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History Wars: Questioning Tolerance

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ABSTRACT

The experience of *history wars* is a laboratory for studying how history is embedded in mass experience. Greece has experienced, recently, such a history war over a new history textbook. The core of the debate centred on whether the nation-state and its ideology should be defended against globalization and the spirit of cosmopolitanism. “History” and “globalization” were set in contrast in a matrix where pastness, particularity, and nationality are pitted against presentism, modernism and cosmopolitanism. This book was written in the historical and pedagogical *Koinè*, the common language of internationalized historical scholarship, history didactics and the spirit of tolerance promoted by the UN, Council of Europe and EU. Studying the war that developed over it also helps us understand, on the one hand, how politics “from above”, promoting human rights, diversity and tolerance in history, encounters political, ideological and cultural reactions in the course of implementation. On the other, its purpose is to observe what happens when the standard language of contemporary history scholarship comes up against national audiences.

Η εξερεύνηση των πολέμων της ιστορίας μπορεί να μας μάθει πολλά για το πώς σκέπτεται την ιστορία μεγάλο μέρος του πληθυσμού στις σύγχρονες κοινωνίες, και τους τρόπους μέσα από τους οποίους αναδύεται η έννοια και η εμπειρία του παρελθόντος. Στην Ελλάδα υπήρξε πρόσφατα ένας παρόμοιος πόλεμος για το σχολικό εγχειρίδιο ιστορίας της Στ' δημοτικού, όπου η «ιστορία» και η «παγκοσμιοποίηση» τέθηκαν σε ένα πεδίο αντιπαράθεσης, στο οποίο από τη μια πλευρά συντάχθηκαν οι έννοιες της «παρελθοντικότητας», της «ιδιαιτερότητας» και της «εδνικότητας» και από την άλλη οι έννοιες του «παροντισμού», του «εκσυγχρονισμού» και του «κοσμοπολιτισμού».

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of their foundation, the United Nations and UNESCO adopted a *Declaration of the Principles on Tolerance* and decided to proclaim 1995 the “International Year for Tolerance”¹. According to the declaration:

tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.

The reason behind this decision was the preoccupation with the ethnic wars that followed the dissolution and the fragmentation of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the mass killing in Rwanda, racial assaults in Western Europe, and nationalist or religious extremism diffused around the world. Intolerance is increasingly being seen by international organizations as a major threat to democracy, peace and security.

TOLERANCE DISCOURSE SINCE 1948

Fostering tolerance in international relations and promoting a culture of peace through education so as to prevent the outbreak of another world war has been a permanent preoccupation of the UN and UNESCO since they came into existence, after the end of World War II and the defeat of Nazism. The connection between education and tolerance was solemnly declared in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, which affirmed that education: “should promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups” (Article 26)².

Historians and history teachers were called upon to educate young people in tolerance. History books and teaching should be freed from nationalist interpretations and prejudice, and history should no longer be a weapon to achieve national aspirations and ambitions, but become rather a means to knowledge and a way to encourage dialogue between countries. In 1954, the *European Cultural Convention*³, which called on signatory states to encourage study of the history and civilisation of the other contracting parties and to promote such studies in the territory of the other contracting parties, was signed in Paris. In addition, the Council of Europe, from the 1950s, urged its member states to revise their textbooks and to present the events of the past in less conflictual terms. Several bodies in UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the European Union, as well as independent entities like the Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig, undertook the task of promoting collaboration among scholars and education authorities from many countries in order to revise history textbooks. To these goals were added the elimination of clichés or incorrect interpretations that tainted the way neighbouring states were presented as well as the removal of discriminating stereotypes against other peoples, religious and ethnic groups. Also encouraged were the reshaping of traditional curricula of history teaching and the planning of new educational programmes against racism, intolerance and gender inequality. For the Council of Europe, the European Union and the constellation of institutes involved, the teaching of history was considered enormously important for the formation of the future citizens of democratic societies. One of the stronger initiatives was *Recommendation (2001) 15* on history teaching in 21st-century Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of Education with the aim “to make appreciable progress in developing a pluralist and tolerant concept of history teaching”⁴. The EU and the Council of Europe have been involved in helping the states of Eastern Europe to reform their history curricula, publish new textbooks and train history teachers. New concepts such as multi-perspectivity, the cross-border nature of heritage and diversity were added to the inspiring values of history teaching, as were new methods based on multi-media and cyberspace.

How these principles and recommendations on tolerance education were conceived in different countries and what degree of influence they had are issues that are still to be researched. Seen from the day-by-day evening-news perspective, the world seems not to have improved much despite the various activities to promote tolerance. Since the Year for Tolerance in 1995, we have seen new outbursts of ethnic conflict and slaughter, as well as religious, racial and xenophobic extremism. As always, the interpretation of human rights and tolerance has not been uniform. In societies where democracy and citizenship had a working meaning, tolerance was already part of the political culture. For this reason, some intellectuals have often taken a critical distance from the discourse on tolerance and human rights, disapproving of its abstractness which permits selective use to be made of it. They argue that the human-rights discourse, as it has developed, is itself part of the problem. Tolerance is the privatization of the difference, and a substitute for equality, it has been argued⁵. On the other hand, tolerance and human rights have been invoked by societies hitherto lacking tolerance and civil freedom. For people living under religious law or arbitrary regimes, in societies divided by ethnic or civil war, for oppressed minorities, for immigrant groups

living without rights, the appeal to the principles of tolerance and human rights is a strategy for empowering the weak. Tolerance is here invoked by those experiencing intolerance. But how have historians viewed this crusade for tolerance?

HISTORY AND TOLERANCE

“History” is a word much older than “tolerance” (an attitude) or “toleration” (an institutional and political practice). While history in its diversity of meanings is a secular term, tolerance emerged as a religious term during the century of religious wars (as a response to them), and retained its religious connotations into the 18th century. John Locke, the 17th-century English philosopher, in his famous *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689)⁶, argued that the state should not interfere in defining religious belief or imposing one on its subjects. The meaning of the concept was defined and enlarged during the Enlightenment by Voltaire in his *Treatise on Tolerance* (1763), Kant, mainly in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), and Thomas Paine in his *Rights of Man* (1791). In the 19th century tolerance moved away from the religious context, acquiring a more political meaning and became part of the liberal attitude (John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 1859), although the spread of European colonialism across the world was sustained by intolerance. The 20th century did not represent the triumph of tolerance, but the opposite. During this century, the literature on tolerance and intolerance was no longer preoccupied with the intolerant state, but mainly with mass politics and intolerant ideologies and mentalities. World War Two was the absolute triumph of intolerance. Since the end of the War, the literature on tolerance has been supplanted by the language of rights. In this way the “other” is not so much tolerated as allowed to be “other”, and even more, his right to respect is protected. Diversity is not “tolerated” but encouraged to be visible. The expanding literature on the politics of difference has gone beyond the concepts of tolerance and intolerance⁷. For this reason, in 2007 UNESCO adopted the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* and this year declared a World Day for Cultural Diversity⁸.

What does history have to do with tolerance, diversity and human rights? The entanglement of history with the nation has transformed history into a cultural practice of reshaping consciousness, identities and mentalities, which was part of the crafting of nation-states⁹. Nationalization of historical consciousness created an “us”-and-“them” dichotomy on the past and intolerance was enforced by its justification through history. National history was cultivated as a “science”¹⁰ but, at the same time and under certain political regimes, it could not avoid engaging in what the Council of Europe’s 2001 Recommendation considered the “misuse of history”. Under this definition were included ideological manipulation, the falsification or creation of false evidence, doctored statistics, faked images, fixation on events to justify or conceal others, distortions of the past for propaganda purposes, abuse of the historical record, and the denial or ignoring of historical fact¹¹.

Parallel to the rise of national history one has seen the process of internationalizing historical studies, theories, debates and communities, which has produced a thick network of conferences, societies, joint projects and journals. Some of the more conspicuous turns in the social sciences and humanities have reverberated internationally across these networks¹². Since the last quarter of the 20th century, the national and international itineraries of historical studies have experienced ongoing divergence. The cultural fashion of constructionism, the criticism of nationalism, and the engendering of historical discourse were the main trends through which the new route towards the globalization of historical studies was paved. The influence of theories coming from Social Anthropology, Michel Foucault and Edward Said (Orientalism) on historical studies has strengthened the focus on the “other” and the idea of “otherness” as an epistemological concept in

the humanities and social sciences, parallel with the the new readiness by international organizations to praise diversity.

But the reality of international meetings hardly corresponds to reality at a national level. Although the former are significant in expanding academic milieus, they are much less visible locally. National audiences are still dominated strongly by national history, which is informed by nostalgia, affection, pride, or antipathy. As a consequence, any attempt to disassociate history from the nation often results in history wars. Sometimes history wars break out after attempts are made to adapt historical teaching in school to the main trends of historiography and educational science. The cause of others is a desire to hang on to national values in education and to prevent the national consciousness from being aligned with new global experiences. Some of these assaults have resulted from a neo-conservative reevaluation of national history as a repository of perennial values. They have also stemmed from particular memory groups contesting the authority of the state to define the content of historical consciousness and demanding the right to see their past experience depicted in the official version of history.

Cultural wars centring on history have broken out in many countries around the world since the 1990s, following what has been described as the crisis of the nation-state, globalization, and the rise of new constituencies of history¹³. The idea that this chapter proposes is that the experience of history wars is a laboratory for studying how history is embedded in mass experience. I think that the battlegrounds over history open new frontiers of research for learning what history and historical culture are and how they have been re-conceptualised as social and cultural practices in contemporary societies. More recently, Greece has experienced such a history war over the new history textbook for the final year of primary school¹⁴. This chapter refers to (and draws on) my experience as an observer of and participant in the unprecedented intellectual and ideological war that followed the publication of this book, lasting for more than a year. The book was written in the historical and pedagogical *Koinè*, the common language of internationalized historical scholarship, adopting the history didactics and spirit of tolerance promoted by the UN, Council of Europe and EU. The study of the war that developed over it is also a contribution to understanding, on the one hand, how politics “from above”, promoting human rights, diversity and tolerance in history, encounters political, ideological and cultural reactions in the process of implementation. On the other, its purpose is to observe what happens when the standard language of contemporary history scholarship encounters national audiences.

THE STORY

The textbook was part of a series of new books issued as part of an overhaul of the school syllabus. The subject matter dealt with the history of the modern world since the Renaissance. In Greek primary and secondary education there are separate textbooks, published by the state, for each class. The authors of these textbooks are obliged to follow the official analytical curriculum set for all the country's schools. The Greek Constitution lays down that education should promote national consciousness and Christian sentiment among students. It is no surprise then that despite its title, *The Modern and Contemporary Period*, the new book focused overwhelmingly on Greek history. Nevertheless, it avoided references to the common myths of Greek national ideology, used a more neutral and detached language in referring to the sufferings or the heroic deeds of the Greeks, and avoided hostile language in referring to the country's traditional national enemies.

When this book was published in March 2006, few expected the unprecedented intellectual and ideological war that followed for more than an entire year. The accusation was that the book un-

dermined the foundations of Greek identity, tried to loosen the bonds between the Orthodox Church and the nation, cultivated historical oblivion regarding Turkey, introduced political correctness into Greek education, and put into practice the supposed imperatives of globalization to eradicate patriotism and national consciousness and to flatten world cultures. According to a more diffused conspiracy theory, a school of Greek historians, in the service of the USA or the EU, has as its purpose the deconstruction of national history and identity. (Note the particular use of the term *deconstruction*). The Church of Greece participated in the debate; its Archbishop condemned the authors as traitors. The book was condemned in churches during Sunday masses and the Holy Synod asked that it be recalled. Cyprus, where Greek textbooks are also in use, did not miss out on the controversy, and the Greek-Cypriot Ministry of Education also requested the book be recalled. Far-right groups burnt the book in front of the Greek Parliament during the National Day parade (25 March 2007). Greek Education Minister Marietta Giannakou refused to recall the book but asked the Academy of Athens to evaluate it. The Academy, a very conservative institute staffed by retired professors, responded (on 22 March 2006) with a text containing almost 80 points of correction, maintaining that the book did not serve the national spirit of education or the cultivation of national memory. The Academy's report was given to the authors' panel, headed by Prof. Maria Repoussi, in order that the book be "corrected". At the same time, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) requested withdrawal of the book on the grounds that it was written in the spirit of European integration, celebrating the free market and the European Union.

Television news shows (with their impassioned debates), the press (with a barrage of opinion pieces), and the internet, where dozens of bloggers and discussion forums created a vast virtual controversy, formed the battleground where this war over the rewriting of Greek history was fought. The controversy over the book became the most popular topic in everyday conversations among common people and one of the hottest issues in the elections debates. Historians who defended the book entered the field by means of a press conference, where five university professors, representing the editorial boards of five history and the social science reviews, explained to the assembled media why the accusations against the book were unfounded and unjustified¹⁵. They also participated in numerous television and newspaper debates.

HISTORY VS. GLOBALIZATION

The core of the debate centred on whether the nation-state and its ideology should be defended against globalization and the spirit of cosmopolitanism. This idea that there is a battle between globalization and cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and the nation-state and history, on the other, is the common denominator of all (left and right) opposition to the book. "History" and "globalization" were set in contrast in a matrix where pastness, particularity, and nationality are pitted against presentism, modernism and cosmopolitanism.

The concept of history and memory as a moral duty vis-à-vis authority came to the fore in the form of the resistance of people against the new cosmopolitan history, reactivating older ideas about memory as resistance. "Memory as resistance" became a commonplace, giving meaning to the cultural practices of history. In the Greek context, this meaning came from the post-war period when the Greek state suppressed the memory of the resistance against the German occupation. The slogan "Lest I forget" was used as a national emblem for remembering the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, and the motto "The people don't forget what the Right means" was used for the rise of socialists to power and delegitimization of their opponents. The conceptualization of memory as resistance was central to Greek politics. But the link between commemoration and resistance also came from dissident Eastern European intellectuals, who used the appeal to

memory against Soviet rule in the aftermath of the Prague Spring in 1968. Milan Kundera's opening phrase in his novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979) became famous: "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting"¹⁶. The genealogy of this link also features George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where the struggle against totalitarianism means the preservation of memory. The theoretic investment in this romanticized role of history came, paradoxically, from very different philosophical approaches, like Walter Benjamin's fragment on "history in peril" and Michel Foucault's references to counter-memory and counter-history as resistance practices against the dominant ideology¹⁷.

But why has globalization been set in contrast with history and how are both concepts related? Globalization is effected by forces standing above and across economies and societies. The intellectual equivalent of this operation is a high level of abstraction, which is at odds with particularities, proveniences and contexts. It resembles the network of superhighways and skyscrapers above the urban texture of old cities. Such a superimposed construction entails a mental break between the old and the new. The forces which unify the world (capitalism, science, technology) are superimposed structures which contrast the future with the past, the global with the local, the abstract with the concrete, and modernization with history. This unhistorical world of shining surfaces contrasts with a revival of nostalgia for oldness, and it is in this context that history as a means of conceiving the world in its diversity is juxtaposed with globalization¹⁸.

The activation of historical feelings in the face of coming modernity is older than the conception of globalization. History has long been considered as an expression of loss for a world fast disappearing under the emergence of mass industrial society in the 19th century¹⁹. According to Svetlana Boym, "nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress"²⁰. In the context of globalization what turns people to the past is the lack of futurity, or the impossibility of conceiving an ideal future different from the all-consuming and fast-consumed real future. As a consequence, nostalgia seems a defence of the old and familiar context against the threat from the superimposed forces of globalization, which are beyond any public control. From this perspective, globalization is considered to be the kingdom of amnesia²¹. This anxiety is not unjustified. Futurist representations of supermodernity include contempt for history, something common to most utopian thinking²².

HISTORY AND NATIONAL HISTORY

There were three main points of criticism for the new book: 1) The way in which it described the four centuries of Turkish rule, known as the *Turkish Yoke* (an official term, still in use for the centuries of Ottoman rule in Greek lands, from the 15th to the 19th centuries); 2) The role of the Orthodox Church in the national awakening, and the tradition of church-run secret schools; and 3) the expulsion of the Greek population from Asia Minor in 1922 after the Greek-Turkish War, in which the Greek Army invaded the Asia Minor territories of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I.²³ These topics form the main pillars of Greek national ideology, the outline of which is that the Greek nation stems from antiquity and has retained its unity despite foreign domination, preserving the dual legacy of Hellenism and Christianity. The book's authors were condemned by their critics not only because of their "cold" and unsentimental description of Greek suffering and achievement, but also because of their ambiguity about the issue of the continuity of the Greek nation from ancient to modern times. These charges found a large receptive audience because they correspond to the version of history embedded in national ideology. As a

consequence, the new book was presented as endangering patriotism; opposition to it, despite initiating from quite marginal groups, thus managed to garner massive support.

The historians who entered the debate explained the fictiveness and inaccuracy, not to mention misinformation, behind most of the charges against the book. Their main argument was that national ideology has created a fictional reality considered to be the history of Greece, which is in sharp contrast with the common acceptances of the scholarly community in historical studies. The historical community in Greece was formed during the post-dictatorship period, and one of the main ideas commonly accepted by its protagonists was rejection of the “ideological use of history”. Historians understood their historiographical task to weed out “ideological myths” from history. This idea, which contrasted “historical reality” with the “ideological view” of this reality, and “scientific” history with “ideological” history, was the common strategy of historians adopted in the controversy over the book²⁴. Looking back now at the debates on the book, from the distance of time, it is easy to understand that what was at stake was not the supremacy of truth over falsehood, or scientific knowledge over ideologically biased beliefs²⁵.

The hot topics of the debate had less to do with history in general than with the history, or more precisely the *biography*, of the nation. The debate had nothing to do with a disinterested, intellectual curiosity over an “historical past”, but with the passion for “our” “practical past”, which we want to use in our collective and public life. The idea of a distinction between two pasts belongs to the British philosopher of history Michael Oakeshott and has been re-elaborated in a recent controversy by Hayden White²⁶. It does not have to do with different pasts, but with different approaches to the past which end up in different pasts. As a consequence national history becomes the “practical past”, while global history is a matter of the “historical past”, because the former corresponds to a lived experience through a nation state, national language, education system, etc., while there is no such a thing as global experience (or it does not yet exist). The “practical past” depends on the “community of experience”, a term employed by Otto Bauer to explain the formation of nations²⁷. Many communities of experience, such as religious communities or the socialist movement, have experienced bitter quarrels over their respective “practical pasts”.

History as the nation’s “biography” refers to the definition of history as the “natural and moral biology of the nation”, provided by the Greek romantic historian Spyridon Zambelios, and as the genealogy of grandfathers, fathers and sons, by which the “national” historian Konstantinos Pappargopoulos presented the history of the Greek nation from antiquity to its present. Both wrote their books in the period following Greek independence, during which the construction of a national tradition of historiography, tailored to the needs of the new-born state, was begun²⁸. This conceptual transformation of history into national biography proposed an affective approach to describing the sufferings and achievements of the nation. Biography views the nation in the changing roles of victim and hero, fostering compassion and pride. In this way, history acquires affective aspects and becomes “national memory and heritage”, something precious worth preserving. “It is unthinkable that our children could learn a different history from what we learned and from what our fathers learned”, a politician proclaimed during the recent debate. As a consequence, the book incurred disapproval for mutilating or erasing the national memory. History matters not as a cognitive realm, but as an elaboration of experience. Whose experience? The nation, as a construction of emotion and knowledge, claims the right to define history as the description of its own experience and to enjoy the intimacy of its own past. History is identified with identity, and apart from cultivating identity, history has no other relevance in society. History as national biography becomes a place of enjoyment. Even mourning past sufferings offers enjoyment. National feastdays and heritage are moments and places for enjoying history²⁹.

PERFORMING HISTORY

The vast interest of the media and also of the general public in this debate on a history book is the consequence of preoccupation with the identity issue. Preoccupation with identity has been the common denominator of several ideological and political cleavages in Greece over the last fifteen years, including the Macedonia naming dispute, and the controversy over whether the religious affiliation of citizens should be stated on identity cards, which locked the government and the Church in a bitter conflict in 2001. The preoccupation with identity was also the driving force behind the proliferation of history supplements in the press, and of historical books and leaflets in general.

In the public debate, those historians who supported the book spoke in terms of history, scholarship and truth, while their rivals did so in terms of identity, emotion and pride. In the debate two incommensurable discourses confronted each other. Staging the debate in the mass media gave the confrontation the form of a performance. Viewer ratings for television and radio programmes on the history controversy surpassed those covering the hottest political issues of the period. Declaring the book anathema became a ritual gesture for press and television stars, bishops and politicians. In viewing nationalism as performance, it is understandable why historical debates concerning the nation turn out to be more performative than argumentative³⁰. As a result, historians entering the performance were expected to correspond to the audience's perception of historians as people who relate the "truth" by presenting documents. According to this view, historians should enact history, because in the semiotics of television, the historian is not someone who interprets documents, but someone who stands for documents, who is the visible and speaking exponent of documents. From this perspective, the confrontation was also about traditional, embedded, widely diffused ideas on what history is and what its methodology should be. In the popular imagination history and the past are overlapping concepts, and hence there is no room for multiple interpretations. The role of the historian should be to reveal the truth of the past through documents, to preserve this truth, and to be impartial to the political cleavages of past and present. But such impartiality, in the popular image of the historian, does not extend to national things. With rare exceptions, historical and national truth is felt to be identical. This identification is a crucial point and has a long history, since the use of history for nation building in 19th century. From this point of view, although the question was not about history, but rather identity, the language dealing with identity should have been legitimized by a modicum of scientificity.

WHO IS ENTITLED TO TALK ABOUT HISTORY?

The claim to scientificity did not mean that history should have been left to scientists; indeed, the opposite. The debate raised the question on "*Who owns history?*"³¹ The same question has been central to the confrontation over the name of Macedonia since 1992/93. The claim by the *altera pars* to the name was considered by the Greek part to be a "usurpation of our history", and the Republic of Macedonia was accused of falsifying history. "Don't let them steal our history" was one of the most popular slogans of the period³². The same attitudes surfaced in the debate on our history textbook, one demand being: "Don't let them fabricate our history". But if Greece was the owner of Greek history in the previous confrontation, who is the owner of history in an internal confrontation with historians? Who owns history? The question was transformed into "*Who is entitled to talk about history?*" Historians claimed this right for themselves, arguing that they are armed with better knowledge on controversial issues. But this view, considered elitist, was disputed by their opponents: The right to history belongs to the people and to everyone, including the Church. According to this response, history acquires a body, is materialized, owned, defended,

and safeguarded against usurpation and alienation. The body of history should be left intact. History materialized as a body was transformed into public property. Defending this public good became a patriotic and democratic task. The dispute over the question “Who is entitled to talk about history?” was a constituent part of this history war. In the same orbit were the demands by several groups that their particular history should be included in the textbook. Pontic (Black Sea) Greeks were the largest group, but regional authorities and veterans’ associations also petitioned that their histories find a place in the textbook.

The demands of particular groups to have their history depicted in the “national” history are remarkable. History is no longer considered the domain of the elite and the state, as it once was³³. This broadening of the historical domain is neither a version of the social history of common people, nor is it the unconventional history of excluded groups; rather, it is a compartmentalization of historical discourse. The particular stories that seek representation in the national story have been forged from the same dialectic pattern of victim and hero. The petitions of minor groups for representation in the national discourse involve broadening the national image-store towards a particularization of identities. In a public debate on the history book, I encountered someone who complained that it failed to make any reference to his home village of Distomo, the entire male population of which was killed by the Nazis during the Second World War³⁴. He was adamant that it should be included, despite the response that a book covering five hundred years of world history could not contain all events of that scale. For him, it was impossible to conceive a history that failed to mention an experience on which he had based his identity and personal pride. Thus, the question of “*Who is entitled to talk for history?*” proves how experience matters in things relating to past time and how history is conceived as a collective and personal construction of identity. But whose experience?

The thirst for memory and the desire to commemorate have emerged as some of the powerful cultural concerns of our contemporary societies, where the word ‘memory’ has almost substituted the word ‘history’ and has invaded historical studies in the form of expanding memory studies. The traumas of the 20th century are the prime cause for the rise of commemorations, but not all of those who demand recognition for their memories have experiences corresponding to those memories. Eelco Runia argues that the thirst for memory not only comes from an ‘excess’ of memory, but also from a ‘scarcity’ of memory: “Commemorating from ‘scarcity of memory’ springs from ontological homesickness and is a manifestation of a desire to get into contact with the numinosity of history”³⁵. The “ontological homesickness” coincides with the lodging of history as nostalgia and its contraposition to modernization and the futurist premises of globalization. But the controversy over the school textbook (a formal and state-sponsored historical narrative) also indicates just how powerful the need is for institutionalization of memories in a mass and non-hierarchical society. History wars are conflicts not just over memories but also over the *institutionalization of memory*. This is the reason why the politics of recognizing genocide, legislation on denial, and petitioning for forgiveness acquire such force and impetus in the contemporary world, and why historical controversies have to do with school textbooks, museums or monuments.

SYMPTOMATOLOGY

At the same time, the rise of memory and identity has led to a reconceptualization of history for mass audiences. Memory furnishes the material for the construction of identities and invests them with the power of emotion. History becomes a discontinuous and out-of-context collection of symptoms denoting violence and sacrifice. In the public debate history has become a discourse on *symptomatology*.

The thrust of the polemic against the book was not directed against its overall interpretation of Greek history, but at the points dealing with suffering and catastrophes. The most outstanding event of suffering in Greek historical culture took place in August 1922 in Smyrna/Ýzmir, where the Greek population of Anatolia had massed in the harbour of the city after the collapse of the Greek Army. As these people tried to board boats, the outskirts of the city were set on fire and armed bands assaulted the refugees. The scene was filmed and the pictures of the city in flames became a powerful symbol for the event, which became known as the “Catastrophe of Smyrna”³⁶. This symbol epitomized the refugees’ agony and also their future pains and misery in Greece, the land of their destination. It later became a symbol of national destiny. The events, symbolized in shorthand by the number “1922”, became the “*lieu du mémoire*” par excellence for 20th-century Greece³⁷. In describing the event, the authors of the history textbook used the quite neutral phrase “waterfront crowding” (*synostismos*). In the debate that followed, the word “*synostismos*” became a symbol for *softening* the dramatic aspects of history and writing a *light* narrative for the purposes of making national consciousness more and more flexible and compliant. The word became the main target of the book’s opponents, and served to rally most of the population descending from the 1922 refugees behind them. The writers were forced to replace the word with “evacuation under dramatic conditions”, the Prime Minister visited the Refugees Museum (a minor museum in the Athens suburbs) in a gesture of respect to the refugee experience, and the authorities decided to give school pupils, as a companion to the textbook, Dido Sotiriou’s novel *Farewell Anatolia* (the original Greek title is *Matomena Chomata*, literally “Bloodied Earth”), the literary expression of the 1922 “*lieu du mémoire*”, in order to balance the emotional deficit and pacify criticism of the textbook³⁸. Nothing pacified the reactions, however, because this sublime event, a central place of memory around which Greek historical knowledge is structured, was turned into a historical symptom of inner pain. And how can a symptom be described without referring to death, blood and atrocities?

The concept of symptom is synonymous with sign in Hippocratic medicine, the method by which an illness was diagnosed from its symptoms. In looking for the pathology of his polis, Thucydides used this method of deciphering signs in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*³⁹. But the modern relationship between symptom and history comes from the use of psychoanalysis in confronting the great historical traumas of the 20th century, the Holocaust in particular. The key argument is that exploration of such traumatic events as symptoms of modern society, rather than the usual historical method, can lead to a deeper understanding of its pathology. But what has happened is the opposite: turning the focus from conventional history to symptoms has produced a series of unrelated and out-of-context traumatic events. In this serialized symptomatology all coherence of explanation has been lost, considered irrelevant and unimportant. What happened in social studies has also happened in historical culture. The sublime events which structure the popular perception of history have replaced the catastrophic events. In this context history has become the description of unrelated symptoms.

Similar entanglements with the past, with strong emotional dimensions, have been described by the term *postmemory*. *Postmemory* refers to traumatic events, like wars, genocides, civil wars and other human catastrophes and it is formed neither by living participation in the events, nor by the transmission of the testimonies of participants, but by circulating rumours, anxieties, and diffused myths. *Postmemory* describes the relationship of the second and the third generation to the traumatic events.⁴⁰ *Postmemory* dominates the public consciousness and under certain conditions of re-activation is associated with *moral panic*. In this case the anxiety of un-remembering the “Catastrophe of Smyrna” was a sign of the perilous amnesia of the mourning for the “lost fatherlands” which lays at the roots of affection to Modern Greek national identity.

HISTORICAL CYBERCULTURE

The use of the internet and the virtualization of historical resources have enormously facilitated the thirst for memory, the need for recognition of suffering and forgiveness of perpetrators. The internet has made it possible for anyone to write about history, to collect historical data, to gather people around particular historical themes, and to write their own personal, family, or collective history. The recent history war in Greece began on the internet; here petitions were started in protest against the book and where everything written and spoken about the book was stockpiled⁴¹. This use of the internet in debating history should be studied from the point of view of transforming historical culture, because when internet sources outbalance books in providing historical information, then non-academic history outbalances academic history in the formation of historical consciousness. With the massive production of historical images, everyone now enjoys the possibility of producing and diffusing their own historical images, of creating private channels of information and discussion lists, which in turn create online communities. Universities and historical institutions cannot exercise any authority over the massive production of these images. Online communities construct their own historical worlds, which follow their own norms, ways of reference and interpretations of the past. The past has acquired a new cyberface, which includes all possible kinds of distorting mirrors⁴². For example, anyone can contribute to Wikipedia, now one of the most read websites in the world. An Irish historian friend whom I talked to about how the book controversy developed on the internet told me that he has noticed how marginal and clearly partisan positions now feature in articles on Irish history in far greater proportion than their actual acceptance in the academic community warrants. Passing straight onto Wikipedia, these ideas gain popularity though their mirroring on other websites and from being read, of course⁴³.

In the case of the history book, being deposited in cyberspace and reflected from mirror to mirror ultimately led it to acquire unimaginable deformations. These deformations, empowered through repetition from site to site and from blog to blog, have come to form new certainties, which have little or nothing to do with the real textbook, but which in turn feed the virtual and non-virtual historical culture with a new reality. Historical culture, in passing through cyberspace, is no longer a place of interaction between institutional history and public memory, nor is it a passive receiver of ideas about the past, elaborated by the academic or the state elites and “high culture”. Rather, it is an active agent in determining how historical images are to be constructed. The entry of history into the realm of “*popular cyberculture*” has changed historical culture⁴⁴. The result of this retrospective impact on the historical discipline is that discursive practices of historians have undergone changes too.

HISTORIANS AND THEIR AUDIENCES

Mass participation in the controversy also had another consequence. Historians did not find themselves in their accustomed position of talking to other historians or to academic audiences of students and colleagues in an environment protected by academic institutions and their culture. On the contrary, they were forced to address a hostile audience. Moreover, this audience disputed the historians’ authority on the past; it claimed its own capacity, and indeed its right, to talk about history and defend its own version of it. At the culmination of historicism the audience to which historians appealed was limited to literate people, and political history was the main concern of both sides. Now the audience interested in history has expanded considerably and includes not only the readers of historical books, but also the viewers of historical film and television productions, as well as internet users. The concerns of historians no longer correspond to those of the

new multifarious mass audiences. The rise of social, cultural and gender history, as well as deconstruction and the linguistic approach, has broadened the gap between mass-consumed national history, and the world of academic historians. Historical consciousness is still constructed around sublime events and presents the past in the form of grand national narratives. That historical studies have turned to social, cultural and gender history and to the history of everyday life has not yet had any impact on the mass audiences of history, nor does it meet their expectations of history. To some extent, history wars have been the result of a new history attempting to enter the public domain, the realm of education specifically. Divergences between scholarship and public history are acceptable as long as the two camps remain apart.

What was the experience of the historians who participated in the history battle? I mentioned earlier the incommensurability of discourses and the media pressure on historians to perform a traditional positivistic role, a consequence of the fact that the structure of the public domain is still patterned on essentialist history. For historians to intervene and change the image of the historian and history would be a legitimate goal as long as they could control the terms of the debate, which they do not. Given the prevalent essentialism in the public debate on history, they can either refrain from interfering in any way in the debate or they can adapt themselves to the required role and resort to a “strategic essentialism”. This term, employed by Spivak, refers to the “strategic use of a positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest”⁴⁵. Strategic essentialism, in this case, entails denouncing a rival opinion as a falsification of history, as a myth without any factual basis, or as a fictitious event, by presenting documents that supposedly tell the truth. The war over the book was fought on the grounds of factual history, even by historians critical of historical positivism. But the dispute was one over meaning, not fact! This double level where facts were the visible signifiers of meaning and discussion of the facts was the signifier of the debate on meaning enabled historians to argue efficiently at a factual level, but left them totally unable to respond at the level of meaning, because meaning was connected with emotionalism and identity. While their opponents could rely on an efficient narrative founded in identity, nation and history, historians could not count on any such thing. Arguing, as they did, about history as a science, they could indicate the connection between exact historical science and an open society, but they could not present a persuasive alternative history to the nation which could attract the attention of the mass audience. Neither could they present an alternative history of the nation, related to an alternative concept of identity which would in turn cover affect and emotion. Historians did not manage to bridge the gap between themselves and the audience. In order to persuade the latter not to doubt their veracity, they need to convince it, at the same time, of the value and effectiveness of their theory and method. But the debate on theory of history did not become a public issue and even historians hardly understand the social potential of theory.

POSTSCRIPT

The history textbook was withdrawn by the government immediately after the 16 September 2007 general election, in which the education minister who supported the book failed in her bid for re-election, and in which, for the first time, the ultra-right Popular Orthodox Rally party entered parliament, having proscription of the history textbook written on its banner. The history war was lost. But the whole issue has posed the problem of understanding how history, as a cultural practice, is embedded in the fabric of our societies, and why it has become one of the central arenas of contemporary social and cultural conflicts. Each case of course has its specificities, but the frequency and the passion of history wars around the globe are signs of something new we need to explore. Older theories on the public use and abuse of history came down in favour of

the history produced by scholars as an inquiry into the past and viewed other uses of history as degenerate forms of historical knowledge. In history wars the apple of discord is use of the past as a constitutive element of the self and the culture we live in. History wars happen not in cognitive, but in cultural fields. We need a new methodology to study this everyday aspect of historical mentalities and practices. The sense of the past in literature and art is, when considered from certain aspects, closer to mass historical culture than historical scholarship. The aforementioned issue concerning Dido Sotiriou's novel, which was to be given to pupils in order to compensate for the emotional deficit of the history book, is indicative of the fact that literature and art are closer to the popular experience of the past than scientific history. Art is related more to emotionality, and, for this reason, it plays a greater role in the shaping of such experience. This is a conclusion that has a significance for the creation of a tolerant society by reforming historical teaching. Intolerance has a stronger veil of sentiment and a more solid basis in mass experience. The two-century reign of national history has not been in vain.

NOTES

- ¹ http://www.unesco.org/webworld/peace_library/UNESCO/HRIGHTS/124-129.HTM (accessed 31 May 2008).
- ² <http://www.un-documents.net/a3r217a.htm> (accessed 31 May 2008).
- ³ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/018.htm> (accessed 31 May 2008).
- ⁴ <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=234237> (accessed 31 May 2008).
- ⁵ W. Brown, *Regulating Aversion. Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, Princeton 2006, pp. 78-106; C. Douzinas, *The End of Human Rights*, Oxford, 2001, and *Human Rights and Empire. The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*, London 2007; S. Žižek, *Human Rights and Its Discontents*, Olin Auditorium, Bard College, November 16, 1999 <<http://www.lacan.com/zizek-human.htm>>.
- ⁶ <http://www.constitution.org/jl/tolerati.htm> (accessed 31 May 2008).
- ⁷ W. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, Oxford 1989; J. Horton, P. Nicholson (eds), *Tolerance. Philosophy and Practice*, London 1992; M. Walzer, *On Toleration*, New Haven 1997.
- ⁸ http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=36528&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (accessed 31 May 2008).
- ⁹ S. Berger, M. Donovan K. Passmore (eds), *Writing National Histories. Western Europe since 1800*, London 1999. J. Revel, G. Levi (eds.), *Political Uses of the Past, The Recent Mediterranean Experience*, London 2002.
- ¹⁰ E. Gazi, *Scientific National History. The Greek Case in Comparative Perspective (1850-1920)*, Frankfurt-am-Main 2000.
- ¹¹ See note 4.
- ¹² K. D. Erdmann, *Toward a Global Community of Historians. The International Congresses and the International Committee of Historical Sciences 1898-2000*, New York 2005; Q. E. Wang, G. Iggers (eds.), *Turning Points in Historiography. A Cross Cultural Perspective*, Rochester 2002.
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- ¹⁴ M. Repousi, C. Andreadou, A. Poutachidis, A. Tsivas, *Sta neotera kai sygxrona xronia* [Modern and Contemporary History], Athens 2006.
- ¹⁵ Taking part in the 5 March 2007 press conference were representatives of the journals "Historein", "Historika, Mnemon", "Sygxrona Themata" and "Epitheorisi Politikis Epistimis", (See report at <http://www.in.gr/news/article.asp?lngEntityID=784709&lngDtrID=244>).

- ¹⁶ R. S. Esbenshade, *Remembering to Forget. Memory, History, National Identity in Postwar East-Central Europe*, in "Representations", Winter 1995, 49 (Special Issue: *Identifying Histories. Eastern Europe Before and After 1989*), pp. 72-96.
- ¹⁷ W. Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, New York 1992; M. Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practices. Selected Essays and Interviews*, Ithaca, NY 1977; B. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, Maidenhead 2003, pp. 61-67.
- ¹⁸ A. Dirlík, *Is there History after Eurocentrism? Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History*, in "Cultural Critique", 1999, 42, pp. 1-34.
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- ²⁰ S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York 2001, p. xv.
- ²¹ Jameson F., *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham 1991, 279-96; A. Huyssen, *Twilight Memories. Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, New York 1995, pp. 85-101.
- ²² A. Liakos, *Utopian and Historical Thinking. Interplays and Transferences*, in "Historein" 2007, 7, pp. 20-57.
- ²³ M.L. Smith, *Ionian Vision. Greece in Asia Minor 1919-1922*, London 1988.
- ²⁴ The main exponent of this theory was F. Iliou, *I Ideologiki xrisi tis istorias*, Athens 1976. See A. Liakos, *Modern Greek Historiography (1974-2000). The Era of Tradition from Dictatorship to Democracy*, in U. Brunbauer (ed.), *(Re)Writing History. Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*, Münster 2004, pp. 351-378.
- ²⁵ H. Exertzoglou, *Some thoughts on the controversy over the history textbook*, in "Sygxrona Themata", 2007, 97, pp. 8-11.
- ²⁶ M. Oakeshott, *What Is History? and Other Essays* (ed. and with introduction by L.D. O'Sullivan), Thorverton 2004; H. White, *The Public Relevance of Historical Studies: A Reply to Dirk Moses*, in "History and Theory", 2005, 44, pp. 333-338.
- ²⁷ G. Ananiadis, *Rationalism and Historicism in Austromarxism*, PhD Thesis, University of Essex 1995, pp. 148-222.
- ²⁸ A. Liakos, *The Construction of National Time. The Making of the Modern Greek Historical Imagination*, in "Mediterranean Historical Review", 2001, 16,1 (special issue, J. Revel, G. Levi, ed., *Political Uses of the Past*), pp. 27-42.
- ²⁹ Y. Stavrakakis, N. Chrysoloras, *(I can't get no) enjoyment: Lacanian theory and the analysis of Nationalism*, in "Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society", 2006, 11, pp. 144-163.
- ³⁰ A. Kitroeff, *Wrestling with the Ancients. Modern Greek Identity and the Olympics*. New York 2004; D. Guss, *The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism as Cultural Performance*, Berkley 2001; K. Askew, *Performing the Nation. Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*, Chicago 2002; K. Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*, Ann Arbor 2002.
- ³¹ See also, E. Foner, *Who owns history? Rethinking the Past in a Changing World*, New York 2002.
- ³² A. Skoulariki, *'Au nom de la nation'. Le discours public en Grèce sur la question macédonienne et le rôle des médias (1991-1995)*, Paris 2002.
- ³³ Nora P., *Reasons for the current upsurge in memory*, in "Transit", 2002, 4, <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-04-19-nora-en.html>>
- ³⁴ M. Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece*, New Haven - London 1993, pp. 212-215.
- ³⁵ E. Runia, *Burying the dead, creating the past*, in "History and Theory", 2007, 46, pp. 313-325, here p. 323.
- ³⁶ In 1982 these documents were used in the film *1922* by the director Nikos Koundouros who took an active part in TV debates against the book.
- ³⁷ R. Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe. The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus*, Oxford 1989. A collection of oral testimonies by refugees: *Exodos*, Athens, Centre for Asia Minor Studies, vol. A+B, 1980-1982.
- ³⁸ The book, first published in Athens in 1964, became an all-time classic, and was translated into English by F.A. Reed under the title *Farwell Anatolia*, Athens 1977.
- ³⁹ C. Ginzburg, *Aristotele, la storia, la prova*, in "Quaderni Storici", 1994, 85, pp. 5-17.
- ⁴⁰ M. Hirsch, *Family Frames. Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press 1997; T. Ashplant, Gr. Dawson, and M. Lambek, (eds), *The Politics of Memory. Commemorating War*, New Brunswick 2000, 43-47
- ⁴¹ <http://www.antibaro.gr>
- ⁴² M. Poster, *History in the Digital Domain*, in "Historein", 2003-2004, 4, pp. 17-32.

- ⁴³ R. Rosenzweig, *Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past*, in "Journal of American History", 2006, 93,1, pp. 117-46.
- ⁴⁴ D. Silver, *Looking Backwards, Looking Forward: Cyberculture Studies 1990-2000*, in D. Gauntlett (ed.), *Web.studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age*, Oxford 2000, pp. 19-30. (<http://www.newmediastudies.com/index.htm>).
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