

Remembering Otherwise: History and Citizenship Education of Shared Fates

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, I take up Sigal Ben-Porath's conception of shared fate in the context of history and citizenship education, and consider how it might be complicated by the concept of remembrance. Ben-Porath has developed the notion of shared fate as an inclusive and historically sensitive conceptual model for citizenship education in diverse societies.¹ Shared fate, she suggests, frames civic life as an ongoing navigation of relationships and of processes of decision-making with diverse groups; citizenship education of shared fate enables students to conceptualize diversity in a way that connects them to, rather than distances them from, others. It provides interpretive frames for students through which they can perceive how, despite differences, our fate is dependent on one another. The frames weave the contemporary with the historical, to elucidate how these inform one another and, indeed, how they reinforce a shared future. My interest is in recasting the concept of shared fate to a concept of shared fates for history and citizenship education. My aim is to offer a more ethically nuanced form of education through a closer examination of how power constructs histories, citizens, and nations.

To do this I take up Roger Simon's concept of remembering otherwise, in which remembrance involves examining histories of domination and exploitation as a means to create the possibility of more inclusive (future) democracy. To remember otherwise is to acknowledge that we share multiple histories and are defined in and through inequitable power relations. In this sense, we are beholden to multiple fates. Reimagining Ben-Porath's conception of shared fate through the lens of remembering otherwise reveals how histories are layered upon one another rather than being melded. Such an education would be an education of shared fates in which students are invited to view histories as a complex web of power relations in which we are all intertwined with one another and in which historical constructions of identity and nationhood make it so that our fate cannot be viewed as singular. To begin I outline Ben-Porath's conception of citizenship education of shared fate, and focus in particular on her treatment of the role of history. Following this, I discuss how an education of shared fate might be extended to forge alternative and more nuanced constructions of democracy. In the third section I discuss Roger Simon's concept of remembering otherwise, beginning with his elucidation of conventional forms of remembrance. In the final section I clarify how remembering otherwise exposes power differentials, and so transform an education of shared fate into an education of shared fates. To exemplify the sort of text that might be taken up in an education of shared fates, I conclude with a brief discussion of Joseph Boyden's *The Orenda*, in which he recounts the history of Canada as a settler nation while troubling the situated positions of historical actors.

AN EDUCATION OF SHARED FATE

Ben-Porath argues that “shared fate encompasses the diversity of visions, affiliations, and values that citizens hold, and it also seeks to weave the historical, political, and social ties among members of the nation into a form of affiliation that would sustain their shared political project.”² Education for shared fate entails an encompassing vision of citizenship that integrates the values, visions, institutions, representative bodies, government structure, and historical interpretations that form the contemporary liberal democratic landscape. Ben-Porath contends that shared fate offers a more inclusive and ultimately more appealing version of national citizenship than what has been provided by liberal and communitarian thinkers. Communitarians, on the one hand, believe that citizenship is constituted by a shared attachment to a substantive common good. Liberals, on the other hand, privilege autonomy and individual rights. Shared fate reconciles these ideals because it removes the expectation that citizens’ sub-group affiliations be relegated to the margins or deemed less significant within the public sphere. Instead, a shared fate vision of national membership offers citizens the opportunity to grow in and through the diversity produced by sub-group identities without having to forfeit their sense of belonging within the nation. Citizenship education of shared fate, in short, invites students to see themselves as a collective, moving in the same direction, without denying or undermining the role of diversity in nation-building.

Ben-Porath’s conception of shared fate citizenship education attends to the historical as central to civic identity as it relates to nation-building. For Ben-Porath, the act of re-telling binds students/citizens to a common ethos and set of norms that, even when there is disagreement, creates a shared mythology of nationhood. Engaging with historical narratives position citizens to reassert their affiliations in different contexts, promoting nationhood as continually unfolding while also shaping their self-concept. Ben-Porath clarifies: “historical understanding of national affiliation transforms citizens’ conception of themselves as belonging to a group.”³ This self-concept positions students as agents in that they then view themselves as “responsible for the reinterpretation of their national group over time.”⁴ Ben-Porath’s notion of shared fate might be viewed as a model of engagement, an invitation to a common narrative that integrates diversity as not only necessary, but also optimal in the pursuit of a rich political landscape.

Shared fate offers an important rhetorical frame for citizenship education, but in this article I would like to reconsider the role of the historical in Ben-Porath’s citizenship education for shared fate by initiating a discussion of how it might include a deeper discussion of power asymmetry. I suggest that, by initiating a discourse of remembrance rather than a broader discussion of history, shared fate citizenship education might be better able to speak to structural power imbalances that face young citizens in liberal democratic societies. Pervasive asymmetries, such as systemic white privilege or Islamophobia, place significant barriers on some citizens, subjecting them to fates that are quite different from those of the white middle-class power majority. Indeed, to take seriously these imbalances would be to engage in a citizenship education of shared fates, in which students learn to view their fates

as entangled, as Ben-Porath argues, but not singular. As Ben-Porath has claimed, historical narratives are central to constructions of civic identity. An education of shared fates that recognizes social, political, and economic disparities would take up Simon's concept of remembrance to frame our shared citizenship as a shared web of relations that illustrates the historical and historicized nature of power disparity.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF DEMOCRACY

Nestled within the liberal democratic landscape of citizenship education, a pedagogy of shared fate narrows in on the challenge of reconciling the perceived chasm between "civic values" and "diversity." It is in the spirit of quelling this tension that Ben-Porath seeks to construct a pedagogy through which we might recognize the ways in which citizenship "extends beyond" legal parameters and, specifically, how pedagogy might frame personal identities or affiliations as integral to, rather than distinct from, civic identity. This article is based on the premise of the fundamental chasm, the view that identities or affiliations are to be reconciled with national belonging. In my view, citizenship education has the potential to reinforce a different kind of democracy. The kind of democracy I have in mind forges relationality and interdependence through articulations of heterogeneity or even incommensurability. That is, diversity is the default and civic relationships are established through articulatory practices. I draw from Roger Simon's theory of remembering otherwise and Chantal Mouffe's radical democratic insights on civic identity and the deepening of democracy to foreground my discussion of shared fates as a model of history and citizenship education that can defend the re-imagining of an intensified democracy.

Mouffe's work has been pivotal in elucidating how political life might be re-conceived through engagement with amplified democratic ideals. Interested in the conditions under which "a strong allegiance to the democratic community" might be secured,⁵ it has sought to (re)define a different kind of democracy from what has been offered by liberal democracy. Her position is nicely captured in the following passage:

We need to conceive of a mode of political association that, although it does not postulate the existence of a substantive common good, nevertheless implies the idea of commonality, of an ethico-political bond that creates a linkage among the participants of the association, allowing us to speak of a political "community" even if it is not in the strong sense. In other words, what we are looking for is a way to accommodate the distinctions between public and private, morality and politics, which have been the great contribution of liberalism to modern democracy, without renouncing the ethical nature of the political association.⁶

Her recasting of political community, citizenship, and democracy, founded in "the ethical nature of the political association," invites a reconsideration of how history and citizenship education is undertaken for two reasons. First, while history and citizenship education have been identified as primary locations in which political identities are shaped⁷ Mouffe's work, which situates the reconstruction of political identities as central to the project of democratic politics,⁸ has a direct bearing on how these identities are constructed within educational spaces. For Mouffe, political community calls for a reimagining of how the private is constitutive of, rather than distinct from, the public sphere. Within this view of democracy, affiliations are not to be "included" in the democratic sphere, but are always and already there. In line

with Mouffe's vision for robust democracy, my interest is in illustrating a pedagogy of history and citizenship education that side-steps reconciliation, inclusion, or toleration of personal affiliations in favour of one that constructs civic identity as immersed in diversity. Whereas Ben-Porath puts forward a view of citizenship education in which citizens' personal affiliations may or may not connect to the public sphere, or may be shaped or altered through ongoing engagements with diversity, I am interested in a history education that takes for granted the co-construction of these spheres for the sake of promoting a more ethically nuanced historical narrative.

While Simon and Mouffe are not commonly brought into conversation, the ways in which they consider the role of the public sphere in the reconstruction of a more ethical and democratic political landscape are complementary. Simon's work on remembrance primarily re-envisioning the limitations of political community as "public life." For Simon, public life:

is not to be limited to a discussion of institutions, sites and spaces, but must include an inquiry into what situated practices will support listening, learning, conversation, and debate capable of reassessing the political cultural, and moral dimensions of the organization of social life.⁹

Simon's proposed re-envisioning of the public sphere seeks to create a different kind of democracy: "democracy to come."¹⁰ Simon envisions democracy-to-come as situated within practices that invite reconsideration of our most fundamental structures. Borrowed from Derridean thought, "democracy-to-come" is a democracy that is never fulfilled; the attempt to achieve it is ongoing. It is in public life that citizens engage in the practice of re-imagining and reconstructing. However, different from the liberal-democratic impulse to build upon shared perspectives and values, democracy-to-come is marked by sustained engagement with alterity. Simon explains that public life "requires being open to the realities of the incommensurable character of the experience of others."¹¹ For Simon, practices of remembrance are not aimed at securing democracy as a settled construct, but at disrupting the premise that democracy is premised on similarity.

PRACTICES OF REMEMBERING AND REMEMBERING OTHERWISE

As Simon explains, remembrance is often called upon in education in relation to the issue of social cohesion. Historical memories, he explains, are typically produced by what he calls "two basic forms of remembrance,"¹² which are reflected in ongoing debates on the role of patriotism in history education. In the first form of remembrance, which can take stronger and weaker forms, we may be asked to sing the national anthem every morning or write poems to commemorate Remembrance Day. The purpose of which is to summon "social consensus by invoking iconic memories" that shape our individual selves, while providing shared sources of identification with others. Identification through remembrance lies at the core of certain forms of history education, in which the aim is to promote common narratives or languages that bond citizens to one another.¹³ In weaker forms of patriotic education, remembrance is used as a tool to engage young citizens in a common narrative while, at the same time, raising potential critiques of these narratives.¹⁴ In both approaches, remembrance is pivotal to engaging young citizens in a shared discourse that connects history to the present, and informs the future.

The second conventional form of remembrance practices, according to Simon, is “more overtly hermeneutic.”¹⁵ He explains that these practices structure, reinforce, and sanction discursive structures that determine what and how to remember. While remembrance might not require that citizens engage in the same practices to form shared bonds, it does instill an ethos that supports liberal democratic virtues. This second form of remembrance, which involves practices that are not exclusively involved in overly regulated and/or prescribed forms of remembrance, but that entwine remembering with liberal democratic values, is illustrated by a historical consciousness approach to citizenship education in which students might use artifacts to reconstruct historical narratives.¹⁶

THE PURPOSE OF REMEMBERING OTHERWISE

In Simon’s view, the forms of remembrance that privilege identification or adherence to symbolic structures are purposefully selective in order to maintain practices of remembrance as self-sustaining. “Both of these practices attempt to secure representations of the past by underwriting the enduring values and social forms that organize and regulate these practices.”¹⁷ Another way of reading this has been articulated by Mario Di Paolantonio, who critiques conventional forms of commemorative practices for failing to trouble the status quo. “Commemorative practices mobilized by identity and resemblance tend to draw from the past only to the extent that it confirms what we already know and only so that the past does not trouble who we think ‘we’ are.”¹⁸ For Simon, the selectivity that lies behind what we remember and how we remember it is pedagogical in that it involves teaching citizens about how we ought to live in the future.¹⁹ That is, remembrance practices are secured as means of civic bonding, of promoting liberal democratic virtues, and also of providing a discourse of how to proceed.

Simon’s critique of conventional forms of remembrance delves into the central concern that I will raise regarding a pedagogy of shared fate for citizenship education: remembrance practices that frame history in the limited sense of bringing people together through narratives of their shared pasts exclude thornier attendant issues such as privilege, shame, and complicity. Even when remembrance practices include a reflexive approach in which critique is welcomed, the underwritten narrative promotes a history that can ultimately be reconciled for the sake of moving forward. The erasure of difference or otherness in how and what we remember stifles possibilities for understanding politics otherwise, for reconceiving what it means to live in a political community, or for teaching citizenship education “as if the lives of others mattered.”

Simon advocates remembering otherwise, which involves rethinking practices of remembrance in a way that does not deny or legitimate histories of domination and exploitation.²⁰ He offers remembering otherwise as an ethical challenge in which we confront the issue of how to act in the face of difference, how to treat those who do not bear resemblance, or as Simon puts it, those “who are not immediately recognized as approximate versions of ourselves.”²¹ While conventional remembrance practices forge connections through narratives of similarity or sameness in order to highlight underlying narratives of belonging, to remember otherwise means to be

in relation with one another, rather than belonging to one another, and ultimately to the state. The logic of belonging asserts a structured approach of entering into national discourse, even if this entrance is partial and/or bogged down in resistance related to sub-national affiliations. Remembering otherwise, or in relation, situates our memories as contingent on one another. This has implications for citizenship and justice, specifically regarding that acknowledgement of diversity. To be in relation is to seek out commonality in a way that includes difficult knowledge and negotiates complicity. When we are in relation to one another it is not presumed that we are the same, that we share a common history, or that we draw from the same historical lenses. The premise of remembering otherwise is to forge relationships in and through what might not be shared.

Remembering otherwise elicits the alterity of the historical experience of others. As Simon explains, remembrance provokes a “reflexive attentiveness to the retelling or re-presentation of a complex of emotionally evocative narratives and images, which define, not necessarily agreement but *points of connection* between people in regard to a past that they both might acknowledge the touch of.”²² This emphasizes how individual and collective stories are held up as opportunities to be in relation with one another, rather than being mutually defining or viewed as belonging to one another. In this sense, histories are taken as asymmetrical but interdependent. The possibility of remembering otherwise enables an examination of public history that opens on to both the demand of, and responsibility to, the alterity of the historical experience of others — an alterity that disrupts the presumptions of the “self-same.” Furthermore, to begin to think through practices of remembrance differently, and to clarify their ethical, pedagogical, and political implications, we need another understanding of the futurity inherent in remembrance. This means becoming less concerned with the consolidating identificatory effects of practices of historical memory and attending more to the eruptive force of remembering otherwise.

PEDAGOGY OF SHARED FATES AND REMEMBERING OTHERWISE

To remember otherwise within history and citizenship education would be to construct narratives of our shared fates. By pluralizing fates, I am pointing to the ways in which power, violence, and oppression have affected histories differently. Following Simon, framing citizenship education in a way that remembers otherwise is to construct a historical imaginary in which our shared lives and futures are entwined, but not the same; in which our shared lives and futures are affected by the same history, but not in the same ways. An education of shared fates brings into play an imaginary in which young citizens might understand their connectedness through an ethical framework of relationality.

Framing citizenship education as an engagement of shared fates also highlights the multiplicity of political struggles. While some may be fighting for gender equality, others are seeking to increase the rights of religious minorities. An education of shared fates would acknowledge not only the distinctness of these struggles but also, and perhaps more importantly, how they often overlap and thereby redefine one another. Controversies surrounding Muslim women’s wearing of the burqa exemplify how (certain forms of) feminism are currently constructed as being at odds with minority

religious identities. This perceived clash is the result of structured thinking around issues of politics and identity. Rather, these might be viewed as complex sites of negotiation in which affiliations are never perfectly aligned or in opposition.

Citizenship and history education of shared fates would reflect and enact what it means to remember otherwise. Although this would include conventional practices of remembrance, it would disrupt the content and also the practice itself. For example, as Simon explains, nation-building narratives of exploration and discovery do not need to be excised altogether: “instead of dismissing the notion of discovery, it seems to me, it must be made problematic.”²³ Breaking the binary between remembering solely for the purpose of reinforcing national bonds and not remembering at all, Simon subverts the content through the act of remembering. In a pedagogy of shared fates, the practice of remembering is shared; this entails negotiating complicity, dealing with difficult knowledge, and acknowledging how historical injustice informs our day-to-day lives differently. Fate must be pluralized, because despite the shared practice of remembrance, it is a fundamental asymmetrical endeavor in which our fates are not aligned. Remembering otherwise takes on an ethical bent, contributing to a redefined version of democracy, which recalls what Mouffe has labeled “the ethical nature” of political associations. To remember otherwise within an education of shared fates is to situate diversity at the center of historical narratives, to bring citizens together through acts of analysis and engagement with those who are not immediately recognizable.

JOSEPH BOYDEN'S *THE ORENDA*

By way of conclusion I will present the novel *The Orenda*²⁴ by acclaimed Canadian author Joseph Boyden as a text with which to remember otherwise, as a narrative that depicts how our fates are shared but plural. *The Orenda* has received considerable attention for its nuanced, creative, and powerful depiction of what was to become Canada in the 17th century. Weaving together the perspectives of three central characters, a Jesuit missionary, a Huron leader, and a young Iroquois girl, *The Orenda* reexamines Canada's history as a settler nation by depicting the complex subtlety and explosive violence that resulted from Canada's nation-building project. As John Ralston Saul has argued, *The Orenda* has deconstructed our collective memory and left us with something different. Saul states that “Joseph Boyden has taken our memory of the past — myth and fact — and ripped it inside out with elegance, violence, emotion, and understanding until before us stands a new myth, a new memory, of how we became who we are.”²⁵ When our collective memory is summoned through the eyes of another, we are drawn to remember otherwise.

In the interrelationship between the three main characters that extends throughout the novel, there is bloodshed, betrayal, and animosity. There is also curiosity, generosity, and moments of genuine compassion. In what might be depicted as a set of purely antagonistic relationships in which there are clear boundaries and unidirectional flows of power, the three main characters are never quite removed from their positions as Iroquois girl, Huron warrior, or Jesuit priest from New France, but neither are they wholly connected to these identities. These contradictions are perhaps best illustrated by Christophe, who finds himself on a lone mission among

the Huron, refers to them as “sauvages” in his journal, and wonders if he has found himself in one of Dante’s rings of hell due to their “shameless lack of modesty” in dress and comportment.²⁶ His dehumanizing attitude towards the Hurons is shaken, however, when he attempts to explain the naturalized hierarchy between humans and animals and how this fits into the Christian settler worldview.

The sauvages are fascinated [by the wool] and ask all the time what animal it comes from. I try to explain what a sheep is, what domestication and livestock are, and the best I can do is try and explain that where I come from we keep animals the likes of which they couldn’t imagine in great numbers for our use. It is God’s plan. They laugh at this, the idea that one might keep herds of friendly sheep or elk that walk happily to their slaughter whenever it’s time for the human to eat meat. Some ask openly if there aren’t consequences of a life so easy to live. The question fascinates me.²⁷

It is in his prolonged encounters with others that moments of listening, and even respect, occur. It is also through these encounters that power imbalances shift. As a representation of colonial rule in the novel, Christophe is regularly mocked for his shaky use of the Huron language and is often in the position of being physically dependent on Huron warriors to transport, feed, and even defend him. While Christophe’s relationships with the Hurons are never completely void of the imperial dynamic, the range of experiences within these dynamics are more wide-ranging and nuanced than is illustrated by narratives that seek to reinforce a specific brand of civic identification. While it is clear to readers that the fates of the three central characters continue to unravel, it is also clear that Christophe the Jesuit’s character maintained historical rule over the First Nations. *The Orenda*’s treatment of diversity and power illustrates how civic readings of historical narratives can illustrate highly complex cultural negotiations in which historical actors are not static. Framing historical narratives as negotiated and nuanced enables young citizens to understand how our enduring historical legacies continually resurface. More importantly, it highlights the ways in which this is neither simple nor straightforward.

My brief discussion of Boyden’s *The Orenda* provides a snapshot of a text that might facilitate discussions around our shared fates as it does not glorify or dismiss Canada’s colonial history, but rather makes it problematic. An education of shared (singular) fate engages students in the multiple perspectives in which we seek positive connections, familiarity, and ultimately reconciliation. When citizenship and history education are experienced through multiple fates, histories might be viewed as shaded by particular matrices of power, while also being bound to one another. Apparently neutral-seeming discourses are set aside in favor of seeking out the fissures and contradictions that normalize inequitable power dynamics. An education of shared fates seeks to call attention to the possibility of new constructions of democracy through reinterpretations of histories and careful attention to how power and diversity have shaped existing interpretations.

1. See Sigal Ben-Porath, “Education for Shared Fate,” in *Education, Justice, and Democracy*, eds Danielle Allen and Rob Reich (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Sigal Ben-Porath, “Citizenship as Shared Fate: Education for Membership in a Diverse Democracy,” *Educational Theory* 62, no. 4 (2012): 381–395; and Sigal Ben-Porath, “Wartime Citizenship: An Argument for Shared Fate,” *Ethnicities* 11, no. 3 (2011): 313–325.

2. Ben-Porath, "Citizenship as Shared Fate," 381.
3. Ben-Porath, "Wartime Citizenship," 321.
4. Ibid.
5. Chantal Mouffe, "Politics, Democratic Action, and Solidarity," *Inquiry* 38, nos 1–2 (1995): 99–108, 99.
6. Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community," in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. Miami Theory Collective (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 75–76.
7. Ruth Sandwell, "History Education, Public Memory and Citizenship in Canada," in *To the Past: History Education, Public Memory, and Citizenship in Canada*, ed. Ruth Sandwell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Harry Brighouse, "Should We Teach Patriotic History?," in *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies: Teaching for Cosmopolitan Values and Collective Identities*, eds Kevin McDonough and Walter Feinberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
8. Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 2006), 60.
9. Roger I. Simon, *The Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning, and Ethics*, 1st edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 7.
10. Jacques Derrida, "The Last of the Rogue States: The 'Democracy to Come,' Opening in Two Turns," in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005).
11. Simon, *The Touch of the Past*, 6.
12. Ibid., 3.
13. J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2007).
14. Eamonn Callan, "Beyond Sentimental Civic Education," *American Journal of Education* 102, no. 2 (1994): 190–221.
15. Simon, *The Touch of the Past*, 3.
16. Peter C. Seixas, *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).
17. Simon, *The Touch of the Past*, 3.
18. Mario Di Paolantonio, "Roger Simon as a Thinker of the Remnants: An Overview of a Way of Thinking the Present, Our Present," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 34, no. 3 (2015): 263–277.
19. Roger I. Simon, "Museums, Civic Life, and the Educative Force of Remembrance," *The Journal of Museum Education* 31, no. 2 (July 1, 2006): 113–121.
20. Simon, *The Touch of the Past*.
21. Ibid., 9.
22. Ibid., 89.
23. Ibid., 21.
24. Joseph Boyden, *The Orenda* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2013).
25. John Ralston Saul, praise for *The Orenda*, by Joseph Boyden (Toronto: Random House Company, 2013), iii.
26. Boyden, *The Orenda*, 28.
27. Ibid., 93.

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