore, in the present chapter we proposed a series of guidelines that may serve to sensitize history teachers, editors of history textbooks, and policy makers about how history is being narrated, how these narratives are being assimilated by lay people, and how they may affect their attitudes. We delineated guidelines around three important areas of interest related to the three competences in historical thinking: understanding historical significance, understanding historical continuity and change, and historical consciousness and perspective-taking.

Guidelines for Teaching to Understand Historical Significance

Based on existing research confirming hegemony of a Eurocentric and / or Western-centric view of history, we can expect that history students will tend to identify European and / or Western events and leaders as having historical significance. It is necessary to be aware that the “dominant ideology tends to be the ideology of ruling groups” and to correct the importance that we spontaneously attribute to “central cultural actors”. Wars and political and military leaders could also be conceived as particularly historically significant because vivid negative information is especially salient in perception and because mass media and to some extent history textbooks stress a narrative and individualized view of events. In addition, teachers may expect students to consider nationally-relevant historical events as more important than those events that did not refer to their country. Students probably tend to perceive “our” history as significant for world history, particularly through idolization of national historical characters. Also, the events and leaders worshiped and idealized in official commemorations (e.g. Columbus and Discovery) and included in narratives related to the foundation of the current nation state are those considered as having historical significance. However, the importance of historical events and people who did not become national heroes and are not commemorated in official rituals should also be stressed (see Zinn, 1999 for a classic example of this). In a similar way, history education professionals should also be aware that the events experienced during adolescence or early adulthood as well as two-three generations old events have particular historical significance for students because of the importance of direct experience and oral communication for the maintenance of events vividly in memory. For communicative and teaching purposes, therefore, they may have better resonance: they

can be used to key entry into earlier eras. Finally, events that fit with general norms and meaning structures prevalent in the society and culture are often assigned high historical significance. In sum, to be aware of socio-centrism and the need to reinforce a more “cosmopolitan” view of history should be cultivated in history education.

Guidelines for Teaching to Understand Continuity and Change

History education professionals should take into account the fact that for their students the idea of progress and decline may coexist in the same way the lineal view of history may be reconciled with a belief in a circular nature of time. At odds with the idea that views of history as a cycle or rise and fall are more common in indigenous or Eastern cultures, an agreement with this idea appears both among university students from both Eastern and Western cultures. On the other hand, to be aware of the tendency to share a “happy end” view of history is also important. “Injections” of critical historical thinking should take into account both the simultaneous acceptance of cyclical and progressive views.

Guidelines for Teaching Historical Consciousness and Perspective-taking

As for teaching historical perspective-taking, history education professionals should be aware of a possible cognitive polyphasia which permits coexistence of apparently conflicting meta-schematas. In the context of history education, students, for instance, may share at the same time a causal or technological view of history, a view of history as fueled by economic development, and an individualistic view of history in which great leaders are an important causal force. In any case, even scholarship historians and sophisticated thinkers try to compatibilize these approaches (see Bujarin, 1925 for a classical discussion). However, teachers and textbook editors should be aware that today the view of great leaders as an important cause of history is related to the belief of the importance of human agency and of inspirational leaders like Gandhi or Mandela, and not necessarily to the approval of authoritarian historical figures, as was the case of classical thinkers.

Also, history education professionals should take into account that in lay beliefs war and politics related events are not perceived as more important than socioeconomic trends. This suggests that a “creolized” individualistic-structural view of history should be taken into account in history education. Students are also expected to agree with the development of science and technology as the main causal factor of history, confirming Iggers et al.’s (2008) assertion that beliefs on technology and linear time are modern

and widely shared in all current cultures. However, while there are not monolithic views of history associated with particular countries or cultural zones, there is a strong tendency for young people in Muslim and Asian countries to have a different view of historical leaders such as dictators compared to Western and Latin American cultures (see Hanke et al., in press).

Also, according to research demonstrating that people tend to view recent events as more historically significant than those which occurred long ago, students in a history class will also probably share a short-term view of history or “last years / century” bias that could be an obstacle to perspective-taking because only “court durée” events are taken into account. In addition, collective narcissism tendencies (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009) may impose a limited historical perspective because each nation has a tendency to believe that their history is especially important and that they live in an important historical moment. To overcome or at least allow students to become aware of their short-term historical perspective and their positive long-term historical bias is important for history education.

Final Outlook

This chapter provided a review of research on SR of history and presented guidelines for strengthening meta-cognitive competences in history education. We focused on three main historical thinking competences: understanding historical significance, understanding historical continuity and change, and historical consciousness and perspective-taking. We hope that our comments will be useful for strengthening other competences such as: an ability to develop opinions about the past; an ability to construct, reconstruct and discuss individual narratives and interpretations of the past; an ability to make use of key historical concepts for relating events; and an ability to understand the complexity of historical events. The data presented should also have some relevance for general competencies, also important in history education, such as being able to reflect, to question, to think critically, and to judge. Finally, we propose that history teachers need to be aware of possible biases that may exist in determining what is historically significant and of the importance of understanding of historical continuity and change in learning history. Developing historical thinking during history classes is necessary because collective memory and history education are mutually dependent.

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