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## Censorship and History since 1945

*Antoon De Baets*

Shall the Dictator . . . be less harsh with facts and records than with men?  
Should he be more tender with the traditions and men of other lands and  
other times than he is with the men of his own land and time?

Bertram D. Wolfe, 'Totalitarianism and History' (1954)

This chapter examines the knot that ties power, freedom, and history together. It is not about the history of censorship, but about the censorship of history and, incidentally, about the history of the censorship of history. It concentrates on the theoretical problems generated by the censorship of history, and its justification and effects in different contemporary political settings (dictatorships, post-conflict societies, and democracies). In order to define the censorship of history, borderline areas and demarcations with closely related concepts are scrutinized in detail. The presence of censorship in different modes, genres, fields, categories, eras, and countries is briefly discussed. This chapter also attempts to offer some coherent sets of illustrations of the phenomenon rather than simply adducing examples randomly (from a universe of thousands of possible cases). The final analysis deals with the relationships between censorship and epistemology, truth and ethics.

### THE SCENE

Let us, however, first get an impression of the scene by comparing an American, a Czechoslovakian, and a Chinese case.<sup>1</sup> During the height of McCarthyism, Moses I. Finley, a historian of antiquity at Rutgers University, New Jersey, was accused of having run a communist study group while a graduate student at Columbia University during the 1930s. The accusation came from William Canning, a historian, and Karl Wittfogel, a former German communist who after his exile in 1934 became a historian of China at the University of Wa-

<sup>1</sup> Antoon De Baets, *Censorship of Historical Thought: A World Guide 1945–2000* (Westport, Conn., 2002), 567–8, 179–81, 113–14.

shington. Both were testifying before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee and had previously accused Finley. In March 1952, Finley declared before the subcommittee that he was not a Communist Party member, but invoked the Fifth Amendment (a constitutional privilege against self-recrimination) when asked if he had ever been one, thus avoiding a possible indictment for perjury. Initially, Rutgers supported Finley but later its board of trustees unanimously declared that pleading the Fifth was sufficient reason for immediate dismissal, thus overruling the conclusions of two special advisory committees. Finley was dismissed from his assistant professorship and blacklisted at American universities. He founded the American Committee for the Defense of International Freedom in response to the rise of McCarthyism. From 1954 until his death, he pursued his career at Cambridge University. In 1958, Finley's appointment to the Cornell University history department was rejected by the university president; the history department's appeal to the faculty Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure was to no avail.

If democracies such as the United States took questionable steps as in the Finley case, all the more so did dictatorships. During the Czechoslovak 'normalization', in 1973, the prize-winning book *Z ilegality do povstania: Kapitoly z občianskeho odboja* [From Illegality into the Rising: Chapters from the History of Democratic Resistance] (1969) was removed from libraries and bookshops. Its author, Jozef Jablonický, a member of the Slovak Academy of Sciences History Institute, was accused of having underestimated the communist resistance and overrated the non-communist resistance during the 1944 Slovak National Uprising. The book had also criticized the 1964 memoirs of Communist Party Secretary Gustáv Husák, who had participated in the uprising. In 1974, Jablonický was dismissed from the history institute and moved to the Slovak Institute of Conservation of Monuments and Protection of Nature. This was the start of sixteen years of harassment during which he was called a 'perpetrator of antisocial activities' and his writings were labelled 'harmful to the interests of the state' and 'in conflict with official historical findings'. His new study on the communist resistance could not be published. The State Security Police investigated his case and his house was searched eleven times. At least three manuscripts were confiscated and not returned. He was interrogated by the police, demoted, and expelled from the Slovak Communist Party. In 1978, his permit for research into historical archives was withdrawn. Meanwhile, Jablonický completed a new text of *Bratislava a vznik Slovenského národného povstania* [Bratislava and the Origins of the Slovak National Rising], the original manuscript of which had been seized by the police. In 1979, he wrote two polemical articles against the gaps in official historiography (eventually published in 1994). His study *Zlyhanie Malárovej armády v Karpatoch* [The Failure of Malár's Army in the Carpathians] circulated in the Padlock Editions *samizdat* series: the first two versions of this study had been seized by the police; the third version was written while the author simultaneously hid away remnants of his own archival collection and every

completed page of his manuscript. He was regularly harassed and detained. In 1984, his most recent papers on history, as well as reference documents, were confiscated because they were considered particularly dangerous in the fortieth anniversary year of the Slovak Uprising. His works were banned until the 1989 Velvet Revolution. In 1990, he was finally able to resume his work at the Political Science Institute of the Academy of Sciences.

In China, Jian Bozan, head of the history department and vice-president of Beijing University, and also a member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, was one of the founders of Marxist historiography.<sup>2</sup> In 1957, he criticized the leading Communist Party cadres for not going far enough with the liberalizing Hundred Flowers Movement, and in 1958–61 he rejected the Great Leap Forward policies. Central to his criticism of the extreme leftist ideological trend of the late 1950s were his ‘historicism’ and his ‘concession theory’. The first meant respect for the context and the complexity of historical fact and primacy of the empirical methodology. The second explained that when confronted with peasant rebellion in history, the ruling class had had to make concessions to restore the established order. In a 1962 speech, he attacked the official slogan ‘Lead History with Theory’ directly. This became the basis for the charge that he had rejected the class-struggle view of history. In December 1965, at the dawn of the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong personally attacked Jian’s concession theory. In 1966, Jian was subjected to more than forty attacks in a dozen different newspapers and journals. He was denounced as an antisocialist, anti-Party bourgeois academic who sought to lay the ideological foundation for the restoration of capitalism, and was brutally persecuted. In late 1967, Nie Yuanzi, leader of the Red Guard rebel faction at Beijing University, compiled a blacklist of the names of thirty teachers from the history department whom she regarded as reactionary. Jian was one of five who were hounded to their deaths: in December 1968, he committed suicide together with his wife, only to be officially rehabilitated a decade later.

When we compare these cases, we see that Finley was persecuted for being too communist, and Jian and Jablonický for not being communist enough. The Finley case was about political rather than historical views, but the outcome deeply affected his further career as a professional historian. In the remaining cases, historical matters belonged to the heart of the affair. In two of the three affairs, the political leaders of the country were directly involved (Husák and Mao). The cases demonstrate several features of what can be called the censorship universe: the diversity of context (McCarthyism, ‘normalization’, Cultural Revolution), the diversity of circumstances (blacklisting, interrogation, dismissal, samizdat, resistance), and the diversity of outcomes (exile, marginalization, suicide). All three historians refused to bow, and developed theoretical and

<sup>2</sup> See the ch. by Susan Weigelin-Schwiedrzik in this volume.

practical perspectives on the epistemological or moral aspects of scholarship. Lamentably, in all three cases, attempts at rehabilitation came far too late. Let us now look systematically into the types of societies behind these and numerous other cases.

## TPOLOGY

The importance of the censorship of history clearly varies according to whether a given political regime is dictatorial, democratic, or transitory between both. In dictatorial regimes, which can be subdivided into authoritarian and totalitarian types, a small group illegitimately holds power over the state, with backing from the military. By their nature, these regimes cannot draw sufficient legitimation for its absolute power from elections and laws. Therefore, to root and consolidate that power, it must seek legitimation elsewhere, often in an ideology that instrumentalizes the past as it has survived in memories, traditions, documents, and cultural heritage. History thus becomes an instrument of the official ideology that in its turn serves dictatorial political power.

To that end, dictators use propaganda and censorship as twin tools—the former to promote the official vision, the latter to eradicate the rest. Historical propaganda is the systematic *manipulation* of historical facts or opinions usually by, or with the connivance of the government or another power, whereas the censorship of history is the systematic *control* over historical facts or opinions—often by deliberate suppression—imposed by, or with the connivance of the government or another power. The union of propaganda and censorship creates an official historiography with monopolistic pretensions and absolute truths. It discourages or blocks inquiry challenging it. Governmental and other institutions are established to implement the official guidelines. Ideally, these institutions do not blatantly falsify the historical record, but leave intact as much of the past as possible, only altering key passages. They attempt to distort history gently so as to arouse unanimity, not suspicion and dissent. Reality, however, does not always match the ideal: history, then, is often crudely falsified. This propagation of the regime's own version of history can be accompanied by tremendous pressure upon historians, resulting in self-censorship, self-criticism, and broken careers. In such a climate of fear and suspicion, professional repression may transform into physical repression. Mail control, telephone tapping, intimidation in all its forms, purges, trials, and detention are part of its panoply.

The best topics for propaganda are those that illustrate the official ideology: cherished antecedents and historical parallels favourable to the dictator in power will be praised, enemies and heresies diabolized. Topics viewed as controversial and liable to be censored are those that call into question the official ideology: allusions to the illegitimate origins and violent maintenance of power, crimes committed by the regime and its interest in covering them up, rivalry among its

leaders, discord among the population, sensitive information about dominated minorities and classes, crises (periods of martial law, revolts, and civil war), frictions with other countries, military defeat, periods of humiliation and weakness, the history of successful rivals, and, finally, historical parallels with all these areas. To that end, key episodes of history need reassessment or recovery.

The dynamics of making historiography subservient typically pass through three stages: a stage of equalization, a stage of ‘normality’, and eventually, if at all, a stage of renewed openness. The length and intensity of these stages is dependent on many factors: history’s place in society; the pre-dictatorial traditions of integrity among historians and their standing as public figures; the degree of consistency, elaboration, and monopolization of the dictatorial ideology; the importance accorded to history therein; and the strength of the repressive apparatus. The manipulated historical facts and opinions are adapted to the needs of the moment; firm and lenient control alternate. Censorship fluctuates with it—at one moment, it is a legal activity, at another an illegal one; at one moment it is fragmented at the sub-national level, at another it may apply to a set of countries that share a common ideology.

When dictators are eventually toppled, the windows of the past are thrown open. The transition to democracy and the abolition of systematic censorship go hand in hand and can enable—though there are no firm guarantees of this—the development of an independent historiography. This includes the partial replacement of compromised historians, the rehabilitation and reemployment, if still feasible, of persecuted historians, and the training of a new generation of history students. Current and archival records require new policies of openness; official secrecy needs democratic legislation and control. In terms of personnel and infrastructure, the solution in most countries leaves room only for a certain degree of generational continuity. If that continuity reflects the dictatorial legacy too closely, historians will not always launch investigations into the problematic past as energetically as they should. Emerging democracies alternate hope for the future and fear of relapse. The past plays a key role in this process, for the exposure of historical falsifications, the rehabilitation of political adversaries formerly fallen in disgrace, the predilection for new historical symbols, all contribute to the delegitimation of the *ancien régime*.

Two dangers related to the censorship of history emerge in these post-conflict societies. The first is obstruction to the proto-historical work of post-dictatorial tribunals and truth commissions. Efforts to punish perpetrators of past human rights abuses and to provide reparations for their victims are often hampered. The second related danger consists in the concealment or destruction of evidence of the violent past. The main targets here are the secret dictatorial archives documenting the past repression, and the clandestine cemeteries that contain forensic evidence of their victims. Archives collected by national human rights groups under the dictatorship or those that are the product of post-dictatorial

criminal justice and truth-seeking efforts are not safe either. In short, tyranny haunts the lands of history long after its own burial.

When these emerging, insecure democracies survive, they gradually transform into stable democracies that protect the human rights of their citizens and that keep the military under firm civilian command. The United Nations Development Programme calculated that the share of the world's countries with multiparty electoral systems that met the wider criteria for democracy rose from 39 per cent in 1990 to 55 per cent in 2003.<sup>3</sup> The more democratic the regime, the more alternative evidence-based historical facts and opinions circulate or are freely allowed to do so in a public debate about history. Some of these democracies, however, may be characterized by a mixture of democratic and authoritarian elements, with the first tipping the scales. Traces of censorship are clearly recognizable in restrictions put upon historians living in those democracies, especially in three domains. As was the case for emerging democracies, the area of public information and secrecy needs regulation. When secrecy rules for current and archival records are excessive, illegal, or both, they lead to censorship; intelligence services in particular are often keen to hide their 'family jewels'. Furthermore, histories commissioned by governments or others are sometimes subtly adapted to avoid unwelcome messages. In these histories, the precarious subjects are mostly tied to the international wars and internal conflicts of the past—frequently (but not always) in combination with imperial or colonial expansion—that in the long run come to be seen as adversely affecting the democratic legitimation of power and the construction of a collective identity: in short, as sources of shame. Finally, groups denying certified research findings, especially about grave historical wrongs, may be penalized for their denial. The historical profession is adamant about condemning the aberrant theses of deniers of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes as products of pseudo-history, but it is divided as to whether the propagation of such views should be criminalized.

## JUSTIFICATION

The justification for censorship and propaganda is rooted in ideology. Indeed, every form of power, dictatorial as well as democratic, is embodied in an official ideology, which must clarify convincingly two major questions: which historical path did the community follow hitherto and why is the ruling elite particularly suited to guide it with a firm hand into the future? The first question, about collective identity, is related to the need of each community (and segment thereof) for roots and feelings of continuity with its ancestors, and to its yearning

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005* (Oxford, 2005), 20.

for pride in a unique destiny. The second, about legitimacy, is linked to the fact that no elite and no ruler whose task it is to give the community that desired background can do without an acceptable biography and a venerable genealogy. In the ideology developed by the elite to satisfy and lend authority to both demands, the past constitutes an important storehouse of usable examples. The problem, however, is that the selection of fitting historical examples can be challenged at any given moment. Therefore, elites and rulers are forced not only to make selective use of the past, but also to optimize that use creatively and permanently. In dictatorial systems, the present commands the past, but it is highly doubtful whether the tyrant who loses the keys to history is still able to rule. Democracies, emerging and stable, also draw some of their legitimacy from the past by presenting themselves as a continuation of earlier democracies, or as a rupture with earlier dictatorial periods.

## ONTOLOGY

The term ‘censorship’, the leading specialist in media law Eric Barendt wrote, is emptied of real meaning if it is applied to any social convention or practice which makes communication for some individuals more difficult.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the focus here lies on the coercive and the tutelary practices of the state. Even with this fundamental caveat, and whatever the regime, it is often difficult to distinguish censorship from similar restrictions on the activities of historians.

First, a general historical context of war, colonization and occupation, poverty and violence may deeply affect the working conditions of historians. Second, in all regime types, the main censors are governments. In dictatorships, they are supported by the complete state machinery. In other regime types, censorship is more indirect and fragmented. On a more fundamental level, every government imposes constraints on historical research, especially if its official information and archival policies are characterized by excessive secrecy used to conceal sensitive information and reduce accountability. The risks of control appear also in the area of public libraries, governmental quasi-monopolies on historical museums, or on certain large source editions. Of a different order is the official prevention, or disturbance of, controversial commemorations and anniversaries. Not only does the executive branch of government impose regulations, parliaments also do. For example, they may adopt laws making mandatory the teaching of history in the language of the majority. Judges may check too eagerly whether the historians carried out their research honestly and prudently and, in the process, attempt to determine historical truth themselves.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Barendt, *Freedom of Speech* (1985; Oxford, 2005), 151.

Third, educational policies govern the capabilities of universities in terms of funding of research and teaching, allocation of scarce resources, grants, employment, and infrastructure management. In the specific field of history, censorship may be further disguised as pressure from the historical establishment, corporatism, political correctness on the campus, and the rejection of theses and manuscripts. It often takes the form of career restrictions. Loss of salary, refusal of promotion, demotion, revocation of academic degrees and responsibilities, restrictions on travel abroad and on contacts with foreign scholars, wholesale boycott, and, finally, dismissal, are sometimes insidious forms of censorship. Dismissal is perhaps the most common sanction against historians around the globe, as the three examples given at the outset clearly demonstrated.<sup>5</sup>

Fourth, individuals and unofficial groups, either allied with, or opposed to, the government, may threaten unwelcome manifestations of the past. They loot archives or museums, destroy or desecrate historical monuments, and boycott books and journals. Elsewhere, radical pressure groups attack historians on religious, political, or ethnic grounds. In many countries, they are involved in censorship activity. Hidden censorship is also at work when historians advise publishers or editorial boards to refuse manuscripts of colleagues because the latter's contents do not conform to the peer reviewer's viewpoint, or when they compete with the peer reviewer's own work. Market mechanisms, publishing strategies, and private enterprise subsidies deciding which genres are popular enough to be published may lead to whimsical or structural exclusion of valuable strands of historical writing.

Fifth, large-scale sexism, nationalism, and ethnocentrism lead to the misrepresentation, negligence, or denial of the history of victim groups. In addition, entire categories of personnel may be excluded from, or discriminated against, during the recruitment for academic vacancies. Some of these practices amount to direct censorship, such as the destruction of historical traces as the result of nationalism, or the rejection of a historical work because of the sexual or racial origin of its author. Sixth, autobiographical factors may induce in historians excessive bias and myopia. On balance, it can be concluded that certain restrictive factors may either result in *de facto* censorship or be disguised forms of censorship themselves.

## PRACTICE

Censorship of history has been practised in all modes, genres, fields, categories, and periods of history, and in all countries. To begin with, it ranges over all modes of the historiographical operation. Pre-censorship, often invisible to the

<sup>5</sup> Conversely, there is a risk of arbitrary censorship charges: legitimate dismissal for incompetence or abuse is sometimes presented as a censorship case by its victim.



public, attempts to regulate research: archives are kept secret or cleansed and manuscripts are rewritten without authorial consent. Post-censorship means that publications are banned, their authorship is deleted or changed without authorial consent, or that lectures are boycotted, or the content of teaching courses is improperly interfered with. Pre-censorship is a common feature of dictatorships, but not of other regimes. All historical genres are affected, although many believe that some of them are more amenable to censorship than others. In particular, source editions (even if this is a safe area for some), genealogies, biographies, memoirs, obituaries, chronicles, chronologies, annals, maps, photographs, bibliographies, historical dictionaries, encyclopaedias, statistics, indexes, and history textbooks have been mentioned as vulnerable. But no genre is really safe, not even the most system-independent. All fields come into the ambit of censorship, not only political or military history, but also economic, social, and cultural history.

Censors also pay attention to all potentially dangerous historical facts and opinions, whatever their category. As the censors' aim is to control the past, they do not necessarily distinguish between professional historians and others dealing with the past. They perceive a danger, irrespective of the qualifications of those behind it. Therefore, anyone expressing historical facts or opinions can be targeted. Popular history, whether written, spoken, or visual, is as much a target of censorship as academic history, and probably even more so. It uses multiple media and many of these media (such as songs, commemorations, films, television, and all forms of cultural heritage) partly feed or reflect collective memory. The reach of popular history, therefore, is wider than that of academic history. Depending on the censor's need, all *periods* of history can be targeted. Archaeology, for example, covers the sensitive problem of the origin of the nation, and is often closely watched. In many countries, contemporary history is certainly the most dangerous period of study. This is mainly because the witnesses are still alive.

#### CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS IN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS WORLDWIDE (1945–2009)

The methodological problem of how to provide, in a short and worldwide overview such as the present one, examples drawn from a universe of thousands of cases illustrating the manifold manifestations of the censorship of history is vexing. Given the infinite variety in amount and degree of censorship, an example of variant 1 inevitably elicits the question why no examples are given for variants 2, 3, . . . *n*. I have chosen a particular strategy here to solve this problem. The universe of all cases of censorship of history since 1945 can be divided in sub-universes, some of which reliably reflect the larger one in terms of

diversity of historical content affected by censorship. One such sub-universe is presented here. On the positive side, the presentation of a sub-universe avoids the distorting selectivity flowing from space restrictions, or the eternal repetition of examples decreed ‘classic’ by those who ignore the rest of the universe; on the negative side, its size reduces the individual items (the examples) to a list.

The sub-universe chosen here, the censorship of history textbooks for primary and secondary education, is, I argue, a good barometer for the censorship of history in general. The textbook genre is watched very closely all over the globe, and because of its reach and potential impact on young minds it is often the subject of controversy and, consequently, not seldom of censorship.

Despite its ambition to represent a sub-universe of the censorship of history, the following worldwide survey of subjects in history textbooks for primary and secondary education is not exhaustive. For each of the controversies, however important, well-known, or typical many of them may be, there are lesser-known ones. However, each subject on the list is based on evidence, the details of which (protagonists, textbook titles, regimes, reasons for the controversies, and so on) are not reproduced here. Where possible, subjects are tied to chronology (which is sometimes tentative). The absence of particular periods or countries does not imply that no history textbook censorship occurred in those periods or countries. Nor does the absence of controversy mean that no censorship took place: countries with the worst censorship records repress controversies.

Three types of textbook controversies were excluded from the survey: (1) those taking place in the form of a legitimate (no matter how heated) debate about national standards, curricula, and textbooks without inappropriate interventions—as was often the case in democracies (indeed, many controversies listed in the survey took place *without* a debate); (2) those relating to the subject of history in general but not to specific historical textbooks (except for attempts to abolish or reduce the subject inspired by the less malleable nature of history compared to subjects such as social studies); (3) those concerning structural omissions in history textbooks as a result of gender, ethnic, or other bias.

The annotation is as follows: *Country*, year(s) of controversy 1 (if applicable: *part of country*): subject 1, subject 2, etc.<sup>6</sup>

*Afghanistan*, 1978–89: Sovietization of textbooks.

*Albania*. See Macedonia, Serbia.

*Argentina*, 1979–80: Marxist views.

*Armenia*. See USSR.

*Australia*, 1994–6 (*Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria*): ‘invasion’ versus ‘settlement’ as accurate description of establishment of Australian colonies.

<sup>6</sup> Sources: for most of the pre-2000 subjects see De Baets, *Censorship of Historical Thought*; for many of the post-1995 subjects see the website of the Network of Concerned Historians (<http://www.concernedhistorians.org>).

*Azerbaijan*. See USSR.

*Bangladesh*. See Pakistan.

*Belarus*, 1994–2009: Sovietization of textbooks versus nationalist views, especially concerning Russian-Belarusian relations in 1918–45.

*Belize*, 1984–9: nationalist views.

*Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 1998–: ethnic representation of 1992–5 war; 2007 (*Tuzla*): Second World War, collapse of Yugoslavia, 1992–95 war.

*Brazil*, 1964–[85]: Marxist views.

*Brunei*, 2004: history of religion.

*Bulgaria*, 1944–[89]: former monarchs.

*Cambodia*, 1975–9: Khmer Rouge halted history teaching; 1979–88: no history subjects offered because of textbook shortage and fear of vietnamization of history; 1989–2000, 2002–9: omission or neglect of Khmer Rouge period from textbooks.

*Central and Eastern Europe*, 1948–89: Sovietization of textbooks.

*Chile*, 2000: military coup of 1973.

*China*, 1954–2009 (*Tibet*): Sinicization of textbooks; 2006: Boxer rebellion, lack of patriotism.

*Colombia*, 1985–9: independence heroes, Marxist views, conservative versus progressive views, contemporary history.

*Croatia*, 1991–2003: moratorium on teaching recent history in Serb-language classes in eastern Slavonia.

*Cuba*, 1961–: school libraries ordered to replace old textbooks with Marxist guidelines.

*Cyprus*, 1974–2001 (*Turkish*): Greek Cypriot historical views; 2004 (*Greek*): textbook illustration deemed ‘too Turkish’ retouched; 2008–9 (*Greek*): Hellenic heritage of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios, intercommunal violence in 1963–74, partition of 1974.

*Czechoslovakia*, 1945–: *odsun* (expulsion of Sudeten Germans in 1945–7).

*Equatorial Guinea*, 1968–79: former colonial ‘imperialist’ textbooks burned.

*Ethiopia*, 2002: Oromo history.

*France*, 1989: revolution of 1789; 2005–6: positive view of French colonialism.

*Germany*, 1945: history lessons temporarily abolished; 1945–9: ban on Nazi textbooks; 1989–92: ban on East German textbooks; 2005 (*Brandenburg*): Armenian genocide.

*Greece*, 1965: ancient emperors; 1984: Turkish invasion of northern Cyprus in 1974; 1984–9: evolutionism; 2002: colonel Georgios Grivas; 2006–7: nature of Ottoman domination in 1458–1821, role of Orthodox clergy in independence struggle, nature of Cypriot Question, expulsion of Greeks from Turkey in 1922; 2009: nationalist versus non-nationalist views.

*Guatemala*, 1960–96: contemporary history; 2002: anti-Mayan views.

*Haiti*, 1947–1990s: history teachers required to be Haitian citizens.

- India*, 1947–: Marxist-inspired ‘economic nationalist’ interpretations of Indian history; 1947–2009: secularist versus communalist views; 1966 (*Kashmir*): anti-Indian sentiments; 1977–8: indigenous versus foreign nature of Muslim rule in 1200–1757, socio-economic history, political versus religious explanation of conflicts; 1992–3 (*Uttar Pradesh*): communalist views; 2001–4: ‘saffronization’ (adaptation of content to Hindu-nationalist views) of topics such as the Indus Valley civilization, Aryan migrations, castes, epics, Ayodhya as Rama’s birthplace, Muslims, Jainism, Sikhism; 2009 (*Goa*): Mughals versus Maratha King Shivaji.
- Indonesia*, 1943–5: Indonesian nationalist views; 1956–: expulsion of Dutch history teachers; 2007–8: role of communists in 1948 uprising in Madiun and in 1965 coup attempt (‘G30S’) in Jakarta.
- Iraq*, 2005–: de-Ba’athification of textbooks.
- Israel*, 1970s–90s: Palestinian-Arab history; 1995: Armenian genocide, Gypsies during Holocaust; 2009 Nakba (expulsion of Palestinians from Israel in 1948).
- Italy*, 2000, 2002: anti-Fascist, communist views.
- Japan*, 1945–6: ban on wartime textbooks; 1957: Japanese atrocities in Second World War; 1965–: controversies over *liberal* textbooks (including a critical portrayal of Japanese history) concentrating on ministry of education textbook screening of topics such as flag, anthem, emperor, Shinto religion, foundation of nation, 1889 Meiji constitution, colonization of Korea in 1910–45, Korean independence movement in 1919, armed forces crimes during 1931–45 Pacific War (including 1931 invasion of China, 1937 Nanking massacre, bacteriological experiments of Unit 731, conscription of Koreans and Chinese into forced labour, crimes in Malaysia, comfort women, 1945 battle of Okinawa, Yasukuni shrine), 1945 atomic bomb, 1991 Gulf War—with frequent conflicts, including the Ienaga textbook cases (1965–97), the Takashima textbook cases (1993–), and textbook conflicts with Korea, China, and other Asian countries in 1982 and 2005; 1986–7, 2000–2, 2008–9: controversies over *nationalist* textbooks with positive views of Japanese militarism and colonialism in 1931–45.
- Korea (North)*, 1948–: total textbook control; *Korea (South)*, 1948–: strict textbook control; –2000: omission of Nogun-ri massacre of 1950; 2000: portrayal of North Korea; 2008–9: liberal versus conservative interpretations of post-1953 history, especially of dictatorships, Korean-American relations, ‘sunshine policy’.
- Lebanon*, 1943–89: absence of contemporary history; 1989–2009: ethnic versus unified view of history.
- Libya*, 1973: former monarchy; 2006: Berber history.
- Lithuania*, 2004: anti-Jewish stereotypes.
- Macedonia*, 2000–6: armed conflict of 2001 between Albanians and Macedonians.
- Mexico*, 1992–93: nationalist heroes, Porfiriato (dictatorship of 1876–1911), revolution of 1910–17, Tlatelolco massacre of 1968, contemporary history;

- 2003: responsibility of army in Tlatelolco massacre of 1968 and of successive presidents in increasing poverty.
- Moldova*, 2001–4: de-Romanization and re-Sovietization of textbooks.
- Morocco*, 2010: ‘Years of lead’ (1961–99).
- Nicaragua*, 1991: Sandinista heroes.
- Pakistan*, 1977–88: Islamization, historical origins of Pakistan, archaeology, pre-Islamic past, role of Muslims and *ulamas* in pre–1947 independence movement, first governor-general and *quaid* Ali Jinnah, regionalism, secularism, atheism, history of 1947–77 period (including 1948 war in Kashmir and history of East-Pakistan/Bangladesh); 2000–2005 (*Gilgit-Balistan* [*Northern Areas*]): Shi’ite *versus* Sunnite representation of Islamic history and religious practices.
- Palestinian Authority*, 2000: history of post–1948 Palestinian–Israeli relations; 2009 (*Gaza Strip*): Holocaust in United Nations history textbooks.
- Paraguay*, 1954–2008: stonismo (dictatorship of Stroessner in 1954–89).
- Peru*, 1970s: traditional heroes versus socio-economic factors as determinants of history.
- Poland*, 1978–9: underground versus official views of history; 1980–5: ban on textbooks, history teachers persecuted.
- Romania*, 1980–97: Transylvanian history teachers required to be Romanian (not Hungarian) and teach in Romanian; 1999: Dacian roots of Romania, tenth-century Transylvanian rulers, Michael the Brave, Vlad the Impaler, revolution of December 1989; 2003–4: Holocaust.
- Russia*, 1997 (*Voronezh oblast, Western Russia*): ‘anti-Russian’ textbook; 2001: post-Soviet reform; 2003–4: USSR during the Second World War, Chechnyan wars (1994–96, 1999–2009), role of President Vladimir Putin; 2007: partial rehabilitation of USSR (particularly Stalinism), justification of Putin’s rule as ‘sovereign democracy’.
- Rwanda*, 1994–2004: teaching of contemporary history, including 1994 genocide, suspended.
- Serbia*, 2002: former President Slobodan Milošević, causes of wars of 1991–95, Srebrenica genocide of 1995; 2004 (*south*): Albanian history.
- Slovakia*, 1996: nature of Czechoslovak (1918–38) and Slovak (1939–45) state; 1997: persecution of Slovak Jews in 1939–45.
- South Africa*, 1948–94: racist views, apartheid.
- Spain*, 1939–70: omission of Republican reforms and conduct in 1931–9 and of Francoist repression in 1936–52; 2000: centralist versus regionalist views of history.
- Sri Lanka*, 1956–; sinhalization of textbooks.
- Switzerland*, 2006 (*Zürich*): Swiss role in Second World War.
- Taiwan*, 1989: ‘228’ (rebellion of 28 February 1947); 1997, 2003, 2007: China-versus Taiwan-oriented views of Taiwanese history.

- Thailand*, 1946–: overthrow of absolute monarchy in 1932.
- Turkey*, 1945–: neglect of contemporary history; 2004: Armenian genocide; 2008: military coups of 1971, 1980, 1997, Gulf War of 1990–1.
- Turkmenistan*, 2000: textbook burned.
- Ukraine*, 1991–: pro-Russian versus anti-Russian views; 2008–: Holodomor (1932–3 famine), Orange Revolution of 2004.
- United Kingdom*, 1990: ban on words of Irish politicians; 1996–7 (*Hong Kong*): Opium War of 1840–2, cooperation between Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) and warlords (1916–25), Taiwan, Tibet, anti-rightist campaign of 1957, Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, Tiananmen massacre of 1989; 2008: war in Iraq since 2003.
- United States*, 1950 (*New York*): blacks during slavery and Reconstruction period; 1954 (*Texas*): *American Declaration of Independence* (1776), *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948); 1959 (*Washington DC*): slavery; 1960–1: textbook authors included in list of ‘liberal, racial, socialist or labour agitators’, views of economic determinism, Great Depression, internationalism; 1961–3 (*Texas*): League of Nations, communist views, Indians, slavery, New Deal; 1966–8 (*California*): ethnic and racial minorities, civil rights, communism, lack of patriotism; 1974–81 (*Mississippi*): racial conflict, ethnic minorities; 1979 (*New Mexico*): conservative views; 1981 (*Alabama*): evolutionism; 1983 (*Texas*): prehistory, evolutionism, religion, capitalism, communist views, New Deal; 1984 (*Oregon*): law against libel of republic’s founders and those who preserved union; 1987 (*Alabama*): ‘religion of secular humanism’; 2005–6 (*California*): ancient India; 2006 (*Florida*): postmodernist views of history.
- Uruguay*, 1973–85: Spanish conquest, Catholic counter-reformation, reign of Spanish King Philip II versus French Revolution and ‘Jewish–Masonic conspiracies’; 2006: causes of military dictatorship of 1973–85.
- USSR*, 1938–53: dominance of Stalin’s *History of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)–Short Course*; 1940–91: annexation of Baltic countries; 1945–[88] (*Nagorno Karabakh enclave [Azerbaijan]*): history of Armenia not taught; 1964–[84]: former Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev; 1981 (*Georgia*): period of Georgian independence (1918–21), Georgian anti-Soviet revolt (1924) and other obliterated episodes of Georgian history; 1988–9: historical examinations cancelled because textbooks were ‘full of lies’.
- Uzbekistan*, 2000: de-Sovietization through order to destroy all Soviet-era textbooks—leading to textbook shortage.
- Vietnam*, 1989–[2009]: law against libel of revolutionary accomplishments of Communist Party; strict textbook control.
- Yugoslavia*, 1970s: dissident Marxist views; 1990–[9] (*Kosovo*): Serbianization.
- Zimbabwe*, 1980–2: racist views.

Some conclusions spring to mind in reviewing this survey. The first is that most controversies arose in relation to recent, twentieth-century content. The next is that the controversies about this explosive content are not a matter of the past alone: they are still prominent in the twenty-first century. A further conclusion is that censorship is geographically universal and that it occurs in widely diverging political and historiographical contexts, though distributed very unevenly across continents. The survey refutes a simplistic assignment of freedom of enquiry to the West and censorship to the Rest. Nevertheless, the basic rule of thumb (the more democratic a country, the less censorship) stands.

Last, and without asserting, as some do, that history textbooks faithfully reflect public opinion, collective memory, or collective identity (if this were so, no controversies would exist), it is still possible to argue that history textbook controversies always reflect divergent opinions on historical questions to some degree and, therefore, different conceptions of a collective—often a national—identity. It appears that many, if not most, of the textbook controversies were part of larger debates that, if regime circumstances permitted, raged also in academia, political and legal arenas, the media, the streets, and, sometimes, in neighbouring countries. It is telling, however, that professional historians did not always participate in the controversy because they found the historical issues at stake already solidly settled by research.

## EFFECTS

Returning from the textbook scene to the overall situation, the effects of the censorship of history are best assessed in its natural habitat: dictatorship. Under a repressive regime, the peer community of historians ceases to act as an honest check on the scholarly character of historical works. Scores of historians are obliged to destroy their own writings. The whole environment is infected, and the border between truth and lies almost irreparably blurred. The censorship of history affects and poisons the entire professional climate: qualifications become unimportant and judgements twisted. Historians are terrorized, the once-stuffed drawers often stand empty. All this leaves its imprint on the present and future generations of historians as a social and professional group. The overall effect of censorship on the profession is not the death of history, but the illusion that it is still alive. In short, the main effect is sterility.

Despite all control, however, professionals are seldom a willing tool of some prescribed line; they always retain bargaining power, represented by their training and knowledge, because they must apply the general ideological guidelines to many different historical problems and contexts, or translate them into detailed curricula and textbooks. In doing so, they are able to create margins that increase as one moves further from the kernel of ideology. For this reason, purely instrumental theories of historiography are usually rather rudimentary.

Although at the broadest societal level, the dictator's aim is a unanimously obedient people, the next effect of censorship may be doubt about dogma and room for dissidence. The implausible tenets of censorship and propaganda engender a credibility gap between the official history taught at school and the versions whispered at home, often followed by a feeling of disillusion, especially among the younger generation, in the face of a culture of lies. For a long time to come, persistent distrust of the historical profession may be the legacy. Thus, even in the darkest hours of tyranny, the distorted past may be challenged by alternative versions. These alternative versions may be equally biased, but they are alternative and, through them, the flame of plurality continues to burn. Under non-dictatorial regimes, the effects of censorship, however serious, are less substantial. Even here, increasing frequencies of censorship may adversely affect the work climate, make the environment more condoning, and the work habits sloppier.

However, under all regime types, censorship can have unintended positive effects. Sometimes, if it is not all-pervading, it provides an indirect incentive for creativity and criticism. More importantly, it has a remarkable ability to highlight that which it suppresses. Taboos always attract curiosity. Repression may discourage that curiosity for decades. But when history as a classical vehicle of the past is silenced and compromised, every utterance—graffiti, literature, theatre, film—becomes its potential vehicle and substitute. Thus, censorship generates the emergence of substitutes: whenever the silenced and silent historians are not able to refute the heralded truths of official historical propaganda, philosophers, poets, novelists, playwrights, filmmakers, journalists, storytellers, and singers take care of the historical truth and keep it alive. Paradoxically, the ostensible vulnerability of many of these substitutes is their power: writing, for example, is a solitary act requiring little institutional support. Sometimes, fictional genres are not taken seriously by the authorities and hence escape their attention. Thus, censorship may not suppress alternative views but rather generate them, and, by doing so, become counterproductive. Censorship backfires.

## EPISTEMOLOGY

The question of how we know that censorship occurred has several sides. Problems of evidence of censorship do not only arise from its practical operation (the large variety of modes, genres, fields, and categories), but also from its very nature as a phenomenon related to knowledge. Three epistemological paradoxes are worth mentioning.

First, many forms of censorship are invisible and difficult to trace, since censorship normally takes place in an atmosphere of secrecy. Omission is less



easily studied than commission. The less visible, the more effective censorship is. Censors' motives are better masked and borderline cases confusingly ambiguous.

Second, in a repressive society there is less information about more censorship, whereas in a democratic society there is more information about less censorship. Under dictatorial regimes, insiders (or outsiders allowed to visit the country) who are aware of the censorship of history or the persecution of historians, mostly do not report them because they fear research or career troubles or backlash effects on themselves or their wider circle. The result is wide under-reporting. Authors who do mention the subject typically do so in passing. Sometimes they treat it more extensively as they write under the vivid impression of a recent famous case. If they systematically research and report it, and become whistleblowers, they may encounter disbelief. Data from the censors themselves is generally lacking, at least until the moment when a post-conflict transition arrives. Several exceptional but most important moments of repression, and moments of large operations in particular, are ill suited for recording. Active recording of repression of historians typically requires stability and routine. In more democratic regimes, censorship is not absent, but it is usually less unobserved and uncriticized.

These twin paradoxes entail a third one (close to the unintended positive effects discussed above) that comes to light when censorship is felt as problematic: studying censorship is the beginning of its suspension. However, although censorship of history is a well-known and obvious area of interest, it has also been, until recently, a relatively underestimated and neglected field of systematic historical research. Scarcity and abundance of information about the censorship of history may be determined by the extent of the censors' success, but also by very uneven research efforts, which make it difficult to distinguish important and typical information from other data and, hence, to identify patterns and trends in the relationships between history, power, and freedom.

## HISTORICAL TRUTH

The ontology and epistemology of the censorship of history provide evidence for the thesis that the search for historical truth carried out with as much objectivity as possible—and however provisional, conjectural, and perspectival that truth as a result may be—is the central problem in historical scholarship. There are many truths about the past, because there are many different perspectives with which to look at the past, and many different ways to make sense of that past. But these tentative truths—the only ones to which we can ever aspire—are intrinsically better than error and lie. It is clear that the existence and centrality of historical truth is corroborated by the history of the censorship of history.

A superficial count of the heads of state and government between 1945 and 2009 who had either a degree in history, wrote a historical work, held important speeches with historical contents, or showed their active interest in history in

other demonstrable ways, totalled 116 leaders in 67 countries. Many of them attacked historians directly and publicly.<sup>7</sup> From time immemorial, the eagerness of rulers to censor history has been proof *a contrario* of their historical awareness and hence, of the existence and importance of historical truth. Why, indeed, would they have bothered to censor certain versions of history if the notion of historical truth was not important?

At the other side of the spectrum, some historians living in a dictatorship refuted historical myths at the cost of irreparable career damage. This can only be plausibly explained by their belief in the value of historical truth. In 1963, for example, Soviet historian Aleksandr Zimin attempted to prove that *Slovo o polku Igoreve* [The Song of Igor's Campaign] was not written in 1187 as most believed, but fabricated as late as the 1770s. During a conference at the Institute of Russian Literature in Leningrad, he outlined his conclusions, questioning the tale's authenticity, destroying it as a source of Russian and Soviet pride in the process. His conclusions aroused much controversy and hostility. In 1964, they were discussed at a three-day symposium of the USSR Academy of Sciences History Institute on the basis of copies of the first draft of his book. Although his work could not appear, Zimin succeeded in publishing his argument in a dozen journal articles. Until the 1990s, almost nothing from what Zimin wrote was published—his manuscripts totalled many thousands of typed pages. The controversy reportedly contributed to his early death at age 60.<sup>8</sup>

Other courageous historians living in dictatorial contexts sometimes criticized the official rewriting of history with its blank spots by *publicly and directly* claiming a right to historical truth.<sup>9</sup> In the Soviet Union, *Novy mir's* chief editor Aleksandr Tvardovsky once wrote in a 1965 editorial that omission of facts was a lie. His article was promptly attacked by Evgenii Vuchetich who advanced the notion of 'two truths': the 'truth of the event and the fact', and the 'truth of the life and struggle of the people'. Vuchetich attempted to introduce this novel notion with the aim of adapting epistemology to ideology. A group of prominent Soviet historians wrote an open letter to the newspaper *Izvestia*, in which the notion of 'two truths' was called an 'attempt to distinguish between suitable and inconvenient facts', and in which the duty to search for the historical truth was emphasized. Submitted in May 1965, the letter was rejected for publication. It was instead published a month later in the *samizdat* journal *Political Diary*, edited by historian Roy Medvedev.

In Czechoslovakia, a large debate about the nature of history took place among *samizdat* historians in 1984–5. It started in May 1984 with the publication of

<sup>7</sup> For a partial overview, see De Baets, *Responsible History* (New York, 2009), 100–7.

<sup>8</sup> From a 1982 book in his honour, the official *Festschrift* designation was removed prior to publication. Three articles in the book that treated Zimin explicitly had all notice of that fact removed from their titles. De Baets, *Censorship of Historical Thought*, 495.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 497–8, 183, 401, 117; and *id.*, *Responsible History*, 153–154.

a *Charta 77* document, *Právo na dějiny* [The Right to History]. This document included a negative assessment of official historiography, a defence of the Catholic view of history, and a reappraisal of several episodes and persons in Czechoslovak history. It also criticized the severely restricted access to archives, especially for post-1918 sources. Some fifteen historians reacted to this *Charta 77* document. Many of the texts from this debate appeared in Milan Hübl's 1985 *samizdat* publication, *Hlasy k českým dějinám* [Voices on Czech History]. There had been predecessors: medievalist František Graus and contemporary historian Jan Křen had launched appeals for more autonomy in historiography in 1956 and 1963 respectively; and, as we saw, in 1979 Jozef Jablonický had attacked the gaps in official historical writing. In Poland, an article entitled 'The Right to Historical Truth' was accepted for publication in *Res Publica*—an independent but legally published monthly from the 1980s—and then banned in 1987. The article, written by historian Adolf Juzweńko, described the problematic state of post-war Polish historiography. It eventually appeared in *Index on Censorship* in 1988.

In a very different context, that of the transition in China after Mao Zedong's death in 1976, a circle of writers around Hu Yaobang (the Chinese Communist Party's future Secretary-General) initiated a major epistemological shift. These writers contended that practice, rather than ideology, was the criterion for truth. A major role in this shift was played by Sun Changjiang, a professor, journalist, and editor with a degree in Chinese history from the China People's University. He was the main author of 'Shijian shi jianyan zhenli de weiye biao zhun' [Practice is the Sole Criterion of Truth], the article of May 1978 that sparked what became known as the 'truth criterion controversy'. Later, in the summer of 1987, Sun would nearly lose his Party membership for allegedly advocating 'bourgeois liberalization' and criticizing leftist dogmatism. He was dismissed as an editor.

Were the actions of Tvardovsky and Medvedev, *Charta 77* and Hübl, Juzweńko and *Index on Censorship*, and Hu and Sun futile? They were not. Although for a large part these authors wrote under pressure and with high risks, they kept burning the flame of truth. They did what may be expected of historians, but they did it under very unfavourable circumstances. Therefore, their actions were important and courageous. Many similarly important efforts by similarly courageous historians have been forgotten. But these historians managed to leave traces of their actions. Therefore, their struggle for a right to history can be remembered here.

## ETHICS

Finally, the problem of the censorship of history possesses an ethical dimension, at least to the extent that the political regime allows historians the oxygen to act as

responsible agents at all. Censorship is a violation of the historians' two core rights which are high on the list of human rights: freedom of expression (for teaching and publishing) and freedom of information (for conducting research). Given these rights, it is the historians' professional duty to apply standards of accuracy and sincerity, in particular to search honestly and methodically for the historical truth. Whereas the responsible use of history—including many forms of responsible selection and omission—is protected by academic freedom, censorship is not. And if restrictions imposed by censorship are not prescribed by law or necessary in a democratic society, they are not even covered by the right to free expression. Censorship of history, through its almost exclusive dependence on non-scholarly interests, is a form of abuse of history. Like all such abuse, it undermines the trust placed by society in scholarship and teaching. Therefore, historians should always oppose it. For this reason, the activities of censoring historians should be condemned, with the aggravating qualification that censorship of history committed by professional historians is worse than the same conduct by nonprofessionals. Detailed study of their cases, however, often reveals that censors are sometimes subjected to heavy pressure themselves. Hence, moral judgements from outsiders on the freedom to act of censoring historians (and on the position of historians who did not oppose censorship) are not always relevant in the more complex cases.

A final basic ethical principle is this: the universal rights of freedom of thought and expression ineluctably include the right to write and teach history and the right to remember the past. Mapping the history of the censorship of history and remembering both those opposing it and suffering from it, are vital avenues for keeping these rights to history and to memory alive.

Obviously, even if the history of the censorship of history has unusually wide ramifications, it does not cover the totality of historical writing. But just as societies are well studied at the atypical moments of their deepest crises, so has the study of historical writing its privileged but surprising vantage points. And, as the dark side of scholarship, the censorship of history is one of them.

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