

## FROM “CIVILIZING FORCE” TO “SOURCE OF BACKWARDNESS”: REPRESENTATIONS OF SPANISH COLONIALISM IN LATIN AMERICA

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**Resumen:** Las representaciones oficiales del colonialismo español mostraron sorprendentes similitudes en América Latina. Un análisis comparativo de los textos de historia (a nivel de la escuela primaria), publicados en el siglo XX en México, Argentina y Perú revela que la conmemoración del colonialismo español fue un eje central en los proyectos oficiales de identidad nacional en estos tres países. Se identifican dos patrones. Durante el siglo XIX las narraciones históricas oficiales representaron el colonialismo español como una "fuerza civilizadora" que impulsó a la nación hacia adelante. Esto cambió a mediados del siglo XX. Desde entonces, los discursos oficiales nacionales representaron al colonialismo español como una "fuente de atraso" crucial para entender el (sub)desarrollo político y socioeconómico contemporáneo. Este artículo demuestra, además, que el alcance de este cambio conmemorativo varió según los casos. Más específicamente, estos patrones de memoria colectiva se inscriben en transformaciones más amplias de representaciones del nacionalismo. En concreto, cambios en las representaciones del colonialismo español vinculados a cambios en el equilibrio de poder político entre distintas fuerzas sociales organizadas, y distintos patrones en el desarrollo de la infraestructura estatal en cada país.

**Palabras clave:** América Latina, nacionalismo, formación del estado, memoria colectiva, colonialismo, identidad nacional, México, Perú, Argentina

**Abstract:** Official representations of Spanish colonialism exhibited striking similarities across the region. A comparative discourse analysis of history textbooks (primary school-level) published in 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexico, Argentina, and Peru reveals that the commemoration of Spanish colonialism was central to official national identity projects in each of the three countries. Two dominant accounts can be identified. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the understanding of Spanish colonialism as a “civilizing force” that propelled the nation forward prevailed in state-sponsored historical narratives. This changed during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. From then onwards, official national discourses portrayed Spanish colonialism as a “source of backwardness” and thus crucial to understand contemporary political and socioeconomic development. Based on an analysis of schoolteachers’ worldviews and their use of textbooks the paper further demonstrates that the extent of this commemorative shift varied across cases. The paper situates these collective memory patterns within broader transformations of nationalism. Specifically, the explanatory argument links changing representations of Spanish colonialism to shifts in the balance of power between state elites and organized social forces, and patterns of state infrastructural development.

**Keywords:** Latin America, nationalism, State building, collective memory, colonialism, national identity, Mexico, Peru, Argentina

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars have devoted major attention to the legacies of colonialism. Focal points have been the long-run implications of colonial rule for a variety of substantive outcomes, including economic growth (Acemoglu et al. 2001; Engerman and Sokoloff 2002; Kohli 2004; Lange et al. 2006; Mahoney 2010), social development (Lange et al. 2006; Mahoney 2010), democracy (Lange 2004; Olsson 2009), and state capacity (Cumings 2005; Go 2007; Lange 2009; La Porta et al. 1999; Mahoney and vom Hau 2005; Kwon 2011). Much, too, has been written on the major causal pathways through which colonialism has left enduring imprints on the postcolonial world (Engerman and Sokoloff 2002; Lange 2009; Mahoney 2010), while major debates have centered on the extent to which colonialism is destiny, and what specific factors have allowed certain countries to break away from the weight of the colonial past (Arrighi 2007; Mann 2003).

The institutionalist perspective that dominates this literature has led to substantial knowledge accumulation. It has allowed authors to distinguish between different colonial projects, and spell out the specific mechanisms through which past institutional arrangements continue to exert influence on contemporary outcomes. Yet, an overt emphasis on institutions also constitutes a potential blind spot. Analysts lack a comparably sophisticated set of theoretical tools to understand the arguably less direct and more diffuse role played by commemorations of colonialism. As a matter of fact, the scholarship on the legacies of colonialism is marked by the relative absence of works on how postcolonial states commemorate colonial rule, and to what extent those official collective memories obtain resonance in society<sup>1</sup>.

This is a significant omission, most importantly because collective memories have a significant bearing on the ‘legitimacy work’ of states. Both

the framing approach in social movement theory (e.g., Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988) and the recent cultural sociology of the state (e.g., Brubaker 1996; Jansen 2007; Loveman 2005; Steinmetz 1999) emphasize the ideational dynamics of public policy making. To win policy battles state authorities employ means of rhetoric and persuasion (Jacobs and Sobieraj 2007). They invoke specific symbols, categories, and stories to infuse policy proposals with emotional appeal, and foster particular sets of policy-supporting beliefs, while delegitimizing the claims of opponents. Seen in this light, official representations of colonialism are part of the legitimacy work of states, for instance by allowing to portray particular policy proposals as either a continuation or break with national interest, or by situating the protagonists and main opponents that appear in policy narratives within a broader historical arch.

This paper contributes to this emerging research agenda through a comparative-historical analysis of official commemorations of colonialism in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru. Spanish America is a particularly suitable starting point for such a study because it simplifies the task of reconstructing collective memories of colonialism and their role in state-sponsored national identity projects. The countries belonging to this regional unit experienced colonial rule by one colonizing nation—Spain—from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and not multiple colonizers at different points in time. Mexico, Argentina, and Peru are chosen because they represent extreme points in Spanish America. Mexico and Peru were centers of Spanish colonialism during the early mercantilist period, while Argentina was a colonial backwater then, whereas Mexico and Argentina were at the center of Spanish colonial activities during the liberal period, while Peru had become a colonial backwater by then (Lange et al. 2006; Mahoney 2010). These three postcolonial Latin American states thus have been characterized by distinct institutional legacies, the upshot of different forms and intensities of Spanish colonialism.

At the same time, the content of official commemorations of the Spanish colonial project exhibited striking similarities across Mexico, Argentina, and Peru. A discourse analysis of history textbooks (primary school-level) from

<sup>1</sup> The new ‘imperial-colonial studies’ (Go 2009) depart from an institutionalist focus and emphasize the role of culture and discourse on colonial state building. Yet, works in this tradition (e.g., Go 2008; Steinmetz 2007) are less concerned with the commemoration of colonialism.

the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards<sup>2</sup> reveals that the commemoration of Spanish colonialism was central to official accounts of national history in each of the three countries. Two dominant accounts can be identified. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the understanding of Spanish colonialism as a "civilizing force" prevailed in state-sponsored historical narratives. This changed during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. From then onwards, official mnemonic discourses portrayed Spanish colonialism as a "source of backwardness" and thus crucial to understand contemporary political and socioeconomic development.

The paper further demonstrates that the extent and the timing of this commemorative shift varied across cases. Based on an analysis of schoolteachers' worldviews and their use of textbooks I show that during the 1930s in Mexico the new representation of Spanish colonialism became fully institutionalized as a regular product of state organizations. During the 1940s in Argentina the official commemoration of the colonial period shifted, but remained contested, even within the state, for example among teachers as the initial point of ideological transmission. Finally, in Peru during same time period the civilizing narrative about Spanish colonial rule managed to persist. It was only during the 1970s that the "source of backwardness" account emerged as a state-sponsored discourse and gained increasing salience.

The remaining parts of the paper proceed accordingly. The next section develops an appraisal of the use of textbooks and teacher testimonies to study official memory discourses, and state-sponsored national projects more generally. The subsequent sections present a comparative analysis of official commemorations of Spanish colonialism in 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexico, Argentina, and Peru, and the extent of their societal transmission. The conclusion points to a state-focused explanation that puts the analytical spotlight on the balance of power between state authorities and organized social forces and patterns of state infrastructural development. The conclusion also identifies some

<sup>2</sup> Schools have long been considered as critical in the production and dissemination of nationalism and state-sponsored memory projects (Weber 1976).

of the broader implications of this study for the analysis of collective memory, but also for the interplay between colonial legacies, commemorations of colonialism, and postcolonial development.

## 2. STUDYING COLLECTIVE MEMORY THROUGH THE LENS OF SCHOOLING<sup>3</sup>

School textbooks are the main source I use to analyze official memory discourses because as written texts that are specifically produced for educational purposes, textbooks do not reveal the "facts" but convey particular visions of social reality. Most of the literature converges in the assessment that states constitute the key actors in textbook production and selection. State agencies employ a variety of strategies to influence textbooks, most importantly by regulating textbook contents and sponsoring textbook competitions. A common practice for education officials is to develop specific curricula guidelines and mandate standard courses. These criteria then serve to adjudicate among competing textbooks submissions, either by directly selecting specific texts or compiling a list of approved titles from which schools make their choices (Apple 1989: 285).

The textbook analysis pursued in this paper starts with the onset of obligatory public schooling in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Mexico, Argentina, and Peru. The endpoint are the educational reforms during the 1980s and 1990s, from which onwards the decentralization of education made textbooks a less reliable source for tracing state-sponsored memory discourses. In each country I reviewed between 50 and 70 textbooks on national history and civic education, collecting at least five publications per decade, and employing three main selection criteria. First, I focused on primary school textbooks because only a small segment of the population attended secondary schools during the period of interest. Second, I selected those textbooks that were published or approved by national educational authorities. Third, among the approved textbooks I used those that were reprinted in several editions, indicating their actual use. In each of the sampled textbooks I

<sup>3</sup> This discussion of my methodology draws heavily on vom Hau (2009; 2013).

explored normative judgments about Spanish colonialism and the precolonial period, and ideas about the main historical agents during epochs. I also traced descriptions of major national heroes and representations of major external enemies.

It is important to recognize, however, that textbooks do not determine classroom activities. Not every statement in these texts is taught and followed literally. Teachers regularly rethink and change textbook contents. While public school teachers often form the largest group of civil servants and constitute the main contact point between state and local citizenry, they are not just implementing official educational policies. The role of teachers is more aptly described as translators that adapt and localize official curricula. As a matter of fact, teachers are often “local intellectuals, recognized as having the authority and responsibility to defend and promote their community” (Wilson 2001: 314). Teachers therefore constitute important mediators in the translation of state-sponsored conceptions of nationhood found in textbooks into everyday understandings of the world. They may contextualize the cognitive framings or counteract specific value messages found in textbooks. Research shows that the reception of textbooks among pupils is heavily filtered by classroom activities and the selections made by teachers (Gvirtz 1996: 157-162). For exploring the negotiation and use of textbooks by teachers I use existing secondary literature on the subject (e.g., Angell 1982; Artieda 1993; Bernetti and Puiggrós 1993; Gvirtz 1996; Portocarrero and Oliart 1989; Rockwell 2007; Vaughan 1997; Wilson 2001) in combination with different kinds of primary sources<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> In Mexico I drew on teacher testimonies already active during the 1920s and 1930s found in the oral history archive *Archivo de la Palabra*. I reviewed 45 interviews with teachers and ultimately used evidence from 13 of them that contained information on the use of textbooks, teacher training, and personal outlooks on national identity and history. In Argentina I combined semi-structured interviews with teachers active during the 1940s and 1950s, and *La Obra* as a periodical written by teachers for teachers. Due to retirement and age I was only able to locate four retired school teachers from the Peronist years. For evidence from *La Obra* I sampled the issues from 1946, 1949, 1952, 1954, and 1955 that were published around the major national holi-

### 3. OFFICIAL COMMEMORATIONS OF COLONIALISM: A TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century—a period often described in terms of “oligarchic domination”—central state power consolidated in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru. School programs, curricula, and teacher training were brought under the direct control of the respective central government, and state authorities installed special textbook approval commissions (Bertoni 2001; Contreras 1996; Vaughan 1982). From a comparative perspective, in all three countries textbooks revealed striking similarities in how they represented Spanish colonialism, and its role in shaping nation identity and development.

#### 3.1. Precolonial “Barbarism” and “Civilizing” Colonialism

Whether in Mexico, Argentina, or Peru, state-approved textbooks portrayed national history as an evolutionary process moving along distinct stages toward greater degrees of “civilization.” Argentinean school texts situated national origins in the colonial period. The historical narrative usually started either with Columbus (e.g., Martínez 1903: 10-13 Pelliza 1892: 7), or with the discovery of the Río de la Plate in 1916 and the foundation of Buenos Aires in 1535 (e.g., Pelliza 1905: 9-18). Authors then proceeded with describing the formation of the Viceroyalty Rio de Plata in the late colonial period during the Bourbon Reforms, an attempt to restructure the administration of the Spanish colonial empire, and depicting Argentina as its “legal inheritor” (Eizaguirre 1895: 64; see also Pelliza 1905: 9-18; Martínez 1903: 10-13; Pelliza 1892: 26-39). Such a focus on Spanish colonialism as a starting point of national history went along with the relative absence of any pre-colonial history.

Mexican and Peruvian textbooks projected the nation backwards into the pre-colonial period and imagined the presence of an entity called Mexico or Peru even before the onset of the Aztec and Inca Empires (Manzano 1908: 5-7; Rodriguez 1900:4, 48, 104). This period of the past appeared as the dark ages of national his-

days. In Peru I conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with teachers already active during the 1970s.

tory. During this “vulgar era” (Lainé 1890: 3) or “primitive epoch” (Fanning 1915: 5) societies situated within the territory of modern Mexico and Peru “maintained themselves with hunting and devoured raw meat” (Zárate 1899: 14).

Even the Aztecs and Incas, whose achievements in arts and architecture were widely celebrated by textbook authors, ultimately lacked civilization. While the Aztecs built “magnificent palaces and temples” (Aguirre Cinta 1897: 42–43) and installed an early form of centralized rule across the national territory, the Aztec Empire did not have a capable elite. Textbooks depicted Aztec rulers as despotic tyrants who “waged war and pirated the surrounding area without distinction and subjugated the [neighboring] populations” (Sierra 1894: 26). Knowledge production was dominated by a caste of priests, “over their shoulders a black gown, full of colorful horrible figures, with long hair, and their hands and dirty body stained by blood” (Payno 1902: 67). Human sacrifices epitomized the lack of civilization among the Aztecs. “For four days prisoners of war were sacrificed to the gods, and the number of these unfortunate victims of this most horrendous fanaticism and evil cult of the Incas rose to 20,000” (Zárate 1899: 62–63).

Peruvian textbooks celebrated the archeological record and the institution-building efforts of the Inca Empire. “The Inca Empire united the tribes and formed one single state that achieved mayor prosperity, competing with the greatest empires of the ancient world” (Rodríguez 1900: 4; see also Calvo y Pérez 1922: 33). Yet, again, textbooks pointed to the despotism and hierarchical structure of the empire as indicating a lack of civilization. Moreover, Inca “socialism” would ensure that “the family and human personality disappeared opposite to the state” (Rodríguez 1900: 18). This form of socioeconomic organization counteracted individual decision-making and entrepreneurialism, ingredients much needed for achieving economic progress (Fanning 1915: 26).

It was only Spanish colonialism that brought civilization. On a first glance, textbooks highlighted the brutality and immorality of Spanish colonizers. “The Spanish pursued the conquest with an incredible cruelty” (Payno 1902: 149). Spanish colonizers also abused their power by enslaving indigenous people and making them

work under inhuman conditions in agriculture or mining (Fanning 1915: 71), combined with widespread “incompetence and corruption” (Rodríguez 1900: 86–87) among colonial state officials.

In a broader perspective the beneficial effects of Spanish colonialism prevailed. In all three countries, textbooks provided a generally positive assessment of Spanish colonial rule. The conquest ultimately was “a step ahead in the evolution of Mexico” (Sierra 1894 in Vázquez 1970: 128) and offset violence and exploitation because “[t]he Spanish gave their American colonies as much civilization as Spain had herself” (Sierra 1894 in Vázquez 2000: 128). Specifically, Spanish colonialism instituted centralized rule and overcame political fragmentation. Similarly, the spread of Spanish as the dominant language fostered national unity and helped to combat ethn racial divisions. Another important “civilizing effect” of Spanish colonialism was the arrival of Christianity among the indigenous population. “The old religion, complicated and full of superstitious and barbarian rites, was followed by Christianity, imposed and diffused by the colonizers” (Zárate 1899: 11). Finally, textbooks celebrated the courage and persistence of Spanish colonizers. As a “race of brave, firm men inclined toward new adventures,” they brought certain beneficial biological and psychological traits to Mexico, Argentina, and Peru (Payno 1902: 278). The result of Spanish colonialism was thus the formation of “a new society [...], based on the principles of a superior culture” (Rodríguez 1900: 4).

Textbook accounts of the colonial period were primarily organized around the agency of elites. Explanations of the Spanish conquest emphasized the particular character traits and psychological dispositions of major political leaders. In Argentina, accounts of Spanish colonialism celebrated the foresight and virtues of Columbus, Juan Díaz de Solís, and Pedro Mendoza (Eizaguirre 1895: 76). In Mexico and Peru, accounts of the Spanish conquest predominantly concentrated on Hernán Cortes and Francisco Pizarro (Aguirre Cinta 1897: 65–99) and granted these Spanish conquerors a place among the most important national heroes, personifying the transmission of European “civilization.” Hernán Cortes was of “strong will, courageous beyond any doubt, ingenious and astute, clear and calm in setbacks, and possessed the gift to seduce



and to lead” (Zárate 1899: 77). These character traits made him a “superior and determined politician” capable of pursuing an enterprise as challenging as the conquest of the Aztec Empire (Sierra 1894: 40). As a matter of fact, “[w]ithout the boldness of Hernán Cortés the country would have never been conquered and submitted to Spanish government” (Lainé 1890: 3). Similarly, Peruvian textbooks depicted Pizarro as a “daring and brave man” (Rodríguez 1900: 100) with a great vision and the leadership capacities to persist even under the most difficult circumstances (Calvo y Pérez 1922: 138-140).

In sum, school textbooks published in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexico, Argentina, and Peru provide a unique window at official representations of Spanish colonialism during this period. My analysis indicates striking similarities with respect how colonial rule was commemorated. The dominant understanding of Spanish colonialism was that of a “civilizing force” that rescued the respective nation from backwardness. These representations also reinforced the centrality of enlightened elites in moving Mexico, Argentina, and Peru towards a more advanced evolutionary stage.

### 3.2. Precolonial Splendor and Colonialism as a “Source of Backwardness”.

Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century representations of Spanish colonialism found in Mexican, Argentine, and Peruvian textbooks changed dramatically. As a matter of fact, state-approved texts almost reversed their evaluation of the colonial period. Yet the timing of these changes varied substantially across the three countries. Mexico was the first of the three countries in which textbook representations of Spanish colonialism changed. During the 1930s, the postrevolutionary government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) introduced a new curriculum at Mexican schools, grounded in the ideas of “socialist education.” In Argentina, official representations of colonialism changed during the 1940s and 1950s, under the government of Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955), the leader of a highly personalistic populist movement. In Peru, comparable changes only took place during the 1960s and 1970s, most importantly under the left-leaning military government of Juan Velasco (1968-1975).

One major shift found in Mexican textbooks published under Cárdenas, Argentine textbooks published under Perón, and Peruvian textbooks published under Velasco was a move from elite-centered accounts to a greater focus on the agency of popular classes in shaping the course of colonial history. During the Spanish conquest subordinate classes constituted an important collective force in their own right. For de la Cerda (1943: 131) it was particularly noteworthy that “against the orders of Moctezuma, the masses rose up and launched a massive attack against the Spanish.” Popular rebellion against Spanish domination continued. Mexican textbooks emphasized recurrent subordinate rebellions against the colonial regime. Indigenous people and mestizos engaged in “persistent resistance” against Spanish colonizers (Castro Cancio 1935: 49; see also de la Cerda 1943: 180). Similarly, Peruvian texts highlighted that Spanish colonizers faced considerable resistance from below. According to *Venciendo* (1976), the Peruvians “rose up against the abuse Spanish authorities committed against indigenous people” (p. 111). In other words, textbooks indicate a shift from a positive overall evaluation of Spanish colonialism towards a more critical one, while subordinate rebellion against colonial rule was celebrated.

In all three countries textbooks also converged in their assessment of the economic and political consequences of the colonial period. Spanish colonialism appeared as a period of foreign domination that lasted for more than three centuries. “The Indians lived independently before the white men came to our country” (Chávez Orozco 1938: 10). Under Spanish colonialism indigenous people faced “the heavy burden of slavery and exploitation” (de la Cerda 1943: 206). Once the Spanish had conquered the Inca Empire, they “took possession and dominated the land, the mines, and the people” (*Fichas de Ciencias Sociales* 1974a: 31.3). The result was dependency and economic exploitation. The infamous *encomienda* “diminished the common lands of the [indigenous] communities, and their inhabitants had to convert themselves into serfs of large landed estates in order to survive” (Castro Cancio 1935: 85). For colonial society this meant that “[t]he Spanish and their descendants had a lot, while the Peruvian people had only very little” (*Peruanito* 1974: 87).

Hernán Cortes personified Spanish cruelty and greed. These character traits were enhanced by the fact that the conqueror lacked a proper education. Cortes "did not have much talent and abandoned his studies to pass his time on the street" (Castro Cancio 1935: 44). Yet, the underlying motivation for the conquest was purely economic and largely driven by structural forces. Spanish colonizers looked for "personal economic benefits," and this drive to "enrich themselves" was embedded in the larger socioeconomic organization of the colonizing society (Castro Cancio 1935: 79, 43).

The representation of Spanish colonialism as a period of foreign domination and economic exploitation was complemented by more celebratory descriptions of the precolonial period. Mexican textbooks often portrayed ordinary Aztecs as "Mexicans," and started to contextualize human sacrifices. Bonilla for instance revised the straight-out condemnation of this practice found in earlier editions of his (e.g., Bonilla 1922) and came to the conclusion that the Spanish inquisition appeared to have "destroyed people with a more painful death when compared to Aztec sacrifices" (Bonilla 1930: 63). In Argentina, Peronist texts portrayed precolonial populations as "very civilized people that constructed remarkable temples and made beautiful artworks" (de García 1954: 15). Thus, textbooks largely abstained from previous characterizations of the precolonial period as epitomizing a barbarian society. As a matter of fact, my analysis reveals that Mexican, Argentine, and Peruvian textbooks also departed from the representation of Spanish colonialism as bringing civilization. Accounts of the military conquest are a point in case. Spanish conquerors were not inherently superior, they just "had the better arms" (Chávez Orozco 1938: 10) and took advantage of already existing grievances among those populations subjugated to the Aztecs (de la Cerda 1943: 130). Thus, the main reasons textbooks gave for the fall of the Aztec and Inca Empires were technology and internal divisions, and not a lack of civilization.

Interestingly, the more positive evaluation of precolonial societies went hand in hand with an emphasis on the colonial origins of a distinct national identity. In Mexican textbooks the underpinning of a homogeneous national cul-

ture appeared to be *mestizaje*, the process of biological and cultural mixing initiated under Spanish rule. "The three centuries of Spanish domination were enough for a new race to emerge within the territory of New Spain, previously inhabited by indigenous people, a result of the mixing between conquerors and conquered. This race that inherited the language, religions, and customs from the Spanish and the sense of resistance and stoicism from indigenous people, is the one that constitutes the Mexican nation today" (Bonilla 1939: 83-84). In Peru textbooks emphasized *mestizaje* as the basis of Peruvian identity and described the "eminent mestizo writer" Garcilazo Inca de la Vega as the personification of the cultural and biological mixing initiated by Spanish colonialism (*Venciendo* 1976: 90, 171). In Argentina, textbooks depicted Argentina as a *crisol de razas*, the local version of the "melting pot." The destination of the *crisol de razas* continued to be the assimilation into a Hispanic culture. Popular national discourses conceived of national identity as shaped by the interaction between cultural traits from Spain and the geographic diversity and "incomparable beauty" of Argentinean territory (de García 1954: 21).

Textbooks also changed with respect to their account of the end of Spanish colonialism and the rise of independent nation-states. The main shift was from an elite-centered account of national independence to an emphasis on popular agency. In Argentina, textbooks emphasized the importance of popular classes in the defense of Buenos Aires against the "English invasion" in 1806 (de García 1954: 19). "[A]lmost without arms, but with courage and enthusiasm, [they] were the true heroes of the reconquest" (de García 1954: 20). Peronist texts also associated the Argentine success in the wars of independence against Spain with the "brave and heroic gauchos [who] strolled around the mountains and caused despair among the hostile troops with their surprising attacks" (de García 1954: 85). Similarly, Peruvian textbooks assigned the Túpac Amaru rebellion (1780-1783) more importance than the national independence movement. "General San Martín declared the Independence of Peru, but the Peruvian people had already fought for many years to be free. The first great revolution that took place in America against Spain was orchestrated by *Jose Gabriel Condorcanqui*

*Túpac Amaru* [italics in text]” (*Peruanito* 1974: 55). Túpac Amaru channeled the “state of consistent rebellion” against Spanish colonial rule among popular classes into a major insurgency (*Fichas de Ciencias Sociales* 1974b: 15.2).

Taken together, my analysis shows that in all three countries, textbook representations of Spanish colonialism underwent dramatic changes, departing from the previously positive assessment. Instead, in Mexico during the 1930s, in Argentina during the 1950s, and in Peru during the 1970s state-sponsored memory discourses depicted Spanish colonial rule as a period of foreign domination and the “source of backwardness,” and emphasized the resistance against colonialism by popular sectors.

#### 4. TEACHERS AND THE TRANSMISSION OF OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF COLONIALISM<sup>5</sup>

From a comparative vantage point, state-approved textbooks exhibited strikingly similar patterns of change. As such, they point to a major shift in how these three Latin American states commemorated Spanish colonial rule. Yet, there were significant differences in the transmission of these new official representations of colonialism, as indicated by the fact that teacher responses to those changes varied substantially across the three countries.

##### 4.1. Mexico

Many schoolteachers were actively involved in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), some of them rising to important political positions in the aftermath of the armed struggles, most prominently Plutarco Elías Calles, the president of Mexico from 1924 to 1928. During the 1920s and 1930s the new postrevolutionary state elites saw schooling as the key to integrating a conflict-stricken society. Teachers represented the vanguard in transforming and nationalizing Mexico’s highly mobilized subordinate classes. And while the political conviction of teachers varied, reaching from an apolitical stance towards communist militancy, the majority of teachers tended to embrace their officially ascribed role as “messengers” of the revolution

(Rockwell 2007: 181, 211, 222; Vaughan 1997: 6-7, 47, 103, 190-191).

The actual role played by teachers in local communities varied. Especially in the central and western Highlands, teachers acted as mediators that actively promoted the official agenda of national development, while simultaneously softening official policies, especially the anti-religious zeal of the official “socialist education.” In other regions, especially in the indigenous communities of Northern Mexico and Chiapas, teachers tended to emphasize their cultural superiority and understand themselves as direct agents of the state, often provoking substantial community resistance (Vaughan 1997: 103-104, 117-118, 152-153, 178-181; Lewis 2001: 58-83). Moreover, official image and teacher self understandings contrasted with their socioeconomic situation. In postrevolutionary Mexico teaching remained a profession with low salaries and social prestige. Federal teachers were somewhat better paid than state teachers employed by provincial governments, yet both usually came from a modest middle class background (Vaughan 1997: 12; Rockwell 2007: 178, 186).

Despite these political, social, and regional differences, teachers across Mexico were sympathetic to the textbook changes enacted during the 1930s. Studies show that teachers in Puebla (Vaughan 1997: 92-93, 125), Sonora (Vaughan 1997: 182-184), Tlaxcala (Rockwell 2007: 210-217), and Chiapas (Lewis 2001: 66-71) embraced the idea of Mexico as a mestizo nation and class-based interpretations of national history. The teacher testimonies from Tabasco and Mexico City reviewed here further support these findings. Interviewees depicted subordinate sectors as the main forces in shaping Mexico’s fate, portrayed class conflict as decisive for Mexico’s historical trajectory, and projected the nation back into the precolonial period. Before Spanish colonialism “the Mexicans were the owners of the land,” while subsequently “large Spanish landowners, together with the clergy, took away the lands of the people”<sup>6</sup>. Colonial exploitation and oppression was met by popular resistance. “The great majority of the Mexican people, from their initial

<sup>5</sup> This section draws on vom Hau (2009).

<sup>6</sup> Public secondary school teacher (history), Mexico City, March 6, 1979.



movements onwards, were against Spanish colonialism"<sup>7</sup>.

And most teachers tended to use the new educational materials. For instance, under Cárdenas the SEP published *Simiente*, a new series of introductory texts to reading and writing. These texts "always talked about agrarianism and the redistribution of land"<sup>8</sup>. Most of the interviewees reported their frequent use of *Simiente*, a pattern also found by Mary Kay Vaughan (1997: 97, 182). If teachers voiced concerns, they usually complained about the lack of educational materials. As one teacher remembers, textbooks often "were not available, the problem was that they were very scarce"<sup>9</sup>. Thus, teachers tended to embrace the new textbook representations of Spanish colonialism and incorporate them into their daily teaching practice, yet at times they faced difficulties in accessing these materials, signs of an educational system in construction.

#### 4.2. Argentina

Perón (1946-1955) perceived teachers as crucial contributors to the transformation of Argentina into an industrialized and cohesive society with a skilled labour force (Gvirtz 1991; Plotkin 2002: 96; Escude 1990: 169-171). In their self understandings teachers tended to exhibit a strong patriotic orientation and conceive of themselves as "apostles of knowledge" (Bernetti and Puiggrós 1993: 225-227), yet they were divided in their political outlooks. Most were secular liberals or political Catholics, and a small minority were active socialists or communists. During the 1940s and 1950s teachers received quite generous salaries that placed them squarely into the middle class (Bernetti and Puiggrós 1993: 208-209).

In rural areas, from Patagonia to Salta to the Chaco, the school constituted *the* state institution par excellence and teachers played a central role in local life. They functioned as mediators of official educational policies, and, often

the only ones with a formal education, negotiated with the outside world on behalf of the community. By contrast, in rural communities composed predominantly of indigenous peoples or European migrants, teachers usually remained more distant from local life, and their patriotic orientation was often met with hostility. Moreover, in the more urbanized *Litoral* teachers usually played a less central role in local communities and were less involved in the organization of extra-curricular activities (Artieda 1993: 307-308, 326-329, 333).

Yet, regardless of political inclinations, social differences, and regional location, the majority of teachers active during the 1940s and 1950s were committed anti-Peronists. Most of the major studies on the subject reveal widespread opposition among teachers against the educational policies of the Peronist government (e.g., Bernetti and Puiggrós 1993: 226-228; Escudé 1990: 175-179). As a matter of fact, teachers largely opposed the new textbooks and their ideological content (Cucuzza and Somoza 2001: 214; Gvirtz 1996: 155-157). The primary sources consulted for this paper provide a similar picture. Interviewees were alarmed about the introduction of new textbooks and complained that the new texts were "full of demagogy up to the last page"<sup>10</sup>. The majority of teachers also rejected the celebration of the masses found in the new textbooks, noting that "mass politics and the theory of the dominant majority" would bear the danger of fostering "intolerance and coercion"<sup>11</sup>. In their own understandings of national history enlightened elites appeared as the driving force behind the nation's fate and anchored most teachers' accounts of Argentine history<sup>12</sup>. For instance, San Martín appeared as "the brilliant securer of Argentina's freedom and independence" and constituted "the greatest hero of our national history"<sup>13</sup>.

Teacher opposition had real consequences for classroom activities. For instance, teachers only

<sup>7</sup> Public secondary school teacher (history), Mexico City, March 6, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Public primary school teacher, Emiliano Zapata (Tabasco), November 30, 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Public primary school teacher, Villahermosa, May 2, 1979.

<sup>10</sup> Public primary school teacher, Buenos Aires, August 28, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> *La Obra*, No. 486, October 15, 1949, p. 58x.

<sup>12</sup> Socialist or communist teachers usually embraced class-based understandings of national history, yet this minority faced severe repression from Peronist state authorities.

<sup>13</sup> *La Obra*, No. 440, July 25, 1946, p. 307.

used a small amount of classroom time to discuss the new textbooks with students<sup>14</sup>. Another strategy was to keep the old textbooks as part of a small library in the back of the classroom. As one teacher remembers, when asked by inspectors about these texts she responded by saying that “these are books from the students, books with stories that the students read over the weekend”<sup>15</sup>. Finally, teachers often employed the new textbooks solely for grammar or orthographic exercises and did not further engage with their content (Gvirtz 1996: 157-162). Taken together, the ideological orientation of teachers and their classroom practices point to a limited transmission of the new state-sponsored commemorations of Spanish colonialism in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Argentina.

### 4.3. Peru

In Peru the extent to which the new official representations of colonial rule gained broader acceptance fell in between Mexico and Argentina. School teachers are indicative for this partial transformation. Under Velasco (1968-1975) they majority of teachers were ideologically supportive the changes in textbook content, yet they resisted the actual use of the new texts for political reasons.

During the 1960s and 1970s both civilian and military governments hoped to achieve the modernization of Peru through the dramatic expansion of education. These efforts cumulated in the attempt of an encompassing educational reform by Velasco. Teachers were seen as crucial in transforming established ideas about nationalism and development. At the same time, teachers nationwide were exposed to declining salaries and worsening working conditions. Moreover, teaching lost in prestige because it increasingly provided members of Peru’s subordinate race-class groups with a path for social ascendance (Angell 1982: 4, 7-9; Wilson 2007: 728).

The literature indicates that most Peruvian teachers embraced a class-based understanding of national history and fully identified Peru with

the Inca Empire (Portocarrero and Oliart 1989: 113-114; Vargas 2005: 7-8; Wilson 2007: 727, 734). My own findings resonate with this assessment. Especially public school teachers from a lower middleclass background with affinities to SUTEP (*Sindicato Unitario de Trabajadores de la Educación del Perú*)—the major independent teacher union under the control of the Maoist party *Patria Roja*—were sympathetic to popular understandings of nationhood. As a representative of this faction suggests, the aim of his classes was “to approach the phenomenon of history from the perspective of the great social mobilizations from below”<sup>16</sup>. Túpac Amaru was considered the most important hero and “representative of Peruvian identity”<sup>17</sup>.

Yet, interviewees from an urban middleclass background articulated a different understanding of nationhood. This faction emphasized the political foundations of the national community. “The spine of a nation is a very good constitution”<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, they viewed national history as driven by elites. As one of these teachers pointed out, Pizarro “conquered Peru. He took all our gold and took advantage of the fact that Huascar y Atahualpa [two rivaling Inca rulers at that time] fought each other”<sup>19</sup>.

These distinct understandings of nationhood are related to important regional differences among teachers in Peru. Teachers working in urban areas tended to be more concerned with proper middle class appearance and maintained a distance to students and their parents. Rural teachers usually became more involved in the communities they worked in. Similar to postrevolutionary Mexico, many teachers in the countryside acted as local intellectuals and mediators between local communities and larger society. Yet, a minority of rural teachers maintained a more paternalistic attitude and acted as *mistis*—mestizos convinced of their own racial and cultural superiority (Contreras 1996; Montero 1990).

Yet, again, these political, social, and regional differences among teachers went along with crucial similarities in their classroom practices. Across Peru, teachers from different back-

<sup>14</sup> Public primary school teacher, Buenos Aires, August 11, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Public primary school teacher, Buenos Aires, August 28, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Public school teacher, Lima, March 27, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Public school teacher, Lima, March 24, 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Private school teacher, Lima, March 29, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Private school teacher, Lima, April 17, 2004.

grounds opposed the new educational materials put forward by the military government (Wilson 2001: 328-330; see also Portocarrero and Oliart 1989: 117-118). Teachers portrayed the top-down character of the Velasco educational reforms as an offense against their professional autonomy and resisted the implementation of new educational materials, even when the new textbook contents were in sync with their own conceptions of nationhood. One prominent example of teacher resistance against new textbooks was *Amigo*. The educational reform obliged primary school teachers to work with this new introduction to reading and writing. In the words of an interviewee from Lima, “all the pages [of *Amigo*]...were images of the profound Peru, of the rural Peru, and had nothing to do with groups of people that were administrators [or] bankers”<sup>20</sup>. Yet, even teachers actively involved with SUTEP did not like to work with *Amigo* because of its new approach to teaching literacy and preferred the traditional *Coquito* instead. In many cases, teachers made students buy *Coquito*, while the ministry of education distributed *Amigo* for free. Only when supervisors came, they used *Amigo*. “Every time supervisors came around, all the children had ‘[*Amigo*]’ on their desks. But when the supervisors were gone, the teacher took out *Coquito* again and worked with *Coquito*”<sup>21</sup>. As this example illustrates, the majority of Peruvian teachers probably embraced the critical assessment of Spanish colonialism advanced in the new textbooks, yet were hesitant to use those texts in classroom, leading to a partial transmission of official understandings of colonial rule.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper has traced state-sponsored memory discourses about Spanish colonialism in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru. A discourse analysis of history and civic education textbooks published throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century indicates a major change in the content of official commemorations, from the depiction of Spanish colonial rule as a “civilizing force” to the notion that Spanish colonialism was a period of “foreign domination,” and constituted the main cause of

postcolonial development trajectories in the region. These changes of war commemoration resonate with a processual approach to collective memory (Jansen 2007; Olick 2003). Memory discourses are best conceptualized as contested and changing. Indeed, these findings question arguments that focus on the robustness of collective memory over time and treat commemoration as a path-dependent process. In all three countries the meanings of memory discourses shifted dramatically.

Yet, country-specific patterns, especially with respect to *when* textbooks adopted different understandings of Spanish colonialism, and *how* schoolteachers reacted to them, also show important variations with respect to the commemoration of colonial rule. Teachers in Mexico during the 1930s largely embraced the representations of colonialism found in the new textbooks and—if available—used the new teaching materials issued by the Cárdenas government. By contrast, the majority of teachers in Argentina during the 1940s opposed the ideas about colonial rule found in Peronist textbooks and employed a variety of strategies to circumvent using those texts. In Peru, teachers were largely supportive of the idea of Spanish colonialism as foreign oppression and exploitation promoted during the 1970s under Velasco, yet they converged in their opposition against the newly issued texts.

How representations of Spanish colonialism transformed was indicative of broader changes of official nationalism in these countries. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century state-approved national ideologies in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru shifted from political and elitist to cultural and class-based understandings of nationhood. These changes were driven by the balance of power between state elites and other organized political forces, new alliance structures resulted in new commemorations of colonialism. State authorities adopted new nationalist ideologies when different political alliances for the consolidation of state power emerged. In turn, the extent to which official representations of colonialism gained broader resonance was shaped by the state’s infrastructural power. The reach of the state and within-state relations between central authorities and the disseminators of ideology such as teachers influenced the insti-

<sup>20</sup> Private school teacher, Lima, April 7, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Public school teacher, Lima, March 29, 2004.

tutionalization of these new ideological forms (vom Hau 2008; 2010).

In developing these arguments the paper casts doubts about a direct link between patterns of colonial rule and the subsequent commemoration of colonialism. The type and level of colonial rule do not determine how postcolonial states remember the colonial era. At the same time, it might be more indirect channels through which variants of colonialism influence subsequent commemorations of the colonial period. Following James Mahoney's (2010) lead, one possibility for future research would be to explore how the persistence of specific "power configurations" from the colonial period onwards shaped nationalism and collective memory by affecting political alliance structures and state infrastructural development during the postcolonial period.

Another avenue for future research concerns the policy implications of representations of colonialism. Preliminary evidence for social policy making in Mexico indicates that the postrevolutionary state employed a variety of legitimizing strategies in struggles over basic health care and pensions systems. Commemorations of colonialism featured very prominently in this legitimacy work. For instance, Mexican state elites portrayed the expansion of social insurance to industrial workers as standing in a distinct national tradition, reaching back to the Aztec Empire, and contributing to overcome the legacies of Mexico's colonial oppression, a narrative that featured prominently in the installation of a state-controlled health insurance system in 1943, the *Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social* (IMSS) (Barrientos and Lloyd Sherlock 2000; Lloyd-Sherlock 2006).

A third possible extension of this research would concentrate on the mnemonic struggles over the meanings of Spanish colonialism, and the nation more generally, and compare official discourses with the framings advanced by social movements and other oppositional forces in 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexico, Argentina, and Peru, including organized labor, militant Catholics, and regional elites. The comparative-historical analysis of official memory discourses presented in this paper provides a starting point to link shifts in official commemorative strategies to the politics of nationhood and domestic memory

struggles between states and state-challenging forces.

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