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Public sphere and platform society

Claudia Gina Hassan[*]

Abstract. The subject of this article is the transformation of the public sphere in the age of digital platforms
and the implications this has for democratic life Building on Habermas' recent considerations of this change, the political implications and contradictions of the nexus between a normative, hopefully functioning public sphere for democracy, with reason at its center, and a digital public sphere marked by the decline of political life and the difficulty of fragmented networked debate marked by the fading distinction between public and private are analyzed. Risks are also highlighted, such as algorithmic secrecy and the potential of platforms
***Keywords*:** Habermas, algorithmic secrecy, digital society, platform society, public sphere.

Riassunto. Il tema di questo articolo è la trasformazione della sfera pubblica nell'era delle piattaforme digitali e le sue implicazioni per la vita democratica. Partendo dalle recenti considerazioni di Habermas su questo cambiamento, si analizzano le implicazioni politiche e le contraddizioni del nesso tra una sfera pubblica normativa e auspicabilmente funzionante per la democrazia, con la ragione al centro, e una sfera pubblica digitale segnata dal declino della vita politica e dalla difficoltà di un dibattito frammentato in rete, caratterizzato dal venir meno della distinzione tra pubblico e privato. Vengono anche evidenziati da una parte i rischi, come la segretezza algoritmica e dall'altra le potenzialità delle piattaforme.
Parole chiave: Habermas, platform society, segretezza algoritmica, sfera pubblica, società digitale.

Public sphere and platform society

The concept of the public sphere, as Habermas formulated it (Habermas, 1962)- at the interface between civil society and the political system in today's complex and differentiated societes- has fully entered the public and scholarly debate. In fact, it has become a privileged perspective for understanding democratic integration, participation and multipolarity. The bursting of pervasive changes in the political and democratic scene due to the digital transformation stimulates theoretical reflection to rethink the concept of public sphere and focus on the nexus of democracy and the platform society (Van Dijck et al., 2018).

From this perspective, engaging the Habermasian conception of the public sphere is crucial for understanding the political implications and contradictions of the relation between a normative public sphere, hopefully functioning for democracy, with reason at its center, and a digital public sphere marked by the decline of political life and the difficulty of a fragmented, networked debate premised on the fading distinction between public and private. Between these two spheres, already for Habermas, there was no clear distinction, but instead a continuous flow of argument in different communicational spheres (Habermas, 1992). In his recent book released in Germany, Habermas, (2022) referring to the degradation of the mass media-dominated society, which was assumed in the 1962 work, raises the question whether the platform society leads to a real restructuring of the public sphere characterized by traditional media. While he was already considering the contradictions and risks within the democratic public sphere in 1962, in the first part of the book released last year

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Habermas questions the structural depth of the changes under way. He wonders whether the new media are changing the model of communication that has prevailed in the public sphere so far and thus whether the paradigm of the public sphere has changed radically. His idea is that the perception of the political public sphere is being warped by communication on platforms and thus the very formation of opinions and political will is in danger. This article analyzes the risks and potentials of the platform society in a diachronic view, addressing the issue of secrecy and regulation.

Platforms: Polyvalence and Ambiguity.

Based on Habermas's question and considerations of the current digital public sphere, on which many other scholars and observers of social change have already reflected (Van Dijck et al 2018), it is important to begin by revisiting the definition and constitutive ambiguity of platforms and with them of digital capitalism.

Long gone are the days when the network, a technological juncture of social transformations, could be included among the mythical tools for telling a story of the future. On the contrary, today we are addicted to the narrative of a public sphere disfigured (Urbinati, 2017) and uninformed enough to suggest coining the term post-public sphere (Schlesinger, 2020).

The emancipatory potential (Allmer, 2015) of networked communication has turned into problematic deregulation within a few decades.The techno utopian narrative has given way to the techno dystopian one, but both do not help us understand reality in its problematic and complex articulation. The demand for democracy, which stemmed from the dream of electronic democracy, has been disregarded, but the need for participation has certainly not diminished and is no less pressing and urgent today.

The opening to infinity of the potential of the net has given way to fragmentation, informational disorder, lack of shared knowledge, disinformation and manipulation. This involution of the public sphere has deeply affected communicative patterns in a finegrained way, but also the representation of reality, the structuring of knowledge, and the symbolic material related to it have not remained unaffected. Therefore, while social media give citizenship and voice to all participants who, in principle, equally become authors *in* and *for* the network regardless of socioeconomic status, the perverse effect of this phenomenon is the emptying and deskilling of the journalistic profession in favor of the disintermediation of communication and information. Indeed, already in the past Habermas warned of the crisis in journalism and called for public intervention to ensure the quality of information. And, still pointing to 2002 as the year of the crisis in advertising revenue, he argued in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that listeners and viewers are not only consumers – that is, subjects who are part of the market –but at the same time they are citizens who have the right to cultural enjoyment, observation of political events, participation and opinion formation. This is exactly the theme that is reiterated today with respect to growing disinformation and the citizen's right not to be misinformed (Nicita, 2022).

In fact, in the realm of social media, all users, who come together as "in principle equal and self-responsible participants," could spontaneously assume the role of authors. However, this would threaten professional journalism and communication (Castells, 2009) insofar as platforms would become self-referential within closed bubbles (Bruns, 2019; Möller, J. 2021) that deform the perception of the public sphere.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that Habermas (2022) speaks of a dogmatic compartmentalization in a fragmented public sphere where the monopoly of platforms reigns unchallenged and thus he warns

of the decline of political life and the public sphere in the dimension of exchange on the network. Unlike in the past, it is therefore not possible to ignore today the monopolistic concentration of the power of platforms analyzed by Habermas by placing it within a general trend of the capitalist system where the old traditional media already played a central role. The quality of information and the formation of public opinion today is deforming, uniform and even flattened, thus disfavoring a free exchange of ideas. Habermas was credited with emphasizing the importance of public opinion formation for the formation of political will in a democracy. His is a broader sociological concept than the ones used in the past and has fully entered the political and cultural lexicon. The public sphere, understood as deliberation, is the practice of problem solving by a collective power of judgment, which also pursues an intent of social criticism. Indeed, the infrastructure of the public sphere makes it possible to critically observe a given society. In this sense, the processual nature of democracy calls for additional attention to the public sphere in the platform society, in order to safeguard society from the erosion of constitutional guarantees. This is hardly new: already in *Between Facts and Norms* Habermas argued that basic constitutional provisions alone cannot preserve the public sphere and civil society from deformation (Habermas, 1996)

It is no coincidence that in this context we have begun to speak of the "platform society" with a negative connotation, if compared to the concepts of information society or "network society" (Sorice, 2020). As José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal have aptly pointed out, platforms have created a profound shift in society by making it more autonomous from traditional institutional agencies, more connected and integrated. Over time, although they were not born with this intent, platforms havegained a central role in shaping the public sphere and public opinion, articulating their values and enabling their activities.

The actors in this new reality of platforms are mainly three: large hi-tech companies, governments, and civil society. Ostensibly constructed to be neutral, in reality platforms are not neutral at all. They have values inscribed in their structures and have enormous agenda-setting power. Algorithmic mechanisms shape behavior and values through big data management, business strategies, and user behavior. The rise of the platform society has occurred concomitantly with the loss of credibility and social incisiveness of the various social and political institutions that have lost traction and contact with citizens and are no longer able to serve as a filter or fully function as intermediary entities. Traditional socializing agencies have nowto deal with an informational chaos that needs to be managed and regulated.

The characteristics of the Net – collaboration, diffuse intelligence, interconnectedness, and an equal and democratic relational space that reversed the relationship between center and periphery,– were extolled by early visionaries, but from 2016 to the present the perception of an emptying, if not zeroing out, of the positive potential of the Net has prevailed. In fact, today we study the reasons for the radicalization and polarization (Boccia Artieri et al.,2021) of online groups, virality, and artfully created fake- news-sharing by politicians and others.

Social media thus become a kind of scapegoat without, however, the identification of the social actor who is the protagonist and interpreter of the changes taking place and without a sense of the role of politics as a regulatory power. While there are undoubtedly social and political implications related to the medium per se, a primary role is also played by the actors in the field, the platforms in the front row, who are not neutral intermediaries and by the regulators. If, therefore, democratic states, in spite of constitutional guarantees, are not necessarily able to preserve the public sphere from degeneration (Habermas, 1992), citizens – one of the key players in the network where possible – can choose from time to time what role to play.

New challenges for democracy

Any of our actions and information on the network is transformed into a huge amount of data for platforms, the basis for advertising profiling, while every activity, emotion, initiative or idea is then commoditized through sale to third parties. The electronic cage is the feature of postmodernity with which we must constantly measure ourselves, as in modernity the Weberian iron cage was. Respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual is often violated for the use of data to be incorporated into the analysis of global markets. So, from social control in the small village we have moved on to electronic control in the globalized society. It is certainly not an Orwellian control, but profiling (Rodotà, 2004) – an electronic network keeps our personal data stored for many years in databases. And the more this network is centralized, the more the possibility of control increases, a process amplified by the network understood as a huge marketplace where sensitive data become an asset to be used for the expansion of the market segment. And this mechanism finds a disturbing application in spyware, spy software that gives information about the spied computer.

From these developments came the web data mining industry. Every web page not protected by firewalls is explored and cross-referencing work with other databases reconstructs and adds value to the data already acquired. This is one of the most privacy-damaging processes. Faced with the explosion, therefore, of this issue of the invasion and violation of sensitive data, the emergence of a *habeas data* (Rodotà, 2004) understood precisely as a new dimension of personal freedom has been invoked alongside *habeas corpus*. The most disturbing aspect of the control of personal data is that it often happens with the lack of awareness of the users, and is accepted by individual web users who due to lack of time, superficiality, simple carelessness or ignorance of the processes at work end up in the gear of the "network machine." This is the background that has fostered the development of platforms and disinformation.

However, in this context, an interest in digital communication on platforms that prescinds from the ubiquitous issue of online disinformation seems to have disappeared from the horizon of research and public discourse: there seems to be under way a real cultural shift, a paradigm and methodology shift. Even in popular newspapers, one can find articles about the overwhelming power of platforms and political hate speech, and even the attention of journalism for a long time has focused on election campaigns distorted by fake news and manipulation especially on Facebook, Twitter and other platforms. The concern has been so general and pervasive that there has been talk of real moral panic over the irrationality of citizens' behavior due to blatant manipulation on the platforms. As if the suffocating rationality of the Weberian iron cage had given way to irrationality within the meshes of the digital lattice. The centrality of diffuse interest also compels interrogation on the symbolic dimension and its significance for the communication ecosystem. The focus was not generally directed against a particular group of people or some very specific subjectivity, as Stanley Cohen observed to be characteristic of the first phase of the construction of a moral panic, but turns out to be a generalized indictment of the entire system of platforms and communication. We are immersed in big data, continually monitored and algorithmatized, and the complexity of the system makes politics appear to be floundering in relation to the speed of social and technological change. The narrative that makes the Net the great culprit of the current predicament of democracy risks plunging us into techno-panic. Technological big brother is not devoid of subjectivity, it is not an abstract entity; in fact, the real danger to democracy (Levitsky, Daniel, 2018) lies not so much in the technology itself but in its use and especially in the social actors who have aimed directly at an attack on liberal and democratic society, (Hanson, Kopstein, 2022) as several scholars have warned. Not

surprisingly, platforms attempted to reconcile their business with democracy and with forms of control aimed at mitigating if not preventing the degeneration of the mediatized public sphere.

The medium itself contained problematic issues that early critics had already glimpsed even in the utopian climate in which they were writing. The attack on democracy thus occurred not through the militarization of society, the repression of civil liberties or the censorship of journalism but as an attack on the very function of communication and information. The emptying of the public sphere and its delegitimization were the result of this virtual attack. Because of their deep ambivalence in their relationship with citizens and the public sphere, platforms in fact are potentially and at the same time a source of empowerment and epistemic aphasia. Digital media have enabled mass self-communication (Castells, 2007), a horizontality and openness of communication to new audiences and a resetting of barriers of access to the public sphere. However, the hybridization of networked communication makes it difficult to identify the quality and reliability of news. Disintermediation has emptied the classical paradigms of journalistic communication, creating at the same time a loss of epistemic editing (Bimber and Gil de Zúñiga, 2020: 710) and the opportunity for citizen empowerment in the public sphere. (cf. Habermas in Czingon et al., 2020: 32; Mouffe 2005). The public sphere and platforms have reorganized themselves (Sevignani, 2022) in this new horizon dominated by the economic exploitation of data and communicative activity (Zuboff, 2019)

In this context, it is not easy to find ways to foster a learning of citizens' democratic skills, but a cultivation of democratic attitudes remains the only way forward. The regulatory turn that the European Union with the *Digital Service Act* is taking in relation to platforms could bring about changes in the public sphere. At a time of profound transformations in the world's communication and its underlying organization, of waves of disinformation, the possibilities of intervention and action or, on the contrary, the powerlessness of citizens determine the very idea of the public sphere, of its change and transformation. Concern about attempts to undermine democratic electoral processes and the protection of citizens' epistemic well-being have fostered this turn toward platform regulation. Freedom in and of platforms, as in the past for freedom of the press, has delineated a clear boundary between democratic and non-democratic countries. The current regulatory need must be placed in the international context of profound changes in global geopolitics, and of a general techlash (Faroohar, 2018) toward large proprietary platforms, a natural technopath as a response to the global power of platforms. The real cultural crux is to understand the new power structuring in such an asymmetrical context as that dominated by platforms and its implications at the political, cultural, and economic levels.

Academic reflection has long (Moore, Tambini, 2018) highlighted the inadequacy of existing normative and intellectual frameworks for understanding the gigantic accumulation of power on the part of Big Tech. The regulatory shift reflects the need for new rules for democracy and the need to limit the political and social economic impact of Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft.

Certainly, regulatory interventions need to be tuned with political and cultural defense strategies. The Russian attack and influence on Trump's election and Brexit, the Cambridge Analytica scandal have led to characterize the new disinformation war as a Cold War climate (Schlesinger, 2020).

In this climate, the vision of Silicon Valley's tech pioneers is widely questioned. Their cultural vision certainly favored an open and free Internet, and not just for technological reasons. But it does not collide with the spread of hateful misinformation, viruses, transmission of sensitive data and gigantic economic interests. Even if the European model of regulation is having some cultural influence the conundrum of reconciling regulation and free speech remains the real challenge for post-public-sphere democracies.

Platforms and secrecy

The wide availability of data on the net would lead us to think that we have gained greater transparency and more widespread access to information, which allows us to be less surveilled.

In reality, algorithms have increased secrecy to the point that once they are set in place it is no longer even possible to decode them. If Stefano Rodotà (2004) had defined the information society as the society of cataloging, far removed from the Orwellian metaphor of control and surveillance, today after a long time we certainly cannot say that that cataloging is transparent and available. Thus, if we are not exactly in the Orwellian society, as Rodotà argued, certainly the combination of secrecy and digital media corresponds to a criterion of direct proportionality. And it is paradoxical that techno-utopian rhetoric has extolled transparency given the inscrutability of the algorithms to which we are subjected. The examples are many, from how insurance companies select customers to job interviews whose first computer screening does not favor blacks or women (Chun, 2013), and the list would be long indeed if we wanted to analyze the discriminatory and obscure use of data in the platform society. In fact, the protocols and transformation of computerized data are certainly not transparent. Paradoxically, the more complex the platform society becomes, and the more it frustrates the demands for readability of algorithm rules, the more the rhetoric of transparency and its expectations serve as compensation. It is no coincidence that the black box metaphor has been used for the platform society (Pasquale, 2015). If we citizen users, consumers and volunteer network workers are increasingly transparent and share even pieces of our private lives, companies remain increasingly obscure in the way they use our data and select us for job interviews or for any other relevant aspect of our lives. The platform society enhances this asymmetry of secrecy and privacy and thus necessarily leads to an imbalance of power. Platforms are thus a powerful tool of obfuscation and opacity.

Three different types of secrecy can be distinguished (Pasquale, 2015): real secrecy, legal secrecy, and obfuscation. In all areas there is a violation of the data collected, especially when data are insufficiently protected, as shown by the case of financial data in the United States where algorithms with extremely complex mathematical formulas are used. Just think of rating algorithms and their critical aspects or medical algorithms with their sensitive implications. The very promise of leveling and greater equality in the face of the supposedly neutral tool that a platform is has in fact created a knowledge and therefore a power gap between those who possess the data and those who do not, between those who can read the data and those who cannot. In addition, data are controlled and can also be leaked out or be deliberately sold. In fact, the issue of control is one of the major problems of the platform society. The very success of platforms does not allow intermediate stages to be analized and makes the whole process opaque. Efficiency points to the outcome and not to the functioning of platforms in all its articulations. Understanding platforms and their social implications requires deconstructing these black boxes and their internal complexity.

Conclusions

The platform society, or the gig economy as it has also been called, is certainly a source of profound innovation, both for collective mentalities and for everyday life, work, leisure, and for politics and the world of information. Platforms produce social structuring (Couldry, Hepp, 2018) and redefine social modes, times, and spaces. The relevance of platforms is, therefore, beyond question: the open question is how much their dominance negatively affects public goods, politics, and democratic processes. Indeed, platforms establish a specific form of domination, accompanied by social inequalities and problematic effects on social integration.

Classical social organization shifts to an organization of platforms that shape every aspect of social life, thus becoming a structural factor with a strong impact on the economy. The consequences for digital capitalism are very strong and are based on a dilemma between "decentralization" on the one hand and "concentration" on the other (Marciano et al.). Not surprisingly, Habermas revisited the central elements of the bourgeois public sphere in order to conduct an illuminating and thought-provoking analysis of the current digitalized public sphere. The outcomes of this process are complicated and will be most likely expanded with the new technological leap of Artificial Intelligence. Indeed, the impact of AI made available to private users remains to be assessed along with the even deeper challenges to democratic processes posed by the rise of artificial intelligence.

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For an *inner Jewish history*: Viennese and Salonikan Jews interviewed by David Boder in 1946[*]

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Abstract. David P. Boder, an American Latvian-born psychologist, came to Europe in 1946 to interview Holocaust survivors in order to study how the impact of the catastrophe had affected them and to let American people grasp the dramatic situation of displaced persons in Europe. Among the interviewees there were Jews from Thessaloniki and Vienna, whose interviews were recorded with a wire recorder, later transcribed and translated into English. They represent an effective means for a deeper understanding of both the survivors' situation after the liberation and the way they dealt with their own past and future, in particular in relation with the cities they were from. They provide that Judeo-centric approach Philip Friedman, the father of Jewish historiography on the Holocaust, aimed at in order to get the full picture of the events. There were many differences between Thessaloniki's and Vienna's Jewish communities but, at the same time, in their history there were similarities. Thessaloniki's Sephardi community shaped the city's features for four centuries, since until the end of the Twenties the Jews constituted the majority of the population. The community in Vienna was mainly Ashkenazi and constituted a minority which nonetheless deeply influenced the cultural and economic life of the city. Both in Thessaloniki and in Vienna the Jewish population included people of different nationalities, which influenced their fate during the Nazi persecution and the Holocaust. In Thessaloniki people owning a Spanish, Italian and Portuguese citizenship were initially excluded from the anti-Jewish policy, but eventually, in 1943/4 many of them were deported. In Vienna, where the persecution began much earlier, as a consequence of the Anschluss, and the Nazis aimed at getting rid of the Jewish population, emigration became a matter of life or death: to hold a citizenship of Poland or Austria, or Hungary, for instance, made a difference in getting a visa or papers to emigrate. In both cities members of the same family might have had different citizenships, therefore they endured also the tragedy of separation which was particularly hard in Vienna, more rare in Thessaloniki, where the speed of the ghettoization and deportation didn't allow emigration. My research is focused in particular on 6 interviews: three given by Salonikan Jews, three by Viennese. My purpose is to analyze how the Nazi persecution, carried out according to a global general plan, affected people coming from different backgrounds, which were the analogies and the differences between their experiences, how they dealt with the persecution and what was their relation with their hometown after the liberation. Boder's interviews allows also to understand the different kinds of trauma the survivors endured utilizing the Traumatic Index Boder elaborated. Despite the chronological shifts, both groups underwent isolation and persecution, uprooting, deprivation, separation, deception, uncertainty and ignorance about their present and future. These interviews are among the earliest testimonies on the Holocaust and were recorded in that time, between the liberation and the beginning of a new life, when the survivors were living in uncertainty and grief, between a painful past and an unknown future: no one of them wanted to go back to their cities, their world had vanished.

***Keywords*:** Holocaust, interviews, Jewish history, Salonika, Shoah. testimonies, trauma, Vienna.

Riassunto. David P. Boder, uno psicologo americano nato in Lettonia, giunse in Europa nel 1946 per intervistare i sopravvissuti alla Shoah e per studiare come l'impatto della catastrofe li avesse colpiti. Intendeva, inoltre, far comprendere al popolo americano la drammatica situazione dei profughi in Europa. Tra gli intervistati c'erano ebrei di Salonicco e Vienna, le cui interviste sono state registrate con un registratore, successivamente trascritte e tradotte in inglese. Esse costituiscono un mezzo efficace per una comprensione più profonda sia della situazione dei sopravvissuti dopo la liberazione sia del modo in cui hanno affrontato il proprio passato e futuro, in particolare in relazione alle città da cui provenivano. Inoltre, forniscono quell'approccio "ebraico centrico" a cui Philip Friedman, il padre della storiografia ebraica sulla Shoah, mirava per avere un quadro completo degli eventi. Esistevano molte differenze tra le comunità ebraiche di Salonicco e di Vienna ma, allo stesso tempo, nella loro storia c'erano delle somiglianze. La comunità di Vienna era principalmente ashkenazita e costituiva una minoranza che tuttavia influenzò profondamente la vita culturale ed

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economica della città. Sia a Salonicco che a Vienna la popolazione ebraica comprendeva persone di diverse nazionalità, fattore che ne determinò il destino durante la persecuzione nazista. A Salonicco le persone in possesso di cittadinanza spagnola, italiana e portoghese furono inizialmente escluse dalla politica antiebraica, ma alla fine, nel 1943/44, molte di loro furono deportate. A Vienna dopo l'*Anschluss*, I nazisti miravano a sbarazzarsi della popolazione ebraica, l'emigrazione divenne una questione di vita o di morte: possedere una cittadinanza polacca o austriaca, o ungherese, per esempio, fece la differenza per ottenere un visto o documenti per emigrare. In entrambe le città i membri della stessa famiglia potevano avere cittadinanze diverse, quindi subirono anche il dramma della separazione che fu particolarmente duro a Vienna, più raro a Salonicco, dove la velocità della ghettizzazione e della deportazione non permise l'emigrazione. La ricerca si concentra in particolare su 6 interviste: tre rilasciate da ebrei di Salonicco, tre da viennesi. Il mio scopo è analizzare come la persecuzione nazista, condotta secondo un piano generale globale, abbia colpito persone provenienti da ambienti diversi, quali siano state le analogie e le differenze nelle loro esperienze, come hanno affrontato la persecuzione e qual è stato il loro rapporto con la loro città natale dopo la liberazione. Come abbiamo subito l'isolamento e la persecuzione, lo sradicamento, la privazione, la separazione, l'inganno, l'incertezza e l'ignoranza riguardo al proprio presente e futuro. Queste interviste sono tra le prime testimonianze sulla Shoah e sono state registrate in quel tempo, tra la liberazione e l'inizio di una nuova vita, quando i sopravvissuti vivevano nell'incertezza e nel dolore, tra un passato doloroso e un futuro ignoto: nessuno volle tornare nelle proprie città, il loro mondo era svanito.
***Parole chiave*:** Interviste, Olocausto, Salonicco, Shoah storia ebraica, testimoni, trauma, Vienna.

Introduction

David P. Boder, an American Latvian-born psychologist, came to Europe in 1946 to interview Holocaust survivors in Displaced persons' camps and shelter houses in order to study how the impact of the catastrophe had affected them and to let American public opinion grasp the dramatic situation of displaced persons in Europe. He aimed at identifying the traumatic experiences of the survivors by examining what they told, through their linguistic choices of words and expressions. Among the survivors he interviewed, there were Jews from Salonika and Vienna, whose interviews were recorded with a wire recorder, later transcribed and translated into English.

These interviews were collected at an early stage, when the survivors were living in a state of uncertainty, between the liberation and an uncertain future. They represent an effective means for a deeper understanding of both the survivors' situation after the liberation and the way they dealt with their own past and future. They also allow to compare the survivors' experiences in relation with the cities they were from and their background.

The purpose of this work is to demonstrate how individual testimonies of Holocaust survivors can be interpreted as a historical source, analysing not only what they remembered, but also the reasons they focused on some events and not others, and how they recollected and told their experiences. Personal testimonies fully represent the complexity of the Holocaust, an event which was globally planned but whose features and outcomes depended on place, time, people involved. Philip Friedman, a survivor himself, called "the father of the Jewish Holocaust literature", already in 1949 (Friedman, 1980) pointed out that it was necessary to collect, record and interpret the Jewish sources in order to understand the true reality of the Holocaust. According to him the German sources

> must be balanced and complemented by Jewish records and statements - interviews with Jewish survivors, reports by Jewish groups and individuals, and biographical materials. Moreover the above-mentioned German sources cover only the political background, the organizational and administrative frame, of Jewish life under occupation. The inner Jewish history, the sufferings and the spiritual life, are rarely or falsely reflected in the German sources, and must be studied in Jewish sources. (Friedman, 1980, p. 503)

Thus, micro-history becomes a key for understanding the bigger and complex events of the Holocaust and their impact on individuals.

Friedman understood that the Jewish sources needed to be collected and interpreted according to new methods which could overcome the issues linked to subjectivity and, at the same time, highlight their importance for a full picture of the events of the Holocaust:

I must admit that the collection of contemporary Jewish materials is not satisfactory; either in quality and in quantity. In order to get more and better material, we must train interviewers in this type of work, which is to utilize sociological (questionnaires, interviews and so forth) rather than historical methods… (Friedman, 1980, p. 505)

This is what David Boder did, working on the interviews he had collected until his death. The analysis of six interviews with Salonikan Jews and three with survivors from Vienna has been carried out studying how and why the interviewees recollected key events or relevant experiences, and identifying the traumatic events which affected them with the support of Boder's Traumatic Inventory (Boder, 1954).[1] Some experiences and traumas were common to both groups, others were specific and depended on their context, their language and socio-cultural background.

Vienna and Salonika

There were many differences between Salonika's and Vienna's Jewish Communities but, in their history, there were similarities as well. Both hosted the majority of the Jewish population of Greece and Austria and their features were deeply influenced by the Jewish presence.[2]

In these multicultural cities, the Jewish population included people of different nationalities,[3] a fact which affected their fate during the Nazi persecution and the Holocaust. In Salonika people owning a Spanish, Italian and Portuguese citizenship were initially excluded from the anti-Jewish policy, which actually started in summer 1942 against the Greek nationals.[4] Many of them were eventually deported first from Salonika in 1943, then from Athens in 1944: the Spanish and the Portuguese nationals were sent to Bergen Belsen, the Italians to Auschwitz Birkenau. Also in Vienna the Jews held different citizenships as a consequence of the immigration waves from Poland and Russia, and because of the effects of the geopolitical changes in national borders after World War I. Austrian citizenship was granted only to those who were residents within the new Austrian borders from 1914, the others acquired the citizenship of the countries where they were born, which were once part of the Austro Hungarian Empire. This resulted in serious consequences for the fate of Jews and Jewish families after the Anschluss.

Among the six interviewees from Salonika four with Spanish or Portuguese citizenship escaped to Athens and were deported from there in April 1944, two were Greek nationals and were deported

[1] The quotes from this article are written in italics.

[2] Salonika's Sephardi community shaped the city's features for four centuries because, until the end of the Twenties, the Jews constituted the majority of the population. The community in Vienna was mainly Ashkenazi and was a minority which, nonetheless, influenced the cultural and economic life of the city.

[3] The Jewish Community of Salonika, which dated back to the II century b. C. and was originally composed of Romaniotes, Greek-speaking Jews, was the result of consecutive migration flows also of Ashkenazi Jews from Germany, Hungary, Poland and of Italian Jews. Actually, the most significant among these flows was the arrival of about 20,000 Sephardim from Spain and Portugal in the XV and XVI centuries, as a consequence of their expulsion during the *Reconquista*. They had brought with them their Spanish habits and the Ladino language (*Judeo Espanol*) which they spoke as their first language, up until the 1920's at least. In 1913 Salonika was annexed to the Greek kingdom: the new rulers carried out immediately a Hellenization process that significantly affected the Salonikan Jews' conditions and way of life: the youngest generations learnt Greek while their parents kept on speaking Ladino or spoke Greek with a recognizable accent, which prevented them to hide among the Greek speaking population.
Several Jews held or could claim for foreign citizenship or status as Spanish, Portuguese and Italian protégés as a consequence of previous agreements, some dating back to the XVII century, or laws passed in Spain and Portugal.

[4] Before July 11, 1942, the *Black Sabbath*, the anti-Jewish policy was not implemented officially, several episodes of harassment and discrimination occurred though. See also Bowman S. Editor, (2002).

with the first transport to Auschwitz Birkenau on March, 15, 1943. Regarding Vienna, among the three interviewees Nelly Bondy was born in Vienna but lived in France, Friedrich Schlaefrig, was born and lived in Austria, and Malka Johles, Polish, resided in Vienna.

In Vienna, the persecution began immediately after the *Anschluss* in 1938: the Nazis aimed at getting rid of the Jewish population for whom emigration became a matter of life or death. To hold a citizenship of a specific country made a difference in getting a visa to emigrate or to be included in other countries' immigration quota. In both cities, members of the same family might have held different citizenships, therefore they endured also the tragedy of a permanent separation.

From 1938 to 1941 the emigration rate was extremely high, approximately 136,000 Jews out of 200,000 were forced to leave Austria: especially younger people and men moved to other countries, they often had to leave part of their family behind. Other 50,000, 33% of the total pre-*Anschluss* population, were deported between 1941 and 1945. At the end of the war 5,512 Jews, mostly *Mischlinge* or protected by mixed marriages, were in Vienna. Only 2,142 of those who had been deported went back to the city.[5]

In Salonika, where the speed of the ghettoization and deportation did not allow a mass emigration, the separation of families was a consequence of the German invasion in 1941 and of the implementation of the persecution. It was mainly due to escapes to Athens in 1943 and to the deportation itself.[6] Only a few Jews managed to hide or went to the mountains.

Despite the differences in the phases and procedures of the implementation, the outcome of Nazi's anti-Jewish policy was the same in both cities: two ancient Jewish communities, with distinct and peculiar features, were almost totally annihilated. The survivors interviewed by David Boder were among the few remnants of a vanished world, where they couldn't and didn't want to go back.

Boder's interviews show, from an internal perspective, the key events and the kind of trauma the survivors endured, how they were affected by the Nazi policies and perceived their harsh situation. Despite the chronological shifts, both groups underwent isolation and persecution, uprooting, deprivation, separation, deception, uncertainty and ignorance about their present and future.

The global implementation of the anti Jewish policy followed generally the same pattern all over Nazi occupied Europe: identification, isolation, expropriation, ghettoization, deportation and extermination. Nonetheless, the ways in which the Nazis implemented their policy depended on time and on the local social and historical conditions. By analysing the interviews, key relevant events can be identified which had a significant or minor impact upon the interviewees according to their origin. The traumatic experiences[7] resulting from them were basically the same and should be seen in relation to what Boder (1954, p. 35) calls *deculturation* an antonym of Dollard's concept of *acculturation*. (Dollard, 1935).

> The term "deculturation" must be understood as referring to two different concepts: (a) the deculturated or deculturating environment (the verbs are used both in their transitive and passive connotations) and (b) deculturated personality. A deculturated environment such as a concentration camp, slums, lock-ups of police stations, bombed-out cities or any makeshift installation in substitution of standard conditions and attributes of existence is bound to evoke manifestations of subcultural behaviour in its victims. On the other hand deculturation of personality manifests itself not in the physical submission but in the intellectual and affective acceptance of the materially and ethically deculturated mode of existence.

At the same time, it is possible to analyse the specific traumatic and deculturating events of each group.

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[5] For the numbers and percentages see: Offenberger, I.F. (2017).

[6] Out of 56,000 Salonikan Jews, who lived in the city before 1943, approximately 45,000 were deported; after the war about 1,950 Jews resided in the city. About the numbers of prewar Jewish population and the number of deportees and survivors see also Antoniou, G., Moses, A.D. (Edited by) (2014); Bowman, S. (2009); Mazower, M. (1993); Michael Molho & Joseph Nehama (1949).

[7] About the traumas which affected survivors and their definition see Boder (1954).

VIENNA	THESSALONIKI
ANSCHLUSS (MARCH 13, 1938)	INVASION (APRIL 1941)
KRISTALLNACHT (NOVEMBER 9, 1938)	BACK SATURDAY (JULY 1942)
ANTI-JEWISH MEASURES (1938-45)	ANTI-JEWISH MEASURES (1943)
EMIGRATION (1938-41)	GHETTOIZATION (1943)
DEPORTATION (1939-1945)	DEPORTATION (in 1943 from Thessaloniki and in 1944 from Athens)

Isolation and persecution

The first relevant events which affected and changed Mrs. Johles' and Mr. Schlaefrig's lives were the *Anschluss* and the *Kristallnacht*, turning points for all Viennese Jews. They understood that the civil and social rules they were accustomed to had been then definitively overturned. The *pogrom* which followed the annexation led to the closure of Mrs. Johles' business, a delikatessen shop she ran with her husband, a Polish citizen. On March 14, 1938, when the *Anschluss pogrom* was being carried out, «They closed our shop right away. Then they opened it again. But … nobody came in anymore. Because there was a guard standing by the door. It didn't go anymore. From this very moment on.»

The Nazis' seizure of power caused also the arrest and detention of Mr. Schlaefrig, both for his being high profile in the Jewish Community and for his political attitudes. He was an Austrian citizen, born in 1875, architect and former counsellor in the Austrian Railroad Ministry. At the time of *Anschluss,* he was president for the second time of *B'nai B'rith* Lodge, which had supported the plebiscite planned by Chancellor Schuschnigg to preserve the independency of Austria.

When Schushnigg was planning in Austria a plebiscite on the question of the Anschluss, … this plebiscite was supported also with the resources of the *B'Nai B'rith* and other Jewish resources… I personally participated in these things and I did not know that, on the evening of Hitler's invasion, my name … together with other names, as one of the, let's say, prominent Jews, was given as one who supported the government of Schuschnigg… I was already politically delivered.

Mrs. Johles and her husband understood the impending danger and made the decision to emigrate. They went from one consulate to the other in order to get the papers, unfortunately with no result.

I had interested (*sic*) the whole time to go away of course, so I stood in line from one consulate to the next, then I got an (unintelligible) in May… Then we waited, and waited and on …October 27 my husband was taken away to Bonj…to Bonjui. A notice of amnesty arrived and he will, err, come back.

Mrs. Johles 's husband was in fact caught in the *Polen Aktion* and sent to Zbaszyn,[8] on the Polish border, on October 27. One week later he managed to go back to Vienna.

After the Kristallnacht the Nazis entered their house: «On November 10, they invaded our… maybe twenty Gestapo men, they took everything, all jewellery, all silverware, everything they took away from me. My husband was arrested on the way».

In the wave of arrests following March, 11, Mr. Schlaefrig and a large number of members of *B'Nai B'rith* were kept in prison for three weeks. He was suspected of connection with communist party, Moscow, and, paradoxically, with the Elders of Zion. He was beaten and interrogated every night:

> There was no lack of personal, of physical mistreatments… we were beaten with those…with rubber truncheons… These weeks were full of night interrogations, we were regularly called for with that closed box-carriage. We were taken to the main police station for night interrogations and in the morning we were returned home…to jail. […] The questions are to a large extent pointless, because, because a large…a large part of the questions were limited to personal viewpoints.

The Nazis could not produce any kind of formal accusation but, after he was released, there were searches in his apartment every night. He was arrested three times until he was deported from Vienna in September 1942, in the meanwhile he couldn't keep his apartment, had to sell all of his properties to people certificated from the party, getting a fourth part of their value, and moved five times.

Mr. Schlaefrig focused in particular on the effects of the *Anschluss*, did not talk about the *Kristallnacht*. This is quite understandable: the major shocking and traumatic turning point for many Viennese Jews was the annexation and the following *pogrom*. The *Kristallnacht* brought about consequences they had already experienced: arrests, pillaging, the indifference of the police and of their neighbours.

In this phase both the interviewees experienced what Boder, in his Traumatic Inventory, listed under the denomination *socio-economical and geographical* traumas: *brutal and abrupt removal of a person from most environmental stimuli which have formed the conditioning framework of his everyday life; introduction of new stimuli especially in the form of human beings unpredictable in behaviour and not restricted in their behaviour by law, tradition or threat of complaint, lack of recourse to law; lack of information as to rules which were to govern the individual's present or future conduct and mode of living.* About this Mr. Friedrich said «This was a frightful time because one never knew when one would be arrested». The *cultural affective* area was affected as well, especially for the *depersonalisation* they were subjected to.[9]

About the trauma deriving from *direct body violence*, Mr. Schlaefrig remembered he was kept in an overcrowded cell (*constriction of physical space necessary for actual body movements, as a consequence of crowding*), interrogated at night (*active interference with sleep and rest*) and beaten (*punishment administered by "authority")*.[10]

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[8] David Boder misunderstood the spelling of the name and transcribed it as it sounded.

[9] «States of constraint such as (a) arrest, (b) imprisonment, and depersonalization for an ignominious treatment of the individual with the utmost disregard for his rights, standards, and values» (Boder, 1958, p.42) He told Boder they were «thrown into those closed box-carriages, like cattle».

[10] Ibidem.

Uprooting

The Jews in Vienna were helpless, this condition of persecution, uncertainty and deprivation compelled them to find a way to emigrate.[11] Mrs. Johles and her family managed to flee illegally to Belgium in December 1938 leaving behind all their belongings. In Aachen they were checked, searched and robbed by the Gestapo, that eventually let them leave. It was the beginning of an odyssey which led them from Brussels to Southern France and caused the temporary separation of the family.[12]

Mr. Schlaefrig dealt with similar issues: his son had been living in South Africa from 1936, his daughter emigrated to England. He tried to emigrate with his wife, but bureaucratic problems about papers, quotas and visas prevented them from leaving. His experience is quite paradigmatic of what happened to Jews in Vienna at that time: they were ready for emigration to South Africa, then Australia and Cuba but could not obtain a permit. Despite the help from American Lodges it took too long to get the affidavit from the USA. In addition, in 1941, new policies for immigration were issued which made the Jews' situation even harder.

This urge or need to escape to a safer place or to emigrate was an experience almost all the interviewees[13] faced sooner or later.

Nelly Bondy was born in Vienna but moved to Paris where she married Harry Bondy, a Czech citizen, in 1936. They ran a jewellery store. After the German invasion, she fled with her children to Southern France to join her husband, who was serving in a Czech regiment. About one year after they went back to Paris, she risked being arrested, on July, 16/17, 1942, during *la Rafle du Velodrome d'Hiver*.[14] «One morning – it was half past four in the morning – they came up to fetch me. Well, I didn't open my door; and I left Paris the very night with the children…».

The *Rafle* was a decisive event for Jews living in France. At that time she was alone with her children, her husband had been already arrested.[15] She escaped to the free zone in the south, where she managed to stay in hiding, concealing her identity until she went back to Paris and was arrested at the Gare de Lyon. She was taken to Drancy, while her children were being hidden in the south.

Mrs. Bondy too experienced the separation from her family, the persecution and the uprooting, at a different time and in a different place. She suffered from traumas pertaining to *socio-economical/ geographical* and *cultural-affective* areas.

Also the interviewees with Spanish or Portuguese citizenship from Salonika, initially exempted from the anti-Jewish measures, endured the same fate. The important events which forced them to escape to Athens[16] were the German invasion in April 1941 for Nino Barzilai and Manis Mizrachi

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[11] The emigration of the Jews was the original purpose of the Nazis, Eichmann was sent to Vienna to organise it. He profited from the situation and forced the IKG to collaborate with him. Between May 1938 and December 1939, exactly 117,409 Jews fled from Vienna. «As people scattered around the globe, their culture and society vanished with them, never to be resurrected. And irreparable family divisions began to occur with the move to mass exodus in 1938.» (Offenberger, 2017, p.158); «... approximately 15,000 Jews who emigrated between March 1938 and October 1941 were caught in another Nazi-occupied territory and would not survive the Holocaust» (ibidem, p.174).

[12] They lived in villages close to Toulouse. Her husband went to the internment camp in Saint Cyprien on May 17, she stayed at the village supported by the villagers. She managed to get her husband out from Saint Cyprien on July 18 because he was a Polish citizen. They stayed in the village until September. Then they went to a family camp, Brens in Tarn, and stayed there until February 1941. They moved to Lyon on February 6 because they knew 'they would have been sent away'.

[13] The Salonikan Jews deported to Auschwitz in spring 1943 did not have the opportunity to escape.

[14] She was among the few foreign Jews living in Paris who were not taken on that July 16,1942 and later deported..

[15] Arrested by the French police in May 1941, he was interned for thirteen months in the Loiret, in the Beaune-la-Rolande camp. He was deported with convoy no. 5, which left directly from Beaune-la-Rolande on June 28, 1942 directed to Auschwitz, there he was assassinated on September 7, 1942.

[16] Athens was under Italian rule until September 8, 1943. The Italians did not applied the same anti-Jewish measures as the Germans did in their zone, so the Spanish Salonikan Jews thought that they would have been even safer there in the future.

and the implementation of the deportations for Eda Button and Jacob Button.[17] The later they got to the Greek capital, the harder and more complex their trip and settlement were.[18]

Mr. Barzilai was born in Salonika in 1892, he was a Portuguese citizen. He lived in Spain for 20 years, then moved back to Greece when the Spanish civil war broke out. The outbreak of the Greek Italian war prevented him and his family from going bak to Spain. Portuguese citizenship had been granted by Portugal in 1913 to the Jews who could demonstrate their Portuguese origin and it was renewed every other year. When the Germans occupied Salonika, he settled in Athens and kept running his business. In his interview he did not talk much of his transfer to Athens: «Later, the Italian war started… Italy and Greece, and then, after some time, the Germans came and occupied Greece. We left Salonika, and moved to Athens where we settled».

Also Mr. Mizrachi and his parents moved there at about the same time. Manis Mizrachi was born in Salonika in 1922, his father Oscar held Spanish citizenship, was an importer of clothing and paper, his mother was a Turkish national. Since Oscar was a freemason «we were afraid for the Germans, them not to take him away from us. That for we made it up to go to Athens, the capital of Greece…» The Spanish consul granted them they would have not been taken, so they did not hide. The Barzilais and the Mizrachis stayed in Athens until spring 1944, when they were arrested and deported.

The trip to Athens was much more traumatic for Jacob Button and Eda Button.[19]

Jacob was eventually summoned by the Germans together with other Spanish subjects, so he made the decision to leave and go to Athens «that was under the Italian rule and there were no measures against the Jews».

I was of Spaniard citizenship, and because of this we were the last Jews of Saloniki to be driven away… The Jews were summoned by the German Police to make an announcement. … I attended the assembly and was able to hide, and later find a way to go to Athens.

Most probably he refers to July 29, 1943, when «Jewish holders of Spanish citizenship … were summoned to Beth Shaul synagogue by Wisliceny, the S.D. officer for an urgent announcement. Most of them showed up. They were notified that they were allowed to leave for Spain on their own and that they could take along whatever they owned… In reality the Spanish Jews had fallen into a trap… they were loaded forcibly onto trucks and taken over to Baron Hirsch camp…»[20]

He tried to leave with his family by boat but was cheated and robbed by the captain, so he had to get back to Salonika. He was helped by Greek friends to stay in hiding for some days then tried again to leave by train. He was recognised as a Jew and was arrested, his family got to Athens.

He experienced betrayal, hiding, the separation from his family, and arrest. After being kept in prison for three months, finally he was released for the efforts of the Spanish Embassy. When he arrived in Athens, the Germans had already begun to register the Jews: they were ordered to report weekly at the synagogue.

By divorcing on paper her Greek husband, Eda Button got back her Spanish citizenship, which she had lost because of her marriage. After he fled to the mountains, she left her daughter in a convent and reached her relatives in Athens. Like Mrs. Bondy and Mrs. Johles, she endured a long and labyrinthine trip. Like Mr. Schlaefrig, she had to move several times when in Athens, especially after September 8, 1943, when the Germans took over. «And the Germans were in Athens and the head of the Gestapo was in Athens again and he did the same things that were done in Thessaloniki, they began to do that in Athens again.» she told Boder.

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[17] They were not related, despite having the same surname.

[18] This can be noticed from the syntactic order of the sentences in particular in the interviews of Mrs. Button and Jacob Button.

[19] They were not relatives.

[20] Bowman, S., 2002, p. 161. They were deported with members of the Jewish Council to Bergen Belsen on August 2, 1943.

All these interviewees underwent uprooting, separation from their families and uncertainty. According to Boder's Traumatic Inventory, at this stage their traumatic experiences were both *cultural-affective,*[21] and *socio- economical and geographical.*[22]

Ghettoization

Before divorcing, Eda Button was considered a Greek Jew because of her marriage, as such she was initially subjected to the anti-Jewish policy implemented by the Germans in Salonika from February 1943.

They ordered that we leave our houses, leave all our furniture and that we have to go in a ghetto. They marked several streets, with stars … and we couldn't go out of these streets. We also have to wear the stars… my husband had to leave his office … we lived on what we had… we had to stay at home all the time… in one room with other four people, men and women together. […] Our things, the things that we had salvaged, we sold that for the Greeks, for eh, for little.

That was the third key event for Salonikan Jews, as we can see from Eda Button's testimony the experiences which affected Jews with Greek citizenship at that time were the registration, the introduction of the yellow star, the expropriation and the ghettoization.[23]

The second relevant event for the Salonikan Jews, after the German occupation had been the Black Saturday, on July 11, 1942. That day was a turning point for many Salonikan Jews and their families.[24] The Germans gathered all Jewish men between 17 and 45 years in Plateia Elephteria in order to register them as forced labourers. During a hot summer day, 9000 men were kept under the sun, mistreated, forced to do gymnastics being severely threatened and beaten by the Nazis.The forced labourers' living and working conditions were so hard that the Jewish community payed a ransom, comprising the money got from the sale of area of the ancient Jewish cemetery, to the Germans in order to free them in autumn 1942.

Mr. Sochami was one of the forced labourers and was sent to work outside Salonika. When he went back, he was sent to the ghetto.

We were taken to a labor camp. Those of us between 17 and 45 years of age … just men. Our names were written down, and we were given some signs. And we had to work. After working there, we were taken to… er …some railways to guard them. After then we were taken to a ghetto. We were locked in the ghetto and we remained there for eight days.

Eda Button likewise remembers February 1943 as a time of uprooting, deprivation, impoverishment, overcrowding and fear for the deportation. Jews had to wear the star of David, leave their house and their belonging, and go to a ghetto.

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[21] Ignorance of relatives' fate, a state of (b) flight, (c) hiding and (d) illegal existence (false papers or assumed status as aryan, etc.) or travel, perfidy and betrayal. (Boder, 1958, p.44)

[22] Flight in the path of war and the break-up of the family group. (Ibidem. p.43)

[23] Eichmann sent Dieter Wisliceny and Alois Brunner to Salonika in order to carry out the deportation of the Salonikan Jews, which began on February 6th 1943. Alois Brunner had been the head of the Jewish department in Vienna where he organized the deportations from 1939 to October 1941. They worked together with Max Merten, the head of the city's military administration, who signed the orders. From that day on the Nuremberg Laws were imposed on the city. The Jews were obliged to register themselves and their properties, which were confiscated or looted, to wear the Yellow star, and move to the ghettos established in the city obeying a curfew. On February 25th all the Salonikan Jews, except those exempted because they had Spanish or Italian citizenship, were concentrated in specific areas of the city,

The main area was the Baron Hirsch neighborhood, in the proximity of the rail station: it was supposed to house 2000 people but 8000/ 10,000 Jews were gathered there at the time of the deportation. As soon as a train was loaded with 2800 average deportees, other Jews were forced into the ghetto/transit camp from the other concentration areas: Regie Vardar, Kalamaria and n.151.The Baron Hirsch ghetto was sealed off and fenced in early March, the deportations began on March 15, 1943.

[24] Families were supported usually by men, once they were gone they suffered a serious impoverishment and were helped by the Jewish Community.

They ordered that we leave our houses, leave all our furniture and that we have to go in a ghetto. They marked several streets, with stars… and we couldn't go out of these streets… We also have to wear the stars…. My husband had to leave his office… we lived on what we had … we had to stay at home all the time… in one room with other four people, men and women together».

In France Mrs. Bondy had been interned for three months in Drancy, the transit camp, where she suffered the same traumas.

Well, I was arrested and was sent to Drancy, that famous camp near Paris. I stayed there three months. There was nothing to do. I was taking care of the room. I was sweeping the floor and the… There was quite a big dormitory. There were … there must have been, …well, eighty or so.

Also Mr. Mizrachi, Mr. Barzilai and Jacob Button with their families were kept in Haidari, a transit camp in Athens, before their deportation.

Analogous events affected Mr. Schlaefrig in Vienna, before his deportation to Theresienstadt on September 8, 1942. Even though a ghetto was never established in the city, the living conditions of the Jews in 1942 were ghetto-like.

Jews remaining in Vienna through the great deportations in April 1942 lived under ghetto-like conditions. Although barbed wire did not physically confine them, and they lived in districts throughout the entire city, they did not move freely, nor were they able to evade German orders.».[25]

They were concentrated in collective buildings in specific districts of the city, had to wear the Star of David which marked also their houses.

In this phase of the prelude of ghettoization and its implementation under different forms, the traumatic experiences of the interviewees were *socio-economic and geographical*, that is *Compulsory transfer of domicile, transfer to significantly substandard housing or improvised inadequate shelters, confiscation of personal property and money , exclusion from the original social group, being forced into the position of out-group*, and *cultural-affective: states of constraint, state of anxiety and fear, a status of threatening danger such as being assigned for deportation*.[26] In the case of Viennese Jews and Jewish Greek men rounded up on July 11, like Mr. Sochami, and Mr. Barzilai in Haidari, there was also *requiring forced or "slave" labor,* often used as a means to humiliate an torture the prisoners. He remembers:

They sent me to a concentration camp in Haidari, Athens, where I spent five and half months doing forced labor. They invented this labor for us, to make us feel tired, because we transported stones from one place to another, and the following day, we would move the same stones back to their original place. We were not working on the fortification nor doing any other tasks, we just carried stones and they made us work everyday.

Deportations

The concentration and the ghettoization of the Jews aimed at making the deportation easier. All the interviewees were deported to a camp, or more than one, from different places: it was a decisive moment in their interviews. Their destination depended on their citizenship, background, place and time of arrest. Eventually, they all suffered from the traumatic effects of deportation and deculturation, even though on varied scales, in relation to their destination and factors like language, gender, skills, which could partially affect their fate.

[25] Offenberger, 2017, p. 261.

[26] Boder, 1958, p. 42.

For instance, the three Salonikan Jews deported from Athens in April 1944 were sent to Bergen Belsen as exchange Jews.[27] Miss Benmayor and Mr. Sochami, both Greek nationals, were deported with the first transports to Auschwitz Birkenau. Also Nelly Bondy had been sent there from Drancy. Mr. Schlaefrig was deported to Theresienstadt on September 8, 1942. They were all transported by train, in overcrowded wagons,[28] with no privacy, toilet facilities, food or water. The longer the journey, the more traumatic this experience was.

Almost all of them had no idea of what their destination could be, they were also victims of deception by the Germans: Eda Button thought, like many people in the transport of April 2, 1944, she was going to be sent to Spain. Jacob Button and his family were sent to Haidari before the deportation and were assured that they were going to be sent to Spain:

> Me, my wife and my two young children were arrested with me, we were also assembled there in the prison, near Athens, in Haidari, there, there we received a visit from the Spanish ambassador in Athens, and I was, we were told that the Germans had promised them to send us to Spain.

In Vienna and in Salonika, the Germans forced the Jewish institution, respectively the IKG and the Jewish Council, to forcibly cooperate with them for the communications and the organisation of the transports. In August 1942, Mr. Schlaefrig was informed about his impending deportation by the *Kultusgemeinde*, of which he had been a member. He asked to be exempted from waiting for the deportation in one of the *Sammellager*,[29] where the living conditions were terrible, and went directly to the station. In his interview he claimed that the IKG was in charge of selecting people for the transports and mentioned the director Joseph Loewenherz and Benjamin Murmelstein as privileged and protected people until winter 1942-43. The same opinion about the Jewish Council's privileged situation circulated in Salonika. «It was thought that if the Jews did it themselves, it will proceed in a more humane form… otherwise the Gestapo themselves would do that» he stated. As a matter of fact, the lists were compiled by the *Zentralstelle*, handed over to the Gestapo, then to the IKG, that was in charge of carrying out the deportation.

The camps

Even though the interviewees were deported to different camps, they suffered a *deculturation* process and specific traumas which can be easily identified in their testimonies. Their common feeling was the uncertainty about the future, the ignorance of what was happening. «They brought us to Auschwitz. We did not know what was done», said Rita Benmayor.

Mrs. Johles, who managed to avoid the deportations from Southern France, told Boder she heard rumours: «They didn't want the people there, they wanted us to go to Kiev.[30] And they were supposed to die, in Kiev». About the transports to Auschwitz, which were sent weekly from Theresienstadt, Mr. Schlaefrig stated: «nobody ever knew where these transports went».[31]

[27] Bergen Belsen was originally established as a camp for Jews holding neutral countries' citizenship. As the interviewees declared, they were not forced to work and families could meet. During evacuations of the camps in Poland, Bergen Belsen became the destinations for thousands of prisoners.

[28] Mr. Schlaefrig and his wife travelled in a third-class wagon.

[29] The Sammellager was the place to which people designated for deportation were to report prior to the departure of the train transport. (Offenberger, 2017, p. 255).

[30] She said "Kiev" since she identified it as a destination for the transports to Eastern Europe.

[31] About the lack of information and the fact that in Theresienstadt people did not know or did not want to accept the idea of an ongoing extermination in the camps see also Hájková A., 2020. In particular: «Until the last weeks of the war, prisoners did not know what had happened to those who were deported and refused to acknowledge messages that informed them of the destruction. Still, a wave of panic, based on scant information, surrounding two eventually abandoned projects of the German authorities morphed into the belief that the SS were going to kill everyone in Terezín. This hysteria was a manifestation of the remaining prisoners' slow recognition of the Holocaust». (p. 237).

The transports were the beginning of a series of traumas, related to different spheres, which affected the interviewees until their liberation.[32] They were forced, both during the deportation and the evacuations, to *travel for days in overcrowded boxcars without facilities or room to sit down, wash, or lie down.* They had *no toilet facilities in locked cars where women, men and children were locked together.* This meant *the abolition of traditions of decency and dignity by suspending the separation between the sexes and privacy for bodily care and processes of bowel movements* which continued inside the camps. Nelly Bondy told Boder about her trip to Auschwitz: «After two days and three nights: no toilet facilities … no nothing… we just wrapped a cover around us». Also about the transports to Bergen Belsen, Mr. Mizrachi said that they were loaded onto «train of beasts»: 64 people were kept inside a wagon where there was nothing to eat, no facilities and a small quantity of water so they could not wash themselves. « It took 14 days, but after 10 days we were like beasts.»

They found themselves in an overthrown world, and, to describe it, metaphors and a new language were needed. About the first selection, Mrs. Bondy used the expression "we were chosen out", when Boder told her that the word was "selected", she replied: « But we didn't know then, you see.» It was, as Mr. Schlaefrig said, « a special existence… people got accustomed to a great deal under these conditions». A right definition for deculturation.[33]

From the analysis of the interviews it is clear that women were particularly traumatised not only by the lack of privacy and hygiene,[34] but also by the shaving, tattooing and clothing process.

Rita Benmayor, a girl of 17 at that time, underlined that they «cut the hair, took all clothes».

All of them were deprived of their belongings, in Auschwitz also of their name, hair, physical features. Nelly Bondi told Boder:

They took everything from us…We were quite shaved… everything. The whole body. I thought first it was because of the vermin or so… But later on I changed my mind. I think it was the sheer malice or so…Women did it but men passed through the room all the time. You see, it was the most horrible experience... And then we got old Russian uniforms… and a foulard… they left me my own shoes… It took me three days to recognise my fellow... My fellow prisoners with whom I had arrived». (N. Bondy).

These experiences were listed by Boder under the *Appearance, cleanliness, dress* theme, which were the basic needs the prisoners lost inside the camp.[35]

When Nelly Bondy, who could speak many languages, was sent from Birkenau to Auschwitz to work in the administration, she stressed the change in her condition saying «I was safe, I got better clothing, I got these striped clothes… I was allowed to grow my hair a bit… There was hot water to wash oneself with… whereas in Birkenau there was no water at all».

The deprivation of basic needs and current social rules,[36] hunger,[37] exhaustion, labor exploitation were part of the demolition of socio-cultural habits which produced the deculturation process. Both

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[32] Confiscation of personal property, money; Death of relatives or ignorance of their fate; Creation of prolonged (protracted) states of terror; Abolition of religious worship; Abolition of funeral rites or any vestige of dignity in disposal of the dead, desecration of cemeteries and utilitarian processing of human bodies; Complete blocking of habits of writing and reading. Requiring forced or "slave" labor. Chronic overtaxing of physical resources by overwork, bad working conditions. (Boder, 1958)

[33] Although in Theresienstadt there was 'no shortage in cultural life', starvation, diseases and fear brought about deculturated behaviors, like stealing.

[34] F.S stated: «Washing belonged almost to the things impossible.»

[35] Listed by Boder as: brutal shaving, bathing, and delousing processes. Tattooing of prisoners. Insufficient clothing, clothing that did not fit. Failure to provide facilities for keeping clean, lack of soap and water. Maintenance of conditions which made it impossible for prisoners to free themselves from lice and vermin. (Boder, 1958, p.45)

[36] Boder lists «Heterogeneous masses of people, strange to each other, differing in age, sex, nationality, country of origin, language, social status, even if all are protagonists of the same misfortune. (b) Lack of recourse to law. Break-up of the family group» (Ibidem).

[37] Listed by Boder as «compulsory change of nutritional habits both in kind of allotted food and in extreme reduction of its nutritional value and bulk. Creation of prolonged states of semi-starvation and thirst» (Ibidem) .

Mr. Mizrachi and Mr. Schlaefrig realised this reversal of rules of civil life when old people were forced to walk and run from the stations to their destinations, Bergen Belsen and Theresienstadt. Hunger caused changes in normal eating habits and stealing.

«I ate the dirt; we stole each other the bread, we did that» said Rita Benmayor in relation to Birkenau, and, about Retzow, «there was nothing to eat.» In Bergen Belsen, despite their 'privileged condition', the Spanish Jews from Salonika had the same trauma: «we starved and everything we saw on the earth we took it out from there and started to eat it without caring if it was dirty or clean. … without cooking, like beasts. We had no rights to go out… we were not supposed to work».

Also diseases played a significant role, especially typhus which was a direct consequence of the harsh living conditions of the prisoners, all the interviewees talked about typhus epidemics which maybe considered a key experience as well as death. In Auschwitz and in the other camps death was an obsessive and ubiquitous presence, an impending threat which became part of daily life. «Death was a 'light' matter under these conditions», said Mr. Schlaefrig, pointing out that.

Liberation and loneliness

Liberation happened at different times and in different ways according to the place were the interviewees were. Those who were in Auschwitz Birkenau were evacuated from the complex in January 1945 or shortly before and experienced the death marches. The women were sent to Ravensbrück and its sub camps, Mr. Sochami ended up in Buchenwald. This trauma was listed by Boder as *long marches on foot after weeks and months of starvation.* Once again the text of interviews provide information about the traumatic experiences of the death marches: they were 'taken to', 'marched to', 'loaded onto open freight cars'.

When they were liberated, or rescued in Nelly Bondy's case, in spring 1945: she managed to escape during a march in Leipzig: « I couldn't walk so I escaped». She hid in a church for three days and didn't tell she was Jewish but told that she was born in Vienna «which accounted for her good German». The Salonikans in Bergen Belsen were liberated by the Americans close to Farsleben. The train they had been loaded onto had left the camp and was directed to Theresienstadt when it was bombed. The Ninth Army found it in the countryside and rescued the passengers, most of them were affected by typhus. Mr. Schlaefrig was liberated by the Russians in Theresienstadt, unlike the other interviewees, he knew that the liberation was near, since he could get information spying the Czech guard who could listen to the radio.

All the survivors were sick, undernourished, completely overwhelmed. To them the liberation represented the moment when they realised their losses. They had lost not only their families, their houses and their belongings, but also their bond to the place where they were from. This is the reason why their words and expressions about liberation belong to the semantic area of loneliness and isolation. Rita Benmayor said: « They took the whole family…My whole family is in the crematorium… I am left alone from the whole family…» and Henry Sochami: «I am the only one left in my whole family; out of 27 I am alone in the world». Also Manis Mizrachi told Boder: «When the freedom came, I was quite alone, I remained quite alone…».

The Holocaust marked a caesura in history and in their personal lives. No one among the interviewees wanted to go back to their country or city.

Their words stressed also the feeling of loss, uncertainty and belong to the semantic area of waiting. Rita Benmayor said: «I did not want to go to Greece, why, I had no family. If I went to Greece, see my house without my mother, without father, I cannot see that». When she was interviewed, she said she wanted to go to America, but she was waiting to leave. Her uncle in the US sent her an affidavit, but the quota for the Greeks was closed. At the moment she was working in Paris.

Also Mr. Sochami felt he couldn't go back to Greece and stayed in Paris, like Manis Mizrachi. After his recover in the hospital in Hillersleben, he decided to go to France where he had some relatives who did not survive the deportation and he could not find them. When he was interviewed

he did not know where to go, maybe to the US, but «Unfortunately I have no one». Three Salonikans from Bergen Belsen did not lose their family but had no plan to go back to Greece. Jacob Button wanted to go to Palestine: «I have applied to Palestine; I want to go to Palestine. I am waiting for a whole year here and I have not received the permission to go to Palestine. I had to try to find something to work here». Mr. Barzilai settled in France. He was very grateful to the French: «None of us will ever forget what France did for us… I will soon start to work. We believe we can stay here in France, in this area».

The situation of Eda Button was a bit different, her husband had already illegally left for Palestine and was waiting for her in Tel Aviv. She had managed to get her child back from the nuns in Salonika but she was having troubles with her. «From the moment she came to me she suffered – she believes that I made her bad (sick) – And especially if she, the little one, maybe she was told that her mother was bad». The child didn't want to stay with her, basically she did not know her mother and wanted to go back to the convent in Salonika where she had been very well cared of. Eda, troubled and sad, said: «I don't want to drive to Greece. I cannot see this country anymore. And I want to drive to Palestine to be free».

Also Mrs. Bondy got in touch with her children when she went back to Paris, but was waiting to settle properly before taking them back. She knew that her husband had died when she was working in the administration office in Auschwitz. She told Boder:

When I was in Auschwitz, I worked in the so-called *Politische Abteilung*, that was part of the administration of the camp, I found out by his file card that he had been, three months after his arrival, killed by a guard, in 1942. […] My husband's file card was still there in… ah… in July 1943; but it was no more there in October 1943.

Mrs. Johles managed to escape to Switzerland from France on December 27, 1942 and was interviewed by Boder in Geneva, she was ready to go to the US with her husband and her daughter. Her older son had already left for Palestine with the first legal transport of youngsters on May 28, 1945.

Friedrich Schlaefrig, who was 71, at the time of the interview, and his wife were waiting to join their son in South Africa.[38]

Conclusions

From the analysis of Viennese and Salonikan Jews' interviews with David Boder it appears that, despite the differences in geographical and historical coordinates, the Holocaust affected them with the same traumatic events. Their context and background differed, but the global implementation of the Nazis's anti-Jewish policy brought about an irremediable break in the survivors, depriving them of their lives as they used to be, of their roots and leaving a deep wound in their souls. From this point of view, as we could see, the key concepts in their experiences were uprooting, isolation, separation, uncertainty and deprivation. Their trauma derived from the prolonged exposition to extremely stressful events: invasion and occupation of their residing place, implementation of anti-Jewish measures, persecution and deportation, psychological and social consequences after the war. The impact of their trauma was cumulative, additive, and summative wherever they came from. They were ready to begin a new life but were not ready to go back to their homelands, which were then perceived as lands not as homes.

Boder grasped the importance of examining the survivors' perspective at that time to fully understand their situation and indicated a path which is worth following and investigating further.

As Malka Johles, the only one of the interviewees who was not deported, told Boder: «One can't possibly… much to tell, my good man. There is so much to tell. Should they experience what it is like to sit on, on boxes».

[38] Their daughter was in Canada at that time.

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Promoting Muslim Nationalism in Turkish Museums: A study of visitors' responses to the *Panorama Museum 1453*[*]

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Abstract. In recent years, studies have shown that the institutional representation of Turkey's national history and identity has undergone a shift closely linked to the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Since the AKP came to power, the government supported the building of new state-sponsored museums reflecting the party's national ideology, which recent literature dubbed "Turkish Muslim Nationalism." These museums prioritize the Ottoman Empire's past and its Islamic heritage as the grand narrative of Turkey's national history, putting other equally important narratives in the background, e.g. the Roman, Byzantine, Greek, and the more recent Kemalist past of the country. One such museum is the *Panorama Museum 1453*, which has become a popular tourist attraction in Istanbul. This article examines how the visitors respond to the national identity promoted by the *Panorama*. It draws on fifty video-based interviews as well as visual elements of the museum. The data collected in this study has been analysed using a theoretical framework based on theories of nationalism. This research findings provide material supporting the thesis that the museum is successful in promoting a distinct version of Turkish Muslim Nationalism. It effectively conveys a national identity that emphasizes the characteristics of a Muslim Turk whose identity can be (and is) still influenced by the Ottoman Empire's historical legacy. This legacy drives Turkish identity as an identity inextricably linked to Islam as the religion of the state, connected with other characteristics such as military power and technological progress. The museum's presentation of this identity in the *Panorama* is compelling and immersive, which helps to solidify visitors' understanding and acceptance.
Keywords: Nationalism; Museum; Turkey; National Identity; Neo-Ottomanism; Cultural heritage

Abstract. Negli ultimi anni, alcuni studi hanno dimostrato che la rappresentazione istituzionale della storia e dell'identità nazionale turca ha subito un cambiamento strettamente legato all'ascesa del Partito della Giustizia e dello Sviluppo (AKP), guidato dal presidente Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Da quando l'AKP è salito al potere, il governo ha sostenuto la costruzione di nuovi musei sponsorizzati dallo Stato che riflettono l'ideologia nazionale del partito, che la letteratura recente ha ribattezzato "nazionalismo musulmano turco". Questi musei danno la priorità al passato dell'Impero Ottomano e alla sua eredità islamica come grande narrazione della storia nazionale della Turchia, mettendo in secondo piano altre narrazioni altrettanto importanti, come quella romana, bizantina, greca e il più recente passato kemalista del Paese. Uno di questi musei è il *Panorama Museum 1453*, che è diventato una popolare attrazione turistica di Istanbul. Questo articolo esamina come i visitatori rispondono all'identità nazionale promossa dal *Panorama*. Si basa su cinquanta interviste basate su video e su elementi visivi del museo. I dati raccolti in questo studio sono stati analizzati utilizzando un quadro teorico basato sulle teorie del nazionalismo. I risultati della ricerca forniscono materiale a sostegno della tesi secondo cui il museo riesce a promuovere una versione distinta del nazionalismo musulmano turco. Trasmette efficacemente un'identità nazionale che enfatizza le caratteristiche di un turco musulmano la cui identità può essere (ed è) ancora influenzata dall'eredità storica dell'Impero Ottomano. Questa eredità guida l'identità turca come un'identità inestricabilmente legata all'Islam come religione dello Stato, collegata ad altre caratteristiche come la potenza militare e il progresso tecnologico. La presentazione di questa identità da parte del museo nel *Panorama* è avvincente e coinvolgente e contribuisce a consolidare la comprensione e l'accettazione da parte dei visitatori.
***Parole chiave*:** nazionalismo, museo, Turchi, identità nazionale, neo-ottomanesimo, eredità culturale.

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Politics and public museums under the AKP

The last twenty years of Turkish history are marked by a radical shift in domestic and foreign policy, both linked to the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. One of the initial aims of the AKP was the accession to the EU (Martin and Icoz 2016). This goal motivated a series of important reforms aimed to narrow the distance between EU countries and Turkey. These included reforms towards democratization, internationalization, new education policy, the normalization of the relations with the Greeks in Cyprus, and the resolution of the Kurdish issue. Undertaking this ambitious plan of reforms, provided Turkey with admiration from both Turkish and worldwide media that elected Erdoğan and the AKP as the champions of Turkish democracy (The Economist 2004). For many, a bright future awaited Turkey as the first Muslim country to enter the EU. It is worth noting that Kemalism, the national ideology of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, has historically enjoyed support from the Western world. However, the recurrence of violence and coup d'états during its implementation was a clear indication of a flawed democracy. In contrast, President Erdoğan's promises of a "New Turkey" that is democratic, inclusive, and economically progressive has been a welcome change for many Turks. This shift in direction is positive news for the EU and its investors in Turkey, a country also known as the land of the crescent moon.

In 2004, President Erdoğan proclaimed that "taking part in the EU will bring harmony of civilizations - it is the project of the century." He went on to state that "during the last days of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey was called the sick man of Europe, never the sick man of Asia. We were Europeans even at our worst" (The Independent, 2004). These statements indicate that Erdoğan initially presented Turkey as a European country during the early years of his rule. However, recent newspaper reports suggest a different stance from Erdoğan, who has become a harsh critic of the EU, frequently bashing Germany and other EU countries and referring to them as "Nazi remnants" (Reuters, 2017). This shift in stance is widely believed to have been triggered by the stalling of negotiations for Turkey's accession to the EU.

The current debate surrounding Turkey's failure to join the EU can be summarized by three key points. Firstly, the slowdown of Turkey's economic growth; secondly, the inability to resolve long-standing domestic and international issues, such as the Kurdish issue and Cyprus, which became increasingly apparent after 2014; and thirdly, inadequate education policies that do not meet the EU's criteria (Martin 2015; Kaya 2015). The consequences of these challenges led to Turkey withdrawing into itself. The government, led by President Erdoğan, shifted its messaging, promoting Turkey as a Middle Eastern country with a unique blend of Turkish, Ottoman, and Islamic characteristics. There were no longer friendly and conciliatory words for Europe. As Öktem and Akkoyunlu noted, "a revolution from above" began (Öktem and Akkoyunlu 2018). Since 2009, Turkey has increasingly looked East, and during his 2014 presidential campaign, Erdoğan famously declared *Osmanlı Torunlarıyız*! (We are the Ottomans' grandchildren!)... we don't need the European Union" (Stockholm Center for Freedom 2017).

The promotion of Turkey as a Middle Eastern country involved the creation of a new national ideology that has been dubbed "Turkish Muslim Nationalism" by White (2009). According to White, the identity of the new Turk was that of "a pious Muslim Turk whose subjectivity and vision of the future is shaped by an imperial Ottoman past overlaid onto a republican framework, but divorced from the Kemalist state project. In other words, everything from lifestyle to public and foreign policy

is up for reinterpretation...according to a distinctively Turkish post-imperial sensibility" (White 2009: 9). There has been an inconclusive debate about whether this identity had social or political roots. Some scholars, such as Rosati and Stoeckl in Multiple Modernities and Postsecular Societies (2012), argue that it is the expression of a unique Turkish modernity and is therefore a social outcome resulting from Turkey's grappling with its Ottoman and Islamic past. However, others argue that the Turkish government has actively used cultural and political tools such as national education, media, charities, and TV to shape the identity of the Turkish people (Lüküslü 2016; Öztürk 2018; Eligür, 2010; Kaya 2015; Al-Ghazzi 2013). These tools have been wielded to mold the identity of the Turkey according to the AKP's desired outcome, much like shaping clay.

Slowly but resolutely, more public shows, speeches from state officials, TV programmes, and also new museums, advertised a new Turkey that built upon the Ottoman past, Turkic ethnic elements, and Islam (Posocco 2022). Museums especially—usually a footnote in newspapers—became the centre of a heated debate on the influence of politics over culture. Writing about the building of more than thirty new museums in 2014, Akyol (2014) reported on the zeal of the Justice and Development Party on revisiting Turkey's Ottoman heritage. Ottomanism goes hand in hand with religious conservatives who claim the Ottoman time as their glorious heritage (Akyol 2014). Similar statements were written on Der Spiegel (2009) in Germany and The Economist (2016) in the UK, which reported on a disillusioned Turkey with Europe and its use of the museum to advertise a Turkish nation anchored to its Ottoman and Islamic past.

Besides magazines and online newspapers, a number of scholarly works have explored the construction of new museums as tools to restore or reclaim Ottoman narratives for both local and foreign visitors who continue to be drawn to Turkey (Posocco, 2022; Posocco, 2020; Posocco, 2018; Bozoglu, 2019; Bozkus, 2014). However, there is a gap in the existing literature regarding whether these new museums are successful in convincing visitors of their narrative. This article aims to fill this gap by examining the *Panorama Museum 1453* and the visitors' responses to its exhibits. Drawing on interviews with museum visitors and insights from the literature on museum and nationalism studies, this study seeks to shed light on the extent of political influence over the museum and the effectiveness of its messaging in shaping visitors' understanding and acceptance of a particular version of Turkish national identity. In addition, by providing insight into visitors' perceptions and motivations, this study contributes to the wider discourse on museum politics in Turkey and beyond.

The *Panorama Museum* provides a good example of how museums in Turkey have been used to commemorate the Ottoman and Islamic heritage of the country. The museum was inaugurated on 31 January 2009 by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Mayor of Istanbul, Kadir Topbaş. The timing of its construction is significant, coinciding with Turkey's shift towards the Middle East. The *Panorama Museum* is also known as the Museum of Conquest, as it features the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmed II, the Conqueror (Fatih Mehmed), in 1453. The conquest is significant because it marks the victory of the Ottomans over the Byzantines, symbolizing the victory of the East over the West, and the growing expansion of Islam in the Middle East and the Balkans. This narrative of conquest is perfectly suited to study the political changes occurring in Turkey and their reflection in cultural institutions. An external view of the *Panorama Museum 1453* is in Figure 2 on page 23 of the article by Hassan & Posocco (2023) in the previous issue of *Trauma and Memory*, while two paintings inside of the Museum are in Figures 3 and 4 of page 24.

Figure 1: The 569th Anniversary of Istanbul's Ottoman conquest
(this is an image of a video that is in YouTube at the address https://youtu.be/apnxCB1Wha0)

Figure 2: Information Panels inside the museum.
On the left, the model of the *Panorama Museum 1453*, with the dome surrounding the visitor
(Source and copyright: Website of the *Panorama Museum 1453*, available at
http://panoramikmuze.com/media/1341/panmuez16a.jpg)

Theoretical Framework

State-centric theories of the Nation-State have a long tradition in nationalism studies. Breuilly (1982), Mann (1995), Brubaker (1992), Tilly (1994), Gellner (1983), and Bourdieu (2014) are some of the most celebrated scholars that identified States as the main forces behind nation-building. They all agree on the fact that the State seeks 'to unite the people subjected to its rule by means of homogenisation, creating a common culture, symbols, values, reviving traditions and myths of origin, and sometimes inventing them' (Guibernau 2003: 4). Other scholars of nationalism like Benedict Anderson (1991), Anthony D. Smith (2010; 1999; 1998), and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) have focused more the cultural aspects of nationalism. In particular, Anderson saw public museums as institutions that contribute to make and spread national symbols and values, which

together with traditions and myths of origin are presented to museum visitors. As he put it: 'museums, and the museumizing imagination, are both profoundly political' (Anderson 1991: 182).

While state-centric theories of nation-building contribute to theorize the influence of national museums over national identity, cultural nationalism can explain how shared national culture and symbols help to form and maintain the nation as a collective through the celebration of shared practices, values, and symbols. Cultural nationalism stresses the importance of sharing culture as the very core of national identity, as as opposed to other factors such as race, language, or religion. This leads to the idea that nations are not static or fixed entities, but are continuously constructed and re-constructed through the active participation of individuals in the cultural practices and symbols associated with the nation (Smith, 1979). The work of "designing the nation" is often the work of cultural elites, a factor also emphasized by Pierre Bourdieu (1993), who discussed the concept of the "cultural capital", which he defined as the cultural knowledge and skills that are valued and rewarded in society.

Anthony D. Smith (2010) argued that museums accompanied the rise of and give continuity to nations, and that they have evolved from private collections but are thereafter under the auspices of the State. For Smith, the criteria guiding museum exhibitions are largely national: 'the objects and artefacts displayed are arranged to tell the story of the nation and its great predecessors, whether in terms of distinct civilisations or of national schools of painting, sculpture and architecture' (Smith 2010: 84).

Besides the theories of nationalism and nation-building, the available literature on museum and nationalism adds relevant theoretical guidelines to this study. There is a large body of studies on identity negotiation and construction in heritage, and museums as rituals of the nation (Elgeneius 2015; Mclean 2006; Newmann and Mclean 2006; Macdonald 2003; Fyfe 2011; Fladmark 2000; Gillis 1996). More published work investigating national identity includes Cooke and McLean (2002a; 2002b); Crooke (2000; 2001); Holo (1999); Macdonald (2003); McLean and Cooke (2000, 2003a, 2003b); and Mason (2004). These studies root back to Tony Bennett's *Birth of the Museum* (1995), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (1992), and Flora Kaplan's seminal book on the *Role of Objects in National Identity* (1994).

Pierre Bourdieu, whose visionary work *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public* (1966) paved the way for sociological investigation of the museum and wrote that museums are part of a greater factory of national emotions, which includes national anthems, national flags, national schools, orchestras, sports, etc. (Bourdieu 2014). The birth of the museum was a moment for "culturing" the public, but also for making a public (Macdonald 2003: 2). Especially national museums were for people to watch artefacts, read information panels, and learn about the story of their nation. However, nationalism became so grounded and entrenched in the institutions of nation-states that national symbols and language soon colonised also other typologies of museums (Posocco, 2022). To visit a museum means always being consciously or unconsciously subject to other ever-present national symbols, like flags, national mottos, and national language in information panels. The visitor doesn't always acknowledge their presence, but psychologists have proved that "unconscious learning" is the best way to teach notions indirectly (Jiménez et al. 1996).

In one of the seminal books on the birth of the museum, Bennett (1995) wrote that national museums were born "for" the people, but they weren't "of" the people. This trend continues in the present. Most museums are sponsored by governments and built by cultural elites that play a primary role in shaping the collective memory of nations (Halbwachs 1950). Inclusive museums, to use the words of Simon (2010), are recent developments that have a hard time in changing the status quo. Turkey reflects the same pattern.

From the time of Kemal Atatürk, the first President of the Turkish Republic after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in WWI, governmental changes have led to changes in the way collective memory was constructed in museums (Shaw 2011). The chronological investigation of museum developments in Turkey shows the influence of politics over exhibitions. National history changed in Turkey

according to the governmental body. From 1920 to the 1960s, museums focused on ethnic elements. They emphasized the history of Turkic tribes that came from central Asia, and avoided references to the Ottoman and Islamic past. This model lasted, almost unchanged, until the 1980s, the time of liberalization in Turkey. In the 1980s and 1990s, wealthy Turkish families started to fund private museums. It's the time of democratization in Turkey, when both religious and secular narratives found a place in museums. The political opening of the 1980s also affected public museums, especially in the 1990s when the first government led by an Islamic leader, Necmettin Erbakan, was established. Erbakan's government lasted around a year, and was outlawed by the Kemalist army loyal to Turkish secularism, but it represented change. In the 2000s, pro-Islamic governments led mainly by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) ruled the country. President Erdoğan, leader of this party, called for a greater democratization that led to the growth of exhibitions on Islamic and Ottoman heritage (Shaw 2011; Kılıçkaya 2010; Göktürk 2010; Bozkuş 2014; Türeli 2006; Öncü 2007; Aronsson 2011; Shaw 2007).

Turkish museums represent the above complexity. There are museums constructed 'in the Kemalist period, small institutions, private museums built in 1980s and 1990s, and recently built museums that reflect the AKP's vision of the Turkish past, present, and future' (Posocco 2018). This variety of museums 'reinforce various narratives of state ideology, heritage, and identity construction as these narratives have changed over the course of time' (Shaw 2011: 942).

Methodology

This study of the *Panorama Museum 1453* employed one-to-one interviews with visitors of the museum and direct observation. The sample includes fifty Turkish visitors of the *Panorama Museum 1453*, without distinction on the grounds of age, race, and political, philosophical or religious creed. Interviews were carried out in front of the museum and filmed, with a camera, by prior consent.

The use of video-based interviews proved to be particularly beneficial in the data analysis phase, as the visual elements provided by the recordings allowed for a deeper examination of the data and facilitated the collection of important information that might have been missed or overlooked during the initial interviews. By watching the clips of the interviews, the research team was able to identify details that might have otherwise been overlooked or temporarily forgotten. However, due to the time-intensive nature of video-based interviews, the research team opted to use short semi-structured interviews with a limited number of questions. Specifically, a total of four questions were used in the interviews. Despite the limitations imposed by the abbreviated interview format, the data collected provided valuable insight into visitors' perceptions of the museum and its exhibits, and allowed for a deeper understanding of the ways in which the museum promotes and shapes a particular version of Turkish national history and identity.

To gather information about visitors' responses to the museum, interviews were conducted with museum visitors who had been approached by a gatekeeper and invited to participate in the study. Once the interviewees had agreed to participate, the interviews were conducted with the following questions:

Where did you hear about this museum?
Why did you decide to visit it?
What did you learn from your visit?
What was your overall impression of the museum?

These questions were designed to gather information about visitors' responses to the museum (questions 3 and 4), particularly the complexity of beliefs and expectations of visitors when approaching the museum (question 2). In addition, questions 1 and 2 provided potential insight into how the museum was advertised. While it was clear from direct observation that the municipality of

Istanbul had invested heavily in advertising the museum, including posters throughout the city and coverage in Turkish media, there were likely other channels—both political and non-political such as word of mouth—that contributed to making the *Panorama Museum 1453* one of the most visited museums in Turkey. The interviews provided a valuable opportunity to explore the various factors that influenced visitors' decisions to visit the museum and their perceptions of its exhibits.

The method of data analysis employed in this study is influenced by, but did not apply rigorously, discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1993). The focus was on coding and text analysis of the discourses from transcribed interviews, and the analysis of pictures and video of the museum display. This approach helped to make sense of the ways in which visitors experienced the museum and whether their words reflected a socio-political stance, their national identity, their sense of national belonging, and their broader views on the Turkish nation. The goal was to identify the dominant discourses and narratives that emerged from the data and to analysis, through theories of nationalism, the ways in which they reflected and reinforced the particular version of Turkish national identity promoted by the museum. By analysing both the verbal and visual elements of the data, the research team was able to gain a more nuanced understanding of visitors' perceptions of the museum and the ways in which it shaped their understanding of Turkish national identity.

In this study, the recording of audio and video data were transcribed and transformed into written data for analysis, whereby analysis we refer to the extrapolation and interpretation of interview extracts. Interview transcripts and informants' texts and field notes were inserted into Nvivo (software of data analysis) to be analysed. The analysis of the interviews targeted descriptive responses from which I extracted portions of transcripts strictly relevant to this study on national identity and museums. Given the limited space, information that does not focus on this aspect haven't been included.

The narrative of the conquest. Interviews with visitors

The *Panorama Museum 1453* serves as a platform for the dissemination of national symbols in the form of historical events, myths, traditions, and heroes through national narratives. Specifically, the museum showcases a particular national narrative centred around the conquest of Istanbul and Ottoman history, which portrays the Ottomans as ancestors of modern-day Turks. This implicit teaching constitutes the foundation of the museum. The belief that Ottomans are the heirs of the Turks is here a doxa: a generally unquestioned reality (Eagleton and Bourdieu 1992). To learn about Ottoman history is, for Turkish visitors, to learn about the roots of the Turkish nation. The following extracts represent examples of such a belief, reproduced by the *Panorama Museum 1453*:

Interview no. 9

Question: Why is Ottoman history important?
Answer: This question has a simple answer: Ottomans mean us, we mean Ottomans. That's why I think it is necessary to learn about Ottoman history. Ottomans are of course important for us. He [the interviewee points to his seven-year-old child] has an interest in this subject. At home there are Ottoman flags and the posters of Fatih, Kanuni (Suleiman the Magnificent) and Yavuz (Sultan Selim I). He is so willing to know more. This museum has been our main reason for coming to Istanbul.

Interviewer no. 11

"The museum made us comprehend one more time what we achieved in history. To be more precise, we are already aware of that, but we wanted to keep our memory alive".

Interviewer no. 2

"We came here to see our ancestors, to see what they have achieved".

These answers repeat very consistently through the fifty interviews. The museum does not create the idea of the Ottomans as the ancestors but strengthens an already existing perception of that. This makes the role of the museum partly redundant, and yet fundamental: it allows the visitors to consolidate what they have been taught, read in history books, watched on television, or simply learned indirectly from others. This is in line with Michael Billig's theory of Banal Nationalism (Billig, 1995), supporting the idea that nationalism is stronger because its symbols are constantly repeated, and almost subliminal in nature. Banal nationalism pervades our everyday language, as illustrated by the use of common expressions such as "us and them" or "our country versus their country", as confirmed by interviews number 9 and 11. This type of nationalism is also embodied in the use of national flags and symbols, as exemplified in Figure 3 (above page 5) and in museum complexes, as this article suggests. The *Panorama Museum 1453* serves as a physical manifestation of this banal nationalism by providing visitors with a sensory experience that reinforces their pre-existing nationalistic beliefs and perceptions.

When asked what the *Panorama* is about and what they learned, visitors answered:

Interview no. 8: The museum made us comprehend once more what we achieved in history. To be more precise, we are already aware of that, but we wanted to keep our memory alive. We visited the museum and lived through that moment. Let's say that we felt it.

Interview no. 9: It is about the biggest war in history. This is the most important war. It tells us how important Turkishness is and how powerful a Turk can be. It is very beautiful.

Interview no. 10: The power of the Turks and the Ottomans, six hundred years of Ottoman history and the power of Fatih Sultan Mehmet.

Interview no. 11: I learned how and with such difficulty this territory we are living in was captured. We saw this closely here.

Interview no. 13: It tells me about history, courage, strife. That's my opinion.

Interview no. 14: Our past, Istanbul; Istanbul, how it was and how it became later.

Interview no. 22: The sufferings of the people. They, our ancestors, our martyrs have experienced boiled oil poured upon them to capture the city. It transmits this. That's it.

Also the above extracts represent a sample of the answers which repeated themselves more than others and are therefore worth analysing. In interview no. 8 the visitor identifies with the ancestors: "The museum made us comprehend one more time what we achieved in history". Also in this extract, the factor of national identity is preponderant, but it is attached here to a feeling of pride, which supports Bourdieu's thesis of museums as factories of national emotions (Bourdieu, 2014). Interestingly, the visitor, which is of Turkish nationality, sees the Ottomans as the ancestor, and project what was achieved by them to all Turks in the present time. This is in line with what Halbwachs (1950) (and later Anderson [1991]) wrote about collective memory as the shared pool of memories and interpretations that individuals in a society or group hold in common, also retrospectively with regard to the past. This interview supports Halbwach's idea that memories are not simply individual recollections of the past, but are rather shaped and constructed by the social and cultural contexts and institutions, as in the case of the *Panorama*, in which individuals exist.

The second extract, from interview no. 9, repeats a similar pattern. The visitor identifies with the ancestor, but there is a further element that is also present in several other interviews: power (e.g. in "how important Turkishness is and how powerful a Turk can be"). This extract is important insofar as it suggests what visitors might perceive when witnessing the 1453 war with Byzantium in the Panormama Museum, a historical museum that makes important use of immersive technology. Everything appears magnified at the eyes of the visitor, so much so that the war becomes "the biggest

war in history" and "the most important war […]". As visitors identify with the Ottoman ancestor, the glory and the power of the Ottomans become, in the eyes of the Turks, the glory and the power of the Turks.

Interview no. 10 introduces the topic of Sultan Fatih Mehmet, which is the figure around which the conquest revolves. All Turks know who Fatih Mehmet is. Many come to see his face allegedly visible among the painted clouds on top of the *Panorama*'s dome. The role of Fatih is important because he was the commander of the Ottoman troops, and incarnates the symbol of the religious soldier to which Erdoğan himself referred to as a point of reference in numerous occasions. Even recently, in April 2022, he has launched the reopening and operation of *Ayasofya Mosque's Fatih Madrassa* — Istanbul's first religious school under the Ottoman Empire, which is named after Fatih Sultan. The school was reopened nearby the ex museum of Ayasofya, recently reconverted into Mosque. Also Istanbul's third Bosphorus bridge was inaugurated by Erdogan and was named "Bridge Fatih Sultan Mehmet". Erdoğan's decision to begin construction of the urban mega-project on May 29, 2013, turned the inauguration into a celebration of the 560th anniversary of the Ottoman Conquest of Istanbul by Fatih Sultan Mehmet.

The *Panorama Museum 1453* is to be seen as yet another tribute to Fatih Sultan by Erdoğan, a symbol that incarnates and materializes Islam. Below, an extracts from an interview that helps make sense of this argument.

Interview no. 23

"These pictures are almost the same pictures we see in the books we read or in the movies we watch, but if one reads the information panels one sees, for example, the letter of Fatih to the Bosnian priests (Christians). I mean, the museum communicates to me the justice of Fatih Sultan Mehmet in the first place and I think this is the most important aspect. Another aspect is that Fatih and his soldiers accomplished the Hadith [saying] of our Prophet".

Interviewer: Could you please repeat this Hadith for those who don't know it?

Interviewee: "The commander who conquers Istanbul is a blessed commander, his soldiers are blessed soldiers" stated our master (the Prophet Muhammad). Many tried to conquer this city, but it was destined to Fatih Sultan Mehmet and his soldiers, that's why, if we speak Turkish in Istanbul today, is thanks to Fatih. In a way we are their (the Ottomans') grandchildren. I hope we can be worthy of them. Let me put it this way. May this be our advice to today's students.

These extracts reflect how certain stories can be seen (and are used) as tools to construct and reinforce a sense of national identity and pride in Islam among Turkish visitors. The interviewee in the extract emphasizes that the museum communicates the justice of Fatih Sultan Mehmet and that he and his soldiers accomplished a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, which predicted the conquest of Constantinople. The interviewee's interpretation of the Hadith suggests that the conquest of Istanbul was a sacred and divine event and that Fatih Sultan Mehmet and his soldiers were heroic and blessed individuals. The visitor further emphasizes the importance of the conquest of Istanbul in shaping the Turkish identity and language, stating that if they speak Turkish in Istanbul today, it is thanks to Fatih Sultan Mehmet. This statement connects the conquest of Istanbul to the creation of a Turkish national identity and suggests that the Turkish language and Islam are interrelated and essential components of that identity. The visitor's final statement, "May this be our advice to today's students," suggests that the museum serves as a pedagogical tool to transmit nationalistic values and ideals to younger generations.

In sum, also this extract illustrates how the *Panorama Museum 1453* reinforces the construction of Turkish national identity and pride through the glorification of the conquest of Istanbul and the portrayal of Fatih Sultan Mehmet and his soldiers as heroic and divine figures. The visitor's

interpretation of the museum's displays and his reflection on the significance of the conquest of Istanbul suggest a sense of nationalistic pride and a desire to pass on these values to future generations.

Figure 3: Inside of the *Panorama Museum 1453*
(this is an image of a video that is in YouTube at the address https://youtu.be/Fze_B2b1o8M)

Interview no. 14

Interviewee: Something unbelievable. Unfortunately, I cannot express that emotion. I have been through something unbelievable
Interviewer: How?
Interviewee: To such an extent that it was dazzling.
Interviewer: Have you learned something new here?
Interviewee: We knew many things from the books we have read of course, but it is something different to get inside the museum and experience it as if were real!

This interview highlights the emotional impact that the museum had on the visitor. The visitor's description of the experience as "unbelievable," "dazzling," and a "great emotion" suggests a deep emotional connection to the exhibits and the historical events they depict. It supports the museum as a spectacle-space which according to Foster 'can swallow any art, let alone any viewer, whole' (Foster 2002: 37). This emotional connection can be seen as a key component in constructing a sense of national identity and pride. The museum creates an immersive experience that allows visitors to connect with the historical events in a personal and emotional way, which reinforces the significance of those events for the construction of a Turkish national identity.

The visitor's statement that they "knew many things from the books we have read" suggests that prior knowledge of the historical events depicted in the museum may have contributed to the emotional impact of the exhibits. This idea aligns with Benedict Anderson's theory of "imagined communities," (1991) which argues that nations are constructed through shared cultural experiences, including the consumption of literature and other media that reinforce national identity.

Interview no. 6

"Visualisation, that atmosphere, I mean, the soldiers climbing the city walls, the sound of cannon balls and horses. If you are proud of being Turkish, as a Turk you feel happy for that conquest. I saw that scene inside. It was animated in my mind. I felt happy and peaceful as a Turk […] You feel happy in the name of your ancestors and then you become peaceful. I felt a warmth in me".

This extracts from interview no. 6 adds to the previous one. Also in this case, it highlights how the museum constructs and reinforces a sense of Turkish national identity and pride through the use of visual and sensory elements creating an immersive experience. The visitor's comments on the soldiers climbing the city walls, the sound of cannon balls and horses, and the animated scenes in their mind links to the museum as an environment creating such experience, which in turn helps the visitor to connect with the historical events and reinforce his sense of national identity. This element is present in most interviews. Like interview no. 14, the visitor's statement that "If you are proud of being Turkish, as a Turk you feel happy for that conquest" suggests a sense of pride, tied this time to the idea of Turkish historical exceptionalism, where the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans is seen as a defining moment in Turkish history that sets them apart from other nations. Like other visitors before him, the visitor's comments on feeling happy and peaceful in the name of their ancestors and feeling a warmth in themselves suggests that the museum creates an emotional connection with the past that reinforces a sense of continuity and identity between present-day Turks and their ancestors who accomplished the conquest.

Figure 4: A painting inside of the *Panorama Museum 1453*
(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Panorama_1453_History_Museum_3.JPG)

Interview no. 12

Interviewee: I understood that everything was too difficult. Nothing was earned easily.
Interviewer: Have you learned anything you haven't known before from this museum?
Interviewee: No, I generally knew it. There is nothing much about knowing. You could learn by reading downstairs, but there is nothing much to learn when you look at the dome. You just see the landscape, how crowded and difficult it was.

Interview no. 12 brings new elements highlighting the difference between knowledge and emotional connection. The interviewee suggests that there is nothing new to be learned from the museum, but the experience of seeing the landscape and understanding how crowded and difficult it was can still create an emotional connection with the past. The visitor's statement that "nothing was earned easily" suggests that the museum reinforces the idea that Turkish national identity is tied to the struggle and sacrifice of past generations, and that present-day Turks should also be willing to work hard and make sacrifices to continue this legacy. This is a regular trope also in Erdoğan's other AKP officials' speeches. The reader might remember that in 2018 Erdoğan was heavily criticised after staging a weeping child in military uniform and telling her that she would be honoured if killed while fighting. "If she's martyred, they'll lay a flag on her," Erdoğan told the sobbing girl at a televised congress of his AK Party. His supporters cheered "Chief! Take us to Afrin!", in reference to Turkey's operations against Kurdish fighters in Syria's northern Afrin region. The speech has been described as "child abuse" and a glorification of death. As interview no. 12 suggests, the *Panorama Museum 1453* walks the same path, highlighting the importance of sacrificing one's life for the nation.

Overall, this interview demonstrates how the *Panorama Museum 1453* creates different forms of engagement with the past, depending also (but not only) on individual experiences and perspectives. The museum's visual and sensory elements can create a sense of pride and accomplishment among visitors, reinforcing their national identity, while the recognition of the difficulties and sacrifices of the past can create a sense of continuity and responsibility for present and future generations.

Interview no. 16

Interviewer: How did it make you feel?
Interviewee: I felt like the Ottoman Empire was a very powerful society and it also felt that we are a very powerful society. It removed from us the myth of the European countries. We have understood, by seeing and by living, that we are the strong ones, not them
Interviewer: How do you relate this to the conquest?
Interviewee: The Turkish nation can be easily re-claimed. With this museum we understood that we get united if necessary

Interview no. 16 confirms that the museum has led them to believe that the power of the Ottoman Empire still resonates with the modern Turkish nation. Furthermore, the visitor seems to view the museum as a way of dispelling the idea of European superiority and instead emphasizes the strength of Turkish society. This also can be seen as a form of cultural nationalism (Smith, 1998), where the visitor is emphasizing the unique culture and history of Turkey as superior to that of other nations. In fact, this extract is in line with Smith's work (1998) that emphasizes the importance of cultural markers, such as language, history, religion, and mythology, in creating a sense of shared identity among a group of people.

The comment that "the Turkish nation can be easily re-claimed" suggests that the visitor sees the museum as a means of promoting national unity and a shared sense of said identity among Turks. This view aligns also with theories of civic nationalism (Anderson, 1991), which emphasize the importance of shared values and civic participation in creating a national identity. Benedict Anderson (1991), who wrote extensively on civic nationalism, distinguishes between "horizontal" solidarities (between individuals of the same social class) and "vertical" solidarities (between individuals of

different classes who share a sense of national identity). This interview seems highlight horizontal nationalism more.

In addition, in this interview, the feeling of being a "powerful society" is not an end in itself but it is promptly directed against Europe. The idea of Europe as a power is, in the mind of the visitor, a spell to exorcise. This is what the museum performs: the duality Ottoman/Byzantine corresponds to the duality Turkey/Europe. The logic behind the visitor's words is the following: (We) Turks are Ottomans; we defeated the Byzantines in the past; we were strong in the past; we are strong in the present; (they) Europeans are Byzantines; they were weak in the past; they are weak in the present; they have been defeated in the past; they can be defeated in the present. In this way, the nationalist narrative of the *Panorama* also serves a myriad of revanchist feelings, although when questioned about the link between today's Europe and the conquest the visitor provided a vague answer such as "we get united if necessary". There is much tacit and unsaid in his answer which is clear only in view of the present socio-political situation in Turkey, the clashes with the Kurdish community, and other ethnonationalist issues faced by this country.

The following extract will help to deepen this subject.

Interview no. 25

"It is very important to visit this place. Why is the situation so messy in Turkey? They are trying to mess it up. Byzantium's flag is pulled down, they want to raise it up again. They feel ripped off. Of course! Why do they want to have it here? Divide and rule! They can't accept to lose. Turkey is dragged into the games of America and Israel in some way. Turks, Kurds, Laz, Circassians, we must be careful. Our ancestors conquered these places with great difficulty. We must protect them. We will protect what we have! The only thing we will protect is our country, our unity. Besides, this museum is very well done. God bless the hands of those who made it".

This extract from interview no. 25 reflects a mix of cultural and territorial nationalism (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Smith, 1998; Anderson, 1991). The visitor expresses a concern for the unity and protection of their country, which suggests territorial nationalism. The reference to "our ancestors" and the conquest of the place with "great difficulty" suggest a connection to a shared history and culture, which points to cultural nationalism. The visitor's fear of being "dragged into the games of America and Israel" can also be seen as a reflection of a desire to preserve their country's independence and sovereignty, another key aspect of territorial nationalism. The reference to protecting "what we have" also reflects a desire to maintain the status quo and defend against threats such as the Kurdish separatist threat. Overall, also this visitor's comments suggest a strong sense of national identity and a desire to protect and preserve their country and its cultural heritage.

Interview no. 4

"These places were conquered through great difficulty. Especially when Byzantium's flag is pulled down by Ulubatlı Hasan[1] with many arrows on his back and despite this he does not die there. This proves that there is a divine force involved there. Here, you feel that divine force. You say to yourself that it is impossible to lift up those cannonballs. Plus, these city walls are still present. How come they are still present? Any work carried out with strife and respect becomes very beautiful and successful. We must listen to the words of our elders. Mehmet the Conqueror is indeed an unprecedented sovereign. Fortunately, we are his grandchildren. May God let us know the value of

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[1]Ulubatlı Hasan was a Turkish soldier who fought in the Ottoman army during the siege of Constantinople in 1453. According to a popular legend, he was the first Ottoman soldier to plant the Ottoman flag on the walls of the city. He is also known for his bravery in battle and is said to have fought with many arrows in his body before falling in battle. The character is present in the *Panorama Museum 1454*.

this. May God protect our country from enemies and evil eyes. It is very very beautiful. I can't find a word to say. I get excited".

The interviewee was a woman in her 60s, traditional in her outlook, and religious by her own statement. This extract suggests yet a new factor: a strong sense of spiritual and divine elements related to the conquest of Constantinople scattering from the *Panorama*. The visitor's belief in a divine force that aided in the conquest and protected the city walls even after centuries, suggest the influence of religious and mystical beliefs in the formation of nationalism. The idea of "divine right" or "chosen people" has been present in many nationalist movements throughout history (Smith, 1999), and it seems to be the case for this visitor as well. Moreover, the visitor's emphasis on the difficulty of the conquest and the respect for the ancestors and their achievements are also characteristic of nationalist sentiment. Also the belief in the superiority of the nation and the importance of honouring the past is a common feature of many nationalist movements (Smith, 1999). Overall, this extract highlights the role of religion, spirituality, and respect for the past in the formation of nationalist sentiment. It also reveals the importance of heroic figures, such as Ulubatlı Hasan, in creating a sense of national identity and pride.

Figure 5: Ulubatli Hasan's extract from the colossal Turkish movie *Fetih 1453*, directed by Faruk Aksoy and released in 2012
(this is an image of a video that is in YouTube at the address https://youtu.be/eRHQY4tPGNI)

Conclusions

This article investigates visitors' responses to the *Panorama Museum 1453* and places the construction of this museum within the wave of national museums built after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in Turkey. These museums emphasize and sponsor a specific national identity for modern Turkey, one that roots the country's past in the Ottoman and Islamic heritage while other equally important heritages of Turkey, such as the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and also the more recent Kemalist heritage remain in the background.

The museum was built in 2009, at a time when Turkey's relations with the EU were worsening, and it became evident that Turkey's accession to the EU would be more protracted than expected. In reaction to what seemed like a dismissal, the Turkish government advocated for a more robust identity of Turkey as a Middle Eastern nation, rooted in its Ottoman heritage rather than a European one. The

Panorama Museum 1453 can be viewed as a tangible manifestation of this political transformation and the emergence of a new type of nationalism that gained prominence in state cultural institutions.

This article focuses on the analysis of the visitors' responses. Visitors were interviewed outside the museum and asked a series of questions to qualitatively investigate the impact of the museum narrative on the visitor. Answers came in the form of visual references and psychological states, revealing visitors' excitement, admiration, reverence, honour, pride, pain, and unity concerning the present political and social disorders. Particular attention was paid to responses that relate to collective memory, particularly national memory, which constitutes one of the founding elements of national identity. While exhibiting on Ottoman history, the museum provides visitors with an answer (or a suggestion) to the question of what it means to be a Turk, promoting a distinctive Turkish Muslim identity that echoes the one promoted by AKP's governments. The idea of the Ottoman as the ancestor of the Turk has been revisited and presented in a new guise that emphasizes technology and modernity. This identity, which fuses nationalist, ethnic, and religious elements, fosters a sense of unity and inclusiveness among the visitors. However, it also excludes a significant part of Turkey's past and present.

Overall, this article attempted to contribute to an existing body of literature on the museum suggesting that museums might (and do) function as a resource and host of national discourses, national identity, and national history manufactured by and within the ruling class to be sold to the masses. In fact, all museums can be influenced by national(ist) narratives and symbols, regardless their specific typology, e.g. art museums, history museums, science museums, natural history museums, etc (Posocco, 2022). The *Panorama Museum 1453* is a history museum, and yet, much of it has to do with the nationalism and the Turkish national identity. Far from being a distinctive Turkish specificity, museums exhibiting ever-positive representations of the nation are, everywhere, the norm rather than the exception (Denton 2014; Forest and Johnson 2002; Kelly 2000 Duncan and Wallach 2012; Light 2000). Vis-à-vis this evidence, it seems fair to suggest the necessity of more comparative analyses that focus on museums and dynamics of nation-building in diverse national contexts. This would help not to fall in the always present trap of orientalism (Said 1978) and/or ethnocentrism (Geertz 1973).

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