This paper is taken from

Citizenship Education: Europe and the World Proceedings of the eighth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network

London: CiCe 2006

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 899764 66 6

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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The politics of memory and forgetting in history textbooks: Towards a pedagogy of reconciliation and peace in divided Cyprus

Hakan Karahassan and Michalinos Zembylas
Eastern Meditarrenean University/ Intercollege, Nicosia (Cyprus)

In his seminal study on nationalism, Anderson (1983/1991) pointed out that selective memory and forgetting are essential elements of the historicity of a nation and its efforts to achieve homogeneity and continuity. History emerges as the salient factor in the construction of national identity and otherness - what separates 'us' from 'them.' Not surprisingly, then, education in general and history curricula and textbooks in particular, have been used to create nationalist subjects. Cyprus provides an interesting case study for the exploration of memory and forgetting in history textbooks, being an island that is ethnically divided between two ethnic communities - Greek Cypriots (G/C) and Turkish Cypriots (T/C) - that once lived together. The case of Cyprus is even more complicated because although people from the two communities can cross the temporary border between them, especially after April of 2003, Cyprus is officially still under ceasefire and no settlement has been reached despite many decades of negotiations. The recent rejection (April of 2004) of a proposed settlement (the Annan Plan), in a way has weakened the hopes of constructing a common education policy throughout the country. Instead, both communities still seem to be trying to legitimise their individual statute using education as a primary tool.

The premise on which this paper rests - that history textbooks use memory and forgetting as 'technologies' of nationalism - is not new; that premise is not the most important contribution of this paper. The more important contribution is the analysis and sorting through of the discourses of nationalism in G/C and T/C history textbooks, to figure out ways of how to disrupt those discourses and invoke a *pedagogy of reconciliation and peace* in both communities. Being raised in these communities - one of us is G/C and the other T/C - we are deeply concerned about the ideological practices that are used to perpetuate the existing stereotypes about the Other within each community. We are particularly interested in telling the story of how Cypriot educators in both communities can invent pedagogical spaces in which former 'enemies' learn to engage in reconciliation and peace despite their past traumatic experiences.

Discourses of Nationalism in Cypriot History Textbooks

There is now ample evidence around the world that in areas of conflict curricula and textbooks are systematically used to depict the evil enemy and legitimise particular nationalist narratives and agendas (Davies, 2004). In Cyprus, there are various studies depicting how school textbooks, national rituals, symbols and celebrations in both communities in Cyprus create dehumanized images of the Other in each community and inspire hatred for the 'enemy' (AKTI, 2004; Bryant, 1998, 2001, 2004; Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, 1998; Papadakis, 1995; POST, 2004; Spyrou, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006). There is also much ethnographic evidence indicating how individuals as well as organized groups from both communities systematically attempt to nationalise suffering

and highlight the need to remember what the 'enemy' has committed in the past (Bryant, 2004; Cassia, 2006; Loizos, 1998;Papadakis, 1998).

For example, after 1974 Greek Cypriots have invested a lot in creating a strong visual/educational culture of not forgetting their 'Turkish occupied territories,' a campaign that has become known as 'I do not forget and I fight' (Den Xechno kai Agonizomai).[1] Similarly, Turkish Cypriots have established museums such as the Museum of Barbarism (Barbarlık Müzesi) in which they portray the acts of barbarism that they suffered from Greek Cypriots before the 1974 Turkish intervention and particularly the Events of the Bloody Christmas of 1963 (Kanlı Noel). Turkish Cypriots also have a similar slogan concerning not forgetting the past, 'We won't forget' (unutmayacağız) which refers to the bloody events of 1963 (Papadakis 1993; Karahasan 2005).

To an outside observer, it is clear that there is a 'memory industry' (Klein, 2000, p. 127) prevailing in both communities. This 'industry' aims at establishing a historical consciousness that 'aligns forgetting with evil forces' (Eppert, 2003, p. 186) that threaten the national identity of the ethnic community. Undoubtedly, there is a lot of lingering anger, resentment and grief in both communities over the years, but the biggest problem, according to Kizilyürek (1993), is the mentality of '*Us and Them'* that continues to be dominant in both communities. The most powerful way for forming an 'us and them' mentality is to idealise one's own group and demonise the other. Idealisation and demonisation are accomplished through 'myth-making' - accounts which justify the negative evaluation of other groups and glorify one's own nation (Aho, 1994).

In the following, we first want to sketch the nationalist imaginings of education through examples of history textbooks in both communities of Cyprus. The aim of this endeavour is to provide an individual account of *our own* history education. In other words, although this paper does not talk about how history is being taught on each side of Cyprus, it *does* talk about how history education was experienced by each one of us, that is, a G/C and a T/C who were raised during a time in which bi-communal contacts between the two communities rarely existed.

History Education in the T/C Community (Hakan)

The education system that I grew up in was a nationalist one. It was mainly based on collective narcissism in which members of the 'same nation' take pride in their nation and hate the 'Other' nation (Karahasan 2003; Kızılyürek 1993, 2001, 2003; Papadakis 1993). The whole educational curriculum in the north (where T/Cs live now) was based on the notion of promoting the struggle of the T/Cs against G/Cs (who now live in the south). For example, when I was studying secondary school (in the mid-1990s), we had two history textbooks: the first one, called *Milli Tarih* (National History) which mainly dealt with Ottoman History. The *National History* book was published in Turkey and taught in north Cyprus as well, whereas the second one - *Kıbrıs Türk Mücadele Tarihi* (Turkish Cypriot History of Struggle - was published in Cyprus. Not surprisingly, both textbooks did not see G/Cs in a positive way. From the beginning till the end, the book was following a narrative of how T/Cs suffered a lot from the Greeks (there is no distinction between the Greeks and the G/Cs but there are only *Rumlar*) and the whole

aim of the book was to legitimise the current T/C official policy (POST 2004). 'The dark years of T/Cs' can be given as an example that shows the sentimental reaction against the G/Cs because G/Cs, after all, were attacking and killing T/Cs in the name of *Enosis*, their vision of uniting with mainland Greece. There was no indication in the book that there were also G/Cs who suffered because of the interethnic violence (POST 2004). As it is indicated in POST's report:

> In ethnically divided societies, especially when conflict lasts for generations, and is still going on, the school education is reflecting the ongoing ethnic conflict. It is a well-known phenomenon that the national historiography reproduces national memory through the adaptation of the mechanisms of forgetting and remembrance in a selective way. The ultimate goal of such historiography is not an accurate account of the history but an effective and efficient contribution to national goals and unity. Hence, the school education is fundamentally political. Especially in those cases where the ethnic conflict is still going on, history education and historiography are at the same time part of the current politics. As Anthony Smith writes, 'in a world of competing states and would-be nations, these are no more academic issues.'(POST 2004, p. 3).

Although this is mostly the case in ethnically divided societies, especially concerning history education, 'we should decide', Dan B. Fleming argues, 'whether textbooks should be used as a source of information and improve the talents such as reading, writing and critical thinking, or to promote patriotism or be an ethical model' (quoted in Pingel, 2003, p.2). Fleming's point is very significant, because if we consider that education plays a key role in the formation of one's identity, then we should decide whether we would consider our education as a part of the 'global world', or as a part of 'national' history, which only sees itself and no one else.

I want to give another example from the northern part of the island. Recently, I was involved in a project called *Education for Peace: Pilot Application for the History and Literature Books of the 5th Grade of the Elementary School*. This was the first bi-communal project in Cyprus that was aiming to find out:

> …the elements, phrases, hidden messages or historical myths that cultivate conflict, fear, and mutual distrust between the two communities in Cyprus, using the curriculum, social science and history books as examples. Although the project attempts to identify the chauvinistic and nationalist elements in the textbooks, it also aims at highlighting some alternative ways of teaching that would help the mutual trust among new generations (POST report, 2004, p.5).

The findings of the project were not a surprise but irritating. For example, the whole social science textbook at the 5th grade of primary school was designed in a way to show that although, we, the Turks (and the Ottomans) did our best and gave them freedom, again the G/Cs were not happy about the situation and their only aim was *Enosis*. At the beginning, the binary opposition was *we*-the Ottomans-Turks against *them*-Christians. After the Ottomans came to Cyprus, the discourse changed to *we*-the Ottomans-Turks against them - *Rumlar* (the Greeks). Evidently, there are numerous things one can point

to showing how Greeks (G/Cs) are demonised throughout the book, which clearly shows one-sidedness and promotes nationalism, fear, and mutual distrust.

Nonetheless, the situation changed in 2003, a time in which after 29 years, many G/Cs and T/Cs started to cross the border and see 'the other half of their homeland' (Yaşın; Karahasan and Şat 2005; Karahasan 2005). In the north side of the island, *Cyprus History* or *History of Cyprus* books at the secondary school level have been revised twice since 2003. Considering the textbooks that I studied when I was growing up, this was quite a significant development. The *Cyprus History* textbook has been given a new name – *Kıbrıs Türk Tarihi* (Turkish Cypriot History) and is being taught to all T/C high schools. For the time being, only the first textbook has been written, and it mainly talks about the Ottoman history in Cyprus. The book is 109 pages long. The Cypriot history before the Ottomans covers only 15 pages whereas the Ottoman period covers the rest of the textbook. However, the positive side of this textbook lies on the fact that it tries to provide more balance than in the past. For example, when I was studying Cyprus History we were taught that Cypriots who lived under the Venetians asked the Ottomans to conquer Cyprus because they were fed up with the Venetians. This was presented as one of the reasons why the Ottomans conquered Cyprus. However, in this new textbook, the reason why the Ottomans conquered Cyprus is being told in a different manner, i.e. that Ottomans conquered Cyprus because of its strategic position. In general, in the new textbook there are efforts to erase biased material; however, a full content analysis of this textbook awaits to be undertaken to show whether it can contribute to peace and reconciliation between the two communities in Cyprus.

History Education in the G/C Community (Michalinos)

Greek Cypriot school education is to this day largely nationalistic in its outlook (Spyrou, 2006) and relies upon the image of the Turk/enemy as the primary Other for the construction of G/C children's identity (Spyrou, 2002). Spyrou documents several negative stereotypes that are encouraged in school education and show the absolute categorisation of the Turk as an enemy, barbarian, uncivilised, aggressive and expansionist. Also, this work indicates that Greek-Cypriot children are unable to deal with the more complex, hyphenated categories of 'Turkish-Cypriot' or 'Greek-Cypriot.' In fact, school education promotes the use of more inclusive categories such as 'Greeks' or 'Turks,' at the expense of more synthetic or hybrid ones such as 'Greek-' and 'Turkish-Cypriots' (Spyrou, 2006; Theodossopoulos, 2006).

Not surprisingly then, memories of life before the conflicts between the two communities - that is, memories of friendly interethnic neighbourhood relations - is almost an absent discourse in school curricula and textbooks, because such memories are at odds with the official nationalist discourse (Loizos, 1998). In particular, the nationalist discourse of the 'suffering nation' becomes a powerful image of hatred in history textbooks by evoking emotional memories of suffering from the past (cf. Duijzings, 1999). The 'victim ideology' is a powerful defensive mechanism in the G/C community too and is used to justify aggression and hatred against the Other, establish the illusion of coherence and order, and mask the anxiety of seeing the similarities with the Other.

Evidently, I also grew up in a nationalistic educational system. I went to elementary school right after the events of 1974 and thus one can imagine the dominant discourses of the victim mentality and the representation of the Other as evil and barbarian. I still have my childhood paintings that depict the Turks as monster-like animals who want to eat us. It is still amazing to me how these common representations (i.e. monsters) are found in numerous parts of the world in which there is conflict. Regarding our history textbooks, in the late elementary school grades, we were taught from a history textbook entitled *Istoria tis Kyprou* (History of Cyprus) which was published a few years after 1974 and is still being used nowadays (it is being re-published without any revisions). In this textbook (its latest re-publication is dated in 2003), the history of Cyprus is written through strongly emotional narratives that present the Greeks and the Turks in stereotypical ways: the Greeks are presented as heroic figures who are always fighting for what is right, and for justice, democracy and freedom whereas the Turks are presented as barbarians, unjust, deceitful, evil, and war-loving. In a recent review produced by the bi-communal project 'Education for Peace,' (AKTI, 2004) the reviewers provide examples of how this particular textbook tells a nationalist story that aims to perpetuate the discourse of G/C as the victims of Turkish brutality throughout history.

For instance, there is no distinction between the Ottomans and the Turks (or T/Cs); thus it is created an image that the Turk has been and will always be a barbarian and evil. Also, the T/Cs are completely absent from this book; they simply exist as Turks/Muslims, i.e. enemies, and there are no references to the peaceful co-existence and often collaboration of T/C and G/C throughout the past three centuries. In addition, the Ottoman rule is represented as brutal, unjust, and cruel, whereas the Christian representative of the Ottomans (the *dragoman*) is considered good and righteous. The guiding questions provided at the end of each chapter aim at presenting the students with the obvious answer - that is a one-sided perspective on history. The historicity of concepts and terms (e.g. nation-state, freedom etc.) is not presented and the students are not encouraged to view events contextually, critically and comparatively with other events in the historical development of nations and societies. In the story that is built, the Greeks (there is almost never a distinction with G/Cs) are presented as noble fighters against injustice and the Others (primarily the Turks) who constantly want to conquer Greek lands. Finally, there is a messianic perception about the role of Hellenism and the Greek Orthodox Church which are represented as the saviours of (Greek) Cypriots; consequently, it is projected that the patriotic duty for G/Cs is to cultivate a 'fighting spirit' (Ipourgeio Paideias kai Politismou [Ministry of Education and Culture], 2002) that retains the memory of returning to the 'Turkish occupied' territories.

Another history textbook - *Sta Neotera Chronia* (In the Modern Years) - that is currently being used in the sixth grade of G/C schools is published in Greece (it is also an old textbook from the early 1980s but it has been revised in 1997) and focuses on modern history (after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 until the mid-20th century). According to the recent review of the bi-communal project 'Education for Peace,' (AKTI, 2004), in this textbook (its latest edition is 2001) there are some positive aspects compared to the *History of Cyprus*; for example, there are excerpts from original historical sources so that the students are encouraged to compare and contrast more than one perspective. However, this textbook does not avoid the usual stereotypes of the Turks as barbarians

and uneducated. The evidence for this kind of stereotyping ranges from the terminology use to the lack of historicising concepts such as the nation, justice, freedom and so on.

In general, one of the goals of history education as described in the *Curriculum Programs for Elementary Education* is: 'To help students know, understand, appreciate and respect all those aspects […] that contributed to the national and natural survival of Cypriot Hellenism during its long history, so that students can contribute to dealing with the dangers facing our land' (Ipourgeio Paideias kai Politismou [Ministry of Education and Culture], 2002, p. 96). Also, there is no connection made between the 'occupation' of northern Cyprus and the relations with the T/C community. There are nowhere to be found - either in the curriculum programs or in the history textbooks - any implications of the partition of the island in terms of the communication process between the two communities. Not surprisingly, then, there is a deadly silence over how to deal with the ease of measures in the communication between G/C and T/C after 2003. Finally, it is important to note that although there are small groups (especially teachers) and NGOs questioning the role of history textbooks and curricula in creating nationalist subjects, there is no official effort in the G/C community to write new history textbooks. A new proposal for a large-scale educational reform in 2004 that includes the promotion of peace and co-existence between the two-communities is still being debated.

The Challenges of Educators in Cyprus: Constructing Pedagogies of Reconciliation and Peace

From the brief discussion of history education in both communities, it should be clear that nationalist discourses still prevail in history textbooks. Textbooks, however, are only one of many ways of problematising the teaching of history. Here, we want to suggest that in addition to revising textbooks or writing common textbooks for both communities in Cyprus, it is equally important to develop pedagogies that promote *reconciliation* and *peace*. We view reconciliation and peace not as states but as ongoing processes of respecting *difference* and seeking alternatives to hatred. Therefore, we want to argue for three roles for pedagogies of reconciliation and peace in Cyprus. The first is to develop pedagogies which encourage empathetic communication through an understanding of Others' thinking and feeling. Second, pedagogies of reconciliation and peace should focus attention on problem solving, criticality and multiperspectivity in the teaching of social studies. Third, there is a need to develop pedagogies that construct citizenship education which accepts *difference* and the notion of hybrid identities. We discuss these roles below.

The first role for pedagogies of reconciliation and peace in Cyprus is to engage both communities in 'relational empathy' (Broome, 1991, 1993, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003). The process of 'relational empathy' can be useful in the development of shared meanings created through interpersonal encounters. Such pedagogies of empathetic communication would lead students to start thinking and feeling about the Other in different ways than those in the past. Instead of presenting the Other as the enemy, or someone who cannot be trusted (as our brief review of the history textbooks has shown), students should be encouraged to see the Other as a human being who has also been traumatised from past events and who has similar needs for security, rights and homeland. In Cyprus there is an urgent need of pedagogies that are based on 'empathy

towards the suffering Other' (Theodossopoulos, 2006, p.10). As Theodossopoulos (2006) asserts, humanising processes, such as similar cultural characteristics between G/C and T/C and common predicaments could be some things to stress when one talks about history.

Clearly, promoting relational empathy in the classroom is not an easy process and it often involves a lot of discomfort for students and teachers. However, a 'pedagogy of discomfort' can be an alternative way to see history from the other's point of view. As Zembylas and Boler (2002) claim:

> …we suggest that a "pedagogy of discomfort" can be used to analyze the contradictions and emotionally-embedded investments that underlie ideologies such as nationalism and patriotism. We argue that a pedagogy of discomfort… offers direction for emancipatory education through its recognition that effective analysis of ideology requires not only rational inquiry but also excavation of the emotional investments that underlie any ideological commitment such as patriotism. A pedagogy of discomfort invites students to leave behind learned beliefs and habits, and enter the risky areas of contradictory and ambiguous ethical and moral differences.

As Zembylas and Boler (2002) further emphasise a pedagogy of discomfort requires that individuals step outside of their comfort zones and recognize what and how one has been taught to see (or not to see). In Cyprus, a pedagogy of discomfort could be used as a powerful pedagogical tool to help teachers and students to 'step outside of their comfort zones' and problematise the ways in which G/C and T/C have been taught to see the Other (e.g. through history textbooks), i.e. to understand how (history) education is so often politicised and one-sided.

Second, peace and reconciliation pedagogies in Cyprus should focus on multiperspectivity, criticality and problem solving, especially in the teaching of social studies (e.g. history). Multiperspectivity is suggested by the Council of Europe in the teaching of 20th Century European History (Stradling, 2001) and emphasises the teaching of history from a variety of perspectives, including political, religious, social, cultural, economic and techno-scientific. The notions of multiple perspectives, critical thinking and problem solving are highlighted by many recent developments in educational research and practice. These notions are not only strategies of understanding the Others' perspectives but also feeling from the Others' viewpoints and building connections with them. Stradling argues that multiperspectivity, especially in the context of history teaching helps students: to gain a more comprehensive and critical understanding of historical events by critically comparing and contrasting the various perspectives that are constructed; to gain a deeper understanding and feeling of the historical relationships between nations or groups; and to gain a more dynamic picture of the ongoing development of the relationships between nations and groups.

Undoubtedly, peace and reconciliation pedagogies can benefit a lot from using multiperspectivity in Cypriot classrooms. Having to deal with multiple perspectives, G/C and T/C students can begin 'seeing' that there are multiple voices within the Cypriot society. More importantly, though, students will be encouraged to see that their ethnic

identity is just one out of many other identities they share with others (related to their age, gender, family relationships). As Stradling writes: 'Often their [people's] identities as a parent, daughter, woman or doctor may be more significant in trying to understand their reactions to a particular situation or event' (p. 143). In those roles, G/C students may begin to realise that they share more in common with their T/C peers than they think - such as fashion trends, technology gadgets, friendships, age-level concerns and worries, food preferences, familial customs and so on. Bi-communal visits to sites in Cyprus and internet communication can certainly help along the lines sketched here.

Finally, another way of pushing peace and reconciliation education is to construct pedagogies that promote the idea of citizenship education based on accepting differences and hybrid identities. It is important to emphasise that one needs to be careful with claims about what kind of citizenship education is promoted, since much citizenship education has been geared to the strengthening of nationalism and patriotism (Davies, 2004). The question here is how citizenship education would look like to challenge nationalist ideologies. We want to argue that hybridity should be an important component of citizenship education. That is, in Cyprus educators need to develop a notion of citizenship that takes into account difference. 'The tendency,' writes, Davies (2004) 'is to view citizenship in terms of universals that everyone, despite or because of their differences, should try to recognise and respect' (p. 90). However, there are problems in an approach that tends to represent citizenship education as a homogenising process. Spinner-Halev (2003) urges us to be particularly cautious about citizenship education in divided societies: 'Education in divided societies has to begin with different assumptions than education in other societies. In divided societies, those divided by religion or nationality, where fear and perhaps hatred permeate these divisions, the group cannot be ignored' (p. 90).

This is precisely the goal of citizenship education in a divided society (such as Cyprus) which cannot exist by itself without the difficult goals of reconciliation and peace. However, to push reconciliation and peace, educators need to encourage tolerance and respect for difference, not bland commonalities. In our view, then, citizenship education in Cyprus has: to value hybridity and multiplicity in identity construction, including regional and global identities; to have a critical approach to difference, enabling analysis of when this is valuable or destructive for individuals and groups (Davies, 2004); and to promote empathetic communication without diminishing the importance of dissent - thus it is significant to avoid the 'veneer of politeness' in building the relations between the two communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our paper aims to document and show how pedagogy of peace and reconciliation could be used on the both side of the dividing line. As we mentioned before, our aim is to show how Cypriot educators in both communities can invent pedagogical spaces in which former 'enemies' learn to engage in reconciliation and peace despite their past traumatic experiences. One of the challenges for this could be relational empathy (Broome, 1991, 1993, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003) and 'empathy towards the suffering Other' (Theodossopoulos, 2006). Also, 'pedagogy of discomfort'

(Zembylas and Boler, 2002) could be an alternative pedagogy in teaching because it promotes the consideration of the other's perspective.

Multiperspectivity is another way that helps not only to understand the Others' point of view but also to see the feelings of the Others. Last but not least, we suggested that emphasising on hybrid identities and recognising the differences in citizenship education are also significant because accepting the differences lead one to think in terms of multiperspectivity, care about the Others, and hence 'feel empathy towards the Other'.

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Endnote

[1] Greek Cypriots talk about suffering from the '1974 Turkish invasion', while Turkish Cypriots welcome Turkey's 1974 intervention as a 'happy peace operation' (Mutlu Barış Harekâtı) that saved Turkish Cypriots from the evil hands of Greek Cypriots (Papadakis 1993; Karahasan 2003).