The Discourse of Majority in Romanian Textbooks: Nationalism versus Europeanism

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Abstract
In the following paper we will critically analyze the discourse of the History Textbook from the period 1976-2011 in order to put emphasis on changes in the presentation of History reflected in a didactic context depending on the dominant socio-political options. Our study reveals these differences from the perspective of orienting the ethnocentric discourse from the ‘80s and 90’s to an Eurocentric one in the years leading up to the country’s integration in the European community. The theoretical framework offered by the theory of symbolic violence presented by Bourdieu allows us to illustrate the role of the formal curriculum in imposing certain systems of meaning and ideology.

Keywords: history textbooks, nationalism, Europeanism, symbolic violence

Paper Rationale
The transformations undergone by the historical science – and it is known that “history of any kind is first and foremost a discourse of power and that one can capture other concomitant discourses meant to restore the balance of truth (Zub, Al, 1991:186) – are reflected also in the school textbooks. We will try to point out, referring to several textbooks belonging to different periods and different political regimes, the modifications that take place (in a didactic context) as a result of the dominating ideology. Generally, information included in textbooks express the theoretical level present at a certain time, therefore, by analyzing school textbooks from different periods we can observe that there is a fluctuation in conclusions and interpretations, sometimes even reaching contradictory

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statements. It is not the problem of historical realities that we wish to draw attention to, but rather the manner in which a reality becomes an educational, political and ideological argument justifying and constructing certain representations of the past. If we refer to the theoretical model of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), we notice the following issues: How can the formal curriculum represent the ideological configuration of interests that are dominant within a society? How do schools legitimize these standards as undisputable truths?

A declared finality of the reforming changes made in education is the promoting of European values, the extending of the collective identity through the incorporation of the European integration. The scope of our study is that of capturing certain tendencies within the discourse of the History textbook from the communist period and in the period after 1990, with possible variations from ethnocentrism and nationalism to Europeanism, depending on the dominating socio-political options. In order to reach this target I have followed these objectives of our research: the determination of the frequency of the elements that belong to the emphasis of national identity within the History textbook, depending on the period analyzed, the identification of the frequency of the European dimension within the History textbook in the period of educational reform during the 2000s, comparing it with earlier periods, the analysis of the evolution of historical collages within the History textbook from the perspective of the dominant values.

Paper theoretical foundation and related literature

During our research we have referred to the theory put forward by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977) which supports the role of the school in the social and cultural reproduction. Education is the instrument of symbolical violence acted on the individual. As the instrument of the imposing of a cultural arbitrary proposed by the entities in power, school is a producer of habitus, legalizing the censure and distribution of knowledge. The school discourse has been seen, next to the media discourse and the political one, as being a possible source of symbolical violence through which one aims to create social categories and identities willing to accept definitions, signs and symbols which carry certain significances profitable to the elite which control the system of social domination. Pierre Bourdieu, when referring to the imposing of national culture as a dominant cultural system, emphasizes the role of the educational system: “especially through the teaching of History and, particularly of the History of Literature which sets up the basis of a true “civic religion”. And, more precisely, the fundamental presuppositions of the national identity” (1999:39).

The study of symbolical violence through the curriculum needs to take into account the relationship between the imposing ideologies and the curriculum. Thus, we have to examine critically not only the manner in which students receive certain knowledge (a dominant issue within the current educational policies based on efficiency) but also why and how certain aspects of the collective culture are presented in schools as objective facts (Apple, M., 2004:12).

Stefan Stanciugel (1998) remarks on the fact that as far as totalitarian systems are concerned, the relationship between the arbitrary selection of cultural significances and the power relations is much more easily detected. However, not only the totalitarian regimes use symbolical violence, the democratic ones do also, being very interested in ideological manipulation, since ideology appears in connection with the political and with the domination of the elites over the masses (actually, any kind of social construct presents a relation of power and thus, of dominance as well).

Methodology

The method of research chosen in order to reach the target of the study is that of content analysis. This method entails the quantitative analysis of texts, aiming for the emphasis of certain themes, tendencies, attitudes, values and patterns with the mechanism of converting a symbolic qualitative material in a quantitative one (Ilut, P., 1997). I have used the content analysis on the following aspects from 12 History textbooks: the texts proposed for study, including the historical sources and documents, the textbook illustrations and the learning tasks that accompany the texts.

I have utilised the essential concepts of the research with the following methods:

Nationalism – the attitude of a nation in favour of isolating itself from other countries, the exclusive value of one’s own national identity;

Europeanism – attitude favourable to the idea of a unified Europe and of promoting European values in the curriculum;

Symbolic violence – the imposition of cultural symbols with the purpose of legitimising and order considered
Since we propose a descriptive qualitative-quantitative research, I have opted for an interrogative expression of the research hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Does the ethnocentric discourse from the communist period of the 1980’s influence the frequency of national identity elements in the History curriculum?

**Hypothesis 2:** During the transition period, do we notice an increase or a decrease of the nationalist discourse in the history textbook?

**Hypothesis 3:** Is the emphasis on the European dimension of the curricular reform from 2000 able to influence the frequency of elements referring to Europeanism from the History textbook?

**Hypothesis 4:** Does the frequency of elements of Europeanism within the History textbook influence the frequency of the national dimension?

Within the study we put forward the category analysis, based on grouping themes according to categories and the equation of frequencies. To this end, I have utilised a coding grill of the discourse-text from the History textbook. The coding grill included four general categories made of several other subcategories:

- **Category 1:** External relations (special external relations: positive; special external relations: negative; anti-imperialism; internationalism: negative; internationalism: positive; European Community: positive; European Community: negative). These categories have been adapted according to the coding grid of Mircea Agabrian’s electoral campaigns, found in the paper “Content Analysis” (2006).
- **Category 2:** Elements of Romanian identity (relationship with the geographical space, the motive of the ancient origin of the Romanian people, characteristics of Romanian Christianity, unity and continuity of the Romanian nation, fight for independence, gallery of national heroes). These elements have been enumerated by Mirela–Luminita Murgescu in the analysis of the elements of national identity present in the 90’s textbooks in the paper “History in the backpack. Memory and school textbooks in the 1990’s Romania” (2004:22-35).
- **Category 3:** Europe in the History textbook (Geographical significance of the Europe notion; cultural significance of the notion of Europe, geo-political motivations of the European integration; Europe’s relationship with other places in the world – equality; Europe’s relationship with other places in the world – superiority; the place of the Romanian space in European history; the relationship between the Romanian identity and the European one);
- **Category 4:** Management of diversity (multiculturalism; interculturalism).

For a more efficient gathering of data, I’ve grouped the coded documents according to the variable period analysed. (Socialist period, the 80’s, post socialist transition period, the 90’s, the systemic educational reform period of the 2000s).

We mention that in order to validate each hypothesis the procedure used is that of the calculation of frequencies.

In order to verify the first hypothesis, I identified the frequency of affirmations from four History textbooks published between the 1976-1985 (forms VII, VIII, X, and XII, Didactic and Pedagogic Publishing House, Bucharest) which capture nationalistic aspects as they are reflected in the historiographical literature. More specifically, we have captured the frequency of the following elements belonging to national identity: the motive of the ancient origin of the Romanian people, the unity and continuity, the fight for independence, the relationship with the geographical space, characteristics of Romanian Christianity as well as the frequency of the mentions of negative aspects of internationalism and the frequency of aspects regarding anti-imperialism. Another parameter of our analysis connected to the nationalistic dimension refers to the presentation of the gallery of national heroes and the frequency of mentions concerning their life and military-political successes found in the History textbooks.

In order to verify the second hypothesis we have performed the same analysis on other four textbooks which circulated in the 1992-1998 period (classes VII, VIII, XI, XII, Didactic and Pedagogic Publishing House, Bucharest).

In order to verify the third hypothesis, we tried to follow the manner of building knowledge about Europe, attempting to capture the tendency of a positive presentation of elements pertaining to the European identity, especially emphasising its superiority, as well as the manner in which European structures and reasons for integration are presented. In our attempt to prove the European orientation in the History textbook discourse, we have extracted the following categories from the coding grid: European Community – positive affirmations, geographical significance of the idea of Europe, the political and ideological aspect of the European idea, the superior relationship of the European Union with other places in Europe, emphasis on the relationship of Romanian
culture with the European one and the category of managing diversity (multiculturalism and interculturalism). We analysed the textbooks of the VIIth, VIIIth, XIth and XVIIth from 2000 published by Humanitas Educational publishing house.

In order to validate the fourth working hypothesis we compared the frequency of elements connected to nationalism and the frequency of the European dimensions in the chosen textbooks for the three periods mentioned above.

**Results**

Table 1. Centralising of results to the quantitative analysis

| Period | 1980’s | 1990’s | 2000’s |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Categories/Subcategories analysed | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 | M5 | M6 | M7 | M8 | M9 | M10 | M11 | M12 |
| Number of elements belonging to nationalism | 39 | 116 | 131 | 38 | 97 | 44 | 173 | 68 | 17 | 64 | 16 | 44 |
| Number of elements belonging to Europeanism | 20 | 16 | 7 | 4 | 14 | 4 | 15 | 7 | 21 | 23 | 77 | 15 |

The results obtained emphasise the dominance in the historical discourse from the textbooks analysed of the nationalistic tonality both in the 80’s as well as the 90’s up to the publication of the alternative textbooks. This type of discourse is counterbalanced by the presence of elements of Europeanism in the 2000s, the frequency of nationalistic elements dropping significantly in the textbooks selected for analysis.

**Discussions**

While in Western Europe people were talking more and more about the negative potential of nationalistic ideas, in Romania the rebirth of nationalism, started at the beginning of the 60’s was perceived as a welcome reversion of the communist leadership towards national values and as a necessary condition for defending the national independence against Soviet interference. More than that, European references were marginalised or even absent in the majority of the communist period (see also graph 1). Historiography was the fundamental terrain for reproducing international relations. Beyond its importance on an international sphere, History was crucial for the symbolic element of the symbolic-coercive manner of control practiced by the Romanian leadership, as Katherine Verdery appreciated (1991). The anthropologist analysed the manner of creating and using national ideologies in the countries from Central and Eastern Europe under socialist regime, noticing that scientists and party activists took part together in the action of creating, enforcing and utilising cultural symbols filled with ideological force. On the other hand, nationalism was the main tool of the Ceausescu regime in order to legitimate the rule over the population and to keep intellectuals in a relationship of collaboration or submission. (Verdery, K, 1991:102)

Once communism left the determinist and internationalist scheme, the historiographical premises were dramatically changed. Struggle between classes and the succession of manners of production corresponded only partially to the new objectives based on a voluntary vision of the past, present and future – meaning, on the role of the political forces, of the party, of the leader – and on the affirmation of national identity. The, evidently glorious
deeds of the past and the grand personalities returned to the foreground. Next to the fight for independence, History textbooks emphasise themes belonging to Romanian nationalism: unity and continuity on the Romanian territory, the ancient origin of the Romanian people, the harmony of the relief forms and its purpose in the unity of the awareness of the nation. Under the impact of the ideological and the political, the face of the process of completeness of the national state could not avoid certain limits and denaturation and denials of historical facts. We are referring to the diminishing of the parts played by certain personalities (such as Ferdinand, Iuliu Maniu), the exaggeration of the parts played by the working masses and by the socio-democracy and, most of all, the “quote mania” (documents of the communist party, the party program, etc.), the replacing of scientific arguments with quotations. The quotations extracted from the works of the founding parents (Marx, Engels) continued to coexist with new formulas, despite the often essential discrepancies. This type of language borrowed from the language of propaganda is no longer a means of didactic communication, but a manner of delivering certain sentences and absolute truths. Critical reflection is no longer stimulated, but rather there are established conditioned reflexes and one listens to the monologue of power (Mihalache, C., 2002). The expressions characteristic of a wooden language, customised and standardised sought an uniformity of ideas. Ultimately, this type of communication was nothing more than a frame to transmit the dominant power discourse.

The teaching of History was based on the text, and on the cursive and explicit story. Even in the time when images appeared in textbooks, as well as reproductions of historical documents, tables or different task cropping, the students saw History as a story about the past. The analyses of the learning tasks shows a value for reproductive questions, detrimental to the problematic ones. Generally, the construction of the textbook on the principle of authoritarian and indisputable affirmations generates with time the effect of thinking at a minimum resistance; this means of building knowledge in students is another expression of the symbolical violence performed by the textbook.

During the transition period in the History textbooks published in the 90’s, we notice a perpetuation of the nationalist discourse, especially in high-school textbooks, at the XIth and XIIth forms, even surpassing the frequency of affirmations that emphasised the ethnocentric dimension at the VIIIth and XIIth forms Romanian History textbooks of the 80’s. For example, one of the elements pertaining to the Romanian national memory (perpetuated in the XIth grade textbook which circulated between 1992-1997), consists in the motive of the ancient origin of the Romanian people. Include in the category of founding myths (Boia, L., 1995) its importance resides in the fact that it puts forward the problem of the legitimacy of certain communities in time and space. Various studies on the ethnicity and origin myths of modern nations have proven that from an ideological standpoint ancestors actually have only a relative importance, surpassing the de facto reality. They are interchangeable if the political and ideological interests of a certain period require this (Murgescu, M.R., 2004:24-25). In the case of Romanian national identity the scope of ethnicity is to prove not only the old origin but also to prove continuity and a rightful claim over a territory. At the level of establishing origins the affirmation is clear: “the Romanians are the sole heirs of the Gaetae and the Dacian people and successors of the Latin element from the Eastern Roman Empire.” (Manea, Pascu, Teodorescu, 1995:6).

After establishing the main ancestors of the Romanian people, now comes a more difficult question: explaining the way in which the two elements united creating the Romanian people. Most textbook authors consider ethnogenesis a fundamental problem in national transformation.

The stress placed on the common origin and the continuity of the Romanians on the territory of their homeland has the purpose of justifying the idea of Romanian unity throughout history. We witness the perpetuation of an ancient national topos reclaimed and emphasised in the communist era. A thorough analysis of the past does not reveal the kind of “permanent” monolithic unity (Murgescu, M.R., 2004:27), proving that the force of the clichés is derived from the ignoring of scientific conclusions that do not fit their scheme.

In a situation when the teaching of History favours the Romanian nationality and the Orthodox faith as historical values, it is difficult for the national minorities to exist independently as well. The older generation of textbooks mentioned them only in their relation to the Romanians. The textbooks from the period analysed presented almost nothing of their customs and traditions, their way of life or their culture. It is possible, as Lucian Nastasa (1995) remarks that a lot of those that had to study the History taught in the 1990’s to feel excluded from this Romanian History which was incomplete and unequal.

In search of that historical truth left unsaid in the previous History textbooks, school books from the 90’s were more uncompromising and more dogmatic than the older ones, notorious for the way they had been used as propaganda instruments. Textbooks from the pots-communist era finally brought back to attention all the great
identity stakes, the grave truths after decades of prohibitions and distortions, which could not be exposed “in a trivial manner, coloured and negotiable, as in the Western textbooks” (Mihalache, C., 2012:260). The accusations brought to the communist regime did not bring radical changes to the tales about the distant or near past. The political and institutional vision concerning History remained dominant, any other addition being clearly subordinated to that kind of representation.

After 1989 Western Europe became – again – the most important external reference, a model for the changes which occurred in the 1990’s. at the same time Romanians became aware of the differences between them and Western Europe, about the specificity of their political institutions and their economic structures. Admission in various European organizations meant accepting some adjustments and these were not seldom perceived as an abandonment of Romanian values. European documents revealed that in most countries History was taught from a national perspective and that the History of other countries came only in connection to national History. Essentially, the national perspective was presented to the students as the only perspective over the past. The European Council pleaded for a revision of the analytical curricula in order to allow the creation of an European context (Manea, M., 2010:275).

In consequence, according to the results of the content analysis, the discourse of the History textbooks from the 2000-2011 period shows a reorientation towards an European perspective. As in other countries from the socialist block, History was re-written in order to emphasise the authentic culture (Zajda R, 2003, Murgescu, M.R., 2004, Mihalache, C., 2012).

At the recommendation of the curriculum, the History textbook for the VIIth form contains a special lesson on the European and Atlantic integration. The problematic issues of the European Union are treated from a historical perspective, starting from the European Community and including the European Council and the Euro coin. In the textbooks for the XIth form, there is an entire chapter dedicated to these issues in which there are presented almost all of the major institutions; the emphasis is placed on a description of these institutions and not on a more detailed analysis. Any inherent problems and difficulties are overlooked, the purpose being the emphasis on the positive effects of the integration.

Europe’s superiority is the dominant key in which the historical discourse of the European idea could be read. This also arises from the analysis of the frequency of affirmations about the relation of superiority, but also from some of the extracts from the VIIth form textbook:

“Europe dominates the world, conquering new geographical spaces and gradually diminishing the “blank spots” on the map of the Earth.

“Although small, the European continent was at the beginning of the century the most populated area of the Earth, being also the setting for the most dramatic events of the time.”

“The demographic growth started even from the previous century accelerated after the mid XIXth century. The most rapid increase was known by the European population which around the 1900 reached the highest level in comparison to the population of the globe: one out of three was then an European of European living in the USA. The causes of this boom were the increase of the number of births, the health improvement and the growth of comfort and hygiene owed to the scientific exploits and economic developments.”

“Europe dominates the world. European domination over the world is based on three factors: people, technique and money. Of all these three, the people represent the oldest means of dominance: thus, at the end of the XIX century, over 50 million Europeans had emigrated to Asia, Africa and the two Americas.” (Sorin Oane, Maria Ochescu, textbook for the VIIth form, 2008:6-54)

However, a task of reflection brings different nuances to the previous paragraph: “Since Athens was the teacher of the Hellenic population, do you think Europe should be the teacher of the world?”(ibidem, p.67). doubtlessly this is a dilemma for a 12-13 year old student, few being really able to answer such a challenging question, difficult even for political analysts, but we can still infer the clearly pro-European perspective of the authors.

Europe is considered the main modern zone and especially a space of well-developed and encouraged technical progress, a true template for civilization. We find thus in the XIth form textbook another motive:

“From the XIIIth century up to the present era, the Western Science has known only three general explanations – three systems of the world: that of Aristotle, which entered in the interpretations and speculations of the West in the XIIth centuries, that of Descartes and Newton which gives birth to classical Science and is presented as an original Western construction and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, announced even from 1905 which starts the contemporary Science”(Sorin Oane, Cătălin Strat, textbook for the XIth form, 2008:10).

Apparently, the Romanian nation’s belonging to Europe does not give rise to any kind of problems for textbook
authors, this fact being considered as a positive aspect. What can be implied is the complex of the “small nation” (Murgescu, M.R., 2004:64) followed by an amount of uncertainty concerning one’s identity which generates the need to claim as much as possible the belonging to Europe and to find arguments justifying Romania’s place in Europe.

Why would the European Union need Romania? The authors of the XIth grade textbook rightly ask. The answer is given beautifully – just as a historical fact is supposed to be (A.D. Xenopol, textbook for the VIIIth form 2008):

“Romania offers its natural beauties, the value of its historical and artistic monuments, a rich and authentic folklore, and also a very important economic potential [...] our country is a state which, with its size and population, its material and spiritual riches and its historical traditions has clear chances of overcoming the obstacles it has in front of it after the defeat of the communist regime...” (Sorin Oane, Cătălin Strat, textbook for the XIth form, 2008:13).

In search of these certainties, textbook authors try to find the basic tangible element which conveys Europe a cultural identity. The Christian dimension is already a decisive presence, but authors don’t insist only on this aspect which could be used to emphasise Europe’s division between the Catholic/Protestant West and the Orthodox East.

Textbook authors emphasise the fact that, after 1990, although the European idea has become a priority of our developing society, this is not in contradiction with the maintaining and preserving of our national structures.

The new approach required in the process of teaching universal History shifts more and more the attention on deeds taking place in Europe and on events tied to it. Because of this direction we deal with history about “us” as Europeans and “the others”, presented sometimes as counter-examples. Thus, the Islamic world falls in contradiction with the European and American democracy through its religious fanaticism, its intolerance and lack of female emancipation (Rădulescu, M.S., in Retegan, Câpiţă, History Textbook for the XIIth form RAO publishing house, 1999:112).

The textbooks published in the period decisive to the integration in the European Union have distanced themselves from the traditionalistic discourse of Romanian History. A new way of teaching History, based on the Christian and modern values of tolerance, diversity, nation and democracy – as D. Mihai (1995:5) remarks, suggests to us another type of responsibility which requires the sacrifice of our cult, maintained by the discourse of the textbooks, for the redeeming heroes and the defeatist ideology, our complexes of superiority or inferiority. The textbooks deals for the first time with themes that have not been included in the previous textbooks, regarding the redeems taking place in Europe and on events tied to it. Because of this direction we deal with history about “us” as Europeans and “the others”, presented sometimes as counter-examples. Thus, the Islamic world falls in contradiction with the European and American democracy through its religious fanaticism, its intolerance and lack of female emancipation (Rădulescu, M.S., in Retegan, Câpiţă, History Textbook for the XIIth form RAO publishing house, 1999:112).

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Conclusions

After the fall of Communism, the monopoly over the truths about the past was no more, which affected the credibility of textbooks, seen as bearers of values and ideologies of the dominant power. This characteristic strengthens Pierre Bourdieu’s claim that education is symbolic violence, in the sense that it imposes certain values, norms and arbitrary rules. As we have tried to prove with the analysis of History textbooks from various periods, these curricular products, despite the academic references they use, do not circulate a neutral “objective” product, but “an amount of versions of the collective memory which animated society at a certain time”(Mihalache, C.,2012:234). We agree that, since political support is a necessary pre-condition for the revision of textbooks, it is just as important that politics be kept out of the writing of textbooks. The shift of perspective concerning the
teaching of History in schools implied the passage from the ethnocentric vision, with which education tries to legitimise the pretensions of its own nations, towards a perspective which values diversity. Therefore, it became absolutely necessary to put something in the place of the “hatred ”suppressed by the textbooks. It is not through accessing differences and dramatic memories that Romanians can incorporate the European identity traits (the History of the Romanian people has been traditionally presented as a history of suffering, losses and dangers always caused by another nation). Such an evolution towards teaching about diversity and tolerance can be supported by the changes in the content of History taught in schools. This type of change should mean a decrease in the teaching of political and military History in favour of economic, social and cultural History. At the same time, placing a greater focus on the local History, centred so far only on the state and superstate level (the History of Romania as an integrated part of Europe) could be a way of developing knowledge about the lives of ordinary people, towards the way these have lived together and towards multiple perspectives.

Future research in this thematic area should show the same importance to Civic Education, Geography, Literature, Music and Art. For example, literary texts present in school books represent one of the most efficient tools in order to not only infiltrate knowledge, but also to create attitude and historical and social conscience. Even though in modern society there are many other sources of socialization, we believe that textbooks still have the power of transmitting the uniform, accepted and even official version of what young people should believe.

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