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History Wars: Notes from the field

The making of a global history is not a follow-up to globalization. Neither the latter nor the former are products of smooth, linear and peaceful courses. Just as the history of globalization should chart the reluctance and resistance towards the integration of the markets, communication networks and cultural spaces, in a similar way the making of global history should also comprise the cultural wars over memory, history and legacies. The major cause of these wars lies in the difficulties in the relationship between nation and history. "History", just as many other concepts and practices, has been reconceptualised through its use as building material in the erection of national institutions during the past two centuries. Moreover, the entanglement of history with the nation has transformed history into an intellectual practice of reshaping society. This practice has spread across national cultures as part of the crafting of nation-states.¹ But parallel to the rise of national history was also the process of the internationalization of 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 networks.²

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, the national and international itineraries of historical studies have experienced ongoing divergence. Although clear distinctions are impossible, the one remains faithful to the sovereignty of national history, while for the other "there was no king in Jerusalem".³ The cultural turn, 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. But the reality of international meetings does not correspond to the national realities. Although the former are significant in expanding academic milieus, they are much less visible locally. The national public spheres are still dominated by national history. As a consequence, attempts to disassociate history

¹ Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore (eds), *Writing National Histories. Western Europe since 1800*, London, Routledge, 1999.

² Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Toward a Global Community of Historians, The International Congresses and the International Committee of Historical Sciences 1898-2000*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2005; Q. Edward Wang and Georg Iggers (eds), *Turning Points in Historiography. A Cross Cultural Perspective*, Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2002.

³ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream, The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, 573.

from the nation often result in history wars. These attempts have not only stemmed from the need for historical consciousness to be aligned with new global experiences; they have also resulted from a neo-conservative turn which appreciates national history as a repository of perennial values, and from the rise of particular memory groups which contest the authority of the state in defining the content of historical consciousness and which demand the right to see their past experience depicted in the official version of history.

Following the crisis of the nation-state and the ascendance of new constituencies of history, cultural wars centred on history have broken out in many countries around the world since the 1990s.⁴ The idea that this paper 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 research frontiers for learning what history and historical culture are and how they have been reconceptualised 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 class of primary school. This paper refers to (and draws on) my experience as an observant of and participant in the unprecedented intellectual and ideological war that followed the publication of this book, lasting for more than a year.

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 unique 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 instructs that education should promote national consciousness and Christian sentiment among the students. It is no surprise then that despite its title, *The Modern and Contemporary Period*, the new book focused

⁴ Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (eds) *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*. New York: Metropolitan, 1996; Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 2003; Chris Bickerton, "France's History Wars", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 2006; Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking": History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States*, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2006. Giuliano Procacci, *La Memoria Controversa. Revisionismi, Nazionalismi e fondamentalismi nei manuali di Storia*, Cagliari, AMD, Edizioni, 2003.

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 undermined 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 to 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 the 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 the everyday conversations of 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 unjustified.⁵ Furthermore, they 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 against 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” has been 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 ascendance of socialists to power and for the delegitimization of their opponents. The conceptualization of memory as resistance was central to Greek politics. But the link between commemoration and resistance came also 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 notorious:

⁵ Taking part at the 5 March 2007 press conference were the representatives of the journals *Historiein*, *Historika*, *Mnemon*, *Sygxrona Themata* and *Epitheorisi Politikis Epistimis*, (See report at <http://www.in.gr/news/article.asp?lngEntityID=784709&lngDtrID=244>).

“The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting”.⁶ 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 from 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 ideology.⁷

But why has globalization been put in contrast with history and how are both concepts related? Globalisation is operated by forces found above and across economies and societies. The intellectual equivalent of this operation is a high level of abstraction, which is at odds with the 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 is contrasted with a renewed oldness of nostalgia, and it is in this context that history as a means of conceiving the world in its diversity is juxtaposed with globalization.⁸

The activation of historical feelings in advance of the coming of modernity is older than the conception of globalization. History was considered as an expression of the loss of a world fast disappearing as the result of the emergence of the mass industrial society in the nineteenth century.⁹ According to Svetlana Boym, “nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress”.¹⁰ In the context of globalization what turns the people to the past is the lack of futurity, or the impossibility of conceiving an ideal future different from the all-consuming and fast-

⁶ Richard S. Esbenshade, Remembering to Forget: Memory, History, National Identity in Postwar East-Central Europe, *Representations*, No. 49, Special Issue: Identifying Histories: Eastern Europe Before and After 1989 (Winter 1995), pp. 72-96.

⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, New York, Fontana Press, 1992; Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practices: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University press, 1977; Barbara Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2003, 61-67.

⁸ Arif Dirlik, “Is there History after Eurocentrism?: Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History”, *Cultural Critique*, 42 (1999) 1-34.

⁹ Jorn Rusen, “Historical Thinking as *Trauerarbeit*: Burkhardt’s Answer to a Question of our Time”, in Andreas Cesana, Lionel Gossman (eds) *Encounters with Jacob Burckhardt*, Basel, Schwabe, 2004, 337-355.

¹⁰ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001, xv.

consumed real future. As a consequence, nostalgia seems a defense 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 amnesia.¹¹ This anxiety is not unjustified. From the view of futurist representations of supermodernity it includes contempt for history, something common to most utopian thinking.¹²

History and national history

There were three main points of criticism of 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 the Greek lands, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries); 2) The role of the Orthodox Church in the national awakening, and the myth 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.¹³ These topics concern 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 with the version of history embedded in national ideology. As a consequence, the new book was presented as endangering patriotism, and for this reason the opposition towards it, despite having been initiated from quite marginal groups, was able to garner massive support.

The historians who entered the debate explained the fictiveness and inaccuracy of, as well as the misinformation behind, most of the charges against the book. Their main argument was that national ideology has created a fictive reality considered to be the history of Greece, which is in sharp contrast with the common acceptances of

¹¹ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, New York, Routledge, 1995, 85-101.

¹² Antonis Liakos, "Utopian and Historical Thinking: Interplays and Transferences", *Historein* 7 (2007) 20-57.

¹³ Michael Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision. Greece in Asia Minor 1919-1922*, London, Hurst, 1988.

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 the rejection of the “ideological use of history”. Historians understood their historiographical task to discharge “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 book.¹⁴ 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 beliefs.¹⁵

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 with “our” “practical past”, which we are interested in using. The idea of the distinction between the two pasts belongs to the British philosopher of history Michael Oakeshott and has been re-elaborated in a recent controversy by Hayden White.¹⁶ 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 national language, in a national state, 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 nations.¹⁷ 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

¹⁴ The main exponent of this theory was Filippou Iliou, *I Ideologiki xrisi tis istorias*, Athens 1976. See Antonis Liakos, “Modern Greek Historiography (1974-2000). The Era of Tradition from Dictatorship to Democracy” in Ulf Brunbauer (ed.), *(Re)Writing History. Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*, Münster, LIT Verlag, 2004, 351-378.

¹⁵ Haris Exertzoglou, “Some thoughts on the controversy over the history textbook” *Sygyxrona Themata*, 97 (2007) 8-11

¹⁶ Michael Oakeshott, *What Is History? And Other Essays* (ed. and with introduction by L. D. O’Sullivan), Thorverton, Imprint Academic, 2004; Hayden White, “The Public Relevance of Historical Studies: A Reply to Dirk Moses”, *History and Theory* 44 (2005) 333-338.

¹⁷ Grigoris Ananiadis, *Rationalism and Historicism in Austromarxism*, PhD Thesis, University of Essex 1995, 148-222.

Spyridon Zambelios, and as the genealogy of grandfathers, fathers and sons, by which the “national” historian Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos presented the history of the Greek nation from antiquity to his present. Both wrote their books in the period following Greek independence, during which the construction of a national tradition of historiography, tailored for the needs of the new-born state, was begun.¹⁸ This conceptual transformation of history into national biography proposed an affective approach in the description of the sufferings and achievements of the nation. Biography views the nation in the changing roles of victim and hero, claiming 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 was disapproved for mutilating or erasing national memory. History matters not as a cognitive realm, but as an elaboration of experience. Whose experience? The nation, as a construction of affect 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 feasts and heritage are moments and places for enjoying history.¹⁹

Performing History

The vast interest of the media and also of the general public in the debate on the history book is the consequence of this preoccupation with the identity issue. Preoccupation with identity was 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 had locked the government and the Church in a bitter conflict in 2001. The preoccupation with identity was also the driving force

¹⁸ Antonis Liakos, “The Construction of National Time. The Making of the Modern Greek Historical Imagination” in Jacques Revel and Giovanni Levi, *Political Uses of the Past*, Special Issue of *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 16,1 (2001)27-42.

¹⁹ Yannis Stavrakakis – Nikos Chrysoloras, “(I can’t get no) enjoyment: Lacanian theory and the analysis of Nationalism”, *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*, 2006, 11 (144-163) 144-163.

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, affect and pride. In the debate two immensurable discourses confronted each other. The staging of the debate in the mass media gave the confrontation the form of a performance. The viewer ratings for television and radio programmes concerning the history controversy reached a highpoint, surpassing 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 argumentative.²⁰ As a consequence, 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 the traditional, well-embedded and 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 as a consequence 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 the past and the present. This impartiality does not extend to national things. With rare exceptions, historical and national truth are identical. From this point of view, although the question was not about history, but rather identity, the language of dealing with identity should have been legitimized by the concept of scientificity.

Who is entitled to talk about history?

²⁰ Alexander Kitroeff, *Wrestling with the Ancients: Modern Greek Identity and the Olympics*. New York, Greekworks, 2004, David Guss, *The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism as Cultural Performance*, Berkley, University of California Press, 2001, Kelly Askew, *Performing the Nation. Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*, University of Chicago Press, 2002, Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2002.

The claim to scientificity did not mean that history should have been left to scientists; rather it was the opposite. The debate raised the question on “*Who owns history?*”²¹ The same question has been central to the confrontation over the name of Macedonia since 1992/93. The claim of the *altera pars* to the name was considered by the Greek part to be an “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 period.²² The same attitudes surfaced in the debate on the book, one demand being: “Don’t let them fabricate our history”. But if Greece was the owner of Greek history in the previous confrontation, who was 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 also the demands of several groups to see their particular history included in the textbook. Pontic (Black Sea) Greeks were the largest group, but regional authorities and veteran associations also petitioned that their histories be included 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 was.²³ 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

²¹ See also, Eric Foner, *Who owns history? Rethinking the Past in a Changing World*, New York, Hill and Wang, 2002.

²² Athéna Skoulariki, ‘*Au nom de la nation*’. *Le discours public en Grèce sur la question macédonienne et le rôle des médias (1991-1995)*, Université Pantheon-Paris II, 2002.

²³ Pierre Nora, “Reasons for the current upsurge in memory”, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-04-19-nora-en.html>.

representation in the national discourse involve the broadening of the national imaginary towards a particularization of identities. In a public debate on the history book, I encountered someone who was complaining 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 War.²⁴ 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 this scale. For him, it was impossible to conceive a history that failed to mention an experience on which he has based his identity and personal pride. Thus, the question on “*Who is entitled to talk for history?*” proves how experience matters in things related 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 twentieth century are the prime cause for the ascendance of commemorations, but not all of those who demand the recognition of 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”.²⁵ 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 for the institutionalization of memories in a mass and non-hierarchical society is. History wars are conflicts not just over memories but also over the *institutionalization of memory*. This is the reason why the politics of recognizing genocides, the legislation on negationism, and the petitioning for forgiveness acquire such a force and impetus in the contemporary

²⁴ Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece*, New Haven/London 1993, 212-215.

²⁵ Eelco Runia, “Burying the dead, creating the past”, *History and Theory* 46 (2007) 313-325, here p. 323.

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 emotionality. History becomes a discontinuous and out-of-context collection of the symptoms of 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/Izmir, 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”.²⁶ This symbol epitomized the refugees’ agony and also their future pains and misery in Greece, the land of their destination. It became later a symbol of national destiny. The events, symbolized in shorthand by the numerical “1922”, became the “*lieu du mémoire*” par excellence for twentieth-century Greece.²⁷ 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 the *softening* of the dramatic aspects of history and for the writing of 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 the majority of population descended from the 1922 refugees behind them. The writers were constrained 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

²⁶ In 1982 these documents were used into the film “1922” by the register Nikos Koundouros who took an active part in TV debates against the book.

²⁷ Renée Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe. The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989. A collection of oral testimonies of refugees: *Exodos*, Athens, Centre for Asia Minor Studies, vol. A+B, 1980-1982.

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 to pacify criticism of the textbook.²⁸ Nothing pacified the reactions, however, because this sublime event, a central place of memory around which Greek historical knowledge is structured, was turned into an 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 the 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*.²⁹ But the modern relationship between symptom and history comes from the use of psychoanalysis in confronting the great historic traumas of the twentieth century, the Holocaust in particular. The key argument is that the exploration of the traumatic events as symptoms of modern society, rather than the usual historical method, can lead to a deeper understanding of its pathology. But what happened is the opposite: the turn of 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.

Historical cyberculture

The use of the internet and the virtualization of historical resources have enormously facilitated the thirst for memory, the need for the recognition of suffering and for the 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 one's own personal, family, or collective history. The recent history war in Greece began on the internet; here petitions were started in protest

²⁸ The book, first published in Athens in 1964, became an all-time classic, and was translated into English by Fred A. Reed under the title *Farwell Anatolia*, Athens, Kedros, 1977.

²⁹ Carlo Ginzburg, "Aristotele, la storia, la prova", *Quaderni Storici*, 85, 1994, 5-17.

against the book and where everything written and spoken on the book was stockpiled.³⁰ This use of the internet in debating history should be studied from the point of view of the transformation of 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 one's 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 mirrors.³¹ For example, anyone can contribute to Wikipedia, now one of the most read websites in the world. Talking about how the book controversy developed in the internet with an Irish historian friend, he told me that he has noticed how marginal and clearly partisan positions now feature in articles on Irish history in far greater proportions than their actual acceptance in the academic community. And once on Wikipedia, these ideas gain popularity though their mirroring on other websites and from being read, of course.³²

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, having being 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 going to be constructed. The entry of history into the realm of "*popular*

³⁰ <http://www.antibaro.gr>.

³¹ Mark Poster, "History in the Digital Domain", *Historein* 4 (2003-4) 17-32.

³² Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past", *The Journal of American History*, 93, 1 (2006), 117-46

cyberculture” has changed historical culture.³³ The result of this retrospective impact on the historical discipline is that discursive practices of historians have undergone changes too.

Historians and their audiences

The mass participation in the controversy has also 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 on history and to 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 sites. Now the audience interested in history has expanded considerably and includes the readership not only 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 turn, 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. The turn of historical studies 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, the history wars were the result of the attempts of a new history to enter the public domain, the realm of education specifically. The 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 immensurability 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

³³ David Silver, “Looking Backwards, Looking Forward: Cyberculture Studies 1990-2000”, in David Gauntlett (ed.), *Web studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age*, Oxford University Press, 2000, 19-30. (<http://www.newmediastudies.com/index.htm>).

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”.³⁴ 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 the discussion of the facts was the signifier of the debate on meaning enabled historians to argue efficiently at the factual level, but left them totally unable to respond at the level of meaning, because meaning was connected with emotionality and identity. While their opponents could rely on an efficient narrative-relating identity, nation and history, historians could not afford such a 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, which in turn could be related to an alternative concept of identity which would also cover affection and emotionality. 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 effectivity 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 potentialities 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 to be re-elected, and in which, for the first time, the ultra-right

³⁴ Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 3.

Popular Orthodox Rally party entered parliament, having written on its banner the proscription of the history textbook. 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 has of course 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 privileged the history produced by scholars as an inquiry of the past and viewed the uses of history as degenerated forms of historical knowledge. In history wars the apple of discord is the 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.