

Microstudies in National Historiography

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The workshop brought together the contributors of the second volume of Team 2 of the five-year European Science Foundation-funded Scientific Programme „Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in 19th and 20th century Europe (NHIST, www.uni-leipzig.de/zhsesf/)“, which runs since 2003. The team is led by Stefan Berger (University of Manchester) and Chris Lorenz (Vrije Universiteit van Amsterdam). Within the programme the workshop highlighted the shifting of the focus from the macro-historical overview type of article to micro-historical examples of national historiographies. The workshop provided an opportunity for team members to present further developed papers for discussion as part of the process to produce a volume in which the construction of the nation and its others are analysed at the level of individual exemplary texts. In this second phase, a micro-historical approach, focusing on individual national historical texts, has been adopted after the overview-approach of phase one. The workshop discussed how each chapter has evolved within the comparative and transnational frameworks that are built into the case studies themselves. The workshop sought to develop the papers presented in former workshops and allowed the co-editors of the volume, Professor Berger and Professor Lorenz, to assess the progress and provide individual feedback to each of the chapter contributors and the volume in its entirety. It also allowed contributors to interact and exchange knowledge and experience, thus developing the themes and approaches to the volume as a whole.

GENEVIÈVE WARLAND (University of Brussels) presented a paper on the role of the Wars of Religion between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in national master narratives in a comparative perspective. In investigating the works of liberal historians such as P.J. Blok, Karl Lamprecht, Ernest Lavisse and Henri Pirenne Warland compared the Dutch, Belgian French and German cases. In placing the respective narratives in their ideological and histo-

riographical contexts she investigated the extent to which religion constituted a basic element for the definition of the nation, the degree to which the investigated historians presented religious matters as a symbol displaying a supposed national character of the respective people and the representation of the religious and national ‘Other’ in these historians’ work.

Designed as ‘popular’ histories the investigated national histories were meant to address educated citizens. Blok, Lamprecht, Pirenne and Lavisse were influential intellectuals whose works were frequently republished and translated. Although they were conscious of the ‘construed and provisional character of their histories’, they presented their work as truthful and objective. Whereas they were bound to give a comprehensive overview of the respective nation’s past, they interpreted it politically and philosophically, being guided by liberal values and the wish to contribute to the creation and consolidation of a national consciousness. This motivation fostered a tendency to embellish the heterogeneity of national cultures, to marginalize religious dissent – all investigated historians wanted to overcome the main ideological oppositions of their time i.e. the controversy between the faiths or between faith and republicanism or liberalism respectively. In order to present an all-inclusive master narrative, the role of religion as a cultural factor was downplayed.

Within a framework of national (not religious) histories religion became a cultural, a social and political phenomenon rather than a theological matter. All investigated narratives gave general accounts of the religious controversy in the respective country, taking into account the border-overlapping dimension of religious alliances and affiliations, thus providing insights of the events in neighbouring countries. Nonetheless, each work reflects the individual conception of history and interest of the prevailing author. The embedding of national histories in universal history provided the opportunity to present neighbouring nations as the national other, and thus point out the distinctiveness and singularity of the prevailing nation. A nation’s distinctiveness and progressiveness was supposedly expressed by its capability to export political, social, and cultural ideas and goods.

Warland then examined the concrete presentation of the Wars of Religion in the national histories of the selected authors. She pointed out that the representation of the religious wars and espe-

cially their resolution included moral judgements that corresponded to a depiction of a supposed national character. Although, according to Warland, the depiction of national traits in the investigated histories could be more 'static', in pointing out the permanence of an intrinsic characteristic, or more 'dynamic' in emphasizing an evolutionary trajectory of the nation's character, these aspects were not exclusive. The nation was depicted as a collective person, defined by a common culture and history, language and ethnic origin. Warland pointed out that whereas Blok and Pirenne presented e.g. moderateness and openness as common and continuous traits of the Dutch and Belgians respectively, the works of Lamprecht and Lavissee reveal a tendency to adhere to an evolutionary concept of national characters.

In their strife for tolerance and impartiality the investigated national histories provided a secularized vision on religion, that was able to support patriotism and depicted the nation as a supraconfessional entity. The liberal master narratives attempted to reconcile state and religion rather than opposing them. They strived to create a cultural synthesis that integrated and subordinated religion to nationalism as the symbol of national conciliation. Warland emphasized that the nationalism of the liberal master narratives was bound to function as a secularized religion for society as a whole.

STUART WARD (Copenhagen University) dwelt on the impact of decolonization processes on British and French national historiography. Ward emphasized that since the 1960s national historiographies in Britain and France 'followed remarkably similar trajectories'. The emergence of a renewed interest in the 'relationship between metropolitan culture and empire' in the 1980s was preceded by a period of 'empire neglect'.

As an immediate effect of decolonization imperial history was virtually banished from national historiography in France and Britain. The long established 'tacit division' between national and imperial history became more accentuated since the 1950s – Ward stated a 'pronounced hesitancy to incorporate empire in the narration of the national history', a 'post-imperial amnesia' ran rampant. In the British case this 'fragmentation of focus and expertise' was fostered by the emergence of new histories for the new nation states. French historians distanced themselves from traditional colonial history, which they deemed compromised by its connection to colonialism and started inves-

tigating the histories of the African peoples as well as the effects of and resistance against colonialism rather than French colonial policy. By the 1970s colonial empires had become a 'dead field within history'. Whereas some critiques claimed that that this lack of attention reflected deliberate attempts to forget or repress the imperial past, others such as Coquery-Vidrovitch stressed the 'relative indifference of a generation of historians and the general public' as well as the 'diversion of attention to other areas'.

The former imperial metropolises needed to recast historiography in the 'post-imperial mould' too. In the British case J.G.A. Pocock's 1973 Christchurch lecture was of particular influence. With this lecture Pocock set the pace for a 'subtle but decisive change in the contours and nomenclature of British national historiography'. Instead of adhering to the Anglo-centrism of e.g. A.J.P. Taylor or Enoch Powell Pocock claimed that 'British' history was more than a mere projection of English history. Instead of an English history writ large British history should be less national and unitary and tackle the 'conflict between and creation of societies and cultures' in the 'North Atlantic Archipelago'. Ward pointed out that Pocock himself as a 'self styled British New Zealander' was strongly influenced by processes of decolonization i.e. a post-imperial disorientation.

Ward then turned to France, claiming that in comparison to Britain, Empire had generally been less important in this country both in history and historiography, which is why decolonization did not 'necessitate a major alteration in perspective for the leading historical schools'. However, the country was torn apart by the Algerian war, the defeat in Indochine and the failure of the Communauté. France's decolonization failures fostered what Ward called the 'Algerian syndrome' (following Henry Rousso's coinage 'Vichy syndrome') – the French public, historians and politicians alike, did not pay attention to or repressed the memory of empire.

Whereas Britain's retreat from the colonies was more peaceful, the country remained attached to the states of its former empire and had to tackle the demands of the Celtic nations at home, France largely had to re-establish itself as a nation-state after having been an 'empire-state' for three centuries. The stronger 'persistence of bonding' with the former empire on side of Britain facilitated the examination of the imperial past in comparison to

France.

The general 'cultural turn' in historiography fostered the historiographical rediscovery of empire in the mid-1980s. The focus on the role of culture, particularly the iconography of empire, its depiction in theatre, cinema, radio, textbooks and novels was supposed to reveal the 'cultural and racial stereotyping of non-European peoples' as well as imperial ideology or imperial nationalism. Both, in France and Britain, it turned out that Empire was more present and played a larger role in daily life and national discourse than had been conceded before. Ward then pointed out an antidromic tendency among British historians, who neglected the new emphasis on the Empire's impact and described it as an attempt to malign the imperial heritage in accordance with political attitudes widely acknowledged among contemporaries. Ward stressed that the debates about Empire are fundamentally debates about national self-understanding. To prove his point Ward finally turned to an investigation of Benjamin Stora's and Caroline Elkin's works about British and French decolonization respectively. The work of these historians, who examined the Algerian war and the Kenyan Mau Mau campaign, raised a controversial debate that confirmed Ward's finding. Historiography itself is at the centre of processes of decolonization and debates about national self-images.

STEFAN BERGER (University of Manchester) continued with a paper on national history writing in Britain and Germany since the 1980s. Berger began by pointing out that the period between 1850 and 1950 was the classical age of national history writing in Europe. After the Second World War, from the late 1950s to the 1970s national historiography was perceived more sceptically in many West European countries. In West Germany the so called Bielefeld school emerged, which depicted German history as a 'succession of wrong turns' and inverted the notion of a German 'Sonderweg', anticipating the endorsement of postnationalism and the notion that Germany's 1871 unification was but a portent that brought nothing but misery to Europe and Germany. Britain, on the other hand faced the emergence of Celtic national histories in Wales and Scotland, which challenged traditional British history, and questioned the United Kingdom and Britishness as ways to consolidate English dominance and doom the 'Celtic fringe to historical oblivion'. Berger claimed that this critical phase of national historiography faced the

emergence of 'more critical perspectives' on national history writing rather than the abandonment of national historiography.

Since the 1980s however, British and German historians have begun to seek more seriously for alternatives to national historiography. This tendency has been more intense in Germany as the 'remarkable rise of comparative history' in this country shows. In Britain, by contrast, comparative history did not become such a success. British comparative studies were closely interrelated to Empire studies, investigating how the Empire shaped Britishness and how Britishness made part of national self-understanding in Commonwealth countries. Because of this occupation with Britishness, claimed Berger, it is questionable if there can really be thought of a turn away from national history in the British case. National history did not cease to be of importance – political developments of the 1980s even fostered the 'revival of historical national discourses' in both countries, and especially in post-reunification Germany, where a massive amount of titles aimed at a return to a supposed 'national normality'. The crisis of Britishness inspired a huge amount of volumes that tackled the challenge of Celtic nationalisms.

Berger then investigated how national histories were narrated in a situation 'in which the traditional national paradigms were in flux' by comparing Heinrich August Winkler's 'Der lange Weg nach Westen' and Norman Davies 'The Isles', two national histories of Germany and Britain respectively. By comparing Winkler and Davies, Berger wants to show how the nation is (de-)constructed in narratives of contemporary histories, how such attempts of (de-)construction are informed by 'concepts of otherness' and how these narratives are 'constructed to show up linear developments towards and away from nations'.

Whereas Winkler had been a representative of the critical historiography of the 1970s, he supported postnational tendencies in the 1980s and called for an 'abandonment of desires for German reunification'. After reunification Winkler claimed that German postnationalism was 'yet another form of hubris' and Germans should rather embrace a new patriotism, which would 'normalize German identity'. Winkler's German history, claimed Berger, is an attempt to provide a 'historical master narrative' as foundation for this normalization. In contrast to Winkler, Davies had not played a central role in debates about Britishness until he wrote 'The Is-

les'. His objective was more or less the opposite of Winkler's – with 'The Isles' he wanted to bury the British national master narrative. In Davies' eyes Britain and the United Kingdom had fulfilled their function and now that their time was over, the different nations of the Isles could go their own way. Thus, claimed Berger, Davies wrote from a postnational stance 'trying to justify and rationalise the break-up of Britain before the event'. He continued by pointing out how problematic Winkler's 'normative assumption of an idealized West as benchmark for a normal German national identity' is. Whereas e.g. Davies emphasized the significance of imperialism for the emergence of nation states in the West, this context is completely ignored by Winkler, whose volumes generally lack of a satisfactory conceptualization of 'the West'.

In concluding the workshop, Chris Lorenz and Stefan Berger confirmed their intention to bring these microstudies in historiography together in an edited collection.

Conference overview:

NHIST Team 2 Workshop - 'Microstudies in National Historiography'
Institute of Contemporary History at the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

Session One

Angelika Epple: A strained relationship: Epistemology and Historiography in 18th and 19th Century Germany and Britain

Geneviève Warland: Wars of Religion and National Master Narratives in a Comparative Perspective: P. J. Blok, Karl Lamprecht, Ernest Lavisse and Henri Pirenne

Joep Leerssen: Narratives of ethnic conquest in national histories - Setting the scene for national history

Arpad von Klimó: 19th Century Liberal Master Narratives revisited: A comparison of Gyula Szekfű and Benedetto Croce

Stefan Jordan: Writing national histories after the end of the Second World War

Xosé-Manoel Núñez Seixas: Postimperial or Transnational Civilisation? A Comparison of two Iberian Historians, 1870-1920

Thomas Welskopp: Clio and Class Struggle in Socialist National Histories. A Comparative Micro-study of Robert Grimm's and Eduard Bernstein's Writings, 1910-1920

Pavel Kolar: Rewriting National History in the

Marxist Vein

Session Two

Stefan Berger: Rising like a Phoenix, The Renaissance of National History Writing in Europe from the 1980s onwards

Andrew Mycock: Nation, State and Empire: The Historiography of 'High Imperialism' in the British and Russian empires

David Laven: Uses and Abuses of the Italian Middle Ages in European National Histories

Stuart Ward: Ends of Empire: Decolonising the nation in British and French historiography

John L. Harvey: A Mission Impossible? Progress, Prejudice and a European Identity in The Rise of Modern Europe

Billie Melman: "That Which we Learn with the Eye": Popular Histories, Modernity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Paris and London"

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