

SUMMARY

Doctoral Dissertation

Evoking the Past of the Nation. Memory and Identity in Moldavian History Textbooks, 1918-2006.

Moldova, a small republic situated in the region of the former USSR, may surprise foreign observers with its hybrid identity, “neither Russian, nor Romanian, nor Jewish, nor Ukrainian, nor Bulgarian [...], that evinces many memories of and references to”¹ the nation. This dance of unmasked and unanticipated identities inspires researchers who generate several epithets – from “identity crisis” to a “magic place of strong identity,” through to a “State searching for its nation”² – to delineate Moldavian reality since the country achieved state independence on August 27, 1991.

Using the mosaic of identity in the Republic of Moldova as a framework for reflection, this dissertation aims to put in historical perspective the societal conditions that make up the Moldavian collective psyche by illustrating, more specifically, the manner in which accounts of the past in the school curriculum are part of the polyphony of identities that resonates today in Moldavian society. First, it describes the general geohistorical context by focusing on the multiple state affiliations and diminishing territory in the Prouto-Dniestrian region, and societal dynamics underlying political efforts to define a national community in Moldova. Following this are analyses in which I enumerate the discursive mechanisms put into play in order to construct, through the use of founding myths, labels identifying the local collective, variously referred to throughout the centuries as “Romanian,” “Soviet,” and “Moldavian.”

An analysis of sources, compiled from about forty programs and from history textbooks that have been in circulation in Moldavian schools from 1918 to 2006, shows two grand historical narratives that conflict with the chapter on Moldavian referential identity. The first, born in the Romania that included Moldova between the two wars, highlights symbolic benchmarks that would link Moldavians to Romanian culture, language, and traditions. The second, conceived of in the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) and revived after World War II as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, promotes a distinct Moldavian nation historically committed to the cause of communism. The dissertation ends with a study of the post-Soviet period, noting that at this time, the production of history was renewed by repeating the preceding discourses.

¹ Catherine Durandin, Preface to the book by Petru Negura, *Ni héros ni traîtres. Les écrivains moldaves sous le pouvoir stalinien*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2009.

² In Moldavian media as well as in the West, this phenomenon has been expressed and decried in several ways. For a brief overview, see Oleg Serebrian, „Basarabia: geopolitica unei identități în derivă” (Bessarabie: The Geopolitics of an Identity in Disarray), *Politosfera*, Chișinău, Ed. Cartier, 2001, pp. 134-144; Flavius Solomon, Alexandru Zub (eds.), *Basarabia. Dilemele identității (Bessarabie. Identity Dilemma)*, Iași, Éd. Fundația academică „A. D. Xenopol, 2001. Dan Dungaciu, *Cine suntem noi? Cronici de la Est la Vest (Who Are We? Chronicles of the East towards the West)*, Chișinău, Ed. Cartier, 2009, Coll. „Cartier istoric”; Dennis Deletant, “What Would Self-Determination Mean for the Moldavians?” in Alexander Shtromas and Morton A. Kaplan, *The Soviet Union and the Challenge of the Future: Ideology, Culture and Nationality*. Vol. 3. New York, Paragon House, 1989, pp. 479-508.

Proceeding from the findings of the resource analysis, the dissertation invites greater reflection of a reality in Moldova manifest similarly in other countries, about writing a “new history”³ for schools, and aporia undermining historians’ efforts to give birth to a common history of the people that responds to modern-day educational requirements. By exploring endogenous factors of the Moldavian community to explain the difficulties in creating a new historical narrative for schools, this study re-examines the investigation of forms of manipulation of symbolic resources of the past, notably founding myths, intentional oversights and amnesia, and the representational value of themes, persons, and chronologies invested with national significance by classroom texts. The emerging themes belong of course to the Moldavian memory-based record, but the manner in which they are exploited in the school narrative may be generalized, and from this workable extrapolation flows one of the major implications of this research. In other words, this dissertation attempts to initiate intellectual debate – and a very timely one – on historical conditions that make possible a work of memory, of a sort that contemporary societies may envisage their future, and that historians redefine their role in society.

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³ Jocelyn Létourneau, *Clio en crise? Trois défis à l'interrogation historique actuelle (Clio in Crisis? Three Challenges to Current Historical Inquiry)*. Available online at <http://jocelynletourneau.com/textes/articles-savants>.