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Research article

Family memory and official history about the recent past in conflict: the case of Cyprus

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship of family memory and children's history learning about the troubled events of 1974 in Cyprus, reporting on aspects of a broader qualitative study on how Greek-Cypriot survivors of these events remember and build self-narratives for communicating their experiences to the younger generation. For this study, research data were collected: (1) via one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 5 history educators, 23 parents or grandparents and 10 joint interviews with (grand)parents and their children; (2) through the methods of document analysis of the history textbook; and (3) by observing classes teaching recent Cypriot history. This study shows that these survivors approach the history textbook and teachers as vehicles transferring the state's approach to 1974 and claim their own share when talking about the past. It reveals that they see politics as a barrier to having an authentic representation of the past and undertake initiatives, such as storytelling, witnessing funerals of missing persons and

visiting places with certain meanings for their family histories, to help their children draw links between the troubled past and present. These memory sites stage adults' stories and are appreciated as enabling youngsters to inherit family history and values while acknowledging their positionality in society. These findings highlight the importance of further investigating intergenerational narratives, as they may help children to develop a coherent understanding of the past or they may distort their ideas about the past, adopting the adults' beliefs, memories and knowledge of the past. These findings suggest the need to enhance our knowledge of family-intergenerational memory and emotional issues in history learning in Cyprus and other conflict-ridden societies.

Keywords history education; family memory; intergenerational narratives; conflict-ridden societies; Cyprus

Historical background

In 1960 the signing of the Zurich–London agreements brought the British colonisation of Cyprus to an end and signalled the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, under the protection of Türkiye, Greece and Britain. Two distinct recognised communities – the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots – form the state. In 1963 the first president, Archbishop Makarios, pursuing the sustainability of the Republic, suggested amendments to the Constitution, but this triggered a crisis as Turkish Cypriots rejected these proposals and withdrew from their governmental positions (Papapolyviou et al., 2013). In December 1963, violent clashes in Nicosia led to the creation of enclaves and to the division of the two communities by the 'Green Line' (Papadakis, 2005). Makarios recruited Colonel Grivas, the leader of the *Ethniki Organosis Kypriou Agoniston* (EOKA – the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters), who had earlier initiated guerrilla warfare against the British, to head the national army and ensure the smooth operation of the state. Because of killings attributed to him between 1964 and 1967, Grivas was forced to abandon Cyprus, but he returned to allegedly set up the paramilitary group EOKA B. Within the Greek-Cypriot community there was hostility between supporters of Makarios and Grivas. In the midst of this, extremist armed groups sparked inter-communal conflict and atrocities (Loizos, 1988).

On 15 July 1974, the Greek junta, military personnel, EOKA B and supporters of the Right in Cyprus staged a *coup d'état* and overthrew Makarios, who appealed for United Nations assistance. Five days later, Türkiye organised a military intervention, claiming to restore stability. This Turkish invasion was arranged in two phases – the first phase started on 20 July 1974, and the second on 15 August 1974 – enabling the Turkish army to take the northern areas of Cyprus. During this intervention, thousands of Greek Cypriots were forced to move to the south of the island, while the Turkish army killed or detained hundreds of civilians, many of whom are still missing today. Camps were set up in open fields for the refugees, who in the 1980s were housed in building blocks known today as 'Government Refugee Settlements'.

Participating in ceremonies and building monuments are some commemorative actions adopted by the Greek-Cypriot community, which can be named official *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory). According to Nora (1989), these sites of memory, which can take various forms, such as a place, an object or a monument, are overloaded with a symbolic element from the memorial heritage of a community, and they encapsulate the notion of shared consciousness. Likewise, the official calendar acts as a site of memory, as air raid sirens sound all over Cyprus on 15 July at 8.20 a.m. and on 20 July at 5.30 a.m. to mark the start of the coup and the Turkish invasion respectively. There is still not an official consensus about the events of 1974, with political parties maintaining their own narratives about the past.

On the Greek-Cypriot educational context

History is an autonomous, compulsory subject in the Greek-Cypriot curriculum. There are two mandatory history books for each year of the lower secondary education (Gymnasium): one textbook that covers world history from the Greek mainland perspective and another that focuses on local history approved,

produced and distributed by the state in public schools since 1994. The latter textbook 'contains a synopsis of the history of Cyprus from the Neolithic until the Contemporary era ... so that children will become more knowledgeable about the History of their home country' (Pantelidou et al., 2016: n.p.). It ends with a chapter entitled 'The Coup d'état and the Turkish Invasion' (Pantelidou et al., 2016: 116–7), which comprises a glossary explaining the term *junta* as military dictatorship, three black-and-white pictures, one black-and-white map of Cyprus and a text of about 500 words. Although the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth gives teachers some flexibility in selecting and creating the material they choose to teach, teachers tend to largely rely on textbooks as a safe educational choice, mostly because these textbooks correspond to the pre-selected content of the curriculum and better prepare students for the mandatory end-of-year examinations.

The textbook on local history is an official top-down *lieu de mémoire*, and is an apt product of how the past is expected to be remembered, in the sense that the state produces it after selecting what knowledge should be conveyed to the younger generations (Foster, 2011; Nicholls, 2003; Wertsch, 2007). International research on the history textbook revolves around the content of the educational text, highlighting the existence of a single historical narrative as a powerful tool for fostering the cultivation of common values in students (Sant, 2017; Terra, 2014). What is mentioned in such a narrative dominates the content of official history (Carretero et al., 2002), and this type of master narrative becomes a 'cultural' tool for delivering historical knowledge of how a nation would like to see its past (Wertsch, 2008) and for cultivating a sense of national identity among students (van Alphen and Carretero, 2015). What is mentioned in the textbook is not what is being taught in the classrooms (Foster, 2011). In the case of Cyprus, the textbook on local history echoes the dominant narrative (as the official letters by the Ministry and educational activities happening in school do), which is not necessarily adopted by the whole society, entangled in a complex set of dynamics boosting ethnocentric and local-centric views of the past.

When reviewing existing literature about history education in the Cypriot context, where this study is situated, three main research focuses can be identified: (1) the history textbook approached as a political document (Christodoulou, 2018; Klerides, 2010; Koutselini-Ioannidou, 1997); (2) the relationship between the history textbook and students' notion of identity (Christou, 2007; Perikleous, 2013; Philippou, 2005); and (3) how personal values, political beliefs and factors such as insufficient training and low confidence can be seen as influencing teachers' practice about past events (Kafa and Pashiardis, 2019; Makriyianni and Psaltis, 2007; Psaltis et al., 2011; Zembylas and Loukaidis, 2021). Other researchers have explored how historical narratives and collective identity, formulated and sustained by the state, social agencies and actors, are contested within the Greek-Cypriot community, which is seen as trapped in a kind of fixed, social trauma to justify specific actions, while endorsing remembrance or oblivion over certain events of the past (for example, Bryant, 2012; Papadakis, 2003, 2008; Pappalardo, 2019; Psaltis, 2016; Rehrmann, 2024; Zeka, 2015). Despite some indirect references (Spyrou, 2006; Symeou, 2007) and a pilot study on parents' attitudes towards learning about the recent past (Foris, 2015), local research production has given no attention to the role that family can play in children's historical learning.

My research maps out this gap identified in literature between family and school history when learning about the events of 1974 in Cyprus. This article is about what happens beyond schools, exploring how Greek-Cypriot survivors approach what their children are expected to learn about the traumatic events of 1974. It is the first research that is focused on family members (parents/grandparents), who are ordinary people of various backgrounds; some have been refugees since 1974, others are not. It sheds light on the 'raw' accounts of these people who lived through the events of 1974, not on well-written speeches by individuals involved in high-rank politics or in the clergy. For these individuals, participating in my research was the means to talk freely to a stranger for the first time about their experiences of the recent past and how they mediate these to their children. Accepting that the social environment of children can influence their historical understanding (McCully, 2012), this research is largely focused on the concept of family, and it enhances our knowledge of intergenerational memory, and sensitive issues in history learning in (post-)conflict settings. At the local level, this research is a significant effort in unveiling concealed aspects of the thorny Cyprus Issue embedded in all generations in the modern society in which the researcher was brought up. This intrinsic quality can be beneficial to the wider society, which is currently pessimistic about finding a political solution to the Cyprus Issue for the reunification of the island, and to policymakers for encouraging the active involvement of families in their children's education. At the European and international level, this research can also contribute to existing literature on how families relate to their children learning about the past in conflict-ridden societies.

Conceptual tools

This research values narrative as a respectful, sensitive and political act during which individuals shared their stories and memories about the events of 1974. In this context, memory was used as a conceptual lens for understanding whether and how (grand)parents depict these historical events and mediate these to the next generation, not for assessing what happened in 1974 in Cyprus.

Therefore, this study accepts individual memory as the treasure of lived experiences, interpreted according to the individual's world view, albeit limited to the duration of an individual's life and to their perspective of current events (Fivush, 2008; Kansteiner, 2002). Individual memory may also incorporate recollections of events that happened to others but have impacted in one's memory through stories, the media and other sources (Norrick, 2013). Lived and vicarious memories are not tangible possessions, they cannot be reproduced in their exact form, but they can become connected to the memories of other persons, living within the same social context (Assmann, 2006). Thus, collective memory embraces a splendid array of shared stories about the past, and it becomes a social practice as people use narratives for expressing their accounts of the past while forming their shared memories about the past (Wertsch, 2008). During this interaction and bonding, people's memories can be enriched, changed, lost, cogent or insistent as people apply a set of long-established materials (such as language and symbols) and subscribe to ideas such as a glorious common past, equal share in the same destiny and participation in customs (Huntington, 1993; Smith, 1991). Therefore, it is understood why states have endorsed collective memory as the means to attain sociopolitical aims, and have used the history textbook for promoting their accepted story of the past (Wertsch, 2021). In doing so, the local history textbook encapsulates the official memory, which boosts the importance of glorious events and shared trauma while silencing the traumatic experiences of those within society as endangering social cohesion (Assmann, 2006; Zembylas and Karahasan, 2017).

Many scholars consider intergenerational stories as the key to connect individual and collective memory. Merrill and Fivush (2016) view intergenerational stories as transcending time constraints as the teller, who experienced past events, shares personal memories, feelings and thoughts with a younger listener who is unaware of these events. In this way, intergenerational stories about the past turn adults into 'living historians' (Kornhaber, 1996: 90) and children into learners of the past (Leonard, 2014). Norrick (1997) and Amadini (2015) argue that the self-conscious transmission of family memory is strengthening the children's sense of belonging in their family and in the world, and infuses a sense of continuity within the family. Furthermore, intergenerational memories, when created in sites that are important to the family, enable youngsters to position themselves in familial history, and benefit from balanced self-esteem and behaviour (Fivush and Merrill, 2016).

Existing research on the role of memory and memorialisation in post-conflict societies identifies that storytelling, written testimonies and artefacts can preserve the memories of survivors and enable the passing of survivors' memories to the next generation, through an excruciating process of recovering from past traumas and reaching resilience (De Yeaza and Fox, 2013; Hamber et al., 2010; Jelin, 2007). For example, extensive research production has focused on Holocaust survivors exploring the mechanisms of transmitting, besides their family history, their burden and trauma within their family milieu (Danieli et al., 2016; Letzter-Pouw et al., 2014; Lev-Wiesel, 2007). So far, research has shown that memorialisation can occur at a local and national level, in countries emerging from conflict, such as Cyprus, where competing memories about the past strive to be recognised. Brito (2001: 38, cited in De Yeaza and Fox, 2013: 348) argues that 'what and how societies choose to remember and forget largely determines their future options', as actions of social memorialisation can encourage either reconciliation or violence.

This research is rooted exactly at the crossroads of family and school – two living organisms of a society. It ties together family, memory and school history, and it delves deeper in the field of history education in Cyprus, seeking to contribute to the advancement of our knowledge of historical learning in conflict settings. The next section presents the research design for exploring the relationship between family memory and official history about the recent past in Cyprus.

Methodological framework

This article presents data derived from my doctoral study, which explores the relationship between family memory and children's history learning in the context of the events of 1974 in Cyprus. Table 1 provides a summarised presentation of the research questions and the methods of data collection and analysis

used in the study. For the purpose and constraints of this article, this article presents gathered data for answering two of the four research questions:

RQ3. How do family members of students approach official memory as this is mediated to their children at school?

RQ4. To what extent, how and why do family members convey their memories and knowledge about the past to their children?

Table 1. The research questions of the study and the methods and tools to approach them

Research question	1. How do individuals who experienced the events of 1974 make meaning of the recent painful past?	2. What are students taught in their history classes at school about the recent past in Cyprus, and in what ways?	3. How do family members of students approach official memory as this is mediated to their children at school?	4. To what extent, how and why do family members convey their memories and knowledge about the past to their children?
Methods for data collection	Interview (one on one)	Observation, document analysis, interview (joint and one on one)	Interview (joint and one on one)	Interview (joint and one on one)
Methods and tools for data analysis	Narrative analysis and Labovian scheme	Content analysis, narrative analysis and coding scheme for observation, coding scheme for textbook, Labovian scheme, aide-memoire for interviews	Content analysis and aide-memoire for interviews, NVivo (for organising data)	Content analysis and aide-memoire for interviews, NVivo (for organising data)

This qualitative research followed a purposive sampling approach that encouraged the recruitment of participants who could contribute to the research aims (Robson, 2011). Selecting three public, lower secondary schools from various areas of Nicosia increased the chances for recruiting volunteers from diverse social, economic and professional backgrounds, corresponding to the existing tendencies and realities of Greek-Cypriot society. The research location is not a typical area of the island; Nicosia is the divided capital of the island, whose division (Green Line) is persistent in everyday life. Remnants of the past, such as the huge, stone-made Turkish-Cypriot flag, lit up at night on the Pentadaktylos mountain range in the north of Nicosia, remind Greek Cypriots of the division of the island, even to those far from Nicosia's centre.

Rich data were collected from 23 one-on-one interviews with Greek Cypriots. This allowed for a more thorough exploration of how family members approach official history, as depicted in the history textbook, about the events of 1974 that they survived, and whether and how they convey their knowledge and memories of the past to the younger generation. These participants – parents and grandparents from different families – were selected based on two criteria: (1) whether they lived in Cyprus when the Turkish military invasion occurred in 1974 or were born shortly after, so that they are familiar with the aftermath of these events; and (2) whether their (grand)child was attending Year 3 of the Gymnasium at the time of this research, as their history learning material included a chapter on the events of 1974. Greek Cypriots regard the invasion as one of the most tragic and important events of recent history, so it served as the most suitable starting point to identify volunteers for the research, and to see whether

personal experience and views exert any influence on the ways they remember and transmit knowledge about past events. Literature considers interviews as the most time-effective and high-response method for exchanging views about a certain topic of interest (Oppenheim, 1992), and as a valuable tool for the co-construction of knowledge for interpreting interviewees' actions, beliefs and feelings (Kvale, 1996). In the context of this research, it was most appropriate to use semi-structured interviews, as this allowed the interviewer to set predetermined questions for collecting relevant data while granting flexibility to follow the flow of the interview by changing the sequence of questions or posing further clarifying questions. An aide-memoire was used as a guide when conducting interviews (Jacob and Furgerson, 2012), containing closed-ended and open-ended questions and details about the research project, the interview procedure and the participants' rights in the research. Closed-ended questions were used as an icebreaker at the beginning of the interview, and for collecting basic personal and demographic data about the participants. Open-ended questions tend to 'encourage co-operation and rapport' between the interviewee and the interviewer (Robson, 2011: 283), and they were used to provide in-depth accounts of the ways in which individuals give meaning to the past, approach the current state of history learning and transmit their knowledge about past events.

All interviews were conducted by the author in a comfortable setting such as at home or in a cafe suggested by the interviewee. To ensure the interviewer's safety, as all the interviewees were strangers to the interviewer, one trusted person was informed of the setting and time of each interview. Interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes, and they were audio-recorded. The long duration of these interviews can be justified by the fact that they produced unexpected answers, which were interesting to follow up. Interviewees were notified of the duration of the interview at the beginning, to make them feel comfortable in terms of time (Elliott, 2011).

Transcribing and analysing interview data

Interviews were transcribed by the author, upon receiving interviewees' consent. Although it was time- and work-intensive, careful reading through the transcript of each interview while listening to its audio-recording helped the author to form a tight relationship with the data (Gibson et al., 2014) and to provide accurate and readable transcripts for the interviewee and for the author. Interview recordings were deleted when the interviewee agreed to the transcribed interview text.

Content analysis was applied for approaching interview data to understand the meanings and beliefs about history learning nowadays. This was a thematic type of content analysis, not a quantitative type of analysis counting words, and it was data-driven, enabling the systematic exploration and coding of all written data by using sentences as the coding unit (Krippendorff, 2004). Software NVivo became a useful tool for managing the bulk of received data, grouping data into categories, generating initial codes and defining categories to make a better assessment of the research data.

Research ethics

This research was conducted according to the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines for research (BERA, 2018). Upon receiving official permission from the Department of Secondary Education of the (then called) Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) and ethical approval from the UCL Institute of Education (where the researcher was enrolled as a doctoral student), and having secured permission from the principals and history teachers to enter their schools and classrooms, volunteers were handed sheets providing information about the research rationale, the process and the participants' rights, and were asked for their consent to participate. In this way, participants were informed ahead of the interview that their involvement in this study was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any stage of the research without providing further explanation. An opt-in procedure was followed for the interviews; only volunteers who gave their written consent were interviewed. Before, during and after the interview, participants were reminded that all answers would be kept anonymous and confidential, and that all personal data were to be stored securely, to eliminate any possibility of their identifiability and traceability. Moreover, participants were informed about the right to review, amend and approve the transcript of their interview within a given time frame.

It was expected that some adult respondents might become emotional when answering questions relevant to their experiences, as this study could inflame their memories of the events of 1974 and other

sensitive 'private, stressful or sacred' issues (Lee, 1993: 4). Techniques were developed, such as taking short breaks, switching to positive topics during the interview or omitting answers without providing explanation, to give time for the respondent to calm down.

All personal data were processed according to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All paper records were scanned and uploaded on to a network drive that enabled secure backup and had a low risk of data loss.

Data analysis and discussion

Focused on ordinary people, and following a bottom-up standpoint on learning about the past, it was interesting to explore how Greek Cypriots who survived the events of 1974 and lived through their consequences approached what official history acknowledged of the recent troubled past. Their responses were organised in two main categories depicting their beliefs and sentiments about the history textbook on the one hand, and the role of history teachers as carriers of the official memory to their children at school on the other.

Participants were familiar with the history textbook and the chapter on the events of 1974, as this textbook has been published and distributed in lower secondary schools since 1994. In fact, eight parents mentioned that they used the same textbook when they were attending school, and they were disappointed because the book had not been revised. For example, Dina (mother, 40) observed that the textbook was not a useful educational tool for her or her son:

My query as a student and as a mother has always been about this history book ... I don't feel that I learned about our history then, neither have my children today. We haven't made any progress in this. Look, the book is the same ... It looks like a copy that was reproduced a million times and, in the process, things got erased ... I mean, I see two black images that ... I can't even make out ... I see a map that I don't understand what is in it ... And it is astonishing, we hear junta all the time in the news, in talk shows ... and in the glossary of the book I see that junta is a military dictatorship. It doesn't tell us anything. What am I going to tell my children about this?

In the last sentence, Dina acknowledges that the narrative is not a tellable story that she can transmit to her children, but rather a brief story with no personal detail and no direction for linking the past, present and future. She notices a careless reproduction in which the details (not given their due) are obliterated.

The limited scope and perspective of the historical narrative in this chapter was strongly discussed by 13 other family members, who were frustrated, as the narrative framing in presenting certain events of this period does not 'help us read history in a right way ... because 1974 didn't suddenly happen' (Demetra, grandmother, 78). Kostas (father, 46) called the textbook 'an eyesore', because it is focused on antiquity, rather than on enlightening students 'about the battles which were the most important to us! ... about their current history; the one their parents and grandparents have survived, and the one they are living now!'

Further, the respondents felt that the strict, distant language employed in the textbook would confuse students and made the story more chaotic, rather than providing deep analysis of past events. For example, Evi (mother, 56) said:

... with this text, children can't develop knowledge, critical thinking or sentiments ... children cannot even get the temporary knowledge to realise the consequences of the *coup d'état* and of the Invasion. It uses wooden language, with unknown words, that children cannot comprehend unless the teacher provides further analysis in the classroom.

These complaints align with existing research, which has long criticised this authoritative, 'deadening' language used in history textbooks, as it has been linked with drawbacks for students' learning. For example, for Marino (2011: 422) such 'textbookese' language holds students back from 'learn[ing] to think critically, nor understand[ing] that the study of the past is a task that can be approached from different points of view ... texts are written in such a way that they are divorced from the lives and experiences of student readers.'

In fact, many researchers take the view that the writer/publisher of the textbook selects this type of authoritative language for strengthening the trustworthiness and objectivity of historical knowledge,

and to make readers accept what is mentioned in the textbook as 'valid' information about the past (VanSledright, 2008; Wineburg, 2001). However, parents strongly questioned the level of truthfulness and challenged the historical reliability of the master narrative based on the recent changes that the Greek-Cypriot community has undergone. For example, Gabriel (father, 51) says, '1,619 missing persons are the tragic side of the Cypriot issue. But today things have changed! Testimonies are coming out, excavations, group tombs, DNA tests ... funerals [for those who were missing]. We see it in the news. But these things are not said here.'

Others reveal inconsistencies in the involvement of two specific agents during the troubled events and object to the narrative framing, which sets events in a certain way while portraying them: President Makarios and Colonel Grivas. Drawing on their personal experiences, Katerina (mother, 52) considers the textbook to be 'one-sided ... because it regards the one as a hero but doesn't say that both are responsible for bringing us here'. In fact, 14 of the 23 respondents reject the notion that Makarios was the hero of this narrative, and this also extended to Grivas. These family members decided to inform their children about the 'true' role of these agents. For example, Theodora (mother, 53) expresses her dislike towards the way Makarios is presented: 'They are fooling us ... My husband and I talked to our children ... My children know that Makarios was a dictator.' Whereas Stephanie (mother, 42) shares about Grivas:

I told my son that EOKA is very different to EOKA B. And that in EOKA, Grivas might have offered services, but EOKA B was a disaster for Cyprus. But he is nowhere in this chapter! I mean, his actions contributed to the events of 1974, and he is blameworthy.

So far, in their responses, the participants appear to encapsulate their strong concern that the official narrative fails to convey to their children true, valid knowledge of the recent past. However, this single perspective on the historical narrative can somehow be understood when acknowledging the context in which this textbook was produced. Cyprus was a newly independent state in the 1960s, and had serious internal issues, which led to the events of 1974. This damaged its status, as the territory of the island was under Turkish military control. These events occurred before Cyprus developed its structure, policy and identity as a state. For bringing social peace, pedagogical scholarship identifies selectivity and conservatism as the two main features of the master narrative, which cautiously avoids mentioning 'shameful' events and controversial issues (Carretero and van Alphen, 2014).

Likewise, 12 participants (4 grandparents and 8 parents) in the research seemed to presume that the state hesitates to provide a holistic approach to the past or to produce a multiperspectival story about the events of 1974 in order to prevent social unrest. As Demetra (grandmother, 78) said:

Because it is not easy for the kids to understand. And it is not easy for the teachers either. If the previous events are mentioned, they will have to position themselves ... they don't want to divide the public ... How can a teacher teach these?

The participants feel that the textbook follows this selective approach in content and narrative framing, 'as it makes it easier for not having differing opinions' (Christos, father, 41) in the government's effort to maintain the status quo. In their view, not letting the children develop thorough understanding of the past will 'pacify them' (Christophoros, father, 50) to stand aloof from politics. Their words appeared to reveal a striking lack of trust in the state.

The participants claim that the textbook has remained unchanged for 30 years because agreeing on what should be said is too difficult politically. They identify a reluctance showed by the state 'in being afraid to change the book' (Kyriaki, mother, 46) and by the political parties, which are seen to guide the Greek-Cypriot community, in reflecting on past mistakes, as they 'can't agree on these events' (Theodora, mother, 53). They object to this one-sided heroic type of narrative, as they prefer a rather multistranded story that takes into consideration the local peculiarities to make students more involved in learning about their recent past. As Stephanie (mother, 42) put it:

The way history has been taught is problematic. We maintain one argumentation that promotes the status quo ... it doesn't try to reach the two sides. I think we should have presented events as they occurred, in their right dimensions. Not by making them look nicer, not by presenting them from our side as having no responsibilities ... Because by presenting that we made no mistakes ... we only succeeded in growing one more generation that hates

the Other, opposite of us ... We should ask, if we had the courage to present things objectively, why we reached this point? This doesn't mean that the Invasion is not to be condemned, but we must understand that we have our share of responsibility ... because the essence of history is not to have kids learn by heart dates and events, but to develop their critical thinking, to avoid future mistakes. This is how we're going to make sensible citizens.

This section has presented how family members approach the history textbook their children use at school as a tool of official memory, and it has provided their negative comments on the selectivity and narrowness of the historical narrative, which, as they claim, restrict their children from becoming interested in learning about the events of the recent past. These family members sustain segments of their living milieu, and they do not refrain from contesting the dominant narrative or supplementing it, as this is found in the official *lieu de mémoire*, that is, the history textbook. In their answers, parents appeared to be more critical of the content of the textbook and of the master narrative, compared to grandparents, mostly because they furiously acknowledged that the teaching had not changed since they were students decades ago. Taking into consideration that existing research also sees the teacher as one potent means for conveying knowledge of the past (Nichol and Dean, 2003), it is now important to briefly show how these respondents view their children's history teachers.

Thirteen parents and five grandparents said that they do not relate with their children's history teachers. For grandparents, contact with the teacher is seen as the responsibility of the parents. Parents explained that they avoid communication, because, in their view, teachers are public servants of the Ministry, with limited power in their hands. With this stand, they undermine the professional status of the teachers. Katerina (mother, 52) says: 'I disagreed with many things, but I did not go to protest ... because I did not want to get in trouble. Maybe because can I really make an inquiry to the teacher since the Ministry gives him this material: "Why are you doing this stuff?"'

Parents, again, were more critical in their answers about the history teacher, as they believe that the teacher is using their position to promote personal beliefs and ideologies during the history lesson. They expressed concerns that the teacher can discriminate against the students who have different views about the past, and they asked their children not to share their family's stories of 1974. They say:

It is very difficult to open such an issue with a teacher ... because everyone is taking care of his child and doesn't want this to have an impact on the child ... like a low grade and negative attitude from the teacher to the child. (Christos, father, 41)

Many teachers don't say things as they are, but according to their political beliefs ... I don't want my child to be involved in the class so as not to be targeted by teachers. (Kostas, father, 46)

Despite these negative responses, five parents provided positive comments about how they viewed the history teacher. They were open to contact the teacher after noticing their children becoming more interested in learning about the past. Stephanie (mother, 42) explains: 'This man is obviously doing his job in a right way. He got them interested, I don't know how, into thinking about the past. Once the year is over, I'll go to congratulate him.'

Becoming involved in their children's history learning

Family members appear dissatisfied with the state's effort to claim ownership of the past while appropriating their history and ignoring them. Therefore, 18 of the 23 participants got involved in their children's history learning to provide them with, as they claim, an authentic representation of the past.

They responded that they convey their knowledge and 'truths' about the events of the troubled past, as they want their children 'to know everything' (Christophoros, father, 50). This is not a rare phenomenon, as existing research indicates that parents tend to 'link their own stories to larger social and political cultural history' (Fivush and Merrill, 2016: 312). As seen, these individual narratives are approached with caution, as listeners receive information about the past (Fivush, 2008) based on the experiences that narrators select to disclose to others. For example, three parents chose a more filtered version of events, as they prefer not to share some of their upsetting stories about the troubled past. They had no direct experience of the events of 1974 and, in order to protect their children from potential distress, they

decided to wait 'for the right age to come, so kids will be mature enough to understand some events' (Andriani, mother, 42).

Before turning to explore the means that these 18 family members use to communicate their memories and experiences about 1974, it should be mentioned that 5 parents of the 23 participants were unwilling to transmit their knowledge of the troubled past to their children. Although they also felt that the state does not provide an accurate or adequate account of the past, they felt that they had poor knowledge of local history or little time to spare, or they decided to abstain from any politically related discussion with their children.

(Grand)parents as carriers of the past

Of the 23 participants, 18 close family members use three methods to convey their experiences about 1974 to their children: (1) storytelling about the past; (2) watching/attending the funerals of missing people; and (3) visiting memory sites (Table 2). Of these 18 participants, 5 parents had no direct experience of the 1974 events (as they were unborn or a toddler then). They had experience of the consequences of these events in people's daily lives, as they were raised at or close to Government Refugee Settlements.

Table 2. Family members and their acts of memorialisation

Pseudonym of participant	Age in 1974	Means of communicating past experiences/memories
Artemis	28	Talking – folktales, watching a missing person's funeral on television
Anastasia	30	Talking – folktales, watching a missing person's funeral on television
Andriani	(born in 1976)	Talking, attending a missing person's funeral, visiting memory sites
Christophoros	6	Talking
Christos	(born in 1977)	Talking, watching a missing person's funeral on television, visiting memory sites
Demetra	34	Talking
Eugenia	9	Talking, visiting memory sites
Kyriaki	2	Talking, visiting memory sites
Xenia	6	Talking, attending a missing person's funeral
Chara	(born in 1976)	Talking
Yiota	6	Talking, visiting memory sites
Grigoris	27	Talking, visiting memory sites
Katerina	8	Talking, visiting memory sites
Soteria	6	Talking, visiting memory sites, watching a missing person's funeral on television
Evi	8	Talking, visiting memory sites
Stephanie	(born in 1976)	Talking
Theodora	9	Talking, visiting memory sites, watching a missing person's funeral on television
Savvas	32	Talking

Storytelling about the past

Of the 23 participants, 16 mentioned that they tell short stories about how they survived the troubled past to their children. These are stories about the memories of events that the narrators have survived, and children become active listeners. This type of communicative memory is time-bound in existence in terms of the event and the duration it requires to be conveyed to another generation (Assmann, 2011; Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995). For the parents, this is done through spontaneous talking, as discussions occur at a random time, day and place: 'while we drive and listen to the radio, we discuss some things' (Yiota, mother, 50). Communicative memories can be heard through spontaneous talking. Talking about the past is usually initiated as a response to an external stimulus, and sparked by questions raised by children, mostly when they have heard something at school, from the media or from their peers. For grandparents, talking about the past is seen as a restorative or spontaneous act of transmitting first-hand memories to the children, not a self-conscious, targeted communication of memories. For example, Demetra (grandmother, 78) says:

I don't start without a reason ... But if we happen to watch the news together ... and he has a question there. 'But who is he, what did he do?', then we talk about it. Or another time, when he asked me about the signing of the Zurich–London agreement, they did it at school ... should it be signed or not ... I told him how we felt then, because I lived at that time as a student ... I avoid taking a clear position ... although I have an opinion.

For two grandmothers, creating short folktales out of their personal daily experiences was a relaxed way of easily communicating their memories about the past to their grandchildren. Anastasia (grandmother, 74) says: 'I told her stories about ... how I lived in Mesoaria plain ... because now she can't experience it. And I described everything to her in a nice folktale, which she loved very much. I called it "Maritsou"'. Such short folktales, expressed in the third-person singular, are mentioned in worldwide research as being crafted for 'exposing children to worlds larger than they can experience ... telling stories ... about the family in which they have been born' (Fivush and Merrill, 2016: 310), and they are seen as helping children understand the notions of causality and chronology of events (Fivush, 2008).

Watching/attending funerals of missing persons

According to seven respondents (all parents), another way of conveying their experiences about the past occurs while watching funerals of persons who have been missing since 1974 on the television news. Since 2006, when excavations and identifications for the missing persons officially started, some families have collected their relatives' remains and scheduled funerals. Showing these funerals on the news was a common sight, usually taking place once or twice a month.

This is differentiated from storytelling, as it is not restricted in the past and it has a third medium; memories are being conveyed through an event in which another story is narrated, through the specific event shown on the television news. This bridges the past events of 1974 to today, as children can see the consequences of the past in their daily lives and raise questions about the missing persons which are not discussed in their textbooks.

Three parents added that they purposely attended such a funeral with their children to help youngsters understand the bitter past. They encourage their children to actively discover the past, and they get engaged in communicating their family memory and values. This support creates feelings of belonging and safety for their children while endorsing family membership, according to Norrick (1997) and Fivush and Merrill (2016). In this way, adults and children can co-narrate family stories of events experienced by both, strengthening the family connection. For example, in my research, Xenia talked extensively about the human loss in her family and about attending the funeral of her missing uncle. Her son, Paris, during their joint interview, co-narrated about the same funeral he attended, emphasising the family bond by communicating some of his family values:

It was recently ... I think we were proud. Especially when the national anthem was heard, I think we were all in tears, I feel an awe when listening to this anthem. I was impressed that there were soldiers ... and the flag of Greece on it [the coffin].

For researchers, this type of children's involvement in family history extends the scope and duration of family memory, and it helps families to 'recreate themselves as an ethical unit in the present' (Amadini, 2015: 37).

Visiting memory sites

For 10 parents, visiting areas of special interest for their families with their children was another way to share their experiences about the past. Children were able to visualise the memories of their families in these memory sites, and to set in their context the stories they had heard before. As Winter (2010: 312–13) notes, memory sites become: ‘points of reference not only for those who survived traumatic events, but also for those born long after them ... inevitably become sites of second-order memory, places where people remember the memories of others, those who survived the events marked there.’

The importance that a place carries for an individual’s memory, and how this relationship can be transformed, has long been explored by many researchers worldwide. For example, for Leonard (2014) and Clark (2014), co-creating and sharing family narratives in memory sites was seen as helping children to understand their position in the world and develop their historical understandings about the past ‘when exploring the concept of historical significance’ (Barrett, 2011: 21). This also applies to the visits these parents undertake to the occupied side of the island to help their children connect with their family history. They saw this as a risky action, taking into consideration that, in case of emergency, they were out of reach, and that they were surrounded by Turkish-speaking people. But it was something like a ritual for them; going back to their roots to pass their heritage on to the next generation, to ‘make the past “living”’ (Amadini, 2015: 38). For example, Soteria (mother, 50), talked about going to her village:

Look, so far, I talk to my kids during some visits to our occupied areas. Recalling these events is very painful for the one who went through them. And when we went ... My house is a ruin now, it was new in 1974 ... the change of the places I used to play bothered me. When I saw my elementary school, I could not speak. I was walking and shaking ... I went to the sea I was swimming as a child ... it is so painful. I am not strong enough to transmit these experiences to my children without crying. I tell my children some things when ... I can get some out of me ... we went first to my grandparents’ house, to my school and then to ours. I went with my two older sons when the checkpoints opened ... In the last year, we went two or three times because the little one asked me ... it is a duty to my children.

Soteria strongly feels that she maintains the right to be at her village, and the right of occupancy of her house. Her private property becomes a memory site with specific meaning for her and her children. Going to her village with her children is her effort to keep that space as an active memory site for her family. Nora (1989) explains that this approach to the *lieu de mémoire* exists due to the extinction of the *milieu de mémoire*, the environment in which (everyday life) memories are formed and developed.

What these three actions have in common is that they are all actions of memorialisation. Stories, ceremonies and visiting sites are all *lieux de mémoire*, as they preserve the memories of survivors and the meanings survivors give to them as they pass them on to the following generations (De Yeaza and Fox, 2013). In this respect memorialisation – a demanding process through which the survivor of a conflict becomes resilient and can recover from the traumatised past (Hamber et al., 2010; Jelin, 2007) – is about conveying one’s memory of the past, enabling children to better understand the history of their family and of their place. Memorialisation is also a social process for reconstructing the collective identity, for challenging the official narrative to accept oppressed memories so that local societies can have a better understanding as to where to head in the future (De Yeaza and Fox, 2013).

Intergenerational narratives

As seen, intergenerational stories are used by adults as a means of communicating their experiences about the past and to help tellers to offer thoughtful interpretations of past and current events (Bielby and Kully, 1989). Based on the gathered data, intergenerational narratives shared by grandparents may be closer to preserving memories. They may have a negative influence on the way children conceptualise the past, as adults may attempt to transform their personal memories into a kind of collective memory according to how they make sense of the past. For example, Artemis (grandmother, 76) reveals her ‘obligation’ towards the younger generation and her country:

It is a sacred duty ... I see that there is interest ... I feel that I transmit authentic stories ... I feel that I am going back, my inner powers are renewed for the struggle for the liberation of Cyprus because now we are not free. So, I relive the youthful spontaneity and bravery ... I feel

a fighting spirit which I want to channel ... The memory must be preserved, the desire to return must be transmitted and we must keep our young people in this vision of claiming our justice. This homeland is ours; foreigners are foreigners.

It is understood that intergenerational narratives, such as this one, through which the elder storyteller communicates beliefs, attitudes and identities about the past (recreating a more admired self), lead the listener to develop ideas of the past grounded in the experiences of the events that the narrator filters to share. This implies that the child is being bombarded by events that he/she does not have any personal memories of, and evaluates the historical past as directed by the living historian-narrator. In this way, the child assumes that the memories and experiences of the past told by the older person relate to the wider notion of remembering the past. In fact, during the joint interview with his grandmother Artemis, Antonis said, 'I feel the injustice. And I feel hatred ... We are those who were unfairly treated.'

There is a growing concern in existing research regarding how intergenerational narratives might influence children's understanding of the historical past. As children adopt their elders' memories about the past, they also inherit certain duties to accomplish as future citizens for securing the existence of their country (Leonard, 2014). However, this plausibly leads to social unrest, as these historical memories might prompt children 'to carry on the work of forebearers, to revenge an injustice or to undo its effects, or to fulfil a historic destiny' (Thompson, 2009: 196).

Intergenerational narratives can also exert positive influence on children. As seen above, research on intergenerational narratives emphasises the connections between older and younger generations' experiences, and it suggests that sharing family memories can contribute to the making of the future self of the child (Fivush and Merrill, 2016). In my research, parents used intergenerational narratives as a means to help children shape a more concrete understanding of the past. For example, Andriani (mother, 42) believes that personal stories about the past might be able to help her children understand phenomena in their later life:

For the next generations to learn, it is important to hear about ... let's say, when their grandparents hosted refugees ... what was the reaction of the refugees, how they received help ... if there was selfishness or arrogance ... Are the current situations of the refugees from other wars, or areas around Cyprus, similar? Was it something harsher? ... I think that you should share your stories, because somewhere, sometime in the future, our children may find themselves in such a situation. And these stories might offer strength, some self-defence so that they can deal with it.

This section has presented intergenerational narratives as the bridge between the past and the present, used by adults as the means of communicating their experiences to youngsters. In this dynamic process children develop a sense of identity and belonging, and ensure family membership. It was noted that intergenerational narratives, as they embody the beliefs and attitudes of the tellers of the past, may influence how children make sense of the past.

Conclusion

This article explored how family memory and official history about the troubled events of 1974 in Cyprus are related, reporting on aspects of a broader qualitative study on how these 23 Greek-Cypriot parents/grandparents of Gymnasium graduate students (of 14 to 15 years) approach what their children are expected to learn about the traumatic events they survived, and on how they communicate their experiences to the younger generation.

Participating (grand)parents view both the history textbook and teachers as carrying the state's version of the past, which is presumed to be mediated to their children. They are dissatisfied with the narrow content, scope and framing of the narrative in the selected historical knowledge their children receive. Further, participants seem to recognise that the textbook has remained the same for decades, as the state and political elite hesitate to confront the bitter past. Most respondents appeared to undermine the professional status of teachers, seeing them merely as government officials who take advantage of their position. The creation of a new, liberal history textbook with a multistranded story and multiple agents and that takes no clear view on the conflict it describes might be the key to encourage students in reconstructing the local past in multiple ways and in exploring how their past can be related to their

present. A story that would not describe something distant to them, but that would draw links with global events, social trends and current issues, would enable them to position themselves in the local and the wider context. In addition, a more flexible curriculum could allow the history teacher to use new pedagogical means (testimonies, documentaries, the media and so on) in their practice, thus making the subject of local history more inclusive, corresponding to current pedagogical trends found in existing literature (Hess and Posselt, 2002; McCully et al., 2021; Purdue, 2021).

The Greek-Cypriot survivors of 1974 who participated in the research not only question the official narrative but also see politics as blocking them from dealing with the past. They demand to have their own voice when talking about the recent past. Storytelling about the past (through spontaneous talking and crafted folktales), attending the funeral of a person who has been missing since 1974 and visiting places with specific meaning for their family history are seen as the means that family members use to communicate their memories about the events of 1974 to their (grand)children, thereby linking their past to their children's present. By revisiting memory sites with their (grand)children, survivors of 1974 can actively help younger generations to discover the historical past, contributing to the making of family memories and to the shaping of their future selves (Clark, 2014; Fivush and Merrill, 2016; Leonard, 2014). In these ways, intergenerational narratives bridge the gap between individual and collective memories as adults get involved in communicating their family values and memories, and as children are enabled to form a sense of their place in the world and in their family (Amadini, 2015; Fivush and Merrill, 2016; Norrick, 1997). But intergenerational narratives need to be approached with caution, these research data show, as through them it is likely that children could become prone to adopting certain ideas, sentiments and stands about the past (for example, political, patriotic), rather than enabling them to shape a coherent understanding of the historical past.

This study enables us to see the importance of further investigating intergenerational narratives in conflict-ridden societies, as they may help a child or young person to become aware of social phenomena, or they may distort their ideas about the past and may lead them to participate in social conflicts. This research may inspire other researchers to explore children as recipients of historical information from differing sources, such as family, peers and the media, and from platforms such as the internet and YouTube. A mixed-method study of a larger scale using questionnaires and interviews could follow up for further exploration of how politics can be involved in learning about the past in Cyprus or in other conflict contexts. Future research is to explore the role of family in their children's learning about the bitter past, including individuals from all the communities in Cyprus, as this will provide a more thorough understanding of this research field.

Data and materials availability statement

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The author declares that research ethics approval for this article was provided by the UCL Research Ethics Committee. Permission to enter public schools and observe history lessons was granted by the Department of Secondary Education of the (then) Ministry of Education and Culture in Cyprus (currently the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth).

Consent for publication statement

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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