

History as a Public Claim and the Role of the Historian: Two Recent Debates Regarding the Ottoman Past in Greece and Bulgaria¹

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In 2007, almost simultaneously in Greece and Bulgaria, public opinion was agitated by what proved to be unprecedented academic as well as political scandals triggered by a sixth-grade history textbook and an exhibition project, respectively. In both cases, the uproar resulted in violent protests against what was considered to be the denationalization of the younger generations coupled with accusations, launched by a large range of the political spectrum, that it was all part of a conspiracy. This chapter will describe these debacles and will relate them to the issue that undermines all efforts to address the shortcomings of public memory and national identity in the respective countries, namely, perceptions of the Ottoman legacy. Furthermore, it will address the role of professional historians, many among whom were labelled as traitors during those crises, as well as the role of scholarly accounts in a process of reconciliation with a nation's historical past.

Greece: The sixth-grade history textbook debate

In Greece, a sixth-grade history textbook² that had been assigned by the socialist Greek government, before 2004, after a public competition, triggered a heated debate in the media. The point of contention was the evident effort made by the authors to abandon longstanding stereotypes dominating national historiography and adopt more moderate views with respect to the Greek experience under Ottoman rule (from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century). This was the result of research and documentation that has contributed to the revision of certain well-established ideas during the last thirty years as well a more general trend based on instructions by UNESCO and the European Union regarding the 'disarmament'

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Eyal Ginio and Prof. Karl Kaser for kindly inviting me to the workshop on 'Ottoman Legacies in the Contemporary Mediterranean: The Middle East and the Balkans Compared,' at the Eleventh Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Florence, 23–27 March 2010. I am also grateful to the Hellenic Studies Program, Princeton University, where I spent the 2011 spring semester as a Stanley J. Seeger visiting fellow, and where I had the chance to extensively rework this paper.

² Maria Repousi, Hara Andreadou, Aristidis Poutahidis and Armodios Tsivas, *Ιστορία Στ' Δημοτικού - Στα νεότερα και σύγχρονα χρόνια* [History for the 6th Grade: On the Modern and Contemporary Era] (Athens: Οργανισμός Εκδόσεων Διδακτικών Βιβλίων [Institute for the Publication of Educational Books], 2006).

of history textbooks and the stressing of other aspects of human experience. An initial political consensus between the Turkish and the Greek government which, following the German-French example, wished to promote a narrative that does not convey hostility has yet to be put into practice and does not seem to have affected, at least officially, the production of this particular textbook. Vociferous protests from the ultra-right wing against what was considered to be the de-Hellenization of the younger generations were coupled with accusations by the Communist Party and other leftist groups of an imperialist project underlying the Greek-Turkish rapprochement. Eventually, the book was withdrawn by the newly re-elected right-wing government of New Democracy, which bowed to the nationalist hysteria prevailing at a time when the 'Macedonian question' among others was once again on the agenda.

Central to the controversy was the role of the Church of Greece and in particular its prelate, the late Archbishop Christodoulos.³ The role of the Church in Greece, as everywhere in the Balkans, has been always particularly important. However, after the election of Archbishop Christodoulos in 1998, a brilliant orator of great intelligence and incommensurate political ambitions, it took unprecedented dimensions. Archbishop Christodoulos wished to impose the Orthodox faith as the dominant ideology in the public sphere. To a large extent he succeeded. Already, in 2001, he had collected millions of signatures against the socialist government's decision to drop religious indication from the new ID cards and thus adapt its legislation to European norms on personal data. This triggered demonstrations by the faithful and a vehemently anti-European, or rather anti-Western, discourse.⁴

What was so alarming for the Church about this book, though? For the first time, its role in the preservation of national culture departed from the realm of myth and became more historically contextualized. There was no mentioning of the legend of the 'secret school' (*kryfo sholio*), namely the assumption that the Ottomans did not permit education among the Christians and therefore the local priest would secretly summon the village children during the night so that, unnoticed by the Turks, the young Orthodox could learn how to read and write. Scholarship, and not necessarily of a 'radical' kind, has proved in all certainty that this is only an invention of nineteenth-century nationalist historiography. Still people enjoy reproducing such stereotypes simply because they resonate with the picture of 'darkness' in the Ottoman times.

The myth of the 'secret school' has been very persistent and was actually debated more extensively during the recent controversy. The powerful image of a monk teaching schoolboys under the light of a candle had become very popular in

³ Archbishop Christodoulos passed away on 28 January 2008.

⁴ See the interview Archbishop Christodoulos gave to a well-known Greek journalist, http://xristodoulos.antibarro.gr/koinonia/mega_19-2-2001.html.

Greece, after Nikolaos Gyzis (1842-1901), one of the most distinguished Greek painters, chose this theme for one of his most famous pictures. This is how art historian Adonis Danos describes the picture:

It depicts a bare, dark room in which five children sit around an old priest and are totally absorbed by the old man's words. His raised finger carries both religious and philosophical connotations, and his gentle, softly lit face exudes an aura of holiness. Behind the children sits a young man, who listens to the priest with similar attention; a rifle rests between his legs, indicating that the depicted activity is dangerous – he is there to protect the children in the case of discovery by the Turks. His youthful but virile figure alludes to the impending struggle of the Greeks for freedom and for the resurrection of their glorious past, as suggested by the large fragment of an ancient column against which two of the children rest.⁵

Gyzis's *Secret School* was included in the 1888 annual Panhellenic Exposition of Athens. Danos comments that, interestingly, even though the myth was well known by then, there was no particular reference to the painting in the press. In 1900, however, inspired by Gyzis's painting, the poet Ioannis Polemis (1862–1924) wrote his well-known poem 'The Secret School',³³ which ever since was included in school textbooks and proved that the myth had become a powerful national icon. What had changed between 1888 and 1900, according to Danos, was the disastrous war of 1897, where the Greek army was humiliated at the hands of the Ottomans.⁶

Danos presents a long commentary on the painting from 1925, where all the various strands of the narrative are brought together, the great hardship suffered by the enslaved nation, which included the suppression of all education by the 'barbaric conquerors' with the 'national consciousness of the race' and its traditions that were the 'inextinguishable fire out of which shone the torch of freedom'.⁷ Danos promptly relates this commentary to what is known as the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922, the outcome of the Greek-Turkish war in Anatolia. The war ended with a bitter Greek defeat and the consequent exchange of population between Greece and Turkey in 1923. Unimaginable devastation was inflicted on the Greek populations of Asia Minor who, if they were lucky to survive the war, had to abandon their territories where, in many cases, an uninterrupted presence of Greek-Orthodox culture could be traced back a few millennia. This devastation led to a fundamental reconsideration of the ingredients of national identity even more substantial than the one in 1897. Similar shifts can be traced during the Second World War or during the colonels' junta of 1967-1974.

⁵ Antonis Danos, 'Nikolaos Gyzis's *The Secret School* and an Ongoing National Discourse', http://19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn_02/articles/dano_print.html.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

As Alkis Angelou, the first Greek historian who studied the issue systematically, has pointed out, there has been no documentation regarding the existence of secret schools.⁸ It is after the outbreak of the Greek Revolution in 1821 that such references emerge. Presumably based on information provided by the Greek scholar Stephanos Kanellos, the German scholar Carl Iken, in his work *Lefcothea* (1825), talks of secret schools in Ottoman Greece. Kanellos was a member of the circle of Adamantios Korais (1748-1833), the best-known contemporary scholar who adhered to the ideas of European Enlightenment. The members of this circle, influenced by the secular ideas of the French Revolution, strongly believed that a similar course of development was feasible for their nation as well. Their major task, therefore, was the transference of European light to their enslaved brothers, a process which would eventually lead to political emancipation. For those scholars, Europe had inherited Greek classical culture, and hence it was necessary to reconnect the nation with its ancient heritage. Moreover, they would have to prove why there was such cultural stagnation among the Greek-Orthodox population despite a relative regeneration among the elite in certain urban centres of the Ottoman Empire. Korais spoke of a 'moral revolution' which proved that Greece deserved to be free and part of the 'civilized' world⁹. Kanellos's contribution to Iken's text should be considered as part of this endeavour. Ruthless Ottoman rule is, essentially, described as the sole reason for cultural degeneration, among Greeks, who against all odds, were seeking to promote education. Another aspect of this story is the role of the Church which had to be reinforced after the shock that the excommunication of the leader of the revolution Alexander Ypsilantis (1792-1828) and his comrades by the Patriarch Gregory V (1746-1821) had triggered.

Another important aspect concerns the role of the Church in the preparation of the national uprising. This is an issue that has agitated academic circles for years. Despite the participation of many individual clergymen in the revolutionary action and the martyrdom of many, due to their position as leaders of the local Orthodox communities, many historians consider that the Patriarch of Constantinople and others among the high-ranking clergy, being themselves part and parcel of the Ottoman administrative apparatus, did whatever was possible to avert any

⁸ Alkis Aggelou, *Το κρυφό σχολειό, το χρονικό ενός μύθου* [The Secret School: the Trajectory of a Myth] (Athens: Estia, 1997), 13-18 and passim.

⁹ Among the vast literature on Korais, see Constantinos Th. Dimaras, ed., *Ο Κοραΐς και η εποχή του* [Korais and His Era] (Athens: Zaharopoulos, 1953); Filippos Iliou, 'Στην τροχιά των Ιδεολόγων. Κοραΐς-Daunou-Φουρνάρη' [On the Path of the Ideologues: Korais, Daunau, Fournarakis], *Chiaka Hronika* 1 (1978): 36-68, Paschalis Kitromilidis, *Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός: Οι πολιτικές και κοινωνικές ιδέες* [Neohellenic Enlightenment: The Political and Social Ideas], 3rd ed. (Athens: MIET, 2000); Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

mobilization.¹⁰ Eventually, Patriarch Gregory V was put to death by the Ottomans as he was held responsible for the uprising. Therefore, he has been depicted as a martyr in Greek historiography. His marble statue stands in the left-hand corner before the University of Athens. In the right-hand corner stands the statue of Rigas Velestinlis (1757-1798), the most prominent revolutionary figure of the late eighteenth century. They were both put to death by the Ottomans, but otherwise they had very little in common.

The new book, following contemporary scholarship, did not reproduce the stereotypes about the contribution of the Church to national independence. Furthermore, in the recent debate, in addition to the tension evolving around the role of the Church, there was another aspect that struck a chord with my experience as someone who was involved in a project tackling equally contested issues. Much of the criticism against the textbook focused on certain phrasings which were considered to deliberately distort historical reality. One of these phrasings referred to the entrance of the Turkish troops to the port city of Smyrna/Izmir following the collapse of the Greek military front in August-September 1922 in western Anatolia/Asia Minor. The Greek army had occupied Smyrna and the surroundings for three years and had been accused by independent international investigatory committees of extended atrocities against the local Muslim population. These atrocities had been condemned by the Greek political and military authorities. They had been justified, however, by their perpetrators on the grounds of other atrocities previously committed against the local Greek Orthodox population. Now that the Greek army was fleeing, in September 1922 the Smyrniot Greeks, who constituted half of the city's population, were terrified of the imminent retaliations. They rushed to the 'Quai', the long sea-dock, with whatever they could carry with them and tried desperately to find a means to escape from the massacres that had already been launched. This tragic culmination of a decade of violence, it was claimed, could not be depicted through the neutral phrasing 'People crowded the harbour of Smyrna' used in the textbook. The unfortunate phrasing was changed, but this did not save the book. Eventually the stakes were much higher. Behind this dispute lies the more significant and more symbolic event of the burning of Smyrna, which took place a few days after

¹⁰ The challenging of the role of the Church in the Greek revolution was introduced long ago by Marxist historians such as Giannis Kordatos, *Η κοινωνική σημασία της Ελληνικής Επανάστασης του 1821* [The Social Significance of the Greek Revolution of 1821] (Athens, 1957) and Giannis Skarimbas, *21 και η αλήθεια* [(18)21 and the Truth] (Athens, 1975). Among the recent accounts, see Christina Koulouri, *Μύθοι και σύμβολα μιας εθνικής επετείου* [Myths and Symbols of a National Anniversary] (Komotini, 1997); Vassilis Kremmydas, *Από το Σπυρίδωνα Τρικούπη στο Σήμερα, Το εικοσιένα στις νέες ιστοριογραφικές προσεγγίσεις* [From Spyridon Trikoupi up to the Present: New Historiographical Approaches to 1821] (Athens: Ίδρυμα της Βουλής των Ελλήνων [Foundation of the Greek Parliament], 2007).

the onset of the violence. Both nationalisms blame this horror on the other side.¹¹

The campaign against the sixth-grade history textbook was spearheaded by the electronic periodical *antivaro*, which launched a petition in the form of an open letter to the government and the parliamentary deputies claiming that 'the Greeks have the right to their own truth', which actually meant the preservation of the 'nationally correct history'.¹² Four groups played a central role in the collection of signatures: the communication networks of the Church of Greece, leftist journals such as *Ardin* and *Rixi*, the ultranationalist party Laos and Diaspora Greek associations. All the relevant literature was reproduced at the internet site of *antivaro*.

The text of this campaign constitutes a detailed account of the shortcomings of the book. According to the organizers of the campaign:

- a) The importance of the Orthodox tradition is downplayed; Kosmas Aetolos (an Orthodox martyr of the eighteenth century) is not described as a saint.
- b) Even if there is reference to uprisings during the 'Turkish rule', the book conceals the fact that the clergy had participated in each one of them.
- c) The discourse employed is not adequately enthusiastic and patriotic. The fact is deplored that 'Heroism, sacrifice, martyrdom are replaced by dry numbers'.
- d) The authors of the petition seem to be particularly frustrated by the upgrading of individual female figures in the broader narrative, while on the other hand, they condemn the omission of well-known incidents where women sacrificed their lives in great numbers.¹³
- e) Another controversial point concerns the description of Atatürk as the leader of 'the Turkish struggle for liberation', whereas, apparently, he should only be described as an archenemy of the Greeks.
- f) Moreover, they criticize the inclusion of official statistics on Thessaly (1881) and Salonica (1913), as they cast doubt on the Hellenic character of those regions at the time of their annexation to the Greek state.

¹¹ This was exactly the focus of a project that was launched in 1999 at the initiative among others of Sabancı University in Istanbul, Panteion University in Athens and Columbia University. In November 2000, a few months after I had first moved to Istanbul, I was appointed the coordinator of the project by Halil Berktaş, the leading figure on the Turkish side. The Shared History Project, as it was called, undertook a phased approach to deconstruct national hate narratives and traumatic incidents. The first example was going to be that of 'the burning of Smyrna/Izmir', and this was carried out through a series of seminars. It was considered a model exercise in presenting controversial and sensitive issues and confidence building. Unfortunately, the envisaged volume stemming from this project was never published while some of the papers appeared individually.

¹² I draw the information mostly from *Ο ιός της Κυριακής* [The Virus of Sunday], a special column of the newspaper *Eleftherotypia*: ΤΟ «ΚΙΝΗΜΑ» ΓΙΑ ΤΟ ΒΙΒΛΙΟ ΤΗΣ ΣΤ' ΔΗΜΟΤΙΚΟΥ Η μεζούρα της εθνικοπροσώνης [The 'Movement' for the Book of the 6th Grade of the Primary School: The Measure of National Correctness], 18 February 2007, http://archive.enet.gr/online/online_hprint?id=20824028,26477916,34564828,48754780.

¹³ As the columnists of *Eleftherotypia* point out, it becomes apparent that the position of women cannot be other than of victims without an autonomous public persona.

- g) Last but not least: they deplore the lack of any reference to the 'secret school' and the unfortunate description of the Smyrna massacres.

A long story of bitter controversies

Let me now return to what Greek public opinion can tolerate. It is not the first time that, in recent years, a similar decision of banning a school textbook was made. In 1985, the then socialist government introduced a book for the first grade of the lyceum with the title *History of Humankind*, by Lefteris Stavrianos. The book was attacked for endorsing Darwin's theory of species evolution. It survived for five years but was withdrawn by the next right-wing government. In 2002, the new book of the third grade of the lyceum, entitled *Modern and Contemporary World* was attacked in the parliament for not referring to Maniaki, a site of heroic sacrifice at the hands of the Turks during the Greek Revolution as well as referring to the 'assassination' of Turks at the outbreak of the hostilities. The statement which provoked the harshest reaction, though, was related to the 'Cyprus question' and it read as follows: 'At a time when the Third World was shaken by radical anti-colonial movements which set as a priority not only national liberation but also social progress, in Cyprus, EOKA,¹⁴ led by General Grivas, promoted a socially ultraconservative nationalism'.¹⁵ This sentence, obviously, was part of a more general account on decolonization and the anti-colonial movements all over the world. The then minister of education of a socialist cabinet ordered, again, the removal of the respective page from the textbook before the latter was distributed to schools. This is how Sia Anagnostopoulou, who has written both on nineteenth-century Ottoman Asia Minor and on Greek and Turkish nationalism on the island of Cyprus, commented on the event:

The cries of despair that Hellenism is vanquished because Grivas-led EOKA is addressed critically by the historian is in the best case, naïve.... It is reasonable that textbooks are supposed to create a coherent framework of reference through which students can identify themselves in time and space. This framework is the national one and this is absolutely understandable. It is not at all reasonable, though, that 'the martyrdom of Hellenism' should always refer only to certain 'chosen Greeks', when some other Greeks of Cyprus are not 'Greeks'.... And why we should reproduce in school history the 'cypriotness' of Greek Cypriots, continuously eliminating the slightest reference to the 'cypriotness' of the Turkish Cypriots?¹⁶

¹⁴ EOKA was the clandestine nationalist committee that, between 1955-1960, fought against the British rule for the unification with Greece, but also terrorized local left-wing Greek Cypriots as well as Turkish Cypriots.

¹⁵ Giorgos Kokkinos, ed., *Νεότερος και Σύγχρονος Κόσμος Γ' λυκείου* [Modern and Contemporary World] (Athens: Οργανισμός Εκδόσεων Διδακτικών Βιβλίων [Institute for the Publication of Educational Books], 2006), 225.

¹⁶ Sia Anagnostopoulou, 'Γράφεται η ιστορία από ιστορικούς ή από το Υπουργείο Παιδείας?' [Is History Written by Historians or by the Ministry of Education?], *Politis*, May 2002.

That was the period when the 'Cyprus question' had already started to be discussed on the basis of what would later become known as the 'Annan plan', and therefore any reference to the very controversial past of the island could be easily attributed to a broader conspiracy.

During the turmoil around the school textbook, another academic endeavour came under attack. In 1998, an NGO based in Thessaloniki, the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE), launched the Joint History Project (JHP) aimed mainly at promoting the writing and teaching of a common history for all South-East European countries. The project, through a series of workshops, has set up a large network of history teachers in South-Eastern Europe and through the involvement of academics from the region, has created a broader audience and received wide acceptance.

The head of the project, Christina Koulouri, argues that 'this enterprise should be understood as the result of a multileveled process: the rewriting of the Balkan countries' history which reflected changes in collective self-definitions; the traumatic impact of interethnic violence and armed conflicts, and the subsequent fear for perpetuated instability; the renewal of the aims and the methods of history teaching; the development of challenges and alternatives to national history'.¹⁷

This endeavour led to the publication of four volumes, outcomes of the respective workshops: *The Ottoman Empire; Nations and States in South-Eastern Europe; The Balkan Wars; and The Second World War*. The reception of these volumes was diverse in the different Balkan countries. In Greece, it varied from the indifferent attitude of the Ministry of Education to direct attacks by groups similar to the ones that had played a key role in the controversy around the textbook discussed above.

Finally, in the summer of 2009, the last in a series of episodes demonstrated that history-writing in Greece can always be on the agenda. Incidentally, the newest scandal is a combination of the previous two ones. One of the authors of the book that was censored due to the reference to the 'Cyprus question' was now attacked by journalists and politicians for his university teaching regarding 'the Greek–Turkish War of 1919-1922'. The coordinator of the groups of authors responsible for the textbook, Maria Repousi, was severely harassed throughout the related scandal. The newest victim of the 'patriotic' circles, who teaches at the University of the Aegean, a colleague by the name of Giorgos Kokkinos, appeared in the headlines as the 'Repousi of the Aegean'.¹⁸

¹⁷ Christina Koulouri, 'The Joint History Project Books: An Alternative to National History?', in Oliver Rathkolb, ed., *How to (Re)Write European History: History and Text Book Projects in Retrospect* (Innsbruck-Wien: Studienverlag, 2010), 131-155, esp. 132.

¹⁸ Haris Exertzoglou, 'Οι φύλακες της πολιτικής ορθότητας και το μαγγανοπήγαδο της Ιστορίας' [The Guardians of Political Correctness and the Well of History], *Synhrona Themata* 106 (July-September 2009).

Bulgaria: The Batak scandal

In 2007 again, a scandal similar to the one concerning the Greek textbook agitated Bulgarian public opinion. The historical anthropologist Ulf Brunbauer and the art historian Martina Baleva launched a project entitled 'Feindbild Islam: Geschichte und Gegenwart antiislamischer stereotype in Bulgarien, am Biespiel des Mythos vom Massaker in Batak' ('Islam as the Image of the Enemy: Anti-Islamic Stereotypes in History and Today in Bulgaria, the Myth of the Massacre of Batak'), aiming at organizing an exhibition and a conference. Batak is a town in the Rhodope Mountains, where one of the most horrible massacres took place during what has become known as the April uprising of 1876 against Ottoman rule. This was a series of uprisings against the local Ottoman authorities inspired by the turmoil in the western Balkans (Bosnia, Montenegro) during those years and leading to the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 and the establishment of the autonomous principality of Bulgaria. When the reprisals approached, however, some of the leading figures, such as Peter Goranov, the leader of the uprising in Batak, escaped, leaving the innocent civilians unprotected.

The massacre of innocent civilians has been portrayed by Bulgarian national narrative as a heroic sacrifice for the liberation of Bulgaria. An important aspect of this story is the role of local Muslims of Bulgarian ethnic origin, the well-known Pomaks, whose very name denotes their conversion (those who have shifted), but also the role of immigrant Circassians. The Ottoman authorities, preoccupied with uprisings elsewhere, preferred to use Muslim irregular troops (known as *Başıbozüks*) organized from among local Muslims who had a reason to take up the task as they had been the first to be harassed by the rebels. Bulgarian historiography systematically downplayed the local aspect of this conflict. The reason was the well-established conviction that Pomaks were actually Bulgarians, who would eventually return to the national community. As Sacit Kutlu, author of the only scholarly account that appeared in Turkish, comments, at least twice, during the Balkan wars of 1912-1913 and in the early 1970s, the Bulgarian state under very different circumstances attempted to convert these populations to Christianity.¹⁹ Therefore, from the point of view of official ideology, it would be paradoxical to accuse them of the massacres. Much more practical would be to put the blame on the Turks in a more abstract manner.

¹⁹ Sacit Kutlu, 'Bulgar kolektif bellek inşasında bir "hatırlama ve unutma yeri' [A 'Site of Remembrance and Oblivion' in the Bulgarian Collective Memory], *Toplumusal Tarih*, (Ocak 2009), 33-39. Kutlu makes an appropriate comparison with similar hysterical reactions in Turkish public opinion when it comes to the reinterpretation of history. In early 2011, the latest 'historical' scandals that tormented Turkish public opinion were the TV series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* [The Magnificent Century], which refers to the era of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (1494-1566), and the film *Hür Adam Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* [The Free Man Bediüzzaman Said Nursi], which refers to a Muslim Kurdish scholar and political leader (1868-1960) of the early republican period who was at odds with the elite of the newly founded regime.

Noteworthy is the fact that these are the massacres described in the European and especially the British press as the 'Bulgarian horrors', which triggered an uproar in British public opinion and led the leader of the Liberals and later prime minister, William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898), to write his famous book *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, where he argued that 'wherever they [the Turks] go they leave blood behind them and where their rule extends civilization is vanished'.²⁰ There has been a whole literature, of course, producing and reproducing images which became stereotypical about other atrocities as well.²¹ Nowadays it is accepted that there was also an inflation of the numbers of the victims. There was no question, however, as to whether the massacre took place or not. Andreas Lyberatos, author of the only related scholarly account that appeared in Greek, quotes the Greek consul of Plovdiv, Athanasios Matalas who, despite being himself strongly anti-Bulgarian, describes the bleak picture of the massacre but claims that the estimates by the English and American diplomats of five thousand killed were overblown, as a result of Bulgarian accounts as well as the macabre impression that any visitor would get. His own estimate was three thousand; Bulgarian historians give the even lower one of two thousand.²²

The main question Brunbauer and Baleva asked in their project was how the event itself was reintroduced to the public memory, especially when a Polish painter, Antoni Piotrovski (1853–1924), visited the place and took photographs from a local church where the remains of the massacred were exhibited.²³ These pictures later became well known and even used as postcards. Moreover, the painting Piotrovski produced with the title *The Massacre of Batak*, which played a major role in the mystification of the event, was occasionally used as a reference proving that the event itself took place. The publication of two articles by Baleva in the local cultural review *Kultura* passed almost unnoticed.²⁴ It was a year later, when the project was translated and leaked to the press, that the Pandora's box was opened. This led very quickly to a lynching campaign against the two organizers of the exhibition. Not only extreme nationalists, but also more moderate politicians from the Socialist Party condemned the project. The incumbent president of the republic, Georgi Pervanov, himself a historian, not only openly condemned the project but also staged a lecture at the site of the massacre itself to set an example of how history should be taught. The message was clear: there are aspects of

²⁰ W. E. Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London: J. Murray, 1876).

²¹ Y. Mitev, *The April Uprising and European Public Opinion* (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1978).

²² Andreas Lyberatos, 'Η σφαγή του Μπατάκ και οι χρήσεις της ιστορίας' [The Batak Massacre and the Uses of History], in A. Matthaïou, Str. Bournazos and P. Polemi, eds., *Στην τροχιά του Φίλιππου Ηλιού. Ιδεολογικές χρήσεις και εμμονές στην ιστορία και την πολιτική* [On the Path of Filippou Iliou: Ideological Uses and Obsessions in History and Politics] (Athens: Polis, 2008), 37-51, 39.

²³ Martina Baleva, 'Das Bild von Batak im kollektiven Gedächtnis der Bulgaren', in Martina Baleva und Ulf Brunbauer, eds., *Batak ein bulgarischer Erinnerungsort*, батаккато място на паметта (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2007), 22-29.

²⁴ *Kultura* 17 (2412), 3 May 2006; *Kultura*, br. 24/21 June 2006, br. 29/7 September 2006.

history that are sacred and should not be dealt with as part of a historical debate. At the same time, the academic community was divided.²⁵ On the one hand, state institutions, first and foremost the Academy of Sciences, described the project as pseudo-academic and banned the National Ethnographic Museum, which was under its jurisdiction, from hosting the exhibition and a related conference.²⁶ On the other hand, hundreds of scholars and academicians signed petitions supporting the organizers and the freedom of historical research and academic expression.²⁷

Eventually, neither the conference nor the exhibition took place. Only the book that was supposed to accompany the exhibition was published. Alexander Vezenkov has pointed out that until today nobody has criticized the content of the book, which was supposed to be the catalogue of the exhibition and which is comprised of articles related to the topic written by various scholars, showing that those who attacked the project had no intention to engage in a discussion regarding the theoretical assumptions of the project. They were only concerned to prove that there was an international conspiracy against Bulgarian history.²⁸ Yet, this is not entirely the case. As Lyberatos has argued, there were historians who, even if they supported the project, criticized the attempt of the organizers to connect the particular event with current politics and more particularly the tense relations with the Turkish ethnic minority.²⁹

The Bulgarian debate on the Ottoman period

It is useful at this point to refer to the broader historiographical context. According to Rumiana Preshlenova,³⁰ the two major issues that have preoccupied Bulgarian historiography that does not deal with the communist period are the Ottoman rule and the National Revival. Traditionally the Ottoman period was described as a 'Turkish yoke' or 'Turkish slavery', terminology which reiterated many negative perceptions regarding social developments after the fourteenth century. After 1989, there was an attempt among certain historians to replace these terms with 'Ottoman presence' or 'Ottoman domination'. However, while for the establishment of the Bulgarian state there was a consensus among historians regarding the term 'liberation', the earlier period proved more contested. The dispute was triggered by an article by the French historian Bernard Lory, published in the

²⁵ President Pervanov's speech can be found at his official site: www.president.bg/news.php?id+=2871.

²⁶ Lyberatos, 'The Batak Massacre', 44

²⁷ http://www.bgpetition.com/apel_na_bg_istorici/index.html.

²⁸ Alexander Vezenkov, 'Proektyt i skandalyt "Batak"', *Razkaz na edin ochevidetz*, *Anamnesis IV* (2009), 1(9), pp. 132-203: http://anamnesis.info/fonts/versiq.1.3/journal/flash_journal/broi9-A.Vezenkov/A.Vezenkov.pdf.

²⁹ Lyberatos, 'The Batak Massacre', 47.

³⁰ Roumiana Preshlenova, 'The Ottoman Balkans and Nation-Building', essay submitted for the project 'Battling over the Balkans: Questions and Controversies', Joint Research Project, CEU-University of Maryland, coordinated by Constantin Iordachi and John R. Lampe (forthcoming, 2012).

Bulgarian journal *Istorichesko budeshite* (Historical Future), on myth-making in Bulgarian historiography.³¹

Apparently, the issue is not simply linguistic but rather political, because it draws a line between the Bulgarian nation and the Turkish ethnic minority of Bulgaria. Lory opposes the notion of 'five centuries of slavery' used extensively in Bulgarian historiography and argues that the period between 1393-1824 is a 'terra incognita', which should not be subjected to interpretation through national history. During this long period, the Bulgarian population shared the common fate of other Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the notion of 'foreign domination' is an attempt to appropriate this period for a national history that refuses to accept the existence and legitimacy of the imperial rule. This approach, he argues, is totally anachronistic and carries later political categories into a society that operated in a totally different fashion.

The turning point in the historical memory of the Bulgarians, Lory argues, is the *Kürdzhali* period of 1779-1819.³² Similar to the conditions of greater autonomy fostered by the rule of local Muslim notables, known as the *ayans*, in this case as well the shift in authority was accompanied by much devastating violence. By the end of that period, there was not much left of the previous conditions of Ottoman rule. Therefore, what the next generation of the 'National Revival' knew about the Ottoman Empire was limited to the experience of the previous generation from the *Kürdzhali* period. On the one hand, collective memory focuses on the period of 'extreme' violence; on the other, the *Kürdzhali* period draws a thick curtain through which the distant past cannot be penetrated. The horror and misery stories serve romantic and revolutionary ideology, which presents things in black and white. Lory concludes that 120 years after the liberation of Bulgaria, it is amazing that the *Kürdzhali* period continues to play the same role. And as a historical paradox, in the last phase of the Ottoman rule in Bulgaria in 1876-1878, there were again massacres, as though to confirm the idea of a continuous chain of atrocities. These massacres, particularly the one in Batak, occupy a central place in the Bulgarian national historical narrative. Without them, much of the justification for the liberation becomes groundless and loses its persuasiveness.³³

³¹ Bernard Lory, 'Razsuzhdeniya vurhu istoricheskiya mit "Pet veka ni klaha"' [Thoughts about the Historical Myth 'They Have Been Slaughtering Us for Five Centuries'], <http://www.libsu.uni-sofia.bg/e-books/Bernar.doc>. See also Vera Mutafchieva, 'Tursko robstvo ili osmansko vladichestvo?' [Turkish Yoke or Ottoman Rule?], <http://e-vestnik.bg/6364>.

³² This term refers to bandits, both Christian and Muslim, who fled the towns and cities along the Maritsa (*Gr. Evros, Tr. Meriç*) River and sought refuge in the surrounding Balkan and Rhodope mountain ranges, especially near the town of *Kırca'ali* (*Kürdzhali* in modern Bulgaria), presumably in order to escape the devastation inflicted by the *ayans*. See Tolga Uğur Esmer, *A Culture of Rebellion: Networks Of Violence and Competing Discourses of Justice in the Ottoman Empire, 1790-1808*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Department of History, University of Chicago, 2009.

³³ Lory, 'Thoughts about the Historical Myth'.

The other debate Preshlenova presents concerns the 'National Revival' itself. There are two views on the issue: the more 'moderate revisionist' view of Rumen Daskalov and the 'harder revisionist' view of Alexander Vezenkov. The latter rejects the very usage of the term 'Bulgarian revival' because it isolates this event from parallel ones in the Ottoman society. He suggests conceptualizing the revival as the process of the emergence of national consciousness and organization, which has to be dealt in the context of the Ottoman Empire in the era of the Tanzimat.³⁴ Daskalov, while approving most of Vezenkov's critical remarks, argues that the total deconstruction of the notion of 'Bulgarian revival' is of no use. What is more important, he says, is to confront the different constructs – national and imperial – and to relativize them.³⁵

In his text of the aforementioned catalogue for the Batak exhibition, Vezenkov opens a broader discussion. He begins by referring to contemporary attempts to reinterpret Ottoman rule, mostly by Ottomanists, as he maintains, but also, especially for the nineteenth century, by literary scholars, because many of the national myths have been founded by literary and journalistic texts. The example of the Batak battle is a very indicative one. It is debatable the extent to which there was an insurgency in Batak comparable to other centres of the April uprising in 1876, whether it was immediately suppressed or even whether it was a massacre against a peaceful populace.

First of all, argues Vezenkov, it is important to note that all interpretations have a political motivation. The version of a massacre against an innocent, peaceful population was endorsed in the 1876-1877 conjuncture in search of European support. In this context the term 'insurgency' had a negative meaning and was avoided. All attention was drawn to 'the Turkish atrocities', of which the Batak massacre was presented as the most harrowing. But after Europe had tolerated the Russian intervention in 1877-1878 and the foundation of the Bulgarian state, all these considerations rapidly lost their value. Now the insurgency and heroism were idealized in Bulgarian historiography. An attempt was made to depict the new Bulgarian state as the result of the struggle and heroism of the Bulgarian people and not of Russian military intervention. Batak today is portrayed as one of the most important centres of the insurgency.

According to Vezenkov, this leads to a contradiction: in the popular imagination, the massacre is in the foreground while historical narratives mostly refer to the insurgency and the heroic struggle. Researchers, aware of this contradiction, try to resolve it through the thesis of *conscious self-sacrifice* and

³⁴ Alexander Vezenkov, 'Ochevidno samo na pruv pogled: "Bulgarskoto vuzrazhdane" kato ot delna epoha' [Not So Apparent Truths: The Bulgarian Revival as a Separate Era], in Diana Mishkova, ed., *Balkanskiyat XIX vek. Drugi prochiti* [The Balkan Nineteenth Century: Other Readings] (Sofia: PIBA, 2006).

³⁵ Roumen Daskalov, *Kak se misli Bulgarskoto Vuzrazhdane* [How Do We Think of the Bulgarian Revival] (Sofia: LIK, 2002).

depict helpless victims as conscious freedom-fighters. According to Vezenkov, the fact that mostly opponents of the insurgency and not its leaders become victims shows how problematic the thesis of 'conscious self-sacrifice' is. He asks the question how was it possible that the leader Petar Goranov and his family who fled immediately after the first clashes survived in 'self-sacrifice in front of the fatherland's altar', and proposes two answers: either Goranov fled, causing his fellow citizens to suffer for his crude heroism or the populace became a victim because they were too cowardly to follow him when he left the village. While contemporaries and first-generation researchers supported either one or the other thesis, the present historiography tries to reconcile both. In doing so everyone is praised, some because they have rebelled and some because they have died, while no attention is drawn to the mutual accusations of these groups.³⁶

To conclude with the controversial place of the Ottoman past in the Bulgarian imagination, I will refer to the last in the series of scandals in Bulgaria. At the end of 2009, the minister responsible for issues of cultural heritage of the Bulgarian communities abroad, Bozidar Dimitrov, announced that the Bulgarian government would accelerate the collection of evidence so that it could forward its claim for compensation on the part of Turkey for an amount of \$20 billion for properties of 250,000 Bulgarian refugees who were driven from their homes, in eastern Thrace, following the Second Balkan War in 1913. Moreover, the Bulgarian government announced that it had established a committee to deal with the issue, claiming that the resolution of this issue would be a precondition for Turkey's accession to the European Union. Certainly, it is not a coincidence that the minister is the same person who, as head of the National Ethnographic Museum then, had played a central role in the defamation campaign against the Batak project.

From national to regional history

If we tackle the two cases comparatively, the similarities are obvious. First of all, these are the latest instances of 'history wars' that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, seem to be a quite common phenomenon. The controversy over Enola Gay in the United States and the debate over the role of Japan in the Second World War are among the most well-known cases.³⁷ In other words, we should not deal with these phenomena as the products of a particular geography, the Balkans; otherwise we run the risk of adding to the lengthy Orientalist literature about how history is manipulated in this part of the world. A more comprehensive analysis would profit from Antonis Liakos's discussion of this controversy. The

³⁶ Aleksandăr Vezenkov, 'Die neue Debatte über das Massaker von Batak. Historiografische Aspekte', in Baleva and Brunbauer, *Batak ein bulgarischer erinnerungsort*, 67-73.

³⁷ 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); Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the 'Rape of Nanking': History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Greek historian argues 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'.³⁸

As Koulouri has pointed out, in South-East European countries, history wars 'should be understood as a reaction to any revision of national history that would endanger the role of history teaching in strengthening national identity. School history with a regional instead of a national scope has been conceived as a threat to the essence of national identity and to the very idea of national existence'.³⁹

Dubravka Stojanovic, another leading figure of the abovementioned Joint History Project, comparing its negative perception in Greece and Serbia, saw the attacks against the books produced by the JHP as focused on three issues: 'possibility of collaboration between historians from the Balkan region; comparative approach; and multi-perspectivity'.⁴⁰

Actually, what counts most in the attitude of many groups in the region is the recent shift in the mental map. The Balkans are now being persistently described as South-Eastern Europe, in other words a region of Europe that should be 'de-balkanized'. As Koulouri points out, 'regional cooperation has been perceived as the symbolic reversal of Balkanization'.⁴¹ Moreover, the burden of negative stereotypes attributed to the history of the region made the prospect of 'European integration' more attractive.⁴²

What is the role of the Ottoman legacy in this respect, though? No matter how banal it might appear, at least with respect to the Balkans, which is my focus, one should not lose sight of Todorova's famous dictum that 'The Balkans are the Ottoman legacy'⁴³. Here, however, lies a paradox. On the one hand, whether viewed from the perspective of comparative history or of trans-national history, a revision of perceptions regarding the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans, especially while building on the recent developments in historical research, rationalizes our attachment to the past and contributes much to challenging longstanding stereotypes. For once, the very fact that this period was not experienced in the same way by different populations and regions in the Balkans allows for diverse views to connect with each other. This is how one can benefit from multi-perspectivity.

³⁸ Antonis Liakos, 'History Wars: Questioning Tolerance', in Gudmundur Halfdanarson, ed., *Discrimination and Tolerance in Historical Perspective* (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2008), 77-91, esp. 80.

³⁹ Koulouri, 'Joint History Project', 143.

⁴⁰ Dubravka Stojanovic, 'Balkan History Workbooks: Consequences and Experiences', *European Studies* 7, Zentrum für Deutschland- und Europastudien, University of Tokyo, 2008, 157-162, quoted in Koulouri, 'Joint History Project', 144.

⁴¹ Koulouri, 'Joint History Project', 145.

⁴² See John R. Lampe, *Balkans into Southeastern Europe: A Century of War and Transition* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006), 289-293.

⁴³ Maria Todorova, 'The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans', in L. Carl Brown, ed., *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 45-78.

On the other hand, this approach might trigger reactions similar to the ones I described earlier. The very fact that the notion of national history is sidelined for the sake of multi-perspectivity is enough to scandalize a confused audience. Even worse, when this national history is presented by the local academia in a manner different from what lay people were accustomed to, it paves the way for all sorts of accusations.

There is yet another point relevant to the role of the Ottoman legacy in such a controversy. If the Balkans are the Ottoman legacy, following the attempt to 'de-balkanize' the region and integrate it into Europe, with its clear liberal political agenda, what would be the logical conclusion for the Ottoman legacy? Should it be perceived as part of the European historical legacy, the same approach would lead to a European integration for other territories which geographically do not fit the predominant paradigm of Europe, first and foremost Turkey. Should 'de-balkanization', however, be accompanied by 'de-Ottomanization', then the danger of a Eurocentric functionalist a-historical approach is apparent. It is important here that the JHP and all those involved in similar endeavours, as also emerges clearly from the relevant publications, follow the first path, in an attempt to contextualize the Ottoman past from a broader European perspective.

History is a public claim

Here lies, though, the main challenge for local societies which through popular culture and years of schooling have been accustomed to consider the European and the Ottoman as contrasting notions. In view of a possible identification of the two, they are prepared to reject both of them in the name of the preservation of their national identity. But, if this is the attitude of the majority and our democratic institutions dictate respect for this attitude, should we decide that the majority is wrong and proceed using the academic and intellectual authority we possess against the ignorant masses? Of course, the views of the majority can be evoked as a strategy against any rational argumentation, as a last resort. In 2010, the same party that had led the campaign against the history textbook in Greece suggested a referendum for the new bill allowing second-generation immigrants to claim full citizenship. National identity was under threat again. Does the nation not have the right to decide what is right and what is wrong for itself?⁴⁴

⁴⁴ This is how one of the apologists of the campaign against the Greek history textbook connects critical history, democracy and illegal migration:

The "new history" aspires to shape the citizen's education for the attempted meta-national 'inter-cultural' collectivity to which Greece is invited to transform itself...the key-word here is "critical thought". This is where, as a democratic claim, the preoccupation with common people and everyday life derives from. The fact that many common people became heroes when the conditions necessitated this does not change anything, as the target of this perception of democracy is to eliminate excellence, which provides positive models for imitation, which encapsulates the virtues and destinies of a collectivity, of a people.... The same applies to the demographic decrease of the Greek nation, through the illegal migration and its apologists. Konstantinos Romanos, *To Paron* 3 December 2006.

Historians who were involved in the debates, such as Antonis Liakos and Christina Koulouri⁴⁵ in Greece or Alexander Vezekov and Rumén Daskalov in Bulgaria, have analyzed the social background of these controversies. Over the last decades, and for reasons that are pertinent to Europe as a whole, ultra-right extremist parties made their appearance in Greece and Bulgaria. Apart from the xenophobic, anti-European, anti-American, anti-globalization and unsophisticated discourse they employ, they put a lot of energy into defending the 'real history' of the Hellenes or of the Bulgarians, by using unorthodox methods. In the Greek case, already in the mid-1990s, popular history programs presented by amateur historians used to appear on marginal private channels. Back then, we enjoyed watching those programs as simply trash TV and longed for the next goof that would become the gossip of the day among young history students. Some of these programs stood on the border between trash TV and parody, which made them a kind of particular culture, where the ancient Greeks are claimed to have been extraterrestrials who later disappeared in the depths of the Earth only to reappear one day to dominate the world as they did at the time of Alexander the Great! This provides a brilliant case study for psychoanalysts and sociologists, but still we, the historians, went on laughing. During the history textbook debate, some of these individuals used their programs to attack the book and all those professional historians who had supported it, pouring insults on 'those who had betrayed the nation'. In the election following the 2007 scandal, some of them managed to be elected to the parliament on the ticket of LAOS (Popular Orthodox Alert, *Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos*), the ultra-right party which was represented in the parliament until May 2012 to be replaced by the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn members, who use crime to promote their extreme views. Similar cases appear in Bulgarian TV programs where nationalist journalists on popular channels would invite the public to protect national history and harass the perpetrators of the crimes against the nation.

However, as the recent public debates reveal in Greece, larger segments of the society, not necessarily on the right, also targeted the textbook from the start. The Communist Party, for instance, which also condemned the book, described the debate as a useless fight between nationalists and cosmopolitans.⁴⁶ People within the opposition Socialist Party were afraid to openly support the book lest

⁴⁵ Christina Koulouri, 'Η ιστορία στην πυρά του φανατισμού' [History Led to the Fire of Fanaticism], *To Vima*, 7 January 2007, 'Πώς γράφεται η Ιστορία; Ησυχία! Κοιμάται...' [How Is History Written? Silence! It's Sleeping], *To Vima*, 28 January 2007.

⁴⁶ The official announcement of the Communist Party when the book was withdrawn was as follows: The withdrawal of the history book for the 6th grade does not signal the end of the attempts of those aiming at the adaptation of the content of textbooks to an anti-scientific, anti-educational, pro-imperialist direction.... The remarks provided by the Academy of Athens did not concern the direction, but side issues, in the context of the controversy between nationalists and cosmopolitans about the kind of history that will be taught.
<http://www.forthnet.gr/templates/newsPosting.aspx?p=210576>.

it cost them votes. The same is true for the Socialist Party in Bulgaria which eventually, despite all its efforts to capitalize on the defence of national truth, did not avoid defeat in the next elections. The history debate enabled broader tensions within the Greek and Bulgarian societies to surface.

In both cases, there was a consensus among political forces and a large segment of the population that the projects were partly or entirely European-funded – actually the Batak project was German-funded funds and undertaken at the Freie University – as part of a larger conspiracy which aimed at deconstructing national consciousness in these countries so as to make them easier prey for the new order and globalized forces. As for the historians who participate in international meetings⁴⁷ on comparing national historiographies, amending textbooks and re-evaluating educational programs, they are considered simply as offering their services to this conspiracy, internationally renowned figures such as George Soros and probably the American government itself.⁴⁸ In both cases, these incidents are symptomatic of a deeper social crisis that seeks readymade answers and does not hesitate to build on the image of the 'despicable Turk' as the most broadly used in the past.⁴⁹

The question that still remains unanswered is what should be the role of professional historians in these conflicts. As has been pointed out by those who took part in the heated debates, their role underwent a process of profound transformation during this crisis, for two reasons. First, historians were invited to TV programs or newspaper columns to defend what was expected of them by the society, namely the 'historical truth'. Thus, in most of the cases unwillingly and contrary to their methodological convictions, they found themselves arguing over the validity of documents, endorsing the most outmoded positivism, because this was the easiest way to refute what they considered as ideological constructions.

⁴⁷ The internationalization of the historian's profession, even beyond the traditional scope of area or regional studies, has been assessed in conferences that focus on the very use of history in many different contexts, 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, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ In the Greek context, similar suspicion of international funding occasionally appears among academic circles as well, see Stratis Bournazos, 'Πατρις - Θρησκεία - Ιστορία: οι αντιδράσεις για το βιβλίο Ιστορίας της ΣΤ Δημοτικού' [Motherland-Religion-History: The Reactions and the History Textbook of the 6th Grade], *newsp. Avgi*, 11 March 2007. Bournazos points out that the fact that historiographical projects aiming at reconciliation in the region are funded by the U.S. State Department at a time when the United States has invaded countries in the Middle East should be questioned. Such criticism, though, albeit legitimate, fails to indicate what would be the alternative funding resources for regional academic cooperation in the particular conjuncture.

⁴⁹ This is how another prominent apologist of the anti-textbook campaign describes this network: 'The dictatorship of the Left.... Most of the university schools have been occupied by "progressive" supporters of the new order, frequently of the "alternative globalization" which in the name of multiculturalism, on a daily basis, undermines the spirit of resistance of our youth', Giorgos Karabelias, *Rixi*, 16 December 2006.

By doing this, however, they fell into the trap of presenting themselves as the guardians of the 'real history' of the nation, which was exactly what they were accusing their opponents of trying to do. In other words, the point was not to prove whose version of national history is correct but that there can be more than one version. This was clearly a lost opportunity.⁵⁰ Second, historians came to realize in a dramatic way that the field of history is not their monopoly. At a time when academic history seems to have a larger specialized audience, the public demand for popular history has also increased dramatically. As has been pointed out, it is not enough anymore for historians to dwell in their ivory towers, declining to confront priests and politicians in TV shows whose only concern is ratings.⁵¹ They cannot do so on the ground that nobody apart from them has the right to speak.

Another controversial issue related specifically to education concerns the survival of the very obsolete regulation that imposes the use of only one textbook for every school grade.⁵² Thus, the question asked by many was: who has the right to speak for history? It is commonplace to say that with the proliferation of new technology and especially the internet, more and more voices found a forum to express themselves. Whether we like it or not, as Liakos has argued, this has fostered an unprecedented democratization in the production of historical knowledge whereby socially and ideologically marginalized groups and ideas, not only the mainstream discourse, suddenly became more conspicuous. During the abovementioned controversies, much of the offensive took place over the internet. The problem for historians is that they cannot just disregard this production as, at a time when subjectivity is a methodological precondition of historical knowledge, it cannot be easily dismissed when it comes to the process of production of that knowledge.⁵³ For example, the unfortunate reference to crowds on the quay of Smyrna irritated the descendants of the victims of the massacres that took place there. The reactions this triggered cannot just be dismissed as a nationalist hysteria.⁵⁴

Which brings me to my final point: what kind of history better contributes to the process of understanding the other, to a process of reconciliation with the enemy? I have not commented at all on the quality of either the textbook or the exhibition project in terms of their educational or artistic values, respectively. That is not the purpose of this chapter. Nor is it to fully identify the two cases,

⁵⁰ Liakos, 'History Wars', 84.

⁵¹ Haris Exertzoglou, "'Ενα φάντασμα πλανιέται πάνω από την Ελλάδα;'" Σκέψεις γύρω από τη διαμάχη για το εγχειρίδιο Ιστορίας της ΣΤ' Δημοτικού [Is a Ghost Wandering over Greece?: Thoughts Regarding the Conflict on the History Textbook for the 6th Grade of the Elementary School], *Synhrona Themata* 97 (April-June 2007).

⁵² Efi Avdela, 'Για τη σχολική ιστορία και τους ιστορικούς' [For School History and the Historians], *newsp. Avgi*, 14 October 2007.

⁵³ Liakos, 'History Wars'.

⁵⁴ Bournazos, 'Motherland-Religion-History'. The author rightly points out that the abuse of patriotic feelings and the ignorance demonstrated by a large part of the society should not lead historians to elitist views and contempt towards the popular sentiments.

disregarding the differences, both at the level of political stakes as well as in terms of their intellectual background. However, I will echo the view of a few historians⁵⁵ who argue that, while we should definitely dismiss ethnocentric warmongering as a trope for educational and other public purposes of a historical account, the answer to our need for understanding human experience cannot lie in an artificial smoothening of the tensions. In order to build conceptual bridges between the publics of two societies, instead of avoiding anything that smells like blood, it would be much better if this blood was accompanied by the flesh of social interaction, common experience and parallel hopes and anxieties. Without flesh and blood, we might end up with the evocation of a 'paradise lost', a condition which, thanks to its abstraction and the impossibility of its existence, can be equally traumatic. Moreover, when this is accompanied by an 'Orientalist' discourse of outsiders, a discourse which legitimizes itself through notions of 'objectivity', academic professionalism and political correctness, no matter the noble intentions, the outcome, traumatic in itself as it unwittingly triggers an unnecessary uproar, risks undermining the respect that the public role of historians should definitely maintain. The perception of the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans has suffered from both approaches.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., the criticism Lyberatos articulates:

"The downplaying of the revolt and the massacre of Batak as a "local historical event" and the description of its residents as illiterate peasants living in conditions of a "traditional patriarchal society" until the intervention of the Polish artist integrates them and their memory into the national narrative, alienate with unforgivable easiness from the historical scope the complex processes of political, social and ideological transformation that for decades connected Batak and its people to the rising Bulgarian nationalism and the Bulgarian national state. In a similar manner, it was considered by the organizers of the program that their own intervention, as new Piotrovskis, and the reformulation of the exhibition of the Batak museum, would affect a "flexible" mass consciousness, as the European "corrective" of the Balkan nationalist distortions of the past.' Lyberatos, 'The Batak Massacre'.

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