

Historical Revisionism: Revising or Rewriting

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Abstract

Historical revisionism has long been a part of effective academic historiography. A constant re-analysis of the past and how previous historians came to their conclusions about it enable corrections to be made and new findings to be incorporated into modern and future historical metanarratives. While plentiful positive examples of this practice exist, in part because of an understanding of history as a discipline and how it is correctly and incorrectly represented in adaptations, notable poor and inappropriate examples of revisionism also exist. These rewrites are usually political and are often contested by political opponents and academics, but nevertheless persist. Understanding how both good and bad practices of revisionism have occurred enable historians of today to correct historiographic mistakes and malpractice in the discipline.

Historical Revisionism: Revising or Rewriting

Historical Revisionism as a historiographic method has been practiced ever since there has been a history to reflect back on. More than one historian has pointed out how history is constant revisionism upon itself, and their assessments are accurate. Former president of the American Historical Association James McPherson spoke for the AMA, asserting that “history is a continuing dialogue between the present and the past.”¹ Indeed, it remains today the consensus among the discipline of history that “all historians are revisionists.”² A traditional and scholarly form of revision serves as an ongoing historiography that critiques the accuracy of our understandings of the past in order to create a more accurate historiography. A scholarly and reliable historiography as the study of the representation of history leads to trustworthy metanarratives that are accurate to past events.

Another form of revisionism also exists however, one that centers around creating and maintaining a controlled narrative instead of building on academic research. Such unhealthy revisionism is generally political and crumbles under academic investigation and pressure, but nevertheless stubbornly persists to manipulate history “for political ends and with a complete lack of scientific foundation.”³ Such “revisionist” efforts often unpleasantly manifest in the form

1 James McPherson, “Revisionist Historians: Perspectives on History.” *Historians.org*. American Historical Association, September 1, 2003. Accessed November 1, 2022 <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/september-2003/revisionist-historians>

2 James M. Banner, *The Ever-Changing Past: Why All History is Revisionist History*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 10.

3 Giovanni C. Cattini, “Historical Revisionism: The Reinterpretation of History in Contemporary Political Debate.” *Transfer Journal of Contemporary Culture*, 6 (2011), 30.

of Holocaust denial or the denial of other human rights violations conducted by a nation's past. These egregious efforts at burying historical records for political gain distort the appearance of revisionist history and threaten to associate it with "consciously falsified or distorted interpretation[s] of the past."⁴ Understanding when revisionism is and is not legitimate historiography is critical for keeping verified history from coming under attack for current political reasons and equips historians of today to better their discipline for those who will come later.

Revisionism in history ultimately affects historical narratives, which themselves make up larger historical metanarratives. Historical revisionism thus varies in terms of how extensive its proposed revisions re-analyze history. The challenge for both historians and readers today is to measure if such revisions are actually warranted due to new examinations of historical data, or if they are largely political and denialist.

I will begin by examining topics in the discipline of history where historiographic changes to their larger metanarrative can be traced, often reaching more accurate understandings of the historical topic being researched. I will then examine cases where adaptations of history similarly affect the historiography of the topic being discussed. Then I will analyze the contested revisionist attempts at history that have been on and off challenges to the larger metanarratives of both the Philippines and Imperial Japan before surveying additional revisionist history efforts happening around the world.

Historical Revisionism: Getting it Right

⁴ James McPherson, "Revisionist Historians" *Historians.org*.

Understanding revisionism as it happens naturally is critical to understanding it as an ongoing phenomenon. Historical Revisionism can and often does happen very soon after the events themselves, as can be seen in the aftermath of World War I. Shortly after the war's end, Germany and Austria both began releasing official legal documents from the beginning of the war to try to clear their name and the reparations that other nations began piling on them. An America that was already beginning to reflexively question its involvement in the Great War began to eagerly reject its previous actions. This included historian Carl Becker, who in 1920 became incredibly disappointed with his previous support of the "futile" and "repulsive" events America joined in 1917.⁵ Sidney Bradshaw Fay was one of those who was able to review Germany and Austria's preserved official papers. She documented these as early as 1920, and based on these papers, she argued for the next decade that no single European nation wanted an all-encompassing war. She instead argued that misjudgment and foolish commitments led to the entangling alliances that made WWI a reality.⁶

The public historical analysis of WWI happened largely independent of this, however. Former interventionist advocate Harry Elmer Barnes gradually changed his views as the perception of fault changed, and he stressed that the rest of his American peers should take note of how "salesmen" pushed an ideological conflict on them. Interpreting the events in this light led Barnes to blame France and Russia for largely instigating the conflict in his 1926 book, *The*

5 Douglas Peifer, "The Sinking of the Lusitania, Wilson's Response, and Paths Not Taken: Historical Revisionism, the Nye Committee, and the Ghost of William Jennings Bryan." *Journal of Military History* 79, no. 4 (2015), 1036.

6 Ibid., 1037.

*Genesis of the World War.*⁷ The publication of Frank Hanighen's *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Armament Industry* further redirected war involvement blame towards what was then a very early military industrial complex. Even with Hanighen's shoddy research and statistical presentations, his analysis put the businesses that profited from the war in the crosshairs of growing negative public opinion.⁸

Based on this research, the congressional Nye Munitions Committee began to investigate the manufacture and sale of munitions and U.S. shipbuilding, going past the reaches of their initial mandate in the eyes of many of their fellow congressmen. Their investigation only stopped when they evidently pushed too far and called the neutrality intentions of Woodrow Wilson into question, leading to an effective defunding of the committee.⁹ Wilson's former Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, resigned in protest to Wilson's proposed second note of ultimatums to Germany. Bryan's negative reputation for his aggressive neutrality gradually diminished, and his proposals were accepted posthumously and in hindsight by many revisionists in the mid-1930s.¹⁰

Revisionism, however, happens across U.S. history and more often than not has much more time pass before it begins to occur, such as in the case of Japanese American internment camps during World War II. Such ill treatment of what were often U.S. citizens understandably carries strong feelings, but examining its causes still holds potential for increased historical

7 Ibid., 1037.

8 Ibid., 1038.

9 Ibid., 1040-1041.

10 Ibid., 1034, 1045.

accuracy. The prevailing assumption that racism was the primary factor for Executive Order 9066 and its authorized evacuation stems from *Personal Justice Denied*, a 1982 published report by the special joint congressional commission that extensively drew from various materials such as witnesses and past scholarly work.¹¹ Academic revisionist approaches to this topic and existing narrative of racism do not question the tragedy of the past or its legitimacy, but do thoroughly re-examine the motives that caused it. While previously racism has often been viewed as the master force that fueled Japanese internment, revisionist historians look for other motives as well.¹² For example, Japanese Americans were moved from the West Coast and Southern Arizona, but not other states, which alludes to a potential legitimate military concern that not all studies and historical accounts look into.¹³ Mike Masaoka's leadership with the Japanese American Citizens League has also had his actions come under heavy critique by many revisionists, who have called his actions of urging cooperation with the executive directive "self-hating", with Richard Drinnon critiquing him for trying to "become one with the colonizer".¹⁴ These examples demonstrate that critical questions into the past about historical motives allow for more complex and accurate metanarratives, warranting their necessity.

The American Civil War on the other hand, has had far more time pass before historical analysis of its causes and retrospective lessons were written and has had an even wider range of historical revisionism applied to the study of it over time. The ultimate metanarrative has been

¹¹ Lon Kurashige, "Race, Revisionism, Ethnic Boundaries, and Japanese American Internment." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 40, no. 3 (2021): 26.

¹² Ibid., 26, 27.

¹³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴ Ibid., 30, 31.

critiqued further and revised more often as time has passed. Around the 1930s, multiple historians such as Avery Craven and James G. Randall diminished the role slavery played in the bitter conflict, with Randall proposing that the North's lack of commitment to ending slavery ultimately left it affecting the war's outcome very little. This perception of the war as being inevitable because of the growing differences around slavery often in hindsight views both the secession of the southern states and the later Reconstruction period as mistakes. This viewpoint has been seriously critiqued today since it "offered something for everyone and placed blame on no one," allowing the Jim Crow era to happen without contestation.¹⁵

The "neo-abolitionist" metanarrative of the American Civil War that would emerge later placed a far greater emphasis on slavery as the driving factor behind the conflict, viewing the civil rights era of the 1960s to effectively be a second Reconstruction period in of itself because of the advancement of civil rights for many descendants of former slaves. This neo-abolitionist metanarrative similarly views the Civil War in a similar light to World War II, as a war that historians can approve of America's participation in.¹⁶ Many historians today further critique the American Civil War and make a concentrated effort to analyze its complexity, such as Stephen Berry who self-identifies as a "new revisionist": breaking with former "reconciliationist" historiographies of the 1930s.¹⁷ Historians David Goldfield and Harry S. Stout retrospectively critique the clergy of both sides of the conflict for supporting their respective Christian religion

¹⁵ Yael A. Sternhell, "Revisionism Reinvented?: The Antiwar Turn in Civil War Scholarship." *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3, no. 2 (2013), 240.

¹⁶ Ibid., 242.

¹⁷ Ibid., 240.

without pushing for peace or reconciliation, critiquing the abolitionists in particular for failing to hold the Union accountable for its actions after the war's conclusion. Pragmatic views of the Emancipation Proclamation portray it as being done to weaken Confederate military options and to gain international approval, with new revisionist historians now seeing it as a potentially unnecessary political tool that could have had a democratic alternative.¹⁸ Both past and present "reconciliationist" views can be problematic as they remove the harsh reality of Black southerners during this time period, who were left without much legal support when Reconstruction's rapid end left them at the mercy of local state governments.¹⁹ Revisionist efforts thus have the potential to add depth and accuracy to previous understandings, even when it reveals the past to be more unpleasant than previously thought.

The understanding and length of time a metanarrative holds on a topic also varies depending on how old the topic itself is. Perhaps the best explanation of the ebbing and flowing views of a historical period through revisionism is that of the medieval Crusades. The Crusades of the Middle Ages have had multiple centuries past since their conclusion, and many a historian has commented and summarized them in their own words before becoming part of history themselves. Religious differences affected interpretations of the Crusades as early as the 16th century, with German Lutheran scholar and humanist Matthew Dresser viewing the former Holy Wars as hindered by "papal lust for terrestrial power," while also contrasting this with the sincere and pious crusaders themselves.²⁰ In the following century, English historian Thomas Fuller

¹⁸ Ibid., 245.

¹⁹ Ibid., 250.

²⁰ Jacques Theron and Erna Oliver, "Changing Perspectives on the Crusades." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018), 4.

found the crusades to be tragic, wasteful, and treacherous while Jesuit priest Louis Maimbourg wrote a far more positive but also clearly biased account that put France and the west in a more positive light.²¹

The enlightenment of the 18th century saw unprecedented criticism about the crusades and their religious motives, with Voltaire viewing the Crusades as a pointless endeavor led by “corrupt and ignorant criminal” leaders, and English historian Edward Gibbon referring to the medieval crusades as the “grossest barbarism.”²² Animosity in historical accounts died down in the 19th century with a mix of views arising, from French royalist and historian Joseph-Francois Michaud calling the crusaders “heroic” in their Christian colony efforts, to Charles Mills heavily referencing them with condemnations of their cruelty while also showing sympathy for the crusaders themselves.²³ By the 20th century and into today, the main voices still covering the Crusades are either American, British, or Israeli, and while there is an appropriate amount of condemnation for past atrocities, enough objectivity has grown in the field that the branding of entire nations is avoided when specific individuals are now more accurately able to be blamed for the historic tragedies. The Crusades were, as Johnathan Riley-Smith puts it, “theologically justifiable by a society that felt itself to be threatened.”²⁴

21 Ibid., 4-5.

22 Ibid., 5.

23 Ibid., 6.

24 Ibid., 9.

One can also trace the high and low views of religious history through specific individuals, especially in the more recent historiographic developments of the philanthropist Edward Colston. Colston's financial donations, despite their origins stemming from the slave trade, were celebrated as early as 1755, when Rev. William Hawkins claimed that the name of Colston "will be an everlasting incitement to Christian virtue".²⁵ Almost 30 years later, Rev. John Hodges would also imply that Colston's growing wealth was providence rewarding his charity for the needy.²⁶ Around this time, Colston's ties to the slave trade gradually began to disappear from historical narratives, with abolitionists praising him in 1788 for his philanthropy, not realizing it was hypocritical since at the time Colston's philanthropy was his only emphasized trait.²⁷ Additional commemoration efforts for Colston began in 1866, when fundraising efforts began for a memorial window to be installed in St. Mary Redcliffe, commemorating his family alongside the Parable of the Good Samaritan.²⁸ A statue of Colston was additionally erected and dedicated in 1895 as part of the history of the city of Bristol.²⁹ Indeed, when Rev. Henry J. Wilkins utilized primary sources in 1920 to write an account of Colston's life, his short condemning analysis of him in his conclusion had nothing to do with his slave trade involvement, but rather due to his temper and stubbornness.³⁰

25 Samuel J. Richards, "Historical Revision in Church: Reexamining the "Saint" Edward Colston." *Anglican and Episcopal History* 89, no. 3 (09, 2020), 233.

26 *Ibid.*, 233.

27 *Ibid.*, 237.

28 *Ibid.*, 234-235.

29 *Ibid.*, 235-236.

30 *Ibid.*, 244.

The notably more recent protests and activity of Countering Colston, active in parts because of disagreement over the nuanced views of Bishop Michael Arthur Hill of Bristol that were shared in November 2014, demonstrate current dissatisfaction with how Colston has historically been remembered.³¹ The active frustration of Countering Colston and similar protestors is evidenced by both an Anti-Slavery Day artistic protest by the statue on October 18, 2018, as well as the subsequent toppling of the statue in June 2020.³² These actions demonstrate the difficult and concerning animosity that can occur when there is a public perception of historical malpractice and intentional selective memory.

Historical Revisionism then, can and often is a worthwhile tool in the pursuit of historical accuracy by re-analyzing how historians have come to the current metanarratives. Both the American Civil War and the Crusades of the Middle Ages demonstrate how perceptions on historical events can seriously change over time. When based on research however, these changes result in more complete metanarratives. At the same time, history that seems to be changing too slowly can be frustrating for some, and in political and tense settings, can result in active demonstrations that disturb the peace in civil society. While academic historiography can feel at times like a thankless job, clearly there is still a need for a constant reexamining of the past and how we know what we know.

³¹ Ibid., 232.

³² Ibid., 238, 252-253.

Adapting History: Intentional and Unintentional Revisionism

History as a discipline can be communicated through a number of different ways, with adaptations of history often being an effective and popular one, through film and the visual or performing arts. Such historical adaptations continually run the risk of revising public understandings of history, be it intentionally or unintentionally. A review of the literature demonstrates that adaptations of history have indeed challenged understandings of history both accidentally and on purpose.

Linda Hutcheon identifies self-reflexive literature that compares history and fiction to both be human constructs as “historiographic metafiction.” These historiographic works are simultaneously aware of where its information comes from while also commenting on it, which can arguably make them more accurate when they discuss history with this in mind.³³ This is an important distinction to make since there was also a time in early contemporary history when secondary sources were accepted as scholarly sources, but not academic literature itself, thus, making it redundant to other historical sources.³⁴ With this understanding in mind, Raw and Tutan propose treating history as an adaptation of facts in and of itself, and Anne-Marie Scholz additionally argues that film adaptations of history are also their own historical events.³⁵ At the same time, the collective and collaborative nature of filmmaking results in portrayals of history that are at least partly democratized, lending credence to hesitations about treating adaptations as

³³ Frans Weiser, “Contextualizing History-as-Adaptation: An Interdisciplinary Comparison of Historical Revisionism.” *Adaptation* 12, no. 2 (2019): 108.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

history.³⁶ Today, professional historians generally fall into one of two camps: those that hold all adaptations are obligated to recreate historical events as accurately as possible, and those that dismiss all nonacademic adaptations, be it films or blogs, as unreliable recreations and historical sources.³⁷

Such understandings of history are important for understanding how adaptations of history can carry varying levels of historical accuracy. Brett Whitcomb's documentary on the 1980s wrestling show *GLOW: Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling*, as well as the fictional Netflix series based on it by Liz Flahive and Carly Mensch, serve as excellent case studies in contrasting revisionist emphases. Whitcomb specifically chooses to angle his documentary against the original show's director Matt Cimber, who referred to the show as "camp" and "fun," in the past and commented at the time that young girls reportedly liked to imitate what they saw on screen.³⁸ His camp and fun comments are juxtaposed against how the wrestling personas used in the show vary in terms of both who claims to have created them and who wants to take credit for them. Lynn Braxton attributes her persona of Big Bad Mama as a creation of Cimber and did not take credit or pride in it, while in contrast, Mt. Fuji's actress Emily Dole took great pride in representing Samoan Americans in popular media.³⁹ The variety of personas used in the show included more than one caricature that would be deemed culturally or racially incentive today. Thus, Whitcomb's decision to not explore the interactions, relationships, or potential conflicts

³⁶ Ibid., 109.

³⁷ Ibid., 111.

³⁸ Thaïs Miller, "Recent Attempts of Historical Revisionism to Reclaim the Empowerment of Female Performers in *GLOW: Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling*." *Studies in Popular Culture* 42, no. 1 (2019), 27.

³⁹ Ibid., 31.

between the performing women in *GLOW* leaves the documentary ultimately feeling filtered and aimed towards villainizing Matt Cimber when it oversimplifies the women that performed in the program.⁴⁰

Flahive and Mensch's Netflix series, however, highlights flaws, complicity, and complexity in relationships through the character and writing, portraying the women in *GLOW* as "not heroic but human." It is a show that critiques the larger historical era for its accompanying subcultures and thought, especially the original audience of *GLOW*, leading the current audience to evaluate consumed entertainment in general.⁴¹ Linda Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction comes into play in the Netflix series, with the show being aware of how visual representation can change societal attitudes about events, "drawing attention to its own construction."⁴² The Netflix show's emphasis on showing multiple perspectives from which to analyze the original show's motives and time period leads to a more well-rounded examination of the individuals of the past.⁴³

Historical adaptations also run the risk of muddying real history, especially in areas with an uncertain historical consensus such as the Salem witch trials. Harvard English professor Barrett Wendell openly contemplated in 1892 the possibility of something "evil beyond words"

⁴⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁴¹ Ibid., 24.

⁴² Weiser, "Contextualizing History-as-Adaptation," 108.

⁴³ Miller, "Recent Attempts of Historical Revisionism to Reclaim the Empowerment of Female Performers in *GLOW*," 40.

about Salem during the era of its infamous witch trials.⁴⁴ Herbut Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History*, however, effectively labeled the mysteries of the day as superstition and the accused as innocents, echoing previous condemnations of the prosecution by Lewis Spence in 1920.⁴⁵ Charles Williams would additionally conclude that witchcraft was likely not present at Salem, while noting the presence of witchcraft in other parts of history in his book on witchcraft in 1941.⁴⁶ The possibility of a combination of sociology and genuine spiritual activity has remained a historical possibility to many throughout the 20th century however, with John Putnam Demos referring to New England as a spiritual "battlefield" in 1982, concluding that antisocial behavior and misogyny additionally came into play in the trials themselves.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* concludes in its gloss notes that devil worship actually happened, but that Miller does not take the concept seriously. While Miller saw *The Crucible* as a historical appropriation, it has still been criticized for its poor historical accuracy.⁴⁸ Because of *The Crucible*'s modifications to the understanding of history, it effectively requires a whiggish interpretation that does not include the possibility of genuine spiritual activity, as its metaphorical connections to the then-current events of its day make it "propaganda more than art."⁴⁹ Miller's work serves to have artistic merit, but is disinterested in

44 R. D. Stock, "Salem Witchcraft and Spiritual Evil: A Century of Non-Whig Revisionism." *Christianity and Literature* 42, no. 1 (1992), 143.

45 Ibid., 144.

46 Ibid., 146.

47 Ibid., 152.

48 Ibid., 141.

49 Ibid., 154.

telling an accurate history as it's main purpose, leaving its revisionist changes largely relegated to it's popular entertainment medium and not the larger discipline of history.

Art and historical adaptations of it are also often revising and challenging historical metanarratives intentionally. Multiple artists of the "1.5 generation" that grew up in the Soviet Union and then moved with their families in the years surrounding its collapse have chosen to record their feelings and memories in the form of art that asks, "How should the late Soviet period be remembered?"⁵⁰ Poet Alex Rif left Ukraine with her family in 1991 at the age of five, but still pushes Russian culture while living in Israel. Her *Immigration Poetry* is read aloud in Hebrew at different Israeli towns, portraying a negative experience of living in Israel, despite seemingly having a success story that includes moving from the Hebrew University to working in the Ministry of Economy.⁵¹ Rita Kogan is another Russian-Israeli poet who emigrated to Israel at the age of 15 and has written about the experiences of being a Russian immigrant woman. Kogan's poetry rejects Israeli assimilation and cultural assumptions that have been thrust on her in dramatic and at times obscene fashion.⁵²

Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi similarly challenges assumptions about living as a Soviet immigrant to Israel. Choosing to enroll in art college instead of military service, her painting series *Soviet Childhood* depicts living in the Soviet Union in a positive light. Her art has had

⁵⁰ Alex Moshkin, "Post-Soviet Nostalgia in Israel? Historical Revisionism and Artists of the 1.5 Generation." *East European Jewish Affairs* 49, no. 3 (2019): 179–199.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

critics on both sides argue it either does not represent the U.S.S.R. systemic harshness to Jews accurately enough, or alternatively does not accurately represent the abundance present under the former Soviet system. Overall, discrimination and antisemitism in the Soviet Union is not alluded to at all in the art of the 1.5 generation, while Israel's accepted historical perception as a refuge is challenged through cultural and experiential rebuttals, as well as through nostalgic reflections to the alternative.⁵³ Although potentially disarming, when taken into the larger historical narrative, the art of the 1.5 generation incorporates additional nuance to macro-views that can accidentally simplify the experiences of different people groups in historical summaries. While such additions are intentionally revisionist in nature, they do not deny events of history as much as they add complexity to the human experience throughout it.

The Contested History of the Philippines

Remembering history correctly in some nations is a strongly contested task. A historical area of ongoing political contestation today can be seen in the history of The Philippines. While under attack by many critics today, the larger accepted narrative of events in the Philippines is agreed upon. The Philippines entered martial law in September 1972 by President Ferdinand Marcos, whose subsequent rule led to the detaining of approximately 70,000 Filipinos for political reasons. Of those, 34,000 of these were also victims of torture.⁵⁴ Following a mass rebellion, the new 1987 Constitution provided a new basis for Filipino rights, with "never again"

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Raphael Lorenzo A. Pangalangan, Gemmo Bautista Fernandez, and Ruby Rosselle L. Tugade, "Marcosian Atrocities: Historical Revisionism and the Legal Constraints on Forgetting." *Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights & the Law* 19, no. 2 (2018): 142.

becoming a rallying call against authoritarianism.⁵⁵ Many republican additions were created by the new President Aquino Corazon in the aftermath of the former dictatorship such as a Bill of Rights, but the country still faces modern day challenges against corruption and authoritarianism.⁵⁶

The Republic Act 10086 in 2010 established the National Historical Commission of the Philippines, which is additionally mandated to resolve historical controversies.⁵⁷ Additionally, Republic Act 10368 recognizes “the heroism and sacrifices of all Filipinos who were victims of gross human rights violations committed during the regime of former President [Marcos]”.⁵⁸ To this end, the Human Rights Victims Reparation and Recognition Act of 2013 sought to formally recognize all victims of Marcos’ authoritarian rule through both monetary and nonmonetary reparations.⁵⁹

Beginning with the Philippine presidential election of 2016, much of the perceived atrocities of the past of the Philippines began to be called into question. Following the election of Rodrigo Duterte as the new President of the Philippines in 2016, he proceeded to fulfill a campaign promise by moving former president Ferdinand Marcos’s remains into the Heroes’ Cemetery.⁶⁰ Upon legal contestation, the Philippine Supreme Court ruled that the Marcos burial

55 Ibid., 150.

56 Ibid., 143.

57 Ibid., 158.

58 Ibid., 164.

59 Ibid., 151.

60 Ibid., 140.

was not a justifiable controversy, and that the Filipino people should move on and “let this issue rest.”⁶¹ This is in spite of the fact that Philippine jurisprudence stands against Marcos through multiple legal references to martial law, Marcos’ illegally gained fortune, and his status as a “deposed dictator” in previous acts of the Philippines. The United States has similarly affirmed Marcos is liable for torture, summary execution, and forced disappearances among other crimes twice through Hawaii’s district court and the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.⁶²

The movement of Marcos’ bones into the Heroes’ Cemetery taps into a much larger revisionist history attempt on his legacy that has been growing online. Multiple online YouTube channels peddle revisionist and often conspiratorial claims of Marcos’ downfall. *Hidden Truths* is a video by Mr. Riyoh, a “conservative Filipino citizen” in his own words, who proposes that Marcos actually improved the country of his day and assisted future Filipinos through the architectural and institutional improvement completed under his rule. He further claimed that Marcos acted as God’s “instrument,” with the “stubborn” lawbreakers of his day deserving the torture and prison that occurred under his martial law.⁶³ Another heavily trafficked revisionist video on YouTube, *Royal Kingdom of Maharlika* claims that Marcos’s rule drastically slowed down the growing national debt of the country, citing disreputable and at times nonexistent sources to claim that outside parties like the United States and the Catholic Church manipulated the EDSA revolution that took power away from him.⁶⁴ Conspiratorial claims about outside

61 Ibid., 143.

62 Ibid., 174.

63 Victor Felipe Bautista, “The Pervert’s Guide to Historical Revisionism: Traversing the Marcos Fantasy.” *Philippine Studies: Historical & Ethnographic Viewpoints* 66, no. 3 (2018), 275.

64 Ibid., 276.

parties also include alleged reports that Marcos was targeted by a variety of enemies, including communists, nuns, radicalized students, U.S. marines, the Vatican, and also corrupt officials vying for his personal wealth.⁶⁵ Some of these claims are based on Marcos' original propaganda. Marcos attempted to use communism as an external scapegoat as the nation's primary threat, claiming the press was spreading Leftist propaganda and ideas of the elite, letting him persecute journalists more easily. He also tapped into native myths of the Malakas and Maganda (strong and beautiful ones, respectively) to portray himself and his wife as filling these roles in his "New Society."⁶⁶

Sorting through actual history and propaganda on YouTube's website is something of a losing battle, as searching "Marcos History" into YouTube's search engine presents many videos, eight of the top ten results of which were not affiliated with any professional organizations. Most of these videos push historical revisionism about Marcos' wealth and the human rights violations that occurred during his reign.⁶⁷ By keeping pro-Marcos political videos visible and in their platform's circulation of content, these videos are essentially normalized by YouTube, which keeps them prominent amongst any channels that gather views from them. YouTube rarely gets involved in cases of disinformation except in instances of above-average public backlash, and as these revisionist counternarratives abound on the website largely

⁶⁵ Ibid., 286.

⁶⁶ Pangalangan, Fernandez, and Tugade, "Marcosian Atrocities," 148.

⁶⁷ Cheryll Ruth R. Soriano, and Fatima Gaw, "Platforms, Alternative Influence, and Networked Political Brokerage on YouTube." *Convergence* 28, no. 3 (June 2022): 788.

unchecked and unchallenged, YouTube essentially silently supports them by not challenging them.⁶⁸

Due to former legislation, martial law is required to be taught in the Philippines' educational curriculum at multiple grade levels.⁶⁹ Because this has made disreputable elements of Marcos' rule known to upcoming generations, y Marcos supporters generally have had to justify the extremes of martial law when they cannot be outright denied.⁷⁰ This is keeping in line with the growing but thus far still vocal minority of Marcos supporters disregarding human right violation concerns of Marcos' rule by either denying their existence or if not possible, by justifying them as being outweighed by the economic and security gains that reportedly occurred during his reign.⁷¹ Revisionists are already content to flip the narrative on the financial debt Marcos gained for the Philippines by claiming the architecture he built that outlasted him trumps any claims of economic malpractice on his part.⁷² If Marcos was the great leader revisionists claim he was, one might wonder why he could not have paid the growing debt of the Philippines out of his personal wealth, since the revisionist video *Royal Kingdom of Maharlika* claims that Marcos owned a total net worth that in reality actually exceeds the amount of currency in global circulation.⁷³

68 Ibid., 798.

69 Pangalangan, Fernandez, and Tugade, "Marcosian Atrocities," 152.

70 Bautista, "The Pervert's Guide to Historical Revisionism," 284.

71 Pangalangan, Fernandez, and Tugade, "Marcosian Atrocities," 155-156.

72 Bautista, "The Pervert's Guide to Historical Revisionism," 282.

73 Ibid., 276.

Thus far, the government of the Philippines has not had their hands forced by an external power to correct their own internal historical metanarrative inconsistencies, although there is international precedent for such pressure to exist. The United Nations Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity (UN Impunity Principles) recognizes the “inalienable right to truth” and “the duty to preserve memory.” U.N. Reparation Principle 22 additionally states that Victim Satisfaction requires “verification of the facts” and an “inclusion of an accurate account of the violations [in] international human rights law training and in educational material.”⁷⁴

In his videos, Mr. Riyoh is eager to disregard discussions on Marcos being good or bad, instead pushing for his fellow countrymen to “move on and unite” disregarding any additional critiques he did not address.⁷⁵ Marcos’ son and now sitting President of the Philippines Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos similarly stated that he will have to “agree to disagree” with people that believe he or others have distorted history.⁷⁶ Perceptions of the Philippine government as being weak, combined with declining media trust in the Philippines, has added to the expansion of revisionist history channels. This is a problem that until mitigated by platform owner YouTube helps mitigate, looks likely to continue.⁷⁷ Barring outside influences, Bongbong

74 Pangalangan, Fernandez, and Tugade, “Marcosian Atrocities,” 164.

75 Bautista, “The Pervert’s Guide to Historical Revisionism,” 292.

76 Pangalangan, Fernandez, and Tugade, “Marcosian Atrocities,” 173.

77 Soriano and Gaw, “Platforms, Alternative Influence, and Networked Political Brokerage on YouTube,” 800.

Marcos is unlikely to correct many of these revisionist histories, and as such they may see a proliferation in the coming years.

The Contested History of Imperial Japan

Japan has had an equally extensive and contested past that has had academic and political reactions regarding its former government structure, with their difficult past in question stemming from the actions of the former Empire of Japan during World War II. Multiple parts of Japan's conduct with its neighbors have come under fire and subsequently been defended by Japanese nationalist groups. The Nanjing Massacre of 1937 severed diplomatic relations between China and Japan, which were not resumed until 1972. Many Japanese historical revisionists claim that the Nanjing Massacre is entirely falsified history, a claim made on the grounds that since there is no provable exact total number of people that were killed, the event could not have happened.⁷⁸ Academically, it is understood that a former Japanese Imperial Army ban on official documentation of the Nanjing Massacre has made piecing the details of the tragedy harder to pinpoint, something revisionists are very eager to exaggerate. Revisionists are similarly eager to cite citational mistakes like Japanese historian Kasahar Tokushi's accidental misuse of a photograph in his book about the Nanjing massacre and its subsequent reprinting as proof of the event's entire falsification.⁷⁹

Some Revisionists in Japan similarly deny the historicity of any mass suicides that historians today believe happened on Okinawa near the end of armed conflict there. The Liberal

⁷⁸ Minoru Iwasaki, Steffi Richter, and Richard F. Calichman, "The Topology of Post-1990s Historical Revisionism." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 16, no. 3 (2008), 517.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 518.

View of History Study Group has claimed that what suicides did occur were chosen nobly by citizens that were following the military's example, and not under any compulsion from a military order.⁸⁰ This same study group similarly proposes in their own publication *History and Education* that the concept of Zamami mass suicides was entirely made up and encouraged the upcoming new generation to break from the "mind control" of the "Tokyo War Tribunal view of history."⁸¹ A version of this denial metanarrative has existed since the 1970s when Sono Ayako's *The Background of a Certain Myth* used soldier diaries and omitted historical details to attempt to throw the entire concept of mass suicides by soldiers into question, rejecting and refuting the narrative that Okinawans were reportedly encouraged to commit suicide through distributed hand grenades.⁸²

One of the most contentious parts of Imperial Japanese history is also that of the 50,000 to 200,000 Chinese and Korean "comfort women" that were forced to work in military brothels while under Imperial rule. While this was somewhat known at the time, those involved were not prosecuted at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal.⁸³ The 1990s would see the testimony of former Imperial army comfort women being told for the first time after decades of historical erasure.⁸⁴ Over 30 women's rights organizations came together to form the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance of the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan in 1990. This then resulted in

80 Ibid., 507.

81 Ibid., 508-509.

82 Ibid., 508.

83 Soo-Hye Han, "Stifled by Freedom of Expression: The 'Statue of a Girl of Peace' and the Legacy of Colonialism and Historical Revisionism in Japan." *First Amendment Studies* 54, no. 2 (2020): 264.

84 Iwasaki, Richter, and Calichman, "The Topology of Post-1990s Historical Revisionism," 511.

apologies from both Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi and the Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei, who acknowledged it will not happen again through “engraving such issues in our memories through the study and teaching of history.”⁸⁵

Following U.N. pressure to disclose documents discussing comfort women and to incorporate comfort women into education curriculum, comfort women were first introduced into approved Japanese junior high-school textbooks in 1997.⁸⁶ This same year, Fujioka Nobukatsu pushed for the removal of any mention of comfort women in textbooks and helped form the Society for History Textbook Reform. Some of this group’s other proposed textbooks would then be approved during the subsequent and heated textbook selection processes.⁸⁷ This same group would work to remove the mention of other “self-torturing” inclusions like the Nanjing Massacre from future history textbooks.⁸⁸ The New History Textbook was then created to challenge such “masochistic” views of Japanese history, although their proposed texts were challenged in both 2001 and 2005.⁸⁹ Japanese revisionists have frequently challenged the validity of comfort women in historical metanarratives, as similar to the Zamami suicides, no specific military order document specifically authorizing them existed.⁹⁰

85 Han, “Stifled by Freedom of Expression,” 265.

86 Ibid., 266.

87 Iwasaki, Richter, and Calichman, “The Topology of Post-1990s Historical Revisionism,” 511-512.

88 Ibid., 266.

89 Erika M. Pollmann, “Japan’s Security and Historical Revisionism: Explaining the Variation in Responses to and Impact of Textbook Controversies.” *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 3 (2016).

90 Iwasaki, Richter, and Calichman, “The Topology of Post-1990s Historical Revisionism,” 518.

In 2007, U.S. Congressman Mike Honda's introduction of House Resolution 121 requested the government of Japan formally acknowledge and "accept historical responsibility" for the conduct of the Imperial Armed Forces regarding comfort women. In response, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe contradicted former PM Kono's 1993 statement and apology, claiming instead that there is "no evidence" coercion was used to acquire sexual servitude of comfort women by the Japanese military. Additional attempts by Abe to remove references to comfort women in U.S. history textbooks and U.N reports on the matter were subsequently rejected.⁹¹ The recent closing of the 2019 exhibit "Statue of a Girl of Peace" that symbolized the comfort women due to protest calls and terror attack threats demonstrates the ongoing battle for historical inclusion of the comfort women threatens civil society today.⁹²

The concept of the East Asian Hundred Year War, where Japan and the rest of the East Asian world is portrayed as continually being pressured by colonialism and discrimination of the west into retaliating, was a result of the work of Japanese historian Hayashi Fusao who first explained the view in 1962. This metanarrative became very popular with revisionists as it incorporates all armed conflicts into a necessary and justifiable struggle, where Japan is portrayed as being forced to survive through regrettable actions that should not be held against them.⁹³ Thus, Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's 1995 statement where he apologized for Japan's colonial "aggression," would, according to revisionists, not be appropriate and should

⁹¹ Han, "Stifled by Freedom of Expression," 267.

⁹² Ibid., 261-2.

⁹³ Iwasaki, Richter, and Calichman, "The Topology of Post-1990s Historical Revisionism," 523.

not have been made.⁹⁴ These and other perceptions have led many of Japan's neighbors to understandably raise their concern about Japan's Ministry of Education and their revisionist textbooks, as while Tokyo sees education as a domestic concern, Japan's neighbors worry about it affecting growing militarism in the country.⁹⁵ Japan's choices about how to remember its past thus affects not just its own future as a country, but international relations and decisions as well. Similar to the Philippines, outside pressure might be deemed necessary to resolve potential uncompromising changes to Japan's historiography.

Other Revisionist History Attempts

Japan and the Philippines are in the spotlight more than most countries, but they are far from alone in their battle for accurate historiography. Israel has its own state self-presentation narrative receive pushback from many of its critics, while it also has developed some of its own historical revisionists. Israeli historian Benny Morris and other "new history" historians fall into the category of revisionist due to their challenging of past narratives, even though Morris rejects the term as it gives too much credit to the existing understanding of Israeli history.⁹⁶ Israel's "new historians" critique Zionist leaders for making false promises and downplaying injustices against Palestinians.⁹⁷ These historians also challenge many "myths" of Israel's founding

⁹⁴ Pollmann, "Japan's Security and Historical Revisionism."

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Stephen Howe, "The Politics of Historical 'Revisionism': Comparing Ireland and Israel/Palestine." *Past & Present*, no. 168 (2000): 230.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 233.

through academic investigations into Israel's creation and the historical tracing of Palestinian political identity.⁹⁸

New History Israeli revisionist efforts are generally secular, left-leaning, often sympathetic to Palestinian political claims, and also spiked somewhat following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.⁹⁹ Israel's "new historians" stress using archival sources like official Israeli, American, and British documentation, a practice that gives their new proposed metanarratives academic credence.¹⁰⁰ Morris's arguments against Zionist plans being the justification for Palestinian expulsion in 1948 have been critiqued for not going far enough in its condemnation of the events by other Arab academics, demonstrating a continual international academic discussion is necessary.¹⁰¹

One of Israel's neighbors, Turkey, has had its own batch of historical revisionism attempted by its citizens in the past several decades. Around the 1970s and 80s, many national founding myths around the world began to fade, with Turkey's founding assumptions of Kemalism beginning to lose acceptance alongside Israeli Zionism and the French Revolution.¹⁰² Around this same time, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia began conducting terrorist attacks, and a new branch of Turkish "denialist literature" began to be

⁹⁸ Ibid., 235.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 238.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 244.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 248.

¹⁰² Doğan Gürpınar, "Historical Revisionism vs. Conspiracy Theories: Transformations of Turkish Historical Scholarship and Conspiracy Theories as a Constitutive Element in Transforming Turkish Nationalism." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 15, no. 4, (2013), 418.

written, first by nationalists and then encouraged more broadly by a national security push.¹⁰³ A subsequent growing divide began to emerge in the understanding of Turkish historiography in the 1990s between the general public and higher academic institutions. As this happened, Turkish historian Taner Akcam emerged as one of the first to challenge the Turkish historical blind spot of the Armenian Genocide, which Halil Berkay further articulated in 2000 through newspaper interviews. Shortly after this, denialist literature in Turkey ballooned following the translation of Armenian genocide books that were translated into Turkish in the 2000s and popular and scholarly historiographies began to blur.¹⁰⁴

This new emphasis on a previously overlooked tragedy coincided with domestic election results to create a perfect storm for conspiracy theories and their popularity in Turkey to take off. These conspiracies centered around rulers of the world conspiring to divide Turkey between them, with apparent threats coming from Christian missionaries, the Vatican, alleged Israeli land claims in the south-east, and alleged Greek land claims near the Eastern Black Sea.¹⁰⁵ Antisemitism also began to rise, accelerated through bestselling books by Soner Yalcin and Ergun Poyraz that depicted Turkish politics as a struggle against Islamists, Jews, leftists, and the West.¹⁰⁶ These conspiracy theories grew as historiography changed, as some academics moved to critique Kemalism and its roots, while state-sanctioned scholarship and much of the general public began pushing a mythological origin of Turkey, becoming xenophobic in defense.¹⁰⁷

103 Ibid., 421-22.

104 Ibid., 419.

105 Ibid., 413.

106 Ibid., 414.

107 Ibid., 425.

When the 100th year of the Armenian genocide approached, state addresses of it began referring to sufferings on “both sides” that belittled the sufferings of Armenians, and conspiratorial history in Turkey is “still a *deus ex machina* for many.”¹⁰⁸

Kenya’s history is similarly muddled, but unlike Turkey, many of its revisionist efforts are being done to establish a comprehensive history of the country for the first time. Kenya’s first president Jomo Kenyatta publicly condemned Mau Mau in 1962, the guerrilla warfare group that helped fight against British colonial rule, calling them “a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again,” and indeed never addressed them after that. A few Mau Mau members found high roles in office afterward, but otherwise were marginalized.¹⁰⁹ A subsequent “suppression by omission” has arguably been happening by groups in Kenya in regards to oversimplifying and omitting the complexity of the Mau Mau movement for political or collective memory efforts.¹¹⁰ The 2010 Kenya Constitution recognizes “those who historically struggled to bring freedom and justice to our land,” but does not name Mau Mau directly, being deliberately ambiguous. Many Mau Mau Veterans support it, however, still viewing it as supporting them.¹¹¹ Museums in Kenya today do not address much of Kenya’s history, electing not to cover any political assassinations that have occurred since Kenyan independence in 1963 as to not place blame or upset any active political groups.¹¹² “Rewriting history” to many

108 Ibid., 426.

109 Lotte Hughes, “Truth be Told’: Some Problems with Historical Revisionism in Kenya” *African Studies*, 70, no. 2 (2011): 187.

110 Ibid., 186.

111 Ibid., 182-183.

112 Ibid., 197.

Kenyans has become synonymous with writing from a Mau Mau veteran's point of view, and "few are brave enough to challenge" this stance.¹¹³

Historical Revisionism has also been attempted in Hungary in order to remember a former historical figure in a specific political light, that being Cecile Tormay. As a nationalist and someone conservative on gender views, Cecile Tormay has been pushed as a unifying figure by the right wing Hungarian political party Fidesz and the far right party Jobbik, even though she was also antisemitic.¹¹⁴ As Hungary left Soviet control in the late 20th century, a country eager to form a new identity for itself latched onto her early patriotic and anti-communist work from the 1920s to celebrate her as they reprinted her works in 2010, tying her former cultural absence to a communist erasure of history.¹¹⁵ At the same time, a subsequent rewriting of the Hungarian Constitution in 2011 included referencing Hungary's self-determination as being lost on March 19, 1944, as to exonerate Hungary from its communist ties as well as any potential criticism of its actions during much of the Holocaust.¹¹⁶ Critics of Fidesz historical portrayals were many, as Tormay's antisemitism and private lesbian lifestyle and accompanying civil suit against her were ample ammunition for political opponents. Fidesz responded by claiming that Tormay's antisemitism does not justify banning her non-political novels from school, while also downplaying her personal lifestyle as much as possible. Her inclusion into the new curriculum

¹¹³ Ibid., 191.

¹¹⁴ Anita Kurimay, "Interrogating the Historical Revisionism of the Hungarian Right: The Queer Case of Cécile Tormay." *East European Politics and Societies* 30, no. 1 (February 2016): 11.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 19.

continues to be contested.¹¹⁷ Members of the LGBTQ community similarly found trouble adopting her as a historical role model, once again due to her antisemitism, but also due to her fascist and irredentist views.¹¹⁸

Historical revisionism is also used purely for financial reasons, as evidenced by Anglo American plc. Anglo American plc is the third largest mining company in the world, and also the largest employing company in Africa, with ruling elites and authorities frequently citing tradition as their basis, as they understand that positive public relations correlate with shareholder value.¹¹⁹ The storytelling of corporations is done to justify and authenticate the new directions or initiatives a company takes but is often always more “operational rather than ideological.”¹²⁰ Cynthia Carroll’s ascension to CEO status in Anglo American in June 2007 was portrayed as the end of one era, but also the beginning of new one, and was full of idealized corporate spin that touched on Carroll being tied to “the stable of Harry Oppenheimer,” son of the company’s founder and former CEO himself, despite no blood relation.¹²¹

Additionally, Anglo American utilizes historical revisionism in the form of intentional myth making results in its portrayals of founder Ernest Oppenheimer as the “emperor of metals” and portraying the Oppenheimers as a non-official South African royal family that supposedly has ascendancy that links to Cecil Rhodes. Similar spin was also applied to Anglo American plc

117 Ibid., 23.

118 Ibid., 27.

119 Dinah Rajak, “Corporate Memory: Historical Revisionism, Legitimation and the Invention of Tradition in a Multinational Mining Company” . *PoLAR*, 37 no. 2 (2014): 260.

120 Ibid., 263.

121 Ibid., 264.

executive offices that stayed in Johannesburg, where Ernest Oppenheimer's office historically was, pushing collective memory to harken back to the past where honor and philanthropy seemingly founded their business endeavors.¹²² Such corporate identity and historical spin is applied before and after potential conflicts with the ruling government or the local community. When the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2003 specifically called out the mining industry in South Africa for supporting apartheid economically, Anglo American plc argued they were hurt by apartheid themselves, spinning company statistics as best as they could.¹²³ While Anglo American plc might only spin part of their story, they also backed the African National Congress at times both before and after the group came to power in the hopes of protecting its interests during potential power transitions.¹²⁴

Conclusion

Historical revisionism has always been a part of scholarly historiography, and this is still true today. A re-examination of the past and the historical facts that construct it can lead to more accurate histories in the present. At the same time, bad examples of politically motivated history denials and largely baseless historical rewrites dilute the term with multiple negative examples. If left unchecked and unchallenged, they threaten to change the accepted meaning of the term and make little of the work of the historians fighting for the truth. An appropriate condemnation of non-scholarly revisionism, alongside an improved emphasis on proper academic historical revisionism that prioritizes data over speculation, offer continued opportunities to maintain the integrity of the term and its usage in academic practice. Such an endeavor is necessary in order to

¹²² Ibid., 265.

¹²³ Ibid., 270.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 273.

preserve both accurate histories and positive perceptions of history and historiography in the present.

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