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Disputed Historical Memories in East Europe and Southeast Asia: Representations, Symbols and Social Practices

Christian Giordano

At first glance, the past would seem to be the main field of research of historians who seek to reconstruct events of an earlier time as they actually occurred in previous epochs. This article, instead, shows that social anthropology, as a discipline bent on analyzing the present-time, is also steadily paying more attention to historical facts. Yet, as the article notes, this discipline essentially explores the past if it is socially relevant to the present, i.e., if any specific historical fact is mobilized in the here and now through the targeted use of social memory. Therefore, knowing the actors (individual or collective,) and especially their ends (not always overt), which lead them to resort to the past, is fundamental to the anthropologist. The article then examines the conflicts and tensions arising from the use of the past through disputed memories. By means of four actual cases – Transylvania, Riga, Angkor Wat and Bulgarian Macedonia – the article shows that memory, contrary to current epistemological approaches that tend to see only its positive aspects, can become a highly efficient and dangerous tool, which can unleash severe phenomena of symbolic, structural and even physical violence. Finally, the article indicates that the reconciliation of disputed memories does not necessarily entail that the actors in conflict must share them.

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Introduction: Historical Truths and Historical Memories

History, being a humanities' discipline, is held to be pre-eminently the *science du passé*. As such, its task is to reconstruct the *reality* and *truth* of past events and processes. The German historicism of Leopold von Ranke and Friedrich Meinecke, the current of thought that for almost two centuries had

so much influence in Germany and inspired followers all over Europe and the United States as well, introduced a *critical method* that could go beyond the field of speculation and reach the *naked truth* of facts (Iggers 1971). Most of the distinguished representatives of this school, therefore, sought to describe facts as they actually occurred in the past. However, from the very beginning the problem lay in accurately and clearly defining what the terms *reality* and *historical truths* should indicate. Already during the nineteenth century, the ensuing disagreements generated heated debates and fierce diatribes, which, however, did not solve the controversy and thus did not provide an adequate answer to the crucial question tackled by historians.

First published in 1955, *Histoire et vérité* is a significant work by Paul Ricoeur in which the French philosopher attempts to define the question once again (Ricoeur 1955). This author aptly stresses that even in this age whoever embarks on the arduous adventure of being concerned with the past, especially historians, is expected to be fairly objective. I believe this expectation has endured nearly unchanged even in the period following the past century's '90s, i.e. after the so-called *postmodernist turn*. However, evoking objectivity means reasoning in terms of *reality* and *truth*, along with the *uniqueness* of both. Paul Ricoeur reminds us that objectivity, with reference to the past, cannot have the same characteristics we expect, rightly or not, from *pure/exact* sciences such as physics, chemistry, or biology. The dissimilarity is due to the kind of knowledge, since whoever sets about reconstructing the past must be *content* with a *knowledge by traces*. In fact, to count on reconstructing both remote and very recent events and processes *as they actually occurred*, as if they were laboratory experiments, and furthermore to presume to (re)live them directly in the present, would be a self-deception. All those who apply themselves to reconstructing any past (personal, as well as that of a persecuted or annihilated community, or a tyrant's) should never be compared to a photographer who, after all, experiences the event he is observing personally and in the present. Consequently, the *integral past* is at the most an ideal or, better yet, a never attained or attainable goal.

Knowledge by traces implies the idea of incomplete objectivity, i.e. the awareness that the past is like a yellowed thus barely decipherable manuscript from which one tries to draw out some meaning. The reconstruction of what has irrevocably occurred is not a plain reproduction, but rather a recomposition that cannot set aside the subjectivity of the person who interprets the manuscript and must heed the many possible truths it includes. In conclusion, to avoid the narrow context of a chronicle, i.e. the plain chronological listing of events, we must reconstruct the past by interpreting it: in other words, by

trying to grasp the meaning of what happened. In the end, historical truth, just as historical memory, consists in several narratives, most times incongruent, and most times antagonistic if not downright opposite.

Stressing the irreducibility of subjectivity, the incomplete objectivity concept, in relation to the reconstruction of the past, obviously undermines the old positivist dogma of a *single* and *univocal* truth. The following example illustrates the significance of subjectivity and the unmistakable plural quality of historical truth: Frederick Barbarossa, emperor and powerful promoter of the third crusade whose purpose was to expel the so-called *infidels* from Jerusalem. In Germany, this outstanding personage of medieval history is still considered a great and positive ruling figure of the Holy Roman Empire (which in German is emblematically called *das Heilige Römische Reich deutscher Nation*). In fact, ever since the 16th century Barbarossa had become the symbol of German national unification hopes. It is far from surprising that Adolf Hitler named his attack against the Soviet Union launched on June 22, 1941, *Operation Barbarossa*. A similarity between Emperor Barbarossa and the Fuehrer was thus skillfully propagandized and insinuated into the national conscience. According to this point of view, both pursued a legitimate crusade with a civilizing mission. The minor difference between Barbarossa and the German dictator, again according to this Nazi slant, was that the former fought the Muslim infidels while the latter fought the Bolshevik ones.

Inversely, Frederick Barbarossa in Italy is almost invariably portrayed as a tyrant and enemy of the nation's unity. In fact, this emperor of the Hohenstaufen dynasty is persistently accused of having tried to overpower the autonomy efforts of the Lombard communes. The struggle between the municipal authorities on the one hand and the empire on the other led to Barbarossa's invasion of northern Italy and the coalition of the Lombard communes sanctioned by the Pontida oath of allegiance on April 7, 1167. Armed conflict became inevitable and at the battle of Legnano on May 29, 1167, the far more powerful imperial army was utterly defeated. Beginning with the Risorgimento times, i.e. from the Italian independence struggles during the 19th century, the Pontida oath of allegiance and the battle of Legnano became two fundamental symbols of the Italians' will to become one nation. Literary works and even an opera by Giuseppe Verdi (titled *La battaglia di Legnano*), certainly the most undisputed founding father of the Italian nation, dealt with these remote medieval facts. Obviously, Barbarossa was cast as the *villain* and stigmatized as the forefather of all treacherous dominators of German origin – above all the Habsburg dynasty – that dominated Italy over the centuries. Thus, Emperor Frederick also became the metaphor of the Austrian domination in the peninsula following

the Congress of Vienna (1815). In short, speaking about Barbarossa at the time implied the Austro-Hungarian occupation in Italy.

However, to prove how multifaceted the *truths* concerning the past can be, we need to add a footnote. About 130 years after the Italian national State was established (1860), the Lega Lombarda, which has notoriously federalist if not separatist views and therefore challenges the legitimacy of the present unitary State that followed the Risorgimento, was founded. All the symbolic apparatus of the Lega Lombarda (assimilated with the Lega Nord by now) again derives from the above-mentioned facts. Pontida has become the classic venue for this movement's assemblies and its charismatic leader's favorite stage for his most important general policy statements. The Carroccio, i.e. the oxen-pulled cart on which the Lombard communes hoisted their insignia during the battle of Legnano, has become the movement's current emblem. In this case, Barbarossa remains a tyrant and a sinister figure, with the sole difference that nowadays he is the symbol of the corrupt unitary centralism, or, in Umberto Bossi's own words, of *Roma ladrona* (Rome the robber) (Giordano 2005: 57).

The Past in the Present

Historical anthropology as *science du présent* highlights that the past not only belongs to the past but also acts heavily upon the present, since specific social actors can actualize it. In other words, the past can be more or less intentionally *mobilized*, or, better yet, *activated* in the present. Such a mobilization or activation, regardless, can occur for specific reasons. For example, it could take place to accent a certain identity or a given feeling of belonging; to convey a metaphoric or symbolic message of hostility or friendship to other actors; to steady positions of power or relations of social inequality; to rebel against reputedly unacceptable political and/or socio-economic conditions, etc.

What has been defined as the actualization of the past is worth being illustrated by a factual example. At the end of the 17th century, Poland lost its independence that had lasted seven hundred years. The country was occupied and divided in three parts assigned to Prussia, Russia, and Austria respectively. The painful dismemberment process incited a resolute resistance that culminated in the ill-fated uprising led by Thaddeus Kosciusko (1794–1795). The revolt was repressed with a lot of bloodshed mainly because of the brutal intervention of Russian troops under the command of General Suvorov. A lesser-known fact is that Kosciusko on April 4, 1794 unexpectedly defeated the Russians at the battle of Raclavice with the momentous assistance of spirited but ill-equipped peasant forces. The Poles consider this rather marginal wartime fact as the most glorious event of the entire uprising. Almost two hundred years later,

at the height of protests organized by the rural wing of *Solidarnosc* – that is, some months before General Jaruzelski came in power (December 1981) and just when the threat of a Soviet invasion was impending – a large rally was organized right at Raclavice in which participants, dressed as late eighteenth-century Polish peasants, held corresponding banners bearing the 1794 motto *feed and fight*. With this actualization of the past, the rural wing of *Solidarnosc* obviously meant to convey the following message: Polish farmers, i.e. the most authentic part of society and the less contaminated by socialism, just as the peasants who fought along with Kosciuszko, are ready to *feed and protect* Poland should there be an intervention from the *usual invaders*, namely the Russians (Giordano 2005: 56).

Of course, this case is quite remarkable and, given the charismatic aspect of the rally, may be considered an exceptional event. However, we must immediately add that the actualization of the past can creep into countless aspects of our everyday life, especially in a period which, despite globalization, seems to be turning increasingly into an *epoch of social memory*. Historical exhibitions, heritage conservation policies, commemorations along with their specific rituals and cults, monuments, names of city streets, representations of personages and events on banknotes etc., are *lieux de mémoire* (as the French historian Pierre Nora called them) and should all be regarded as cases of actualization of the past which usually we are not even aware of (Nora 1997). Moreover, just as often we do not realize that these cases of mobilization of the past, apparently banal and commonplace, suggest and at times impose a specific kind of *truth* that is anyway submitted to us as the *only truth*.

If we accept the assumption of the actualization of the past in the present, we need to ask ourselves the following questions.

- Who are the managers that oversee the past?
- How do specific social actors use past events, i.e. what means do they have?
- How is the past re-elaborated, reinterpreted, manipulated or utterly re-invented?
- How are facts selected, i.e. which events are magnified and which are scaled down or omitted?
- What reasons underlie these choices?

These questions, which in our opinion are essential, will be analyzed in the next sections.

Antagonistic Truths and the Politics of Symbols

Previous reference to the case of the emperor Frederick Barbarossa's representation in Germany and Italy was intentional. The reason lies precisely in the fact that the two truths have never been closely connected and therefore,

though contradicting each other, have never become truly antagonistic. Thus, they never turned into an actual object of conflict.

There are cases instead in which two or more divergent, if not opposite, truths very often appear simultaneously and become the target of heated ideological discussions among intellectuals and of political contentions among the ruling classes of a country, or of two or more States. Therefore, in most cases intellectual and political elites manage the past and produce both the histories and the memories of a society, and consequently the antagonistic truths. The latter are a specific social construction of reality that follows an accurate re-elaboration, reinterpretation, manipulation, or even reinvention of the past in the present. In such cases, historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have fittingly used the expression *invention of tradition* (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). Such an invention is never utterly arbitrary or spontaneous, and should be interpreted as a clever modulation of the same facts. Two antagonistic facts might even be based on the same past events (Giordano 1992).

To avoid being overly abstract, we will analyze what we believe to be enlightening examples.

1. Contested Territories or the Right of the First-comer: Transylvania and Analogous Cases

In this case, we have chosen the age-old controversy, burdened by interethnic conflicts and tensions, which divides Hungarians and Romanians on the *Transylvanian question*. In fact, the entire political contention is based on two opposite views of the past. The Romanian one stems from the undeniable premise that Transylvania was part of ancient Roman Dacia and its inhabitants were Romanized autochthonous populations that should be regarded as the ancestors of present-day Romanians. Moreover, this truth's corollary is that a demographic continuity since Roman times can be ascertained in this region, according to some sources. Therefore, grounds for this claim are in the premise that Transylvania has remained continually populated for at least 2000 years. Such a fact has turned it into one of the nation's cradles, if not the cradle of the nation tout court. The Hungarian version is based on another thesis: i.e. of a forsaken and uninhabited Transylvania. The Magyar nomad tribes of Ugro-Finnic origin reached the Pannonia plain and the Carpathian basin (present Transylvania) towards the end of the ninth century. They settled down in this region specifically because it had been abandoned during the Roman Empire's decline and territorial diminution. Thus, Transylvania is a cradle of the nation for Hungarians as well.

The question at the core of the diatribe and resulting conflicts is the following: *to whom does Transylvania belong?* Obviously enough, there are two antithetic answers! Recent history has made the situation even more complicated and dramatic because Transylvania, which for centuries was part of the Austrian Empire, was assigned to Hungary after the 1867 settlement that created that odd two-headed institutional contrivance known as the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. After WWI, the Treaty of Trianon (June 4, 1920), which decreed Hungary's disconcerting defeat (as part of the Central Empires) and rewarded Romanian intervention at the side of the winners, granted Transylvania to Romania. Other than the WWII boundary revision conceived by Hitler, the ephemeral overlord of Central and East Europe at the time who gave Transylvania back to Hungary, the situation has endured to this day. If for Hungarians the loss of Transylvania is a far from overcome grievous collective trauma, the attribution of this region to the Romanian national State instead incites a strong feeling of national pride that is often openly performed through a specific policy of symbols, which, in turn, causes strong resentments among Hungarians, particularly in the Transylvanian minority.

Antagonistic truths often bolster the community spirit, or the ethnic or cultural identity of a group facing an actual or presumed threat from outside. At the same time, the ensuing contention tends to strengthen the ruling class' hegemonic status and therefore confers legitimacy to the elites. Usually, the latter are interested in kindling the antagonism of the truths and thus in amplifying tensions and conflicts through a shrewd emphasis or a crafty re-evaluation, or again by deliberately omitting certain facts of the past. In such cases, there is frequently a conflicting policy of symbols ending in a symbolic battle over the *lieux de mémoire*; for example, in Cluj/Napoca, capital of Transylvania, were the name itself gives rise to tensions between Hungarians and Romanians. In fact, Napoca is the city's Roman name and the demonstrative use of this ancient name on road signs and maps is an attempt to legitimate the Romanian *truth* of demographic continuity between Roman times and now. Moreover, in Cluj, where a relevant Hungarian minority lives, the nationalist mayor of Romanian origin has been trying for years (unsuccessfully till now mainly due to financial problems) to erect a copy of the Trajan Column in one of the city's main squares, i.e. the one with the Hungarian Roman Catholic cathedral and the monument in honor of Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary. This historical square is the paramount *lieu de mémoire* of Cluj's Magyar community and the mayor's intention is to heavily stress the undeniable *Romanian quality* of Cluj in a place sacred to the rival nation. In turn, the rival nation is extremely reluctant to credit the mayor's historical *truth*, besides strongly asserting its own truth instead.

Yet, to further stress Romania's historical right to territorial sovereignty over Cluj/Napoca and Transylvania, in the 1990s the more nationalistic circles led by the above-mentioned mayor were able to place the statue of Avram Iancu (1824–1872) in the nearby square close to the symbolic places of Romanian presence and national identity in Cluj/Napoca (i.e. the Orthodox Church and the Romanian National Theater). Antagonistic historical memories once again come into play, worsening the divide between Romanians and Hungarians. In fact, Romanians still regard Avram Iancu, a character halfway between an anti-imperialist revolutionary, a guerilla fighter with peasant roots, and a social bandit, also known as *little Emperor of the mountains*, as the undisputed hero of the 1848/49 anti-Austro-Hungarian uprising in Transylvania, whereas the Magyar community evidently views him as an outlaw and a cruel enemy.

Antagonistic truths concerning the past are used especially in territorial contentions in which boundaries are ill-defined or have a *variable geometry* because they have almost constantly been shifted in the course of history. Therefore, antagonistic truths and the principle of territoriality are frequently linked. We should always remember that an appeal to an historical right, the so-called *right of the first-comer*, generally legitimates a territorial claim. However, this implies dealing with the past to give credence to ones' requests in the present. The clash between two antagonistic truths regarding who reached a specific territory first is extremely dangerous for social cohabitation (especially among ethnic groups). In this case, the collective with a more plausible claim to being there for a longer time can easily obtain prerogatives, or even specific types of sovereignty, to the prejudice of the other. Given such political implications of antagonistic truths, it is far from surprising that in Kosovo – before, during, and after the war – antagonistic truths have often been used to corroborate territorial claims by both the Serbian and the Albanian camp.

Yet, we ought to recall that these controversies did not ravage Southeast Europe alone. Locating them solely in this very troubled part of the Old Continent would be unfair. In fact, similar discourses based on the confrontation between two historical truths stemming from territorial disputes have repeatedly flared up in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We need only recall the bitter dispute regarding the territory of Jerusalem, and above all of the so-called Holy Sites, which are believed to be so because of facts that occurred in a now distant past.

2. Disputed Places of Memory. The Case of Angkor Wat

Though all this may seem irrational and ludicrous, the politics and potential war of symbols linked to antagonistic truths should be taken very seriously

because they are the most disruptive igniters in case of interethnic and international tensions. The case of Angkor Wat illustrates how antagonistic memories, usually the repository of symbols and founding myths, may suddenly stir up dangerous and violent disputes between two contestants who for centuries on end have been vying for a place they consider their own. In such cases, antagonistic memories can definitely be likened to smoldering fires.

Getting back to our example, at the end of January 2003 the international community was stunned by a violent, unexpected, and, to outside observers, nearly inexplicable uprising in Cambodia's capital, one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia. Given the current socio-economic circumstances, caused by a tragic recent past during which the country's leaders perpetrated a full-scale genocide of their people, it could have been thought to be a classic hunger uprising. Hardly so.

Right from the start, the Phnom Penh uprising was openly anti-Thai due to the unconfirmed report, moreover unfounded and deliberately spread probably by Cambodian nationalist circles, of an amazing remark made by the beautiful and renowned soap opera actress Suvanant Kongying. According to the inaccurate report, which the actress denied immediately, she had stated that she would visit Cambodia only when this country gave back the vast temple complex of Angkor, near the town of Siem Reap, to her country, i.e. Thailand.

Luckily there were no casualties in the January 2003 popular uprising, but the Thai community suffered heavy material damages. In fact, Thailand allegedly claims 25 million US dollars from Cambodia. Furthermore, the Thai embassy was seriously damaged during the uprising and Thai entrepreneurs in Phnom Penh had to be whisked out of the country by plane. The uprising, forcefully repressed by the Cambodian government, has however left a deep mark on relations between the two countries, which persist in their deep-seated mutual mistrust.

Then why would an alleged remark made by a lovely actress of shallow soap operas cause such a violent reaction?

To find a plausible reason for this event, which apparently lacks any rationale, we have to turn to antagonistic memories. Relations between Thailand and Cambodia have always been strained. In fact, the two bordering and powerful empires, rivals and enemies, have fought against each other for centuries on end, practically until the French protectorate over Cambodia was established during the second half of the 19th century. The issue of Angkor Wat instead is less known and can be summarized as follows: both Cambodia and Thailand lay claim to the temple complex on the grounds of contrasting historical memories.

For Cambodians, Angkor Wat is the paramount symbol of their nation and culture. Even the notorious *Khmers Rouges*, though once in power they intended to refound Cambodia starting from a fictitious *year zero*, would not dare wipe out Angkor Wat from the country's historical memory. Under French protectorate, the *Khmers Rouges* and to this day, Cambodia's flag has always borne a stylized representation of Angkor's principal temple as its sole symbol. Therefore, it is no surprise that when BBC reporter Larry Jagan asked Cambodians what Angkor Wat means to them, their answer was:

„Angkor Wat is the heart and life of Cambodia, it is the soul of our culture... Any attack on it is an attack on all Cambodians.“

According to the Thai, however, it is quite another story. They uphold that Angkor Wat is part of their national heritage, so much so that inside the Royal Palace of Bangkok stands a model of the principal temple, the same one represented on Cambodia's flag. We need to bear in mind that the Royal Palace of Bangkok is the *sancta sanctorum* of all monarchic, imperial, religious, not to mention national symbols of former Siam and present-day Thailand. The model of Angkor Wat, which almost everyone at first perceives as a replica of a Thai monument since it is surrounded by other symbolic representations of this country's religion and culture, is set near the symbol of symbols of the Thai nation and identity: the revered and renowned Emerald Buddha. Yet, thanks to this model of Angkor Wat, the Thai have symbolically reappropriated a place they consider *theirs*, but which, due to adverse historical reasons, was wrongly taken away from them and unfortunately now lies beyond national borders. That this country considers Cambodia's paramount symbol as its own cultural heritage is also corroborated by the fact that again in 2003 a well-known brewery launched an advertising campaign using typical Thai landscapes... including Angkor Wat.

The reasons underlying this claim, never voiced but constantly implied, are historical-territorial, thus backed by a specific perception of the past engraved in collective memory. In fact, it is common knowledge that for over four centuries and a half (precisely from 1431 to 1907) Angkor belonged nearly uninterruptedly to the Siamese empire, the institutional precursor of present-day Thailand. What is less known instead is that the Japanese, in redrawing the region's borders, despite the firm opposition of Vichy France which was then the colonial power in Indochina, handed over part of western Cambodia to the Thai, including the province of Siem Reap, in reward for their complaisant neutrality in the Southeast Asian theater of war during WWII. However, Tokyo forced the bellicose government of Bangkok to renounce control over the temples of Angkor.

Antagonistic historical memories are glaringly detectable even in place names. In Khmer, Siem Reap, the area near the Angkor site, means *flattened Siamese soldiers*, yet in Thai, Siem Reap becomes Siamrat, which means *State of Siam*: in other words, belonging to Siam.

3. Glorified yet Contested Heroes: Mihail Bogdanović Barclay de Tolly and Jane Sandanski

We should recall that the past confers excellence and thus legitimacy to a social group and/or political community (a nation, for example). Whoever *owns* a past can count on a considerable *symbolic capital* employable in the present. This capital based on the past is a crucial tool in what may be called the struggles for recognition: for example, when a minority tries to assert its identity in contraposition to a majority's one, or, inversely, when a majority refuses to accept a minority group's identity claims. On this subject, there are several examples in which the clash of antagonistic truths implies a symbolic struggle for recognition. We will now analyze two of them in particular.

In Riga, the capital of Latvia, such a symbolic struggle concerning the statue of Mihail Bogdanović Barclay de Tolly (1761–1818), has worsened interethnic relations lately (after a period of relative calm) between members of the Russian minority and those of the Latvian entitled nation.

Russian general Barclay de Tolly, a distant descendant of a Scottish clan as his name indicates, was born in a family, which, after immigrating to present-day Latvia, had become completely germanized and at the same time risen to the ranks of nobility. Nowadays Barclay de Tolly is remembered not so much for his military victories, moreover modest, but rather for having invented the scorched earth tactic during the anti-Napoleonic campaign. Riga's Russian community currently venerates him as the *hero of the 1812 war* (Geroj vojni 1812 goda) and *our fellowman* (Naš zemljak) (Dimenštejn 2002).

A statue in his honor was erected on the centennial of Russia's victory over Napoleon (1812) and mounted on a stone pedestal near the opulent Orthodox cathedral, symbol of Russian imperial domination. The statue was removed and placed in a storehouse after Latvia's first independence (1919); however, the massive and nearly irremovable pedestal remained as an involuntary but lasting memento. During the dramatic WWII events that befell Riga, the statue of Barclay de Tolly disappeared mysteriously and was never found again. Soviet power, following German occupation, had no interest in honoring a reactionary czarist general, so it never bothered to set up the statue again, not even a copy. The state of affairs persisted until the mid-1990s when in Latvia's second independence a Russian tycoon financed a replica of the statue that was once again placed on the solitary stone pedestal.

At this point the scandal broke out because Riga's municipal administration decided to remove Barclay de Tolly's statue on the grounds that he did not deserve such recognition chiefly because he was a Russian general and therefore a representative of the great neighbor who had oppressed and occupied Latvia for so long, i.e. in czarist and Soviet times. There was no lack of reactions since the Russian community organized a remarkable series of manifestations, demonstrations and petitions, countered by similar measures by Latvian citizens. Luckily, contrary to what occurred in Tallinn (Estonia) in the spring of 2007 in connection with the removal of the monument dedicated to the Red Army soldier, there were no actual acts of violence, though tension mounted considerably. The statue of Barclay de Tolly in Riga is still a time bomb that could explode any moment precisely because of antagonistic historical memories. In fact, the controversy centers on two opposing truths. For the Russians, Barclay de Tolly is an important national hero and a great strategist in the war against Napoleon (consider his statue near the Kazanski Sabor of St. Petersburg). He is the symbol of their legitimate presence in Latvia and their right to recognition as a minority. For Latvians, the same personage is a symbol of foreign domination and therefore the disavowal of their own nation.

The second emblematic case regards Jane Sandanski (1872–1915). Along with Goce Delčev, Jane Sandanski is definitely one of the most renowned exponents of Macedonian armed resistance against the Ottoman Empire and later, when eastern Macedonia was assigned to Bulgaria, against this state. He took part in several uprisings and became known as the *czar of the Pirin Mountains* for his organizational skills and as charismatic leader of irregular militia. Just like the previously mentioned Avram Jancu, he too must be regarded as an ambivalent personage halfway between a combatant for Macedonian independence and a social bandit. He was killed in unclear circumstances on April 22, 1915: a date that to this day has had a markedly symbolic connotation, as we shall soon see. According to the Macedonian account, which Bulgaria has always challenged, Czar Ferdinand himself, a fundamental aspect, armed the hand of Jane Sandanski's killers. The Bulgarian monarch, again according to this account, had practically condemned Jane Sandanski to death since 1909, when he tried to have him killed a first time. In fact, Ferdinand had already branded him as the most dangerous enemy of the interests of a Great Bulgaria that should have incorporated Macedonia as well.

For accuracy's sake, we need to add that Jane Sandanski was ranked a hero also in Bulgaria when Tito and Georgi Dimitrov in the late 1940s planned to set up a federation, which never came about, between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. During this brief lapse of time, that part of Macedonia under Bulgarian sove-

reignty was granted some autonomy along with the recognition of symbolic personages with Jane Sandanski foremost who, with a socialist slant, was represented as a sort of precursor of partisan struggle. In the wake of the promising moment the town of Sveti Vrač was renamed Sandanski, a denomination still in use though the old name is becoming popular once again.

Currently Jane Sandanski is certainly the most representative and hallowed hero of eastern Macedonia's population (the part belonging to the Bulgarian State) as well as of many citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Each year on April 22nd, on the anniversary of his death, a commemoration is held at Jane Sandanski's tomb, near Roženski Manastir, which is one of Bulgaria's most artistically representative monasteries. This event, organized and tenaciously mobilized by Macedonian minorities' political organizations, such as the radical OMO Ilinden and the more moderate OMO Ilinden-Pirin, is markedly national-popular, as I was able to observe in person, with singing, dancing, and tables laid sumptuously with local specialties (obviously, only typical Macedonian ones). Attended by the Macedonian ambassador to Bulgaria, as a rule the event begins with a religious ceremony at Jane Sandanski's tomb and above all with a salvo of fiery speeches exalting the glorious qualities of the hero and stigmatizing the arrogance and iniquity of the Bulgarian State, still viewed as Jane Sandanski's murderer.

The venue's perimeter is closely patrolled by scores of police officers who seem to put on a show of force with their arrogant and scornful attitude towards anyone involved with the event. We can perceive that the State is patently staging a structural and symbolic violence. I myself observed the open contempt of these police representatives towards my activity as observer who was simply taking pictures of the event. Therefore, there is a palpable tension between police officers and participant population and it is not surprising that incidents of physical violence have occurred in past commemorations, as the Macedonians have denounced several times.

Yet, at the bottom of this atmosphere of reciprocal hostility, disdain, and distrust bordering on violence are precisely the antagonistic historical memories. According to Bulgarian authorities, Jane Sandanski represents an outlaw, i.e. a symbol of the illegality and rebellion that incites the Macedonian population to dissidence and rebellion against the central government. For those who take part in the commemoration and the popular event, Jane Sandanski is the undisputed hero who was brutally murdered by a tyrannical, domineering power to which the current government, just as scornful, obtuse, violent, and downright ill-disposed towards the Macedonian minority's legitimate claim to the recognition of their historical rights, is closely related.

Conclusive Considerations: Blasts from the Past

Instead of concluding this article conventionally, i.e., with an overview of the analyses put forward, I would rather end with some suggestions for further thought that should broaden the horizons I have outlined.

- The cases presented show that antagonistic memories are activated on specific occasions that, quite purposefully, coincide with festivities, ceremonies, and rituals. On this point, I believe that until now these collective practices with a highly symbolic meaning have been correlated too often to the social production of cohesion and harmony, with few exceptions, amongst whom anthropologists Victor Turner and Jeremy Boissevain stand out (Turner 1974; Boissevain 1965). The conflictual aspect of festivities, ceremonies, and rituals, regarded as considered destructive and thus unpleasant, has far too often been wiped out and deliberately concealed. Admittedly, a somewhat pernicious type of populism, inherent to social sciences in general and detectable in ethnology and anthropology as well, has led to constantly minimizing and downplaying conflict. By introducing antagonistic historical memories, we have tried to offset this trend and show that these representations of the past, as in Jane Sandanski's case as well as the other ones mentioned, may be viewed as the discursive grounds, the symbolic capital, or, using a slightly obsolete Marxist-like expression, the ideological superstructure of festivities, ceremonies, and rituals whose structural conflict and violence are manifest, while their physical violence could materialize at any moment. Conflicts last via antagonistic historical memories. Festivities, ceremonies and their corresponding rituals are *social dramas* (in line with Victor Turner's definition), i.e., disharmonic processes (Turner 1974) where these controversies are celebrated and reiterated at regular intervals.

- Pierre Bourdieu has spotlighted the importance of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron 1970; Bourdieu 1972), while Ivan Čolović has repeatedly pointed out the key role of the politics of symbols (Čolović 2002) in social practices of domination between individuals and collectivities. On the other hand, Max Weber and Georges Balandier have stressed that power cannot be based solely on physical coercion (Weber 1956; Balandier 1992). Symbolic violence and politics of symbols appear clearly to emerge as the essential instruments of legitimacy in the exercise of domination and in power struggles, due also to the deliberate utilization of social or collective memory, especially through the targeted use of antagonistic historical memories. Admittedly, this applies just as often to history as *science du passé*.

- I do not think anyone sustaining that social memory in general, and in several cases individual memory as well, is never entirely innocent may be accused of vulgar Machiavellianism. This is true especially about antagonistic

historical memories, which, almost without exception, feature a strong political component and are effective instruments in the struggle for recognition of *one's self* and the misrecognition of *others*, respectively. Contrary to current scores of memory enthusiasts who only see its positive aspects and leave out any misuse, we want to stress that antagonistic historical memories especially are quite often dangerous weapons of discrimination, which kindle permanent and then hardly extinguishable flash points of conflict. At this point, along with Paul Ricoeur, we can wonder whether in specific cases, such as the ones previously mentioned, the difficult exercise of partial oblivion (Ricoeur 2000: 536 seq.) would be more productive, since an overdose of the past fixed in memory and history alike turns into a dreadful and insidious obsession that is difficult to shake off, as the example of the Balkans shows, in which the past seems to never end. Yet, the real problem lies not so much in the choice between remembering and forgetting as in developing the vision of a *fair memory*, i.e. negotiating *reconciled memories* that do not necessarily have to be *shared* ones. This issue has been mentioned with keen insight also by Paul Ricoeur but is far from solved, as he himself acknowledges with great honesty (Ricoeur 2000: 593 seq.). Following Ricoeur's line of argumentation, we believe that reconciled, yet not necessarily shared, antagonistic memories imply the mutual recognition of the legitimacy of the other's historical memory, without necessarily forsaking one's own view of the past. In Malaysia for example, the notorious May 13, 1969 pogroms perpetrated by the Malay against the Chinese are still interpreted quite differently by the two ethnic communities who at the time were in conflict with each other. Despite significantly divergent viewpoints, each group is willing to acknowledge the other's historical reasons and at the same time, though not sharing the same memory, both agree that similar events shall never occur again. Therefore, what is being shared is not the historical memory of past events, but rather the awareness of what shall never occur again in the future. To this day, one of the founding myths that, despite obvious difficulties, guarantees this Southeast Asian country's national unity is based on this premise.

- Some attentive reader may have noticed that this article stands apart from the optimistic notes emerging from the certainly novel *histoires croisées* paradigm. This approach, expression of the very latest historiographic studies in Europe and France in particular, seeks to move beyond the various national perspectives via an analysis of relations, exchanges and transnational processes in general. As examples, we can mention the new social-historical researches regarding the Mediterranean area or the Black Sea basin. The distinguishing characteristic of the transnational perspective inherent to the *histoires croisées* lies precisely in purposely highlighting points of contact between social enti-

ties while neglecting socioeconomic, political and even identity tensions and conflicts. Despite its undeniably substantial methodological justification, for a skeptical anthropology as the one proposed in this article the above paradigm is, alas, deliberately too unilateral and somewhat naïve since it brings out only the productive and far too trouble-free aspect of the coming together and exchanges between societies and cultures. Antagonistic memories, instead, highlight the other side of the coin, the one of tensions and contentions, which is nearly systematically blotted out by this approach's perspective as if it were beside the point.

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Ginčijamos istorinės atmintys Rytų Europoje ir Pietryčių Azijoje: reprezentacijos, simboliai ir socialinės praktikos

Christian Giordano

Santrauka

Pagrindinis straipsnio teiginys – *tikrovė* (istorinis faktas) gali turėti kelias *tiesas*, socialinės antropologijos terminais sakant – įvairias socialines atmintis.

Istorija kaip humanitarinė disciplina pirmiausia laikoma praeitį nagrinėjančiu mokslu. Taigi istorija, taikydama veiksmingą kritinį metodą, bando rekonstruoti objektyvią praeities įvykių ir procesų *tikrovę* ir *tiesą*. Prancūzų filosofas Paulis Ricoeuras pažymi, kad kiekvienas, turintis reikalų su praeitimi, ypač istorikas, tikisi esąs objektyvus.

Socialinė antropologija nagrinėja praeitį, jeigu ta praeitis socialiai tiesiogiai susijusi su dabartimi, t. y. jeigu koks nors specifinis istorinis faktas mobilizuojamas *čia ir dabar* turint tikslą panaudoti atmintį. Antropologo akimis, istorija yra ir praeities socialinės atminties (rašytinė) forma. Taigi esminis dalykas yra žinoti socialinių veikėjų (individų ar kolektyvų) istorijas, o ypač jų gyvenimo pabaigą (kuri ne visada būna iki galo aiški).

Christiano Giordano nuomone, objektyvios *tikrovės* ir *tiesos* lūkesčiai išliko net po vadinamojo postmodernistinio posūkio (*postmodernist turn*). Tačiau samprotavimai objektyvios *tikrovės* ir *tiesos* plotmėje jau reiškia jų abiejų *unikalumą*.

Praeities rekonstravimas pasitenkinant žinių nuotrupomis (*knowledge by traces*), aptiktomis kronikose ar kituose dokumentuose, grindžiamas ne visiško objektyvumo idėja, savaime lemia įvykio interpretavimą, taigi ir subjektyvumą. Galų gale istorinėje tiesoje, kaip ir istorinėje atmintyje, glūdi keli naratyvai, daugeliu atvejų nesuderinami tarpusavyje, antagonistiniai, o gal net atvirai priešiški.

Subjektyvumo svarbą ir akivaizdžią istorinės *tiesos* pliuralistinę savybę galima iliustruoti, pavyzdžiui, Trečiojo kryžiaus žygio įkvėpėjo imperatoriaus Fredericko Barbarosos istorija. Vokietijoje Frederickas Barbarosa laikomas dvi dvyriū, kovojusiu už krikščionybės (europietiškasias, pasak dvidešimtojo amžiaus interpretacijos) vertybes, jau nuo XVI a. yra vieningos Vokietijos lūkesčių simbolis, o Italijoje jis laikomas tironu ir nacionalinės vienybės priešu. Šios dvi *tiesos* yra unikalios, bet iš tikrųjų jos niekada nebuvo glaudžiai susijusios, tad nors ir prieštaravusios viena kitai, jos niekada iš tikrųjų nebuvo antagonistinės, t. y. niekada netapo aktualiu konflikto objektu.

Socialinė antropologija pabrėžia, kad praeitis ne tik priklauso praeičiai, bet ir veikia dabartį, nes specifiniai socialiniai veikėjai (daugeliu atvejų – in-

telektualusis ir (arba) politinis elitas) gali tyčia mobilizuoti arba, dar geriau, *aktualizuoti* praeitį dabartyje. Praeitis aktualizuojama siekiant specifinių tikslų. Pavyzdžiui, tai noras akcentuoti tam tikrą nacionalinį identitetą ar bendrumo jausmą, perteikti metaforinį ar simbolinį neapykantos arba draugystės supratimą, įtvirtinti galios ar socialinės nelygybės santykius ir pan.

Christianas Giordano teigia, kad jeigu tyrėjas vadovaujasi praeities aktualizavimo prielaida, tai nagrinėdamas empirinius istorinių ar šiuolaikinių įvykių ir (arba) procesų šaltinius, jis būtinai turi rasti atsakymus bent į tokius pagrindinius klausimus:

- kas yra praeities tvarkytojai (*managers*);
- kaip specifiniai socialiniai veikėjai išnaudoja praeities įvykius, t. y. kokių priemonių jie turi;
- kaip praeitis permąstoma, perinterpretuojama, kaip ja manipuluojama ar apskritai ji sukuriama iš naujo;
- kaip atrenkami faktai, t. y. kokie įvykiai garbinami, o kokie niekinami ar net visiškai pašalinami iš atminties;
- kokiais paaiškinimais grindžiama atranka.

Autorius pats ieško atsakymų į šiuos klausimus analizuodamas keturis realius atvejus iš savo lauko tyrimų patirties.

Ginčijamos teritorijos pavyzdys yra Transilvanija, šiuo metu priklausanti Rumunijai. Transilvanijos klausimas – ilgaamžis vengrų ir rumunų ginčas su etniniais konfliktais ir įtampa. Abi ginčo šalys Transilvaniją laiko savo nacijos lopšiu.

Ginčijama memorialinė vieta straipsnyje yra Ankor Vato šventovė, esanti Ankore, milžiniškame mieste ir šventovių komplekse, kuris šiuo metu priklauso Kambodžai. Ankor Vato klausimas atspindi daugiaamžę dviejų galingų kaimyninių imperijų kovą, vykusią bemaž iki to laiko, kol Kambodža tapo Prancūzijos protektoratu (XIX a. antroje pusėje). Kambodžiečiams Ankor Vatas yra svarbiausias tautos ir kultūros simbolis, kurio net raudonieji khmerai nedrįso ištrinti iš šalies istorinės atminties. O tailandiečiams Ankor Vatas – nacionalinio paveldo dalis, dėl nepalankių istorinių aplinkybių atsidūrusi už šalies ribų.

Antagonistinių tiesų susidūrimas gali tapti ir simboline kova. Simbolinis kapitalas, grindžiamas praeitimi, yra pagrindinė vadinamosios kovos už pripažinimą priemonė, pavyzdžiui, kai mažuma bando įrodyti savo etninį identitetą pasipriešindama daugumai, arba atvirkščiai, kai dauguma atsisako pripažinti mažumos grupinio identiteto reikalavimus.

Praeities simbolinio kapitalo pavyzdys yra karo ir liaudies didvyriai. Vienas iš jų – Michailas Barclay'us de Tolly (1761–1818), Rusijos generolas, dalyvavęs 1812 m. Napoleono kare; generolui Rygoje pastatytas paminklas. Kitas – Jane'as Sandanskis (1872–1915), vadintas Pirėjų kalnų caru, liaudies didvyris, Make-

donijos ginkluoto pasipriešinimo Otomanų imperijai, o paskui – ir Bulgarijai (kai jai atiteko Rytų Makedonija) simbolis.

Latvijos rusams generolas Barclay'us de Tolly yra teisėto buvimo Latvijoje ir jų teisės į pripažinimą kaip mažumos simbolis. Latviams jis – užsienio dominavimo, vadinasi, ir pačios nacijos neigimo simbolis. Jane'as Sandanskis – veikėjas, kurį labiausiai garbina rytinės Makedonijos (dabar priklausančios Bulgarijai) ir daugelio buvusios Jugoslavijos – Makedonijos Respublikos (FYROM) gyventojai; nužudytas neaiškiomis aplinkybėmis. O Bulgarijos valdžia laiko jį nusikaltėliu, neteisėtumo ir maišto prieš centrinę valdymą simboliu (su tam tikromis išlygomis Jane'ą Sandanskį galima palyginti su lietuvių Tadu Blinda).

Transilvanijos, Ankor Vato, Rygos ir Bulgarijos Makedonijos atvejų studijos parodo, kad aktualizuotos antagonistinės *tiesos*, tai yra skirtingos *tikrovės* interpretacijos, gali būti labai efektyvus ir pavojingas instrumentas, galintis sukelti simbolinę, struktūrinę ar net grėsmingą fizinę prievartą.

Socialinė praktika rodo, kad ginčijamų atminčių sutaikinimas nebūtinai reiškia, kad konfliktuojantys veikėjai turi jomis dalytis, taigi antagonistinės *tiesos* yra uždelsto veikimo bomba.

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