Doctoral Research Summary

“Why Does History Matter? National Identity Representations in Greek Elementary School History Textbooks Post-1974”
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My research can broadly be understood as an analysis of the national identity representations found in Greek elementary school history textbooks produced in the post-junta period. The teaching of history is crucial to the self-understandings and representations of the modern nation-state. Hence, history curricula and textbooks have an important role in recounting and envisioning the nation, its evolution and the national identity.

Greece, unlike many other European nation-states, has a completely centralised educational system with a unified and compulsory programme for all the schools in the country and the state-produced textbooks are the only source material used in schools. Moreover, the elementary years of schooling are exclusively dedicated to the teaching of the ‘National History’. The centralised nature of the Greek educational system and the focus on the national history stimulated my interest in how the national identity appeared in Greek history textbooks.

The analysis of the data (that is, all history textbooks produced between 1969-1995 and the National Curricula of 1976 and 1986) suggests that Greek national history in textbooks strives, and achieves, to follow a national narrative which is continuous in time, beginning with the ancient Greeks, progressing through Byzantium and culminating in the construction of the modern Greek nation-state. Despite territorial losses and claims this chronology remains complete in the textbooks national time-frame.

The difficult but successful reconciliation of the pagan past with Byzantine Christianity produces a rather ‘synthetic’ national history and identity, referred to as the ‘Hellenic-Christian Tradition’. This tradition is based upon a continuity of culture over time, turning the Greek ‘nation’ into a cultural community travelling through time. Furthermore, this fusion between the Hellenic and the Christian worlds allows Greek Orthodoxy to become a defining characteristic of the Greeks in textbooks. However, the ‘black periods’ of Muslim Conquest and Ottoman Rule, historically represented by the loss and capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans, brings Greek culture to a temporary halt and provides Greece with a persistent Turkish ‘Other’ in textbooks regardless of her location in Europe.

The thesis argues that the processes of democratisation and Europeanisation as well as the experience of marginality (particularly after the Balkan Crises of the late 1980s and early 1990s) have changed the content of textbooks and the nature of curricula objectives. While these factors have not disputed the dominant conceptualisation of the national identity or the prevailing emphasis on the symbols and ideals of the nation found in textbooks and curricula they have influenced the way in which that identity, the national evolution and the ‘other’ appears as well as reducing the overtly nationalistic tone found in textbooks.