

CLEO Cultural Memory in Europe: Commemoration, Memory Making, and Identity in the 21st Century

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Cultural memory in Europe:
Handbook for higher education

University of Patras
Pandelis Kiprianos



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Table of contents

Introduction Pandelis Kiprianos 2
From the Holocaust to the Spanish Holocaust: an essay in plural interpretation Jean-Michel Chaumont 7
Memory of Heroes and Victims, the Holocaust and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Markus Meckl 25
Female Icons of heroism and victimhood Monica Amari & Cinzia Laurelli 37
The Concurrence of Victimhood Miljan Vasić 58
Between heroization and victimization: The "Asia Minor Catastrophe" in the Greek school texts Pandelis Kiprianos, Nektarios Stellakis, Thanasis Karalis & Sofia Kasola 74
A National Hero and a Communist Saint: The Veneration of Thomas Müntzer in East Germany Matthias Riedl 93

Introduction

Pandelis Kiprianos

Contemporary historical culture and commemorative practices in Europe have undergone significant changes in recent decades. Historiography has employed the term post-heroic to characterise this shift, which entails a transition «from heroization to victimization» (Sabrow, 2016, p.59). This transformation is evident in the fact that public recognition is no longer bestowed upon heroic deeds, but rather on the victims of conflicts and wars (ibid.). This introduction provides an overview of a handbook consisting of six contributions that explore various case studies and conceptual analyses related to the post-heroic shifting perspective on history and commemorative practices. The texts in this handbook are focused on a conceptual framework articulated around two axes; the first one explores the historic shift from a heroic to a post-heroic vision, and the second one investigates the concepts of victims, victimization, and victimhood. The authors delve into questions such as how this shift occurs and its reflection in academic and public discourse, as well as in commemorative practices. Through the examination of different cases, the authors seek to provide a thorough understanding of the post-heroic shift occurring in Europe. This shared concern lends unity and complementarity to the handbook.

The first two contributions analyse various aspects of the Holocaust. Professor Jean-Michel Chaumont's contribution, titled *From the Holocaust to the Spanish Holocaust: an essay in plural interpretation*, uses a socio-historical perspective to provide an analysis of the term 'Holocaust' and its usage and significance in the public discourse. Chaumont examines the viewpoints of two American scholars, historian Novick and sociologist Alexander, and agrees with their argument that the Holocaust is not a natural occurrence but rather a social one. However, he differs from them in terms of perspective and chooses to stand by a "moderate constructivism" rather than Novick and Alexander's "radical constructivism". As a result, he proposes a framework consisting of four circles of dissemination of the Holocaust, which ultimately leads to the establishment of its significance and serves as a potent mean to draw public attention. From this perspective, Chaumont examines Preston's book *The Spanish Holocaust*, which was published in 2012. After considering various interpretations, including the idea of competition among victims, Chaumont ultimately supports what he calls "a plural interpretation" by suggesting that multiple analyses can be proposed regarding the existence of a Spanish Holocaust, without excluding one another.

The second contribution, written by Professor Markus Meckl, is entitled *Memory of Heroes and Victims, the Holocaust and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. Meckl explores the history of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and how its

perception and commemoration have evolved over time. He aims to examine the changing practices of remembrance for Holocaust victims and illustrate how shifting norms and values impact our understanding memory and representation of the past. Meckl begins by defining his perceptive, which transitions from a heroic to a post-heroic viewpoint. He provides a brief overview of the Warsaw Ghetto's history and the Uprising, noting that during World War II the event did not receive significant attention. This lack of recognition continued even when the surviving Jews returned home from concentration camps in 1945, as their survival was associated with shame. However, a movement for recognition emerged, recalling Chaumont's analysis in the previous contribution. As early as 1944, the Uprising acquired symbolic meaning, and Jewish communities in New York and London transformed its anniversary into a commemorative day to remember the destruction of European Jews. Unlike the concentration and extermination camps, the ghetto presented an opportunity for an identity-building narrative. Thus, Meckl describes the ghetto's story as one of rebellion and heroism. Over time, the narrative detached itself from historical reality and became intertwined with the prevailing trends surrounding the hero myth and its attributes. Meckl notes that the portrayal of heroes always demands aesthetic elevation, as heroes are expected to be beautiful. However, despite the progressive construction of the narrative, it remains open to different analyses as the interpretation of the insurgents' sacrifice depends on the observer. Nevertheless, as the 20th century ended, the narrative centered around the hero began to fade, giving way to the post heroic era and a shift in the culture of remembrance. This shift redirected attention to everyday life and its practices. Meckl concludes that as the culture of remembrance and commemoration changed, the significance of the Ghetto Uprising in the collective memory of the Jewish genocide diminished. The opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington marked a turning point, as it was one of the last instances where the Ghetto Uprising held a symbolic position in Holocaust remembrance, since the opening took place on the 50th anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising. The heroes of the ghetto, once celebrated for inspiring others, had fulfilled their duty. In post-heroic memory, public recognition is no longer bestowed upon the heroes, as reflected in the choice of Holocaust Remembrance Days, which now focus on the liberation of Auschwitz and the commemoration of Holocaust victims.

The third contribution, entitled *Female Icons of heroism and victimhood*, is authored by Monica Amari and Cinzia Laurelli. It delves into the subject of female emancipation and explores the portrayal of female icons as both heroes and victims. In the first section, Monica Amari traces the historical path from the Seneca Falls Convention to the Suffragettes. She begins by analysing the initial Women's Rights Convention, known as the Seneca Falls Convention, which was held in New York in 1848. The final document produced from this convention is called the Declaration and consists of two parts. The first part presents a comprehensive examination of the mistreatment, offenses and encroachments perpetrated by

men against women. The second part asserts women's demand for equality, including access to all civil and political rights, equal treatment under the law, and the right to participate in public life. These rights would allow women to break free from the constraints of silence and invisibility. Amari argues that the central focus of this movement was the struggle for the right to vote. This struggle was finally achieved with relative success only at the end of World War I. In the second part, *Women in WWI and WWII*, Cinzia Laurelli analyses the condition of women in the two world wars. She argues that these wars brought about significant changes in their lives. With men mobilised and absent from workplaces, women took on their roles and assumed various responsibilities considered masculine. Nevertheless, there were significant disparities in the perception of women between the two wars. Women's circumstances worsened during WWII. As the conflict expanded, the role of women become increasingly vital. They worked in various capacities and often participated in military operations, consequently making them more vulnerable to retaliation.

Miljan Vasić, in his contribution titled *The Concurrence of Victimhood*, takes an interdisciplinary approach, and provides elaborate definitions of the subject being discussed. After referencing various definitions of the term "victim", Vasić concludes that all these approaches share a common understanding of a victim as an individual with needs that cannot be met on his own. When harm is inflicted by another person or group, the victim is portrayed as innocent, vulnerable, and contrasted with the offender who is deemed guilty and responsible. In addition, Vasić introduces a distinction between individual and collective victimhood, and he also distinguishes between victimization and victimhood. While victimization refers to the act of harm committed against an individual or a group, victimhood is the state of self-identifying as a victim based on that harm. Vasić provides insights into different aspects of the concurrence of victimhood, which involves a competition over determining who has experienced greater suffering. Vasić concludes by highlighting that in contemporary societies, there is a noticeable trend among minority groups to present themselves as victims in order to gain increased social recognition.

The last two contributions explore two distinct cases. Kiprianos, Stellakis, Karalis, and Kasola delve into the most traumatic event in Modern Greek History, known as the Asia Minor Catastrophe. This event refers to the defeat of the Greek Army in the Greek-Turkish War in 1922, following four years of intense and bloody battles in the then Ottoman Empire. One of the significant outcomes of this war was the forced exchange of nearly 1,6 million Christians and Muslims along the two coasts of the Aegean Sea. Their contribution titled *Between heroization and victimization: The "Asia Minor Catastrophe" in the Greek school texts* focuses on the history textbooks used in Greek elementary schools and examines how this crucial event in Greek History is presented. Before analysing the textbooks, the authors emphasise the significance of textbooks in shaping and influencing public history and the official narrative surrounding this event. After analysing the content of

the history textbooks, the authors reach two conclusions. Firstly, they observe a consistent pattern that persists throughout a century of history textbooks, albeit with some minor variations. They assert that this pattern is significant and cannot be easily overlooked by the textbooks. The second conclusion partially challenges the prevailing perception of the event and introduces new elements into the narrative. The authors highlight a gradual shift towards social history, which, while still acknowledging heroism, also illuminates the aspects of everyday life. They note that the tone in the school textbooks has traditionally been heroic, emphasizing the bravery and resilience of the Greek soldiers who endured numerous hardships and emerged victorious in battles. The authors explain the reasons which made the situation changed after 1974. After 1974, history textbooks progressively adopt a different approach. The conventional political-military perspective is diminished in favour of a more social viewpoint. Greater attention is given to everyday life, and new aspects, such as culture, are incorporated into the narrative.

The last contribution, written by Matthias Riedl, is entitled *A National Hero and a Communist Saint: The Veneration of Thomas Müntzer in East Germany*. As suggested by the title, the article explores the reception of Thomas Müntzer in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Müntzer was a theologian reformer, known for his prominent role in the German Peasant War in 1525, where he fought alongside the peasants who were ultimately slaughtered by the army of the allied princes of Hesse and Saxony. In his analysis, Riedl explains how the veneration of Müntzer in the GDR was a part of the post-socialist East-German identity-building process. He argues that anti-fascism alone was not sufficient for the GDR's need to establish a positive founding myth that would support national identity and legitimize the GDR's claim to represent the entire German nation. According to this myth, the GDR continued the positive traditions of Germany, which not only deserved protection but also required further fulfilment.

Together, the contributions provide examples on how the emergence of post-heroism has brought about significant shifts in commemorative and memory-making practices in Europe. Traditionally, heroism played a central role in shaping narratives of collective memory, with commemorative practices focusing on glorifying and venerating heroic figures and their sacrifices. However, in recent years, a more nuanced and critical approach has emerged, challenging the hero-centric paradigm and paving the way for post-heroism. Post-heroism emphasises the complexities and ambiguities of historical events and the multiple perspectives involved. It encourages a deeper examination of the past, acknowledging the flaws and limitations of heroic narratives. One key aspect of this transformation is the diversification of voices and narratives in commemorative practices. Post-heroism encourages the inclusion of previously marginalised or silenced perspectives, such as those of women, minorities, and victims of historical injustices. It promotes a more inclusive

and comprehensive understanding of history, highlighting the experiences and contributions of a wider range of individuals and communities.

From the Holocaust to the Spanish Holocaust: an essay in plural interpretation

Jean-Michel Chaumont

Prologue

By way of introduction, I propose reading these three excerpts from reviews of Paul Preston's 2012 book *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth Century Spain*.

The first was written by Jack Fischel, for the journal *Shofar* in 2014: "Although in a short review such as this, defining the Holocaust would be inappropriate, it is important to acknowledge that the Shoah represented something unique in human history. The intention of the Nazis was to eliminate from the planet every man, woman, and child who was Jewish. Spain, Syria, the African slave trade, or the fate of Native Americans are all examples of man's inhumanity to man and included massive loss of lives. But in all of these cases there was no intention to annihilate the victims' entire population. The international community recognizes this distinction between the deliberate effort of a nation state to kill innocent civilians and the Nazi Holocaust when it uses the word genocide to describe mass murder." ¹

The second was written by Rob Stradling and was published in *The English Historical Review* in 2013: "His title, with its use of the term Holocaust, was chosen with an eye to 'impact.' The book's dust-cover embraces its content as 'The International Bestseller'! One is not infrequently dismayed by spurious claims to authenticity and significance made by publishers, reviewers and even authors. But it is rare to find a work of history the actual title of which is patently tendentious. Preston's decision to use this title, with its obvious resonances, was entirely deliberate: he knew what he was doing in choosing that term. Preston has devoted admirers in and outside Spain: both Prologue and Acknowledgements (...) confirm that he was warned by them about the negative reactions-from moral outrage to mere disquiet-that his title would elicit. Yet, even if the statistical data presented by Preston were unimpeachable, his use of the term would still be invalid. There was no holocaust in Spain. There is no evidence beyond anecdote and braggadocio for programmatic extermination on either side: nor of genocide, ethnic cleansing, or other current catch-all constructions. Moreover, it seems almost an act of bathos to register that there was also no Inquisition in twentieth-century Spain. Thus, apart from "Spain", every noun in the book's title lacks validity." ²

¹ Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5703/shofar.33.1.135>, p. 137.

² Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24473946>, p. 1618.

The third one was written by Fernando del Rey, for the Journal of Contemporary History in 2016: "Unquestionably, whether or not one shares the author's conclusions, this commercially successful study has a strong narrative and provides much information, although its best sections are the few that are based on primary sources. However, in the context of the aforementioned polemics that transcend the university seminar room, The Spanish Holocaust has become a weapon in the Spanish 'memory wars' of the twenty-first century, a logical outcome given the book's focus on revolutionary and counter-revolutionary repression. Leaving aside the political controversy, the historiographical debate on the book has centered on the theoretical repercussions of its title, which expresses a thesis - Francoist 'genocide' or 'extermination' - which several leading historians consider completely inappropriate. Moreover, the use of the term 'Inquisition' in the English version's subtitle, which resuscitates the 'Black Legend' of the sixteenth century and has nothing to do with Spanish realities of the first half of the twentieth century, has produced bewilderment among these historians."³

Introduction

The claim of a Spanish Holocaust is not intelligible independently of the relatively recent centrality of the Holocaust in a growing number of countries⁴. In order to contextualize the appearance of this "Spanish Holocaust", it is therefore necessary first to understand the meaning of the evolution that has made the Holocaust the symbol and standard of evil that it has become. We can then, in a second step, attempt to interpret the gesture, repeated many times over the last twenty years, of "revealing" the existence of other holocausts, holocausts generally described as hidden or forgotten⁵.

The recurrence of this gesture alone constitutes a first and precious indication for the interpreter: it assures us that this way of relating to certain past events is not a strictly national, in this case Spanish, matter. Of course, the way in which the claim is supported depends largely on the Spanish socio-political context and its evolution since the late 1970s⁶. However, I

³ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24671850>, p.431.

⁴ The words "claim" and "claim-maker" may not be the most appropriate insofar as they may suggest that the content of the vindictive proclamation is without merit. In my use of them, the question of content remains open: the "claim" may or may not be grounded in different ways. Thus, for example, the "proclamation" of a Spanish Holocaust seems to me to be manifestly unfounded from a *historical* point of view but potentially justifiable from an *ethical* point of view.

⁵ In Belgium a "forgotten genocide" was recalled in 1998 by Adam Hochschild *King Leopold's Ghost*. A mediocre book from a scientific point of view, it caused a considerable stir and was still much discussed in the recent federal parliamentary commission on the colonial past. Recently, another "genocide" was brought out of the bowels of history to reinforce Flemish identity: the extermination of the Eburons in retaliation for Ambiorix's successful ruse in 54 BC. JC.

⁶ In 2012, I found D. AÏACHE's text, "Mémoire, oubli et récupération de la mémoire historique de la guerre civile espagnole" (Memory, oblivion and recovery of the historical memory of the Spanish Civil War) particularly illuminating from this point of view.

would like to focus here on what seems to transcend this specific context and participate in a more general movement. In this respect, I believe that we are dealing with an important modification of our cultural models, that is to say, of the collective frameworks from which we draw the symbolic resources that allow us, among other things, to signify our destinies, both from an individual and a collective point of view. The question remains open as to the extent and intensity of this transformation: what geographical area does it cover exactly⁷? To what depth? Only empirical investigations will make it possible to determine this precisely once the transformation is complete, which was clearly not yet the case in 2012 when a first draft of this text was written. In 2023, by contrast, we can ask ourselves the question: at least in some countries - and I will take the example of Belgium in conclusion - it seems that the memorialization of the Shoah has reached a stable point of completion.

The evolution that led the Holocaust from the periphery to the center of public attention in the United States, that is to say, in the heart of the world's leading power, has been the subject of numerous studies⁸. These agree roughly on its main stages. They differ, however, not only on the empirical identification of the ways and means used, but even more so on its normative interpretation: to the question of whether this is a positive or negative development, Peter Novick and Jeffrey Alexander, the two authors with whom I would like to enter into a dialogue, answer in opposite ways: Novick deplors it, Alexander welcomes it. Having been a modest participant in this process in the early 1990s as a scientific collaborator of the Auschwitz Foundation in Brussels, I will also present some hypotheses about it.

From "Nazi atrocities" to the "Holocaust": the paths of evolution

In addition to agreeing on the growing centrality of the Holocaust, both Novick and Alexander - at the time a historian in Chicago and a sociologist in Yale - believed that it was a social phenomenon and not a natural one. In other words, it is not

⁷ It would probably be better to measure the extension within certain *social strata*, more or less broad, of certain countries, sometimes in an unexpected way: thus in Japan, in the novel by H. MURAKAMI, *Q84*, p.304, this surprising dialogue: "Have you ever read Aristotle? -Almost not -You should. I'm sure you'd like it. When I have nothing more to say, I read the Greek philosophers. I never get tired of them. There's always something to learn from them. -What does that mean, basically? -That everything leads to the Good. The Good, in other words, is the consequence of everything. And doubt is something we can save for tomorrow," Komatsu replied. That's what it means, in essence. -What does Aristotle say about the Holocaust?"

⁸ The phenomenon itself had been noted since the early 1980s: thus G. KREN and L. RAPPOPORT wrote as early as 1980 in their seminal *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behavior*: "Its growth in our culture over the past decade hardly requires documentation." p. 3.

the intrinsic properties of the events grouped under the term "Holocaust" that would explain its contemporary centrality, but rather the efforts of organized social actors who worked successfully to that end.

Novick and Alexander, however, conceive of the modalities of action of these agents in rather different ways.

For Novick, who has focused almost exclusively on the Holocaust in American life, the impetus came from the leaders of a few American Jewish organizations whose motivations were primarily opportunistic and strategic⁹: unlike their counterparts in the 1950s and 1960s, they became convinced that it was in the interests of Jews - and particularly American Jews - to highlight the plight of their co-religionists during the Second World War. Since they are also well represented in the mass culture industry, they have benefited from many relays to popularize the Holocaust as a human tragedy without precedent or equivalent¹⁰. A cultural context that was increasingly particularistic and sensitive to the figure of the victim constituted a particularly propitious framework for ensuring that this proposal would have a considerable audience in the general public. Non-Jews were invited to identify with the horrific plight of the victims of the Shoah and, apart from among anti-Semitic groups and the descendants of less well-recognized victims, the invitation was generally well received.

Alexander, on the other hand, presents a more complex vision in which the main actors are "cultural workers" who are not only driven by strategic motives. In his theory of cultural trauma, cultural workers are much more diverse than in Novick's historical account: theologians and philosophers, artists, scientists, lawyers, members of the cultural industry, civil servants, political figures... All participated in the movement in their respective arenas. Without any consultation among them, a new symbolic framework and a new way of telling the story of Nazi crimes and genocides were created. As for the Holocaust, after everyone was able to identify with the Jewish victims¹¹, it became the symbol and even more the standard

⁹ Note that P. NOVICK ("Response to Lederhendler and Lang," p.170) regretted giving this impression of a "conspiracy" of community leaders while acknowledging that it did emerge from his book.

¹⁰ P. Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 207: "How did this European event come to loom so large in American consciousness? A good part of the answer is the fact, not less of a fact because anti-Semites turn it into a grievance, that Jews play an important and influential role in Hollywood, the television industry, and the newspaper, magazine, and book publishing worlds. Anyone who would explain the massive attention the Holocaust has received in these media in recent years without reference to that fact is being naive or disingenuous."

¹¹ Influenced by the concept of trauma (where the dimension of repetition is central: the past "does not want to pass"), Alexander insists on *identification*. I find him more convincing when he explains that trauma became cultural from the moment when what was a trauma only for the memory of the persecuted group became a trauma for the rest of society, or even for the whole of humanity (J. ALEXANDER, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals", p. 5). R. EYEMAN ("Cultural Trauma", p. 74) speaks of the transition between "collective (*group*) memory" and "*public* (collective) memory". In the same vein, I had suggested talking about the passage from a *private* memorial singularity to a *public* memorial singularity (J-M. CHAUMONT, *La concurrence des victimes*, pp.290-296).

of evil and undue suffering. As such, adorned with the halo of the sacred, "the Holocaust became engorged, and its seepage polluted everything with which it came into contact"¹².

This is what makes it possible to understand, as we shall return to it, the attractiveness of comparisons with the Holocaust: if the audience can be convinced that, even if it differs from it in other respects, it is close to it in certain points of view, the horror that the Holocaust inspires will be transferred to the event in question. The claim-maker of other events then mobilizes "polluting analogies with Nazism"¹³ in the hope of seeing them recognized and denounced with an intensity comparable to that of the standard of measurement, id est with the Holocaust.

Compared to these two interpretations, which can be described as radically constructivist, I would support a moderate constructivism¹⁴:

I think, as Novick and Alexander do, that it was actors who brought about the evolution, but I think that it was impelled very early on after the Second World War by the direct impact of the events and their progressive revelation. Both of them ignore this almost underground current, these discreet but decisive actors for understanding the subsequent part of the story. It was they who, without suspecting or caring that they were pioneers, prepared the way for what was to follow, elaborating the conceptual and symbolic tools that were to spread on a large scale three or four decades later¹⁵. If we do not pay attention to these pioneers, we think that the contemporary discourse and the late centrality occurred almost ex nihilo, triggered by who knows what external "events" (the Six-Day War, the Kipur War, the Vietnam War, the advent of victims, the disappearance of the optimism of the "thirty glorious years"...) and without the slightest link with what happened during the war.

The difficulty here lies in the fact that few people at the time took the measure of what had just happened: stunned, it was often in a state of shock that these pioneers undertook to reflect on it. While the consecrated places of memory celebrated the victory over Germany and commemorated the dead heroes in the well-honed memorial molds of the First World War, this minority of thinkers and artists quickly realized that the resources of meaning available to make contingency and

¹² J. ALEXANDER, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals", p. 44.

¹³ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁴ In the sense given to this distinction by E. GOODE and BEN YEHUDA, *Moral Panics*, p. 158. The radical character of Novick's and Alexander's constructivism comes from the fact that they deny any necessary link between the event and its traumatic or memorial impact (cf. J. ALEXANDER, *Trauma*, p. 13). In the perspective defended here, this link is not sufficient, but it is necessary.

¹⁵ As G. KREN and L. RAPPOPORT wrote in 1980 about the Holocaust, "Ever since it happened, the culture-makers of Western Civilization -writers, artists, scholars, scientists, and thoughtful people generally- have wondered why it happened, how it happened, and what it means for human society." (*The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behaviour*, p. 13)

misfortune bearable did not work in this case: it was impossible to see in these crimes and genocides the work of any kind of providence. The social factory of meaning was, if not out of order, at least seriously stuck¹⁶.

This "discovery" was for a long time the unenviable privilege of very restricted circles: confidential works, private correspondence, tortured works of art were the discreet sites of it. While the importance of the events was hardly open to discussion among themselves, the questions related to their causes and consequences, necessarily interconnected, were painfully debated. In order to imagine the diffusion process - of which there are few records but which makes it possible to resolve many of the questions left unanswered by Novick and Alexander - I imagine several circles, further and further away from the impact, as when one throws a pebble into the water of a pond and the wave slowly diffuses.

The four circles of dissemination

The first circle was made up of those who, often because they had had first-hand experience, took the measure of the events and their implications. For years, they corresponded only among themselves, directly or through publications, without worrying much about widening their audience. It was in their works that the questions were asked and sometimes certain answers were elaborated that the events called for. To illustrate my point, I would say that the correspondence between H. Arendt and K. Jaspers in the immediate post-war period is typical of the activity that took place within the first circle. The state of mind that reigns there is well summarized when Arendt writes in 1946: "We desperately need, for the future, the true history of this hell built by the Nazis. Not only because these facts have changed and poisoned the very air we breathe, not only because they populate our nightmares and permeate our thoughts day and night, but also because they have become the fundamental experience of our time and its fundamental distress. It is only from this foundation, on which a new knowledge of man rests, that our new perspectives, our new memories, our new actions can take their starting point. Those who may one day have the strength to tell the whole story, however, must realize that the story itself offers nothing but sorrow and despair, but above all no argument that can serve any historical purpose."¹⁷

¹⁶ According to N. SMELSER ("Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma", p. 37) a *social* trauma occurs when economic or political institutions break down; a *cultural* trauma is a social trauma that is prolonged by a breakdown of the "meaning system".

¹⁷ H. ARENDT, *La tradition cachée*, p. 241 (*my translation*). It is interesting to note that when Arendt evokes "Nazi hell", she is undoubtedly thinking of the book by the survivor Eugen KOGON: *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System behind them*, published in Germany in 1946. In other words, she is not thinking only of the Judeocide but of all Nazi crimes and genocides: see on this point J-M. CHAUMONT, "La singularité de l'univers concentrationnaire selon Hannah Arendt". For the French-speaking world, the activity of these pioneers is well documented in François AZOUVI'S book *Le mythe du grand Silence, Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire* (2012). The book that has become the reference work for the representation of the history of the

While these isolated thinkers and artists are looking for words to express and signify the catastrophe, the memory is maintained just as discreetly in the camp's survivors' associations that commemorate their dead and assert the rights of the living¹⁸. In Belgium, it was the time (1946) when some of the survivors of the Shoah met in the *Amicale des ex-prisonniers politiques de Silésie*. It was not until ten years later (1956) and the first reparations paid by Germany that a second association was formed, mainly for those who were still somewhat pejoratively called racial victims at the time: the Union of Jewish Deportees of Belgium, daughters and sons of the deportation.

It was only several decades later within a second circle of speakers that the concern to widen the audience became decisive: to convince the rest of the public that something very important had happened that did not leave the conditions of the symbolic reproduction of the societies concerned intact¹⁹. In the survivors' associations, younger people were added to the first circle. As a result, the *Amicales* adapt to welcome those who do not had a lived experience of the events. In Belgium, for example, in 1976 the *Amicale* set up a *Foundation Auschwitz*, which obtained the status of an association for continuing education, thanks to which public subsidies became available. Commemoration was now replaced by a concern for transmission. Initially, this was done mainly by organizing trips to Auschwitz for history teachers: It was a matter of convincing them by all reasonable means possible (visiting the scene of the crime, meeting with survivors, publishing a small magazine, running a documentation center...) that Auschwitz was, according to the words put down on paper twenty years earlier by Arendt, "the fundamental experience and distress of our time" and that they had a duty to pass on this truth to their pupils. It was also necessary in those years to counter the negationists. The survivors were at the forefront of this struggle²⁰.

As for the third parties now involved, their activity is very comparable to that of art critics discovering a work that, in their informed but fallible eyes, constitutes a revolution in the history of art and forces them to revise all or part of what they

memory of the Shoah in France -*Deportation and Genocide* by Annette WIEVIORKA, completely ignores this underground current and created "the myth of the great silence."

¹⁸ See P. LAGROU (2003), *Mémoires patriotiques et Occupation nazie. Résistants, requis et déportés en Europe occidentale, 1945-1965*.

¹⁹ I am paraphrasing here a formulation by J. HABERMAS: "Auschwitz modified the conditions that allowed the historical fabric of life to perpetuate itself spontaneously - and not only in Germany" (*Ecrits politiques*, p. 228, *my translation*). This is exactly the content of the notion of collective trauma. Let us note that the postconventional subject as well as the morality of the same name are conceived by Habermas as (normative) consequences of Auschwitz.

²⁰ To better combat the negationists, the organization changed its name and became the *Amicale belge des ex-prisonniers politiques d'Auschwitz-Birkenau, camps et prisons de Silésie* (Belgian Association of Ex-Political Prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Camps and Prisons of Silesia) in the same year. See the article by Sarah TIMPERMAN, "De l'Amicale des ex-prisonniers de Silésie à la Fondation Auschwitz: constructions de mémoire en Belgique."

thought was established in terms of artistic canons²¹. These few critics will produce arguments to support their judgments and promote the work²². These arguments will be debated, refined, contested, refuted and will convince - or not - a more and more extended public. Among the latter, other individuals will in turn become proselytizers and will praise the qualities of the work, will take up - possibly by popularizing them somewhat - the arguments that have convinced them of its importance. Thus the number of supporters of the said work will grow, more or less quickly according to the quality of the means available to make it known and the people who embrace the cause: small provincial gallery or large museum in the capital, unknown art magazine or prestigious journal with a strong impact factor, obscure critics or opinion makers... All this counts and in most cases, the promotion of the work fails for a multitude of internal reasons (intrinsic weakness of the work, lack of means to promote it...) or external reasons (context not conducive to a good reception...).

In this sense, Alexander and Novick are right to underline the contingency of the process²³: just as it is probable that important artists have remained unknown, no doubt events that would have deserved more attention have been quickly forgotten. On the contrary, minor works are often given too much attention: the promotional apparatus can be powerful enough to make them acclaimed and sold.

In the case of the Holocaust, the promotion was finally successful, but it was not an easy undertaking. While the facts seemed to speak for themselves, the shame long attached to the allegedly too passive conduct of the victims ("as sheep in the slaughter") and the scarcity of heroic conducts were long insurmountable obstacles.²⁴

But finally, by the early 1990s, it was clear that the battle of memory would be won. From then on, while the third parties who joined the first circle in the 1980s were for the most part disinterested, more cynical profiles soon appeared who rightly saw in the growing interest in the Shoah the opportunity to make a career or to obtain various benefits for themselves or their groups.

²¹ For readers familiar with sociological jargon, I would say that their activity is a variant of "claims-making": on the broad continuum that links the construction of public problems to the fomentation of moral panics, the campaigns conducted by these event promoters are singled out by the discursive modalities privileged to convince a broader public of the justness of the cause. Whereas the fomenter of moral panics agitate scarecrows sometimes created from scratch in the service of often hidden agendas and that the experts in social problems resort more readily to the arid discourse of the statistics and the grey literature, the "promoters of events" mobilize especially "noble" discursive registers such as philosophy, history or poetry.

²² "To promote a work": I do not attach any pejorative nuance to this expression. On the contrary, it seems to me to be a very noble activity to argue the importance of a work or an event and to try to convince others of it. The fact that the term has been unduly monopolized by commercial discourse should not prevent us from resurrecting the ancient meaning of "supporting one's cause".

²³ Let us note however that A. ROSENBERG ("Was the Holocaust Unique?", p. 150) had pointed this out several years before them: certain events have all the qualities required to become "historical turning points", but these qualities are not sufficient.

²⁴ See on this point J-M. CHAUMONT, *Survivre à tout prix ? Essai sur la résistance, l'honneur et le salut de nos âmes*, Paris, La Découverte, 2017.

They represent a part of the third circle. But some of the newcomers still sincerely felt that it was their duty to mobilize their skills to inform and move the general public. It was then that a whole organization was set up to serve the memory. Better and better financed, the organization was taken over by associations, often competing, each of which developed real educational programs to raise awareness among the general public. The survivors actively participated in the process, but they no longer had control over it. In 1992, for example, the Auschwitz Foundation organized an international colloquium at which some fifteen presentations were given simultaneously in specialized workshops. The survivors did not know where to turn amid this profusion of creativity in the service of the memorialization of their history. The choppy and hesitant speech of the early days gave way to a confident and archived speech. This discourse could often become a source of historical-moral dogma, but this was not a fatal destiny: it could also continue to generate awareness and authentic reflection.

Finally, gradually, the cause became institutionalized, and a fourth circle took over. In 2012, this was not yet completely the case in Belgium. In 2023, we can consider that it is. We will come back to this in the conclusion, but it is significantly illustrated by the creation of a Hannah Arendt Institute in the city of Mechelen, from where the Jews of Belgium were deported. Thus a Jewish intellectual who would not have been very welcome in Belgium when she sought refuge outside of Germany; who devoted much of her energy after the war to understanding the historical tornado that had just devastated Europe in general and her own people in particular; who only began to make inroads into the French-speaking academic world in the mid-1980s; ... has given her name 40 years after her death to an institution dedicated to the design of tools in the service of "never again".

The members of the first two circles have good reason to be wary of an institutionalization that sometimes seems to be akin to paying lip service, but a minimum of sociological realism leads one to admit that large-scale dissemination necessarily presupposes mass media and that these media in turn presuppose drastic formatting and simplification. There is no reason to reject them a priori. Nevertheless, their real impact is extremely difficult to evaluate²⁵. What could it be, what should it be? To answer these questions, it is important to consider the meaning of the evolution that has taken place: should it be welcomed or, on the contrary, deplored?

²⁵ In Belgium, polls show the far-right party winning the 2024 elections in Flanders... This should temper somewhat the optimism that might emerge from the evolution traced here of Holocaust memorialization. How could we judge its effectiveness? I think it is far too early to do so.

On contingency after Auschwitz: the meaning of an evolution

According to Novick, in the United States, the acquired centrality of the Holocaust is frankly regrettable: not only do the so-called "lessons of the Holocaust" seem trivial or inoperative to him, but more seriously, the attention paid to the Holocaust distracts Americans from the past they should be confronting: that of the enslavement of Black people²⁶. Within the Jewish community, the effects are, in his view, equally negative: externally, the insistence on the uniqueness of the Holocaust insensitizes the suffering endured by others (since it cannot be compared to that of Jewish victims without trivializing the Holocaust) and creates competition, even hostility, among victims²⁷. Internally, the "obsession with the Holocaust" (according to the harsh expression of the Jewish survivor and theologian I. Schorsch quoted by Novick²⁸) feeds the Jewish version of ethnic withdrawal characteristic of the great return of particularism in the United States. Novick's pessimism is best revealed in the conclusion of the fourth section of his book: "The desire to find and teach lessons of the Holocaust has various sources, different sources for different people, one supposes. Probably one of its principal sources is the hope of extracting from the Holocaust something that is, if not redemptive, at least useful. I doubt it can be done."²⁹ . For Alexander, the Holocaust having been linked to many other manifestations of political and social suffering, it has become the driving force leading to the establishment of "universal human rights" and, in the name of the latter, limits to the sovereignty of States; this is what he calls "post-Holocaust morality"³⁰ characterized by an unprecedented universalist

²⁶ P. NOVICK, *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 195: "Their grievance was that in America, the group that was by a wide margin the most advantaged was using European crimes to trump American crimes against what was, by an equally wide margin, the least advantaged group. As succeeding decades saw ever diminishing concern with the misery of blacks and ever-greater concern with past Jewish suffering, resentment grew. The greatest symbolic affront was that while Jews had a federally funded museum memorializing their victimhood, proposals for a museum of the black experience never made it through Congress."

²⁷ NOVICK spoke of "victimization olympics". Cf. *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 195: "The most common Jewish response to the charge that Jews were intent on permanent possession of the gold medal in the victimization olympics has been to protest that it was others, not they, who were engaged in competition. (...). The most commonly expressed Jewish grievance was the use of the words "Holocaust" and "genocide" to describe other catastrophes. This sense of grievance was rooted in the conviction, axiomatic in at least "official" Jewish discourse, that the Holocaust was unique. Since Jews recognized the Holocaust's uniqueness that it was "incomparable," beyond any analogy they had no occasion to compete with others; there could be no contest over the incontestable. It was only those who, out of ignorance or malice, denied the uniqueness of the Holocaust who could be so foolish as to engage in competition. (Some scholars in fact characterized denial of the Holocaust's uniqueness as a form of 'Holocaust denial')".

²⁸ P. NOVICK, *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 198: "At the same time, within the Jewish world there have been many critics of the fetishism of the Holocaust's uniqueness some of them, like Ismar Schorsch, the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary and a refugee from Nazi Germany, quite eminent. For Schorsch the obsession with uniqueness is a "distasteful secular version of chosenness", which introduces pointless enmity between Jews and other victims."

²⁹ P. NOVICK, *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 263.

³⁰ J. ALEXANDER, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals", p. 59.

dimension. As such, it undeniably represents moral and political progress in his eyes. However, his demonstration leaves one a little skeptical because this legal progress was acquired in the great UN conventions of the late 1940s, well before the Holocaust became a major symbol. As for his invocation of NATO's military intervention against Serbia in 1999, it would be more convincing if he had been able to point to a similar intervention to stop the genocide in Rwanda just five years earlier. His more abstract theoretical presentation of the concept of "cultural trauma" does, however, provide a useful way of conceiving other kinds of normative effects.

According to him, events, especially wars, only become traumatic when "those who have fallen are seen not as sacrificing for a noble cause but as wasted victims of irresponsible chicanery."³¹ Then the deeply anchored heroic narratives break down and, since it is from their cultures that humans expect meaning, cultural workers actively seek a non-shocking way to make sense of their deaths. This search gives rise to many debates that sometimes degenerate into bitter polemics. A sort of public contest takes place, the solution that will most likely win being the one with the greatest performative power.

Which one will be the least likely to give meaning to the absurdity of so many deaths for nothing?

Despite the religious connotations of the term, the victims of the Holocaust did not sacrifice themselves: they are neither heroes nor martyrs. Nor were they the instruments of a Providence or expiators punished by a wrathful God... The few who claimed this fail to convince and unite many people around them. Since it seems impossible to refer the murder of the victims to a meaningful prospective intention, a logical alternative emerges: to signify their death retrospectively. To act collectively in such a way that their death represents a caesura, a historical turning point, a productive trauma... It is a question of making it possible to say in two or three centuries, that in the middle of the twentieth century, a horrible massacre of innocents took place, and as a consequence of this, the following generations began to consider their past - that is to say, the substance of which they were made, their identity-, differently: no longer as the sometimes bumpy road to the best of all possible worlds, but rather as that which permanently contained the virtuality of the worst injustices and crimes. Not guilty of what had happened before their birth, they declared themselves responsible for what they would bring back from this past, finally problematized. Thus, they consoled themselves a little with the murder of the victims: they had not died in vain, since their disappearance had been the determinant of this major historical crisis and, consequently, a new starting point for at least a portion of humanity.

This way of coming to terms with radical contingency was probably not completely unprecedented, but it became the most common way of making sense of the suffering undergone: in French, it is associated with the word "resilience", and it

³¹ J. ALEXANDER, *Trauma*, p. 3.

remains to be determined what links the fortune of the concept with the impact of the Holocaust. The process is quite simple: one dissociates the cause (the trauma suffered) and the solution (what one does with it afterwards). It was impossible to abolish what had been, but it was possible to rebound by making it the occasion for a learning experience so essential that it became a turning point in one's individual history (or collective history, by aggregating individual turning points), a turning point after which nothing would ever be the same: one had to mourn many illusions, but one could now boast of a critical relationship to one's heritage, of the shedding of its detestable aspects, of a truer relationship to oneself, of an increase in real freedom... In short, paraphrasing the Sartrean formula, one would have succeeded in making something of what our past had made of oneself... Resilience, a new procedure to signify contingency, has rapidly turned from a narrow door into a royal road, if not compulsory, at least highly recommended. Because he or she manages to make sense of his or her suffering, the resilient person moves from the status of a grieving and powerless victim to that of a "survivor". As the Holocaust became the standard of evil, the Holocaust survivor became the model for all victims, for all traumatized people. Shani Orgad, who has analyzed this injunction to become a survivor, has also shown that it is not without perverse effects.³²

Whatever the elective affinities between resilience and the lessons of the Holocaust, it seems plausible that one of the ways -but only one among others- to effectively transform the Holocaust into a historical crisis or a collective trauma is to revisit the past in its light. So, just as the thinkers who made it a proper name did so to draw attention, other actors, wanting to draw attention to other parts of the past that they considered traumatic and insufficiently recognized, began to use the signifier. As early as 1980, Kren and Rappoport understood this perfectly: "Analogies and claims to the status of Hitler's Jews, therefore, have become a virtually automatic means of arousing attention to the plight of threatened groups everywhere."³³ It is in this context that the invocation of the Spanish Holocaust can and must be situated.

The Spanish Holocaust: an attempt at a plural interpretation

As with other claimed holocausts, several readings can be proposed, depending closely on the meaning that is given to the centrality of the Holocaust. Given the presence of several circles of actors with different logics and motivations, it is normal that several correct interpretations coexist, especially depending on whether one is more interested in one

³² S. ORGAD, "The Survivor in contemporary Culture and Public Discourse: A genealogy".

³³ G. KREN and L. RAPPOPORT, *The Holocaust and the crisis of human behaviour*, p. 4.

category of actors. But other factors obviously weigh in, starting with the level of recognition - or denial - of the "holocaust" presented to the general public.

Let us say at the outset that the argument that the substance of the two events is so historically similar as to justify the use of the noun "holocaust" in the Spanish case seems untenable: not, as Fishel dogmatically claimed in *Shofar*, because the Holocaust was unique, but rather because, as Stradling rightly pointed out, the massacres and atrocities that were committed were not committed with a genocidal logic. Thus, the comparison reduces rather than increases the intelligibility of the Civil War. It could be argued that a holocaust occurred within the war, just as the Judeocide occurred during and in the context of the Second World War, but the victims of Franco's repression had too many links with the Republican camp to support the existence of two independent series. It is therefore appropriate to reassure historians that this debate does not concern them as such; its real stakes lie elsewhere, in the "Spanish memory war" mentioned by Fernando del Rey in our prologue.

If one adopts as disillusioned a reading of the Holocaust as Novick's, one will undoubtedly be tempted to see in the invocation of a Spanish Holocaust only opportunism: it is only a matter of hoping for material benefits (for example, selling many copies of a book) or symbolic benefits (gaining notoriety). It is their presumed greed that disqualifies Preston and his ilk here.

More generous, one could propose a psychologizing reading where the lack of historical rigor would be excused by almost therapeutic motives: Franco's repression would have provoked a trauma or rather a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, all the more profound because it was forbidden to express it for several decades. The invocation of the Holocaust would then be read as a symptom of the importance of the trauma, a return of the repressed that would obey the laws of the unconscious rather than those of a sober apprehension. Seeing the images of people broken in front of mass graves, I am willing to believe that for a minority of people directly concerned, the hyperbole of the name corresponds to the pain of a mourning that has been censored for too long.

From a perspective inspired by the competition of victims, one could argue that the name "holocaust" is appropriate precisely because the guardians of the "axiom of the uniqueness"³⁴ tend to forbid it: the gesture would then be understood as a provocation, a challenge to the monopoly to which some claim. Reminders of orthodoxy have indeed

³⁴ To use an expression of P. NOVICK, *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 14: "It is connected to the *axiom of the uniqueness of the Holocaust* and its corollary, that comparing anything to the Holocaust is illegitimate, indeed indecent. I have suggested that the very notion of uniqueness is vacuous, but rhetorically for ideological or other purposes the claim of uniqueness (or its denial) can be powerful."

been issued which could have given rise to a Spanish variant of these vain polemics³⁵. For all that, I did not have the impression of coming across actors irritated by the pretensions to the uniqueness of the Holocaust in Spain. Unlike those who felt directly excluded by its affirmation, it seemed to me that the Spanish actors were largely unaware of the dogma of the uniqueness of the Shoah and therefore had no intention of challenging it. Not being a connoisseur of the public debate in Spain, I could be wrong, but if this is the case, it is to be welcomed.

On a slightly different note, it seems more likely that there is irritation among some actors that Spain officially commemorates the Holocaust every year, while Franco's massacres and persecutions are not entitled to such recognition. The situation is then comparable to that of African Americans, descendants of slaves, who have long been indignant at seeing America commemorate the Holocaust perpetrated in Europe with great pomp and circumstance, but not willing to dedicate a museum to slavery similar to the one dedicated to the Holocaust since 1992³⁶.

It could also be that invoking the victims of terror is a roundabout way of recalling the spoliations of their property and initiating a process of devolution of abusively confiscated property: the stakes would then be economic and no doubt weigh in the balance. The search for statutory benefits is obviously not to be excluded either.

More directly aimed at yesterday's enemies, the assertion of a Spanish holocaust can be an effective political weapon for damning their heirs. By affirming the incommensurability of Franco's terror - which, more than the Republican "excesses," was organized and continued well beyond the fighting before being concealed - the foundations of the post-Franco compromise on the representation of the past are undermined: no longer is there any question of sending the two camps back to back by deploring the war crimes committed on both sides, there would clearly be the good and the bad, waiting to be identified and condemned as such. The logic would be that of a symbolic revenge and the obtaining by the heirs of the Republicans of the moral capital associated with the signifier "Holocaust"³⁷.

Finally, as many authors from Kren and Rappoport to Alexander have argued, the use of the symbol can be aimed at attracting attention, but in a sense close to that which the expression "to present a grievance" once had, that is, to expose

³⁵ Thus M. YUSTA for whom "we must never lose sight of the unique and unequalled character of the Nazi genocide", in: *La guerre d'Espagne en héritage*, p. 67. To which we will leave it to the Jewish historian Novick to answer: "Does anyone (except, just conceivably, those making the argument) believe that the claim of uniqueness is anything other than a claim for preeminence?" (*The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 197).

³⁶ As of 2016, this is no longer true: African Americans have won their case. See <https://nmaahc.si.edu> I don't know if the museum meets their wishes, probably not all parts of their community. The commemoration of the victims of slavery has had its own international day at the UN every year (March 25) since 2008. The Holocaust has its own day since 2005. (See : <https://www.un.org/en/observances/list-days-weeks>)

³⁷ See on this subject: J-M. CHAUMONT (2022), "Moral Capital and victim Competition", forthcoming.

an oral or written complaint exposing a grievance in order to obtain reparation, or only to make known a misfortune. As in the previous point, it would not be a matter of reclassifying the Civil War as a Holocaust, but only of bringing certain Francoist practices closer to certain characteristics of the Holocaust and, through the pollution effect described earlier by Alexander, of making them as intolerable in Spain as they appear to us in the case of the Holocaust. Thus problematized, they invite the same work of critical revision of the historical heritage of certain Spanish traditions that the Holocaust calls for in other respects. In other words, it would be an invitation, mainly but not exclusively to the heirs of Francoism, to first recognize the crimes committed and then, above all, to examine the national or political traditions (fascism) that were the breeding ground for them to prevent their renewal.³⁸ This is called historical responsibility and, from a normative point of view, the use of the analogy with the Holocaust seems to me justifiable in this case. As I had hoped when I saw myself as an activist for its memory, the Holocaust then becomes an echo chamber that can provide a safe haven for victims whose voices have not been (sufficiently) heard.

As we can see, it is possible to propose several interpretations -not exclusive of each other- of the affirmation of a Spanish Holocaust. Beyond their factual interpretations, they call for equally differentiated normative judgments: the invitation to assume historical responsibility is undoubtedly more easily justifiable than self-serving opportunism. Just as in the long run of social and cultural history it is still premature to pronounce on the ultimate meaning of the centrality of the Holocaust, the meaning of the invocation of the Spanish Holocaust will depend on the practices of the actors who support it and on what awaits us in the coming decades.

Postscript

This was verbatim the conclusion of a paper that remained unpublished given at Casa Velasquez in Madrid in May 2012.³⁹ Since then, I have not followed the evolution of the memorialization of the Civil War in Spain. The main reason I unearthed this text was for the developments on the diffusion of the aura of the Holocaust from the first to the fourth circle on the one hand, on the multiple meanings that analogies with the Holocaust can have on the other.

Even without having closely followed the process of institutionalization of the memory of the Holocaust in Belgium, some steps have been sufficiently reported and commented in the press for any moderately informed citizen to know that in

³⁸ And from this point of view, one could see in the anachronistic addition of the term "inquisition" in the subtitle of the English edition of Preston's book an invitation to flush out in the present still traces of the detestable institution.

³⁹ See <https://www.casadevelazquez.org/la-casa/news/the-case-of-victims-in-spain-and-europe/>

2012 the Dossin barracks in the Flemish city of Mechelen, which became the place of assembly from which more than 25,000 Belgian Jews were deported, officially became a memorial flanked by a museum and a documentation center⁴⁰. It is noteworthy that it is part of the so-called European Holocaust Research Infrastructure⁴¹. A few years ago, it was also in Mechelen that I attended a conference on the role of the police forces of the German-occupied countries in the tracking down and deportation of the Jews, organized by the so-called International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance⁴², which brings together government delegates from 35 countries, 45 if you count the observer countries. This was the only time in my life that after being welcomed by the mayor of the city, I was escorted, like the other participants, by motorcyclists to pay a visit to a museum. We are very far from the time - barely thirty years ago - when, in Belgium, two modest associations of survivors and their handful of employees recovered from the third labor circuit were keeping this memory alive...

But I have the impression that this institutionalization - which in some respects represents a remarkable achievement for the promoters of the historical event - also represents an endgame. Other "historical sequences" are currently being "promoted" by the same kinds of cultural actors who promoted the Holocaust: I am thinking in particular of colonization and patriarchy... There is a notable generational phenomenon here, but not very surprising when one thinks about it: it seems normal that the present generations settle accounts with events closer to them (and incidentally that they reproach the generation that was busy promoting the Shoah for having ignored these other patent injustices...).

If young people frequently express to me their satiation with the Shoah, it remains that their own claims to memory are part of the same process of a critical return to the dark pages of our past. In this sense, it is perhaps very paradoxically those who today contest its centrality who attest that, from certain points of view at least, the Shoah did indeed mark a turning point in history, a victimial turning point whose consequences are far from being fully deployed.

Jean Michel Chaumont (<http://www.uclouvain.be/283292.html>)

⁴⁰ <https://kazernedossin.eu/fr/>

⁴¹ <https://www.ehri-project.eu/>

⁴² <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us> . For the record, "the IHRA currently has 35 Member Countries and 10 Observer Countries. The national government of each country forms a delegation, generally consisting of leading educators, academics and representatives of museums and memorials. Many delegates also have specific areas of expertise, for example the genocide of the Roma; antisemitism and Holocaust denial; and other genocides and crimes against humanity."

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Memory of Heroes and Victims, the Holocaust and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Markus Meckl

In recent years, the term post-heroic has become established in historical scholarship to describe the "shift from heroization to victimization" (Sabrow 2013: 314) that occurred in commemoration in the second half of the last century (Leonhard 2016: 105). This shift manifested itself in the fact that public recognition is no longer attributed to heroic deed, but to the victims of conflicts and wars (Sabrow 2013: 314). The commemoration of the Holocaust illustrates this shift. We are very aware of the Jewish genocide since it appears in every school curricula in Europe, and are regularly reminded of this event through commemorative days. Furthermore, the suffering of the Holocaust has become a point of reference where people compare their own suffering to it in order to draw public attention. The Holocaust is the symbol for the commemoration of suffering.

What we might take for granted these days is however only the outcome of a recent development. Just by looking at how much time it took to inaugurate monuments for the victims of the Holocaust is telling: in Vienna, Berlin and Paris, it took 60 years before they were erected. This article will elaborate on changing commemorative practices for the victims of the Holocaust and demonstrate how the shifting norms and values impact our memory and representation of the past.

When the surviving Jews returned home from the concentration camps in 1945, they were not given any public recognition because their survival had been associated with shame. The mere surviving had not only been associated by the fellow concentration camp inmates with shame (Chaumont, see PR1), but this feeling of shame had also been internalized by the survivors Jews themselves, as indicated by multiple sources. For example, a Jewish survivor wrote in *Le Monde Juif* in 1947 that we should forbid to teach Jewish history to "our children" because "why the hell should they be taught the shame of their fathers?" (quoted in: Chaumont 2001: 21). Elie Wiesel still asked in the 60s: "So why do we think of the Holocaust with admitted shame? Why do we not claim it as a glorious chapter in our eternal history? After all, it changed man and his world. [...] Perhaps that should be the task of Jewish educators and philosophers: to recreate the event for us as a source of pride" (quoted from: Chaumont 2001: 108).

In the years after the war, it did not occur to anyone to commemorate the mere victim, who did not die for any cause; neither for their fatherland, nor for any ideology. As a victim their suffering might produce pity, but not public recognition. Public recognition had been attributed to a different form of behaviour, as indicated by the early monuments which

appeared to commemorate the events of World War II. It took only five years for the Warsaw Ghetto Monument to be erected, honouring the heroes of the Uprising. The sculptor of the monument Nathan Rapoport explained his intention: "Could I have made a stone with a hole in it and said, 'Voilà! The heroism of the Jews'? No, I needed to show the heroism, to illustrate it literally in figures that everyone, not just artists, would respond to" (Quoted in Young, 168). Seven figures appear on the western wall of the Warsaw Ghetto Monument. Each of them is holding a weapon, and they are all young and beautiful. It looks like they are fighting their way out of the stone. In their gestures they seem familiar, and the woman on the left side, in her pose and with her naked breast, reminds one of Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*. Rapoport wanted to show the heroism by referring to already existing heroic presentations and he needed to show the heroism since only the heroic act would give public recognition, which was crucial for the surviving Jews.

The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest of the ghettos established by the German occupiers in the East. At times, over 500,000 Jews were imprisoned in the ghetto, which had been established since November 1940. Most of the ghetto population had no opportunity to work, which led to hunger, destitution, and death. In the ghetto, one birth occurred for every forty-five deaths (Hilberg 1990: 282). In July 1942, the staff of "Aktion Reinhardt," the unit led by Odo Globocnik, responsible for the murder of the Jews in the General government, arrived in Warsaw. On July 22, 1942, the deportation of the ghetto population to Treblinka began. When the German occupiers finished the deportation in September, they had killed over 300,000 people from the ghetto. There were then about 60,000 Jews left in the ghetto, who were either needed as labour for the Germans or who had gone into hiding. On April 19, 1943, when the remaining Jews in the ghetto were to be deported to labour camps, the fighting began that made history as the "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising." On May 16, 1943, SS-Gruppenführer Jürgen Stroop wrote to his superior: "The former Jewish residential district of Warsaw no longer exists. With the blowing up of the Warsaw synagogue, the large-scale action was ended at 8:15 p.m." (Stroop, 1943: 692). The German-language press had reported about the Warsaw Ghetto since its existence (e.g.: Gilfert 1941: 8). The first brochures about the ghetto appeared abroad as early as 1942 (Lachs 1942). When Jan Karski published his experiences as a courier for the Polish underground in 1944, reporting on his visit to the Warsaw Ghetto, he already found it necessary to add: "Is it still necessary to describe the Warsaw Ghetto, so much has already been written about it" (Karski 1944: 330). Three days after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began on April 19, 1943, the first news item about it appeared on the front page of *The New York Times*:

The secret Polish radio appealed for help tonight, April 21, 1943, in a broadcast from Poland and then suddenly the station went dead. The broadcast, as heard here, said: the last 35,000 Jews at Warsaw have

been condemned to execution. [...] The people are murdered. Women and children defend themselves with their naked arms (quoted from: Grobman 1976: 53).

News of the ghetto uprising had no further public resonance; it was just another atrocity in the war, and a year later an author living in Switzerland commented resignedly:

On April 19, 1943, first day of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Bermuda Conference opened (ironically) to find means to save the surviving victims of Nazi hell. Jewish delegates were not admitted. The conference did not reach any practical result. [...] and the killing continues (Judenlos unter Hitler 1944: 7).

What the first reports about the ghetto uprising had in common was that they did not attribute any significance to the event per se. There was no reference to the uniqueness or exceptionality of the act. News from the front during World War II, the battles of Stalingrad and El Alamein were far more important for the European and American public than an uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, which was then irrelevant from a military point of view. Therefore, in July 1943, a Belgian underground magazine could still comment: "The movement in the Warsaw ghetto happened without conscious leadership [...] and without any serious connection with the revolutionary movements"; it could therefore only be seen as an act of "desperation" (quoted from: Steinberg 1994: 99).

But in the following year, the uprising was given a symbolic meaning and Jewish communities in New York and London transferred the anniversary of the revolt into a day for commemoration, where the destruction of the European Jews was remembered (Patt, 169). Contrary to the history of the concentration and extermination camps, the ghetto offered the possibility of an identity-building narrative. The uprising was from a military point of view insignificant, but it had tremendous symbolic value since Jews could point out to be "proud participants of common victory" (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 1943, here quoted after Patt, 106). The "act of despair" became somewhat a commemoration of heroes who were to be granted "eternal glory" (Nai Presse, 1945: quoted after: Wieviorka 1994: 94). The commemorations of the 5th anniversary, during which the Ghetto Monument in Warsaw was inaugurated, already had an international resonance and on the 10th anniversary, the renowned English philosopher Bertrand Russell spoke at the event (Russell 1993 [1953]). The anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising subsequently established itself as the Holocaust Remembrance Day, honouring the heroes on behalf of the Jewish victims in the German extermination and concentration camps. Eleven years after the uprising, Isaak I. Schwarzbart explained this choice in his report for the World Zionist Congress:

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising has already become a symbol of what might be called the The Third Churban, the destruction of six million Jews. It is no accident, but rather profoundly significant, that the Warsaw

Ghetto Uprising commemorations are now combined with the lighting of six candles, each for one million murdered Jews (Schwarzbart 1954: 2).

The symbolic meaning of the event impacted the writing of memories, because only memories written by Jews participating in the uprising were published; the survivors who did not participate in the uprising, who constituted a much larger group numerically, either did not write memoirs or did not find publicity. In the postwar years, the first fiction writings about the ghetto uprising appeared. The narrative style of the first memoirs and depictions of the ghetto suggests a clear line of events from the invasion of Poland by the Wehrmacht to the armed resistance against the German occupiers. The story of the ghetto is a story of insurrection. When Yisrael Gutman writes the history of the ghetto, *The Jews of Warsaw 1939/1943*, he describes it as a teleological story toward revolt in three chapters: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt (Gutman, 1982). The uprising in these years is described as a "people's revolt" (*Judenlos unter Hitler* 1944: 52), suggesting that the entire ghetto rose together. The first accounts of the 1960s, told by survivors of the ghetto who did not directly participate in the uprising were characterised by the fact that the uprising is given an important space in the narrative even when the events described are not based on what was directly experienced. A typical example is the autobiography of Halina Birenbaum, who was in the ghetto as a child:

In the confines of the present ghetto now lived people who had nothing left to lose. [...] Now we listened only to the leaders of a secret resistance movement, we believed them and waited for their orders. They aroused pride and admiration in us. [...] The weapons, which in the days of the Judenrat one would not even have dared to look at up close, were now treated almost tenderly and held aloft (Birenbaum 1996: 58).

How little this corresponded to reality can be seen in the memoirs of ghetto fighter Simcha Rotem; fifty years after the uprising, he wrote that the Jews who remained in the ghetto distanced themselves from the activities of the underground movement and that the resistance "therefore [was] doubly underground - on the one hand, vis-à-vis the Germans and, on the other, vis-à-vis the majority of the Jews" (Rotem 1996: 39).

Within a few years, after the uprising could be described as a "collective delusion," it had become a symbol, and as stated in 1949 in *Le Monde Juif*, "The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is considered worldwide as the symbol and the culmination of Jewish resistance to Nazi rule" (*Le Monde Juif* 1949: 1). The word symbol appears in every commemorative speech or writing about the ghetto uprising.

This symbolic meaning and importance of the event determined its description, like Rapoport's movement is full of references to other monuments of heroes, the verbal representations, in speeches, history books, memories and fiction did

the same. The result is that the rules, which have applied to the heroic tale since Homer, act as a guideline for the story of the ghetto as it has been told and retold. Thus, the traditional literary motifs and aesthetic forms of the heroic epic have shaped and determined the story of the Warsaw Ghetto.

The central motif in every hero's life since Homer is the moment of decision. Achilles had to choose either to participate in the fight for Troy and, as his mother Thetis predicted, to get killed, or to return home and live a long and peaceful life. But only the fight and his death would bring him honor and glory for eternity. Two variations of this motif recur in the memory of the Ghetto. One variation is the choice between leaving the Ghetto or staying in it; the other is the choice between fighting and not fighting.

In John Hersey's novel *The Wall* the leader of the Bund is supposed to be brought to the Aryan side, but he declines, since "his place is here." (Hersey, 372) Hanna Krall tells Marek Edelman: "And I have read a poem about Gepner: 'Canto About an Iron Merchant, Abram Gepner.' It says, among other things, that his friends on the Aryan side had implored him to get out, but he refused and stayed in the Ghetto till the end. Have you noticed how often in these stories that theme recurs: A chance to get out and the decision to stay?" (Krall, 1986: 69) For most of the Ghetto population it was not possible to get out, since one needed a lot of money and good contacts on the "Polish side." Nevertheless, no autobiography or description of the Ghetto abstains from telling a story like this.

The other choice which is repeatedly mentioned in the literature about the Ghetto is the choice between fighting and not fighting. This is by no means norm-free; posthumously, the decision is judged morally. Death without a struggle is considered shameful, while dying with a weapon in one's hand is considered glorious, as Reuben Ainsztein concludes in his book: "Jews had only the alternative of dying with dignity or like trapped animals." (Ainsztein, 1974: 565). I. Eisenberg concurred: "They decided, since they knew death was certain, that it would not be a shameful death, it would be the cry of the revolt." (Eisenberg, 1962: 58).³⁰ In the decision to fight, Schwarzbart also sees the main element of the heroism of the Jews: "The remnants of the Jewish population in Warsaw knew then that their fate was sealed, and they decided to offer resistance. They resolved to die with dignity. It is this aspect of their decision which contains the element of heroism. (Schwarzbart, 1953: 8).

The retrospective moral judgment is often based on sources which suggest that the inhabitants of the Ghetto thought in the same kind of categories. The words of Anielewicz are therefore repeatedly quoted: "The only question for the Jews was (...) how they are going to die: Either as sheep going to the slaughter or as men with dignity." (Dawidowicz, 1979: 300).

Judging the decision to fight as glorious is part of a hero's moral codex, but this codex was not familiar to most people in the Ghetto. In the diaries of the Ghetto which survived, like those of Stanislaw Adler, Abraham Lewin, and Chaim Kaplan, the choice between fighting and not fighting is never mentioned (Adler, 1982; Lewin, 1988; Kaplan, 1973).

The stylization of insurgents as heroes continues to require that the hero is willing to sacrifice his life for an ideal; the hero dies for something. But while the rules for hero portrayal are rigid, the ideal for which the insurgents sacrificed their lives depends on the interpreter. In Poland the ghetto fighters died for Poland, in the Zionist interpretation for Israel, in the West German for human dignity, and for the PLO for the struggle of the disenfranchised against their oppressors (Meckl 2000: 47-62). The insurgents are endowed with all those attributes in the description with which the ancient authors already characterized the classical hero: courage, audacity, cold-bloodedness and perseverance (Meckl 2000: 64-72). Even chivalrous behavior is attributed to the insurgents in a children's book by Uri Orlev: "Three German officers came as negotiators. All three [...] had white ribbons attached to their uniforms. [...] I just don't understand why the Jews didn't kill the three officers [...] it was not time for chivalrous behavior" (Orlev 1990: 126). Orlev, who often incorporated historical incidents into his children's book, had however slightly altered the scene for his juvenile readers. According to Marek Edelman, who gave the order, the insurgents shot at the negotiators but "unfortunately missed" (Krall 1992: 109). The classic hero often reveals his greatness in childhood, and when Marek Edelman recounted in conversation a childhood anecdote about the leader of the ghetto uprising, Mordechaj Anielewicz, which precisely does not represent "whole life as a chain of miracles" (Campell 1978: 303), there was a storm of indignation. Edelman had dared to tell in an interview: Before the war he [Anielewicz] had lived in the Solec district. His mother dealt in fish, and when she couldn't get rid of them, she sent him for red paint; he had to dye the gills so they would look fresher (Krall 1992: 10).

Obviously, the leader of the uprising cannot have colored the gills with red dye to make the fish look fresher, because this does not fit the image of a hero, and so Edelman recounts a visit from a writer who urged that this episode be corrected: "The fish was not dyed by Anielewicz" to make them look fresher, "but the mother. Make a note of that, says Mr. S., the writer. Because that's very important" (Krall 1992: 22).

Even the Germans are not only ascribed the role of faceless and cruel murderers, but they are used as witnesses of heroism. This is because the classical hero could always be sure of the esteem of his opponent. Thus, in his novel "Mila 18", Leon Uris puts the following words into the mouth of an SS-Oberführer Funk:

Do you know who is left over there in that ghetto? The one man among thousands who is inevitably always there in every age, in every civilization, the one man who, because of secret forces working in his soul, inevitably stands up and defies every oppressor and tyrant. The one man among thousands whose

indomitable spirit never, ever bends, the one man among thousands who cannot be led to the envelope
(Uris 1961: 467).

Even in scholarly works this pattern can be found, as demonstrated by Reitlinger: "Even Goebbels mentions the reports of the Jewish High Command in his diary" (Reitlinger, 1979: 309). Isaak Schwarzbart also quotes Stroop to highlight the heroism, although he is a little uncomfortable with it: "I am doing it only to show that even the beast in human form was impelled to respect and to fear the handful Jewish fighters" (Schwarzbart 1953: 14). In order to elevate the ghetto uprising to a symbol of heroism, its story had to subordinate itself to the patterns of the heroic epic. If the pattern falls away, then there is no positive symbol at the end.

Furthermore, the figure of the hero always demands aesthetic elevation as well since the hero must be beautiful. The statue erected in honour of Anielewicz in the Negev desert observes these requirements and is based on the figure of David by Michelangelo. The aesthetic idea of a hero's death finds its equivalent when the fighters go to their death in an upright walk, with their heads raised, as the monument in Warsaw would have us believe. Only such an attitude in battle, when even the sky is "immaculately blue" (Elten 1953), allows Hermlin to describe the uprising like a "panorama of an ancient battle" (Hermlin 1951: 58).

The necessity to describe the history of the ghetto in such a manner:

has to do with an aesthetic principle that Lessing already formulated in his *Laocoon* and that is as old as literature itself. A hopeless suffering no longer arouses pity, but only disgust, which is why the Greek sculptor depicted Laocoon and his sons not at the moment when they are being mauled by snakes, but at the moment when they heroically, if futilely, resist (Buch 1990: 22).

This has nothing to do with the reality in the ghetto. For Marek Edelman the reality of the ghetto presented itself differently: "The dark and ugly ones, sapped by hunger, between humid sheets, wait for someone to bring them oats cooked with water or perhaps something from the garbage can. Everything there is grey: faces, hair, sheets (...) Death by starvation is as unaesthetic as is the hungry life" (Krall, 1986: 16). The Germans allowed photo reportage in the Ghetto because they were sure that viewers would be repulsed by the images of the Jews. Goebbels noted in his diary on 17 August 1941: "The Journey of the Italian journalist, which I organized a couple of days ago, was an unexpected success (...). They got the worst impression in the Warsaw ghetto. Actually, we should guide every well-meaning foreigner through the Ghetto; this is the most practical instruction for Anti-Semitism." (*Die Tagebücher des Joseph Goebbels*, 1996: 249)

The human being, deformed through hunger, misery, cold and sickness, does not evoke compassion, but repulsion. The Polish messenger, Jan Karski, who was sympathetic towards the Jews, visited the Ghetto secretly in autumn 1942 to see

for himself and be better able to describe what was happening there to the free world: "It is hard to explain why I ran. There was no occasion for speed and, if anything, our haste could have aroused suspicion. But I ran, I think, simply to get breath of clean air and a drink of water. Everything there seemed polluted by death, the stench of rotting corpses, filth and decay. I was careful to avoid touching a wall or human being. I would have refused a drink of water in that city of death if I had been dying of thirst. I believe I even held my breath as much as I could in order to breathe in less of the contaminated air." (Karski, 1944: 334)

With the changing culture of remembrance at the end of the 20th century, the need to place the heroic at the centre of the narrative faded. In commemorative speeches on the 50th anniversary of the ghetto uprising, there is usually no reference to the heroism of the insurgents. Instead of reflecting on the struggles in the ghetto and their significance for posterity, the anniversary is used to report on the suffering and misery of the ghetto population. Heroes have gone out of fashion. Uniqueness and exceptionality, terms that for many years could not be omitted from any commemorative speech about the ghetto, have come to refer to Auschwitz as a symbol of genocide. If Poland and Israel argued for decades about whether the uprising was part of Israeli or Polish history, a joint commemorative stamp in Poland and Israel honoring the uprising appeared on its 50th anniversary. This happened while the conflict over the occupation of the site of Auschwitz, as a place of Polish or Jewish martyrdom, is vehemently fought between the two countries. The changing culture of remembrance is also reflected in the choice of commemoration days; the Holocaust Museum in Washington was inaugurated on the 50th anniversary of the ghetto uprising. However, when three years later Germany proclaimed a national Holocaust memorial day, 1996, January 27 was chosen for it, the day of the liberation of Auschwitz. With few exceptions, this day of liberation became established as a day of remembrance in many countries; only Israel continued to retain the anniversary of the ghetto uprising.

With the disappearance of heroes, the tone of survivors' autobiographies is also changing. The authors' concern is no longer to prove how heroically Jews can fight but how daily life and survival in the ghetto occurs. And so Adina Blady Szwajgier justifies her writing fifty years later with the words:

To make clear that the people who were imprisoned there in the ghetto were not simply a herd of cattle. When people talk about the ghetto, they always talk about death, about how miserable they died there. There is never any talk about the lives and heroism of these ordinary people. Of their struggle to remain human, to persevere in a human way (In July 42 1993: 215).

Adina's friend, Alina Margolis-Edelman, mentions the uprising in her memoirs simply with the words: "When the ghetto burned" (Margolis-Edelman 1999: 84). Alina Margolis-Edelman does not tell a heroic epic about the ghetto. She narrates

the mundane everyday moments of this ghetto world. The change in tone is all the more remarkable because both women had actively participated in the resistance. What remains are stories that refuse to be appropriated. On Easter Sunday 1943, many residents of Warsaw gathered at Krasinski Square, including the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz. Under the impression of the burning ghetto and the children's carousel spinning at the same time, he wrote the poem "Campo di Fiori". In the crowd was also Adina Blady Szwajgier:

For a few days there had been a merry-go-round in operation in the square immediately next to it. Children were sitting on this carousel, and it was turning and turning, and I could hear the music. Or was it all in my imagination? The children were laughing, and the adults who walked by were smiling. And you could hear gunshots from the other side. You could hear gunshots, and the children were laughing. And I was standing there with my bouquet of marsh marigolds, smiling like everyone else. [...] When I read the poem later, much later, I thought to myself whether Milosz had perhaps seen a smiling girl with marsh marigolds at this merry-go-round" (Blady Szwajgier 1990: 101).

On the other side of the wall at Krasinski Square was the part of the ghetto that was under the command of Marek Edelman. He, too, came to talk about the carousel: "The wall reached only to the second floor. From the second one you could already see the street over there. We saw a merry-go-round and people, we heard the music and were terrified that these sounds would drown us out and that these people would not notice us, that no one at all in this world would take notice of us, this struggle and the dead." (Krall 1992: 13). Here, the story of the ghetto is not long transfigured into a heroic epic that allows the story to be wrapped in the mantle of meaningfulness. The ghetto uprising no longer serves for positive self-assurance, but is directed against the viewer:

What do I say to him, Jew of the New Testament,
 who has been waiting for the return of Christ for two thousand years?
 My shattered body delivers me from his gaze,
 And count me among the helpers of death:
 The uncircumcised" (Miłosz 1990 [1944]: 20).

The viewer must answer when Marek Edelman resignedly concludes: "Europe behaves like a stroller who, on a festive day, carelessly circles on a merry-go-round around the ghetto walls, behind which people perish in the flames" (Edelman 1993: 83).

What remains

As the culture of remembrance and commemoration changed at the end of the 20th century, the significance of the Ghetto Uprising in the collective memory of the genocide of the Jews diminished. When the Holocaust Museum opened in Washington, it was probably one of the last times that the Ghetto Uprising occupied the symbolic place of remembrance of the genocide of the Jews, as the opening took place on the 50th anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising. The heroes of the ghetto, once praised for the fact that their deeds inspired people, had done their duty. In post-heroic memory, public recognition is no longer given to the heroes. The choice of Holocaust Remembrance Day expresses this. It is the day of the liberation of Auschwitz, on which from now on the victims of the Holocaust are commemorated. Thus, the ghetto loses the central place it held in public memory. It is this loss of public recognition that made it possible to describe the events beyond the strict rules of the heroic epic. But there is a danger that the breakup of the normative heroic memory will be short-lived, for the choice to now grant public recognition to the victims, always viewed sceptically over the decades, those who, as the accusation has repeatedly been, allowed themselves to be led like sheep to the slaughter, has the effect of creating a new framework for the narrative (Chaumont 2001). For like the hero, the victim must submit to rules in the representation of his suffering, in which the story is wrapped up.

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Female icons of heroism and victimhood

Monica Amari & Cinzia Laurelli

Historical Introduction

Monica Amari

To analyze changes in women's movements from the beginning to more recent times, their historical and legal context needs to be outlined so as to identify the basic paradigms upon which society was based until the early 1800s. In those years the keywords were "silence" and "invisibility", and even though some women fought against this status quo they were few and far between. Division between the sexes seemed to be the order of the day and the androcentric vision imposed itself as neutral (Bourdieu, 1998). One symbolic example is The Lord's Prayer, also called the Our Father or Pater Noster, one of the most well-known invocations in the Christian world. It matches rules of public patriarchy with private rules and allows the strength of the male order to be imposed without having to justify itself. Silence was what was required of and imposed on women by virtue of their nature, which was considered to be "inferior" - if not actually "damned" with regard to their sexual component - whenever they found themselves in a forum in which men were also present. Examples can be found in literature. Telemachus imposed silence on his mother Penelope (in *Odyssey*, I, 325-64) and the ancient Greek tragedian Aeschylus stated in his *Seven Against Thebes* (vv. 230 -232) that a woman's duty is "to be silent and stay at home". In the Roman world too, silence was considered a duty, an obligation, as recalls the presence of goddess Tacita among the Roman gods in the Olympus of the gods. Perfect was the woman "who does not fall into any speech", both because she did not speak and because "no one talked about her". St. Paul ordered women to be silent in church. His First Letter to Timothy reads: "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission". Centuries later in the modern era, the same approach is found in Shakespeare, in the final monologue of Katharina, the protagonist of the *Taming of the Shrew*:

Such duty as the subject owes the prince
 Even such a woman oweth to her husband;
 And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
 And not obedient to his honest will,

What is she but a foul contending rebel
 And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
 I am ashamed that women are so simple
 To offer war where they should kneel for peace;
 Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,
 When they are bound to serve, love and obey.

Rousseau declared that girls being educated should absorb only a male gaze on reality which he exemplifies with *Emile*, or on *Education*, one of the most well-known educational novels (1762). Virtue for women is represented by public silence and a sentimental education as opposed to a rational one. This was still the dominant view even after the events of the French Revolution. In May 1792, *La Révolution de Paris*, an organ of the Jacobins, read: "The political honour of women consists in cultivating in silence the virtues of their sex, under the veil of modesty and in the shadow of solitude".



Portrait of Olympe de Gouges⁴³/Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen, 1791⁴⁴

Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793), who spoke publicly on political and juridical matters - in the Declaration of the Rights of Women and of the Female Citizen - generated astonishment but was also the cause, in spite of herself, of her own

⁴³ Figure 1: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympe_de_Gouges#/media/File:Olympe_de_Gouges.png

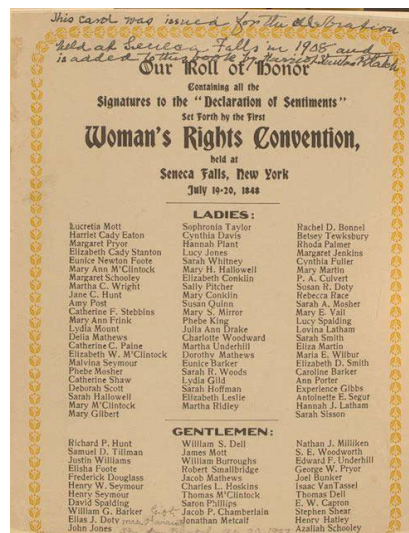
⁴⁴ Figure 2: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DDFC.jpg>

beheading. She would be consigned to history as a prostitute, as well as a "delusional personality", struck by "reformatory paranoia" for challenging male authority and speaking in favour of women's rights. In parallel, the female body is not represented as expressing strength, valour or courage, as is the case with the bodies of male heroes, but only as an instrument of seduction. Heroines are considered to be those who embody the myth of chastity, do not accept violence and consequently sacrifice themselves, as represented in mythological paintings. Lucrezia chose to kill herself after being raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the last king of Rome Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, and was one of the favourite models of mythological painting up until the end of the 18th century. Sexual violence is considered inescapable and is mythologized, as in the rape of Proserpina and the story of Apollo and Daphne immortalized in Bernini's sculpture. Meanwhile, women expelled from the labour market during the first industrial revolution had no choice but to become prostitutes, as shown in Dickens' novels. The Enlightenment was a time when philosophers came into limelight and some of them who influenced the ideals and the course of the French Revolution were women as Sophie de Grouchy who published a short text entitled *Huit Lettres sur la Sympathie*. The idea of "sympathy"- syn-pathos (gr) - as the capacity to share emotions and participate in the unhappiness and suffering of others - characterized women's nature according to the educational rules of the time and took shape in literary salons, such as that of Sophie Marie Louise de Grouchy (1764-1822), an intellectual and writer as well as the wife of Nicolas de Condorcet. Inspired by the works of Adam Smith *Theory of Moral Sentiment* and *Origins of Language*, Grouchy believes that moral sentiment and judgments can be derived from sympathy and that we need to develop our rational abilities to render this capacity useful. This idea of women's capacity for sympathy plays a key role in all conceptions of politics and law which are alternatives to those based on fear and the need for security. The reference to social solidarity in the 1791 French Constitution relating to education and work for the "valid poor" and assistance for the "sick poor" aimed at improving the living conditions of that mass of poverty-stricken people who populated the urban and rural areas at the time of the French Revolution, cannot be considered a coincidence. This is a dimension which was never evoked in the United States Declaration of Independence (1776) or in the Bill of Rights (1791) but would be in the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, the final document of the Seneca Falls Convention (1848).

The birth of the Women’s Movement from the Seneca Falls Convention to Suffragettes

Monica Amari

The Seneca Falls Convention was the first Women’s Rights convention. It was held between 19-20 July 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York and was organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Coffin Mott, Martha Coffin Wright, Mary Ann McClintock and Jane Hunt. It is considered to be the beginning of the first phase of feminism, a phase which would end in 1920 when women were given the right to vote throughout the USA and in most European countries. The final document of the Convention, the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, was signed by 68 women and 32 men out of the 300 attendees who had come together to discuss the civil, social, political and religious conditions of women. The title recalls the concept of sympathy, the capacity to share emotions and express social solidarity, which can be considered the final result of the French Revolution. The first part of the Declaration consists of a survey of the abuses, offenses and usurpations carried out by men against women; the second part consists of a declaration for women’s equality and a claim to access all civil and political rights, equal treatment under the law and the right to participate in public life, which would mean emerging from silence and invisibility. In that context invisibility means exclusion and a failure to acknowledge the contribution of women in various disciplinary areas, as masculine thought is considered the only possible one. This attitude is defined as the obliteration of the feminine (Beard, 1946).



Signers of Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls⁴⁵

⁴⁵ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Woman%27s_Rights_Convention.jpg

The theoretical roots of the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments can be traced back to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1791 and published in 1792, also in the USA. The work calls for women and men to be educated equally and advocates women's suffrage.

Wollstonecraft's work argued that the educational system of her time deliberately trained women to be frivolous and incapable. She posited that an educational system that allowed girls the same advantages as boys would result in women who would be not only exceptional wives and mothers but also capable workers in many professions. She wrote:

My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone.

The ideology of separate spheres had profound implications for the concept of American freedom because it severely limited the attainment of the nation's egalitarian and democratic ideals. The idea had been developed within classical Greek thought. Aristotle himself had prefigured a certain type of separation between men and women, the former active in the political arena, the latter relegated to the domestic arena. By relegating American women to the private sphere, this theory also excluded them from the market economy. In a context in which work was such only if it produced monetary value, household work was not recognized, despite the fact that it was fundamental for the maintenance of the family. The first Industrial Revolution had increased the importance of work for women in the Northern states of the USA, offering new employment opportunities in factories and, consequently, fostering improvement in the economy of small producers.

The solicitations to emerge from the "home" were not sparked only by the needs of the economy. Just as relevant in the struggle for women's emancipation, which culminated in the Seneca Falls Convention, was the decade of activism and the participation of women in public life. American women were motivated by religious teachings which they borrowed from evangelical Protestantism. They had participated in the American Revolutionary Age both by playing an active role in the struggle of the colonies against the motherland, Britain, and through philanthropic associations, the only way to become visible outside the private sphere (Baritono, 2001). In the framework of the new Republic, the role of women was fundamental for the formation and strengthening of society. Women were defined as "Republican Mothers" who had the task of educating their children, inculcating them civic virtues and thus making good citizens of them. In order that they might perform this role, women were given the right to education. They acquired significant political weight in terms of an increase in their culture (which allowed them to become aware of their condition), and of being the moral guarantors of the country's future. In the late nineteenth century women also started to discuss sexuality in public. The idea of Voluntary

Motherhood came into being, denoting a conscious decision on the part of a woman to give birth to and raise a child. It was accompanied by a demand for birth control. This represented the understanding amongst feminists that involuntary motherhood and child-raising were significant aspects of the oppression of women (Gordon, 1973). Some of those who advocated voluntary motherhood were also members of small, usually anarchist, Free Love groups who played a classical vanguard role in the development of birth-control ideas without ever becoming a movement themselves. The social gap between suffragists, those who were involved in the first wave of the campaign for women's suffrage, and moral reformers, more concerned with respectability, and Free Lovers grew during the second and third generation of feminists. In the 1860s and 1870s the great feminist theoreticians had been much closer to the Free Lovers. All the groups were composed of educated middle-class Yankees, disturbed by the consequences of rapid industrialization and looking forward to a decline in patriarchal power within the family but worried about the possible disintegration of the family and the loosening of sexual morality. In all these attitudes there was something traditional as well as something progressive. The concept of voluntary motherhood reflected this duality. The birth control movement paralleled the feminist movement calling for the introduction of women's suffrage.

There is no doubt that the struggle to win the right to vote was fundamental for the emancipation of women and for the development of the women's movement. Those behind the Seneca Falls Convention and the annual National Women's Rights Conventions that followed were also the leaders of the American suffragist movement: Susan B. Anthony, Elisabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy Stone. At the 1869 National Women's Rights Convention the women's rights movement split into two organizations: the National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA), led by Anthony and Stanton, and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) led by Stone. The NWSA moderate and reformist, based in the Boston area and speaking through the "Woman's Journal", a weekly newspaper, proposed separate campaigns in the various states of the USA. The roots of the more radical and aggressive AWSA were mainly in New York. In 1890, the two organizations merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association which also included the women's clubs and religious groups which had formed in those years.

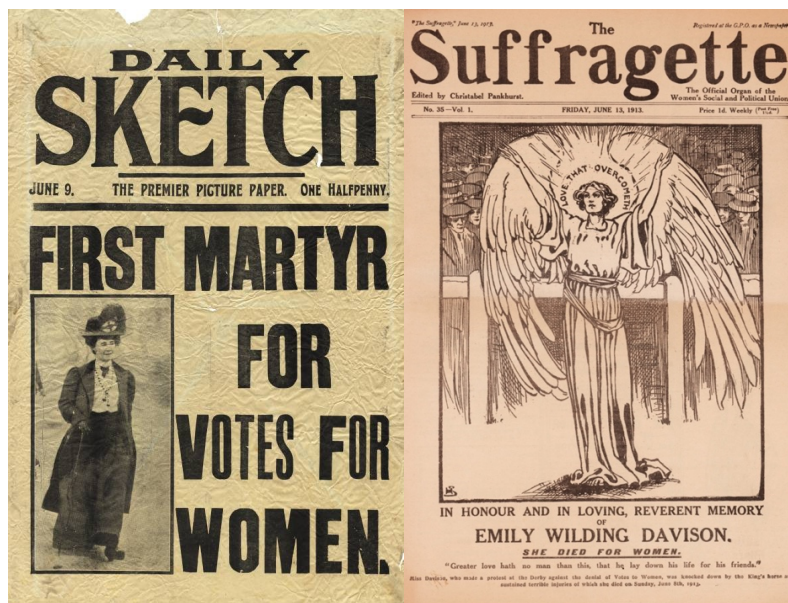
At that time the term contraception was used to refer to artificial devices intended to stop conception during intercourse. The term birth control was used to refer to anything, including abstinence, which avoided conception and pregnancy. In the late 19th century the [social purity movement](#), composed primarily of Protestant moral reformers and middle-class women, attacked contraception, viewing it as an [immoral](#) practice that promoted prostitution and [venereal disease](#). The main claim made against contraception was that it was "unnatural", this argument reflecting a romantic yearning for "natural" conception that was typical of many 19th century reform movements, inspired by the Rousseau education model.

In a system that deprived women of the opportunity to make extrafamilial contributions to culture, it was inevitable that they should be more strongly identified with sex than men were. Indeed, women were frequently regarded as “the Sex” by 19th century society.

[Anthony Comstock](#), a United States [Postal Inspector](#) and leader of the anti-vice movement, successfully lobbied for the passage of the 1873 Comstock Act, a federal law which criminalized use of the US Postal Service to send any of the following items: obscenity, contraceptives, abortifacients, sex toys, personal letters with any sexual content as well as any information regarding the above items. This “parent” act was followed by similar state laws (collectively known as the [Comstock Laws](#)), sometimes extending the federal law by outlawing the use of contraceptives, as well as their distribution. The concept of contraception was accompanied by another, potentially explosive, idea: the reacceptance of female sexuality. The concept of the maternal instinct helped to smooth over contradictory attitudes with respect to women’s sexuality. As with birth control, the most open advocates of female sexuality were the Free Lovers, not the suffragists, even though later women’s rights advocates demanded recognition of female sexuality. The double standard of the Victorian sexual and family system which had made men’s sexual freedom irresponsible and oppressive to women left most feminists convinced that increasing, rather than releasing, the taboos against extra-marital sex was in their interest, and they showed their support behind social-purity campaigns (Gordon, 1973, 16). The ideal of Free Lovers - responsible, open sexual encounters between equal partners- was impossible in the late 19th century, because men and women were not equal. Women’s sexual activities divided them into two categories - wife or prostitute. These categories were not mere ideas but were enforced by severe social and economic sanctions.

In Britain, the homeland of Mary Wollstonecraft, the demand for women’s suffrage was increasingly taken up by prominent liberal intellectuals from the 1850s on, most notably by John Stuart Mill and his wife Harriet. The first women’s suffrage committee, the Manchester Committee for the Enfranchisement of Women, was formed in 1865 (its name being changed in 1867 to the Manchester National Society for Women’s Suffrage). In 1867 Mill presented to the House of Commons the Committee’s women’s suffrage petition which demanded the vote for women and which, thanks to collaboration with the Kensington Committee, now contained around 1,550 signatures. The Reform Act of 1867, which enfranchised part of the urban male working class in England and Wales for the first time, contained no provision for female suffrage. However, women’s suffrage societies were formed in the meantime in most of the major cities of Britain, and in the 1870s these organizations submitted petitions to Parliament containing a total of almost three million signatures and demanding the enfranchisement of women. All in vain.

It was the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel Pankhurst and Sylvia Pankhurst, that gave rise to a more intransigent militancy which adopted a provocative and even violent strategy. The question of the vote degenerated in many cases into open clashes between the suffragettes, a term coined in 1906 by a reporter writing in the Daily Mail in order to belittle the women advocating women's suffrage and embraced by militants, on the one side and conservatives and the police on the other. The police dispersed suffragette meetings by assaulting and beating participants. Suffragettes heckled politicians, tried to storm parliament, chained themselves to railings and smashed shop windows; 120 were imprisoned, including Emmeline Pankhurst. Upon imprisonment, they went on hunger strike and were force-fed. In 1913 the WSPU found a martyr in Emily Wilding Davison. After years of futile fighting, Davidson killed herself in protest by throwing herself under the legs of King George V's horse at the Epsom Derby.



Front page of the *Daily Sketch*, 9 June 1913, reporting the death of *Emily Davison*⁴⁶ / The front page of *The Suffragette* newspaper of 13th June 1913, which depicts *Emily Davison* as an angel⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Daily_Sketch_front_page,_9_June_1913.jpg

⁴⁷ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%22The_Suffragette%22,_13_June_1913_-_Emily_Davison_memorial_edition.jpg

Only at the end of World War I, thanks in part to the notable contribution made by women to the war economy, was some measure of success achieved. The British Representation of the People Act 1918 extended the franchise in parliamentary elections to women over 30 years-old, of whom there were six million. In 1919 in the USA, the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, prohibiting the United States and its states from denying the right to vote to citizens of the United States on the basis of sex, was ratified. Three years before this ratification, the first birth control clinic had been opened in the USA by Margaret Sanger, one of the first activists advocating contraception and sexual education. It was closed immediately by the police and Sanger was sentenced to 30 days in prison. However, when Sanger helped to establish a second clinic in 1923, there were no arrests or disputes.

The First World War period thus witnessed a point of convergence between female sexuality and women's enfranchisement. When many soldiers were diagnosed with a series of sexually transmitted diseases, the Federal response in the USA was to have the Public Health Service conduct a public health campaign, thus demonstrating that sexual intercourse and contraceptive methods were important social issues and legitimate topics of scientific research. This was the first time that a US government institution had engaged in a public discussion on sexual issues and the question of contraception, considering such matters to be inherent to the well-being of the general population. This was encouraged by a gradual shift in attitudes on the part of civil society and public opinion and the increasingly important role played by women in political society. It can thus be said that for the first time the presuppositions of the theory whereby male power is based on the appropriation of female fertility were identified (Héritier, 1906; Gauchet, 2018), as the history of the other phases of the women's movement will demonstrate.

It is interesting to observe that the difference between, on the one hand, the American and British Women's Movements and, on the other, European Women's Movements - mainly in Germany, Switzerland and France - was that the former focused on obtaining the right to vote from the start, and considered it as an instrument to gain social and political equality. This strategy, originating in the 1787 United States Constitution which guaranteed certain basic rights for citizens has proved successful over time, to the point that the active message of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, an American women's religious organization, made a fundamental contribution to ensuring that women first obtained the right to vote in New Zealand in 1893.

European Women's Movements, however, focused their attention mainly on social problems in a context in which the link between women's emancipation and the socialist movement was emerging at the end of the nineteenth century and

would assert itself after the World War 1, as demonstrated by the activities and lives of Clara Zetkin, Anna Kuliscioff, Vera Figner, Luise Kautsky, Aleksandra Kollontaj and Rosa Luxemburg.

Women in WWI and WWII

Cinzia Laurelli

The discussion on the relationship between gender and war has been a point of focus since the 1970s. The issue of the destabilisation of gender relations in the two world wars can be examined through different, albeit interrelated, aspects (Thébaud, 2014), such as women's participation in war work, both military and civilian; women's performance in traditional non-combatant roles as wives, mothers and friends in war; the impact of women's pacifist opposition to war; and the relationship between women's participation in war and the feminist demands for equality. Although the war in 1914 was seen as a man's world, a group of scholars from across the humanities⁴⁸ have examined cultural mobilization in the First World War as a fundamental site of feminine identity formation and deformation. They show that in the historical setting of WWI, narratives and representations of identity formation were both expressions of official power relations and sites of constant exchange and negotiation of meaning in each national context, resulting in a dynamic space of fluid cultural materials (Pedriali, 2020).

During WWI, when millions of men were at the front, hundreds of thousands of women were officially serving their countries.⁴⁹ Women played a crucial role in maintaining the country by filling in men's position in the workforce and in industry and on the war front by engaging in nursing and military operations. For many years, the role of women was greatly undervalued in memorialization⁵⁰. It is worth noting that the women who mobilize memories and are considered influential figures in national history are women with a middle-class educational canon, shaped primarily by male humanist thinkers. These women are those who worked in medicine, journalism and combat, and most of them belonged to the middle class which means that they were personally able to finance and fund their organisations and activities.

⁴⁸ International workshop held at the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, University of Edinburgh, 11–12 May 2017, entitled "Mobilizing Identities/Identities in Motion Through the First World War: History, Representations, and Memory."

⁴⁹ The History Press, the destination for history, The role of women in the first World War

⁵⁰ The History Press, the Goal for History, The Role of Women in the First World War. <https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/women-s-history/women-and-war/>

Under the theme gender and Europe, the digital Encyclopedia of the European History (EHNE)⁵¹ mentions several women who took part in combat: Milunka Savić in Serbia, who was promoted to the rank of sergeant, was wounded and decorated numerous times; Maria Botchkareva in Russia, who by special dispensation was already enlisted in the Imperial Russian Army, and founded the 1st Russian Women's Battalion of Death after the revolution of February 1917.

Perhaps the female figure of World War I who influenced popular opinion the most in Allied countries and the United States was nurse Edith Cavell. She was simultaneously considered a hero and a victim because as a nurse she helped those in need at the cost of her own life. She cared for soldiers from both sides indiscriminately and helped some 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium, but she was then found guilty of treason and executed in 1915. Her execution received worldwide condemnation and extensive press coverage. Immediately after her death, she was buried in Belgium, and after the end of the First World War, her body was transferred to Britain and a state funeral was held at Westminster Abbey in 1919. A year later, a memorial was erected near Trafalgar Square in London, UK.



*Detail of [Edith Cavell Memorial](#), Trafalgar Square, London, United Kingdom*⁵²

⁵¹ <https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/gender-and-europe/when-war-disrupts-gender/feminization-european-armies>

⁵² Edith Cavell. In *Wikipedia*. By PRIORITYMAN - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=39369784>

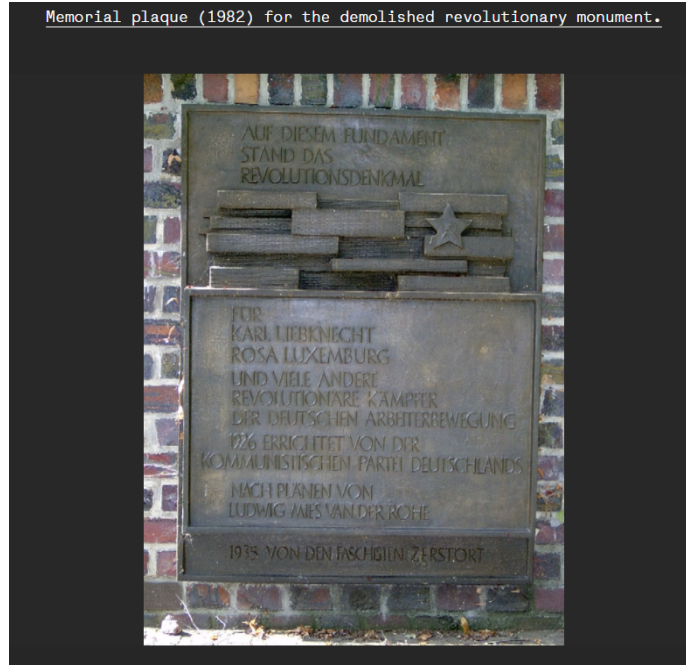
Women and men reacted differently to the war. While the suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel actively recruited soldiers, other women were imprisoned for their commitment in the war. One example is Rosa Luxemburg, a Polish-born German revolutionary who came from a traditional Jewish merchant family. She is a representative of the heart of left feminism, which seeks gender justice, anti-racism and global social justice. Rosa Luxemburg played a key role in the founding of the Spartacus League⁵³ in August 1914 along with Karl Liebknecht and Clara Zetkin and members of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) who disagreed with the party's official policy of supporting the war.



Rosa-Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht's inauguration of the monument to the revolution Architects: Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, Herbert Garbe, Eduard Fuchs, June 1926⁵⁴ © IWM WMR-15983-1241847

⁵³ The Spartacus League derives its name from Spartacus the leader of a slave revolt from 73 to 71 BC in the Roman Republic. For the Spartacists his name symbolized the ongoing resistance of the oppressed against their exploiters

⁵⁴ Source <https://architectuul.com/architecture/rosa-luxemburg-and-karl-liebknecht-monument-to-the-revolution>



Plaque for the demolished revolutionary monument⁵⁵ of [Rosa-Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht](#) - © IWM (WMR-15983-1241847)

Rosa Luxemburg was imprisoned for her activism in promoting the Spartacus uprising, was arrested along with Liebknecht and murdered in Berlin on 15 January 1919 in the car that was taking her to prison. The Memorial to Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, leaders of the Spartakusbund and martyrs of the failed November 1918 Revolution in Germany was first erected in 1926, on a project of Mies van der Rohe. In 1935 it was blown up by the Nazis while the stars were removed and displayed as a symbol of the victory over the Bolsheviks. There were several attempts to reconstruct but the reconstruction is still publicly debated. There is evidence that monuments have been systematically used by authorities to recontextualise the reality of war and soldiering in Europe and the US since WWI. The representation of women on the war memorial has been particularly important for this contextualisation, which avoids any critical instance while promoting celebratory discourses of nationhood, protection and noble sacrifice (Abousnoug & Machin, 2011).

According to the publication of the Senato della Repubblica Italiana (2017) 'Le Donne che hanno fatto l' Europa'⁵⁶, Louise Weiss is described as the suffragette of Europe. Louise Weiss played a role in the issue of refugee relief, notably by

⁵⁵ Source: <https://architectuul.com/architecture/rosa-luxemburg-and-karl-liebknecht-monument-to-the-revolution>

⁵⁶https://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg18/file/repository/relazioni/libreria/novita/XVII/Volume_Donne_Europa_RE V9_web.pdf

founding the Missing Families Intelligence Office, which worked in France, Britain and the Netherlands to reunite scattered families. After WWI, she was an influential journalist in France and dedicated her life to peace and women's suffrage. During WWII she helped rescue Jewish children from the Nazis and joined the French resistance.

Whether at the national or international level, Who and how the women of WWI were chosen and remembered is complex to define. Feminine memory in WWI is still in the process of being defined and negotiated. Many new jobs were indeed created during wartime for women, who took paid work outside the home for the first time. Most women worked in munitions factories, shops and offices where they were engaged in letter writing, filing and typing. Lower-class women were employed in all areas of agriculture and none of them were remembered as heroes.

The conference 'Women, Gender and the First World War: Home Fronts and War Fronts,' held at the University of Portsmouth in October 2015, was an attempt to engage in productive dialogue about all aspects of WWI related to women and gender. The Imperial War Museum's 'Lives of the First World War' project, which collects and tells the stories of women from across Britain and the Commonwealth who served in uniform and worked on the home front, has reinforced the tendency to reproduce iconic images of nurses, munitionettes and countrywomen. In the essay 'The Carer, the Combatant and the Clandestine,' Rayner critically analyses the coverage and visual representation of women during WW1 in Britain and across Europe in the popular pictorial weekly magazine *War Illustrated*. The analysis provides a complex representation of women who were both portrayed as vulnerable carers and potential victims whilst paradoxically as active heroines and used to symbolise human values characteristics of the national identity (Rayner, 2018).

When it comes to women and heroism and the public impact on the philosophy of heroism, Angela Hoobs argues that women were recognised at the national level as active female heroes of WWI because they were willing to risk death and harm for the greater good and because they played a leading role in supporting male heroism. Moreover, the cultural mobilisation around women's activities is a plural process of identity construction and deconstruction and what society considers heroic says much about the values of that society (Hoobs, 2008).

Moreover, the paper 'Remembrance and gender: Making Gender Visible and Inscribing Women into Memory Culture' points out that the deconstruction alone is not sufficient to integrate sites of remembrance with female connotations into public memory culture, because a gender-sensitive integration of women's historical experiences into public memory needs a spatial frame of reference alongside and beyond the nation-state. Schraut & Paletschek (2008) write that 'writing women into the culture of memory means breaking the dominance of politics and nation in cultural memory and taking up those thematic fields that were previously assigned to historical anthropology or cultural history'.

Sexual violence⁵⁷ perpetrated during WWI by enemy soldiers against the female population is reported to be unsystematic or unplanned and it was not considered to be deliberately commanded and used as a 'weapon of war' as happened in WWII. During WWI, national propaganda used these crimes against women and girls as recurring themes to influence public opinion. A major tool of propaganda against the German invasion reporting incidents of rapes that occurred during WWI in France and Belgium was the Bryce Report⁵⁸ published by Britain's War Propaganda Bureau and translated by the end of 1915 into every major European language. These kinds of reports about 'enemy's crimes' were published by the various commissions set up during WWI in several states to discredit the enemy and are one of the main sources for historical research on this subject. During WWI rape and other forms of sexual violence occurred in all occupied countries and especially in East Prussia, in Friuli and Veneto after the Italian defeat at Caporetto (1917-1918), and in Serbia mass rapes were perpetrated from 1915 to 1918 during the Bulgarian occupation; the Jewish population was particularly targeted by the brutality of the Cossacks (Astashkevic, 2018).

Rapes were explicitly added as a war crime at the Peace Conference⁵⁹ that opened in Paris in January 1919, but this crime was not further mentioned during the talks⁶⁰. At the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg in 1945, sexual violence was mentioned as torture but could not be prosecuted because rape was not included in the tribunal's chapter. In 1946 rape was considered by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) as an 'inhuman treatment'. Rape was recognized only on August 12, 1949. At the Geneva Convention IV PART III, Article 27 Part III holds that 'women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution or any form of indecent assault'⁶¹.

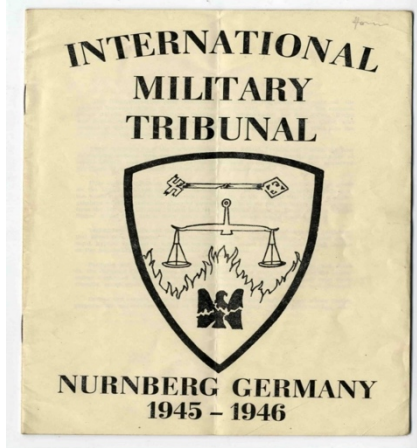
⁵⁷ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2004/09/01/definitions-sexual-and-gender-based-violence>

⁵⁸ The Committee on Alleged German Outrages, often called the Bryce Report after its chair, Viscount James Bryce

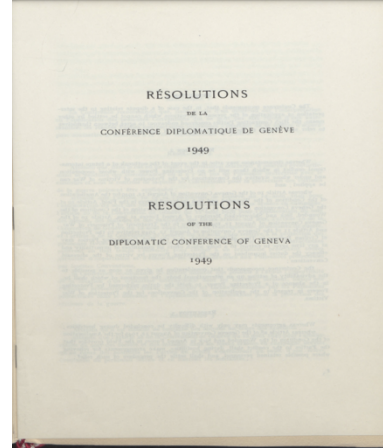
⁵⁹ The Paris Peace Conference was the formal meeting in 1919 and 1920 of the victorious Allies after the end of WW1

⁶⁰ Rivière <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/rape>

⁶¹ <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-0173.pdf>



*Nuremberg International-military-tribunal-booklet-cover*⁶²



*Diplomatic Conference of Geneva of 1949*⁶³

Sexual violence and the torture of women and civilians had an immense and lasting impact on collective memories and contributed to categorise women as victims of sexual abuse; however, there is no mention of these victims in post-WW1 commemorations.

World War II was a greater global conflict, where the entire population of involved countries was mobilized, making the role of women become increasingly important. Until 1941, women's contribution was voluntary, and they worked in industry, agriculture, health care and transportation. In Italy, Mussolini, who had passed laws to prevent women from working outside the home, gave them permission to work during the war. The same happened in Germany, where more than 450,000 women joined military auxiliaries because of the desperate need for resources. Women also gained more opportunities to serve directly in their country's armed forces during the conflict, which were limited during WWI (Manning, 2009). Women worked in positions that were considered highly skilled, such as drivers of fire engines, trains, etc. A recent reminder of the work of these women is 'The Unsung Heroes: Women of WWII,' a collection of 10 black-and-white stamps issued by Royal Mail that show a comprehensive picture of the various fields in which women worked during

⁶² <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/artifact/international-military-tribunal-booklet-cover> Photo credit: Nuremberg Municipal Archives

⁶³ <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011525350/>

Diplomatic Conference For The Establishment Of International Conventions For The Protection Of Victims Of War. (1949) *Final record of the Diplomatic Conference of Geneva of*. [Berne: Federal Political Dept., ?] [Pdf] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011525350/>.

the war. Four other stamps feature the 'Spitfire Women,'⁶⁴ a group of female pilots. The two stamp collections exemplify a rare and popular recognition of the contribution of women in wartime⁶⁵.

During WWII, women played an important role in various resistance activities and became active resistance fighters, (including unknown heroines whose exploits have not been fully documented to this day). The most famous of these is Nancy Wake, also known as the 'White Mouse.' She helped lead the French resistance against the Nazi occupation in the 1940s, saving the lives of thousands of soldiers. Then she became a spy, and by 1943 the Nazis considered her the most wanted person⁶⁶.

Wagner College's Holocaust Center⁶⁷ commemorates leaders or members of resistance organizations in the ghettos, such as Haika Grosman in Bialystok. Among the women active in relief and rescue efforts for Jews in German-occupied Europe are Hanna Senesh, Zivia Libetkin and Irene Sendler. The European Commission⁶⁸ includes four resistance fighters among the eight notable women who shaped Europe: Marga Klompé, who was active in the Dutch resistance during World War II. She became a member of the Dutch Parliament in 1948 and was one of the negotiators of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nilde Iotti and Ursula Hirschmann were active in the clandestine anti-fascist opposition movement in Italy, and Simone Veil, who survived the Holocaust, became the first president of the European Parliament.

Sexual violence and rape against women were means of domination, humiliation, and power for both the victim and family members. Sexual violence was planned and encouraged by commanding officers and occurred in all occupied countries. The extent of violence against women during WWII was comprehensively outlined by the Commission of Government Experts for the Study of the Convention for the Protection of Victims of War (1947).

The rape of German women by Soviet troops during the war and occupation is considered the largest phenomenon of mass rape in history. The exact number of German women and girls raped is uncertain, but historians estimate that their number probably runs into the hundreds of thousands and may be as high as two million. Sexual violence and rape

⁶⁴ The Spitfire women or girls were the female members of the British Air Transport Auxiliary a civilian organisation of pilots who were responsible for ferrying military aircraft around the United Kingdom during WWII.

⁶⁵ <https://www.granthamjournal.co.uk/news/spitfire-women-among-new-second-world-war-stamps-highlight-9251832/>

⁶⁶ https://civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/nancy_wake,17565.html

⁶⁷ <https://wagner.edu/holocaust-center/survivor-collections/women-resistance/>

⁶⁸ <https://europeancommission.medium.com/8-remarkable-women-who-have-helped-shape-europe-we-know-today-6b768e249b2b>

during the Holocaust occurred inside and outside the death camps, and women were also victims of forced prostitution and forced abortions.



Mother Ciociaria by Fedele Andreani, 1964

Castro dei Volsci, Frosinone, Italy⁶⁹



Detail of a statue in memory of the comfort women

Wiesent, Germany Photo: Yonhap News⁷⁰

Moroccan mercenary troops fought with Free French troops in Italy under conditions that 'included permission to rape and pillage in enemy territory.' However, the most extreme institutionalized sexual violence against women as young as twelve from Korea, China, and other Southeast Asian countries was the 'comfort women' of the Imperial Japanese Army in World War II. This was a system of sexual servitude in which women and girls were placed in military sex slave camps and forced to provide sexual gratification to military personnel. Scholars have argued that the motivation for establishing

⁶⁹ Public domain image

[https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1382254119283227&set=a.361349724707010&_cft_\[0\]=AZWdEbZgTQ5KZ1dXl8rv3JK3ntm0ilLoaXDvzNuyOEIW1tNfRPmYOSWzyVb1teFtbzBScH1Lhz9ooW-GXSdaDRjsWhC8WWaVtSjufF787PRDIKC_2QCP_Ma8Ug9rSVDuvyF5fAHlaEhLUlrFiw-Vk8nQckoA68BqWzZOOjbcv7QPtmw7-x209GVnJvdIQaMZjUrFNHd4vChq193tT7YInaS5&_tn_=EH-y-R](https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1382254119283227&set=a.361349724707010&_cft_[0]=AZWdEbZgTQ5KZ1dXl8rv3JK3ntm0ilLoaXDvzNuyOEIW1tNfRPmYOSWzyVb1teFtbzBScH1Lhz9ooW-GXSdaDRjsWhC8WWaVtSjufF787PRDIKC_2QCP_Ma8Ug9rSVDuvyF5fAHlaEhLUlrFiw-Vk8nQckoA68BqWzZOOjbcv7QPtmw7-x209GVnJvdIQaMZjUrFNHd4vChq193tT7YInaS5&_tn_=EH-y-R)

⁷⁰ Public domain image downloaded from the website: https://www.scmp.com/news/world/europe/article/2077424/first-comfort-women-statue-europe-unveiled-germany?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=2077424

'comfort women and stations' was to avoid repeating the history of mass rape by Japanese soldiers in Nanking, China, which could have destroyed Japan's public image at the time.

The issue of sexual violence against women during World War II was taken up by human rights activists and, in the 1970s, by feminist scholars, and is a relatively new field of research and discussion. In recent years (especially since 2010), there has been a significant increase in the number of memorials dedicated to these victims and more generally to selected groups of women killed during World War II. Ana Milosevic⁷¹ critically analyses the purpose of these memorials and asks the question of whether we need memorials or memorials need us.

Patriarchy, the male gaze and women's oppression have dominated much of the Western world for the past two centuries, despite the growth of women's movements since the 1800s. In their demands to fight invisibility and exclusion, women have encouraged and spoken in favour of the regain of control over their own lives and bodies, and their participation in public and political life. Women's right to vote was the first step towards enfranchisement which continued in WWI with the contribution of women to the war economy; their increased visibility brought forward issues of inequalities, freedom of choice, childbearing and sexuality and came with a series of empowering decisions for women's identity construction and emancipation. However, despite women's significant role in the war economy and effort both during WWI and WWII, public memory culture has underrepresented women in their commemorative endeavours. Moreover, the silence and lack of recognition surrounding sexual violence and rape against women during both world wars echo contemporary events where survivors of these violent acts are often denied recognition when speaking out. In addition, the invisibility and prejudice endured by women until today have often been at the intersection of gender, race and class and shown that it is generally the most disadvantaged in society that suffer most from oppression.

⁷¹ <https://europeanmemories.net/magazine/can-memorials-heal-the-wounds/>

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The Concurrence of Victimhood

Miljan Vasić

Israel is the only place on earth where Jews have the right and the ability to protect themselves. This right has to be preserved at all cost [...]. The Arab world has not recognized yet our right to a state in this place where our nation had been born. [... Our enemies] have not ceased to dream of destroying us.

Ariel Sharon, former Prime Minister of Israel

We face unjust aggressive war against our people, from the field of thorns to the battle of the hundred days [...], to the protective fence, and our people in every city, camp, and village, and in every town holding steadfast in the face of occupation, siege, massacres, and aggression.

Yasser Arafat, former President of the State of Palestine

The concurrence of victimhood refers to a phenomenon where multiple individuals or groups claim to be the main victims of a particular event, situation, or circumstance. This phenomenon can take various forms. Sometimes two parties may acknowledge each other as victims but compete over the status of the “bigger” victim. Alternately, each party might perceive itself as the sole victim of the conflict and identify the other party exclusively as the perpetrator.

The concurrence of victimhood can lead to conflicting narratives, where each party seeks sympathy and support, making it difficult to determine who deserves the most recognition and assistance as a victim. When multiple parties lay claim to victimhood in a particular situation, it becomes necessary to examine the events from multiple perspectives in order to understand how each party’s experiences contributed to their victimization. However, this can pose an additional challenge, as it may potentially cause further harm to those who have already suffered. For instance, when multiple parties claim to be victims of a single event, the attention and resources that are typically devoted to supporting and aiding victims can become divided. Consequently, this division can lead to additional distress for those who are still struggling to cope with the impacts of the event. In such situations, research on the concurrence of victimhood becomes significant, as it underlines the complexities involved in determining who qualifies as a victim and who does not.

This paper aims to undertake a comprehensive examination of this phenomenon and to delve deeply into its complexities and intricacies, exploring its various aspects in detail. We will start with a terminological analysis, scrutinizing terms like “victim” and “victimhood”. Once we outline their meaning, we will proceed to describe the process of developing the collective sense of victimhood. In the remaining sections, we will examine the types, causes, and functions of the concurrence of victimhood. Finally, we will offer some general strategies that can be employed to address and overcome the issues that lead to this phenomenon.

Victims, victimization, and victimhood

Victims, victimization, and victimhood are three interconnected concepts frequently discussed in various fields of study, including psychology (Bar-Tal et al., 2009), sociology (Chaumont, 2019), history (Ballinger, 2004; Meckl, 2016), legal studies (Wilke, 2007), and criminology (Meier & Miethe, 2013). Each of these terms encompasses distinct aspects of the victim’s experience, and it is crucial to distinguish between them in order to examine more complex phenomena, such as the concurrence of victimhood. Using the term “victim” carries different implications based on the user, timing, and intentions behind its usage. Its functions may vary greatly depending on whether someone is claiming it, rejecting it, or attributing it to others (Meredith, 2009, p. 259). As such, it can reflect a wide variety of standpoints and perceptions, which is why it is important to properly understand the term.

In the common usage of the term, victim is used to describe somebody who has suffered a serious loss or a misfortune, through oppressive treatment by others, or by tragic circumstances. Thus, it is common to refer to victims of the Nazis, but also to victims of earthquakes (Feinberg, 1984, p. 117). Some scholars choose to focus on elements in the victim’s psychology that emerge as the result of those events. These include feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, self-pity, low self-esteem, vulnerability, a sense of guilt, and loss of trust, meaning, and privacy (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 229). More formally, a victim can be defined through a set of necessary conditions a person must meet to be considered a victim: (1) they were harmed; (2) they were not responsible for the act; (3) they could not prevent it; (4) they have suffered injustice and are morally right; and (5) they deserve sympathy for it (Hitman & Lewin, 2022, p. 4; Strobl, 2004). All of these approaches share a general understanding of the victim as a person characterized by the existence of needs - psychological, medical, financial, spiritual, or other - that they are unable to meet on their own. When the harmful act was carried out by another person or a group, the innocent and irresponsible victim is usually put in contrast to the offender who is, by extension, considered guilty and responsible (Meredith, 2009, p. 260).

Different studies of victims accept the central distinction between “victimization” and “victimhood”. Victimization is an act of harm perpetrated against an individual or a group, while victimhood is a state of identifying as a victim based on that harm (Jacoby, 2015, p. 513). Thus, we can say that victimization refers to the actual experience of being harmed and is an objective description of a specific event rooted in factual reality. On the other hand, victimhood pertains to a psychological state in which an individual perceives themselves as a victim due to feeling wronged or mistreated, and it is subjective in nature. It is crucial to differentiate between victimization and victimhood because they carry distinct implications for how a person sees themselves. However, since the two are not necessarily causally related, the relationship between them is not always clear. Sometimes, a person may feel a sense of victimhood even if they were not directly subjected to the act of victimization. Likewise, the act of victimization does not always generate victimhood (Strobl, 2004). The perception of victimhood requires social recognition of the victim's suffering. In other words, no person can identify as a victim without others recognizing them as such. “Victimhood is in the eye of the beholder” (Saeed, 2016), and it is always context-dependent and of political nature.

The recognition of victim identity within society is influenced by various bodies, including government institutions, legal frameworks, economic distribution, civil rights, political rights, and civic participation. The state of victimhood is shaped by politics and heavily influenced by the political system in which the act of victimization has occurred. Generally speaking, democracies are safer for a larger number of their citizens when compared to non-democratic regimes. In democracies, even the members of the least advantaged groups have access to channels through which they can express their discontent. Furthermore, democratic systems typically have a range of institutions that prevent the abuse of power and foster political participation, thus reducing opportunities for causing harm to others (Jacoby, 2015, p. 518). In contrast, authoritarian governments lack such institutions and often face challenges to their legitimacy. In their struggle for power, those regimes often resort to violence and pay little respect for public safety or citizens' wellbeing (p. 519). For this reason, acts of victimization are more common in authoritarian regimes where violence may go unpunished. However, victimhood develops more frequently in democratic governments that allow victim-based identities to emerge (p. 520).

Likewise, it is democracies that show an incentive to investigate social or historical circumstances that may have caused victimization, which is another reason why victim-based identities are fostered in democratic governments. On the other hand, authoritarian governments tend to ignore such investigations, mainly because they are most likely to be held responsible for much of the victimization, and are thus unwilling to compromise their position of power (Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2010, p. 136). Nevertheless, an authoritarian state may foster a victim-based identity on a national level when such an identity fits the authoritarian leader's political goals (Huysse, 2003, pp. 64–65).

However, regardless of the political system, victims rarely have the opportunity to completely shape or define the circumstances of the victim identity that they develop. The struggle of interests within the state usually shapes victim categories in any given society, be it democratic or authoritarian (Jacoby, 2015, p. 520). Even in democracies, the sense of wrongdoing is not necessarily related to the actual levels of harm or threat. An illustration of this is the prominence of terrorism as a concern within the American political sphere following the September 11 attacks, even though significantly more lives are lost each year in car accidents compared to terrorist attacks (Wilson & Thomson, 2005). Such dominant narratives often shape the perception of harm and suffering. Individuals who develop a victim-based identity often do it by association with those pre-established narratives. Authoritarian regimes, in turn, tend to ignore victims and push them to the margins of political life, unless the victims' claims align with the established political doctrines or directly challenge them (Jacoby, 2015, pp. 522-525).

Other societal factors also play a role in the development of victimhood. Somebody may reject the victimhood label due to opportunities related to upbringing or education. On the other hand, an outsider can identify with a victimized group through activism and empathy. Moreover, people of mixed ancestry can divide their loyalties between multiple groups, some of them being victimized, others victimizers (Jacoby, 2015, p. 520). The subsequent section will undertake a more comprehensive examination of these different claims of victimhood. For now, it is important to emphasize that victims shape their identities based on established parameters and within the framework of prevailing sociopolitical conditions.⁷² The act of victimization can occur on an individual or collective level, leading to distinct forms of individual and collective victimhood (Huysse, 2003, p. 54). Nevertheless, irrespective of its manifestation, victimhood always encompasses a social dimension. In the next section, we will explore this social dimension, examining both the shared characteristics and distinguishing features involved in the construction of individual and collective victimhood.

⁷² This does not imply that victims are entirely devoid of agency when it comes to their position within society. While individuals may not be completely liberated from their cultures or dominant political interests, they are not completely determined by them either. A growing body of research in the field of transitional justice emphasizes the significance of giving voice and agency to victims (Lawther, 2020; McEvoy & McConnachie, 2013; Ross, 2003). It is claimed that victims should have the opportunity to define their victim identity in a way that is empowering and reflective of their agency and resilience. The inclusion of victims' voices is imperative for acknowledging the broader social and cultural factors that contribute to victimization.

From individual to collective victimhood

Individual victimhood refers to the psychological state of an individual who perceives themselves as a victim, behaves accordingly, and identifies with that role (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, pp. 232–233). Collective victimhood, on the other hand, occurs when members of the same group share the feeling that they were the subject of victimization for the sole reason of being the members of that group (2009, p. 234).

Individual victimhood is built through three stages (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 233). First, a person needs to realize that they have suffered harm. Second, since personal perception is not enough, there must be social recognition that the harmful act was unjust. And third, once individuals perceive themselves as victims and are recognized as such, they seek to maintain that status, either until reaching the set goals, or indefinitely. The first two stages are necessary to distinguish actual victims from other possible claims of victimhood.

The first stage of victimhood revolves around an individual's perception of themselves as a victim, while the second stage focuses on how others perceive them. As a result, the combination of self-identification and social recognition leads to four possible outcomes (Strobl, 2004, pp. 296–297). If an individual identifies as a victim and is acknowledged as such, they are considered an actual victim. Conversely, if someone neither identifies as a victim nor is recognized as one by others, they fall into the non-victim category. The remaining two combinations are more problematic. One of them is a rejected victim, which refers to a person who sees themselves as a victim but is denied a victim status by important others. There can be several reasons for this outcome, such as circumstances surrounding the harmful act disqualifying them from the victim role (e.g., involvement in illegal activities) or their violation of certain norms or possession of undesirable personality traits. Finally, a designated victim is a person to whom others ascribe victim status despite their reluctance to identify as such. They may reject to identify themselves as a victim due to a lack of awareness or a desire to avoid associated stigma and expected behaviors.

In general, being in need of help is crucial in self-identifying as a victim, while the absence of responsibility for victimization is important for social recognition (Strobl, 2010, p. 6). Only when both criteria are met, we can consider the first two stages of victimhood completed and thus deal with actual victims. The third stage of victimhood involves the fulfillment of major functions that the status of the victim is meant to achieve, although, at times, this status can become an end in itself.

Collective victimhood progresses through those same stages. Just as individuals develop a sense of victimhood based on their personal experience, collectives (such as ethnic groups, religious groups, and persons of the same gender, race, or

sexual orientation...) can develop collective victimhood through their shared experiences. Importantly, collective victimhood can arise even if not all group members, or even the majority, have directly experienced harm themselves. Victimhood can stem from a deep sense of belonging to the group (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 239).

In cases of collective victimhood, members share common beliefs about the victimization of the entire social group they belong to. They perceive that the inflicted harm was intentionally directed toward the entire group itself and, by extension, toward its members solely for their membership in that group (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 234). Apart from beliefs, members of the same group also share common attitudes and emotions (Mackie et al., 2008). As a consequence, there is a surge of empathy when one witnesses or hears about suffering experienced by a fellow group member. This is an important mechanism in developing a sense of collective victimhood, since even those who did not directly experience harm may label themselves as victims just because other members of the group were hurt (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 234).

Another crucial aspect of collective victimhood lies in its connection with the past. At times, a group may adopt a victimhood stance even if the act of victimization occurred in the distant past. Such groups hold onto the collective memory of a long-ago trauma and maintain a sense of woundedness and past injustice across generations (Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003, p. 722). Examples of these “chosen traumas” can be found among some European nations, such as the Serbian defeat in the Battle of Kosovo (Volkan, 2001), the Polish suffering under the dominance of their Russian and German neighbors (Jasińska-Kania, 2007), and the lasting memory of the Great Famine in Ireland (Rice & Benson, 2016). In some instances, the group utilizes the memory of such an event to mobilize its members in the future, particularly when an opportunity arises to pursue the group’s political goals or seek revenge (Bar-Tal & Čehajić-Clancy, 2014, pp. 129–130). Therefore, a collective sense of victimhood can be defined as a shared mindset among group members that emerges as a consequence of perceived intentional harm with severe and lasting effects. This harm was inflicted on a collective by another group or groups and is seen as undeserved, unjust, and beyond the control of the victimized group. The perceived harm could happen in the recent or distant past and it can be partly imagined or entirely based on objective reality. It can stem from a single traumatic event such as the loss of a battle, genocide, or ethnic cleansing, or long-term oppression of the group, such as slavery, discrimination, or occupation. The collective victim mindset emerges as a result of the cognitive and social construction of the event(s) that have caused the harm (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 238).

The first stage of the process of collective victimization is similar to the individual case. A harmful act is carried out by another group, and it is then recognized as such. This recognition can be made immediately after a particular event (mass killings, foreign invasion), or through a long process of self-enlightenment that may occur after years or centuries of suffering through discrimination, oppression, and exploitation. In both cases, the recognition of harm must be

accompanied by an evaluation that the harmful act was unjust, undeserved, and unavoidable by the affected group (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 239).

After such an evaluation is made, the second stage of collective victimhood begins. This stage involves actively persuading other groups or, in the case of genocides and ethnic cleansings, the entire international community, that the status of the victim is warranted. Here lies one of the key differences between the processes of developing individual and collective victimhood. As mentioned earlier, in cases of individual victimhood, social recognition plays a crucial role in attaining the status of a victim (Strobl, 2004). However, in contrast to the individual case, recognition by the other groups is not a necessary condition for developing collective victimhood. Even if the international community rejects the group's perspective or (even more) views them as perpetrators, the group may persist in perceiving themselves as victims (Bar-Tal, et al., 2009, p. 240).⁷³ Therefore, when it comes to collective victimhood, a group that is externally seen as the rejected victim can also be internally recognized as the actual victim. In such cases, the social construction within the group functions as a form of social recognition, enabling the group to progress to the third stage of constructing victimhood, which involves pursuing collective goals.⁷⁴

The persistent focus on past memories can be understood by examining the functions that collective victimhood aims to fulfill. Despite the numerous negative consequences associated with being a victim of a crime, victimhood carries a certain moral prestige (Noor et al., 2012, p. 3). The victimized party emerges from the conflict with a sense of moral superiority, a belief in deserving sympathy, and immunity from criticism (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 237). The development of collective victimhood makes it easier for group members to cope with stress, foster a sense of solidarity and patriotism, and provide moral justification for engaging in retaliatory acts against perpetrators (pp. 238–240). Moreover, when the victimhood status receives international recognition, it encourages support from the global community, particularly when the victimized group is perceived as the weaker party, experiencing greater suffering, and not violating international moral norms. As a result, the victimhood status plays a vital role in securing political and material assistance, as well as garnering

⁷³ Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a former President of Iran, once said: "We've been victims of terrorism ourselves. It's regrettable that people who argue they are fighting terrorism – instead of supporting the Iranian nation – are supporting the terrorists and then turn the finger at us." (Chan, 2007)

⁷⁴ Another difference between individual and collective senses of victimhood lies in the fact that collective victimhood is not related to the strength of the collectives involved in the act of victimization. Unlike individual victimization, where the perpetrator typically holds a position of power, collectives that possess considerable military, political, or economic strength may still identify as victims. In a state of collective victimhood, the self-attained status of the victim does not necessarily entail weakness (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 241).

support from worldwide public opinion. Given that the recognized victim is deemed deserving of sympathy and support, the victimhood status can become a subject of contention and competition (p. 246).

The concurrence of victimhood

The Black Holocaust was 100 times worse than the so-called Jew Holocaust.

Khalid Abdul Muhammad, Nation of Islam

One may be tempted to regard all those who have suffered from a violent conflict as members of one big harmonious family or, at the very least, natural allies. After all, those who have experienced victimization should be the first to empathize with others who have undergone similar treatment, one would assume. However, such scenarios are seldom witnessed in practice. In reality, victims frequently compete with each other for recognition and “rewards” that such recognition entails. These rewards may take the form of symbolic gestures like monuments, medals, and commemorative practices, or tangible resources used for compensation (Huyse, 2003, p. 54). This phenomenon, known as “the concurrence of victimhood,” emerges when multiple parties lay claim to being the sole victims or primary victims of a specific event or a broader range of atrocities (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, pp. 246–24, Noor et al., 2012, p. 1).

The struggle for recognition unfolds as a process where one party (let’s call them A) acknowledges another party (call them B) as having a valid victim status. In cases of victimhood recognition, A recognizes B as a victim. However, the concurrence of victimhood occurs when A, as perceived by B, recognizes a separate group (call them C) as valid victims while simultaneously denying this recognition to B.⁷⁵ Hence, the phenomenon of concurrence involves (at least) three separate entities: the two (or sometimes more) groups that compete over the recognition of their victimhood, and a third entity – society, government, or the international community – which possesses the authority to grant or deny recognition (De Guissmé & Licata, 2017, pp. 148–149).

Types of concurrence. Depending on the situation, the concurrence of victimhood can manifest in three different forms. Firstly, concurrence may arise among the victims of the same atrocities. Secondly, it may appear among the victims of

⁷⁵ Sometimes, C can have the exact opposite view on the matter and perceive that A has granted the recognition only to B. Nonetheless, the concurrence phenomenon can still occur as long as at least one party perceives themselves as being denied the victim status. In other words, it is enough for one side to feel that they are not being acknowledged as victims for the concurrence of victimhood to take place.

different aggressions (Huyse, 2003, p. 64). Lastly, it can take the form of a competition between two conflicting sides, with each side perceiving themselves as victims (Jacoby, 2015, pp. 526–527). The first two types share the common aspect of involving groups that compete over their respective victimhood, even though they are not responsible for each other's victimization (De Guissmé & Licata, 2017, p. 148).

The concurrence of victims who have experienced the same atrocities can occur when individuals or groups, who have suffered similar harms, injustices, or traumas, vie for attention, recognition, or resources. This phenomenon can arise when victims believe that their suffering has been marginalized, overlooked, or minimized when compared to that of others. For instance, members of the Roma community often feel that their claims of victimization during World War II have received different responses compared to the Jewish population. They argue that this disparate response stems from the unequal distribution of organizational and institutional resources between the two groups (Woolford & Wolejszo, 2006).

However, concurrence may also arise between two unrelated victimized groups, in situations when one group believes that they are competing over the shared pool of material or social resources. In such cases, concurrence may occur between victimized groups within the same society (Noor et al., 2012, p. 1). One example includes the potential competition among different victims of human trafficking. While human trafficking can manifest in various ways, the bulk of police efforts, time, and resources are primarily directed toward combating the sex trafficking of local girls. As a result, other victims of trafficking, such as foreign workers who face exploitation outside the sex industry, may be left neglected and unsearched for. This situation can create animosity between groups of victims who experience different forms of human trafficking, as they are compelled to compete for the limited available resources (Brennan, 2008). Concurrence can also manifest in situations where two social groups have endured similar atrocities but have never been involved in each other's historical episodes of collective victimization. In such cases, members of one group may develop negative attitudes towards members of the other group if they perceive that the latter group has received preferential treatment denied to their own. One instance of this can be seen among Belgians of African descent who express negative attitudes towards the commemorative practices related to the Holocaust. They believe that while Belgium acknowledges the assistance provided by the Belgian State in the deportation of Jews, it deliberately overlooks the atrocities committed during the colonial era. This attitude may give rise to the development of "secondary antisemitism," which includes stances such as Holocaust denial and the perception that Jews are exploiting Holocaust remembrance (De Guissmé & Licata, 2017). Alternatively, a group that has already attained universally recognized victim status may oppose granting the same status to other groups. This is evident in the claims about the "uniqueness of the Holocaust" (Chaumont, 2019), which have led some Jews to

deny other victim groups the right to label their suffering as a "genocide," as in the case of the massacres of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

Lastly, the phenomenon can be observed when two sides are or were involved in conflict. International conflict is especially marked by victimhood rivalries, where all sides in the conflict lay claim to being the "true" victims deserving of sympathy and compensation. When a significant atrocity committed against one side gains public prominence, instead of being acknowledged or recognized by the other side, it is usually greeted with questions like: "What about [insert the past act of victimization significant to that community]?" The implication is that one's own community is the one that has suffered the most and is the "real" victim of the conflict. This practice, sometimes called "whataboutism," is frequently used to emphasize one's victimhood while simultaneously denying the same status to the opposing group (Lawther, 2020).

Sources of concurrence. Multiple underlying factors contribute to the concurrence of victimhood. These factors encompass psychological, social, and political aspects, and their interplay encourages groups to embrace a victim identity while contesting similar identities of other groups. One such factor is moral typecasting, which is the tendency to categorize moral actors into binary and unchangeable roles. On one side, there are those who have the capacity to perform both right and wrong actions, while on the other side, there are individuals seen as passive recipients of these actions. When applied to the analysis of victimhood, moral typecasting makes the status of victimhood appear dichotomous and non-divisible (Noor et al., 2012, pp. 3-4). In other words, this dichotomy presents victimhood as an all-or-nothing status. Another contributing factor is the inclination towards social comparison, a human tendency to use others as a reference point when evaluating one's own traits and characteristics. A magnitude gap refers to a phenomenon where there is an observable discrepancy between victims' and perpetrators' perceptions of the same harmful acts. While the perpetrators tend to underestimate the magnitude of those acts, victims show a tendency to overestimate their severity and illegitimacy (p. 4). Biases in individual and collective memory also contribute to the concurrence of victimhood. For example, individual memories of harmful acts encountered in the past are construed in such a manner that one's blame is usually underemphasized, while one's righteousness and innocence are overestimated. The aforementioned examples of "chosen traumas" illustrate the presence of similar biases in collective memory, where specific events are mythologized and their symbolic meanings are transmitted across generations (Volkan, 2001). Furthermore, war-promoting journalism can establish a zero-sum perception of the conflict by focusing on daily updates of the war rather than its underlying causes, emphasizing physical impacts over psychological ones, and highlighting differences between parties instead of their similarities. Exposure to such a type of journalism can make both sides believe that their needs can be met only by the

defeat of the other. It can also promote dehumanization, shaping the collective perception of one side as the exclusive victim and the other as the exclusive perpetrator (Noor et al., 2012, p. 5).

Reasons for concurrence. The idea that groups compete over the role of the victim might seem paradoxical. Victims are usually associated with vulnerability, helplessness, and humiliation, which are generally undesirable qualities. Naturally, groups may be inclined to reject the victim identity and the associated stigmas (Noor et al., 2012, p. 8). However, as we already stated, despite potential drawbacks associated with that role, victimhood is seen as a valuable resource, so valuable that groups engage in competition for victim status.

The struggle for the recognition of that status is an important (possibly main) strategy for minorities who wish to improve their position in democratic societies (De Guissmé & Licata, 2017, p. 162). For these populations, invoking victimhood becomes a crucial means to mobilize their group, pursue redress for past injustices, and advocate for changes in their overall representation within society. Even in democracies, certain minority groups can face discrimination and be deprived of their basic political and economic rights. These collectives are marginalized by the biased application of laws, workplace regulations, and mistreatment within their families and neighborhoods. This situation is particularly evident for the Roma minority in various European countries (Moscovici & Pérez, 2009).

There are various reasons why collectives wish to obtain the exclusive right to be labeled as victims. Victimhood may serve as a means of increasing the bonds within the group, both across generations and among members of the same generation. It may provide moral justification for any retributive violent act aimed against perpetrators. It may also help the group to avoid responsibility or negative group emotions when confronted with historical episodes in which they were the perpetrators. Furthermore, the status of the victim helps the group to maintain a positive image, not only among its members but also in the eyes of the third parties who were not directly involved in the conflict. Any material or moral support that the group may receive during or after the conflict can motivate the concurrence between the self-designated victims (Noor et al., 2012, p. 9).

Negative effects. In addition to the positive effects experienced by groups that gain recognition as victims, there are numerous negative consequences when it comes to inter-group relations. For example, collective victimhood can change the worldview of the group, foster egocentrism, and block empathy towards other groups. It can lead to the selective and biased processing of information, resulting in a reduced sense of accountability and responsibility (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p.

243). When comparing their experiences to those of others, some groups may claim the hierarchy of suffering and ascribe greater value to certain types of victimization (Lawther, 2020, p. 5).⁷⁶

Groups who are engaged in the concurrence of victimhood are less motivated to let go of their painful past and tend to linger on their suffering. This, in turn, decreases the likelihood of eventual forgiveness. The more the group members engage in competition over the status of victimhood, the less willing they become to consider the suffering of another group. Eventually, their identity begins to form as a direct opposition to the identity of the opposing group (Noor et al., 2012, pp. 11–12). The concurrence of victimhood can also have negative implications for relationships between previously unrelated groups. For example, different minority groups that have suffered from the same majority can develop mutual antagonism during their struggle for recognition of victimhood, instead of forming a coalition against “a common adversary” (De Guissmé & Licata, 2017, p. 163).

Possible resolutions. There are two general strategies for overcoming the phenomena of concurrence. The first strategy is to address the issues that have led to victimization in the first place. This can be achieved through intergroup dialogues, especially between groups that have been involved in open conflict. Through dialogue, members can recognize (rather than deny) that their own group has committed injustices too, and empathize with the sufferings and existential threats faced by the members of the opposing group. Once they have realized that the hardships of the other group usually mirror their own, the process of reconciliation is well on its way. This process implies that both parties, not only get to know but truly acknowledge what has happened in the past. Recognizing that both groups have suffered and have different narratives of the conflict is crucial for the process of reconciliation because one-sided collective memory only encourages the continuation of the conflict and obstructs any peace efforts (Bar-Tal & Čehajić-Clancy, 2014, p. 131). The mutual acknowledgment allows the groups to move away from an exclusive victim identity and sets the stage for constructive dialogue (Noor et al., 2012, p. 13).

The second strategy for resolving the concurrence of victimhood focuses on the social recategorization of the groups competing over the victim status. By perceiving more similarities and identifying with superordinate categories that transcend their specific group identities, the groups become more willing to reconcile.⁷⁷ Such a strategy is effective regardless of the type of concurrence, as it can both foster the reconciliation between former adversaries and end

⁷⁶ Claims to such a hierarchy are present during commemorative practices in Trieste (Italy), where the Slovene population expresses the attitude that retaliatory actions carried out by Yugoslav partisans in World War II against Italian civilians should not be equated with the atrocities committed by Axis forces (Ballinger, 2006).

⁷⁷ For example, this strategy encourages group members to recategorize themselves as Americans instead of as Blacks and Whites; or to consider themselves to be common members of humanity rather than members of different nations (Noor et al, 2012, p. 14).

competition between non-adversarial victim groups. Victims who had suffered major life-transforming harm (loss of loved ones, being tortured, etc.) can realize that members of the group they are competing with had undergone similar traumas. By listening to each other's stories, groups can maintain their experience of unique victimhood and simultaneously extend their focus to shared victimhood (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p 257). Additional mechanisms supporting this strategy include highlighting a common legacy of historical mistakes and violence and endorsing peace-promoting journalism instead of war-promoting one (Noor et al., 2012, p. 13). Ultimately, by promoting a more inclusive understanding of victimhood, victims from different groups can unite in their shared experiences of victimization.

Conclusion

The political recognition of victimhood can lead to two possible outcomes. The first possibility is that a victim group, once its status is recognized, may achieve its objectives and overcome its victimhood by full integration into a democratic society. Through this process, they may eventually move beyond their victim status and transition into a state of being survivors.⁷⁸ The second possibility is that the recognized victim group remains trapped in its state of victimhood indefinitely, relying on the benefits and support (financial or moral) that come with victim status. This can make them unwilling or unable to move forward and perpetuates their sense of victimhood. (Jacoby, 2015, p. 528).

In contemporary societies, there is a growing tendency among minority groups to profile themselves as victims in order to gain more social recognition (Moscovici & Pérez, 2009). This sometimes leads to negative attitudes towards other minorities, even if those groups are not responsible for their past victimization (De Guissmé & Licata, 2017, p. 148). The situation becomes even more challenging when it involves former or current enemies. It is therefore crucial to understand the nature and meaning of collective victimhood before addressing the issue of concurrence, which is the competition over who has suffered more.

Putting collective victimhood under scrutiny is by no means an attempt to diminish the status of victims or suffering people have gone through. However, it must be emphasized that collective victimhood can become deep-rooted and transmitted to future generations. Once it is established on firm grounds, it tends to become frozen in time and can negatively impact relations with other groups. Instead of preparing for a new future, groups simply continue to live in the

⁷⁸ Recognition plays a crucial role in the process of reconciliation. A clear example of this is seen in the case of Palestinians and Israeli Jews who, when informed that their group was granted a victim status by some third party (e.g., a scientific community), have expressed more forgiving and conciliatory attitudes afterward (De Guissmé & Licata, 2017, p. 150).

same past and fight over the status of the victim (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, p. 258). It is suggested that the strategies for overcoming the concurrence of victimhood are those that are aimed to address the sources of collective victimhood. Firstly, it is important to address the underlying factors that contribute to the victimhood. Without communication, examination of the harms done by all sides, and assessment of responsibility, there can be no reconciliation. Additionally, successful reconciliation requires the emergence of a common victimhood identity that enables and encourages victim groups to focus on their shared experiences rather than differences. Only through these steps can the contested territory of victimhood transform into a space for shared memories and a path toward healing.

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Between heroization and victimization: The “Asia Minor Catastrophe” in the Greek school texts.

Kiprianos Pandelis, Stellakis Nektarios, Karalis Thanasis, Kasola Sofia

Introduction: The post-heroic perspective

Historians and social scientists have observed that commemorative practices in many European countries have changed in recent years. According to Sabrow, we assist to a “shift from heroization to victimization. It means that disadvantaged groups or social movement use a new strategy through narratives of victimhood to gain public recognition. To depict this shift, we use the term “post-heroic” era” (cited by Meckl, 2016: 408). Lagrou concludes that “we live in societies inhabited by a multitude of victims of various crimes and discriminations and of an infinite gradation of offended identities. We always commemorate and recognise some at the expense of others. Rather than having to choose between remembering or forgetting, we are faced with a complex geometry of rivalling aspirations and with a general process of out crowding, whereby groups and memories can only end up frontstage by pushing, even invertedly, other groups back-stage. Such a process is inherent in the political struggle for public recognition, which is a scarce commodity. As much as it is inevitable, awareness of the true nature of the political process is vital” (2011:287).

To account for this change in commemorative practices, Chaumont⁷⁹ introduced a new concept, that of moral capital. Building on Bourdieu’s well-known symbolic capital, Chaumont argues that the moral component of this concept is invested with a special meaning in commemorative practices. Chaumont (2022) adopts Heinich’s definition of capital as “a measurable, accumulable, transmissible, interest-earning, and convertible resource”, and extends this definition to moral capital. Moral capital allows individuals who possess it to gain recognition and authority in public and private life. Following this standpoint, we will appraise whether the concept of post-heroism can be applied to one of the most crucial and unhappy events of Greek history i.e. the Greek-Turkish war (1919-1922) which resulted in the collapse of the Greek army, the retreat from Asia Minor and the forced displacement of more than 1,2 million Orthodox Christians, Greeks and Armenians in the current Greek territory.

Based on the Greek school textbooks, we will consider how this war and the subsequent displacement and settlement of these refugees has been perceived and presented since.

⁷⁹See his contribution in this volume.

The subject and its rationale

After the successful War of Independence in 1821, the modern Greek state was established in 1830 with the endorsement of the then Great Powers, i.e., England, France, Russia. Since then, it has gradually developed with the Great Idea as its ideological guide, which generally meant the formation of a state that would encompass the areas that were previously considered Greek. This policy was actualized after the Balkan wars (1912-1913) and the Great War (1914-1918).

During the first Balkan war (October 8, 1912 - May 30, 1913), the Balkan countries (Greece, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro) allied themselves against the Ottomans and seized or liberated, according to the established term, extensive areas by the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, the distribution of the new territories led to internal conflicts and the dissolution of the Balkan alliance. As a result, on June 13, 1913, Bulgaria attacked Serbia and Greece, resulting in all belligerent forces attacking it and leading it to a disorderly capitulation on July 31, 1913, and the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest.

Greece especially benefited from the Balkan Wars as it increased both its territory and population. The Ottoman Empire was expelled from the Balkans - except from Thrace. Here, two facts are worth mentioning. The first one is the ferocity of the conflicts and the huge loss of lives of civilians. The next one refers to the movements of populations of all ethnicities. This changed considerably the composition of the population in the region and inflicted a very strong blow on the hitherto multinational Ottoman Empire. According to some estimates, 890,000 emigrated, while the dead are estimated at hundreds of thousands (Liakos, 2019: 62).

During the Great War (1914-1918), the Balkan countries found it difficult to choose a coalition of forces. Their difficulty is largely due to the hesitancy of warring coalitions as the accession of one country to one alliance could lead other countries to the opposed one. Eventually, the Ottoman Empire turned to the Germans and the Central Powers (Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire). Bulgaria entered the same coalition while the other countries, including Greece, turned to the Entente (United Kingdom, France, Russian Empire).

The accession of the Ottoman Empire to the German side is marked by the systematic persecution, especially after May 1914, of other ethnic groups, mainly Armenians and Greeks. The torments and displacements will continue until the end of the First World War, with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and its allies, a defeat that will mark the beginning of its definitive dissolution. According to the statistics of the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in the five

years 1913-1918, 773,915 Greek Orthodox were displaced in Asia Minor, Pontus, and Eastern Thrace (Alamani-Panagiotopoulou, 1978: 106).

The persecution of the Greek population in Asia Minor will be the main concern of the Greek government from 1913 onwards. This was also the main argument in international forums after 1917 for its request for a mission of the Greek army in Smyrna. After the rather surprising capture of Antalya, a town on the southern coast of Asia Minor, by the Italians in April 1919, the British and the French consented to send Greek troops to Smyrna. Finally, on May 15, 1919, the Greek army landed in Smyrna under the protection of the British, French and American warships.

That was the beginning of what is called in Greece the Asia Minor Campaign, or the Greco-Turkish War, which is the term used internationally. In Turkey this war is called Turkish War of Independence. It officially lasted 40 months, until September 6, 1922. It ended with the defeat and disorderly retreat of the Greek Army. Hereinafter for the Greeks it is the "Asia Minor Disaster", while for the Turks it is the liberation of the country, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

The war is marked by atrocities, huge losses and with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne. For the first time in human history, the latter foresees the forced exchange, with a few exceptions, of the Christians of Turkey with the Muslims of Greece. The outcome of the dispute is painful. The trauma is multiple and multi-layered for this crushing military defeat, with huge political, ideological and economic consequences. Greece is on the brink of economic collapse and at the same time one of the fundamental ideological pillars of the Greek state, the Great Idea, is being buried; in other words, the idea of the liberation of Greeks everywhere and the expansion of the country into territory considered Greek.

Additionally, to the economic and ideological consequences we should mention two others that will mark the country's history for a long time. It was military personnel who overthrew the pro-royalty government, and installed a new one, which included several liberals and supporters of the previous prime minister, Eleftherios Venizelos. One of the first decisions was the referral to the trial of eight prominent political and military figures. The six will be convicted and executed despite the fierce reaction of the "Great Powers", mainly England and France (Marselos, 1979). This event will further dynamize an already charged climate and will have consequences for the political history of the country until at least 1974.

The second major consequence concerns the arrival of a large Christian population from the regions of the former Ottoman Empire to Greek territory: 1,221,849 according to the national census of 1928, in a total population of 6.2 million, of which half arrived immediately after the collapse of the Greek army and the rest after the Lausanne Treaty. Of those, about 50% were farmers, settled in northern Greece, mainly Macedonia, annexed only in 1913. The other half

settled mainly in the big cities, such as Athens, Thessaloniki, Piraeus, and Thrace (Karadimou-Gerolympou, 2002: 64-5). To those we should add another 800,000 who came earlier, in the troubled decade of the 1910s (Katsapis, 2011: 129). The big challenges for this population were the integration into Greek society, its survival and, of course, peaceful coexistence with the native population.

The questions posed in Greek historiography are many, but in this text, we will stick to the basics. Was it the right decision to send the Greek army to Smyrna? Why was the Greek army defeated? What are the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne for refugees from both sides? What effects did this Treaty have on Greek-Turkish relations? Finally, a series of questions are asked about the refugees who came to Greece. How were they received by the locals? How did they coexist with the settled population? What are their paths in all fields? How did they themselves deal with the tragic event of forced exchange and relocation to a new place? How did they form new identities and what was their relationship with the existing ones? What memory policies did they follow? The last question certainly also concerns the Greek state and its mechanisms. What policies of memory did it follow regarding this pivotal event and how did it pass them on to younger generations?

The above-mentioned questions are indicative. Many of these intertwine or bring up new questions and more complex answers. For example, during the first years and while the first generation of refugees were alive, the management of memory was difficult. Beyond personal/collective experiences in a different place than that of birth and childhood, images and memories were mediated by several factors such as language, school, new neighbors, new state mechanisms, and a different political system. All of these contributed greatly to new representations and largely new identities.

It is beyond the aim of this text to examine all these aspects. We will focus on the History textbooks of the 6th grade of elementary school to investigate how this fundamental episode of Greek History is presented. But before analyzing the textbooks, we will present the official narrative on this event.

The official narrative of the Asia Minor Catastrophe

It is certainly quite unusual to talk about an "official" version of the Asia Minor disaster. The same could be said for any historical event, let alone for one that marked more than any other the Greek history. From the beginning, there were disagreements between the political forces on almost every aspect of this event: in the dispatch of the Greek army, in the continuation of the campaign, in the disengagement of the Greek forces, and in the attitude towards the refugees. The conservative-pro-royalist party, as well as the newly established Communist Party were against any military involvement. It

is noteworthy that the deputy chief of the General Staff of the Army, later dictator I. Metaxas, considered the army mission to Asia Minor to be a big operational mistake.

We argue that the official version can be found in the ten-volume History of the General Staff of the Army and specifically the "EPITOM HISTORY OF THE MINOR CAMPAIGN 1919-1922", which was published by the General Staff of the Army in 1966 "for the public in general, but also for the military and especially the candidates for students for the Military Schools" (1966: IX). This History is important as it condenses to a large extent the most widespread understandings of the issue, thus it could be considered as the core of public History.

Why was the Greek army sent to Smyrna in May 1919? Two reasons are cited which are of a different order and they are not necessarily compatible. The first lies in the liberation of the Greek populations, who have been in the region for thousands of years. "The Asia Minor Campaign conducted by the Greek Army from May 2, 1919, to September 6, 1922, had as its purpose the liberation of the Greek populations living in the western part of the Asian continent, called Asia Minor. The reasons for undertaking the campaign are closely connected with the History of Hellenism and have deep roots within it. From the 2nd millennium BC, prosperous Greek establishments are found on the northern, western, and southern coasts of Asia Minor, the wetted ones by the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea" (196: 3).

The second reason concerns the protection of persecuted Christians by the Ottoman authorities, especially during the Great War: "The victorious Balkan wars, although they granted freedom to approximately two million brothers of same origins and same religion, did not complete the liberating mission. About 2,500,000 Greeks remained under the shoe pad of the Turkish dynasty. Turkey expressed its regret for the heavy defeats it suffered during the Balkan wars and, continuing its usual tactics, implemented a broad and exterminating plan of persecutions on the territories of the remaining Christian populations, with numerous deportations of Greeks from Asia Minor and Thrace. The repeated efforts of the Greek Government to calm down these cruel and inhumane measures did not lead to any positive results, until the First World War erupted, which dragged Greece and Turkey into its vortex. The opportunity was thus created for Greece to undertake a new effort to free the enslaved brothers of those living in Asia Minor" (1966: 3-4).

Why did the campaign lead to this outcome? In the text this is attributed to three factors: 1. the reaction of the nationalists under Mustafa Kemal, 2. the internal disagreements of the allies and their progressive approach with Kemal and 3. the gradual strengthening of the Turks and the simultaneous weakening of the Greeks. "Nevertheless, Kemal's Nationalist revolution was destined to prevail in the end and this was because each one of the Allies followed their own policy. Thus, the Governments of France and Italy, faced with serious internal difficulties, unable to maintain their military forces in Asia Minor and seeing with growing concern the Middle East dominion of Great Britain oriented themselves towards the

Government in Ankara. The subsequent events not only stabilized Kemal's Government but strengthened it to such an extent that it could defend the Greek army in Asia Minor with victory" (1966: 51).

This approach coincides to a large extent with the official justification of the Greek government when it requested and succeeded in sending the Greek army to Smyrna (1919). This view is adopted even today by well-known Greek Historians (Svolopoulos, 2009). On the other hand, this approach reproduced the "Great Idea", that of liberating "our brothers living in slavery". But we have to say that this is a position that is rarely found in historiography anymore. It exists more implicitly, especially in public discourse, as a huge, missed opportunity to reconstitute the Byzantine Empire, if not the empire of Alexander the Great. We would say that it is not the dominant nor the science-based view, but it seems that it is rather a widespread version of public history.

Finally, as far as the causes of the defeat are concerned, the General Staff of the Army mentions the following to explain the loss: the value and the power of the enemy, the wavering of the allies and their subsequent collaboration with the enemy, the exhaustion of the Greek army, and, finally, mistakes of a purely military nature. In the following chapter we are going to examine how all these are formulated in 6th grade elementary school history textbooks.

History textbooks in primary school

The importance of school, especially primary education, for the education of Greeks in this period and especially the education of refugees is of great importance, for at least four reasons.

First, the refugees were exhausted. Many died during the forced movements from hardship and disease. Among the dead were many young children, and this was also reflected in their demographic composition. The whole population of the refugees who came to Greece consisted mainly of young people aged 14-18 years, elderly people, and women. Moreover, the number of men was small, especially in those ages that can bear arms. This makes sense for two reasons as many perished on the battlefields. Secondly, the Turks, either in the army or paramilitary groups, killed or captured these men so that they would not join the Greek army or help it in any way. Finally, the percentage of children up to 14 years old was relatively low. According to the 1928 census, while among the natives the children aged 0-14 amounted to 33.4% of the total population, among the refugees it was 29.14%.

The refugees are not a homogeneous group. They came from different places, various social environments, practiced different professions, some spoke only Turkish, others Greek, others were bilingual or multilingual. In Greece, half of the refugees settled in Macedonia and a significant number, especially from Eastern Thrace, moved to Western Thrace. Most of

the refugees were farmers and for this reason, nearly 2,000 new settlements were being established in northern Greece. Finally, A significant number of refugees, mainly those from urban areas and workers, settled in the big cities, Athens, Piraeus, Thessaloniki.

This is reflected in the educational level. According to the 1928 census, 48.5% of Greeks knew how to read and write - 62.4% men and 35% women. The corresponding percentages among refugees are somewhat higher: 49.7% overall, 61.1% for men and 39.3% for women. The difference is relatively small at first glance and significant for women, a difference that could be read as an indicator of the better social position and condition of women in the refugees' places of origin.

The relatively good educational profile of the refugees cannot, however, hide the great differences between them. We should mention the comparatively high educational level of the refugees from the big urban centers and the low level in the mainly rural areas. This could be considered a reasonable finding if we consider the social composition of the Greek Orthodox population in the Ottoman Empire and the state of education in their areas. For example, the Military Commander of Epirus, one of the poorest regions of the country, estimated in 1923 that 25 to 30% of the refugees in the region knew how to read and write, in contrast to 70% of the natives. Even if we argue that this is far from reality and refers to a small number of refugees - close to 30,000 at that time - it shows the large discrepancies between the refugees and natives.

Based on these, the role of the elementary school, taking for granted that at that time there were only a few kindergartens (Kiprianos, 2007: 146)- is extremely critical because school offers education for learning the language and supports the social inclusion in a new environment. Moreover, at the same time, school offered ways, mainly through language and history, to form new identities and consequently supported the homogenization of populations from different environments and with different understandings and horizons. We could argue that the role of school was a nationalizing one, but perhaps it is not only this but something even deeper. The school had the role to form identities in places with populations who had strong contrasts, whether they were ethnic, linguistic, cultural.

It is the special role of school that motivated us to study the History textbooks used in the last class of primary school. Primary school is compulsory and only a few used to continue to secondary education during that period. This concern partly explains the significant increase in the number of primary school students in the 1920s and 1930s. From 570 thousand (74% of this age group), the number of primary school students reaches 636 thousand (82% in 1928) and 977 thousand (88% in 1937) (Dendrinou-Antonakaki, 1955, Greek Education, 22). Finally, we focus on the 6th grade, because in this class the students are taught Modern Greek History for the first time in their school life.

In this context history textbooks have their own special weight. We know from studies that the image that most people have of an important historical event, especially those who did not go to school for many years, is to a very large extent a derivative of school (Kiprianos, Stellakis, Karalis, Kasola 2023; Ferro, 1983). And this is the case despite and contrary to the fact that history seems to be evaluated as one of the most boring subjects for the pupils.

In the Greek case, the influence of the textbooks may be stronger due to the status of the textbooks. Until 1967, the year that Dictatorship came to power, teachers had to choose from several textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education. Since then, the Ministry of Education approves a single textbook which is distributed freely to all students.

Content analysis of textbooks

As we have already mentioned, in Greece the State provides the schoolbooks in all levels of education. The question which arises from such a system is whether exist differences in the influence exerted on students between the approved by the state book or a system that allows teachers to choose between various books on the same topic approved by the competent institutions. We can assume in principle that the limited possibility of choice by the teachers has some importance since they are not completely passive. They can at least choose between books and get a deeper understanding of them. Unfortunately, in Greece teachers who teach History, in primary but also in secondary education, restrict essentially their teaching to schoolbook and only rarely go beyond by suggesting or reading other books or texts. Two facts allow us to consider things somehow deeper. All textbooks are approved by the Ministry of Education or institutions under its authority. This already means a very important filter in the content. It is almost impossible to deviate from the norm. Does this mean that every government conveys to students what it believes? We will investigate this case below. Secondly, the event of Minor Asia War is a relatively recent one. Many of the protagonists as well as the victims of the war and following events were still alive until recently. A few years after we had a considerable number of short stories and novels by well-known writers who themselves or their parents were victims of this painful event. In addition, many associations of refugees or their descendants were established to defend their own "battles", to preserve memory and share their own views. Depending on the occasion, these groups can co-shape the memory and in this way directly or indirectly influence the content of books, especially the content of schoolbooks.

Regarding the number of textbooks from 1923 to the present, the repository of the competent institution, the Institute of Educational Policy, comprises a total of 14 textbooks. 6 in the period 1923-1940, 3 in the decade 1940-1950, 4 in the

period 1950-1967, 1 in the period of the dictatorship of the Colonels, 1967-1974. Two textbooks of them, reworked, were in use from 1974 to 1982. Since then, we have had two more textbooks.

As for the content, the question under consideration in the history textbooks until 1974 is limited in scope. In a total of 80 to 170 pages each book, a relatively limited space was given to this issue. In the book published in 1923, immediately after the event, there is only one paragraph. In the following books there are two pages at most. On average, until 1974, one and a half pages are devoted to The Asia Minor Catastrophe. It means that in a few paragraphs, issues, and events such as the war, the Treaty of Lausanne, the arrival and settlement of the refugees, the "Revolution" of the army, the resignation of the pro-Royal government and the abdication of King Constantine in favor of his son George were covered.

This image changes with time, especially after 1974. The four history textbooks released after 1974 have more pages: 129 by the reworked book of Kafentzis, 190 pages for the reworked book by Diamantopoulos-Kyriazopoulos; 288 for the book by Aktypi et al., and 238 by Koliopoulos et al.⁸⁰ It is plausible to explain this if we consider that the new books present current event and include references to the international situation and especially references to European history of the time.

Two more reasons account for the extension of text dedicated to this event, one technical and one pedagogical. The technical one has to do with the addition of illustrated material, such as photos of cities, events, people, institutions, which was not possible half a century ago. The pedagogical one touches upon two aspects: the addition of visual sources (maps, monuments, etc.) so that the narration is more illustrative and more attractive and secondly the motivation for students to act independently, take initiatives, work in groups, and increase their interest in historical issues. This is why various sources of information, such as texts, photos, and artefacts, are included in the textbooks. Moreover, questions are listed to offer students the chance to discuss or debate about certain topics. So, the first of the four aforementioned books has two pages, covered by a short text, a photo, a map and four questions. The second dedicated four pages: three pages of text, half a page with a map and seven questions. The third book devotes two sub-chapters to the event, a total of 13 pages, more than any other. However, the text is less than two pages. The rest is covered by maps, photos, questions, and literary texts as well as historical texts. Finally, the textbook that is used today devotes six pages, of which only one and a half pages are text, with the rest to be testimonies, speeches, questions, and mainly photographic material.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Exception is the withdrawn manual of Repoussi et al. in 2007 after acerb public debate, which had 136 pages.

⁸¹ The composition of the four pages of Repoussi's book (that which was withdraw in 2006) is quite similar.

A diachronic pattern with variations

Regarding the content of the texts, the stability diachronically of the description in the manuals is impressive. Until 1974 the approach is that of traditional history. It means that the focus is given to political and military events. The basic pattern remains the same in the next textbooks despite the political changes that have taken place in the meantime. Textbooks focus on the narrative of the Liberals, in other words the narrative of Eleftherios Venizelos. This is grosso modo the same as that of the History Department of the General Staff of the Greek Army but differentiated in two points. First, as to the reasons for the campaign and secondly, regarding the attitude of the great powers of the time. Regarding the first, the Greek army was not sent to liberate the Greeks of the area but was sent after a relevant decision by the English and the French Allies to protect the Christians of the area and to "unite" Smyrna with Greece. Accordingly, the Allies abandoned the Greeks being dissatisfied with the electoral victory of the royalists in 1920 and their policy in the war.

Surprisingly this pattern is maintained even in textbooks edited when pro-royalty governments or dictatorial regimes are in power. For instance, the books edited during the dictatorship of Metaxas, the officer who was opposed to any army mission in Asia Minor. The textbook published in 1936 praises both Metaxas as well as King Georgios. It is noteworthy that this book is the first 6th grade History textbook that has a chapter entitled "The Asia Minor Catastrophe". The text refers in a non-emotional way to the issue. It considers as one of the reasons of this Catastrophe the policy of the "allies" without any further explanation. Trying to explain the difficulties of the Greek attack in August 1921, the author notes: "Greece was then in a difficult position. They did not receive financial support from Europe. On the contrary, some European States supported Kemal. However, it was decided to move on as far as Ankara to destroy the Turkish Army" (Petrounias, 1937: 165).

Quite a similar account is adopted by Sakkadakis' textbook, which was distributed to students throughout the dictatorship (1967-1974). It mentions three reasons for the defeat: the isolation of the Greeks, the help of the allies to Mustafa Kemal for reasons of their own interest and internal dissension. The explanation seems convenient and compatible with the basic legitimizing argument of the Dictatorship: internal discord, internal insecurity, and communist threat. All this is summed up in the phrase: "Alone, divided and helpless, the Greeks were unable to succeed" (Sakadakis, 1973: 159).

Apart from similarities there are also differences in the texts. These have less to do with the causes of the defeat and more with the reasons the Greek army was in Asia Minor. Some of the books depict the landing of the Greek Army to Minor Asia as a decision taken by Allies. The rest sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly depict the arrival of Greek Army

because of the will to liberate those areas which considered as Greek ones. This is also reflected in the consequences.

Indicatively, we read "These were once ours" or "we lost these beautiful places".

There are also differences in another point which fades with time. In a few textbooks, immediately after the Catastrophe, the event is shown as something that could be reversible. It is presented like the "nice places" were never lost and that at some point they may be "ours" again. Indicatively, in the long-lived manual of N. Ginopoulos, which was first published in 1904 and distributed to students even in 1923, we read: "Unfortunately, the Greek army, which for 10 whole years fought bravely and won everywhere, suffered in August 1922 in Asia Minor a great accident and was forced to abandoning the Hellenic countries (...). In this way the Panhellenic union and the national restoration - the beautiful ideal of the Greek race - was removed again. It was removed but not extinguished. This is your duty, new generation" (Ginopoulos, 1923: 80).

Something similar, but less intense, can also be found some years later (1937) in Petrounias's manual.

Could history textbooks to be unaffected by the political condition?⁸² Could the authors work solely based on scientific criteria? Could those in power not concern themselves with the content of the textbooks? Obviously, this is not the case. In Greece we have at least five History textbooks which were not approved by the relevant educational -or the political- authorities and were withdrawn (Athanasiadis, 2015), after reactions from various groups as well as the Greek church. We argue that the last century sees a pattern on how the major event is presented to next generations. How could this pattern be explained? It is plausible to assume that all history books follow the official canon, set by the mainstream ideological powers.

It is quite surprising that the textbooks have so much in common in a long period (1923-1974) during the political climate was characterized by instability and there were a lot of changes. There are some differences, but they are not so pronounced, with one exception: when they refer to rulers. For example, the Metaxas Dictatorship textbook praises the regime, the way it came to power, the way it governs. The same applies also to the textbook students received during the years of Dictatorship of the Colonels. It praises the regime without differentiating itself from the norm for the Asia Minor Catastrophe. In fact, the contradiction is even stronger as while praising the dictatorial regime in previous chapters he criticizes the authoritarian regimes of the interwar period.

⁸² Investigating "The Macedonian Question in Greek History Textbooks" D. Karakatsani wrote: "It is a fact that the content of history textbooks very often changes as a result of political circumstances because educational policy follows in most of the cases the foreign policy of the State as well as the public opinion. So the way in which the most controversial subjects are presented in the textbooks mostly reflect the current political and social problems and the different controversies". (2002: 291).

To sum up, a pattern has been established in the matter which textbooks can hardly ignore. This, in its basic lines, remains unchanged, beyond the beliefs of the rulers and eventually of the authors. By contrast, in matters that directly concern the rulers, the manuals generally reproduce their credo.

Heroes and victims. The shift to social history

The Asia Minor Catastrophe did not only have heroes. It also had many victims, soldiers from both sides who died or were captured, civilians, native Muslims, and native Christians, belonging to various ethnicities. And, of course, hundreds of thousands of refugees.

The tone in the school textbooks is heroic. The heroism of the Greek soldiers, who managed to cope with all kinds of difficulties for years and win battles, is emphasized. In almost all of them - this is a constant - the personality and value of the Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal is emphasized. The recognition of his value gives an even more heroic tone to the narrative as in this way the Greek defeat is partially justified and at the same time the value of the defeated is highlighted. But heroism cannot erase the intense and pervasive presence of victims. The textbooks mention the Christians who were displaced from 1913 until the end of the war, the Christians who died during the war, especially after the Turks entered Smyrna, and, of course, the Christian refugees. The victims are everywhere but in the texts their presence is rather weak. The textbooks seem to give priority to military and political events, which means that the traditional positivist approach is adopted as the historical approach to transmit knowledge to young pupils, who will be the citizens of tomorrow.

The situation changed after 1974. We already mentioned two reasons of which one is the new technical possibilities offered by the addition of audio-visual material, and the second the shift to pedagogical approaches aimed at a more active learning focused on the child's self-activation. In this point we would like to add one more reason. After 1974, with some delay, History textbooks progressively change their approach. The traditional political-military viewpoint is weakened in favor of a more social one. More focus is given to everyday life and new aspects are added, such as culture.

This is not the case for the two first of those textbooks (Kafentzis, and Diamantopoulos-Kyriazopoulos), renewed version of older textbooks. The third textbook (Aktypis et al.) remained in schools for almost 30 years. Of the two chapters on the Asia Minor Catastrophe which makes a total of 6 pages, the second chapter, which is more than half of the 6 pages, is entitled "The Final Arrangements: Borders and the Exchange of Populations". The focus here is given to the refugees, their forced departure from their homeland and their settlement in Greece. Relevant photos from the places of origin and the places of

settlement and personal testimonies are listed. The chapter closes with two related exercises, which give students the chance to comprehend the text.

Quite similar is the exposition of the Asia Minor War, its defeat and its consequences in the textbook given to students today (Koliopoulos et al.). Two chapters (5th and 6th) are devoted to the Asia Minor War. In the fifth chapter entitled "The Asia Minor Campaign and the Disaster", the events from the landing of the Greek army to the destruction of Smyrna are analyzed in 6 pages. The text is accompanied by photographs, maps, and testimonials. At least half of these concern Greek, American and Ottoman testimonies about the persecution of Christians in various parts of the Ottoman Empire. The sixth chapter is entitled "The Interwar period", covers 4 pages and focuses exclusively on refugees and their settlement with testimonies of prominent personalities, among them E. Venizelos. Both chapters include questions to students in reference to refugees.

The current textbook does not deviate from the canon and the prevailing narrative about the Asia Minor War and the Catastrophe. It presents both events without strong emotional phrases. In contrast to the pre-1974 textbooks, the heroic element and heroism are missing. Even Mustafa Kemal is presented neutrally, without any strong adjectives. On the other hand, the image of the "bad" Turk remains, either in a direct or in an indirect way. This image is partially offset by a pedagogical approach that seeks to arouse the student's interest through maps, visuals, testimonials, and questions. In conclusion, this is an approach that we could call a conservative version of social history. It focuses on the everyday life of people, but not everyone. It refers extensively to the everyday life of the Greeks, the refugees, but ignores the others and especially the Turks. The former are presented as victims of a systematic policy of extermination by the latter.

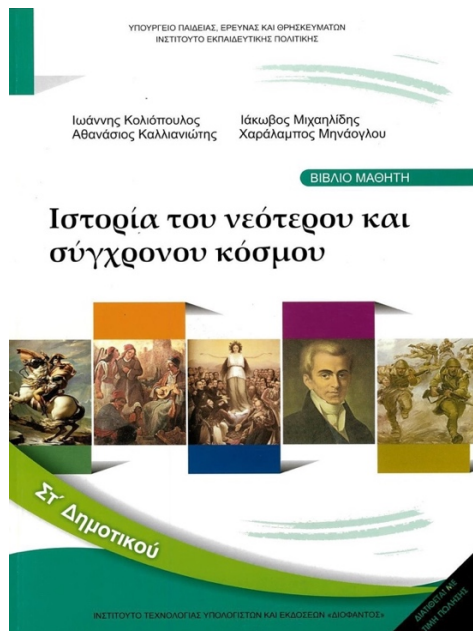
We do not want to ignore the textbook by M. Repoussi and her collaborators (2006) which never entered the educational system as it was considered a "killer of the nation". Of 136 pages in total, two chapters of three pages each are about Minor Asia War. Their titles are: "Minor Asia: campaign and destruction" and "The final arrangements: the borders and the exchange of populations". Repoussi's textbook in terms of structure and content is similar to the aforementioned Koliopoulos textbook. But there are two differences. The first concerns the pedagogical approach. Repoussi's text is less ideologically oriented, it does not present students with specific attitudes. Without any kind of emotional language, it prompts students to reflect and allows them to form their own opinion. A consequence of the first difference is the second. Greek Orthodox refugees appear neither as heroes nor as victims. But as people who found themselves in a war storm which affected them badly and drove them refugees far from their ancestral homes.

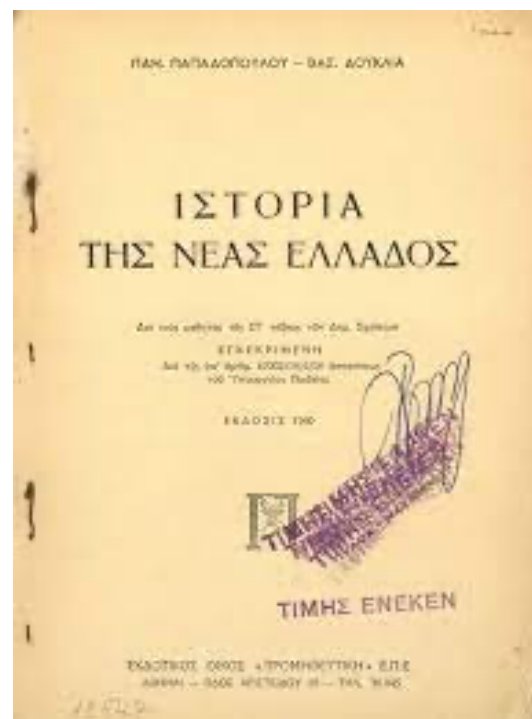
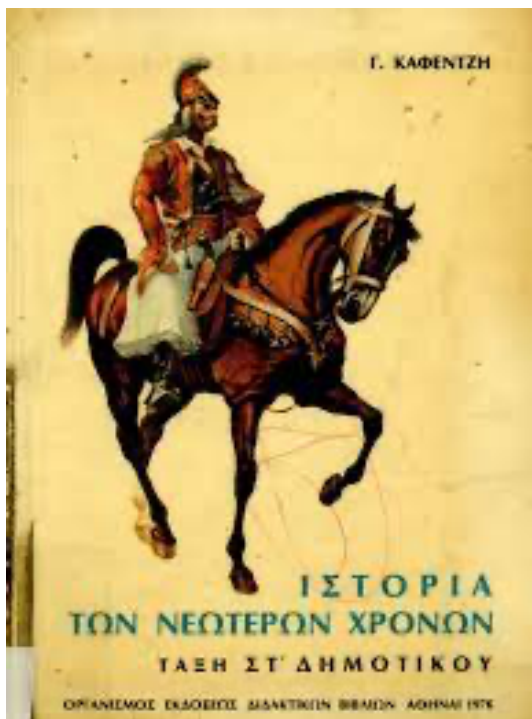
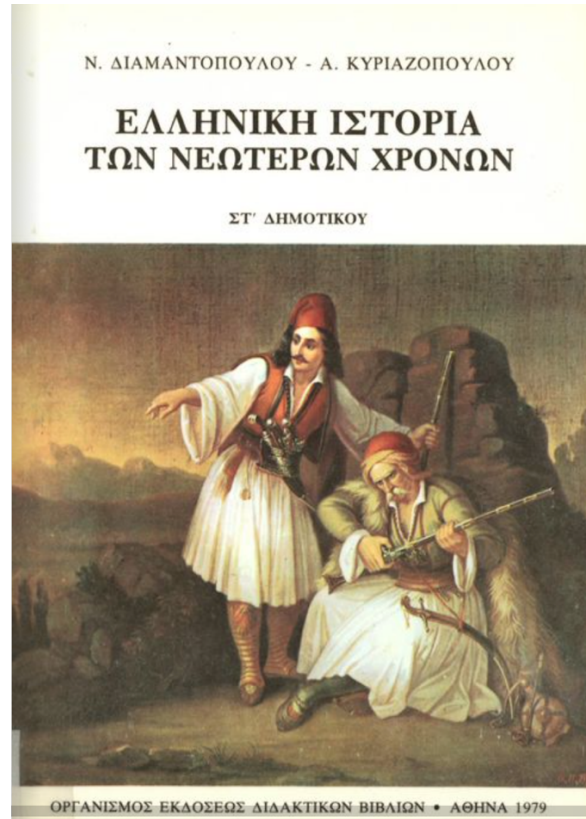
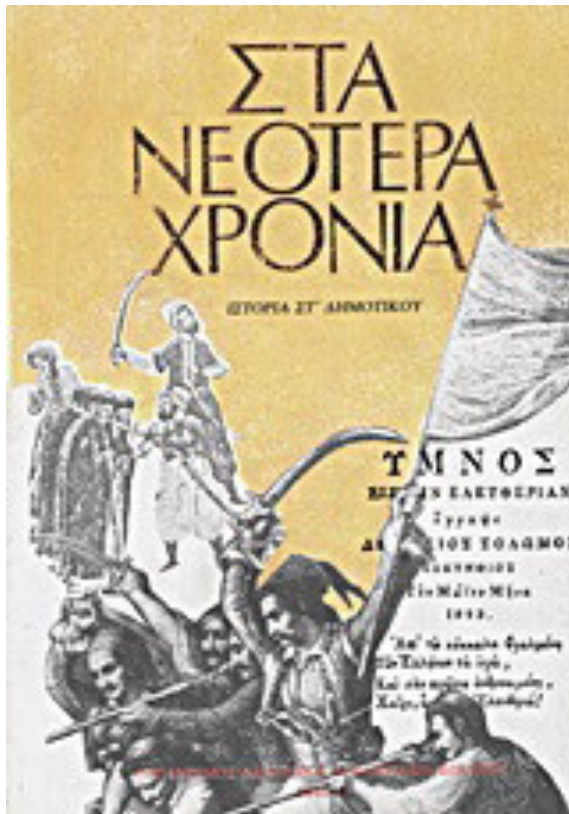
Conclusions

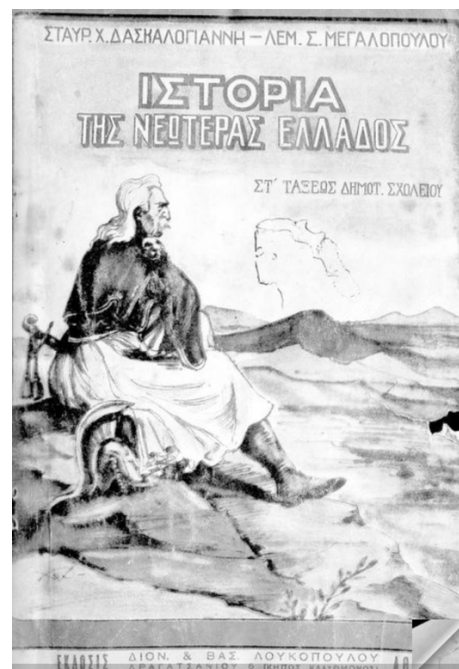
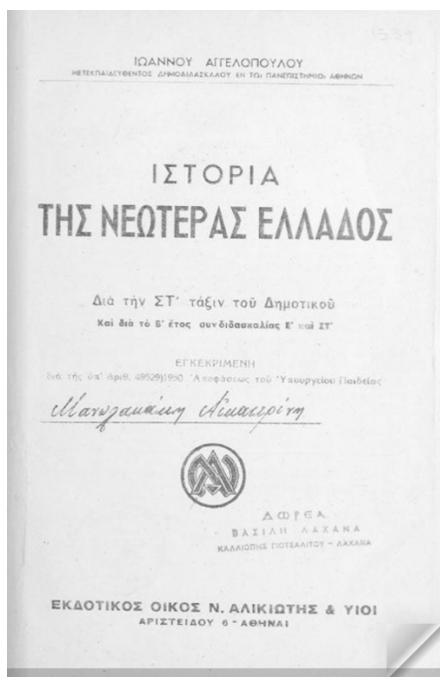
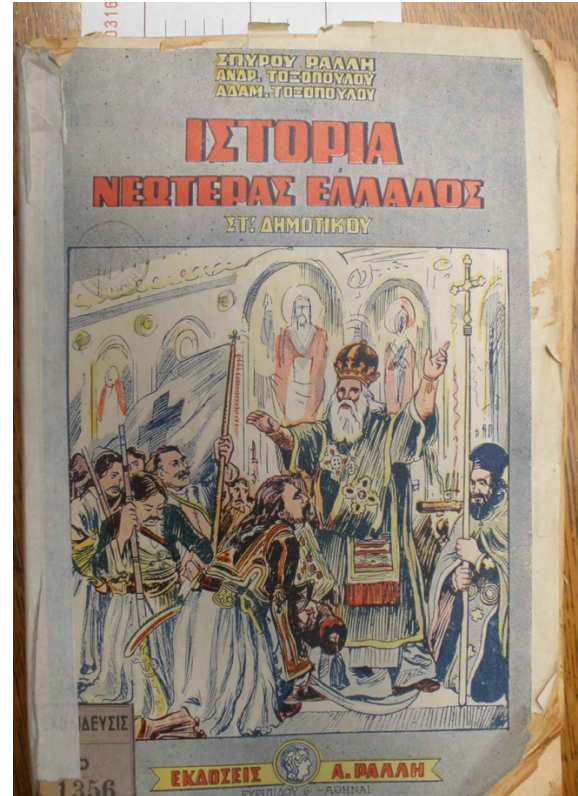
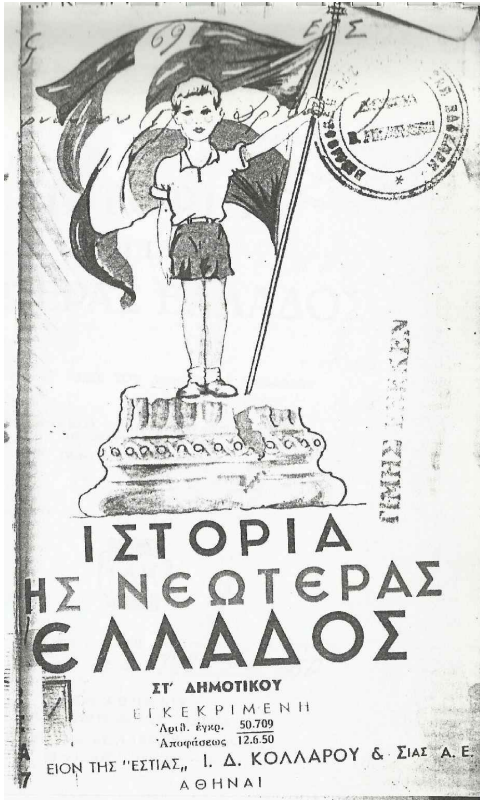
From 1923 until today, a pattern has been established in Greece for the Asia Minor campaign, the defeat of the army and their consequences regarding the forceful exchange of refugees and their settlement in Greece. This pattern is essentially outlined by the liberal prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos. With some variations this view is objectivized by the History of the General Staff of the Greek Army.

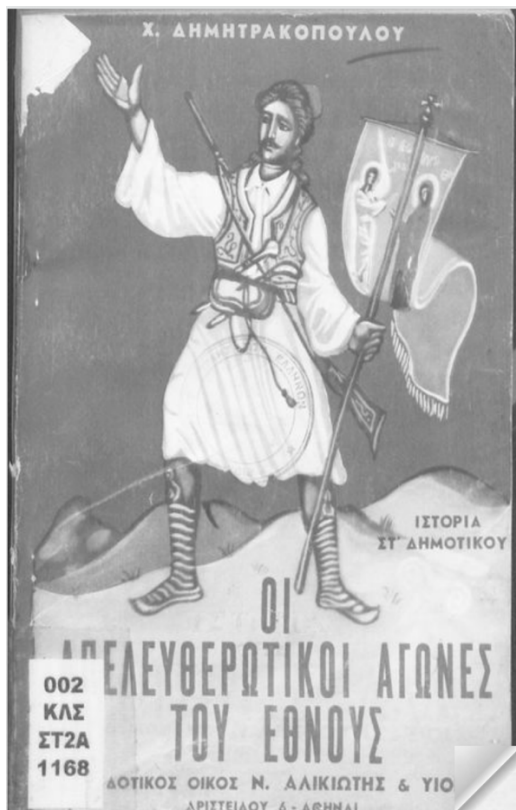
This pattern is broadly reproduced in elementary school History textbooks. The differences that exist among the textbooks are not of any significance until at least 1974. The texts are focused on war events and were inspired by heroism. Only a few lines are dedicated to the Christians persecuted by the Ottomans after 1913, presenting them as victims of a policy of ethnic cleansing.

After 1974 the pattern remains, but some things change. The texts are enriched with photos and documents. For pedagogical reasons, the texts are less didactic, the tone is less emotional, more space is given to the sources and stimuli for the students' initiative. Finally, thanks to the changes in history itself, the texts are less political-military oriented and incorporate elements from people's everyday life. More emphasis is placed on people's lives during the war, and their movement and settlement in Greece.









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A National Hero and a Communist Saint: The Veneration of Thomas Müntzer in East Germany

Matthias Riedl

Introduction

On May 15, 1525, an army of some 7,000 peasants entered a horrible battle. A leading figure on the side of the peasants was the reformation preacher Thomas Müntzer. The battle of Frankenhausen is named as one of the most important battles of the German Peasant War but, in fact, it was rather a massacre. The peasants, poorly equipped and inspired by a charismatic preacher with no military experience, had not the slightest chance against the army of the allied princes of Hesse and Saxony. 6,000 peasants were slaughtered, while the princes lost only six soldiers.⁸³

Thomas Müntzer escaped from the battlefield and tried to hide. Soon he was found, taken into captivity, interrogated and heavily tortured. On May 27, twelve days after the battle, he was executed by decapitation. His body was impaled on a pike, as a deterrent to any future rebels.

This is an equally spectacular and tragic way of ending one's life. Unsurprisingly, Müntzer's role in the peasant war has determined the historical perspective on his person ever since. The most famous case in point is Friedrich Engels' book *The Peasants' War in Germany*, which evokes the image of Müntzer as a proto-communist. After the canonization by Engels, the tale of Müntzer's heroism spread over the entire globe and reached all countries where communist parties emerged. His works were translated into numerous languages, even Japanese. Müntzer-scholarship is an equally global phenomenon, at least it used to be until 1990.

Yet, also non-Marxist historiography remembers Müntzer primarily a peasant leader, but for different reasons. In West German academia, the discipline of church history is often placed in theology departments, wherefore much of the West German historiography was produced by protestant theologians and was primarily interested in Müntzer as a counterpart to Martin Luther. Even in more recent TV and movie productions, Müntzer plays the role of the fanatic, while Luther is presented as a political realist. A case in point is the 2003 movie "Luther," a European co-production, directed by Eric Till

⁸³ Bräuer, S. & Vogler, G. (2016). *Thomas Müntzer. Neu Ordnung machen in der Welt. Eine Biographie* [Thomas Müntzer. Making new order in the world. A Biography]. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 369.

and starring Joseph Fiennes, which was partly financed by Lutheran interest groups.⁸⁴ Also from this perspective, the confrontation between Müntzer and Luther seems to culminate in the Peasant War, when Müntzer sided with the peasants, while Luther encouraged the princes to crush the rebellion—fearing that it would discredit and endanger his achievements as a reformer. The memorization of Müntzer as a hotheaded and violent troublemaker was already instigated by Martin Luther and his followers.⁸⁵ It dominates the West German historical memory to this day and, even thirty-two years after the unification, continues to contrast with the East German memory. Admittedly, the more specialized scholarship is much more nuanced and defies a simplistic East-West binary.

As established above, Bauernführer (peasant leader) is the label most frequently attributed to Müntzer's name in historical textbook literature. Nothing could be more wrong. In fact, Müntzer's activity as a theologian, preacher, reformer, and revolutionary had very little to do with peasants.⁸⁶ Müntzer's troops, mainly recruited from among the burghers of the city Mühlhausen, joined the peasants only two days before the battle of Frankenhausen. At this point, the peasant rebellion in Thuringia had been going already for quite some while, without Müntzer playing a major part in it.⁸⁷

In other words, Müntzer's active involvement in the peasant movement comprises not more than the last weeks of his life. In Müntzer written works, the peasants are hardly ever mentioned, instead he addresses the "common man" or the "people" in much more general terms, implying virtually all non-aristocratic lay persons.

To briefly outline Müntzer's trajectory as a theologian and reformer: He was probably born in the late 1480s or early 1490s in the mining town Stolberg in the Harz Mountains. While the family was not markedly rich, it certainly wasn't poor either. Müntzer's larger kinship belonged to the emerging municipal middle class of the region and included political and clerical officeholders. In these circles, the new humanist ideas could flourish.⁸⁸ Higher education was appreciated and pursued, as it opened up a variety of career opportunities, in jurisprudence, education, administration, and the church.

⁸⁴ In the movie, the radical reformers Thomas Müntzer and Andreas Karlstadt were conflated into a single figure.

⁸⁵ Blickle, B. (2014). Luther und der Bauernkrieg. Interpretationen zwischen den Gedenkjahren 1975–2017 [Luther and the Peasants' War. Interpretations between the commemorative years 1975-2017]. In Schilling, H. (Ed.), *Der Reformator Martin Luther 2017. Eine wissenschaftliche und gedenkpolitische Bestandsaufnahme* [The Reformer Martin Luther 2017. A Scientific and Commemorative Review]. Berlin: de Gruyter, 233-243.

⁸⁶ Already in winter 1524/25 Müntzer may have met with insurgent peasants in the Black Forest, but he certainly did not instigate or lead the rebellions.

⁸⁷ See the reevaluation of the Thuringian Peasant War and Müntzer's role therein in: Müller, T. T. (2021). *Mörder ohne Opfer. Die Reichsstadt Mühlhausen und der Bauernkrieg in Thüringen* [Murderers without victims. The Imperial City of Mühlhausen and the Peasants' War in Thüringen]. Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag.

⁸⁸ The standard work on Müntzer's origins and education is Bubenheimer, U. (1989). *Thomas Müntzer. Herkunft und Bildung* [Thomas Müntzer. Origin and education]. Leiden: Brill.

Müntzer studied at several universities, including Leipzig, the Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder, and Wittenberg. His writings, and even more so his letter and notes, show an amazing degree of learning and the ability to write in polished Latin. In other words, Müntzer's social background is not noticeably different from that of other leading figures of the Northern Renaissance and the early Reformation, including Martin Luther.

As Müntzer's correspondence shows, his main interlocutors were humanists and theologians, but also artisans and city councilors.⁸⁹ His most determined followers were miners and craftsmen from the less affluent guilds. Müntzer explicitly said that it is the sweet sweat of the craftsmen, which has turned into bitter gall, that could be the fuel for the coming transformation. In other words, the political and economic dissatisfaction of the urban population was the sentiment he could count on for his revolutionary plans.

Nonetheless, Thomas Müntzer, the sophisticated theologian and urban reformer, disappeared behind the Lutheran narrative of radical "enthusiasm" (Schwärmertum) and the communist narrative of the social revolutionary.

Thomas Müntzer: A communist hero

Until the 19th century, the Lutheran narrative dominated the German memory of Thomas Müntzer; but, in the pre-revolutionary Vormärz period, perspectives changed. From 1841 onwards, Wilhelm Zimmermann (1807-1878) attempted a new, source-based evaluation of the German Peasant War, eventually published as the three-volume work *Allgemeine Geschichte des großen Bauernkrieges* ("General History of the Great Peasant War"). Zimmermann was not only a historian, but also a theologian and a politician—a quite radical one by the standards of the time. As a democrat and a republican, he rejected the creation of a German national state in the form of constitutional monarchy and, consequently, joined the left in the short-lived revolutionary parliament of 1848/49, the Frankfurt Assembly. In Zimmermann's account, for the first time, the peasant rebellion was seen as a positive event and integrated into a progressive left-Hegelian narrative.⁹⁰ All revolutions, all wars are "symphonies of the divine spirit" and elements "in the great global poem called the history of mankind." "Mankind must continuously re-create itself. The peoples must work toward higher capability. Through their fighting they must strive for the final goal. And that goal is liberty."⁹¹ In Zimmermann's account it often seems that neither individuals nor peoples are aware of this final goal, toward which the cunning of reason directs all humans, often against

⁸⁹ „Das städtische Milieu war sein Lebens-, Erfahrungs- und Handlungsraum.“ Bräuer/Vogler, *Thomas Müntzer*, 342.

⁹⁰ Friesen, A. (1974). *Reformation and Utopia. The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation and its Antecedents*. Wiesbaden, 76-113.

⁹¹ Zimmermann, *Der große Bauernkrieg*, 1:3; my translation.

their intentions. But history cannot completely do without personal agents. In decisive historical moments, there appear the Bewegungsmänner (movement men), who set a new development in motion. Such movement men were the apostles of the early church, whose religio-political message spread the first revolutionary seeds of a “Christian republic.”⁹² Yet, in Zimmermann’s theory of revolution insurrection only occurs when religious fervor meets with actual material hardship and the experience of economic suppression and injustice. The most important movement man in the Peasant War, of course, is Thomas Müntzer. While the theologian Müntzer was inspired by medieval mysticism and apocalypticism, the revolutionary activist Müntzer turned prophecy into action. He was a fanatic, Zimmermann admits, but not a monastic fanatic of dogma; rather his fanaticism was driven by a *Weltbeglückungstrieb* (impetus to effect universal bliss) which materialized in a threefold way.⁹³ a) Combining religious zeal with a sense for economic injustice, b) turning theory in action, and c) working not toward one’s own salvation but toward the happiness of human society. These three elements, one may conclude, account for heroism in Zimmermann’s account—a heroism Zimmermann himself impersonated in his propagation of democratic revolution. In a fitting picture, Zimmermann declares that material injustice is combustible matter (*Brennstoff*), while the religiously inspired movement men are the ignition sparks.⁹⁴

The most prominent reader of Zimmermann’s work was Friedrich Engels, whose study *The Peasants’ War in Germany* was first published in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1850.⁹⁵ Engels concedes that he took the entire empirical material from Zimmermann.⁹⁶ But he accuses Zimmermann of ignoring that the superstructure of religio-political struggle only mirrors its true basis in class struggle.⁹⁷ Therefore, the history of the peasant rebellion had to be re-written, in accordance with the principles of dialectic materialism. The religiously inspired “movement men” or “ignition sparks” had to be removed from the narrative, as they smelled too much of idealist inspiration. There is only one reason, why the likes of Müntzer had to speak in religious terms, Engel writes: because the Roman church had limited all intellectual life to the sphere of theology.⁹⁸

However, besides the replacement of idealist categories with materialist ones, Zimmermann’s elements of heroism remain largely in place. Engels presents Müntzer as a revolutionary, who already as a child experienced the injustice of the

⁹² Zimmermann, *Der große Bauernkrieg*, 1:378-79; cf. 2:48-53.

⁹³ Zimmermann, *Der große Bauernkrieg*, 2:64.

⁹⁴ Zimmermann, *Der große Bauernkrieg*, 2:49 and 3:379.

⁹⁵ Friedrich Engels, “Der deutsche Bauernkrieg,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, 7:327-413, at 344-47.

⁹⁶ Friedrich Engels, “Vorbemerkung zu ‘Der deutsche Bauernkrieg’ (Ausgabe 1870 und 1875),” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, 7:529-42, at 531.

⁹⁷ Engels, “Vorbemerkung,” 531.

⁹⁸ Engels, “Der deutsche Bauernkrieg,” 343-44.

feudal and clerical order. He hated the ruling class, but his revolutionary agenda also had a religious source, the chiliasm of medieval prophets, such as Joachim of Fiore who predicted the tribunal over “the degenerate church and the corrupt world.”⁹⁹ In his struggle, Müntzer tried to turn theological theory into revolutionary action. Thereby, the concern for otherworldly redemption was replaced by the concern for the actual socio-economic situation of the people.

Marx’s eleventh thesis against Ludwig Feuerbach famously claims: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”¹⁰⁰ But it seems that this change is the moment, where even materialist theory cannot entirely dispense with the heroic actor. Heroes like Müntzer fail because their revolutionary consciousness predates the emergence of a revolutionary class. In this way, they become prophets in action as opposed to prophets in theory and writing, such as the medieval chiliasts. They must end tragically, as Müntzer did, but they are shining examples for the revolutionary masses of the future.

The East German Müntzer Cult

Engels’ narrative was tremendously successful and was propagated and elaborated by widely read Marxist authors, such as Karl Kautsky and Ernst Bloch.¹⁰¹ Eventually, it took on institutional form in the East German Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat (“Workers’ and Peasants’ state”), where Thomas Müntzer soon held the uncontested status of a national saint. This development must be seen in the context of ideological “acculturation” in the Eastern Bloc. In the postwar situation, many of the Soviet satellites tried to establish their own national narratives in such a way that they contributed to the general narrative of class struggle and global revolution. The Czechs refashioned their national hero Jan Hus and the Hussites as proto-communist revolutionaries; the Hungarians tried the same with their national hero György Dózsa. The Hungarian choice for a peasant leader as the local proto-communist already emulated the apparently successful East German model. The difference is, however, that Müntzer—other than Huss or Dózsa—did not play a significant role in earlier German identity discourses.¹⁰² There was no established tradition of Müntzer veneration when the GDR was founded. Instead,

⁹⁹ Engels, “Der deutsche Bauernkrieg,” 351.

¹⁰⁰ Marx, K. (1998). *The German Ideology, including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 571; italics in the original.

¹⁰¹ Brady Jr., T. A. (2014). Luther und der deutsche Marxismus [Luther and the German Marxism]. In Schilling, H. (Ed.), *Der Reformator Martin Luther 2017. Eine wissenschaftliche und gedenkpolitische Bestandsaufnahme*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 195-203, at 199.

¹⁰² Günther Franz, an influential West German historian of the Peasant War had previously served the Nazi government. Müller, L. (2004). *Diktatur und Revolution. Reformation und Bauernkrieg in der Geschichtsschreibung des 'Dritten Reiches' und der DDR* [Dictatorship and Revolution. Reformation and Peasants' War in the Historiography of the 'Third Reich' and the GDR]. Stuttgart: Lucius

already in the formative years of the GDR, the creation of a “new memory culture” became an essential element in state-building.¹⁰³ This can be exemplified by an almost comical episode. When, after the disaster of Frankenhausen, Müntzer was found in his hiding place, he was identified by a letter bag with his correspondence and notes.¹⁰⁴ Müntzer’s manuscripts were used in the trial against him and later split between the victorious princes of Hesse and Saxony, as part of their war booty. The larger part found its way into the archive of Electoral Saxony in Dresden. More than 400 years later, after World War II, the provisional Saxonian government in the Soviet occupied zone, in a ceremonial act, donated Müntzer’s papers to Joseph Stalin, the “friend of the German people and the wise leader of the Soviet people,” at the occasion of Stalin’s 70th birthday on 21 December 1949.¹⁰⁵

Apparently, the autographs of Thomas Müntzer had already achieved the status of communist relics. They remained in Stalin’s private possession until his death in 1953, when they were given to the Lenin Library in Moscow. In this location, now renamed into Russian State Library, the papers are still held today. The episode exemplifies how the newly emerging states of the Eastern Bloc took pains to exhibit their contribution to the history of revolution.¹⁰⁶ Thus, it was a fortunate coincidence that Müntzer’s birth town Stolberg and many locations of his activity (Jüterbog, Zwickau, Allstedt, Mühlhausen, Frankenhausen) lay on GDR territory.

&Lucius. Despite the efforts of Franz, Müntzer—other than Martin Luther—never played a major role in the self-historization of the National Socialists. One possible reason is his rather friendly attitude toward the Jews, especially if compared to Luther’s fierce anti-Judaism. The arguably more important reason is the complete lack of a national argumentation, as it is found in Luther’s *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*.

¹⁰³ Fleischauer, A. (2010). *Die Enkel fechten’s besser aus. Thomas Müntzer und die Frühbürgerliche Revolution—Geschichtspolitik und Erinnerungskultur in der DDR* [The grandchildren fight it out better. Thomas Müntzer and the Early Civil Revolution—Historical Politics and Remembrance Culture in the GDR]. Münster: Aschendorff.

¹⁰⁴ Bräuer/Vogler, *Thomas Müntzer*, 369.

¹⁰⁵ See Siegfried Bräuer’s introduction to *Thomas-Müntzer-Ausgabe. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Leipzig: Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004-2017; vol. 2, xxxix-l, at xlvi.

¹⁰⁶ Tikhomirov, A. (2022). *The Stalin Cult in East Germany and the Making of the Postwar Soviet Empire, 1945-1961*. Lanham: Lexington, 197.



A postal stamp entitled "Thomas-Müntzer-Veneration of the GDR 1989" shows locations of Müntzer's trajectory on GDR state territory.¹⁰⁷

The Müntzer cult was built on a peculiar political myth that went far beyond the earlier communist narratives, as found in Engels and others. The new myth established a special connection between Müntzer and the East German state, which aimed at the solution of a specific political problem. Robert Walinski-Kiehl writes:

Myth-making was especially important in new communist societies in order to instill the requisite socialist consciousness into the people. The GDR regime, in particular, remorselessly utilized mythic versions of the past for the political ends of consciousness-raising. It must be remembered that East Germany's leaders were aiming to impose a communist system on a defeated people who had witnessed twelve years of Nazi rule.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ The image is taken from Wikipedia and is in the public domain.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stamps_of_Germany_\(DDR\)_1989,_MiNr_Block_097.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stamps_of_Germany_(DDR)_1989,_MiNr_Block_097.jpg)

¹⁰⁸ Walinski-Kiehl, R. (2004). Reformation History and Political Mythology in the German Democratic Republic, 1949–89, *European History Quarterly* 34: 43.

Both emerging German states build their own political myths. The West German myth, in the first post-war generation, built on the narrative of the *Wirtschaftswunder*, the economic prodigy: Rising from the ashes of the war, the Germans built a successful and competitive economy.¹⁰⁹ The second post-war generation criticized that this narrative was silent about the Nazi past and began to engage in historical education and public memorialization of the past. These efforts eventually took the form of another “retroactive” foundation myth, namely that of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past).¹¹⁰ The Germans had allegedly turned the experience of dictatorship and war into something positive, when they were not shying away from placing their darkest past at the center of historical research, historical education, and public memorial culture. They had built a stable democracy in the heart of Europe, which owed its stability to the conscious appropriation of the country's totalitarian past. The post-war constitution soon became the central symbol of the West German state, written by founding fathers who had internalized the *Lehre von Weimar* (“Lesson of Weimar,” i.e., Germany's failed first republic, which had its capital in Weimar) and, therefore, had established *Menschenwürde* (human dignity) as the supreme constitutional norm.

The East German state took an entirely different approach, as it denied any historical continuity with Nazi Germany. The East German state was allegedly built by the workers, who had been the victims of Nazi terror and had suffered in concentration camps. Jewish victims were hardly ever mentioned. In the eyes of East German propaganda, West Germany constituted the reactionary successor state of the Third Reich, as evidenced by the country's participation in US-led “aggressive imperialism.” In 1961, when the almost impenetrable inner-German border and the Berlin Wall were erected, the East German authorities referred to them as *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* (anti-fascist protection wall).¹¹¹

But anti-fascism was not enough. The GDR needed a positive founding myth, which allowed for national identity building and confirmed the GDR's claim to represent the entire German nation. According to this myth, the GDR continued all the positive traditions of Germany that were not only worth protecting but also needed more complete fulfilment.

In 1967, at the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the reformation, the ruling SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands/Socialist Unity Party of Germany) declared in a manifesto to the East German citizens:

¹⁰⁹ Münkler, H. (2000). *Wirtschaftswunder oder antifaschistischer Widerstand – politische Gründungsmythen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der DDR* [Economic Miracle or Anti-Fascist Resistance - Political Founding Myths of the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR]. In *Der Wandel nach der Wende. Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft, Politik in Ostdeutschland* [The change after the reunification. Society, Economy, Politics in East Germany]. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 41-65, at 57-60.

¹¹⁰ For an overview over the discussion see: Kansteiner, W. (1999). Mandarins in the Public Sphere: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the Paradigm of Social History in the Federal Republic of Germany. *German Politics & Society* 17(3), 84-120.

¹¹¹ Münkler. *Wirtschaftswunder oder antifaschistischer Widerstand*, 51-57.

The coming centuries will envy our generation; they will envy us, who in this present time have brought forth the People's Germany—as desired by Thomas Müntzer and predicted by Marx and Engels—from the realm of dreams and prophecies into the living reality of our German Democratic Republic.¹¹²

The historian Max Steinmetz cites the very SED manifesto in the conclusion of a massive 1971 monograph, covering perspectives on Thomas Müntzer over four centuries, up to Engels. Steinmetz sees the GDR preserving, actualizing, and—in the Hegelian sense of *Aufhebung*—elevating the revolutionary legacy of the German nation, especially the heritage of the Peasant War. He also emphasizes the collaboration of academic historians and public actors in this endeavor:

In the GDR, Müntzer's legacy is a living possession (*lebendiger Besitz*); his important thoughts and his passionate strive have become reality on a higher level (*auf höherer Ebene Wirklichkeit geworden*). In ever-new attempts, historians, poets, visual artists, and filmmakers have tried to shape his image. This all happened and is still about to happen due to a profound insight into the course of our history and in the awareness that the creators of the GDR's socialist human society are not only the heirs of the Communist Manifesto, but also the heirs, continuators, and perfectors of an old revolutionary and truly humanist tradition, reaching back to the rural and urban fights of the Middle Ages—a tradition most forcefully incorporated in the figure of Thomas Müntzer.¹¹³

In short, Thomas Müntzer impersonates the revolutionary potential of Germany which has been fully actualized in the GDR. This is what the core of the Müntzer cult comes down to, a Marxist version of sainthood. Müntzer's heroic activity, his suffering, his persecution, his association with peasants and proto-proletariat, his political and military leadership, his eventual martyrdom: it all exemplifies the striving of the socialist person, which the GDR aimed to create—not unlike the way in which the deeds of a Catholic Saint exemplify the conduct of a good Christian.

In the above quote, Steinmetz summarizes an ideological conception, he himself had helped to create. Rarely ever did a historian play such a crucial role in the identity building of a modern state. As a student and young researcher at Freiburg University, Steinmetz pursued a promising academic career, supported by the highly influential historian Gerhard Ritter, until he was drafted into the Wehrmacht. Later, as a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union, Steinmetz converted to Marxism-Leninism and underwent training in propaganda techniques. He was not the first GDR historian to write about Müntzer, but his contribution became constitutive for the political-historical myth of the GDR. Steinmetz brought a concept to prominence, the *Frühbürgerliche Revolution* (Early Bourgeois Revolution), which has some roots in the works of Friedrich

¹¹² *Manifest des VII. Parteitag der SED an die Bürger der DDR* (Berlin 1967), 27; my translation.

¹¹³ Steinmetz, M. (1971). *Das Müntzerbild von Martin Luther bis Friedrich Engels* [The Müntzer Image from Martin Luther to Friedrich Engels]. Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 438; my translation.

Engels, the Soviet historian M. M. Smirin, and the early GDR historian Alfred Meusel. Essentially, the concept says that the transition from feudal economy to early capitalism caused great frictions within society, aggravated by papal oppression and political fragmentation. The rural uprisings in Germany, culminating in the great Peasant War of 1525, signify the revolutionary desire of the Germans for economic justice, democratic government, humanist culture, and national unification, precisely the progressive German traditions that the GDR claimed to represent. In this way, (East-)Germany was given a central place in the history of revolution.¹¹⁴ Moreover, Germany had been progressive and revolutionary earlier than even England and France!

Steinmetz' concept was an enormous success; he achieved "a major coup in the sense of a Marxist master narrative."¹¹⁵ Even though several noteworthy German and Soviet Marxists had enormous doubts about the orthodoxy of this historical reconceptualization,¹¹⁶ it became so central to East German identity building that it was not seriously challenged until the GDR's collapse in 1989. The concept was quite inclusive, as it integrated figures who were not exactly peasants, but represented the progressive "humanist" spirit of the period, such as the Renaissance artists and, paradoxically, even Martin Luther.¹¹⁷

It seemed that an entire country had come to identify with a historical period. A recent study has shown that the reformation period had been given hugely over-proportional space in historical school education. Moreover, officials in the Ministry for the Education of the People thought out a variety of methods how children could learn to feel with Müntzer and the peasants. History teachers were advised to cooperate with music and art teachers, so that pupils would learn how to draw accurate representations of peasants and learn how to sing their songs. "This kind of holistic approach to the topic of the Reformation and the Peasants gives an interesting indication of the significance of the period as a cultural identity-building subject, a national project."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ There is ample literature on this topic. See for instance: Vogler, G. (2012). *Das Konzept deutsche frühbürgerliche Revolution. Genese – Aspekte – kritische Bilanz* [The concept of German early bourgeois revolution. Genesis - Aspects - Critical Balance]. In *Signaturen einer Epoche. Beiträge zur Geschichte der frühen Neuzeit* [Signatures of an Epoch. Contributions to the History of the Early Modern Period]. Berlin: Weidler, 59-88; Blickle, P. (2004). *Die Revolution von 1525* [The Revolution of 1525]. Munich: Oldenbourg, 280-288; Müller, *Diktatur und Revolution* [Dictature and Revolution], 256-287.

¹¹⁵ Fleischauer, *Die Enkel fechten's besser aus*, 128; my translation, italics in the original.

¹¹⁶ Walinki-Kiehl, *Reformation History and Political Mythology*, 49.

¹¹⁷ In earlier Marxist narratives, Luther had been framed as the supporter of the feudal ruling class and as the archenemy of Müntzer. It seems that this juxtaposition of hero and villain remained popular among the GDR population, even when historians and state officials abandoned it. This topic is broadly discussed in Walinki-Kiehl, "Reformation History and Political Mythology" and Fleischauer, *Die Enkel fechten's besser aus* [The grandchildren fight it out better].

¹¹⁸ Blood, H. P. (2018). *Religious History in an Atheist State: Teaching the Reformation in the German Democratic Republic*. Unpublished MA thesis. Budapest, 34.

There is more: Müntzer and the peasants were omnipresent in the public space. Movies and TV-productions were commissioned or funded by the state, multiple historical novels were written, museums and memorial sites were established, most importantly the Zentral Gedenkstätte Deutscher Bauernkrieg ("Central Memorial Site German Peasant War") Peasant War Museum in the Müntzer's city Mühlhausen with an exhibition that the narrative of Early Bourgeois Revolution.¹¹⁹ But the even the public sphere was not sufficient to instill the dual memory of revolutionary and national legacy into the minds of people. Müntzer also had to be present in the workplace, wherefore factories and mines were named after him, and workers' brochures covered his heroic deeds. Military units were proudly continuing Müntzer's martial legacy. Even rural cooperatives were named after Müntzer, as the collectivization of agriculture appeared to be the final actualization of the peasants' desires ever since the 16th century.¹²⁰ Müntzer's face was also printed on the Five-Mark bills. Since the Five-Mark bill was the smallest bill, even persons with little money permanently carried Müntzer's portrait in their pockets.



*Thomas Müntzer on the East German Five-Mark bill.*¹²¹

The most magnificent memorialization of Müntzer and the peasants was placed on the site of the Battle of Frankenhausen. The Panorama Museum was completed in 1989 to celebrate the coincidence of Müntzer's 500th birthday and the GDR's

¹¹⁹ See the rich documentation in Fleischauer, *Die Enkel fechten's besser aus*.

¹²⁰ Walinki-Kiehl, *Reformation History and Political Mythology*, 45.

¹²¹ The image is taken from Wikipedia and is in the public domain. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:5-Mark-1975.jpg>

50th birthday.¹²² The memorial had the shape of a rotunda, on the inside of which Werner Tübke created the largest mural in the history of the GDR, 123 meters long and 14 meters high. It is entitled “The Early Bourgeois Revolution in Germany.”



*Frankenhäuser Panorama Museum*¹²³

In a way, however, the Frankenhäuser memorial also marks a turning point. Because of its enormous costs it was highly unpopular with the people, who mocked its shape and dimension by renaming it “elephant toilet.”¹²⁴ The artist Werner Tübke had not at all followed the esthetic norms of socialist realism. Instead, his painting, praised even by conservative Western critics, was inspired by the Renaissance artists contemporary to Müntzer. In other words, the artist silently challenged the narrative of the GDR as the fulfilment of Müntzer’s struggle and transferred Müntzer back in his historical time. The ministry of culture had wished for a painting that “dedicated to the heroic struggle of the peasant movement under Thomas Müntzer and meant to deepen the historical knowledge of the population, especially the youth, as well as to serve patriotic education.”¹²⁵ Tübke’s work, however, rather resembles a panorama of the human predicament. The Panorama Museum was officially opened on September 22nd, 1989. Seven weeks later, the Berlin Wall came down.

¹²² Müntzer’s actual birthday is unknown to historians, but the SED set it to 1489. In 1988, the Politbureau of the SED formed its own Thomas-Müntzer Committee, led by head of state Erich Honecker. Fleischauer, *Die Enkel fechten's besser aus*, 282-291.

¹²³ The image is taken from Wikipedia and is in the public domain. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schlachtberg.jpg>

¹²⁴ Walinki-Kiehl, “Reformation History and Political Mythology,” 59.

¹²⁵ Cited from Dickel, H. (2016). *Deutsch-deutsche Kunstgeschichte am Beispiel von Hanne Darboven und Werner Tübke* [German-German art history at the example of Hanne Darboven and Werner Tübke]. *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 79 (1), 92-114, at 93.

The Post-Socialist Legacy of Thomas Müntzer

This final part of my contribution is not more than an outline. Research on the post-1989 legacy of Thomas Müntzer would require extensive field work, which cannot be undertaken in the context of this study. But a few preliminary thoughts might be in order, even if they are based on anecdotal evidence only. It appears that the two above-mentioned memorial sites continue to attract significant crowds. The Frankenhausen Panorama Museum counted three million visitors between 1989 and 2019.¹²⁶ The Peasant War Memorial Site succeeded with newly conceptualized exhibitions, under the leadership of Thomas T. Müller, director of the Mühlhausen Museums. A particular success was the exhibition *Luthers ungeliebte Brüder* (“Luther’s unloved brothers”), which focused on reformers, such as Thomas Müntzer and Jakob Strauß, who contested Luther’s indifference to socio-political reform. The opening of the year-long exhibition was purposefully scheduled for 31 October 2016, to have the conclusion coincide with the 500th anniversary of Luther’s promulgation of the 95 Theses. Speaking to the federal public radio station Deutschlandfunk, Müller emphasized Luther’s role in the Frankenhausen massacre and called Müntzer the “first inner-protestant propaganda victim.” Müller very well criticized the appropriation of Müntzer by GDR ideology, but the exhibition was clearly directed against the public memorialization of the reformation in West Germany: “Officially, it is called ‘Reformation Anniversary,’ but everywhere one finds only Luther or almost only Luther,” while it would be necessary to demonstrate that there were alternative conceptions of reform.¹²⁷ The exhibition was opened by the prime minister of Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow, a member of the leftist party Die Linke, a party which, at least regionally, represents East German post-socialist identity discourses. In his address, Ramelow stated that modern democracy owes its understanding of citizenship partly to Müntzer, who wanted to empower the people and give them influence on their own lives and believes.¹²⁸ This statement may be also understood in a way that East Germans wish to see their own historical – or historiographical – legacy acknowledged in the public memory of a unified German state. Claiming Müntzer for modern democracy may take things too far; but the call for a more inclusive all-German memory culture is understandable.

There are two ways in which historians can look at politically myths of heroism. One way is to evaluate myths for their historical (in)accuracy, undeniably an important task of critical inquiry. The other way is to see the constitutive role of

¹²⁶ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25. July 2019.

¹²⁷ <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/ausstellung-zur-reformationsgeschichte-wider-den-wucher-100.html>; accessed 20 October 2022; my translation.

¹²⁸ *Thüringer Allgemeine*, 1 Nov 2016.

myths and, ultimately, their indispensability for identity formation. The historian's task, therefore, also implies to explore which myths support tolerance, civic engagement, and democracy, and which myths don't. From this perspective the continued remembrance of Müntzer may appear as a positive feature of the post-socialist East German public memory. The image of Thomas Müntzer is now liberated of the narrow confines of Marxist discourse and the Early Bourgeois Revolution narrative. What remains is the veneration of a heroic fighter for the oppressed and underprivileged. This is not the worst of role models, one might say.

More than thirty years after the German unification, a renewed, comprehensive reevaluation of the reformation period, as an indeed formative period of German history, appears as highly desirable. It is, of course, not the historian's task to engage in mythopoesis. Yet, without overstepping the limitations of their craft, historians may remark that Luther's pioneering translation of the bible into the German vernacular is part of the national memory, while Müntzer equally pioneering creation of a German mass and liturgy is not. Historians might also point to the often-overlooked humanist elements in Müntzer's theology, which allowed for a more tolerant attitude toward Jews and Muslims. In this way, they may contribute to a more balanced memory culture.

The 500th anniversary of the reformation came with a renewed discussion of Luther's agitation against witches, Jews, and Muslims. None of this is found in Müntzer who, at times, praised Rabbinic theology and openly welcomed Turks into his "New Apostolic Church." Müntzer, of course, is by no means an unproblematic figure, considering his theological justification of violence. But it is equally important to remember Luther's justification of violence against the peasants and to call out the misrepresentations of the Lutheran reformation as preparation of enlightenment, human rights, and modern democracy.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ See the official brochure of the German Federal Government on the 500th Reformation Anniversary: *Die Bundesregierung und das Reformationsjubiläum 2017. Eine Positionsbeschreibung* [The Federal Government and the Reformation Anniversary 2017. A Position Statement], ed. Projektgruppe Reformationsjubiläum. Bonn, 2014.

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