

# The research topic as a guideline

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## *Abstract*

*There are several ways of studying the history of a historical narrative: from outside (institutions, authors, academic trends, etc.) and from inside; in the latter case, the historian must become a discourse analyst, and build a method in accordance with the discourse itself. But his work can rapidly lead from an analysis of a representation to an analysis of words, pictures or maps, which all are signs. Soon the signs become themselves research topics and, like the leaves of a tree, can enable the researcher to identify the tree itself. Thus, insignificant objects in the daily press or in the urban landscape can reveal the nature of a state ideology. From history to linguistics and semiology, from semiology to anthropology, and back to micro-history: mapping out a posteriori the path I have followed, I am just trying here to find a coherence in my previous researches about contemporary Turkey and Cyprus.*

The path I followed in my research field appears to zigzag from one academic discipline to another, and often uses tools belonging to different branches of knowledge. The research I have carried out for the last twenty years have a unity, however: they all deal with Turkish nationalism and/or with the Cyprus issue. From outside, my identity is simple enough: I can be considered as a turcologist. I began with the study of history teaching in Turkey, particularly how the account of the past, in this country, is influenced by nationalist trends and how ideologies pervade the historical discourse controlled by the state. My main source was, besides nationalist publications, the corpus of the history textbooks published and used in Turkey since 1931. As I analyzed both the textual discourse and the maps, my main tools were discourse analysis and semiology. Then I widened my research to the study of the influence of certain Islamist trends on Turkish nationalism, and the “Turkish Islamist synthesis” which paradoxically pervades the discourse of a state known as the only secular Muslim state. This research was not implemented with the classical tools of political science, but was rather a study of surface phenomena, using as sources newspapers, photographs, street semiology, pamphlets, maps, announcements, etc. More recently, in order to deepen the analysis of the Turkish perception of the nation, I felt it necessary to cope with the Cyprus issue (Copeaux 1997, 2000a; Copeaux and Mauss-Copeaux, 2005).

Even though I was trained in history, I never felt attracted by the search for “what exactly happened”. Because of my research topic, I had to focus on the social representations and social uses of the past in Turkey, and as soon as I began, I was led to the borders between history, historiography, the political sciences and linguistics.

As a consequence, when I consider the authors who have influenced my researches, I count only a few historians (among them Paul Veyne, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Pierre Nora). The influence of philosophers (like Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jean-Pierre Faye) and of political scientists (Benedict Anderson or Michael Billig), was more decisive. But one cannot deny to Foucault or Faye the quality of historians, and I find it characteristic to have been impressed by authors themselves standing on borders. Although much criticized by some “classical” historians in France, Foucault has been considered as having stirred up history (Veyne 1971, 2008). Jean-Pierre Faye’s work on the “totalitarian language” is a contribution to Germany’s history (Faye 1972).

Regarding my research method, the works of philosophers of the language (Olivier Reboul), of linguists (Olivier Maingueneau) or of cognitive scientists (Dan Sperber) were highly helpful. As for the sources, when a piece of research deals with sensitive topics, or when written archives are barely accessible, a scholar must sometimes manage with whatever comes to hand. This often prevents one from working with standardized concepts, methods, research protocols, and helps one to imagine other research methods; as a result, the risk of remaining “schoolish” is perhaps lower.

## Linguistics as a tool for history

Textbook studies are often considered as part of the history - or sociology - of education (*Schulbuchforschungen* in Germany, *Sciences de l'éducation* in France). They include the study of well-known and well-defined epistemological categories like the authors, the institutional framework, or the state’s educational policies, but other approaches are also possible. As with Dominique Maingueneau (1979), a *Schulbuchforschung* can be implemented from a linguistic point of view, a case study in discourse analysis. But an historian must also consider that a history textbook, like any historical narrative, is, among other things, a representation of the past. Like a myth, a representation can act, it can give birth to other representations and even to some events. As a consequence, representations can be studied in the same way as facts: they have their own history and they take place in the course of events.

The Turkish case provides a good example of a representation of the past created and applied by a state. After Turkey became a republic in 1923, its leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk nourished the ambition of a complete renovation of the country’s cultural life. Among his reforms, the adoption of the Latin alphabet (1928) is well known. But in 1931-1932 kemalist power carried out a “reform of history” which completely turned upside down the account of the past: according to this “reform”, the Turks were presented as the most civilized people, who originally lived in Central Asia and, around 7000 BC, migrated and spread over the whole of Eurasia. By their influence, they supposedly gave birth to Chinese,

Indian, Egyptian, Sumerian, Hittite, Greek civilizations. This “Turkish history thesis”, as it was labeled, was officially adopted and implemented by the publication of a set of history textbooks in 1931. Turkish history, from then on, was seen as fully Asian and the new compass was turned towards Central Asia, from which any civilization in the world, including Western, was supposed to have originated (Ersanlı-Behar 1992; Copeaux 1997).

This account of history was a case of instrumentalization of the past by a nationalist trend, in a nation-building context. In Turkey this research topic was mostly studied by scholars belonging to the Bosphorus University (*Boğaziçi Üniversitesi*) and a private history foundation, the *Tarih Vakfı*; a new trend in history and social sciences was expressed by certain journals like *New Perspectives on Turkey*, *Tarih ve Toplum (History and Society)*, *Toplumsal Tarih (Social History)*, *Toplum ve Bilim (Society and Knowledge)*, etc. Historians like Halil Berktaş and Büşra Ersanlı-Behar opened the way, and in 1995 a large international conference was organized by the Bosphorus University, followed in 1997 by the University of Mersin (Berktaş and Tuncer, 1998; Gökdemir et al. 2000). The whole trend was the result of a reaction against the official account of the past. This topic was almost taboo, since the account of history was due to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself, whose personality and reforms were, and still remain, held sacred and indisputable by the establishment. Following Ersanlı-Behar, my aim was to analyze the origins and birth of the phenomenon, but also the representations of the past themselves, and the way they had influenced the cultural life, the political mythology and the society up to the present day.

Coping with a vast textbook corpus required finding a path. My first approach was based upon passive observation, an attitude which can be used in every field of knowledge, and naturally incites crossing over some knowledge borders, since the observed elements are complex, and never fit within a single discipline: a cursory reading, open to everything striking the attention. But the problem lies in what “strikes” one’s attention, and at which level of observation an element may be considered as “striking”. I can provide an obvious example here: the text of a speech delivered by Atatürk in 1933, annexed to a lesson dealing with the *Göktürk* tribe’s history (VIII<sup>e</sup> century), apparently is an anachronism. But what seems to be an error or the result of the editor’s carelessness has to be analyzed, and appears to be highly significant. In fact, most of the “striking” elements can be noted only if they are observed under a microscope. To find them, linguistic tools appeared to be necessary, and the most important among them is perhaps the distinction between discourse and narrative.

A historical *narrative*, be it a textbook or a scholarly work, is theoretically supposed to be neutral. It requires a distance between the author and his topic. In French, it is, for example, often characterized by the use of the *passé simple* tense, hardly used in everyday life. A narrative is supposed to be objective.

What characterizes a *discourse* is the presence of “shifters”<sup>1</sup> revealing the precise situation of the enunciation: the place and time of the enunciation, its

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<sup>1</sup> According to Jakobson, a shifter is a term whose meaning cannot be determined without referring to the message that is being communicated between a sender and a receiver (for example, the word

addressor and addressees. The shifters (like connotated words or appreciative modalities) generally unveil the author's (the addressor's) opinions or preferences. A discourse is subjective.

But the distinction between narrative and discourse is theoretical. A history textbook is supposed to be a "narrative", an objective account of the past. But in fact the "striking" elements I mentioned earlier just appear to be shifters, appreciative modalities, turning the narrative into a discourse. Very often, and in any country, one can find elements of discourse fitted like a nugget inside the narrative: the nugget may be very visible. In the above-mentioned example, the anachronistic presence of a speech of Atatürk is a nugget of discourse inserted in a narrative, and the message is clear: Atatürk is properly the outcome of an old deep-rooted Turkish genius. But most of the nuggets can be identified only with a fine sieve.

They can consist in the use of certain grammatical forms. For our case study, Turkish language has two modes for expressing the past. The use of the one infers that the narrator has witnessed the event, or that he is sure of the veracity of the story: it is a statement. Conversely, the use of the other mode infers that the narrator did not witness the event, or that what he is narrating is doubtful and has to be verified (it could be translated in English with the help of adverbs like "reportedly", "allegedly", etc.). Even in everyday life, the use of both past tenses is very precise and significant; for example, the use of the first when reporting a miracle (for example, the revelation of the Coran to Mohammed by the archangel Gabriel) does mean that the utterer is a believer. Its use in a textbook infers that he is addressing supposed-to-be believers.

Other "nuggets" of discourse consist of connotated words. For example, the use, instead of "dead" (*ölü*), of the word "martyr" (*şehid*), which bears a religious significance, implies that the author considers the martyr, the readers and himself as members of the same community, be it an existing community, or a community to be created or reinforced. Very often, the use of the pronoun or adjectives "we", "our", "us" (like "our soldiers", "our prophet"), which is ahistorical and creates an artificial link between the past and the present, is enough to turn a narrative into a teleology.

As significant as their presence, the *distribution* of the nuggets/shifters and modalities throughout a narrative precisely underlines certain historical events; the shifters highlight them, emphasize their signification and emotional charge. They give them an ideological sense, and turn them into elements of a teleology. In the case of the Turkish history textbooks, these events are identical throughout the decades, forming a series of what I qualify as the "primary events" of the Turkish historical narrative. They are as follows: the migration of the primitive Turks from Central Asia, the birth of Islam, the conversion of the Turks to the Muslim faith (VIII<sup>e</sup>-IX<sup>e</sup> centuries), the victorious battle of Manzikert (East Anatolia) which opened what is today "Turkey" to the Seljuk Turks (1071), and finally the defeat of the Greeks by Mustafa Kemal's army (Liberation War 1919-1922). They appear to form a whole, a discursive event which can be

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we). Roman Jakobson (1971). *Selected Writings*, vol. II, *Word and Language*, The Hague: Mouton, p. 132.

isolated from the general narrative: we find here the skeleton of stereotypes used in other contexts.

## Back from linguistics to political science and to the history of social representations

In turn, the linguistic tools used in the first phase of this research provide materials for analyzing the *history* of political or social representations. The above-mentioned “primary events” are generally presented as sacred in the nationalist discourse, because they are seen as the nation’s basis and foundation; their use as references in a political discourse is supposed to legitimate the utterer. Thus, simply by using the main source as a guideline, I was led from history to the political sciences, *by the use of linguistic tools*.

When the research field is widened to other sources and discourses, an osmosis can be observed: the stereotypes travel across different media, from textbooks to newspapers and television, sermons, etc. As they express widespread ideas and prejudices, they benefit from an effect of authority, hence of an inertia and they are long-lasting; as a *climat d'idées* they can outlive a political power or even a regime.

It is possible, at that point, to continue with the same method, but headed towards the political sciences. The way is the opposite: it consists of identifying “nuggets” of an historical narrative encysted in a political discourse. In every nation-state, the school produces a “shared knowledge” including a series of heroes. In Turkey, the prominent hero is, of course, Atatürk, the founder of the Republic, but other heroes are praised, such as Bilge, kagan of the *Göktürk* in Central Asia, or the sultan Alparslan, the conqueror of Anatolia in 1071. Heroes, exploits, sentences, images and stereotypes are well-known and ready to be used in the political discourse. Insofar as the republican regime, although young, needed to present itself as a deep-rooted regime, Atatürk has been presented as heralded by ancient heroes, and as their successor (Copeaux 2000c). There are controversial uses of other heroes, like Sultan Mehmet II, conqueror of Constantinople, and champion of the “Islamist” wing. The heroisation process can evolve, and we presently are perhaps witnessing a retrieval of Sultan Mehmet by the kemalist establishment.

From that point on, it is possible to go back to contemporary history: history of ideas, or of intellectual life. This process can lead to unexpected conclusions. Ideologies are not always where they are expected to be; at present in the republic of Turkey, which is known as “secular”, the historical narrative is entirely addressed to Muslim readers; and, most paradoxically, this “islamization” of the narrative occurs when the cult of Atatürk, champion of the secularist trend in Turkey, is at its height, around 1985. Chronological caesuras often differ from what is usually admitted: while elections, military *coups* and changes of government are generally considered as turning points between eras, the changes in cultural history often do not coincide with such political events.

Once there exists a “shared knowledge” provided by the school, the nation can build a collective memory, some elements of which are periodically reactivated by the political discourse - precisely the elements I labeled earlier as

“primary events” - in order to legitimate a policy, and in order to become active. In fact, the set of stereotypes, as identified in the historical narrative, form together a “latent discourse”. This is the condition of pertinence: a discourse is efficient provided it addresses a public sharing a common knowledge with the addressor (Sperber and Wilson 1989).

The “latent discourse”, as defined by Jean-Pierre Faye (1972), is often made up of stereotypes and clichés, it is diffuse, it persists and evolves, spreads out in the media, and provides a basis for historical and political myths. It can be non-textual, as I have tried to show by analyzing Turkish historical maps. For example, a repetitive appearance of the island of Cyprus on a map of Turkey can have a long-term effect on the public’s perception of the Cyprus issue: it can lead to considering Cyprus as annexed by Turkey (Copeaux, 2000a). A latent discourse can arise from very inferior texts, like pamphlets, leaflets, fliers, combining to form, to use again Jean-Pierre Faye’s notions, “a narration leading from the periphery to an invisible center”. It should not be considered insignificant chatter: a visible center may appear later on, which will capture latent and peripheral discourses<sup>2</sup>. As Siegfried Kracauer (1969), quoting Lewis Namier, pointed out, such phenomena are just like the leaves of a tree: observing the leaves can help to identify the tree itself. Jacques Revel (1996) characterizes it as a “phenomenology of surface manifestations”. What is observed is what comes to act as evidence, that is, what can contribute to shape everyone’s mind or public opinion, as is shown in the above-mentioned example of the map of Cyprus. The distribution of this sign, even in public announcements, is not confined to nationalist or government publications, and is not even related to the political trend of the relevant media. Therefore, the observation of these surface manifestations leads out of history.

## Outside historical discourse

Hence, it is possible to go further into the world of signs and photographs. For this purpose, when living in Istanbul, I have considered the Town as a political landscape, to be submitted also to passive observation. My sources, then, were both the daily press and public life.

Often, researchers first consider pre-established « hard », « central », « important » objects, like political parties, trade unions, institutions, press groups, etc. But, in the semiology of everyday life, numerous « nuggets » of a discourse are identifiable, exactly as in a text. Among other criteria, they can be spotted by their frequency (like the map showing both Turkey and Cyprus). Their banality makes them part of a visual urban landscape, at a point where they are no longer perceived. Often, this leads to characterizing them as « uninteresting », to ignoring them as chatter, as « weak » and « soft » matter, unlike the above-mentioned « serious » and « hard » matters (Billig, 1995 ; Copeaux, 2000b). This kind of chatter, however, is what linguists qualify as a

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Pierre Faye (1972b, p. 10): “Narration qui va de la périphérie vers le centre: ‘centre invisible’ sur quoi les narrateurs en action s’interrogent, avant de le voir souvent prendre un nom”.

phatic discourse, “a speech used to share feelings or to establish a mood of sociability rather than to communicate information or ideas”<sup>3</sup>. A phatic discourse, in social life, is highly functional and keeps both the sender and the receiver in good conditions of mutual listening and fine-tuning. The Turkish state constantly makes use of chatter, a phatic discourse, within which lies a “basic” discourse.

I am referring here to the rich agenda of the commemoration and remembrance of the past, which echoes, for a whole society, the historical chronography as it has been assimilated at school. I am also referring to political rituals like the pilgrimage (*ziyaret*) to the mausoleum of Atatürk (*Anıtkabir*), systematically reported in soviet-style articles in the media, with highly codified photographs (Copeaux, 2000b), and to repetitive objects (the national flag) and recurrent images (newspaper photographs including the flag: Copeaux and Mauss-Copeaux, 1998), even to colors, like red, the color of the flag, as used in commercial announcements on the days preceding the national commemorations. Many things in this framework can be considered as images, like maps and images including other images, cartoons including the country’s map, or photographs including portraits of Atatürk. In some fields, it is possible to identify rituals and norms, and hence the way the norms are observed, unobserved, turned away, diverted or transgressed. This research field, which is quite new, is becoming a trend and is now being explored by both Turkish and foreign scholars (Seufert 1997, Navaro-Yashin 2002, Özyürek, 2006, Bulut 2008).

Nothing is to be considered as insignificant, everything is worthy of attention because everything can form a set of signs by its presence *or by its absence*. In a highly codified political and social life, the absence of an image can open up a crisis: the lack of a portrait of Atatürk, or of the Turkish flag, at a public meeting; the lack, in a newspaper issue, of a report on a national commemoration, etc. As a whole, the signs form a background noise which makes sense, precisely as the music of the wind in the leaves characterizes the tree. At the very periphery of political life, the leaves define a compulsory consensus made up of attitudes, social behaviors, leading to denouncement as well, and above all a self-restriction – mostly during the 1990s - on discussing certain sensitive matters like the war in Kurdistan, the Cyprus issue, the army’s role at the head of the state (Copeaux 2000b).

The study of such soft matters can help to delineate the hard core of political life, and to identify undeclared, concealed trends of state ideology, brought to light by the leaves: this is the case of an ideology known as the Turkish-Islamic synthesis. This trend, developed among a group of nationalist historians since the 1970s, considers the Turkish nation to be both a spearhead and a shield for the Muslim world. Supposedly, by embracing Islam, the Turks have found their true identity, and have in turn protected Islam from decline. As Turkey officially is “secular”, this unofficial ideology is never named or exposed in public documents. But it largely pervades the peripheral state discourse (textbooks,

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<sup>3</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. A dialogue between lovers is typically phatic.

sermons) and semiology (ceremonies like the martyrs' funerals: Kaya 2008). Conversely, the leaves themselves can give birth to, or boost, certain events, as was the case in 1996-1997 in the framework of a strong opposition between the Turkish army (the guarantor of secularism) and an Islamist coalition government; certain semiological events, at that time, were at least as decisive as proper political implementations in public life and in their perception by the media. For instance, the placing of "Islamist" signs close to a monument of Atatürk, at Sincan (near Ankara) in February 1997, was used as the pretext for a military intervention in political life, characterized as the "soft" or "post-modern" *coup* of February 28, 1997. Obviously, the use of a given semiology has its own history, and a retrospective view provides, in turn, an historical perspective, as the observed phenomenon seems to characterize the 1990s.

## Cyprus: Territorial limits and knowledge boundaries

My zigzagging route moving from history to history through linguistics, political science and semiology led me to study the Cyprus affair, a cornerstone of the Turkish perception of the nation. Naturally, it had already been observed, analyzed, and commented on in thousands of books, reports, articles, memoirs, and during my research on Turkish nationalism, I left it apart because I considered it – wrongly - to be a boring and over-ruminated subject. But it could not be ignored. To cope with it, a new approach was needed, different from the classical one, which often focuses on "hard" concepts such as international relations, diplomacy, geopolitics, and international strategy.

It is perhaps useful here to recall some events of the island's recent history. From 1878 Cyprus was a British colony inhabited by – to put it simply - a Greek-speaking Orthodox majority (80%) and a Turkish-speaking Muslim minority (20%), living together since the XVI<sup>th</sup> century. The United Kingdom granted independence in 1960 but in fact the Greek nationalist movement (EOKA) claimed its annexation (*enosis*) to Greece, which was strongly rejected by the Turkish nationalists, who argued for partition (*taksim*). In 1963-1964, violent inter-communal incidents occurred, a first separation was carried out and the Turks were confined to 45 small enclaves (1964-1974). In July 1974, an extreme rightwing Greek putsch in the island was the pretext for intervention by the Turkish army, which landed on the Northern shore, occupied one third of the island and expelled from this zone about 200, 000 Greek Cypriots, while the Turkish Cypriots living in the South were displaced to the North. Since then, although the Republic of Cyprus is officially the sole legal power, the island is *de facto* divided into two parts by a buffer zone (the "Green Line") impassable from 1974 to 2003. In 1983 the North claimed its independence as the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC), recognized only by Turkey. Since 2004 Cyprus has been a member of the European Union, while the TRNC, officially a part of its territory, is still occupied by the Turkish army.

The research I carried out with Claire Mauss-Copeaux was focused on the North, somewhat neglected by the scholars (Copeaux and Mauss-Copeaux, 2005). Aware of the importance of Turkish nationalist semiology, and its distribution and location in the landscape, our first approach to the Cypriot

reality was a search for signs affixed to the Northern part of the island aiming to make it “Turkish”; for traces of the recent past in this territory turned upside-down by the conflict; and for traces left behind by the displaced populations. Thus, it was necessary to focus on the island itself, its topography, its landscapes, villages and *lieux de mémoire*.

But of all the elements of the landscape, the Green Line has given meaning to this research. Undertaking an investigation into Cyprus, divided by an impassable borderline, was a challenge. Until 2003, Cypriots had often left their past in an inaccessible part of the island. The borderline, and our strategy of managing in spite of the line, was as influential in our inquiry as it has been in the Cypriots’ lives. The impassable Green Line compelled us to transgress knowledge borderlines.

The Cyprus issue provides a good example of a well-known dilemma in history. A general narrative, a view “from the top”, always sounds clear and comprehensible to the reader but, as the narrative is often built with standardized concepts, the clarity is an illusion; such an overview is, to quote Arlette Farge (1997), “a quiet land made of clearly identifiable causalities”. The more general is the narrative the farther it is from the reality and the more deceptive. Conversely, however, a detailed narrative presenting the facts “from the bottom up” is often difficult to understand. Claude Lévi-Strauss has underlined this dilemma in *La Pensée sauvage*: when a narrative increases in precision, it loses in clarity, and vice-versa. The way out, says Lévi-Strauss, is “to go out of history”<sup>4</sup> (Lévi-Strauss, 1962).

There are dozens of general narratives of the Cyprus issue. But they generally give little space to the human factor, to Cypriot life, to the island itself. Quite evidently, however, a narrative of the Cyprus issue “from the bottom up” cannot be understood by a foreigner. And as researchers, we were not able to understand what Cypriots told us at the beginning of our research. To solve the dilemma, we adopted a double approach, made up of observation on the ground and micro-history.

## Observations on the ground

Our research field, the TRNC territory, was saturated with signs. Political signs first, due to the weight of nationalism and to the intense turkification of the land since 1974. Signs referring to the recent past of the Northern part whose population, before 1974, was mostly Greek Orthodox, the monumental environment itself being a sign of a major discordance between past and present. Signs consisting of visible traces of past events: irrelevant slogans, bullet impacts

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<sup>4</sup> “[...] le choix relatif de l’historien n’est jamais qu’entre une histoire qui apprend plus et explique moins, et une histoire qui explique plus et apprend moins. Et s’il veut échapper au dilemme, son seul recours sera de sortir de l’histoire.” (Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1962, p. 347). English translation: “The historian’s relative choice is always confined to the choice between history which teaches us more and explains less, and history which explains more and teaches less. The only way he can avoid the dilemma is by getting outside history.” (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, The University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 262)

on walls, ruins. These signs, of course, testified to the past, but in addition they were signs of a will or of an inertia (why have Turkish Cypriots not erased the traces of Greek otherness during the decades of separation?).

Other signs, less visible, referred to an “elsewhere”, a “beyond”, an “other side”; they were just one part of a twin semiological system consisting of a twin toponymy and monuments, lying in both parts of the island. This twin semiology has been the very guideline of our research, as a great many village names and commemorative monuments indicate the origin of the villagers, like a compass. As a consequence, the key of our research has been this tension between the two territories. The first tool we used was our own photographs of the Turkish villages located in the South, then almost inaccessible to their former inhabitants since 1974; frequently we were the first people to make them face up to their past. But with such a proceeding being highly emotional, even quite dangerous for our interviewees, we later used it very cautiously, only after obtaining the connivance and confidence of the person we were speaking to, and only on the occasion of a second or third contact.

The second approach was micro-history. A good knowledge of what exactly had happened in every village we arrived in was very important both for understanding the life stories of our interviewees and for gaining their confidence. With the help of written sources (life stories, reports, newspapers, even novels), our knowledge of the local past created an acquaintance, a complicity with the villagers, a shared knowledge which opened doors; and similarly micro-history opened the door of oral investigation.

In any event, the ground enlightened both written and oral sources, and vice-versa; and micro-history enlightened general history. In part, our research had perhaps an anthropological dimension, since our concern was not only the past events, but the human pain resulting from the events, human pain considered as an historical fact, because the pain in turn causes the events to last and can give rise to other events (Farge, 1997). Hence, despite the tools we used, our book is decisively historical: we have told the history of a separation, of a precise period in the island’s history lasting from 1964 to 2003.

As another point dealing with Cyprus, I would now like to show how a single fact can have several dimensions and cannot be studied in the framework of a single discipline. In the TRNC territory every tomb in every Orthodox cemetery has been systematically, and deliberately damaged and profaned. Although the phenomenon is a strikingly visible element in the landscape, it apparently had not been studied or even described in a scholarly context – and this silence itself could be a research topic.

The profanation concern is relevant to the past, the present and the future of the island. From a historical point of view, it is an event, perhaps even a unique event. Thus, it falls to historians to explain how the profanation was decided, how the orders were formulated and transmitted, who perpetrated the act, how did – or didn’t – the local population react. As far as we know, this work has not been done.

Then the profanation is a topic for anthropology. It refers to death, to death rituals, to lineage and memory; it refers also to the sacred and its transgression, to the war. The impact of the phenomenon on a population which has lived since 1974 within the sight of damaged and profaned tombs of their former neighbors

is relevant to sociology. Finally, the profaned cemetery acts on the present and on the future, it could even harm the reconciliation process. This is a topic for the political sciences.

But, above all, we have considered this general profanation as a semiology. This action highlights responsibility of the authorities, since it can be interpreted as a sign of sovereignty: the profaned Orthodox cemetery, present and visible since 1974 in every village, is, precisely like a patriotic monument or the flag itself, a symbol of the TRNC or, more precisely, of its protector, Turkey. More generally, the profanation (the implementation of which was very accurate and excluded the Maronite cemeteries and churches) reveals how the definitions of both national identities in Greece and Turkey, but also “Greek” and “Turkish” communities in Cyprus as well, have been indexed on religion, even by the British administration, and how the words “Greek” and “Turkish” mean in fact “Orthodox” and “Muslim” in discourses and in minds. The implementation of the Orthodox cemeteries’ profanation shows how a representation of the nation can be turned into action.<sup>5</sup> This perhaps characterized many conflicts in the post-Ottoman area in general.

## Conclusion

In some cases, it is sometimes not very easy to find a consistency or a cohesion in a lengthy period of research. As an example, let us consider the work of Siegfried Kracauer who has written about cinema, photography, detective novels, about *Weimarer Republik*’s middle classes, about Offenbach, and finally about history and historiography. Some features of a researcher’s life are due to personal predilections rather than to rational choices. Quite evidently, a coherence can always be found *a posteriori*: the cohesion is given by the researcher’s life itself. It is probably a normal trend to try giving one’s own life a linear character, just as nations do! If a research topic can be the researcher’s guideline, this does not mean that there is only one guideline. That would of course be illusory and deceptive. The researcher has to face a choice, a variety of possibilities, which can lead him in various directions. Personal inclinations, opportunities and chances in life, encounters, readings are perhaps as decisive as are scholarly elements.

But it is important here to state that in some cases the existence of a choice is also an illusion. If the researcher is not a fortunate amateur benefiting from his own private means, he is confronted with the frameworks and institutions of the profession. Beginning my researches with the study of history textbooks, I could have continued on the path of *Schulbuchforschung*, or in historiography, or in the field of the “uses and abuses” of history. But the spirit of “orientalism”, although

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<sup>5</sup> As was the case in the Great Exchange between “Turks” (Muslim people often Greek-speaking) and “Greeks” (Orthodox people often Turkish-speaking) in 1923: religion was the one and only criterion to label people as “Greek” or “Turkish”, despite of their language. This exchange (in fact a mass expulsion) is the very basis of the Turkish Republic’s nation-building process. The exchange policy is a result of a representation of the “nation” inherited of the Ottoman concept of *millet* or religious communities – the word itself has been adopted to express in Turkish the idea of nation. But the present conception of the nation (with a religious connotation) is in turn influenced by the *de facto* Muslim character of the Turkish population.

criticized for such a long time, is still powerful in France, not in the research fields themselves, but in the research and academic institutional frameworks. Once someone has chosen an “oriental” field of research, he is always pushed towards “oriental” studies. So was I pushed towards Turkish studies, which was not my initial aim.

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