

## **Greeks' and Germans' representations of world events: Selective memory and voluntary oblivion**

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This research investigates events composing world social memory and oblivion. Participants, 243 Greek and German students, were asked to write three world history events that they wished to remember and three others that they wished to forget and then to evaluate them in terms of their positiveness and importance. Correspondence Analysis (SPAD) was applied to data. Results indicated that: a) All the events of world social memory and oblivion are important. Pleasant and positive events are arranged in social world memory whereas unpleasant and negative ones in social oblivion. b) The content of world social memory is objectified in World War II and the socio-political events that occurred in Europe during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. c) World social memory is Eurocentric and is characterized by recency or “last years/century” bias. d) Membership in a national group functions as a filter for the choice of world historical past. Greeks and Germans are anchored to their own historical past.

The aim of the present research is to investigate the social representations of world events, as a paradigm of social memory and social oblivion. It investigates how the world's historical past is objectified and evaluated and how different national identities are anchored in it and mark it.

Social memory can be defined as the selective handing down of events that have brought about significant long-term changes to the individual or to society from generation to generation (Deschamps, Paèz & Pennebaker, 2001). These events are emotionally charged, they are reproduced by mass media and are connected with collective behaviors and commemorating rituals that result in a coherent narration at the institutional as well as at the personal level (Paèz & Liu, 2009). In this way, world memory can be defined as the sum of past events that hold an important place in the history of humanity. These events have deeply marked time and space because of the changes, either positive or negative, they have caused in different regions or groups. Nevertheless, people have not lived through all the events of the past in person. They have collectively constructed, elaborated, transferred and preserved them either formally, by means of institutions, or through informal communication (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Consequently, social memory deals with the representations of social subjects (individuals or groups) regarding the recent or distant past (Haas & Jodelet, 1999); it emerges from historical events, narrations, customs, traditions, speech, gestures, monuments, symbols, songs, street and square names, souvenirs, anniversaries, etc. (Connerton, 1989). All these function as mnemostrategies to remember the past (Madoglou, 2008; Madoglou, 2009) and display the relationship of societies with it.

Social memory is the co-construction of the past in the present, with the participation of individuals and groups, society and institutions, and intrapersonal and social functions. Olick (1999) underlines that individual memory can exist only along

with social experience and that there is no social memory without individuals participating in the life of a community. This transcendence of the dichotomy between the individual and society is revealed by the study of the relation between social memory and social representations. Social memories and social representations are two phenomena with a common theoretical background; that is, they rely on fundamental common characteristics and procedures (content – elaboration – functions) that illustrate their close relationship (Laurens & Roussiau, 2002). From this perspective, this relationship is a two-way one: “*from social representations towards memory and from memory towards the social representations*” (Roussiau & Bonardi, 2002, p. 47).

The aim of this paper is the study of world social memory or, in others words, the content of the social representation of the world’s historical past. Specifically, the aim is to unveil which events of world history two national groups, Greeks and Germans, choose at a representational level to keep in mind or to forget and how they evaluate them in terms of their positiveness and significance. Moreover, we will investigate the relationship between world social memory and specific national identities. National identity is considered one of the most important social identities that social subjects of a nation-state share and its presence in almost all fields of individuals and community action is undisputed (Billig, 1995). History and, consequently, social memories, that is the social representations of past events that the national groups share, plays an important role in the process of national determination. Identity and memory are two inextricable concepts, since the one seems to determine the other and vice versa (Gillis, 1994).

It is difficult to draw a clear distinction between memory and identity. Social anthropologist Candau (1996) maintains that “*identity without memory (the sum of “remembrances” and “oblivions”)* cannot exist, since this specific feature allows self-consciousness to function within time (...). Respectively, memory without identity can not

*exist because the correlation of sequential situations that the subject is aware of is impossible, if he or she doesn't have a priori consciousness that this sequence of temporal situations can possibly be of any significance to him or her"* (p. 119). In this framework, national identity plays a crucial role in the selection and evaluation of historical events.

In subsequent sections, we will first define the concepts of social memory and oblivion; we will then describe how they relate to the notion of social representations and illustrate the functions they serve. Finally, we will discuss their relationship with social identity and particularly national identity.

## **SOCIAL MEMORY AND SOCIAL OBLIVION**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century four social scientists, influenced by “social constructivism”, put forth, almost simultaneously, the social dimension of memory. These were: in France, sociologist Halbwachs (1925/1994; 1950/1968), and psychologists Janet (1928) and Blondel (1928), and in Great Britain the psychologist Bartlett (1932/1954). All four treat memory as a “social construction” that occurs in the frame of communicative processes. This stance affected the social sciences extensively in the seventies (see Olick & Robbins, 1998 for the sociological literature), mainly history and sociology, as well as social psychology during the last two decades (e.g. Middleton & Edwards, 1990/1997; Jodelet, 1992; Pennebaker, Paèz & Rimé, 1997; Haas & Jodelet, 1999; Laurens & Roussiau, 2002; Madoglou, 2005; 2010). The core idea in Halbwachs’ and Bartlett’s work on the social aspect of memory is that memory is a restructuring of the past in the present, carried out with materials found within the sharing of our lives with others within our communities (Halbwachs, 1925/1994; Halbwachs, 1950/1968; Bartlett,

1932/1954). Memory is social only insofar as it is constructed on the basis of narrations, communications, activities, practices and interactions. This means that the past is reconstructed and co-constructed by the use of social contents, which are space, time and language, and also by acts of understanding that generate virtual representations, ideas and meanings (Halbwachs, 1925/1994). Memory, by way of these social contexts, reconstructs a picture applicable to every period of the past and includes the dominant ideas of society and the prevailing concepts and situations in which individuals find themselves (Bartlett, 1932/1954; Brown & Middleton, 2008). Regarding the sociopsychological approach, memory does not reside in the brain as a passive reflection of things past nor does it represent a mere reiteration or reproduction of events; rather it is a dynamic process continuously developing. Memory is a synthesis, recreation and construction of the past in the present.

Memory, according to Halbwachs (1950/1968), results from the transference of a set of remembered and forgotten events, that is of both remembrance and forgetfulness about a context of events. In the present context, forgetting, or in other words social oblivion, has nothing to do with the pathology of individual mnemonic processes (Ribot, 1881/2005); moreover, it is not a “mnemonic error” referring to an omission or a wrong answer (Auriat, 1996); rather it is a strategy (Madoglou, 2009) to erase or pass over a part of the past in silence, a loss of memories of the events that have occurred, a "refusal of remembrance” and an escape “by all means” from a truth, regardless of what that truth refers to; these are the workings of what has been called “blindness” (Ricoeur, 1999a, p. 80; 1999b).

The content of social memory and consequently of world memory is neither the same nor consensual for all people and social groups (Pennebaker, Paèz & Rimé, 1997). The choice of the elements of the past and their construction in the present is achieved by

means of strategies which are not only personal but also social and historical and may be related to a deliberate hushing up of the past. In this way, the content of memory is always adjusted to the values, norms and beliefs of social subjects and tailored to their sociopsychological identity. Social oblivion, on the other hand, is frequently expressed by silence; Liakos (2007) argues that “*there are many types of silences: silences because we forget, silences due to the censorship and selectivity of memory, silences for very traumatic experiences that cannot be uttered, silences of shame and guilt and silences for things that we remember or forget*” (p. 274).

Individuals, groups, societies and nations choose to remember and decide to forget. Public opinion usually contrasts social remembering with social forgetfulness, placing a positive value on the former and, explicitly or implicitly, a negative one on the latter (Rousso, 1999). Positive events are communicated and shared among individuals, while negative, unpleasant or traumatic events are kept in silence. In this way, the past is constructed by recollections and silences; this constitutes a “social thinking”, as a result of transferring “remembrances” and “oblivions” that connect us with past, present and future. Memory and oblivion are inseparably connected and form the two aspects of “social thinking” (Haas & Jodelet, 1999), one explicit and one implicit.

Haas and Jodelet (2000) refer to social memory as echoing all society, being represented in official institutions, in dominant media and the official educational system. They also refer to collective memory; the memory of all those groups whose interests are still discerned in the present. They suggest using the plural for memory (“memories”) in order to incorporate conflicts of interests. Although history is only one, it is expressed by means of different memories (Thadden, 1999). There is not a unique and uniform memory, but multiple ones. When the past is painful or dangerous, in order to manage it, the group can become the source of denials or silences. It can censor, hide or modify a

traumatic or unbearable past. As Haas and Jodelet (2000) point out, this “hidden side of memory” leads us to the issue of oblivion. Consequently, social oblivion deals with the other side of the same coin, which is deliberate memory. In fact, it is unwanted and unintentional memory; in essence, it represents a constructive rearrangement of the past, being a dynamic product that allows individuals to handle it in such a way as to facilitate their continued existence in the present and future.

## **SOCIAL MEMORY AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS**

Social memory can be viewed as a set of social representations concerning the past which the individual or the group generates, casts into social institutions, defends and conveys to others through communication (Jodelet, 1992; Haas & Jodelet, 2000; Deschamps, Paèz & Pennebaker, 2001; 2002; Madoglou, 2010a). The study of the contents of the construction processes and of the ways social representations work is realized by taking into consideration communication, social interaction, the social marking of contents by social subjects, their contribution to the construction of personal and social identity and the role of the natural or everyday language in contrast to the formal, scientific or written one (Viaud, 2003).

The two constructs share common characteristics:

1. Memories and representations turn “absence” into “presence”, that is an event that has ceased to exist into an event of virtual existence in the milieu of reflection. Memory aims at overcoming absence and distance (Janet, 1928), whereas the representation of an object may be viewed as its “re-presentation” i.e., the re-appearance in the present of an absent object (Viaud, 2003).

2. Both memories and representations are constructed within the framework of communication and social interaction processes (Moscovici, 1976; Farr, 1984; Middleton & Edwards; 1990/1997; Haas & Jodelet, 1999).
3. Social representations are constructed by means of the processes of objectification and anchoring, both of which depend on memory (Moscovici, 1976). It could be argued that social representations are actually “controlled by memory” (Moscovici, 1981, p. 189), as they are constructed on the basis of previous knowledge (Rouquette, 1997). These two complementary processes, on the one hand, exemplify the relationship of the represented object to the past and on the other mediate its social and historical relevance to the present. More specifically, the recording of a social representational object within a pre-existing system of categories (by simplifying, abridging, subtracting, adapting and “naturalizing”) and the influence exerted by the past onto the present, bear a strong social and historical character (Rouquette, 1997). As such, social representations encapsulate memories of the near or distant past, whereas social memories involve social representations of the past. The representational process of anchoring is associated to the process by which various social groups incorporate into their preexisting system of categories, conceptions, beliefs, values and norms, the outcome of the process of objectification, that is the “concrete object” reflecting the social representation. Social thought is built on a preexisting social, cultural and ideological foundation, which has already drawn its own historical path. These depositories of familiar categories and systems of ideas are registered in easily accessible memories.
4. Memories and representations maintain a dialectical relation: representations filter information and knowledge that is committed to memory,

whereas the latter influences the content of representations themselves (Roussiau & Bonardi, 2002).

5. Social representations are related to social memory only insofar as the latter constitutes the central core of the former (Abric, 1994; Abric & Guimelli, 1998).

The process of objectification sets the boundaries around representational contents structured in terms of organizational principles. In contrast, anchoring reveals the differentiations among social subjects (Doise, 1990; Doise, 1992). Although memories and representations are consensual, they are also characterized by strong inter-individual or inter-group differences. This suggests that both the individual and the collective subject should be taken into account. In the present work, objectification is presumed to define the contents of voluntary and involuntary social memory. At the same time, however, representational contents are assumed to be anchored in terms of participants' national identity, that is of Greeks' and Germans' identity in the present work.

World events concern the history of the whole world, which, according to Viaud (2003), consists of scientific representations of the past conveyed through the formal public educational system. Clémence (2002) distinguishes historical from social memory, suggesting that the former is a scientific construction of the past made by experts (historians), whereas the latter "*derives from the transference of traces of the past to a constant movement of live exchanges among generations*" (p. 52). Historical memory is the history that is being taught, whereas social memory is the live history constructed by means of communication: the history that was narrated or taught to us and the history that we have experienced. Nevertheless, historical and social memory are interdependent; they penetrate and affect each other. "*Historical memory is transformed in collective*

*memory, just as science is transformed to public opinion*” (p. 61). In this context, the past is a mixture of scientific and representational thought (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1984), of formal and informal memory, that highlights the socialization of science or the impact of science on the “*world of opinions*” (Moscovici, 1976). We are against the explicit or implicit identification of historical memory (=scientific) with “truth” and objectivity, and of social memory (=representational) with “lie” and subjectivity. Both aspects of memory are about the activities of individuals that have an ideological, economic-political and psychological involvement within a specific socio-historical context, and that develop strategies and choose the events that will enhance or denigrate identity since the content of memory deals with identity stakes (Moscovici, 1976; Deconchy, 1989; Candau, 1998). These two aspects of thought are conceived and interpreted in different ways regarding the past, yet they interact and elements of the one penetrate the other, making the distinction between them vague.

## **SOCIAL MEMORY AND SOCIAL IDENTITY**

The socio-psychological approach to memory becomes evident through the theories of social representations and social identity. Tajfel & Turner (1979) have noted that social identity entails both individual self-perception and self-definition in terms of group membership, implicating group member relations at the emotional as well as the symbolic level. Social identity, in other words, incorporates, condenses and expresses the relationship of the individual or the group with the social reality and at the same time composes the socio-psychological context through which the world is conceived. This identity process is supported by the memory that filters the events of the past. Within this framework, memory works as a mechanism that selectively encodes the past, thereby contributing to identity formation. In other words, memory filters past events, aiming at

retaining those that support the continuity and cohesion of the social subject (Halbwachs, 1950/1968; Gaskell, 2001; Laurens & Roussiau, 2002).

Memory participates in defining the social subject's identity: it formulates selfhood (McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007), narrates "who the individual is" (Lyons, 1996), keeps the person in touch with his or her roots and points to her or his future. At the same time, it possesses a normative function which distinguishes desirable from undesirable actions (Licata, Klein & Gely, 2007). The recollection of the personal sense of victory or defeat in one's own past actions and past deeds deemed as moral or immoral all take part in defining one's own identity's value. Additionally, whatever is recollected is determined by the contents of the specific individual or social identity, since identity determines what individuals remember, forget or hush up from the past. Individuals belong to groups having a past, a history. Values, beliefs and the ideological system of their in-groups and, more generally, their ideological positions orient the content of past social representations towards effective communication and maintenance of intra-individual, inter-individual, intra-group, inter-group and ideological cohesion and integrity in the present as well as in the future. Consequently, memories and identities maintain a two-way, dialectical relationship: memories construct identities and identities construct memories.

The object of this paper is to study the events of world history that two national groups, Greeks and Germans, choose to remember or forget. The question that is posed is the degree to which the national identity of the two groups is implicated in this choice. In the contemporary world, which is characterized by the presence of nation-states, the nation or the national identity points to a "*hegemonic representation*" (Moscovici, 1988), whereas the national group constitutes a fundamental element of social reality. Gellner (1983/2006) points out to what extent "belonging" to a nation is considered natural and

self evident. More specifically he maintains that *“the idea of a man without a nation seems to impose a far greater strain on the modern imagination”* (p. 6). In this way, national identity seems to be an imperative social identity (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990) that filters the national as well as the universal past.

The nation is a multiform concept directly interwoven with contemporary society, as it determines its political structure and affects its social conflicts, as well as the course of its international relations. Moreover, the nation constitutes part of our everyday world, since its presence is detected in our daily interactions (Billig, 1995). It is also a framework of thought, which establishes the way we tackle things and realize our entity and the surrounding world.

The presence of the nation in people’s lives constitutes a reality which is apparent through the establishment of certain values, symbols and codes of communication that remind the members of the national group of their common heritage and uniqueness (Billig, 1996). History plays an important role in this, since it *“provides us with narratives that tell us who we are, where we came from and where we should be going.”* (Liu & Hilton, 2005, p. 537). According to Halbwachs (1950/1968) the historical past refers to a sequence of events that has defined the national group and generated either positive or negative fundamental changes that are kept in a concise and formulated shape. Nevertheless, history is not a cohesive and uniform narrative, nor does the past always completely fit in with what applies in the present; that is the reason it is reshaped and idealized. Consequently, people construct social representations of the history of their national group. It is through the social representations of their history that individuals learn about the important events of their national group and the important people that have affected the course of their nation through time. Moreover, it seems that there is a broad consensus regarding the events and people that are important for the establishment

of a nation's history (Liu, Wilson, McClure & Higgins, 1999). The social representations of history contain descriptive elements which generate memories and contribute to the construction of the social representation of the nation which is shared by all the members of national groups. Cohesion that is created in this way facilitates the communication of national group members. The sense of homogeneity in space and time constitutes a constant reference to the individual and to personal or social identity and is supported by the mnemonic process (Gillis, 1994). The conveyance of national achievements to new generations, that is, a positive image of the past, assures national identity in the present in relation to other national out-groups. Furthermore, it is not only the past that "*weighs on the present*" (Liu & Hilton, 2005), but the present also determines what we selectively remember from the past in order to serve needs, political interests and agendas (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Sen & Wagner, 2005).

In the framework of this paper national identity will stand as the anchor of voluntary and involuntary world social memory.

## **HYPOTHESES**

In this paper, we expect to find evidence for the following:

a) The content of voluntary and involuntary memory<sup>1</sup>, (remembering and forgetting) of world events will be polarized positively and negatively, respectively. This is investigated through the evaluation of events as positive or negative. The importance of events will be evaluated irrespective of their consequences, so that the content of world social memory can be constituted. These are events that have contributed in one way or another to historical–political developments worldwide and for quite a long time.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "involuntary memory" refers to "social oblivion" that is to something that has already been recorded in the memory but the subjects wish to forget (wishing not to have happened) and to hush it up, since, otherwise, they confront a painful and traumatic past.

b) Research referring to social representations of world history proved a more Eurocentric than an ethnocentric content (Liu et al. 2005; Pennebaker et al., 2006). Thus, it is expected that the content of world social memory will be objectified in the European historical past. The participants are expected to refer to world events that have taken place, mainly in Europe, with emphasis on the world wars. Moreover, it is expected that national events will be mentioned as important world events.

c) World memory comprises the common national experiences of members of various national groups. The organisation and expression of mnemonic contents of world events comprise both time and territorial cross-classifications and reflect the socio-psychological identity of active subjects. Consequently, it is expected that national events will be interwoven with world events. Greeks and Germans will keep the positive historical events of their in-group and will manifest the desire for oblivion of the negative ones or will hush them up. There will be differences in relation to the subjects' national identities. Participants, Greeks and Germans, are expected to be anchored in their own national frameworks, that is, their own national history.

d) Participants' answers are not expected to differentiate on the basis of gender. Past research has indicated that gender is not associated with issues of individual, social and historical memory (Madoglou, 2008; Madoglou, 2010a; Madoglou, 2010b; Madoglou & Melista, 2010).

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

A questionnaire was distributed to 243 participants (102 male and 141 female) ranging from 18 to 25 years of age. They were 123 Greek and 120 German students studying at the Universities of Athens (Greece), Munich and Mainz (Germany). Table 1 shows the distribution in relation to their gender and nationality.

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Greece</b>	46	77	123
<b>Germany</b>	56	64	120
<b>Total</b>	102	141	243

Table 1: Participants' gender and nationality

### **Questionnaire**

The research project was presented to participants as a study of the way in which we think about our past. Participants answered a questionnaire which, apart from demographic information (age, gender, nationality), included questions relative to the memory and oblivion of world events. Participants had to write three events from world history which they would like “to remember” / “to forget”. Then they had to mark to what degree they considered each event as unimportant, of moderate importance or important and negative, neutral or positive. This project was carried out during 2007.

### **Recording of verbal data**

The answers referred to the representational content of the world events of social memory and social oblivion. All verbal data were recorded in detail either by keeping literally the participants' answers as representative of category whenever this was possible (short or one-word answers) or by putting them into categories that condensed the content of the sentence which described the event (a short or one-word expression of the central idea).

## **RESULTS**

### **Objectification of world past**

A total of 243 participants produced 1.221 answers. This number corresponds to 83.74% of the number of answers that theoretically would have been produced (1.458 answers) if every subject had marked six events (three events of world memory and three events of world oblivion). In this way, the average verbal production per person is 5.02 whereas

there is a loss of answers amounting to 16.26% (237 cases of the “No answer” category that appear in the second and mainly third answer/choice). The total of the 1.221 answers produced includes 133 different events. Due to the great number of different events produced we chose to keep those that had appeared at least 5 times. These events, 64 in total, corresponded to 90.42% of the answers produced (1.104 out of 1.221 answers). These 64 different events were put into nine categories in order to maintain a concise description of the world memory and oblivion. The percentage of historical events of world social memory and oblivion for each category appears In Table 2.

<b>1. HISTORICAL- POLITICAL EVENTS OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY (32.51%)</b>
World War II (5.69%), Attack on the Twin Towers ( 11.9.2001) (3.91%), World War I (3.57%), “A” Bomb (3.5%), War in Iraq (2.61%), Holocaust (2.06%), World Wars (1.71%), European Union (1.71%), Fall of the Berlin Wall (1.37 %), War in the Former Yugoslavia (0.82%), End of Cold War (0.69%), War in Vietnam (0.69%), May 1968 (0.69%), Cold War (0.48%), Russian Revolution (0.48%), Unification of Germany (0.48%), End of World War II (0.41%), Gulf War (0.41%), United Nations (0.41%), Cyprus (0.41%), The Defeat of Germany (0.41%)
<b>2. EVENTS OF THE DISTANT PAST (11.31%)</b>
French Revolution (3.29%), Discovery of America (2.06%), Enlightenment (1.03%), Crusades (0.82%), Middle Ages (0.75%), Industrial Revolution (0.75%), Renaissance (0.69%), Ottoman Occupation (0.55%), Native Americans (0.55%), Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans (0.48%), Colonialism (0.34%)
<b>3. SOCIAL ISSUES (9.80%)</b>
War (2.19%), Politics (1.44%), Terrorism (1.23%), Revolution (1.17%), Economics (0.82%), Death (0.69%), Changes (0.62%), Racism (0.48%), Independence (0.48%), Hunger (0.34%), Practices (0.34%)
<b>4. TECHNOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS (7.48%)</b>
Inventions (3.16%), First Landing on the Moon (2.95%), Discoveries (1.03%), Science (0.34%)
<b>5. POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL FIGURES (3.50%)</b>
Hitler (1.65%), President Bush (0.62%), Names of leaders (0.48%), Kennedy (0.41%), Alexander the Great (0.34%),
<b>6. NATURAL DISASTERS - ACCIDENTS (3.08%)</b>
Chernobyl (1.51%), Tsunami (0.82%), Disasters (0.41%), Accidents (0.34%)
<b>7. VALUES (2.53%)</b>
Human Rights (0.96%), Religion (0.75%), Civilization (0.41%), Ancient Civilization (0.41%)
<b>8. SPORTS EVENTS (1.23%)</b>
Mundial (World Cup) 2006 (0.82%), Olympic Games (0.41%)
<b>9. NOTHING (4.25%) / NO ANSWER (16.26%)</b>

TABLE 2: Percentage of universal events of social memory and oblivion which appeared 5 times or more

As we can see In Table 2, participants acknowledged historical and political events of the 20th century (32.51%). Higher percentages of events mentioned are for World War II (5.69%), the attack on the twin towers in New York on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 (3.91%), World War I (3.57%), the atom bomb (3.5%) that signalled the end of World War II, the war in Iraq (2.61%), the Holocaust (2.06%), the World Wars (1.71%), as well as events directly or indirectly related to important socio-political and economic changes such as the founding of the European Union (1.71%) and the Fall of the Berlin Wall (1.37%). On the other hand, the War in the Former Yugoslavia (0.82%), the end of the Cold war (0.69%), the Russian Revolution (0.48%), the Cold War (0.48%), the Unification of Germany (0.48%) and the Gulf War (0.41%), as well as the end of World War II (0.41%), the defeat of Germany (0.41%) and the founding of the UN (0.41%) are referred to with lower percentages. There were also references to the events of May '68 (0.69%), the War in Vietnam (0.69%) and the Cyprus issue<sup>2</sup> (0.41%).

A second group comprises events with high percentages derived from periods of the distant past (11.31%), such as the French Revolution (3.29%), the discovery of America (2.06%) and the Enlightenment (1.03%). These events are better illuminated along with other events having lower percentages such as the Crusades (0.82%), the Middle Ages

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<sup>2</sup> When participants mention Cyprus they refer to the invasion and occupation of the northern part of the island by the Turkish army in 1974.

(0.75%), the Renaissance (0.69%), the Ottoman Occupation<sup>3</sup> (0.55%), the Fall of Constantinople<sup>4</sup> (0.48%) and Colonialism (0.34%).

The third group of answers referred to social issues (9.80%), such as war (2.19%) and politics (1.44%), as well as terrorism (1.23%) and revolutions (1.17%). Lower percentages were observed for economics (0.82%), death (0.69%), racism (0.48%) and hunger (0.34%).

The fourth group of answers includes technological and scientific achievements (7.48%), either in the form of specific events, such as the first landing on the moon (2.95%) or in the form of general references about scientific progress and development, such as inventions (3.16%) and discoveries (1.03%).

References to natural disasters and accidents appear to claim their own share of world memory (3.08%), such as the Chernobyl accident (1.51%), the Tsunami (0.82%) and other disasters (0.41%) and accidents (0.34%).

Additionally, various political and historical figures (3.50%) such as Hitler (1.65%), President Bush (0.62%), Kennedy (0.41%) and Alexander the Great (0.34%) were acknowledged by participants. Similarly, values (2.53%) such as human rights (0.96%), religion (0.75%), ancient civilization (0.41%) and generally civilization (0.41%) are worth mentioning. Other events that were referred to as world memory were sports

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<sup>3</sup> The Ottoman domination is the period of occupation of the Hellenic land which lasted almost four centuries i.e. from the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 up to 1821, year of the declaration of the Greek Revolution against the Ottoman Turks. This period is described as dark in the history of Greece and is identified with regression both in the economic and the cultural sectors in the social memory of Greeks. Lekkas (2001, p. 132) underlines that the predicaments, the destructions, the unfairness and the misery that the Greek nation faced in the course of centuries, are recounted and stressed to a great extent and are counterbalanced by triumphant events of the nation. This interpretation has already been pointed out by Renan in 1882, who claimed that the memory of common sorrows unites more than happiness does, since destructions dictate duties requiring common effort.

<sup>4</sup> The Fall of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453, constitutes a particularly traumatic event for the Greeks and in particular, as research has revealed (Madoglou, 2005), its recollection causes sentiments of shame, which seems to be interpreted by the interruption of the Orthodox Christian tradition, part of which is the overwhelming majority of Greeks (Herzfeld, 2002).

events (1.23%) such as the Mundial 2006 (0.82%) and the Olympic Games (0.41%). Finally, the share of “Nothing” answers is 4.25%.

### **Evaluation of world memory events**

Correspondence Analysis for the portrayal of the relationship among frequently mentioned world events of voluntary and involuntary memory was applied to data, on the basis of their importance and positiveness. Results (Figure 1) indicated a basic factor<sup>5</sup>, which interpreted 65.15% of total variance and portrays opposing evaluations, on the positive vs negative evaluative dimension of world voluntary and involuntary memory events. In contrast, importance, the second evaluative dimension that the participants were asked to use, did not differentiate their answers. When the figures are read, consideration must be given that the further the variables (either independent or dependent) are away from the centre of the axes the more they participate in their definition. The neighbouring variables share a common profile.

A glance at Figure 1 shows that the events that are far from the centre of the axes and are close either to the positive or to the negative pole define the axis, contributing to its total variance. On the contrary, events that approach the centre of the axes have the same profile and do not participate in its definition. In this way, the events that are evaluated positively gather on the left side whereas those that are evaluated negatively are depicted on the right.

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<sup>5</sup> Five factors correspond to two variables. If factors had participated with equal percentages, then each would have interpreted 20% of total variance. The percentage of total variance that interprets each axis and measures the quality of factors should be greater than or equal to 20% of 20, that is  $100/(\text{number of variables} - 1)$  or  $100/5$ . Consequently, the specific correspondence analysis yielded only one factor.

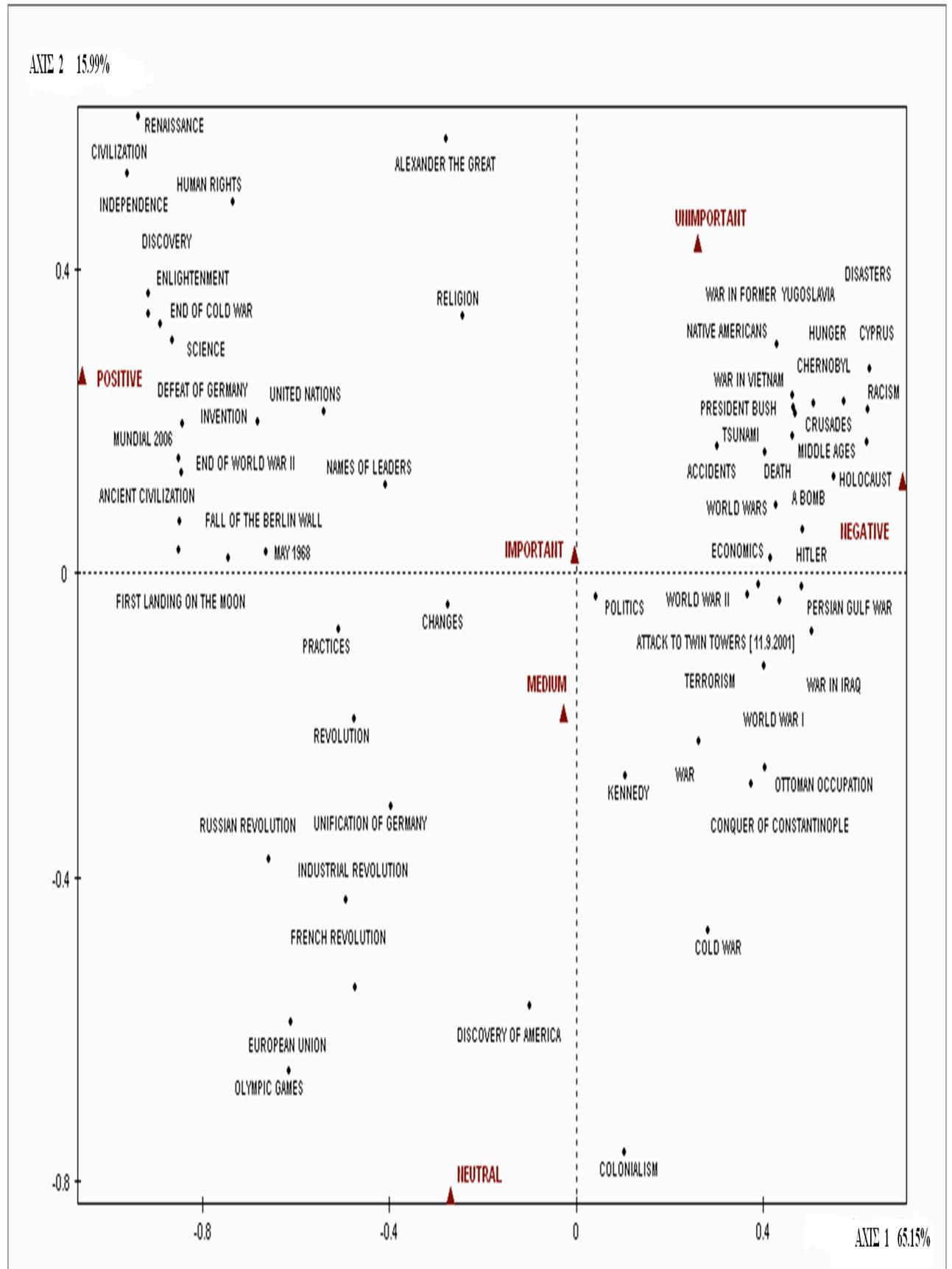


Figure 1: The importance and positiveness of the world events

All events characterized as positive are those that have contributed to the development and progress of individuals. Revolutions both generally or specifically mentioned, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, May '68, events that refer to the peaceful coexistence and collaboration of the people (the fall of the Berlin wall, the end of the cold war, the end of World War II, the defeat of Germany, the EU), scientific and cultural achievements (inventions, the first landing on the moon, discoveries, science, civilisation, ancient civilisation) that signal the progress and development of the individual, various periods of history (the Enlightenment, the Renaissance) that were marked by intellectual and cultural development, and the idea of progress.

On the contrary, events that are characterized as negative are wars, both of the recent and of the distant past (World Wars - I and II -, the war in Iraq, the Crusades, the atomic bomb, the Holocaust), terrorism in general but also specifically, such as the memory of the attack on the twin towers in New York (11-9-2001), as well as the accident at Chernobyl. In other words, events that left behind them hecatombs of deaths and sadness appear to be evaluated as negative.

However, all the world events, regardless of their evaluation as being positive or negative, appear to be important. Apparently, such events have left their imprint on human memory<sup>6</sup>; their significance is determined not by their positive or negative outcome, but by the outcome itself that brought on changes, whatever they might have been.

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<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that there is a tendency, portrayed in Figure 1 (quadrant above right), to evaluate negative events as unimportant, this finding is not considered significant.

**Anchoring of the world past according to participants' gender and national identity**

World events that participants mentioned were categorized according to social memory/oblivion, gender and nationality. Correspondence Analysis applied to data indicated two fundamental axes that interpret 90.23% of the total variance. The first axis portrays the contrast between events of social memory and oblivion and it interprets 59.05% of total variance, while the second, with 31.18%, juxtaposes the national identity of the Greek and German people.

In Figure 2 we observe an explicit distinction between events of social memory and oblivion. Verbal production for social memory is portrayed on the left of the figure, while social oblivion is on the right. It also distinguishes the verbal production of Greeks in the upper part of the figure, from that of Germans, placed at the bottom. Finally, there seems to be no differentiation between men and women as their answers are portrayed in the centre of the axes.

The reading of the figure indicates that events of social memory and oblivion that are clearly far from the centre of the axes have a considerably different profile from the average profile of verbal production for world events; the latter are mentioned among social memory or social oblivion events of both Germans and Greeks, regardless of gender, at the centre of the axes. More specifically, it can be observed that world memory, found on the left edge of the figure, is structured mainly around five organisational principles:

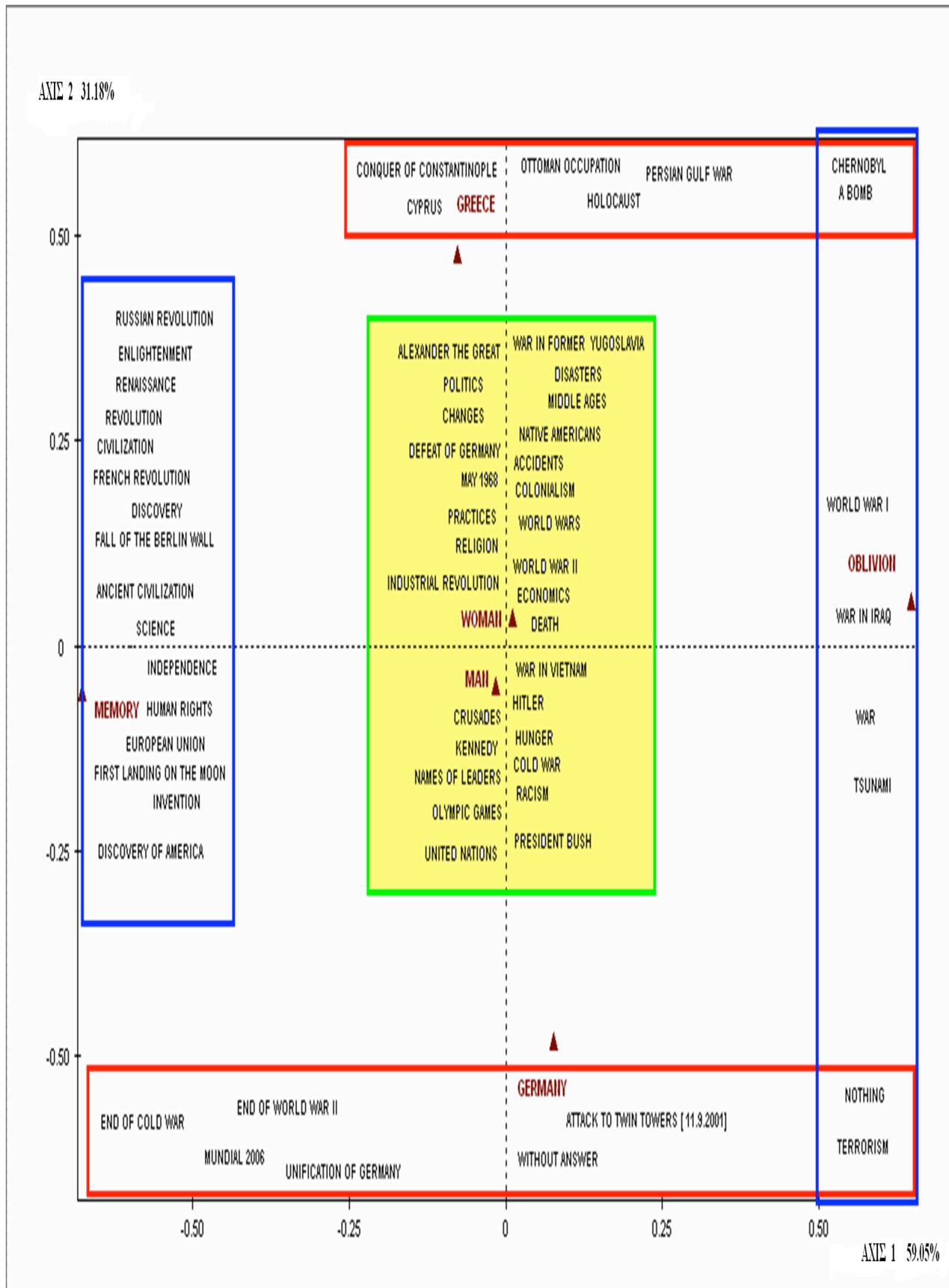


Figure 2: Universal events according to memory/oblivion, gender and nationality

- *Revolutions and movements* that occurred in Europe, i.e. the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution. These events triggered changes in the political, social and economic lives of individuals.
- *Discoveries and inventions either cited generally or as more specific events* (the discovery of America, the first landing on the moon). Such references indicate the unceasing striving of man for improvement and change and are the outcomes of scientific research.
- Civilization, both generally and specifically, i.e. ancient civilization and periods of the distant past (Renaissance and Enlightenment), which were marked by significant intellectual growth.
- Human Rights, as hallmarks of history in general and of the history of liberties, concerning equality among individuals and their peaceful co-existence.
- Efforts for co-existence and cooperation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (fall of the Berlin wall, the EU).

These organizational principles concern the progress, development and continuous efforts of humanity for innovation and change.

On the right edge of Figure 2, there are world events of social oblivion that are organised on the basis of three organizational principles:

1. Wars, mainly of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, constitute traumatic events that participants want to forget because they were accompanied by death, pain and sadness, and are in juxtaposition with the progress and development of humanity.
2. Terrorism
3. Natural disasters (the tsunami in South-East Asia) and the Chernobyl accident are events of involuntary memory, as they were followed by thousands of deaths.

The second axis portrays the different anchors of voluntary and involuntary world memory content of the two national groups. At the bottom right edge of the Figure, there is the verbal production of Germans focusing on events that concern their national identity. Specifically, the “End of World War II”, the “End of the Cold War” and the “Unification of Germany”, are events that are particularly important to the German nation. It is worth mentioning that Germans refer to the “Mundial 2006”. This event, although a world sports one, alludes to the national identity of unified Germany. Gebauer (2006) points out that during the “Mundial 2006” in-group cohesion and a spirit of nationalism emerged among Germans: German citizens wore the colours of German football teams, were dressed in their national colours and proudly waved the flag of unified Germany.

As long as social memory operates in a regulatory way, aiming to defend the identity and cohesion of the group, the usual response to a “traumatic” past is silence (Barret-Ducrocq, 1999, Haas, 2000). Thus, what we observe at the bottom right edge of the figure are the “No answer” and “Nothing” categories, possibly referring to a non-communicable and non-transferable past; these categories stand for the denial or/and the rejection of the traumatic past of Germany, and at the same time the will to remember what has happened, yet avoiding naming it. Reference is also made to “Terrorism”, represented by the terrorist attack on the twin towers (11/9/2001), an important event of our times.

In the upper part of the second axis, the verbal production of Greeks focuses on the Fall of Constantinople, the Ottoman domination and the Cyprus issue, as well as on World War II, mainly through references to the Holocaust and the Atom bomb. The Chernobyl accident also appears to constitute a traumatic event that Greeks want to forget, while they also mention the war in Iraq.

Elements which do not differ in participants' answers are placed in the centre of the figure. These are events mentioned by both men and women, Greeks and Germans that are not placed clearly in either social memory or in social oblivion. Such events specify organizational principles of social memory and social oblivion, as they are about World Wars, the cold war, the Crusades, the Middle Ages, colonialism, changes in the countries of the former Warsaw Pact, the social phenomenon of racism and figures that played a crucial role in 20th century developments (Hitler, Kennedy). Although references are made mainly to ideas and notions, the Olympic Games, although a sports event, are also mentioned, possibly due to their underlying connotations.

There seem to be events constituting the content of world memory which are commonly referred to by both Greeks and Germans, while some others strongly engage both people in intentional forgetting. It must be underlined that while world historical reality is single and unique, its representations, constructed by active participants are multiple. Greeks and Germans shape their memories through their experiences or the consequences of the historical events, focusing on their own particular historical-national identity.

## **DISCUSSION**

The growth of the mass media, technological developments of the modern world associated with new information and communication systems, as well as the globalization of collective phenomena, have gradually constructed a form of mass memory that aims for the development of collective responsibility and the mobilisation of individuals towards the protection of human rights and democracy (Jodelet, 1992). Individuals from all over the world unite their forces in international groups or movements to participate in

activities against war, racism, nuclear arms, environmental destruction, inequality etc. Social memories come together under the umbrella of mass memory which addresses humanity in its entirety. Values such as “peace”, “freedom”, “democracy”, “equality”, “human rights”, “solidarity”, “science”, “development” are not limited within national borders; they abolish them and are largely accepted as organizational principles for the choice of the world events of social memory and oblivion.

Events of world memory and oblivion are important and they are evaluated in a positive and negative way respectively: on the one hand there is the positive, good and pleasant social memory and on the other hand the negative, bad and ugly social oblivion. Both memory and oblivion are elements constituting our past. The representational content of memory includes a descriptive or functional dimension and an emotional or evaluative one (Vergès, 1992; Moliner, 1994). The functional dimension consists of those events that are considered suitable and important to make up the past of humanity, a past useful, effective, instructive and telling for both the present and the future. The regulatory dimension deals with the quality of those events that were chosen to represent the past. Such events are shaped by evaluations, opinions, judgements and stereotypes, in other words by the dominant ideology in each socio-historical context. Billig (1997) maintains that ideology determines memory and oblivion. Social oblivion of certain events or dimensions of history is neither an error nor a deviation or roaming of social thought. It is a strategy, it is organised thought determined by the force of practical or symbolic utility.

World events that will be passed on from generation to generation and from nation to nation are those that have changed the balance of power. Extreme minority events (either progressive or reactionary, Moscovici, 1979; Mugny, 1982; Papastamou & Mugny, 1983) that either resulted in securing the above mentioned values or violated

them are subject to active thinking and communication, determining in this way the identity of the individual–citizen.

World social memory is objectified by events that are mainly related to World War II as well as by political and socio-economic events that occurred in Europe in the course of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, there is a Eurocentric dimension in the content of world social memory which coincides with the results of other cross-cultural research (Liu, 1999; Liu et al. 2005; Pennebaker et al., 2006). These researchers proved that young people, in European and Asian countries mention World War II and politics as being world events of outstanding importance. Consequently, what has appeared is consensus regarding the content of world social memory. It is, however, remarkable that although both Greeks and Germans mention World War II they emphasize different events. The Greeks stress the Holocaust and the A-bomb whereas the Germans mention the end of the war. It is evident then that each national group maintains a specific memory of the war and not a general recollection of that period (Paèz et al., 2008).

Greek and German participants mention mainly events that transpired over the last sixty or seventy years. This recency or “last years/century bias has been confirmed by other studies too (Liu et al. 2005; Pennebaker et al., 2006). The majority of these events were experienced by the parents and grandparents of the participants and were conveyed to them. According to Deschamps, Paèz and Pennebaker (2002), social memory in western societies lasts three generations, encompassing events that were experienced by the children, the parents and the grandparents (see also Assmann, 1992). Additionally, we observe that the content of world social memory resembles a sequence of historical events that occurred in a short period of time: wars, revolutions, movements, intellectual and artistic events, political crises, ideas. Braudel (1993) believes that this can be

attributed to people's tendency to conceive their surrounding world through a time perspective that is no greater than their own exceptionally short lives. He underlines the important place that the past possesses in the present and points out that among the numerous features of our times there exist two pasts, the recent one and a more or less distant one. Recent history comes running towards us, while distant history accompanies us at a slower pace.

Social oblivion appears to function as much as an institutional strategy as it does as a strategy of active subjects to select a useful past for the future. Individuals choose to hush up disturbing events (Haas, 2000; Haas, 2002). In this way, the categories "Nothing" and "No answer" which characterize the Germans and are reflected in social oblivion might be interpreted as silence or avoidance of naming painful events of their historical past, a hypothesis which needs further investigation by other research. Additionally, in research on social oblivion either referring to autobiographical past (Madoglou, 2008; Madoglou, 2011) or to the national past (Madoglou, 2010b; Madoglou & Melista, 2010) or to the local past (Haas, 2002) the categories "No answers" and "Nothing" characterize in a constant way the social oblivion which may be interpreted as "silence" that aims to the protection of the subjects' personal and social identity (about the "No answers" discussion see Haas, 2000). This assertion is strengthened by the fact that the Germans do not mention the Holocaust as the Greeks do and, as is evidenced by other research that the French-speaking Swiss people do (Deschamps, Paèz & Pennebaker, 2001). Dresler-Hawke (2005), who studied the perception of the Holocaust by third generation people in the unified Germany, found that the German university students hold members of the population that lived in that period responsible for the Holocaust, and at the same time they tend to consider their grandparents either victims or dissidents of the regime and innocent of any blame.

Membership in a particular national group determines which world events individuals choose to remember or express the will to forget. These events are important for national identity. Thus, differences in world memory stem from the participants' national identity, revealing a socio-centric bias. The identity of members belonging to the two national groups becomes obvious from their answers. Greeks and Germans concentrate on their particular national history that involves modes of thinking, communication, interaction, experiences of history that are registered in their own socational context (Doise, 1992), considering it "universal": Greeks concentrate on the Ottoman domination and the Fall of Constantinople, Germans on the end of the cold war, the unification of Germany and on the symbolic national role of Mundial 2006. National groups that are expressed by the will of the active subjects seem to claim a place in world memory by suggesting a specific content. On the one hand, there are the Germans, who cover the holocaust with persistent silence. This silence is used as a collective defense mechanism aiming at emotionally deleting the past (Mitscherlicht and Mitscherlicht, 1972 in Marques et al., 1997). On the other hand Greeks project Turkey, a historical enemy of the nation (Ottoman domination, Fall of Constantinople, Cyprus issue). This traumatic memory of the Greeks has its roots, according to Ferentinos, Madoglou & Pachoulidis (2003), in the territories of Asia Minor lost in the war of liberation, the effort of constructing the Greek nation-state in 1821 and in the uprooting of the Greek population from "Asia Minor", as well as in the rekindling of the historical "hatred" which *"is fed back by present situations and facts related to continuous threats by the neighbouring country (...) Imia, Aegean, the Cyprus issue..."* (p. 37).

Particularly for Greece, previous research has indicated that the representation of Turkey is interwoven with the historical constituting of the modern Greek nation, that is, with the existence of the national group and its identity (Madoglou & Ferentinos, 2005).

Even though collective memory lasts over three generations, this does not appear to apply regarding the representation that Greek people harbour for Turkey, *“from the years of the “Asia Minor destruction” up till now, as five generations have already passed since then (cf. individuals of 10-12 years) and the stability in the content of social memory is apparent. This stability, apart from socialization and institutionalized historical knowledge and/or its oral transfer, may also be due to the national defeat of Cyprus thirty years ago, as well as to the constantly experienced national expansionist threat of Turkey”*, (Madoglou & Ferentinos, 2005, p. 82-83).

## CONCLUSION

European citizens commonly construct a European identity by selecting as content of world memory mainly events related to the history of Europe and conveying in an underlying way the concept of the domination of western civilization over others. Universal memory is objectified in the context of Western European civilization of the 20<sup>th</sup> the century in terms of space and time. Doise (2009) underlines that research has proved that European identity is being constructed in the context of a new European nationalism with a more severe attitude towards non-European foreigners and limited support for a further opening of the borders.

However, in world memory (even in the European one) there is room for different national memories. Actually, the wholeness of world memory is the result of reconstructing partial national memories. In this interaction of the part with the whole, the part claims its particularity and resists integration into the whole. Memories of world events are not a uniform representational product of the past for all individuals or groups, i.e. nations. At the same time, humanity needs certain symbolic constants, either

conventional or virtual, to survive, since we know that not all individuals live peacefully, freely, democratically and equally, nor enjoy the outcome of the struggles for human rights, solidarity and scientific achievements. A uniform and coherent European identity exists separate from the identities of other continents. However, there is a number of European member state-nations claiming their own particularity and history; a history for which they seek the respect of others. Thadden (1999) points out that “*All of us live with historical memories shaped by the experience of history and we all have to accept the different memories as well as the variety of perceptions of what we call historical reality. We must respect the multiple memories and abandon the wish to reduce them to one, unique memory that erases all others. Even if there is just one and unique history, this will always be comprehended through different perceptions and memories*” (p. 45).

Results of the present research seem on the one hand to be restricted to describing the world voluntary and involuntary social memory that the university students of two European countries have constructed and, on the other, highlight that national identity functions as a filter in the construction of the world’s historical past. Nevertheless, these results need further scrutiny in order to investigate the various issues that have come to light. Why, for example, do the Germans mention terrorism (the attack on 11<sup>th</sup> September) as an important event of social oblivion and the Greeks, who mention the Chernobyl accident, do not? This, possibly, has to do with the relationship between these dissimilar groups relating to the past conflict of the western and eastern world.

The methodology used (associative recollection of events) restricts the interpretations of the results as well as their generalization. A multimethodological approach with qualitative and quantitative data would benefit the research in many ways. On one hand it would facilitate access to processes of negotiation and selective construction of world historical past and on the other would introduce more direct

evidence regarding the contribution of differentiated national identities in the construction of world social memory. Additionally, it would contribute to the understanding of the mechanisms of selection of the national past for the construction of national identities.

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