

# WILEY

---

Contesting the Past

Author(s): JEREMY BLACK

Source: *History*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (310) (APRIL 2008), pp. 224-254

Published by: Wiley

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24428433>

Accessed: 06-06-2020 04:59 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Wiley is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *History*

# Contesting the Past

---

JEREMY BLACK

*University of Exeter*

## Abstract

The search for validation and quest for justification in the past is a commonplace tendency. It is of particular note at the present and is widespread across the political spectrum and around the world. Using the past can also entail the deliberate erasure of contentious episodes. While motivated by a search for good relations, contesting the past creates new 'victims', in so far as those whose role is neglected or actively misrepresented can be seen as victims or at least as having a grievance. From this perspective, the historian emerges as the necessary opponent of false consciousness, with his own obligation to truth in both past, present and, therefore, future.

History is full of examples where people who had right on their side fought against tremendous odds and were victorious. And it is also full of examples of people passively hoping to wait it out, only to get swallowed up by a horror beyond what they ever imagined. The future is unwritten.<sup>1</sup>

The above advertisement for *The World Can't Wait* movement's 5 October 2006 march, which was directed against the Bush administration and the American commitment in Iraq, is certainly instructive for historians because it offers yet another instance of the commonplace tendency to seek validation in the arms of Clio, the muse of history. However, the emphasis on using the past for identity and grievance creates serious problems for academic historians, as their quizzical and critical stance is not suited to the assertiveness about the past that is central to these stances. This will doubtless cause problems at the individual level in the classroom, with committed and intolerant students complaining about being asked to read or listen to different views. More serious is the extent to which competing views of the past will also make any public account of it necessarily divisive. Consider, for example, the problems of presenting Islamic history in western Europe. As a result, the presentation of history can become a potential threat to public order, and thus safety.

Accepting that relative views exist does not mean that judgement should be discarded. Instead, it opens up a richer field for discussion.

<sup>1</sup> *USA Today*, 20 Sept. 2006.

Not least, the role of historical myths and related 'history wars' leads to the question whether such myths are a necessary basis for identity. This can be particularly related to the tension between civic and ethnic nationalism. It is appropriate to ask whether these historical myths are more important for authoritarian states that have to allege a destiny through time, past, present and future because they cannot readily rest on the present consent that is crucial to the democratic process. Yet, democracies themselves require an identity and a sense of value that is greater than that of elections: episodic referenda.

Whether necessary or a burden; good, bad or indifferent; the weight of history can be seen very differently. Running together history and memory, Friedrich Nietzsche contended in 1874 that history was a burden that enslaved the spirit by leading to a fixation on the past which weakened resolve and induced mental paralysis.<sup>2</sup> At the psychological level, he argued for the value of forgetting as a positive force.<sup>3</sup> A century later, Hayden White took up the argument.<sup>4</sup> More prosaically, the sense of historically grounded wrongs, of empowerment through grievance, of atavistic hatreds, and identities through opposition, encourages a feeling that history is a curse. For many years, this was a response that the British readily voiced in reaction to the sectarian divides of Northern Ireland. The 'could they not get over this' view was a powerful sentiment, and one that was far from new. During the crises of the Napoleonic War, for example, British commentators had expressed the same view about Protestant–Catholic divides in Ireland.

A similar response has been illustrated in reaction to the existential challenge posed by the demands of al-Qaeda for the withdrawal of non-Muslims from formerly Muslim lands, especially al-Andalus, southern Spain. That these lands had only ever been Muslim as a result of conquest in the eighth century is ignored by al-Qaeda, which deplores the fact that Spaniards are now free to choose the religion of their choice. There is, indeed, a direct and total antagonism between the free values of the west and theocrats who oppose toleration. In 1998, the World Islamic Front had called for a *jihad* 'against the Jews and the Crusaders',<sup>5</sup> which is an aspect of the extent to which notions of a clash of civilizations are only made understandable in and by history.

In al-Qaeda demands, there is also no sense that distant time was anything other than an immediate issue. Whereas episodes such as the Palestinian movement (both forced and voluntary) from Israel were within living memory, this was certainly not true of the final extinction of al-Andalus in the fifteenth century, nor of holy warriors held up for

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 57–123.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York, 1969), pp. 57–8.

<sup>4</sup> H. White, 'The Burden of History', in Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 27–50.

<sup>5</sup> E. Peters, 'The Firanj Are Coming – Again', *Orbis*, iil (2004), 4.

emulation, such as the medieval Mamluks of Egypt or Muhammad Ahmad, Mahdi of Sudan in 1881–5. The French conquering Algeria from 1830 in part saw themselves as latter-day crusaders, not least in creating a Christian settler society, but this was not true of the Americans or British in Iraq from 2003.

Conversely, drawing a distinction between the fifteenth century and the period covered by the memory of those still alive can be regarded as presentism and as a breach not only of the injunction ‘never forget’, but also of the role of an understanding of ‘deep time’ in inculcating group identity. This is true of religions as well as nations. If movements such as Islam, or for that matter Christianity and Judaism, are to be seen as long-term entities historically grounded through revelation and theology, then it is easy to understand how an organic appreciation ensures that past events become present grievances and thus wrongs to be righted in the future.

This was seen in Britain in 2006–7 with the leaders of the Church of England treating that body’s attitude prior to 1807 to the slave trade as a matter for present contrition. In 2006, the Church agreed to apologize to the descendants of slaves for the Church’s involvement in the slave trade. The idea that nobody alive was responsible, and, indeed, that another age had a very different set of values, was ignored in the face of this ahistorical assertion of corporate responsibility which represented an ostentatious attempt to identify with victims rather than perpetrators.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the importance of the slave trade in the creation of the modern world was emphasized, as in the International Slavery Museum opened in Liverpool in August 2007. Slavery and the slave trade thus became a means by which to criticize globalization and modernization.

In contrast, for example, the chronologically far more distant conquest of Britain by the Romans from 43 and the subsequent treatment of the population are not a theme in British discussion. In academic terms, there has recently been a debate over Roman rule in terms of exploitation and foreign domination that was not, as it was subsequently to be presented, an anticipation of Britain’s later imperial success, but this is a distant history that plays no role in any politics of grievance.<sup>7</sup>

In more general terms, especially in the context of victimhood and grievances, the search for tailor-made versions of the past that suit present preferences is also an attempt to free the past from the shackles of facts. As such, it entails freeing both past, and present, from the stranglehold of intellectual discipline, as facts do not speak for themselves (in any case, which facts?), but have to be analysed. Rejecting the complexities and fact-based nature of historical analysis serves political ends. Moreover, as another instance of self-indulgence, this rejection is also part of the pernicious (and really anti-rational) legacy of post-modernity. The popularity of counterfactual (what if?) history also takes a part as it can

<sup>6</sup> J. Black, *The Slave Trade* (2006).

<sup>7</sup> D. Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire* (2006).

represent 'the seduction of being able to manipulate the past'.<sup>8</sup> Technology also plays a potent role. The role of the Internet in facilitating the circulation of contending and usually presentist versions of the past is considerable. Through ostensibly democratizing the presentation of history, it actually undermines our understanding of the complexities of the past.

The bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade also raised the contrast between a historicized sense of grievance, which it was easy to express, or, in critical eyes, indulge, and the more complex reality of problems in the modern world. At the same time as Britain was being denounced for the trade, there was scant reference to the key role of African co-operation in the trade, and that there is little research on this is interesting in itself. In Britain, the outlawing in Ghana in 2001 of the practice by which women, known as *Trokosi*, were enslaved to traditional priests attracted scant attention. This practice also exists in several other West African countries. A lack of strong interest in the role of slavery in Africa is also true of the presentation of other aspects of the slave trade such as the museum on the island of Goree in Senegal that tells the history of a branch of the trade dominated by France, or, indeed, commemorative events on 23 August, which has been designated UNESCO Slavery Remembrance Day.

Empowerment through historic grievance is a source not only of division but also of a reluctance to search for the compromises necessary if life is to continue both within and between communities. It focuses on where one comes from, and not what one can do, on an incapacity, and not an active potential. Indeed, in place of national interests being presented in terms of 'we are ablest and thus should get', comes an alternative: 'we have been mistreated and thus should receive'. Empowerment through grievance thus focuses on the vindication of victimhood, rather than any *real* commitment to a way forward.

Much of history does deal with conflict, and with identification through difference, and to ignore this is foolish. Moreover, there is a sense that a consideration of the past can provide lessons. There is, however, a determination to search not for complex lessons, but for those that apparently offer obvious guidance. In short, the public treatment of history frequently takes on a demagogic form and also a quasi-religious character, with episodes providing homilies about what will happen if wrong choices are made. The emphasis thus is on sin rather than redemption, with the curse being that of fundamental error, whether in the shape of supposedly malevolent racial, religious, social or political groups, or that of malign and self-indulgent human will. In contrast, notions about learning from the past in an incremental fashion assume not a millenarian perfectibility of mankind or ending of history, but, rather, a notion of improbability. That, however, poses a danger, that, in

<sup>8</sup> R. J. Granieri, 'Telling It Like It Isn't?', *International History Review*, xxix (2007), 343.

pursuit of an exemplary lesson, the past may be jettisoned if it does not contribute to or correspond with the lesson.

The most accurate history that notes the ambiguities of the past, the diversities of motives and the complexities of causation is not one that corresponds with political and religious strategies or with public needs for clarity, heroes and villains. Such a history is one that reveals most about the past and about ourselves. It is one that repays examination, but can leave one with the stigma of Cassandra. For the individual, as for the nation, experience must be clearly and fully understood and built upon to ensure a better future. If we delude ourselves about the lessons of past events, we will not avoid the pitfalls of the past, or secure its successes, in the future. Above all, it is necessary presentism: past 'wrongs' cannot be righted by generations not responsible for them.

## I

If history is a civil discourse, then it is natural to expect that it atrophied under regimes that starkly policed the public sphere, whatever the particular politics of the regime. It is also natural to expect that the restoration of an open public sphere would result in renewed historical debate. 'History thinking', from this perspective, emerges as a gauge of the health of civil society. While historical debate does not guarantee a healthy public space, its absence definitely indicates something amiss. Debate, of course, does not prevent abuse of the processes of historical scholarship, while the propagation of partisan opinions becomes a problem when there is not only empowerment through grievance but also an attempt to close down differing voices.

This is exemplified in Spain where the right-wing dictator Francisco Franco, who seized power as a result of his success in the bitterly-fought Spanish Civil War of 1936–9, retained control until he died in 1975. During his Nationalist regime, there was a determined attempt to present the type of history that the Vichy regime of 1940–4 in France would have applauded. There was an emphasis on unity through the victory of the Nationalist cause and the central role of Catholicism, and an exclusion of regional perspectives and the important role of Jews and Muslims in Spanish history. The harsher aspects of the Francoist approach were, however, moderated from the late 1950s onwards as the divisions of the Civil War, while still stressed, were replaced by a memorialization linked to an attempted national reconciliation that was designed to secure the stability of the new order. Indeed, there was at times a conscious omission of the Civil War. For example, the university curriculum frequently stopped the teaching of Spanish history in the nineteenth century, or quickly moved through the 1930s, presenting those years as a lesson about the dangers of liberal rule.

Accounts critical of the Nationalists were not published in Spain. Thus, a Basque translation of George Steer's *The Tree of Gernika: A Field Study of Modern War* (1938), a discussion of the brutally destructive

bombing of Guernica in 1937, had to be published by exiles in Caracas in 1963.<sup>9</sup> The government also took measures to stop historical investigation of the Civil War, not least by closing the archives. After Franco's death, although what critics termed 'bunkerista' writers, such as Ricardo de la Cierva, continued to offer Nationalist history, there was a widespread determination to move beyond his legacy as part of the attempt to create a new, democratic Spain. This was termed the 'Pact of Forgetfulness', and it was maintained during both the centrist government of 1976–82 and its left-wing and right-wing successors of 1982–97 and 1997–2004 respectively. The last, the Aznar government, in particular, tried to present a consensus view of the past. There was also a failure of novelists and film-makers to discuss the issue, particularly in the 1970s. The anniversaries of key events in the 1930s were left to discussion rather than public memorialization.

There were, however, cracks in the edifice. An anti-Francoist intellectual consensus developed with, for example, a discreet revolution in the Spanish universities in the 1980s. Moreover, the National Civil War Archive in Salamanca was organized in the 1980s. Ironically, most of the material was originally derived from Republican sources and had been compiled under the Francoists in order to help in the trials of Republican leaders. The opening or, at least partial opening, of foreign archives was also instructive. The fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war were important, as the Soviet archives helped to clarify Stalin's policy. There was also an opening up of non-Soviet material about the Spanish Civil War, including the Italian archives which contained information on the part that Italian troops played in the war on the Nationalist side.

In the 2000s, the uneasy consensus within Spain collapsed. In part, this was a result of political pressure, especially from the regions striving for a proto-nationalism. The assault on what was essentially a Castilian account of Spanish history helped lead to the reconsideration of the Civil War, not least because of the prominent role of Catalonia in the resistance to Franco. The Catalans were finally able to regain material Franco had deposited in Salamanca. There was also an attack on the Pact of Forgetfulness at the popular level. Associations to recuperate the historical memory of the Republicans were founded. Novelistic accounts of the large-scale slaughter of Republicans during and after the Francoist takeover appeared in what developed into a widespread cultural movement. These books became popular and many were published at the local level. Moreover, the web was extensively used in order to discuss the issue. Much of this focused on the bodies in the large number of mass graves across Spain. The families of Republicans were insistent that their forbears be exhumed, identified and reburied. This pressure coincided

<sup>9</sup> H. R. Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica! A Study of Journalism, Propaganda and History* (Berkeley, 1977); N. Rankin, *Telegram from Guernica. The Extraordinary Life of George Steer, War Correspondent* (2003).

with advances in geo-radar equipment, DNA testing and forensic science that made such discovery and identification a stronger prospect.

Furthermore, the advanced age of the children of the victims lent a sense of urgency to the situation, with pressure for the identification of their parents before they themselves died. The grandchildren proved the main champions. The first exhumation occurred in 2000, and by 2003 there were exhumations at the sites of Francoist concentration camps. The search for truth was linked to memorialization with plaques now explaining how people had died. As with similar campaigns elsewhere in the world, there was also pressure for restitution of property and for the return of children who had been seized. After the Civil War, such children had been given to the families of Francoist officers, as also happened in Argentina in the 1970s. Confrontations over the confiscation of children encapsulate the passion of history wars.

Politics played a significant role in contesting the past. The Aznar government opposed what it saw as left-wing pressure for action, not least for a judicial process to investigate the cause of all deaths. After it fell from power, its replacement, under José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, sought to garner political capital by highly publicized reversals of Aznar's policies. Left-wing pressure in turn led to a backlash from the right, with writers, such as Pío Moa, who restated the old Nationalist view and attacked the re-evaluation of the history of the 1930s, finding an eager public, in large part because much of the population is deeply polarized. Moa claimed that the Civil War occurred due to the undermining of the political order by the left and, in 2006, 30 per cent of the respondents in a poll in the newspaper *El Mundo*, the paper of the 'populist' moderate right, argued that the Francoist rising of 1936 had been justified. In turn, the revisionists were criticized by establishment historians, most of whom were on the left. The debate was waged vigorously in the press and on the web. Thus, the recall of history reflected and sustained persisting cleavages in Spanish society.<sup>10</sup>

The Civil War, moreover, continued to be part of the vocabulary of Spanish politics. Thus, in 2007, Jesús de Polanco, the head of the left-wing aligned media empire Grupo Prisa, accused the conservative opposition People's Party of wanting 'to go back to the Civil War' because of its criticism of left-wing media opinions. This provided an easy way to say that something appeared unacceptable, but, although a powerful charge, the facile comparison was foolish, not least because Spain is in a very different situation from the 1930s, in part because it is a member of international bodies, most prominently the European Union.

<sup>10</sup> R. Stradling, 'Maoist Revolution and the Spanish Civil War: "Revisionist" History and Historical Politics', *English Historical Review*, cxxii (2007), 422–57. I have also benefited from hearing a paper on Spanish historiography by Tim Rees delivered to the Exeter branch of the Historical Association.



## II

A very different type of divisiveness was exposed by contention over another civil conflict, the murderous treatment of the Armenians by the Ottoman authorities during the First World War. At this time the Christian Armenians were seen as a pro-Russian 'fifth column'. Aside from large-scale killing and the expropriation of property, many were driven into an arid region where they died. This became but one episode in the process by which the Ottoman empire was transformed into Turkey, a state with a clearly proclaimed ethnic identity which broke with the multiple ethnicities of the far more cosmopolitan Ottoman system. Thus, the substantial Greek population in Asia Minor was also driven into exile after Greece was defeated in 1922–3. Most of the European powers, especially Britain and France, had a major responsibility in egging on or supporting the Greeks. There was, in the end, a formal 'ethnic exchange' of people between Greece and Turkey.

In Turkey, subsequent criticism of the events of the 1910s and 1920s was regarded as a direct challenge not only to the integrity and cohesion of the state but also to the Kemalist tradition of Atatürk, who had established the modern Turkish state. Atatürk pressed hard for the assimilation of those living within its boundaries, of whom possibly 15 per cent were of Caucasian origin (which includes Armenians). Distinct cultural traditions received scant support, and education had to be in Turkish. Official Kemalist nationalism denied a separate Kurdish identity and sought to incorporate Kurds into a Turkish national identity by designating them as 'mountain Turks'.

The Armenian issue came to the fore from the 1960s onwards in part as a result of pressure in the diaspora where it became a key issue in asserting identity. There was strong Armenian lobbying against Turkey in the United States Congress, while, as part of the cold war, the Soviet Union provided backing for the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia. The Turks did not welcome this agitation and, in turn, presented their own view of the relevant history, as in *Armenian Allegations: Myth and Reality* which was published in Washington in 1986 by the Assembly of American Turkish Organizations. The Armenian cause moreover was regarded as a Trojan horse for that of the Kurds, who also challenged Turkish nationalism. As a result, legal action was taken against those who discussed the Armenian Massacres, while some nationalists resorted to force.

A climax of sorts was reached in 2006, with legal action in Turkey, while, at the same time, in France it was made illegal to deny that the massacres occurred. This legislation did not improve relations between the two states, but it was not motivated simply by a dispute over history. Instead, there was a clear political dimension. Aside from the domestic politics in both France and Turkey, there were international angles. French critics of the United States found it useful to condemn one of its major NATO allies, Turkey, while those unhappy with the prospect of

Turkey in the European Union focused on an issue in which the possible member state readily appeared in a poor light.

The Armenian issue shows every sign of gathering pace as the anniversary of the mass slaughter in 1915 nears. In part, this reflects the widespread international unpopularity of a Turkish government that is perceived, at least in the west, as harshly intolerant and as overly influenced by the military, although the latter is a powerful agent against Islamization. By early 2007, eighteen states referred to the massacres as genocide, a description that in part drew on their designation as comparable to the Holocaust. In contrast, the official Turkish version charges that the Armenians killed more Turks than vice versa, a wholly inaccurate account.

More specific political pressures also played a role in the controversy. For example, the rise in Islamic political fortunes within Turkey in the early 2000s increased tension, while, in 2003, the Turkish refusal to allow the United States to use Turkey as a military base from which to invade Iraq led to American anger. This was accentuated when Turkey put out feelers to Hamas, Iran and Syria, all, correctly, seen as anti-American. The result was pressure in the United States leading, in 2007, to a congressional bill declaring the Armenian slaughter to be genocide.

The historical issue also affected relations between Turkey and its neighbour Armenia, which gained independence after the fall of the Soviet Union; although Turkish opposition to Armenian control of the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which it occupied in its war with Azerbaijan, is the key issue in diplomatic relations. Relations are still not 'normalized', which means that the border has been closed since 1993, while Turkey also rejects diplomatic relations not only because of Nagorno-Karabakh, but also in response to Armenia's campaign for international recognition of what it presents as a genocide. The Turkish government in effect is punishing Armenia for making it feel guilty, although the Turks also do not appreciate part of their country being called 'Western Armenia'.

### III

Division has also occurred in East Asia as Japan considered how best to record its controversial military and imperial role in 1931–45. Japanese nationalists both downplayed their country's responsibility for the warfare of the period and presented a seriously misleading account of its brutality. Anger with and in Japan focused on two issues – the 'Rape of Nanjing' in 1937, in which large numbers of Chinese civilians were cruelly slaughtered,<sup>11</sup> and the enforced prostitution and harsh treatment

<sup>11</sup> For a recent guide to the extensive literature, see T. Yoshida, *The Making of the 'Rape of Nanking': History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States* (Oxford, 2006).

of large numbers of, mostly Korean, 'comfort women' in order to provide sex for Japanese troops.<sup>12</sup>

The Japanese were apt to downplay both episodes, omitting them from history textbooks and denying evidence about the brutality involved. This caused controversy in Japan, with bitter upsurges in the debate over Nanjing in 1972–4 and the mid-1990s, and also angered the Chinese. Within Japan, right-wing nationalists rejected accounts of the Nanjing atrocities. Iris Chang, an American of Chinese descent, who wrote *The Rape of Nanjing: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (1997), was a reviled figure in these circles, and had a number of websites dedicated to overturning her book. Praised by the Chinese, Chang was the sort of popular writer that engaged public emotion in a calculated effort to stir 'history wars'.

In 2002, the Chinese foreign minister protested when the Japanese Supreme Court refused to consider an appeal by Azuma Shirō, a veteran who had been found guilty of libel in 1996 by the Tokyo District Court for allegedly attributing an atrocity to his platoon in the journal about Nanjing he had published in 1987. In 2005, the Chinese National Museum held an exhibition about the Rape of Nanjing. Nanjing itself has a Victims' Memorial Hall, a Nanjing Massacre Museum, as well as a Centre for the Study of the Nanjing Massacre at the Nanjing Normal University. In 2007, the Chinese foreign ministry responded critically when Satoru Mizushima, a nationalist Japanese filmmaker, proposed to make a documentary entitled, 'The Truth about Nanjing', that purported to deny evidence of Japanese atrocities, not least by querying the evidence. This would counter the Chinese film *Nanjing 1937* which had provoked nationalist demonstrations in Japan.

Although history textbooks are not mandatory reading in Japanese schools, they were important not only because they were believed to influence the young but also as they were a public indication of official or officially accepted views. This is linked to legislation in 2007 making the teaching of patriotism compulsory in Japanese schools. In part, however, there was a degree of naivety as the influence of textbooks on the later views of adults is limited, not least in response to the greater impact of current images and ideas, especially those conveyed by the visual media. Thus, the effort to influence the content of textbooks can be seen as a throwback to an earlier cultural politics, that associated with the nationalist state-building of the later nineteenth century, as well as a disparate response to the difficulties of influencing the amorphous processes of opinion-forming in a modern society. For example, the special programme, including testimony by participants, on the Nanjing Massacre broadcast in 2002 by TV Asahi, a leading network on 15 August, the key

<sup>12</sup> G. Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (New York, 1994); Y. Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation* (2002).

commemorative anniversary for the Second World War, probably had a far greater impact than the textbooks.

History for many Japanese nationalists is central, as both goal and means, to an 'information war' conceived in unapologetically nationalist terms. The role of honour was underlined by the controversial nature of the visits by Japanese politicians to Yasukuni, the war shrine in Tokyo but one that, from 1978, includes memorials to executed Class-A war criminals from the Second World War, such as General Tojo, who was head of the government from 1941 to 1944. The place of the shrine, where the war dead are supposed to be rewarded with a role as deities, in national memorialization had long been an issue in politics. This is not least as a result of the legislative attempt in 1963 to make it a state shrine, thus breaching the division of church and state, and subsequent agitation on that issue. The Shinto interpretation of history has to be taken into account as it underlines the extent to which Japan is not to be understood in a western light. In contrast, in Turkey, there is a rather more 'western' juxtaposition between religion and a secular state.

The 1963 legislation failed, but political identification with Yasukuni became more prominent after the mid-1980s. The visits, in 2005 and 2006, by Junichiro Koizumi, then the prime minister, were regarded as particularly provocative. While serving as an MP, Shinzo Abe also visited Yasukuni, although he did not do so as prime minister in 2006–7. The museum at the shrine is uncritical about Japan's military past, and, instead, depicts it in terms of honour and glory, and presents Japanese imperialism favourably.

In June 2007, a visit to the shrine by Lee Teng-hui, president of Taiwan from 1988 to 2000, led to criticism from the Chinese government and from Taiwan's opposition Kuomintang party. As a reminder of the wider ramifications of the issue, Lee went to pay respects to his elder brother who died while serving in the Japanese navy in 1945 when Taiwan was a Japanese colony. Indeed, owing to the colonial link from 1915 to 1945, about 30,000 Taiwanese are commemorated in the shrine. Lee is a supporter of formal Taiwanese independence from China, and, in June 2007, he also claimed that Japanese colonial rule had laid the foundation for Taiwan's modern democratic society. The Japanese legacy is seen by those pressing for independence as supporting the claim that Taiwan is not Chinese.

The mistreatment of the 'comfort women' is also a highly controversial issue. In 1993, Yohei Kono, the chief cabinet secretary in Japan, admitted and apologized for the military's role in coercing women into prostitution, while, in 1995, the Asian Women's Fund was established to provide financial compensation. In March 2007, however, Abe's attempt to introduce qualifications, by arguing that women were not coerced, led to considerable controversy. Although the Chinese government did not react with particular anger, the American House of Representatives pressed for a full apology for the wartime coercion and for adequate compensation. Abe offered a form of apology to President Bush.

Other issues in Japan's treatment of its wartime past include individual attempts to seek compensation for wartime forced labour, which, in June 2007, were rejected by the High Court at Sapporo. More generally, Japanese attempts to underplay their role and to minimize their brutality in 1931–45 are unacceptable to the Chinese. For the Chinese government, Japanese atrocities provide a useful aspect of nation-building, and one that distracts attention from the brutalities of the communist regime, but they also draw on a deep well of anger in China. At the same time, it is impossible to debate openly the communist years in China, not only the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, but also earlier episodes, such as the Great Leap Forward. In China, relevant anniversaries of these episodes are ignored, domestic publications banned, foreign works censored, and much history is left to personal memories.

The democratic nature of Japanese public culture is relevant here. For all the experience of reactionary nationalism in Japan,<sup>13</sup> Japanese students and the public are readily able to explore alternative readings of national history, and the most active critical participants in the debate about Japanese actions during the 1931–45 period are Japanese. In China, by comparison, the government remains actively involved in shaping an historical memory of Japanese aggression against China that shuts out any ambiguities, for example of the many Chinese who co-operated with Japanese rule.

The continuing controversy between China and Japan will be kept alive by anniversaries of the wartime conflict. On one hand, these can be seen as extraneous to 'realist' disputes focused on the issues of the here and now, particularly the political and economic manifestations of regional dominance, such as the fate of Taiwan, which is regarded as crucial to the security of Japanese trade, and also rights of maritime exploitation, especially oil drilling. On the other hand, tensions over the past can be seen as encouraging distrust and rivalry when addressing these issues.

Joining both together is an aspiration to assert what are seen as national interests. This means a more robust stance both politically and in terms of identity. In large part, the two cannot be separated. For example, Japanese military deployments and an interest in missile-defence systems are linked to ideological transformation, not least the demand for a revision of article nine of the post-war constitution, which commits Japan to peaceful policies. Linked to this is a governmental move, the proposal to transform the Japanese Defence Agency into a full ministry with a seat in the cabinet.

Yet assertion also takes place within a political context, not least that of the responses by others. Thus Japan's post-war government and political culture were, in part, moulded by the American victors and occupiers. In contrast, post-war relations between Japan and China proved far more troublesome. Alongside the cold war, which divided Japan from China,

<sup>13</sup> For a recent example, see 'Japan Focus Newsletter', [www.japanfocus.org](http://www.japanfocus.org) for 16 July 2007, article by David McNeill.

the earlier experience and nature of Japanese occupation were clearly part of the equation as China was brutally treated, whereas, with the exception of part of the Aleutian chain of islands, the United States avoided occupation. This contrast was also seen in March 2007, when Japan and Australia were able to negotiate a security pact. Chinese opposition to Japanese military transformation draws on a political application of the memorialization of the Second World War. Furthermore, since the 1980s, this memorialization within China was extended to encompass the role of the Kuomintang in the opposition to Japan, as exemplified in the museum complex opened near Chengdu in 2005.

Conversely, assertiveness in Japan resonates with nationalists and others seeking a more positive account of the past. The Second World War thus plays a central role in public discussion, which, in turn, helps encourage demands by nationalists. The Hall of Shōwa, which opened in 1999, displaying everyday life during the Second World War, was entrusted to the Japan Association of War-Bereaved Families, a conservative body that was far from critical of Japan's wartime policy. Two years later, a Tokyo banquet attended by prominent figures, including an ex-prime minister, commemorated the death of the progenitor of the *kamikaze* attacks, Admiral Takijiro Onishi, who killed himself a day after the Japanese surrender in 1945. At the banquet, youths dressed as *kamikaze* pilots sang war songs from the stage before the general singing of a patriotic song.

Yet, to underline the contentious nature of the past and its memorialization, the Socialist Party supported an official apology to China and Korea, the Japan–China Friendship Association was highly critical of wartime policy, and supported research on it, and the Japan Association for Memorializing Student-Soldiers Fallen in Battle used the Second World War as a basis for advocating pacifism.<sup>14</sup> Contrasting responses to the death of the Emperor Hirohito in 1989, the wartime monarch, made these differences readily apparent. Memory politics set themes and parameters for competing arguments about present and future.

#### IV

The fall of the communist regimes in eastern Europe in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989–91 brought together a number of post-war trends that provoked new histories, particularly the end of imperial rule, the creation of new as well as newly-independent states, for example Croatia and Ukraine, and sweeping political changes. A lack of popularity, indeed consent, particularly in eastern Europe, had made it increasingly difficult for the communist governments to view change and reform with much confidence. Far from time vindicating the

<sup>14</sup> F. Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006).

communist prospectus, with time the sham character of communist progress became more apparent. Furthermore, instead of being made redundant by the advance of communism, nationalism re-emerged publicly as a powerful force both in eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union.

Nationalism, which became a more central political issue from the late 1980s onwards, apparently offered identity, freedom, and a route to reform freed from a sclerotic imperial structure. Nationalism also entailed the rejection of Soviet and communist history and, instead, placed an emphasis on the histories subordinated, if not denied, by both. This led both to the re-evaluation of recent history and to a consideration of earlier episodes. For example, in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, there were complaints about the Soviet annexations in 1940, which had been the prelude to brutal and bloody authoritarian rule. These complaints brought a focus on the Nazi–Soviet Pact of 1939 under which the annexations had taken place. This was a pact that the Soviets had done their best to ignore and to sweep from the historical record because it accorded their regime the same legitimacy and goals as those of Nazi Germany.

The end of communism permitted a new history in which past links with non-communist countries and movements were emphasized. Thus, in Estonia, it now proved possible in public to contrast the Swedes, as good imperial rulers, with the Russians, and to devote due attention to the British role in 1919 in helping Estonia resist Russian conquest. The fall of the Iron Curtain also did not mean the end of history, in the sense of ideological division (as Francis Fukuyama unwisely predicted or at least was held to have predicted), but the end of communist rule certainly led to a marked revival of history, not least as national history offered a source and cause for both the legitimacy of the new states and their independence.<sup>15</sup> As such, this provided a powerful new instance of the continuing process by which the contested eastern European past, with its interrelated but adversarial ethnicities, is interpreted in light of the present.<sup>16</sup>

This revival of history was a matter not only of the contents of the presentation of the past but also of its form. Examples were provided by the establishment of new museums and monuments as well as by a transformation of those already there.<sup>17</sup> In Poland, an excellent Museum of the Warsaw Uprising opened in 2004. There remains no national history museum in Warsaw, for at the time that they were being built in the nineteenth century, Poland was not an independent country. However,

<sup>15</sup> 'Identifying Histories: Eastern Europe before and after 1989', Special issue, *Representations*, ii (1995); R. G. Suny, 'Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations', *Journal of Modern History*, lxxiii (2001), 862–96; (*Re-*)*Writing History: Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*, ed. U. Brunnbauer (Münster, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> K. Brown, *The Past in Question: Modern Macedonia and the Uncertainties of Nation* (Princeton, NJ, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> (*Re*)*Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*, ed. R. Ostow (Toronto, 2007).

funds have now been allocated to build a National Historical Museum. Chairs in national history were founded in newly independent states, and even in Belarus which remained close to Russia. Archaeology also served as a way to advance national historical narratives. Moreover, as an aspect of the rejection of communism, the organization of archives was transformed. In Hungary, the New Hungarian Central Archives, a depository for post-Second World War documents, was abolished as a rejection of a periodization based on communism. The archives of the Communist Party were also placed in the public domain.

The revival of the past entailed the nationalization of historical figures. In Mongolia, there was a marked emphasis on descent from the great thirteenth-century empire of Chinggis Khan. Timur performed a similar role in Uzbekistan with statues of him replacing those of communist figures, as well as a museum devoted to him, and the creation of the Order of Amir Temur and the Amir Temur Fund.<sup>18</sup> In the Caucasus, there was also an emphasis on those who had opposed Russian conquest in the nineteenth century. This was also linked to religious assertion. Thus, in 1997, a new mosque was dedicated in Makhach-Kala, the capital of Dagestan, during the celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Shamil, the most famous resistance leader.<sup>19</sup>

Aside from nationalism, there was the need on the part of post-communist states to face the legacy of the recent past and the pressure created by the politicization of this legacy. The previous century and, even more, the years from the 1940s were dissected in order to allocate responsibility, and thus blame, and to castigate rivals. The wartime resistance to Germany and its allies was re-examined, and the communist role in it was downplayed or criticized. Thus, in the castle-museum at Bled in Slovenia, the display on Slovene history (as of June 2007) includes the following passage: 'The excessive desires for absolute power among members of the Communist Party of Slovenia caused the original, unsullied idea of united resistance to Nazism and Fascism to disintegrate.'

More generally, in place of the long-standing communist focus on eastern European fascist or authoritarian collaboration with Germany during the Second World War, a focus designed to discredit the right and to highlight resistance by the communists, came a concentration on the cruelties and iniquities of the post-war communist era, a theme deliberately struck as a way to condemn the left. For example, the Polish administration of the Kaczynski brothers and their governing Law and Justice Party, in 2007, sought to open the fifty miles of secret-police files from the communist era. This was also linked to moves against the WSI, the military intelligence service, and to an attempt to use vetting to remove the alleged secret system of pro-communist agents of influence in public life, although this attempt was struck down by the Constitutional Court.

<sup>18</sup> J. Marozzi, *Tamerlane* (2004), pp. 169–73, 421.

<sup>19</sup> P. B. Henze, 'Dagestan in October 1997 – Imam Shamil Lives!', in *Caspian Crossroads* (2000), pp. 16–31.



These initiatives reflected the government's view that such agents had been responsible for a flawed transition to democracy, and one that was weakened by the continued influence of networks of ex-communists.

In Romania, the issue of the relationship between the Ceausescu regime, with its communist rule in the shape of an authoritarian dictator, and post-communist governments was a matter of controversy, with claims that there was more continuity than there should be, not least amongst the renamed Communist Party. There was also a determination on the part of the anti-communists to draw attention to the crimes of the brutal Ceausescu regime. This included the memorial established in 1992 at Sighet, where opponents had been imprisoned. An attempt to discover information about the regime led to a scrutiny of the Securitate (Secret Police) that was not welcome to its successor, the SRI. A National Council for the Study of the Securitate files was established in 1999, in part with the help of the comparable East German body. The sensitive nature of history was indicated in 1990 when Ioan Petru Culianu, a prominent Romanian historian, was murdered.

In Bulgaria, police files were opened for inspection in 1997 and the ministry of the interior released the names of some public figures who had worked for the communist-era security agencies.<sup>20</sup> In Hungary, the names of those who had collaborated with the domestic and foreign secret police have been occasionally leaked to the press, and several of them later acknowledged their role. Most famous was Péter Medgyessy, deputy prime minister responsible for economic affairs in 1988–9 and prime minister in 2002–4. Shortly after he was elected prime minister, news regarding his work for the department of the Hungarian Secret Police as an officer under the code name of D-209 was leaked. Medgyessy acknowledged this, but claimed that his role was to help Hungary in joining the International Monetary Fund and, in this capacity, that he worked mainly with the KGB.

In some states, the issue of continuing communist influence played a greater role than elsewhere which, in turn, helped direct attention to the communist years. In former East Germany, despite concern about its activities and scandals about its informants, the role of the Stasi (secret police) did not become a political issue comparable to that of the secret police in Poland. Despite the large-scale oppressiveness of its policies and attitudes, the Stasi was never declared a 'criminal organization', unlike the Gestapo, and many Stasi members were even re-employed in the police.

Nevertheless, there has been a major attempt to highlight the nature of Stasi activity. The Stasi Records Law was passed by the Bundestag in December 1991, and, from January 1992, citizens could inspect their own personal files. By January 2004, over 5 million applications to do so had been received. The Stasi Records Office also carries out research.

<sup>20</sup> R. J. Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford, 2007), p. 411.

Permanent exhibitions in information and documentation centres are supplemented by a central touring exhibition. It is also possible to visit Stasi prisons, such as those in Rostock and Berlin-Hohenschönhausen: the latter had earlier been used as a Soviet special camp. In 1992, the prison complex at Berlin-Hohenschönhausen was listed as an historical monument, a measure pressed by former inmates, and the Memorial Site was established in 1994. In 2000, it became an independent foundation and by the mid-2000s, over 120,000 people, including 35,000 students, were visiting the site annually, with most of the guided tours conducted by former inmates. The Association for the Victims of Stalinism sought to direct attention to the plight of those who had been jailed, but, against this, left-wing opposition deputies and several former members of the Communist Party, tried to block the provision of government funds to use computers to help fit together the approximately 600 million pieces of Stasi files. These had been shredded in 1989 in order to preserve the secrets of the East German state, not least the extent of informants. The measure, however, was approved in 2007.

On the one hand, this can be seen as a necessary closure that also better enables victims to seek compensation (as well as clarifying issues for historians) and, on the other, as a living in the past that does not reflect, alongside the evidence of brutal oppression, the complexities and compromises of East German society under the communist oppression. Indeed, interviewed in 2005, Konrad Jarausch, the co-director of the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung in Potsdam, which seeks to bring together West German and 'positively evaluated' (i.e. not communist loyalists) East German scholars to work on the history of East Germany, noted the need to take seriously its dictatorial character, but also 'attempted to address the mixed experiences of the people in their repressive state, because we found out very quickly that for East Germans it was very difficult to dissociate their personal lives from the political system'. Jarausch also pressed the need to avoid what had happened in post-1945 West Germany, namely 'a discrepancy between the dominant critical history and a subterranean apologetic memory ... handed down as a private narrative of victimhood'.<sup>21</sup>

This point is more directly relevant in discussion both of apologies and of 'truth and reconciliation' processes. Part of the context, in Germany, was the prior purging of much of East German academe and its 'colonizing' by West Germans. Museums were also transformed.<sup>22</sup> Rather than seeing this in negative terms, it is worth noting the parallel

<sup>21</sup> 'German Institutes of Contemporary History: Interviews with the Directors', *German Historical Institute, Washington*, xxxviii (2006), 69–70.

<sup>22</sup> K. Pätzold, 'What New Start? The End of Historical Study in the GDR', *German History*, x (1992), 392–404; G. A. Ritter, 'The Reconstruction of History at the Humboldt University: A Reply', *ibid.*, xi (1993), 339–45; A. S. Ernst, 'A Survey of Institutional Research on the GDR: Between "Investigative History" and Solid Research: The Reorganization of Historical Studies about the Former German Democratic Republic', *Central European History*, xxviii (1995), 373–95.

with West Germany, as it is now widely held that, owing both to governmental and popular unwillingness in West Germany, and to the exigencies of the cold war for the occupying powers, Britain, the United States and France, insufficient effort was made to push through denazification after the Second World War.

There was also in Germany a parliamentary investigative commission established in 1992 by the Bundestag, for considering 'the history and consequences' of the East German dictatorship. Property, as both justice and power, moreover, was at issue, both with the resolution of property disputes and with the role of the Treuhandanstalt, the agency with executive competence established to dispose of state-owned concerns. There were also trials of those involved in what were seen as crimes affecting both East German government officials and also border guards. Retrospective justice came understandably in a heavily politicized form, as particular issues were judged in light of current political divisions, as well as of views of German history and historical example.<sup>23</sup>

In Hungary, the emphasis was, and still is, on the re-evaluation of the 1956 Hungarian Rising, which had been brutally suppressed by Soviet forces.<sup>24</sup> This re-evaluation was part of the very challenge to and, then, rejection of communist rule in 1989, as a new public identity was vigorously asserted. Thus, in June 1989, the remains of Imre Nagy, the prime minister in 1956, who had been executed in 1958 as part of the post-Rising suppression, were dug up and ceremonially reburied. This is a conspicuous and common form of acknowledgement of wrongs, as with the reburials of the Romanovs, the Russian royal family, slaughtered by the communists. Their tombs can now be seen in the Peter and Paul Cathedral in St Petersburg, where they are a site of reverence.

The eulogies for Nagy in Hungary in 1989 provided an occasion for criticism of the suppression of the Rising and a large crowd of about 100,000 attended. During the speeches, Viktor Orbán, then one of the leaders of the Young Democrats (Fidesz), later prime minister (1998–2002), called upon the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops. It was the very first time that a politician in Hungary had made such a public demand, and with this Orbán became transformed from a little-known member of the opposition to a known politician.

Once the communist regime had gone, and Hungary had become a democracy, then the re-presentation of 1956 and the communist years gathered pace. Thus, in 1996, a statue of Nagy was unveiled near parliament, part of a process by which the statuary in Budapest changed guard, with that from the communist era banished to a museum. Statues and other memorials had also played a role in the events of 1956. Then, demonstrators focused on monuments to nineteenth-century opponents to Habsburg rule, which could be seen as a precursor of the foreignness

<sup>23</sup> A. J. McAdams, *Judging the Past in Unified Germany* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> C. Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Stanford, Calif., 2006).

of Soviet domination. Thus, students marched to Batthyányi's Eternal Flame Memorial, while the statues of Sandor Petöfi and Josef Bem served for displays of opposition: Petöfi was a major nineteenth-century nationalist poet. Also in Budapest, a 1956 Institute was established, and, in 2006, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising, a memorial was unveiled where Stalin's statue once stood, and 'cultural' events were organized by the government.

The visit to Hungary, in 2006, by President George Bush, underlined the political dimension of the commemoration, as a rejection of communism. The changing international context had also been shown in 1992 when the post-communist Russian government of Boris Yeltsin handed over Soviet documents from 1956. The oppression during and after the suppression of the Rising was brutal, but the Soviet Union kept secret the accounts of the atrocities its forces committed. The most potent physical legacy of the Rising is the Terror Háza Múzeum (House of Terror) on Andrássy Boulevard in Budapest opened in 2002, in the very building where the secret police once did their worst. This preserves the cells and the torture and execution chambers.

At the same time, the language and labels of the communist years were discarded in Hungary. Those who were called counter-revolutionaries by the communists have become heroes. Indeed, in the Terror Háza Múzeum, there is a suggestion that communism was more harmful than fascism, not least because more space is devoted to communist atrocities.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, as democratic politics has created and revealed fault-lines, so the memorialization of the past has become more complex, not least as there remain unanswered questions about actions and responses in 1956. In comparison, earlier episodes from pre-communist days are less contentious, not least those focused on the nineteenth-century quest for freedom.<sup>26</sup>

## V

The practice of destroying statues, in order to mark and enforce changes, is long-standing and indeed an aspect of the extent to which history is about silencing and silences. Just as documents can be destroyed or ignored, the past being at the disposal of the present, so statues could be destroyed, as that of George III was in New York in 1776, or shunned. The Russian Revolution saw the destruction or removal of statues of the tsars, one of Alexander III, for example, being hidden from view at the Russian Museum. Whereas, in the 1880s, Bohemian Germans erected numerous statues honouring the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II as a past supporter of the German language, after Czech independence in 1918 these were attacked and destroyed by nationalists and, soon, by the

<sup>25</sup> T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (2005), pp. 827–8.

<sup>26</sup> P. Hatos, 'Kossuth and the Images of Hungarian Identity after 1989', *Hungarian Studies*, xvi (2002), 225–36.

authorities. The Roman practice of *damnatio memoriae* offered the idea of erasing the name in the inscription on the base of statues, as a clear demonstration of being removed from history.<sup>27</sup> The modern removal of statues to obscure settings, as of British imperial figures in India, offers a parallel.

In April 2007, the removal of the Bronze Soldier, a monument to Red Army casualties in 1941–5, and thus to Estonia's liberation from German control in 1944, was denounced by the Russian government as an act of 'neo-fascism' and as 'blasphemous'. To most Estonians, the monument, erected in 1947, was a symbol of the Soviet occupation occurring in 1940–1 and 1944–91, but the ethnic Russians living there, comprising a quarter of the Estonian population, had a very different view and rioted in the capital, Tallinn. This was an aspect of the extent to which the Soviet successor-states have inherited its tension between nationalizing states and, on the other hand, national minorities with external national homelands.<sup>28</sup>

The townscape of Tallinn is a rejection of communism. There is a Museum of Occupation, while the former KGB headquarters, now a police building, carries a plaque: 'This building housed the headquarters of the organ of repression of the Soviet occupational power. Here began the road to suffering for thousands of Estonians'. In Freedom Square under tsarist rule, there was a statue of Peter the Great. Under the Soviets, the square was used for military parades. In 2003, however, the Freedom Clock was installed. It shows both the current time and the number of years since Estonia became independent. The Soviets had covered up the consequences of their heavy bombing, in March 1944, of the area round Harju Street, blaming the destruction on the Germans and turfing over the area. It, however, was then excavated and signs were erected to draw attention to the Soviet actions.

In Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, the prominent mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov, secretary-general of the Comintern, the communist international organization from 1935 to 1943, and post-war premier (1946–9), was deliberately destroyed by the government in 1999. Like the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, it had been a major site for anti-communist graffiti. The square next door which, under the communists, was called 'September 9', recording the takeover of the government by the communists in 1944, has been renamed 'Battenberg Square', in honour of Alexander Battenberg, a German who had become prince in 1879 after Turkish rule ended. In Budějovice in the Czech Republic, the large town square is now named after Otakar II, King of Bohemia from 1253 to 1278. Those it had earlier been named after include the Habsburg Emperor Franz Josef,

<sup>27</sup> C. W. Hedrick, *History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity* (Austin, Tex., 2000); A. S. Marks, 'The Statue of King George III in New York and the Iconology of Regicide', *American Art Journal*, xiii (1981), 61–82.

<sup>28</sup> R. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, 1996).

ruler from 1848 to 1916, the first Czech President Tomáš Masaryk (President 1918–35), and Hitler, whose forces occupied Bohemia in 1939–45.

More generally, the issue of actions during the communist years became an apparently key test of integrity for politicians and others, and thus a source of rumour and dissension. This affected the Catholic Church in Poland in 2007, with the resignation of Stanislaw Wielgus, the archbishop designate of Warsaw, and was more generally an issue of contention across eastern Europe. The Wielgus resignation also provided an opportunity for the expression of historicized hatreds. To some, the charges against Wielgus, of active collaboration with the communist secret police, indicated the work of Jews, foreigners and liberals to disparage the Church. This was a charge that reflected long-standing prejudices held by some Catholics and that also ignored the ample ability of the Church to damage itself. The issue also brought up questions of contrition and forgiveness which reflect the complex relationship with conduct under a totalitarian past. Pope Benedict XVI, a German (although the significance of this is unclear) seeking reconciliation within the Catholic world, had declared in Poland in 2006 that nobody should 'sit in judgment on other generations', a call for forgiveness, but that approach can also cover a multitude of sins.

## VI

Competing views were given a different twist in Yugoslavia as the key issue became, from 1991, the creation of new states and the attempt to justify their territorial and other pretensions by reference to the past. The assertion of newly independent or autonomous territorial identities overlapped with the feuding characteristics of some ethnic-religious protagonists, to provide a particularly chilling instance of the weight of the past. The relationship with the past in Yugoslavia in the 1990s also included the attempt to disrupt, if not destroy, the historical consciousness of opponents. This led, for example, to the bombardment of monuments that were culturally important. Given the religious divides in former Yugoslavia, it is unsurprising that this destruction extended to churches and mosques, with the Serbs, for example, destroying Catholic churches and the Croats doing the same to Orthodox ones.

In Yugoslavia, the fate of baptismal and civil registers was regarded as important as they provided the evidence of who people were and the ethnic composition of particular areas. The archives were also damaged, the Oriental Institute building in Sarajevo, with its collection of Muslim manuscripts, being destroyed, having been deliberately targeted, and the contents of the archives in Mostar damaged. Moreover, the Yugoslav crisis saw the looting of history for admonition that is such a key feature of its use. Serbian nationalists, who very much employed the past for political ends, looked back to the struggle against the Muslim Ottoman Turks, particularly the heroic but disastrous battle of Kosovo of 1389, in

order to provide historical reference and resonance for their modern opposition to the Muslims of Bosnia and Kosovo. Conversely, the modern Turks want a pro-Ottoman account of Balkan history. Similarly, alongside the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and others sought heroic resonances from the past, and legitimated their new states through history.<sup>29</sup>

As far as former Yugoslavia is concerned, there might seem to be a contrast between great powers, which obsess about loss of position, while lesser powers worry more about survival, and the former entertain ideologies of Manifest Destiny or regional hegemony, while the latter are content to expand a bit here or there. Nevertheless, Serbian nationalists showed in the 1990s that Serbia being a lesser power did not prevent them from having an ideology of Manifest Destiny and a brutal practice to match.

History provided opportunities for assertion through symbols, as in 1989 when the remains of Nikola Petrovic, king of Montenegro (1860–1918), who had died in exile, were returned to the Montenegrin capital, Cetinje. Aware of the near-universal use across the west of the Munich agreement of 1938 as a craven and foolish appeasement of fascism, the spokesmen of Vojislav Kostunica, the Serbian prime minister, in February 2007, rejected the proposal by the United Nations representative for independence for the former Serbian province of Kosovo (which has a majority Albanian population). It was argued that this would be akin to the 1938 loss by Czechoslovakia of the Sudetenland, with its majority German population, which Hitler acquired as a result of the Munich agreement. The comparison was totally misplaced, not least because the harsh Serb treatment of Kosovo was different from the Czech treatment of the Germans in the pre-war Sudetenland, but that was scarcely going to stop the drawing of such a parallel.

The description, in 2006, by Vuk Drakovic, the Serbian foreign minister, of Kosovo as ‘the Jerusalem of Serbia’ captured its role in myth as well as history. In 2007, the anniversary of the battle of 1389 proved an opportunity for hard-line nationalists in the Guard of Tsar Lazar to demonstrate their rejection of any loss of Kosovo. Lazar I was prince of Serbia from 1371 to 1389. A more recent history was also at issue in Kosovo, with Kosovans claiming retribution for Serbian atrocities in the 1990s including, in 2007, publishing the names of Serbs who had served in the secret police or army.

As elsewhere in eastern Europe, the legacy of communist years was a major issue in Yugoslavia, but the particular issue there was also that of the conflicts of the 1990s, especially the war of 1992–5 which focused on Bosnia. With Muslims, Croats and Serbs convinced that, in addition to pre-1990s issues, they were now even more the victims, charges of mistreatment served to underline differences and to lessen chances for

<sup>29</sup> W. Bracewell, ‘The End of Yugoslavia and New National Histories’, *European History Quarterly*, ixix (1999), 149–56; S. K. Pavlowitch, *Serbia: The History behind the Name* (2002).

co-operation. The Bosnians claim that in 1992–5 there was no civil war in Bosnia and, instead, that they were attacked by the Yugoslav army, while the Bosnian Serbs claim the opposite. These charges were contested not only within the former Yugoslavia but also more generally, as in the eventually unsuccessful Bosnian case before the International Court of Justice that Serbia was responsible for genocide, although the Court did decide in 2007 that Serbia had failed to stop the genocide that did occur. This was presented as a legal decision, but can also be seen as a political one.

Anti-Semitism was also an aspect of the post-communist historical consciousness in eastern Europe. A key aspect of the alleged legitimacy of the communist regimes had been based upon their role in replacing governments that had been pro-Nazi, and complicity in the Holocaust had been an important aspect of this wartime support for Germany, particularly in Croatia, Romania and Slovakia.<sup>30</sup>

In practice, for example in Poland in 1968, there had been a great deal of state-directed anti-Semitism during the communist years, part of it under the guise of anti-Zionism; but the situation was reconfigured after the fall of the communist regimes as wartime regimes, such as those of Ion Antonescu in Romania, Ante Pavaelic in Croatia, and Jozef Tiso in Slovakia, were rehabilitated. In part, this revival of anti-Semitism was a reflection of the ethnically exclusive concept of nationalism, and, in part, a hostility to what were seen as cosmopolitan pressures and thus to globalization. Thus, nationalist opposition politicians in Hungary in 2006–7 actively pushed anti-Semitic themes in an attempt to discredit the government. The coalition that ran Poland in the mid-2000s included a party with anti-Semitic inclinations. In Russia, the writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a key figure in the attempt to revive a traditional Russian culture, was critical of Jews, mistakenly blaming them for some of the pogroms they suffered in the 1900s, and, more generally, for rejecting his view of assimilation.<sup>31</sup>

All too often, there is an alignment between a xenophobic nationalism and ecclesiastical bigotry or self-interest, as with the close link between government and Orthodox Church in Romania, or government and the Catholic Church in Poland. The rehabilitation of past regimes was also linked to present politics. For example, Franjo Tudjman, the president of Croatia, not only, in the 1990s, praised Pavaelic, denying that his regime had killed as many, principally Serbs, but also Jews and Roma (Gypsies), as was in fact the case, but also supported brutal policies of ethnic aggrandizement against Muslims and Serbs. In Romania, the rehabilitation of Antonescu cut across the post-communist revelation that the Romanians had participated actively in the Holocaust, which, in turn, was a contradiction of the tendency during the communist years to blame the Germans for the slaughter. An international commission supported

<sup>30</sup> J. Black, *The Holocaust* (2008).

<sup>31</sup> A. Solzhenitsyn, *Dvesti let vmeste, 1795–1995* [*Two Hundred Years Together, 1795–1995*], (2002).



by the government that reported in 2004 clarified the prominence of the Romanian role in the Holocaust.

## VII

Under the communists across eastern Europe, history had played a role in justifying the large-scale post-war frontier changes and enforced movement of people that was regarded by both Soviets and the new governments as necessary to consolidate the post-war situation. This left a legacy of historical argument and memory, particularly on the part of the numerous deportees, that, in the 1990s, remained as more than a passing echo. An historicist sense of identity and interest was also important in the relations between the newly independent countries, and also between them and the two major states of the region, Germany and Russia.

This was a particular problem for Poland for which historical resonances were pressing in its relationship with each power. This contributed to tension and made co-operation difficult. Thus, the Kaczynskis' government regularly opposed and even insulted Germany in the mid-2000s. The father of the Kaczynski brothers fought in the Warsaw uprising of 1944, and, while mayor of Warsaw, President Lech Kaczynski had demanded reparations for the Germans for the savage wartime destruction of the city. On 14 June 2007, he told the [London] *Times*: 'co-operation within and within Europe should not be dependent on agreement with Germany . . . It is Germany that first of all needs to understand Poland.'<sup>32</sup> In contrast, the fact that the Allies (Britain, France and the United States) supported Polish independence in 1918 is deeply engrained in Polish thought. For Poles, co-operation between Vladimir Putin and Gerhard Schroeder earlier in the 2000s offered echoes of joint action by Germany and Russia in the partitions of 1772–95 and 1939, while the Germans failed to understand the resonance of this history.

Equally, the governments of Germany and, even more, Russia found it difficult to abandon a sense that their views ought to prevail in eastern Europe. In large part, this reflected their inherent strength, for example that of Russia in energy supplies, but historical resonances of past concepts of inherent influence also played a role. In Germany, this strength was combined with a sense of victimhood derived in large part from the German refugees driven from eastern Europe after the Second World War. Russia's attitude to the Baltic States is very much based on the experience of control by the Soviet Union and, earlier, by Russia.

For Russia, under Vladimir Putin, there was an unwillingness to abandon the sense of natural dominance over eastern Europe that had developed during the cold war. A rethinking of the relationship on the basis of the equality of sovereign states proved unwelcome, and is one

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*, 15 June 2007.

reason why Russian entry into the European Union is not at present credible. Indeed, the keenness of the Putin government to reverse Russia's relative decline, and to challenge the post cold-war settlement in Europe, extended to include a rethinking of recent history. Thus, in Munich in February 2007, Putin argued that, far from losing the cold war, and thus being considered weaker than the United States, the Soviet Union had voluntarily ended it.

There was also a rethinking of public commemoration in Russia. This drew on atavistic impulses that could plunder history for examples, at the same time that they called on a sense of historical continuity. For example, to replace 7 November, Revolution Day, 4 November became a new national holiday. It was intended to mark the expulsion of the Polish garrison from the Kremlin in 1612, a key episode in bringing the Russian 'Time of Troubles' to an end, and thus a memorialization of the link between domestic division and foreign exploitation. In turn, pro-Russian elements in republics which had formerly been part of the Soviet Union but were now independent drew attention to historical episodes that supported their case. In Ukraine, this included the Treaty of Pereiaslav of 1654, under which the Cossacks had sought Russian protection.

The replacement of 7 November by 4 November in Russia reflected the attempt by the state to keep control of memorialization, by aligning it to the historiography of the new regime. The challenge of local initiatives had been demonstrated in 1991 when the mayor of St Petersburg decreed that the 7 November holiday become a celebration of the city's new identity. Just as not everyone was happy to see the passing of the name Leningrad, so, on 7 November 1991, a variety of histories was celebrated. Some communists met at the *Aurora*, the warship that played a key role in the communist Revolution of 1917, while monarchists left flowers at the grave of Peter the Great, the founder of St Petersburg, those marking the victims of totalitarianism organized requiems, and so on.<sup>33</sup> Two years earlier, the Hungarian government had felt obliged by mass protests to recognize 15 March, the date the revolution began against Habsburg rule in 1848, as an official national holiday.

Within Russia, alongside the generally private memory of Stalin's brutal mass slaughter, the public search for distant and recent memory, or, rather, the use and misuse of it, focused with Russia's international standing. There was far less concern with celebrating aspects of the past domestic situation, unsurprisingly so, as most of it offered little to a Russia that was experimenting with democracy, or, at the governmental level, with authoritarianism in the guise of democracy. Thus, although the Duma in 2003 agreed to a pension bonus to compensate relatives of victims of Stalin's purges, Putin did not want attention directed to the role of terror in supporting communism.

<sup>33</sup> L. A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995: Myth, Memories, and Monuments* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 284.

Instead, the role of Russia in defeating Nazi Germany was the key theme, and this provided a background for demanding influence in eastern Europe and for rallying Russia against the United States, as in Putin's speech on Victory Day (9 May) 2007 in which the American challenge was presented as similar to that posed by Nazi Germany. The role of Russia in defeating Nazi Germany, however, was differently remembered. Whereas, in the 1970s, a statue was erected to commemorate the wartime relief of Leningrad, in the 1990s a monastery was added to the same goal.

In turn, for other states handling the legacy of the communist years, this entailed also dealing with the consequences of Soviet power. These included Soviet atrocities. In 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev admitted the long-denied responsibility for the slaughter of captured Polish officers at Katyn in 1940,<sup>34</sup> but other episodes remain more obscure and there is still controversy over the numbers who died as a result of Soviet terror. Nevertheless, the nature and extent of Soviet atrocities were far more discussed in the 1990s and 2000s than during the cold war when such accounts had, inaccurately, been frequently labelled as propaganda. In the 2000s, alongside popular historians, non-academics dwelled on this theme.

This was true for non-Russian as well as Russian writers, for example, the novelist Martin Amis in *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million* (2002), which, in part, was an attack on those outside Russia who excused communism. In keeping with the widespread tendency in modern public culture to give voice to individual experience, there was also an attempt to record the voices of the victims of the gulags, as in Anne Applebaum's *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* (2003). Frequent reference to the gulags as concentration camps served to underline criticism of the Soviet system.

It was not only formerly communist states where the end of the cold war signalled a change in public history. In Finland, the Lotta Suård, a women's movement that had provided food and nurses for the army and had taken part in plane-spotting during the wars with the Soviet Union in 1939–44, had been subsequently banned as a result of Soviet pressure. After the end of the cold war, it was revived, received a medal from the president, and was celebrated in a museum. With Finland having to show less concern about the military threat from its Russian neighbour, it also became more acceptable to mention the close to half a million refugees who had fled Karelia when it was annexed in 1940. In Finland in July 2007, I was personally told that this represented losing 'the left arm of Lady Finland'.

A common theme in contesting the past is that, far from the end of communism leading simply to a liberalization of practices and a depoliticization of history (and much else), there has, in fact, been a

<sup>34</sup> G. Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory* (2005).

tendency, alongside liberalization, to maintain similar practices of state control, albeit without the directing ideology of communism. This has resulted in nationalism coming to play a greater role in which it has displayed a strong ethnic component. Yet the new degree of freedom that was not possible under communism also needs emphasis. This freedom has notably included the ability to debate the communist years and to represent them fictionally, as in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's critical film *The Lives of Others* (2007) about the Stasi. Such debates were challenged by ex-Stasi demonstrators, while there were also attempts to alter critical Wikipedia entries on East Germany.

## VIII

Any criticism of the political conditions in ex-communist countries should refer to the more dire position in still-communist states: the contrast between 'countries' and 'states' is an advisable one in this context as the use of the term 'country' implies consent. If North Korea may be an extreme instance, there is still room to note the degree of manipulation of history in China and Cuba. In China, the situation is affected by the challenge created by the degree to which the economy has changed and is changing. Partly as a consequence, the Communist Party there does not make it easy to question its orthodoxy. For example, it is difficult for independent commentators to check on the authenticity of the Long March, a key iconic episode in Chinese communist history. The historical accuracy of the established account is dubious. The passage of the Dadu River in 1935 is a matter of considerable controversy, with the heroic accounts of a crossing of a burning bridge in the face of heavy fire ripe for critical scrutiny.<sup>35</sup> In 2004, a book on the anti-intellectual, 'Anti-rightist' campaign of 1957–8 was banned by the Communist Party's propaganda department. Such issues are a reminder of how far, in contrast, the ex-communist countries have come in their discussion of their past. Tiananmen Square in Beijing retains its Monument to Revolutionary Heroes and the mausoleum of Mao Zedong, while the large portrait of Mao on the Tiananmen Gate is replaced annually.

The supposedly heroic past is also on view in Cuba. In 1997, the body of Che Guevara was returned from Bolivia where he had been killed after leading an unsuccessful attempt to stage a revolution. It was re-interred in the crypt of a mausoleum on the Plaza de la Revolución Ernesto Guevara in Santa Clara. An eternal candle stands sentry within, while the square above is dominated by a bronze statue of the failed leader. The revolution in Cuba that brought Castro to power is also celebrated in the town. As with the bridge across the Dadu River, the focus is on a military occasion, in this case an attack on an armoured

<sup>35</sup> A. McEwen and E. Jocelyn, *The Long March: The True Story Behind the Legendary Journey That Made Mao's China* (2006); S. Shuyun, *The Long March* (2006).

train. The bulldozer used is maintained on a plinth, while four of the restored boxcars from the train are nearby.

## IX

Tackling the legacy of communism is not a separable add-on to otherwise clear national histories. Instead, there is the problem of inherently complex and controversial histories that interact with very different and clashing agendas for presenting the past. To cope with these discourses of the strident, it is necessary to produce histories that incorporate the disparate perspectives on offer. Thus, in 1972, under the auspices of UNESCO, a Joint West German–Polish Textbook Commission was established, and, in 1976, following nine conferences, joint recommendations on the presentation of German–Polish relations in history textbooks were issued. The Commission, which was the basis for the Japan–South Korean Joint Study Group on History Textbooks established in 1990, continued and has issued material for history teaching, although there were topics that were not tackled publicly.<sup>36</sup> The History Education Committee of the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe launched in 1999 a project for ‘Teaching by Modern Southeast European History’ supported by American, British and German government funds. Conferences were followed by the publication of four school workbooks. The goals set out in the ‘General Introduction’ were clear: ‘Through the teaching of history, students must acquire the ability to evaluate human acts and make moral judgements. The development of critical thinking cannot stop merely at raising doubts; it must help to mould responsible citizens with moral values, able to resist any attempt to manipulate them.’

There has also been considerable co-operation between French and German historians. The Institute of Civic Space and Public Policy, an international think tank, at the Lazarski School of Commerce and Law in Warsaw, is bringing together authors and publishers from Poland and east-central Europe to correct the many factual errors in textbooks. These were not the sole initiatives. The Polish city of Wrocław (previously German Breslau) commissioned an account of its history designed to foster reconciliation. Written by Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse, this was published simultaneously in 2002 in English (*Microcosm: Portrait of a Central European City*), German and Polish.

Unfortunately, there is little similar co-operative work on other locations. At the political level in some case, there has, however, been a willingness to downplay the revisionist sentiments of deportees, irredentists

<sup>36</sup> T. Frank and F. Hadler, ‘Overlapping National Histories: Confrontations and (Re-) Conciliations’, *Storia della Storiografia*, 1 (2006), 130; K. Kazuhiko, ‘The Continuing Legacy of Japanese Colonialism: The Japan–South Korea Joint Study Group on History Textbooks’, in *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*, ed. L. Hein and M. Selden (Armonk, NY, 2000).

and zealous nationalists. This is true for example of Polish governmental views on Polish minorities in Belarus, Lithuania and Ukraine,<sup>37</sup> and, in 2003, the presidents of Poland and Ukraine jointly unveiled a monument to the victims of the atrocities of the 1940s. As a parallel, it was not until the late 1950s that a committee of Belgian and German historians agreed that the German destruction of the city of Louvain in the opening campaign of the First World War in 1914 was unjustified, a view the Germans had rejected in 1927.<sup>38</sup>

Across much of eastern Europe, especially in the Balkans, such compromises are often treated as historical betrayals that amount to a deracination that threatens identity. This is not simply due to the communist interlude. Instead, the legacy of nineteenth-century notions of nationalism remains very powerful, not least in Greece. However, to argue that nationalism in eastern Europe, at the level of established states, is more malign than in western Europe might not be a view that recommends itself, for example, to Catalan, Flemish or Scottish separatists. Moreover, this argument risks continuing an unhelpful and inaccurate tradition of primitivizing eastern Europe and using it to project western European anxieties.<sup>39</sup> However, it can also be argued that western stereotypes about eastern Europe have an important basis in fact,<sup>40</sup> and that the nationalism of some of the latter's states has unpleasant aspects, or that some east European nationalisms have only selected features of west European nationalism, and therefore are not comparable. A long-standing identity and tradition of unity was powerful in Hungary and Poland but not in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, each of which was an invented country. Interference in the Balkans by the great powers has helped to create unstable ethno-cultural mixes and deep mutual suspicions.

As a reminder of the difficulty of analysis, the very term 'eastern Europe' is itself controversial. During the communist years, the use of the term argued for the unity of the history of the countries of the Soviet bloc. Critical historians and others in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s focused on differences and proposed first 'central eastern Europe', then 'central Europe' (which, because of its usage by the Germans in the inter-war period, was very sensitive), and then 'east-central Europe'.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> T. Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> J. Horne and A. Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, Conn., 2001).

<sup>39</sup> L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilisation on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif., 1994).

<sup>40</sup> *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. D. Chiot (Berkeley, Calif., 1989).

<sup>41</sup> *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, ed. J. Keane (1988), pp. 291–331; P. Hanák, 'Central Europe: A Historical Region in Modern Times. A Contribution to the Debate about the Regions of Europe', in *In Search of Central Europe*, ed. G. Schöpflin and N. Wood (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 57–69.

There is also the wider question of the value, indeed legitimacy, of nationalism, and therefore its associated historical accounts, myths and drives. One approach is to consider nationalism in terms of the supposed challenge presented by a globalism that can be seen as denying individuals much of a sense of value other than as consumers or of identity, except through membership in a global community that does not, in practice, fulfil their desire for community. Nationalism, in this light, can be viewed as a defence mechanism that helps communities and individuals to respond to changes and problems,<sup>42</sup> although the same point can be made about minority consciousness and assertion.<sup>43</sup>

No matter how flawed or even false, nationalist history lends itself to organic theories of community that, at least, acknowledge a human diversity. This is lost when ideologies such as communism propound universal nostrums that challenge cultural specificities. Nevertheless, as eastern Europe shows, an acknowledgement of diversity in the form of cultural identity and historical distinctiveness at the level of the nation-state can be linked to a failure to appreciate or understand diversity within such states, and this failure can be destabilizing politically as well as as discriminatory.

It is important to probe both the universality of nationalism and its variations. Nationalism is not 'out there', but is part of the universal condition of states, actual or aspirational. For example, it was the Spanish nationalists who crushed the Catalans and Basques. Turning to the variations, there are important differences between 'defensive ethnic' and 'triumphalist ethnic' nationalism, for example between Estonia and Serbia. There are also contrasts over the extent to which nationalism is 'völkisch' in the nineteenth-century sense. In some aspirational nations, such as Catalonia, there have been important moves away from such nationalism, and it was never strong in Scotland. In contrast, in Corsica or Flanders, where there is such 'völkisch' nationalism it is associated, in particular, with hostility to immigrants.

Any contrast between ethnic nationalism, seen as historicized, atavistic and bad, and civic nationalism, presented as modern, modernizing, benign and good, however, is far too simple, not least as it, misleadingly, proposes a contrast that cannot be readily made.<sup>44</sup> If this distinction is to be made, it is rather the case that there is a continuum, and not a dichotomy, and it is also worth noting that civic nationalism, as well as ethnic nationalism, can be the cause of conflict. A focus on tendencies, indeed, is helpful, as nationalism (like democracy or religion) can be seen as a category containing contrasting drives. These include both a notion of essentialism (generally racial), with all the negative implications of

<sup>42</sup> R. H. Wiebe, *Who We Are: A History of Popular Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> D. Northrup, 'Globalization and the Great Convergence: Rethinking World History in the Long Term', *Journal of World History*, xvi (2005), 266.

<sup>44</sup> A. D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Oxford, 2000).

others and outsiders that that implies, as well as a more liberal concept of nationalism. As the history of eastern Europe over the last century indicates, this tension does not conform to any simple contrast between left and right.

From the perspective of historians, the reconciliation that addresses the past of conflict and repression can also entail a process of deliberate erasure of contentious episodes. While motivated by a search for good relations, contesting the past can create new 'victims', in so far as those whose role is neglected or actively misrepresented can be seen as victims or at least as having a grievance. An example is the South Korean tendency of late to downplay North Korean responsibility for the Korean War (1950–3) and, instead, to focus on unwelcome actions by their American protectors. Closer to home, there is the extent to which the benefits of the British empire are downplayed or ignored, while the Germans are misleadingly presented as the victims of Allied war crimes in the shape of strategic bombing. There is also the downplaying of the evils of paramilitary terrorism as an aspect of the end of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'. From this perspective, the historian emerges as the necessary opponent of false consciousness, with his own obligation to ascertain truth in both past, present and, therefore, future. This is, however, a role in which the historian is unlikely to be successful.