

Towards inclusive historical narratives: Research on the clash of conflict narratives in the study of international reconciliation and peace

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Summary of Research

This research explores the clash of conflict narratives youths share in the study of international reconciliation and peace in International Relations (IR) classrooms. In a typical IR classroom often featuring multiple nationalities, the learning space becomes a room for encountering different versions of war-related narratives. While currently enrolled students, often born after 2000, are far from past violent events, they may exhibit entrenched views derived from official narratives they were exposed to. This can lead to elements of surprise when students realize that there are other versions of 'what happened' while studying international history and politics with students from the other side of the world. Here we witness clashes of national narratives every day when addressing the heritage of the Second World War.

In this context, the present study poses the following questions: Which conflict narratives do students bring into IR classes, international reconciliation and peace studies in particular? What happens when they clash? How do they react in the presence of many others? How can we create inclusive historical narratives in order to implement innovative learning about controversial past? Drawing on online surveys, interviews, and class observations, this research project aims at exploring how highly selective narratives of the national past, learnt at school or absorbed from the media, affect collective identity (the way we perceive the self versus the other), how globalizing learning environment challenges its shaping, and most importantly, which pedagogical tool to implement in order to create inclusive and cross-border historical narratives.

The originality of this study lies in challenging the current state of conflict narrative studies, often staying exclusive to each other. It is a new attempt at looking into painful past from the opposing view. The pedagogical method, I name 'Through the eyes of others' approach here, offers an opportunity for students to think, learn, and share with others when exposed to competing national narratives on war and peace. In doing so, this research invites us to redefine the concept of we-ness across national borders: Do we want peace with them or against them? This reflection itself does not bring any immediate solution to the issue of international reconciliation itself. But engaging in it is an open expression of willingness to ask revising the concept of enmity and to demand overcoming the spirit of exclusion, still very present in IR today.