

*Journal of Modern Greek Studies*  
(Australia and New Zealand)

Special Issue on  
***Culture and Memory***

Edited by Vrasidas Karalis  
Sydney 2006

# *Modern Greek Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand*

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## INTRODUCTION

It is rather impossible to find a common thread that would link the extremely diverse studies included in this volume. They all began as papers presented at the international conference of the Modern Greek Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand which took place in Sydney in December 2004. Their common ground was the concept of cultural memory in the Greek world, from which starting point the contributors branched out into exploration of wider fields of study, employing various methodologies and divergent presuppositions. Thus the unifying concept of 'cultural memory' was transformed into both culture and memory, which in their turn took on multiple meanings indicating multiple realities. Memory is not simply the re-collection of past experiences or impressions; memory became the re-membering of past unities: reassembling, as it were, a lost coherent vision of vanished realities articulated through the needs of the present.

It can be said that the contributions to this volume endeavour to construct a macroscopic view of the recorded past in its various forms: literature, philosophy, history, politics, art etc. Most of the articles address crucial issues about the re-membering of culture, the practice and the discourse of remembering in all its variegated plurality and somehow chaotic multiplicity. Remembering culture means the foregrounding of its prismatic nature and of its multilayered structure. Yet in order to see or excavate the past, one must use the tools given by the present; in this process the tools themselves become essential parts of the enterprise. Today we don't dig into the past in order to learn 'what really happened' since we have problematised the concept of the real and we have lost the safety of all certain knowledge. Nineteenth century historians and cultural thinkers were in the extremely privileged position to believe that they were able to know what really happened, since their main work was that of reconstructing events through grand narratives with implied ideologies for nation-building. Today our imagination has been tainted by the ravages of global

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history; it has lost its monocentric innocence and has immersed itself into polycentric otherness and its strange multiplicity.

The Greek world and its discourses evolved oscillating between the innocence of home and the guilt of the infinite world. Its innocence was born from its introverted self-sufficiency and the vision of a nation bound by its history to continue the past, and yet living under its heavy shadow. Its guilt originates from the scholars of the Greek Diaspora who articulate their world in constant juxtaposition to the multiplicity of the other and its achievements. In that process the guilty Diaspora sees that the innocence of home is not sufficient to articulate a valid vision of being in contemporary reality and that it creates a rather deformed vision of its actual position in history. The studies in this volume address both the introverted, self-sufficient, innocent vision of a Greek world together with the multiple, polymorphous and remorseful vision of the Hellenic ecumenical vision constantly open to the challenges of history and the practices of the other.

Despite their diversity, all the contributions to this volume define a centre of references that belongs to contemporary problematics of identity, gender, history, morality and politics. The fact that these studies come from the margins of European cultural territory and indeed of the empire has its own significance also; it indicates the necessity to look at the centre from peripheral positions where criticism can be independent and new problematics can emerge through a process of osmosis with difference. Most of the essays see Greek culture from the perspective of a lost innocence; they address Greek themes from a vantage point external to those of tradition and attempt a drastic reconfiguration of their position within contemporary realities. The culture of memory can easily become the cult of memory in an oppressive and self-congratulatory manner. The memory of culture gives the perspective of depth to contemporary questions and situates them within a spectrum of current needs. This volume attempts to bring together disparate visions of research in the area of Greek studies and as such it simply claims to map out the territory. One has to look at the real territory in order to understand the dilemmas of contemporary Greek studies.

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