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THE 'DIFFICULT' PAST OF A TOWN  
THE RESONANT SILENCES AND SUPPRESSED MEMORIES  
OF FLORINA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

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ΤΟ «ΔΥΣΚΟΛΟ» ΠΑΡΕΛΘΟΝ ΜΙΑΣ ΠΟΛΗΣ  
ΟΙ ΗΧΗΡΕΣ ΣΙΩΠΕΣ ΚΑΙ ΟΙ ΑΠΩΘΗΜΕΝΕΣ ΑΝΑΜΝΗΣΕΙΣ  
ΤΗΣ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΙΚΗΣ ΚΛΗΡΟΝΟΜΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΦΛΩΡΙΝΑΣ

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### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Στόχος της εργασίας είναι να εξετάσει τις προσλήψεις, τις στάσεις και τις πρακτικές που αφορούν στην πολιτισμική κληρονομιά της πόλης της Φλώρινας, δίνοντας έμφαση στις υλικές εκφάνσεις του πολιτισμού, οι οποίες αποτελούν αντικείμενο χειραγώγησης τόσο από την επίσημη, όσο και από άλλες ιδεολογίες. Εκκινώντας από την άποψη ότι το τοπίο της πόλης λειτουργεί ως ένα «ανοιχτό» μουσείο, στο οποίο εγγράφεται το παλίμψηστο

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της ανθρώπινης δράσης και συμπεριφοράς στον χρόνο και ότι αποτυπώνονται σε αυτό οι αέναιες απόπειρες της κοινωνίας να διαμορφώσει τη συλλογική της μνήμη, εστιάζουμε στο γεγονός ότι ορισμένες όψεις του ιστορικού τοπίου της Φλώρινας είναι ιδιαίτερα «ηχηρές», αναγνωρίσιμες και καλά διατηρημένες, ενώ άλλες έχουν καταστεί αόρατες, σιωπηλές και ανοίκειες, καθώς κατεδαφίστηκαν ή κατέρρευσαν και ερειπώθηκαν. Αυτή η επιλεκτική και αντιφατική διαχείριση της κληρονομιάς είναι προϊόν της αντίληψης ότι πτυχές του υλικού πολιτισμού της Φλώρινας αντανακλούν, οπτικά ή συμβολικά, ταυτότητες ασύμβατες με τον εθνικό κανόνα, υποδηλώνουν την εθνοτική, γλωσσική και πολιτισμική διαφοροποίηση της περιοχής στο παρελθόν και στο παρόν ή υπενθυμίζουν ιστορικά τραύματα και ενοχές. Οι κύριοι παράγοντες που καθόρισαν την παραπάνω εικόνα είναι οι εθνικές πολιτικές για τη διαχείριση της πολιτισμικής κληρονομιάς, οι αποφάσεις σε κεντρικό και τοπικό επίπεδο και οι παρεμβάσεις της εκκλησίας, η οποία λειτούργησε στην περιοχή ως εργαλείο ιδεολογικής καταπίεσης. Το αποτέλεσμα ήταν πολλά μνημεία, κτήρια και τόποι μνήμης να παραμεληθούν, να αποκαθαρθούν και να ισοπεδωθούν (τα ισλαμικά μνημεία, το χωράφι με τους άταφους νεκρούς του εμφυλίου, εκκλησίες και σχολεία που συνδέθηκαν με τη βουλγαρική γλώσσα), ενώ άλλοι μνημονικοί τόποι, πιο συμβατοί με την κυρίαρχη πρόσληψη της εθνικής ιστορίας, αναγορεύθηκαν σε σημαίνοντα της τοπικής ιστορίας (δημόσια γλυπτική και μνημεία που αφορούν στους ήρωες του Μακεδονικού Αγώνα και στον Εμφύλιο πόλεμο, αντίγραφα αρχαίων επιτύμβιων στηλών). Τέλος, σχολιάζουμε τις δυνατότητες που παρέχει η τυπική και άτυπη εκπαίδευση, το διαδίκτυο και η διαρκώς αναπτυσσόμενη βιομηχανία του ελεύθερου χρόνου στην κατεύθυνση της επαναδιαπραγμάτευσης πτυχών του «δύσκολου» παρελθόντος της Φλώρινας, ώστε να αποδοθεί νόημα και να αναδειχθούν όψεις του υλικού πολιτισμού, οι οποίες ήταν έως τώρα σιωπηλές και αποκλεισμένες από την επίσημη συλλογική μνήμη.

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore the perceptions, attitudes and practices towards cultural heritage in the context of a small town in north-west Greece, Florina. The emphasis shall be on those material aspects of the past that were manipulated by

national and other ideologies. Our rationale is based on the approach that a townscape potentially operates as an open museum that presents the palimpsest of the sequences of human behaviour and activity overtime. In another sense, it reflects the never-ending attempt of a given society to construct its collective memory. In doing so, many features of Florina's historical landscape became rather obvious, extremely grandiose, easily recognizable and well-preserved, while others were rendered invisible, mute, unfamiliar, and even demolished or allowed to collapse into ruins. This selective and conflicting cultural management is the outcome of the perception that many material features of Florina's past, either visibly or symbolically, project identities incompatible with the national canon, manifest the ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of the area in the past and present, or remind a traumatic/guilty past. National cultural heritage policies, central and local governmental decisions and the intervention of the Church, which worked as a tool of ideological oppression in the area, are the main agents that defined the current state of Florina's difficult heritage: many monuments, buildings and memory sites were neglected, purified and neutralized (e.g. Islamic monuments, Civil War burial grounds, a church and school associated with the Bulgarian language), while other sites, more compatible with the dominant perception of national history, were elevated to the status of hallmarks of the local past (e.g. sculpture and monuments of the heroes of the Greek Struggle in Macedonia (1893-1908), the Civil War (1945-1949), and models of ancient Greek headstones). Last but not least, we discuss how education, both formal and informal, the widespread use of the internet and the expanding touristic and leisure-time industry develop new opportunities for re-negotiating aspects of the town's difficult past and for ascribing significance to issues which were formerly silent and excluded from the realm of the "authorized" collective memory.

## A recent story of appropriating the past

The area of Florina was a focal point of the Greek Civil War (1946-1949). One of the final actions of this contentious chapter of Greek history unfolded on the night of 11 February 1949. It was the final attempt of the Democratic Army of Greece (the army created by the Greek Communist Party in 1946) to occupy the town of Florina, which ended with their defeat by the National Army and the Hellenic Gendarmerie. The dead fighters of the Democratic Army of Greece, about 750-850 people,<sup>1</sup> including many wounded soldiers, were buried using bulldozers, after being thrown into a collective grave in a field at the south-east side of the town, just below the church of St. George.<sup>2</sup> The traumatic event of the “unburied fighters” was an open secret for the entire subsequent period until the 90s. Every mention of it, or of other difficult local issues like the Slavic-speaking (slavophonic) dimension of the area, was considered an act of betrayal. Everybody knew about the “pit” with the numerous dead, among whom were many young people, adolescent boys who had been violently recruited. However, silence was maintained or the issue was solely talked about in whispers, for fear of being branded a traitor. The trauma of the Greek Civil War in Florina created an abandoned site of memory, a well-known open secret within the local community.

Since 1989, the Communist Party of Greece had made efforts for the recognition of the area as a place of sacrifice, advocating for the expropriation of the field and the placement of a monument. Twice, in 2006 and 2008, the Party erected a white marble slab devoted to the fighters of the Democratic Army of Greece, which was subsequently desecrated and destroyed by ‘unknown’ vandals. Finally, the Communist Party purchased the field. On Sunday, 14 February 2016, a monument was unveiled at the site of the mass grave of men, women and youths of the Democratic Army of Greece, in the presence of Dimitiris Koutsoumbas, the Party’s General Secretary. The monument is a work of art by sculptor Memos Makris. More specifically, it is an exact replica of another sculpture of Makris that was erected in the concentration camp at Mauthausen, Austria. It is a sculptural synthesis that does not portray the mourning and trauma but, through the raising of the hands of 11 sculpted figures, it depicts optimism and the continuity of struggle. The construction and erection of the monument, along with the enclosure of the site, was funded by colleagues and friends of the Greek Communist Party from Hungary, where Memos Makris lived, worked and became distinguished as an artist.

Sixty-seven years later, the silent trauma dealing with a bleak historical event is being transformed by a particular political agent, the Communist Party, into a hermetically closed memorial monument. The field is enclosed by a stone wall with railings and an iron door which is always locked. Any attempt to enter, pay tribute to the dead, read

their names written on marble blocks located around the walls, or admire the sculptural synthesis of Memos Makris is possible only with the presence (or permission) of the local members of the Party. In this case, the difficult past attested to in the abandoned field continues to be perpetuated by the political ownership and the current –literal– confinement and restriction of free access to all. The argument of fearing possible vandalism in the future converts a place of memory into a field of exclusion. So, in the course of time, the handling of the memory of the field below the Church of St. George proceeded from historical trauma to silence and abandonment, and, more recently, from abandonment to the ideological appropriation and the confinement of memory.

This very recent event represents a resonant example of how heritage is being perceived, used and abused in the case of Florina. The aim of this paper is to explore attitudes, mentalities and perceptions regarding cultural heritage related to difficult aspects of local and/or ethnic history. The paper discusses how the material evidence of Florina's past is being manipulated by national and other ideologies and negotiated via social practices, cultural management, performances and outreach activities.

### **Heritage and memory in the public space**

During the second half of the 20th century, and even more in the 21st, the obsession with memory has become a common phenomenon for Western societies that ever increasingly desire to preserve, present and celebrate their pasts. The exaltation of memorial cultures have acquired diverse forms of presentation, ranging from museums, memorial monuments and restored buildings to plaques and art installations that seek to perpetuate collective memory in public spaces (Carrier 2005: 2; Huysen 2003: 3, 11; Macdonald 2013: 1, 3-4).

The concept of collective memory was introduced by M. Halbwachs in the early 20th century. It stressed the social and cultural nature of memory, as an expression of collective meanings about the past, formulated by those groups that lived it (Halbwachs 1956). Theory surrounding collective memory witnessed considerable recognition from the 70s on, mainly due to the contribution of the work of Nora (1996), who outlined the impact of "lieux de mémoire" (sites of memory), which range from museums, monuments and historical sites to textbooks, archives and symbols like flags, parades and celebrations. These sites are vested with historical significance by modern societies, seeking to preserve and maintain their collective memory and perform rituals of commemoration in various settings, which are not necessarily connected with traditional approaches to history. According to Hoelscher, place is one of the premises of heritage, and, in his view, Nora's conceptualization of sites of memory is indiscernible from heritage, recalling that all memorial displays of history (artifacts in

a museum, public squares, war memorials, even texts) are spatially defined (Hoelscher 2006: 204, 216).

According to the above, cultural heritage management in the cityscape arranges spatially collective memory or oblivion and transforms public space into a museum, in a broader sense. For example, Gioka suggests that a number of monuments concerning mass killings or the Holocaust erected by modern societies have exceeded the current functions of public commemoration and acquired the qualities of an exhibit in the public space, a space that is not a museum in technical terms. She believes that a memorial can transform the space around it into a museum, and, in this way, the built and fully symbolized public space is invested with “apparitional museum meanings, when someone is viewing a monument and is situated in the hierarchies set by a museum, as if these hierarchies were a second nature that surrounds the monument” (Gioka 2016: 155-156). Similar feelings might be created when people observe restored or collapsed buildings, monuments or other tangible features of cultural heritage in the townscape.

Many scholars, combining knowledge and methods from different research fields (history, archaeology, anthropology, architecture, museum and cultural studies), have explored how collective and other types of memory, representations of the past and different identities are inscribed, negotiated and collide in city/townscapes (Boyer 1994; Hayden 1995; Huyssen 2003; Macdonald 2009; Fokaidis & Chronaki 2016; Stavridis 2006). These views envisage the historical landscape as a dynamic field of imprinting, rewriting and erasing history and personal or collective memories, providing a new reading of the urban space as a system of representation with multiple layers of historical meanings.

Despite the multitude of memorial possibilities in the cityscape, not all history is selected for commemoration, and many dark chapters of the past still face considerable difficulties in the ways they are presented and perceived. Sharon Macdonald has thoughtfully discussed the case of Nuremberg and its Nazi material heritage, that is recognized as meaningful in the present but remains also contested and awkward for public reconciliation and for self-affirming contemporary identities (Macdonald 2009). The management of an undesirable past often leads to policies of deny-and-delete, accompanied by the destruction of heritage in its physical space, applying a modern “*damnatio memoriae*” that recalls the practice applied by the Roman state against persons or situations for which it had been decided that Roman citizens ought not to remember (Triantis 2016: 65).

### **Florina in context: History and the historical landscape**

For a better understanding of the relationship of Florina with what we define as a “difficult past”, some historical considerations should be made concerning the cultural,

political and social conditions under which certain historical agents and cultural players shaped and manipulated the historical landscape of the town.

Florina lies in the north-western part of Macedonia, along the borders with Albania and FYROM. In November 1912, wrested from the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), it was annexed to the national body of Greece, as many other neighbouring areas were in the same period that formed the Greek part of Macedonia. In the framework of the Ottoman Empire, Greeks, Bulgarians, Turks, Jews, Vlachs, Slavophones, Arvanites, Roma –along with other ethnic groups– coexisted in the region on social, economic, educational and cultural terms (Karakasidou 2002: 126-132; Vouri 1992: 20-25). By 1870, that is, before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, emerging nationalisms, mostly Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian, transformed that peaceful cohabitation into a new situation based on ethnicity and religion. This discord came to a climax with the severe conflicts during the “armed phase” (1904-1908) of the Macedonian Struggle, that is, the religious, diplomatic, political and, finally, military struggle of Greece against Bulgarian propaganda and military intervention that intended to appropriate the territories and population of Macedonia (Dakin 1996). The Balkan Wars signalled the end of these antagonisms, setting the national borders and dismantling the geography of the formerly united region of Macedonia. What, before 1912, had been perceived as a common historical experience, transformed rapidly into the history of the “Other” –the enemy.

The first fissure in the relationship between the local area and its past and divergent histories is the historical incision of 1912. Very few cultural traces from before 1912 were left intact, due to the Greek State’s homogenizing practices, in collaboration with the religious and local political administration and the tolerance of the majority of the local society. Some of these material elements survived as depictions in the photos and postcards of the French Armée d’Orient and in a few texts by historians and travellers, such as Evliya Çelebi and Victor Bérard (Bérard 1896, 1987; Broilo 2011: 92; Dimitriadis 1973). Such was the zealotry apparent at the time that nearly everything related to the “others” of Florina’s past was swept aside. Places of worship vanished (mosques, Jewish synagogues, cemeteries) –not only in the town of Florina but also in the villages of the area, in general– viewed as being synonymous with inferior and unworthy cultures. As a result, of the numerous mosques (the Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi witnessed seven in the 17<sup>th</sup> century), a clock-tower, several Ottoman mansions and two bath-houses that existed in the town until 1923 –the time of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey– only one minaret, one bath-house and the non-preserved and collapsing relic of an Ottoman tower-house (*koules*) have survived (Broilo 2011; Kaskamanidis 2004; Oikonomou & Stoios 2013). This destruction, abandonment and lack of care concerning the architectural heritage of the ethnically diverse populations of the area are associated with deliberate decisions made by the Municipal Council. A role

was also played by the shortcomings of the cultural management policies in Greece that up to the 1970s still neglected modern and contemporary cultural heritage.

The second element that should be taken into account, in order to better understand the difficult past of Florina, is that of the linguistic stratification and cultural diversity in the area, including communities of slavophones (speaking the Bulgarian or the Slavo-Macedonian dialect), vlachophones (speaking the Aromanian dialect) and arvanitophones (speaking the Albanian dialect). Among them, slavophones were under constant surveillance and suspicion, which in many periods led to severe oppression (Karakasidou 2002; Kostopoulos 2000; Van Boeschoten 2000).

From 1912 onwards, several categories of monuments were created as a result of the widespread destruction and disappearance, indifference and abandonment, silence, replacement, over-projection and promotion of the glorious national past, along with a predilection for exalting certain people and politicians. What is visible in the townscape of Florina today is the result of the interplay between different ideologies, practices and concerns, which shaped the material palimpsest of human behaviour and activity, in turn reflecting the attempts of the local society to construct its collective memory. This palimpsest incorporates visible and invisible cultural heritage that is recognized either as valuable for being remembered or as contested, awkward and unsettling and thus ignored or poorly presented, without regard to its meaning for the present (Macdonald 2009: 1). Operating as an "open-air museum", the historical landscape of Florina feeds the local collective memory through the occurrence of several memory cultures. This includes specific cases of excluding or celebrating Florina's cultural heritage, which will be further analysed and discussed below.

### ***Heritage of oblivion***

The presence and activity of Augoustinos Kantiotis (secularly Andreas Kantiotis) in western Macedonia was decisive for the ideological management of Florina's difficult past. He initially became engaged as a preacher (1942-1947) and later on, from 1967, as the Bishop of Florina, appointed with honour by the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church during the period of dictatorship in the country (1967-74). Kantiotis contributed remarkably to the process of hellenization and the purging of every cultural element that was deemed by him to be harmful. These offensive elements could be summarized as being anything considered antithetical to the doctrine of a "Greece of Greek Christians". The violence he addressed to anything considered non-Hellenic was multifaceted. Apart from verbal vitriol, excommunications and constant curses, the wanton demolition of monuments and their replacement by new ones functioned as symbolic violence against the inhabitants of the area.

A typical example of his actions was the 1971 demolition of the St. Panteleimon cathedral, built in 1870, and the immediate foundation of a new church in its place,



expunged of all the “non-Greek” remnants in the architecture and paintings of the previous one. According to the anniversary edition of Florina’s diocese (Pichos 1993: 23, 26), Athanasios Roukalis, an older priest of that church stated:

It weighed gravely upon me that the cathedral, internally and externally, had a Slavic architectural planning and design. It had three domes in the Slavic style. All the windows were also of a Slavic form. In the interior of the church, the paintings of the iconostasis were written with Slavic letters and the Greek were written on top of them. In many cases, the Greek letters were worn off or faded and the Slavic ones became visible again. I couldn’t accept that.

After removing all the “offending” church icons and modifying the altar and the windows, they finally demolished the whole church. Under the pretext, that they were public safety hazards, several churches in the wider area were torn down, the Cathedral of Florina included. In many cases the “threat” was so immense that they were forced to use tanks to demolish the buildings, as happened in the case of the St. Konstantinos and Helen’s Church in Amyntaion, another town in the Florina district.<sup>3</sup>

In the same ideological context, another important building that faced total destruction and rebuilding in order to be “Hellenized” was the so-called Economic High School of Florina (Picture 1).



Picture 1. The Economic High School of Florina. (A. Vogiatzis’ Photographic archives)

It was built between 1905 and 1908 by the inhabitants of the town affiliated with the Bulgarian Exarchate and functioned as a Bulgarian School until 1913. From 1916 onwards, it served as a sixth grade Greek high school; as the French Headquarters

during the First World War; a mixed-gender high school; a requisitioned building by the Germans during the Second World War, and by the National Army in the Civil War; a Commercial School; and from 1961 to 1977 as the Economic High School of Florina. It was a two-storey building, with an attic called the “pigeon house” by its students, and an austere facade with pseudo-pilasters recalling neoclassicism.

In 1978, on the initiative of Florina’s Art Centre (Stegi Filotechnon) and with the contribution of Dimitris Kalamaras, Dean of the Athens’ School of Fine Arts, a large exhibition was hosted at the Economic High School under the title “Four Masters of Greek Art”, presenting artworks by the prominent Greek painters D. Kokkinidis, P. Tetsis, D. Mytaras and N. Hadjikyriakos-Ghikas. Before the end of the exhibition, the Prefect of Florina demanded that the members of Florina’s Art Centre leave the building and for it to be handed over to the authorities. In this case, the destruction and the subsequent “Hellenization” of the high school was the result of the collaboration between the ecclesiastical authority, namely Bishop Augoustinos Kantiotis, and the local political authorities, that is, the appointed Prefect of Florina, T. Aspasidis.

Although the Art Centre of Florina was expecting a governmental decision for the building to be given a preservation order and to be chosen to house the Art Museum of Florina, the violent destruction of the high school, a landmark for hundreds of students, began one night in December 1978. Apparently, a building constructed by adherents to the Bulgarian Church did not fit Bishop Kantiotis’ aesthetic views, and in this opinion he was supported by the cooperation of the local political administration. The destruction of the Economic High School started at 2:00 am, with no license for demolition. In the place of that building, important in terms of both architecture and its diverse historical and cultural biography, a new school was built, the Third High School of Florina, in a so-called “Macedonian” architectural style, that is an imitation of the luxurious mansions of Western Macedonia during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Cultural heritage such as the Cathedral of St. Panteleimon and the Economic High School of Florina faced total destruction for their purification and subsequent replacement by similar “Hellenized” buildings in order to fit the national canon. The targets of these practices were mainly the Slavophones of the area. Both buildings were connected to the people affiliated with the Bulgarian Exarchate, and, thus, they were considered as reminders of a dissonant and undesirable past. The purification actions, conducted by the secular authorities, with the close cooperation of the Orthodox Church, Bishop Kantiotis and the prevailing conservative environment that he created, destroyed everything that did not represent a ‘healthy Greek view’. These policies functioned as symbolic acts of violence against the Slavophones, a “non-minority” of the area (Karakasidou 2002) that, despite being the largest cultural group of the region, was always under suspicion and treated as a minority by the measures and practices

adopted by the Greek government. A significant part of the local society still discusses the destructions of these two buildings, considering these acts to be the darkest moments in the recent history of the area.

### *Heritage of remembrance*

In contrast to the previously described practices of 'sanitizing' the past through the obliteration of difficult cultural heritage that is considered unsettling and officially unwelcomed, there are other inscriptions in the townscape of Florina that portray histories much more desirable for remembrance and commemoration.

At the moment, in Florina, a town of less than 20,000 inhabitants, almost 40 memorial monuments of various types are on display. These historical monuments are in the form of statues, busts, sculptural syntheses, headstones and other artefacts, such as rusted and ruined cannons. Both the context of their creation and their themes reveal certain aspects of how the history of the area is manipulated and portrayed. A thematic analysis indicates that they mostly present and commemorate historical topics and periods connected to the Macedonian Struggle, World War II and the Greek Civil War. All these events and their monumental representation reflect the dominant political ideology of the post-Civil War period of Greece.

Some cases of representation are quite revealing for their public significations. The twelve sculptures scattered all over Florina that depict fighters and politicians related to the Macedonian Struggle were the first memorial monuments erected in the town. This process began with the pre-planned placement of many of them in 1960, both in the town of Florina and in the villages of the surrounding area (Andreou & Vamvakidou 2006: 97-98). This action certainly represented an attempt –since the end of the Civil War (1949)– to transcend the awkward and difficult past through framing public memory and defining historical consciousness. That past left large historical wounds in the local communities of Florina (exiles, deprivation of properties, permanent banishment from the country, kidnappings) that were considered better forgotten, like the mass burial of the defeated Communists mentioned above. The Macedonian Struggle and its heroes, cast in marble and bronze, symbolized the right of the area to be, and remain, Greek and the sacrifices against the Bulgarian propaganda and repression of that time. It did not matter that some of these fighters had complicated cultural backgrounds and fluid identities, including being slavophones (Slavic speakers), or had questionable allegiances, such as Kapetan Kottas (Andreou 2003), the most famous among the fighters in the area of Florina.

Nevertheless, even in the context of state monumentalization of the past, conflict existed as local ideological mechanisms intervened and censored the artistic representation and aesthetics of certain sculptures. The statue of Kottas (Picture 2), a work of art by the famous sculptor and academic Dimitris Kalamaras, himself a native

of Florina, was criticized as being too abstract and thus anti-national, anti-Greek and anti-heroic by Florina's Bishop Kantiotis and his followers. This conservative mentality created by the Church and sections of the local society lead to the statue's relocation in various places around the town and finally its "disappearance" for many years, until 2002 (Andreou & Vamvakidou 2006: 146; Tsiara 2004: 173-77).



Picture 2. The statue of Kottas (1863-1905), by D. Kalamaras, in the New Park of Florina. (Photo by the authors)

In addition to the monumentalization of the Macedonian Struggle, another set of public monuments, including busts and weapons (the so-called "cannons" of the defeated Communists), dramatically signify the military and ideological victors of the Greek Civil War. Their visual domination functioned symbolically in a period during which both local and central government employed various means to enforce the cultural and linguistic assimilation of the diverse population of the area (Karakasidou 1993; Kostopoulos 2000). Currently, the central square of Florina (George Modis' Square)

represents a historical intermingling of memorial monuments. It presents the heroes and intellectuals of the Macedonian Struggle at the first visual level, a statue of freedom and the monument to the fallen Greek soldiers of the Greek-Italian War (1940-1941) at the second level, and, finally, at the most elevated position, two heads, those of L. Pyrzas, a hero of the Macedonian Struggle, and of I. Pappous, the General of the victorious National Army in the Greek Civil War, accompanied by the spoils (cannons) taken from the losers. Without doubt, this blatant commemoration of the winners of the civil conflict is in deep contrast to the silent 'pit' of buried losers from the communist side, discussed in the introduction of this paper.

Another case concerning the instrumentalization of memory cultures in Florina relates to the three marble models of ancient funerary reliefs located in the centre of the town, one of which lies in the courtyard of the Town Hall (Picture 3).



**Picture 3. Model of an ancient funerary relief in the centre of the town.  
The original one resides at the Archaeological Museum of Florina.  
(Photo by the authors)**

The original artefacts, dating from the end of the Classical Era and the Roman Period, are included in the exhibition of the local Archaeological Museum and their style and features (Greek names, gods, pediments, etc.) are typical of ancient Greek material culture. The copies were erected in 2005 on the decision of the Municipality of Florina and this initiative can only be perceived as a visual statement of the Hellenic character

of the area in the past and the present. They serve as a perpetual reminder of this standpoint in the context of the political dispute between Greece and FYROM, concerning the nature and ownership of ancient Macedonian heritage, which has been an ongoing issue since the 90s (Danforth 1995; Roudometof 2000, 2002; chapters in Cowan 2000; Mackridge & Yannakakis 1997; Pettifer 1999).

Antiquities, especially the discovery of the "Royal Tombs" in the village of Vergina, have been proclaimed as emblems par excellence and signifiers of Hellenic national identity in Macedonia (Hamilakis 2007: 131-133; Kotsakis 1998). Both countries have sought to appropriate and exploit ancient Macedonian heritage through various practices, including the erection of various sculptures inspired by Macedonian antiquity (Andreou & Kasvikis 2015). The presence of these funeral headstones in the streets of Florina could be more resonant and explicitly fundamental in enhancing public memory than the whole exhibition of the Archaeological Museum and the archaeological site of a Hellenistic town on the outskirts of Florina, since neither of which attracts significant numbers of visitors.

### **Public perceptions, outreach and education**

How are knowledge, experience and awareness of the aspects of Florina's difficult past, reflected through the various forms of cultural heritage in the town, being shared and disseminated to the public? After a long period during which this difficult past was not open to discussion and negotiation, many intellectuals and citizens started to focus on and examine the elements of local heritage that had, until recently, been silent and rejected. For example, local architects studied the Ottoman-Islamic architectural heritage of the area and many overshadowed elements of local history were presented in the exhibition "For Florina: Architectural landscapes of the past" in the Art Museum of Florina (Oikonomou & Stoios 2013). The documentary by Sophia Antonakaki "Florina of the arts and passions" also raised many issues concerning the negative role of the Church and its followers in the local context that systematically censored many artistic events and procedures in Florina, like film-making and fine arts, including the aforementioned statue of Kottas. Nevertheless, reminders of silent and excluded cultural heritage in Florina are not always welcomed or without conflict. A lecture on the subject given by one of the authors of the present article, in the context of the annual cultural festival, "Prespeia" (Andreou 2012), received mixed reactions, both positive and negative, supported by many members of the local community, but also provoking severe objections from right-wing politicians and local nationalists. We believe that, despite the reservations and restrictions set, mainly by the Church and conservative parts of the local society, new opportunities and challenges for re-negotiating and ascribing new meanings to old practices and perceptions about the

difficult past are provided today by formal and informal education, the internet and the leisure and recreation industry.

Formal and informal education is an effective medium for disseminating knowledge to the public and promoting historical awareness by exploiting the informative, mnemonic, symbolic and ideological values of cultural heritage. For an effective educational approach to Florina's difficult cultural heritage, the following presuppositions should be taken into account:

- a. Florina's difficult cultural heritage includes different types of mnemonic sources (memorials, statues, buildings, monuments, weapons) which require different teaching strategies.
- b. The material substance of those sources and the fact that, despite their materiality, a number of them have become invisible, though their memory is preserved through other forms of evidence (photos, documents and oral narratives).
- c. Some aspects of cultural heritage under discussion are recognizable, highlighted and preserved, while others are ruined or erased and remain silent and practically invisible.
- d. As a result, they are differentiated in terms of perceptions and the acceptance they enjoy among the local community, being either celebrated or controversial, or even repressed by the collective memory.

In accordance with the above presuppositions, a combination of different approaches from different fields is needed. Museum education, public archaeology, history teaching and *remembrance education* provide valuable tools for enabling different target groups to appreciate all forms of heritage, both familiar and contested ones. In terms of museum education and material culture teaching, for an effective educational context that will promote critical reading and interpretation of the material evidence of the historical landscape, such as buildings, monuments and memorials, the key factors of "materiality", "visibility" and "visit potential" are indispensable (Kasvikis & Andreou 2008).

Similar to museums, historical landscapes have their own values as resources and places of education. They create an alternative educational environment and a communication system different from the classroom, favouring outdoor research activities and opportunities for learning from objects (in the broader sense), occasionally in local places of memory very familiar to students. Due to its materiality, heritage evidence manifests cultural tools that require multisensory engagement and can promote embodied experience and learning approaches that involve active participation, experiential learning, discovery learning, expression of personal views and open-ended interpretations (e.g., Corbishley 2011; Henson, Stone & Corbishley 2004; Stone & Molyneaux 1994). In our case, even the destroyed and vanished relics of the difficult past, that can only be accessed mentally and not visually, also prompt reflection for and through their absence.

On the other hand, the issue of conflict is intrinsic to a number of Florina's monuments under discussion. In recent years, important research work has been done concerning the teaching of sensitive and controversial historical issues (the Holocaust, ethnic cleansings, pogroms, war crimes, civil wars, treatment of minorities), or the traumatic past, and history educators have proposed very detailed theoretical and methodological frameworks and specific educational strategies requisite for providing a consistent historical understanding of conflicting historical events (Bjerg, Körber, Lenz & Von Wrochen 2014; Cooper & Nichol 2015; Kokkinos & Mavroskoufis 2015).

Occasionally, the documentation of these conflicting issues is based on "traditional" written records, in addition to photos and oral history, which entail a restriction of the corresponding educational strategies to the examination of these types of sources. In our case, despite the fact that these approaches provide many opportunities for negotiating the conflicting past, they also pose constraints to historical understanding, due to the fact that Florina's cultural heritage relates to other types of historical evidence. For example, C. Baron (2012) suggests that Wineburg's (1991) heuristics, identified as intrinsic to developing or engaging in historical understanding when working with primary and secondary source documents (corroboration, sourcing and contextualization), is a good analytical framework, but proves inefficient when applied to historical sites and buildings. She proposes a modified and expanded framework for historical thinking at historic places. This includes origination, intertectonality, stratification, supposition, and empathetic insight, which, according to her research, encourage more historian-like analysis in the context of historic sites. More recently, A. Körber (2014) provided a thoughtful framework for teaching memorial cultures in museums, monuments and memory sites and defined the core historical competences for analysing and reflecting on culture(s) of remembrance.

*Remembrance education* is the most recent educational approach for a pluralistic memory culture. Arising from the theoretical basis that education should prepare students to participate actively in society, it attempts to enhance their memory concerning negative aspects of human behaviour in the past (war, intolerance and exploitation) to avoid repetition in the future. Sharing many theoretical and methodological assumptions, but also displaying distinct differences with history teaching, remembrance education intends to build a moral bridge between past and present, deviating from the more historical and contextual thinking of history education (Van Nieuwenhuysse & Wils 2012).

Nevertheless, the educational usage of the difficult past comes into conflict with a history education that is predominately restricted to accounts that compel students to consolidate the national past as it is articulated in the curricula and history textbooks. We have discussed elsewhere (Kasvikis & Andreou 2014) how teachers of the area appear unwilling and hold many reservations about introducing content and practices



concerning Florina's cultural diversity and multiculturalism, as identified in the past and present, for fear that they might be misused to challenge national identity and develop anti-national sentiments. Consequently, these teachers internalize and operate a peculiar form of self-censorship concerning the "dangerous" aspects of Florina's local history. A possible solution to this problem is the introduction of multiperspectivity in the educational framework concerning the difficult past, as

a way of viewing, and a predisposition to view, historical events, personalities, developments, cultures and societies from different perspectives, through drawing on procedures and processes which are fundamental to history as a discipline (Stradling 2003: 14).

Multiperspectivity contributes to the development of historical thinking and citizenship through the interplay of strategies of using multiple and contrasting evidence, examining the diverse perspectives of historical agents in their context and reflecting on the moral dimension of the past (Barton & Levstik 2004; Seixas & Morton 2013). In our case, encouraging historical multiperspectivity can facilitate the transition from an ethnocentric perspective of history to the recognition of the multiple voices of the past reflected in cultural heritage as well as the multiple views and competing judgments of people in the present.

Despite local reservations about the educational values of the difficult past, it is very promising that some aspects of Florina's difficult past (the remaining minaret, the Ottoman bath, a Muslim tower-house) are recognized and signposted by the Centre of Environmental Education of Vevi-Meliti, Florina, in the context of the project "We know our town" (previously "Environmental and cultural routes in the town of Florina") addressed to Primary and Secondary Education students. This project is taking place at thirteen cultural heritage sites in Florina and aims to discuss aspects of sustainability, heritage management and local history (Nikos Nanis personal communication). In addition, teachers have gradually started to develop projects about memorial monuments, for example those of the Macedonian Struggle, focusing on issues of vandalism and heritage management.

Finally, Communication and Information Technology provides new challenges and opportunities for the visible and invisible material heritage of Florina's difficult past to acquire different meanings and interesting forms of representations, involving more sectors of the community and different target groups. The internet, for example, is fundamental as an alternative medium of knowledge and forum for local cultural players, bloggers and interested parties to discuss, dispute and reflect upon local history. However, this process is apparently not always approached with a positive point of view or dispassionate voice concerning the difficult heritage's issues of conflict.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the beginning of collaboration between the Municipality of Florina and the "Workshop of Local History" of the Department of Primary Education, University of

Western Macedonia, strives to provide an alternative option for the local community and the visitors of the town to understand and interpret Florina's historical landscape. The project aims to produce information material, both printed and digital (accessible via QR-Codes), that will be available in-situ, at about 40 different locations in Florina, including a number of existing (and many of the disappeared) monuments that deal with the difficult heritage of the town.

### **A difficult past for the future**

In this paper, we have focused on and analysed how the difficult past of a small, regional town – manifested in various forms of cultural heritage – was and continues to be manipulated, managed and presented by different social agents, cultural players and educational actors over the last hundred years, in contrast to other aspects of local history which are considered more worthy of remembrance. The adopted policies concerning the management of Florina's difficult material culture imposed the practices of ignoring, silencing and destroying that are common to other cases of negotiation of difficult heritage (Macdonald 2009: 3). They sought to reinforce – even to reshape – identities, to propel historical memory and to reproduce social and ethnic values. Consequently, many conveniently remembered aspects of specific cultural heritage were emphasized, celebrated, and effectually reinvented. This trend is exemplified in memorial monuments of the Macedonian Struggle and ancient Greek heritage, while others not compatible with the dominant national ideologies were purposely ignored and erased from the public space as manifested in certain buildings, statues and heritage related to 'otherness'.

Similar to what Sharon Macdonald also observed in her case study (2009: 3), in the context of Florina a number of monuments as well as intangible heritage (e.g. the linguistic diversity) belong to what Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996: 21) describe as "dissonant heritage". This is in the sense that they either embody a contested form of heritage, belonging to people that no longer exist in the area (e.g. Muslims and Jews) or they do not have the authority or power to call for the right of their heritage to be conserved and commemorated (e.g., the Slavic speaking part of the local community). The exception in our case are the political agents that asserted the exclusiveness of their memory (e.g. the Communist Party of Greece).

In order to understand the difficult past of Florina, as it is reflected in the cultural heritage management of the area, it is important to consider the certain political and cultural situations, both national and local, that form the historical frameworks within which memory cultures are developed and negotiated by different agents, as they did not come about in a social and political vacuum. These include the central governmental policies for assimilating the diverse linguistic populations of the area, the

local expression of the Cold War harmonized with the political climate of post-Civil War Greece, and the role of particular local decision-makers. The official memory interventions, manifested in various forms of local cultural heritage, as have been described above, seek to counterbalance histories that seem unpleasant to remember and are incompatible with the imperatives of the dominant national ideology. Decision-makers, acting either independently or within the framework of conservative political powers, imposed their own beliefs about national identity and locality. Nevertheless, these practices of constructing local memory cultures do not simply represent a top-down process. They were not planned solely by the central government and imposed upon the local context, but were directed with the fundamental contribution of local agents that enforced their own ideas and attitudes towards cultural heritage.

For example, in the case of Florina, the role of the Church, and in particular that of Bishop Kantiotis, who had the longest incumbency in the area, was decisive for a number of memory “arrangements”. In contrast to the kind of interventions analysed by MacDonald (2009) concerning Nuremberg, the bishop did not seek to remind but to delete uncomfortable histories reflected in cultural monuments. He applied a particular programme for eliminating the offending and preventable cultural heritage (the Cathedral of St. Panteleimon, the Economic High School), a local “*damnatio memoriae*” of people and activities related to elements that local society is forced to forget. Political parties, both conservative and progressive, also had their impact on the decision-making and application of their perspectives of managing the difficult past. The local right-wing politicians supported a policy of ignorance, eschewing the remembrance of painful and traumatic moments of the past reflected in monuments. More recently, the Communist Party strived for the emergence and management of historical remembrance, instilling its own ideology and hegemonizing the memory of the Civil War. Finally, local decision makers, such as mayors, prefects and bureaucrats serving in the local administration, also contributed either as the long arm of the State or in collaboration with the Church, in employing the programme of sanitization and Hellenization of Muslim and “Bulgarian” cultural heritage.

Sharon Macdonald (2008: 94) noticed that even in the successful cases of memory interventions, these did not manage to achieve a major revision of public memory. In the case of Florina, these memory interventions in what we consider as the difficult past of the area resulted in the oppression of collective memory for several decades. Only recently have different, and occasionally competing, members of the local community sought to break the bonds of the current cultural heritage manipulation that favours a non-controversial, and thus neutral, reading of the area’s difficult past, raising their own voices concerning their interpretation of material heritage. Undoubtedly, the negotiation and reconciliation with the difficult past, which presupposes the gradual embodiment in the collective memory aspects of –until

recently— undesirable and uncomfortable cultural heritage, remains difficult and controversial. However, it also portrays an optimistic perspective for the future in social and educational terms.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Newspaper *Rizospastis*, 18 October 2009.

<sup>2</sup> See photos and a description of the battle at: <http://www.kolivas.de/archives/212899> (retrieved 31/10/ 2017).

<sup>3</sup> See one of the rare photos of the Cathedral along with the opposite opinion of the followers of Bishop Kantiotis concerning the demolition of churches in the district of Florina at <http://www.augoustinos-kantiotis.gr/?p=16874> (retrieved 31/10/2017).

<sup>4</sup> See for example reactions concerning the recent memorial monument founded by the Greek Communist Party: [https://panosz.wordpress.com/2009/10/18/civil\\_war-24/](https://panosz.wordpress.com/2009/10/18/civil_war-24/) (retrieved 31/10/2017). For an English translation, see: <http://tinyurl.com/jkol57b>