

The Living Past: Memory Wars, Contested Heritage and Nostalgia in Southeast Europe

Introduction

This research project aims to focus on “memory wars” that have taken place in various South Eastern European countries since 1974. We define “memory wars” as all public controversies surrounding mainly traumatic historical experiences of the 20th century such as world wars, genocides, expulsion of populations, civil wars—events which have triggered fierce debates and sometimes violent confrontations.

'Memory wars' happen all around the world and in Europe, and have proliferated in the period now termed the 'memory boom', from the third quarter of the twentieth century to today. Our project will focus on Southeastern Europe for a series of reasons: First, very little research has been done on memory and heritage issues in this part of the world. There is an important need for such studies, the lack of which has enhanced negative stereotypes such as 'Balkanism', to use Maria Todorova's term. For example, the Balkan Wars of the 1990s were castigated by Western audiences as evidence of the region's endemic violence and cruelty. Second, the region distinguishes itself by a series of historical specificities, like its multi-religious and multi-ethnic character, which have been preserved throughout centuries. If in Western Europe the presence of Islam is mainly a twentieth-century phenomenon, in the Balkans it is an important cultural heritage going as far back as the fourteenth century. The compulsory exchange of populations between Christian Greeks and Muslim Turks as a result of WWI and the war between the two countries in the early 1920s is also a unique phenomenon in European history, if we consider the fact that it was legally sanctioned by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Before the violence in present-day Ukraine, the last war (and ethnic cleansing) on European soil took place in Yugoslavia. For these reasons, the Balkans may function as a laboratory for the study of the forces leading towards and away from the construction of European identity, a process that includes Euroscepticism and resistance to the Western European canon. It is worth noting that European integration has not followed an easy path in this region. A large number of European states which have not yet become EU members are in this region: Serbia, Albania, FYR Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Turkey. In that respect, some questions that arise are the following: Have the problems of integration of Southeast European countries into the European Union been related to memory wars? How have the varied collective memories of various European wars (mainly WWI and WWII) influenced the region's 'Europeanness'? By including Turkey, a Muslim country which dominated the Balkans for five centuries, and whose European candidature has been controversial, we initiate an inherently multi-perspective and original transnational approach in the study of the memories and the cultural heritage of the wars of the 20th century.

The departure point for these investigations will be the present, i.e. the post-1974 period, because we consider this year as an important turning point: This was the year when dictatorships in southern Europe fell (Portugal, Greece, Spain), a fact that paved the way for the integration of these states into the European community. This was also the year of the coup against the Cypriot government, the Turkish invasion and the division of Cyprus. In the 1970s a shift toward nationalism may be detected in many communist countries of Southeast Europe. The fall of communist regimes after 1989 was another turning point after which the countries of the 'Eastern bloc' pursued their own pathway to integration into Europe. We will attempt to highlight the ways different agents of memory or memory groups have been involved in these 'wars'. Emphasis will be put mainly on the local level and on people's memories. But one cannot study memory at a local level without taking into consideration the different forms of mobility, intimately linked with 'flows' of people, information and capital crossing borders and circulating around the world. We will, therefore, follow the path from the present towards the past and from the local towards the national and the transnational to detect different layers of memories embodied in present memories, at times the source of new conflicts. At the same time we will investigate the ways in which cultural heritage is enmeshed in the politics of recognition, often being deployed as a means of 'healing' an identity crisis and coping with experiences of rootlessness, rupture and displacement. Consequently, we will analyse how memories of all the major conflicts prior to 1974 (the pre-1914 Balkan wars, WW1, Greek-Turkish war, WW2, Civil wars) were reshaped, renegotiated, instrumentalized or abused due to dramatic changes and new conflicts which emerged after 1974.

Memory wars have often targeted monuments (mainly of a religious character) symbolising the 'other', a fact that has resulted in the destruction or vandalism of some and the (re)construction of others. On the other hand, many sites such as destroyed villages, synagogues, mosques and churches, cemeteries, and monuments commemorating 'heroes' and 'martyrs' represent a contested landscape of cultural heritage, fought over by various memory groups and states.

It is important to understand how people relate to these monuments and sites, how sites of memory are involved centrally in the politics of memory and oblivion, and how restoration policies have been connected with reconciliation processes. Given that 'memory wars' have been fought at many tribunals and parliamentary sessions, it is also important to investigate the content of what we may call 'judicial memory' and how parliaments' and tribunals' resolutions have been received at the local level.

In Southeast Europe memory wars are not only 'hot' as elsewhere in Europe (e.g. debates about Holocaust denial in Germany, Austria, and elsewhere, public controversies about 'memory laws' and the colonial past in France, etc.); they are also politically relevant in the

present: they are instrumentalized by governments and political elites in order to manipulate voters. In these conflicts, public participation is massive, ministers resign, while extreme right parties enhance their public profile. But memory wars are also financially relevant: cultural heritage constitutes a big business whether we see it in relation to tourism or as an expensive restoration industry or as an aspect of national educational policy.

For all these reasons, systematic academic work linked to the development of policies in the fields of ('intangible') memory and ('tangible') heritage is necessary and urgent. A problem that we may detect in all Southeast European countries is the distance between academic research on the one hand and policies and public opinion on the other. Our project is aimed not only at developing high quality research but also at achieving measurable social impact. Because national museums in the region in many cases have been reproducing a one-sided highly ideologized version of the past, we intend to develop multi-media materials which will be disseminated to policy makers and to the larger public audience they serve. More specifically we are planning to produce educational materials and organize temporary exhibitions where municipalities and local agencies will be involved.

WORK PACKAGES

Vertical axes of *qualitative data analysis*

(These are analytic tools and perspectives to be employed in all Work Packages.)

i. National, transnational, local, translocal

- Constructing (and re-constructing) "historical truth" and national history
- Establishing and negotiating memory regimes
- The mnemonic politics of national identity
- Mobile communities of memory
- Re-imagining memory at local, national and transnational levels
- Are transnational narratives/configurations of contested memory possible?
- Relational remembering
- Official "grand narratives" of memory and alternative configurations
- Religious identities and collective memory

ii. Gender

- (En)gendering memory wars
- Memory practices in gendered, familial and affiliative contexts
- Gender stereotypes in contexts of memory wars and contested heritage
- Gendered politics of memory
- Gendered practices of transmitting and communicating memory

Work packages

1. The history and social life of entangled and contested memories of war

- State of the art: concepts, and methodologies
- Conflict, trauma, and collective memory in contemporary South Eastern Europe
- Historicizing the politics of memory and memory wars
- Historical and social background: Why since 1974? Why South Eastern Europe? Which countries to be selected as case studies?
- Historical specificities
- Conceptualizing living past and contested memory, heritage, and commemoration
- Events and literatures of entangled, contested, and divided memories
- Setting a comparative, interdisciplinary and transnational framework
- Innovative methods of studying memory wars
- Reconciliation

Deliverables: international conference; national reports; transnational reports

2. Performing the memory of collective displacement and violent conflict

- Researching the social and cultural afterlife of specific traumatic historical events: displacement, genocide, ethnic cleansing, refugeedom
- The history and social poetics of remembering disaster, displacement, and violent conflict
- Local enactments of commemoration: “martyr cities”, “refugee municipalities”
- Local and translocal practices and discourses of remembering and commemorating
- Local pedagogies of memory wars
- Discourses of nostalgia and mourning
- Witnessing and testimony in constructions of European identity
- Inheriting and transmitting catastrophic histories/memories
- Questioning/protesting official memory: Dissident memories
- Micro-histories of excluded memories
- Family memory, generational memory
- Religious memory (wars)

3. Memories that matter: negotiating, responding to and dealing with heritage

[coordinator: Department of Social Anthropology, Panteion]

- Heritage management (heritage institutions and practices, museums, archives, collections, monuments)
- Policies and politics of memory

- Visual art (installations, video art, performances)
- Artefacts of the everyday (photographs, relics, memorabilia)
- Spaces/places/sites of memory (architecture of memory-scapes, cemeteries, ruins, defilement/vandalism of sites of memory)
- Travelling memories (memory tourism, pilgrimage tours)
- Locating/materializing bodies of memory: embodied enactments of memory and memory wars, embodied inscriptions and responses to 'heritage', landscapes of gendered/national belonging, affects and body politics of rupture and loss)

4. Memory wars in the media, digital spaces, and popular culture

[coordinator: University of Copenhagen]

- Mediatizing public memory (memory (war) as media event)
- The public/aesthetic life of memory wars
- Images and technologies (the visual cultures of memory, film, theatre)
- Memory industry

5. The role of intellectuals and education in public memory wars

[coordinator: University of Belgrade]

Partners: Zagreb?

Memory wars are waged on parallel platforms, on official and unofficial levels, on the main front and the fringe. Moving through these fronts, intellectuals are among the most influential and mobile agents of memory, because through their work and public appearances they construct memories, disseminate them to the public and take part in memory wars, making the past constantly alive.

An important aim of the project is to explore "memory roads", the flow of memory from the minor to the major "fronts" and back. The starting assumption is that different models of memory originate in intellectual circles or academic institutions and, in critical political moments, when the memory models are shifting, these intellectual constructs and the intellectuals as their carriers cross over to the main stage of politics, providing a "historical" underpinning to the new ideology by "conforming" the past to current political needs. The project will also examine the situations in which intellectuals acted as "keepers of the flame", bringing rejected memory models, whose political shelf life had passed, back into books, culture sections, journals, or academic institutions, where they waited for their cue to return to the main stage, the political one.

The aim of the project is to examine which intellectual circles and institutions form the memory models; determine the role of academic and non-academic historians in the formation of memory; assess the role and importance of critical historiography; detect political moments when the change on the official memory throne occurs and examine the role of intellectuals in those moments; determine the links between the regime and intellectual elites; study the rivalry on the field of memory between the dominant and alternative intellectual circles; examine which historical events the intellectuals used to

construct necessary political memories, how the “golden ages” changed and which value systems were built upon them?

Education plays an important role in disseminating official memory, and through the teaching of history, geography or language it conveys the basic concepts of the past, spreads the official interpretations of events, stereotypes, the philosophy of history, myths, “what the nation should believe.” Throughout South East Europe, history teaching still has the role of creating national identity. This is why it played a major role in the regional conflicts of the last 40 years, either by setting up conflicts or by maintaining tension and serving as a continuation of war by other means after they ended, often looking more like recruit training than educational discipline. The project will examine the role of such “applied history”, as well as the possibilities for alternative education.

- Forming, presenting, and writing public memory: Institutions, public figures, discourses
- Historians and historiographers as public intellectuals
- Academic and non-academic historians, amateur archivists
- Critical public histories
- History on internet
- Public spheres and micro-publics (i.e., religious or otherwise) of memory wars
- Literature
- theatre

6. Judicial memory

[coordinator: Geneva University of Art and Design]

- Legal documentation
- Memory laws
- National and international tribunals addressing/regulating memory wars
- Expert testimony
- Deciding whose injuries should be recognized
- Memory and justice
- Legal definitions of “perpetrators” and “victims” in the aftermath of conflict
- International and national justice

7. Reconciliation

[coordinator: University of Ljubljana]

- Reconciliation and beyond reconciliation
- Seeking recognition through remembrance
- “Healing” practices
- Forgiveness, forgetting, amnesty
- Restoration policies as reconciliation policies

- Reparations
- Peace education
- Speech acts of public apology
- Resistance to forgetting; the 'duty of memory'
- Reconciliation through memory

8. Dissemination: Production of documentaries and other visual material

The project will produce 5 short documentaries (10-15 minutes each), which will explore how diverging memories of collective displacement, genocide and violent conflict in South Eastern Europe are preventing peace and actively contributing to the possibility of an outbreak of conflict in the region. They will reveal the process of inheriting and transmitting catastrophic histories/ memories, capturing the powerful role they play in our lives today.

The films will be based on location shooting with first, second and third generations, living in Greece-Turkey, Cyprus, Bulgaria-Greece-Turkey, and former Yugoslavia. Working closely with the project's historians, the films will allow a diverse and wide audience to gain deeper insight into how the memory of conflict can affect our present and future, and how the past is remembered differently across borders or by diverse groups of people.

In addition, the project will create a one-hour documentary to provide a comprehensive overview of genocide, expulsion and conflict in the Balkans, in the 20th Century. The documentary will combine rare film archive with in depth interviews with the project's historians. It will reach broader and diverse conclusions about the importance of memory wars in determining the present and future of South Eastern Europe, but also will explore the role of conflict in the 20th century in creating diverging memories.

Over the period from multinational empires to modern nation-states in the Balkans, we will comprehend the causes of large-scale political violence that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands and the permanent displacement of millions. We will attempt to come to terms with ethnic cleansing and genocide, discovering how the memory of these events continues to play a powerful and ever-changing role across the region. An important part of the film will also reveal how the study of history can help the reconciliation process in South Eastern Europe.

The historical scope of the film is: Balkan wars, WWI, Armenian genocide, Greek-Turkish war and population exchange (1919-1924), Cyprus (1960-1974), wars of former Yugoslavia (1991-1995) and Kosovo (1998/99).

The documentaries will contribute to a sense of shared suffering of past conflicts, helping to spread knowledge about the common cultural and historical heritage of the region, and to convey it as a valuable asset for the next generations.

Audience

The short documentaries are aimed at school children (use by teachers within schools) and the general public (social media, the project's website).

The one-hour film will be used for educational, community and cinema screenings, but also for TV broadcast across Europe.

Both the short films and the one-hour documentary will be also used within the exhibition (see below).

9. Dissemination: Exhibition

A photographic exhibition by award winning photographers to document the impact of memory wars on cultural heritage across South Eastern Europe.

The exhibition will depict villages and cities in which people of different backgrounds and religions still live side by side, but also will explore how ongoing memory wars have taken a huge toll on the region's historical-cultural heritage, from the deserted village of Kayaköy in Asia Minor, to the empty homes in Nicosia's buffer zone and churches, mosques and synagogues. It will also feature landscapes and monuments commemorating heroes, martyrs, genocide and conflict.

The photographs will ultimately explore how cultural heritage is contested between various memory groups and states and reveal how people relate to these monuments and sites, and how restoration policies have been braided together with efforts at reconciliation.

The exhibition will also include documentary screenings followed by discussions and an interactive element in the form of a memory tree. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, visitors of all ages can write and add their thoughts, experiences or memories and attach their notes on the "Memory Tree". This installation, in the form of a tree, develops with the continuous participation of the public. Schools and educational organisations will also take active part in the "Memory Tree". Children collect family photos or memories and other materials from home or their neighbourhood, prior to visiting the museum or write short narratives and thoughts. These notes are hung on the memory tree.

10. Dissemination: Educational materials and activities

The short films will be accompanied by a six-lesson teacher's Guide to help teachers and students think and talk about conflict, forgiveness and reconciliation, as well as their personal experiences. The guide prepares young people for viewing the documentary films by deepening their understanding of the experience of co-existence and conflict in the region, as revealed through the eyes of inhabitants. It will ultimately help teachers to use film in the classroom to support reconciliation and explain how "historical truth" and national history can be constructed and affect our present and future.

11. Coordination/ Management / Communication

- Conferences and workshops
- Web site
- Assessing the social impact of the project
- Creating networks with civil society
- Developing policy recommendations