

Narrating the Unspeakable: The Epistemological Value of Literary Representations of the Holocaust of Greek Jewry

Olga Gkouma
PhD Candidate at the University of Alicante



INTRODUCTION

This presentation investigates how literary narratives offer vital pathways to understanding the Holocaust of Greek Jewry. While historical accounts provide crucial factual frameworks, literature offers unique insights into the lived experiences, socio-cultural contexts, and enduring memory of this tragedy. Drawing on Mark Mazower's assertion of literature's distinct value alongside archival sources, and by examining a range of Greek literary works, this study argues for the integration of these narratives into historical discourse for a more comprehensive and empathetic understanding of this historical rupture.

Research Problem

Although literature offers vital insights into the "kaleidoscopic interactions" of society not always captured by official reports (Mazower), it remains potentially underutilized as a significant source in Holocaust historiography, particularly concerning the experiences of Greek Jews.

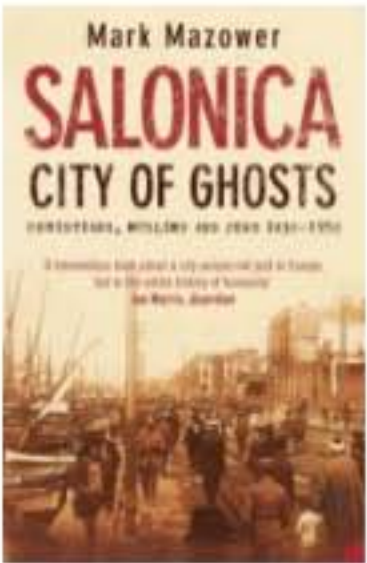
This research endeavors to bridge this gap by highlighting the epistemological value of these narratives in revealing subjective realities, elucidating pre-existing societal biases (as noted by Ampatzopoulou), and tracing the evolution of cultural memory surrounding this genocide.

Areas of Research

This study investigates four key areas to elucidate the role of literature in shaping Holocaust memory concerning Greek Jewry. Firstly, it examines pre-Holocaust portrayals of Jewish identity within Greek literature, often characterized by negative stereotypes and religious fanaticism. Secondly, it focuses on post-Holocaust literary works that function as acts of witnessing and memorialization, capturing narratives of trauma, persecution, and survival. Thirdly, the research analyzes contemporary Greek literature's engagement with Holocaust memory, highlighting how modern authors confront or perpetuate the silence surrounding this tragedy. Finally, it investigates the ways in which literature contributes to the cultural and political discourse of memory, particularly through popular fiction that addresses previously taboo subjects and reinterprets collective narratives.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology centered on close reading and thematic analysis of a carefully selected corpus of Greek literary texts, including novels, autobiographies, and short stories. These textual analyses are contextualized within relevant historical frameworks, with particular attention to the antisemitic climate in pre-war Greece (as discussed by Abatzopoulou). The analysis draws upon interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives, including trauma theory, narrative theory, and memory studies, to understand how literature not only reflects but also actively shapes the memory and historical consciousness of the Holocaust within Greek society.



Expected Findings

This study anticipates that literary narratives offer a crucial epistemological complement to historical records. These works provide emotional and cognitive depth by capturing personal and often marginalized experiences that traditional historiography may overlook. They illuminate the social and cultural contexts in which antisemitism and trauma were lived and remembered, and they amplify voices and memories that have been otherwise silenced. Furthermore, literature is expected to play an active role in shaping Holocaust memory within both Greek society and its diaspora, influencing how this historical trauma is understood, communicated, and memorialized.



Conclusion

In conclusion, literary narratives serve as powerful and unique forms of testimony that significantly deepen our understanding of the Holocaust of Greek Jewry. Their inclusion in historical research and public discourse is essential for a more empathetic, nuanced, and comprehensive engagement with this profound human tragedy. By integrating these literary perspectives, scholars and educators can foster a more inclusive historiography that recognizes the emotional, cultural, and subjective dimensions of memory and trauma, thereby ensuring that the legacy of Greek Jews during the Holocaust is neither forgotten nor misrepresented.

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