HISTORY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSIES IN GREECE, 1985-2008: CONSIDERATIONS ON THE TEXT AND THE CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to present the Greek conflicts over history textbooks by relating them to the context in which they took place. The dominant historical culture and its traditional narratives, the relationship between the state and the Greek church and the way in which history is traditionally taught in Greece are, in the frame of this paper, the determinants. I therefore argue that the textbooks in question could be viewed as emergences of new discourses that have the implicit or explicit aims to marginalise the old dominant national narratives produced and reproduced by school history.

INTRODUCTION

History Education has increasingly become worldwide the field of unprecedented intense, ideological debates and cultural wars about the use of the past in nowadays societies[1]. History textbooks are the favourite battlefield of these wars (Crawford, 2000) revealing the importance which is still given to this traditional mean of teaching and learning. Despite the expansion of the public uses of history, the subsequent plethora of sites in which history is frequented and the data manifesting the mistrust regarding school history, it is still considered the main apparatus for the social production of national identities. Moreover, the textbook, contrary to all predictions of its marginalization in the era of multimedia and electronic means, remains the dominant, often exclusive, educational practice (Nichol & Dean 2003, Montagnes 2000) and finally the dominant definition of the curriculum in schools (Bernstein, 1991). To cite the well-known statement of Henri Moniot, the textbook is the witness for what happening in teaching practice (Moniot, 1993)[2]. In social studies and especially in history, textbooks reflect relations of power as they construct the dominant narratives to be anchored in collective memory. In the introduction of their classical work, *The politics of textbooks*, Apple and Christian-Smith have considered textbooks as artefacts defining whose culture is taught in schools (Apple & Christian-Smith 1991:1). Defining the dominant culture is like identifying the dominant political, social, national, gendered, group. It renders it legitimate, official, truthful and finally then natural. This is a significant hermeneutical scheme which is used to understand why controversies revolve around what is included or excluded in history and social studies textbooks. It is first a question of power. Post colonial, post communist, post national and globalization transition's conditions increase the uncertainties and the fears of people and give popular investment to this complex power relationship.

Recently, 1990 onwards, new nationalisms or reframed nationalisms (Brubaker 1996) with its emphasis on reinforcement of national identities against a menacing new cosmopolitan order (Saaler, 2005) selects History Education as the main area to fight many issues. It is not only to confirm which version of history is the dominant narrative to be taught in schools or to define who has the power to legitimise it. Even more, it is the link between this kind of master

narrative with social changes, future developments of the nation state, and its position to broader political and social forms. It is a refusal to renegotiate fixed identities constructed in the frame of nationalistic frameworks. Thus collective memories, national narratives, history textbooks and curricula are the target of a range of groups and memory's agencies aiming to defend the past as future.

THE CONTEXT OF THE GREEK DEBATES

1. DOMINANT HISTORICAL SCHEMES AND MASTER NARRATIVES

The process of Greek nation-building, the creation of the Greek state in 1830, as well as the procedures of national unification during the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th were firmly linked to history and anchored the Greeks' past from which they drew legitimacy and recognition. The Greek speaking Orthodox populations of the Ottoman state had to form an independent state as they believed to be the descendents of the ancient Greeks, those who had given light to the world, who had created the arts and sciences and who had invented democracy. The Greek state in the 19th century had to be enlarged not only because Greek populations remained, despite the revolution and the foundation of a Greek national state, under the Ottoman rule, but also because the historical mission of the Greeks did not end with the transfer of the light to the West. The East in which Greeks had a powerful economical, social and cultural presence was according to the Greek irredentism the second and last step of their civilisation mission (Clogg 1986; Veremis 1989; Veremis 1990, Kitromilides 1994; Leontis, 1995; Gourgouris 1996; Liakos 2001).

During the 19th century and the early 20th, as long as the issue of the Greek borders remained open and the irredentism was the basic national goal, the stereotype image of the Turk was formed and took root in Greek historical culture and collective memory. The Turk as the national 'other' became the violent and inhuman conqueror of the Greeks, the oppressor through four hundred years of slavery (1453-1821), trying to Islamise by force the Greek Christian population of the empire, forbidding their education–thus the school was alleged to be clandestine–threatening the national identity. Against him, according to the master national narrative, stood the Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate, which managed to save both the religious and national feelings and convictions of Greeks.

The national antagonisms between the Greek state and the Ottoman Empire in the period 1830-1922 maintained and increased the stereotyped hostile and entirely negative image of the Turks. The defeat of the Greek army in the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922, the eviction of the Greek populations of Asia Minor, as well as the Greek-Turkish quarrels in a series of confrontations during the 20th century, culminating Cypriot tragedy, made the image of the Turks a component part of the Greek national identity[3]. Any attempt to historicize the Greek-Turkish past and modify collective representations of otherness is believed as a threat to national identity.

2. THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE STATE: THE DEFICIT OF SECULARIZATION

Despite the foundation of the Greek national state according to the Enlightenment rationale which was compatible with the classical Greek tradition, national policies from 1840 to the early 1920s operated mainly on the basis of an unrealistic and utopian vision of irredentism dealing with the repossession of lands that were once Byzantine lands. Byzantine history was also included to the national scheme of continuity representing the link between the classical times and the modern ones. Modern Greece is consequently considered to be the heir to another important civilization, the Byzantine, which was not only Christian but also Orthodox tension meaning developed with Western Latin Christianity. Thus Orthodox Christianity in correlation with classical Hellenism has been a main constituent of Greekness. Greek Orthodox Church as its institutional inheritor embodies the representation of the idea of national identity as inseparable from Orthodoxia. The constructed correlation has been often used by conservative forces as a tool for political control and it has served as an obstacle to modernization of Greek society (Mouzelis, 2001).

As a consequence, church and state in Greece, despite the tensions manifested in their relation from 1830 onwards (Manitakis 2000), never separated and the Greek Constitution states that the Eastern Orthodox Church is the official religion of the country (article 3). The secularization deficiency is apparent everywhere especially in education, which according to the article 16 aims to promote national and religious consciousness. It is also obvious in the title of the Ministry of Education still named Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs. The Church exploits this

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to the full and politicians cannot confront it without political cost. Recently, in 2004, the Simitis government's initiative for new identity cards without mention of religious affiliation became the field for the religious to demonstrate their power in political affairs. A large campaign was organized by the Church against the decision of the government and those who were for the separation of the church from the state. The campaign weighted heavily during the elections of 2004. The right wing political party of New Democracy, which declared its opposition to the omission of the religious mention, was the winner of the elections. The leader of the Opposition and after 2004 Prime minister Konstantinos Karamanlis stated on several state occasions and in speeches that Orthodoxy and Hellenism are inseparable.

3. THE HOSTAGE STATUS OF SCHOOL HISTORY

In Greece, History Education is under a regime of strict supervision by the state. There is a centrally planned and detailed Curriculum, obligatory for all the schools in the country (Koulouri 1994, Repoussi 2007). This programme is almost exclusively oriented on Greek history and on the celebration of events that highlight the glorious Greek past. What is involved is essentially a genealogy of the nation. The children's exposure to history, according to the national curriculum, starts from the age of eight through Greek mythology and the very ancient times, it continues at the 4th grade–nine years old–with Ancient History which is essentially Greek ancient history having a little Roman history. In the fifth class, they learn Byzantine history, which is taught as Mediaeval Greek History. In the sixth class Modern and Contemporary Greek history, which is also Greek History. The same cycle is repeated almost exactly in the junior high school and with some minor deviations in senior high school, where the children also have the option of being taught European history. They are given no option whatsoever of studying–independently of Greek History– world history and in the compulsory education syllabus there are only allusions to European or World history. This totally ethnocentric model also defines the writing of the school textbook which is unique per subject and grade, written under the supervision of an official body, the Pedagogic Institute and distributed at the behest of, and the expense of, the State. Any and every attempt to alter the above model meets with resistance from some politicians, political groups or parties, and increasingly in recent years the Greek Church. This stance is shared and defended by a large section of public opinion which tends to declare itself as opponent of any changes towards the way of teaching history in schools. For them, history is national and unchangeable. Supporters of the reform of History Education are accused of seeking de-Hellenization, historical forgetfulness, subordination to the agenda of globalization and foreign decision-making centres. As a consequence, any attempt to modify school history paradigm is considered to be an attack on Greek national identity.

THE TEXTBOOKS CONTROVERSIES AS COMPETING DISCOURSES

School textbooks constitute a specific genre (Korbin, 1996: 4) far away from being neutral from ideologies, group interests, political as well as cultural belonging, pedagogical influences and epistemological premises. Especially social studies or history textbooks are powerful social constructions presenting versions of human knowledge as sanctioned and officially legitimate and intending to introduce young people to existing cultural order structured by relations of power and domination (Apple & Smith, 1991; Fitzerald, 1979: 47). Viewed as important part of a complex learning environment included curricula, educational practices, expectations and post knowledge, history textbooks can be considered as discourses, that are systems of ideas, attitudes, actions, beliefs and practices (Hall 1997) which built master narratives as constituent of national identities. These discourses are shared by a large community including not only the education community, but also the environment of the education. Textbooks as well as the curricula continue to be regulative discourses of dominant collective memory, which on the one hand they eternize and on the other they are nourished.

In Greece, social and political changes, transformations of the system of designing, authoring and producing history textbooks, historiographical or epistemological developments have occasionally created a context favourable to contest the school history paradigm and to destabilize its regulative discourses. New history textbooks, as competing discourses, try therefore to renegotiate master national narratives and the way these narratives are embodied in education. Thus they constitute also powerful systems of representations producing meaningful statements, affecting identity practices and politics. This was the case for four history textbooks in Greece, from 1980 onwards. The textbooks in question, planted in a distinct discourse community, that is the historical studies community, can be viewed as explicit or implicit attempts to modify in a critical reflective way national narratives, to problematize dominant collective memory, to question the relationship between remembrance and oblivion and to renegotiate those boundaries of knowledge that claim the status of master narratives and fixed identities.

The first attempt was when a worldwide recognised historian Leften Stavrianos (1913-2005) received the responsibility for writing a world history textbook for the first class of lyceum[4]–16 years old–replacing ancient history

which was taught also in primary school as well as in the gymnasium[5]. The book, titled *History of Human Kind*, was published in 1984 for the school year 1984-1985 and it represents a significant innovation as it was the first that diverged from the ethnocentric rationale of Greek history textbooks. It also included evolution based on Darwin's theory. The first critics came from religious circles, namely from para ecclesiastical organizations supported then by nationally concerned journalists and politicians. The textbook was believed to be an offence to the Greek Orthodox Church and the collective religious beliefs and a relevant campaign was launched during 1985 aiming at its withdrawal. The textbook survived with 'corrections' until the end of the 80s and it was finally withdrawn in 1990.

The same school year, 1984-1985, the second attempt was manifested with the release of the new history textbook about *Modern and Contemporary History* having the significant subtitle *Greek, European, Global*. The book was written by an academic historian, Vassilis Kremydas, associated with the 'Annales' school of thought and known for his research. The textbook was innovative in many aspects in its content. The first innovation was the effort to insert Greek history in a broader historical frame of European and World history settling the needed interconnections and interdependences of the historical process. The second was a new, for Greek school historiography, approach of the Greek past without national myths and nationalistic stereotypes. The book was strongly criticised as anti-national and anti-clerical. It was submitted to "corrections" without the permission of its author and finally it was withdrawn in 1991 following detection of "ideological one-sidedness", with an accompanying proposal for its replacement with another book "placing greater emphasis on Greek history" and "more appropriate for use in teaching" (Repoussi 2009).

The third controversy revolved in 2002 around the history textbook *History of the Modern and Contemporary World, 1815-2000*, for the last class of the senior high school. It was authored by a group of new historians imbibed in new historiographical approaches under the responsibility of Prof. Giorgos Kokkinos. It was also a new attempt to renegotiate the teaching of Greek history (a) by integrating it in a broader European and Worldwide historical scheme, (b) by historicizing its content. This time the reactions had arisen towards the critical presentation of a national Greek-Cypriot organization, EOKA. The rightwing organization had operated for the liberation of the island by the English possession, the union with the Greek state as well as against the Turkish-Cypriot population of the island. The critical presentation of EOKA was viewed as an insult to the struggle of the Greek-Cypriots for liberation and national independence (Cavoura 2008), to excuse the Turkish occupation of the island. The book was withdrawn even before the school year began.

The fourth case, waged as a headline issue in 2006-2007, against the history textbook of 6th grade, *Modern and Contemporary Times* headed by Prof. Maria Repoussi and taught in schools during the school year 2006-2007[6]. The whole debate nourished by the electoral atmosphere of 2007 is considered to have significant political, social and educational aspects and consequences. It produced vehement and unprecedented reactions against the whole historical representation of Greekness and otherness inherent in the textbook. The reactions took the form of an hysteria which culminated in the burning of the book in the front of Greek Parliament during the National Day parade and its condemnation in churches during Sunday masses. The Archbishop himself and the Holy Synod also condemned it. It is therefore the most revealing of the tensions toward the relation between history and identity policies.

The book was criticised (a) as anticlerical, by downplaying the role of the Church in the national emancipation, (b) as antinational by hiding the Greek suffering during the ottoman occupation and the Turkish atrocities in Asia Minor in 1922 as well as by depreciating military and political events proving the heroism and the self-sacrifice of Greek nation, (c) as political correct, by overstating the role of women and understating the role of national heroes and by emphasizing marginal historical themes in the place of the important ones. According this oppositional rhetoric, it was ordered either by New Order and globalization centres, either by the European Union, or by the Turks to impose de-hellenization and loss of national identity. As stated by this conspiracy theory, a school of Greek historians, an historians' elite, in the service of foreign centres, having seized Greek universities, decided to manipulate compulsory education in order to deconstruct national history. The struggle against the textbook was consequently a fight for the protection of national identity.

Due to its "mediatization" on the one hand and its electronic spread on the other, the struggle took the form of a real symbolic war between two camps[7]. The first was composed by historians mainly, teachers or those who supported a renegotiation or historicization of the master national narrative or even those who believe in the independence of Education from political and ecclesiastical interferences. It was almost the same camp which was declared against the inscription of the religious affiliation on the identity cards, supported the secularization of the education or the separation of the church by the state. On the other side stood first the Church, politicians, media personas, journalists and public agents of memory which increased as the balance had turned more and more against the textbook. The two camps had completely different and

competing discourses. As Antonis Liakos claims, historians spoke in terms of history, scholarship and truth, while their rivals did so in terms of identity, affect and pride (Liakos, 2008), messages having a large audience and strong affiliation. In the end, it was affirmed by many people connected with the identity messages that they don't care about general truth. They would like to protect their truth, the truth learned by their ancestors, against any attempt to destabilize or correct it. As a main persona of the debate, the perfect of Thessaloniki, affirmed in one of his interviews on television

> • In the New Order of things, **I** don't like to be partner. If we don't react, we will be accomplice in it. I, personally, don't want to be an accomplice in the crime called genocide of memory
> • Do you think that the change in the way history is narrated is a mandate from outside? Is it a need of others?
> • I talked about a New Order of things. I said that this book has been written for others not for Greek children
> • For whom, do you mean?
> • Those who want to participate in the New Order. Personally, **I** don't want to participate in any Order. **I** belong to Greece. Ok? And I would say that all the nations belong to Greece. **We** are the ones who taught history, civilization, democracy, freedom and these are things we should not forget. **I** don't want to be in the thrall of anybody. **I** want to live, to close my eyes, to teach my children the things that I learnt. And I consider that **I** have learnt the factual history[8].

The textbook was finally withdrawn in September 2007, immediately after the elections of 2007 and a significant change in the head of the Ministry of Education. For the first time also, the main political opponent of the textbook, the ultra-right Popular Orthodox Rally was seated in the Greek parliament.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the differences manifested in the relevant cases, differences in the text and the context, a series of commonalities can be depicted from these controversies enforcing the enlargement of the analytical framework we use to explain the phenomenon of textbooks controversies and debates. In the Greek case, the textbooks under attack, although they were commissioned by the Ministry of Education or resulted by competition procedures, published by the official body for school textbooks' publishing and distributed by the Pedagogical Institute, they constitute alternative, competing to the master, discourses. The issue is obvious in their attempt to install critical reflections on master national narratives, to modify the school history paradigm, to renegotiate the history components of national identity and to problematize collective memory. Based on common broadly accepted historiographical premises, textbooks in question are efforts to reconnect school history with its discipline of reference, the historical studies and to inscribe it in the development of historical thinking.

But, despite the process of their establishment as official knowledge, made legitimate by legal state procedures, they encountered strong reactions by groups which contest the monopoly of the state to define what children should learn in schools and claim the right to impose rules. Until the eighties, this movement was the result of social, teachers' and scholars' initiatives for changes. It was a progressive movement which demanded a new school, teaching a new history. The recent debates reflect the opposite. This time, official knowledge is contested by equally established institutions or agencies as well as by grass root movements which defend the status quo.

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NOTES

[1] There is an abundant bibliography on history education controversies. For USA, cf Nash, Crabtree & Dunn (2000), for Canada Dagenais & Laville (2007a), Bouvier 2007 and Dagenais & Laville (2007b), for Australia cf Macintyre & Clark (2003), for Israeli and Palestinian textbooks cf Pingel (2003), for Northen Ireland cf Smith (2005), for Japan cf Saaler (2005), for the common trends of these debates cf Repoussi (2008a), Cf also the following references here.

[2] « Image la plus directe et la plus tangible de la réalité scolaire », Moniot (1993: 199-200).

[3] Equivalent collective representations are cultivated in Turkish master narratives towards the Greeks (Millas 2002).

[4] Senior high school, from 15 to 18 years old.

[5] Junior high school, from 12 to 15 years old.

[6] For the rationale of the textbook cf Repoussi 2007 and 2008b.

[7] To see relevant texts visit http://users.auth.gr/~marrep/.

[8] Psomiades, Perfect of Thessaloniki, interview aired on Tsimas's television programme, *Research*, April 2007.