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Review on *The Engaged Historian: Perspectives on the Intersections of Politics, Activism and the Historical Profession*. Edited by Stefan Berger. 314 pp. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books. 2019. ISBN 978-1-78920-200-7

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Within the broader question of the public engagement of intellectuals, the place of historians, as those who deal with the events from the past, deserves a separate analysis. The “engagement” for a historian has multiple meanings, ranging from their scholarly production to their participation in everyday social and political issues. The book *The Engaged Historian* deals not only with the personal involvements of historians in the past as public intellectuals, but also with their engagements through their writings, where the notions of “impartiality,” “historicism,” and “memory” play important roles. The book is divided into fourteen different chapters, written by a number of researchers, who are mostly historians by their profession. There are also two chapters written as a prologue and epilogue of sorts by Stefan Berger and Georg G. Iggers, respectively.

Stefan Berger, in his introduction to this book, noticed how various forms of engagement were present from the onset of the professionalization of history as a science in the late eighteenth century. The romanticist historians were engaged in their respective national movements, which was reflected in their writings from the fields of national history. However, there were also early examples of the dissident intellectuals, as in the case of the *Göttingen Seven*, which included two historians as well. All of them lost their university positions in 1837, due to their opposition to the constitutional reforms in the Kingdom of Hannover (p. 7–8). There were also historians, especially in the latter part of the aforementioned century, whose writings reflected their own political or religious beliefs (p. 9–10).

Historians are engaged through their writing, as Emilia Salvanou noted in her chapter about refugees’ memory and historical practices in interwar Greece, due to the very nature of their intellectual engagement. They always wrote about the past, but they did it because of the contemporary needs of the society they lived in (p. 118). In her study, she analyzed the Greek communities from Anatolia and Thrace, which became part of Greece in the aftermath of the war with Turkey that ended in 1922. Their traumatic experiences were not represented in the official Greek narrative about the conflict, which robbed them from their past and left them in search for their identity in the new reality they experienced (p. 123). A number of amateur historians, many of whom came to Athens years prior to the arrival of the refugees, from the same region, would use their writings to create a collective memory. Their aim was to create a “new historical consciousness” that would help to incorporate the refugee community into the Greek interwar society (p. 124–125). On the other side of the globe, in the similar time period, historians gathered in Zhanguo Ce Clique, as Xin Fan showed in his chapter. Clique “weaponized” their historical research in order to tackle their contemporary challenges (p. 139). In the midst of the destruction brought on by the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), they politicized the ancient Chinese past in their writings. They mostly wrote about the Warring States Period, which took place prior to the unification

of China under the Qin dynasty in the third century B.C. (p. 141). Followers of Oswald Spengler's cyclical theory, the members of Zhanguo Ce Clique believed that the lessons from the past could be utilized in their present as well, in an effort to create a strong centralized national state. The historian Lei Haizong, who was a prominent member of this clique, was an ardent supporter of the militarization of society, cult-building around Chiang Kai-shek, and an orientation towards utilitarian and ruthless international diplomacy. All of this led the communists to label him and his colleagues as fascists (p. 142–143).

But what about the personal engagement in real-life events? If we follow the historicist view, the necessary distance between the present and the past becomes even murkier if the writer was a participant in the events they try to portray. In his chapter, Manos Avgeridis presented the case of historian C. M. Woodhouse, who was a British secret agent and military officer during the Second World War in Greece. Being a professional historian, he raised a controversy with his 1957 lecture held in Munich. There, he reasserted the historicist view of the necessity of waiting for the past to be distant enough in order for it to become an object of analysis. What raised voices of displeasure in Greece were his diminishing remarks about the importance of the Greek resistance movements in achieving the ultimate victory over the Axis powers on that territory, while praising the role of British intelligence. These remarks came during the ongoing Cyprus crisis, where the British also played a significant role (p. 154–156). Even though Woodhouse's views on the importance of the British intelligence came from his own personal bias, he later clearly emphasized the necessity of a professional and serious history writing. He even discarded his own memoirs, dedicated to his participation in the Second World War in Greece, as an unreliable source material, due to the provenly exaggerated data he used (p. 157).

Was Woodhouse ultimately wrong in his claims? The other example of an actively engaged intellectual from *The Engaged Historian* comes from one of the authors of the chapters themselves, although not intentionally. In her study about the *Workers' Defence Committee* (KOR), founded in 1976 in communist Poland, Nina Witoszek attempted to over-emphasize the importance of this intellectual clique and its ultimate contribution to the success of the oppositional workers' organization *Solidarnosc*. By presenting the cases of three historians and their social and scientific engagement, she argued that it was the KOR and its engagement that were the most impactful opposition force. However, what makes her chapter an object of analysis in itself could be explained in several ways. First, her direct participation in the events she tried to portray raises again the question of objectivity in historical writing. Second, a negative example of engaged writing is her discourse and clearly rosy portrayal of the nature of the KOR, including its comradery and influence, referring to it as an "oppositional humanism" (p. 179). Therefore, she was engaged both in the real-life events she wrote about and in her writing as well. Even though participating in

the historical events tends to lead to a biased writing by historians, it could also give them a perspective, accumulated through their own engagement. In his chapter dedicated to the experiences of Japanese historians, collected in the book *History as Memory, Memory as History*, Michihiro Okamoto analyzed the conditions which influenced and formed their historical writing (p. 186). These researchers were mainly connected to the *Annales*-inspired journal *Social Movement History* (1972–1985) and the Zenkyoto student movement of the late 1960s. One of them, Kenichi Kinoshita, wrote about the Paris Commune, taking into account his own experiences from the participation in the Zenkyoto movement, and argued that both of these events were rather autonomous gatherings of people than being any models for the future dictatorship of the proletariat, as envisioned by Marx and Engels (p. 193).

One of the common themes of this book is the question of historical objectivity, which includes the notions of historicism and memory as well. Being an objective historian was often equated to being non-engaged in writing, as Jörn Rüsen noted, whilst trying to hold neutral scientific positions. However, Rüsen saw this view as unsustainable, as there was no real way to exclude one's subjectivity from their historical writing (p. 33). In his chapter, he presented an elaborate methodology, imbued with historical examples, stating that the division between engaged and non-engaged historiography was "too simple," because every historical writing would fall into the category of the former, and not the latter, as it "includes a constitutive relationship to practical life" (p. 38). Furthermore, Rüsen differentiated forms of engagement in historical writing to *political, aesthetic, ethical*, and *religious commitment* (p. 37–38). Was there a way to practice an engaged historical writing and keep the notions of impartiality and neutrality? Martin Wiklund, in his chapter about the ideal of justice and its significance for historians, argued that "impartiality as an ideal does not preclude engagement but can rather be understood as an *engagement for impartiality*" (p. 54). He used the analogy of the courtroom, where he called for historians to take not only the role of the prosecutors who are seeking to rectify an "injustice," but also to act as a defense lawyer or a witness, and to take a role of the judge, as well (p. 51). The ideal they should strive for is that of "historical justice," which should transcend all the political and ideological biases of the researcher, and would give the historians an opportunity to tackle more sensitive societal issues, while serving as a public conscience (p. 57–58). An interesting perspective on the nature of historical writing was provided by Kalle Pihlainen, and it could be connected with the Wiklund's ideas. In his chapter about history and narrative communication, Pihlainen argued that the historical writing followed rules of any other literary genre. If the historical narrative was less engaged, and it only presented facts without the aim or final conclusion, it would have less impact on the readers and its message would be harder to transmit. In order for the narrative of the past to have more meaning, it should be "moved into the realm of the aesthetic or that of the ethical" (p. 74).

The structure of the literary narrative, with its necessary closure, would inevitably lead to “judgement,” in this case the one made by a historian (p. 64).

Georg G. Iggers’s contribution to this book is a striking personal account of a person who was politically engaged since his childhood. From living in and emigrating from Nazi Germany, through his strong support for the African-American emancipation movement in the United States, followed by his engagement in the anti-Vietnam war movement, and finally, with his role in connecting the scholars from the two different sides during the late phase of the Cold War, Iggers constantly exhibited an example of a publicly engaged intellectual. His account of the nature of his historical writings reveals his conscious engagement as well, which he does not hide (p. 277, 292). Another contribution of this chapter to the general messages of the book is Iggers’s view of historicism. He structured his lectures at the universities he taught at in such a way that they were “problem oriented” and not the simple presentation of a “straight narrative” (p. 285). His idea was also to connect different scholarly circles, surpassing national and ideological boundaries (p. 289). His take on the classical German notion of historicism was to argue that it was never truly objective, even though that was its proclaimed goal, and that it ultimately served German nationalistic aims, which led to the destructions in both World Wars. His book on the German conception of history called for German historians to “rethink their past from a democratic perspective,” which was criticized by some conservative German historians. Iggers’s answer to them was that the German historians of the past and their historical writings could not be separated from their ideology. He admitted that this was also the case with his own writings, but that his own bias “did not necessarily invalidate it” (p. 293). Lastly, Iggers stated that his historical writings “reflected my commitment to social justice and peace,” while striving to “keep in mind standards of honest scholarship” at the same time (p. 296).

While Iggers’s criticism of Rankean historicism is valid in many ways, I would argue that one of its key aspects should not and cannot be abandoned among the professional historians. Separation of the past from the present is crucial for the emotional and ideological detachment from the object of analysis. Obviously, on a personal level, these temporal divisions are hardly distinguishable, and the notions of the past, present, and the future are often overlapping. The exact purpose of a historian is to attempt to create these divisions within themselves. Only then could they aim to reconstruct an event in the past. Naturally, there are dangers in thinking that the absolute objectivity in historical writing is a reachable goal, but striving towards it remains the only way. Otherwise, the role of historians diminishes, whether they were engaged or not, and the space opens up for various other actors who would rely on emotionally driven narratives in order to serve some ideological or political purpose in their contemporary realities.

Temporality and its perception among the public is one of the aims of the chapter of Antonis Liakos, who analyzed the “the street history” in late 2000s’ Greece, and tried to see “how history is experienced” among the protesters in the urban environment (p. 261). Their graffiti and other public expressions showed how history was used in the present, and how protesters used it only if it “proves useful for the future” (p. 262). It is understandable that historical writing, in its essence, is writing about the past for the present, as Liakos noted, but the historians should still aim for impartiality (p. 273). This is especially the case in the modern digital age, when abundance of information, as Effi Gazi rightfully noted in her chapter, is creating new challenges for deciphering the past. She argued that historians could gain more prominent public roles in the future, due to their ability to dissect data from the past and decide whether something should be preserved or forgotten (p. 255). However, the public will not always hear the opinions of historians about the importance of certain data, as it was the case with the deletion of the majority of sources from the Greek Civil War, during the 1990s. Vangelis Karamanolakis showed in his chapter how the destruction of security files, kept on the private citizens who participated in the civil war, was a joint political effort from a coalitional Greek government, consisted of both left and right parties. Even though the historians argued that only the analysis of those sources would lead to a national reconciliation in the Greek society, the public and the ruling political parties opted for the option of forgetting a mean of achieving national unity (p. 243–244).

As a final remark, the book *The Engaged Historian* is a remarkably cohesive work on the topic of engagement of not only historians, but of all intellectuals as well. What is missing is a case study of the politically engaged historians on the right of the political spectrum, potentially from the German example, which would better explain the downfalls of historicism. Even though the article of Gazi covers the topic of digital history and its challenges very well, there is also a need for a separate analysis of the role of historians in the “digital public sphere.” This would provide answers on how the development of social media in the past decade influenced the public perception of historians, on the one hand, and how they engaged themselves on these platforms as public intellectuals, on the other.