The Educational is Political

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Abstract

Many approaches to political education take it to involve the construction of particular sections of the curriculum in which political matters are addressed – named perhaps "civics" or "citizenship education". While these approaches have often been beneficial, they are all also problematic and controversial in some degree. Moreover, it is sometimes said that political education operates across a wide range of what happens in educational institutions – for example, in the ways of behaving that are promoted inside and outside the classroom, in the general ethos of the school or college, and through its marking of significant dates or events. The approach adopted in this paper takes a more radical line, however, in that it resists the restriction of the political that these approaches assume. This is not to argue for the mobilization of schools and other educational institutions as instruments of politics. It is rather to try to show that matters of political significance are pervasive of the curriculum. The substance of the curriculum is an expression of what the culture takes to be important and of the values that the culture wishes to pass on. The fostering of those values must have some effect on the kind of society that is then promoted, and indeed this must be inherent in the aims of education.

The crowds exceeded expectations. Parliament Square had quickly filled with people, spilling over to the side of Westminster Abbey and then on the other side of the square, past Big Ben, towards Westminster Bridge. The ranks of demonstrators extended down Whitehall as far as you could see, past Downing Street, the Prime Minister's residence, towards Trafalgar Square. The march had started in Park Lane, moved down past Hyde Park Corner, past Buckingham Palace and along the Mall. The organisers had anticipated that 100,000 people would participate, no doubt strategically underestimating, but they too were clearly amazed. In the end the official estimate was that almost 700,000 had turned out.

The makeshift placards the marchers carried protested at the lack of justice, denounced the government's handling of the matter, and named a number of leading politicians as liars. Speakers from wide-ranging walks of life - from students to stars, from the old to the young, and from all the main political parties - addressed the rally in a unanimous plea: that there be a further referendum, based on the arrangements finally negotiated for Brexit, now rhetorically inflated as a "People's Vote". The most telling of the slogans - "No one voted for this mess!" – summed up the incontestable gap between the expectations aroused in voters at the time of the 2016 UK

referendum on leaving the European Union and the machinery and prospects of the divorce that is currently being planned. The March for a People's Vote was motivated not by the straightforward belief that the UK should not leave the European Union but by commitment to the idea that, now that the realities of Brexit are clearer, it is right, and indeed a matter of democracy, that the people should have the chance to think again. The march took place on 20 October 2018, just four months away from the time of the UK's scheduled exit from Europe.

What are those realities? Perhaps the first question most people raise is about the economic prospects. Will we be better or worse off? Plainly, there is no simple answer to this, and inevitably it is a matter of speculation: no one knows what will happen – what trade deals will be struck, what other factors intervene. Nor is it clear what the economic prospects for member-states of the European Union are. There is no doubt also that this economic question shades into more obviously political ones. Free movement in Europe has meant that workers from European countries with lower pay, such as Poland and Bulgaria, have come to the UK where their prospects are better, supposedly taking jobs from British people. But the resentment aroused by this has tapped into a deeper xenophobia and nostalgia for Empire. Donald Trump's rallying cry at the time of the election that brought him to power – "We are going to make America great again!" – has its resonances amongst some of those in the UK who are determined to leave Europe. The xenophobia in this derives also from an island mentality: there is a fear of the transit of refugees from war-torn parts of the world – from Syria and from North Africa – via Europe's less well-protected borders.

The multi-ethnic society that now makes up the UK has established itself over decades, even centuries, and although this continues to be problematic in various ways, there has been reasonable success. Yet in the months following the 2016 vote to leave Europe, there was a significant rise in race-related crime; there was a new sense in some sectors of society that it was acceptable to be racist.[i] In January 2019, some three months after the march, Anna Soubry, a Conservative Member of Parliament, known for her outspoken views in favour of a People's Vote, was jostled and verbally abused by demonstrators outside Parliament, who accused her of being a Nazi. The reasonable complaint against the campaign for a further referendum, after the matter had been settled in 2016, scarcely justified the claim that she was a threat to democracy and, hence, a Nazi. Irrational and appalling (and illegal) as this is, it is a symptom of the depth of feeling that exists amongst many of those who voted to leave.

The demography of the referendum result revealed an age divide (with younger voters generally wanting to remain, older voters opting to leave) and geographical differences that are striking. The more multi-ethnic urban areas generally voted against Brexit, as of course did cosmopolitan London. But the differences were far from being straightforwardly a divide between the big cities and the rural areas. Scotland voted convincingly to remain in the EU, as for different reasons did Northern Ireland. Wales, a net economic beneficiary of the EU, ironically voted to leave. In some parts of the country, and especially among some social classes, the vote for Brexit was and continues to be solid.

It is also the case that those voting to remain are generally better educated. Lack of education was exploited by the campaign in favour of leaving the EU. This appealed to simplistic notions of national identity, made extravagant, indeed ludicrous promises regarding the economic benefits of leaving,[ii] pandered to prejudices regarding the excessive red-tape of European bureaucracy and legislation, emphasising their adverse effect on small and medium-sized businesses, and surreptitiously exploited a latent racism. At the time of writing the story is unfolding, but a political stalemate prevails. Commentators of different political orientations tend to share the view that all possible outcomes will be unsatisfactory – reflecting perhaps the extent of the divisions within society.[iii]

It would be wrong to think of Brexit as just a local development: it is likely to have far-reaching consequences in Europe and around the world. But the point of beginning this paper with this fairly lengthy treatment of the topic is that it brings into focus problems concerning citizenship and education, and questions about the very nature of the political. I want, next, to spell out the nature of the problems I have in mind and then to turn to the consideration of two policy contexts in which, in different ways, pertinent issues are manifested. Both have an important bearing on how education's relation to the political has come to be conceived, crucially in terms of its relation to history.

Education and citizenship

Many approaches to political education take it to involve the construction of particular sections of the curriculum in which political matters are addressed. Sometimes such names as "civics" or indeed "citizenship education" are used. While these approaches have been beneficial, they are also problematic and controversial in some degree. Moreover, it is sometimes said that political education operates across a wide range of what happens in educational institutions – for example, in the ways of behaving that are promoted inside and outside the classroom, in the general ethos of the school or college, and through its marking of significant dates, festivals, and events.

My purpose in the present paper is to resist the restriction of the political that these approaches assume and to press for a broader, more radical conception. This is not to argue for the mobilization of schools and other educational institutions as instruments of politics. When, in some Western countries, in the heady climate of the late 1960s and 70s, schoolteachers sometimes fancied themselves to be agents of the coming revolution, it was right to react against this: there was a risk of the subordination of the curriculum to relatively narrow and fixed political ends. Hannah Arendt's criticism, in "The Crisis in Education" (1954), anticipates this kind of distortion of educational purposes. But to suggest, in response, that education be conceived as independent of the political is to fall short of the demands of politics and of education itself. It is important to show that matters of political significance are pervasive of the curriculum – even that the curriculum testifies to political significance in some way or other. The fostering of the values imparted by educational institutions must have some

effect on the kind of society that is then promoted. It is difficult to see how any expression of the aims of education could be politically neutral. The substance of the curriculum is an expression, in some way or other, of what the culture takes to be important and of the values that the culture wishes to pass on. Educational practices may or may not be effective in realising these aims, but the crucial point is that the aims themselves cannot be politically empty: the very practice of education involves the passing on of something thought to be of value. In extreme regimes, where education is geared instrumentally to the reproduction of the society or to shoring it up ideologically through practices of indoctrination, this will obviously be the case. But in more enlightened regimes, where perhaps the commitment is to some version of liberal education, this will also be true. In classical times, Confucius' conception of the good life is expressed through teachings the ramifications of which extend across human lives in multiple connected ways, while the vision of the good society in Plato's *The Republic* is at the same time a vision of education. My title, which borrows from a feminist slogan of the 1970s, "The personal is political", may be found to be hyperbolic by some, but it expresses a truth to which these visionary texts attest.

My purpose here, however, is not merely to show the inevitably political dimensions of policy and practice in education but to advance a more substantive account of democratically justified practice. It is precisely this concern that motivates my initial description of the Brexit crisis. Let me extend this now by turning to those two historical policy contexts that cast light on the development of thinking about citizenship and education in the post-Second World War era. They help to show what is at stake and how, in the name of democracy, things might be improved.

Political education under the veil

The first concerns a predominantly Western general trend that was manifested in particular policy developments in the UK in the 1990s. Not only were these symptomatic of the time and in many respects of the decades that followed: they were to be influential around the world.

Let me sketch their background. Public outrage was caused in 1993 when two-year old Jamie Bulger was abducted, abused, and killed by two ten-year old boys. They were found guilty of murder, making them the youngest murderers in British legal history.[iv] Outrage was renewed in 1995 when headteacher Philip Lawrence intervened in a fight outside the gates of his school and was stabbed to death by a fifteen-year old boy from another school. It is surely the case that, in some countries, these events, and especially the latter, would have received less attention than they did in the UK – not that they would have been any less terrible. The point of raising these examples here, however, is to identify a trajectory of public reaction that played into the shaping of policy in education.[v]

The fact that the killers in both cases were so young prompted an outcry about the failure of moral education. The cause of this failure was said to be the fact that teachers no longer felt that they could teach children the difference between right and wrong. They could not do this because, in

the prevailing climate of multiculturalism, emphasis was on respect for different beliefs, customs, and mores: there was a general fear of ethnocentrically imposing the expectations of the dominant group. In response, the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Agency established a commission that brought together leaders of religious groups, academics, and others with a professional interest in moral education to try to determine whether there were any values with which all could agree and, hence, that could be regarded as universal. The commission was successful, in its own terms, in that there was agreement around the value of, for example, truthfulness and justice. This finding is less impressive than may initially have seemed to be the case, however, when it is recognised that agreement over the value of justice does not determine what constitutes justice: plainly there is profound disagreement and cultural variation over this, and in the UK that variation was clearly evident. Hence, in terms of practice, it proved difficult to take the work of the commission forward into policy.[vi] Notwithstanding the commitment of educational practice to the moral development of young people, a dedicated moral education curriculum had never been a standard part of provision. Given the complexity of the situation, this was unlikely to change.

The sense of outrage described above certainly did seem symptomatic of an incipient apathy during the 1990s, at a time when the more confrontational politics of earlier decades had dissipated and when there was greater acquiescence in the sense of European membership. On the whole, the 1990s saw increasing European cooperation and convergence in education, especially around commitments to university education. 1996 was the European "Year of Lifelong Learning", in which the UK played a prominent part. It is perhaps understandable, then, that the impetus towards reform that had gathered on the strength of this sense of outrage became channelled instead towards citizenship, national and European, a topic that, with greater commitment to Europe, had risen on the political agenda. This slippage from moral education to citizenship reflects, for good reason, the overlap between these projects. But it is also significant that, whereas "moral education" retained connotations of restriction and correction, "citizenship education" brought with it ideas not only of responsibility and duty but also, more positively, of ownership and choice, values that had been inculcated over the previous two decades with the rise of neoliberalism: citizenship gave people rights and opportunities, freedom of choice within the terms of the market, and, so it appeared, a modicum of power.

Against this background, a government committee chaired by the political philosopher Bernard Crick produced a set of fairly specific recommendations (subsequently known as the Crick Report). Legislation to amend the National Curriculum in order to adopt a major part of these recommendations was enacted in the years that followed. The purpose of the curriculum that the Crick Report recommended was to increase the knowledge, skills, and values relevant to participative democracy, to enhance the awareness of rights, duties, and responsibilities, and to encourage participation in the local and wider community (The Crick Report, 1998, p. 40, section 6.6). This was to be realised through education in four

specific categories: *key concepts* (such as democracy and autocracy; co-operation and conflict; equality and diversity; and rules, law and human rights); *values and dispositions* (including concern for the common good; concern to resolve conflicts; courage to defend a point of view; and willingness to change one's opinions in the light of discussion and evidence); *skills and aptitudes* (for example, the ability to make a reasoned argument; consideration and appreciation of the experience of others; and tolerance towards other points of view); *and knowledge and understanding* (of such matters as the nature of democratic communities, including how they function and change; as well as topical and contemporary issues and events at local, national, EU, Commonwealth and international levels) (p. 44).

Although the Report did draw attention to the overlap between its recommendations and history as a school subject, the tenor of the document was general and abstract. The committee expressed a reluctance to intervene in curriculum matters in detail and wariness of being overly prescriptive; and a degree of abstraction was inevitable given the nature of its task. When the recommendations were taken up in policy, however, these abstract features remained evident. The skills and dispositions were understood in relatively idealised terms, and the knowledge imparted tended to be formal in character. In other words, the historical resonance of the topics in question was not brought to the fore. I speak of idealisation not to suggest that these policies and practices explicitly posited an ideal world but because of this abstraction from the contingency of circumstance and history, the rough ground of the landscape in which civility in the real world must find its footing.

There is more than an echo here of the initial approach of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1972), surely the most influential work in anglophone political philosophy during the past fifty years. Central to Rawls' masterwork is its celebrated thought-experiment: this attempts to work out what a just society that reconciles principles of liberty and equality might look like if rational judgements as to the just distribution of rights and goods were made. This might be achieved if a society were created where its members were initially behind a "veil of ignorance", not knowing which positions or which needs and talents they as individuals were to have. The experiment generates two guiding principles. The first is that "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all", and the second that "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged. . ., and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity" (p. 266).

There is no doubt that this is an immensely powerful conception of political justice, and its influence has extended to questions of education in fruitful ways. The quip that Western philosophy is "footnotes to Plato" might be matched by the formulation that, over the past thirty years or so, anglophone political philosophy of education has become footnotes to Rawls. In spite of the achievements of work in this vein (around, for example, the practices and legitimacy of school choice), the gravity of the arguments pulls consistently towards the formalism of theorisation and principle that I have

drawn attention to above. Of course, actual cases and lawsuits figure in these discussions, but the tendency of the argument, with its commitment to democratically levelling the field of consideration, is to mute the sense of history.

My main concern here is not exactly to criticise such research but to draw attention to the ways that citizenship education was being conceived. It is instructive also not only to recall that curricular practices regarding citizenship in England, following Crick, have been influential elsewhere but also to attend to some salient differences that were evident at that time (see Standish, 2002). To take a closely related example, the policy and practice adopted in England contrasted in some respects with those of the separate jurisdictions of Scotland and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, the same abstract principles were adopted but supplemented with the requirement that there be a celebration of Scottish identity; in Northern Ireland, the principles were taken up, without any celebration of identity, but with a strong emphasis on the development of the disposition of tolerance. I take it that the need for tolerance in the divided society of Northern Ireland is obvious, just as the celebration of the identity associated with Scotland, a country that has been afflicted by English oppression, is understandable. The lack of any suggestion of the celebration of English identity in Crick's recommendation derived perhaps from a justifiable sense that English identity had been too much celebrated in the past! Twenty years on from the time of the report, with the rise of the UK Independence Party, the hardening of the Conservative right, not to mention Brexit itself, that sensitivity seems to have been dulled.[vii]

Bearing in mind the looming spectre of nationalism in these policy shifts, let me turn to the fate of history in a different context, that of Japan.
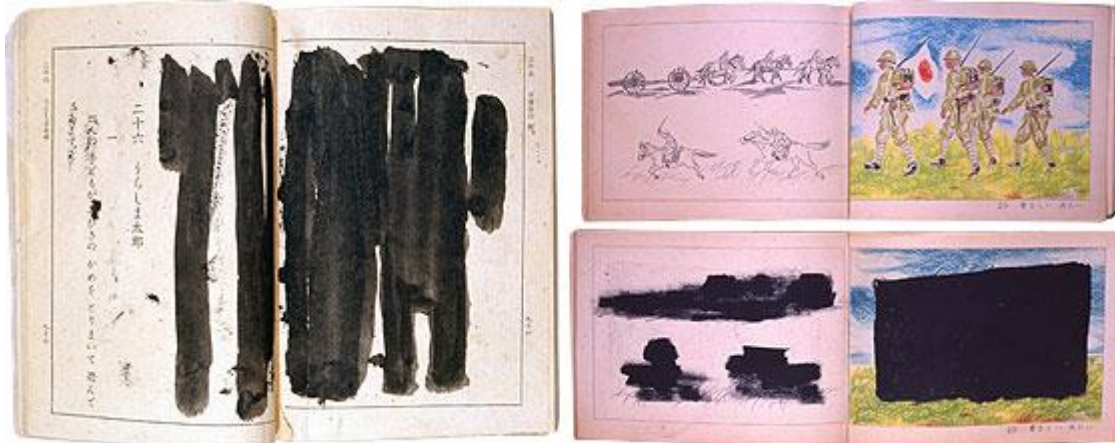
Political education under erasure

As will be well-known to many readers of this journal, there is an intriguing literature relating to the history of textbooks in Japan – particularly to textbooks for the teaching of history itself. A key focal-point for this is to be found in the extraordinary measures that were taken in the years following the Second World War, with the establishment of the Fundamental Law of Education, and with the censoring of books already available in schools.

In October 1945, the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers began to issue directives regarding the content of the curriculum, prohibiting the presentation of militarist and ultranationalist ideologies, and carrying out a purge of teachers who had promoted such ways of thinking. In December that year the prohibition was extended to Shinto, including a ban on teaching materials such as *Kokutai no Hongi* (The True Meaning of the Kokutai) and *Shinmin no Michi* (The Path of the Imperial Subject). Japanese history textbooks would have to be rewritten. On the 31 December, it was ordered that moral education (*shushin*), Japanese history, and geography be suspended, and textbooks and teacher's guides for these subjects were withdrawn.

Prior to this, however, in August, 1945, the Japanese government's post-War textbook policy had begun with a process of blacking-out

(*suminuri*). Schools were instructed by the Ministry of Education, as Yoshiko Nozaki (2008) explains, to exercise discretion in using the existing books and to delete from them any militaristic content (see the images below).

GOOD-BYE, DEAR BIRDS, GOOD-BYE!

I

and ~~sailors~~ ~~fighting~~ in the South

SISTERS WORKING

Good-bye, dear birds, good-by

EXERCISE

次 の 文 を 未 來 に 直 せ。

1. Winter is here.

It is likely, however, she suggests, that the Ministry's intention was to conceal rather than to negate militarism in education. The point was to conceal the content from the occupying forces: it was not to eliminate from education the spirit of the national polity (*kokutai*) that it expressed, a polity conceived around and in relation to the figure of the Emperor. Items specified for removal were principally war-related descriptions; surprisingly, many stories revering the emperors remained. The requirements for what was to be eliminated were not precise, and judgements had to be made at local levels, even by individual teachers, about what exactly to exclude; and often it was the students themselves who blacked out or pasted over the offending content. The upshot was, as Nozaki explains, that

> no two blacked-out textbooks emerged from the process exactly alike, indicating that each classroom teacher took some liberty in determining which items were to be removed. In a sense, though to a limited extent, a different construction of national narrative took place in each classroom (p. 4).

Schools were allowed to use blacked-out textbooks until July 31, 1946, by which time "stopgap" textbooks had been distributed, albeit that these were in short supply.

Clearly the significance and effects of this extraordinary practice warrant further comment, but let me first set Nozaki's account here in the broader context of her book. State censorship or control of textbooks is obviously not peculiar to Japan, and similar controversies are to be found in many states confronted with a need for nation-building or reconstruction. As Nozaki rightly claims, "the Japanese case and the situated, contextual knowledge, both empirical and theoretical, gained from it offer revealing points of comparison and interpretation that illuminate contemporary global issues of war and peace, historical memory, and education" (p. xiii). Her purpose in the book is indeed broader than to consider the blacked-out

textbooks. She aims to bring to light "the complex, multi-layered battles fought over the issues of war memory and school textbooks from 1945 to 2007, locating them in the larger social, cultural, political, and educational transformations inside Japan, as well as in the context of major changes in international relations. . ." (*ibid.*). She considers not only how right-wing nationalism, the dominant power bloc, and the state worked together to exert power over schools, and how textbooks themselves have influenced the sense of national identity that people experience, but also how "oppositional and alternative forces—so called 'progressive' forces—fought against the hegemonic power(s)?" (pp. xiii-xiv) Much of her book focuses specifically on the sustained campaign against government policy undertaken by Saburo Ienaga, who had worked as a history teacher in schools and in a teacher education college. His book *Shin Nihonshi* (New Japanese History, 1947) was a product and expression of the view that history education should be based on the robust standards of history as an academic – even scientific (*kagakuteki*) – discipline, and on commitment to democratic values and the desire for peace. Nozaki's book examines the several law-suits that Ienaga went on to press against the Japanese government in the decades that followed, offering her own commentary on later developments in history textbooks for schools.

It is plain that the textbook controversy has been a struggle over education and its content, raising questions about the nature of the official, state-sanctioned knowledge taught in schools. Whose knowledge ought to be presented to students? Who should decide this? Answers to these questions, as Nozaki observes, are inevitably political, and this is in line with the point I have been pressing throughout this paper – particularly with regard to content.

A particular fascination of the blacked-out textbooks case is the manner in which the elimination was done. It is quite literally a case of "writing under erasure". This phrase is associated especially with the work of Jacques Derrida and with Martin Heidegger, and their conception of this is not primarily negative. They see in it a double-gesture of both presenting and withdrawing – through crossing out, pasting over, blotting out, saying and negating, double negation, erasure in its multiple forms. Clearly the possible effects are diverse and highly contextual. The practice can be seen then as a creative means of acknowledging something that cannot be simply recognised – in other words, as part of a restrained or quiet affirmation ("I'm not unhappy"). But similar, though negative formulations can be found in such corrosive expressions as "I'm not saying you are mean but. . ." It can be effected also in more visual ways, as here in the blacked-out images. The black-ink deletions can have an almost visceral effect.

How was this experienced by teachers? How was it understood by the Allies? What of the schoolchildren evidently required to collude in the paradoxical concealing of things from themselves? Did it not undermine or at least compromise the curriculum ostensibly presented to them? Is it not likely that the obliteration of the texts aroused a dangerous curiosity, at the same time symbolising the repression of a people then in defeat? Of course, the times were exceptional, but what message must such an experience have imparted about the nature of education and about the nature of

Japanese identity – an identity now defined by being partly under erasure? These matters become all the more burdensome if they are placed against the questions concerning identity that had come progressively to the fore in the latter part of the 19th century, with the Meiji restoration in 1868, and especially during the 20th century. The rise of Japanese nationalism had coincided with a questioning of the Western conception of history – as universal and as a progress towards civilisation, in which different peoples of the world were at different stages of development, and with the West of course in the leading position. It was part of a new Japanese confidence in the pre-War years to contest this view of history, in effect connecting with the rival conceptions of historicism that had emerged in the West.

Perhaps this new confidence, asserted with the rise of nationalism, had itself borrowed something from the very idea of identity that had become so entrenched in Western thought (see Standish, 2011), a conception inextricably linked with ways of thinking that are bound up with a logic of representation. This is not a matter of political representation in the ordinary sense (for example, the fair representation of particular groups of people in a democracy) but rather to do with a kind of equation of being represented and being *real*. Things and people are understood in terms of sets of defining characteristics, collected in a descriptor, a profile, an image; and in some sense this must be made visible or made present. An inflamed form of this is found, on the grand scale, in celebrity culture and, in a more modest but perhaps more surreptitious way, in the ubiquity of social media. In both cases a person's "profile" or "identity" depends upon, and is understood precisely in terms of, a set of signifiers, and this becomes their reality.

Now it was not for nothing that Roland Barthes called Japan "the empire of signs", but a consideration of Japanese aesthetics can help to reveal the different possibilities of thought that signs can enable. The Western conception – of signs as representations – is burdened by a latent Platonism. This is the idea that behind the appearances of the ordinary world there is a true world of the forms. Our experience is of a world of flux, but we can become aware of a realm behind this that is timeless and unchanging, and hence more real. We can identify chairs of various shapes and sizes, and made of widely different materials, and we do this without hesitation; we can do this because we retain a *concept* of chair that does not require materialisation in these diverse ways; it is the concept (the true form) that enables our recognition of the contingent chairs we happen to come across. Similarly, and more convincingly, we might think of the triangular shapes and objects that we encounter in the ordinary world and yet be struck by the thought that none of these, in fact, has the absolutely perfect sides that define what a triangle is. Although we have never seen a perfect triangle, we have no difficulty at all in conceiving of that perfect form, and it is upon this concept that the ordinary operation of the term depends. Moreover, the perfect form, unlike the triangular shapes we happen to encounter, is timeless and indestructible; according to Platonism, it is more real. The logic of representation is then tied up with a notion that the sign correlates with a real thing, and hence with a hierarchisation of surface and depth. But think, by contrast, of the words, sounds, and gestures of the *Noh*

play. These are not the coding of a "deep" meaning: on the contrary the audience is to attend to the surface of the signs and to be moved with the play from one surface to another, laterally as opposed to vertically, as it were, through the relationships between the signs. Think also of the way that the idea of *mu* (nothing) is so elusive to Western thought, which seems incapable of thinking of nothing except as an absent *something*. The Japanese water-colour floats on the surface of the paper; the classical Western painting fills the canvas. These factors, I believe, complicate the aesthetic and semantic effects of the blacked-out books in ways the implications of which are hard to fathom but that touch on difficulties in the expression of Japanese identity in a manner that avoids its constriction by the limitations of Western thought.

But let us step back in order to attend further to matters of history. Hitomi Koyama provides a thoughtful discussion of the relationship between stagist views of history, with their civilising mission, and the romantic turn to culture as a means of resisting Eurocentric history. Culture becomes a site through which sovereignty is projected. She is concerned to address what has come to be called 'the history problem' (*rekishi mondai*) - the relationship in Japan between history-writing and atonement for its militarist and imperialist past (Koyama, 2016a, p. 783).

Koyama describes how, in the late 19th century, a form of "Enlightenment history" or "civilizational history" (*bunmeishi*) gained prominence, led by figures such as Yukichi Fukuzawa (1834-1901) and Ukichi Taguchi (1855-1905). Civilisational history and science became the central currents in the early Meiji period. Committed to finding universal principles of development, Ukichi Taguchi's *Nihon Kaika Shoshi* (A Short History of Japanese Civilization, 1877) focused on material progress, following Adam Smith's account of societal development from a nomadic society to a commercial, urban one. Similarly, Fukuzawa theorised *bunmeishi* as "an endeavour to capture the positionality of the subject against the universal law of development" – in other words, to assert, against the background schema of development, a conception of human autonomy on Kantian lines. Within this three-stage schema, Japan was positioned as a semi-developed country; Europe and the US were developed, while Africa and Australia were still primitive. If Japan remained at this stage of development, its loss of autonomy would be inevitable.

One reason for the growth of resistance to *bunmeishi* (civilizational history), however, was the issue of race. Koyama draws attention to the impact of the 1886 Normanton Incident: a British captain was acquitted on charges of letting all 37 non-Western members of his crew (Japanese, Chinese, and Indian) drown when his ship sank, notwithstanding the fact that he had safeguarded the lives of every British and German crew member. The incident incited outrage, demonstrating that "civilisational status" was ultimately determined by skin colour. Thinkers in Asia were left, she argues, with a complex predicament:

> to affirm the idea of historical development was to deny one's agency, since Europe depicted Asia as a calcified, backward site without historical movement. However, in adopting a stagist approach to

history, this denial seemed unavoidable. The problem of how to think about historical development in Asia has therefore revolved around the question of how to conceive of political agency. It is here that we begin to see the Romantic moment (p. 794).

Towards the end of the 19th century, then, there was a growing body of thought to the effect that civilisational history was Western history, and hence a different conception of Asia gradually emerged, one that stressed cultural difference. Asia was not static and backward but rather a site of resistance. Nevertheless, as Koyama tries to show, this Romantic historicism also proved susceptible to incorporation into a colonialist discourse. The Western idea of Asia as backward is replicated in its own version of Orientalism, where it claims a degree of civilisation greater than other Asian states. Japan reproduced this Western civilising mission in its attitude towards and eventual colonisation of Korea in 1910.

It was against this background that the philosopher Kiyoshi Miki came to prominence, becoming head of the cultural division of the Showa Research Association (SRA), the advisory committee to Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe on Asia policy. By the late 1930s he was arguing for the need to defeat the Eurocentric idea of world history as the history of white people. His concern was with pluralising the ways in which historical development is conceived. Miki's treatise on history was written, Koyama explains,

> amid the convergence of three transnational intellectual movements: (1) the Pan-Asianist movement that sought to redefine what 'Asia' symbolised in history and worked in tandem with; (2) the rise of a view of Kultur as an antidote to civilisation that, in combination, enabled (3) 'Asia' to be reconfigured as a spiritual giant which was no longer perpetually 'backward', as defined by the West. The fusion of these trends is reflected in the treatise on international politics, *Principles of Thought for a New Japan*, published by the SRA under Miki's leadership (p. 795).

Around the time the above article was published, Koyama presented a paper with the title "Reexamining the Curious Convergence between Shinzo Abe and Norihiro Kato over the Reconstitution of Japan as a Subject of History in 1990s". In this she explores ways in which the question of how to tell the story of Japanese imperialism continues to haunt Japan's relationship with its neighbours (Koyama, 2016b).viii Japan's "history problem (*rekishi mondai*) has been taken to stand in need of a concrete resolution, but Koyama shifts attention in order to question the persistence of the problem *as a problem*. This history is, it seems, simultaneously there and not there – a tension that she suggests is illustrated precisely by the blacked-out textbooks of the 1940s. Semblances of patriotic or militaristic content were blotted out, such that the state of history in postwar Japan appears "as a palimpsest, both present and absent from public discourse and memory" (abstract for the paper). This state of history, she goes on to suggest, "implies a convergence

between Shinzo Abe's revisionism and Norihiro Kato's responses to the Asian 'Other'."[ix]

Koyama's general thesis, if I have understood correctly, points to the constraining effects of the dominant binary construction of historicism (as either civilizational history or cultural history): Japan's "history problem", she shows, needs to be understood in terms of the only partial adequacy of such a distinction to historical reality. The erasure of the textbooks is a metonym of this inadequacy. Let me draw this paper to a close by identifying the effects of such binary thinking in relation to the political education that is its central focus. This will involve identifying tensions in the discussion that are present in contemporary educational policy in Japan and placing these in relation to a Japanese aesthetic and metaphysics that the Western terms of debate are apt to override.

The turn to history: outgrowing growth

The binary construction of historicism finds its educational policy counterpart in Japan in the tension between a liberal-progressive orientation and the reassertion of national identity. Both, however, are vulnerable to disabling pressures from neoliberalism, in which "choice", "competence", and "performance" are powerful signifiers. Liberal education, which by rights should keep a degree of distance from progressivism, is rightly concerned with the initiation of the young person into those ways of thinking and understanding that are part of our shared inheritance as human beings, into the freeing of thought that these enable.[x] But the forgetting of this ideal – its liberal-progressive depletion, as well as its narrowing into a preoccupation with the abstract skills of critical thinking in service of the exercise of rational autonomy – facilitates a cultural slide into the values prioritised by liberal economics, where choice is epitomised by the freedom of the consumer. Conversely, the commitments to culture and tradition associated with Japanese identity are subsumed within an Abenomics dedicated more to asserting Japan's importance on a globalised economic and political stage. Ironically, these conspire to distort what might more richly be thought of as an inheritance of Japanese culture.

A refreshing contrast is provided by a short piece published by Kato in the *New York Times* in 2010 (though not, I think, here converging with Abe, curiously or otherwise). In some ways, Kato's observations can be seen to be reaching towards a conception of citizenship that exceeds both the binary terms of historicism and the educational opposition articulated in the previous paragraph. He comments on the responses of mature acceptance he has found among the younger generation to the slowing of growth in Japan and to its being overtaken by China:

> The new maturity may be the province of the young Japanese, but in a sense, it is a return to something much older. . . Starting in the 19th century, with the reign of the Meiji Emperor, Japan expanded, territorially and economically. But before that, the country went through a 250-year period of comparative isolation and very limited economic growth. The experience of rapid growth was a new

phenomenon. Japan remembers what it is like to be old, to be quiet, to turn inward.

Freshly overtaken by China, Japan now seems to stand at the vanguard of a new downsizing movement, leading the way for countries bound sooner or later to follow in its wake. In a world whose limits are increasingly apparent, Japan and its youths, old beyond their years, may well reveal what it is like to outgrow growth (Kato, 2010).

This is simultaneously an acknowledgement *of* history, of a Japan beyond the modernising that the Meiji era set in train, and the recognition of a turn *in* history, of a time to come that is not obsessed by growth in GDP.

My purpose in this paper has been to illustrate the failure to turn sufficiently to history, and I have identified this as a significant impoverishment and distortion of political education. There is no avoidance of political education, and, Arendt's critique notwithstanding, the illusion of thinking there is outweighs the problem of instrumentalization. In fact, the acknowledgement of the inevitably political aspects of education is a means of recognising the dangers that instrumentalization presents. The two main contexts to which I have drawn attention have served to show problems of abstraction and repression. Global Citizenship Education is currently being promoted by the OECD, and there is good reason to assume that this is well-intentioned. But it manifests tendencies that are the object of criticism in this paper: to counterbalance these tendencies, it is necessary to attend to the multiple forgotten histories, histories that neoliberalism's global success story denies. A substantial element in the vote in favour of Brexit as well as in "rust-belt" support for Donald Trump is the expression of aversion to that success story, misguided though the channelling of that expression may be. Neoliberalism's story is, as I have implied, entrenched in aspects of Western metaphysics, and its obsessions with identity and representation need to be overcome.

Perhaps it will help if this problem is put more starkly. The argument is not that questions of identity should simply be avoided; that representation is in some way or other essential to the intercourse and communication of human beings is scarcely to be denied. But where identity becomes detached from inherited networks of relation, there is a danger that it turns self-conscious and narcissistic, whether inflated with the existentialist fervour of the 1960s as some kind of heroic quest, or rendered vapid and ephemeral in the faddish trending of postmodernity: this is a change in the notion of identity itself, in the region of which a set of signifiers – from "profile", "narrative", "bio", and "ID" to "identity" itself – move beyond their descriptive function to become marketing tools in the make-over of human nature.[xi] Let me be clear, however, about one thing. Appropriate acknowledgement of what I have called the multiple forgotten histories should not be taken to be simply a reiteration of the need for personal or collective narratives. The narrative turn also is subject to self-indulgence and oversimplification, and in the end it can succumb to precisely those problems with identity and representation identified here.

But then what is it that I am asking for? I have drawn attention to examples of history and education, and I have intimated that there may be resonances between the dichotomies that present themselves within each of these, related especially to questions of relativism and access to truth. Narrative raises questions about language and writing itself. What is it to give an account? What counts, what matters? Given a certain context, narratives are received and judged as explanation and justification. They are understood as having a unilinear relation to truth, in the absence of which relation the door will be open to relativism, to the view that one person's truth is different from another's and that both are equally "valid".[xii] Certainly, relativism of this kind is to be avoided. But the emphasis on explanation and justification in such approaches can fail to do justice to the nature of human action as essentially multivalent. Unlike purely causal physical processes or the behaviour of animals, what constitutes action is dependent upon the *experience* of the people involved - their sense of what they are doing and why and of what is happening to them - and, hence, upon diverse subjectivities. Human experience itself is inseparable from the ways in which it is articulated – as spoken, written, thematised in thought. One witnesses things; and, when one tells others about them, one bears witness to them – perhaps casually and in passing, and perhaps in circumstances of greater moment. One tells others what one has seen, and it is basic to social relationships that as a matter of course one normally accepts what one is told. It is taken on trust, and trust is built into the interaction. Not that everything one hears is necessarily right, as one very well knows, but one believes the words to be meant: believing *someone* is part of what it is to recognise them as a person. In more troubled circumstances, one hears painful, perhaps conflicting accounts of experience. Does it not then seem incumbent upon one to exercise judgement, to determine which account is right and who is telling the truth? But this may be to rush too quickly into explanation and to miss something fundamental in human being. The speaker needs to be heard, a testimony to be read. Appropriate response may require holding back from passing judgement, receptivity to what the other person has said. Justice must be done and reparations made. Yet these will not exhaust the need for acknowledgement, which is not a skill or competence but a turning towards an object to which attention must be given. Human beings are not characters in a detective story whose function is to be pieces in the solving of the crime. Let me risk two examples.

On 15 April 1996, South African national television presented, live, the first two hours of a hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, and from then until June 1998 there were hour-long episodes each week of the "Truth Commission Special Report". The Committee, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, had been established by the South African Parliament with the mandate to bear witness to, record, and in certain cases grant amnesty to perpetrators of crimes relating to human rights violations. The Committee failed in many respects: reparations were awarded but not delivered, amnesty was sometimes granted for reasons of political or economic expediency, and the weekly broadcasts risked becoming absorbed into the rapidly expanding genre of confessional television.[xiii] But the

hearings were designed not primarily for litigation: they were to allow victims and perpetrators to speak publicly about their experience, to bear witness and, in some cases, to express remorse. The Committee's emphasis on reconciliation has been said to stand out by contrast with the measures adopted by the Allies in 1945 in Germany and Japan.

On 24 August 1950, Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* was released. As is well known, the film presents different versions of the same incident, involving a robbery, rape, and murder. The stories conflict, and no definitive account is provided; yet at the end of the film, there is the promise that the baby that has been born will be cared for. Here, again, the film does not explain, does not provide a litigation, but draws the viewer into the experience of each of the characters. The complex symbolism of the film can in part be taken as allegorising Japan's experience at the end of the War. A minor aspect in the making of the film makes it answer uncannily to earlier parts of the present discussion. Kurosawa records how, when the camera was aimed upward at the cloudy sky over the Rashomon Gate, the rain could not be seen. Black ink was added to make the rain visible.

In a case such as that of the blacked-out textbooks, it is not clear what and whose stories need to be told. It is not clear what these would amount to, if faith is to be kept with the complex, polyvalent realities of history. Stories must be told, but they remain problematic, and there is always more to be said. Academic writing, history, criticism tend to take it as a matter of obligation that analysis be provided and explanation given, while social justice research in education, in the torrent of its heroic master narratives, risks losing sight of the streams of contributing little narratives, in their variety and specificity. The big dichotomies with their "positions" are to be resisted, because testimony to the truth, in its attestation and acknowledgement, requires a degree of reticence, a new maturity, and something closer to humility.[xiv] Our politics is a city of words. Education and the narratives it enables are part and parcel of that politics.[xv]

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[i] See, for example, *The Guardian*: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/16/hate-crime-brexit-terrorist-attacks-england-wales. Accessed on 24 February 2019.

[ii] In the most notorious of these the claim was made that leaving Europe would mean than an extra £350 million could be spent on the National

Health Service each week. See the related video, which was broadcast on mainstream television: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtlGN8wVnis.

<superscript>iii</superscript> The election of Donald Trump in the United States exposed similar rifts – regional and partly class-based. In both countries there were larger sections of the population who felt that, while so many people had benefited from the prosperity that the neoliberal dispensation had produced, they had somehow missed out. Moreover, as the surprise election in France of President Macron indicated, and as more recent *gilets jaunes* protests and unrest there have shown, these kinds of division and political disillusionment are more widespread. It would be parochial, and indeed blinkered, to suppose that these problems arise only in richer countries or only in the Western world. I shall not presume, in what follows, to comment on the ways that division and strife, often on a far worse scale, are encountered in poorer countries, but I do hope to break out of some of the confines of Western assumptions.

<superscript>iv</superscript> It is worth adding that the case of Jamie Bulger has now come into the news again. In January 2019, a short film based on the story was nominated for Best Live Action Short Film at the 91<superscript>st</superscript> Academy Awards. *Detainment* is based on transcripts of police interviews with the boys responsible for the murder, and it was made without consulting the parents of the child. Vincent Lambe, the film's director, has resisted requests to withdraw the film from nomination, in spite of a petition initiated by Jamie Bulger's mother. To withdraw the film would, he claims, defeat its purpose.

<superscript>v</superscript> Other horrifying incidents around that time could also be mentioned. In 1993, Stephen Lawrence, a black British teenager from south east London, was murdered in a racially motivated attack while waiting for a bus. The case and the way it was handled by the police had ramifications that extended through the decades that followed. Two of the perpetrators were convicted of murder in 2012. In an incident in 1996, Thomas Hamilton entered Dunblane Primary School, near Stirling in Scotland, and shot sixteen children and one teacher dead before killing himself. The incident led to tighter regulations on the ownership of guns, outlawing private ownership of most handguns in Great Britain.

<superscript>vi</superscript> For a more developed critical discussions, see Smith and Standish (1997). It is a striking feature of curricula in the United States that there has been a growing cautiousness about content and, especially, about the dangers of giving offence. Diane Ravitch (2004) has written in condemnation of such tendencies as the writing of fiction customised to an audience of school students such that it gives offence to none. One way to avoid offence, it would seem, is to avoid history; another is to shy away from the pressing political problems of the day, except in stylised or abstract terms. These trends in curricula in the US – which is noticeable in the humanities particularly, but also in biology, for example, especially given the religious sensitivities in some states – and the priority that is given to skills to pass Standard Achievement Tests have together contributed to the sense the schooling is a content-free zone.

<superscript>viii</superscript> For further development of these ideas, see Koyama (2018).

<superscript>ix</superscript> Norihiro Kato, Professor of Japanese literature at Waseda University, has been influential in, for example, articulating the effects of the American

shadow on Japan (Kato, 1995), tracking the world that unfolds in the novels of Haruki Murakami, and explaining the Japanese propensity to that kind of kitsch that has become branded as Japanese cuteness (*kawaii*), in the trajectory from Godzilla to Hello Kitty (2006). Since the Asia-Pacific War, Kato writes, "sorrow no longer unites us. . . It shatters us apart. We are given a predicament by losing the war where unless we find another way, we cannot go forward. . . yet behind this experience lies a kind of worldliness" (Kato, 2006).

[x] For further discussion of liberal education and its relation to progressivism (or child-centredness), see Standish (2007).

[xi] The list of terms given here might be supplemented by "character" and "personality". The problem with the latter is evident in celebrity culture and the cult of personality. The former becomes a problem in the new prominence that has been given to "character education", where emphasis on the term is an attempt to finesse the less explicit and less codifiable realities of moral education. For further discussion of questions of identity and narrative, see Smeyers, Smith, and Standish (2007), especially chapters 4 and 5.

[xii] A better use of language would follow the principle that truth is a property of propositions, and validity one of arguments. But the appeal to "validity" is familiar enough in the relativistic views in question. This incorrect usage exacerbates the problem of achieving clarity in these matters.

[xiii] See, for example, the Internatinoal Center for Transitional Justice: https://www.ictj.org/our-work/regions-and-countries/south-africa. Accessed on 23 February 2019.

[xiv] For a fuller discussion of humility, see Standish (2012, especially Chapter 1). The idea of "little stories" connects with Jean-François Lyotard's *petits récits* and with idea elaborated in Standish (2019), especially the chapters entitled "In Freedom's Grip" and "Humanism, Anti-humanism, the Inhuman".