Geographical literacy and European Heritage

A challenging convention in the field of Education

Edited by
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Assistant Editor: Nausika Kapsala

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Locality, Identities, and social differentiation in the field of Education

Argyris KYRIDIS  
Professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Christos ZAGKOS  
Assistant Professor, University of Ioannina

Christos TOURTOURAS  
Assistant Professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Abstract

The fact that every human activity occurs in a particular place, the existence of distances, the differences between geographical areas and the social symbolisms attributed to specific places show that the place is integral to almost all the social functions. In this sense, the places are nothing more than natural structures, which are built through human behavior and social collectivities. The place is ultimately a combination of natural structures and human contributions. It is clear that the place is not conceptually identical to space. The place is actually the space where there is and lives a population of people, intervenes and interacts with the environment. Place attaches to space symbolisms, meanings, collectives and culture. On the modernity era the national state is the keystone of a national community, as it links its historical experience to a specific geographical place. Nation-State implies a community of people tied with emotional as well as geographical bonds. In the recent years, the concept of nation-state and its representations, as well as the need of national self-determination, have been linked to the construction of collective/national identities, within the framework of very specific national ideologies operating over time and on the basis of criteria such as race, language, religion, common culture, customs or traditions. Thus, through national education a close socio-cultural control is exercised, the myth about national uniqueness is reproduced, the feelings of patriotism and loyalty are promoted; national interests are served by the collective oblivion and the simultaneous stereotypical projection and downgrading of the “Other”.

Topics covered  
Identity, Diversity, Education, Social place, Nation-State
The notion of place on the sociological thought. The case of local identities.

The place as a component of society has been introduced to social theory by Georg Simmel since the early 1900s but it has taken about 80 years in order the social scientists to be able to express the thesis that a spatial view of society is now recognizable in sociological thinking. And it is no exaggeration to claim that the "local" as a realistic version of the social site has penetrated quite deeply into modern scientific social thinking both as an "example" and as a research starting point. E. Casey (1993) states that there is nothing to interest sociologists and not to be anywhere. Indeed, everything that interests a sociologist or any social scientist in general, is somewhere. It occupies a space, and most often identifies its entity using, among other things, the place where it is located, acts or interacts with other environmental elements. The fact that every human activity occurs in a particular place, the existence of distances, the differences between geographical areas and the social symbolisms attributed to specific places show that the place is integral to almost all the social functions (Massey, 1984).

Sociological thought has passed from the overrun (Coleman, 1993) or the absence (Relph, 1976) of the place and from the cities without places (Sorkin, 1991) in its modern "spectacular" era (Giddens, 1990). Today, when we refer to the place, we are consistently referring to a geographical area, which has a name, associated with specific physical features – natural or anthropogenic - and with specific values and social meanings. For example, we cannot refer to a place without using a name or, in any case, a geographical description or a place name. Besides, each place is geographically unique (Entrikin, 1991). Places are a combination of natural and anthropogenic material features. So, speaking about a geographical area, we include both its natural environment as well as all the human intervention in it (homes, catastrophes, embellishments, etc.) (Goldring, et al., 1996). In the same logic the approaches of the place can be included as an “aggregation” or “gathering” of
materials (Latour, 1996). Finally, each place is being “described” by using names (Basso and Feld 1996), characteristics, values and social significations (Soja, 1989).

Each place, as the perceptual shape of a "certain geographical area" has the characteristics given by its people that are constructing the specific identity of the place (Rotenberg and McDonough, 1993). In this sense, the places are nothing more than natural structures, which are built through human behavior and social collectivities. The place is ultimately a combination of natural structures and human contributions (Steele, 1981). Moreover, at the same, place can be attributed different social markings such as historical, political, family, aesthetic and apparently scientific (Semken and Butler, 2008). And there are not many cases where a series of historical events, even social circumstances, shape what is called the "sense" of the place (Williams et al., 1992; Brandenburg and Carroll, 1995). Social symbolisms are attributed to specific places and in fact the places are under constant social negotiation (Casey, 1996).

Nowadays, the basic tendencies that dominate the sociological study of the place are two. On the one hand, there is the way in which social phenomena are identified locally. Among these phenomena are social arrangements, consumption, assimilation, etc. (Lamont and Molnar, 2002; Pachucki et al., 2007; Binder and Cheyne, 2010). On the other hand, the place is considered a component of social life and social change (Gieryn, 2000; Binder and Cheyne, 2010). It is clear that the place is not conceptually identical to space. The place is actually the space where there is and lives a population of people, intervenes and interacts with the environment. Place attaches to space symbolisms, meanings, collectives and culture (De Certeau, 1984; Hiller and Hanson, 1984; Harvey, 1996).

The materiality of place and the social symbolisms attributed to it are the basis upon which the social hierarchies are produced, constructed and reproduced. Thus, we came from the social stratification, the distribution and reproduction of power to the dominant ideology. The distribution of populations in settlements -from small villages to big cities- has to do with hierarchies depicted on arrangements and space
management. In addition, Henri Lefebvre named as a social place, the place where production relations are reproduced and where dialectical contradictions are mainly spatial and less chronical (Lefebvre, 1973). Apparently, H. Lefebvre understands the place as a necessary condition for the existence of the social phenomenon of production relations. The material means of production originate and are used by and in a certain place. The labour comes from, and runs in some place. The capital exists and is activated in a very specific place. And when capital is in risk has the advantage -against labor-to move faster and finally change place.

The limits of human and social action can also have temporal, moral or local determinations. Border is one of the ways in which individuals and social collectivities decide to define the formal boundaries of their action. Any area included between the formal or informal boundaries is provided with social meanings and symbolisms. The connection of individuals and societies with specific spatial areas is an inherent tendency that arises as a need for every living organism to connect in some way its existence with a particular space, in which it even attributes features that are necessary, vital and inalienable for its existence. Borders precisely define a geographical area and constitute a necessary condition for the allocation and exercise of power. It is characteristic that every form of formal power is defined and condensed within a specific and strictly defined space. For each form of power, the territorial boundaries of its exercise are automatically determined.

Human activity either individually or collectively occurs anywhere. Every community has the right to be and to act somewhere. Each collectivity has its place and time of action. And it is this space and time that largely defines the basic characteristics of social action, but also, on the other hand, the forms of social actions give space and time morphological characteristics. Place, as a physical space and as a signifier, is a measurable variable that most often clearly defines the form, the range, the species and the impact of human activity. For these reasons, the spatial variability of social action has influenced the thinking of several sociologists from different perspectives and theoretical starting points (Lefebvre, 1973; Harvey, 1996; Castells, 1983; Soja, 1989).
The place is actually a three-dimensional entity, since it requires the simultaneous presence of three components: the location, time and culture. Every place marks a social world, a social microcosm full of determinations, markings, collective actions, changes and culture. Place as the main component of the substructure nowadays constitutes the main research area for most of the social sciences. Sociology, political science, social anthropology, history seem to have turned their attention to the local field.

The national state is the keystone of a national community, as it links its historical experience to a specific geographical place/country. It implies a community of people tied with emotional as well as geographical bonds. A community is defined as ‘geographical’ when its members live in a specific area and are related with close and unbroken bonds, on account of the fact that they ‘share’ the same living space whereas the people who are born and live in a specific geographical place establish, primarily, an emotional community (Tsaousis, 1985). The development of the nation-state also gave impetus to the study of the social and political structures that are shaped and developed in "populous clausus" living and operating in "territorium clausus". This is also the nature of the social structure developed in the nation state, the "closed society" (societa clausa) (Tsoukalas, 1999). For the nation – state society seemed to be solid, indivisible and practically and conceptually inseparable (Tsoukalas, 1999). The feeling of ‘belonging together’, as well as the singular emotions produced, are ascertained in a ‘fictitious’ conception (Anderson, 1991), that is, of a nation, which is metonymically reduced to homeland. In this case, the feelings that a nation enjoys are defined as ‘patriotic’, as a nation is transformed into a rational construct, which occupies a particular place, that is, a homeland (Febvre and Paul, 1996).

From now on the historical discourse is devoted to building the identity of "us" through a constant contradiction with the "others". In this way, the "national" identities are constructed on principle and the national discourse became the basis upon which a profound social reconstruction, both at a macro-social and a micro-social level took place (Demertzis, 1996). It is liberalism, which dominates not only as an ideological shell of the new collective entity, but also as a symbolism that
runs through every aspect of organised social life. Thus, the fragmented society of "different" individuals is symbolically integrated with the impetus of the liberal ideology. To sum up, the institution of nation–state and the people living in its area should have two basic characteristics: an inalienable identity and duration in time. Thus, each "national culture" will be required to shield the nation and to register it as a historically unique entity and as a carrier of its own national spirit (Elias, 1996). Here comes the role of "national" socialization and "politicization". This is the mission of the social and political institutions and of the ideological mechanisms of the state. This is the role of the school, the church, or the union: the emergence of the common national culture and its role as a unique unifying factor (Althusser, 1976). In this way, modern liberal power is established on culturally “pure” societies. The (pure) national societies are called to internalise their historical past in order to make it the driving force of their evolution (Gellner, 1992).

The theory of H. Tajfel (1978) and J. Turner (Turner et al., 1979) is the basis for understanding social identity. It assumes that the perception we shape for ourselves stems primarily from the attributes and characteristics recognised to us through our participation in specific social groups. In this way we are engaged in a continuous process of evaluation -through social comparisons- with other social groups of which we are not members. For example, members of a social group continuously compare the characteristics of social groups to which they belong with characteristics of other social groups, placing more emphasis on their positive characteristics and clearly less or no emphasis on their negative characteristics (Turner et al., 1979; Howard and Rothbart, 1980; Abrams and Hogg, 1990; Hunter et al., 1996; Capozza and Brown, 2000; Reynolds et al., 2000). The construction of social identity takes place mainly through the social interaction and dynamics inherent in the environment of social action of individuals (Goffman, 1959).

States consider the map of nations as definitive, but ethnic minorities see the same map under negotiation. This is the current problem of coexistence of different social groups under the same state power. Ethnic groups (minorities) today articulate their own discourse and culture; a discourse and a cultural identity similar to those that
articulated the existing nation states during the previous century. National sciences through the national educational system aim to nurture the younger nations with the principles and traditions that will ensure its unity. Therefore, the nation-state has ensured its existence as an essential scientific convention, avoiding tendencies to challenge or even dissolve its existence.

**Educational system and national identity**

In the recent years, the concept of nation-state and its representations, as well as the need of national self-determination, have been linked to the construction of collective/national identities, within the framework of very specific national ideologies operating over time and on the basis of criteria such as race, language, religion, common culture, customs, traditions, and above all, the consciousness of the existence of a nation and the will of the people to belong to it. The historical formation of national states, with the prevalence of the bourgeoisie on the basis of the above common archetypes, created the need for their stabilization and their viability (Intzesiloglou, 2000). In this effort mechanisms of ideological reproduction and collective formation were recruited, of which the most important was that of education (Althousser, 1976).

Traditionally the function of the educational mechanism was focused on preserving and promoting the particular characteristics of each national state, on the development of the nationalist morality and, thereby, on promoting social cohesion and national identity, on recreating the glorious past, cultivating national pride and vanity of citizens and contempt for everyone who does not belong to it. Curriculums and respective school textbooks, as well as teachers’ books of a similar style and content, were produced and made available to the educational systems all over the world, serving their propagandistic function. The curricula (formal-applied or informal-hidden), as a realization of a particular philosophy, goal development and selection of appropriate knowledge, have become the basic tool for the stabilization of the national state and the main exponent in the relevant educational policy.
In this sense, the curricula were used as instruments of social, economic and cultural control, as well as carriers of institutions and ideology reproduction. The school textbooks are also an ideological tool of the school system, since they express the same philosophy that permeates each dominant society. Also, starting from their cognitive background, they transport and cultivate attitudes, ideals, and habitus. Through these, a close socio-cultural control is exercised, the myth about the uniqueness and a common fate, the culture and the identity of the nation are reproduced, the visibility of the national tradition and history is guaranteed, the feelings of patriotism and loyalty are promoted; national interests are served by the collective oblivion and the simultaneous stereotypical projection and downgrading of the “Other”, by rendering to it a number of inaccuracies and negatively charged unfamiliar to the in-group qualities.

Surveys show that neither the Curricula nor the school textbooks defend the peace, despite of any pompous declarations. History, more than the other courses of the Curriculum, attracts over the time the particular care of the educational policy of each country. Moreover, History holds a privileged position in the process of the formation of the national identity and the reproduction of the representations of the so called “national self” and “national others”, within the school. Especially, in the framework of this course the pupils’ critical thinking is undermined, because of the over-projection of the concept of the nation (Flouris and Ivrindeli, 2000). Thus, although nationalist consciousness is widely perceived to be out of date, in practice however, the national-racial discriminations seem to be re-enacted. The modern world continues to be separated between “we and the others” and confined to xenophobic and racist views.

Ethnocentrism is also still promoted in the mainstream mono-cultural education systems as an absolute value, advocating the legalization of any distinction to anything foreign and aiming at its homogenization and cultural subordination to the dominant culture. Besides, the very choice of the term “tolerance” to the other, which is widely used in the official texts in the fields of education and policy internationally, suggests the generosity of the hierarchically superior and also the negative evaluation
of diversity, which we simply experience and we are called to tolerate (Flouris and Ivrindeli, 2000).

The diachronic study of the educational system internationally, in the light of various trends of the Sociology of Education, consistently confirmed its role and function on the exertion of ideological and symbolic violence as well as the production and reproduction of the dominant capitalist relations within the process of the production. The national states have massively educated their citizens, through the institutionalization of compulsory education, demonstrating the great importance they have attached to the educational system in shaping a supra-class, intercultural and inter-ethnic national consciousness in their collective subjects (Adamou, 2002).

A collective national consciousness that refers to what Balibar (1991) calls "an illusion of national identity" and consists in the belief that generations succeeding each other over the centuries, in a specific territory and with a common name, are carriers of a unique “glorious” heritage. This is the result of a national ideology that contains ideal signifiers (such as the "nation" and the "homeland"), which constitute the national identity and give it religious characteristics, connecting it with notions and feelings such as sacredness, love, respect, sacrifice and fear. It’s about an ideology that treats the state as an expression of a pre-existing unity, believing that its historical mission is to service the nation, idealizing at the same time national substance and national politics (Balibar, 1991).

This national consciousness is constituted within the framework of a common past and a single identity and obliges the collective subject to act based on the commitments of a supposedly stable and unchanging historical past. The necessity to create national consciousness in any sovereign state, within the framework of wider transnational formation, arises basically from the problems of cohesion, internal disintegration and extermination that threaten it. Moreover, issues of administrative uniformity that guarantees the effectiveness of state policy advocate the cultivation of a single national consciousness. The term "national state" contains the socio-political notion of "nation" -which is defined within the actual or even imaginary borders of the
state- of the second concept from which nation–state is constituted. The modern institution of "state" that precedes the "nation" is a pre-eminent construction, and is born through class conflicts and the violence of history, while it manufactures, on a second level, the notion of "nation" in order to replace the convenient until recently racial idea, in the context of the more effective service of the values and interests of the new bourgeoisie that dominated the public sphere, without, however, the legal and moral outcry that would bring about an unexpected attachment to the ideology of racial racism. Of course, within the nation and the respective sovereign state, one can distinguish individual national groups on which the current workforce is formed.

National groups deriving from the capitalist hierarchy of labor, in the context of a gradual and unequivocal exploitation of the surplus value they produce, which is a constitutive principle of the capitalist system and in which those national groups must be socialised. Thus, the socialization of labor power is accomplished by learning the skills that are specific to it. The culture of a national group embodies all the rules incumbent upon the younger generations from the older ones and in this process of engraving, the state plays a leading and protagonist role with its mechanisms, especially with its educational system (Wallerstein, 1991). The dominant ideological mechanism of the state makes use of the school institution, assisted by other ideological mechanism based on the common basis of the hegemony of nationalism, in order to ensure the perpetuation of its own interests and the service of its own purposes. Thus, the more the bourgeois classes are trained, the more the individual differences determine individual’s different social destinies, perpetuating the carefully covered class divisions, in the name of a nationalised culture operating on the boundaries between raciality and nationalism (Balibar, 1991).

Thus, within the framework of the national educational system, the conditions for the preservation and reproduction of dominant production relations are formed. Any particular cultural, national and social variations from the predominant norm are employed as a danger, a threat to social cohesion and peace, and are related to inequalities in the context of the national states' monocultural educational systems based on ethnic and racial criteria. It is about constructed inequalities, consisting of a
series of national socialization institutions, formal and informal, the inadequate participation in which is a destabilizing factor, disrupts social cohesion and solidarity and produce phenomena of marginalization and social exclusion. In any case, ignoring the local or national values raises retaliation from the nation state. It is also worth noting the uniqueness of the conditions for the construction of national societies and hence of the dimensions of social problems such as social exclusion that end up being historical products strictly linked to the particular elements of the historical heritage and national consciousness of a specific society in which are emerging and which they finally concern (Papadopoulou, 2012).

Diversity and Identity

The problem of individual and collective identity remains one of the central issues of social sciences. For sociology, searching for and interpreting the social characteristics of individuals is a matter of identifying. History, with passion, tries to trace and replicate identities of the past by making reductions in today's reality. S. Freud was the one who introduced the concept of identity in psychology, and for decades social anthropology has focused its dynamics on the discovery and description of individual and collective identities. The concept of identity acquires substance only when it becomes comparable to another a “strange” identity. I am a Caucasian "white" guy and I am different, perhaps "superior" to a black man. I am tall because there is a comparable shorter man than me. There are plenty of times when science simply reproduces and confirms with its prestige and typology the hierarchical identities within the social creation, just because science is nothing more than a social construction, which is constantly struggling to obtain a guarantee of objectivity. National identity is a special form of collective identity in which the element of community involves not only shared territory, language, religion, and customs but also a sense of continuity, historical memory, and common destiny, all of which relate the individual to his or her society (Smith, 1990). Needless to say, all national cultures perceive themselves as unique, sometimes pure and certainly inimitable. Invariably, they are products of their own particular histories (Zagkos et al., 2007).
Several years ago -though we insist that the debate remains topical and essential- the opposing social identities focused on class characteristics. Nowadays, as if class structure does not exist, as if there are no rich and poor, cultural identity is the center and the foundation of a new-born social conflict, where the class characteristics of the members of a society seem to be inexcusable or non-existent in front of a shaped by cultural terms "we" and a culturally hostile "other". The new scientific sociological discourse was disengaged from his obsession with class domination and devoted to build the cultural "we" through an endless contradiction with the "others". In this way, the "national" identities are constructed in order to establish and substantiate a new ideological power and hegemony; a power that will unite the culturally similar individuals and will be formed through cultural hierarchies and fake rivalries.

Today, a series of key questions arise concerning the social status of the "other" -mainly of the national- and the postmodern version of diversity: What is the role of national identity in social life? What approaches exist in the different versions of diversity and what are their strengths and weaknesses? There is no general theory of national identity in the social sciences, and any theoretical debate emphasises and takes into account only a few aspects of the problem. There is a broad and complex set of phenomena related to the concept of national identity and which have led many scientists (Liebkind, 1989) to the assumption that the attempt to create a single theory for national identity should be abandoned. The most appropriate approach to national identity should be developed according to each time specific socio-historical contexts (Weinreich, 1973). Difficulties with the universal theories of national identity are caused not by the weaknesses of contemporary approaches of social sciences but by the complex and multidimensional nature of national identity itself. Despite the widespread use of the term national identity in the bibliography, it is very difficult to distinguish it from other relevant concepts, and is often used simply as a synonym for the nation. Indeed, identity is often taken as a given term that should not be defined, and it is used to identify ethnicity. The definition of Schildkrout (1978) is characteristic: "The nation is a set of conscious or unconscious beliefs. There are" national us "and" national others ". National identity is treated as a single
characteristic of a member of a national group. The nation is regarded as a primitive bond that means unity and solidarity above and beyond each internal division. National ideology is more or less a "false conscience" manipulation that is adopted and evolves as a strategy for the political and economic goals of national groups’ (Okamura, 1981). Citizenship and nationality are two basic components of individual and social identity. Particular emphasis has been placed on linking the two above elements to the social behavior of individuals (Hofstede, 1991; Trompenaars, 1993). The traditional model of national citizenship is based on a “structure” of a state as a representation of a single “pure” national team (Breuilly, 1982; Hobsbawm, 1990). This particular form of state self-determination required the construction of a nation in the sense of the diffusion of a common culture, history, language and religion. Finally, the interpretation of national identity in the light of social psychology is not significantly different from the sociological approach of interaction, and especially from the version of the processual interactionism, according to which identities are established and maintained on the basis of a framework of social action. Social phenomena are the basic tool for interpreting the process of identity formation (Gecas, 1982).

**Concluding Remarks**

Today, in the age of international communication and supranational blocks, nationalism cannot really believe in itself anymore and must exaggerate itself to the extreme in order to persuade itself and others that it is still substantial (Adorno, 2017). So, in the concrete framework, expanding the thought of Balibar (1991), we could say that in the new unified European reality, functions and symbols of the national state seem to be transferred to a community level, while it is also observed an orientation to an idealization of the European demographical identity as opposed to the populations of the South, rather than keeping a direction to a European lingual or cultural co-function. In other words, the European coalition has been transformed to a kind of “euro-fortress” with explicit characteristics of isolation and extreme repression, due to a general external and internal xenophobic and psychotic political paralysis respectively. In this sense, the nationalisms of the individual nation states are
transferred to a supranational and transnational level, emerging an impressive absurdity, according to which any “national” nationalism, surpassing itself, presupposes its supranational dimension.

Regarding the role of education as a “weapon” of the people against nationalistic stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes we support the well – known thesis that “ignorance causes prejudice”. A higher level of education increases insight into the complexity of society, refuting simplifications inherent in ethnic stereotypes. Education, finally increases the knowledge and understanding of different norms and values other than those common in one’s own social group and raises awareness of the subjective and particularistic character of individual beliefs (Coenders & Scheepers, 2003).

References


