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BOOK REVIEW

Hadjiyanni, M. (2008). *Contesting the Past, Constructing the Future: A Comparative Study of the Cyprus Conflict in Secondary History Education.* Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller Aktiengesellschaft & Co. KG. 152 pp. ISBN 978-3-639-01973-5

– Reviewed by Demetrios Spyridakis, Teachers College, Columbia University

In this pioneering study, Marina Hadjiyanni carefully analyzes the biases inherent within history textbooks assigned in the secondary schools of Cyprus. A small Eurasian country situated at the northeastern end of the Mediterranean basin, Cyprus has become the focus of international attention since the Turkish military invasion of the northern portion of the island in 1974. The Turkish invasion came in response to the actions of a Greek nationalist regime that staged a *coup d'état* in Cyprus with the ultimate goal of annexing the island to Greece. The invasion itself has sparked considerable controversy and poisoned Greek-Turkish relations ever since. Though the United Nations, the European Court of Human Rights, and the international community have denounced Turkey's military aggression and refuse to recognize a separate Turkish-Cypriot state in the north, the consequences of the invasion continue to resonate over thirty-five years later.

With the 1974 invasion so deeply imbedded in the psyche and historical consciousness of Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike, it is hardly surprising that secondary level history textbooks from both communities present radically different interpretations of the island's division. After carefully investigating a number of such textbooks, Hadjiyanni affirms that the historical narratives of both communities lack objectivity. From the onset, Hadjiyanni clearly states two important aims of her study: (1) to corroborate her argument that both Greek and Turkish Cypriot textbooks are biased by using textual evidence, and (2) to provide perspectives on the biases from history teachers and educational researchers who actively propose solutions to this problem.

Hadjiyanni's overarching theme is both sensible and well-argued: that Greek and Turkish Cypriot educators should abandon efforts to create a nationalistic barrier, which creates an "us" versus "them" dichotomy between the two communities within Cyprus. Instead, they should actively work toward historical peacebuilding in which mutual tolerance, reconciliation, and an appreciation for differing perspectives might facilitate the emergence of a united Cyprus. Given the overwhelming scale of the Cypriot problem, Hadjiyanni's suggestion that peace might be facilitated through historiography may at first strike the reader as idealistic and impractical. But few would disagree with the contention that nationalistic tendencies have their roots in historical understanding. It can be argued that this situation provides educators with a significant role in helping

shape a nation's identity. After all, as Samuel Butler noted, "It has been said that though God cannot alter the past, historians can."

The book is organized into six chapters and includes a list of five appendices at the end. The first chapter provides a pithy introduction, stating the study's research questions and themes. Here the reader learns of the novelty of the study, as Hadjiyanni correctly asserts that, prior to the appearance of her book, "no specific research was conducted on how the historical period of 1955-1974, which led to the de-facto separation of the island, has been depicted in the secondary school history textbooks on each educational context" (10). In the second chapter, Hadjiyanni surveys the literature addressing various academic curricula authored by credible educators who analyze how history can be taught for peacebuilding, as opposed to promoting nationalism. Together, these authors provide one common insight: the teaching of history can either exacerbate a terrain of struggle in the classroom or grant a more objective avenue through which students might unite. They suggest this can be achieved by building a spirit of academic collaboration which, in leading students to understand the past experiences of humanity, creates the conditions by which they can help bring about positive social change in the future.

In chapters three, four, and five, Hadjiyanni analyzes both a Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot textbook produced by the Ministry of Education for each community. The Turkish-Cypriot textbook was written for children aged from fourteen through fifteen, and the Greek-Cypriot book for students aged from seventeen through eighteen years of age (36). Hadjiyanni documents examples of bias from both textbooks. The conclusions she draws from her analyses are that both the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot textbooks conceal acts of wrongdoing committed by their own side, and that both groups "seem to reinforce nationalistic and intolerant attitudes among Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot students" (88).

After examining the two textbooks individually, Hadjiyanni describes the process of interviews she conducted in which she would (a) question the participants about their perspectives on the textbooks, and (b) request suggestions for rectifying the problem of bias in textbooks. Conducting interviews of 45-50 minutes each (41), she conversed with the following five participants: a Turkish-Cypriot history instructor who argued that the Turkish textbooks are biased and communicate a "notion of revenge" (90); a Turkish researcher, holding a Ph.D in History, who was forced to resign from a textbook revision committee which she claimed consisted of "very strict Turkish-Cypriot nationalists" (92); a Greek-Cypriot educator trained in philology and history, who contended that the "role of Turkish-Cypriots during 1955-1964 is completely excluded," and that "Greek-Cypriot teachers usually avoided integrating this issue in the history classroom" (92); a Greek-Cypriot researcher and instructor of pre-primary teachers/trainees in history who asserted that Greek textbooks provide "chauvinistic representations" (93); and a Danish history teacher at a private school in Greek southern Cyprus, who identified extant

educational propaganda inasmuch as students are “not given the opportunity to question and critically think about historical narratives” (94). The common solution provided by the participants involves the revision of textbooks so that they can “discuss alternative historical perspectives and interpretations” (98). Finally, in chapter 6, Hadjiyanni summarizes her research findings.

Notwithstanding the book’s numerous strengths which have been addressed *supra*, a few glaring weaknesses deserve mention. First, in Hadjiyanni’s literature review appearing in chapter two, she includes a brief section titled “The Cyprus Problem in Historical Context.” Paradoxically, Hadjiyanni’s narrative contains no discussion of the significant historical events that transpired prior to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. In fact, her historical discussion begins with the invasion itself. Thereafter, she provides commentary on the current disputes that exist over the island, namely that the “Turkish Cypriot leadership demands the resolution of conflict through the creation of a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation which recognizes political equality” (22), and that the Greek-Cypriots “demand a unitary, sovereign state with indivisibility of territory and single citizenship, which identifies the Turkish Cypriots as the minority” (22). Given the complexity of the Cyprus dispute and the widely divergent positions concerning its origin, the lack of general information is sure to leave unfamiliar readers puzzled. Only when analyzing the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot textbooks in subsequent chapters does Hadjiyanni include some critical historical discussion, though it is scattered throughout the text. There, however, her historical discussions function more as personal commentaries and are often abruptly abandoned for other topics.

Second, in the historical context section of chapter two, Hadjiyanni simplifies her coverage of the Annan Plan to a discussion of the failure of UN General Secretary Kofi Annan to convince the people of Cyprus to approve his 2004 proposal, which Greek-Cypriots perceived to be unfair. Missing are the key features of the Annan Plan which the Greek-Cypriots found objectionable: for example, the failure to demilitarize the island, the lack of guarantees against the unilateral intervention of foreign powers, and the absence of a property recovery system for displaced Greek-Cypriot refugees. Unfortunately, a lack of appropriate historical context pervades the book and significantly detracts from Hadjiyanni’s aim to educate readers about the biases found in history textbooks. Readers without the proper factual background and objective historical data will find it difficult to identify biases present in history textbooks and, by extension, to evaluate the merits of Hadjiyanni’s assessments of those biases.

Finally, a review of the eighty-six sources consulted by Hadjiyanni reveals very few pertaining to the period from 1955 to 1974, a watershed in Cypriot history which she repeatedly emphasizes is her primary research focus. Since her work deals largely with the subject of history, her citation of only five secondary historical sources discussing the “Cyprus Problem” appears inadequate. Of these five sources, only two are books, one written by Volkan (1979) and dealing primarily with psychoanalysis, and the other

authored by the Cyprus Ministry of Education (2003). The Cyprus Ministry of Education, however, mainly comprises specialists in the field of curriculum development, rather than historians. Books written by experts in history would have been more appropriate sources to consult. Moreover, the other three cited sources are concise essays by Papadakis and Volkan appearing in a volume edited by Calotychos (1998), and a short article by Zervakis (2002). Also of concern is the absence of citations relating to primary sources.

A few contradictions within the text are also problematic. Hadjiyanni identifies a Turkish-Cypriot textbook's characterization of Nikos Sampson – the forcibly installed successor to Makarios as President – as the murderer of several British and Turkish individuals an item of propaganda for the purpose of justifying the subsequent Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 (45). Curiously, however, Hadjiyanni then criticizes a Greek-Cypriot textbook for not properly documenting acts of persecution aimed toward the Turkish-Cypriots, especially by the leadership: "The Greek-Cypriot narrative does not provide any evidence that indicates the burden of responsibility of the Greek-Cypriot leadership for causing the sufferings of the Turkish-Cypriot minority" (82). The reader is left to wonder why Hadjiyanni would criticize the Turkish-Cypriot textbook's documentation of persecution as propaganda, and then censure the Greek-Cypriot textbook for failing to document acts of the same persecution. Hadjiyanni presents a similar inconsistency undermining her peacebuilding history argument when she reprimands the Turkish-Cypriot textbook authors for their "characterization of Turkish-Cypriots as the brothers of Greek-Cypriots" (52). Hadjiyanni opposes this characterization since the textbook "establishes the representation of Turkey as the peacemaker" (52). Hadjiyanni argues that Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots should live harmoniously in a multicultural world united as one Cypriot nation, and "move beyond the homogenous national identity," (121) yet she skeptically dismisses a fraternal reference made by Turkish-Cypriots.

While Hadjiyanni's work is not without its flaws, the positive aspects far outweigh the negative. Hadjiyanni possesses a vast amount of knowledge about the state of affairs of Cypriot historical education and offers important insights in her analysis of nationalistic and peace building approaches to the teaching of history. She is sensitive to the challenges of teaching history in a more objective manner, and should be lauded for her efforts. Her work demonstrates how historical narratives can be skewed to justify a community's every action, presenting a significant obstacle in the way of peace. This book will surely appeal to scholars of both history and education. It remains a definitive study of the biases plaguing textbooks which shape the historical consciousness of a generation of Cypriots who have inherited one of the last divided capitals in Europe.