



Reparative remembering for just futures: History education, multiple perspectives and responsibility

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ABSTRACT

The growing literature around reparative futures in education agrees on the importance of multiple and inclusive narratives for learning about the past. Indeed, it is recognised that multiplicity has to be part of a reparative account of history given the harms caused by single, exclusionary and hegemonic historical narratives. However, there is limited literature, pedagogical guidance or accounts of how multiple perspectives approaches apprehend competing narratives of the past specifically on questions of responsibility. Drawing on experiences in Cambodia and the UK – where violent and colonial pasts (and presents) are poorly apprehended in the formal school system – this paper reflects on the place and absence of histories of responsibility within history education. We do so in order to explore the potential role such histories can play in securing more just and inclusive presents and futures. We explore the relevance of multiple perspectives pedagogies for futures research and ask questions around how multiple perspectives can interact, including whether they are treated equally, decontextualised, relativised, or can be weighted ethically towards narratives that are seen to be more ‘true’ or more in service of reparative goals. We identify limitations in multiple perspectives approaches around questions of ‘balance’ and representation before reflecting on lessons from theorists engaged in postcolonial and decolonial thinking to parse the ethical and political opportunities afforded through concepts that redefine responsibility around *implication*, *shared future responsibility*, and *mutual interdependence*.

1. Introduction

Shortly after the release of Peru’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission report in 2003, members of the Peruvian armed forces began sharing their own accounts of the armed conflict in the 1980s and 1990s between state forces and armed groups, principally Sendero Luminoso. The truth commission final report found that approximately 69,000 people were killed during this period, the majority of whom were rural, Indigenous people. Responsibility for these deaths was attributed to armed groups (Sendero Luminoso – 54%, Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru - 1.5%) and to state forces (37%), including the military, police and state-sponsored security forces. The truth commission outlined the responsibility of each government in power during the period and particularly of the government of Alberto Fujimori, which it argued systemically violated human rights of rural and Indigenous peoples and enabled a

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culture of indifference and racism amongst urban-dwelling, middle-class and non-Indigenous Peruvians (CVR, 2003). The truth commission included a Lieutenant General from the air force amongst its commissioners, who, in signing its final report indicated that he did so with reservations. He insisted that his dissenting letter also be included with the final report. This letter argued that the armed forces were doing their constitutional duty in during the years of violence and were risking their own lives in doing so. He objected to the CVR's recommendations that members of the armed forces be prosecuted for gross violations of human rights and justified their actions in the defence against terrorism. Shortly after, the Lieutenant and other members of the armed forces published a report contesting the CVR's conclusions about military violence (Heilman, 2018). Books were published in 2006 and 2010, respectively contesting the "CVR's falsehoods" and sharing "the official memories of the armed forces" (Heilman, 2018; Villasante, 2022).

Paulson followed the ways in which the CVR report and its conclusions about the causes and consequences of the armed conflict in Peru entered the education system (see Paulson 2017). In the same way as the CVR report's findings about state responsibility were resisted by powerful actors, including in the armed forces and in wider society, the inclusion of its findings in education materials and classroom discussions was controversial. In discussions with fellow researchers and educators at a high point in this controversy, Paulson wondered about introducing multiple perspectives into teaching about armed conflict in Peru. Materials up until that point had relied almost exclusively on the CVR as their source material, opening them up to the politicisation and denialism that swirled around the CVR. Michelle Bellino asked which perspectives might be introduced, pointing to the existence of the now multiple accounts produced by the armed forces. Ought these be included in textbooks and classrooms alongside the CVR's final report and the testimonies of victims of violence that it draws upon? What kinds of sense should learners be encouraged to draw from these various accounts of the period? Should teachers treat each version as equally valid and true or should learners be encouraged to judge their veracity and rigour, to unpick their positionings and motivations, or to arrive at a moral or ethical conclusion?

These questions were again raised when in June 2021 in the UK, Pearson withdrew its two textbooks on conflict in the Middle East for the second time in two years. Pearson is the only textbook publisher and exam board (via EdExcel) in the UK that still offers curriculum content and a GCSE option on the region,¹ so the withdrawal of the textbooks (again) seriously limits further opportunities for young people in the UK to learn about the Middle East at school. The textbooks were first withdrawn in 2019 after complaints that their portrayal of conflict in Israel and Palestine was biased towards Palestine. In 2021, the revised version was again pulled, after complaints of bias towards Israel (Lightfoot, 2021). Several analyses of the content of both versions have been commissioned, including by Pearson and by complainants, who in 2019 included the Board of Deputies of British Jews, UK Lawyers for Israel and the Zionist Federation, and in 2021, the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine. The 2019 review that Pearson commissioned, conducted by the education organisation Parallel Histories, recommended some changes to the books, but in its overall analysis did not find that the books showed any overall bias (ibid.). The other reviews, commissioned by complainants did find bias, arguing in each case that images and word choices, depictions of harm and violence, explanations for violence, and acknowledgement of efforts towards peace were uneven, one-sided or unbalanced.

Even when the Pearson textbooks were available only a small majority of GCSE history students in the UK studied the Israel-Palestine conflict (1100 students at 27 out of 3458 schools in 2021). History educators have supported Pearson's willingness to continue to publish and work on the textbooks, arguing that it is important for young people to learn about this long running conflict given its implications in the present. Echoing many of the recent arguments for a "multiperspectivity" approach in history and peace education, Parallel Histories argue that the textbook "opens students minds to see different perspectives, and also ensures they critically engage with evidence" (as quoted in Lightfoot, 2021). In their justifications for the need for this teaching, educators and Pearson aspire towards a history of the Israel-Palestine conflict that avoids the bias that both sets of complaints have argued exists in the textbooks and aspired to "get that balance right" through the co-presentation of two narratives (Pearson representative as quoted in Lightfoot, 2021). But, is balance an appropriate aspiration for learning about a conflict where imbalances in power, harm and losses are so profound?

"Getting the balance right" implies a series of social and political promises to the future: that by appropriately and fairly teaching and remembering violent pasts, we can enable more just and civil futures. Indeed, the inauguration of more peaceful and harmonious futures through history education is a principle at the heart of work across practice in peacebuilding, transitional, historical, and reparative justice. Yet the relationship between violent pasts, often violent presents, and better futures is more complex than these (more linear and teleological) promises seem able to grasp. Ongoing work in futures research promises important avenues for thinking about these issues. While core strands at play within future studies remain focused on untangling the technical, administrative, complex or risk focused attempts to *locate* the future (Fergnani, 2019), especially through heightened figurations of disaster and catastrophe (Oomen et al., 2022), recent futures research has developed less as a 'predictive' field and is now more concerned with mapping what alternative and preferred futures might look like (Dator, 2018). This has especially featured an insistence that the future might be multiple, complex, and ethically unresolved (Osberg, 2010). Questions of repair and reparation, including through education, have figured in these debates in important ways (see Sriprakash, 2022). This article engages with the complex questions raised by engaging multiple perspectives in history education. It does so by exploring the roles of history education about past violence (always alive in the present and with implications for the future (Sandford, 2019; Mitchell & Chaudhury, 2022) in imagining and contributing towards reparative futures. Reparative futures recognise and seek to repair past injustices, processes that often imply both imbalance (in power, harm and legacies) and responsibility (for past wrongs and for righting them in the present and for futures). We begin by

¹ Until 2005 EdExcel was an examination body managed by a charitable foundation. It was then taken over by Pearson and is now the only privately owned exam body in the UK. A General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is the most common qualification awarded to 16 year olds in the UK.

outlining the centrality and scaffolds of multiple perspectives in peace and history education, while identifying an affinity in the way futures research and multiple perspectives pedagogies are apprehended and understood. We then reflect on examples from the Authors' involvement in two contexts that are not often put into dialogue: we consider the legacies of Khmer Rouge crimes in Cambodia, histories of enslavement and colonialism in the UK, and the relation between these violent pasts and (colonial) presents in order to open a wider set of questions about how conceptions of responsibility might figure within our appeals to the future. In the penultimate section, we bring two concepts that have emerged from engagements with colonial pasts and presents into dialogue, drawing on Rothberg's work on "implicated subjects" (2019) and Shotwell's cautionary discussion of "purity" within appeals to "forward looking responsibility" (2016), to parse ways forward. We conclude by encouraging multiple perspectives approaches to make use of these more agile conceptions of responsibility in reparative and futures facing history education.

2. Reparative remembering: history education and multiple perspectives

Peace education, history education and educating for futures have largely operated as separate fields of research and practice. However, all three are required in any idea of reparative futures since these must actively seek to acknowledge and repair past injustices and open possibilities for futures that build justice and sustainable peace. All three areas of research and practice are beginning to cohere around the conviction that narratives about the past, the ways that they are delivered, and what future generations are encouraged to make of and do with them matter for any future imaginings of peace or justice. In peace education, critical scholars and educators have argued against an ahistorical, decontextualised and universalised approach to teaching and learning about peace, insisting that peace education explore and seek to explain the causes of violence and injustice in ways particular to and appropriate for the locales in which it operates (e.g. Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011). Indeed, Zembylas call for peace education to ".move away from the dominant categories of Eurocentric thought and engage explicitly with the ways in which pedagogies of peace education are implicated in modernity and coloniality" (Zembylas 2018: 1). There is considerable debate in the field of history education about the desired purposes and outcomes of learning history (e.g. Levstik & Barton, 2008), including whether it is appropriate for history education to provide ethical or moral lessons (e.g. Peterson, 2011; Edling et al., 2020). However, the defining transitional justice injunction of 'never again' – that to remember and *learn* will inoculate the future – increasingly animates history education discussions and rationales for teaching and learning about the past (e.g. Keynes et al., 2021; Paulson 2015). Here the argument is that the ways in which historical narratives are conveyed should enable an appreciation of the causes and consequences of past violence and injustice, such that learners in the present will be more able to recognise similar patterns and potentials in their own societies and therefore prevent the recurrence of mass atrocity into the future. In futures, the idea of the 'thick present,' which contains and embeds past, present and future injustices in how pasts are remembered, subjectivities lived and future possibilities glimpsed (Sandford, 2019) opens questions about how historical narratives can be broached such that they do not continue to cast inequity and injustice as future inevitabilities (Nordstrom, 2004). All three areas, therefore, increasingly share the question around how to teach history generally and histories of violence particularly in order to support reparative futures.

The traditional approach to history education reproduces colonial scaffolds in the way it delivers a single, linear narrative focused on the nation, in order that students may apprehend this nation as natural and feel part of it (Carretero, 2011). This approach has many problems and limitations, including potential contributions towards social division, discrimination and violent conflict. These single and linear historical narratives are necessarily exclusionary, constructing the nation and the in-group in contrast to an 'other', beyond and often within its borders. Singular historical narratives can be actively discriminatory and inflammatory, including by dehumanising or fomenting discrimination towards particular groups (Bentrovato et al., 2016; Paulson, 2015). The silences, omissions and elisions present in these dominant and singular historical narratives can also perpetrate epistemic violence and contribute to discrimination by denying and omitting the historical realities of particular groups and by eliding the ways in which historical injustice has advantaged other groups including into the present (Mills, 2007). Despite these considerable and well documented limitations, the trend in societies emerging from periods of armed conflict and/or mass atrocity in the last three decades has been to adopt a version of this traditional, single narrative approach to history education (Lerch, 2016; Paulson, 2015; Bentrovato, 2017). Revisions to history education textbooks and curricula often seek to arrive at a 'consensus version' (Bentrovato, 2017) that can offer a 'usable past' (Werstch, 2002), which it is hoped might contribute to mending societal divisions by emphasizing past commonalities and a shared project towards the future. History education researchers, however, argue that this approach "contravenes current historiographical and didactic trends" and reproduces the risks and exclusions inherent in any hegemonic narrative" (Bentrovato, 2017, p. 49).

The historiographical and didactic trends contravened by "usable past" approaches are those that argue for a disciplinary, enquiry-based approach to history education, which privileges "multiple perspectives" to make sense of the past. The argument proceeds that students should expect and accept ambiguities, appreciate the past as messy (Levy, 2014), and should develop tools and critical skills by which to interpret this messiness, ambiguity and multiplicity (Seixas, 1999; McCully, 2012). Multiperspectivity approaches should impart an understanding of the constructed nature of historical knowledge (Bain, 2009). In practice, this approach often involves working with source-based materials that present different experiences of the past in question and therefore impart different perspectives, which students are tasked with evaluating (Seixas, 1999). Multiperspectivity as an alternative to the single historical narrative has peacebuilding promise, seen as the "most effective way for history education to contribute to postconflict understanding" (McCully, 2012). The approach is argued to open possibilities for dialogue, empathy and mutual-acknowledgement and to model and align with democratic practice and methods (Davies, 2003; Novelli et al., 2017).

The commitment to multiple perspectivity in history education is also developed in scholarship around reparative futures in education. The idea of 'reparative remembering' (Sripakash et al., 2020) privileges the recovery of historical narratives and perspectives that have been systematically silenced, elided, denied and/or disregarded in dominant historiographies and in history education. In a

process of “‘revindicating’ the lifeways of the oppressed” via engagements with multiple narratives and multiple ways of accessing them Sripakash et al. (2020) suggest that through: “the practices of oral history, the recording of life histories, the writing of autobiographies, public testimonies, performances of song and dance, and visual sources of all kinds”), reparative remembering opens a wider range of possible histories and renewed possible futures. Indeed, in this sense, multiperspectivity is a pedagogical technique of “futuring” because it insists on viewing “...the future in terms of the imaginative work and practices that negotiate meanings and legitimacy, embed knowledge, engage publics and create relations of trust” (Oomen et al., 2022: 254).

Multiple perspectives (as a pedagogical approach) and future studies share an assumption that we will struggle to locate or ‘resolve’ a single, bounded or defined future. They further share the concern that to do so might itself be harmful. Indeed, futures researchers have cautioned that locating the future as a technical object that can be programmed or instrumentalized in education practice in order to produce a specific sequence of outcomes and benefits poses risks (Craft et al., 2013). While futures figure within everyday life in fluid ways, education as a field tends to apprehend futures with an intent to control them (Mandich, 2020). As Slaughter notes, a “decontextualized” of future facing education will tend toward stereotypes and can actually attenuate the possibilities of real change (2008). When multiple perspectives are mobilised in education for the future, there are risks that some interests and perspectives are served over others, especially through narratives of “burden” or “obligation” that pit groups against each other (Priyadharshini, 2020). These assumptions offer lessons for prevailing approaches in transitional justice, international criminal law, and some mobilisations of peace education. These tend to face ‘the future’ as a linear trajectory whose outcome their processes can effect, for example through the common injunctions of “never again”, deterring violence, dignifying victims, building capacity, etc. a sustainable peace can and will be reached and sustained. These approaches also simultaneously rely on strong messages against violence and about the importance of understanding its causes in order to prevent it in future (e.g. Bellino et al., 2017). However, this strong moral messaging against violence and its causes, often obscures direct discussion of responsibility for violence. For example, decolonial peace educators have argued that the emphasis on ‘structural violence’ and inequality in peace education and transitional justice can serve to ‘distance’ the past and obscure continuities with the collective, systemic and ongoing relations within which violence can take place (Hajir and Kester, 2020).

This point is important because it raises the question of how issues of responsibility figure within multiple narratives about the past and the questions of alternate “multiple” futures. As our initial vignette of Pearson’s textbook writing highlights, the promise of “balance” contains a risk of equivocation, de-contextualisation, and the obfuscation of past and present power asymmetries around ongoing harms and colonial continuities. Hearing or encountering both sides in the classroom in a balanced and unbiased way appears to be the fallback answer when multiperspectivity is challenged. Here we ask whether such a conception of balance is an adequate response or indeed always an appropriate goal for history education for reparative futures: if ‘balance’ is understood superficially as a form of representation, or as a form of accounting through a moral ‘balance-sheet’, it is freighted with risks of false balance and equivocation. Indeed, such approaches actually conflict with the promise of “usable pasts” approaches that insist on balance as to constitute a form of analysis that deepens historical knowledge i.e. diverse sources are balanced and weighed in order to complicate our understanding of the past. Important questions for reparative futures therefore remain outstanding. If reparative futures make a moral and ethical demand for the recovery of silenced narratives, then, how might these then be juxtaposed with more dominant narratives? In imagining futures of repair, how do the present and past connections that students encountering multiple historical narratives will have to these histories enter into classrooms and how might teachers treat them sensitively? Education for reparative futures potentially holds a need for *both* clear moral lessons and messages about the past – including on issues and questions of responsibility – that can, paradoxically, avoid “singularity” and yet furnish space to see and *think with* alternate, multiple narratives and emphases around stories of harm.

3. Singular narratives, responsibility, and the social production of forgetting in Cambodia and the UK

We now turn to consider examples of history education around past harms from two contexts that tend not to be put into dialogue: Cambodia and the UK. We do so to think through the opportunities and limits of multiple perspectives approaches for redressing past violence and repairing unjust futures, especially as these might respond to and locate issues of responsibility. Both contexts respectively include history education that covers the experiences of the Khmer Rouge “Democratic Kampuchea” regime and the role of the UK as a colonial power and in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In each case, this history education can be read as reproducing monological narratives about past harms. Both contexts tend to reproduce “prelapsarian” narratives about harm within the public school system, pivoting on historical accounts that locate harms as an aberration within otherwise linear stories of progress to the promise of benign and peaceful futures; in other words, each tends to narrate harm through a specific sequence: it was ‘bad’ (in some conditional ways) and now it is and *will be* ‘good’. Each context further suffers (and arguably effects) an absence of criticality around issues of responsibility. And each obfuscates and subsumes any sense of continuity with ongoing structural harms, inequality, and division.

The legacy of the Khmer Rouge “Democratic Kampuchea” regime (1975–1979) remains politically sensitive in Cambodia, with the question of responsibility positioned in complicated ways. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, 1.7 million Cambodians died of hunger, disease or were executed. Since then, the history of the Khmer Rouge has occupied a changing place within Cambodia’s national school curriculum since. Through the 1980 s and 1990 s, while a civil war against the remaining groups of the Khmer Rouge continued, the curriculum (including key history textbooks) played a subservient role in the service of wider political and peacebuilding objectives. These depicted the Cambodian nation as a victim of the regime, cast the successor People’s Republic of Kampuchea government as “saviours” of the Cambodian people, while oscillating between periods demonizing the Khmer Rouge leadership and blanket avoidance of the topic. Key history textbooks throughout this period did not include an exploration of the responsibility of the large numbers of lower-level Khmer Rouge members, who were deemed a critical constituency in ongoing reconciliation efforts, despite their roles as

potential perpetrators of bystanders of violence (Keo, 2016). During this period of civil war, human rights violations continued, while the political conditions and patronage networks that underpin the current landscape of landgrabs and targeted harassment of government critics were set. The curriculum was (and remains) a key plank in the reproduction of a monological account of the Khmer Rouge history that works to legitimate and serve the interests of the ruling Cambodian People's Party.

Since the end of Cambodia's civil war in 1999, which witnessed the initiation of a wider raft of transitional justice efforts, the situation has complicated. In 2006, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia were established to prosecute "senior leaders" and those deemed "most responsible" for crimes perpetrated under the Democratic Kampuchea regime – an intervention justified with one eye on the future, under the slogan "moving forward through justice". The ECCC prosecutions – which concluded work in 2022 after several significant verdicts of crimes against humanity and genocide – can be read, on the one hand, to be continuous with previous monological construction of responsibility, focusing exclusively on the guilt of the Khmer Rouge leadership while reproducing a de facto amnesty for lower-level Khmer Rouge.

On the one hand, one effect of the ECCC has been a further obfuscation of more complex issues of bystandership and perpetration, which has left significant outstanding questions about repair and reconciliation within Cambodian society. On the other hand, the establishment of the ECCC catalysed a significant increase in efforts to develop Khmer Rouge history education. These efforts have been notably characterised by two tendencies. Firstly, they have fleshed out gaps in the above existing "top down" narrative of the Khmer Rouge years through an emphasis on the common victimhood of lower-level Khmer Rouge i.e. that lower level perpetrators were "complex" victims of the regime. Secondly, they tended to prioritise a need for younger Cambodians to learn about their history as a means of acknowledging and dignifying the experiences of the older generation. The work of the ECCC created space around these aims – through material resources as a priority for donor funding and as a broader site of public interest and dialogue – for an ecosystem of civil society initiatives focused on education within and beyond the classroom. Such initiatives have included approaches that adopt multiple perspectives principles. For example, the Bophana AudioVisual Center has led efforts to develop tools for learners, including a multi-media mobile phone app, that could map competing interpretations of key historical controversies around the history of Cambodia's genocide, including from the perspectives of Khmer Rouge perpetrators. Yet within the formal school curriculum, this space was still highly constrained. In the early years of the ECCC, the Documentation Center of Cambodia led efforts to develop a new, standardized national history text on the Khmer Rouge; *A History of Democratic Kampuchea* was published in 2007 (Dy, 2007). The new textbook provided a vital resource for teachers in Cambodia but still tended to accede to the singular narrative preferred by the Cambodian state: a fairly minimalist and evidential focus exclusively on the guilt of the Khmer Rouge leadership, without contextual scrutiny of what happened in Cambodia before and after (i.e. the causes, legacies, and indeed beneficiaries of genocide).

Such an account mirrored the narrowly juridical frames of responsibility – of clear victims and perpetrators – at work at the ECCC, while periodizing and isolating violence as endemic to one distinct period in Cambodia's history (Manning, 2017). In this sense, we must ask what presents and futures the existing curricula actually services. As history education in Cambodia locates violence episodically, or through an "event based model of trauma" there is a failure to connect the past with "ongoing, everyday forms of traumatizing violence" (Rothberg, 2008: 226). In other words, existing history education in Cambodia actually helps to obfuscate the ongoing continuities with current inequalities, patterns of dispossession, and violence that notably obey a colonial logic in their patterns of expropriation and extraction (Springer, 2011).

Identifying points of rupture and continuity with violent histories becomes even more difficult within contexts of historical rather than transitional (in)justice because structural and systemic violence is often reproduced immanently within and across institutions that are ostensibly meant to remedy those harms. In *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2010), Paul Gilroy cautions of the marginalisation of colonial histories within western European societies, as minimising and revisionist accounts of colonialism and empire have been popularised in the reassurance of national consciences. For Gilroy, this feeds the "illusion that Britain has been or can be disconnected from its imperial past" (2010: 4). Indeed, a preoccupation with relitigating "guilty" histories of violence and oppression within a wider denial of both past and present harms against racialised groupings is a marker of social and political dysfunction. Rereading Freud, Gilroy employs the distinction of an individual's "melancholia" and "mourning" to characterise the social relationship between (white) British public consciousness and the imperial past. While "mourning", for Freud, marks a healthy response and relationship to loss, for Gilroy, Britain continues to experience a "melancholic" and social-pathological relationship to empire that is generative of and sustains racism in the present. In other words, ideas of nationhood and belonging in Britain have revolved around a conceit of innocence, delusions of grandeur, and an inability to substantively engage with questions of responsibility.

Gilroy has one eye on the future in his calls for an "agnotology" for the study of "productive ignorance" (2006). That is: how are denialism and wilful amnesia in regard to historical responsibility reproduced? For Shotwell, the reproduction of colonial continuity – and the possibility of rewiring a decolonial politics of shared responsibility – entail the recognition that "...practices of colonialism are written into the infrastructure of the states founded through expropriation, and in this sense they ascend from the past as the infrastructure of the present. Patterns of social relations, as structure not event, then predict the practices of the future." (2016: 36). Education is one of the crucibles in which ideas of race, nation and belonging are concretised and contested. 'Race' and racism shapes and structures educational outcomes; and the classroom is a site of racism and social control, with commentators highlighting the racialised effects of, for example, the Prevent programme,² or through the surveillance of students' migration status (Bain 2018; Sriprakash 2022). The discursive terrain of history education i.e. the curriculum and textbooks, and its relation to memory and history, is a key site

² The UK government's "Prevent" programme was introduced in 2007 as a means to apprehend people deemed vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism, particularly in schools. Although presented as a 'race'-blind intervention, Prevent "hypervisibilised" specific young Muslim groups as security 'risks', racialising them further as beyond and incorrigible to 'mainstream' (white) British public life (see Ali, 2020).

within this political imagination and, while politically changing and contested, the UK curriculum has broadly minimised British responsibility for colonialism, trans-Atlantic slavery, and their ongoing role in reproducing racialised inequalities. In recent decades, notwithstanding momentary consideration of colonial histories within the wider ‘cosmopolitanism’ of the early 1997 New Labour government’s programmatic multiculturalism – a moment fleetingly anchored with reference to the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence and the MacPherson report (1999)³ – the UK has otherwise reproduced an education system which, “...despite attempts at multicultural and anti-racism education, left untouched a ‘whitewashing’ of the past and the post imperial values of empire” (Tomlinson, 2019: 7). Education remains a site that connects and mediates past and present racialized harms that have significant colonial continuities.

Today, the limited presentation of colonial histories within the UK history curriculum has the effect of decontextualizing and isolating issues of responsibility.⁴ Colonialism and slavery are visible as discrete discontinuities in the national curriculum and are treated as episodic events, punctuated within (rather than constitutive of) a national history. An episodic focus on, for example, the abolition of slavery has the effect of a form of revisionism. It provides “...a way of constructing England’s role” as expressing a “humanitarianism that was to be remembered, not the country’s investment in the slave trade and slavery” (Hall, 2018: 14). Across Key Stage 3 (age 11–14) schools have the option to include coverage of Britain as the first industrialised country, the growth of the British empire, and the transatlantic slave trade, but these are presented as separate isolated elements, limiting the possibility to see them as mutually implicating. This history is presented as a specifically *national* story: as it obscures the violence of empire, and attendant questions of responsibility, it reproduces and naturalises wider racialized constituencies of belonging, origin, and attendant exclusions of racialized “internal others” as less or non-British (Virdee & McGeever, 2018). Most importantly, it is unclear how such a decontextualized and minimalist account of these harms could inform and populate multiple perspectives, especially given the absence of moral messages about harm and responsibility – or their continuities with the present.

Considering these two contexts, we might observe contradictory effects and implications for the future. In both contexts, we see conditional or partial forms of acknowledgement informing educational curricula. Remembering through education is promoted through superficially reparative goals: for reconciliation and deterrence, multi-cultural values, or the crafting of the values of good citizenship. Yet the effects of limited and obfuscated responsibility within national narratives of ‘progress’ – and the decontextualization of past harms from present and future needs, divisions and inequities – serves to reproduce regimes of both (colonial) amnesia toward the past and denial of the colonialities of the present. It is not obvious whether multiple perspectives approaches that face the future can challenge – or are even commensurable – to these regimes of forgetting.

4. The limits of ‘multiple perspectives’

The issues of repair and responsibility is complicated within and between two tendencies. Firstly, monological accounts, in limiting or suppressing issues of responsibility, and in effecting and socially producing forgetting, can themselves invite revisionism. The gaps in narrative and ongoing forms of division can gestate future harms and act as alibis for the reproduction of violent systems. Yet multiperspectivity, too, can produce unintended effects when deployed without an understanding of responsibility that can at least ‘couch’ and contextualise the co-presentation of divergent narratives about past harm. Manning has first-hand experience of the ambivalent and often contradictory effects that can be created within such spaces. Leading a participatory filmmaking project with pre-service teachers in Cambodia that aimed to support intergenerational dialogue and reconciliation through short documentary interviews with lower-level Khmer Rouge – an intervention specifically justified in the name of multi-perspectives and an exploration of their experiences of conflict and harm that followed the genocide – Manning found that reparative genocide education specifically addressed to “complex” lower-level perpetrator histories *could* produce both desired and problematic effects (Cooke et al., 2023). The pre-service teachers involved rationalised their involvement in the project on the basis of establishing historical truth, learning to prevent and deter future atrocities, and that the project would help them incorporate Khmer Rouge history within their own teaching and thereby support reconciliation; indeed, they further reported increased empathy with and sympathy for the lower-level Khmer Rouge “complex victims” that they interviewed. In this sense, they understood their involvement in the project as episodic but also as a form of “mobility” that allowed a “cognitive and symbolic response to difficulties seen in the local context and acts as a sort of bridge towards the future.” (Cuzzocrea & Mandich, 2016: 563). Yet post-programme surveys highlighted the risks arising at such a juncture: increased empathy seemed to extend to sympathy for historical accounts that risked revisionism and celebrated Khmer Rouge leaders as national “patriots” who fought a Vietnamese ‘occupation’. Such accounts would likely offend victim constituencies in other parts of Cambodia but are only salient because of a wider politics of national and racialised identification that has a tendency to exclude experiences deemed ‘foreign’ and non-Khmer. There is a chasm between narrow, legal attributions of blame to a handful of individuals – at play within Cambodia’s main transitional justice process at the ECCC and within the national history curriculum – and wider questions of both complex bystandership and more collective and shared ethical obligations to the past and future. Multiple perspectives, in this instance, seems to fall victim to two questions within this chasm: Whose perspective must be repaired? And on the

³ Stephen Lawrence, a black British teenager, was murdered in a racially motivated attack in London on 22nd April 1993. In light of significant police failings around the investigation of Lawrence’s death, a public inquiry was commissioned, leading to the publication of the MacPherson report and the finding that the London Metropolitan Police were “institutionally racist” (1999).

⁴ See Department for Education “Statutory Guidance: National Curriculum in England, History Programmes of Study” <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study> (Last accessed 14th February 2023)

basis of whose past?

These questions are critically poised in the UK classroom too. As multiple perspectives approaches insist on "...the importance of adopting an inclusive, symmetrical, and democratic collaborative approach... which ensures a sense of empowerment and ownership for the various parties and sides involved" (Bentrovato, 2017: 55), significant questions about ongoing 'asymmetries' of power, voice, and influence seem outstanding. In recent years, while teaching on UK undergraduate units that deal with issues of 'race', racism, and rights, we have encountered concerns and unease from some white British students at the absence of a less critical and more accommodating account of the UK's colonial histories and racially divided presents. In some cases, students have explicitly asked to hear 'both sides' when learning about the realities of racism in the UK, repeating the demands for a 'balanced' hearing of multiple perspectives. In other words, there exist appetites for 'multiple perspectives' but these can express – or, if superficially mobilised, risk licensing – forms of false balance, self-exculpation and denialism. This raises particularly thorny questions about the relationship between the past and its relationship and continuities to forms of identity in the present and into the future. Writing on the challenges of repair in North America, Shotwell provides a helpful elaboration of this challenge:

"This tells us something useful about how people, even when they have not reflected on the problem very deeply, view whiteness and settler colonialism—these students see one part of the historical role of white people with accuracy, and it is a shameful role, one that terrifies them to imagine being reversed. Their response also redeploys a classificatory rigidity, transposing the activities of settler colonialism into a settled identity that cannot be transformed but only rejected. (2016: 42)

Shotwell is wary of treating the moral lessons of historical narratives as neatly or inescapably positioned within particular identity positions; indeed, Shotwell's call is a refusal of any "purity" that might follow from clean continuities of victim and perpetrator. Shotwell stresses that we must "...hold in mind that the stakes of memory and forgetting are not equal; while people, and white settlers in particular, benefit from forgetting the past that organizes the racist present," (2016: 37) but that "...the very complex entanglement of practices and habits of ignorance, repression, and active disavowal that constitute an active settler process of not telling, not seeing, and not understanding the truth of the matter, which is a truth of being shaped as the legacy of the harms of the past." (2016:38).

What role *can* future facing multiple perspectives history play in these contexts? The Bristol based organisation CARGO have been exploring creative ways to overcome barriers that obstruct teaching of inclusive histories that can begin to account for colonialism, slavery and racism. CARGO embarks from the recognition that, while the UK curriculum includes limited and episodic 'content' of colonial and racialised histories of violence, its formulation reproduces significant representational absences around Black and minority experiences, especially through stories of success, resistance or accomplishment of Africans and the African diaspora. In other words, CARGO sees the absence of narratives that can dignify African experiences of the past as a fundamental obstacle to providing inclusive futures. For CARGO, such "epistemic inequalities" that arise from the absence of stories of the lives and accomplishments of African people are exacerbated by the lack of grounding, expertise, or confidence among teachers around the delivery of education on racialised histories. CARGO's aims are incremental and pragmatic. They see opportunities to use the (episodic) points of colonial history that exist within the national curriculum as entry points and a platform to provide materials and additional support for teachers in the UK. CARGO has begun to develop interactive lesson plans that, for example, utilise a combination of historical narrative, biography, imagery, and poetry to shed light on alternative histories of African experiences. The CARGO resources focus on individuals, beginning with Imothen and working through to contemporary figures, they celebrate lives of resistance, leadership and contribution, offering a form of redress to the singular narratives of African victimhood that CARGO's founders encountered in their own education. The emphasis here, as a form of multiple perspective, is a basic recognition of how Black and African experiences were agentic, not confined to categories of victimhood (and perpetration), and full of history. Such interventions begin to show how the histories at work in the curriculum might be better contextualised.

Can we read CARGO's work as a form of multiple perspectivity? If so, how do questions of responsibility figure within its delivery? On the one hand, as CARGO suggest, the inclusion of such exercises does not come at the expense of more conventional (dominant) white colonial histories. Rather, they are positioned to augment rather than invalidate the dominant, existing national narrative expressed in the curriculum. On the other hand, CARGO's efforts ensure that past responsibility is at a minimum implicitly presented within an otherwise white British historical narrative. The presence of alternate histories that emphasise Black and African agency and dignity can, in this sense, be read as a challenge to their absence in the curriculum otherwise. CARGO's work gestures at how multiple perspectives might begin to avoid equivocation and false balance by creatively working to present and dignify narratives and experiences in ways that move beyond a simple co-presentation of 'two sides'. In this sense, CARGO's work begins to demonstrate how much more is needed: repairing the future, with a conception of responsibility, must work beyond representation and visibility. Moreover, responsibility obliges a sense of how we are all mutually implicated in histories of harm and injustice.

5. Rethinking responsibility for the future: "Implicated subjects" and "forward-looking" responsibility

In this penultimate section, we parse two strands of ethical and conceptual thinking around issues of responsibility that have arisen in debates on coloniality that might better focus the shape and direction of approaches employing multiple perspectives in history education. We have seen, from our discussion of both the need for – and limits of – multiple perspectives approaches in Cambodia and the UK, that there are outstanding questions around the imagined outcomes of engaging with multiplicity (specifically, balance and an accommodation of responsibility) and the ways in which the present day subjectivities of teachers and students, connected as they are to past injustices, might be sensitively acknowledged without essentialising individuals and their relationships to responsibility and victimhood in and for the past.

In *The Implicated Subject*, Rothberg invites a reconsideration of how we might conceive and act on questions of political

responsibility for historical and contemporary violence and harm. Writing from his own position as a descendent of Holocaust survivors, living in the US and reflecting on his connections to and obligations towards ongoing violence towards Palestinians, Rothberg develops the idea of implication to offer a route to broaden questions of responsibility. For Rothberg, implication "...both draws attention to responsibilities for violence and injustice greater than most of us want to embrace and shifts questions of accountability from a discourse of guilt to a less legally and emotionally charged terrain of historical and political responsibility" (2019: 20). Rothberg insists on a form of temporal flexibility that allows the concept of implication to face the past, present and, indeed, the future. Rothberg insists that we must equip ourselves with the potential to *see* the obligations of political responsibility extend to "...the implication of people in events that are temporally and/or spatially distant and in which they have not played or do not play a direct role as perpetrators or victims" (pg. 61). The concept envelopes and is sensitive to the ways that "...a structural position in relation to groups, classes, and modes of production... makes some people the beneficiaries of histories "not their own" and disadvantages others regardless of their genealogical connection to the past" (pg. 80). In the context of ongoing, immediate violence and harm, Rothberg is uncertain "...that a discourse of victimization is the most historically accurate or politically efficacious; the discourse of victimization tends to re-objectify contemporary subjects and strip them of agency in the present." (pg. 62). In other words, Rothberg invites us to think about political responsibility as something that is collectively shared – even as he is sensitive to its asymmetries and uneven distribution (pg. 202).

In *Against Purity* (2016), Alexis Shotwell, similarly mines the challenges of repairing futures that are shaped and structured by past and present harms, especially in regard to contexts where colonial continuities are reproduced. Like Rothberg, Shotwell refuses narrow, juridical, or binary conceptions of responsibility, suggesting that such frames offer the "...delineation of theoretical purity, purity of classification, [that] is always imbricated with the forever-failing attempt to delineate material purity—of race, ability, sexuality, or, increasingly, illness... the world always exceeds our conception of it." (2016: 4). In other words, for Shotwell, the categories that structured past and present harms are unlikely to emancipate the future; for Shotwell, we have to discard any sense that the ethical questions arising from our past and future can be apprehended from positions of "purity". Like Rothberg, Shotwell further invites us toward a broadening of conceptions of responsibility away from neat ties to specific identities (or essentialised identity based perspectives). Shotwell calls "...for a mode of being, an identity politics, which is framed as the grounding of our identities in our politics, instead of taking our politics from our identities... If we take our identities from our politics, we collectively craft identities, ways of being, based in the specific political context we encounter and the political commitments that shape our response to those contexts." (pp. 169–170). In practice, this might mean, for example, ensuring that peace and history education does not refuse the experiences of groups that arise on the basis of identitarian or ethnicized cleavages; rather such work should be deployed to reveal how colonial and violent systems rely on and reproduce the continuation of such divisions (see [Cárdenas, 2023](#) on how peacebuilding as a field can perpetuate such cleavages).

Shotwell grounds her analysis in a recognition of interdependence as the basis for "future responsibility" (2016: 175). Shotwell argues that "interdependence can be understood as constitutive of our nature as well as arising as part of the causes and conditions of our lives" and, in doing so, we can begin to "...craft practices of responsibility that track how we are differentially situated in relations of coproduction. This final piece opens a way of thinking about the conditions for imagining futures grounded in the interdependent present as a practice of responsibility (pg. 179). Shotwell explicitly envisages means of apprehending more just (but less 'pure') futures that can emerge from a recognition of interdependence. Shotwell reflects on forms of "forward-looking responsibility" that entail taking ownership and responsibility for matters that are not, in an individual, temporal, identitarian, or juridical sense, strictly our own. In doing so, Shotwell asks for a kind of reparative remembering that is a "...relational and situated process through which we collectively determine the significance of the past for the present as a form of forward looking responsibility." (pg. 48). Importantly, neither Shotwell nor Rothberg are satisfied with or calling for balance as the objective or outcome from an engagement with multiple and messy pasts. While their workings towards implication and forward looking responsibility do not imagine a single or simple moral conclusion to an engagement with multiplicity, they are far from relativist. Together they help to clarify the ethical imperative of multiple perspectivity to build collectively the ability to acknowledge implication and imagine responsibility in creative, open and generative ways that can build futures in which past injustices are no longer inevitabilities.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have tried to pin down some of the opportunities and limitations of prevailing multiple perspective approaches for history education as they might be deployed for reparative futures. Multiple perspectives, as a pedagogical approach, is an important area for futures research because it stakes out futures as unresolved and potentially manifold. We have asked how questions of responsibility can and should figure within these practices. In Cambodia and the UK, we have seen how the future can be structured by ongoing forms of forgetting and erasure. These specifically emerge from the delivery of decontextualized, highly limited, or conditional claims about responsibility. We have highlighted how prevailing multiple perspectives approaches offer limited solutions to these problems specifically because of their insistence on forms of 'balance' that further obfuscate ongoing asymmetries of power in the past and present. Multiple perspectives approaches deployed without attention to past responsibility and its complicated, 'impure' implications for the subjectivities of teachers and learners in the present are insufficient for the construction of reparative futures. Instead, multiple perspectives pedagogies might explore not just the identities and identity groups linked to particular historical narratives but also the ways in which violence can be part of the process of identity construction ([Schulz and Sentama, 2020](#)). In doing so, a decolonial approach to multiple perspectives might move beyond the co-presentation of divergent narratives as *past* to instead weigh and work with the continuities and relevance of past harms as they shape the present. Discussions of responsibility might then move beyond juridical guilt or innocence, identitarian conceptions of blame, or limiting discussions of structural violence and

inequality to think about responsibility in relational and distributed ways, exploring ideas of implication with students. Creative resources like those developed by CARGO and the conversations that they generate provide openings to continue to imagine and describe these processes.

Reparative futures *do* require some sense of moral and ethical responsibility for the past (and the present too). Yet, as our discussion of Shotwell and Rothberg's thinking shows, we must be mindful not to reproduce the logics and structures that caused and sustained harms in doing so. Multiple perspectives approaches to history education can and should serve these aims: multiple perspectives and multiple futures are possible through the acceptance of responsibility around shared positions of collective responsibility even as different groups are positioned within these in invariably uneven and unequal ways. Reparative history education can and should heed Shotwell's cautionary reflections on 'purity' and our discussion of future responsibility through a sense of shared implication (rather than blame) offers a potential avenue to do so.

Declaration of Competing Interest

We can declare that the authors hold no conflicts of interest in regard to this article.

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