# Children, Identity and the Past

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Edited by

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# The Palaeolithic for Children, Text, and Identity

Nena Galanidou

> 'Looking at history is like looking at oneself in the mirror.
> Our own image is different each time, depending on the moment in which the looking takes place, which in turn depends on time and space.' Varotsos 2007[1]

In the modern western world, alongside the traditional ways of learning through books and teacher-centred oral narrations, hands-on experience and digital media are becoming increasingly significant vehicles to children's learning, whether formal or informal. In museums and at archaeological sites, computer-aided or interactive educational programs teach young visitors about archaeology and invite them to experience the past through their imagination and senses. Parents rush to obtain computers for their offspring, state policy plans secure funds for mass orders of school computers, and the more ambitious computerisation projects such as the 'One laptop per child' (http://laptop.org/) target schoolchildren worldwide. In tune with this trend, academic discussions have shifted their attention to new media, with the aim of evaluating their potential as learning tools. Two issues are principally emphasised in connection with this: Firstly, the effectiveness of multimedia in rendering the learning process more lively than the more traditional ways of learning and teaching, and secondly, the significance of instant access to multiple sources of 'information'. Thus, while there is much discussion about new learning media, with emphasis being placed on differences from traditional methods, what often receives less attention is the very nature of the 'information' mediated; in other words, the contents of the parcel rather than the box, wrapping paper and ribbon. Yet, the essence always lies in the story and the story can be told in words or in images, whether one employs new or older media.[2] The story is a historical product of the

era in which it was conceived and, like archaeology, is neither neutral nor objective. Thus no matter how modern or innovative the medium might be, no matter whether it talks to all senses of a child or uses state-of-the-art graphics, what lies at the heart of the matter is the information transmitted via the medium's core narrative. Children's books dealing with archaeology, classified in the educational genre, have for many decades been valuable sources of and reference points to many such stories.

In this paper I discuss textual narratives about Palaeolithic life presented in educational children's books. By critically examining their form and content, I question the messages transmitted to children. These narratives, as any encounter with the past, are more closely allied to ideas and values of the present than to the remote prehistory they refer to. One starting point in this research is that I accept the centrality of social constructs such as gender or age that are produced and reproduced in human interaction. These constructs operate actively as organising principles in all social systems and domains of *Homo sapiens*, Stone Age ones included (see Badler and Bowdler 2006, Kuhn and Stiner 2006, Owen 2006). Through the study of material remains, social archaeology aims to make social categories visible in past social phenomena, as demonstrated by many of the chapters in this volume. In parallel, such research questions and deconstructs many of the outdated assumptions about prehistoric societies that pervade archaeological interpretation and its dissemination to wider audiences. It is this very last aspect that my work identifies with. By examining how various aspects of the lives of Palaeolithic children, women, men and the elderly are depicted in texts written specifically for children, I take issue with many of the themes that dominate narratives about the past, crowding out a more balanced reading of prehistoric foragers. Beyond that, in discussing texts that sit uncomfortably on the fence between archaeology and education, I address identity with a gaze on the future. I plead for plurality in the representation of the past, higher scientific accuracy, and the need to narrate the history of the Palaeolithic to children, adopting a global humanistic vision in education, such as that proposed by Edgar Morin (1999); as I argue below, the very nature of the Palaeolithic record is admirably suited to this purpose.

## The Palaeolithic: humanity's global heritage

In his 1999 essay on 'Les sept savoirs nécessaires à l'éducation du futur', Edgar Morin, the French sociologist and head of UNESCO's European Cultural Agency, proposed an agenda for global education in the future. His proposal highlights issues that are currently ignored or forgotten by modern education systems, but which would radically transform teaching if adopted and incorporated. The recommendations are more in the way of a reform of thought than an account of things to be added or deleted from individual education systems. He suggests that traditional disciplines are no longer capable of fully addressing the complex problems of society and humanity with special reference to peace and development. At a time when much is said about cultural and religious conflict, Morin argues that these seven lessons need to be adopted universally by all societies and cultures, according to their specific rules, without exceptions or exclusions. In other words, the lessons are just as relevant to the education of children in Afghanistan or Iraq as they are for children in Norway or Greece. The principles of his view can be summarised as follows (http://www.prasena.com/public/peace/9.htm):

'a. Detecting error and illusion: Teach the weaknesses of knowledge: what is human knowledge? Teach its errors, its illusions: Teach to know what to know is!

b. Principles of pertinent knowledge: One must be able to take into account global and fundamental problems, in which partial and local knowledge will then be used. Knowledge cannot be split into disciplines. One must be able to consider the objects of knowledge in their context, in their complexity, in their whole.

c. Teaching the human condition: Teach the unity and the complexity of human nature. This needs input from biology, from human sciences, from literature, from philosophy. Teach the relationship between the unity and the diversity of what is human.

d. Earth identity: Teach knowledge at a worldwide level. Teach the history of the planetary era; teach the solidarity between all parts of the world.

e. Confronting uncertainties: Sciences have established a lot of certainties, but they also have revealed many uncertainties. Teach the uncertainties in physics, in biology, in history.

f. Understanding each other: Teach understanding; understanding in all its meanings, mutual understanding between human beings. And teach what misunderstanding is. It is a crucial basis for peace education.

g. Ethics for the human genre: Teach the world. Teach the ethics of humanity preparing citizens of the world. Teach how democracy relates to mutual control between society and individuals.'

The purpose, it seems, of mainstream books, schools and museums is to present the status quo viewpoint of the past. In a homogenous society, that might be a valid intent. But what about a heterogeneous society? The twenty-first century marches on, witnessing multicultural societies worldwide. Can there be a single book or school or museum exhibition that grapples with the divergent pasts of those peoples? Popularising archaeology nowadays may be seen as an opportunity to create narratives that encompass these divergent pasts, acknowledging diversity, be it cultural or social, in ancient times (Golding 2004). The emphasis here is on 'difference' and its multiple expressions in the archaeological record. It may also be seen as an opportunity to emphasise similarity. The Palaeolithic, the period in human prehistory which refers to a common substratum of all human cultures: human origins and evolution and a foraging mode of life that precedes the productive economy founded on agriculture and husbandry, may prove to be the key here. Although the Palaeolithic is far removed in time, lying as it does at the temporal antipode of the modern era, and exhibits enormous temporal and spatial variability, it may yet prove to be very close at hand, as a heritage common to all modern people regardless of present state borders and differences in nationality, race, language, religion or income. In an updated educational agenda for children worldwide, Palaeolithic Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology could by and large contribute to teaching the essentials of the human condition. Both fields offer numerous instances for understanding and consolidating a sense of equality amongst people, pointing out the fundamental similarities between humans while acknowledging and respecting local or ethnic difference.

At the same time, the many issues open in the discourse of Palaeolithic archaeology and Palaeoanthropology, as indeed in all other discourses where certainties are frequently overturned and disproved, provide fertile ground for 'demystifying' science by introducing children to the history of ideas and the importance of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary collaboration in reaching the current state of knowledge. Such questions may serve as primary material in teaching children to confront uncertainty. They could,

moreover, offer food for thought about past human practices, interaction with the environment and patterns of adaptation to dramatic climatic changes, such as the ones we are beginning to experience on account of the greenhouse effect. Given that current economic practices pose a major threat to the earth's environment and future, Palaeolithic heritage may provide yet another opportunity to forge an education which accepts that 'home is the entire globe', and make it possible for 'this realisation to be translated into an intention to achieve earthly citizenship' (Morin 1999, 4). Archaeological writing and museums ought to be part of this movement–the Bryggens museum in Bergen, Norway, is blazing a new trail in this direction, by hosting (in 2006) GreenPeace audiovisual presentations about the earth's major environmental issues next to its permanent archaeological exhibits.

## Textual analysis

The texts discussed here are published in the books listed in Table 1. They are a representative sample of the tendencies seen in books of this type (see discussion and table 1 in Galanidou 2007). In all such books, texts play an ancillary role to their powerful counterpart, the illustrations, and both work hand in hand to construct a narrative of the past. Illustrations cover most of the page at the expense of text.[3] The aim is straightforward: human evolution and many millennia of prehistory are compressed into a few dioramic scenes (Gifford-Gonzalez 1993) composed in such a way that transmission of a clear and easily digestible message is ensured. Analysis of the visual language employed reveals that, with very few exceptions, a limited range of iconographic themes and patterns is repeated throughout, confining interpretations of Palaeolithic life to a few stereotypical associations by means of gender or age (Galanidou 2007).

The texts that accompany the illustrations typically follow suit. They dramatise the remote past to prove the superiority and ingenuity of the present. They project social inequity in early Prehistory to show how deep in time its roots can be traced. They are classifiable into two groups. (**a**) Tales of humans and their everyday life that take place in prehistory. They usually have a child as a protagonist, be it a Palaeolithic boy (Briggs 2002, Hoffman and Lebrun 1998, Bitsa 2005) or a modern one who steps into the past (Manning and Granström 2000). Notably, none of the protagonists in these books is ever a girl. In four cases it is explicitly a boy, named Ug, Noune, Merouti and Petrenios (i.e. "Stone-made"). In the one it is a child of unspecified gender or name, whose illustration is nonetheless

| | Reference | Illustrator(s) | Series Title |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **M. Manning and B. Granström, 2000,** *Stone Age Bone Age*. **London: Franklin Watts** | **M. Manning and B. Granström** | **Wonderwise** |
| 2 | **G. Hoffmann and F. Lebrun, 1998,** *Au temps des cavernes*. **Paris: Casterman** | | **Des enfants dans l'histoire** |
| 3 | **R. Briggs, 2002,** *Ug. Boy Genius of the Stone Age*. **London: Red Fox Books - Random House** | | |
| 4 | **M. Vaidis, 1992,** *Noune. Child of Prehistory*. **Vic-en-Bigorre: MSM** | **G. Sales** | |
| 5 | **S. Bitsa, 2005,** *Short-short stories for the very-very early times*. **Athens: Benaki Museum Educational Programs** | **F. Bartsota** | |
| 6 | **M. Rius, 1994,** *La prehistoria y el antiguo Egipto*. **Athens: Kedros (originally published by Parramòn Ediciones)** | **G.Vergés and O. Vergés** | **Travel to history** |
| 7 | **E. Beaumont, 2000,** *L'imagerie des dinosaurs et de la préhistoire*. **Paris : Fleurus** | **M-C Lemayer, B. Alunni and V. Stetten** | **L'imagerie** |
| 8 | **P. R. Cox and S. Reid, 1994,** *Who were the first people?* **London: Usborne** | **G. Wood** | **Usborne Starting Point History** |
| 9 | **A-M. Lelorrain and P. Allen, 2002,** *Mon Premier Larousse de l'Histoire*. **Larousse** | | |
| 10 | **M. Berger, 1987,** *Early Humans: A Prehistoric World. A Pop-Up Book.* **London: Child's play International** | **M. Welply** | |
| 11 | **F. Chandler, S. Taplin and J. Bingham, 2000,** *Usborne World History: Prehistoric World*. **London: Usborne** | **Collective** | **Usborne World History** |

Table 1. The books discussed in this chapter

boyish (Manning and Granström 2000). The result of this fundamental gender assignment is that in the pages of these books, modern children are directed to look through what is for the most part a male domain (Manning and Granström 2000, Hoffmann and Lebrun 1998) in order to discover essential information about the early Stone Age. (**b**) The second group consists of narratives of Palaeolithic life, perhaps plain, perhaps didactic, sometimes humorous, others dramatic, often enriched with dialogues and accounts about the major events of evolution or stories from the history of archaeological research.

## Issues of form

The first text is taken from *Stone Age Bone Age,* the story of a modern child, presumably a boy, who enters into the life of his peers 12.000 years ago and is invited to participate in their activities.[4]

[1] 'Listen – water dripping! Wind moaning! You've woken up in a dark cave. You've woken up in the stone age! No light switch, no window. Feel your way towards the sound of voices… [A boyish face against a dark blue background]

'Outside there's a stone age family. Mums, dads, grannies, granddads… aunties, uncles, cousins… All getting ready to go hunting, all getting ready to gather wild food. People lived in large family groups back then. It was safer that way and easier to find food.' [A group of four bearded adult males (two carrying spears, one holding a knife), three females (with ornaments on their clothes and hair) in close association with three children, a figure of indeterminate sex playing a drum, and a dog.]

'You go too! Let them show you where to gather seeds and berries, where to find the best honey, where to dig for beetle grubs…' [Women and children only.]

'You go too! Hunt the lake for fish and water birds. Learn how to paddle a dug-out canoe … Or try to tickle trout in fast-flowing streams. Flip them on the bank with just a flick of your wrist!' [Three boys.]

'Make tricky traps and track wild animals' [Exclusively men's activity – boys carrying spears watch them]

> 'But be careful! They may be tracking you…' [Three boys, their dog and a brown bear]
>
> 'What's this? Sh ambush … Shhhh! A herd of woolly mammoths? And they're getting closer … Shhh! Now! Jump up and chase them… Stone age, bone age! Food for a month!' [Four men and two women all armed with spears and stone tools participate in a mammoth hunt– two boys are watching.]
>
> …
>
> 'Now it's time to visit the magic place. Deep in the cave, by smoky torch-light, the walls come alive! Heartbeat … Drumbeat …' [Three boys only.]
>
> 'Stamp like a stag! Strut like a bird! Growl like a bear! Stone Age! Bone Age! Howl like a wolf! Stone Age! Bone age! What a clever age! (Manning and Granström 2000)'

I begin my examination with this book, because it is one of the rare examples that leave the reader with a generally positive feeling about life during the Upper Palaeolithic: people were different from us back then, yet not inferior. The author has produced an original narrative, in a sincere attempt to write a kind of children's story different from the ones abounding on the shelves of prehistory learning books.[5] Although he employs some of the pillars upon which Palaeolithic representation is founded, such as cave-dwelling or large game hunt, the story is enriched by accounts of activities organised by different social categories. It neither ignores possible dangers of the past (e.g. brown bear) nor dramatises them. It is interesting to note, however, that the visual language used in the illustrations seems rather perplexing when compared with the author's expressed intent to write differently. Men outnumber women and children, and are depicted in the stereotypical associations. This notwithstanding, the overall endeavour is positive, confirming a hypothesis made elsewhere (Galanidou 2007), i.e. that it is authors rather than illustrators who lie behind attempts to reform learning books. Now let us compare the first text to the following extract from *La prehistoria y el antiguo Egipto:*

[2] 'Sometimes in prehistory it was very **cold**. People did not know how to build houses to protect themselves, so they lived in caves. It was **dangerous** to move away from them. If anyone got lost, they would **die of cold or be eaten by wild beasts**. Prehistoric people **did not know** how to cultivate and produce their food, so they ate whatever

fruit and plant they found near their cave. They also hunted wild animals, which they killed and ate. To keep warm they made clothes from the animals' skins. (Rius 1994) ' [Bold added, my translation]

Judging from this text, Palaeolithic people were condemned to a hopeless, desperate existence, since they lacked know-how concerning food production and house building. This is vividly illustrated by means of genderless figures of wretched appearance clad in animal skins. The vocabulary abounds with words that make an impact: 'cold', 'dangerous', 'die of cold', 'eaten by', 'wild beasts', 'did not know'. One might argue that we are here dealing with a simplified vocabulary specially chosen to facilitate communication with young children. Simplicity, however, need not coincide with rather impoverished and vague vocabulary, placed in sentences with very basic syntax. These two combined produce affirmative statements about the past. The result is an impression of hardship and primitiveness, an overall negative icon (Costal and Richards 2007) of the Palaeolithic, in stark contrast to that obtained by children reading text [1].

In all probability, children will not challenge the textual or visual representations of the past presented in this book. Nor will any non-specialist adult; the following extract from a series of short histories aimed for the general adult audience is also informative in this light:

[3] 'From every point of view (the Palaeolithic) was a period **full of fear** and **desperation**. Those early humans **had not as yet developed** agriculture. They **could not cultivate** the land in order to produce their food, but had to rely exclusively on hunting and plant gathering (Armstrong 2002, 26).' [Bold added, text in parenthesis added]

Texts [2] and [3] are of an impressive similarity in content, tone, and vocabulary. They need not necessarily have used the same source, but depict the same stereotype about the Palaeolithic and clearly show how urgent it is for archaeologists to be seriously engaged in writing for the wider audience.

One could argue that employing short sentences, of the basic subject-verb-object type, and the occasional conditional clause, are keys to promoting children's comprehension of the text. Simple phrases and easy-to-follow syntax may indeed make pleasant or easy-to-follow reading for children, yet text [1] achieves both entertainment and educative roles without any concessions to language or content. Text [2] makes bold statements and fails to account for any positive contribution by the Palaeolithic. Instead it adopts an a-historical and simplistic view of the past, as if the entire

Palaeolithic was a single event. The underlying idea places our culture above all previous civilisations, in a manner reminiscent of some ancient philosophers' reconstructions of early human life. Democritus[6], for instance, argued that humankind gradually improved from an initially unhappy condition, a state of savagery, during which people lived like wild animals, into the human condition, i.e. happiness and civilisation (Stockowski 1994, Lianeris 1997).

Moving on, my concern here is not only about the vocabulary and syntax used, i.e. about form (Binant 2007), but also about the accuracy achieved. If Palaeolithic people had truly eaten 'whatever fruit and plant they found close to their cave' in all probability they would rapidly have died from food poisoning. The following paragraph from the *Mon Premier Larousse d'histoire* refers to a prehistoric settlement:

[4] 'The first people were few in number. They lived in small groups of a few families. Their time is called prehistoric. In order to feed themselves, they hunted, fished in rivers and gathered plants and fruits. Prehistoric people settled in **safe areas** protected from wild animals, often on the bank of a river. They lived near **caves** or built **huts** from branches and animal skins. (Lelorrain and Allen 2002)' [Bold in book, my translation.]

In addition to the short and snappy sentences chosen, one can see here that the need to compress many thousand years of prehistoric life into a few sentences makes authors devise a few key-words to show evolution through time. Such a tactic, however, runs the risk of oversimplification and inaccuracy. River banks were not by themselves safe areas, nor were caves or huts without the help of a hearth, for instance. The next extract shows how the need to describe cultural change through time produced by different hominid species likewise runs the risk of making false statements and contradicting the very contents of the same book:

[5] 'Cro-Magnon Homes … In cold and hot lands, on plains and mountains, in dry and damp climates – Cro-Magnons had to adapt to many different environments. Thus they learned to build various kinds of dwellings. Most of their houses were conveniently located near springs or lakes. In the northern areas the houses often faced south to take advantage of solar heat. Where possible, Cro-Magnons lived on hills so they could spot passing animals. They almost never lived in caves as the Neanderthals did. (Berger 1987)'

A few lines below, the caption under a cave illustration states:

[6] 'Simple shelters were caves, probably with animal skins hung over the entrance to keep in the warmth. (*ibid.*)'

The last three extracts may be contrasted with the following one:

[7] 'Did they really live in caves? Some early people did, but most couldn't. Unlike houses, caves can't be built, and there weren't enough to go around. Those who were lucky enough to find a cave lived near the opening. Inside a cave, it was dark and there was no chimney to let out the smoke and smells. (Cox and Reid 1994)'

In text [7] the myth of 'cave men' is elegantly deconstructed, inviting children to exercise observation and common sense.

In educating children, Edgar Morin invites us to 'teach children to navigate in an ocean of uncertainties, passing through the archipelago of certainty (1999, 50).' The majority of texts in the second group (Table 1, books 6, 7, 9, 10) work in the opposite direction. Unlike text [7], they are characterised by a generally authoritative tone and treat archaeological data as universal truths, which children are invited to place faith in. They thus leave little space for uncertainty or critical thought during the learning process (e.g. texts [2], [4] and [5]). The only exception to this is *Who were the first people?* Its authors have chosen to present their material in a series of questions and answers that are close to the sort of questions a modern child would ask. Amongst these there is space for the following:

[8] 'Are archaeologists ever fooled? Yes, they're only human. In 1913, a skull was found at a place called Piltdown in England. It had the shape of a man, but the jaw shape of an ape. Archaeologists were very excited. 40 years later, it was proved to be a trick. Someone had attached an orangutan's jaw to a human skull! (Cox and Reid 1994)'

In the same book, uncertainty and probability are introduced to the readers both by the vocabulary and syntax chosen:

[9] 'Did they eat chocolate? No, but they **probably** liked sweet-tasting things. There was no sugar, but honey made by wild bees **would have been** popular. (Cox and Reid 1994)' [Bold added]

Last but not least, although the words 'cold' and 'snow' are omnipresent, and 'fire' and 'warmth' from 'hearths' are deemed essential for survival and well-being, authors rarely take pains to explain why it was cold, what an Ice Age may mean and that it is important to understand climatic change as a global phenomenon with a very long history. The opportunity to explain the very notion of the Ice Age, its sensitivity to astronomical variations, its repercussions on local ecological conditions, and its impact on human evolution and social life is thus missed. A possible path to cultivate environmental awareness amongst modern children is overlooked.

## Issues of content

In her introductory chapter to *Invisible People and Processes*, E. Scott reminds us that 'agency can be surprisingly male in its presentation' (1997, 6) in archaeological debates. This is equally true for its re-presentation in popularisation texts aimed at children. The vocabulary in the following passage accompanies an illustration of Cro-Magnon man, and works magically to conceal over half the prehistoric population of the Upper Palaeolithic, rendering men as the central actors of biological survival and key cultural processes such as cave 'art':

[10] 'Neanderthal **man** will gradually be replaced by an artist, the Cro-Magnon **man**, who came from the East.' (In the caption): 'While the artist paints, others are preparing new colours. The cave is lit by means of large torches and small oil lamps. (Beaumont 2000).' [Bold added, my translation]

This caption brings us to the issue of differences between adult men and others through the scene of Upper Palaeolithic imagery in the making. The way it is represented is indicative of a broader trend, which ascribes any new element of material culture to the male domain. Almost without exception, such inventions are created by male hunters, whereas the possibility of others–women, children or individuals with exceptional spiritual or other attributes–having a significant input is plainly ignored. The next two extracts clarify who the creators of Upper Palaeolithic imagery were and who led the communities:

[11] '…Mouk sometimes stops and steps back to examine the results of **his** art. Before Mouk, other artists painted the wall of this cave.

Every new generation adds its creations to those made by the ancestors. Mouk understands that **he is the inheritor** of a tradition that **entrusts** the decoration of caves to a few **men**. (Hoffman and Lebrun 1998)' [Bold added, my translation]

[12] Prehistoric people lived and hunted in bands. The most important figure in a band was **the leader**. **He** was the **bravest** amongst all and the one who would lead the hunt. Upon his death, large stones were placed on top of his tomb to mark the spot. Then another **man** would become the **leader**. (Rius 1994)' [Bold added, my translation]

Comparison of the next two texts depicts a difference both in emphasis and content and a greater caution in naming the creators of 'art':

[13] 'Hunting was a really dangerous thing. Hunters were killed by wild **beasts**. Sometimes they would not find many animals and thus they got **hungry**. At that time they had to **desert** the cave and look for animals in another region. Prehistoric people painted images of the animals they would hunt on the walls of the cave in which they lived. They believed that in this way they would kill more. Some of those paintings are still found even today in caves all over the world.' (Rius 1994) [Bold added, my translation]

[14] 'A day in Cromagnon times. Deep inside the **caves,** prehistoric people made great **paintings**. They represented wild animals such as horses, bison, mammoths etc. The artists drew with their fingers, with sticks or leaves, using the colours found in nature–red, yellow, black–and obtaining their light from oil lamps. Prehistoric people did not live within these caves. It is believed that they were some sort of a church where people gathered for **religious ceremonies** (Lelorrain and Allen 2002).' [Bold in book, my translation]

Text [13] is the more dramatic, claiming that parietal images are found in caves also used for living in. Text [14] presents the imagery as something 'great' associated with religion and states the very opposite: these caves were not inhabited by human groups. They are both similar in that neither explicitly states who produced the imagery. In both cases this is rendered visually by the accompanying illustrations, which conform to the canons of representation by depicting art as a male–only or male–dominated domain (see for example Galanidou 2007, figure 4). Men are seriously involved in the task, and in the few cases where other members are present in the

illustration, they are far fewer in number and are either at play (e.g. children) or assigned to minor roles (e.g. women). The visual narratives thus offer an exclusively male-centred interpretation of the process through which this exceptional category of Palaeolithic material culture is meaningfully produced, used, and experienced. The accompanying textual narratives do nothing to alleviate this icon.

The androcentric reading of Palaeolithic life is not only present in connection with 'parietal art' but is omnipresent in almost every scene of daily life. Texts describe men as naturally born leaders (e.g. [12]), responsible for providing for their community, working for its welfare and generating art, innovation and economic change. The following account of Petrenios, a Palaeolithic boy who talks about his community life, draws a clear distinction between men and women:

[15] 'The weather was becoming very hot, and the endless travelling had tired most of us out–especially the **women**, who were about to give **birth**–so we chose a place next to the river to settle. **Men hunted** red deer, hare, fallow deer and ibex… but for how much longer? Their numbers had begun to dwindle, and before long we would be out of food. The eldest of all, **an old man respected** by all, found the **solution**. "...We should stay in this land for ever and cultivate it… Our **life changed** once and for all. From hunters we became agriculturists and herders.' (Bitsa 2005) [My translation]

Adult men are thus defined as the most important figures in a community. They participate in big game hunting and make the significant decisions that will ensure the group's survival. Elder men follow in the social hierarchy, participating in ritual ceremonies and teaching children to do what their fathers do. Adult women hold subsidiary roles, and elder women are never mentioned in texts. Children, whenever mentioned in texts, simply live on the margins of an adult male world and are the passive recipients of adult training. The following texts vividly render this social hierarchy through the description of different kinds of food consumed by children and men:

[16] 'First night in the cave. The **children** lie down wearing all their clothes. They sleep wrapped up in warm animal skins…For breakfast they **eat** some **nuts** crushed on a large stone.

Preparing for the hunt. Before departing for the hunt, the **men** stock up on energy by **eating meat** cooked on burning hot stones. (Beaumont 2000) ' [Bold added, my translation]

Children eat raw food that is gathered, whereas men eat highly valued cooked meat, rich in nutrients and energy to support them in their mission. By projecting the modern western view that places red meat at the top of the food pyramid–and its consumers highest in social rank–made-up Palaeolithic dietary needs and habits become the vehicle to prove that similar discrimination was present in the deep past.

Gender-oriented division of labour and the spatial disposition of individuals and their respective activities are clearly depicted in the following passages, which describe life in a dramatic snow-covered landscape:

[17] 'Departing for the hunt. It is very cold and everything is covered in snow. **Men depart** for the hunt whilst **women and children stay near** the cave. While the **men** have gone to **get food**, **women gather the firewood** needed to keep the hearth lit day and night. The **children play** with stones. They **learn** to take aim and throw them at tree trunks. Soon they will be ready to accompany their fathers on the hunt.

Making clothes. While the **men are away hunting**, **women make** their **clothes** from animal skins (Beaumont 2000). ' [Bold added, my translation]

The social hierarchy depicted in the texts above is repeated in the majority of children's books, further reinforced by means of the accompanying illustrations. In the *Prehistoric World*, visual material covers more than 2/3 of each page. The remaining space is covered by text, which is itself carefully written to avoid any social or other associations. For example:

[18] 'The first artists

Around 35,000 years ago, people began to paint pictures on the walls of caves. Cave paintings have been found in many parts of the world, but the most famous ones are in France and Spain. Nobody knows why these pictures were created, but tribes may have used the painted caves for meeting and ceremonies.

> The first priests? Sometimes, artists painted strange creatures that seem to be part human and part animal. These paintings may be portraits of early priests dressed as animals. Tribes may have held religious ceremonies in the caves where these figures were painted (Chandler 2000).'

The effect here is made by the illustration and its caption: a male-only party participating in a ritual that takes place within a cave with painted walls. Five men, their bodies painted in ochre, sit on the cave floor holding their spears. In the centre of the scene a human figure is dancing, wearing a wolf's tail, bird feathers and a head mask with deer antlers covering the face. The caption explains: 'This man is a priest. (Chandler 2000)'. Thus, although the core text of the book may be open to interpretation by its reader, the illustrations and captions clarify any possible ambiguity. The following captions from dioramic representations of modern human activities in the Upper Palaeolithic are eloquent about the division of labour by means of gender and age.

[19] 'The first modern people. This [old] man is telling some children about his hunting adventures.

> These men are from a different tribe. They have come to trade stone blades for seashells.
>
> This woman is making a basket from reeds.
>
> The Mammoth-hunters. This man is teaching children how to throw a spear.
>
> This man is making a stone knife.
>
> These women are making necklaces from shells and animal teeth (*ibid.*).'

The vast majority of the texts examined fail to capture prehistoric social dynamics; instead, they formalise the past into a few fixed associations. Women, children and the elderly simply watch adult men taking the important initiatives with regard to survival strategies, technological innovation and ritual. The latter operate in the public sphere and are associated with technology, progress and authority. Elder men full of knowledge and wisdom likewise operate in the public sphere, whereas elder women are simply invisible. Adult women are associated with biology (through pregnancy, maternity and child upbringing) and operate in the domestic sphere. Finally, there is little or no provision for children, who are either apprentices (boys)

or dependents (girls). These attributions echo parochial interpretations of the deep past dating back to the early and mid 20th century, at the time when some of the source illustrations were made, rather than the plurality of the ways archaeologists envision that past today. They work silently and effectively to render arbitrary visions which acquire the status of canonical narration about the past (Gould 1997). Through repetition and the 'scientific gloss' attained by ascription to the educational genre, these books in turn naturalise and authorise social discrimination and gender biases that may be familiar to the readers from other discourses, yet are miles away from what might have 'happened in prehistory'.

It is not only texts referring to Palaeolithic archaeology that distort children's vision of the past**.** Similar issues are raised in connection to a wide range of books coming under the 'educational' umbrella. Christine Detrez, for instance, has looked at children's encyclopedias dealing with the biology of the human body (Detrez 2005). Her examination of the language used to describe the body and the sexual denomination of organs reveals that the biological body is a social construction. She argues that through the biases abounding in the description of the body, in effect it is social rules and values that are scientifically 'justified' (*ibid.*) rather than scientific discoveries that are popularised.

## Visualising text: a context for interpretation

Since Clifford Geertz's (1973) proposal to read culture as text, a number of ethnoarchaeological investigations have focused on the production of meaning in various domains, and in particular on its imprint on material culture (e.g. Hodder 1982, 1989; Jordan 2003; Moore 1986). Research of this genre conceives of material culture as a text forming a code of signification: a communicative system (Jordan 2003) which, like words, is meaningful only within a context of action. As Jordan suggests 'words in a text are polysemous–they have no essential meaning and represent chains of signifiers, which tail off into a potentially infinite array of meanings. Meaning is only interpreted in terms of a context (*ibid*., 19).' Adopting this metaphor in my study, I conceive of texts aimed for children as elements of a special category of material culture: illustrated books. Like words, these are meaningful only within a context of representation. The context here is not simply shaped by words in relation to their place in the text but also, and perhaps more importantly, by the visual imagery accompanying the text. Thus meaning is rendered primarily by the illustrations found alongside

texts. The impact of the visual element in learning books is perhaps best illustrated by means of the following example:

[20] ‘Did they have wallpaper? No, they didn’t have any kind of paper. But they did sometimes paint pictures on cave walls. These were usually in the difficult-to-get-to inner parts of the caves, where people didn’t actually live. They were often pictures of the animals they hunted.

What were these inner caves for? Special occasions. They were probably seen as magical places, doors to another world. People think that they were used by hunters for special ceremonies (Cox and Reid 1994).’

The answers to these questions offer a reading of Upper Palaeolithic parietal imagery without making any explicit reference to gender. The accompanying illustration is, however, a stereotypical depiction of art in the making, showing hunting and ceremonial activities as male domains. Indeed, in the entire book there is often conflict between text and illustration: the former is innovative, whereas the latter follows visual clichés. Moreover, the use of the words ‘probably’ and ‘people think’ in the text introduces an element of uncertainty as to what Palaeolithic imagery is all about, and is contrasted to the didactic tone of the texts examined earlier. Yet this element of uncertainty disappears, as the image leaves hardly any space for it and has a much stronger and longer-lasting effect on the way the children who read this book are directed to envision who created the images on the cave walls and why they did so. Unlike the authors of the book, the illustrator is only prepared to meet the existing canons of visual representation (Galanidou 2007), and in doing so sets a fictional agenda for the deep past.

Examination of the illustrations accompanying texts in children’s books has shown that in visual narratives of Early Stone Age life, roles are always attributed by gender and arbitrary hierarchies of social relationships are depicted (*ibid*.). Through their position, their sheer number, and the type of activity they are shown to be involved in, men are visually rendered as more important than other members of the group in terms of both survival and social life. They are placed at the top of these hierarchies. Most illustrations conform to canons of representation established long ago, and deviate enormously from archaeologists’ current envisioning of Palaeolithic societies. This is not to say that Palaeolithic interpretation has radically changed, but at the very least it has been enriched by discussions of the

possible roles of women, children, the elderly and individuals distinguished for their physical and spiritual attributes (e.g. Owen 2005, Roveland 2000, Grimm 2000, Conkey 1991). Although few archaeologists would still make reference to the Palaeolithic as a legacy driven solely by brave, prime-aged hunters,[7] illustrations aimed at the public have no hesitation in doing so, and thus in sending children their own biased message about the past.

## Children, text and identity

Texts and illustrations work together to show that the origin of ideas about social hierarchy is in the deep past. They perpetuate stereotypes of the Palaeolithic as a period in human prehistory that operated and advanced thanks to the 'solitary doings' of adult men. Such a representation may be best conceived within the process of modern identity formation. Social scientists argue that memory, identity, and social cognition–or human cognition more generally–are fundamentally organised by metaphoric and narrative structures. Identity, how the self is conceptualised, is historically and culturally situated. The subject gives and receives meaning with reference to the 'other'. In these books, the Palaeolithic heritage, our own common heritage of hunting and gathering, is treated as the 'other', safely placed in the remote past. The texts examined here abound in language biases and arbitrary metaphors designed to render preconceptions of primitiveness, inferiority and harshness as scientific facts. They thus underscore the superiority of modern 'us' as opposed to the prehistoric 'other', and the major contribution made by adult males to reaching modern civilisation. These views offer scientific justification to the idea that social and cultural discrimination were born in the distant past and have followed humanity from its early steps.

Despite their potential, the texts make no concerted effort to work towards a different sort of identity, introducing children to the notion of 'global consciousness'. This is defined as 'comprehension of and receptivity to foreign cultures, and the availability of certain knowledge of and information about socioeconomic concerns and ecology' (Oxford Dictionary of New Words, 1991). At a time when ready stereotypes and fear of the unknown constantly threaten to prejudice children's perceptions of other social or cultural groups, these textual narratives do nothing to promote intercultural understanding and empathy. Neither do they treat the Pleistocene climatic record of recurring advances and retreats of continental ice sheets, the glacials and interglacials, as an opportunity to elaborate on

global climatic events, similar to those which modern children will have to face sooner rather than later, and on the responses of past foraging societies to them. As we saw earlier, this constitutes yet another wasted opportunity to acquaint children with the long-term history of humans and the Earth. In short, the books fail to address modern issues or open windows to critical thought, and are plainly incapable of meeting the modern educational agenda (e.g. http://www.prasena.com/public/peace/9.htm).

## Reconsidering Palaeolithic Archaeology's popularisation

In the western world, the genre of learning books emerged in the 1940's out of the wish of a few inspired teachers to offer their students more information about the world and new learning stimuli. What began as a step towards innovative teaching half a century ago has now become a major sector in the commercial publishing business (Galanidou 2007). It not only targets a wide range of age groups, but also accommodates a wide range of academic subjects, from evolution to aerospace engineering, and is characterised by various degrees of scientific reliability, originality and success in arousing children's interest in the particular subject matter. While some publishers may specialise solely in this genre, almost every 'respectable' publishing house targeting younger audiences features a section on education. Of this output, books about the past as revealed by archaeology will find their place not only in bookshops but also in museum shops, school libraries and classrooms, thus constituting a significant vehicle through which educators and children acquire views of the past.

In discussing children's books about prehistory, we are faced with the more general problems that surround the popularisation of science. Discussions of archaeological education and popularisation are often confined within the narrow bounds of the discipline. What is usually at stake is the quest for higher scientific accuracy in dissemination, which goes hand in hand with the need to tune the information presented to children or the non-specialist with the discipline's most recent discoveries. Presenting our discipline's technical matters to a wider audience without significant loss in scientific accuracy (e.g. Binant 2007) is, however, only one aspect of modern popularisation. Updating narratives about the past so that they encompass archaeology's current theoretical and interpretative concerns is another. We certainly need new narratives aimed at children, which will invite them to

grasp concepts such as 'difference' as a 'choice' made by Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers, at least involving those who were of similar brain capacity to ourselves. We need both visual and textual narratives that envision different social categories in the past and hypothesise on their activities depending on the day, season or setting. For example, as recent studies suggest (Owen 2005), Palaeolithic women may at times have been engaged in arts, crafts, shamanism, plant food gathering, big game hunting and educating, as well as mothering and grand-mothering. Palaeolithic children may have learned a craft or social rule through their very presence in a place, through play, imitation, storytelling, or formalised apprenticeship.

All these notwithstanding, it is essential that writing archaeology for the wider audience, and especially children, be re-addressed. The study of the past, when interwoven with the major social, economic and environmental challenges at the beginning of the 21st century, adds another exciting dimension to research. Looking at prehistory through the lens of the global issues of modern humanity–and vice versa–nurtures a humanistic view well placed within Edgar Morin's outline for the future educational agenda. Today, one might consider why it is important to invest in expensive, sophisticated interdisciplinary research in order to investigate, for instance, modern human origins in Sub-Saharan Africa or plausible scenarios for Neanderthal extinction–such as famine, epidemic etc.–if sight is lost of the fact that a large number of endangered animal species worldwide is likewise very close to extinction; that famine is a harsh reality for a large part of the human population in the third world; that many thousands of people are infected, killed or orphaned as a result of the HIV epidemic, with sub-Saharan Africa currently accounting for 76% of all AIDS-related deaths in 2007 (http://www.unaids.org consulted on 30/10/2007); or that survival of the few remaining tribal people's life ways is under threat (http://www.survivalinternational.org consulted on 30/10/2007). When linked to modern problems, the Palaeolithic past may offer a worldwide historical angle on the way the wider audience and children view themselves in the world, their long history on earth and, more importantly, their future. A non-stereotypical view of humanity's early steps on Earth may give a fresh impulse to 'thinking globally and acting locally'. It may indeed prove to be a valuable key to thinking in the 'long-term' and understanding 'the human condition and earth identity' (Morin 1999, 24–25).

## Concluding remarks

On critically examining the textual narratives through which archaeological information about the Palaeolithic is presented in educational books, we see that the texts complement a limited range of iconographic themes. Although both claim to recreate the past in a scientific manner, and in fact are classified as 'early science', their content has little to do with archaeological concerns and hypotheses. With very few exceptions, the texts are dramatic, didactic and perhaps rather authoritative in tone; whether these qualities are desirable for a children's book is a subject of another debate, involving disciplines such as children's psychology and education. However, no matter what their tone, these texts tend to incorporate mainstream perceptions about the past. For all their potential as educational tools, they fail to address the new educational agenda for children worldwide (Morin 1999). Instead, they reify modern assumptions and proffer preconditioned images of power and authority in Palaeolithic societies. They rely on a supposedly scientific justification of social and cultural discrimination as 'genetically imprinted' by providing them with an origin rooted in prehistory. Such representations stem from contemporary power strategies and modern identity construction processes. In effect, the texts underscore the superiority of 'us', the modern humans, as opposed to the 'others', the early humans. When discussing scientific revolutions, Kuhn (1962) observed that scientific disciplines discipline thought by making some ideas seem natural and others almost unthinkable. It appears that exactly the same applies to the powerful textual narratives about Palaeolithic life: they make some ideas seem natural and others almost unthinkable. Are we to allow them to stand unchallenged?

## Notes

1 Catalogue of the exhibition 'Future seen through the Past' (2007, 9), Benaki Museum, Athens. The exhibition consisted of artistic interventions or 'commentaries' on the permanent exhibits, archaeological finds and historical objects, of the museum's 'Panorama of Hellenism'.

2 This notwithstanding, new media are much more heavily reliant on images and what images can be made to do (animation etc).

3 The predominance of imagery is likewise seen in most new learning media referred to in the introduction.

4 My own comments are given in square brackets.

5 Alison Roberts of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, is scientific advisor to the publication.

6 Greek pre-Socratic philosopher, c. 460-370 BC.

7 For example, such a view has been challenged at two recent scientific meetings: 'Beyond Cave Hunters: Gendering the Upper Palaeolithic' organised by F. Audouze at EAA 2004 in Lyon and 'Diversifying Pleistocene Societies: Theories, Methods, Evidence' organized by O. Soffer and F. Audouze at SAA 2006 in Puerto Rico.

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## Abstract

This paper examines the form, content and impact on identity construction of texts about Palaeolithic life in educational children's books. These reify modern assumptions, proffer preconditioned images of power relations in Palaeolithic societies and lie closer to contemporary ideas and values than to the prehistory they refer to. The paper pleads for plurality and greater scientific accuracy in representing the past, but strikes a note of optimism by stressing the potential of these texts to narrate the Palaeolithic to children, adopting the global humanistic vision in education proposed by Edgar Morin (1999). This promotes intercultural empathy and prioritises common humanity, pointing out the similarities between people while acknowledging and respecting difference.

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