

Othering and the construction of the West: The description of two historical events in Finnish school textbooks

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The initial core values stated in the Finnish curriculum are democracy, human rights and equality. Taking them seriously means respecting the equal value of all human beings and challenging prejudiced conceptions, as opposed to constructing Westerners as superior to other people. The article uses discourse analysis theory to examine othering and the construction of the West in history textbook articulations using two events as cases. The Ancient Greek battle of Thermopylae is described as the first battle for Western values. 2500 years later, in the descriptions of the events of 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, there is a similar discursive approach to the war, defending Western values. The superiority of the West is constructed by describing Western lives as more valuable (grievable) than others and by essentially connecting the West with good values while hiding Western violence. Furthermore, the construction of Muslims or Arabs as the essential enemy of the West is explored. Overall in the examined textbook cases, the West stands for only good values. Western violence is hidden and prejudiced attitudes towards Muslims are visible. A critical literacy approach is needed to examine and challenge this hegemony.

In Finland, the underlying values guiding the comprehensive school are human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability, and the endorsement of multiculturalism (National board of education, 2004). Taking these core values seriously means promoting a world-view where all lives are equally valuable, not dividing the world into “us” and “them”, where Westerners are more valuable than others. But what does it mean to talk about human rights, democracy and equality as guiding principles for education? The concept of cosmopolitanism in education seems to suggest an answer. According to Appiah (2006, p. xv), two ideas are central to the notion of cosmopolitanism. The first one is that we have obligations to people other than just our relatives, friends and compatriots. Secondly, it means taking the particular value of all human lives seriously. Appiah represents a normative perspective of cosmopolitanism (Strand, 2009, p. 230), which is non-confrontational and is in agreement with Nussbaum’s humanistic idea of cosmopolitan education as learning first of all to be world citizens instead of patriots (Nussbaum, 1994). A cosmopolitan attitude to education can be seen as forcing us to recognize our own subjectivity and how it affects our conceptions. In practice, this could imply suspending judgment about people instead of immediately falling back on prejudiced conceptions (Mansikka & Holm, 2011).

However, the concept of cosmopolitanism needs to be looked at critically. According to Mignolo (2000, p. 744), the link between values such as human rights and democracy and the understanding of cosmopolitanism should not be taken for granted as a blueprint, but as a starting point for a critical discussion. There is a risk of cosmopolitanism being yet another concept forced upon the world from the West. Since cosmopolitanism is rooted in the same legacy as European imperialism with all its violent crimes, it needs to be de-colonized, basing itself in the pluriversity of the world (Mignolo, 2010). Sharon Todd suggests a more critical approach to cosmopolitan education than Nussbaum’s. If cosmopolitanism in education means cultivating a shared humanity embedded in goodness, there is a risk that antagonisms and

violence, other parts of what is human, are not faced. Cosmopolitan education based on universalism disguises the complexities of pluralism and social relations (Todd, 2008; 2010).

The debate around cosmopolitan education, both in terms of its theoretical basis and its practical consequences, provides a platform for examining what core values such as human rights, democracy and equality mean as guiding principles for education. In this article, I look more specifically at how Finnish history textbooks construct Westernness, thereby othering non-Westerners. I approach the phenomena of othering and constructing Westernness through the description of two historical battles – the Greek-Persian battle of Thermopylae, which in the textbooks serves as a founding battle for the “West”, and the most recent historical events of the 9/11 attacks and the following wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which are often referred to as a struggle for “Western values”. Both battles are located far from the current Finnish context, but they make a difference for the construction of “us” as Westerners in the history textbooks. Through a discourse analysis of the books, I examine how and to what extent this othering and construction of Westernness is carried out.

Westernness, othering and ungrievable lives

What is considered worth knowing in school subjects? The field of curriculum studies focuses on questions such as what is selected as knowledge, how it is organized in categories and whose knowledge is valued. In addition, according to Popkewitz, curriculum studies should challenge the traditional foundations of the subjects (Popkewitz, 2011). These challenges are important to explore, considering the extent to which we organize our thinking about schools, both epistemologically and practically, upon assumptions about school subjects as ready-made categories with contents consisting of seemingly unbiased information. In textbooks, the content is often presented as stable knowledge even though scientists continuously involve themselves in struggles to determine what is considered wrong and right (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 115). The political implications of textbooks cannot be overlooked. History education can promote either conflictual relations or peaceful interaction between the self and others (Dorschner & Sherlock 2007).

The question of what schools should teach is related to values and self-image. Since curricula are often nationwide documents, nation-building and the construction of national community are often visible. Besides geography, which is closely tied to teaching a world-view (see Schmidt, 2010), history teaching can influence the images of “us” and of others. In Finland, Mietola (2001) has studied the concept of difference in school textbooks and noted that Finland is portrayed as a model country for equality and tolerance while racism is ignored. Anssi Paasi has studied Finnish school textbooks from the angle of nation-building and noted that both history and geography books have been used to construct a national identity, defining a national “us” (Paasi, 1998). What I am interested in, however, is the construction of a wider community, that of the “West”. Bernadette Baker points to the power of the trilogy of West, Science and Nation as interlinked with establishing what is worth knowing. The trilogy limits not just ways of thinking, but also social practices and the building of institutions (Baker, 2010, p. 230).

The focus of my research is how the West is constructed in the context of Finnish education. I use the term *othering*, a concept stemming from the postcolonial tradition with Edward Said (1978) and Frantz Fanon (1961). Othering is here seen particularly as constructing a division between the “West and the Rest”. The discourse of the West and the Rest (Hall, 1992) is an idea that has been constitutional for the development of Europe. Othering is therefore always linked to a construction of the self, in this case the construction of “Westernness”. The West does not primarily consist of ideas about geography and place, but of something different (as

visible in the concept “to become westernized”). The division between an “us” and a “them” has been created deliberately in the making of a European or Western identity as superior (Hall, 1992; Balibar, 2009). While Hall refers to the whole non-European world as the Rest, Edward Said focuses on the Arab and Muslim world and coins the concept of Orientalism. In order to construct the image of the self as enlightened, rational and dynamic, Western scientists have described people from the East as backwards-thinking, irrational and static (Said, 1978). These ideas about the Orient have been hegemonic, leaving no room for alternative interpretations. Challenging knowledge that has reached hegemonic status and discovering alternative paths is the object of critical literacy (Shor 1999).

In this article, I link the discussion of othering to the description of two conflicts – one ancient and one current. The concepts of othering and the construction of Westernness seem as important now as ever. Some scholars have proposed fruitful ways of looking at the combination of othering and the aftermath of 9/11 in New York, what is often called “the war on terror”. Judith Butler describes the victims of these wars as *ungrievable lives* (2009). She asks herself why people in the West experience such revulsion against suicide bombings but not against state sponsored violence, and finds the answer in the position of the victims. Some individuals have authentic and grievable lives, while other individuals have lives of lesser value. Their lives constitute living forms of threats against “us”. The destruction of the other’s communities, houses and institutions is therefore the destruction of threats, nothing to grieve (Butler, 2009, p. 48). In fact, killing and violence directed towards ungrievable lives becomes the elimination of threats against life, and is thereby justified as rational. In Zygmunt Bauman’s analysis of the Holocaust, the mechanisms are similar: by othering and making lives into abstract categories of threat, killing was made rational, thereby justified (Månsson, 2005). The references to the debate around today’s wars “against terror” are familiar. The justifying of violence can be seen for instance in common media language, where the killing of people in Afghanistan or Iraq can be called *neutralizing*, meaning killing in the name of eliminating threats.

History textbooks as discursive documents

My material consists of school textbooks in history (printed 2005–2010) in Finnish comprehensive schools. History is taught in grades 5 to 8 in schools in Finland, in chronological order from the first civilizations to the state of the world today. The Finnish national core curriculum, which states what should be covered in the subjects, is a fairly general document, allowing for textbook authors to choose to focus more or less on different themes, and to present different points of view (Virta, 2008, p. 40). The teachers choose which books to use in class. There are currently six major textbook publishing companies, two of which publish books in Swedish for the Swedish-speaking minority schools. All these companies have donated their history textbooks for my research. Altogether, the material used for this article consists of 19 books, including workbooks. Despite the lack of textbook regulation in Finland, the textbooks appear fairly similar with regard to content and ideology. According to Mattlar (2008, p. 37), a lack of regulation would suggest a possibility for alternative ideologies in textbooks, but big textbook publishers rarely deviate from the ruling hegemony.

In my analysis, I have been inspired by discourse theory as developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2008), originally published in 1985. Their view of the world is not that of a reality existing out there and needing to be uncovered in order to be understood. Instead, they see us constantly creating an understanding of what is real and true in our talk, text and actions. They call this creating objectivity. The concepts that Laclau and Mouffe suggest using, such as

social antagonisms, hegemony and articulations, are fruitful tools for analyzing othering and the construction of the West in school textbooks. Articulations are any bits of texts, talk or action attempting to create objectivity. In this manner, I see texts, pictures and assignments in the textbooks as articulations.

The Gramscian concept of hegemony is an important part of Laclau's and Mouffe's theory. Hegemony is a state of naturalized power relations, or a set of ideas that comes to be perceived as a norm, or a universal ideology. The construction of a hegemonic discourse is a result of articulation (Torring, 2005, p. 15). Discourse analysis deconstructs the hegemonic, the power relations that are often taken for granted as natural (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). As such, the analysis reveals the social antagonisms which show the borders of discourses.

Discourse analysis theory has political implications. According to Mouffe (2005), hiding social antagonisms is a risk, because it withholds the notion that societal conflicts of interests can be overcome around one objective good. Politics based on consensus between parties from the right to the left hides the fact that there are different political interests. Without these social antagonisms being visible, the choice that is left is to support the common good or oppose it – a choice between being right and being wrong. In European politics, the lack of visible social antagonisms can be seen as a reason for the rise of the xenophobic extreme right. Mouffe avoids the term cosmopolitanism, but her reasoning supports Sharon Todd's concern for a critical shift from harmony to agonism within cosmopolitan education (Todd, 2010).

When doing discourse analysis, the material studied should be complemented with a review of the structural context (Howarth, 2000, p. 140). In my case, it means seeing textbook findings as articulations of something discursive, taking the societal context and the debate around "Western values" into account. Concepts such as "Western societies" and "Western values" are often mentioned in news reporting and everyday debates, but rarely deconstructed. I want to know how the concepts of the West and Western values are described in Finnish history textbooks, and have chosen to do so by looking more closely at the descriptions of two historical events.

Many battles have been fought throughout history between Europeans, or "Westerners" and others. I have, however, decided to focus on the description of two historical events. The first one, the Greek-Persian battle of Thermopylae, took place 2500 years ago in the Aegean Sea. I find the battle of Thermopylae particularly interesting because many of the textbooks consider Ancient Greece to be the birthplace of "Western values". Supposedly, the battle of Thermopylae is the first time that peoples with attributed "European" or "Western" values defend themselves against a threat from the East, the other. It can therefore be seen as a founding battle for the "West". The description of Ancient Greece and the battle of Thermopylae are covered in the 5th grade books. The second case I look at is the broader 9/11 and the post-9/11 wars, that is, the description of the attacks on the WTC in New York City and the following wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These current events are covered at the end of the 8th-grade books, sometimes in chapters called "War on terrorism", which is why I look at them as one case. I have chosen these two distinct events since together they frame the notion of justifying Western values through war, the first and the latest battle, 2500 years apart.

Three constructions of othering

My research objective is not to examine the extent to which the textbooks deal with what "really happened", but rather to see how the events described are used in order to create a sense of

objectivity. More explicitly, I look at three constructions that promote othering by creating a certain objectivity of the West. They are all part of a hegemonic understanding of Westerners as superior to other people. This way, they work against the core values stated in the Finnish curriculum.

The concept of discourse has been the object of debate both in terms of its meaning and its usefulness (Simola 1995). It is hard to find a single definition of discourse. However, discourse is often seen as a system of *meaning*. By trying out the concept of *construction* in this article, I suggest a more specific term that emphasizes how the creation of hegemony, in this case that of a superior West, takes place. The proposed analytical concept of constructions focuses more on creation than on meaning, and constructions can be seen as the load-bearing pillars for hegemony. The term makes some of the attributes it shares with the term discourse more tangible; constructions point to contingency, in the sense that something constructed is not natural, it could as well have been in a different way. Another understanding implied in the term construction is that anything that is constructed can be deconstructed.

The first construction I look at concerns Western lives as essentially more grievable, valuable and in more need of being defended, than others. Besides Butler's concept of grievable and ungrievable lives, Edda Manga reminds her readers about how wars between Westerners have historically differed from wars with others. Researching the concept of justified wars during colonialism through the talks of Francisco de Vitoria, she suggests the tripartition *noster* (*the self*), *alter* and *alius*, with *alter* as the "traditional enemy" and *alius* as the alien. This can also provide more understanding of the description of today's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Going to war with an *alter* means abiding to laws of war, such as the fair treatment of prisoners, while *alius*, the radical other, is exempt from these rights and even dehumanized (or, if you will, ungrievable) (Manga, 2008, p. 325).

The second construction is that values such as freedom, democracy and human rights belong to the West. It suggests that the West has a particular responsibility to stand up for these values. It withholds the idea that these values are products of an essentially Western mindset, thereby suggesting that they could only have been developed by Westerners. It also entails that there is a justified need to defend and export these values using Western force. This construction hides the abuse of these values committed by Western countries and violence caused by Western military campaigns. In the name of spreading democracy, people and communities can be bombed, if this is seen as removing threats (Butler, 2009).

Studies about the image of Muslims in European textbooks such as Härenstam (1993) and Challand (2009) have shown a confrontational approach. Thirdly, I look at the construction of Muslims or Arabs as the enemy of the West in the textbooks. Said (1978) discusses the role that academics have had in creating Muslims or Arabs as both inferior and potentially threatening to the West. This is deeply embedded in the constructed character of the Arab. For example, anger in the Arab world is described as being products of Arab people's mentality, not as legitimate political claims. The construction points out the Muslim or Arab mentality as the main problem. Said draws comparisons to 20th-century explanations of black people's experiences, which were explained as due to the "negro mentality" (Said, 1997, xii). The Orient is here seen as inferior while simultaneously seen as a threat because of its potential to "take over" the West. This third construction indicates that meetings between the "West" and the "East" can only end in violence, and that Muslims or Arabs essentially cause the primary threat against the "West" and "Western values".

School textbooks have a specific audience, in this case young Finnish students. My aim is also to find out to what degree the textbook reader is expected to experience a sense of belonging to the “West”. In addition to the three constructions above - Western lives are more grievable; freedom, human rights and democracy are essential for what is Western; the essential enemies of the West are Arabs and Muslims – I look at how the textbooks equate a Western identity with an “us”.

Case 1: “We” the Greeks

My first case concerns the description of the people of Ancient Greece. History teaching starts in the 5th-grade books with a presentation of the earliest civilizations, the Mesopotamians and the Egyptians, before moving on to the Greeks. The Greeks are, here in contrast to those earlier civilizations, described as being special in a very positive way, not just in terms of what they accomplished but of a state of mind – while referring to “us”:

We, too, are also in many ways ‘Greek’. We believe that democracy, the power of the people, is right. We vote, go to the theatre at night, admire sport heroes and beautiful artwork (Kauan sitten – matka maailman historiaan, p. 54).

This quote constitutes the mindset of Greeks as a special one. It also links the textbook reader, the Finnish student, to this democratic ideal. Interestingly, the word “Greek” here actually seems to stand for “Athenian”. The textbooks all pay attention to the Greek city-states of Athens and Sparta and the differences between these two. Athens stands for democracy and freedom, while Sparta stands for military discipline and the politics of selection, where only strong babies were allowed to live. Generally, Athens is described as the more positive place of the two, while Sparta is seen as brutal. However, Sparta is at times seen in a more positive light, for instance as a place where women were more active. The military discipline is also celebrated at times, as in the following passage:

Sparta, along with Athens, were the strongest city-states in Greece. The fierce soldiers of Sparta awoke fear and respect. Boys started their military training at age 7, upon which tens of years of army life followed. Also the Spartan women and girls had to be healthy and fit. As opposed to the Athenians, the Spartans didn’t spend their time talking in group meetings [...] (Historia kertoo, p. 102).

While most of the time highlighting the democratic ideal of Athens, this passage shows a belittling attitude towards that very ideal. Here, efficiency and military power are celebrated at the expense of democracy. This topic is interesting because of how differently Athens and Sparta are described, while at the same time referring to the whole idea of Greece as the cradle of Western values, or in a sense of who “we” essentially are. When the textbooks refer to ancient Greece in general as the birthplace of European values, however, they tend to use philosophy, democracy and freedom as examples, while ideals from Sparta, such as militarism and brutal politics of selection are not referred to. This way of constructing an “us” means picking only the good parts and ignoring the ones that do not fit the picture, in this case Sparta. Even though one can argue that European history certainly contains Spartan features, regarding the continent’s war-torn history, the textbooks refer to the ancient Greek values that “we” share only in the positive terms of Athenian freedom and democracy.

The descriptions of Athens and Sparta contribute to my proposed second construction of a superior West. The Spartan example shows that there is a legitimacy of military force embedded in the whole notion of Ancient Greece, this cradle of “Europe”. At the same time, the

military part is invisible, as Ancient Greece as a whole is referred to in the positive terms of democracy and freedom, without mentioning military brutality.

The first battle for Western values?

Ancient Greece in the textbooks is portrayed as the birthplace of Europe, of “us”. However, for an “us” to be constructed, there is a need for a “them”. This is visible in some of the textbooks recounting the battle of Thermopylae, in which the Greek city-states unite despite their continuing internal wars, in order to defend themselves against an invasion from the Persians. The battle, in 480 BCE, has achieved a fair amount of attention in literature, film and video games as the triumph of a few over a much bigger army. It can also be seen as a symbol for the first battle for “Western values”. In some of the 5th-grade history books, the battle receives much attention, in some less so. In one of the books, four whole pages describe the event through text and illustrations, starting with:

The small, free Greek city-states were threatened by the mighty Persian empire in the East. [...] If the Greeks had lost the war against Persia, Europe’s history would have taken another turn. (Kauan sitten – matka maailman historiaan, p. 72)

And ending with:

The war ended in 479 BCE. If Persia had won the war, the way of life in the Greek city-states would have been over. Many of the inventions, artworks and buildings of the Greeks would never have been born. The thought of democracy, the right to think and speak freely would have been forgotten. The world would have become very different without these (Kauan sitten – matka maailman historiaan, p. 74).

Generally in history education this kind of “what-if” speculation, called counterfactual history, is rarely to be found in the textbooks. Obviously, there is no way anyone can know what would have happened if things had been different. This quote not only speculates, it states as a fact that democracy and free thinking are values that could only have been developed in “the West”. Besides, it ignores much of history between 500 BCE and now – for instance during the mediaeval era when the Greek philosophers’ texts were being kept and saved by the Arabs. The second quote essentializes the Greeks as the only possible inventors of democracy and human rights. It thereby strengthens the second construction, that freedom, human rights and democracy are essentially Western. Additionally, without mentioning any particular human lives as grievable, the last quote builds upon the first construction—Western lives are more grievable—when it suggests that a Persian victory would have meant that the way of life in Greece would have been over, and that the inventions, artworks and buildings would never have been *born*. These artifacts therefore represent something “living” that had to be defended.

Considering the flexibility of the national curriculum and the fact that there are a handful of different textbook publishing companies in Finland, one could expect to find ideological differences between the books. However, to a large extent they share the same content, and consistent ideological differences between the books are hard to find. Some articulations in the books suggest a construction of the West as superior, but there are also competing, deconstructing articulations. An example of how different the articulations can be is shown in the following two extracts, from two different books describing the Persian leaders. The first one shows a classical sign of what Edward Said coined as Orientalism, attributing characteristics to

people of the East as, for instance, wild and uncontrolled. Here, the Western triumph over the Persian leader Xerxes is described, referring to Xerxes' "wild" rage:

[...] The decisive battle was fought at the straits of Salamis. The Athenian navy beat the great Persian navy, and Xerxes, watching the battle from a coastal hill was left huffing his rage in vain (Matkalippu historiaan, p. 133).

Another textbook articulation deconstructs the very same view, highlighting the equality of human beings throughout history and cultures:

The Greeks called themselves Hellens. They saw themselves as better than and more civilized than others. Anyone not Greek they called a barbarian. They tried especially to portray their main opponent, the Persians, in as bad a light as possible. The Persian rulers were portrayed as cruel lunatics. [...] During wars in our days, the opponent is still labeled as underdeveloped or barbarian. This has been part of warfare by states ever since ancient times (Historian tuulet I, p.80).

During the times of the battle of Thermopylae, where Greek city-states fought Persians, neither Christianity nor Islam existed; there was no concept of the Western world, and Arabic was not a dominant language east of the Mediterranean. It would therefore appear that my third construction, that of Muslims or Arabs as an essential threat to the West, was suppressed in this case. Interestingly however, the description of the Persians as the great enemy of the East, and the suggestion that they were a threat not just to the Greeks as a people, but to certain values (such as the "right to think and speak freely" in the quote above) seem particularly familiar in the context of today's discourse on Islam as a threat to the West and Western values. The description of the battle says more about current history writing than about what really happened 2500 years ago in the Aegean Sea. The Greeks are constructed as the first "Westerners" and their other, coming from the East, as threatening their "Western values".

Case 2: "Us" and "them" in the post-9/11 world

The last chapters in the 8th-grade history books cover the state of the world today, recounting the events of 9/11 and the responses to the attack, the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. When it comes to these events, I am again interested not in how accurately events are described, but in how the events are used in order to create hegemony and construct Westernness. Which lives are grievable? How are the descriptions of 9/11 and the post-9/11 wars linked to discussions about Western values? And to what extent are Arabs or Muslims being presented as the enemy of the "West"? I begin by looking at looking at the Finnish context in relation to the events.

In chapters often called "The war on terrorism", the textbooks all suggest that the world has become a different place, starting in New York 2001:

The events of September 11th, 2001 dramatically changed the course of world history. More people died in the terrorists' attack in New York than in the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Historian tuulet 7-8, p. 208).

Interestingly, Pearl Harbor is here chosen as a point of reference, suggesting that the attacks mostly concerned the USA. Meanwhile, the event is seen as changing "world history", which would of course include "us". Geographically, Finland is situated far from the venues of war (USA, Iraq and Afghanistan). Finland is not a NATO member, nor does it play an active part in

the war in Iraq, but there are around 200 Finnish soldiers in Afghanistan (Ministry for Foreign Affairs Finland 2011). After 9/11 2001, there was a three-minute silence in workplaces in Finland, including schools. There has not been any similar public grieving at any time for victims of the post-9/11 wars.

The events of 9/11 in 2001 are generally described in detail. All books have pictures from New York that day and one book mentions the exact minute when the planes crashed. There is a slight difference between the ways that the textbooks describe Finland's role. Two books portray the incidents as mostly a problem of the US, while four link Finland and the US more or less closely together, as in this example where you get a sense of belonging through the "time stamp" and through the description of New Yorkers and Finns, as "people who work":

September 11th, 2001 seemed to be a normal day among others. People in the US were starting their working days, while the working day in Finland was just ending (Historian tuulet 7-8, p. 208).

Another book introduces the topic in a different way, by describing the role of the US in world politics preceding the attacks as an explanation:

However, the US still acts according to its role as world police, a role that they came to have during WWII: their mission is to fight against the "enemies of freedom" everywhere (Kronikka 8, p. 196).

The latter example, which has a somewhat sarcastic tone which might not be understood by 8th graders, comes from a book that clearly excludes Europe when describing the events of 9/11 and its aftermath. This particular text sees the conflict as concerning the USA more than "us".

In one of the two books that include pictures of the anti-war demonstration in Helsinki in 2003, the protests in Europe against the Iraq war are brought up. This book suggests a division not actually between Europe and the US but between the US and European leaders on one side and the European people on the other:

However, the governments didn't listen to their citizens. For instance Spain sent their troops to Iraq, even though almost half of the Spaniards opposed the attack (Kaleidoskooppi 8, p. 178).

This in turn is interesting from the point of view of Europe as the cradle of democracy. If Europe is described as the haven for democratic values, why would the European people's will be set aside by their rulers? It is thought-provoking to look at this, bearing in mind the construction of Athens and Sparta as parts of Ancient Greece, the birthplace of "Western values". What is essentially Western is described in terms such as democracy and human rights, but violence in the form of military dominance is always close at hand. Furthermore, the book quoted above is the only one of the textbooks that mentions the rise of human rights violations since 2001.

My research shows that a bi-polar world-view where the "West", including "us" is threatened by the other, in this case Arabs and Muslims, is common in the books. An example of this is the description of victims, which follows Butler's distinction of grievable and ungrivable. While the victims of the WTC towers are counted and lamented in the books, people being killed by Western forces in Iraq or Afghanistan are practically invisible. The initial quote in this chapter compares the number of victims of 9/11 to that of Pearl Harbor. Obviously, there would be other

recent mass deaths to refer to, such as the number of victims in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, there are no stories about the lives of civilians, and there are few pictures of people from these countries. In fact, it doesn't seem like the West causes any harm at all. Western violence is clearly invisible, as in the following passage:

After the fall of Saddam, the US-led coalition occupied Iraq and appointed a new democratic government, but the coalition didn't succeed in stabilizing the country. The occupation has been characterized by violence both against the coalition and between the different groups within the country (Historia 1900-talet, p. 173).

The textbooks do not mention victims of coalition-caused violence in Iraq or Afghanistan. There is for instance no acknowledgement of the consequences of Western military attacks. With the lack of pictures and stories about the everyday life of Afghans and Iraqis, they tend to become an abstract category of threat, as is shown in the following passage:

After the Soviet Union, Arab terrorism is all the more clearly emerging as the enemy of the USA (Kronikka 8, p. 197).

Using the term "Arab terrorism" here suggests that there is a certain kind of terrorism that can be attributed to Arabs. This is in line with the third construction of Muslims or Arabs as the essential enemy of the West, suggesting that there is something about the mentality of Arabs that justifies the dehumanizing term "Arab terrorism". All the books describe what happened on 9/11 in New York, often highlighting that the victims in New York were "ordinary" or "innocent". When describing the wars that the US and its allies wage in Afghanistan and Iraq, there are no similar humanizing elements. Words like *terrorists*, *fundamentalists*, *political factions of Islam*, *fanatical Muslims* and *horror regimes* are used to label people in Afghanistan or Iraq, thus creating distance to the other.

Case 3: Muslims seen as attacking Western values

Adding to the clash between "us" and the other, some books make quite clear assumptions about the underlying motives of the other – to destroy Western countries and Western values. By focusing on Western values and culture as the target, the violence caused by Western forces is hidden, as in the following extracts about 9/11, where a sharp difference between Arabs/Muslims and the West is created:

The Muslim extremist group al-Qaida and its leader Osama bin Laden became known to the world through the 2001 terrorist attack on the WTC-towers in the USA, because the organization is believed to be behind it. The organization wages a so-called holy war against the Western countries in order to stop the growing influence of the West in Islamic countries (Aikalainen, p. 181).

[...]Experts on Islam claimed that the deeds were a desperate action by Muslim fundamentalists in order to stop the ongoing modernization of the Arab world. Other Islam experts were more pessimistic and meant that the attacks on the World Trade Center, Pentagon and Capitolium [sic] or Harrison didn't mark a new era in world history. The attacks should instead be seen as one part in a long campaign against mainly Americans and Jews and with a total destruction of Western culture as its final goal (Historia 1900-talet, p. 267).

From the perspective of Mignolo's description of modernity as the darker side of coloniality (2000, p. 723), the second example raises important concerns. In it, "Islam experts", clearly in the role of an unquestioned authority, suggest two analyses which both strengthen the hegemony of Western superiority and dominance. The first one, being more "moderate", talks of "fundamentalists" resisting modernization as the problem. The second one does not only forcefully create a distance between "us" and "them", it also gives an indication of an upcoming civilizational struggle. This is remarkably different from the core values in the curriculum. Elmeroth (2008, p. 52) uses a definition of islamophobia which sees it not only as a fear of Islam, but as often combined with ideas about a Muslim conspiracy intending to crush Western society. The definition makes sense bearing in mind that anti-Semitism adheres to a similar notion about Jews conspiring to take over the world. According to this definition, some of the articulations in the textbooks are clearly islamophobic since they, like in the quote above, suggest that there is a Muslim master plan to destroy Western culture.

The concepts of Western values and Western societies are frequently mentioned but less often determined. Most commonly, they are unexplained, but at times they are related to "freedom" and "democracy". One book, however, links Western culture to "business as usual", or in fact, to the capitalist economy:

The attacks took the lives of 3000 innocent people, people from many different countries and belonging to different belief systems and language groups. *But the attacks didn't succeed in demolishing the Western world. Within the economy, "business as usual" rules.*[emphasis added]. The airline industry has admittedly suffered from hard losses, but stricter airport controls have made it safer to fly (Historia 1900-talet, p. 267).

This articulation mentions the Western world as part of the conflict. At the same time, by mentioning that the victims of 9/11 belonged to different religions and languages, it aims to justify the universality of what is "Western" – in this case the freedom to fly and to do business.

Discussion

In this article, I have examined Finnish history books in the very beginning and at the very end of comprehensive school history teaching, in order to gain an understanding about how othering and the construction of "Westernness" take place. Writing history books is about prioritizing. Certain events are emphasized while others are ignored. This is not a random act, but a political one which needs to be seen in a sociopolitical context. The two cases I have examined are events that have been highlighted in the history textbooks. Both articulate the concept of the "West" in a way that tends to portray Western lives as more grievable than others.

Ancient Greece is, not without reason, celebrated in many ways. It was the birthplace of Western philosophers and was in many ways extraordinary and ground-breaking. However, the supposed trajectory that is implied in the textbook descriptions needs to be questioned. The trajectory is aligned with my second construction concerning the concept of Western values. Through this construction, values such as freedom and democracy become essential features of the West, which could only have been invented in the West and need to be defended by the West. This imaginary trajectory fails to see the role non-Europeans have played throughout history, for instance the role of Arabs in maintaining and refining the Ancient Greek scientific findings during the European medieval period.

The second construction also implies hiding Western violence, since Western military campaigns can be justified by the assumed responsibility to stand up for Western values. In this context, the assumed trajectory of the success story of Western values fogs the memory of a continent torn apart by internal wars and by the world wars started on its territory, not to mention the destruction brought to the world by colonialism and state- and academy-sponsored racism, the Holocaust, etc. This construction is, however, more visible in the case of 9/11 and the Afghan and Iraqi wars, since the books tend to focus on questions of values and on Western victims when describing the conflicts, and not on what happens on the ground in Afghanistan or Iraq. The suffering caused by the West is invisible. This invisibility is part of a larger media discourse about these wars. Research shows that the media imagery of the Afghanistan war does not resemble war itself. In a vast collection of pictures there are for instance no images of ISAF soldiers involved in an act of war, instead they are often portrayed doing humanitarian work, such as promoting the education of women (Kotilainen, 2011).

The third construction I examine, that of Muslims or Arabs as the primary enemy of the West, is based on widespread prejudice. Both cases studied encourage the creation of an “us” and a “them”. Although taking place 2500 years apart, they are both constructed as battles for “Western values”, where *the other* represents a threat.

It is impossible to say how textbooks alone impact their readers. However, to a certain extent, both majority and minority students’ definitions of themselves and other people are influenced by the world-view portrayed in the textbooks. Phelps (2010, p. 197) notes that finding appropriate text materials about especially Islam and Muslim and using them to promote critical literacy is especially important in the current political context. Part of promoting critical literacy would be looking at structures, such as the fact that school knowledge about minorities and non-Westerners has a history of prejudice and racism. Even though Finland has not been a colonial power, it has been part of colonialist structures (Lehtonen & Löytty, 2007). The Western majority population has had the defining power when it comes to knowledge, the self and the other (see Pihl, 2010). This is not shown in the books, leaving the critical reading up to the teacher.

What would taking the core values in the Finnish curriculum of equality, democracy and human rights seriously mean for education? Cosmopolitanism in its humanistic sense promotes seeing all as equals and points towards the possibility to co-operate. At a first glance, this seems as an adequate way of ensuring the values. However, taking the real world and its injustices into account suggests that more is needed. Since Western violence is hidden and since Muslims are portrayed as an essential threat to democracy, there is a need for critical literacy. A critical cosmopolitan education means facing the pluralism and the antagonisms involved in social life. Learning to live in the world requires recognizing not just the equal value of all people but also how this is being compromised in the world today, often in the name of promoting the very values that are promoted in the curriculum.

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Year 5, case 1:

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