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The Construction of the Relation Between National Past and present in the Appropriation of Historical Master Narratives

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Abstract Master narratives about national history have been recognized as powerful cultural tools, influencing both historical understanding and national identity construction. For example, by the work of James Wertsch and studies on national history representation from a sociocultural point of view. However, the appropriation of these narratives needs to be considered in more detail for a clearer picture of how the nation is imagined and how this representation could change. In this paper a contribution is made by analyzing how the relation between past and present is constructed in master narrative representation, based on interviews with high school students narrating national history and presidential discourse commemorating it. It is proposed that the relation between past and present is constructed in three ways: past and present are identified; the past is idealized and their relation is teleologically constructed. By looking at how past and present are related in representations of the national past, the functioning of national historical myths as cultural tool becomes more clear. This contributes to clarifying how the master narrative constrains historical understanding and how it might enable national identification processes.

Keywords History education · Master narratives · National identity · Collective memory · History learning

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Introduction

The construction of the relation between past and present can be approached from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary viewpoints (Bevernage and Lorenz 2013). Whereas a psychological point of view might emphasize how people construct this relation making sense of their past from their present (e.g., Straub 2005), a historiographical perspective generally emphasizes taking a distance from the present to study the past in its own right and to study the causal relations between the past and present (Burke 2001). Establishing a dialogue between these two perspectives is complex, particularly when attempts to historicize processes meet attempts to universalize or naturalize them (Millstone 2012; Knights 2012). Nevertheless there have already been several efforts to interdisciplinary approach issues that interest both historians and psychologists. This has been done in terms of collective memory and social representations (Glaveanu and Yamamoto 2012; Liu and Hilton 2005), but also in the extensive cognitive and educational studies on history understanding (Barton and Levstik 2004; Carretero and Voss 1994; Carretero et al. 2012a; Seixas 2004; Wineburg 2001) and more recently the so-called “public uses of history” (Bjerg 2011; Levi and Revel 2002). Even though these approaches differ in terms of emphasis on either memory or history (see Rosa Rivero 2004, and Burke 2005, on the difference), they share the idea that a historical dimension needs to be introduced, whether in psychological investigation, in considering social scientific concepts or in education. Particularly the notion of ‘cultural tool’ allows for building meaningful bridges between history and psychology, as they are historically constructed and interiorized to constitute psychological processes (Wertsch 1998). Because they are taught cultural tools also allow for education to enter into the interdisciplinary dialogue between history and psychology. In the current discussion of the construction of relations between past and present we situate ourselves in this multidisciplinary field and focus on master narratives as cultural tools influencing this construction. More specifically, our theoretical and empirical framework attempts to integrate the cognitive constructivism from developmental and educational psychology with the cultural psychology of mediational means, while centering on historical narratives of nation (Carretero and Bermudez 2012). Not individual narrative constructions relating past and present but national historical narratives framing this relation are at the center of this argument.

The present paper advocates the historicity of the construction of the relation between past and present with respect to the nation. We propose that the imagination of nation is both a cognitive, cultural and historical process. In agreement with the seminal work by Anderson (1983) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and many social scientists in their wake, the nation, as concept and narrative, is considered itself historical. Billig (1995) and Reicher and Hopkins (2001) have contributed to this idea from a social psychological point of view, emphasizing that nations and nationalism should not be naturalized and that national identity is a historical category as well as a social category, interiorized throughout various social psychological processes. According to these authors representations of the past, such as master narratives, contribute to that naturalization. In this sense the relation between the past and present nation has been taught and learned since the nation became a project of politicians, historians and educators in the 19th century. Indeed, history as a discipline initially was national history aimed at legitimizing political projects and creating national citizenry

around the world (Berger 2012). Smith (1991) considered that most nations have been built on a myth of origin, a kind of master narrative. Master narratives play an important role in the imagination of nation, not only in the invention but in sustaining national identity as well. Myths of origin have come to the attention of sociocultural psychology and are found to be spread out through a number of educational and cultural artifacts (Jovchelovitch 2012). “Official” and “unofficial” historical narratives have also attracted attention (Wertsch and Rozin 2000), in terms of what they include and exclude. Many studies about history textbooks and curriculum contents have shown how they have been influenced by their original purpose of constructing national identities (Nakou and Barca 2010) and how they sustain “official” or national historical narratives and myths of origin (Ferro 1984–2000; Foster 2012; Van Sledright 2008). Master narratives in general are increasingly considered as a unit of analysis in the social sciences. Heller (2006) describes master narratives as general interpretation patterns and considers that their function is making sense of the past, present, and future of a cultural community. In a similar vein, Wertsch (2004) proposed that repeatable elements of historical narratives form schematic narrative templates in our minds, but distinguishes specific historical narratives from the pattern that manifests in these narratives. The theoretical and empirical scope of the notion of master narrative is rather broad. We understand it as national myth of origin or the grand narrative of nation. Many other potential master narratives (for example of ethnicity, class and gender) have been subsumed under that of the nation (Berger and Lorenz 2008). In agreement with Penuel and Wertsch (2000) we approach master narratives theoretically and empirically as ‘cultural tools’ (Carretero and Bermudez 2012; Wertsch 1998, 2002). This means that they are produced and propagated for particular (political, educational) purposes, and that they are appropriated or ‘consumed’ by students or citizens. There have been many historical and educational studies on the production of master narratives, on why they were implemented in the first place and how they manifest over and over again on national curricula or in school history textbooks (Alridge 2006; Ferro 1984–2002; Foster and Crawford 2006; Grever and Stuurman 2007). However, as with cultural tools in general, the production of these national historical contents does not guarantee their consumption and appropriation (Wertsch 1998). Therefore our attention has been drawn to studying the appropriation of the master narrative as a cultural tool. Wertsch (2002) uses appropriation to refer to active internalization of textual means and distinguishes two levels: mastery (cognitively managing the narrative) and appropriation as such (making the narrative one’s own, possibly transforming it). In this vein, we consider appropriation to refer to different degrees of active internalization, that can vary between echoing other voices or narratives and telling or using them as one’s own. As seen in the theory of mediated action (Wertsch 1998) the objectives of the cultural tool and the objectives of the agent using the cultural tool are not necessarily the same. Agents using the master narrative as cultural tool might not be aware of its inherent objectives, that might even be at odds with their own objectives. However, they can also reject or resist the master narrative. In this sense, the agent’s construction of a representation of national history can be more or less framed by the master narrative.

Master narratives, as we understand them, are intimately related with history education. National histories were born to be taught, traditionally to foster social cohesion and national identities (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). History education

has used narrative as a principal vehicle and has been predominantly focused on national history (Barton and Levstik 2004; Grever and Stuurman 2007). However, history education has two different objectives in tension with one another (Carretero 2011). It has, throughout disciplinary developments, not only aimed at the construction of national identities but also at understanding the past. The former objective of history education is in line with the traditional romantic view of teaching history. This view emphasizes the past as a model for, or justification of, the present and values identification with the past. Particularly, it involves a positive assessment of the own national past, present and future, and the political processes connecting them. The latter objective is more recent in history education and aligns with a disciplinary view. This view proposes the comprehension of the past as such, of historical time and change, of complex multi-causality, and approaching methods of historiography to relate the past to the present (Carretero and Bermudez 2012). Whereas the former objective is served by the master narrative, history understanding as an educational objective is inspired by contemporary historiography. According to this objective students should be able to distinguish past and present scenarios, in order to avoid presentism (Lowenthal 1985), and establish a meaningful relation with the past or achieve historical consciousness (Rüsen 2004; Seixas 2004). 'Thinking historically' (Levesque 2008), as an objective of history teaching and learning, is the capacity to analyze the complex social and political situations of the present, taking into account the influence of past events. The master narrative has been considered to enable national identity construction but constrain historical understanding (Alridge 2006; Carretero and Kriger 2011; Wertsch 1998). However, in further studying the master narrative as a cultural tool in relation to history education objectives, we think it is necessary to look at how past and present are related through this narrative as opposed to the disciplinary construction of this relation.

Constructing causal relations between past and present is at the core of historiography and has been a matter of methodological debate in the discipline. According to the now referential work of Carr (1961) and Bloch (1953), past and present can neither be absolutely differentiated (as in 'the past is not accessible from the present') nor can there be a simple identification between them (as in 'the past can be simply accessed from the present'). Rather, being aware of how foreign the past is from our present conceptual framework, a historian should construct this relation carefully by letting a present question interact with different sources from the past. Debates on history and its methods continue (see for example Megill 2007) but it is safe to say that historiography aims at staying clear from anachronistic, reductionist, determinist, presentist and teleological explanations as ways of connecting past and present. That is, past and present should not be reduced to one another, the past should not entirely determine the present, the past cannot be fully understood through present frameworks and concepts, nor can the present be taken as a goal towards which the past has been orientated (see also Carretero and Solcoff 2012; Fischer 1970).

Now, the emphasis on national identity facilitates other constructions than the emphasis on investigating the national past and historicizing the nation. Master narratives present the historical continuity of the nation. The identity of nation and nationals, fundamental for establishing the master narrative's protagonist, implies that in national terms past and present are the same. Changing the emphasis in history education from national identity construction to historical understanding has been difficult, both in terms of educational implication and impact on learning. This, we hypothesize, is a result of the pervasiveness of master narratives and invites considering them in more detail.

To this end an analytical model of master narrative production and consumption has been proposed (Carretero 2011; Carretero and Bermudez 2012). The presented features of this model, or national historical narrative characteristics, are in brief: a historical subject of national events established in logical opposition to another nation and national identity; historical events set in terms of personalist and concrete attempts at freedom and progress of the nation; heroic examples and moral directions; and the transcendental character of the nation and national identity. Research about how national historical narratives are represented by students found that, when asked about the event that marks the origin of the nation, most their narrations demonstrate these master narrative characteristics (Carretero et al. 2012b; Carretero and Van Alphen 2014; Lopez et al. 2014a; Lopez et al. 2014b). These results were found both in Spain and Argentina, among adults and adolescents. The presence of these features, along with studies in history learning and cultural psychology, suggests a predominantly master narrative representation of national history in which particular constructions of the relations between past and present appear. As the master narrative establishes the identity of a nation, its past and present are directly related through a protagonist, action and goal.

In the following we attempt to clarify how master narratives, produced for national identity construction and consumed by students and citizens, involve connecting past and present. As seen from a sociocultural point of view (Carretero and Bermudez 2012; Wertsch 2002), this means considering in more detail the appropriation of the master narrative as a cultural tool. At the same time we attempt to develop the interdisciplinary dialogue between historiography and psychology on the tension between master narrative and historiographical accounts of the national past. In this sense, analyzing the construction of the relation between past and present allows for reflecting on how master narratives as cultural tools constrain historical understanding when this concerns the own nation.

As will be further argued in this paper, master narratives that aim at fostering national identity connect the national past and present in particular ways. Three ways of the master narrative constructing the relation between past and present are discussed, as they appear in both students' narratives about national history and politicians' commemorative discourses. Firstly, there's identification of past and present, taking national identity as a natural and transcendental category. Secondly, there's idealization of the past, taking it as a moral, heroic or patriotic example. Finally, there's a teleological interpretation of the past, taking the result of a historical process as its inherent and predetermined goal.

Three Constructions Relating Past and Present in students' Master Narratives

Three different constructions of the relation between the past and the present can be distinguished in master narrative representation, as will be illustrated by fragments from interviews carried out in our ongoing investigation (see also Carretero and Van Alphen 2014). These interviews focused on the narratives about the events marking what later came to be considered as the origin of the Argentine nation, and therefore on capturing the master narrative in the Argentine subject's representation of the national past. The

historical events in Buenos Aires on the 25th of May 1810 that are referred to can be compared to the Boston Tea Party in the United States and to historical events symbolizing the origin of nation all over America (Ortemberg 2013). These narratives are often referred to as ‘myth of origin’ (Jovchelovitch 2012; Smith 1991) and share the theme of independence or freedom from colonial rule. The same events are recalled in the presidential discourses presented later on, in which the same constructions of the relation between past and present can be found. The interviews were conducted in Spanish. The presented fragments as well as the discourse by president Fernandez de Kirchner were translated by the authors and revised by a native English speaker.

Participants

A total of 18 Argentine high school students, 16 years old and representing the urban middle class, were interviewed. They had studied the May 25 events in history class a year before. History plays an important role as a subject matter on the Argentine curriculum and it is studied for four full years. The processes of Independence are given much detailed consideration. Like many Argentines, the students are most familiar with these events because they are celebrated every year on the 25th of May, in and out of school, as the events marking the origin of the Argentine nation. The patriotic rituals carried out on this day are mandatory in Argentine primary and secondary schools. How these students view the national past is particularly interesting given their recent exposure to the school history on the subject and their pending political participation, as the right to vote at 16 was introduced in Argentina a couple of years ago. A first analysis in terms of master narrative characteristics (see Carretero and Van Alphen 2014) found that the accounts of four students did not demonstrate these characteristics. In their accounts the master narrative was rejected and more disciplinary historical explanations were given. Also, the relation between the past and the present was established differently (see *analytic strategy*).

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews (Duveen and Gilligan 2013) were conducted to obtain the students’ narrative representation. The same kind of questions were asked to all the participants, but the interviewer would be guided by their answers in the course of the interview. The individual interviews took place at the public high school that these students attended, they lasted about 30 min and were recorded following the student’s consent. The interviewees were presented a well known painting of the so-called May Revolution and asked to take their time to elaborate what happened in the represented event, why it happened and who participated.

Analytic Strategy

Specific parts of the interviews were analyzed to take a look at how the relation between past and present was constructed in the context of the master narratives told by the students. Namely, their answers to the questions whether those participating on May 25th 1810 were Argentines, whether they were Argentines as Argentines nowadays and whether they felt Argentines like nowadays. The questions invited the

students to elaborate a relation between past and present with respect to national identity, while at the same time inviting reflection on historical change. This relation can be constructed in ways very different to the master narrative construction, as was the case in the four master narrative rejections. That is, according to the sources, at the time of the 1810 events Argentines did not exist, nor did Argentina or any kind of collective identity similar to the Argentine identity nowadays (Chiaramonte 1989). These historical considerations can be applied to other countries in the decolonized world. This is to say, the British colonists carried out the Boston Tea Party in 1765. Like the Spanish colonists carried out the *Cabildo Abierto*, the town council meeting on May 25th 1810. Historically the former cannot be considered a U.S. citizen, like the latter cannot be considered an Argentine citizen. The 18th century people and present nationals also differ because two centuries ago only a very small part of the population was a full citizen. Women, slaves and natives were not considered as such. However, in master narratives a continuity between past and present national identity is typically presumed suggesting that all the (Argentine) people were involved or represented. The answers to the particular questions about the national identity are relevant here, because they can illustrate how master narratives format the relation between national past and present. Considering how students answered these specific questions allowed us to distinguish identification, idealization and teleology as ways of constructing the relation between past and present through master narratives.

Identifying Past and Present

In master narratives past and present are related through a national sameness over time, in other words national identity. Like in this first fragment, there is something identical between those participating in the origin of the nation and the nationals now.

Those who participated [on May 25, 1810], were they Argentines like nowadays or were they different?

I suppose that the habits must be different and their way of life and all that, but I suppose they would be Argentines like Argentines nowadays. [...]

Did they feel Argentine?

Yes, if they wanted an Argentine government yes. No doubt.

Because of what they wanted?

Of course, for what they wanted to achieve, to stop depending from Spain.

Did they feel Argentines like Argentines today?

Yes, I suppose so, I'm sure. Like nowadays we fight for the Malvinas at that time they fought for the country itself. The feeling was more or less the same, the sovereignty of the country.

Did they feel Argentines like you?

Yes, I feel Argentine and at that time I would have fought for the same thing.

Mariano (16)

For Mariano, even though life and habits are different, Argentines are the same then and now, particularly in the fight for sovereignty. From a historical point of view there is no similarity between the events in 1810 and the Falklands/Malvinas conflict since the 1982 war between the UK and Argentina. The historical context and the historical subject are different. Nevertheless, in the master narrative the identity of nation is constructed and people then and now are considered identical in terms of their nationality.

Mariano identifies past and present nationals and identifies himself with the national group and its common purpose too. Even though these are different operations - establishing a national similarity *between* past and present is not the same as identifying *with* the national group - they jointly appear in this interview fragment and might very well be connected. That the identification of past and present need not explicitly involve the interviewee personally can be seen in the next fragment from a fellow student:

Do you think they felt Argentine?

Yes.

Like Argentines nowadays?

Yes, they felt Argentines, to fight against what would be Spain at that time...yes, they felt Argentines. [...]

Did they feel Argentine like you?

No, I don't think so.

Why not?

I think they felt more... they had reasons to fight, I don't have to fight for my country now, thank God.

Lucas (16)

Lucas also identifies the past and present in terms of a national identity, but does not seem to identify with the historical subject. He does talk about 'my country' in the present, so somehow historical identification between the national past and present and social identification with the nation are separated. It looks like Lucas, compared to Mariano, takes a distance from the past national historical subject but based on an idealization of past events. This is another way of the master narrative relating past and present, as we will consider next.

Idealizing the Past

If there is something 'more' in the past than in the present, particularly patriotism, ideals or union, this is not just a differentiation of past and present. Rather, the past becomes mythical or idealized. The following fragment illustrates this:

If they were Argentines at that time and nowadays they are as well, in what are they the same or different?

I think that at that time it was more open, everybody expressed what they thought and they were more united for the Independence. Today there is a lot of division.

Did they feel like Argentines at that time?

I suppose so, yes, they really felt part of one and the same country. Everybody felt part of one and the same country.

Veronica (16)

For Veronica the Argentine people in the past were more tolerant and there was a unity that is lacking in the present. From a historical point of view no such union existed (Chiaramonte 1989; 2013), or, as a fellow student said, for slavery to be abolished and women's rights to be acknowledged 'time had to pass'. However, in terms of 'the people making themselves independent' the master narrative typically frames the remote national past. Veronica, as a consequence and comparing with the present situation, idealizes the past in terms of tolerance and unity of the people. So does Fernando, comparing himself and the Argentines today with the real patriots of 1810, in the next fragment.

Do you think they felt Argentines the same way you do?

I don't know... the feeling of being Argentine varies between every person... Because I'm not really a patriot or anything like that because... I don't know... I have different ideas but I guess that at that time everybody had the same idea, the great majority had the same ideal, aspired the same purpose.

And now it's different...

Nowadays the ideas are quite a bit separated, more or less anyway.

Fernando (16)

According to Fernando, Argentines in the present disagree more than they did in the past. Thus he emphasizes that today there is a separation rather than uniformity of

Argentines. Of course, when heroic patriots celebrated in a myth of origin set the example then Argentines today can only stand in their shadow. From a historical point of view the contemporary divisions and problems can be understood quite straightforwardly, because nothing was ever lost to be regained, that is, there never was a mythical union. Internal conflicts and exclusion are found throughout history and help both in historically contextualizing and in understanding present conflicts and problems. The master narrative, nevertheless, sets a moral example to live up to and this clearly affects how past and present nationals are related.

A Teleological Interpretation of the Past

Another relation between the present and the past is constructed by an inherent *telos* of the past protagonists and events. This is the narrative's solution for sustaining a national sameness throughout processes of historical change. In the master narrative the results of the historical process are taken as its motivation or goal, not in the least because these narratives were invented many years after the historical events (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In the case of May 25 the independent nation is taken as a pre-established goal, as can be clearly seen in the following fragment:

Did they feel Argentines like Argentines nowadays?

Yes I think so, because it was a fight over time... because it was not all that easy, but rather a process that... I think that every time they took a step towards the Independence, towards that revolution, that they felt happier because it was a weight less off their backs.

Clara (16)

The protagonists already knew, as Clara does now, what was going to happen. The revolutionaries, as the first patriots, are on a national quest, the very theme of the master narrative. The Independence was pre-determined, there could have been no other outcome of the historical processes. Teleological explanations of history typically happen when looking back, taking the present as the goal of the past events, or taking a point later in time as a lens through which to look at a point earlier in time. Often there is a notion of progress or freedom underlying this kind of interpretation, in this case independence (Alridge 2006; Barton and Levstik 1998). Indeed, the Argentine master narrative tells of historically predetermined revolution and independence.

The teleological explanation can involve the future: the historical process we participate in presently has been aiming at a certain future goal to be achieved. In the next fragment past, present and the future are clearly teleologically related.

Were they just as Argentine as Argentines nowadays?

I think that they were the first Argentines, at the time there were lots of Argentines, but the first ones to feel like wanting a country apart from Spain, to feel that we were other people with another culture and came from somewhere else [...] I believe that the majority of who we are today, of politics, of many

ideas, of many ways of thinking, was thanks to this kind of people that said this was a separate country, that we were not Spain number two, that we weren't a colony. They had the strength and courage to express... the first ideas to stop with the colonies, because the Independence happened later, but the beginning of a process that is not finished nowadays. We are a separate country and all, but sometimes we have political dependence, not that much political nowadays but perhaps economical. It's difficult to explain.[...]

Did they feel Argentines like you do now?

Yes, I believe so, sometimes I think that without all of them I would not feel as much a part of history. That has more to do with the present. I think that politics and that kind of things are a tool for change, that participating, to able to talk, to be able to round up friends to discuss or go to another neighborhood to help, are ways of constructing a better country. They also at some point thought about that, about the weakest, about those who did not have as many opportunities as they had.

Violeta (16)

Violeta positions herself as a participant of the ongoing (inter) national economical and political challenges. The ultimate goal for her and the master narrative protagonists lies in the future. She identifies with the revolutionaries through sharing a goal she supposes they have in common. Her identification with and teleological interpretation of the past is also demonstrated when she says "sometimes I think that without all of them I would not feel as much a part of history". This indicates how much she considers the past events to have a certain direction. The same direction as hers. We might say that the level of appropriation of the narrative is higher, as Violeta really makes the narrative her own. Nevertheless, the master narrative remains and constrains the past-present relation so that future plans cannot be conceived in another way, as if they cannot exist without legitimation from the remote past.

The teleological interpretation, common to master narratives, is much criticized in historiography (Megill 2007). Of course, history is written from a certain present and it is inevitably involved in a dialogue with the past. However, attempting to suspend presentism is exactly what allows for seeing the historicity of national narratives and of social concepts like 'nation'. Contextualizing the historical events involves trying to avoid taking present visions or ideals as the inherent goal of the historical process. A strategic or political use of history sits in the teleological interpretation that master narratives generate.

Past and Present in Presidential Master Narrative Appropriation

As our argument intends to show the constructions of the relation between past and present framed by the national historical master narrative, looking at students' representations is not sufficient. The master narrative also manifests in different situations and with higher degrees of appropriation. Indeed, the three ways of relating past and

present do not only occur in the master narrative representation by students, but also in the wider political use of national history, such as commemorations. Patriotic commemorations and the political use of history sustain romantic accounts of national history and are likely to influence students' representations (see Carretero 2011). Some similarities can be found when comparing the students' accounts above with the speech that Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, President of Argentina, delivered on the occasion of celebrating the 203 years since May 25, 1810.

I want to commemorate history, I want to remember those 203 years of our May Revolution, but not the bland and sanitized version so often explained to us. I want to remember and I see in all of you, in these young faces, the other young faces of French, Beruti, Moreno, Monteagudo [*some of the event's protagonists*]. The true brains of that revolution, French and Beruti, who handed out rosettes, not to celebrate the fall of the [*Spanish*] viceroy, as we were taught, but actually to qualify people to be allowed into the Town Hall. That's how the Revolution and other great processes of transformation in Latin America and the world took place. Young people with ideals as well [...] the ideas, together with the weapons to defend that great nation that was born, constructed history. [...] We have succeeded in articulating this, and that is the best homage we can pay to those men and women liberating the people 203 years ago. The task remained unfulfilled, because we also are still fighting. Not for liberty but for equality, the great symbol of this past decade and of those to come.¹

President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner matches citizens in the present with the Spanish colonists looking for Independence when stating "I want to remember and I see in all of you, in these young faces, the other young faces of French, Beruti, Moreno, Monteagudo". She both idealizes the past and identifies past and present. She invites her public to perform this identification and idealization too. In 'we are still fighting' lies the identification between past and present, similar to how Mariano above considered Argentines then and now to be alike in their fight. The fight might be different, indicates the president, but as Mariano said 'the feeling is more or less the same'. The president's idealization can be seen in the 'true brains of the revolution', as a 'great' process of transformation, and the ideas or weapons that defended the 'great nation' and constructed history. For Fernando there also was something mythical about the May revolution. In the fragment above he idealizes in terms of the shared ideals of a majority that was more patriotic in the past. Contrary to the president he does not identify between the past and the present. He emphasizes the differences between a great revolution and contemporary political division, and considers himself not really a patriot. The president mentions the similarity of some revolutionaries to the young faces in front of her. Would 16 year old Fernando have been among them? Violeta seems more likely to have been there. The presidential discourse and Violeta's account above are alike in terms of identification but particularly in the teleological aspect. The president connects past and present teleologically when she mentions the men and

¹ Commemoration of the 203rd anniversary of the May Revolution: Words from the President of the Nation (25-05-2013). See <http://www.caserosada.gov.ar/discursos/26500-conmemoracion-del-203d-aniversario-de-la-revolucion-de-mayo-palabras-de-la-presidenta-de-la-nacion>. Accessed on 19-01-2015.

women liberating a people 203 years ago, whose incomplete task has been taken up in the present. Violeta talks about the beginning of a process of independence that is still going on and constructing a better country through helping others. The president mentions a shift in emphasis from liberty to equality, and later in her discourse the motto *la patria es el otro* (the other is the homeland) also appears.

Nevertheless, the president has other objectives in using the master narrative than the student has in telling the interviewer about what happened. The president gives a historical foundation for national celebration and gives the master narrative a political and social function. The history is re-written, culminating in the very moment of delivering the speech: the national history has led up to this moment and we, the same way as our predecessors, are on a special national quest. There is no need or intention to be historically accurate or complex. The emphasis is rather on national identification: we all have something in common. In this 'political use of history' (Chiaromonte 2013) we see a cultural tool in action, a master narrative made meaningful in function of the particular situation or celebration. And this happens elsewhere too. Let us consider for instance United States President Obama's second term presidential address.

[E]ach time we gather to inaugurate a president, we bear witness to the enduring strength of our Constitution. We affirm the promise of our democracy. We recall that what binds this nation together is not the colors of our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names. What makes us exceptional, what makes us America is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago. [...] Today we continue a never-ending journey to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time. [...] The patriots of 1776 did not fight to replace the tyranny of a king with the privileges of a few, or the rule of a mob. They gave to us a republic, a government of, and by, and for the people. Entrusting each generation to keep safe our founding creed. And for more than 200 years we have. Through blood drawn by lash, and blood drawn by sword, we noted that no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half slave, and half free. We made ourselves anew, and vowed to move forward together.²

The political developments described in this speech are presented as a teleological trend: "Through blood drawn by lash, and blood drawn by sword, we noted that no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half slave, and half free". And there is a clear transcendental "we" uniting past and present in "We made ourselves anew, and vowed to move forward together". The republic has dramatically changed during 200 years, but these changes appear subordinated to an idealized connection between past and present. The exceptionality of the people in the present is awarded by the constitution established in the past. However, isn't this exceptionality a product of a myth of origin?

More than in a situation of delivering a political speech, the student interviewed about the 25th of May 1810 has the opportunity to historically and critically construct

² President Obama's second inaugural address (Transcript). Washington Post, January 21, 2013; http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/president-obamas-second-inaugural-address-transcript/2013/01/21/f148d234-63d6-11e2-85f5-a8a9228e55e7_story.html. Accessed on 19-01-2015.

the relation between past and present. Fernando and Veronica are critical about the present, but they idealize the past. In this aspect, but even more so in terms of identification and teleological explanation, the presidential discourse and the teenager's narrative about the same national historical event resemble each other rather than they resemble a historiographical account. The demonstrated constructions of the relation between past and present take the past to be very similar to the present, they take the past as an example for the present, or they take the present as a goal set in the past. And they appear even though the master narrative is appropriated in different situations in different degrees. This indicates the pervasiveness of the master narrative, but furthermore that identification, idealization and teleological explanation can be taken as the particular ways of connecting past and present through master narratives across different levels of appropriation.

Discussion

Recent developments in conceptual history (Koselleck 2004) and conceptual change in History (Leinhardt and Ravi 2013; Carretero et al. 2013; Carretero and Lee 2014) acknowledge that every historical study of the past is influenced by the present, because historical concepts are symbolic tools undergoing a process of change over time. This implies that the conceptualization of the past happens through present concepts, but also that there are traces of the past in our present concepts. Both classical historiographical positions (Carr 1961) and new developments in historiography (Burke 2001) maintain that the conceptual differentiation between past and present is necessary to study their possible and mutual relations. Thus, for example, Lowenthal (1985) has maintained that the past is a “foreign country”, indicating that our direct experiences with heritage and museums need to be reconceptualized. Wineburg (2001) has developed this idea for history education, indicating that thinking historically is an *unnatural act*, that cannot be carried out just from present conceptualization. Moreover the concepts and social practices in which they are employed are themselves historical and considering their historicity is an important contribution that history makes to psychology. We think that the study of collective memory is very important to fathom the psychological construction of the relation between past and present, but we emphasize that particularly in the representation of remote history certain models of relating the past and the present play a determining role. The national historical representation is mediated by cultural tools, and here a tension between master narrative and historical investigation exists. This tension is further illustrated by the present paper. More specifically identification of past and present, idealization and teleology, as presented above, play an important role in this tension.

Looking at how national past and present are connected provides insights about the constructions at work in master narratives as cultural tools and also gives an idea about how they might enable national identification and constrain historical understanding. As illustrated by the interview and discourse fragments, the relation between national past and present is constructed in three different ways in agreement with the master narrative. In terms of an effect of the two opposing objectives of history education mentioned above, one has apparently had more impact than the other. This doesn't mean that the relation cannot be otherwise meaningfully constructed, but that there is a

dominant way of constructing this relation aimed at sustaining national identity. That is, the three presented constructions support a transcendent national identity.

The effect of the master narrative cultural tool can be considered positively, in terms of what is enabled. Certainly, the identification function of history education and narrative is important in citizenship or moral education (Barton and Levstik 2004; Bellino and Selman 2012) and in matters of social cohesion and group formation for emancipation (Hammack 2010; Jovchelovitch 2012). However, the specific role of the master narrative in enabling civic identification is not that clear. Some of our interview fragments suggest that the historical identification between past and present nationals and the identification with nationals are not the same thing. The social psychological identification with past and present nationals is aimed at with the master narrative, but ultimately depends on how the individual relates to the master narrative and to the national group in general. A higher level of appropriation, involving personal identification, depends also on the circumstances in which the master narrative is invoked (see Wertsch 2002). So is civic identification constructed by these narratives? Idealizing the national past could be a convenient way of not identifying with the national group. Considering oneself to be less patriotic than revolutionaries in the past can be a justification for not participating politically in the present. Historical identification too often means historical exclusion and is hardly compatible with current ideas about cosmopolitan or multicultural citizenship (Abowitz 2002; Hansen 2012). On the other hand, a teleological interpretation with a clear personal ideological involvement could indicate the active citizenship of the narrator. Either way, how civic identification is exactly related to the master narrative that connects the past and the present in certain ways, is a matter for further investigation.

National identification has been recognized as both a facilitator and inhibitor of historical understanding (Epstein and Schiller 2005; Goldberg 2013; Goldberg et al. 2011; Hammack 2010; Lopez et al. 2014b). That is, it can generate the student's interest but also introduce a bias in representing the past. In the current paper the construction of the relation between past and present through master narrative appears to be clearly different from the critical historiographical construction of this relation. More work is necessary on exploring whether combining the effects of the two objectives of history education is possible or leads to much confusion in the individual representation (Hammack 2010; Lopez and Carretero 2012; Carretero and Kriger 2011). Yet, from a historiographic perspective, the three master narrative constructions imply that a differentiation of past and present is lacking and that therefore the causal historical relations between past events and present situations cannot be well understood. If the nation is basically the same in the past, present and probably in the future, then change and otherness are not accounted for. If the past is idealized there is no historical contextualization, and this is important to understand the more remote (pre) national past. Finally, a teleological interpretation involves historical predetermination and a biased or linear view of the past. The political use of history is very well served by these constructions. However, the students' or citizens' construction of relations between past and present might not be. Particularly when they are interested in understanding the past or making new plans for the future. They might have objectives that differ from the master narrative objectives or the political strategies employing these narratives. Idealizing the past, and at the same time underestimating the present, typically ignores the many conflicts at the time of the so favorably portrayed protagonists and events. It

often overstates the role and impact of personal intentions and does not consider how political, social and economic factors interact in a complex way at a specific historical moment. These past conflicts and interacting factors, however, could help in contextualizing present problems. At the very least it would help to know that the past was not necessarily better. Teleological interpretations make sense of the past and reaffirm present positions, but in doing so predetermine past, present and also future in terms of one limited view of change and progress. Historical understanding reaches far beyond the mere appreciation of historiographical discipline. It involves the formation of critical thinkers, that are able to contextualize, move beyond their own perspective, and pluralize ideas about change. Do master narratives and the particular relations between past and present involved contribute to this formation?

We emphasize that relating past and present through national identity is not the only possible way of individually making sense of history, but a product of certain political strategies and historical developments materialized in master narratives. Before stating that master narratives are necessary in framing projects and identities, we think they need to be considered in more detail as historically constructed and evaluated in terms of their functionality and, more importantly, for whom exactly.

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