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EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND SCHOOL MANUALS:
HISTORICAL-COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN ITALY AND TUNISIA

POLITICHE EDUCATIVE E MANUALISTICA SCOLASTICA:
ANALISI STORICO-COMPARATIVA TRA ITALIA E TUNISIA

The aims of this research was to reconstruct the ways in which both history and geography secondary schools manuals represent the other, specifically those embodied by the Arab-Muslim world in specific regard to Italian textbooks; and Tunisian textbooks in regards to the Europe-occident. A cross examination offered the researcher an opportunity to perform a comparative analysis between the two chosen countries, in order to understand both the convergences and divergences in imagery of otherness conveyed through the textbooks. The following questions were asked: On what factors and elements has the narration and construction of itself been founded? How have the countless exchanges, meetings, clashes, dialogues and knowledge been elaborated contemporaneously? Which identity view has been chosen? What is the role that covers the 'otherness' in the representation of itself?

This research will try to understand whether ethnocentrism is a possible ideological drift that belongs to both countries or not; without aspiring to explanations or improper generalisations. Identical choices are always culturally and historically located, and are clearly reflected in textbooks. Such textbooks are offered as sources that, if duly interrogated, can reveal multiple clues as to the identity choices, memberships, closures and narratives of themselves and others.

La ricerca ha l'obiettivo di ricostruire le modalità attraverso le quali i manuali di storia e geografia delle scuole secondarie di secondo grado rappresentino l'altro, incarnato nello specifico dal mondo arabo-musulmano per quanto concerne i libri di testo italiani e l'Europa-Occidente per quanto concerne i libri di testo tunisini. Lo sguardo incrociato offre l'opportunità di effettuare un'analisi comparativa tra i due paesi prescelti, allo scopo di comprendere convergenze e divergenze nell'immaginario sull'alterità veicolato attraverso i libri di testo. Su quali fattori ed elementi si è fondata la narrazione e costruzione del sé? Come gli innumerevoli scambi, incontri, scontri, dialoghi, conoscenze, sono stati elaborati nella contemporaneità? Quale visione identitaria è stata prescelta? Qual è il ruolo che ricopre l'alterità circa la rappresentazione del sé?

Tenteremo di comprendere se l'etnocentrismo è una possibile deriva ideologica che appartiene o meno a entrambi i paesi, senza, pertanto, ambire a spiegazioni o improprie generalizzazioni. Le scelte identitarie sempre culturalmente e storicamente situate si riflettono in modo evidente nei libri di testo, i quali si offrono quali fonti che, se debitamente interrogati, possono disvelarci molteplici indizi circa scelte identitarie, appartenenze, chiusure, narrazioni di sé e dell'altro.

Key words: Manuals; identity; otherness; inter-culturalism; Mediterranean.

Parole chiave: Manuali; identità; alterità; interculturalità; Mediterraneo.



Comparative multilevel analysis

In 2011, the results of research conducted by the authoritative German institute, Georg Eckert, on the representation of Islam in the manuals of Spain, Great Britain, Germany, Austria and France, became available through, among various channels, newspaper articles and websites to the various countries involved¹. Even countries that were not directly involved in the research, such as Italy, were aware of the results². The research concluded that textbooks of the contemplated countries convey an extremely simplified, homogenized and essentialized image of Islam; producing, among the many consequences, a “symbolic marginalisation” of Muslim students living in Europe.

The study led to the realisation that the lack of differentiation between Muslims and their reduction to a single group which opened the way to forms of “cultural racism”, in which religious difference is treated as something immutable. The basic idea does not concern the representation of Muslims as antagonists in conflicts, but rather their representation as ‘the other pre-modern’ in opposition to modern Europe. Although the description of the Islamic Middle Ages takes place in positive terms, as a period of splendour of Islamic civilisation, the predominant idea is that of a “broken” cultural development; where development would be interrupted in Muslim societies. Research shows that the representation of Islam in different countries, beyond national peculiarities, has great similarities. A common element is that it’s conceived as an antagonist of European identity. The contribution of the Islamic world to the development of modernity in Europe is not sufficiently explained, but Muslims are considered as simple intermediaries.

Three adjectives are well summarised as the representation of Islam which are reiterated through the manuals: homogenization, essentialism and timelessness. The basic vision represented is a Eurocentric one, where the historical narrative is firmly anchored to Western values and norms, without explaining the relationships of reciprocity and cultural, economic and social exchanges between populations and cultures.

Starting from this awareness the researcher asked what happened in the Italian school textbooks. Were the results of the research of the Georg Eckert Institute also generalisable in regards to the Italian school manuals? The analysis of the textbooks in Italy has been driven by a comparative need with respect to the European manuals both at the level of the numerical sample (25 Italian manuals analysed by the researcher, compared to 24 analysed by the Georg Eckert Institute), and of the methodology, utilising the same analysis grid.

¹ Le figaro September 18th 2011 published the article “Des manuels scolaires trop simplificateurs sur l’islam”, while on the web site “Islam Hispania” they speak of «Imagen falsa del Islam en colegios europeos». On September 19th of the same year the web site “Euro-islam” published the article titled “Representation of Islam in European Textbooks”, while three days before on the web site “the local.de” we could read “Schoolbooks distort Islam, study shows”.

² It is the case of “Blitzquotidiano” that on September 15th writes “Uno studio: nei libri scolastici dell’UE cultura anti-islamica”, or the web site “migrantitorino”, which talks about “Cultural Racism”, citing the study of the German institute.

This first comparative aspect (Italian manuals compared to European manuals) was succeeded by a further analysis. The representation of otherness, specifically incarnated by the Arab-Muslim world, in fact, has been studied not only from a European viewpoint, but also in opposition; starting from how the manuals of Tunisia, an Arab country of the Mediterranean, represent Europe. This cross examination from north to south and vice versa constitutes a further interesting variable to consider; it constitutes an experimentation of cultural decentralisation, aiming to subject the otherness and objectify ourselves as “others”. In this case, those who for Europe constitute the other – the Arab-Muslim world – become a narrating subject that constructs its own narration of the diverse. The preliminary question is: Does Europe represent the otherness by excellence in Tunisian manuals? How does the latter approach the narration of the diverse?

The selection criteria of the textbooks was to choose the most adopted textbooks of history and geography in three Italian municipalities (Genoa, L’Aquila and Reggio Calabria) during the school year period 2015/16 for a total of 25 manuals, and 7 Tunisians manuals, of which four were in use during the 2014/15 school year in addition to three older ones (1969, 1986, 1998), in order to understand the consequences of the three reforms of the educational system (1958, 1991, 2002) on textbooks. In the case of Tunisia, it was not necessary to define further selection criteria, as it is the state which, through the “National Pedagogical Center” (Centre National Pédagogique), prints and distributes textbooks throughout the national territory, which, being subsidised, has a comparatively low price. The uniqueness of the manual, far from being perceived as a problem, becomes the reflection and consequence of the policies of democratisation and massification of public education, according to which education must be compulsory and free. Compared to the Tunisian manuals, one notable difficulty was the translation of the Arabic texts and one French text.

For the analysis of the manuals the grid conceived by Siegfried Jäger for the study performed by the Georg Eckert Institute mentioned earlier³ (2011) was utilised.

The research also attempted to understand the coherence, or possibly lack of coherence, between school rules on inter-culturalism and school textbooks. On question the research aimed to look that was; how have these changed with respect to identity anchorage and representation of otherness in Italy and Tunisia? Have they conformed to the regulations and the decrees?

Why study the manuals in a comparative key

Analysing the way in which the manuals tell the story of alterity means questioning oneself about oneself; about one’s own identity building that inevitably happens through continuous exchange and comparison with the other from oneself. It is start-

³ The Current Status or Representations of Islam and Muslims in Textbooks in European Countries – Germany, Austria, France, Spain and England. http://repository.gei.de/bitstream/handle/11428/172/Islamstudie_2011.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. (20 June 2018).

ing from the awareness of the relativity of such identity constructions, which change according to the political circumstances and the specific needs of the period considered, that the manual, if well questioned, becomes an instrument able to reveal important factors related to the identity construction and imagery on otherness and, consequently, on the sense of 'us' in a particular historical period. The tendency to conceive the historical narration as legitimate and absolute makes the manual a privileged means able to convey certain representations that will be deposited in the dominant imagery about otherness, even more so if we take into account the fact that the whole population learns about the history mainly through textbooks.

If we consider that history is not an established truth, but the fruit of the interpretation of certain events, which depends on different variables, including culture, the cognitive background and the methodological posture of the researcher, and the socioeconomic conjuncture, we can understand how much these interpretations are the result of a never definitive human product, but subject to reformulations and new interpretations. This awareness obliges us to critically rethink the way in which history was written, told, handed down and sedimented in our conscience, and it has structured our perception and interpretation of the world. In particular, history as we have learned it at school, an institution responsible for the transmission of knowledge, has acquired an absolute value of "truthfulness" and "scientificity" not easily passable to other interpretations or put in discussion, but characterised by a «purported objectivity and absolute completeness of the historical narrative» (Genovesi 2009, 8). The legacy of the nineteenth-century conception of history has shaped the structure of manuals on which entire generations have been educated, often remaining the only approach to historical knowledge. The burdensome task of being the citizen has also been accomplished thanks to historical knowledge and manuals.

History, indeed, and in particular the one proposed in school textbooks, becomes a strategic place for the processes with which the nineteenth-century states face ever more insistently the theme of national identity and its legitimacy. The centrality of history in all of this, is such that, according to the words of François Guizot, «l'histoire c'est la nation, c'est la patrie à travers les siècles» (Genovesi 2009, 12-13).

Analysing the manuals and the history of manuals in this sense provides a series of elements that go beyond the educational sphere, as intrinsically linked to politics and national identity.

Although it is not the only factor [...] texts can influence, sometimes decisively, not only on the development of skills related to 'reading, writing and doing', but also on the introjection of behavioural norms, social principles, modalities of interaction with each other, cultural values. Posing as the repertory, officially legitimised (by endorsement of laws and directives Ministerial, scholars and colleagues) of what is important or essential to know, textbooks can play a decisive role in the construction of judgments on the *Mitwelt* (social atmosphere and physical surrounding), more or less corresponding to reality: therefore also ethnocentrism, stereotypes and preconceptions, from which [...] attitudes of racism and xenophobia can arise (Portera 2000, 80).

The manual represents an important cognitive medium that has shaped and continues to shape the image of the citizens of every nation. But, to put it like Alain Choppin (2008), what is the manual? If we consider the many definitions that in the different national contexts are attributed to the textbook on the lexical level, it will be possible to understand how much the demand is not taken for granted. The different terminologies, in fact, tend to want to underline and emphasise a specific aspect, that is related to the learning method (*cours* in French, *method* in English), or related to its managerial role (*guía* in Spanish, *mentor* in French), or still linked to the material aspect, like the terms “*manuale, manuel, manual*”, literally small and, therefore, that can be carried by hand, just to give some examples.

In an attempt to define what is meant by a scholastic textbook, the author makes a reflection on what unites it and differentiates it from other types of manuals or texts, as could be, for example, literature for children. It is therefore a matter of understanding what is the substantial difference between “scholastic manual” and “scholastic book”. While the latter category may contain any book used within the school walls for the initiative of a teacher, the first involves the intentional design of the instructionally and pedagogically prescribed use of the textbook. This intentionality would therefore distinguish the school manual from any other manual. The drafting of a manual is therefore a complex work that requires, first of all, a reflection on what the objectives of training are, then a reflection on the contents and, finally, a final important analysis on the didactic aspects. It is clear that this complex operation includes a series of variables that will determine a “unique” and “partial” product, also the result of the social, cultural, educational, political and economic vision of both the publisher and the author.

Comme tout objet de recherche, le livre scolaire n'est pas une donnée, mais le résultat d'une construction intellectuelle: il ne peut donc y avoir de définition unique. Il est en revanche indispensable d'explicitier les critères qui président à cette élaboration conceptuelle, car l'une des principales insuffisances – maintes fois dénoncée – de la recherche historique sur les manuels scolaires, et notamment de la recherche comparée, réside toujours, comme le déplorait encore récemment Annie Bruter, dans le caractère en quelque sorte naturel, an historique, des manuels scolaires aux yeux de bien des historiens' (Choppin 2008, 56).

If we take into account the primary purpose for which the manual was conceived, or rather the transmission of knowledge in the educational field by the educational institution, we can understand in what sense it represents the principal tool for teaching. Nevertheless, the latter can't be considered as a mere educational tool through which the transmission of a certain knowledge to the new generations takes place, but is itself an indicator and a sign of the dominant ideologies and rhetorical of society in a given space-time context. The manual, therefore, if on the one hand reflects those that are the dominant ideas of society, on the other hand tends to reproduce and reframe such ideas. «It is therefore understandable that there is no State in the world that does not care to direct the teaching of history and exercise some form of control over the texts through which it is given» (Procacci 2005, 9). It may therefore be useful to

conceive the manual as an important source to be subjected to scrupulous hermeneutical and interpretative analysis in order to grasp the values, ideologies and emergent representations. Moreover, the manual is the medium for excellence used by teachers, who «ask too much, for the textbook, which often becomes their main source of inspiration, the major source of documentation and updating» (Squarcina 2012, 140).

The textbooks therefore, beyond the transmission of contents – facts, events, dates – also convey ideologies, in line with current political trends, endowing them with historical legitimacy.

The interest in the manual and its dual educational / ideological value and awareness of the need for revision of the same, was born in the period following the Great War and parallel to the birth of the League of Nations. In fact, at the end of the conflict, committees of teachers and members of the political world denounced the responsibility of textbooks in forging and reinforcing a distorted, strongly stereotypical image of enemy countries, increasing the spread of xenophobic attitudes. So in 1925 the “International Commission of Intellectual Cooperation”, within the League of Nations, invited each national body to analyse manuals in order to purge textbooks from anomalies about the representation of otherness, work that became concrete with the drafting of a document on school textbooks in 1932 (Prescott 1930). In the period between the two wars there were numerous similar initiatives by neighbouring states, which often had the aim of putting pressure on publishers or authors about the new recommendations for the drafting of manuals, in particular with respect to the representation of conflict and enemies, which should have happened with more criticality. These experiments led 27 countries in 1937 to sign a “Declaration Regarding the teaching of history (Revision of School Text-Books)⁴”. The declaration concerns the following purposes:

1. It is desirable that the attention of the competent authorities in every country, and of authors of school textbooks, should be drawn to the expediency:

- a) Of assigning as large a place as possible to the history of other nations;
- b) Of giving prominence, in the teaching of world history, to facts calculated to bring about a realization of the interdependence of nations.

2. It is desirable that every Government should endeavor to ascertain by what means, more especially in connection with the choice of school-books, school-children may be put on their guard against all such allegations and interpretations as might arouse unjust prejudices against other nations.

3. It is desirable that in every country a committee composed of members of the teaching profession, including history teachers, should be set up by the National Committee on Intellectual Co-Operation, where such exists, in collaboration with other qualified bodies[...]⁵.

These statements remain as current as ever. After almost seventy years we are still

⁴ *Declaration Regarding the Teaching of History (Revision of School Text-Books)*. UNESCO *Guidebook on Textbook research and textbook revision*, Falk Pingel: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002209/220958f.pdf> (22 June 2018).

⁵ UNESCO *Guidebook on Textbook research and textbook revision*, Falk Pingel. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002209/220958f.pdf>, p.10 (22 June 2018).

far from having achieved similar goals. What is the cause? Firstly, the most powerful countries of the time refused to sign the declaration. The motivations are manifold and specifically concern, on the one hand, the distrust of nations towards the interference by international organisations in matters related to education and national identity; and on the other hand, the national differences regarding the educational systems. In fact, some of these delegate the choice of scholastic adoptions to the regions, or even to the teachers, who have the skills and full decision-making in this regard. The result was that the principles upheld by the Declaration had a very small echo, as they had been adopted by a small number of countries. With the advent of the Second World War and the failure of the declarations existing up to that time, it was understood how much more necessary it was to pursue with more rigour and in a systematic manner, the work undertaken previously on the revision of the textbooks, in order to promote international creation and consolidation of a culture of peace and solidarity. To this end, UNESCO set itself as an organisation charged with continuing and strengthening as had already been done by the United Nations Society. The first General Conference of UNESCO dates back to 1946. The result was a “Programme for the Improvement of Text-Books and Teaching Materials as Aids in Developing International Understanding” (Pingel, 2009). UNESCO has also played an important role in the organisation, collaboration or support of conventions and conferences on an international scale on the subject of the revision of textbooks. In the national commissions, teachers, authors of school manuals and representatives of the Ministry of Education have often collaborated. As far as the bilateral agreements are concerned, if there was the incontestable advantage of erecting the issue concerning the manuals bringing it to the attention of governments, on the other hand the focus was shifted to the representation of the other, without putting into discussion the structure of the text, strongly anchored to the history of the nation. Thus the transition from bilateral to multilateral comparative analysis, hoped for by the 1974 UNESCO General Conference, declared:

Member States should encourage wider exchange of textbooks, especially history and geography textbooks, and should, where appropriate, take measures, by concluding, if possible, bilateral and multilateral agreements, for the reciprocal study and revision of textbooks and other educational materials in order to ensure that they are accurate, balanced, up-to-date and unprejudiced and will enhance mutual knowledge and understanding between different people (Pingel, 2009, p.13).

The main changes concerned, in essence, the transition from a local and regional approach to a global one. Another important aspect concerns the re-contextualisation of the manual, which was conceived not only as an object of analysis in itself, but also starting from the didactic use that is made of it. A first de-contextualisation in the direction of globalisation followed, with a return to the regional approach or, more precisely, a dynamic integration of the two approaches. These achievements have led to the creation of an “International Textbook Research Network” (Pingel 2009, 15) in 1992 within the Georg Eckert Institute, which coordinates studies and research on

manuals at the international level, under the responsibility of UNESCO. Next to this body, there is another important one, the Council of Europe, an advocate of studies and publications on the revision of the manuals in Europe.

The emergence of new forms of nationalism, intolerance and xenophobia led, thanks to the General Conference of 1995, to formulate the criteria to be followed in the drafting of the manuals or in their revision, summarised in the following:

- The production of manuals can encourage international cooperation. Whenever a manual or other teaching aid is written, contextual changes must be taken into account;
- Manuals should propose more points of view about a subject or event described and make the cultural or national context in which they are produced transparent;
- Their contents must be based on scientific evidence;
- It is desirable that the documents of UNESCO or other institutions belonging to the United Nations are disseminated and usable by educational institutions, most of all in countries where the production of educational materials is scarce, due to economic difficulties.

The awareness of the multicultural changes of societies that reflect on the school population is discussed in the declaration “The UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2006)”⁶, thanks to which we want to re-contextualise the importance of reviewing and editing of manuals in light of social changes and the creation of multicultural societies, in which old divisions or new stereotypes may resurface.

Values education and the forming of world views that define self-images and images of the “other” through textbooks has again become a focus of international textbook revision. Following this trend, interregional working groups have been established with a particular emphasis on the Euro-Arab dialogue (Pinkel 2009, 17).

For the realisation of these objectives, UNESCO, through the document «Comprehensive Strategy for Textbooks and Learning Materials» of 2005, played a prominent role in collaborating and supporting the various member states on the elaboration of the rules and criteria for the selection of manuals, as well as other teaching aids that promote quality education. This operation involved an in-depth analysis of the contents of the manuals, as well as the way in which the latter are presented. UNESCO’s action covers several fronts:

- Political level: relating to the definition of the criteria for the relationship and selection of school textbooks;
- Analytical-structural level: relative to the actual analysis of the contents and structure of textbooks;
- Comparative level: related to bilateral and multilateral projects in order to understand both the anomalies in the manuals of each country, and the good practices or

⁶ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147878f.pdf> (26 May 2018).

themes shared in a neutral and objective way;

- Didactic level: related to the involvement of all the parties involved, from teachers to publishers, as well as to researchers;
- Project level: regarding the definition of solutions to be adopted and projects to be supported regarding the improvement of school manuals for the pursuit of a higher quality of education.

This brief historical reconstruction of the manual revision policies, albeit partial, helps us to understand the evolution of interest and work on the analysis of manuals and the decisive role of UNESCO, an organisation that still today commits to building a culture of peace and recognises the manuals as tools and means essential for the formation and education of the citizen. What we are interested in analysing here is the bilateral comparative level between Italy and Tunisia. To this end, we can see in the concrete that which emerges from the study of the scholastic manuals of the two countries.

The Arab-Muslim world in Italian school textbooks

Reconstructing the rhetoric on the diversity that has historically shaped the national imaginary is certainly a complex and articulated operation, which however, has the merit of allowing the understanding of many contingent factors of the present and of assembling new and old imaginative practices. Compared to the analysis of textbooks, this operation also makes it possible to highlight how they have changed in relation to the course of events, if and to what extent social, political and economic phenomena have influenced their content or structure, and if and how identity membership has changed form and why. If, in general, from the Fifties to the Nineties of the last century the textbooks underwent significant improvements on the iconographic, didactic and “morphological” level, through the enhancement of the teaching support system – exercises, in-depth sheets, explanatory windows – the same cannot be said about the contents. Talking about the representation of the Arab-Muslim world, the manuals of the fifties supported the thesis of Henri Pirenne on the supposed cultural fragmentation of the Mediterranean subject to Arab expansionism. This thesis will not be questioned in the coming decades, but we still find it today. The manuals do not lend themselves to incorporating in their narration the most important acquisitions of the historiography of the period around the Arab-Muslim world, hence the discrepancy between historical research and scholastic history:

It is not profitable, given the premises of the research, considering the interpretations of books on the exclusive meter of historical research, since history is a potential remedy for ethnocentrism that has always existed, from Herodotus to Montaigne, alongside and against the ethnocentric histories. History as a taught subject, however, remains the production of ethnocentrism (Cecalupo 1999).

It can be said that over a period of fifty years, regarding the representation of the Arab-Muslim world, changes occur and are inserted «within a framework that remains ethnocentric». In the fifties the textbook conveys some “strong” images:

The desert associated to the “primitive”, to the poverty, and to the absence of organization; the sudden and violent emergency of Islam; the warlike and predatory nature of the Arabs; the irreversible fracture of the Mediterranean area; distance from Christian Europe (Cecalupo 1999).

In the following decades there was a sort of “negative continuity” with respect to the representation of diversity, which follows to be told in the name of ethnocentrism. Even the colonial past is removed from the collective consciousness, or alternatively minimised. What happens in the most recent manuals? At a quantitative level, the Arab-Muslim world occupies a minimum space with respect to the totality of the book: 20 pages out of 223 in “Storia e progetto 2”, 44 out of 325 in “Geopolis 2” and 31 out of 197 in “Le voci della storia 2”, just to give some examples. Analysing those themes, a first thematic is based on the historical heritage of the Mediterranean. In the text “Storia e progetto 2” there is a section in which it’s highlighted how and where the Roman heritage in the provinces is still visible today. This argument is used, however, to mark a watershed between nations that have retained mostly the Roman footprint, namely Portugal, Spain and France (and Italy of course) and those that subsequently had a strong Slavic (Romania) and Germanic (Switzerland, Great Britain, Belgium) influence, where the Roman influence is weaker. But when talking about North Africa it is said that:

All the others suffered an even more violent fracture when they were occupied by the Arabs and converted to Islam: today North Africa and the Middle East do not preserve at all, if not in the archaeological traces, the memory of the long cohabitation with the Romans (Calvani 2014b, 23).

Or again:

Even the places evolve over time. They are like a freight port in which new people arrive creating unpredictable reactions: sometimes the culture of the conquered is preserved and won over by the conquerors; sometimes it merges with it by creating a new culture; at other times it is crushed and lost forever (Calvani 2014b, 23).

In the text prevails a reified and homogeneous vision of culture, which seems to be the product of a single, unique and isolated population. Tunisia, on the other hand, considers the Roman cultural heritage as an integral part of its identity anchor, which is located in the Mediterranean, as we shall see later. In the manual we find the following statements:

- The Islamic state was radically different from the model that one day would have been followed by the West;
- The Code of Laws was and still is the Koran, the Holy Book, eternal and immutable. The judges themselves are simultaneously imams, that is, spiritual guides of their

community, and their universities are inside the mosques. Today, for Westerners, this is considered the greatest of the difficulties that prevent a frank dialogue with the Islamic world;

- The Islamic state is a slave state;
- The Islamic state [...] based its economy on slavery and the family on polygamy;
- The many restrictions that Muslim women are still subject to, despite all the differences from nation to nation, they have roots in that era and the exaltation of the military role of the man who travels through the Koran.

The prevailing point of view is timeless, there is often confusion between past and present, the immutability of Islam is sanctioned and it is said that even today divine and political law coincide, just as universities are located inside mosques. Also with regard to the issue of women, it is stated that women are still subject to restrictions, without saying anything about the nature of these restrictions, nor about the countries where, eventually, these restrictions are applied, nor the fact that in many countries these restrictions do not exist at all. The Arab-Muslim world is represented in a static and unchanged way. The same conception of culture is conceived in this sense, as a pond of impassable change or fusion: culture in this sense can only be imposed and overcome, or be suffered and make the defeated one disappear. There is no third way, in this vision, which foresees a constant change and adaptation of cultural processes. According to this view, the Arabisation of North Africa would have, indeed, totally removed the long period of Roman presence from the collective memory, habits and customs. The Arab-Muslim world, despite being the protagonist of a period of splendour (only partially recognised, as there is not the slightest reference to the transmission of the cultural heritage of ancient Greece or to prominent figures such as Avicenna or Averroè) has not adapted to the changes of modernity as it has not assumed the model of the secularity and universality of human rights (equality between man and woman).

The lack of contextualisation and the absolute generalisation about the Islam of yesterday and today, as well as the coincidence between state and religion and gender discrimination are the themes from which stereotypes could arise or be confirmed towards the Arab-Muslim world. The text also presents some objective errors, concerning:

- The alleged coincidence between religion and law in the “Islamic world”, between judges and imams;
- The alleged coincidence between secular and religious education (“Universities are located inside mosques”);
- The alleged restrictions to which “Muslim women” are subject even today.
- The textbook “Le voci della storia 2” is the only one of the two-year manuals, which deals with the topic concerning the Arab-Muslim world in a rich, “neutral” way, devoid of a simplistic and stereotypical image of it⁷.

⁷ With the partial exception regarding the subject of woman’s conditions.

Another element of criticality is the iconographic representation of migrants, who are portrayed as “needy”, on the “margins”, while they perform de-skilled jobs. For example, in the text “EcoGeo”, migrants from the southern hemisphere are stereotyped: while carrying a large number of bags and cartons (a contemporary variant of cardboard cases with which Italians emigrated in the past) or while carrying out marginal and precarious activities, such as the itinerant trade with “arranged” means and tools. In this sense the divergence about the representation of the immigrants of the “south” and those of the “north” of the world is emblematic. If with regard to the emigration from Western Europe the historical changes that have affected the migratory flows are highlighted, in particular with respect to the social categories that leave the country, compared to the emigrants from the developing countries, these changes and the heterogeneity about the routes, the specialisations, the destination countries chosen as well as those of origin are not highlighted. The “brain drain” is a phenomenon that not only involves Europe, but also developing countries. But the only current representation of non-European-western migrants is due to the precariousness of their paths: starting from the trip, for which they do not even own a suitcase, but boxes and envelopes, up to the settlement in the destination country, where they will be destined to stay on the margins: live in degraded suburbs and carry out the most humble jobs.

Another important subject is the Islamic terrorism. In all texts dealing with this subject, it’s not inserted within a paragraph on international terrorism, but within the chapter on globalization in one case (“EcoGeo” textbook), on today’s world (“Geografia. Territori e problemi” textbook) in another, and within a paragraph on religions in the world (manual “Geografia. Territori e problemi) in a last case. Although the subject is faced in an objective way, free from extreme simplifications and the ambiguity of the interventions by the West in Afghanistan and Iraq is partially expressed, it is striking that the only form of terrorism mentioned is the Islamist one. This tends to create an association between terrorism, as a phenomenon, and Islam. Another dangerous equation that the text could create, is to relate Islam, as a religion, to an Islamic fundamentalism. The fact, for example, that the subject of Islamic fundamentalism is included in a text, in the paragraph about religions in the world, reinforce this relation. It’s significant that if we speak of religious fundamentalism we don’t specify any different typology from the Islamic one. The image of an “Iranian Islamic fundamentalist who worshiped Ayatollah Khomeini at the end of the seventies”, always within the paragraph on religions in the world, serves as reinforcement.

Furthermore, the political and social causes of the phenomenon are not investigated, except for the general assumptions about the disparities in development:

Probably the war on terrorism requires forms of international cooperation on the informational level (the so-called intelligence) and, above all, that intervenes to heal those injustices that create the conditions in which hatred and religious fundamentalism find consensus, especially among the most disadvantaged populations (Tincati, Dell’Acqua 2014, 50).

With regard to the subject of North Africa and the Middle East, the representation

of such a vast and heterogeneous territory is traced back to some stereotype icons: the desert and the dromedaries on the iconographic background, from antiquity to today everything seems to be still and unchanged. In the text “Ambienti, popoli, idee” we say: «Muhammed’s preaching addresses a world, that of the Bedouins of Arabia, divided by centuries and bloody rivalries among the tribes and regulated by a rigid and primitive code of honour» (Sofri G., Sofri F. 2010, 312).

There is essentially a devaluing description of pre-Islamic society, with the use of terms such as “primitive”. Although it is recognised that the rebirth of medieval thought in the West is due to the Arab contribution, which gave a strong impetus to the birth and development in science, we immediately speak of “decadence”, from which until today it seems that Arab world is no longer able to get out of. Nothing is said about the current situation of the Arab countries and the differences between the various states. The point of view of the text is timeless: in fact they are driven away by historical changes that have affected the Arab-Muslim world. Even the images confirm this timeless and stereotypical vision: dromedaries, mosques, Mecca, veiled women in whole or in part, are the elements represented iconographically. With respect to today’s economic and social condition it is said: «The path to democracy is still slow and meets a lot of resistance. The economic conditions of the population are still quite backward and are at the origin of the many social conflicts within these countries [...] the result is that this region is in fact a powder keg, continuously lit by war» (Sofri G., Sofri F. 2010, 317).

The vision of the Arab world prevails as the site of incurable conflicts. There is talk of fanaticism, religious extremism of Islamic origin, as a confirmation of this vision. In the “Geografia. Territori e problemi” a paragraph is dedicated to the Arab-Muslim world within unit 7 “Men and cultures in movement”. The description of Islam is simplistic and homogenised. It is said, for example: «Thus began an intense preaching based on faith in a unique god to which one must submit, and the imminence of a divine judgment that would punish the wicked and reward the good» (Iarrera, Pilotti 2010, 110). The idea that the text implies is that of a strict and intransigent religion. The presumed coincidence between religion and the law decreed as regards the Islamic world it’s also ratified: «In many Islamic nations, unlike what happens in Western cultures, there is no distinction between the religious sphere and the social-political dimension of human action» (Iarrera, Pilotti 2010, 110).

If it is undoubtedly true that some Muslim countries apply religious precepts to regulate political and social life, it is equally true that there are others where it is not and where the lifestyle, habits, and customs are “westernised”. To omit this means to place the Arab-Muslim world in the pre modern age, consecrating an erroneous and distorted vision. The Arab-Muslim world, in fact, is not attributable to Saudi Arabia, or even to the Gulf countries, but it is part of countries where the lifestyle is strongly “secular”, as may be the case with Turkey or the Tunisia and, in part, Morocco. Even within the most intransigent countries, social practice is, in reality, far more complex than it may appear to an external observer who looks with superficiality. The heterogeneity of the social component and of the values, norms, customs, ideologies, beliefs,

is an element that unites all societies equally, without exception for the Arab-Muslim ones. Omitting the elements of complexity of the different Arab countries is equivalent to shaping a fossilised, timeless image of them, which can only increase the existing stereotypes. Compared to polygamy it's assumed that it is practicable in all Muslim countries, but this is not the case: in some of them it is prohibited by law (Turkey and Tunisia), while in others, although not prohibited, it is bound to the consent of the first wife who must declare her agreement before a notary (Morocco and Algeria). Finally, the last sentence of the text is emblematic:

Since the Industrial Revolution Islamic culture has gradually lost its hegemony and has been overshadowed by the winning culture of the industrialized and technologically advanced West, a bearer of behavior patterns and political values contrasting with the Islamic tradition. Precisely the unresolved relationship between Western modernity and the varied Islamic world – divided between those who are willing to make part of the culture of industrial civilization and those who reject it entirely, fearing the end of Islam – is the basis of many conflicts and tensions that characterize our time (Iarrera, Pilotti 2010, 111).

There is no room for the construction of a common project in the latter narration because the differences seem to be irreducible and unbridgeable between the two worlds, Western and Arabic. The manual “Il segno della storia 1” supports the thesis of the historian Henri Pirenne, expressly citing:

Pirenne thought that from a political and economic point of view only the rapid and unexpected Arab advance had marked the end of the Mediterranean unity that had characterized the whole of the ancient age. As a result of this event, the political and economical barycentre of Europe would have moved from the Mediterranean to the central-northern regions, which became the real driving force of the Carolingian Empire.

This thesis is undoubtedly not universal, because if there was an interpenetration between the Roman and the Germanic world, the same would have happened with respect to the Arab-Muslim world. To define Arab expansionism as the end of the cultural unity of the Mediterranean means presupposing a line of continuity that from ancient Greece and from Rome to today, means excluding the southern shore of the Mediterranean from the definition of Europe, which is located for the most part in the Mediterranean.

The Tunisian manuals and the Mediterranean as a dominant identity axis

Compared to the openness of Diversity in programs and manuals, from several sources (Abbassi 2009; Ayachi 2010; Ayachi 2015) it has been highlighted how the Tunisian manuals are open to the other. It is undoubtedly true that the space reserved for diversity, especially if it comes to Europe, is very substantial. The history manuals, in particular, deal in detail with the history of Europe, which, on the contrary, as already previously ascertained, does not happen in the European manuals with respect to the

history of the Arab-Muslim world, of which there very little and homogenised talk. Inspector Néjib Abdelmoula, General Coordinator of the study commission for the analysis and evaluation of the Tunisian school manuals and programs at the Arab Institute of Human Rights, involved in the national dialogue for reform, has long been involved in the manuals and the presence of human rights concepts in textbooks. Within the latter survey, he collaborated with the German institute Georg Eckert. He states:

The Georg Eckert Institute is essentially interested in the image of the diversity in school textbooks, and certainly it was interested in the representation of diversity in Tunisian textbooks. I made a speech about the presence of human rights concepts in Tunisian programs from 1959 until 2002. Everyone was surprised and said that the revolution in Tunisia was possible thanks to the school that, step by step, put the bases for what concerns human rights ... I believe that this is the strength of the Tunisian school⁸.

The subjects of historical interest to be treated in the handbooks are often the subject of controversy between political parties or representatives of religious or secular institutions. In particular, the Islamist party Ennahda considering the Tunisian textbooks as excessively inclined to the narration of Western history insists that the latter be replaced with the history of the Arab world, as well as the request to completely Arabise the school curricula, a request that provoked a strong reaction of civil society which, on the contrary, is fully recognised in the bilingual and pluralist model. The inspector Abdelhmid Ben Sliman says:

Whether we are talking about the the manuals of the past or the current ones, there is always a positive image of the West. The Tunisian student studies Europe and its great transformations, the enlightenment, the role of Europeans in global developments and changes. Even the occupation of Tunisia or other countries is treated in a rather neutral way, there is no negative image of the occupier. The Tunisian student is urged to become an open citizen. The fundamentalists, and those of the Right-wing, accuse the school programs and textbooks of being pro-Western, they want to speak above all about the Caliphate, the East, and the Middle East. There is also the problem of the Arabization. They want to impose mono-linguistic teaching in Arabic. We have refused and we have organized demonstrations before the constituent assembly, recalling that in history Tunisia has always been open to Mediterranean languages and teaching was multilingual even before the French colonization.

With respect to the present research, from an initial quantitative analysis of the corpus of textbooks, what is striking is the space that Western European history occupies in the Tunisian manuals. This is a considerable space, ranging between half and two-thirds of global content. If in the history manual of the third year of the scientific sector, Western European history is spoken of in 154 pages out of 276, and in that of the second year in 135 pages out of 200, in the geography manual of the third year of the scientific sector we speak about it in a good 181 pages out of 295. Beyond the quantitative aspect, certainly to be taken into consideration, it is the actual textual analysis that offers important clues. There are many topics dealt with regarding

⁸ Interview realized on October 6th 2015 at the head quarters of "Centre de recherche pédagogique".

European-Western history. The first thematic axis, related to antiquity, concerns the civilisations that have developed around the Mediterranean: Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians. The Mediterranean dimension appears central, as it represents a sort of red thread from which these civilisations developed. The main argument appears to be linked to the description of the Mediterranean as the cradle of civilisation and progress. The approach is inclusive, as it emerges the idea that all civilisations are the result of mutual exchange and interaction, as can be seen from the following sentences:

Although Islam and Arab heritage were the basis of Arab-Muslim civilization, this civilization has benefited from numerous contributions from Greek and Persian civilization

The coexistence of the Arabs with the Latin nations during the Middle Ages involved clashes, but also cultural exchanges and ideas, having generated mutual influences on both sides and the transfer of cultural heritage from East to West. This enrichment operation between the two Arab and European cultures is visible in Sicily and in Andalusia above all (*Livre d'histoire de 2^{ème} année secondaire*, 2014, 207271).

The historical narrative, in a dynamic perspective marked by change, is placed within historical time. The relationship with Europe is linked to the shared construction of a cultural project which, from ancient times, thanks to Arab-Muslim mediation, is situated in modernity.

Besides emphasising the dynamic perspective with which we talk about otherness, worthy of note is the perspective from which the other is told. The treatment of European history, in fact, takes place from the European point of view. The quotations from the French manuals or from European-Western authors are examples of this. The manual, which dates back to 1969, before the reforms of 1991 and 2002, is far from the representation of Tunisia as a bridge between East and West, reaching out to the Mediterranean and having an identity that has been forged and consolidated starting from the Mediterranean specificity. Certainly, the day after independence, France remains to be the reference to the historical narration. As shown by the historian Abbassi (2009) in the years following independence, the teaching staff was largely made up of French and even the teaching of history was perpetuated on the model of historical story telling in vogue during the protectorate. The manual analysed, dating back to 1969, in this sense constitutes proof: still in French, it is characterised by the aseptic nature of the historical narrative. Although the links, the exchanges and the interactions between the two worlds, Arab and Western, are not lacking, we are far from the perspective of the interconnection present in the most recent manuals in which the Mediterranean is at the centre of the historical narration. Here we have rather European history, with a list of dates, events and facts quite sterile, on the one hand, and the history of the Arab world, with events, dates, facts, on the other.

The history manual analysed in the fourth year of 1986 represents a faithful reproduction of that of 1969. After almost twenty years the contents have remained unchanged, although the programs have been Arabicised from a linguistic point of view: it changes the language, therefore, but not the content. Even the structure of the

text remains almost unchanged: density of the text, which develops in a reasoned and discursive, didactically linear, little involvement of the learner, deducible from the scarcity of the exercises and the mere verification of knowledge and understanding. The aspects that most differentiate the manuals analysed so far, the most recent ones of the first and second year of secondary school published in 2013 and 2014 and those of the oldest date both adopted the fourth year of secondary school dating back to the years 1969 and 1986 are:

- Structural difference of the textual corpus: while the manuals of 1969 and 1986 develop the themes related to the historical narration in a discursive way, using a descriptive and argumentative method, the most recent manuals are structurally constituted by citations of authors' texts and exercises in which the learner is asked to develop and actively produce historical-geographical knowledge. The argumentative part is almost minimal and consists of the conclusions of each chapter;
- Difference in the active / passive role of the learner: while the manuals of '69 and '86 reserve a passive role for the learner, simple assimilation of the contents, the most recent manuals conceive the role of the student as active in building the precisely historical-geographical knowledge. The exercises go in this direction to the extent that they ask the student to deepen themes through the use of multiple sources, including texts and works by authors, internet, media. Starting from the quotations, therefore, the student has to produce meanings, to link heterogeneous phenomena, something that, instead, does not happen with the oldest manual, in which the simple acquisition of contents is evaluated;
- Difference of identity anchorage: if in the manuals of '69 and '86 there are no links, exchanges and interactions between the Arab-Muslim world and the Western European world, we are far from the perspective of the interconnection present in the more recent manuals in which the Mediterranean appears at the center of the historical narration. In the former we have rather European history, with a list of dates, events and quite sterile facts and the history of the Arab world, with events, dates, facts. On the basis of the interpretation and the historical paradigm adopted, the manuals no longer in use conceive the Mediterranean as a geo-historical space that can unite or divide, depending on the period and vicissitudes, and in any case, are not at the center of the descriptive and argumentative approach. The most recent textbooks start from the Mediterranean for the construction of a certainly plural identity anchor, but which can not ignore this dimension, which becomes ontologically linked to one's sense of belonging;
- Difference in the iconographic apparatus: the images in the manuals of '69 and '86 are quantitatively small compared to those of the most recent manuals (sixty-six images in the 1969 manual, more than two hundred in that of 2014). Moreover, while the former do not recall the attention of the student in a changing way, as, in addition to often being in black and white, these are images that tend to complete the textual part (architectural motifs, geographic maps, miniatures, frescoes), having a predominantly exemplary function, the latter, on the contrary, are very attrac-

tive and have a function not only ornamental and decorative, but also didactic: the student is asked to produce knowledge and interpretations just starting from the suggestions produced through the images. The element that unites, however, old and new manuals is the lack in both of iconographic references to the contemporary, through links between yesterday and today. As will be argued in the next paragraph, however, the iconography quality of the second year manual published in 2014, for example, is not a general element to all the Tunisian textbooks analysed.

The representation of Europe is linked to the historical event and the period considered, and changes with the changing of historical events: there is not a monolithic and unchangeable representation of a generic “Europe”, but we talk about the peculiarities of each country, through a dynamic representation that highlights rivalries between states, power games, economic interests, in a complex perspective. Moreover, there is not a demarcation line that sanctions European history as split from that of Tunisia. On the contrary, continuity and mutual influence are reiterated, especially from Europe to Tunisia. The economic, political, social and cultural changes that took place in Europe during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries greatly influenced the history of the entire world.

If identity is delineated in Tunisia from adherence to nationalism, nonetheless, this identity on a national basis incorporates the pre-Islamic past by placing it precisely in the Mediterranean. As if to say: there is a constant dialectic relationship between the two belonging. The adherence to the Mediterranean dimension is part of a more general and multifaceted “Tunisian identity”, with specific features:

Selon cette conception développée dans la Loi de juillet 1991, la Tunisie, à travers son histoire trois fois millénaire, est présente et agissante, autant par son islamité et son arabité que par son africanité, sa berbéricité, sa romanité, son fond carthaginois, et son interaction avec les civilisations méditerranéennes. Cette conception est fondée sur la reconnaissance d'une identité propre à la Tunisie et sur la recherche des références intellectuelles et des idéaux inhérents à son riche patrimoine de civilisation, au fil des époques (Jemaï 1998, 6).

The Tunisian identity construction is, therefore, very complex and is placed along a time axis of three thousand years, precisely starting from the intersection of the three continents in their constant interaction with the Mediterranean. It is the reform of the educational system of 1991 made by Minister Charfi to mark a watershed moment compared to the past, as an advocate of an epistemological rupture with the antecedent perspective of the '70s and '80s in which the ministerial recommendations openly claimed the Arab identity- Muslim (Jemaï 1998, 13). The role of the school in the forging the new “Tunisian” identity is therefore evident starting from the 1991 reform. It is about enhancing the pre-Islamic past of the country, considering the Berber, Punic-Carthaginian, Roman heritage, as an indispensable part of its history and, consequently, of its cultural heritage. On the contrary, it becomes a sign of a reductionist amputation to place the Tunisian identity exclusively in the Arab-Muslim world, starting from the seventh century AD. There are many historical actors and

characters that should be remembered as “fathers” or forerunners of the modern nation, who laid the foundations of today’s cultural identity: Annibale, Sant’Agostino, Al Kahina, to name but a few.

Conclusions

If Tunisia has broadly incorporated the “Mediterranean” into its narrative identity, considering itself as a bridge between East and West, between Africa and Europe – also with the aim of defining and creating its own national specificity, thus distancing itself from the rest of the the Arab world and the wave of re-Islamisation in vogue; Europe, on the contrary, married the thesis of the historian Henri Pirenne, according to which the Arabisation of the Mediterranean during the medieval period would have sanctioned an irreconcilable rupture between the north bank and south shore of what until recently was the “Mare Nostrum”. This thesis, more or less emphasised or openly supported by Italian textbooks, has led to the removal of the historical heritage shared between the Arab-Muslim world and the Mediterranean Europe. Not only is the prospect of enrichment lost in the exchange and ineluctability of the processes of contamination about the construction of cultures, always in movement and in transformation, but the possibility of dialogue and common design construction, in the name of specificity, is compromised of their shared affiliations, certainly not marginal.

Looking at the Arab-Muslim world under the lens of exchange and shared heritage, means placing it and incorporating it fully into the construction of the Mediterranean identity, from which we can not ignore. This desired re-reading would allow on the one hand to recover part of its historical heritage, building bridges to all the Mediterranean countries, in the name of a common belonging, even with national differences, and on the other, to sanction the opening of a fruitful dialogue with the Arab-Muslim world, in particular by offering the opportunity for Arabs living in Europe to recognise the common roots and influences that have contributed to the development of modernity. The construction of such a profitable project can not but be consumed among the school desks, where the bases of national belonging are laid. Textbooks in this sense represent a valuable tool capable of “incarnating” and becoming the spokesman of that dialogue so praised by the regulations. But is it really like that? As has been attempted to demonstrate, Italian textbooks, compared to the representation of the Arab-Muslim world, do not respect the rules on interculture, as they convey an extremely simplified, stereotyped and homogenised image of the other, thus risking to reinforce the preconceptions widely spread to Muslims and preventing young Muslims in Europe from recognising themselves as Europeans. These considerations apply to the majority of the manuals analysed, except for some rare exceptions. In fact, if in general the presence of good practices, such as cultural decentralisation exercises, has been found, these are still sporadic examples, not a organised structure outlined upstream, where interculturality is at the basis of the overall design of the manual.

The subject is different with regard to the Tunisian manuals. In addition to having found that on a quantitative level the space that Europe / the West occupies in Tunisian programs is substantial, it is the qualitative data that surprises: the historical story about the European history is objective and differentiated, the main changes are highlighted. They have interested the various European countries in a dynamic perspective, the interconnection of social phenomena at the base of human history prevails as a key to the reading of historical facts. What is the possibility that “Mediterraneanness” should be incorporated as an essential aspect of our identity in the historical narrative? The numerically significant presence of Arab-Muslim students will be recognised in the direction of greater openness also regarding the revision of the curriculum? Will the school succeed in achieving that “knowing how to live together”, of which Delors spoke also starting from the curricula and the knowledge? These are all questions that remain open, which require an urgent commitment towards the recognition of the alarming Islamophobic rhetoric spread in European societies, including Italy. The school, in particular, has the primary responsibility to recuperate the point and the deep meaning of inclusive practice, where the stigmatising representations towards the Arab-Muslim world would have, among the many consequences, that of provoking a “symbolic marginalisation” of Muslim students, preventing and hindering the concrete possibility that they recognise themselves in a model of “European” citizenship, a citizenship that includes, but not too much.

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