

Academic Integrity in History Writing Impacts Society Values and Ethical Decision-Making

Abstract:

Academic integrity in History writing is exercised in different ways and degrees of complexity depending on the level of engagement and the experience of the author in the methods of the discipline. When the writer is an undergraduate student, s/he must be taught via a specialized course or a series of history discipline-specific seminars the art and science of writing History. The central theme of this exercise must be the understanding and practice of academic integrity. After the student has completed the first cycle of history studies and is ready to begin a research degree then s/he must acquaint her/himself with the advanced tools of academic integrity in history writing such as the evaluation of sources and the cause and effect relationship. Academic integrity in History writing is practiced when the historian avoids the hypothesis fallacy as well as the fallacies of generalizations, pre-conceived ideas and anachronism. The practice of academic integrity educates citizens to acquire and use autonomous decision-making thinking tools. Therefore, academic integrity in the classroom via student assessment may at the end of one or more education cycles impact their societal values and ethical decision-making as well as engage students in ethical questions of researching and writing in the human quest for truth.

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Academic integrity is by all means a subset of the integrity of human character and academic integrity in History writing is part of integrity in scholarship. The teaching of academic integrity in all levels of the formal educational process is desired and must be required because the very essence of education is to prepare good citizens and civilized human beings. Higher education prepares students for work, for the further development of disciplines, and graduates for political and social life in the Aristotelian meaning. One of the main components of History teaching is the method for History writing and the integral part of it is academic integrity. The persisting and methodical teaching of integrity in History writing will impact the graduate's social values and his/her decision making in life will be influenced by the developed personal ethics. However, it all starts in the family environment.

History writing is a complex process of finding the truth about what happened in the past or the different protagonists' perspectives on past events or the modern conception of the past. History writers, from undergraduate students to accomplished scholars, need to follow certain methodological steps: collection, evaluation and study of sources, the writing of History. There are certain rules that apply during the historian's handling of the sources that we are not going to discuss here but we will focus on the process of writing. There are certain ways that have been identified and must be avoided when the historian is ready to put together the information s/he has collected along with his/her opinion and judgment regarding the selected topic of study. In the last two centuries, historians have identified the conceptions that do not constitute sound History writing but actually breaches of academic integrity. They are collectively named "Historians' fallacies." We are of course aware of the ideas and theories of Post-Modernism historians, who might consider the fallacies as part of traditional History writing but our reply is that in History writing there is only "past. And no "post."

One of the most common fallacies is generalization and the first aspect of it is that which occurs during the statistical sampling of a quantitative historical study. During the 20th century, historians on both sides of the Atlantic and especially in France, Britain and the US, began using

statistical models in order to draw conclusions regarding the social and economic trends of the past. In the previous century, the students of History understood that the past must be studied in a comprehensive way. That is, there are Histories to be found in every little corner of past life: from the traditional historical themes of political and military affairs, further on to the constitutional and economic affairs and even up to the edges of social affairs such as eating habits and human health as well as sexual life and prostitution. Therefore, nowadays, is not uncommon for historians to use mathematical and statistical formulas and models in order to prove their historical arguments. However, using an insufficient body of data or a non-representative sample may lead to weak or wrong conclusions or the results that the historian would like to find. In other words, the historian guides the data to lead him/her to the conclusions instead of the comprehensive or truly representative body of data showing the historian the way to his/her conclusions. One example is the conclusion of two American historians that one of the decisive factors for the formulation of the US Constitution (1787-1790) was the significant age difference (on the average 9.8 years) between the two political factions, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. This was based on a certain sample of representatives but in reality in a different study the sample was constructed in such a way that the age difference between the two groups was on the average 13.9 years and in a third study a greater sample resulted in no main differences. Although a statistician could claim that the larger the sample the safer, a historian can use the argument of limited data sets and construct a large enough sample that will only prove his/her argument.

Another example of generalization and single dimensional hypothesis in History writing is the case of the “single rat” when the whole argument is based on a single piece of evidence and the historian or the archaeologist draws very general conclusions. This has happened in the last sixty years or so with the question of who controlled the seas and the trade in East Mediterranean in the 14th and the 13th centuries BC: were they the Canaanites (the ancestors of Phoenicians), the Cypriots or the Mycenaeans. Since the 1980s, a single historical or archaeological evidence on the Syrian coast, Lebanon, Israel, Cyprus or Greece (e.g. pottery finds) leads scholars to arrive at new conclusions and theories of “thalassocracies” (command of the seas).

Historians begin a study having perceived a working hypothesis of what they wish to investigate and how they are going to achieve this goal. It is impossible for a researcher to know everything about everything or something about everything or everything about something. Usually, s/he will manage to know something about something. Therefore, most historians as well as every scholar in any discipline, tries nowadays to investigate a very limited aspect of History and arrive at sound conclusions. However, if one allows his/her political, racial, social, sexist, anti-semitic, anti-Christian or anti-Muslim etc ideas to govern his/her research, s/he will definitely breach academic integrity and commit the fallacy of preconceived ideas. Historians must allow their research to guide them towards the outcome of their study instead of allowing their hypothesis to lead them only to the evidence that proves their assumption disregarding other evidence that disproves it. A well known example is the case of “Black Athena.” A British-American specialist in modern Chinese political history eventually developed a keen interest in ancient Jewish history and culture which led him to the study of Ancient Greece. According to his theory that eventually changed from scholarship to racism and politics, he tried to prove that the Ancient Greek civilization was the result of the influx of peoples from Egypt and the Ancient Near East and therefore it had “afroasiatic roots.” The author provided only the evidence that proved his theory refusing to see the possible contacts of the Minoans and the Greeks with Egypt and the Ancient Near East. The “Black Athena” study was probably the result of the use of writing methods for modern history topics and the social sciences which were applied on ancient history and archeology themes. The methods and the tools used in the study of ancient, and medieval, and modern history differ a lot from one historical period to the other due to the nature of the sources for each historical time. It is very easy,

therefore, for a scholar to become monolithic in the study of ancient history topics if s/he uses modern historical and political tools and methods.

One other outstanding example is the Histories written about the Greek civil war (1946-1949), the war between the communist guerrillas and the regular National Greek Army for the taking over of political power in the country. There are three different groups of historical work on this major event of 20th century Greece: those written by the communist supporters, those published by the nationalists and those authored by independent historians. The communist supporters who wanted to show that the war was just for their cause selected the sources that proved they were right. The nationalists, who believed that their role was to stop the coming of the communists to Greece, used those pieces of evidence that proved they fought a just war. Either of them with their preconceived ideas and in their attempt to prove what they wanted, they breached the scholars' integrity. On the other hand, there are Histories written by the so called impartial historians who may even place this event within the context of the post World War II geopolitical arrangements in East Central Europe but they still take one side or the other even though this may not be immediately obvious. In this case the problem is that in the context of the late 1940s both groups were right and wrong at the same time as they were not aware of the secret agreement between Churchill and Stalin in Moscow in October 1944.

Still another breach of academic integrity may occur when historians try to use modern ideological conceptions in their attempt to explain situations in the Ancient or the Medieval World. The most striking example is that of imperialism in the Ancient World. In the first half of the 20th century, Marxist historians using the conception by Marx and Engels (*Communist Manifesto*, 1848) that all of history is a class struggle and Lenin's definition of imperialism tried to compare early 20th century European imperialism and its methods (e.g. European economic exploitation of Africa) with political and economic practices in the Ancient World. In other words, they took it for granted that Athens and Republican Rome aimed at creating empires by exploiting other contemporary city-states in the case of Athens or peoples in the case of Rome. In the case of Athens, though, we lack the necessary historical and financial information in order to determine the type of hegemony that was used by the city in the 5th century BC but what is certain is that the burden of this "empire" (the tribute paid to Athens) was borne by the rich not the poor. Until Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul (France) and Britain in the 1st century BC, the Romans used the idea of the allies (*socii*) to incorporate the defeated peoples into their Republic (e.g. the Latins and the Greeks of South Italy) but it does not appear that they intended to create an empire from that early age of their History and definitely this was not their intention when they struggled against the Carthaginians in the 2nd century BC. In a similar way, comparisons of slavery practices based on racism in Colonial America with slavery in Ancient Greece do not constitute sound scholarship. In the Lavrion mines of Attica, slaves could also work under hard labor but generally in Ancient Greece they were house servants entrusted to guard and raise the children of their owners. Slavery in Ancient Greece was a social institution accepted by both masters and slaves. Therefore, when that method of comparison is used by historians it cannot be but intentional historical anachronism.

The above examples of historian's fallacies or breaches of academic integrity are over and beyond the simple plagiarism issue that all academics faced, are facing and will face with higher education students. Plagiarism, which etymologically derives from the Greek word "plagios" (indirectly) and the Latin "plagium" (kidnapping), is a diachronic academic issue that academics warn students about and may catch using a scholarly and/or electronic detection method. Teaching how to avoid plagiarism is the beginning of helping students understand the ethical issue that creeps behind breaches of academic integrity. At the undergraduate level, in special courses in the discipline of History such as "Writing in History" or "Introduction to Historical Methods" students are taught to a certain degree how to avoid plagiarism. Empirically testing the references to

breaches of academic integrity, we found that in some syllabi the reference is very general that is, a short sentence or a paragraph, and in others the student is taught within the course the basics of correct selection and evaluation of History sources, referencing and writing the History paper. On the other hand, at the graduate level, a “Graduate Research and Scholarly Writing” course with writing exercises may teach the basics of academic honesty.

However, teaching our undergraduates and graduates how to consciously avoid historians' fallacies and academic dishonesty is an entirely new chapter in the battle for societal values. By explaining why a historian needs to check the generalizations s/he uses, question the content and the size of the sample on which s/he is going to draw conclusions, draft meaningful hypotheses independent of preconceived political, ethnic, racial etc ideas and avoid historical anachronism, the teacher/professor introduces to the History class the basics of ethical values in scholarly work. But at the same time, these values cannot be different from the societal values the student is asked to hold while being a member of a social group such as a family, within a working environment, in a social club and above all as a citizen. Therefore, it is imperative that we teach those values to our students in any History class and not in just our methods courses. We can find the right examples such as why the French celebrate the storming of the Bastille prison on 14 July 1789 when only seven prisoners and some of them real criminals were liberated instead of the expected thousands of French citizens and why a few years ago a German publishing company was so eager to publish Hitler's memoirs that bought the forged documents without questioning their validity, in order to show our students that asking the right questions before making decisions is not only a Historian's required academic skill but a citizen's obligation within our society.

The role of higher education in the American tradition of Liberal Arts education is not only to teach a student a profession but to prepare graduates to become citizens of a western democracy. Therefore, it must be our main role to teach society values and ethical decision making in the classroom. This can be achieved in many disciplines and in different ways so that the graduates are well prepared to become citizens of our democracies. Students will eventually learn to question survey results, comparisons between historical periods, the false conception that “History repeats itself,” statements of politicians of various inclinations, just to mention a few paradigms of understanding how integrity, including academic integrity, insinuate in every day life experiences. The statement “most Greek pupils between the age of 13 and 18 have used illegal substances at least once” printed as the main result of a survey conducted by a major Greek public university needs further testing of the way the survey was conducted and the answers were verified as this implies that Greece is a free paradise of drugs at school. A serious 2014 statement of the sort: “we live in a Roman Empire were the German Chancellor is the emperor” published in a major Greek newspaper has no meaning in both historical and modern terms. If the journalist referred to the Roman Empire of the Romans, historians know that the seat was in Rome and the emperor's control was universal in the lives of both citizens and non citizens. If he meant the Holy Roman Empire of the modern times, the Holy Roman Emperor was Austrian and not German and the seat was in Vienna not in Berlin. The Holy Roman Emperor never had full political and financial control of his empire as his authority was checked by the local and other national aristocracies. Just for the record, the Holy Roman Empire came to an end in 1918 at the end of the First World War. “History repeats itself” is a statement repeated every so often by the people in the street to denote historical events of the immediate past compared to the distant past with a lot of external similarities. However, History cannot repeat itself as no natural laws apply to the discipline. Therefore, this statement remains a figure of speech. Still another example is the political rhetoric and its method of sirens' singing for the eyes of voters. In the last thirty five years, the Greeks have believed in politicians of various political inclinations that Greece's economic growth would be eternal and pensioners of at least the public sector would enjoy very high pensions even when they left the working force at a very early

age. However, specific studies that were sponsored by the various Greek governments in the last twenty years showed very clearly that even within an environment of high economic growth the system of pensions would not survive for more than a few years unless it was continuously subsidized by the government itself. The same governments that accepted the results of the studies they had authorized, those same governments rejected them as “myths” of statisticians until the moment of the truth came and it was revealed that the system would survive only with general pension cuts. The goal, therefore, of teaching academic integrity in the history class and actually how to test it in everyday social and citizen life should be embedded in the learning outcomes of all our classes, even beyond our discipline. This should become an educational goal of higher education itself.

Empirically, though, it seems that it all begins with the family. The father, the mother and the close relatives are the models of behavior for the little child and the adolescent. Children do understand when grown ups break the law and may even warn us when we do not stop at the red traffic light or we boast at the PTA meeting that our son or daughter will graduate from high school with straight A's. Once, here in Greece, a grandfather used to travel by metro with his grandson, who was six at the time, and they both punched their tickets before entering the system. In one of their almost daily trips, it just happened that if they waited until they punched their tickets, they would miss the train. The grandson, urged the old man to run saying that there were a lot of others who did not punch their tickets in order to catch the train. But the grandfather stopped him and explained that they are not going to break the law as other do because they may ended up in jail. Since then, the grandson has never traveled without a validated ticked. In another occasion, the son complained to his father that he got Cs in mathematics at school just because he did not copy the formulas on his knees as the girls did. The father's answer was “I do not care how others earn their grades. What I want from you is to study as well as you can and earn the grade you deserve. I will be satisfied if you studied for a C and earned a C. I do not want fake grades.” The son graduated from high school with a borderline B- but this was his own B-. That son, when he became a college student, he was satisfied that his papers were clean through Turnitin although he complained from time to time: “you do not know how much cheating is out there, especially in exams.” The father's reply was typical: “I do not care about your fellow students. I do care about you gathering the knowledge and the values that your degree represents.” The son had to do his service in the Greek army and the parents picked him up from the camp for his first leave of absence. He was in the back seat of the car and he wore his military beret all the way to the house. Far away from the military camp, the mother asked him to remove the beret because he was in the car but he replied “as long as I wear the military uniform, I have to wear the beret. This is in the regulations.” Parents know that reminding their children they rules and regulations all the time is very tiring and that is why in Greece we say that 'if you do not raise children, have a house built and undertake all the expenses of your child's wedding, you do not know anything about life.' However, the time parents spend on the child's development of integrity will be paid off when the child becomes a father, a mother, a citizen.

Integrity and academic integrity are life exercises. We must practice them everyday day of our life and in every occasion and not when we know that our crime, small or big, may be revealed. We need to question our actions every single moment and make the ethical decision: we will suffer but we will not break the law or our personal integrity. We must not travel by metro or bus if we do not posses a validated ticket even if it is for sure that we will not be caught by inspectors. We must not beg our child's teachers for a better grade using all kinds of excuses so that we, ourselves, will avoid the smiles of contempt of other parents. We must not change our student's final grade from an A- to an A because he is a handsome boy or she is a pretty girl. However, nobody is perfect and in education we have all bypassed academic integrity rules once or twice because the

school/college/university is the protected societal environment and we want to reward a student's sincere apology or total ignorance and unintentional academic 'crime.' This is understandable among us who practice in higher education and we have met thousands of students with a lot of different educational needs.

The teaching of academic integrity in History writing is not just preventing plagiarism. It actually entails the teaching of avoiding historians' fallacies which lead to breaches of academic integrity or to ethical decision-making on how results of a scholarly research must be presented. The training of the students in History writing must begin at the undergraduate level and in most if not all History courses especially in honors programs that may require a bachelor thesis. Our empirical research showed that at the graduate level of US universities there are cases in which the fallacies are taught but this emphasis on academic integrity must definitely be adopted by all schools and at an earlier educational stage. We are convinced that the teaching of the details of academic integrity in History writing during the educational process results in the student's development of personal integrity as well as his/her understanding of how information and results of studies presented in scholarly and non-scholarly information media must be analyzed and dissected. In the final analysis though it seems that best results in academic integrity and integrity in life in general are achieved when the rules are taught at a very early age in the family and are continued to be taught throughout the education process and especially in higher education so that they impact one's role as a citizen in our democracies.

Demetris Loizos
Deree College-The American College of Greece

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