

## Historein

Vol 15, No 2 (2015)

Historein 15/2 (2015)



**Review of Anna Maria Droumpouki's, Μνημεία της λήθης: Ίχνη του Β΄ Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου στην Ελλάδα και στην Ευρώπη [Monuments to oblivion: traces of the Second World War in Greece and Europe]**

*Phaedra Koutsoukou*

doi: [10.12681/historein.8596](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.8596)

Copyright © 2015, Phaedra Koutsoukou



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Koutsoukou, P. (2016). Review of Anna Maria Droumpouki's, Μνημεία της λήθης: Ίχνη του Β΄ Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου στην Ελλάδα και στην Ευρώπη [Monuments to oblivion: traces of the Second World War in Greece and Europe]. *Historein*, 15(2), 77–80. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.8596>

of the traditional regulations of political and social divisions.

Voglis' book demonstrates the advances of Greek historiography in the last ten years. His book illustrates an impressive command of diverse primary sources and, more importantly, a synthetic approach that is emancipated from long-lasting inertias. The major one relates to the ambivalence of the left to address the civil war as a social conflict with revolutionary aims. Voglis does not hesitate to address this question, demonstrating that acknowledging the revolutionary potentials of the civil war does not imply either a nostalgia for a magical past or a polemical narrative, as in the case of the revisionist "new wave" historians. This is a welcome addition to Greek historiography and one can only hope that the author will consider producing an English translation that will allow for the integration of the Greek Civil War in the debate on the long civil war that divided the European continent.

#### NOTE

- 1 For an overview, see Thanasis D. Sfikas and Anna Mahera, "Does the Iliad need an Agamemnon version? History, politics and the Greek 1940s," *Historein* 11 (2011): 80–98.

**Anna Maria Droumpouki**

*Μνημεία της ήθνης: Ίχνη του Β' Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου στην Ελλάδα και στην Ευρώπη*

**[Monuments to oblivion: traces of the Second World War in Greece and Europe]**

**Athens: Polis, 2014. 512 pp.**

**Phaedra Koutsoukou**

Historian

Tracing the sites of memory linked to the war-time occupation primarily in Greece, but not only, and from a comparative perspective with those in Germany, Anna Maria Droumpouki in this book explores the phenomenon of the "second life" of the events of the Second World War or, to put it in other words, the successive survival of the past in the present. The starting point for her study is that sites of memory reflect the historical and political peculiarities of each era, sometimes functioning to support state or regime ideology. In this sense, sites of memory can be treated as social texts that can have more than one reading. The book aims not to provide an exhaustive list of sites of memory related to the occupation in Greece but rather to demonstrate how selected sites of memory of the period can function in multidimensional ways to produce a dense network of multiple meanings. Sites of memory are understood not only as monuments but also concentration camps, execution sites, burial grounds and museums. Indeed, as Pierre Nora, to whom the study refers extensively, has pointed out, even historical dialogue is a "site of memory". Not only is the materiality but also the spatiality of the past treated in the study.

The book is structured around the sites of memory related to the Greek resistance and the Holocaust. Despite the existence of a plethora of monuments to the different sides in the civil war, many of them erected after 1982, the author has chosen not to include these sites of memory in her study as “the period is still viewed through an ideological and partisan prism” (62) and Greek historiography has failed to treat the civil war as a separate area of research. The book consists of three parts: the first is devoted to theoretical contributions and representations of the past, the second to the unexplored materiality of the war and the last on divided memories and transformations of memory. After a theoretical analysis of Nora’s approach to memory, the author discusses the phases in the development of a culture of memory in postwar Germany, with a special focus on German and as well as Greek disputes over the memory of the war. It concludes that despite the explosion in public history, the public treatment of the occupation past has suffered in both countries from the lack of sober and objective knowledge. The second and third parts outline the “biographies” of selected sites of memory linked to the occupation, monuments and museums related to resistance, Holocaust memorials and German war cemeteries. As far as they can be distinguished, one could say that the second part deals with historical “instrumentalisation” while the third with contested and “divided” memories.

As Droumpouki makes clear in the second part, the former internment and execution sites in Greece remain largely unexplored. The largest concentration camp in occupied Greece, located in Haidari in western Athens, is the least known at European level. The author places its fate in its historical context and demonstrates that the significance of the Nazi geographical map of deportations is inverse-

ly proportional to its current neglect. On the other hand, Kaisariani rifle range is a symbol for the resistance movement and is one of the best-known sites of memory related to the period. However, its belated recognition as a site of historical remembrance and the chronic state indifference on the need to protect it from damage once again raises the urgent question why the sites of memory related to the occupation in Greece have received so little attention and promotion. A comparison of these examples, and also the case of the completely abandoned Pavlos Melas barracks in Thessaloniki, with relevant cases elsewhere in Europe allows the author to draw some conclusions on how memory sites have been managed in different contexts.

In the chapter on these comparisons, the author attempts to evaluate the memorialisation of concentration camps in the two Germanys during the Cold War. A common feature was the pronounced “bipolarisation of memory” since political leaders attempted to instrumentalise the past and strengthen their own historical narrative. In East Germany, the camps were used from early on to serve the state’s educational policy, idealising the communist antifascist resistance and as propaganda against the “militaristic” policies of West Germany while ignoring the genocide of the Jews. On the other hand, in West Germany, memorialisation of the camps began much later as it did not fit in easy with the country’s culture of memory, where little importance or visibility was given to the memory of the strong communist resistance against the Nazis. In the united Germany, there was almost no place for the East German exclusive focus on communist resistance. By applying an analogy, the author is led to the conclusion that the Greek sites of memory related to the occupation also reflect the transformations of postwar memory. She considers Kaisariani rifle range as

the ideal expression of the culture of consensus and virtual national reconciliation that has been pursued since the 1980s.

Within the framework of the conflicting narratives that can be triggered by sites of memory of the occupation in Greece, the study focuses in the final part first on the memorialisation of the Shoah, by looking at Holocaust memorials in five cities (Athens, Thessaloniki, Rhodes, Larissa and Ioannina). The outline of the course of each monument is methodologically determined by the historical factor, which is defined by the fact that the monument represents; the political factor, which concerns the intentions behind its construction; and the social factor, namely the study of its position in public history. The delays in erecting the monuments, the vandalism and neglect that exists, as it is clear from this comparison of multilevel cases, illustrate the deficient dealing with the period and the difficulty of including the memory of the destruction of the Jews in the national narrative. The author seeks the reasons for this reluctance not only in the after-effects of the civil war but also in the inability of Greek society to accept cultural diversity.

However, the Kalavryta massacre by German soldiers in December 1943 triggers conflicting memories and has produced new official narratives. The memory of Kalavryta is divided into an official version highlighting the heroic sacrifice of the town's inhabitants on the altar of fascism and an informal/collective one that focuses on the resistance operations which led to the German reprisal. The endless local recriminations and the chronic disputes on whether historians should or should not highlight retaliation as a cause of the tragedy has thus prevented, with a few exceptions, the historicisation of the massacre.

The human remains of Wehrmacht soldiers, which the author evaluates as an additional material relic of the Second World War, have produced contradictory and divided memories, as evidenced by the examples of the two German war cemeteries in Greece (Maleme, near Hania in Crete and Rapentosa, in eastern Attica). With the argument that there was no equivalent cemetery for the resistance, during the 1950s and 1960s Greek society, hesitant and incapable of achieving reconciliation, as the Germans would have liked, delayed the creation of Maleme cemetery, which tested Greek–German relations.

After reviewing the Greek museum landscape of the 1940s, which she notes is dominated by local and private initiatives, in the final chapter of the study Droumpouki returns to the lack of consensus between the resistance memory communities, emphasising the absence of an institutional state museum devoted to the national resistance.

Methodologically, the author approaches her topic in four different ways. The first takes on board the theoretical contribution of memory studies, mainly by Pierre Nora and Maurice Halbwachs. As an analytical category in the historical narrative, spatiality is used to examine the interaction between space, the monument and memory communities. The comparative perspective is another tool that defines the study, as is evident in the presentation of memory policies in various European countries, the comparison of Jewish monuments, etc. Finally, the author resorts to public history to fill the gaps created by the limited archival material.

The study is based on an impressive array of sources. Droumpouki draws on primary material in German and Greek archives, print and electronic media and the oral testimony of sur-

vivors. She has followed and incorporated the relevant literature. Camp literature, fictional prose, novels, historical novels and films have provided ideas, inspiration and, at times, as she admits, a firmer mental guide than the historical source. The author aptly demonstrates the deficient management of sites of memory in Greece, which raise “uncomfortable” issues between Greeks and Germans and between Greek Jews and Greeks, and the two sides of the Civil War. The conflicting and traumatic memory of the Second World War, including the selective amnesia of the occupation, is the reason why a unified memory culture did not emerge after the war.

The explosion of European memory in the 1990s highlighted the policies of memory as a special research area. The study of sites of memory is thus virgin soil in the rich Greek historiography on the 1940s. In this sense, the present study is a most welcome contribution to the newly emerging field of memory studies in Greece. By highlighting for future historians the unexplored areas of research such as the study of divided memories at various sites of memory throughout Greece and the study of the memorials of the civil war, Droumpouki expresses her belief that material remains, these visible traces of the past, will ultimately create the ideal conditions for a cultural reading and understanding of the 1940s.

**Evanthis Hatzivassiliou**

***NATO and Western Perceptions of the Soviet Bloc: Alliance Analysis and Reporting, 1951–1969***

**London: Routledge, 2014. xii + 228 pp.**

**Sotiris Roussos**

University of Peloponnese

The study of the policy-making process is always a fascinating exploration, even in circumstances where an iron-clad balance of power and a state's interests ultimately dictate foreign policy positions. This is even more so in the case of alliances, where the effort to legitimise the allied position is indispensable. Cold War international politics were always a mixture of geopolitics and ideology and, thus, the case for legitimisation was always of major importance. Evanthis Hatzivassiliou stresses the importance of the legitimisation process from the outset. At the same time, the bipolar system that dominated Cold War politics led the superpowers to legitimise their hegemonic positions within their respective camps. In that sense Hatzivassiliou's work on Nato's analysis and reporting process in the first two decades of its existence is most interesting and welcome.

The book examines the internal politics before, during and after the composition of major analyses and reporting papers. It researches the institutional changes that accompanied this composition, the stance of the alliance's major powers and the accuracy and the effectiveness of these reports in influencing Nato strategy. It also focuses on the role played by certain individuals in both the drafting of the reports and the initiation of new institutional frameworks. The study of this analytical pro-