


THE “STORMS AND TURNS OF HISTORY”: EMIGRATION NARRATIVES IN THE 20TH CENTURY IN POLISH AND HUNGARIAN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

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ABSTRACT

History textbooks are special sources, reflecting on the era in which they were published. They play a role in formation of national identity and shape students' perception of the past and their relation to the present. Central Europe's recent media have given considerable attention to emigration. How do history textbooks narrate migration? This paper explores how the current history textbooks in Hungary and Poland narrate mass emigration. Findings reveal several reasons for the mass migration named by the textbooks, which include a desire for improved economic and living conditions. The treatment of emigrant groups as transnational populations in both Hungarian and Polish narratives suggests that they are separated from their home country's national history and in a way 'step out' of its flow – however, the narratives appearing in the Polish textbooks deal with the overall neglected groups in greater depth. In addition, this research explores how these textbooks treat these transnational populations.

Keywords: history textbooks, emigration, memory politics, Poland, Hungary.

INTRODUCTION

Emigration takes a prominent role both in the public and academic discourses. In the presented research the focus was placed on an indirect way of portraying this phenomenon – in history schoolbooks – concerning a limited time period of the 20th century, regarding mass and willing emigration. The chosen two Central Eastern European countries are Poland and Hungary, so the analysis would also include a transnational comparison, although remaining within the same region. An initial factor that led me to the topic was the more and more centralized production of history schoolbooks in Hungary, a debatable topic that can bear its dangers, but definitely result in examining the content, which is being put out, closely. The question that my research wishes to answer is in what way do history schoolbooks portray Polish

and Hungarian communities who willingly left their home country within the 20th century? Further questions were: are they given (enough) space and attention to? Are they portrayed from a one-sided or rather comprehensive way? Are they alienated and treated as the ‘others’ as soon as they leave the country? Based on the school-books do we know anything about their further faith in the receiving country hence are they treated as continuing part of the country and its history or they “step out” from it? These are the main questions that my research wished to find answers for by examining history schoolbooks of current use in the two above mentioned countries. The lack of space allows me to elaborate in detail on one of the emigrational waves, emigration on the turn of the nineteenth and 20th century, on which I will exemplify my research methodology, although in the closing section I include the concluding points drawn from the whole of the research.

THE SOURCES

Regarding the sources, the aim was to pick schoolbook families and publishers which are the most highly used and distributed within the two countries – therefore most likely show tendencies and directions. In all cases I wished to target the highest level of general education, the highest classes in high school – directed toward the 16-18-year-olds.

Among the Hungarian ones two were picked by the eventually same source – the “state publisher,” the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development (Oktatási- és Fejlesztőintézet) which has a general publication and an experimental one. Contrary to the initial intentions, to be able to choose at least one alternative, the two carry quite similar content when it comes to the topic examined. The third publication appears as a contrast from an independent publisher (Műszaki Könyvkiadó).¹ The official direction is the centralized use of the first two schoolbook line – which appear in the 2017/2018 official schoolbook catalogue, and the latter one was published after the 2012 regulations on schoolbook publishing.²

When it came to the Polish schoolbooks the selection was based on the schoolbook catalogue, issued in 2012³ and includes major publishers as such: Nowa Era, Wydawnictwo Pedagogiczne OPERON, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne. To keep a similar age-target as for the Hungarian schoolbooks the 2 last books created for the 2nd and 3rd year of high school was examined, as well as one which is written

¹ T.F. Sárhegyi, “System Change in Secondary School History Schoolbooks,” *Történelemtanítás* 2017, p. 23.

² 2017/2018. *tanévi köznevelési tankönyvjegyzék*, https://www.oktatas.hu/koznevelés/tankonyv/jegyzek_es_rendeles/tankonyvjegyzek_2017_2018 [accessed: February 14, 2020].

³ *Wykazy podręczników*, https://podreczniki.men.gov.pl/dopuszczone_lista3.php [accessed: February 14, 2020].

for those who do not wish to study history on an advanced or extended level, therefore they study it for only one year – and only the 20th century.

SCHOOLBOOK RESEARCH

The greater discipline that defined my research was the relatively newly emerged study of schoolbooks: textbook- or schoolbook research. The field, which came into being after the World Wars, aimed to improve and “clean” textbook content for the sake of international peace and cooperation. Since then the discipline branched out to several different directions, each school subjects claiming its own textbook researchers – who are usually originate from that certain field of studies e.g. history, geography. The center of the research is the Georg Eckert Institute, located in Braunschweig, Germany. The main tree objectives regard pedagogical, academic and political aspects of schoolbooks – form which my research deals with the political aspect primarily, however it’s not possible (and I do not wish) to make a clear cut, and not touch upon the other areas as well.

One of the newly established directions include dealing with questions of constructing and reconstructing national identities or authorization when it comes to publication. I wished to progress my research based on this specific direction as history schoolbooks bear some special features within the whole of the research field. The collective memory of a modern nations is in continuity through different forms of practices and canons. Within history education pupils are obliged to listen and learn the narrative exposed to them. Obviously, this is not a 2-dimensional equation and in history education the teacher bears a great role in conveying, yet recent studies show that in our technological time still schoolbooks are the primary channels of information.⁴ The greatly centralized position of history schoolbook production in Hungary, as per mentioned, was one of the initial phenomena led me to this project. I treat history schoolbooks as a part of the national canon.

METHOD

The research method was both qualitative and quantitative. The 5-dimension model of Katalin Morgan and Elizabeth Henning (2013) provided a base, a leading line for my analysis, to which I added two of my own aspects: the wider context (Chapter, subchapter) and the quantity of the schoolbook content (in which case the

⁴ E. Fuchs, “Current Trends in History and Social Studies Textbook Research,” *Journal of International Cooperation in Education* 2011, vol. 14, nr 2, pp. 14–37; A. Assmann, “Transformations between History and Memory,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 2008, nr 1, p. 75.

lack of content is also telling). Within the 5 dimensions there are groups of questions which the researcher asks when encounters relevant topics within schoolbooks.

Just to mention a few to each dimension in order to understand the idea of the method, for dimension A the questions would be the following: “What are the discipline-specific, ‘scientific’ areas of knowledge that the textbooks mediate and how do they do it?”

For Dimension B: “This is sometimes discussed in terms of a memory being ‘experience-far’ or ‘experience-near’ ... allowing a reader to have a ‘being there’ experience or reporting on events in ways that create a wide distance between readers and events.”

For Dimension C: “The social consequences of knowledge consumption might be when history facts may be presented in a specific/biased fashion, and when observable ideological positions are espoused by the authors.”

For Dimension D: “To understand story structures as the fundamental values and norms which underlie a story. Who are the characters, and do they develop authentically, or do they remain ‘flat’, serving a specific purpose of the template? What are the narrative gaps? Are there any counter-narratives?” This is going to be the dimension I put the most focus on as my initial question was regarding how the people the émigré is portrayed.

For Dimension E: “The main aim with this dimension was to find out how the sign-makers, the authors, position themselves in the mediation of history through the use of images and related captions and representation in the language text.” So, any type of graphic image, visual aid – pictures, graphs, statistics, maps, caricatures etc.⁵

Equally important, in several cases merited, it was not feasible to apply all dimensions.

THEMATICAL APPROACH AS A POINT OF COMPARISON

I followed a thematic approach, meaning that I examined the same wave of emigration within the Hungarian and within the Polish books and then compare the general conveyed picture between the two countries’ schoolbooks. My initial aim was to compare the same waves of emigration, however this intersection only happened in two cases – in the case of the emigration on the turn of the 19th and 20th century – the first wave I examined in both cases, and in the case of the last one, following 1989. This does not mean that the analysis of the rest of the waves could not be considered successful as I was more interested in the way, the manner emigrant groups are being portrayed. The last wave being looked at is the most recent one – after 1989 and eventually 2004 with the EU seizure. Interestingly the Hungarian books reach almost up until today, while the Polish ones finish discussing History at 2004.

⁵ K. Morgan, E. Henning, “Designing a Tool for History Textbook Analysis,” *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 2013, vol. 14, nr 1, pp. 1–21.

As to present my findings I decided on one of the one common, and well comparable example, an intersection of the emigrational wave on the turn of the 19th and 20th century.

THE FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH EXEMPLIFIED ON A POLISH AND HUNGARIAN EXAMPLE

For this specific part 5 sources have been used. First, I would like to compare the Hungarian and Polish sources within themselves and after that more generally with each other.

As for the Hungarian ones I examined the content of 3 different schoolbooks from the 2 schoolbook families, one family being the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development's two copy the “experimental” edition and the regular one. As well as the copy of the independent publisher, the Műszaki Könyvkiadó. Interestingly the independent and the regular copy by the state publisher bears the same editor (Miklós Száray), whilst the content being quite different. From the Polish side I set against each other the Nowa Era and the Operon publications and finally compared the overall picture of the Hungarian and Polish content. From all 5 I aimed to include extracts which show the distinct qualities of each.

EMIGRATION IN HUNGARIAN SCHOOLBOOKS

The first extract from the state publisher's regular publication, the second one from the experimental edition. The experimental edition actually contains all from the regular edition as well, but more and I included here the additional parts (self-translated).

From the 1890s Hungary joined the great European emigrational wave as well: up until the First World War, nearly 1.5 million left the country. The main target was the USA. They emigrated mostly from the areas of population growth and poor agricultural conditions such as Upper Hungary or Subcarpathian region.⁶

Due to the fact that living conditions and job opportunities did not improve on the turn of the century, the agrarian society began to emigrate to the United States. The emigration wave affected nearly 2 million people. People who set out wished to use the money they gathered in a few years to pay off their debts or buy lands at their home country. In the beginning of the 20th

⁶ M. Száray, *Történelem 11.*, Oktatási és Fejlesztő Intézet, Budapest 2016, pp. 96–98.

century, however, more and more people settled in America permanently and the mass emigration of families begun.⁷

The third extract was taken from the independent, Műszaki publisher.

Emigration was a phenomenon closely related to the demographic explosion . . . A great proportion of the émigré groups did not leave the county with the intention of final settlement. The emigrant men wished to collect money for the well-being of their family and to purchase land on their return. Majority of them finally decided to move his whole family out and settled, but still many returned. Their successes and stories about the conditions in the USA increased the enthusiasm to travel abroad in some regions of the country.⁸

All extracts appear in the context of demographic changes within the period of Dualism, however, the latter two takes 3-times the place of the first one. The characters in the first case melted into a homogenous group of poor agricultural workers. In the second two cases variation appears, but most strongly in the case of the third one. The characters are not schematized, we got to know their initial intentions and final resolutions. Their story develops authentically – touching upon not only the narrative dimension, but on the one related to learning empathy as well. The group is not distanced, portrayed as the *other*. The first two are followed by several visual aids – which from several aspects make up for the lack of information in the textual content. A picture of a family waiting to board, and the task stated below – asking pupils to consider the social status and its generality in the case of all the emigrants at the time. Empathy and the individual learning aspect actively appear. The afterlife of the emigrant groups however is unknown. The second two extracts are giving a two-choice variation: stayed or went back home, yet we don't know much about the further faith of either of them. The scarce presence makes the relevance of the topic greatly questionable, the authenticity of the conveyed picture in the second case, however, proves that there is room and possibility to create variation, “near-memory” experience within the limited context of schoolbooks.

EMIGRATION IN POLISH SCHOOLBOOKS

The two Polish sources I got to analyze have different perspectives as well, both appear within the chapter regarding Polish territories in the second half of the 19th century and both take up around half a page (self-translated).

⁷ P. Borhegyi, R. Paksa, *Történelem II. tankönyv*, Oktatási és Fejlesztő Intézet, Kísérleti tankönyv, 2016. p. 74.

⁸ M. Száray, *Történelem III. középszintű számára*, Műszaki Könyvkiadó, Budapest 2014, pp. 266–267.

. . . particular to the United States, where strong Polish diasporas were established (including Chicago and New York) . . . The peak of the emigrational movement to the promised land (as the USA was referred at) was in the 1890s.⁹

By time nearly 30% migrated back to the country. They had a great impact on the mentality of the environment they came from, especially non rural areas . . . They were

characterized by better knowledge of new customs and achievements of modern civilization they also better understood their social and national circumstances.¹⁰

The Nowa Era publication mentions emigration on the Galician territories, giving a well-reasoned background for leaving the homeland. The expressions “promised land” (regarding the USA) and “economic emigration” appear in the text, which raised my attention greatly. The textbook provides information about the further faith of the émigré who settled by the first wave in Brazil, but more importantly by the second wave in the USA, in Chicago and New York – and established strong Polish communities. A distance to which Hungarian examples have not yet followed the Hungarian communities. Content-wise the Operon publisher’s book carries quite the same information but slightly more. The author points at Chicago as the main target city and describes within its Polish cultural life that before the First World War 15 Polish newspaper and 60 Periodical were in use. This extent of information hasn’t appeared in either of the so far examined schoolbooks. Another point from which this volume adds to the rest – is the described effects of the returnees. It points out that 30% returned and their experiences abroad contributed to the mentality change in rural areas, as they got to know foreign customs and lifestyles – they achieved better understanding of their social and national role. I did not encounter such positively portrayed result within the examined topic.

CONCLUSION

After a lengthy introduction by which wishing to base my research on strong foundations and providing some concrete examples of my source-base and methodology I reached the uneasy part of drawing an overall conclusion of my work. It is not simple to draw a more in-depth conclusions from such direct texts, I would also not like to draw misleading, too general conclusions as this is only small part of a greater picture, of a greater phenomenon introduced in the first part of the paper. Therefore, I would like to reflect on the whole of my research stating conclusions within the spectrum of it and not beyond. Generally, I observed that even within the limited space given in schoolbooks there is a possibility to include variations. I was able to observe the same phenomenon, emigration, from different perspectives, in different

⁹ P. Galik, *Zrozumieć przeszłość. Lata 1815–1939. Podręcznik do historii dla liceum ogólnokształcącego i technikum. Zakres rozszerzony. Część 3*, Nowa Era Spółka z o.o. 2014. pp. 256–257.

¹⁰ J. Ustrzycki, M. Ustrzycki, *Historia 2. Część 2. Zakres rozszerzony. Podręcznik dla szkół ponadgimnazjalnych*, Wydawnictwo Pedagogiczne OPERON Sp. z o.o., Gdynia 2016, pp. 237–238.

adaptations. When it comes to Poland and Hungary, Polish schoolbooks portray in a more descriptive way, they follow up the life of their émigrés further, however time to time show thematic differences within the 20th century, one publisher includes a wave while the other one does not even mention it. Hungarian schoolbooks generally portray the same waves, however in a much less detailed way. The life of the émigré groups is overlooked, neglected, in a way they got lost in the mass of history. I would like to close with a section from the schoolbook meant for the 12th grade, the senior year of Hungarian high schoolers by the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development which uses interesting language when it comes to émigré groups – such as: storms of history, drifted and scattered. The vague phrasing exemplifies how the examined group is generally talked about.

“The storms and turns of history drifted approximately 5 million Hungarians beyond national borders. Around 3 million is living in the Carpathian-basin, 2 million scattered around in several countries of the World. The biggest communities are living in the USA and Israel.”

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